

Senegal

Country Facts

History

Archaeological excavations prove, that the region of modern-day Senegal was already inhabited in Paleolithic and Neolithic times. The mystical stone circles found in the Saloum delta and on the north bank of the Gambia River are believed to date back to around the 4th to 8th century AC. They are thought to be built as burial sites or places of worship providing evidence of an early population.

During the first millennium A.D. major migratory movements took place in this area. From the 6th century onwards the Wolof and the Sérèr started to arrive moving from east to west. In the 9th century, at the beginning of the golden age of the Ghana Empire, they were joined by another large ethnic group, the Tukolor. The Ghana Empire was probably founded around 600 AC by the Soninké. The wealthy rulers resided in the town of Koumbi Saleh in modern-day southern Mauretania where ruins were discovered that are believed to be the capital of the ancient Ghana Empire. From there, they controlled the trans-Saharan trade, especially the trade in gold was the key to Ghana's prosperity. The empire was at its zenith in the 11th century when it extended from the River Senegal in the west to the banks of the River Niger in the east and deep into the Sahara Desert in the north. When the Almoravids, a Berber dynasty of Morocco, conquered Ghana in 1076 the first great empire in the western Sudan began to decline and never recovered from its fall.

In the 13th century the young king of the Malinké tribe Soundiata Keita lay the foundation for the rise of a new empire: Mali. During his reign it stretched from the Fouta Djallon Highlands in today's Guinea to the Niger inland delta. However, the most successful and important ruler of the Mali Empire was Kankan Moussa, who set off on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 stopping off in Cairo where he gave away so much gold that the Egyptian gold market crashed. During Kankan (or Mansa) Moussa's reign the Mali Empire was at its height, huge gold fields and the trade in salt and slaves were the reason for its immense wealth. At that time Mali stretched from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the border of modern-day Nigeria. It was also a time of peace in which important historic buildings were created and architecture and art were at their peak. Kankan Moussa's successors were not able to consolidate and expand their power and at the beginning of the 15th century the Mali Empire had started to decline.

The second half of the 15th century saw the rise of a new dynasty. Sonni Ali Ber, a Songhay leader, took power in 1464 and considerably expanded the Songhay territory to consolidate his supremacy in the region. By 1476 he controlled the land from the Niger inland delta to the west of Timbuktu. At his death in 1492 he was succeeded by his son Sonni Barou who was overthrown one year later by one of his father's commanders named Mohamed Touré. Touré took the title of "Askia" and founded a new dynasty of Songhay rulers who dominated the Songhay Empire for almost one century. At that time, the empire was at its zenith, Timbuktu became a celebrated center of Islamic learning and a university town and the empire's territory was greatly expanded stretching from the Senegal River in the west to modern-day Nigeria in the east. When the Moroccans invaded Songhay in 1590 it included large parts of the modern nations of Senegal, Mauretania, Mali and Niger. The Moroccan conquest only one year later led to the fall of the great Songhay Empire.

In the 14th and 15th centuries some local kingdoms gained independence with the Wolof kingdom of Jolof being the most important of them.

From the mid-15th century on, Europeans, primarily the Portuguese, sailed along the West African coast. In 1444 the Portuguese reached the island of Gorée which from then on they used for landing. They were

the first to install trading posts along the coast, soon followed by the Dutch, British and French. While at the beginning the Europeans were predominantly trading in gold, ivory, spices and other commodities, the 16th century saw the first growth of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Africans, taken in battle or in slave raids often very far inland, were brought to the coast and kept in dungeons while awaiting transport to the new world. The local African chiefs including the rulers of the Jolof kingdom played a direct role in the slave trade receiving weapons, canons, gun powder and other goods from the traders in exchange for slaves. In 1807 the slave trade was abolished by the British Parliament, while in France the ultimate abolition of slavery came in 1848.

In the 17th century the French colonisation of Senegal began. They establish a trading station at the mouth of the Senegal River and

in 1659 Saint-Louis was founded as first French settlement in Africa. Until the 19th century the region of Senegambia by the Portuguese, Dutch, British and French each of them trying to protect their own sphere of influence along the coast. In 1663 the Island of Gorée was occupied by the Britains and in 1667 the Dutch were finally expelled from the area. The French had to suffer a defeat when in 1758 the British could conquer all French possessions in Senegal merging them with their own territories to form the crown colony of Senegambia. The conquered areas were later returned to France in 1783. It was not until the middle of the 19th century that France could finally gain control of the region, when governor Louis Faidherbe conquered vast areas of modern-day Senegal and started to establish fortified stations up the Senegal River, from 1854. Challenged by the Tukolor El Hadji Omar Tall, who struggled against French expansion, Faidherbe fought the army of the resistance fighter penetrating into the Casamance region, which ultimately was ceded to France by Portugal in 1886. The Berlin Conference, taking place from November 1884 to February 1885, was convened to specify criteria for the recognition of colonial possession. In the aftermath of the conference, Senegal was made a French colony, with its capital at Saint-Louis which later became the capital of French West Africa, when the French colonies were grouped together, in the same year. In 1902, it was replaced as the capital by Dakar. Twelve years later, in 1914, Blaise Diagne became the first black African elected to the French Chamber of Deputies. In 1946, all Senegalese were made French citizens and suffrage was finally granted to all of them. At the same time, the politically motivated negritude movement which had been initiated in the 1930s, gained in importance under the leadership of the Senegalese poet Léopold Sédar Senghor, founder of the Bloc Démocratique Sénégalais, a political party set up in 1948. In the same year, social movements, leading to strikes and claiming real equality with the French, also became increasingly significant. Ultimately, France granted independence to Senegal in two stages. In 1958, it gained extensive autonomy within the French Community. At the beginning of 1959, it merged with the French Sudan to form the Mali Federation, which became fully independent on 20 June 1960. However, two months later the federation was dissolved when both members each proclaimed independence.

Léopold Sédar Senghor became the first president of the new republic. He established a one party system represented by the Union Progressiste Sénégalaise (UPS). The early post-independence period was marked by three politicians: President Léopold Sédar Senghor, the President of the National Assembly Lamine Guèye and Prime Minister Mamadou Dia. In 1962, Dia had to resign after allegations of a coup attempt were made, and as a result, the Constitution was amended to give more power to Senghor, making the post of the prime minister part of his own position. In 1970 Senghor reestablished the post of prime minister giving it to Abdou Diouf.

When an economic crisis erupted due to falling prices for groundnuts, Senegal's most important export crop, social tensions arised and mass demonstrations were organised against Senghor's authoritarian regime. As a result, Senghor attempted to gradually liberalise the political system and in 1976, authorized the formation of two opposition parties, a Marxist-Leninist party, the African Independence Party and a liberal party, the Senegalese Democratic Party. In 1978 the first free multiparty elections were held, invariably won by Senghor's Socialist Party, receiving 80% of the vote. The Senegalese Democratic Party was also able to enter the Parliament as opposition party. In 1980, President Senghor was the first African chief of government to peaceably retire from politics and, in accordance with the Constitution, hand power over to his successor, Prime Minister Abdou Diouf who remained in that position for twenty years. In 1981 he abolished entry hurdles for political parties. The economic crisis worsened during the 1980s, caused by further eroding prices in the groundnut sector, drought and crop failure. At the same

time, violent separatist movement in the southern region of the Casamance emerged, a conflict persisting until today. On 1 February 1982, Senegal joined with the Gambia to form the nominal confederation of Senegambia. However, the union broke down and was dissolved in 1989. In the same year, the Mauritania–Senegal Border War erupted due to disputes over the use of the Senegal River resources and grazing rights. This conflict has had a lasting impact on the relations between Mauritania and Senegal. Another reason for the dissatisfaction of the population and strong social tensions was the sharp depreciation of the CFA franc in 1994. Opposition leader and founder of the Senegalese Democratic Party Abdoulaye Wade won the presidential elections of 2000 and Senegal experienced a peaceful transition of power. In January 2001, a referendum was held which approved the amendment of the Constitution which limits the president to two five-year terms in office. The next elections were held in 2007 in which Wade was re-elected by an absolute majority vote. The elections were considered free and fair by the ECOWAS countries (Economic Community of West African States) and other international observers. During his second term the population grew more and more dissatisfied with his autocratic leadership and the elections in 2012 have been accompanied by violently suppressed protests because Mr Wade was bidding for a third term in office. Although his attempt at re-election violated the constitution it has been approved by the country's constitutional court. As no candidate had won an absolute majority of the vote in the first round in February 2012, a second ballot between the two leading candidates took place in March which saw Macky Sall, a former Prime Minister under Wade, win with an overwhelming majority. He is still the current President of Senegal today.

Population

The estimated 13.5 million inhabitants belong to more than 20 different ethnic groups. The biggest and best-known group is the Wolof, who comprise about 42% of the overall population. Most of them live in the area to the north of Dakar as far as Saint-Louis and to the west and south of Kaolack. The Wolof also live in Gambia and in Mauretanie. The second-largest group are the nomadic or semi-nomadic Fula (also known as Peulh or Fulbe), who are found all over the country with their huge herds of cattle. In Senegal they make up about 23% and are one of West Africa's most widespread groups, you find them from Senegal to Tchad and Sudan. They are closely-related to the Tukulor constituting about 10% of the population. The third-largest ethnic group are the Sérère people, predominantly farmers concentrated in central Senegal and in the western part of the country. The former president of Senegal Léopold Sédar Senghor belonged to the Sérère. Other ethnic groups in Senegal include the Diola in the southern part of the country practising wet-rice cultivation, the Mandinka, Bambara and Soninke who are also found in neighbouring Mali, the minority groups of Baïnouk, Balante, Manjaque, Mancagne, Karone and Bandial. In the remote mountain area of eastern Senegal the Bassari and Bedick and their sub-groups, the Tenda, Coniagui and Badiaranké are found. These tribes have maintained their animistic culture and traditions. Senegal has also significant European and Libanese communities.

Religions

About 93% of Senegal's population is Muslim following the Sunni branch of Islam. Christians constitute about 5 % and 2 % of the population practise traditional beliefs. The former president of Senegal Léopold Sédar Senghor was a Christian, he was a Catholic. Islam's influence in the area of today's Senegal began between the 9th and 11th centuries brought there from the Maghreb region. Christianity was introduced to the country by Portuguese explorers and traders. Traditional religions were only maintained in the south-eastern part of Senegal, whereas Islam and Christianity are interwoven with elements of the animistic beliefs. A special branch of Islam in Senegal is Mouridism. The Mourides are an important Sufi brotherhood founded by Cheikh Amadou Bamba Mbacké in 1883. The holy city of Mouridism is Touba, the Great Mosque of Touba houses the tomb of the brotherhood's founder. Touba has an extraterritorial status, where the state has no power. The Mourides are very friendly people, non-Muslims and foreigners are welcome to visit the Great Mosque and the tombs of their marabouts. There are other brotherhoods in Senegal such as Qadiriyya, one of the oldest Sufi order and the Tijaniyya order. Senegal is a secular country, where freedom of religion is protected by the Constitution and a high level of tolerance is shown to people of other faiths.

Languages

The official language of Senegal is French, it is used in secondary school education, by administration and in the courts and understood by about 30% of the population. Languages having the status of national languages include Balanta-Ganja; Hassaniyya; Jola; Mandinka; Mandjak; Mankanya; Noon(Serer-Noon); Pulaar; Serer; Soninke and Wolof. National languages are those languages with a standardised spelling, appropriate for school education. Wolof is the most widely spoken language in Senegal thereby serving as lingua franca of the country. An estimated 95 % of the Senegalese population speaks Wolof. There are about 40 languages and dialects listed for Senegal. Some languages, such as Cobiana, Karone or Kwatay are extremely rare and are only spoken by very few people. They are considered to be seriously endangered by UNESCO.

Plant Life and Wildlife

Plant Life

Depending on the average rainfall Senegal has a wide range of vegetation types: Thorn bush savanna predominates in the dry north of the country. An exception is the fertile valley of the Senegal River where rice and other crops are grown. The interior consists primarily of a dry savanna with only a few trees including acacia (*Acacia senegal*) and baobab(*Adansonia digitata*). The unusual baobab tree, also known as monkey bread, is a national symbol of Senegal. Everywhere in Africa it is considered sacred. Every part of the tree is useful. The fibres of the bark are woven into mats, the pulp of the fruit is rich in vitamins and provides a refreshing juice, the calcium-rich young leaves are used in cooking and the roots are employed to make traditional medicine. Farther south trees become more common. The silk cotton or kapok tree (*Ceiba pentandra*), tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*) and shea-butter tree (*Vitellaria paradoxa*) are widespread. Shea butter, also known as karité butter, is produced from these useful trees. The butter is an important component of traditional African medicine and indispensable ingredient of West African cuisine. It is also exported to Europe to be used in the cosmetic industry. The dark-brown, oil-rich nuts are roasted and pounded with a little water. According to the traditional method of making shea butter this mixture is cooked in huge cauldrons and soon begins to ooze a rich oil. When cool it has a creamy colour. Butter-balls are sold at the markets throughout West Africa. In the extreme south, primarily in the Basse Casamance, tropical rain forests are predominantly found. Dense mangrove forests cover river banks and their tributaries, called Bolongs. In this rain-laden region oil palms and coconut trees (*Elaeis guineensis*, *Cocos nucifera*), bamboo (*Bambusoideae*), teak (*Tectona grandis*), mahogany (*Khaya senegalensis*) and silk cotton trees (*Ceiba pentandra*) grow abundantly. Tall elephant grass (*Pennisetum purpureum*).typically occurs in this area.

A number of exotic fruits are grown including mango, banana, orange, leimon and pawpaw. The most important commercial crops in Senegal are groundnuts. They are cultivated in the interior of the country, predominantly between Kaolack and Tambacounda.

Wildlife

There are seven national parks and sanctuaries and a large number of natural protected areas in Senegal. The country's largest national park is Niokolo-Koba in the eastern part covering some 9,130 square kilometres. It was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981. 84 mammal species, about 60 reptile species and amphibians as well as 330 bird and about 60 fish species occur in the park situated on the Gambia River. Niokolo-Koba is a good place to see various species of antelope including the rare and endangered giant eland, lions, leopards, African buffalo, West African chimpanzees and other primates. Other national parks and reserves include the Sine and Saloum Deltas, the Langue de Barbarie, Ile de Madeleine, which can only be visited with an official permit, Basse Casamance, currently closed due to political instability of the region, and Djoudj Bird Sanctuary, an internationally important bird site. The Bandia Wildlife Reserve is a private game reserve, housing several African mammal species, that were introduced or re-introduced to West Africa by the park including white rhinos, giraffes, zebras and ostriches.

Senegal is a country with great birding potential. 675 species have been recorded, 18 of them officially classified as endangered. Senegal boasts the world's third-largest bird sanctuary; the Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1981. The park serves as a breeding-ground for the Great White Pelican. To see the large number of birds is an unforgettable avian spectacle. More than 400 species occur in Djoudj including pelicans, flamingos, ospreys, African fish eagles, fulvous and white-faced whistling-ducks, spoonbills, crowned cranes, various species of herons and egrets including purple and squacco heron, cattle and great egret, saddle-billed storks and other stork species, cormorants, African darters and many more... Another important site for bird-watching is the Langue de Barbarie National Park, where a lot of seabirds including seagulls and terns may be spotted due to the park's exceptional location at the mouth of the Senegal River. Enthusiasts should use a field guide to birds of West Africa.

Among the reptiles commonly encountered in Senegal are Nile crocodiles, Nile monitors, lizard, agama species and the common house gecko. A wide variety of snakes is also found in Senegal including the green mamba, rock pythons and more than 50 other species, but most of them are very shy and unlikely to be seen.

Geography

Senegal spans an area of about 196.700 km² and stretches from its border with Mauretania in the north to Guinea and Guinea-Bissau in the south, and from the Atlantic ocean in the west to Mali in the east. It surrounds the small state of The Gambia on three sides, so that its southern part, the Casamance, is largely separated from the rest of Senegal by The Gambia. Senegal's territory stretches approximately 650 km from west to east and 500 km from north to south, Its coastline extends for 531 km (330 miles) along the Atlantic Ocean. It is a flat, low-lying country reaching its highest point of 581 m in the border area of Guinea in the Kédougou region nearby the village of Nepen Diakha. The "Pointe des Almadies", situated on the Cap-Vert peninsula onto which is settled Senegal's capital Dakar, is the westernmost point of the continent of Africa.

The longest river is the Senegal, with a length of about 1086 km. The country owes its name to the river taking its source in Guinea's Fouta Djallon Highlands, where it is called Bafing. Its headwaters are the Bafing and the Bakoye rivers coming together at Bafoulabé in the southwest of Mali. Then it runs along Mauritania's southern border with Senegal, before emptying into the Atlantic Ocean near St. Louis forming a huge delta. Other important rivers are the Gambia, Sine, Saloum and the Casamance rivers. Senegal's largest lake is the flat Lac de Guiers, south of the city of Richard-Toll. It stretches approximately 35 km from north to south and 12 km from east to west. During the rainy season it may even reach far into the Ferlo Desert. Senegal's Lake Retba or Pink Lake is a famous tourist attraction. Its distinct colour is caused by the *Dunaliella salina* bacteria, that is found in the water. The salt concentration of 380 grams/liter is higher than that of the Dead Sea. However, which makes salt extraction a major local industry.

Economy

About 60% of the workforce is employed in agriculture, whereas the majority depends on substantial employment and income arising from subsistence farming. Groundnut production is the mainstay of the economy and makes an important contribution to exports. Roughly 3 million people are employed by the groundnut industry. However, exports suffer from the falling world market prices of groundnuts so that now fish products, the sale of fishing rights and cotton are among the country's main foreign currency earners. More than 600.000 people depend on the fishing industry. The most important agricultural products are millet, sorghum, rice, maize, cassava, and sugar cane. The primary sector constitutes only about one-sixth of the total economic performance. The industry sector which is concentrated in Greater Dakar, makes up about 20 %, whereas the production has declined over the last few years, particularly in the chemical industry. Only the construction sector and energy suppliers have recorded economic growth. In addition, there are food, leather and textile processing factories. Calcium phosphate provides the basis for a prospering fertiliser industry. Senegal has large phosphate mines and iron ore reserves, but the

production from the mining sector has also declined. In the Kédougou region in eastern Senegal gold is produced at both the artisanal and industrial levels.

The service sector accounts for about 60 % of gross domestic product, whereas tourism is Senegal's second-largest foreign currency earner. The tertiary sector is dominated by the telecommunications industry. The country has also become an important regional banking centre.