

GREEN TOURISM AT ITS BEST: FARAKUNKU LODGES IN THE GAMBIA

So often, the term 'eco-lodge' is wrongly used as a label for any tourist accommodation off the beaten track and offering only basic facilities. It can have a rather rough and ready approach to service and accommodation. This idea that the more basic the provision, the better the eco label fits, is not true green tourism and nor is it what all tourists want on their travels.

A true eco-lodge, offers quality green tourism, and requires considerable investment in providing a clean, comfortable, reliably functioning environment that includes good alternative power from solar and/or wind energy to provide plentiful lighting, cold water on tap from bore holes, hot water showers, 'proper' toilets, refrigeration and fans. Careful disposal of waste water, sewage and rubbish is managed without harming the environment and always follows the recycling route, be it to water gardens or create compost. Locally produced fresh food is always used and staffing comes from within the local community.

In West Africa, and specifically The Gambia, eco-tourism is becoming increasingly important and popular along the developing coast and surrounding countryside. Bird watchers, nature lovers and visitors who seek the 'real' Gambia come to escape from the big hotels to enjoy peace and affordable comfort at an eco-lodge of their choice.



All the eco-lodges in The Gambia are managed personally by the owners who have good local knowledge as well as high standards which often surpass guests' expecta-

tions. A growing number of guests return year after year to enjoy this type of holiday and the outlook is promising. Several eco-lodges now focus on high quality accommodation and





offer delicious food in their on-site restaurants as well as providing trips to places of interest, using bikes guided walks or private boat/vehicle transport.

Eco-lodges are built in amongst existing trees to cause as little disturbance as possible to the flora and fauna. By retaining indigenous trees

and planting even more trees and flowering shrubs in and outside the grounds, more birds and butterflies are encouraged into the immediate area to compensate for the deforestation elsewhere. Employing local labour on a good regular salary is always part of the eco-lodge ethos and guests are encouraged to visit local

families, small scale agricultural projects and schools.

The challenges for eco-tourism are always there, as in any business, and require sound financial back-up and commitment. Regular upgrading and maintenance of solar batteries, panels, hot water storage cylinders, the structure of the buildings as well as the interior furnishings, ensure continuing high standards. Guests choosing eco-lodges seem to be well travelled and appreciative of the comforts and personal small-scale service that well-run lodges can offer, which match or better those of more expensive hotels found in the holiday brochures.

The visitor season in The Gambia is from November to the end of May...this is the dry season with temperatures between 25°C and 30°C, no rain and few mosquitoes. Each lodge accommodation is set in its own private gardens to ensure privacy as well as offering restaurant and poolside social space. All the eco lodges have mosquito netting over beds as well as at each window and ventilation from sea breezes are supplemented by ceiling fans.

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