

AFRICA · HISTORY · CULTURE · ARCHITECTURE · DESERT · OFF THE BEATEN PATH

 Mali

Djenné's Great Mosque is the largest mud-brick building in the world, and the Dogon villages clinging to the Bandiagara Escarpment preserve centuries of masks, granaries and cosmology. Mali also gave the world Timbuktu's manuscripts and some of Africa's finest music. Much of the country has been affected by conflict since 2012, so check the FCDO advice closely before planning any travel.

 **The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to Mali.**
Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.
FCDO advice last updated 10 July 2026.

 CAPITAL Bamako	 CURRENCY West African CFA franc (XOF) £1 ≈ FCFA 781	 LANGUAGE Bambara, French Fula, Songhai	 BEST TIME Nov–Feb
 DAILY BUDGET £35–£170 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, E 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 8h 30m via Paris, Casablanca or Istanbul ~£600–£1,000 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+0 standard time

Mali's great sights follow the Niger River as it arcs north-east across the Sahel. The classic itinerary ran from Bamako to riverside Ségou, then to the mud-built towns of Djenné and Mopti, out to Dogon Country on the Bandiagara Escarpment, and by boat or road up to Timbuktu at the desert's edge. That route, through the heartlands of the old Mali and Songhai empires, remains the country's appeal, but insurgency since 2012 has repeatedly closed much of it to visitors. Any trip now begins with the FCDO advice rather than the map.

When travel is possible, Mali is cheap, slow and deeply rewarding. Long greetings matter, markets are social occasions and music is everywhere: this is the country of Ali Farka Touré, Salif Keita, Toumani Diabaté and Amadou & Mariam. Bamako's live-music bars and National Museum make the capital worth a few days. Expect heat, dust, power cuts and long, bumpy road journeys; French and a few words of Bambara go a long way. It suits seasoned Africa travellers working with trusted local contacts.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

ARCHITECTURE

Great Mosque of Djenné

Rebuilt in 1907, the world's largest mud-brick building dominates Djenné's market square, and townspeople replaster it every year. Non-Muslims may not enter, but the Monday market at its feet is spectacular.
- 2

CULTURE

Bandiagara Escarpment (Dogon Country)

A 150-kilometre sandstone cliff where Dogon villages, granaries and older Tellem cave dwellings cling to the rock. Walks between villages such as Sangha, Ireli and Teli are among West Africa's classic treks.

3

HISTORY

Timbuktu

The fabled desert city's Djinguereber Mosque dates from the 14th century, and its family libraries held hundreds of thousands of manuscripts on astronomy, law and poetry, many smuggled to safety in 2012–13.

4

HISTORY

Tomb of Askia, Gao

Built in 1495 for Askia Mohammad I, emperor of Songhai, this 17-metre pyramidal mud tomb bristling with wooden beams is a UNESCO World Heritage Site beside the Niger at Gao.

5

CULTURE

National Museum of Mali

Bamako's National Museum displays superb Dogon masks, textiles, musical instruments and archaeological finds in airy galleries set in gardens, with models of Djenné and Timbuktu's mosques in the grounds.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Bamako

≈ 4.2 million people

A sprawling river capital with an excellent National Museum, busy markets such as the Grand Marché, and some of West Africa's best live music in its bars and clubs.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Sikasso

≈ 390,000 people

A green market town in the far south, known for its fruit and the remains of the tata, the earthen wall that defended King Babemba's capital against the French.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Ségou

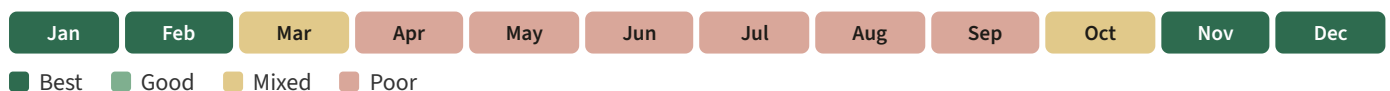
≈ 300,000 people

A relaxed riverside town of colonial-era buildings, bògòlan mud-cloth workshops and nearby pottery villages, at its liveliest in February for the Festival sur le Niger.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

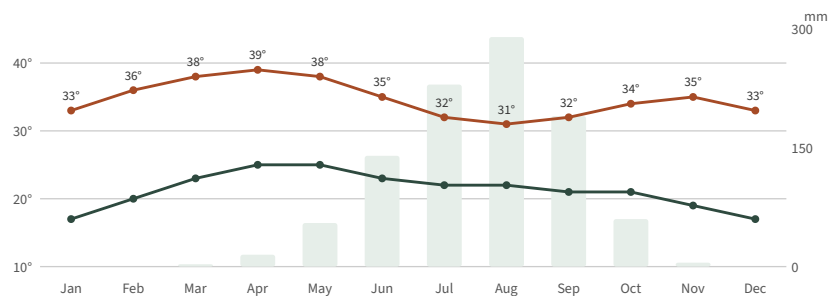
When to go to Mali

Best time: **Nov–Feb**.



Average climate in Bamako

— High °C
 — Low °C
 ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan–Feb	Ogobagna A week-long celebration of Dogon culture in Bamako in late January or early February, with a temporary artisans' village, mask dances, traditional wrestling and concerts.
Feb	Festival sur le Niger Held each February on the Ségou riverfront since 2005, this festival of music, dance, puppetry and contemporary art draws performers and audiences from across West Africa.
Apr	Crépissage of the Great Mosque Djenné's whole community turns out, usually in spring before the rains, to replaster the Great Mosque with fresh mud in a single exuberant, competitive day of work.

How much does Mali cost?

SHOESTRING £35 per person / day ≈ FCFA 27,328 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £80 per person / day ≈ FCFA 62,465 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £170 per person / day ≈ FCFA 132,737 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
---	---	---

Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Tigadèguèna Mali's beloved groundnut stew: meat or chicken simmered in a thick peanut and tomato sauce and served over rice, known elsewhere in West Africa as maafe.	Tô A stiff porridge of millet or sorghum, the everyday staple, eaten by hand with a slippery baobab-leaf or okra sauce.	Capitaine Nile perch from the Niger, grilled whole or fried and served with chips, salad and chilli; Bamako's riverside restaurants specialise in it.
---	---	---

Getting around

Most travel is by road. Long-distance coach companies link Bamako with Ségou, Sikasso and Mopti, while battered bush taxis and minibuses fill the gaps. Seasonal Niger River boats and motorised pinasses once carried travellers between Mopti and Timbuktu. In Bamako, green sotrama minibuses and yellow taxis are cheap; agree the fare first. Roads have frequent checkpoints, so carry ID, and take advice from trusted local operators before setting off.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  C E 220V — bring a UK-to-C/E adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Police: 17 Ambulance: 15 Fire: 18 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +223	TIME ZONE UTC+0 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Not expected at street stalls or local eateries; leave around 10 per cent in upmarket Bamako restaurants and tip guides, drivers and porters.

ETIQUETTE

Greetings are essential: ask after family and health before any business. Use your right hand, dress modestly, ask before photographing people and respect Dogon rules about sacred sites.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Modibo Keita International Airport (BKO), Bamako

Visas & entry for Mali

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to visit Mali. The application and payment process is now fully online via the Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs website.

An entry permit will be issued electronically once approved. There is no need to send documents to the Malian Embassy in Brussels, which covers the UK.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya

Dengue

Hepatitis B

Measles

Meningococcal disease

Polio

Rabies

Tuberculosis

Yellow fever

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required for all travellers (usually over 9 months or 1 year old). There is a risk of yellow fever in parts of the country — vaccination may be advised.

MALARIA

High risk of malaria

- There is a high risk of malaria in Mali: antimalarial tablets recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Mali

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Wed 20 Jan 2027	Armed Forces Day
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Fri 26 Mar 2027	Martyrs' Day
Mon 29 Mar 2027	Easter Monday
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Tue 25 May 2027	Africa Day
Sat 14 Aug 2027	Prophet's Birthday (date may shift)
Sat 21 Aug 2027	Prophet's Baptism (date may shift)
Wed 22 Sep 2027	National Day of the Republic of Mali

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in French

ENGLISH	FRENCH	SAY IT
Hello	Bonjour	<i>bon-ZHOOR</i>
Thank you	Merci	<i>mair-SEE</i>
Please	S'il vous plaît	<i>seel voo PLAY</i>
Excuse me	Excusez-moi	<i>ex-KOO-zay MWAH</i>
How much is this?	C'est combien ?	<i>say kom-BYAN</i>

Know before you go

Read the FCDO travel advice before anything else, and check that your travel insurance remains valid for every region you plan to visit.

Carry CFA francs in cash: ATMs that take foreign Visa cards are found mainly in Bamako, and euros are the easiest currency to exchange, at a fixed rate.

Learn the Bambara greeting 'I ni ce' (ee nee CHAY) and use it freely; long, friendly greetings open doors in markets and villages.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.