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Mali, West Africa

February 23, 2011 by [Michelle White](#) · [3 Comments](#)



Enigmatic

Mali is a land of ancient history, endless dunes, rivers and various cultures. When planning your trip, many hotels and restaurants in Mali, especially outside of Bamako, do not have websites or publicly listed phone numbers, making our Mali Guide by writer/photographer Michelle White extremely valuable for travelers interested in traveling here. Once there, Malian tour guides and numerous English-speaking locals offer comprehensive knowledge, assistance and directions.

Sleep

[Hôtel Tamana](#) (BP E 985 Bamako; +223 2021 3715) offers a serene retreat with comfortable, air-conditioned rooms just a short walk from restaurants and clubs in the Hippodrome quartier. Mingle with travelers of various ethnicities while relaxing over the included breakfast of coffee, tea, fresh bread and jam amid the tropical gardens and swimming pool.

[Mandé Hôtel](#) (Cité du Niger, BP 2639, Bamako; +223 2021 1993) is situated along the Niger River with an open-air restaurant providing scenic views with which to enjoy an evening cocktail. The hotel holds a barbecue each Friday evening and a buffet every Sunday, and maintains an excellent reputation for service.

[Y A Pas de Probleme Hôtel](#) (BP 16 Mopti; +223 2143 1041 / +223 7601 0792) is a quaint establishment with a pool and covered terrace restaurant/bar with views of Mopti, Mali's largest port town on the juncture of the Niger and Bani Rivers. The comfortable hotel is a quick walk from the Niger River.

[Hôtel Doux Rêves](#) (BP 32 Mopti; +223 2143 0490) blends tradition and modernity, organizing weekly concerts and offering Wi-Fi as well as laundry service.

Houde Mali (Quartier San Fil sur la Route de Kabara, BP 103, Timbuktu; +223 7602 3239), conveniently located close to the Timbuktu airport for those who reach the famed city by air, offers a brand-new oasis among the sands of the Sahara. Wander a short way into the dunes to watch the sunset while sipping Tuareg tea, and return to the hotel for a hot, fresh-baked pizza.

L'Auberge du Desert (Quartier Djimdjarey Ber, Timbuktu; +223 7644 9425) provides laid-back, classic lodging within Timbuktu. An open-air restaurant offers floor seating with low tables and cushions, promoting a friendly ambiance, and you may even encounter local government officials dining nearby who invite you to share in mishui, a Malian specialty of delectable roast lamb.

Hôtel la Palmeraie (Route de Kabara, Timbuktu, +223 219 80 175 / +223 7640 00 00) is an elegant hotel, open since 2009, with a pool open only to hotel guests (unlike many other Malian hotels) and even a swim-up bar. It also offers a wine cellar and cigars.

Eat & Drink

Restaurant Bla Bla (Route de Bla Bla, Hippodrome quartier, Bamako) offers traditional Malian fare including excellent capitaine (white fish) brochettes against a background of reggae music.

Y A Pas de Problème Hôtel (BP 16 Mopti; +223 2143 1041 / +223 7601 0792), within its covered terrace restaurant/bar, offers views of Mopti and traditional Malian dishes including grilled capitaine fillet, mutton, poulet yassa (spicy marinated chicken with lemons and onions), as well as salads and omelets. The guava juice is highly recommended and not available everywhere.

Poulet d'Or (Maison des Artisans (city center), Timbuktu; +223 614 5850) offers traditional Malian fare including excellent soukasso (steamed bread with mutton and savory sauce) among multi-level seating and easy access to the handicraft shops, silversmiths and tailors of Timbuktu's artisans' market.

See & Do

Dogon Country excursions offer insight into a way of life that has changed very little in the past several centuries, within a huge expanse of cliff-bound villages in southern Mali. Exploration of this UNESCO World Heritage site entails trekking amid formidable black rock grounds and breathtaking views; meeting local people, known for their animist traditions and symbolic sculpture; and relaxing at guest houses for lunch and siesta during the midday heat. Excursions may include the villages of Amani, Yandouma and Sangha.

The infamous **Timbuktu** is home to many attractions that evoke its golden age as a trading outpost and intellectual and spiritual center in the 15th and 16th centuries. In the center of town, stop to see the ancient manuscripts on mathematics and astronomy, currently being restored; visit the municipal museum to reflect on the past via old-time jewelry, attire, and musical instruments. Observe the multicultural architecture of the town's three main mosques, Djinguereber, Sankore, and Sidi Yahya; and witness the symbolic Flame of Peace monument commemorating the 1996 burning of weapons and reconciliation between the Tuaregs and the Malian government. For an unforgettable, somewhat bumpy ride, borrow a Tuareg camel for a sunset sojourn into the Sahara.

Bamako, Mali's bustling capital, is estimated to be the fastest-growing city in Africa. Check out the National Museum of Mali, founded in the 1950s, with archeological and anthropological exhibits including musical instruments, dress, and ritual objects representing Mali's various ethnic groups. Other attractions include the

Saudi-style Bamako Grand Mosque, Bamako Botanical Gardens, Bamako Zoo, and the National Library of Mali. Browse le grand marche (central market) during the day, and at night go to the Hippodrome quartier for dinner and music.

Djenné is the site of the Great Mosque, the world's largest mud building and one of many Sudanese-style structures made from sun-baked mud bricks within this charming city. Non-Muslims are not allowed inside the Great Mosque, but the sheer scale of the building's exterior provides ample, unique photo opportunities. Each Monday, a large marketplace forms, drawing merchants and shoppers from surrounding regions, and another (women's) market is held daily in a courtyard opposite the Mosque.

Ségou is a peaceful town situated along the Niger River, well-known for pottery, cattle farming, and fishing. At the local markets, shop for pottery, hand-made by the women with clay from the river; woven tapestries, blankets, wrappers and carpets; bogolan (Malian mud cloth); painting; and sculpture. Ségou is also a perfect place to stroll and observe French colonial and Sudanese architectural influences within the mosques, monuments and homes.

The Niger River is a peaceful aquatic passageway connecting several of Mali's main cities, and some tour operators can arrange for a private pinasse (traditional Malian boat) to journey among them. For instance, a 370-kilometer cruise from Timbuktu to Mali's main port town of Mopti takes three days, narrowing through remote fishing villages and widening at Lake Debo, abundant with sea birds. This journey also encompasses Niafunke, home of Mali's most renowned musician, Ali Farka Toure. You will see gorgeous sunsets over the river and camp on the riverbanks at night, eating fresh-caught, campfire-cooked fish under a star-studded sky.

Know

When to Go: Temperatures are most pleasant from November to February, and world-renowned music events Festival au Desert and Festival au Niger [River] take place in January and February, respectively.

Getting there: A passport is required, valid for at least six months before the expiration date, and a visa is required for most travelers. U.S. residents can obtain a five-year multiple-entry visa; to learn more, contact the [Embassy of Mali](#) (2130 R Street N.W., Washington DC 20008; (202) 332-2249).

Organized tours: [Mali Mystere Expeditions](#) (Abaradjou, BP 103 Timbuktu; +223 2198 0189 / +223 7602 3239); aly_dicko@yahoo.fr is a fully accredited Malian organization offering 9-17 day trips that depart from Bamako, including tours focused around *Festival au Desert* and *Festival au Niger*, as well as custom itineraries. Led by Aly Dicko, an experienced tour operator and Timbuktu native fluent in English, French, and several local languages.

[From Here 2 Timbuktu](#) (50 Cleeve Drive, Cleeve, Bristol, BS49 4NP, UK; +44 117 230 1909 / +44 (0) 1934 833463); guy@fromhere2timbuktu.com offers numerous tours in Mali and other parts of Africa, including tours focused around Festival au Desert and Festival au Niger, as well as custom itineraries. Led by Guy Lankester, a British tour operator with two decades of experience traveling in Africa, in partnership with local guides.

Give

Consider a donation to the [Mali Fala Fund](#), an organization dedicated to helping the country's women and children. Their mission: to assist 500 women acquire a trade at their learning centre, *Centre Pour le Developpement Des Femmes*, within the first year of operation. Eventually they hope to expand the program

to rural villages, as well as other major cities in Mali.

The process is to provide a learning facility that shares knowledge and teaches sustainable trades, which are designed to help students start and maintain their own business. For mothers who would otherwise be unable to attend classes, childcare is available on the premises.

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Thanks Michelle for sending the link. Sheri has always wanted to visit Africa. Me? not so much, but I love your descriptions of everything 😊 So who knows? Also to the webmaster, great site! I'll keep looking around!

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