

DISCOVERY



GUINEA BISSAU & BIJAGOS: THE SACRED ARCHIPELAGO

9 DAYS / 8 NIGHTS

**Scheduled departure dates
from Bissau**

2020

February 21st (Carnival, special itinerary and special rate),
April 2nd (Vaca Bruto Mask dances, special itinerary),

Oct 29th (Turtle nesting)
December 27th (Turtle nesting, high season rate)

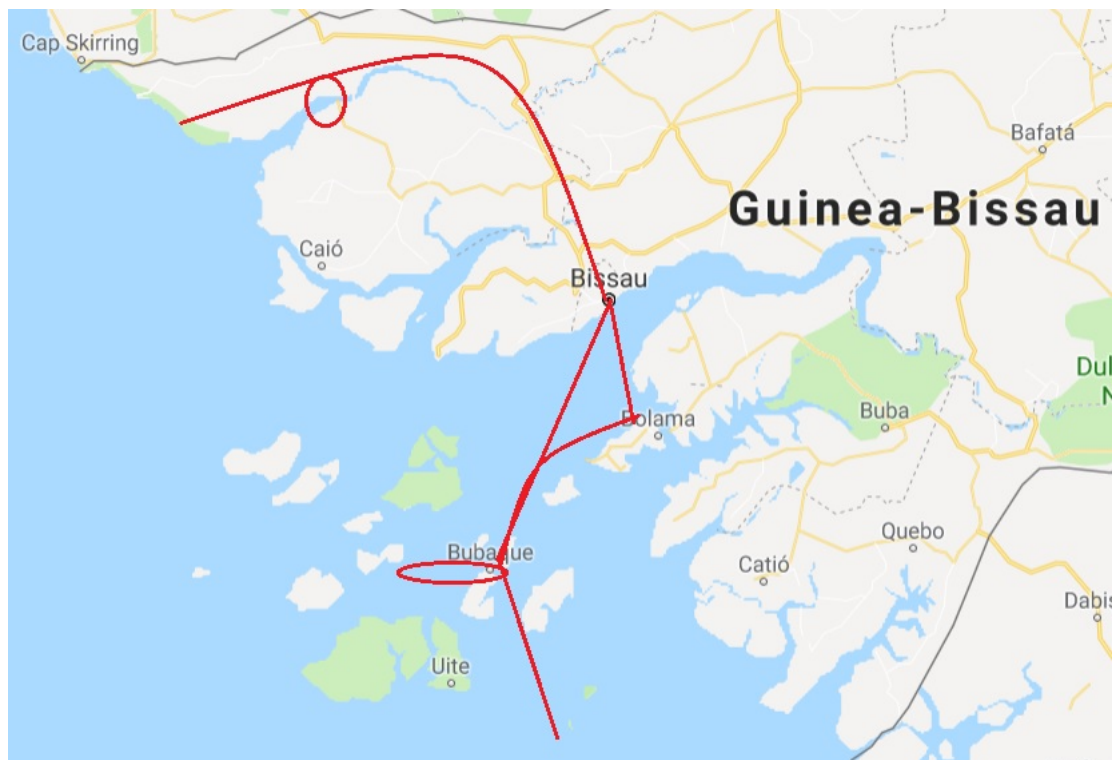
Each departure date is carefully chosen to coincide with an unique event

Minimum 2 – Maximum 16 participants

Any other date upon request

Guinea Bissau, a still unknown country where borders between water and land change with the changing of the tides, covering and uncovering mangroves, beaches and estuaries. A trip that will take us to pristine forests, remote villages, animistic ceremonies and the largest archipelago in Africa: the Bijagos. Most of the Bijagos islands have no permanent settlements and are a real paradise for many bird species and rare fauna. Finally, Bissau gives a great opportunity to experience the intriguing mix of Portuguese and African style, spreading unique vibes.

*An itinerary aiming at discovering nature and culture as well as some relax to enjoy the blue ocean and wild beaches where our footprints are the only tracks.
For travelers who look for something new and very special in Africa!*



What is Special about the trip

Following the “uncertain border” between land and water, we move across natural environments such as deserts, mangrove swamps, forests, ocean and islands. By traveling from north to south we follow the route of migratory birds, a constant presence along the whole journey. Depending on the departure date, we may discover rare endemic fauna.

Turtle Nesting - Poilao Island (G.B.) is an uninhabited site of a great beauty. It is also considered the main nesting ground for the Green Sea Turtle (Chelonia Midas) in West Africa. In the night, on the silent beach, we wait for the magic moment when a female emerges from the ocean and digs a deep hole where she lays her eggs. If luck will be on our side, we will witness this natural wonder of nature and/or the hatching, when the tiny ones emerge from the sand to join the ocean and begin a long journey that will bring them back to this same beach after 30 years, when they reach sexual maturity.

ITINERARY

DAY 1: Bissau, the capital

Arrival in **Bissau** and transfer to the hotel.

Meals Own arrangements

Overnight Hotel Azalai or similar (all rooms en-suite and with air conditioning)

DAY 2: Ancestors' cult



Living Bissau, we will visit Bandin the largest market in the country. Full day dedicated to exploring the region inhabited by the **Manjaco**. This ethnic group calls their traditions “Gendiman” and keeps them still very much alive. We visit tiny villages hidden in the forest to discover sculptured wooden poles called “Pecab” representing the spirits of their ancestors; they are kept in sanctuaries known as “Cab Balugun”. With the permission of the elders, we will have the opportunity to admire sacred wooden sculptures varying in age and styles. It is indeed a unique opportunity to enjoy tribal art in its original cultural context: the village.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Banagam (all rooms en-suite and with air-conditioned, basic comfort)

Day 3: Villages of the flooded forest

By car and by foot we reach some remote villages inhabited by **the Felupes and Baiotes**, both tribes part of the Diola ethnic group. They live in an isolated ecosystem where, thanks to their complex “tribal technology”, they manage to desalinate the land and farm rice. We will walk in a unique landscape made up of streams, salt swamps, flat lands, clay dams and rice farms. In this remote environment, some huge isolated Kapok and Baobab trees provide the shade to the tiny human settlements. Local people live in adobe huts built in a distinctive African architectural style: clay “buildings” supported by a complex structure of palm tree poles, surrounded by a shady veranda and covered with high wide thatched roofs, with garrets for aeration. The Felupes practice different ceremonies and the initiated groups include a powerful cast of female priestesses; rituals are generally announced by large sacred drums called “Bombolon”.

In the afternoon we will assist to ritual dances of the **Diola** sacred mask; rarely shown to the foreigners, this mask belongs to a secret society and the identity of the dancers is not revealed, it is said that the mask is animated by the spirits. Drums, dances and a colourful crowd will enliven the tiny village in the shade of large kapok trees.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Aparthotel Avo Anisa, simple in Varela

Day 4: reminiscences of colonial time

We drive to Quinhamel to visit of a traditional healer specialized in the treatment of bone injuries. He will show us the herbals and traditional medicaments and explain us his way of proceeding and how he became a “healer”. Visit of an old-style local rum distillery (Cana) dating back to the old colonial days and walk across a cashew nuts plantation, the main export product of the country.

Meals: B – L – D

Overnight: Cupedo hotel (all rooms en-suite and with air-conditioned, basic comfort) – **NO TWINS**

Day 5: Bissau the capital

Morning spent discovering the magical and animistic traditions of the intriguing **Pepel** people. In this region the forest hides a fetish endowed with feared powers: only the initiated young men can carry it on their shoulders...

In the afternoon we arrive at **Bissau**. We will stroll around Bissau-Vehlo: the lively old quarter with its sleepy streets and alleys. Here we will be amazed by the interesting Portuguese architecture which gives Bissau an

atmosphere that reminds us of Portugal back in the days. Old wooden café where to drink Portuguese wine and watch Portuguese news. Or an open-air restaurant where to drink the best mojito in town...

Meals: B – L – D

Overnight: Hotel Azalai (all rooms en-suite and with air conditioned)

DAY 6: From the ghost capital to the Bijagos Archipelago



Aboard a speedboat, we start our sailing to discover the Bijagos Archipelago with its remote islands and isolated human settlements. **The Bijagos Archipelago** is located approximately 40 miles off-shore and, with its 88 islands (of which only 21 are permanently inhabited), is the largest archipelago in Africa. With its wild and pristine landscapes, its genuine tribal culture and its unique fauna, Bijagos is a “geographical jewel”.

Due to the remoteness of the destination, the lack of transportation and the deep attachment to the local traditions, the Bijagos inhabitants have been little influenced by the external world: during ceremonies women still wear the *saiya* - a traditional skirt made of straw - and the rhythm of life in villages is given by initiations and secret ceremonies – for example young men have to go through a seven-year initiation rite during which they live in a “convent” without any contact with women..

Our first stop will be **Bolama Island**, the former capital of Portuguese Guinea from 1871 to 1941, before it was moved to Bissau. When the Portuguese left, native people came to live in the town which is now falling apart and is partly invaded by tropical vegetation. It was originally built following the plans of a «Castrum Romanum» (roman citadel) so today we can witness its large sunny lethargic avenues, its empty squares, its dry fountains, its bush-like gardens and its charming administrative buildings in neo Palladian style. In the Governor’s Palace we can still admire columns in the classic style ... where now goats graze! Bolama, although inhabited, is plunged in the fairy-tale atmosphere of a ghost town.

Arrival on Rubane Island where we will stay **at the most beautiful lodge of the Bijagos Archipelago.**

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Ponta Anchaca or similar (ocean front comfortable bungalows en-suite with air conditioning, private wild beach, sea water swimming pool, spectacular bar and gastronomic restaurant on stilts).

DAY 7: Turtles

We move to reach the southern islands hidden in the remotest part of the archipelago which became the « Marine Park of Poilao and Joao Viera », a protected area of an absolute purity that stretches over 495 Km².

After dark, we will remain silent on the beach until the magical moment when the turtles emerge from the ocean to dig deep holes in the sand and lay their many eggs. If we are lucky, we will witness this wonder of nature and we might even see the hatching with the tiny turtle coming out of the sand already looking for the ocean to begin a long journey that will end on this same island when sexual maturity is reached, 30 years after: males come back to the same place to mate with the females.

Meals B – L - D
Overnight in tents, basic

DAY 8: Beach and relax

In the morning departure by speedboat to **Bubaque**.

Visit of Bubaque, the largest village in the archipelago and the only one connected to the continent by a ferry once a week: unpaved alleys, a tiny colorful market, local bars and traders; quite interesting also the ethnographic museum dedicated to the Bijagos culture.

Then we reach our very comfortable hotel on the beach in Rubane Island.

In the afternoon, time to relax on the beach or to discover the lush vegetation and villages of the island.

Meals B – L - D
Overnight Hotel Ponta Anchaca or similar

DAY 9: to Bissau

Relax on the beach

Arrival by speedboat in **Bissau**, the actual capital of the country. Here a vehicle will be waiting to take us to the hotel to have the last shower.

In the evening transfer to the airport for the flight out.

Meals B – L
Day-use Rooms in day-use till 18.00 (all rooms en-suite and with air conditioning)

Recommended Extension:



At the end of this intense journey, we can recommend a few extra days in the Bijagos Archipelago. On request, we can arrange for some extra days in Ponta Anchaca Hotel on Rubane Island, in a comfortable ocean-front bungalow enjoying fine French and tropical cuisine. At the hotel you can relax at the pool, go for walks on the wild beach, discover the island lush vegetation or do some sport fishing - all in the natural paradise of The Bijagos Archipelago. **Bijagos Archipelago is known for top game fishing.**

Technical sheet

- **VISAS:** single entry visa required and obtainable upon arrival in Bissau airport (please advise if we have to arrange for it)
- **VACCINATIONS:** Yellow fever – compulsory; malaria prophylaxis - highly recommended; cholera not necessary at the moment but to be checked upon departure

- **MEALS:** lunch, picnic or at local restaurants (tourist menus); dinner at the hotel restaurant (tourist menu)
- **LUGGAGE:** Due to frequent transfer from vehicles to boat and wet shores, please contain your luggage in approximately 20 kg preferable in waterproof duffle bags_ when on the speedboat, passengers may get splashed by water or foam, we advise to protect any camera and electronic equipment.
- **TRAVEL INSURANCE:** Not included. Mandatory for medical assistance, repatriation, material and physical damages. In the event of a claim, our liability is limited to the coverage of our local insurance.
- **TRANSPORT:** on roads and tracks by Minibus or 4x4, motorboat fitted for ocean sailing to the Bijagos Archipelago.
- **TIDES:** with each departure, visits and itinerary could be re-scheduled as per the tides; all visits will be done but, maybe, in a different order.
- **ACCOMMODATIONS** hotels and lodges are always chosen with maximum care, however due to possible lack of availability in some hotels, the Tour Leader may have to replace some hotels during the tour itself with others of similar standard. In some hotels single rooms are not always granted. One hotel we use only has 8 rooms.
- All our trips are designed to be flexible so that we can adapt to weather conditions, focus on the group's interests and take advantage of opportunities that arise once there. Meteorological condition can change or cancel some navigations and visits.
- Considering the special nature of the journey, some parts may be modified due to unpredictable factors and are based on unarguable decisions of the local guide. Costs originating from such variations will be sole responsibility of the participants. Of course, the guide will do his/her utmost to adhere to the original program.
- Prices could change in case of major changes in services costs, beyond the organizer's will

Departure: Oct 29th (Turtle nesting)
Rates per person in sharing double
Validity 2020

All departures are confirmed with minimum 2 people, when booking occurs at least 60 days prior to departure.

Number of Participants	Published Rate (Recommended Selling Rate)
Based on 6+ guests	2 675 Euro
Based on 2 / 5 guests	3 065 Euro
Single supplement	387 Euro

Departure: December 27th (Turtle nesting)

Number of Participants	Published Rate
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Based on 6+ guests	2 775 Euro
Based on 2 / 5 guests	3 165 Euro
Single supplement	387 Euro

The scheduled tour is sold by an international pool of tour operators.
A departure can also be booked privately by a tour operator

Extension at Rubane: Ponta Anchaca

Rates on request

Boat excursion to watch hippos at Orango island:

Rates on request

Included:

- Assistance at airport upon arrival (day 1) and departure (day 9)
- Transfers and tour in minibuses/microbuses and/or 4WD vehicles, speed boat on Cacheu River and speedboat fitted for ocean crossing to the Bijagos Archipelago.
- Local guide (languages spoken: English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish)
- Tours and visits as per the programme
- Accommodation in standard rooms, as per itinerary
- All meals as described: B = breakfast, L = lunch, D = dinner
- One bottle of mineral water each participant each day in the bus/car/boat during the visits.
- Entrance fees to parks, concessions, protected areas and cultural sites
- First Aid box
- All service charges and taxes

Not included:

- International flights
- Earlier (prior day 1) and/or later (after day 9) transfers from and to airport
- Visa fees and any airport departure taxes
- Any meal or sightseeing tour other than those specified
- Mineral water and drinks at meals and hotels.
- Porterage
- Fees for personal photos and videos
- Personal and holiday insurance (compulsory)
- Tips for drivers, guides and hotel staff
- Costs relating to delayed or lost luggage
- Any item of personal nature such as phone calls, laundry, etc.
- Whatever is not mentioned as included

Terms of payment

Payment policy

A deposit of 30% is required at the time of confirmation and the balance is due no less than 14 days before the arrival of guests at the destination.