



# Guinea-Bissau

**Status:** Presidential Republic in West Africa  
**Area:** 13,948 sq. miles  
**Population:** 1,759,159 (2016 est.)  
**Currency:** 100 Centimes = 1 CFA-Franc (popularly known as a "See-Fa"). 610 See-Fa = US\$1



In 1914, there were specific stamps in a common design for Portuguese Guinea, Scott 160.

After Portuguese navigators arrived off the Guinea coast in the mid-15th century, Portugal controlled commerce on the West African coast for nearly a century. The lucrative trade, especially in slaves, attracted other European competitors. The Portuguese operated trading stations in coastal villages, but there was little penetration into the interior and little Portuguese settlement. The colony was administered from Cape Verde. By the 19th century, the British and French had reduced Portuguese Guinea to an enclave about the size of Maryland on the Guinea coast. Eventually the British laid claim to that.



Early Portuguese Guinea stamps created by Portugal were overprints of Cape Verde issues, Scott 13, issued in 1881.

In 1870, the Portuguese and the British asked U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant to mediate their conflicting claims. Grant decided in favor of the Portuguese. Lisbon then took steps to strengthen its hold. In 1879, Guinea was separated from Cape Verde and its capital was established at Bolama, which received a number of public buildings, including a post office, a magnificent governor's palace, and a public park graced with a monument to President Grant, the ruins of which remain today.

After the 1885 Berlin Conference, Portugal wanted to show "effective occupation" of Guinea. It resorted to "pacification" campaigns, which continued to the eve of World War II. Portugal responded to growing post-war nationalism by designating Portuguese Guinea as an "overseas territory" in 1951. In 1956, a formal pro-independence movement was organized. The level of violence rose and the Portuguese recognized the colony's independence as the Republic of Guinea-Bissau on September 10, 1974. Since independence, Guinea Bissau has suffered considerable political instability.



After World War II, overprints and common designs gave way to stamps designed specifically for Portuguese Guinea, Scott 272.

Portugal issued the first stamps for Cape Verde in 1877. These were valid for Portuguese Guinea until 1881 when Cape Verde stamps were overprinted specifically for use in Guinea. In 1941, when the Portuguese moved the capital to Bissau, they erected an impressive post office building across from the Cathedral. Mail service was expanded to small postal stations throughout the territory where post office boxes were sold to individuals for life.

After independence, the village post offices were stripped and often became dwellings for squatters. Immediately after independence new stamps were inscribed "State of Guinea-Bissau." In 1976-77, that was replaced with "Republic of Guinea-Bissau." Portuguese currency was used during the colonial period. With independence, the Guinean peso was introduced in lieu of the escudo. In practice, both currencies remained in use at par until 1976. Stamps of the period were denominated in either currency. Serious inflation led to the adoption of the West African franc in 1997.

Today, the post office in Bissau is essentially shuttered, offering services to the public from a room on the side of the building. During a recent visit, three ladies served the public from tables at the entrance, with several desks occupied by supervisory personnel behind them. Only one person seemed to sell stamps. Her sales folder contained a total of 51 stamps: six of the 50-franc Coat of Arms issues of 2011, five of the 100-franc (Michel 5385-86) and two sheets of 20 of the 350-franc stamp of 2003 honoring Fats Domino (Michel 2334). A request for stamps for collectors brought a well-worn folder from a supervisor containing about 20 different souvenir sheets and panes issued between 2003 and 2013.



Stamps of 1975 were overprinted in 1976 to match the country's change in currency denominations from escudos to pesos, Scott 357, 367C.

The postal system seemed efficient. Postcards arrived in the United States within about a week — much faster than those from neighboring countries. All received a dated service stamp rather than a traditional cancel.