



# Timbuktu, Mandé and the Photography Biennale

**MALI**



**12 days**

26 December 2026 – 06 January 2027

English speaking tour leader



## The 'unforgettable' of the trip:

- The **caravan city of Timbuktu**, on the edge of the Sahara Desert
- The hustle and bustle, the markets and the **Bamako African Photography Biennale**
- A trip down the **Niger River**, taking us to the camps of the Bozo fishermen
- The **puppets of Yaya Coulibaly**, an artist-sorcerer and heir to a thousand-year-old tradition
- **New Year's Eve concert** featuring Mali's famous blues
- The songs of the *griots*, the **mask dances** and the natural wonders of the **Pays Mandingue**
- The art of *bogolan*, the mud mosque and the royal palace of Biton Coulibaly in **Sekoro**
- The **gold mines of Dabali**, where the precious metal is sought using rudimentary methods



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## MALI

### Day 1: Saturday 26 December

#### Outward flight/Bamako (BKO)

Flight to Bamako. Meet the Kanaga Africa Tours team, who will arrange your transfer to the Hotel Tamana or similar. Overnight stay in a twin room with services.



Welcome to Mali!

### Day 2: Sunday 27 December

#### Bamako (Photography Biennale)

After breakfast, assistance with exchanging euros and purchasing a local phone SIM card, if required. Visit to BAMAKO, the capital of Mali: the viewpoint on Point G hill, offering unrivalled views of the city and the River Niger; the scrap market, where blacksmiths breathe new life into old metal sheets; and the National Museum, which houses ethnographic masterpieces such as Dogon masks and Bambara headdresses. We will also visit the exhibitions of the Rencontres de Bamako AFRICAN PHOTOGRAPHY BIENNALE, now in its 15th edition. Lunch in a restaurant. In the afternoon, a boat trip on the NIGER RIVER to explore the Bozo fishermen's camps and the buildings that define the city's skyline. Overnight stay in a twin room with services.



Bamako from above

### Day 3: Monday 28 December

#### Bamako (BKO)/Flight/Timbuktu (TOM)

Breakfast at the hotel, followed by transfer to the airport in good time for the scheduled flight\*\* to Timbuktu. On arrival, meet the escort and transfer to the Hotel du Desert or similar, followed by lunch. In the afternoon, weather permitting, initial sightseeing in the city. Overnight stay in a twin room with services.



Recycling market



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### Days 4-5: Tuesday 29 to Wednesday 30 December

#### Timbuktu

Days entirely devoted to visiting TIMBUKTU. A legendary city, the myth of Timbuktu echoes far and wide. Known as the gateway to the desert, where 333 saints once stayed, it was founded, according to tradition, by a mysterious Tuareg woman in search of water for her camels, who made her fortune around the well now preserved in the city museum, in the heart of the historic districts. Since then, the well has become an obligatory stop for desert caravans trading gold and slaves in exchange for water. In 1275 it was annexed to the Mali Empire and, at the beginning of the 14th century, Kankan Mansa Moussa (universally recognised as the richest man of all time), returning from a pilgrimage to Mecca, had the Djingareiber Mosque built there at great expense, using gold ingots; it is one of the oldest and most famous mosques in West Africa. During the reign of Sonni Ali Ber and the Songhay Empire in the 15th century, as well as being a thriving hub for trans-Saharan trade in gold, slaves and salt, it was also a major centre for Islamic culture, and the Sankoré Mosque became the seat of the most important and renowned Koranic university in the 16th century. By the time the first European explorers began arriving in the 19th century, its former splendour was a distant memory, but its fame remained undiminished. The first explorer to reach Timbuktu and survive to tell the tale was René Caillé in 1828; prior to that, Mungo Park had been denied permission to travel up the waterway leading from Korioume to Timbuktu, whilst Gordon Laing, who arrived in 1826, was massacred by the Tuareg before he could set off again. The houses where the explorers stayed are still open to the public and can be visited in the city centre. As a testament to the ancient splendour of Timbuktu, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, there remain three iconic historic mosques – Djingareiber, Sidi Yahya and Sankoré – and the mausoleums of the saints, true architectural gems crafted from clay in the Sudanese style, as well as numerous libraries housing ancient manuscripts of inestimable value and historical interest. Yet the atmosphere of this mythical and mysterious city—inaccessible, hostile and alluring at the same time—has remained unchanged over the centuries, amidst the beautiful inlaid and studded doorways, the traditional windows, similar to mashrabiyya or latticework, through which one feels perpetually watched, yet unable to know by whom, amidst the constant chanting calls to prayer that occasionally break the hushed silence of the sand, which covers and envelops everything, in a ceaseless battle against the encroachment of the desert. Its inhabitants, the Tuareg, the warrior people of the desert, legendary ‘blue men’ whose guiding light is the North Star, contribute to the city’s fame with their mysterious charm, characterised by beautiful indigo-blue turbans, rebellion and freedom. We will be able to witness their songs and dances, and take a ride on a dromedary. Overnight stays in hotels.

*\*\*Scheduled domestic flights with Sky Mali are subject to changes in the timetable; therefore, it may be necessary to adjust the itinerary accordingly. Days originally planned for Timbuktu may be rescheduled for Bamako, and vice versa. Any private flights are not included in the price.*



Young Tuareg



Sankoré Mosque



Through the streets of Timbuktu



Bella Camps



Dancing at sunset

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MALI

## Day 6: Thursday 31 December

### Timbuktu (TOM)/Volo/Bamako (BKO)

After breakfast, transfer to the airport in good time for the scheduled flight\*\* to the capital. Sightseeing tour of Bamako, starting with the main mosque (exterior) and the Grand Marché, including the section dedicated to fetishes and natural remedies. Lunch at a restaurant. In the afternoon, we will attend a puppet and mask show with the artist-sorcerer Yaya Coulibaly, heir to this thousand-year-old tradition. In traditional Malian theatre, a whole range of masks, helmets and parade crests that have no direct connection with religious ceremonies are considered puppets. Whilst the actual masks possess real power and profoundly influence the social and political life of the community, the puppets are instead objects of entertainment and spectacle, serving to reconcile the conflicts and changes of a rapidly evolving and contradictory society, without the risk of divine retribution. We will also be able to enjoy the evening's LIVE CONCERTS, featuring performances by the biggest stars of Malian music. Overnight stay at the hotel.



Grand marché



Fetish market

## Day 7: Friday 01 January

### Bamako/Siby/Bamako

After breakfast, we set off for the MANDINGUE REGION, amidst its hills steeped in history and ancestral spirituality. Once we arrive in SIBY, we will meet the Donso hunters, a secret and legendary society endowed with magical powers and knowledge of the occult, who, accompanied by the melodies of the simbi, will intone propitiatory chants. Next, we will meet the healers to learn about the traditional therapeutic use of medicinal plants, and a seer who has the power to read the future through divination with cowrie shells, a magical art widely practised in the region. Lunch in a restaurant. In the afternoon, we will visit the decorated houses of the village and the Maison du Karité, a women's association that produces shea butter and transforms it into soaps and creams. Before sunset, we will watch a MALINKE MASK DANCE. Return to Bamako and overnight stay at the hotel.



Puppets by Yaya Coulibaly



New Year's Concert



Hunters with the simbi



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### Day 8: Saturday 02 January

#### Bamako/Siby/Bamako

After breakfast, we set off for SIBY, where we will climb along the edge of the cliff to the ARCH OF KAMADJAN, a miraculous masterpiece created by Kamandjan Camara, a military general, sorcerer and healer, from where we can enjoy magnificent views of the mango forest below. Visit to the cave of sacrifices and soothsayers, where we will be shown the art of divination on sand, still practised today by the Camara family. We continue to the DJENDJE' WATERFALL, where you can take a refreshing dip in its clear waters – the ideal spot to relax amidst the wild countryside. Lunch with a packed lunch. In the afternoon, we descend to the village of DJOULAFOUNDO, where we will meet the village chief and his councillors, and visit the mosque, the mud houses, the smithy, the school and the madrasa. Before returning to Bamako, we will also visit the Saturday WEEKLY MARKET in Siby. Overnight stay at the hotel.



Decorated houses of Siby



Djendjé waterfall and natural pool

### Day 9: Sunday 03 January

#### Bamako/Segou

Breakfast at the hotel and departure for SEGOU, with the option of a stop along the way to visit a BAMBARA VILLAGE. Upon arrival, check-in at the Hotel Esplanade or similar, followed by lunch. In the afternoon, excursion to SEGOUKORO (or Sekoro, "old Ségou"), a small rural village once the capital of the Bambara Kingdom of Ségou and its two powerful dynasties, the Coulibaly and the Diarra, who ruled the region for nearly two centuries until the conquest by the Toukouleurs of El Hadj Omar in 1861, who was in turn overthrown by the arrival of the colonizers. Fully restored to its original appearance, the beautiful Royal Palace of the first Biton ruler Mamary Coulibaly, who ruled until 1755, and the Banquo Mosque, which he built for his mother, who converted to Islam, have been completely restored. Biton's remains still rest today in the royal tomb, which can be visited opposite the palace. In Segoukoro, time seems to have stood still, amid the narrow alleys that branch off from the courtyard, among the façades dotted with niches and arrow slits, modeled from red clay, the typical intense color of the Segou sand. Overnight stay in a double room with services.



Village of Djoulafoundo



Arch of Kamadjan



Boat on the Niger River



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### Day 10: Monday 04 January

#### Segou/Bamako

After breakfast, the morning is dedicated to visiting SEGOU: the colonial quarter, with some beautiful neo-Sudanese-style buildings, the bogolan (cotton fabrics decorated with natural pigments and clay) manufacturing workshop, and the riverside with its ceramic markets. Lunch at a restaurant. In the afternoon, return to Bamako, check-in at the Hotel Tamana or similar and overnight stay in a double room.

### Day 11: Tuesday 05 January

#### Bamako/Kangaba/Bamako

After breakfast, we'll depart for the DABALI gold mines: we'll see the prospectors extract the precious mineral using rudimentary and very courageous techniques, digging holes in the ground by hand and simply lowering themselves into the tunnels with ropes and torches. Lunch at a restaurant. In the afternoon, we'll visit the sacred house (exterior) of KANGABA, and the village of KELA, with its imposing sacred baobabs, the mud mosque (exterior), and the traditional thatched-roof houses scattered among the millet fields. We'll also meet the GRIOTS, the traditional storytellers who guard the secret of the word. A MUSICAL PERFORMANCE with traditional instruments will accompany the tales of the heroic deeds of the kings of Mandé. Return to Bamako, some rooms available for day use. Transfer to the airport in time for your return flight. End of services.

### Day 12: Wednesday 06 January

#### Bamako (BKO)/Return flight

Arrival at the destination airport.



Bogolan



Gold digger



Griot



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**Individual participation fee in double room  
(min. 6/max. 16 pax)**

**4,190 €/pax**

**in promotion at € 3,990  
for bookings before 08/05/2026**

### Supplements:

- Enrollment fee: **free!**
- Single room: **€300**
- Hotel Azalai Salam Upgrade (6 nights): **€400/person in double room**
- Visa service for Mali: **€150/passport**
- Burkina Faso extension: **on request**

### The fee includes:

- French/English-speaking guide in Timbuktu;
- English-speaking tour leader (D6-D11);
- French-speaking local guides where necessary;
- Visits and excursions as per the itinerary;
- All transfers by 4x4 or minibus (depending on the group size) including drivers, fuel, and tolls;
- Sky Mali domestic flights to Timbuktu and back;
- Half-board meals as mentioned in the itinerary;
- Mandatory armed escort in Timbuktu;
- 10 nights' hotel accommodations;
- Day use in Bamako (1 room per 3 people).

### The fee does not include:

- Visa for Mali;
- Cancellation/health/baggage insurance;
- International flights;
- Possible private flights to/from Timbuktu;
- Drinks and mineral water;
- All dinners;
- Airport transfers outside of scheduled hours;
- Tips for photos and videos;
- Tips and personal expenses;
- Everything mentioned under "Supplements";
- Everything not expressly mentioned under "The fee includes."

*\* The travel program may be subject to changes beyond our control, as the Malian government reserves the right to close and open certain areas without notice, and security conditions on the ground may change.*