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GAMBIA G131

Gambia is the smallest country on mainland Africa. It is surrounded on three sides by Senegal and by the Atlantic Ocean on the other. Many tourists come to visit the Gambia River that flows through the country.

The country was once central to the slave trade because of its position on the Atlantic Ocean. Many people were transported against their wishes by Europeans to North America and Carribean plantations.

Gambia was a British colony from the nineteenth century until its independence in 1965.

Flag

On 18 February 1965 the Gambia adopted this as their national flag. There are five horizontal stripes on the flag. The red coloured stripe stands for the sun shining on the Gambia River whilst the blue portrays the river. Green is the land, forests and agriculture. Thin white stripes symbolise the unity, peace and purity of the land.



Fan

This fan is made from palm leaves. The wood might look rough and basic but the leaves are hand-woven. A great deal of time and thought goes into creating the pattern. The strands are dyed to give the fan additional colour.



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Gourd



The gourd is actually a plant! There are many different varieties of gourd - all of them related to melons, pumpkins, and squashes. The bottle gourd (Lagenaria siceraria), also often called a calabash, is one of the most useful plants in West Africa. It is one of the few plants cultivated in both the New and Old worlds in prehistoric times. Botanists believe the plant may have originated in Africa and then floated across the seas to South America.

Young bottle gourd fruits of certain varieties are eaten as a boiled vegetable. The best are slightly sweet, tender, and free of bitterness. Other varieties are bitter and may contain poisonous substances, although they can still have a use in medicine. As well as providing food their skins can be dried out to make into containers. There are different ways of doing this. One technique is to fill the partially cleaned gourds with clean, dry sand, and cover them with sand in a container. This is heated over a fire for several days, drying out the gourds. Patterns may be cut into the gourds before they are dried, or the shells may be forced into desired shapes, as is the case with this example. Well-treated gourds become durable containers, some of which are very large and are able to hold a large amount of dry or liquid material. The dry hard shells have been used for bottles, milk pots, churns, bowls, ladles, spoons, work baskets, floats, pipes, musical instruments … almost anything you can imagine.

Gambia pod



The pod comes from a very useful tree called *Acacia Senegal*. Shake the pod and you can hear the seeds inside it. These can be dried and then eaten - a tasty Gambian snack!

Cutting the tree's bark produces a gum that is drained and used as a medicine. It is said to treat inflamed skin and diarrhoea.

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Shovel



Many Gambian people still work in agriculture to earn their wages. This means they farm food and look after animals. The shovel is therefore a very important tool for a farmer wanting to plant seeds.

Groundnuts are one of the easiest crops to grow in Gambia. They are harvested around October. This is the end of the rainy season. Once the plants are dug up they are dried. After this they get thrashed to release the nuts which are then sold in markets.

Mudstone necklace



Mudstone is made up of tiny clay particles. These particles are so small you need a microscope to see them.

The beads have had small holes drilled in them so that they can be joined to make a necklace. Look closely at the stones. Some have had decorations carved into them. What do you think they represent?

Men who belong to the Fula tribe traditionally give necklaces, arm and leg ornaments made from mudstone. These are given to women they want to marry as a sign that they can provide for them.

Purse



Can you guess what this has been made from? They are made from plastic bags that have been crotched. It takes about 10 shopping bags to make the purse.

A lot of countries rely on plastic bags to carry their groceries. Once used they are sometimes left to litter the countryside. If they lie around they can be eaten by cattle causing them to choke.

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Banknote and coins



Gambia's currency is called the dalasi. In the box is a one dalasai coin. This was modelled on the British 50 pence coin. The ten dalasai note shows a bird and a young boy on the front. The bird is called a sacred ibis. If you look closely at the left side of the note, above the signatures, it is possible to see the head of a crocodile. This is the watermark, which is added to all banknotes to make it harder to forge.



Crocodiles are highly revered in the Gambia. They are seen as a contact between the living and dead. In the west of Gambia is a popular site called Katchikali. It is home to a number of crocodile pools that are considered sacred. Visitors traditionally come for many reasons such as believing it will help them have children. They pray and throw in kola nuts into the pools for the crocodiles to eat.