Gambia, The

Location
This country touches the North Atlantic Ocean and is sandwiched between Senegal. The country is located in western Africa (13 28 N, 16 34 W). The capital of this country is Banjul.

Geography
The country is about twice the size of the state of Delaware. Gambia has a coastline that touches the North Atlantic Ocean. This area is close to a river, flooding often occurs. The highest area of the country is only 53 m. The lowest point is the North Atlantic Ocean. About 28% of the land can be used for farming purposes.

Climate
From June to the November it usually rains a lot and is quite hot, but from November to May it is quite cool and dry. Droughts are also a common occurrence.

History
The Sarahuley ethnic group is mainly the group of people that inhabited this small country. Portuguese and British explorers once trampled through this country and introduced items such as cotton and tropical fruits. The population was small and soon there was intermarriage, washing out the purity of the ethnic group. The country was also part of the slave trade. The British later developed a trading relationship and later took over the country as a colony. Their independence was gained in 1965 from the UK. Since then it has formed an alliances with Senegal, but that was short lived. It was overthrown by military coups.

Important Dates
February 18 is Independence Day, May 1 is Labor Day, and July 22 is Revolution Day.

Population
The current (2008) population is 1,735,464. People usually live to their 50s and women give birth to 5 to 6 children. The Gambians are also composed of other ethnic groups as well including Mandinka, Fula, Wolof, Jola, and Serahuli. AIDS is also known in the country with a rate of 1.2%. Around 6000 people die each year from this disease.

Currency
The currency that the country uses is known as the dalasi (GMD). The conversion rate (2008) is; 1 US Dollar = 21.83500 Gambian Dalasi and 1 Gambian Dalasi (GMD) = 0.04580 US Dollar (USD).

Education
President Yahya Jammeh led the country in education reforms making sure that all children had an equal chance for education. He made sure that each child would at least receive the minimum of 9 years of school. He added more schools to the country and reformed the system as well. Interestingly, girls could go to school for free in this country. Boys who are having financial problems are also well taken care of by the government. The government set up many scholarships that would enable all children to go to school. Also, they have their own
university as well, compared to some African countries that have to go abroad for higher education.

**Language**
The main language is English, although tribal languages (Mandinka, Wolof and Fula) are spoken as well.

**Religion**
There are a number of Muslims and Christians in the country besides some of the locals who have their own beliefs. The country is accepting other religions as well and they are also known to be very dedicated and strict regarding their beliefs. The Muslims pray 5 times a day and celebrate Ramadan as well. Mosques can be found where many gather for prayer.

**Agriculture**
Being close to a body of water, fish is very plentiful in this country. The country’s soil is not the best for agriculture, but they depend a lot on their production of ground nuts. Other products that they produce include corn, mangoes, bananas, oranges, pawpaws, limes, manioc and millet. They locally obtain their own oil from oil palms.

**Trade**
Some of their natural resources include petroleum, clay, tin, silica sand, titanium, and zircon. A majority of what they export are peanuts and corn kernels to countries such as India, China, France and Belgium. They import items such as machinery and certain food items. The countries that they usually import from include China, Senegal, and Cote D’Ivoire.

**Food**
Like most European countries, they do not use refrigeration that often. Most meat products are cooked the same day that it is bought from the Market and is usually very fresh. Like most African dishes, the like to accompany meals with fufu and rice. Many of their dishes are stew which is thick and is eaten with rice or bread. They cook whatever they could mix together. The Gambians also enjoy a lot of fruits as well, such as mangoes and oranges. Fish, chicken, goat and beef are the meats that are usually consumed and since peanuts are one of their major products, they use it in cooking as well.

**Landmarks**
One should visit the capital of Banjul because it is the site where all the freed slaves used to live. British influence can be seen in that city as it was once the property of Britain. Government buildings can be seen as well as the center for transportation and business. For a resort, go to Serekunda, which is one of the biggest cities in the country. There you could experience village life and there are many small shops. Georgetown would be another town that would be nice to visit and experience local life.

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