



The coast at Saint-Louis

الشاطئ عند سانت لويس

Senegal

Sufi heritage and exotic wonders of nature

Nour - eddine Saoudi

Situated to the south of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Senegal is a country with a Moslem population of 90%. The practise of Islam has some unique characteristics: the majority of the Senegalese are connected to a Marabout or religious guide. All Marabouts are affiliated, to some extent, to a Confraternity or Zaouiya, united supporter association around a Sheik (master), who dispenses teachings and religious practices, founded on the Koran and Sunna. The confraternity is part of Sufism, Islam's mystical tradition. The Sufis (the word comes from the Arabic for wool suf, referring to the clothes of the Sufis), were the ascetics who crystallized their quest for God through meditation, the understanding of the texts of the Holy Koran and a life focused on spiritual rather than material considerations.

Besides their adherence to the five pillars of Islam, the confraternities undertake practices aimed at moral purification and a spiritual ascension: the wird and the dikr. Every confraternity has its wird, or recitation, that includes a set of incantations of God's name (Allah) and prayers for the Prophet Mohammad, or the recitation of some Koranic verses before sunrise and sunset.

In the same way, the confraternities practice dikr, a spiritual exercise based on the repetition of Koranic verses, shahada (the Islamic articles of faith), or of Allahu Akbar. Every confraternity performs

the dikr in its own way.

Main confraternities: Tijaniya and Mouridiya

In Senegal, the two main Moslem confraternities are the Tijaniya and the Mouridiya. The Tijaniya (or the Tidjanism) was founded by Sidi Ahmed At-Tijani (1737 - 1815). The principles of Tidjanism are the traditional religious teachings of Islam, as well as the wird and dikr. The affiliation to Tidjanism comes through a religious guide, or muqaddam, who gives the disciple (talibe) the Tidjany wird. Tidjanism is composed of several wirds or

wasifa (prayers), and the hadra (session of dikr in practices undertaken on Fridays).

Tidjanism had become prominent in Africa during the 19th and 20th centuries. It was introduced to Senegal around 1835 by El-Haj Sheik Omar Tall (1799-1864) and revitalised by El-Haj Malick Sy (1855-1922). The later succeeded in propagating the ideas of the confraternity and its influence throughout the country. Today the Tijaniya confraternity represents more than 51% of Senegalese Moslems. The members of the Tijaniya community meet every year in the holy city of Tivaouan, or other Senegalese cities, for the ➤

commemoration of Maouloud (the Prophet's birthday), celebrated with religious songs and Koranic readings.

The Tariqa Mouridiya (or Mouridism: a dedicated worshiper of God, Muridul-Allah in Arabic), was founded by Sheik Ahmadu Bamba (1853 - 1927), one of the distinguished Imams of Islam in Africa last century. He defended Islam in West Africa, against missionaries and colonialism, not with weapons but peacefully through Islamic education. His fight for Islam forced him to endure 32 years of persecution, but that didn't stop him from writing the masterly Massalik al-Jinan (Roads to Paradises), which contains his Sufi teachings. The library of Sheik el-Khadim in Touba, built by Sheik Abdul-Ahad Mubacki Ibn Sheik Ahmadu Bamba in 1977, has most of his writings.

Mouridism is a code of conduct and worship: a Sufism based on the love and imitation of the Prophet Mohammad, whose aim is spiritual perfection. Thus, the disciple Mouride must try to be a Moslem who "develops" his spirituality through iman (faith) and ihsan (beneficence). The holy city of Touba, famous for its mosque, one of the biggest in Africa, is the centre of the Mouridiya Confraternity. Members of the Mourides community and friends meet there every year to celebrate the return of Ahmadou Bamba from exile, in a feast called the Magal of Touba. In Senegal today, 30% of Muslims follow the Mouridi creed. There are many Koranic schools in this community to teach the principles of Islam and the writings of the founder of Mouridism.

Other confraternities are found in Senegal, of which the most important is the Zaouiya of the Kounta, affiliated to the Zaouiya Quadiriyya of Morocco. It is directed by the family of Sheik Mohammed Fadhel, who was the founder of the movement in the country. In Senegal Eid el-Kabir (the feast of the sacrifice of the sheep), is called tabaski, and is the most important feast of the year.

Splendid tourist sites

Senegal, a land of sunshine throughout the year, has a land area of 196,192 km ➤



Djoudj Park

الحديقة الوطنية في دجودج



Djoudj Park

حديقة دجودج



A village

قرية



Touba Mosque

مسجد التوبة

with 700 km of thin sandy beaches and a mild climate, of warm sea water moderated by the marine current that comes down from the Canary Islands.

Despite its modest area, Senegal has four different ecosystems: the mountain of Fouta-Djalon (south-oriental), dense forests in Low Casamance, mainly in the border region with Guinea-Bissau, desert hills to the north and lakes.

Senegal also has six national parks - the jewels of West Africa encompassing the entire region's ecological diversity. There is Niokolo-Koba Park, where lions, elephants, hippos and buffalos live freely. It has been designated a world heritage site by UNESCO. The National Park of Low Casamance is one of the most beautiful parks in Senegal, home to many hippos, panthers, boars, rabbits, numerous species of monkeys and reptiles such as crocodiles and African snakes. It can only be visited by car. The national park of Djoudj is, the second largest bird park in the world. Most migratory birds pass through it on their travels.. The spectacle of the lake water covered by flamingos, pelicans and cranes is astonishing.

Senegal is an ideal tourist destination for visitors throughout the world, who are trying to discover and understand Africa's traditions and appreciate the cultural heritage of Islam, especially Sufism. Those who are searching for exoticism, natural beauty and serenity will also find Senegal is a destination where their dreams come true. ■

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