

Beach to their own

Senegal - a unique winter sun retreat away from the masses, ideal for a cultural break off the beaten track or just lazing under a tropical sun on pristine beaches free from the mass-market throng.

Senegal sits on the Atlantic Ocean at Africa's most westerly point, between Guinea-Bissau and Mauritania, with The Gambia almost entirely enclosed within it. Due to its position, between the Tropic of Cancer and the Equator, it enjoys a superb year-round climate making it an excellent choice for a lazy beach holiday – especially in the Saly region, just south of the capital, Dakar.

The country also has three mighty rivers nourishing a swathe of fertile land and carving some wonderfully intricate coastal lagoons and waterways that are also a joy to explore for those who like a little more out of a holiday. Because of this abundance of water and fertility, Senegal supports a mass of wildlife, including numerous birds, from coastal waders to large raptors, and various

mammal species such as warthogs, hyenas, monkeys, baboons, manatees and dolphins.

As a French speaking country, Senegal remains undiscovered by the majority of UK holidaymakers. Specialist tour operator, Serenity Holidays, has launched a dedicated brochure, *The Senegal Experience*, opening up this magical destination to travellers from Birmingham International Airport, flying twice weekly to Dakar with Brussels Airlines. The new range of holidays on offer include resort areas of Saly and the Sine Saloum Delta.

Saly, the closest comparison to a conventional beach resort, is located on the 'Petite Côte', approximately 50 miles south of Dakar and 40 miles north of the Sine Saloum Delta. The palm-fringed sandy



beaches and clear waters are an obvious lure for holidaymakers, but also for fishing enthusiasts and those seeking a more active holiday, Saly has several excellent water sports centres bustling with a range of activities, such as jet-skiing, water-skiing and windsurfing, as well as providing catamarans and kayaks. There are also several well-established fishing clubs in Saly offering world-class, deep-sea fishing.

On dry land your choice of diversions continues. Quad and buggy tours or horse treks are available in and around the resort. Saly is home to one of Senegal's best 18-hole golf courses, as well as the Accrobaobab Adventure Park, where both adults and children can climb, swing and slide on a series of nets and ropes amongst the characteristic baobab trees.

The nearby Bandia Nature Reserve wildlife park will also delight, offering the chance to see indigenous animals roaming freely through a natural setting. The wildlife includes many of the biggest names in African game, such as giraffes, rhino, zebra,

ostrich, antelopes, buffalo, bush pigs and impala, as well as the many colourful species of birds, which flock to make the warmer climes of Senegal home.

Outside of the hotels there is a small selection of shops selling a range of colourful goods, such as paintings, jewellery and ornaments, as well as several bars, restaurants and supermarkets.

Hotel options cater for a range of tastes and wallets, including the five-star Lamantin Beach Hotel, the most luxurious in Saly. African style two-storey bungalows are set amongst manicured gardens, and the hotel boasts a large swimming pool, its own luxurious spa, gym, marina, private white sandy beach and gourmet restaurant.

Another popular hotel in Saly is the Hotel Espadon, also situated on the beachfront, with its impressive 'Le Ponton' Bar in a magnificent setting perched over the water – a must at the day's end to experience the magical Senegalese sunset and a great viewing point to see the resident pelican, 'Popsi', fishing for its supper!

For something a little different, how about a Senegalese style lodge where you can step out directly onto the beautiful white sands? Just a short distance from Saly you'll find the unique and charming Tama Lodge nestled amongst a grove of coconut trees and set right on the beach. Its traditional thatched huts conceal luxurious interiors providing all the mod cons needed for a relaxing stay – including air conditioning. With a wonderfully laid back atmosphere you really can get away from it all, watching the world go by from a perfectly placed hammock.

By contrast, the stunning Sine Saloum Delta, a protected area of natural beauty, is around an hour's drive south from Saly. The Delta is a region of great diversity consisting of rivers, glorious beaches, mangrove swamps and sand islands, an interesting alternative for those seeking complete escapism and tranquillity, while for the more active there are plenty of opportunities for bird watching and fishing.

Again, there are some exclusive hotel

options, including Le Royal Lodge, a luxurious 5-grade hotel, which offers the ultimate location, positioned both on the outskirts of the Saloum Delta National Park and directly on a virtually deserted, sandy beach. Each suite boasts African architecture, with luxuries such as a private terrace and Jacuzzi bath. An infinity pool, framed by palm trees and a distinctive Baobab tree, offers an inviting tonic to relax in during the day, and, when illuminated at night, makes a perfect backdrop to the restaurant, charmed further by views of the Atlantic Ocean.

For the adventurous, nearby Lodge des Collines de Niassam offers quite unique accommodation in the form of stilted lodges, perched over a lagoon, as well as individually designed tree houses built into the magnificent baobab trees.

With such an extensive range of hotels on offer, the thought of choosing between them could leave you in a bit of a dilemma. The Senegal Experience can also provide the option of multi-centre holidays, letting you

sample more than one hotel during your Senegal stay. If you want to spread your wings further, you can also combine your visit with a stay in The Gambia to try a slightly different flavour of what West Africa has to offer.

Picture-perfect though the beach resorts are, some might argue that Senegal's greatest draw is its thriving culture, which derives from centuries of the region's tribal history and also the many influences from outside cultures, including the Islamic marabouts who came to the area from Northern Africa, and the French who were the dominant colonial power during the 19th and 20th centuries, until independence in 1960. These myriad influences have fused into an eclectic whole, which can be seen in the local dress, music, cuisine and architecture.

A range of excursions to local areas of interest is available to further enhance 'The Senegal Experience', and can be booked locally through the tour operator's representatives. Among these, a trip to Gorée Island is a must. A half hour boat trip

from Dakar, this tiny, beautiful island with its colourful colonial style houses and idyllic beach was once an important staging post in the slave trade and visitors will have an opportunity to visit the historic museum as a sobering reminder of the past.

The Senegal Experience has personal, first-hand knowledge of the destination making it the ideal to help finding the holiday that's right for you. So, with its ever-shining sun, beautiful scenery, relaxed pace of life and excellent hospitality, Senegal is just waiting to be discovered!

Thanks go to Serenity Holidays for their help in preparing this article – Cloud Nine.

Getting there...

Flights twice weekly from Birmingham International Airport to Dakar with Brussels Airways

Packages available with Serenity Holidays, see www.serenity.co.uk or call 0845 330 8700.