

Lusophone countries



Guinea Bissau – Angola and Sao Tomé & Principe

May 2018



Bissau, Cacheu and more...

... I arrived an hour late into Bissau with my flight from Lisbon. I prepared to get quickly to customs not wanting to be tied up for hours in queues as I had a prepaid visa which need to be added into my passport. I succeeded and with my luggage already on the belt, I was probably one of the first one out. Met by pick-up from my hotel, I still had to wait for 30 minutes as he was collecting more people also from the same flight. I checked into the **Hotel Imperio** which had the advantage of being spot in the centre of town near the palace.

After having slept in a little until 8 o'clock, I set about to find a local driver/guide who could take me around to the things on my to-do-list of things to cover in GB. I understood already upon arrival in the evening that I would not be able to get out to the islands as the ferry schedule did not fit my days of visiting. I therefore decided to try and cover the mainland GB instead.

Not easy to find a local driver/guide speaking English apparently – Almost nobody speaks English in this country. The driver I ended up with was promised to speak English – this turned out to be not quite true. He agreed to my questions but could really never offer any answers. Nor did he seem to know the country and places I wanted to visit. Expect to pay ca: 30,000 XOF + gasoline money, if traveling out of town (gasoline ca: 650 / litre).

We set-out for **Cacheu** on the north-west side of the country. Here they have an **old fort from the 16th century (1588)**, by the Portuguese. Cacheu is a 2-hour drive on pretty good roads from Bissau. You also pass through the towns of **Bula and Canchungo** – not much to see apart from the usual local market spreading alongside the road. We visited a family in the poorer areas of Cacheu and delivered a large bag of infants/children's clothes which I had brought along from Sweden (Pyret).

On the way back from Cacheu we headed for **Quinhámel** on the way and made a quick stop at the **local distillery – Manuel Portuguese**. He was home, but he hosted a private dinner (this was Sunday). He was very kind and gave me a bottle of his local produce and invited me also to join the dinner. I declined as I had just eaten at the local place and resort – **Mar Azar** – where I had **local Oysters** with lime-sauce which they are famous for. Highly recommended and very affordable, where you could eat as much as you could muster for less than 7 Euro.



Guinea Bissau
On the road to Cacheu north-west



Guinea Bissau
A group of people



Guinea Bissau
A bridge crossing one of many waters



A former Portuguese colony with a bleak future



... Made plans to cover Bissau and the surrounding for the following 2 ½ days. Walked along Amilcar Cabral Avenue from my hotel down to the harbour area. Walked along the waterfront up to **Amura Fortress**. This is today the Military H Q for the armed forces and closed to the public. Thanks to Pyret who had been here before, I had a personal note from Major Napoleon, who worked here, and was with this note not only able to slip in but was also given a guided tour of the Fortress. The head of the Languages training facilities - Domingo, who spoke English, accompanied us around the premises and showed me all.

Got to see **Amilcar Cabral Mausoleum, National Heroes' memorial, the Liberty Radio station unit** which was used for communications during the Liberation among other things. The fortress was built by the Portuguese back in 1753 and was rebuilt in recent years and is now used for the Military command and as a Military museum. Had lunch at **Restaurant & Hotel Kaliste** also recommended by others. The afternoon I spent walking around the old parts of Bissau - **Bissau Velho** - where one could get a glimpse of what once was with colonial buildings. Most of this now in shambles. **Try the restaurant Papa Loca** (2 of 7 in TripAdvisor) - looks like a regular pizza joint - but they produce good food.

Continued to cover Bissau and went to the **main market - Bandim**. Full of people on both sides of the road. You'll find just about anything here. Good place to wander around and for photos. Try also **restaurant Bistro** (1 of 7 with TripAdvisor) - not any better than the others but gives you some variations. Hotel Imperio has its own restaurant on the 6th floor, but this is empty of people and a bit pricey. They do however have a good bakery on the side - worth to check out for bread and bagels. There are also a number of small Mercado's where one can purchase soft drinks, water etc.

Republic of Guinea-Bissau
República da Guiné-Bissau (Portuguese)

Flag: Emblem:

Motto: "Unidade, Luta, Progresso" (Portuguese)
"Unity, Struggle, Progress"

Anthem: *Esta é a Nossa Pátria Bem Amada* (Portuguese)
This is Our Beloved Homeland

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Location of Guinea-Bissau (dark blue)
- in Africa (light blue & dark grey)
- in the African Union (light blue)

Capital and largest city: Bissau
11°52'N 15°36'W





The northern route on day one

Traveling from Sao Tomé capital to Santa Catarina – end of the road....

We continued to the northern most point of the main island – a beach called Tamarind beach. A lovely white sanded beach which get locals coming during the weekend to picnic and swim.

Next stop was lunch at Pema Restaurant along the main road. Was quite surprised by the excellent grilled Barracuda fish I had for lunch. Very enjoyable. After this we continued along the coast travelling south now. From Lagoa Azul we continued to the town of Nevis and Praia Ponta Figo, which apparently is the first place the Portuguese set foot when they came and discovered the island back in the 15th century. From here we continued down to Diego Vaz and stopped at another Plantation. We made a few more stops along the way to distribute clothes and footballs and finally arrived at Santa Catarina – a fishing village which is where the road also ends. It is not possible to travel further south from here by land. The highest point is also near this place. Pico Sao Tomé which is over 2000 metres high.

We travelled back to the capitol the same route we came earlier in the day and reached the city around 5 PM. Walked around the city and had dinner at a local restaurant before calling it a day.



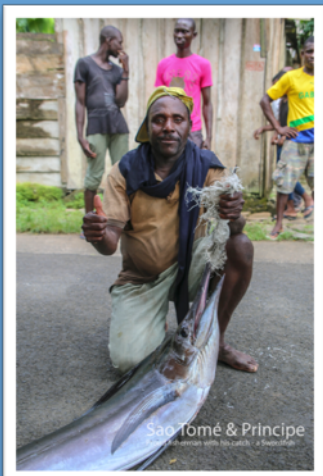


The Southern route on day 2....

Traveling to the very southernmost point of Porto Alegre

On day 2, we covered the south of the main Island. We made a first stop at another former grand Coffee plantation not far from the capital. Also, this place had been closed down since long. Now taken over by locals who had moved in to the former “workers quarters”. It is a wonder what these people make their living from since no one is seems to be farming or manufacturing anything here. We drove along the cost-line – a beautiful scenery – and made a couple of stops along the road at some deserted and pristine beaches. We stopped to watch when they slaughtered pigs and prepared them for selling in pieces. At the very tip – end – of the island we reached **Porto Alegre** – a fishing village – pretty much in shambles.

A couple of miles from this place further south the Praia Ilhame is located. This is a very nice beach, which also has a resort where we had lunch before heading back up north to the Capitol again. The trip back took only a little more than 1 hour. The chocolate factory was unfortunately closed this Friday, so we had to go to the supermarket to purchase the famous Cacao with such high quality. Tour ended at around 5 PM. I thought the Northern route was much better than the Southern route. Had a late check out from Hotel Marilyn at no extra charge. They even included a transfer to the airport. The departure time was 03:00 AM and expected departure time at Luanda was 05:00 AM in the morning. Got through emigration without any hic ups.





...A full day on foot in Luanda

I arrived on time in Luanda and also got through without any incidents. What to do when arriving to Luanda at this early hour without any local money. I was informed the black-market rate was 500 Kwanza to 1 Euro c.w. 275 being the official rate. There were no money changers in sight so I opted to check with the taxi if I could pay in Euro and with black market rate – that was ok. Here I'd like issue a word of warning. Don't take the "Official" white airport taxis all lined out nicely outside the terminal – even though they offer to drive on a meter and take you Euros. These guys are crocks and have this system of manipulating the taxa meter. I did not notice this at this early hour until arrival. For a 15-minute drive to my hotel **The Faias Residence** the taxa meter read 18,000 Kwanza equal to some 37 Euro – far too much. I did not have my wits about me at this early hour unfortunately. The good thing however was that my room was ready for check in although the usual check-in time is around 12 noon. After 2 hours sleep and breakfast (still not rested) I still decided to start exploring the city a little bit. Did a walking tour for some 4 hours and covered quite a bit from **Fortaleza de Sao Miguel** to the waterfront strip called **the Marginal**, some interesting buildings including **the Central Bank** (early century), **the castle** and much more. Main problem though I couldn't find a black-market moneychanger. My hotel staff eventually helped out but at a lower rate. I checked TripAdvisor for restaurant options but found out many of them had actually closed down.





Kissama National Park....

...empty of animals only 20 years ago – many now reintroduced

Arranged with the hotel for a taxi to take me on day 2 for a half day tour to **the Shipwreck Cemetery north of Luanda** at a fixed rate. I was picked up on time and off we went. The main road was closed off 30 min. north of Luanda due to construction work so we had to detour through a huge, but really rough and unsafe favela neighbourhood. I hour later and back on the main route the driver did not follow his GPS instructions to the site and hence we could not find it and had to turn back. 4 hours of lost time. To my great surprise he still insisted I should pay, and not only the prearranged price but also what he had been running up on the taxa meter. This was 3 times the agreed price. No, English possible, I got out without paying and referred to our go-in-between (hotel reception) to sort it out. I regrouped and got out to **the beach on Ilha** some 15 minute's drive by taxi and settled on the beach instead. A lovely beach on a tongue of land outside Luanda. Here they also have plenty of bars, clubs, hotels and restaurants. I tried **the bar Caribe** and settled later for **dinner at Macau restaurant**. Back at the hotel I had message from Paul and Eco Tur that he had managed to put me on the safari tour the following day.

Third day started then with a pick-up at the hotel at 05:45 AM. I had been able to join a private group of American expats working for Chevron Oil in Angola, as there was one free seat in the Land rover. Had a great full-day Safari trip all-inclusive (220 EUR) to **Kissama National Park**. Except for Cats and Elephants, we saw the following animals: Pluto Monkey, Vervet Monkey, Zebras, Kudus, Oryx, plenty of Wildebeest and giraffes. Also, a wide range of birds like: The Go-away bird, bee-eaters, Egrets, Grey Heron, Franklin birds, Palmnut Vulture Wydah longtail, Lilac breasted starling, seagulls and Sea Falcons. Got back in time to check in to my flight at the airport.

