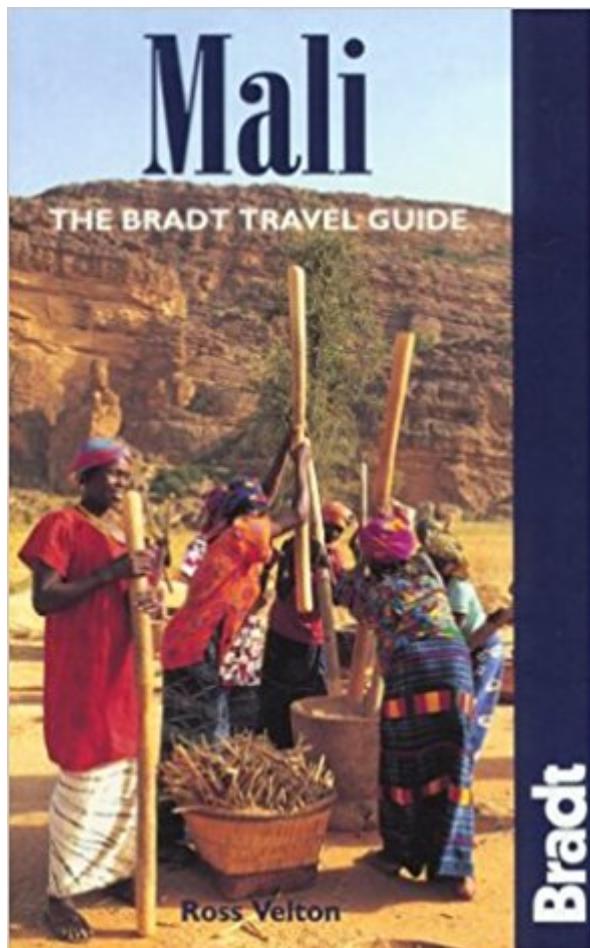


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Mali (Bradt Travel Guide Mali)



Synopsis

This first full-length guide to Mali covers all its fascinating towns including the fabled city of Timbuktu.

Book Information

Series: Bradt Travel Guide Mali

Paperback: 240 pages

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Customer Reviews

Mali is one of the most exciting destinations in West Africa. At its heart is the River Niger which winds through vast areas of Sahelian landscape, linking the fabled city of Timbuktu with the capital, Bamako. Travelers can explore Dogon cliff villages, the famous mosque at Djenné and much more in a country enlivened by colorful markets and arguably the best music in Africa. In Mali: The Bradt Travel Guide, author Ross Velton looks at every aspect of travel in this seldom-visited country, enabling the visitor to get right to the heart of a land whose people are some of the most amicable in Africa. Inside you will find information on: planning and preparation, including health and safety; rail links, transport on the River Niger and other travel routes; where to stay and eat, with a guide to Malian food; ancient civilizations and culture, including the Tuareg and Dogon people; a comprehensive guide to Malian music; communicating in Bambara and French.

Peace Corps volunteers need guidebooks that focus on the country they're working in. I took this book with me to Mali and it's proved to be an absolute inspiration. Great background information sensitively written as well as accurate and detailed practical stuff. I've been working in remote places that I didn't expect to be covered but this book has it all. A must for travelers to Mali.

There is a dearth of material on Mali in English (much more in French) so at least in English, this volume has little competition. I found the information in this book quite accurate, though a bit dated: as of March 2003, a number of new roads have been paved, and, as the book correctly anticipates, a number of hotels etc. were constructed after the book's publication for the Africa's Cup soccer tournament, and, as a consequence, are not included in the descriptions. The material on Pays Dogon is good, but far from comprehensive - some of the most interesting villages I visited were not even mentioned in the book. Like other Bradt guides it shows a good cultural sensitivity to travel in very low income countries, for example providing some useful suggestions on how to constructively handle the frequent requests one gets from village children for candy or pens. (The claim in another review that the book encourages giving such gifts is a flat misrepresentation of the author.) So, the book is quite good though a bit dated - nothing that could not be addressed easily in a new edition.

Although this book provides a good description of what attractions and tourist facilities one can find on a trip to Mali, it does not convey what it is like to travel in Mali by modest means. If you have never been to Africa or the developing world, you will be in for quite a shock when you reach Mali. The crowds, the lack of sanitation and the cuisine of a people on the brink of starvation can overwhelm a soft westerner who has never left North America or Europe. This was particularly hard on one of my travel companions, who in Dogon country refused to eat local food for about three days. This can vary, of course. Maybe you like sphincters and mystery tubes in your spaghetti. The long distance buses that I rode, while "basically like what the book said", were a hazard to my luggage. This came from both rain from leaky cargo compartments, and from the urine of sheep checked as luggage. When checking bags on Malian bus lines, pack as though they will surely get wet. The book does get the bachees more or less correct... slow and uncomfortable transportation that is often your only option. It should be added that because they are so cramped and stop so rarely, long rides on bachees are dehydration risks. They do offer the opportunity to affect an aloof, macho, "more authentic than thou" air when you encounter French tourists in SUVs passing you by while your bachee has a flat tire. The book does not discuss the bartering and haggling system that is omnipresent in Malian markets. This is a substantial oversight, and can lead to wasted money. The book also encourages people to give candies and pens to the local kids. This is an outrage. The omnipresent mobs of children with their cries of "tubab ca va" and "cadeau" were the least pleasant thing about Mali. Please don't encourage their begging, a candy won't cure malnutrition. Give to an NGO, or even better, lobby your USA or EU governments to drop their trade

barriers and subsidies spoiling your local farmers so that the Malians can compete in the global marketplace and better themselves without handouts. I should not be so negative. I had a good trip to Mali, and there are many good things about this book. It is certainly better than the short chapters in the big "West Africa" guidebooks. It gives a good introduction to the country and nicely surveys tourist sites and facilities. However, it seems to best describe a more luxurious trip than I had: travelling in rented Range Rovers or by Air Mali and eating only in tourist restaurants. If you are not ready for a rough adventure, you should seriously consider such options. If you travel using more modest means and eat local street food, it will seem that this guide describes a candy-coated and more tourist friendly Mali than the real place.

My wife and I just returned from a month-long trip in Mali, and the one book we found indispensable there was Ross Velton's Bradt Travel Guide to Mali. We would have been lost without it - literally, because the maps in this book are outstanding - clear, accurate and easy to use, unlike those in other books we had (the Lonely Planet maps, for instance, were very disappointing). Velton's writing is clear, lively and accurate, with excellent descriptions of all the main destinations and cultural attractions, and provides a judicious selection of hotels, restaurants, and other practical travel needs. Best of all, Velton conveys a deep understanding and appreciation of the Malian people, preparing visitors nicely for their first encounter with these warm, open, exceptionally likable men and women.

During the past five years I have been searching for a book like this as I prepare to do development work in Mali and want to learn more about this country. However, books of any sort on Mali are few, especially in English. This is the first guidebook on Mali, itself, that I have discovered, and I have found it to be an excellent overview not only of the individual areas of Mali, but also of the culture and history of the country. I highly recommend it!

A superb book - blows the competition out of the water. Well-written, sensitive, passionate and informative. The author obviously loves Mali and its people, and, after reading this book, so did I. I spent time in Bamako, Djenné, Mopti and Dogon country, and this book helped me in each one of these places. Well done also to the publisher for focusing on just Mali rather than including it in a 'monster' guide to the whole region.

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