

The CREATIVES

Aboubacarr Dem
Abouz Photography



Lena Nian
Lena Nian Photography



Bernard Yaw Acquah
TallBlaqBen



Ismaila Badjan
STS Pictures



Ousman Fye
Idealist Media



Fatou L. Bojang
Aspiring videographer & photojournalist



Muhamadou Mughtar Bittaye
Bitz Photography



Maria Mendy
Photojournalist (Cinatrix Media)



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HIDDEN GAMBIA

A visual journey
to the heart of
The Gambia

#Gambia #VisitGambia

HIDDEN GAMBIA

Widely known as the Smiling Coast of Africa, The Gambia offers a unique experience to visitors from leisure, adventure to culture-based tourism. The Atlantic Ocean meets endless beaches where tourists spend their days swimming, going for long walks, enjoying freshly made juice and adoring the sunset. From young backpackers looking for an adventure off the beaten track, explorers enjoying cultural experiences, birdwatchers relishing the rich biodiversity, to retired elders in search of a warm and peaceful environment, The Gambia offers a great experience to all.

Since early 2017, the International Trade Centre (ITC) has been supporting the Gambian tourism sector and creative industries through the European Union funded Youth Empowerment Project (YEP).

YEP has supported a range of market-driven interventions: market-led skills training, development of new products and experiences including cultural

tourism and community-based tourism and marketing of products and destinations. In 2021, through the YEP Andandorr Programme, ITC launched a new initiative with Gambian creatives to help boost sustainable and inclusive tourism and support the recovery of the tourism sector badly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eight photographers and videographers embarked on a journey to capture The Gambia through their lens. The group of talented men and women were guided by Jason Florio, an award-winner photographer and Helen Jones Florio, Producer. The various themes explored by the photographers and videographers which you will find in this booklet include community-based tourism, a road trip documenting a journey through The Gambia's heartland, traditional masquerades, a cultural harmony, environmental heroes and a host of other subjects that show The Gambia's rich heritage. With every page and every picture comes a new discovery of The Gambia.



About the International Trade Centre



The International Trade Centre (ITC) is a joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations. ITC assists small and medium-sized enterprises in developing and transition economies to become more competitive. Under the Tekki Fii Program, ITC is implementing the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) which takes a market-driven approach and enhances employability and self-employment opportunities for youth, with a focus on vocational training and the creation of micro and small-sized enterprises. For more information, please scan the QR Code.

About European Union Emergency Trust Fund



The European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) addresses the root causes of destabilisation, forced displacement and irregular migration by promoting economic and equal opportunities, strengthening security, development and resilience of vulnerable people. For more information, please scan the QR Code.

a visual
Journey
to the heart of The Gambia



Lena Nian

Lena Nian Photography



@lena_nian_photography

Born in Sweden to a Gambian father and Swedish mother, Lena Nian has been blessed with the advantage of developing creative influences hailing from both of her cultures. Her love for photography began on her 9th birthday when she received her first camera.

In her early years, Lena was widely known amongst her family and friends for capturing special moments. As her passion progressed, Lena decided to formally study Fine Art and Photography at Katerdalskolan, Vaxjo in Sweden, and later ventured to the London College of Communication (London College of Arts) where she received a BA Honors in Graphic Design for Advertising.

Lena relocated to The Gambia in 2009 and has built a reputation as a noted photographer and graphic designer. Lena is the co-founder of Fashion Weekend Gambia where her love for fashion photography continues to grow.

Lena has worked as head of visual communications at Hot Ink Media since 2010 and runs her own company and studio known as Lena Nian Photography - Her portfolio includes photos for private clients, corporate companies, advertising and events, but she specializes in portraits and Fashion.

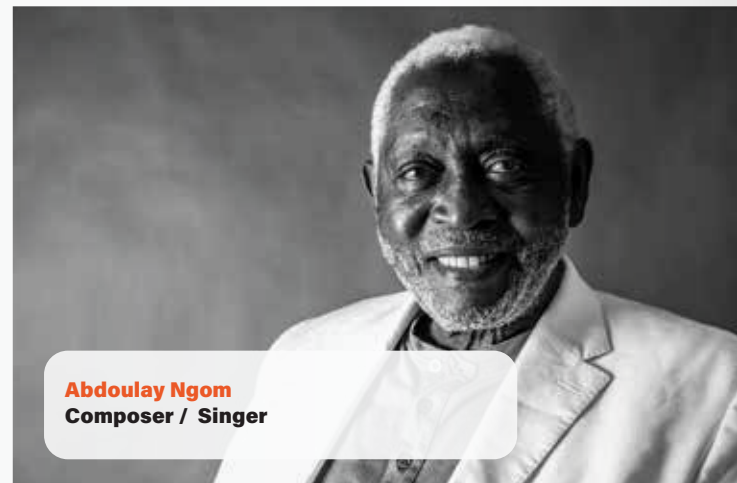
Her work has been published in national and international publications including Fashion Ghana Magazine, BHF Magazine and B-Inspired Brussels Airlines Inflight Magazine for three years running.

In 2018 she exhibited her work at the Dak'art Biennale, Senegal and in 2019 her photograph "Black Madonna" was exhibited at the Women, Wine & Words Festival in Harare, Zimbabwe as one of 54 female African artists.

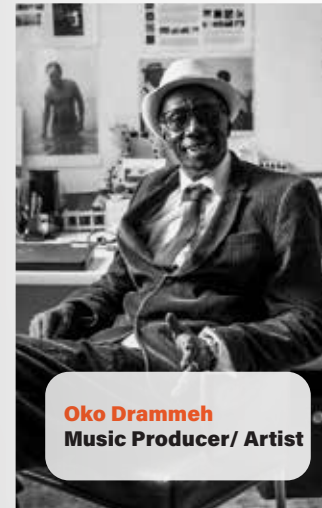
She has worked with Gambian brands such as NFC, Medoune, TARA, Phuzion and internationals such as Sunday Beach, Mixed Grill, and AWC, London. She is also the creative brain behind FWG's branding and commercial photography.



Janet Badjan Young
Playwright, Actress and Pioneer of Ebunjan Theatre - the first Theatre in The Gambia



Abdoulay Ngom
Composer / Singer



Oko Drammeh
Music Producer/ Artist



Gina Bass
Olympic Athlete - World Championship Finalist



Jaliba Kuyateh
Griot - most renowned Kora virtuoso

EXTRAORDINARY GAMBIANS

The Gambia, the smallest country on mainland Africa is blessed with gifted minds and great individuals who have etched their names in the history books. As captured by Lena, these familiar faces show the diversity of The Gambia. From Jaliba Kuyateh, the King of Kora whose melodious voice will leave your heart craving for more. Janet Badjan Young, who has revitalized the performing arts sector as a form of experience and employment for young Gambians. Gina Bass, the athletic track queen making The Gambia proud every second in her race to the finish line. And many more Gambians who inspire across all walks of life. The uniqueness of The Gambia stems from its rich cultural and social heritage that exemplifies harmony, tolerance and hospitality.

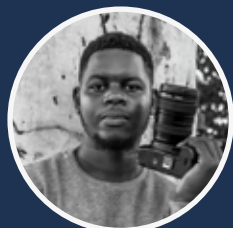


Ndey Fatou Ceesay
creative artist



CULTURAL HARMONY

With a growing population of just over 2 million people, The Gambia is known as the melting pot in West Africa due to its multicultural and multiethnic society. The mixed bag of languages, attires, masquerades, festivals, foods and different ways of life is how the country uniquely shows up to the world. The rich diversity and apparent harmony of cultures are marked by inter-marriages, joking relationships, deep mutual respect and peaceful co-existence.



Muhamadou Mugtarr Bittaye
Bitz Photography



@bitzphotography

Muhamadou Mugtarr Bittaye is a passionate and self-motivated Gambian-based photographer. His focus is on capturing the essence of everyday life in The Gambia.

He believes dignity is a fundamental human right and strives to convey this through his photography, showing emotions to create lasting memories of the people around him.

Muhamadou's style is rooted in traditional photojournalism, but he brings his unique fine-art-inspired aesthetic to create work that is not only impactful but visually appealing.

He has worked on multiple projects for international and local organizations including The International Trade Centre and African Network Against Extrajudicial Killings and Enforced Disappearances (ANEKED) for their "Memory House" project, a memorialization and education centre which offers a space in which the relatives of the victims of Yahya Jammeh's regime in The Gambia can share and reflect on their stories.



ATTAYAH

KINGS & QUEENS

Green Tea, popularly known as Attayah, is a unifier of hopes, hearts and humans in The Gambia. At home, it brings together families sharing stories, folktales and laughter. In the streets, young Gambians meet around a cup of attayah to catch up on the latest football scores.

An Attayah gathering stops the daily grind.

Relationships are formed and bonds are strengthened with every brew and a glass passed around.



Bernard Yaw Acquah
TallBlaqBen



Bernard Yaw Acquah, popularly known as TallBlaqBen is a professional commercial and editorial photographer. He spent most of his childhood in The Gambia before leaving for Ghana to further his education.

While in Ghana Bernard started photography primarily as a hobby and most importantly as a way to connect with others as he struggled to interact with people. In 2016 whilst working with Glitz Africa Ghana, Bernard quickly realised that photography was his true passion.

In August 2019, Bernard started commercial photography while still working as a Financial Auditor and Accountant. In January 2021, he decided to switch to photography full time.

He appreciates the raw quality of everyday life and the fleeting beauty of those in-between moments and captures every picture with that in mind. Bernard wants his viewers to relate to his photographs through recognition and familiarity with the emotions and energy. To him, a picture is a universal language he intends to speak fluently.



HOW WE CELEBRATE

A Gambian celebration is the summation of happiness in all its variance, colour and flavour. A naming ceremony in The Gambia, which marks the welcoming of a newborn baby, a traditional wedding ceremony to celebrate love and union, the periodic masquerade parades and religious festivals are all adorned with the rich culture of the different ethnics, traditions and beliefs.

The tolerance in The Gambia is in the religious celebrations where Christians show up for Muslim feasts and Muslims participate in Christian festivities. This further extends to the different tribes and how they interact with each other.



GAMBIAN ROADTRIP

The Gambia is blessed with beautiful scenery along the river Gambia and beyond, dotted by diverse communities and natural sights that captures the interest of anyone lucky to experience it. From the charming skies, the welcoming and smiling faces, the magnificent sunsets to the rich biodiversity, the country serves a great taste of nature.

Bitz & Ben take you on a road trip to the heartland of The Gambia

BITZ & BEN





Fatou L. Bojang

Aspiring videographer & photojournalist

Fatou L. Bojang, a graduate from St' Peters Technical Senior Secondary School is an aspiring videographer and photojournalist.

She currently attends Fandema Women Development Center where she is learning video production and photojournalism.

As a young woman, her work is focused on women empowerment for a positive change. Even as a married woman with a child and all the responsibilities that come with it, Fatou keeps moving forward to develop and build her career.

Fatou aspires to be one of the best videographers and photojournalists in The Gambia.



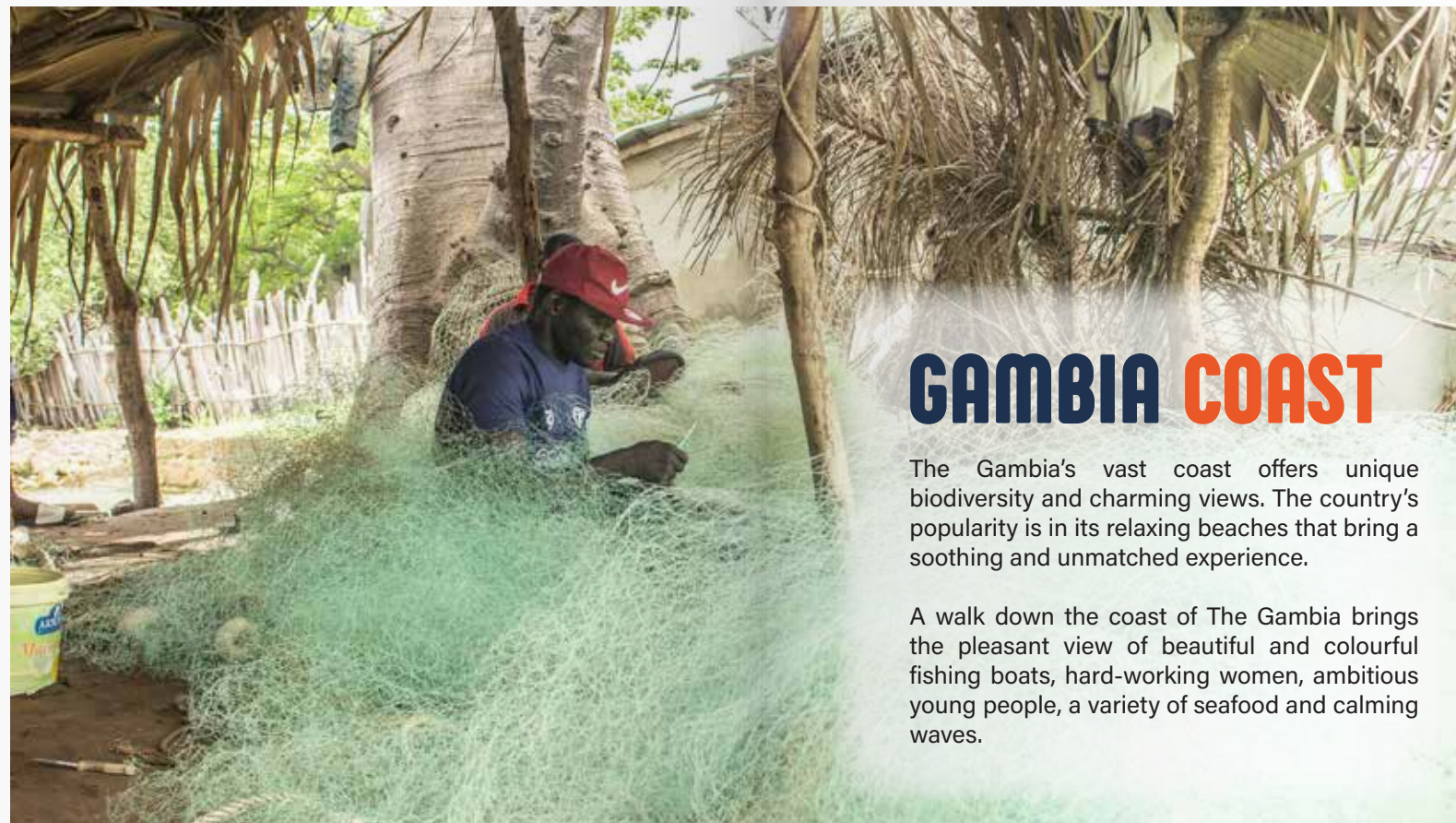
Maria Mendy

Photojournalist (Cinatrix Media)

Maria Mendy is a photojournalist currently an intern at Cinatrix Media.

She attended Theresa's primary and upper basic school and completed in 2007. After her Gambia basic examination, she proceeded to unity comprehension senior secondary school where she graduated in 2011. Upon completion, Maria proceeded to the management development institute (MDI) and later went to Fandema Women's Development Center.

At her leisure time, Maria enjoys reading magazines and watching documentaries of great photojournalists.



GAMBIA COAST

The Gambia's vast coast offers unique biodiversity and charming views. The country's popularity is in its relaxing beaches that bring a soothing and unmatched experience.

A walk down the coast of The Gambia brings the pleasant view of beautiful and colourful fishing boats, hard-working women, ambitious young people, a variety of seafood and calming waves.





FATOU L. BOJANG

MARIA MENDY



Aboubacarr Dem
Abouz Photography



@abouz_photography

Aboubacarr Dem is a graduate of Gambia Senior Secondary School and underwent training in Computer Science at the Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTI).

Aboubacarr works at the National Centre for Arts and Culture (NCAC) as a Studio Technician responsible for all audio-visual productions under the Research and Documentation Division's Oral Archive collection of written and audio-visual material and also provides internal IT Support.

Besides his official functions of the NCAC, Aboubacarr is a professional photographer - a career he started in 2011. He is also a Graphic Designer for Jallow Jerry Printing as well as Sunrise Publishers.

In 2018, Abouz Photography was selected as part of the Gambian Filmmakers Association to produce a short documentary film on Transitional Justice which was nominated and featured in the Senegalese Film Festival - Ciné Droit Libre where he was certified by the French Ambassador in Senegal.

In December 2018, he signed a contract with Senegalese popstar Wally Seck to cover his concert show in The Gambia.

In 2019, Aboubacarr benefitted from the YEP Photography training and participated in the Andandorr Programme, where he underwent mentorship from Jason Florio - award-winning photojournalist and filmmaker.



MASQUERADES

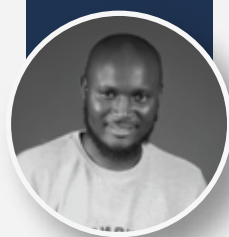
With cultural diversity comes fascinating masquerades that represents the traditions, spiritual and social beliefs of the different ethnic groups and in some cases, guide a way of life. Common masquerades include the varying and mysterious Kankurangs which are associated with the Mandinka tribe and are commonly used to rid evil, especially during the rite of passage and circumcision ceremonies. The Kumpo and Mamapara, are associated with Jolas while the Zimba is attributed to the Wolofs. These masquerades and many are celebrated and acknowledged in social and cultural events.

Ask a Gambian about their most vivid memories growing up in The Gambia and they will share an endless list of encounters with these masquerades. They preserve culture, heritage and contribute to the uniqueness of The Gambia.



ABOUZ





Ousman Fye
Idealist Media

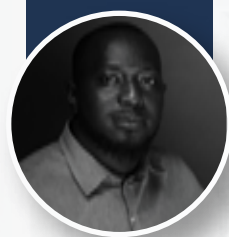


@ousfye

Ousman Fye is a Documentary Filmmaker with over eight years of experience providing media services for individuals and cooperations.

Ousman does a lot of work on Irregular Migration and Climate Change stories in the rural Gambia. He works quite well with a team and enjoys good company. In 2017, his documentary – “Nna Saama Mangkol” made it to the final top two of the TVE Biodiversity Movies competition out of four hundred and fifty entries worldwide.

He has worked in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal respectively for various organizations including DW Tv and the International Organization for Migration



Ismaila Badjan
STS Pictures



@badjanhc

Ismaila Badjan is a Gambian filmmaker, husband, and father of a lovely boy. He graduated from Sheikh Mass Kah Senior Secondary. He is highly skilled in Information Technology.

Ismaila works with STS Pictures, an award-winning and one of the leading multimedia companies in The Gambia. His main area of interest in filmmaking is lighting, therefore, he does all the lighting for productions at “STS Pictures”. In recent times, Ismaila worked on a 50-minutes long film through STS Pictures in collaboration with Rebel VZN where he managed and coordinated the lighting. He aspires to be one of the best filmmakers in Africa. Ismaila enjoys travelling, meeting new people and has a great passion for photography.

ABOUT THE MENTORS

Jason Florio is a photojournalist and filmmaker based between London and The Gambia- where he has lived and worked on and off since 1998. His focus is on under-reported stories about people living on the margins of society, and human rights. He has produced images and films around the world for NGO's, and publications including The New York Times, The New Yorker, Smithsonian, Geographical and Amnesty International. His work has been recognized with several awards, including the prestigious Magnum Photography Award 2017 and American Photography 2018 in recognition of his work on documenting the migration crisis in the Mediterranean.

Helen Jones-Florio is a photography producer, photographer and writer. She has been travelling to The Gambia for 20 years and has produced photography assignment in the region as well as the USA, Mexico, and Europe. Along with Jason Florio, she co-led the first recorded circumnavigation of The Gambia – a 930km expedition by foot. This was followed by co-leading together the first recorded source-to-sea expedition of River Gambia with canoes, from its source in Guinea to the Atlantic Ocean in Banjul. Both expeditions resulted in the creation of award-winning photography projects – raising international awareness about The Gambia and its culture.

A DRIVE TO A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

The Gambia is affected by climate change, which has altered lives and livelihoods. It has affected agriculture, a primary source of income for Gambians, especially for women and smallholder farmers in rural areas. In some communities, climate change has severely contributed to conflict and unrest, stealing from the cloth of peaceful co-existence, the brand mark of the country.

To battle the challenges of climate change, selfless Gambians have paved the way to a sustainable environment through tree planting exercises, sustainable energy technologies, replenishment of lost land and biodiversity. The work of these great individuals has helped put The Gambia on the map as the only country on track to meet its Paris Agreement Goals on climate change.

Ousman Fye and Ismaila Badjan, young aspiring filmmakers show the drive to a sustainable Gambia in the videos linked below. Scan QR codes to watch the videos.



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