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ESSAKANE: MUSIC FESTIVAL OF THE DESERT

TRIP DETAILS

15 days ~ Mali

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

*9 nights camping,
5 nights hotels*

2009 DATES

Jan 3-Jan 17

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

2009 LAND COST

*\$4,595 per person
(9-13 members)*

*\$4,895 per person
(6-8 members)*

\$800 single supplement

The World's Most Exciting Celebration of African Music!

TRIP LEVEL
EASY TO MODERATE

HIGHLIGHTS

- *See and hear the world-renowned Festival au Desert!*
- *Visit the mystical city of Timbuktu, once the Saharan capital of camel caravans*
- *Trek to the fantastic sandstone cliffs of the Bandiagara escarpment, where the animistic Dogon reside, and attend a special masked dance performance*
- *Navigate the Niger River by pirogue to visit Fulani, Bozo, and Songhai tribes*

Revised August 20, 2008



ESSAKANE: MUSIC FESTIVAL OF THE DESERT

The World's Most Exciting Celebration of African Music!

For years our music-loving clients have pleaded with us to add the Festival Au Desert to our Mali itinerary. We finally saw the light and put their dream trip together. Since its inception in 2001, the festival has become the throbbing center of the international African music scene. What started as a mostly Tuareg affair with dancing, swordplay, and camel races, has become a sophisticated three-day musical extravaganza that has opened its doors to renowned artists from all over the world.

But most of us don't travel halfway across the planet just to hear a good band. That's why we've packed the rest of this 15-day itinerary with travel through the most vibrant and mature of Sub-Saharan Africa's cultures, which thrive intact in the ethnic mosaic of West Africa. From the camel-riding Tuareg nomads, to 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, this is an ethnologist's dream journey into a tradition-bound world. You'll be immersed in 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.



We'll spend our first day in Segou, keeper of one of the most ancient histories of West Africa as the capital of the ancient Bambara kingdom. We'll then journey to the medieval town of Djenné, where little has 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 traveling by *pinasse*—a type of pirogue or small, flat-bottomed boat, particularly common with West African fishermen—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 showtime! We'll spend three days in the desert outpost of Essakane dancing under the stars to the best beats in the world before traveling to Timbuktu, the mystical city in the heart of the Sahara. Historically, the salt trade was the main economy of the region and in this forgotten no-man's land, nothing has changed since the 16th century. Once a great center of art and learning, Timbuktu is now a sleepy desert outpost that has become a synonym for "the back of beyond."

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Heading back from Timbuktu, we'll spend a few days with the animist 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 villages visited by few other groups (and not on any maps) and perhaps witness a wild and breathtaking Dogon mask dance.

Note—This is a rugged journey with a fair amount of rough road travel. Temperatures can reach into the 90's F (or higher) and conditions can be dusty.



FOR INFORMATION OR RESERVATIONS, CALL TOLL-FREE | 888 MTSOBK (687 6235)

ITINERARY

DAY 1 ~ Arrive in Bamako

Arrive in Bamako, where 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. You'll have a free evening to rest up and recover from the long flight.

D...Hotel Plaza or similar

DAY 2 ~ Bamako to San (286 miles)

After meeting the group, we'll depart to Segou, the keeper of one of the most ancient histories in West Africa. The capital of the ancient Bambara kingdom, the modern city of Segou was founded in 1852 and served as inspiration for many artists, including Maryse Condé, whose novel *Segou* was inspired by the eponymous city. Segou is also the site where, according to writer Mark Jenkins, when famous physician/explorer Mungo Park finally reached the Niger, he "fell to his knees, thanked God, and drank from the muddy water." Later in the afternoon we'll transfer to the nearby city of San.

B,L,D...Hotel Santoro or similar

DAY 3 ~ San to Djenne (92 miles)

Djenne, the most beautiful and genuine example of Sudanese adobe architecture, houses rich trader families, Koranic schools, and a mosque that happens to be the largest clay building in the world. Be sure to note the intricate architectural details like Moroccan windows, Toucouleur gates, and rounded bricks dating back to the time before colonization. In Djenne, masons are considered artists and priests, all rolled into one. Your experience here won't be complete unless you cross paths with one of them. Also, be prepared for a colorful crowd to invade the city. This is market day and everyone busts out their best ethnic costumes for the occasion.

B,L,D...Campement Hotel or similar

DAY 4 ~ Djenne to Mopti (95 miles)

After breakfast we'll drive to the city of Mopti, built on three islands where the Bani and Niger rivers converge. The town buzzes with the converging cultures of Bozo fishermen, Gogon, Bambara, and Bella farmers, and Tuareg and Paul shepherds. Take advantage of the diversity by paying a visit to the market and harbor, both of which are saturated with intense colors and smells. At the harbor, be sure to watch the artisans building their traditional pirogues (wooden boats), from pounding out the nails to painting the sides of their finished creations. Jewelry lovers will be happy to know that Mopti is the regional hub for bead and jewelry sales and trading.

B,L,D...Hotel Ambedjele or similar

DAY 5 ~ Mopti to Konna and cruise on the Niger River (36 miles)

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 recedes, green grass is fodder for countless herds of zebu.

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

DAY 6 ~ Niger River to Nianfounke to Essakane (142 miles)

We end the river trip near Niafounké, the home village of the late worldbeat star Ali Farka Touré, who brought Malian folk music to the world's ears. After lunch on board, we set out by four-wheel-drive to reach the desert outpost of Essakane in time for the beginning of the festival.

D...Mountain Travel Sobek Bush Camp

DAYS 7 & 8 ~ Essakane

Settle in to desert life among the Tuareg nomads who helped found, along with a few international organizations, the now-famous Festival au Desert. Four thousand revelers come from all over the world to watch traditional dances, camel races, and swordplay, and to listen to classic African melodies that have now become an integral part of the worldwide music scene.

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

DAY 9 ~ Essakane to Timbuktu (60 miles)

Today we arrive in Timbuktu. After checking into the hotel, we'll take a short tour of this legendary town. Timbuktu (Tombouctou) 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 *pinasse* plying the river with cargoes of gold from the mines of Bourem. In its long history, it has been occupied by the Manding, the Songhai people of Gao, then the Moroccans, the Peuls (Fulani) of the kingdom of Macina, and finally again by the Tuaregs. We may wander the markets and visit Djinguereber Mosque, presumably built in the 13th century, it is the oldest clay building in Africa and the most interesting monument in the city.

B,L,D...Hotel La Maison or similar

DAY 10 ~Timbuktu to Douentza (138 miles)

After breakfast we'll drive through the desert dunes to the Gourma region, where we may encounter a few Fulani, Tuareg, or Bella camps. With the protection of the Niger River, the Gourma region, which spreads between Timbuktu and Douentza, is a land of savannas mixed with dunes and desert steppes. In the afternoon, we'll visit a tiny narrow village tucked away in the Gandamia Mountains.

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

DAY 11 ~ Doutentza to 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 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 their cone-shaped houses with elaborately carved wooden doors, and learn firsthand about the enduring spiritual life of these animist people.

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

DAYS 12 ~ Bandiagara Cliffs

In the morning, we'll take a path to a hidden village where a dozen people live in an open cave with a freshwater spring gurgling from the center. We'll then visit the house of the Hogon (high priest) who has fetishes and trophies on display.

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

DAY 13 ~ Bandiagara Cliffs

Today we'll 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 apart, 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...Hotel La Falaise or similar

DAY 14 ~ Bandiagara to Segou (306 miles)

After an early breakfast we'll depart for Segou. On the way, we'll visit a cave that's been beautifully painted with the classical cosmologist colors of the African people (red, white, and black). During the tour, we'll hear about the initiation rites that take place every three years in this natural amphitheater. We'll also stop for visits at Bobo and Bambara villages along the way.

B,L,D...Hotel Auberge or similar

DAY 15 ~ Segou to Bamako and Departure (155 miles)

The lively Malian capital of Bamako, on the banks of the Niger, is home to the best ethnographic museum in West Africa. Its great collection displays masks, ritual sculptures, archaeological terracotta, textiles, musical instruments, tools, and traditional weapons. After lunch, we'll transfer to day rooms where you can get some rest and a shower before an evening transfer to the airport and departure.

B,L,D...Dayroom

2009 LAND COST

\$4,595 per person (9-13 members)

\$4,895 per person (6-8 members)

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

Single Supplement—\$800 for “requested” singles; \$400 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 \$400 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 TravelSobek 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 pirogue 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; 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 *pirogue* 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. 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 12.

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 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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