

May 11 – Depart USA

Fly from USA to Dakar. Arrange your own air for flexibility. Dozens of airlines fly roundtrip to Dakar. Some offer direct service like Delta. We may present group air later for you.

May 12 – Arrive Dakar

Arrival in the vibrant city of Dakar and transfer to the luxurious seaside hotel the Pullman Tettanga. Exotic and eclectic, Dakar has made its mark as a bustling port city since the 15th century. Once the center of West Africa slave trade, it is now a major financial hub. Here's where elegance meets chaos and it's never boring. The location on the Cap-Ver Peninsula makes Dakar a key player for in world trade as ships ply their way along the western coast of Africa. Our newly renovated hotel is right on the beach. It's walking distance to the ferry terminal as well several venues where you can listen to Senegal's famous mbalax (jazz) music

This evening enjoy a welcome dinner to meet your fellow AFS travel junkies!

Overnight: Pullman Terranga (D)

May 13 – Day of Dakar and Gorée Island

Prepare your senses for the sights, sounds and scenery that is the amazing Dakar city. The "plateau" district or central district is awash in a mixture of French colonial era buildings and ancient markets. Visit the impressive President's Palace and Parliament House, which is home to the national Assembly. Tour the Grand Mosque – the most important religious building in all of Senegal. Dakar's Artisan's market is an astounding array of local crafts ranging from trinkets to rugs to furniture. Traditional medicines are still very important in Senegal and we'll meet healers, learning about traditional medicines and herbs while exploring Tilen Market.

The tragic history of West African slave trade comes into focus as we ferry to Gorée Island – a UNESCO World Heritage site. Now a peaceful refuge of charming bougainvillea adorned cottages and quiet lanes, for almost 4 centuries, this island was where an estimated 20 million of Africans passed through "The door of no return." Loaded onto to slave ships docked at Gorée, they were sent across the globe to be sold. We will visit the 18th century Slaves' House where shipping was arranged and the Henriette-Batheley Women's Museum where women's role in Africa is examined. Painters also call the island home and we see artists in their workshops as they practice their centuries old techniques.

Lunch will be near the ferry dock at beautiful and historic Chevalier Boufflers restaurant. After crossing the harbor back to Dakar, we stop at the IFAN Museum (l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire). This is one of the oldest African art museums in West Africa containing some of the most important collections of ancient artifacts from Francophone Africa.

Overnight: Pullman Terranga (B, L)

May 14 – Pink Lake – Toubacouta

Set off in the morning to explore an amazing marvel of nature, **Lake Retba** – meaning "Pink Lake." And it is. Retba's mystical waters sparkle with an unusual pink color – the hue coming from a combination of a high salt content and a unique bacteria. Only a narrow white sand dune separates the salty lake waters from those of the Atlantic. The waters are said to have healing powers. High salinity makes it virtually impossible to sink and it has been compared to the Dead Sea. The lake is also famous for being the last stage of the famed historic Paris-Dakar car rally.

A lakeshore lunch at the Campement Lac Rose hotel and then witness the laborious process the local women undertake to harvest the salt from the waters. Visit a traditional fishermen's village near Pink Lake before driving towards Toubacouta. Toubacouta is a small town on the Sine-Saloum River delta known for its countless mangrove trees, friendly locals and laissez-faire attitude.

Our charming hotel is the Keur Saloum Lodge located right on the river. Manatees and dolphins come to play in the waters, lured by rich marshes. This delightful resort of thatched huts includes an open-air restaurant and bar overlooking the river with a terraced infinity pool.

Overnight: Keur Saloum Lodge (B, L, D)

May 15 – To The Gambia... Safari Day

It's time to get your game face on. An entirely new ecosystem awaits as we venture into **Fathala Nature Reserve** in search of African wildlife. Eastern Africa is known for its game, but did you know that you can also find giraffes, rhinos, Giant Elands, zebras, pythons, and even water buffalos here as well?

Lunch today is out in the wild with a picnic out in the bush. Afterwards, those who dare can take a walk on the wild side. We are offering an opportunity to walk among the king of the jungle on a **Lion Walk**. This Lion Walk preserve is home to cubs and young lions. There are no bars, no chains, no cages as you spend about 30-40 minutes walking and even getting to pet these young lions in their natural habitat. (Price: \$49)

From Fathala, we drive south into **The Gambia**. Not just Gambia. Officially the "Republic of The Gambia." Stop along the way to the 1,200 year old Stone Circles, a UNESCO World Heritage site. These are Africa's version of Stonehenge and the origins of the Wassu Stone Circles are just as mysterious. The cluster of monoliths which are believed to be ancient ceremonial mounds of kings and chiefs in ancient times date between 750-1000 AD.

Overnight in the Baobolong Annex just across the Gambia River from the main town of Janjangbureh. These huts offer us a bit of an adventure but this is the best lodging Janjangbureh has to offer. There is a bar and restaurant located at the water's edge.

Overnight: Baobolong Anex Camp. (B, L, D)

May 16 – Cruising through River Gambia National Park

After breakfast, you can relax at the camp or take a short ferry ride to Janjangbureh Island (formerly McCarthy Island) to explore its lush forest. A birder's paradise, many flock here just to birdwatch. You could also take a quick trip into Janjangbureh itself. Formerly called Georgetown, this used to be a thriving British enclave. Now, it's a sleepy small village with a waterfront of former warehouses and businesses that serve as a reminder of its past.

Then our river adventure begins! We board a local river craft to explore the River Gambia on our way to Kuntaur. Think back to the Journey of the African Queen. We're in for a relaxing 4-5 hour cruise past dense tropical forest islands through hippo and crocodile infested waters. On the banks, you are sure to spot baboons, monkeys, and colorful birds. Lunch on board and keep your eyes peeled for wildlife.

Our venture through River Gambia National Park (RGNP) is truly a pinch-yourself-and-see-if-you-are-awake opportunity. Here you have the chance to spot chimpanzees in the wild in one of only a handful of places in the world where this is possible. Since 1979, chimps confiscated from illegal trade have been brought here to be rehabilitated and recolonized. The Gambia River has numerous islands and these quizzical primates can be spotted in the trees from the waters, protected from outside interference.

Further downriver, a local family invites us into their compound to show us the Senegambia way of life. And if you haven't already figured it out, this involves overwhelming hospitality and a generous spirit. You can count on the local children coming with curious giggles to say hi.

If our return journey falls on a market day, we will stop to visit a 'Lumo' – the weekly African open flea market. It is truly an experience to witness traditional bartering in this wildly colorful setting as they haggle over everything from livestock, local produce, food stuffs, and clothes.

Cross on a local ferry at Farafenni and continue downriver past local villages to the spectacular Kairaba Beach Hotel. We'll call this 5-star ocean-side tropical paradise home for the next three nights. The Kairaba is the perfect place for sunsets. It has four restaurants, two bars, private gardens and a spa for pampering.

Overnight: Kairaba Beach Hotel (B, L)

Mar 17 – "Roots" and Juffureh River Cruise

Alex Haley's classic "Roots" is not just an epic novel and TV series – it's a reality. Roots' origins and people come to life in an unforgettable full-day cruise along the Juffureh River. Leave from the port of Banjul -The Gambia's capital and venture up-river to the centuries-old trading station of Albreda. The flagpole that promised freedom still stands in the town. Local lore said that any slave who touched it after escaping from nearby James Island would be guaranteed freedom. Few, if any, were so lucky.

The brutality of The Gambia's history with trafficking humans is outlined during a visit to the Museum of Slavery. From here, a short walk takes us to the birthplace of Kunte Kinte – the village of Juffureh. As is customary, our first stop is a courtesy call to the village Chief. Then we proceed to the Kinteh family compound. In researching his "Roots," Haley found the slave trip his ancestors traveled in from Gambia and retraced their journey to this place. The locals still tell the legend of when Kinteh disappeared during a normal outing.

Lunch is served as we proceed on our river vessel called "Pirogue" or wooden canoe towards Kunte Kinte Island – A UNESCO World Heritage Site. Look for wild dolphins, manatees and various primates on shore. Once called James Island, it was renamed after records showed this was where Kinte began his journey to Maryland. He was one of 98 slaves in 1767 aboard the slave ship Lord Ligonier. Wooden canoes will shuttle us to the island where we visit imposing ruins of the fortress that once played a major role in the capture and selling of slaves. Canoes will take us back to our ferry for our journey back to Banjul. Enroute, keep your eyes open for dolphins swimming and playing in their natural habitat.

Overnight: Kairaba Beach Hotel (B, L)

May 18 – Full Day Down Oyster Creek

Now, who do you know who has ridden a camel on the beach in The Gambia? Pretty sure that would be, "No One," so today you get some extra bragging rights in this memorable African adventure. Journey to Camel Park in nearby Tanji and meet you hump-backed steed. Your guide will give you pointers and as your camel guzzles a bottle of Coke, you mount up. Set off for Tanji Beach for the ride of a lifetime. It won't take but a few steps of its rolling gate for you to figure out why they call them "The ships of the desert."

Luckily, the journey isn't a long one down to the Oyster Creek. Get caught up in the hustle and bustle at one of the country's busiest fish landing site where locals haul in their daily catch. Watch them preserve the fish by smoking and drying while nearby, local craftsmen carve out canoes. Continue on along the coast, stopping for a little beach time.

Next up, we hop on our boat at Denton Bridge to "cruise along Bolongs." These meandering mangrove-filled tributaries of the Gambia River are awash with exotic tropical birds as well as also local villagers collecting oysters from their age-old, dugout canoes. Take a dip in the river or even try your hand at fishing.

Then toast the occasion with a sparkling buck's fizz (similar to a mimosa) before a buffet lunch on board. Our afternoon is spent cruising, swimming and enjoying the unique surroundings.

Overnight: Kairaba Beach Hotel (B, L)

May 19 – Crocs and Crossings

After breakfast, we leave Banjul behind and experience the busiest ferry crossing point within Senegambia, as we ourselves take the ferry on our way back to Dakar. Have your passports ready for another stamp during the formalities at Amdalaye/Karang.

If time permits we'll stop at Kachilally which is truly the world's coolest crocodile pool. These crocs keep an eye on you as you return the favor, but with the help of a guide, you can even have the chance to touch or pet them!

We'll make a stop for lunch along the way at the riverside town of Kaolack. We arrive at Pullman hotel in the late afternoon and enjoy a relaxing evening by the pool or the beach.

Overnight: Pullman Hotel (B, L)

May 20 – Back to USA

After breakfast, departure for the airport according to flight schedules.