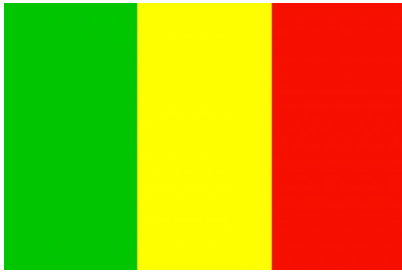


Bamako - Mali's Charming City in the Desert



Mali is not a rich nor an economically strong country, nor is it a mecca for tourists, yet, with its simple and unrefined way of life, it can become a charming experience for visitors.

The capital, Bamako, situated on the River Niger, certainly doesn't fit the usual picture of capitals. There are no high-rise buildings or huge shopping plazas. It has great character, based on its lively and welcoming people and their traditional way of life, and also on its marvelous markets. You can find some wide boulevards when walking around, but you are most likely to pass through lots of narrow alleyways. There are many nightclubs, most of which play recorded music, but from time to time you'll come across a live-band. Other attractions include the Musée National - one of the best ethnographic museums in West Africa - and the zoo and botanical gardens.

Most of Mali is desert, though its sands are strikingly red, and look almost as if they were on fire. Local tribes, whose oral recollections are the best source of authentic information about the country, attract many visitors. To explore Mali, tourists either hike, go on exciting camel rides, or rent a car.

Not far from Bamako is the fabled Timbuktu, once believed to lie near the ends of the earth. There are many architectural attractions here, including exquisitely beautiful mosques and tombs from the medieval era.

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