



THE PROTECTED AREAS OF GUINEA-BISSAU

Guide to ecotourism



Guide prepared by the
Institute for Biodiversity and
Protected Areas in cooperation
with the The Ministry of Tourism
and Craft Industries and the
NGOs working in the field
of ecotourism

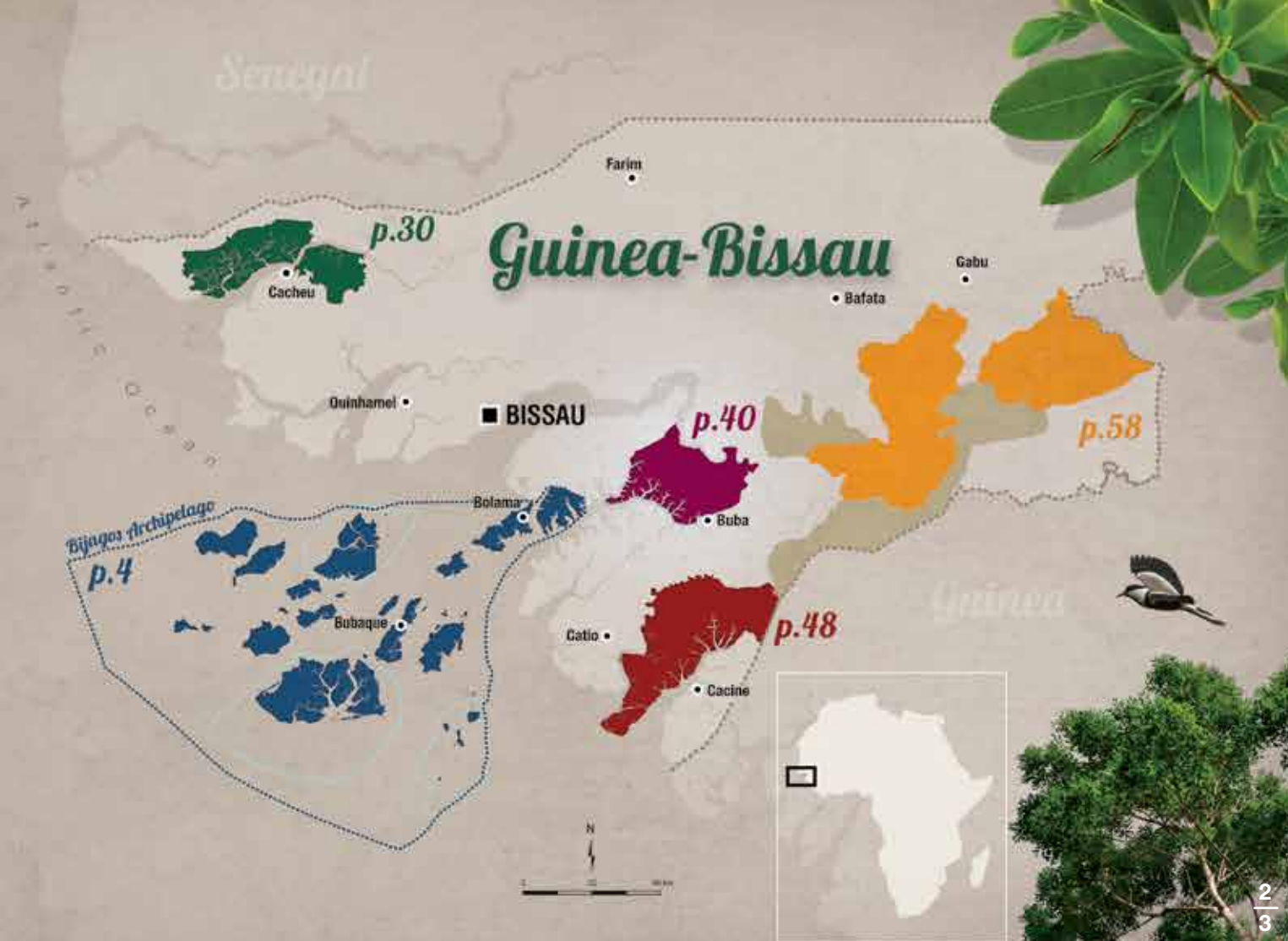


Guinea-Bissau's history, the composition of its territory and its geographic situation, have endowed the country with an exceptional cultural and natural heritage. Thirty or so different ethnic groups live here in close proximity to nature and have maintained the balance of the natural environments up until today. From the point of view of climate, the country is situated in a transition zone. The landscape varies greatly from savannah in the north-east to dense forest in the south, with mangrove along the seaboard and the archipelago of the Bijagós islands off the coast. Guinea Bissau has immense potential in terms of ecotourism: a rich cultural heritage and the welcoming nature of

Guinea-Bissau, land of biodiversity

The purpose of this brochure is to describe the main attractions for the ecotourist in the country's protected areas, to help visitors make their choices, find out about the heritage value and give them the practical information they need to organise their stay.

the people, the beauty and proximity of the sites, the untouched landscape, the presence of numerous emblematic animals such as the chimpanzee, the hippopotamus and the marine turtle make it a country with a strong vocation for a type of tourism that is currently thriving. Considerable efforts have been deployed to set up a nation-wide system of protected areas intended to cover almost a quarter of the landmass and encompassing a sample of the best preserved natural environments. These areas are occupied by communities whose knowledge, culture and lifestyles are closely linked to their natural surroundings. This characteristic affords a double opportunity, providing content for tourists to explore and creating alternative sources of income for these same communities.



BIJAGOS ARCHIPELAGO

*A world apart,
where nature and
culture are in symbiosis*

The Bijagos islands are a former delta that became an archipelago when the sea level rose. It is the only delta archipelago along the coasts of Africa and represents the continent's largest complex of mudflats.

The 32,500 inhabitants, almost 90% of whom belong to the local ethnic group known as Bijago, live year-round on only 21 of the 88 islands and islets. The islands of Bolama and Bubaque have deep water ports and constitute the administrative and service centres in relation to the main economic activities which are agriculture, fishing and tourism. The archipelago is well-known as one of the major natural monuments of the African coast, characterised by its mudflats and mangroves peopled with birds, marine turtles, manatees, hippopotami, etc. The conservation of the landscape and of the

natural habitats is assured in the first instance by the management methods of the Bijagós. The location and the strategic resources are protected by the spirits and their use is determined within the framework of magico-religious ceremonies. Many sites and islets are considered sacred, which confers on them a high level of protection. These traditional management measures were the inspiration for the rules and zoning of the Biosphere Reserve created in 1996 as part of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) and the classification of 3 protected areas.





The Council of Elders

Social organisation of Bijagós based on age

Each village, with an average 100 - 200 inhabitants, can be considered a political, economic and religious entity. The social organisation is based on the distinction of age which leads young people gradually to the status of elder through a series of stages with initiation ceremonies. To change from one age category to another, the youngest must perform ritual

payments to the elders to receive the secrets of knowledge in exchange. The high points of life are celebrated with ceremonies, offerings to the spirits and ritual dances. On these occasions, the young men give spectacular dance performances wearing bull, shark, swordfish or hippopotamus masks while the young women beat out the tempo on

gourds. These representations, which exalt the forces of nature, express the vitality and cohesion of the community. At the same time, they signify the links the Bijagós maintain with nature through a particularly rich cosmogony.

A production system finely balanced between land and sea



Gathering shellfish

The Bijagos production system is based on the cultivation oil palms, rice and the products of the sea. Rice is most often grown on land reclaimed by the slash-and-burn technique. A system of leaving land fallow allows the soil to regenerate. Other food crops grown include haricot beans, ground nuts and yams. In addition to oil, fruit and wine, the products of the palm tree are used in a number of ways. The expansion of the cashew, encouraged by the advent of a monetarized economy, is reducing the preponderance of the palm and rice. Sea products play a major role, in particular shellfish, which represent the principal source of animal protein. Fishing itself plays a secondary role outside the initiation periods when fish traps made of plant materials are installed in sites specially selected for the purpose. Ceremonial fishing is performed by women with the aid of palm branches woven together, which can be considered the earliest ancestors of the fishing net.

Bijago art

Bijago art expresses a rich cosmogony through sculpture, murals and dance. Most ritual objects present zoomorphic wooden carvings of great aesthetic sensibility: ceremonial stools, walking sticks, spoons and various containers are decorated with the heads of emblematic animals such as the hippopotamus, the hammerhead shark or the sacred ibis. Dance costumes, masks, back panels and bracelets represent the forces of nature such as bulls, sharks and swordfish. Murals, particularly those used to decorate places where ceremonies are held, depict the same species but also original geometric designs.

- 1 & 2 Wall paintings
- 3: Ritual recipient
- 4: Iran (spirit) of the isle of Canhabaque
- 5: Dance, isle of Formosa
- 6: Hammerhead shark dance mask
- 7: Shoulder bracelet for dance
- 8: Accessories of the elders



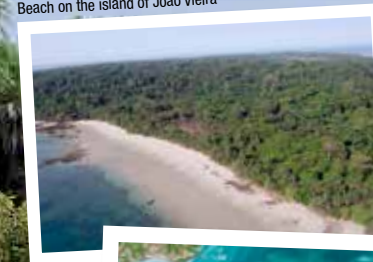
The terrestrial environment; between savannah and palm groves

The land of the islands is mainly covered in savannah and palm groves. The savannah consists in vast expanses of grassland which is used for cattle breeding and for straw which is used to cover the houses. The wettest savannah is used for rice-growing in the rainy season. The savannah in Orango national park constitutes a habitat for the bushbuck and the hippopotamus. On grassland that is less well drained, lakes form in the rainy season, and these are sought out by herons, ducks, including

whistling ducks, spur-winged geese and Egyptian geese, as well as by the black caiman.

A few vestiges of forests remain on most of the islands. There are even a few strands of sub-humid forest, in particular on the sacred islets and in the compounds of the initiation sites. The tall trees are used by the extremely rare Timneh African grey parrot for nesting, along with the colonies of waterfowl (pelican, ibis, spoonbill and cormorant).

Beach on the island of João Vieira



Satellite image of Orango National Park

A sanctuary for sharks and rays

The archipelago is characterised by the diversity of its predatory fish population, and is considered a sanctuary for sharks and rays, in particular. The shark species present include the tiger, sand tiger, hammerhead, lemon and bullhead and there are two species of sawfish close to extinction. 31 of the 42 species identified in the archipelago are considered endangered on a global scale.

Sharks and rays mature late (sometimes up to 15 years old) and produce few young, a phenomenon that is compensated for by their relatively long life spans. This reproduction strategy does not protect against pressure from fishing, which explains the critical situation of this family of fish. Sharks and sawfish occupy a privileged place in the Bidjogo cosmogony, particularly through masks for dance, wall paintings and sculpture.

Sawfish dance masks



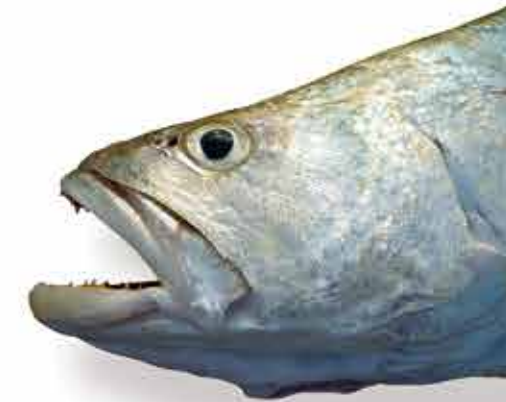
The sawfish, an endangered species

The marine environment is rich in biodiversity

The influence of the estuaries and marine currents on the one hand, and the presence of mudflats and mangroves on the other, explain the richness of the waters of the archipelago. These influences are responsible for a high production of plankton, which is the staple of small schooling fish (Bonga shad, sardinella) which constitute the prey of predators such as the horse mackerel, barracuda, various species of shark and two species of dolphin, the humpbacked dolphin and the bottlenose dolphin. The abundance of the fish stocks has determined the presence of a number of deep sea fishing camps in the archipelago, where record catches have been made. A great diversity of seabirds including terns, cormorants and pelicans also feed on these fish.



Bottlenose dolphin



The largest complex of mudflats on the African continent

The archipelago has the largest complex of mudflats on the African continent. At low tide, almost a third of the archipelago is uncovered, while at high tide only the islands emerge, surrounded by beaches or mangroves.

Every time the tide rises, the sea deposits on the mud banks quantities of plant matter, mainly the decomposing leaves of the mangrove trees. This organic matter feeds the myriad organisms that live on the surface of the mudflats or in galleries: plankton, bacteria, worms, shellfish, crabs and shrimp. All these invertebrates constitute a source of food for fish, birds and humans.

Satellite image of the Bijagos Islands and the coast of Guinea Bissau



Shorebirds in flight - Urok islands



Whimbrel

Shorebirds, a living link between Europe and Africa

Shore birds are small migratory waders of around fifteen species: curlew, godwit, sandpiper, plover, etc. When the tide is out they feed on small invertebrates on the mudflats. They share the resource naturally through their different morphologies: the godwit and the curlew have long beaks for probing deep into the mud, while the short-beaked plovers scour the surface.

In the months of March-April the shorebirds set off to migrate to Northern Europe, Siberia and Greenland, covering a distance of more than 6,000 km to lay their eggs. At the end of the summer, the nights grow longer, the temperatures fall and their prey decreases. So they set off again for the South. They spend 6 months along the African coast, and in particular in the archipelago of the Bijagós, which hosts almost a million of them, some of the largest concentrations known after those of the Banc d'Arguin in Mauritania.



Bar-tailed godwit



Sanderlings

The mangroves, forests in the sea

The mangrove is a plant formation comprised of different, specialised species, particularly the mangrove tree. To survive in sea water while standing in mud, the mangrove trees have made remarkable evolutionary adaptations, growing aerial roots, excreting salt through the surface of their leaves,

increasing the osmotic pressure of leaf sap, etc. The mangroves protect the coasts from erosion, and also constitute an important milieu for the breeding of marine resources, offering a wide range of useful products: wood, bark, fruit, honey, salt and various ingredients in the traditional

pharmacopeia. Their biodiversity is also remarkable: birds, crocodiles, monkeys, otters, manatees and hippopotami find shelter there or a preferential feeding ground depending on the position of the tide.



Mascarene reef egret

*The manatee,
the aquatic mammal
that inspired
the mermaid legend*

Manatees



The manatee is a species of aquatic mammal in the order Sirenia. Their bodies are massive, with adults weighing up to 750 kg. Their heads are round, with a snout and large, prehensile lips with which they graze aquatic plants, a herbivorous regime that is unique among the marine mammals. These characteristics justify the nickname of seacow or pis bus (cow fish) in Creole. This is a secretive species that lives in the cloudy waters of the mangroves and which gave rise to the legend of the mermaid. In the countries of the region, the story goes that a young woman was bathing at the edge of a river, when she was surprised by a hunter. She jumped into the water to hide her naked body and was then transformed into a manatee...

The relatively high concentrations of manatees in the archipelago can be explained by the extension of the mangrove trees, as they feed on the leaves and fruit, the existence of underwater freshwater springs and the low human presence. The manatee nonetheless remains an endangered species in West Africa and the sanctuary of the Bijagos islands is crucial to its survival.



Ark shell

A conservation model inspired by traditional Bijago management

The conservation of the natural environments and their resources was originally achieved through the management methods employed by the Bijagos. Strategic places and resources are protected by the spirits and their use is determined in religious ceremonies or by traditional rules. Many sites have sacred status which bestows on them a high level of protection.

These traditional management measures have inspired the zoning rules of the UNESCO Biosphere reserve set up in 1996. Some of the central zones were given a formal conservation status in the form of a marine protected area:

The Marine National Park of João Vieira e Poilão islands

a group of sacred islands that are home to the largest colony of green turtles on the African continent

Orango National Park

which is characterised by the highest biodiversity index in the archipelago

The community Marine Protected Area of Urok islands

for its concentration of waterfowl and manatees

Turtles hatching



Lagoon with hippos



Shorebirds resting



In 2014, the archipelago was awarded the status of Wetland of International Importance under the **Ramsar Convention**. The area is currently being considered for listing as a **World Heritage Site**, for the recognition of its exceptional universal heritage.

Ceremony for the spirit of the island (Poilão)



General Assembly of Urok CMPA

ORANGO NATIONAL PARK

The National Park encompasses the islands of Orango, Menegue, Canogo, Imbone and Orangozinho, representing a total area of 1,582 km² for the protection of the richest biodiversity of the archipelago and the unique landscape.

At a remove from the mainland, the Orango islands have preserved an undeniably wild character. Whether travelling on foot or by pirogue, their exploration would delight the naturalist, the lover of beautiful scenery or the amateur anthropologist. The first can observe the dolphins, manatees, crocodiles or hippopotami and close on 250 species of birds. The second can contemplate the pristine landscapes of the savannah, forest and mangroves that offer a sense of harmony. The third one can enjoy interesting encounters in the villages, the rice fields or the palm groves and, if they are lucky, they could witness one of the many ceremonies that are a common occurrence in the lives of the Bijago people.



A mosaic of natural habitats

Savannah, mangroves, lagoons, mudflats and shallows. Breeding ground for fishing resources.



Remarkable biodiversity

Sea hippopotamus, manatee, otter, crocodile, sea turtles, dolphins and waterfowl.



Resident population

2,500 people, 95% of whom belong to the Bidjogó ethnic group, living in 33 villages.



Human activities

Farming (rice, oil palms and cashew nuts), shellfish gathering, fishing and crafts.





The marine hippopotamus of the Bijagos, a symbolic animal

The archipelago's hippopotamus population has the unique characteristic of living in a marine environment. The hippos spend the day in the sea or in the mangroves and only come out at night to feed in the savannah grasslands. They can be dangerous, in particular for any pirogues which come too close. As they are no longer hunted as before, their numbers seem to be increasing, particularly in Orango National Park, which is now home to almost 130 individuals. To counter the risk of crop damage, solar-powered electric fences have been installed around the rice fields, which has allowed annual rice production to double. The totemic animal par excellence of the inhabitants of Uno and Orango islands is the *pis cabalo* (horse fish), one of the species best represented in sculpture, painting and dance.



Lagoon with hippos



Anôr village community lodge



Egyptian geese



Orango: Discovery trails

1 Lagoons with hippopotamus and waterfowl

Lookouts for watching the hippos. A community guest house, situated in the village of Anôr, serves as a base for visiting this part of Orango Island, and for getting to know a Bijagó village and its inhabitants. This village can be reached on foot from Eticoga (12 km) or by hiring a boat from the Orango Parque Hôtel or any other resting place in the archipelago.

2 Rice fields and palm groves:

Between the months of August and December there is continuous activity in the rice fields. Cultivated following an ingenious traditional method, they offer some spectacular scenery

3 Bidjogó village

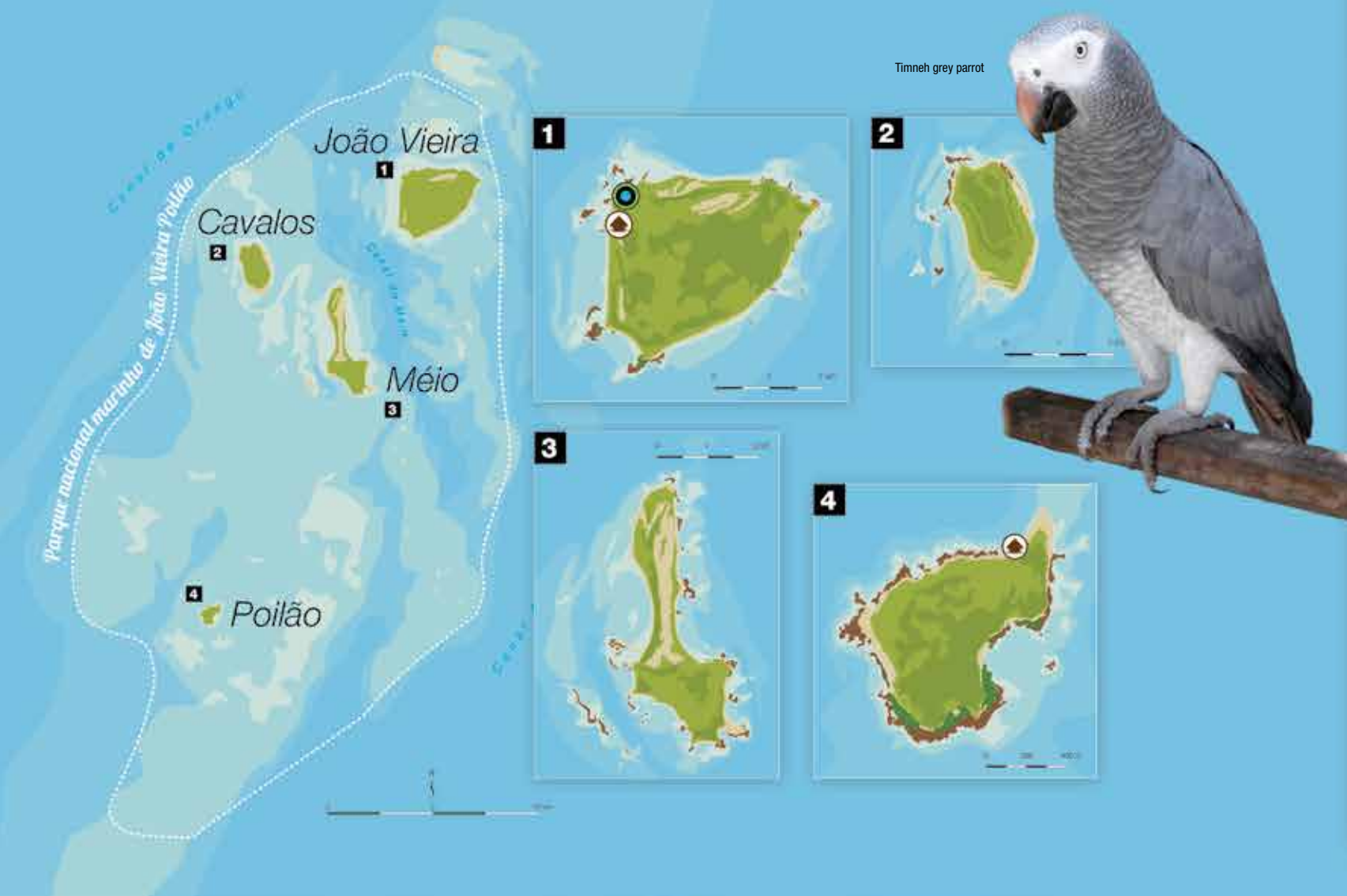
A visit to the village of Ambuduco will allow you to learn all about the way of life of the Bijagós and you will also see the rare Timneh African grey parrot.

4 Mangroves

The mangrove trees that grow in seawater compose a rather strange landscape and an ecosystem it is fascinating to explore. Excursions by canoe or motor boat can be organised from Orango Parque Hôtel.

5 Imbone

Wild birds, crocodiles, hippopotami.



Timneh grey parrot

MARINE NATIONAL PARK JOÃO VIEIRA & POILÃO

Natural habitats
Island, forests, beaches, rocky shallows.
Breeding ground for fishing resources.

Remarkable biodiversity
Marine turtles, Timneh grey parrot, shore birds
and waders.

Resident population
The 4 main islands are considered sacred and traditionally
belong to 4 villages on the isle of Canhabaque.

Human activities
Rice growing, palm oil, fishing

Green turtle

Headquarters of the João Vieira Island National Park



This island park, covering an area of 500 square km, provides protection for the 3rd largest colony of Atlantic green turtles and some unique landscapes: desert islands, white sandy beaches bordered by tropical forest, the resting grounds of seabirds.

Situated to the south of the archipelago, near neighbouring Guinea, the islands in this park are characterised by their sandy beaches, which are among the most stunning, and the relative absence of mangroves. Wherever you look, there is always an island further out to sea, sitting on the horizon. This impression of living far from inhabited land, on the edge of forests which are home to the parrots, creates an unforgettable experience.

Green turtle

The rendezvous of the Atlantic marine turtles

The largest numbers of green turtle – an endangered species – can be observed on the beaches of the isle of Poilão, where the number of nests varies between 7,000 and 37,500 depending on the year. This is the most important green turtle breeding ground in Africa.

Research carried out in the João Vieira Poilão national marine park has shown, with satellite markers to support this, that the adults migrate towards the waters of Mauritania after breeding, whereas a part of the young turtles cross the Atlantic and head for Brazil and Argentina.

The temperature of the sand determines the sex of the turtles at birth: an increase in the temperature increases the proportion of females. Unlike most sites where global warming leads to a feminisation of the population, the proportions of the gender of the turtles born at Poilão is balanced, as the nests dug in the shade of trees produce a predomination of males. The isle of Poilão, with its forest, therefore plays a strategic role in the survival of the species in the face of climate change.



Young green turtle

Caspian terns



Exploring nature...

The colony of sea turtles on Poilão island

The turtles can be watched during the breeding period between July and December. The camp site can host no more than 15 visitors at a time to avoid disturbing the animals. See the turtles laying at night. From November, watch the baby turtles hatching. A guide will provide you with information on the biology of the turtles and on the conditions to be respected when observing them.



The Timneh grey parrots

An extremely rare species that lives mainly on the islands of Meio and João Vieira. Their conservation poses a certain number of problems, in particular in relation to the protection of the forest and the tall trees in which they build their nest.



Fauna and flora of João Vieira

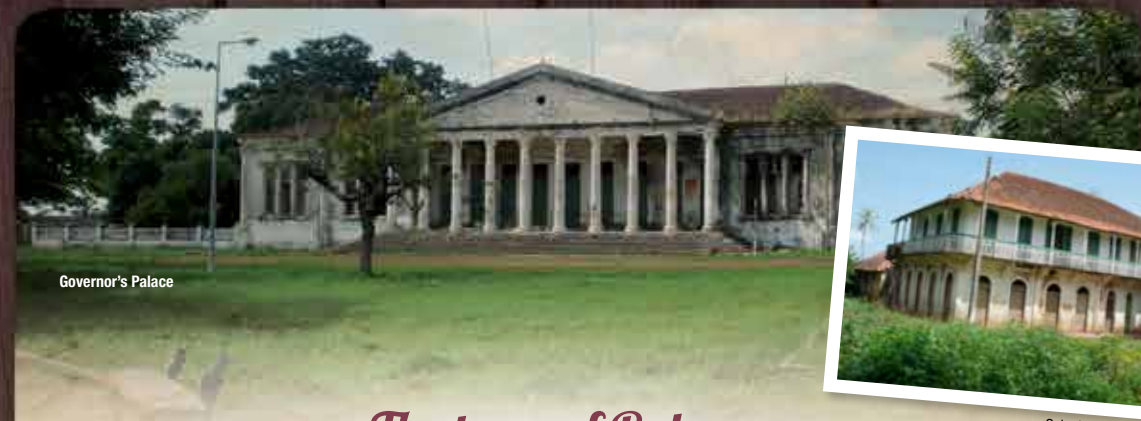
A guide can accompany you to explore the forest part of the island with its flora (wild fruit, medicinal plants) and fauna. The tour will lead to the beach where seabirds and other small waders can be observed.



Bubaque, the economic capital of the archipelago

By its central position in the archipelago and its deepwater port, the island of Bubaque and the town of the same name constitutes the most popular starting point for exploring the archipelago. It is the destination of the public ferry from Bissau, the location of a large part of the tourism infrastructure, including the landing strip that receives visitors from Bissau or Senegal. There are two small museums to be explored, one of which is in the environment and Bijagos culture centre which constitutes the headquarters of the UNESCO biosphere reserve and where information can be

obtained on visiting the national parks. The island itself is well worth a visit for its villages and beaches, in particular Bruce beach in the south, which can be reached by hired bicycle. The inhabitants of the village of Bijante are reputed for their sculpture. Every year, there is a cultural festival at Easter, and a Mardi Gras carnival. From Bubaque, canoes take you to the principal islands of the archipelago but, for safety reasons, the speedboats from the tourist lodges are to be preferred.



Governor's Palace

Colonial house

The town of Bolama, former capital of Portuguese Guinea

Thanks to its deepwater port, sheltered from the wind, Bolama appealed to the European colonisers in the 16th century for the installation of a military and commercial base intended in particular for the slave trade towards the Brazilian sugar cane plantations. The French, British and Portuguese in turn claimed possession of the island, until the arbitration of the President of the United States, Ulysses Grant, in favour of Portugal in 1871. Many buildings still bear traces of this colonial past. Former colonial houses, with their wide verandas,

the Governor's palace and the Customs House bear witness to the time when the town was the capital of the country (1879 - 1941) and up to 249 seafaring vessels a year used the harbour. Today, although it is still the administrative capital of the archipelago, a large part of Bolama seems to be somewhat dormant, as if forgotten by history. The development of tourism related to the town's past could turn out to be decisive for giving the town a new impetus.

HOW TO ORGANISE YOUR TOUR OF THE ARCHIPELAGO

How do I get there?

A ferry leaves on Fridays from the commercial port of Bissau, around high tide. Information and payment (approximately Cfa francs 15,000 for the return journey) from the cargo port. Return from Bubaque on Sundays around low tide.

The tourist lodges organise private transport by boat that can take you to Bubaque, the protected areas or to the other tourist lodges.

Visiting the National Parks

Visits to the Community Marine Protected Area of the Urok islands are temporarily subject to special conditions. Only the peripheral area is accessible, in particular for sports fishing or bird watching. The Orango and João Vieira-Poilão National Parks are open to the public, with an entrance charge. Destination management companies are there to welcome you on the island of Orango (Orango Parque Hôtel and Anôr guest house), on the island of João Vieira



Beach on the island of Meio

(Chez Claude) and on the island of Poilão (sea turtle camp) and to help you organise your visit of these two parks. Conditions for visits, information and entrance fee from the Environment and Bijagó culture centre (Bubaque), tourism lodges and from the head office of Itap in Bissau.

Environment and Bijagó culture centre (Bubaque)



Village on the isle of Canhabaque



Where can I stay in the archipelago?

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ARCHIPELAGO

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map
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The largest mangrove system in West Africa

The Rio Cacheu mangroves natural park lies in the northwest of the country, in proximity to Casamance. As the name suggests, it includes a section of the Cacheu river and protects the largest contiguous area of mangroves in West Africa.

The part of the natural park situated to the south of the river comprises the historical town of Cacheu, an important port in the slave trade and the first capital of the former Portuguese Guinea. It also includes tropical forest and savannah grasslands that compose some admirable scenery. The kindness and welcoming attitude of the inhabitants, in the villages surrounded by tall trees that shelter the spirits, plays a major role in making these visits delightful.

The northern section of the Park can be reached by boat or by car. The river route presents the advantage of experiencing the special atmosphere of the mangroves. You may come across a canoe with paddles and flocks of birds that take flight as you pass. Visiting the villages in this part of the Park occasions a real aesthetic shock: the harmony of the huts, the pattern of the rice fields, the bouquets of trees scattered across the savannah, everything here breathes of man's complicity with nature.



Mandjak woman with traditional woven cloth

The population groups

The park is occupied by almost 28,000 inhabitants spread over 44 villages. They belong to several ethnic groups, mainly animist, including the Feloups, Bayots, Manjacos, Cobianas, Balanta and Banhums who are the most represented. Their presence within the Park means that it is not classified as a “Wilderness Area” but rather as a set of natural environments carefully managed by the communities who have amassed precious knowledge of nature. The forests are exploited for agriculture by means of slash-and-burn techniques and for various resources such as wild fruit, honey, medicinal plants and palm wine. Some of them are protected as sacred forests that harbour spirits and serve as a setting for traditional ceremonies. These communities are confronted with the challenges of modernity, and in particular climate change, given the extreme dependency of their agriculture on rainfall and the rise in sea level. Tourism, still very discreet, could represent an additional source of revenue in their economy.



Basketwork
Women going to the rice paddies



Cacheu Fort

Cacheu, a town steeped in history

History is irresistibly present in the atmosphere of the town of Cacheu. Perhaps because of the military fort, a vestige of the Portuguese *descobrimento* whose ramparts rise on the banks of the river; is it the old memory and the suffering along the route of the slaves who were dispatched from Cacheu to the improbable shores of the new world? Or the rhythm of the tides that gently rock the nonchalance of the people and, like a metronome, commands the movement of the canoes on the river? The fact is there, incontrovertible, the town exudes a very special kind of poetry which beckons, when, for example, you visit the slavery memorial and the old military fort.

The Cacheu River

The Rio Cacheu is not actually a river. It is a sea inlet that receives little fresh water input, outside of the rainy season. The influence of the tides can be felt up to 150 km from the mouth, and governs the rhythms of daily life: movements of the fauna, human activities, variations in the landscape... Under the water or clinging in clusters to the roots of the mangrove



Dug-out canoe

trees, the wild oysters are gathered by the women. In the secret of the waters, fish and crustaceans of all sorts live and breed, taking advantage of the productivity of the mangroves, before heading back out to sea to be caught by the fishermen. This is also where the manatees and the sea hippos hide, the inspiration for many a legend.

Feloup fisherman

Village of Bolol



Pink flamingos



In the mangroves of the rio Elia

The mangrove, trees for the fish

Guinea-Bissau is a mangrove country par excellence. The most recent studies worldwide show that the country is top ranking for the proportion of its surface area, at almost 9% of the landmass.

The mangrove is composed of mangrove trees capable of surviving in sea water and standing in mud thanks to their aerial roots. Their presence at the interface of the

marine and terrestrial environments has the effect of protecting the coasts from sea erosion and storms.

In addition to the fish and crustaceans that find ideal breeding conditions here, the mangroves offer a wide range of useful products: wood, bark, fruit, honey, salt and various ingredients in the traditional pharmacopeia, that make a considerable contribution to the local economies. The milieu is

also remarkable for its biodiversity: close on 275 species of birds have been recorded in the park, including many migratory species from Europe, but also crocodiles, monkeys, otters, manatees and hippopotami, all of which find shelter in the mangrove or a feeding ground, depending on the tide.

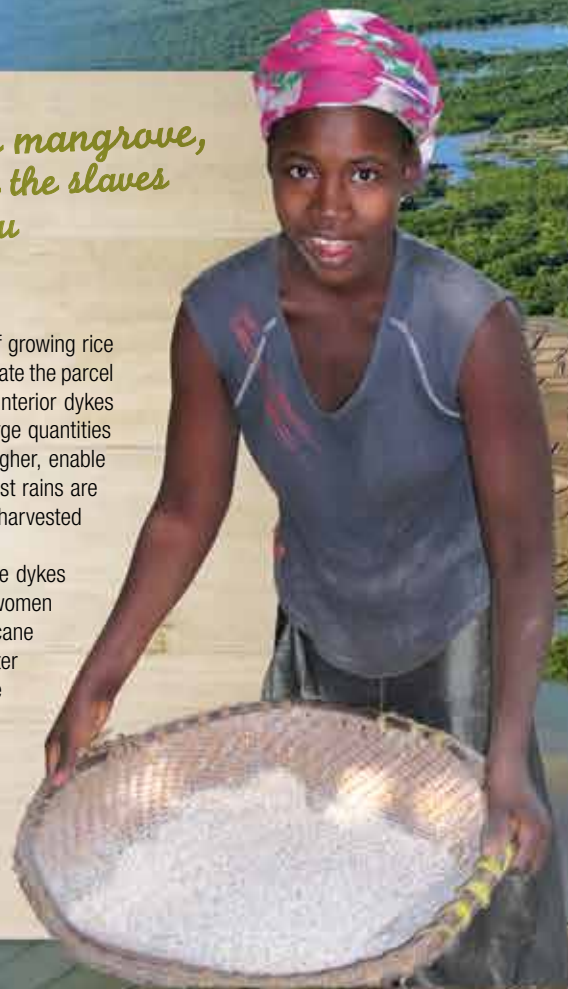


Village of Elia

The rice grown in the mangrove, cultivation methods that the slaves took from Guinea-Bissau to the New World

The Feloups and the Balantas are among the rare ethnic groups capable of growing rice on the salt mud of the mangroves. They build an enclosing breakwater to isolate the parcel from the influence of the seawater. Once the mangrove trees have died, interior dykes are raised to separate the compartments. The furrows are deep to hold large quantities of fresh water at the height of the rainy season, while the ridges, all the higher, enable the roots of the rice to be kept away from the briny part of the soil. The first rains are used to desalinate the soil, then the shoots are transplanted. The rice is harvested manually, ear by ear.

This mangrove rice-growing requires a considerable work force to build the dykes and dig the furrows. All the men from the village are enlisted, aided by the women chanting encouragements and distributing rations of alcohol distilled from cane sugar. At the end of the rains, the dykes are opened again to let in the seawater that provides nutrients and prevents the acidification of the soil. The rice fields are then transformed into lagoons which are invaded by waterfowl, bearing witness to the harmony that persists between man and nature. At a time when the question of the transfer of technology between North and South are on the table, it is good to know that these agricultural practices were taken to the New World by the slaves from Guinea Bissau.



En route for transplanting



Harvest



Dyke maintenance

Mangrove rice paddies



Kingfisher

PLAN YOUR STAY

Finding information

It is best to go to the Park headquarters, at the entrance to the town of Cacheu or of São Domingos, to obtain information about the visiting conditions and the hiring of canoes. Boat tours depend on the times of the tides. Additional information from the headquarters of Ibap, in Bissau (Bairro de Luanda).

What to see

Guides can show you the following circuits:

- 1 • **The historic town of Cacheu** with the fort built by the Portuguese in 1588 to control the slave trade in the region, the slavery museum, the chapel
- 2 • **Canoeing near Cacheu** on the Rio Blimbom: mangroves, birdlife, sacred forest
- 3 • **Village of Cobiana**: sacred forest, cultural heritage, Mandjak pilgrimage
- 4 • **Canoe circuit** between Cacheu and São Domingos: mangroves, rice fields, birdlife
- 5 • **Feloup villages**: landscape, rice fields, mangroves, cultural heritage, harvest and rice festival

Village of Blimbom



Village of Elia



*Where to stay,
where to eat in the Park
and the surrounding area?*



RIO CACHEU
MANGROVES
NATURAL PARK

Cacheu

Park office (+245) 955 70 31 72 / 955 59 74 26
ecoibap@gmail.com - www.ibap-gb.org
Babu Restaurante and Bar (+245) 966 25 10 10

Canchungo

Casa Canchungo (+245) 955 65 12 72 /
(+33) 6 73 30 77 51
www.casacanhungo.com

São Domingos

Octavio Hôtel - Restaurant (+245) 966 64 22 05 /
(+228) 966 61 79 96
Keta Hôtel - Restaurant (+245) 966 61 83 82

Varela

Chez Hélène (+245) 966 64 01 80 / 955 30 13 73
valscorpione@hotmail.com
www.facebook.com/Aparthotel-Chez-Helene

Bolol and Elalab (Feloup villages)

Community guest houses

Guides:

Elalab – Lucas (+245) 955 86 41 13 /
Alexandre (+245) 955 35 66 63
Elia – Jose Carlos (+245) 969 24 09 46
Bolol – Ibu (+245) 966 45 36 87.

Tour operators

Mérodie Ninnin in São Domingos

(+245) 969 29 04 08
melodie.ninnin@free.fr

Transafrica

(+228) 222 168 23
transafrica@transafrica.biz / roberto@transafrica.biz
www.transafrica.biz/en/tour-guinea-bissau.php

Feloup hut of the King of Elia





A mosaic of wetlands

The Natural Park, which covers some 880 square km, protects a wide variety of wetlands.

In addition to the Lagoa de Cufada itself, Guinea Bissau's largest freshwater lake, the park has two other smaller lakes, part of the rio Corubal, which constitutes the country's principal waterway, while the southern boundary encompasses part of the Rio Grande de Buba which is in fact a sea inlet, its banks fringed with mangrove trees. The Park also protects important plant formations such

as gallery forests and some dense forest areas. This diversity of habitats is home to a remarkable array of wildlife including 54 species of mammals and 337 species of bird, particularly waterfowl which are the reason why the Park is classified as a "Wetland of International Importance" within the framework of the RAMSAR convention.





Women from the Bubacalhau association (Buba)

The population groups dependent on the natural resources

The main ethnic groups living in the Park are the Beafada, Fula, Mandinka and Balanta. The religion of the first 3 being Muslim and the fourth animist. They are mainly farmers who grow rainfed rice, millet, ground nuts, beans and manioc. The women are more particularly in charge of the rice-growing on low-lying ground, gathering wild fruits and the extractive activities (palm oil, salt). Cashew production occupies an increasingly large place. The Balanta people distinguish themselves by their mastery of rice-growing on mangrove soil using remarkable knowledge and technologies necessary for overcoming the presence of salt in the soil. The Balanta women catch fish, and gather shellfish and crustaceans. The extractive activities, hunting and fishing are subject to authorisation from the traditional chiefdoms who contribute in this way to the management of the site.



Cashew apples



Child with bunch of palm fruit

Beafada woman



The lakes and humid savannah, at the heart of unspoilt nature

Cufada and Bionra are permanent freshwater lakes bordered by swamp extending to the rio Corubal. The area acts like a giant sponge, absorbing water during the rainy season and providing a gradual supply to the water table and wells in the region during the dry season. The lakes are occupied by aquatic plants; wild rice around the edges and water lilies in the deepest parts. The outside edges are covered in flood-prone meadow or forest, the whole composing an admirable landscape. Canoeing on lake Cufada offers unforgettable moments of calm and serenity in the heart of the natural wilderness.



Jacana



Whistling ducks

A wide variety of water birds can be observed there, in particular during the dry season. Where the water is deep, geese (*Pygmy goose*, *spur-winged goose*) mingle with the ducks (*White-faced Whistling-Duck*), pelicans and cormorants. Several species of egret and heron as well as black crowned cranes seek out their sustenance in the borders, while the jacanas tiptoe from lily pad to lily pad and the ospreys glide above the water in search of fish.



Kingfisher



Cufada Lake



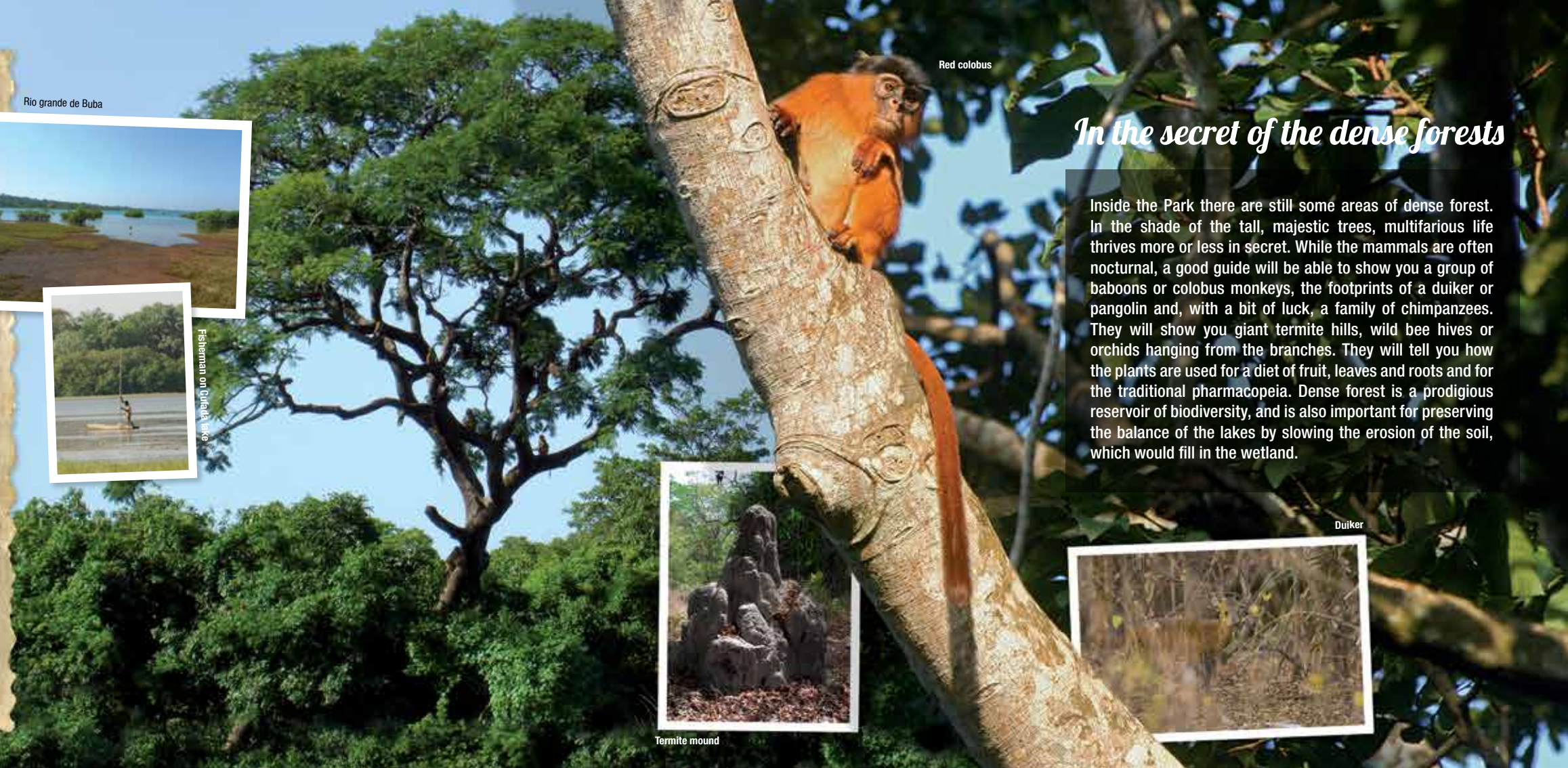
Rio grande de Buba



Fisherman on Cufada lake

The Rio Grande de Buba and its multitude of tributaries

Part of the north bank of the rio grande de Buba falls within the boundaries of Cufada Park. It is not, strictly speaking, a river, but a ria, that is to say a stretch of water that runs inland from the sea. A multitude of secondary inlets, or bolons, draws the contours of the shore in the shape of an oak leaf, the outline of which is underlined with a line of mangrove trees. We sometimes catch a glimpse along a bolon of a fisherman throwing a hand cast net or a pirogue gliding in silence in the current. Water birds can be seen all along the banks and there are sloths in the mangrove and, in the actual river, there are dolphins and manatees.



Red colobus

In the secret of the dense forests

Inside the Park there are still some areas of dense forest. In the shade of the tall, majestic trees, multifarious life thrives more or less in secret. While the mammals are often nocturnal, a good guide will be able to show you a group of baboons or colobus monkeys, the footprints of a duiker or pangolin and, with a bit of luck, a family of chimpanzees. They will show you giant termite hills, wild bee hives or orchids hanging from the branches. They will tell you how the plants are used for a diet of fruit, leaves and roots and for the traditional pharmacopeia. Dense forest is a prodigious reservoir of biodiversity, and is also important for preserving the balance of the lakes by slowing the erosion of the soil, which would fill in the wetland.



Termite mound



Duiker

HOW TO ORGANISE YOUR STAY

Finding information

At the head office of Ibp in Bissau, or at the headquarters of the Park in Buba: reception, information, documentation, entrance fees. Local guides are available.

Observation tower on Cufado lake



Canoeing



Water lily

What to see

1 • "Forests of Bacar Conté"

The circuit takes you to the banks of the Rio Corubal, the main watercourse of Guinea Bissau and still untouched, where a few groups of hippos still live. You will travel along the gallery forests on the edge of the river that offer a different landscape and a special type of wildlife. If the tide is favourable, you may be able to see the phenomenon of the tidal wave. The circuit takes approximately 1½ hrs.

2 • "Cufada Lake"

After a general presentation of the site by the guide, set off in a canoe on the still waters to the watch tower on the other bank. From there you have a view of the lake and the surrounding forest where you can take in the scenery and observe the birdlife. You can enjoy a picnic at the watch tower. On the way back, you can spend as much time as you like in the canoe. The circuit takes approximately 3 hrs.

3 • Boat ride on the Rio Buba



Where to stay in the vicinity of the Natural Park?

cf.
map
p.41



Buba

Pousada Bela Vista (+245) 966 64 70 11 / 955 37 80 89

Berço do Rio (+245) 955 70 57 00 / 966 62 47 86

Buba Hotel (+245) 955 92 99 66

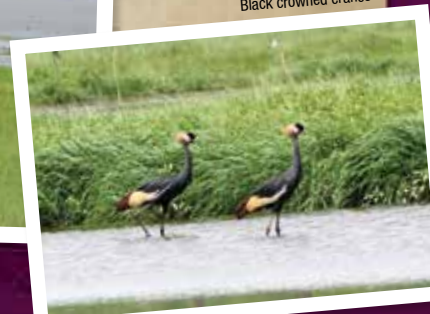
Saltinho Pousada de Saltinho

Mamadu Aliu Djalo (+245) 955 99 88 00

http://gw.geoview.info/pousada_do_saltinho



Black crowned cranes





The largest areas of dense forest in the country

Cantanhez National Park was set up for the conservation of the largest areas of dense forest in the country, some of which are primary forest.

It encompasses a cultural heritage of interest by the ethnic diversity of the population but also because the forests provided cover for independence fighters, so they are something of a national symbol.

In addition to the forest, the 1,057 square km of Park contains a wide diversity of natural habitats such as sea inlets, mangroves, dry forest and savannah, in addition to the spaces transformed by man into rice paddies, palm groves and orchards (cashew nuts, citrus fruit). These mosaics explain the diversity of the flora and fauna, with emblematic species such as the chimpanzee and the elephant.

The people are from the ethnic groups of Nalu, Balanta, Sosso, Tanda, Djacanica and Fula, each with their own production system. The challenge consists here in achieving a harmonious combination of the necessities of development and those of the conservation of biodiversity.



The population groups

The first people to arrive in the Cantanhez peninsula, settling there before the 15th century, were the Nalus, an animist ethnic group originally from Guinea and adept at extracting oil from the palm and making palm wine, growing rainfed crops and fishing on the edges of the sea inlets. Towards the middle of the 19th century, the Fula arrived and pushed the Nalus towards the south. Initially nomadic shepherds, they became sedentary, cultivating crops using slash-and-burn and at the same time introduced the religion of Islam. Towards the end of the 19th century, the Sossos from Guinea combined forces with the Nalus to contain the advance of the Fula. Their speciality of growing fruit was also to have an impact on the evolution of the forest. The last wave of arrivals was the Balanta, who arrived at the beginning of the 20th century, and contributed remarkable skills in terms of rice-growing on mangrove soil.

Healer from Lautchande forest

Contribution to human well-being

The Cantanhez National Park was set up to meet the need to conserve the forests and the many services they offer to the communities in the vicinity. The shade and humidity they produce helps to maintain a favourable climate, particularly an abundance of rain. Their importance vis-a-vis the climate also comes from their capacity to sequester carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas) during photosynthesis, and store the carbon in the trunks, branches and roots of the trees. Their foliage protects the soil from heavy drops pounding it and carrying off the most fertile layers of humus by erosion. The roots of the trees help the rainwater to penetrate the ground and fill the water table.

The Cantanhez forests are a veritable reservoir of biodiversity which contributes to the quality of life of the population for food, medicinal plants, fuel, building houses and canoes and craft work. Some, considered sacred forests, also play a role on a spiritual and cultural level, especially during the initiation periods of the animist peoples.



Working the furrows of the rice fields



Path through the forest

Islets of primary forest with considerable botanical value

As it is adjacent to the western extremity of the Guinea-Congo centre of endemism, and to date still comprises pockets of primary forest, the Park is of enormous floristic value. No fewer than 840 plant species have been identified, a large number of which are used in the pharmacopeia or in traditional gastronomy. One study showed that the Nalus alone have identified and make use of 203 different species of plant.

The giants of the forest tower some 30 meters or more in height, exposing their canopies to the light and the heat. This is therefore where the majority of flowers and fruit are to be found. Under their vault reigns a climate of obscurity, cool and moist, where other species grow that spread out more and have wider leaves the better to absorb the light. The very low level of light that reaches the ground explains the relative absence of herbaceous vegetation. In this closed milieu where air does not circulate, seeds are pollinated and dispersed by monkeys, bats, birds and insects, which eat the fruit and the flowers.



Slash-and-burn agriculture

Every year, parts of the forest are burnt to free land for agriculture. Crops are then planted - rice, millet, sorghum or maize - and take advantage of the plentiful rain to grow. The soil offers only meagre harvests and cereals are rarely sown more than 2 years in a row on the same patch. The land is then left fallow, to be used again 5 to 7 years later, or planted with fruit trees (cashew, banana or citrus). Slash-and-burn agriculture is one of the principal causes of deforestation. The wildlife, deprived of its natural habitat, invades the orchards, coming into conflict with the farmers.





Chimpanzees, protected by taboos

Chimpanzees are an endangered species. Guinea-Bissau counts between 600 and 1,000 individuals, a significant proportion of which live in the Cantanhez forests. They live in groups of 5 - 10 individuals that travel over a vast territory to satisfy their varied dietary needs. Equally at ease on the ground and in the trees, they make use of all the strata of the forest to search for fruit, leaves, flowers and insects, and more rarely, small mammals. Like man, they are capable of using tools: sticks to catch the termites in their mounds, sponges of chewed leaves to find water, stones used as hammers to crack nuts. They are active mainly in the morning and late afternoon and rest during the hottest part of the day. In the evening they build their nest in the trees, mainly in the palms, folding the branches inward.

Although they are protected by taboo because of their resemblance to man, their mutual relations have a tendency to deteriorate due to the development of agriculture and the concomitant disappearance and fragmentation of the forest. The existence of the Cantanhez National Park and the forest conservation actions attenuate this conflict between man and his distant cousin.



A site of international ecological importance

There are a multitude of insects in the forest environment. Termites alone represent up to 70% of the invertebrates in the soil and play a vital role in the decomposition of the plant matter. The termite mounds resemble clay castles, designed to direct the currents of air to maintain a constant temperature and humidity level. To date, 194 bird species have been spotted in the Park, which, for this reason, is considered a globally Important Bird Area (IBA) by Birdlife International. A study of the mammals revealed the presence of at least 84 species, 33 of which are in the category between "vulnerable" and "critically endangered" on the IUCN red list. Among the herbivores, the emblematic species are savannah elephant, buffalo, hippopotamus and, in a marine environment, the manatee. All are difficult to spot, unlike the colobus monkeys, baboons, chimpanzees and other primates.



Violet turaco

The pangolin, with its scaly body, and the aardvark are major termite eaters. Among the predators, note the discreet presence of the panther and 23 other species of carnivores that are smaller in size, such as the serval or the otter. Reptiles are represented by the Nile crocodile, which is still abundant along the banks of the rios Cacine and Cumbidjã, as well as by snakes such as the python and the mambas with their deadly venom.



Serval



Bushbucks

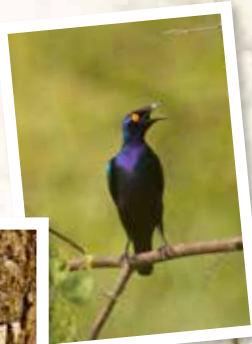
HOW TO ORGANISE YOUR STAY

Finding information:

At the head office of INAP in Bissau, or at the headquarters of the Park in the village of Jemberem: reception, information, documentation, entrance fees. Local guides are available and you can hire canoes, pirogues and bicycles.



Ceiba tree



Glossy starling

Exploring nature

- 1 • **Balana - Guiledje**
Colonial cartel, museum (national liberation war, environment & culture)
- 2 • **Canamina**
Dense forest, mangroves, primates, aardvarks, canoeing
- 3 • **Lautchandé**
Dense forest, chimpanzees, buffalo, Colobus monkeys
- 4 • **Farim village**
Memorial of the veterans of the Paigc (African Party for the Independence of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde)
- 5 • **Cadique Nbitna**
Rice paddies, Borassus stand, mangroves
- 6 • **Isle of Melo**
Mangroves, beach campsite, sports fishing, bird watching



Chimpanzees

CANTANHEZ
NATIONAL PARK



Where to stay
around Cantanhez?



Guiledje
Guiledje Bungalows

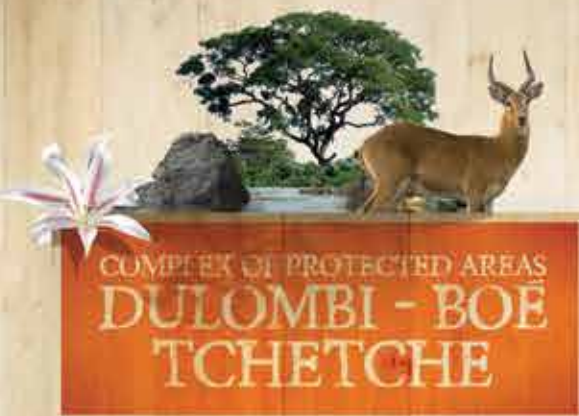
Faro Sadjuma
Faro Sadjuma Maison Rurale

Jemberem
Jemberem ecotourism lodge

For information and bookings:
ONG Acção para o Desenvolvimento
Bairro de Klelé, Bissau (+245) 955523358
ad.gbissau@gmail.com
www.adbissau.org



Jemberem community lodge



At the extremity of the country, oases of biodiversity

Situated in the southeast of the country, the complex comprises two National Parks and 3 wildlife corridors, the whole covering a surface area of some 2,800 square km.

It includes part of the catchment area of the rio Corubal as well as continental ecosystems (forest, savannah) situated along the foothills of the Fouta Djallon range. The landform is undulating, formed by hills no higher than 400 m, with valleys and depression called “wendos” lying between them, such as the Wendo Tcham, a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance, and water courses that form more or less temporary wetlands. This set of environments plays a significant role both for the population and for biodiversity.



Roan antelope

The population groups and their systems of production

The eastern part of the region was once inhabited by the Mandinka and the western part by the Beafadas. The Fula began their invasion as early as the 13th century, gradually imposing their presence as nomadic herders, while the other ethnicities became the minority. The organisation of the Fula society is characterised by the presence of casts which include kings, their servants, musicians and warriors. The people are also divided into occupational casts such as blacksmith, weaver, carpenter, farmers and, at the bottom of the scale, the “captives”, former prisoners of war now part of a family. The “kingdom” or *regulado*, which is the highest level of territorial administration of the Fula, encompasses a set of villages managed by a village chief “*djarga*”, the elders and the Imam regarding customary prerogatives. Seven *regulados* are listed in the Dulombi – Boé – Tchetché complex of protected areas.

Demographic growth and the socio-economic transformations set in motion by colonisation (taxes, forced labour, duty on ground nuts as an export crop) pushed the Fula to move with their herds to new pastures, convert themselves to become traders, farmers or fishermen. The system of production comprises household farm crops (vegetables and root vegetables), cereals, rice-growing on slash-and-burn or low-lying ground and fruit (especially the cashew), to which can be added livestock breeding. The household economy also draws on the exploitation of forestry products, the wildlife, and, to a lesser extent, fishing in the temporary water courses and lakes

Fula woman

Cultural and historical heritage

Discovering the culture and traditions of the Fula is one of the most interesting aspects of a stay in the region, whether it is a case of lifestyle, architecture, music or dance, gastronomy or crafts. The homes are built in an original way with the aid of a mixture of clay and cow dung to keep the interior cool even at the hottest times of the day. Although Islamised today, the ethnic groups present still maintain certain areas as sacred, be they forest, springs, rock outcrops or grottoes.

The region presents a particular historical heritage in relation to the ancient Mandinka empire, the conquests of the Fula and, more recently, the war of independence. The vestiges of Portugal’s military presence are visited regularly today by the former colonisers in a spirit of “memory tourism”. This was the scene of some of the most glorious episodes of the fight for national liberation, conducted by heroes such as Domingos Ramos and Amílcar Cabral, an emblematic figure of the struggle. Shortly after his assassination in Conakry on 20 January 1973, the 2nd Congress of the PAIGC was held in Boé, on the site now known under the name of “independence mountain”, along with the 1st meeting of the Popular National Assembly at which the creation of the State of Guinea-Bissau was proclaimed.



Traditional Fula dance



Amílcar Cabral ©DR

Scenery on the rio Corubal

Fishing with hand cast net, Vundu Tcham



Boé landscape

The natural environments

The DBT complex comprises a mosaic of plant formations composed of gallery forests and dense palm groves along the edges of the water courses and lakes, which are gradually replaced by dry forests as the wetlands are left behind. These forests are in turn replaced by wooded savannah then by grassy savannah, the existence of which is often associated with the presence of a laterite crust called “*boual*”. Unlike the rest of

the country, the region presents some hills, rock outcrops of sandstone, some of which are considered sacred, in relation to the presence of grottoes that sometime shelter large concentrations of bats. The rio Corubal, which is highly dependent on the rainfall over the Fouta Djallon range in Guinea, is the only freshwater river in Guinea-Bissau. There are islands in the middle of the river on which you can camp in the middle of the

wilderness, where the only sounds to break the silence are birdsong and the distant cry of a family of chimpanzees. The river also has rapids, such as at Cussilinha, a name which means “murmuring waters” in Béafada language. In the downstream part of the rio, near the mouth, at spring tides there is a possibility of observing a tidal bore.

Little bee eaters

Biodiversity

The diversity of the natural milieu and the low population densities explain the presence of exceptional biodiversity, that is the reason why part of the region is classified as a protected area. Of the 74 species of mammals identified, several are considered endangered and are located at the extreme edge of their distribution area. Also notable are the presence of the lion and the leopard, the roan antelope and the kob, the forest and savannah buffalo, the

Leopard and kobs



Male kob



Nile crocodile



Chimpanzee

chimpanzee, hippopotamus and Nile crocodile. In Dulombi Park, small groups of elephants are sometimes spotted during the rainy season. The inventories of reptiles, amphibians or birds, which are still in progress, confirm the existence of this remarkable diversity. The presence of wildlife corridors connecting the protected areas with each other and with the other parks situated to the west (Cufada Natural Park) and south (Cantanhez National Park) favour exchanges between the different populations of these species, thereby improving the conditions for their protection. This connectivity will be extended in the direction of Senegal (Niokolo Koba National Park) and Guinea (Badiar National Park).

HOW TO ORGANISE YOUR STAY

Finding information

At the head office of the Institute for Biodiversity and Protected Areas (Ibap).

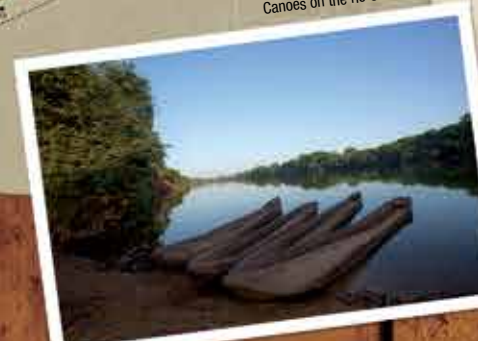
At the head office of Boé Park, in Beli:
Reception, information, documentation, entrance fees.

At the head office of Dulombi Park, in Dulombi:
Reception, information, documentation, entrance fees.

Landscape with mushroom termite mounds

What to see

- 1 • **Wendo Tcham lake:** a wetland of international importance and its water birds, and other Wendos. Canoe trip, wildlife watching and trekking in the surrounding forests.
- 2 • **Cofara island**
The Rio Cofara and its salt flats, the presence of hot springs, trekking.
- 3 • **Sport angling** along the Corubal river.
- 4 • **Beaches along the Feli and Corubal river,** rivers, the rapids, walks in the gallery forests and bathing.
- 5 • **The large animals and numerous species of waterfowl and forest birds:** in Boé, the dense forests in proximity to the confluence of the rios Corubal and Fefine and at Dulombi, in the forest near the Corubal and Binafa rivers south of the Campossa (chimpanzee, buffalo, leopard, roan antelope, hippopotamus, crocodile, other species of primates and hoofed mammals).
- 6 • **Memorial places:** Lugadjole, site of the proclamation of independence; Boé, tomb of the national hero Domingos Ramos.
- 7 • **Speleology** in the caves in proximity to the Corubal and Fefine rivers.



COMPLEX OF PROTECTED AREAS
DULOMBI - BOÉ
TCHETCHÉ



Where to stay
in the vicinity of
the DBT Complex?

cf.
map
p.59



Beli

Fonda Huuwa

9 bungalows (15 beds) meals with local cuisine and produce, wildlife guides (chimpanzees in particular),
Beli - Julio Djalo (+245) 955 82 29 54

Saltinho

Pousada de Saltinho

Mamadu Aliu Djalo (+245) 955 99 88 00
http://gw.geoview.info/pousada_do_saltinho

**Organisation of ecotourism
and fishing expeditions on the Corubal**
M'Île vagues de Découvertes

(+245) 966 99 38 27 / 966 79 49 65
laurentsonia.kéré@gmail.com
France: kere.bijagos@gmail.com (+33) 06 65 67 55 88
Sites: <http://bijagoskere.fr> - <http://aventure-corubal.fr>
Facebook: Île de Kéré

Guinea-Bissau has invested considerable efforts in the conservation of its natural and cultural heritage, in particular through the creation of a system of **protected areas** that now covers almost **26% of the national territory**.

This Guide was produced by the Institute for Biodiversity and the Protected Areas, in cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism and Craft Industries and the NGOs, with the aim of promoting such conservation efforts by developing ecotourism, an activity that also promises to generate revenue for the benefit of the local communities. Posters, including detailed maps, have been produced for the different protected areas. They are available from the headquarters of IBAP, the offices of the Parks or from the Tour Operators.

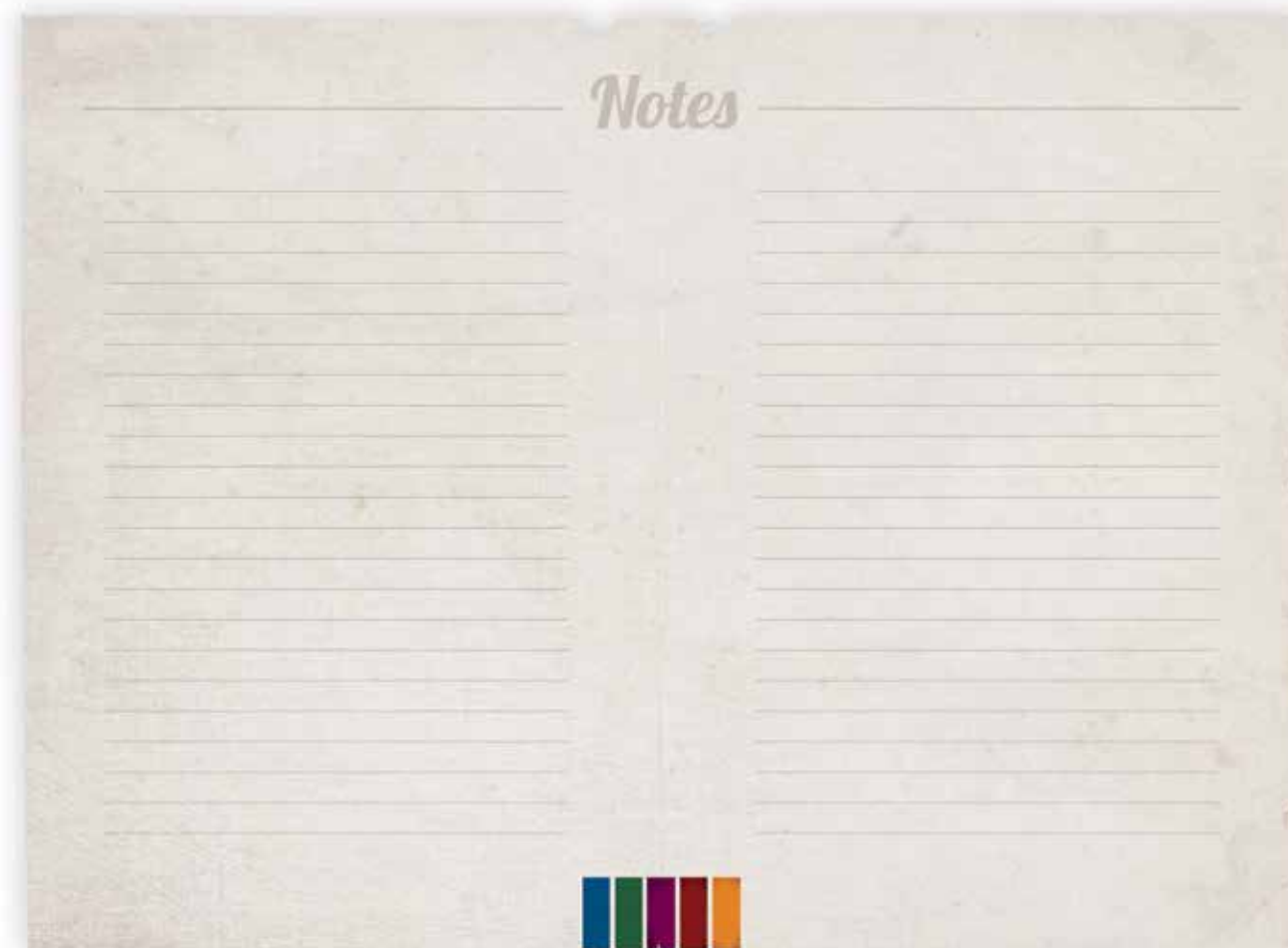
Additional information on conditions for visiting the protected areas can be obtained from



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Ferrazetta Bairro de Luanda, Bissau.
Telephone: +245 320 71 06 / 07
ecoibap@gmail.com
www.ibapgbissau.org



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THE PROTECTED AREAS OF
GUINEA-BISSAU
Guide to ecotourism



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