

Mali



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Travel time: November 2000

It's hard to walk around here without one, two or more so-called guides glued to your feet knowing better than you what to buy, what you need and where you have to go.

Most of the given information by locals where wrong or they lie to have some business with you. So look around how things are working and you will know how you have to act and talk to other foreigners. The locals made some trouble but failed when we were telling prices to other foreigners.

You will experience the things mentioned above especially on touristy places. Away from the beaten track you will find friendly, helpful and reserved people. Its a pleasure to visit their villages, see their live style and make fiends with them.

In Mali you have to pay a lot of money for less value, comfort and service.

Highlights

- Traveling with the train from or to Dakar is nice especially when you have a first class sleeper.
- To hike in Dogon country is worth the money you should spend for a guide.
- There is not much to discover and the journey can get quite hard but the spirit of Timbuktu is worth a visit.
- What's a pleasure after the trip to Timbuktu to take the big boat to Gao.

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Bamako

We arrived here at 4 am with the train from Dakar which we had to leave immediately and were waiting for the sunrise on the platform where a coffee bar serves coffee 24 hours. Some basic meals are also available.

To get a minibus to the bus-terminal is quite difficult: When leaving the railway station turn left till you see a taxi rank and turn right. Pass by the taxies and follow the road. After 500 meters at the second cross road on the left-hand side stops the minibuses going to the bus-terminal for 200 CFA.

Bittar Bus Company leaves 5 times a day to San for 5.000 plus 500 CFA per piece of luggage and it takes around 4 hours.

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Tominian

It's a nice relaxing village where the time seems to go slower. Nothing special here except you and the big weekly Sunday-market where you will meet all people from the neighborhood villages.

Tominian has around 2.500 friendly inhabitants, a hospital, post office, schools and a small mosque. When the generator works there is electricity between 4.30 pm and 0.30 am every day and running water when the pump works.

At the main street you will find different stores with basic supply and a butcher's shop where you can get all meals everyday. There are three pub`s serving beer but only one has 4 rooms with shared bath and cooking possibilities for 1.000 CFA per person. Meals can be ordered only in advance.

To reach Tominian take a bus from San leaving in the direction to Mopti. Leave the bus at the village Tion which is just 20 minutes bus ride away from San and cost 1.000 CFA. From Tion it's no problem to get a carriage to Tominian on dirt road for 3.000 CFA all in all. It takes around 45 nice and relaxing minutes. You also can try to hitchhike if its not too late.

To leave Tominian ask around at the shops on the main road because there is no regular bus or taxi except Monday where a minibus is leaving to the weekly market at San around 8 am and will return around 4 pm. All other times the locals will give you a lift for 1.000 CFA to San or Tion. A minibus from Tion to Sevare takes 3 hours for 2.500 CFA.

The border to Burkina Faso is only 40 km away from Tominian on dirt road to Benena and bordercrossing is possible in daytime.
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Sevare

Everybody how is not selling Dogon stuff is a guide. When you stay longer at the bus stop you will meet different guides showing you the same letter of recommendation again and again and...

Hotel Oasis, Tel: 420498, is clean, has large rooms, a small garden, friendly stuff, good menu for 7.500 CFA and cold large beer for 1.000. Its 9.500 for a room with fan and mosquito grating where two or three persons can stay. Shower and toilet are shared and kept clean. Good breakfast is 1.000 extra. From the roundabout walk along the street to Mopti around 500 meters where you'll see a Shell gasoline station. Turn left before and its another 500 meters. Its same way to Hotel Le Bozo.

Minibuses to Bandiagara are leaving opposite the gasoline station at the roundabout only in the morning and evening hours. They cost 1.800 CFA and takes 1,5 hours on dirt road.

If you stay here and leave on road its a good idea to register before at the police station. We haven't and had to pay 500 CFA per person after a long discussion with a fucking police officer at the check point.

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Bandiagara

Its the gate to Dogon country where every tourist has to pass through. Everybody seems to be a guide too but they are not that importunate like in Sevare. The city itself is quite scenic, has a bazaar and is located at a small river. Like with every village in the Dogon country you have to pay 500 CFA admission to enter.

The best place to stay is Le Kambary, BP 13, Tel.+Fax 420388 where rooms starts with 15.000 / 17.000 CFA for single /double with fan and own bath room. For an aircon room you pay 22.000 / 24.000 CFA which comes with a TV-set. They have a small apartment too with fan, own kitchen and fridge for 30.000 CFA. Add 500 CFA per person for tourist tax. The rooms are clean and in good conditions and the food in the restaurant Cheval Blanc is tasty. Breakfast is 1.500, daily menu 3.800 and the nice tourist menu 4.500 CFA. The location is managed by a Swiss and is very scenic.

We can recommend a good guide named Allaye Tessougue or better known as Jean-Pierre, Tel. 420005. He take 4.000 CFA per person and day and additional 15.000 for his car per day. He speaks English, is well-known to the Dogon people and knows a lot about them and their area. Its a pleasure to have him aside but discuss the expense before.

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Dogon country

Every Village you enter will charge 500 CFA per person as a tourist tax. With a guide you pay only in that villages you stay for longer.

A very nice day trip is to hike from Dourou to Nombori and back. Its around 1.5 hours walk one way and you climb down a beautiful canyon before you reach Nombori. Here you can get cool beer for 1.200 CFA and lunch for 1.500. Back in Dourou you can stay at the Campement-Hotel Teriya. A room with a mattress on the floor and a fan on the ceiling will cost 2.000 CFA per person. Cool drinks are available too. To Bandiagara its 1 hour by car.

Another nice trip is to hike from Driguibambo to Kani Kombole, Teli, Ende and from here back to the starting point. This circle took

us two days. Its one hour hike down to Kani Kombole where we got lunch for 750 CFA and cold soft drinks. From here to Teli its 1.5 hours by feet on flat surface. The ancient part of the village is on the cliffs from where its very nice to watch the sunset. We slept on a roof for 1.000 CFA with a bucket shower. They charge the same for a cool large beer and 750 for vegetable dinner. To Ende its another 1.5 hours along the cliffs. Every five day the weekly market is held here. It starts at 1 pm and every village has its own place there. From here back to Driguibambo is quite a hard walk but very impressive because you have to cross a few canyons.

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Mopti

Everybody's business seems to get in touch with foreigners. Its hard to get a minute for yourself. The old part of the town is getting developed now because of the football competition in 2002. Its an experience to walk around here after sunset.

The cheapest possibility to stay is the Catholic mission where you get a small clean room with shower for 5.000 CFA for a couple. The gate will be locked at 9 pm.

Campement Hotel has air-conditioned rooms with private shower, toilet and mosquito net for 17.000 for a triple. For 10.000 you can get a dark, dirty and smelly bungalow with fan.

Hotel Ba_Faro is located in the center of the new part of Mopti. For 18.000 CFA three persons can stay in a dark, tiny room with own fan and shared bath. With aircon its 27.000 CFA with private bathroom. Breakfast and mosquito net are included.

From here to Timbuktu you can take a 4X4 for around 30.000 CFA which needs at least one day. Normally as many people as possible will be stuffed in the car.

Another possibility to Timbuktu is by boat. Company CoMaNav (Navigacion) runs three ships as long as the water of river Niger is deep enough. A boat should arrive Wednesday evening and leaves Mopti at Thursday evening. The boat comes from Bamako and left space will be sold on Thursday 9 am at the companies office when the boat is on schedule. Otherwise you have to wait for the arrival.

Most locals travel to Timbuktu by pinasse. This boats are like large bathtubs with diesel engine and a roof. They are around 20 to 30 meters long, 6 meters wide and 2 meters depth. This pinasses will be loaded to its maximum that only 10 cm are left over the water. Than the passengers can enter and squeeze together. Locals try selling tickets for that pinasses starting at 30.000 CFA promise a lot of space, mattress on the roof for the night, no other passengers, good food, one-night-two-days-travel... Go to the harbor and you will see where you will end up: Little space on some cement bags (if you are lucky) where you stay for the next three days and where you try to sleep when the other 40 passengers turns of their noisy radios. Three times a day you get rice with ugly instant sauce (greetings to Maggi). No space, no toilet but lot of mosquitos and bugs and you can get that for 15.000 CFA only. That's the way to Timbuktu instead of walking.

More comfortable and expensive is a exclusive pinasse for up to 10 passengers. It takes also three days and at night they pitch up tents to sleep at the bank. For 60.000 CFA per person you get meals and service offered by travel companies.

A exclusive taxi to Djenne is 25.000 CFA including the ferry. You might have to allow a mechanic to join you. In our case the mechanic changed suddenly into a guide at Djenne.

If you stay here and leave on road its a good idea to register before at the police station. We haven't and had to pay 500 CFA per person after a long discussion with the fucking police officer at the check point.

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Timbuktu

You have to register either at the police station where you were forced to buy a voucher for 5.000 CFA for free entrance at the big mosque and museum and pay additional 1.000 CFA for the registration itself. Or go to the tourist office where you get your passport stamped for 500 CFA only but than the police at the checkpoint outside the city might complain about it. At weekend the vouchers are not on sell.

There is a new Hotel in the center: La Colombe, BP 5, Tel.: 921435. They have 12 nice clean rooms with aircon, satellite TV, international phone and private bathroom for 18.500 / 22.000 CFA single / double. A bar is located at the ground floor and a restaurant with nice view on the first.

Hotel Bouctou, BP 49, Tel.: 921612, starts with 7.000 / 10.500 CFA for 1 / 2 person for a dorm with shared clean shower and toilet or the roof on the third level from where you have a nice view and ends with aircon rooms for 17.500 / 24.500 CFA plus 500 CFA skin tax each. Breakfast is available for 1.500 CFA on a large terrace which is also the meeting place for guides, salesman, Tuareg... Daily menu is good and 4.000 CFA.

Traditional food is available at restaurant Poulet d'Or which you have to book in advance especially for beer which has to be brought from the far hotel. For instance Tucasu is a big dumpling which is served with spicy sauce and pieces of meat and in our case a lot of desert for 2.000 CFA.

A camel tours from 8 am to 2 pm or 4 pm to 7 pm are 7.000 CFA. You start just behind hotel Azalai and ride to a Tuareg campsite 3 km away. Here you get tea while the guides open their bazaar around you.

From Korioume (harbor) its 800 CFA to the center of Timbuktu but if you are late you are lucky with 1.500 CFA.

An exclusive 4X4 to Korioume with a stopover at Kabara where you can buy tickets for the big boat at CoMaNav office is 11.500 CFA and can be filled with eight or more persons.

To Gao we took the big boat run by CoMaNav which I really can recommend once you experienced the local pinasse. Tickets will be sold at the office in Kabara or two hours before arrival direct at the harbor of Korioume. Expect some days delay.

When the boat arrive you will be told to wait until the chef du couchette appears to give you your room number but that ends no matter how with given information: its wrong. Enter the boat right away.

Second class has cabins with 2 two-floor-beds and a little space in between where a washbasin is mounted. Shared shower and toilet are on the corridor. You pay 31.152 CFA which includes three edible meals a day and the privilege to enter the bar where large beer are 700 CFA and soft drinks 300 when on stock.

At third class you have 4 three-floor-beds in a compartment. That's it. Because its located above the engine so its much more noisy here than in second or first class.

Its such a pleasure to sit on the upper deck at the rail, watching the landscape and drinking cold beer. Its a must. When the boat reaches Gao late at night you are allowed to stay on board till next morning 6 am.

While waiting for the boat there is a "restaurant" just left-hand side of the entrance (fence) at the Port du Korioume where you can get soft drinks for 500 CFA, meals like pasta or rise with sauce for 750 or rent a small but private room for 4.000 CFA a day.

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Gao

The police office where you have to register will open around 8 am which is too late to get out of here. Bani Transport operate busses to Bamako four times a week at 7 am. They leave at Plaza de Independence and its 5.000 CFA and 7 hours to Sevre. There was no registration control on the road neither at Gao nor at Bilali Koyra across the river Niger.

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Djenne

Its quite scenic here and that's why you have to pay 1.000 CFA entrance fee.

Hotel Le Bozo has basic rooms for 2.500 CFA with mattress on the floor or you stay on the roof for the same price. Shared shower and toilet are very basic. The benefit is the restaurant which is a relaxing area. Beer is 800, soft drinks 300, breakfast 750 and good daily menu 2.800 CFA.

From here to Mopti is 1.750 CFA plus 250 per luggage. Only to the junction for the road Sevre-Bamako its 1.250 CFA and from here to Tion another 1.500 CFA.

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Bordercrossing to Burkina Faso

There seems to be no more busses going from Mopti to BF. There are daily busses from Bamako to Bobo-Dioulasso or Ouagadougou. Some are going across Bougouni and Sikasso, others to Segou, Bla and Koutiala.

We caught the bus to Bobo at Bla at 1 pm for 6.000 CFA and it took 8 hours. Bordercrossing was possible between 7 and 8 pm.

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Additional information

Guidebooks:

In English: Mali, written by Ross Velton, published by Brandt, ISBN: 1 898323 93 3.

In German: Westafrika Band 1: Sahelländer, published by Reise Know-How.

Maps:

Mali, 1 : 2 mio., published by Institut Geographique National, No.: 3615 IGN

It can get very dry here (less 10%). Its good idea to bring something against dry nose and lips with.

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