

■ OFF THE BEATEN TRACK { Dakar }

Chasing the endless summer sprays

December is the perfect time to grab your board and surf the wild winter waves in the West African Atlantic, says **Duncan Madden**, as he follows in the 50-year-old footsteps of two legendary American adventurers in Senegal

Plunging into the bath-warm waters for my first surf in the West African Atlantic, it's actually the prickly heat of 20 intense gazes that raises a sweat on my brow. Recruits from N'gor Island's tiny army base (which excellently doubles as its only off-licence), these orange-life-vest-clad local men are learning to swim and seem intent on following my every move. But my gaze is set to the horizon, where beautiful blue-green waves are peeling thunderously over a razor sharp reef.

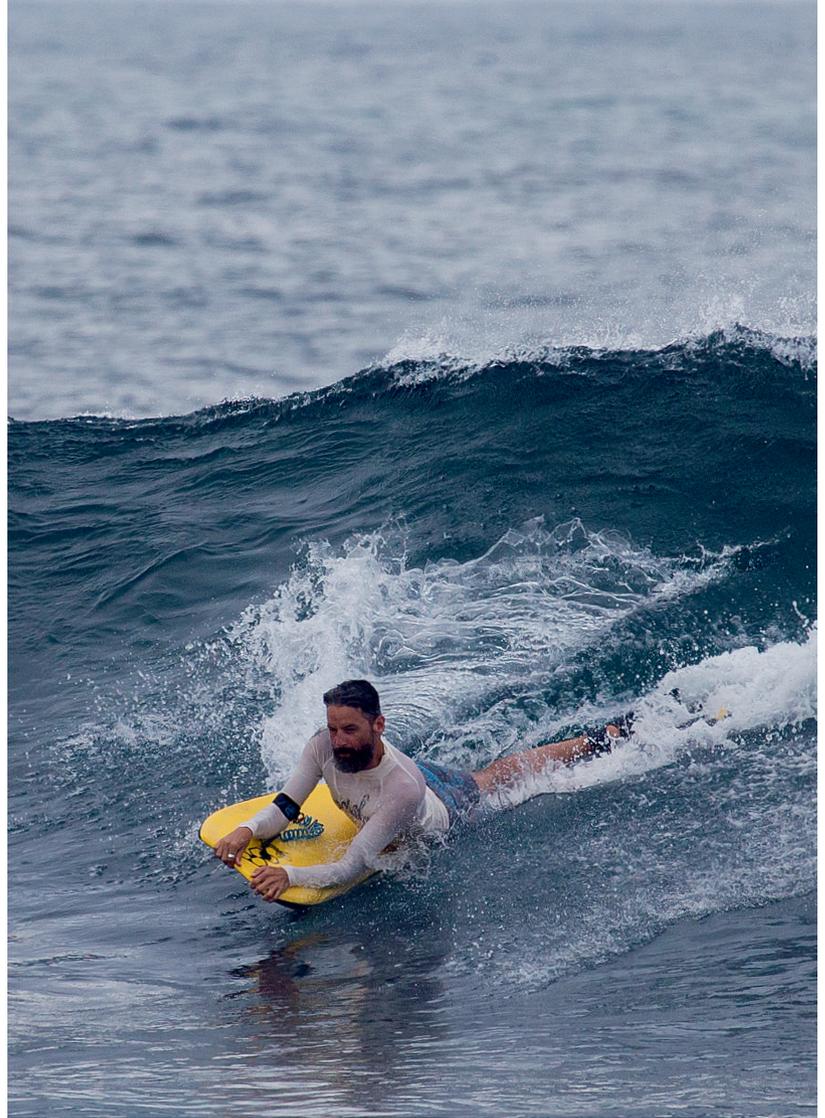
It's a promising start. I've been in Senegal only a few hours and am already fulfilling a lifelong dream – to surf and bodyboard N'gor Right, the wave made famous by

intrepid Californian surfers Mike Hynson and Robert August in Bruce Brown's cult 1966 travel film, *The Endless Summer*.

Under the growing warmth of a rising sun, my friends and I holler each other into head-high, tubing waves against the backdrop of West Africa's chaotic capital, Dakar. A friendly mix of local and travelling surfers shares the lineup with us – among them Jesper, a blonde Dane who fell in love with this wave a decade ago and hasn't looked back to chilly Aarhus since. "It's paradise," he shrugs with a whimsical smile a minute after I first meet him, before disappearing from view in a fan of fine white sea spray.

It's Jesper's place we're staying in – an Endless Summer-styled retreat metres from the surf on N'gor Island. Wave drunk, we return to cool down in the pool and refuel on ▶





instant coffee and the leftovers from last night's *mafé ginaar*, a sweet local peanut and chicken stew. From the roof, views stretch across the sandy island tracts and the Baies des Carpes beyond, and it's here we plan our coastal explorations for the coming weeks.

Because Almadies Peninsula isn't just home to N'gor, Dakar and its environs. Africa's westernmost point is also exposed to the fury of the Atlantic with a coastline that offers many beautiful beaches and extraordinary waves amid the urban sprawl and seething mass of humanity.

Our first port of call is the Plage de Yoff Tongor (or Yoff between friends), a stretching sand beach not far to the north, hugged its entire length by encroaching suburbia. At first glimpse it could be mistaken for any sunny Mediterranean shoreline, but our senses soon tell us different.

Mixing with the smoke of sizzling barbeques, grilling fish pulled from the water metres away, is the tangy aroma of wandering goats exploring every discarded bottle and bag in search of food. In the shoreline, local women in fabulously coloured robes scrub soapy clothes while men cast lines and hawkers sell their wares.

Yoff's sand bottom waves are a safer, simpler experience than those of Ngor Right, and we spend hours playing in the water, snacking on fresh-cooked prawns and chatting with

Happy, our polyglot guide and an accomplished local surfer. "This place is easy," he smiles knowingly through ivory-white teeth and ebony-black dreadlocks, "but tomorrow I take you to Club Med. More fun."

Happy, I soon discover, isn't making reference to the Club Med of package holiday infamy, but rather Africa's westernmost surf break. A dredging low tide barrel peppered with rocks, it takes its name from the neighbouring abandoned holiday resort, which has long since surrendered to the whims of Mother Nature.

My oldest friend Toby and I paddle out on bodyboards, with Happy on his usual tiny, high performance surfboard, towards the setting sun to catch the day's last waves. We dodge boils of water that indicate urchin-clad boulders just below the surface. We joke about paddling to the next landmass at Cape Verde, mutedly discuss the rumour of sharks, and catch a smattering of waves in the dying light before scrambling for the safety of shore.

"See... more fun!" blinks Happy, dripping in the fire-red light. I smile and can't help but agree. "Tomorrow I take you to a secret spot called Secret Spot," he winks conspiratorially. I can't wait. gosurf.dk

Previous page: A local surfer tackles N'gor Right; Clockwise from above: Duncan Madden experiences his Endless Summer; The view of the mainland from N'gor island; Seafood on a stick is one of the culinary treats at Yoff

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