

Petite Côte & Siné-Saloum Delta



Petite Côte means ‘small coast’ – a name that aptly describes this stretch of seashore, which is indeed short compared to the Grande Côte that leads north from Dakar. In terms of tourism, however, this sheltered shoreline is anything but petite. This is where the industry’s monetary hopes reside – in the concentration of seaside centres and classy hotels around Saly, the ever-expanding resort zone halfway down the coast from Dakar.

But there’s more to the Petite Côte than your average tour operator will show you. Just a few kilometres away from the built-up hotel zones, small fishing villages tempt with a real-life attitude and calmer beaches.

South of the twin villages Joal and Fadiout, where your footsteps resound to the crunching of seashells, the Saloum River cuts into the coast, opening up a vast maze of mangroves and marshes. This region is astoundingly rich in wildlife, with huge flocks of wading birds making for particularly spectacular sights. But it’s not all about nature – this region is also of strong historical interest. At the southern edge of Siné-Saloum, the ancient shell mound Diorom Boumag gives evidence of West Africa’s most ancient civilisations. Physical legacies of the area’s powerful empires, including the 17th-century kingdom of Cayor, are harder to find. But stay in a village, and local residents will be proud to relate the legendary stories of the illustrious leader Lat Dior and his fierce anticolonial struggle to you.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Meander along the coast and enjoy fishing-village life in **Toubab Dialao** (p178)
- Walk the wooden bridge from **Joal** to **Fadiout** (p184), the island where everything is made of shells
- Venture into the maze of mangrove creeks and forest islands that is the vast **Siné-Saloum Delta** (p185)
- Watch dozens of colourful fishing pirogues roll in with their glistening catch at **Mbour** (p183)
- Indulge in lazy beach life at **Saly** (p181), Senegal’s largest sea-resort zone



■ POPULATION: 2.3 MILLION

PETITE CÔTE

This is where Senegal greets the Atlantic with kilometres of sandy coast. Safe swimming beaches attract large numbers of tourists, and cause the flashy holiday village of Saly to spill over its boundaries. If you like your holiday more low-key and your beach body slightly less exposed, the villages Toubab Dialao, Popenguine and La Somone in the north, as well as Mbodiène, Nianing, Joal and Fadiout in the south have white strands that still swing to the local rhythm.

TOUBAB DIALAO

pop about 2000

A tiny fishing village, Toubab Dialao is a pretty hide-out close to Dakar, with beaches that aren't yet haunted by mass tourism. It's great for swimming, walks and horse riding. **Les Cavaliers de la Savane** (☎ 836 7876) offers guided tours on horseback to beginners and advanced riders in the surroundings of the village (two hours CFA10,000), and staff is very knowledgeable about the region. Senegal's famous dance school **L'École des Sables** (☎ 839 8090; www.jant-bi-acogny.com), run by famous dancer and choreographer Germaine Acogny, is situated a short drive along a dirt track out of town. International dance courses and rehearsals often take place here and can sometimes be witnessed. Even if deserted the school is well worth a visit. Its main space has a breathtaking view out to the sea, and is the perfect place to watch the sun set or see groups of flamingos land on the water.

Sleeping & Eating

There are three auberges (small hotels) in the heart of Toubab Dialao that form a Tolkien-esque village within the village. The trend was started by a Frenchman, Gérard, who owns the highly rated Sobo-Bade, the hub of much activity in the village.

All the hotels have restaurants and most offer half-board options. In town, the small Senegalese eatery Niougop is unbeatable for ambience and taste.

Sobo-Bade (☎/fax 836 0356; www.espacesobobade.com; dm per person CFA4000, s/d from CFA10,000/12,000) This characterful hotel is entirely decorated with seashells and overlooks the ocean from its position on a small cliff. The artistic decor

is complemented by workshops in dance, batik, percussion and sculpture, and you can hire bikes (two hours CFA5000) or go horse riding (two hours CFA10,000).

La Source Ndiambalane (☎ 836 1703; ndiambalane@sentoo.sn; d/tr CFA12,000/15,000) Next door to Sobo-Bade, in the heart of town, this place continues the shell-art theme to such perfection that it looks almost like an extension of Sobo-Bade.

Auberge La Mimosa (☎/fax 826 7326; mimosa@sentoo.com; d CFA10,000, 🚽) Just across from La Source, this auberge doesn't have a view but does have comfortable rooms and an Internet café, and serves excellent local fruit punches.

Iris Hotel (☎ 836 2969; www.irishotel.net; 🚽 📺) Follow the dirt track out of town, and the multiple signposts, and you get to this place, the grandest address in town. Unashamedly upmarket, this hotel has luxurious, tastefully decorated rooms and a spectacular sea-view terrace.

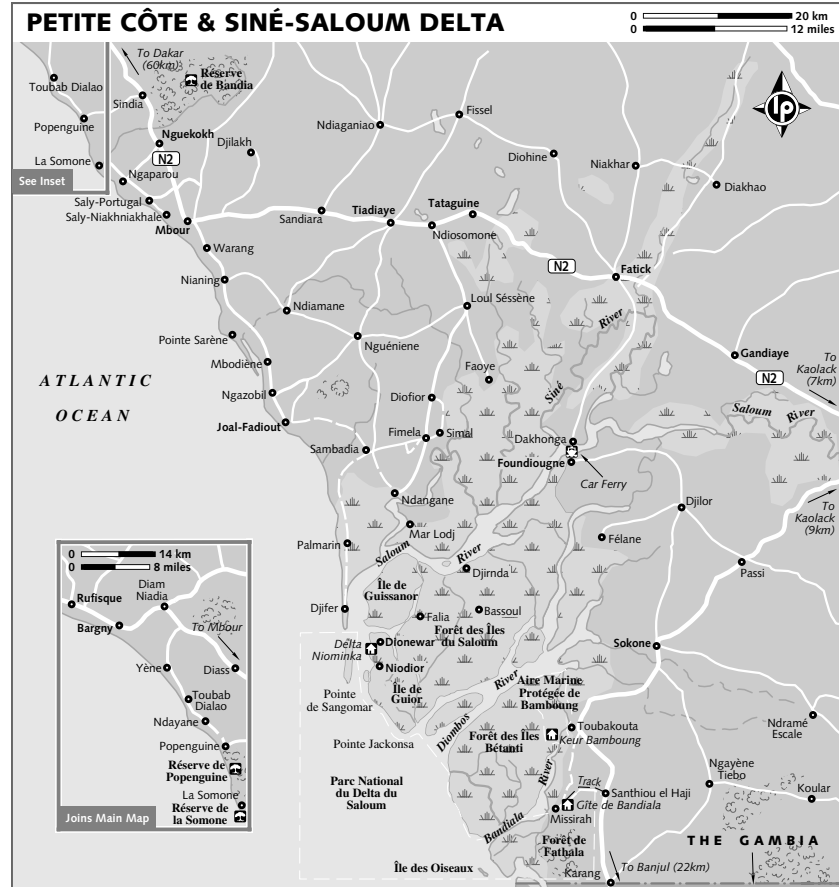
L'Escale (☎ 836 3595; meals around CFA4000; 🚽 11am-10pm) If you feel like something different, try this place, which sits a short walk off the main road between Yenne and Toubab Dialao. It has good food and a view. It has a good selection of European food (plus the usual assortment of local dishes) and a view. There are also a couple of rooms for stranded travellers – inquire about rates.

Chez Paolo (☎ 658 7594; pizzas from CFA3500-10,000; 🚽 11am-10pm) A bit further on, Paolo's is the place to enjoy a proper Italian pizza – phone first, and opening hours will be adapted to your presence.

For some solitude, head for one of the two *campements* (lodges) in Ndayane on the dirt track leading to Popenguine. **Terre d'Afrique** (☎ 957 7155; s/d CFA20,000/30,000) is one of them, yet the better option is the stunning **La Pierre de Lisse** (☎ 957 7148; pierredelisse@sentoo.sn; s/d CFA20,000/30,000), run by the friendly and knowledgeable Bab Mbengue, who's an excellent guide to the region.

Getting There & Away

To get here from Dakar, take any transport headed for Mbour and get off at Diam Niadia junction. Minibuses run from here to Toubab Dialao (CFA300). Or go to Rufisque, take a taxi to garage de Yène and change there for a taxi to Toubab Dialao. A hire taxi from Dakar would cost around CFA15,000.



RÉSERVE DE BANDIA

This small **wildlife reserve** (☎ 685 5886; admission adult/child CFA7000/3500; 🚽 8am-6pm) sits 65km from Dakar on the road to Mbour, about 5km south of Sindia. It's well managed and crowded with wildlife, including species indigenous to Senegal as well as rhinos, giraffes, buffaloes, ostriches and other animals more at home in East Africa. In that sense it's more of a zoo, but an amazingly beautiful one with not a cage in sight. And because of its compact size you're almost guaranteed animal sightings.

For those more interested in human tradition than beasts, the Serer burial mounds and giant baobab, once used to bury griots, may be an enticement to visit.

Walking isn't allowed here, but you can normally enter with your own car or hire taxi. During or shortly after the rainy season you may have to hire one of the reserve's own 4WDs (CFA30,000), as many routes will be impassable to smaller vehicles. Tours take two to three hours.

Even if you don't want to visit the park, the fantastic restaurant overlooking a pond is worth a visit. You can normally spot buffaloes, monkeys, birds and crocodiles from here, and the food is good too (dishes CFA4000 to CFA6000).

Across the Dakar-Mbour main road, the fantastic **Accrobaobab** (Xavier Larcher ☎ 637 1428; www.accro-baobab.com; adult/child CFA15,000/10,000) is where you can climb, glide and clamber your