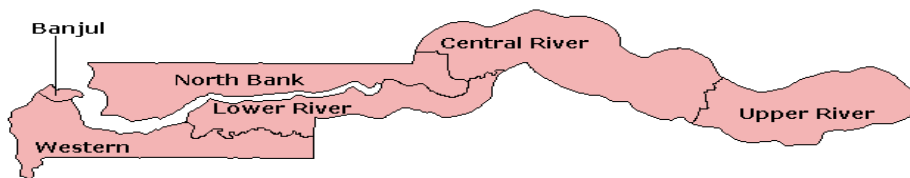


The Gambia



Map



Background

- **Land and Climate:** The Gambia (named after the river Gambia which flows west to east of its entirety) is located in West Africa and is almost entirely bordered by Senegal. With a total area of 11300 km², The Gambia is approximately twice the size of the American state of Delaware and is the smallest country in Africa. Consisting of a tropical climate, from June to November, it is hot and rainy, and from November to May, temperatures are cool and dry. The, is placed before Gambia when referring to the country, is dependent on agriculture and livestock for its livelihood.

People

- **Population:** With an estimated 1,782,893, and a growing rate of 2.67%, The Gambia consists of a variety of ethnic groups. 99% of the population is African. This percentage is subdivided into different tribes. Mandinka being the largest is composed of 42% of the population. Followed by Fula with 18%. Then Wolof at 16%, Jola at 10%, and Serahuli and 9%. There are less common tribes like the Creole Akus comprising of 4%. The non-African population at 1% of the population. More than half the population resides in rural villages; however the

gap between the urban and rural residential is gradually tightening as western values are exchanged with the traditions of the country.

- **Language and Greeting:** English is the official language, followed by Mandinka, Wolof, Fula, and other indigenous tongues. The Akus speak a creole mixture of English and other vernaculars. Greetings are essential in Gambian culture. They are lengthy and repetitive because they are a respectful way to acknowledge and relate to another person. The family name is often repeated because this doesn't only acknowledge the person but also their family, history, those who are dead and alive, and also shows a concern for their well being. Regardless of status or wealth, everyone greets each other with the same respect, no matter what is taking place. This is a priority in the Gambian culture because it helps maintain peace. Although a verbal hello in a common vernacular is well appreciated, the physical act of shaking hands is also recommended (for males) with the use of the right hand. More intimate greetings are not done in public. There are different greetings for gender types and age differences. Women are not expected to shake hands when greeting but to substitute a hand shake, women will raise clasp hands to a group of people. The youngest greets the elderly first and avoid eye contact. A lack of a greeting is the best way to express your anger with a person. It's regarded as an insult.
- **Religion:** 90% of the population is Muslim. The other 10 percent is accounted by Christians, Animists and Baha'is. The first settlers were Animists. Animists believe in reincarnation and like every religion, have their set of morals. Muslim means "one who has submitted" (in Arabic) to Islam which means to submit. The Muslim Holy Wars established Islam in The Gambia. The Holy Koran is the book of reference and guidance. Along with the five principles (Pillars of Islam) all followers must adhere to. Christianity came along with the Europeans, and the book of reference is the Holy Bible. Baha'I is not as prominent as the other three however followers have a center for worshipping in the capital city of Banjul.

Lifestyle

- **Diet and Eating:** When it comes to food, sharing is caring. An invitation is not necessary, anyone and everyone is welcome to eat. Mats are placed on the ground and a communal bowl consisting of food whether it be rice, meats or vegetables, is placed in the center of the mats. Usually there are gender groupings, males eat with males and females with females. Shoes are taken off before sitting, hands are washed and a form of grace is said. There is an invisible sector dividing the food where everyone eats the portion that is directly in front of them. With their right hand only, the food is eaten. Drinking is done after you have eaten. Your beliefs dictate your diet. Those who are Muslim are forbidden to drink alcohol or eat pork, however this may not be an issue for others.

- **Recreation:** Dancing and composing music are what Gambians are well known for. Soccer, Softball and Handball are the most commonly known and played but other sports such as Wrestling, Tennis and Martial Arts are developing.
- **Holidays:** Depending on the religion being practiced. The holidays that are observed and celebrated are in accordance to that religion. Since Islam is the most prominent in the country holidays such as Yawmal Assurra (Muslim New Year), Maolud Madi (Prophet Muhammad's birthday), Koriteh (the end of the fast of Ramadan), and Tobaski (to honor the prophet Abraham) are celebrated and set by the lunar calendar. Other holidays such as Independence Day (February 18th), Republic Day (April 24th), and Holy Maria Day (August 15th) are celebrated.
- **Commerce and Currency:** The Gambian currency is the dalasi and the exchange rate is one U.S. dollar to 22.75 dalasi. Weekly open markets called luumoo are accessible in different parts of the country on different days and are open to bargaining for prices. Whereas supermarkets and stores have fixed, marked prices.

Society

- **Transportation and Communication:** Land lines and cellular phones are used to communicate as well as radio broadcasts, internet access and a government owned television station. For transportation, roadways and waterways are commonly used. There are also merchant marines, ports and terminals, and an airport.
- **Health:** Although Gambians are at high risk of diseases such as, bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, Hepatitis A, Typhoid fever, Malaria, Rabies, Meningococcal Meningitis, Schistosomiasis, and HIV/Aids, institutions are in place to aid in the treatment and curing of illnesses. In the capital of Banjul, the Royal Victoria Hospital and a school for medicine are accessible. A school of Public Health is located in Brikama (the capital of the western division in The Gambia). Referral hospitals are located in Farafenni (a common town in the North Bank division), and Bansang (a town in the Central River division).

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