

## COUNTRY PROFILE

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### MALI: FERTILE LAND FOR SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY TOURISM

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Situated at the core of Western Africa, Mali is twice the size of France. Mali is a landlocked country which is bordered by seven countries (Senegal, Mauritania, Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Guinea). The two big rivers that cross Mali are: the Niger and the Senegal.

Mali has experienced the greatest Empires of the sub-region where the ruins, still visible today, are now tourist attractions.

#### Growing Tourism

Thanks to its legendary hospitality based on Djatiguiya, and its cultural diversity based on Sanankouya, Mali is a politically and socially stable country in which security prevails. Foreigners are welcomed with open arms. Indeed, from 82.000 tourists in 2001, Mali received 210.000 tourists in 2006. This steady growth also explains the beauty of the sites and tourist tours in Mali, notably Timbuktu, Djenne, the Dogon Country which were classified world-heritage sites by UNESCO.

Also in Mali, foreigners can enjoy sites or leisure villages like Teriya bugu, the biggest solidarity tourism village of the region. AMPTS is conscious that sustainable tourism is impossible without the participation of the local population. Therefore, in accordance with its objectives, AMPTS is raising people's awareness and is offering on-the-ground training.

In March 2003 already, together with UNAT and the Malian government, AMPTS organised an international seminar on 'the concept of social tourism in Africa', in which a dozen African countries, France, Italy and Canada took part. Under the presidency of the head of State, these events were a great success thanks to the participation of every stakeholder of tourism in Mali and the civil society, especially trade-unions and mayors.

Today, the AMPTS takes part in every training workshop or seminar that promotes Mali as a destination. It organises conferences and discussions on tourism as well as guided tours for its 'foreigner friends' who stay in Mali.

Even though the AMPTS finds it difficult, due to limited financial resources, to offer young Malians the opportunity to discover their own country, it plays an active part in actions designed to develop interior tourism.

'It is better to see once than hear about it a hundred times'. This translation of a Malian saying conveys that the entire population has a taste for trips and discoveries within & beyond their country. Holidays are a time for recreation, relaxation and learning. Each individual goes on holiday with their own resources.

It is a great opportunity for families who live in the cities to send their children to experience the culture and traditions of their parents. It is another school: the school of life. Also, some students, who receive yearly travel tickets provided by the state, can enjoy a holiday and go to the resident cities or villages of their parents.

Senior civil servants, bankers and local diplomats take advantage of visiting or showing their relatives tourist sites in Mali or in neighbouring countries. Certain societies and institutions like the National Institute of Social Foresight (*Institut national de prévoyance sociale*), EDM (energy of Mali), and BCEAO – Mali (Central Bank of West African States) organise trips for the children of the employees working in their firm.

However, for the majority of Malians, this passion for trips and discovery tends to be restrained by their limited incomes.

This is the reason why the main resolution from the International Seminar on Social Tourism held in Bamako in 2003 was to promote the organisation of domestic tourism, forming the basis of the development of the tourism sector.

The National Administration for Tourism, together with the private sector and the local authorities, are well aware that national tourism only represents a loss of earnings for the state. Hence, they started a series of activities, including the organisation of tours for the members of Parliament in order to encourage the elected representatives of the nation to get acquainted with their region; the organisation of tours for diplomats; the creation of tourist information offices (around a dozen were established in 2007); incentives for tour operators to give preferential rates to nationals for their holidays within the country; the creation of cheap accommodation facilities.

Since the seminar in Bamako, the AMPTS has travelled the length and breadth of Mali from Kayes to Gao, from Sikasso to Timbuktu, in order to work out a feasibility project. The project of the AMPTS, which was designed for young people, mainly for schoolchildren and students, will surely fill in the gap regarding the promotion of interior tourism.



## **International Forum on Solidarity Tourism**

From 20th to 22nd October 2008, in partnership with associations of solidarity tourism, the Government of Mali will welcome Africa and the rest of the world within the framework of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Forum on Solidarity Tourism (FITS).

With more than 500 participants, coming from a hundred different African countries and other continents, FITS 2008 will be a centre of discussion and reflection between the stakeholders of tourism, civil society and the governments for the development of tourism to the great benefit of the populations.

To all of you, for the Forum or a guided tour of Mali, the AMPTS welcomes you to the Djoliba country!