



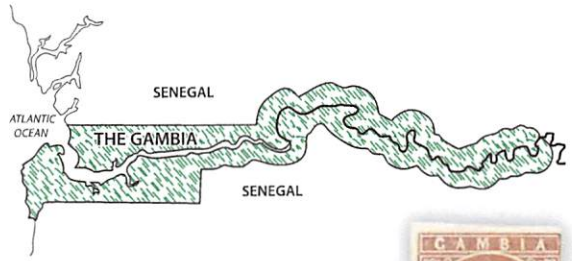
The Gambia

Status: Presidential Republic in West Africa

Population: 2,051,263 (2017 est.)

Area: 4,363 sq miles

Currency: 100 Bututs = 1 Dalasi. US\$1 = 47 Dalasi.



Little is known of Gambian history before Muslim traders arrived with their religion in the ninth century. There is speculation that several Mediterranean cultures at least knew about the Gambia River in pre-Christian times, but the first recorded visit by Europeans was in 1455, when the Portuguese, seized by the vision of Prince Henry the Navigator, pressed southward down Africa's Atlantic coast. They set up a few trading settlements near the mouth of the river, but Vasco da Gama's discoveries soon drew Portugal's attention to the riches of the Indian Ocean. Its Gambian holdings languished.

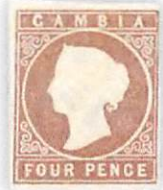
A century later, a cash-strapped Portuguese royal sold the area's trading rights to the British. They, too, found the region disappointing. Climate and disease made life along the river basin harsh. Nevertheless, Gambia was swept up for the next two centuries in Britain's competition with the Netherlands and France for control of the world's mercantile trade. In the mid-17th century, an odd interloper entered this competition when the duke of Courland (now Latvia) colonized an island at the mouth of the Gambia River. In less than a decade the duke lost his Gambian holdings to the British. As compensation, the British supported his claim to Tobago in the West Indies.

By 1783, the British had gained virtually unchallenged control of The Gambia. They left its administration to private companies engaged in the slave trade. The abolition of slavery in 1808 practically ruined these companies and in 1821, the Crown took control of The Gambia, placing it under the governor of Sierra Leone. Once the British learned that the Gambia River did not offer access to the heart of West Africa, they sought to trade the colony to the French, who were consolidating their control in that region. After two decades of sporadic negotiations with the French, the British, in 1888, made The Gambia a separate colony, anticipating that the trade could be accomplished at the Paris Conference of 1889. The conference achieved general agreement between the two countries on their spheres of influence in Africa; The Gambia trade was not part of it.

As a result, the British recognized that they would have to pay more attention to the colony. Firmer control was established over the interior and governmental institutions were strengthened. In 1963 it was granted full internal self-government and in 1965 it became fully independent.

Until the middle of the 19th century, mail relied on occasional ship visits. About 1855, mail to The Gambia was sent to Sierra Leone accompanied by funds to defray the postage. An uncompensated postmaster took care of the mail when it arrived in Bathurst. On January 1, 1858, the first post office was opened at Bathurst. In 1867, the colony applied for its own postage stamps. After considerable negotiations over the cost, De La Rue & Co received the contract. To keep the price low, the stamps were imperforate and printed on unwatermarked paper. The embossed cameo design was fashioned after the issues of Heligoland. The first two stamps were placed on sale in Bathurst in January 1869. Stamps were inscribed "Gambia" until 1966 when it became "The Gambia."

Although The Gambia has become a prolific issuer of postage stamps, most of the stamps are only available at a special philatelic section of the main post office in Banjul. However, other post office patrons throughout the country are offered stamps from the 2010 issue depicting traditional musical instruments.



The first stamps of Gambia are imperfs and show an embossed portrait of Queen Victoria as a cameo, Scott 3. The design is based on stamps from Heligoland.



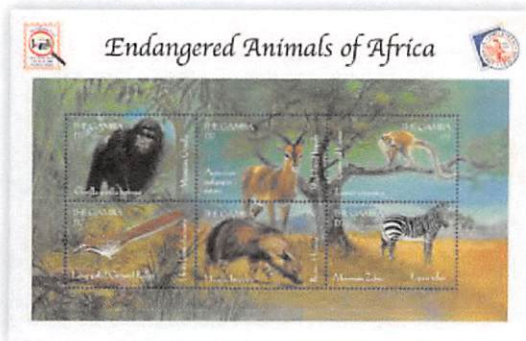
A set of handsome stamps with an inset of King George V, issued in 1922-27, includes this low value green stamp showing an elephant, Scott 102.



The first set of stamps featuring Queen Elizabeth shows local scenes, including this palm wine tapping vignette, Scott 153.



The high value of a 2010 15-stamp set showing traditional musical instruments, Scott 3292. This set is one of the few modern sets available to the local population.



A souvenir sheet, Scott 2194, featuring endangered animals was issued during the 2000 AmeriStamp Expo in Portland, Oregon. The annual show is sponsored by the APS.