



# TIMBUKTU & BEYOND

*Exotic Tribal Cultures of Mali & Burkina Faso*

**MALI & BURKINA FASO ~ CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS ~ 18 DAYS**

## TRIP DETAILS

*Rugged 4-wheel-drive travel*

*2 days moderate hiking*

*2 days river travel*

*Camel rides*

*9 nights camping*

*6 nights hotels*

## 2004 DATES

*Jan 23–Feb 9*

*Feb 20–Mar 8*

*Oct 22–Nov 8*

*Nov 26–Dec 13*

*Dec 17, '04–Jan 3, '05*

## LAND COST

*\$3990 per person  
(10-15 members)*

*\$4190 per person  
(5-9 members)*

*\$4690 per person  
(3-4 members)*

*\$135 internal airfare*

**LEVEL  
3**

The most vibrant and oldest of Sub-Saharan Africa's cultures thrive intact in the ethnic mosaic of West Africa, from camel-riding Tuareg nomads, the noble "blue men" of the Sahara who roam the dunescapes around Timbuktu, to the very traditional Dogon, agriculturists known for their breathtaking mask dances and the pre-Islamic cosmology they have cherished for 700 years. On this West African cultural odyssey—an ethnologist's dream journey into a very tradition-bound world—you'll be immersed in the fascination of some of the richest and best-preserved tribal cultures remaining in Africa.

In Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso, we'll stroll the central market, an ethnic potpourri of turbaned traders, then move on to the countryside for a night's stay in a picturesque Gurunsi village. The Gurunsi people are known for the "painted sand-castle" architecture of their distinctive adobe compounds. Our hosts will make us feel very welcome and delight us with stories passed along through the ages.

Heading to Mali, we'll first visit the Dogons, among the most tradition-bound people in all Africa. The Dogons moved to this part of Mali in the 15th century, successfully escaping Muslim expansion and thus preserving their traditional religion, as they continued to do throughout Africa's colonial era. With their ancestor worship and complex cosmology, they fascinate ethnologists and are the creators of some of the most fantastic art forms in Africa. We'll camp in remote Dogon villages visited only by our groups (and not on any maps), perhaps witness a wild and breathtaking Dogon mask dance, and learn about the Dogon view of the world.

We'll enjoy the atmosphere of the medieval Niger River town of Djenné, little changed since the 14th century, and Mopti, a traditional river port where dugouts still sail upriver from Timbuktu to bring slabs of salt to market from mines in the Sahara. Then we'll enjoy two relaxed days of travel by *pinasse* (a traditional boat) on the Niger River, visiting villages as we go and camping at night on the sand dunes that line the Niger's banks.

Then we'll take a true expedition deep into the heart of the Sahara—a discovery of one of the rapidly disappearing lifestyles on the continent. From November through March, long caravans loaded with salt from the Taoudenni mines in the center of the Sahara make their way through the village of Araouane on their way to Timbuktu. Historically, the salt trade was the main economy of the region. In these forgotten no-man's lands nothing has changed since the 16th century. The same camel caravans leave Timbuktu in search of salt, the "white gold," that has made Timbuktu prosper (some say that salt was once exchanged at the same weight as gold).

1266 66th Street, Suite 4, Emeryville, California 94608-1117

T: +1 510 594 6000 or 1 888 MTSOBEK (687 6235) F: +1 510 594 6001

info@mtsobek.com www.mtsobek.com

The Azalaï track to Timbuktu is one of the most important, though least known, of the caravan routes that plied their way to the salt mines. Caravanners made the 1,000-mile round trip journey on foot in 36 days, leading camels carrying four blocks of salt, each weighing 80 pounds. Traveling by 4-wheel-drive vehicles and on camel, we'll travel along the traditional Azalaï track through the "sea of sand" to Araouane, the only village on the salt route. Maur peoples (Arab Bedouins) have lived here since the 11th century and we'll have a chance to mingle and observe traditional lifestyles.

We end the trip with a visit to Timbuktu, the fabled city that was once a great center of art and learning and is now a sleepy desert outpost and a synonym for remoteness, before flying to Bamako, Mali's capital. Here we'll take a short tour before boarding our homeward-bound flights.

Our program is unique, not duplicated by any other U.S. tour operator, and takes you far from the standard tourist circuits. You can expect a challenging—yet entirely enriching—adventure.

*Note—This is a rugged journey with a fair amount of rough road travel, especially during the desert portion on Days 12-16. Temperatures can reach into the 90s (or higher) and conditions can be dusty.*

## ITINERARY

### **DAY 1 ~ Fly to Burkina Faso**

Leave your hometown and fly to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (your air itinerary will be coordinated by a member of the Mountain Travel Sobek Air Desk).

### **DAY 2 ~ Ouagadougou**

Arrive in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, the "Land of the Wise Men." Your trip leader (or a Mountain Travel Sobek representative) will meet you outside the customs and immigration area of the airport and escort you to the hotel. "Welcome" dinner and trip orientation with the trip leader and the group.

*D...OK Inn*

### **DAY 3 ~ Ouagadougou – Gurunsi people**

Noted for its lively lifestyle, Ouagadougou boasts one of the best "*Grande Marchés*" (city markets) in West Africa. Burkina's basketry is famous and this market is a good place to buy baskets, along with items like tie-dyed cloth from Guinea and Mali. The state-operated Centre Artisanal is the place for exotic batiks, good quality bronze castings, and carvings. Various street vendors also sell Dogon carvings, masks, and wooden Senoufou chairs. After a morning tour of the town, we'll depart in the late morning and drive three hours to the southern savannas to visit the people of the Gurunsi (Kassena) tribe that live in fortified houses in the Tiebele region on the border of Burkina Faso and Ghana. The Gurunsi women create beautiful abstract African frescoes that decorate the walls of their mud huts that are situated in a harmonious, round formation. The Gurunsi architecture—known for the beauty of its functional lines—inspired the Swiss vanguard architect Le Corbusier.

*B,L,D...Mountain Travel Sobek Bush Camp*

### **DAY 4 ~ Tiebele region – Ouahigouya**

We take leave of the Gurunsi and drive along a track in the savanna to discover the villages of the Mossi people and their giant clay granaries. One of 60 ethnic groups that make up Burkina Faso, the Mossi are famous for having the longest royal dynasty in west Africa, dating back some 900 years. At one time there were four Mossi kingdoms, each with its own monarch. Continue three hours to Ouahigouya, in the north of Burkina Faso. Ouahigouya is a relaxed

town; it was founded in the 18th century as the capital of the northernmost of the Mossi kingdoms, but most of its important buildings were destroyed in the Yatenga civil wars of the 19th century.

*B,L,D...Hotel Amitié or Hotel Dunia*

### **DAY 5 ~ Dogon Lowlands**

We head to the Malian border to enter the sandy Dogon lowlands. This Sahelian bush country is characterized by enormous baobab trees and spiny shrubs. This part of the Dogon lands receives few visitors and has the oldest Dogon settlements. Each village is dominated by a *togu'na*, a pillared platform under which elders commune about village business. The drive takes about five hours, but we'll stop often to visit villages and stretch our legs.

*B,L,D...Mountain Travel Sobek Bush Camp*

### **DAYS 6-7 ~ Dogon Lowlands**

We begin our exploration of the Dogon cliffs. We'll take easy early morning treks to unmapped traditional villages that are visited only by our groups, thus lessening the impact on these cultures. We will visit special Dogon villages, including one on a sacred mountain and another hidden deep in a gorge. Below the cliffs are their ancestral burial caves, to which the bodies are lowered on ropes.

The Dogon people are among the most interesting of all the ethnic groups in Mali. They fled to this area in the 15th century in order to retain their cultural and religious traditions in the face of Islamic invasions. They continue to maintain a fascinating traditional society and have chosen to resist the influences of the modern world. The things they hold dear are rooted in the earth and sky, in youth and old age and in birth and death. Marriages are sometimes arranged even before the birth of a child, with the ceremony taking place early—as with brides as young as 12 years old. A man is not considered an adult until he has produced a child. Water, the giver of life in this arid land, is venerated and is an important symbol in Dogon ceremonies.

Ethnologists are fascinated by the Dogon's ancestor worship, complex cosmology, and simple but unaffected artistic expressions reflected in masks, musical instruments, and ritual dances. Numbering about 450,000, the Dogon are celebrated for the genius of their abstract artwork. Their geometric designs in woodcarvings and masks inspired, among others, the young Picasso, and are acknowledged as a major influence in modern art.

Ingenious Dogon farmers have created green oases around their precariously situated villages by constructing clever irrigation channels. They grow maize, millet, and onions while stocking goats and sheep. We'll admire the artistry of cone-shaped houses with elaborately carved wooden doors, and learn firsthand about the enduring spiritual life of these animist people. During our visit, we will experience one of the exhilarating Dogon masked dances, which includes masks that can reach 15 feet tall and dancers that perform on vertigo-inducing stilts.

*B,L,D each day...Mountain Travel Sobek Bush Camp (Day 6); Hotel Le Cheval Blanc, Bandiagara (Day 7)*

### **DAY 8 ~ Djenné**

Continue driving to Djenné, a once great religious and commercial center located on the Niger River. Djenné was built in the 14th century and has fine Afro-Arab architecture, including the most famous mosque in all of Mali. The largest clay building in the world, its façade is decorated with columns and minarets in the startling fanciful Sudanic style. We'll be here on a Friday, when the plaza of the mosque is full of people in colorful dress who have just attended the main prayer ceremony of the week. Camp on the outskirts of the town.

*B,L,D...Mountain Travel Sobek Bush Camp*

**DAY 9 ~ Mopti**

Continue to nearby Mopti, the “Venice of Africa,” consisting of three small islands linked by levees. Mopti's two-story earthen architecture is strongly reminiscent of classic American Southwestern adobe, and its mosques are impressive. We take a walking tour of the town, including the quay, where we can see salt bars for sale, and perhaps visit a blacksmith or antique dealer. A multitude of ethnic groups wear white Islamic robes, colorful *boubous* (batik robes), or brightly painted Fulani hats that seem strangely Vietnamese. Dinner and overnight at hotel.

*B,L,D...Hotel Kanaga*

**DAYS 10-11 ~ Niger River**

We begin our journey up the Niger River by thatch-roof *pinasse*, a gentle trip that gives us an intimate look at life on the river. As we stop at points of interest, we'll see how the river is the heart of Malian life. The river teems with fish, most importantly the species called the “capitaine” (*Lates niloticus*); fishing and trading in dried fish are some of the most important elements of the Malian economy. We'll stop a couple of times during the day to visit local Bozo villages and meet the people who live along the river. Be sure to bring your binoculars—the Niger is the ornithological paradise of West Africa and all kinds of aquatic birds congregate here. Arrive in Niafounké late in the afternoon of the second day. Niafounké is the home village of worldbeat star Ali Farka Touré, who has brought Malian folk music to the world's ears.

*B,L,D each day...Mountain Travel Sobek Bush Camp (Day 10); Campement Hotel (Day 11)*

**DAYS 12-13 ~ Into the desert**

From Niafounké, we drive through an area between the desert and the Niger River that is inhabited by Tuareg shepherds. Accompanying us is a local caravanner who knows the desert, location of the wells, and the nomad tribes that live in the region. We'll pass many ranges of sand dunes and a few places where wells have been dug for the local nomads. We may see them watering their herds of camels and sheep and may also be able to visit some encampments of the Maur people of Moorish descent. (This genuine nomadic group, rarely visited by foreigners, will bestow the traditional hospitality that is a trademark among the nomads of the Sahara.) Along the way we are sure to come upon a few camel caravans, either heading south with their bars of salt from the salt mines, or convoys heading north with goods bought with the proceeds of their salt trade. Camp overnight.

*B,L,D each day...Mountain Travel Sobek Bush Camp*

**DAYS 14-15 ~ Araouane**

Riding camels, we form our own caravan and for two hours cross a region of dunes to arrive at Araouane, an outpost that is the only place of habitation along the whole caravan route. (Those who don't wish to ride the camels can go in the vehicles.) Araouane has been inhabited since the 11th century by some salt traders of the Arabic clan Ouled Sidi Hammed. The appearance of “foreigners” is a rare event and we'll be invited for lunch by the local chief. We'll spend a few hours visiting the town, which consists of a few clay houses half buried in the sand, and perhaps the local school and medical clinic. After lunch we'll begin the return drive to Timbuktu along the Azalaï caravan track.

*B,L,D each day...Mountain Travel Sobek Bush Camp*

**DAY 16 ~ Timbuktu**

Morning arrival in Timbuktu. After checking into the hotel, we'll take a short tour of this legendary town. Timbuktu (Tomboctou) was founded by Tuareg nomads at the end of the 12th century and was once the capital of a flourishing Tuareg empire. Now landlocked away from the shifting Niger River, Timbuktu was the meeting point

for caravans that descended from the Maghreb (the settled area in the northern Sahara that spawned the caravans) to cross the Sahara, and of *pinasses* plying the river with cargoes of gold from the mines of Bourem. In its long history, it has been occupied by the Manding, then the Songhai people of Gao, then the Moroccans, then the Peuls (Fulani) of the kingdom of Macina and finally again by the Tuaregs. We may wander the markets and visit Djinguereber Mosque, probably built in the 13th century, the most interesting monument in the city. In the evening we'll attend a performance of Tuareg dances.

*B,L,D...Hotel Azalai*

### **DAY 17 ~ Fly home**

Fly to Bamako, the lively Malian capital on the banks of the Niger. Bamako's markets and bazaars hum with a bustle of activity—women in multi-colored *boubous* and the “*bana bana*” (street sellers) who hawk all kinds of objects from artwork to fruit for the “best price” offered. Bamako, a meeting place for people from all over northern Arabic and western Black Africa, is the most authentic example of a true African city. Evening transfer to airport and depart on our flights home.

*B,L,D...Dayroom at Hotel Plaza*

### **DAY 18 ~ Arrive home**

## **LAND COST**

\$3990 per person (10-15 members)

\$4190 per person (5-9 members)

\$4690 per person (3-4 members)

\$135 per person internal airfare (Timbuktu/Bamako—subject to change. Mountain Travel Sobek will book and issue these tickets for you.)

Rates quoted are per person, based on sharing double accommodations.

Single Supplement—\$600 for “requested” singles; \$450 for “forced” singles.

If you prefer single accommodations, you must pay the Single Supplement Fee. If you're traveling alone and wish to share accommodations, we'll try our best to find you a roommate. If that's not possible, we will only charge you a \$450 single supplement.

### **Tier Pricing**

Adventure travel works best with a small group of people. In order to operate these small groups, our trips are priced according to the number of full-price passengers on the trip. (Mountain Travel Sobek staff, trip doctors, and other discounted travelers are excluded from the count for this purpose.) We initially invoice you at the highest tier level price (the smallest group size we can operate). If the price drops due to an increase in group size, you will be refunded the difference.

### **What's Included**

- ◆ expert leadership
- ◆ accommodations
- ◆ all field arrangements, including group camping and commissary equipment
- ◆ meals as noted (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)

- ◆ airport transfers
- ◆ sightseeing as noted in the itinerary
- ◆ ground transportation
- ◆ tips for camp, hotel and pinasse staff
- ◆ basic medical and evacuation insurance

### **What's Not**

International airfare; flight within Mali (see separate cost above); meals not noted on itinerary; insurance other than basic medical and evacuation insurance noted above (we strongly recommend you purchase the supplemental trip insurance offered by Mountain Travel Sobek, which includes trip cancellation insurance); optional tipping to leader and assistant leader; visas; excess baggage charges; airport taxes; cost of medical immunizations; and items of a personal nature (sodas, alcoholic beverages, laundry, etc.).

### **International Airfares**

Airfare is not included in the land cost of our trips. As part of our commitment to total customer service, our team of professional air travel consultants will be happy to assist you with your international air travel plans and tickets once you sign up for the trip. (You may call our sales staff at 1-888-MTSOBK [687-6235] for a ballpark airfare.)

Since our goal is to facilitate your flights and save you money, we have negotiated special rates with some of the major air carriers. But you must book early. Space is limited on competitive fares, so be sure to contact us immediately after you sign up. If you are making your own airline reservations please check with our staff before purchasing your tickets. We need to verify your schedule and ensure we have enough participants to operate the trip.

## **WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT**

### **Expert Leadership**

Expert leadership is the key to an exciting, unforgettable experience. Our trips feature gifted leaders for whom leading trips is a true vocation. Besides showing you wonders you'd never find on your own, they make sure everything runs smoothly and safely without a hitch. They are knowledgeable about all aspects of your trip, and take great pleasure in sharing their insights with you. More than just guides, they positively elevate your experience by being teachers, companions, and the best of friends. You'll be in good hands with them every step of the way.

Although trip leader assignments are subject to change, *Roberto Cerea*, *Alberto Nicheli*, or *Laura Martinotti* lead the trip.

Italian-born **Roberto** has a background in philosophy, theology, anthropology, and ethnology, with an emphasis on traditional African religions. He has lived in Togo for the last six years (his wife is Togolese) and has been leading tour groups in West Africa since 1994. His knowledge of West African cultures guarantees deep insights into Africa's fascinating tribal peoples, and his enthusiasm and empathetic nature make him a favorite among our guests. Roberto also regularly writes articles for *Nigrizia*, an Italian magazine on Africa.

**Alberto** is also Italian by birth but has the heart of a nomad and is happiest when adventuring over unknown ground (we think he's cut out of the same fabric as the great 19th-century explorers of Africa). He's traveled extensively throughout West Africa since 1975 and been a resident of Togo since 1984. His travels have been in

pursuit of the understanding of these people: their customs, art, history, and tribal wisdom. He has established fast friendships with chiefs and elders in many remote villages and works energetically to preserve and understand their ways of life. Alberto is a contributing writer to Italian tour magazines and collaborated with Angela Fisher and Carol Beckwith on their field research for *National Geographic's* articles on West Africa and their book *African Ceremonies*.

**Laura Martinotti** was born with a fierce sense of wanderlust, and fell in love with Africa on a trip to Libya while still in her teens. She continued to travel the world while a student of anthropology and ethnology at universities in Nice and Turin, and in 1992 founded the Italian-based cross-cultural organization “Club Viaggiare Insieme” (The Traveling Together Club), whose aim is the development and knowledge of Africa and Asia. Laura has shared her fascination with the peoples and cultures of West Africa with travelers from around the world and now devotes six months each year to her pursuit of educating travelers on the many facets of the region. Her perspective, personal interests, and overall expertise in everything West African will translate into an insightful and exploratory expedition.

Leader assignments will be confirmed in the Final Bulletin sent to you three weeks prior to departure.

### **Lodging, Food & Vehicles**

Camping nights in remote locations are spent in airy, mosquito-proof, two-person dome tents. You will be provided with a foam sleeping pad (you must bring your own lightweight sleeping bag). The camps are somewhat rustic and may involve “roughing it.” A toilet tent is provided, as well as a shower tent (except while we are in the desert). Dinners in camp may include West Africa cuisine or Italian specialties. Lunch is cold food, served picnic style. On the Niger *pinasse* journey, our cook prepares excellent meals, including fresh fish from the river. Frequently, we will have imported Italian and French wines. Some of the hotels in the cities are quite good with French food, air conditioning, etc., but we will also be staying at simple guesthouses and camping along the Niger River and in Dogon country.

We will be traveling into remote areas aboard sturdy, all-terrain, air-conditioned Land Cruisers that seat a driver and four passengers. (Please note: the Land Cruisers used on the Azalaï segment of the itinerary are not air-conditioned.) In the cities we may use mini-vans.

### **Activity Level**

On a scale from 1 to 5, we rate this trip as a 3. *It is moderate to strenuous because of the heat, rustic nature of travel, and long drives.* You must be in good physical condition, enjoy an active life, and have recent hiking and camping experience. A spirit of adventure and a positive attitude are musts!

Walks in the Dogon country typically start early in the morning to take advantage of the cooler temperatures. The weather can be hot and the terrain is hilly. Trip members should be prepared to hike two to five hours per day on hiking days. Optional visits to some sites involve bouldering, climbing rustic ladders, and scrambling up cliffs.

If you are not optimally conditioned, we recommend that you start a training program *at least three months* before departure, gradually increasing the intensity and duration. If your health is questionable or your physical capacity is limited, please discuss other trip options with us.

Note—Minimum age for participation is twelve.

## **Climate**

Mali has a typical dry climate with a rainy season from June to September. The Saharan influence is felt in winter with the ebb of the monsoon and the arrival of dry air masses. The cooler dry season is from November to February, with lows of 45°-65° and highs of 75°-90°. In March, temperatures increase with lows of 55°-75° and highs of 80°-100°. In the dry season, the humidity is only 5% or 10%.

## **THE NEXT STEP**

### **Ready to go? Signing up is easy!**

Call us at 1-888-MTSOBEK (687-6235) and reserve a space with your credit card or use the enclosed reservation card. You can also book a reservation online at our website ([www.mtsobek.com](http://www.mtsobek.com)). If you prefer to use a travel agent, he or she can book your trip at no extra cost and provide other helpful assistance. Frequent flyers with mileage-earning credit cards take note: you also have the option to make all your payments by credit card so you can rack up even more mileage for your next trip!

### **Then Leave the Rest to Us**

Before you go, we provide you with extensive pre-departure information, including clothing recommendations, suggested reading lists, up-to-date health advice prepared by our consulting physician (an expert in wilderness medicine), and other details from procuring visas to advice on local customs.

### **Why Mountain Travel Sobek is Your First Choice for Adventure**

Mountain Travel Sobek is the pioneer in active adventure travel. No other adventure travel company can lay claim to that title. We were the first to take Americans trekking in Nepal, raft the wild rivers of Africa, and open up many previously inaccessible corners of the world to curious travelers. We set the standard for adventure travel and have a strong reputation for excellence that we do everything we can to maintain. Since we are the leading adventure company, we have a lot to live up to, so we make sure we provide safe, quality trips and the best customer service to our passengers.

With Mountain Travel Sobek, you'll see West Africa as only an insider can, with friendly, hospitable guides who know the region intimately. They'll accompany you throughout the day, lending support and insights about where you are and what you see. Their close familiarity with the local geography, history, culture and traditions (plus their entertaining stories and great jokes) are the key to a superb, informative experience—one you just can't get on your own.

### **References**

Don't take our word for how great our trips are. We'll be happy to provide you with references of satisfied past travelers.

### **Questions?**

Feel free to call us at 1-888-MTSOBEK (687-6235) if you still have any questions or concerns. We're here to help you. You can also check out our website at [www.mtsobek.com](http://www.mtsobek.com).

**Note on Itinerary**

Although we will do our very best to adhere to the itinerary schedule as listed, it is subject to change for numerous reasons beyond our control. Please read the Limitations of Liability and Booking Conditions in the four-page Participant Information Form.

**Conditions of Participation**

Your participation on a Mountain Travel Sobek trip is subject to the conditions stated in the four-page Participant Information Form, which includes the Agreement and Release from Liability and the Booking Conditions. We urge you to read this information carefully, and to call us if you have any questions.

**Note on Services**

We often use local suppliers who provide services that may include transportation, equipment, logistic support, and other services (hotels, restaurants, etc.). We do not own or operate these independent suppliers. We work with service providers who share our commitment to safety and quality, and work closely with them to develop itineraries unique to Mountain Travel Sobek.

©2003, *Mountain Travel Sobek*

CST 2014882-10

*Registration as a seller of travel does not constitute approval by the State of California.*