

Mali



PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION

Mali is our favorite country in West Africa. Friendly people, a rich historical tradition, diverse cultures and environments, and some really unique architectural and historical sites present wonderful opportunities for discovery, interaction, photography and inspiration. Roads in some areas are rough. Punctuality is a little known concept. Drought, dust, locusts, mud and heat make life a challenge for the locals and travelers alike. We hope the knowledge you will gain from this booklet will also help you harvest leisure, friendships and memorable experiences from your Mali trip.

GETTING READY FOR YOUR TRIP

Passports

- ❖ Passports are required of U.S. Citizens to enter
- ❖ Must be valid for at least 6 months after your trip – if not, apply or renew immediately
- ❖ Keep a copy of the picture page of your passport in a separate place while traveling
- ❖ Carry an extra passport photo in case you need to apply for a quick replacement

Visas

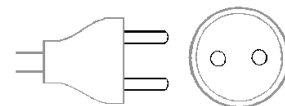
- ❖ **A visa is required for entry into Mali, and must be obtained in advance.**
- ❖ Please see the separate visa information.
- ❖ Nationalities of other countries please inquire regarding visas
- ❖ **NOTE:** If you are arriving on Air France, expect them to examine all of your documents and immunization records very closely before boarding your flight. Americans and Australians, in particular, seem to be subject to exceptional review. Note that they will not let you on a flight to Bamako without a Mali visa. They will enforce all possible surcharges and cancellation penalties if you miss your connecting flights in Paris or Bamako, and they are not good about tracing or compensating for lost luggage. Unfortunately, there are few other choices for air carriers to Mali.

Health, Immunizations

- ❖ Yellow Fever vaccination is **required** for entry into Mali
- ❖ Recommended standard immunizations include: Typhoid, polio, tetanus, MMR, hepatitis A & B
- ❖ Malaria prevention is strongly advisable
- ❖ **SEEK INDEPENDENT MEDICAL ADVICE** from your physician or local travelers health service
- ❖ For the latest recommendations for immunizations or malaria prevention contact the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia: 800-311-3435, or visit their website: <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>
- ❖ Many universities have immunization clinics that can assist you

Time Difference

- ❖ Mali is on Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) all year
- ❖ When it is 9 PM in Mali, it is 4 PM in New York City, and 1 PM in Los Angeles



Electricity

- ❖ Where available, 220 V, 50 Hz
- ❖ Plug adapters for the 2 round prong outlets are found in standard kits

ARRIVAL

We use local operators (private contractors) in each of the African countries where we offer trips. They all have extensive experience organizing safaris in their respective areas. All of our guides in Mali are experienced, knowledgeable, and speak English.

- ❖ Upon arrival at the airport, you will be welcomed by our local operator Cheche Tours, and taken to a hotel for your overnight.
- ❖ Contact information for Cheche Tours will be sent with your Last Minute Reminders a couple weeks before your departure.
- ❖ Upon arrival in Mopti, Djenne, Gao, and Timbuktu, you may have to register with the police (commissariat) by filling out a form and paying 1000 CFA for a stamp in your passport.

GETTING ALONG AS A VISITOR

Food & Restaurants

- ❖ Meals are generally well balanced and consist of foods that are familiar to Americans.
- ❖ Eat only foods that are thoroughly cooked, and raw fruits and vegetables that you have peeled yourself
- ❖ Drink only bottled drinks, and avoid tap water, fountain drinks and ice cubes.
- ❖ Bottle water is readily available for purchase
- ❖ Avoid fresh salads unless the vegetables are washed with purified water, and avoid dairy products that are unpasteurized or may not have been refrigerated properly
- ❖ Special diet or meal requests cannot be guaranteed, but our operators will do their best to accommodate you. Please advise us if you have any special dietary requirements.
- ❖ Compared to other developing countries, Mali is a relatively expensive country. In restaurants you can have meals for about 2500-5000 CFA, or \$4-8.

Accommodations

- ❖ We use the best accommodations available, however they are not without their quirks and malfunctions. Expect the worst, and you won't be disappointed. Some things you may expect to encounter...
- ❖ Bathrooms may not have hot and cold water working at the same time, or any water at all.
- ❖ Electricity can be limited to certain hours of the day or night. Bring a flashlight.
- ❖ Most hotels have air conditioning, but the power may fail, or they may be usually noisy and marginally effective. Fortunately, it does cool off considerably at night during the warm season.
- ❖ Hotels overbook their rooms, and you may have to overnight in "less adequate" accommodations.
- ❖ Hotel continental breakfasts are meager and you should ask the price of extra entrees.
- ❖ Phone service is very poor, and forget about checking email outside of Bamako!
- ❖ It can seem like every room is next to the disco.
- ❖ During the camping portion of your trip, we expect you to be flexible in your outlook and willing to make a modest contribution to camp activities. Some things you may expect to encounter...
- ❖ Some villages offer the possibility of a 'campement' with basic rooms and shared bathrooms and toilets.
- ❖ When arriving in a Dogon village, your guide will contact the chief of the village to find out where the group can camp that night. Depending on availability, you may be camping on the roofs, in a courtyard, or in a hut.
- ❖ In a Tuareg camp you will be sleeping in a collective nomad tent or in the open air, in the corner of the camp designated for guests.
- ❖ For sanitary conditions, there will be bucket showers and a pit toilet.

Money and Currency Exchange

- ❖ Mali's National Currency is the CFA Franc
- ❖ Euros in cash or in traveler's checks are best, US Dollars can be difficult to exchange
- ❖ Important: Currency that is old, has rips, marks, folds, or holes may NOT be accepted. Be sure to bring crisp, clean, and new bills to exchange
- ❖ The best place to exchange money is in Bamako, your guide will be able to arrange this for you
- ❖ Outside Bamako, it is only possible to exchange money in Mopti and sometimes in Hotel L'Auberge in Segou, although they charge a higher commission. We advise changing enough money for your entire trip, in Bamako.
- ❖ You can change your remaining CFA Francs back into Euros with our agent.
- ❖ We recommend you budget approximately \$25-30 per day for meals, beverages, and gratuities, plus extra for the souvenirs you may want to bring home.
- ❖ Credit cards are not widely accepted outside of Bamako. You may find some hotels, restaurants and up-scale crafts merchants do, but expect substantial surcharges at point of sale and as added by the credit card companies for currency conversion and non-dollar transaction penalties.
- ❖ The main reason for carrying travelers checks rather than cash is the protection they offer from theft,



though they are losing popularity with many travelers. There can be problems with conversion in some countries. We have had clients report it taking up to 2 hours to find a facility that would cash travelers checks. Many people rely on ATM's. Here again we must warn you: ATM's may not always be available, they may not be in working order and their security cannot be guaranteed. Please note: we have had clients report waits up to 1 hour once they have found a working ATM. For your convenience, and the convenience of others in your group, it may be easier to carry cash, but note that proper security precautions must be taken.

Tipping

- ❖ Gratuities should be in Euros or the local currency. Recommendations for good service are:
- ❖ Guide: \$5 per person, per day (approximately 4 Euros)
- ❖ Driver: \$2 per person, per day (approximately 2.50 Euros)
- ❖ You may want to consider tipping a little more if you are in a small group.
- ❖ Anytime you especially appreciate someone particularly informative or helpful, an extra tip is always gratefully accepted.

Emergency Services

- ❖ Prevention of injury is always the best policy.
- ❖ Emergency services and care for major medical illnesses may be limited
- ❖ Your guide will advise you in the case of urgent medical need during your tour

SPECIAL REMARKS

People

- ❖ It is best to ask permission before taking portrait photos. If in doubt, ask your guide
- ❖ Often people will ask for a *cadeau* (gift) for a picture. You need to decide if you want to do this or not.
- ❖ Never take pictures of military objects, airports, or even close to a police station or *douane* (customs) stop on the road. You risk your camera being taken, your film confiscated, and a fine.

Language

- ❖ The official language of Mali is French
- ❖ Each ethnic group has its own language, and most people know one or two other languages
- ❖ About 80% of the people speak Bambara

Time

- ❖ Relax and enjoy the rhythm of Mali
- ❖ Do not expect everything to happen on time; remember that in some places time is not as important as it is back home, and there is often little concern for punctuality
- ❖ Travel in Mali is often difficult and unpredictable. Roads are often bad and travel time is difficult, if not impossible, to predict.

Restroom Facilities

- ❖ It is a very good idea to carry your own small supply of toilet paper. In cities where there are flush toilets you will usually find a wastebasket next to the toilet - most sewage systems can't handle paper. Most bathrooms will neither look nor smell as sanitary as those you are used to.

Safety

- ❖ Observe the same precautions taken at home
- ❖ Do not flaunt a bulging wallet, lock unattended vehicles, do not leave baggage unattended in public
- ❖ Make use of security facilities provided for valuables in your accommodation and on the boat
- ❖ In towns, the best place to carry your passport and money is in a pouch worn around the neck inside of the shirt or in a money belt around the waist



- ❖ It is highly recommended that you buy travel insurance that covers your baggage before you leave
- ❖ Don't take anything you can't afford to lose or can't replace

Shopping

- ❖ The Dogon are famous for their masks, sculptures, and beautifully sculpted doors.
- ❖ The Tuareg specialize in metal objects, such as swords and bijoux. They also make very nicely decorated leather boxes.
- ❖ In Mopti you will find Mopti blankets
- ❖ Bogolan cloth (mud cloth) can be found throughout Mali. It comes from the region of the San, but the Dogon also make it.
- ❖ You can also find most of these crafts at the craft centre (Artisanat) in Bamako
- ❖ If you buy masks or sculptures that look old, you will need to show an export permit, which can be obtained at the National Museum in Bamako.
- ❖ Bartering is the norm in Mali (except in supermarkets where prices are fixed). You will need to bargain, sometimes down to half or one third of the price. You may want to ask your guide for some guidelines, but it is not appropriate for the guide to help in bargaining.
- ❖ Remember that what is only a few dollars to you may mean a great deal to the average seller or artisan. Never barter unless you intend to buy.

Seasons & Weather Conditions

- ❖ **Hottest months:** April and May, with temperatures rising up to 115-120 degrees Fahrenheit.
- ❖ **Wet season:** June to September
- ❖ **Best time to visit:** October to February, when temperatures are pleasant 75-85 degrees Fahrenheit, and the roads are good because there is no rain.
- ❖ The Harmattan wind, that takes dust from the desert to the southern regions, blows from December to February. It does not cause much harm, but does however obscure the views.

Equipment & Packing

- ❖ A good goal is to fit everything into a single piece of checked luggage and a carry-on daypack
- ❖ We recommend a durable, water-resistant, soft duffel bag or lightweight soft-sided suitcase as your checked luggage. Hard suitcases are not practical due to space limitations.
- ❖ A small backpack or hip-pack is ideal for carrying bottled water, camera, extra sunblock, etc, while on excursions where the terrain requires your hands to be free.
- ❖ Choose a distinctive, easily identified bag, and use a JOURNEYS luggage tag for bag identification by staff, and your name and address should be also indelibly affixed inside the luggage.
- ❖ Lightweight & light colored clothes will help keep you cooler. Also keep in mind that synthetic fabrics dry faster than natural fibers like cotton, especially in humid areas, so you can pack less if you are able to wash and dry your clothes easily.
- ❖ Casual clothing is appropriate at all times
- ❖ Some hotels may have laundry services, but you will probably need to wash out some clothes en route
- ❖ Be aware of weight limits on checked luggage and pack accordingly
- ❖ You may want to bring an extra smaller, collapsible (lockable) duffel, to leave items in a city hotel while you are on an excursion or to use on your return for souvenirs
- ❖ **PLEASE NOTE:** The local kitty of 150euro must be paid **in cash** to your guide on arrival.

CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT SUGGESTIONS CHECKLIST

Pre-Departure Tasks

- Obtain or renew passport
- Buy travelers checks in low denominations
- Evaluate and obtain trip cancellation, baggage and medical insurance
- Consult with physician for immunizations and prescription medicine recommendations



- Break-in primary footwear
- Make final payment to JOURNEYS at least 60 days before trip departure

Clothing

- Lightweight hiking boots or comfortable athletic or walking shoes
- Sport sandals with Velcro strap
- Extra shoes, flip-flops or sandals
- Shorts
- Comfortable, lightweight pants
- Lightweight long-sleeve shirt
- T-shirts, short sleeve shirts and/or tank tops
- Light jacket
- Rain gear - poncho or jacket and pants
- Sun hat or cap with wide brim
- Bandana
- Swim suits
- Socks
- Sleepwear & under clothes

Personal Items

- Sleeping bag
- Towel / washcloth
- Sunblock (waterproof, high SPF)
- Lipbalm with SPF
- Insect repellent with DEET content
- 2 spare passport photos (in case of lost passport)
- Wrist watch and/or travel clock
- Sunglasses (with strap, case)
- Extra eyeglasses/contacts
- Money belt or pouch for valuables
- Small flashlight with extra batteries
- Copies of all important documents
- Day pack (can also serve as an airline carry-on bag)
- Camera, memory cards, film, batteries, charger
- Lead bag/containers to protect film in X-ray machines
- Binoculars (lightweight)
- Plug adapter (if needed)
- Soft duffel with shoulder strap or durable suitcase
- Luggage tags
- Ziploc-type bags for packing shampoo or other liquids
- Stuff sacks or plastic bags for organizing inside luggage (also useful for dirty laundry)
- Thread, needles, safety pins for minor repairs
- Small packable umbrella
- Envelopes for tips

Personal First Aid Kit

- Aspirin or other pain killer
- Cold relief tablets, antihistamine, cough drops
- Band-aids, gauze pads
- Antibiotics
- Prescription medicines
- Aloe gel or lotion in case of sunburn
- Anti-diarrhea medicine
- Antibiotic cream/ointment
- Supply of feminine hygiene items
- Motion sickness tablets
- Earplugs

Essential Items For Your Carry-On Bag

- Passport
- Domestic and international air tickets
- Travelers checks, money and credit cards
- Insurance certificates
- Address and telephone number of emergency contact
- Prescription medicines
- Extra set of underclothes
- Toiletries in small leak-proof bottles
- Camera gear, film and other valuables

Optional Items

- Address book, writing paper, or journal, pen/pencil
- Map
- Video camera
- Phrase book
- Small washcloth



- Wet wipes/moist towelettes and Kleenex
- Favorite snack foods (pre-packaged)
- Pictures of your house and family

