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TRIP DETAILS

15 days

Mali & Burkino Faso

*Rugged 4-wheel-drive travel,
2 days optional moderate hiking,
2 days river travel,
optional camel ride*

*9 nights camping
5 nights hotels*

2008 DATES

*Jan 23–Feb 6
Feb 27–Mar 12
Mar 26–Apr 9
Oct 15–Oct 29
Nov 5–Nov 19
Dec 3–Dec 17*

*Note—Dates are subject to
change due to airline
schedules.*

LAND COST

*\$4,395 per person
(10-16 members)*

*\$4,695 per person
(6-9 members)*

\$250 internal airfare

\$700 single supplement

TIMBUKTU & BEYOND

Exotic Tribal Cultures of Mali & Burkina Faso

TRIP LEVEL
EASY TO MODERATE



HIGHLIGHTS

- *Spectacular expedition into the Sahara to see colorful trains of camel caravans (and to ride camels!)—you can only do this with us!*
- *Visit remote Dogon villages that aren't on any map, attend a special masked dance performed just for our group*
- *Two-day riverboat journey on the Niger River to visit with Bozo and Fulani villagers*
- *Superb crafts—Dogon granary doors and other carvings, mud cloth, batik fabrics, Tuareg jewelry*

Revised January 2, 2008



TIMBUKTU & BEYOND

Exotic Tribal Cultures of Mali & Burkina Faso

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. 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.

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 by few other 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 then 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. Following this 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 it's time for the highlight of our journey: a genuine and utterly amazing 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). 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.

As seen in *Conde Nast Traveler* (March 2006):
<http://www.concierge.com/cntraveler/roomwithaview/detail?articleId=10234>

We’ll end our desert expedition 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. Flying to Bamako, Mali’s capital, we’ll take a short tour before boarding our homeward-bound flights.

Note—This is a rugged journey with a fair amount of rough road travel, especially during the desert portion on Days 11-13. Temperatures can reach into the 90s (or higher) and conditions can be dusty.

ITINERARY

☞ This trip begins with a rendezvous at the airport in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. You can arrive at any time on Day 1 of the itinerary.

DAY 1 ~ Arrive in 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 2 ~ Ouagadougou – Gurunsi people

The life of Ouagadougou is in the streets, in a unique fusion of village and town ambiance: old taxis, bicycles, and scooters vie with donkeys pulling chariots, while porters carry loads on their heads. On the sides of the street informal traders offer colorful goods, open-air small restaurants proffer beer and music, and everywhere chickens and goats scramble for crumbs of food. Noted for its lively lifestyle, Ouagadougou boasts colorful markets.

Burkina’s basketry is famous and it’s 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 using natural colors—red, white, and black on an ocher background—that decorate the walls of their mud huts, which 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. In the evening we will gather around a fire as the rhythmic beating of the tom-tom harkens the ancient tradition of their oral culture: a competition of enigmatic tales, as well as riddles to which the young showcase their knowledge of their culture by finding a solution. Afterwards, we retire to our camp to sleep under the stars.

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

DAY 3 ~ 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

"[This trip] expanded my awareness and brought a level of interaction with the local peoples that I rarely find in my travels. The cultural experience was unique and fascinating. Not your everyday tour."

Fay Coleman

New York, New York

DAY 4 ~ 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 platform with carved pillars representing ancestral figures 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 5-6 ~ Dogon cliffs

We begin our exploration of the Dogon cliffs. We'll take easy early morning treks to unmapped traditional villages that are visited by few other groups, thus lessening the impact on these cultures. We will visit special Dogon villages, including one on a sacred mountain and another hidden in a huge cave in the escarpment.

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. Dogon masks have deep eyes, framed by vertical and parallel lines—a kind of rectangular box looking at you from another world. They are pure cubist art, with the soul of a population living in communion with the spirit of ancestors, nature, and the stars. Only men are

permitted to be close to the dancers. Women stay away, perched on the clay roofs of surrounding houses. Even if it's a taboo for them, they do not want to miss the performance. Masks are related with death and funerals; women are related with birth and life. They have opposite and complementary roles (better to avoid any unfortunate clash!).

B,L,D each day...Mountain Travel Sobek Bush Camp (Day 5); Hotel Le Cheval Blanc, Bandiagara (Day 6)

DAY 7 ~ Djenné

Continue to Djenné, once a 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.

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

DAY 8 ~ Mopti

Continue to Mopti, stopping along the way at Somadoudou, where crowds throng the streets on market day. Arrive in Mopti, the “Venice of Africa,” a town 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 blocks for sale, and perhaps visit a blacksmith or antique dealer. Part of the harbor is occupied by a traditional workshop, where artisans build *pinasses*, starting with the production of nails and finishing with colorful paintings on the sides of the boats. The town is alive with the different cultures of the region: Bozo fishermen, Dogon, Bambara and Bella farmers, Tuareg and Peul (Fulani) shepherds, all sporting a variety of colorful ethnic costume: white Islamic robes, colorful boubous (batik robes), or brightly painted Fulani hats that seem strangely Vietnamese.

B,L,D...Hotel Relais Kanaga

DAYS 9-10 ~ Niger River

We begin our journey on 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. Lunches are aboard the boat and prepared by our own cook.

Be sure to bring your binoculars—the Niger is the ornithological paradise of West Africa and all kinds of aquatic birds congregate here. Midway the river turns into huge Lake Debo, whose shallow waters host enough fish to feed the region; when the water level recede, green grass is fodder for countless herds of zebu.

We end the river trip near Niafouké, the home village of the late worldbeat star Ali Farka Touré, who brought Malian folk music to the world's ears, then head out into the desert to camp.

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

DAYS 11-13 ~ Into the desert

We drive through an area between the desert and the Niger River that is inhabited by Tuareg shepherds. We'll see their tents as dots on the horizon and also come across the rounded huts of the Bella people, former slaves of the Tuareg. The presence of various *tell* (archaeological sites like small hills with large terraces, jars, and tombs) stand as mysterious testimony to the populations that lived in this region in the remote past. 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 both the Tuareg and 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.

Riding camels, we form our own caravan and for two hours cross a region of dunes to arrive at Araouane, an outpost—some 150 miles north of Timbuktu—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 Azaläi caravan track. Because of its remoteness, Timbuktu was often referred to as "the end of the world." As we return to it from the Sahara on the caravan route, we'll see that it is actually the beginning of it!

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

DAY 14 ~ Timbuktu

Arrive 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 oldest clay building in Africa and the most interesting monument in the city.

B,L,D...Hotel Azaläi

DAY 15 ~ Bamako – depart

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. Time permitting we will visit the ethnographic museum, the best in West Africa, with its wonderful collections of ancient art objects, masks, sculptures, traditional weapons, textiles, musical instruments, and tools. Evening transfer to airport and depart on our flights home. You can depart from Bamako any time after 5:00 p.m.

B,L,D...Dayroom

LAND COST

\$4,395 per person (10-16 members)

\$4,695 per person (6-9 members)

\$250 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—\$700 for “requested” singles; \$500 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 \$500 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)
- ◆ flight from Timbuktu to Bamako (see separate cost above)
- ◆ 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; 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.).

Air Travel

Airfare is not included in the land cost of our trips. For air reservations, we recommend you contact the airlines directly, either by phone or the Internet. In addition, many travelers elect to use their “frequent flyer” miles when traveling with us. **But please check with our staff before purchasing or obtaining your tickets.** We need to verify your arrival and departure 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. 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 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 Azalai segment of the itinerary are not air-conditioned.) In the cities we may use mini-vans.

Activity Level

Although we rate this trip as "easier," it can be considered, for some people, as 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!

Just call us at 1-888-MTSOBEK (687-6235) and reserve your spot! You can also book a reservation online at our website (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.

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.

Note on Itinerary

Although we will do our best to adhere to the itinerary schedule as listed, it is subject to change. Please read the Limitation of Liability and Booking Conditions in the four-page Participant Information Form. You can find all this information on our website at www.mtsobek.com/faq and the form itself at www.mtsobek.com/pdf/participant_info.pdf.

Terms & Conditions

Once you have made a deposit for a trip, you agree to be bound by all our terms and conditions including the Limitation of Liability Clause. The full Terms and Conditions can be found at www.mtsobek.com/faq/#liability or call 1-888-MTSOBEK (687-6235) for a copy. These are partial conditions. Your participation is contingent on your signature on the full list of terms specified in the four-page Participant Information Form (www.mtsobek.com/pdf/participant_info.pdf). Any dispute concerning, relating or referring to the Terms and

TIMBUKTU & BEYOND

Conditions, to any literature concerning this trip, or the trip itself, shall be resolved exclusively by binding arbitration in San Francisco, California, according to the then existing commercial rules of the American Arbitration Association. Such proceedings will be governed by substantive California law (but not procedural law) without regard to the California Arbitration Act.

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