

West African countries – Senegal

Senegal is a big country in West Africa. It has about 15 million people.

It is the most western country in Africa or Europe, on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean.

The name of the country has an interesting history. Some people believe it comes from words in the Wolof language. The words are 'Sunuu Gaal', which means 'Our boat'. Some believe it comes from the name of the river 'Senega' or the Berber people the 'Zenega'.

History - It is a very old country. People lived here thousands of years ago.

Kings controlled the country from 600-700 AD, in the Takrur kingdom.

The country was part of the Jolof Empire in the 13th and 14th centuries.

Europeans arrived in the 15th century, from Portugal and then other countries.

They bought and sold many things – including people. Many people went from Senegal to America as slaves. They left Senegal from the buildings on the island of Goree.

Senegal became independent in 1960. The first president was President Leopold Senghor. He was president for 20 years. He was a poet and a writer, and the first African member of the Academie Francaise.

Senegal is a stable and peaceful country, with good relations with its neighbours Mauritania, Mali, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau.

Senegal has a good climate in most of the country – it is hot but not too hot. And there is rain in the time between June and October.

The people of Senegal come from different groups. The biggest group are called Wolof. Their language is also Wolof. There are other groups like Fula and Toucouleur. French is the official language but most people also speak Wolof and other languages like Pulaar and Serer.

Dakar is the capital and the home of the government. It is the biggest city in the country and has over 2 million people.

Economy - Senegal has a good economy. Industries include fish, mining, making petrol from oil, and shipbuilding. Senegal sells cotton, peanuts, vegetable oil, beans, tomatoes to other countries. The economy is growing. There is a very good internet connection and a lot of internet businesses.

Tourism - A lot of tourists go to Dakar, to visit the beach, the old city and the island of Goree. It is easy to travel in Senegal. There is a new international airport in Dakar, and modern roads to other parts of the country. There is a railway line from Dakar to Bamako, the capital of Mali, but it is not running at the moment.

Culture - Senegal is famous for storytelling; the people called 'griots' tell stories about the people and history of Senegal. The griots know a lot about history, culture and music.

There is a small film industry in Senegal - it was very successful in the 1970s and 1980s but it is now very small. There is a big film festival in Dakar every year, called Recidak.

There is a famous kind of music in Senegal, called 'mbalax'. There are famous musicians like Youssou N'Dour and Orchestra Baobab.

Food - People in Senegal eat a lot of fish, and also chicken and lamb. They cook with peanuts and many vegetables. Most dishes come with rice or couscous.

Sport - Football and basketball are very popular, but also wrestling is popular in Senegal.

New words for this article -

1	kingdom	a country controlled by a king
2	slaves	people who are not independent, and are bought and sold
3	poet	writer of poetry
4	stable	safe, unchanging
5	griot	storyteller

Comprehension questions

- What is the main language spoken in Senegal as well as French?
- When is there rain in Senegal?
- What is part of the economy in Senegal?
- Where does the railway line go to?
- What are the 3 popular sports in Senegal?

- most people speak Wolof
- there is rain in the time between June and October.
- Industries include fish, mining, making petrol from oil, and shipbuilding. Senegal sells cotton, peanuts, vegetable oil, beans, tomatoes to other countries.
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- Football and basketball are very popular, but also wrestling is popular in Senegal.

**Answers -
Comprehension questions**