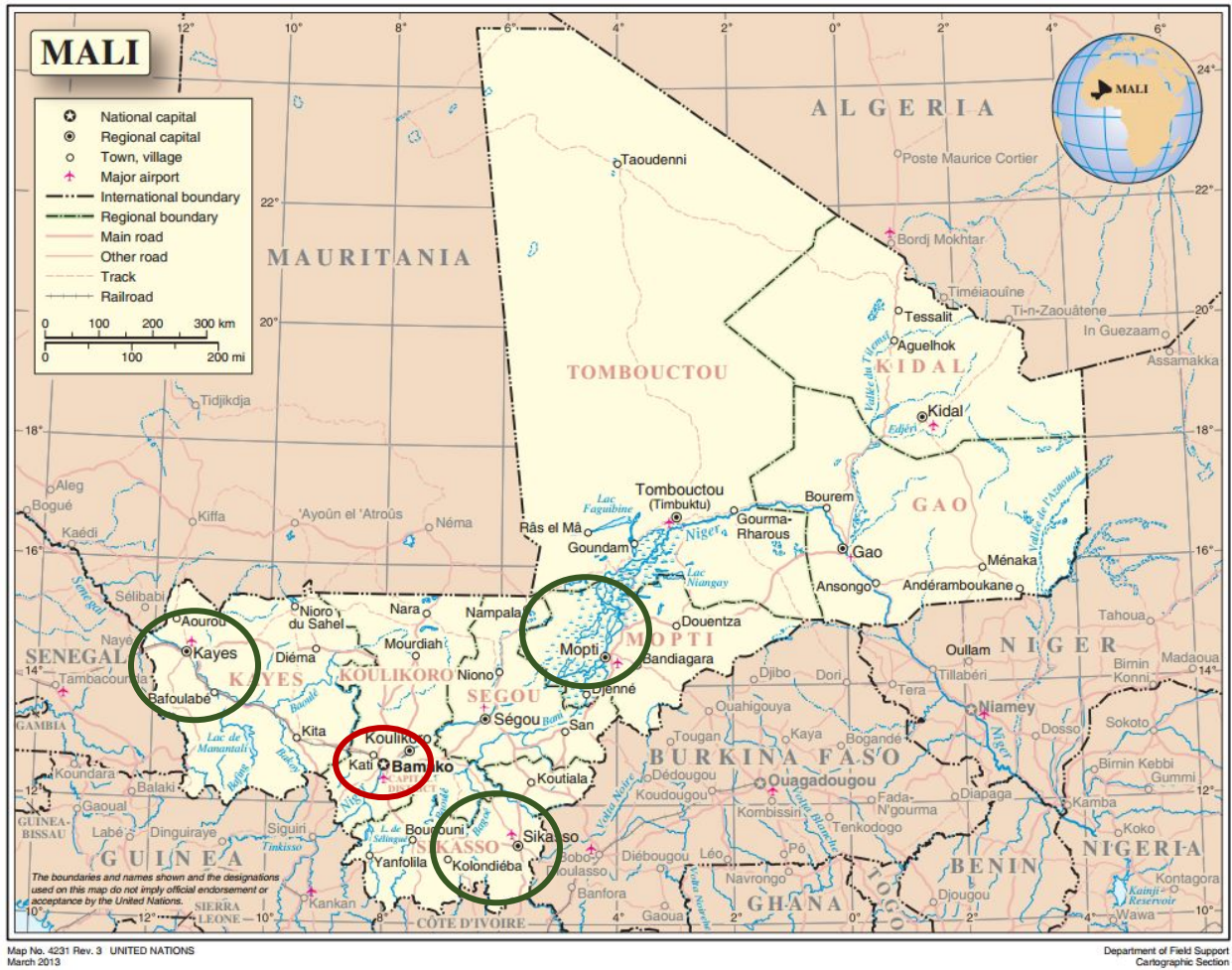




# MALIAN COUNTRY BRIEFING DOCUMENT

# Malian Map



**Project Zones:**  
Where you will work

**Country Capital:**  
Where you will arrive

## Location, Geography & Climate

Mali, one of the largest countries in West Africa (1,246,000 square kilometers) with a population of about 18,957,25 inhabitants, is bordered by seven states: Algeria lies to the north and northeast, Niger to the east, Burkina Faso to the southeast and, with the Ivory Coast, to the south. On the west are Senegal and Mauritania.

Mali is shaped a bit like a butterfly, leaning to the northwest, with a much smaller left than right wing. The larger north western region of the country, which extends into the Sahara, is almost entirely arid desert or semi desert. In the central region, known as the Sahel, life follows the Niger River's annual flood cycle, with high water between August and November. In the south western area, rainfall and rivers are more plentiful, and this region is marginally lusher than the rest of the country.<sup>1</sup> Mali's single most important geographic feature is undoubtedly the great Niger River, which traverses both the Sahel and the south eastern section of the country. The Niger, like the Nile, is both a critical source of sustenance and a major transportation artery--and in this latter capacity, it is an excellent venue for boat travel.

Although most of Mali experiences only negligible rainfall, the 'rainy' season in the south extends from June through September.

The temperature varies from approximately from 20 degrees Celsius in October, November December, January and February to 44 degrees in March, April, May and June. In the North, the temperatures can vary from 10 degrees during the nights to 45 degrees in the days. The rainy season starts in July and ends in September. The humidity is about 55 degrees. It takes less than 6 hours to fly from Europe. Mali became independent in 22 September 1960 under the leadership of Modibo Keita. The Capital city is Bamako.

Administratively, the country is divided into 8 administrative regions and the District of Bamako.

## History & People

Although Mali is today one of the poorest countries in the world, it has a long and illustrious past as an integral part of great African empires. The first of these empires was the empire of Ghana, which from the 4th to the 11th century controlled the trans-Saharan caravan routes. Ghana fell under invasions by the Muslim Almoravids, but a Mandinka empire of Mali soon supplanted it. Mali reached its pinnacle of power and wealth during the 14th century, extending over almost all West Africa and controlling virtually all of the rich trans-Saharan gold trade. It was during this period that Mali's great cities, Timbuktu and Djenne, became fabled centers of wealth, learning, and culture. Mali's power didn't last much longer. In the 15th century, it fell to the Songhai, who had established their own capital at Gao. The Songhai held sway until the end of the 16th century, their empire collapsed under both internal and external pressures. The end of the Songhai Empire also marked the conclusion of the region's history as a trading centre, for the trans-Saharan trade routes quickly lost their vitality after the establishment of sea routes by Europeans.

In the late nineteenth century, Mali became a French colony, and in 1960, it became independent. The country has suffered from periods of internal and external strife, as well as from an extended drought in the early 1970s, but today it appears to be moving toward a stable, multi-party democratic government.

Mali's population comprises several different peoples, including the Bambara (who are the largest single segment), the Songhai, Mandinka, Senoufo, Fula, Bobo, Miniangka, Sarakole, Dogon, etc. The last of these

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.geographia.com/mali/>

groups, the Dogon, are world-renowned for their artwork, and a visit to their traditional cliffside villages is a fascinating experience. Most Malians are Muslim, and the official language is French. Bambara, however, is the country's true lingua franca.

## Democracy and liberty

Before the “coup d'état” Mali was quoted today among the African countries where democracy and individual and collective liberties are respected. The former President Amadou Toumani Toure has been removed from power before finishing his second and last term of five years after regular and transparent elections in May 2007. The new parliament also was set up in calm and transparency in August 2007.

Ibrahim Boubacar Keita took office in September 2013, promising to help unify the country after a rebellion, a coup and an Islamic insurgency.

He won the first election held since mutinous soldiers overthrew long-time President Amadou Toumani Toure early in 2012. He won the second election in July 2018 after months of political tensions. Until this day opposition organizes protests to criticize government's decisions.

## Culture

Culturally, Mali is a very rich country, which has given to world great musicians like Salif Keita, the late Ali Farka Touré or Oumou Sangaré. The country has also a 'National Ballet' and a 'National Instrumental Group'. On clothing side, the Malian “bogolan” and ‘batiks’ are very well-known fabrics worldwide.

## Economy

Mali is primarily an agricultural nation growing millets, rice, maize and other cereals, and Cotton. It is also a great livestock farming country. Tourism is also a very important sector of the economy.

You can import as foreign currency as you wish, although sums over \$ 3,000 must be declared at your point of entry.

## Health Requirements

An International Certificate of Vaccination is no longer compulsory for visitors to the Mali. However, a yellow fever vaccination will be required.

The last outbreak of yellow fever was in 1978 and there is no immediate danger to visitors.

Should you require the services of a doctor please contact the country office or your hotel. If you feel unwell please do not suffer in silence - please ask for help. In an emergency, it is suggested that you ask for help. You will find all the important phone numbers at the end of this document. If you are on long road trips, please carry your drugs with you. Avoid, if possible, drinking unfiltered water. Take bottles of mineral water with you when travelling.



The very dry climate will make you sweat and you are subject to dehydration if you do not drink adequate liquids. 'Traveller's tummy' is common because of eating new and different foods. It is recommended that you travel with Imodium (or similar) in case of emergencies when travelling. Check with your doctor prior to travelling about Malaria (the disease is one of the biggest killers in Mali) and make sure you have the necessary drugs against malaria just in case. You can also carry mosquito repellent cream and you can apply some on your clothes too.

## Mali Visa Requirements

Citizens of the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and other nations with a reciprocal visa abolition agreement with Mali do not require a visa to enter the country on holidays or on business trips. All other countries should possess a visa, which is available from Malian embassies and consulates abroad. If there is no Malian Embassy in your country of residence, you will require a "ground visa" - please contact Mali Country Office for information on how this is obtained prior to your arrival in Mali.

Mali Team will support you in the visa process.

## Security

Since March 2012 the country has become less secured because of the "coup d'état" that has removed the former president from power.

The south of the country where the office is located is more secure, however our other locations are secured, and we take measures to ensure your security during your assignments. Please, do take sensible precautions - follow the lead of the people who live here. Photocopy your passport details and any important documents.

Although peace has come back in most parts of the north of the country, Kidal region still knows some sporadic attacks from rebels. Mali government, in collaboration with international community, ECOWAS, African Union and all involved partners, has deployed more troops to make sure Kidal is secured from those attacks. Have a case that locks.

Preferably use hard suitcases that lock with a key or a combination when travelling. In hotel rooms do keep your valuables locked away. If you need to be taken to a police station for any reason (to for example report loss of belongings etc), please ensure you go with someone from country office.

Also, when you are in town (especially during the night), make sure to be in a crowd and lightened location.

## Currency

The currency in use in Mali is the “CFA” or “XOF”. Some rates versus CFA may fluctuate by time to time.

You can use this website for reference : <https://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

Currency	Sum in CFA
US Dollar (1\$)	575 F CFA
UK Sterling (1£)	732 F CFA
Euro (1€)	655.67

However, Euro and US Dollar are the more used.

You can import as foreign currency as you wish, although sums over \$ 3,000 must be declared at your point of entry. It is better not to travel with large sum as ATMs are available all over the city.

## Arrival

Mali has one international Airport. All international flights arrive at Bamako Modibo Keita International Airport in Senou. The airport is about 15Kms from the country office. You will need the following information to fill in your arrival form:

Postal Address	c/o CRS Mali, BP: E3256 Bamako, Mali
Physical Address	Hamdallaye ACI 2000 Immeuble Alou Diarra
Office Phone number	+223 20 23 44 57 / +223 20 22 87 30

After immigration, you will enter the baggage hall. There are few porters. There is a currency exchange office as soon as you get out of the airport. Otherwise, there are many currency exchange offices in town. After collecting your luggage, proceed to customs. You may be subject to a baggage search. This is normal. It is better to avoid bringing fresh fruits and vegetable with you.

After customs checks please proceed to the arrivals area. Your programme will indication who you will meet (most of the time it will be Khadidjatou the volunteer coordinator). We will be identified with the CRS logo.

Do not respond to the offers or help from strangers, keep your belongings close.

All the useful phone numbers will be in your companion.

There is no need to offer a tip for any service rendered at the airport.

## Accommodation

The preferred accommodation at CRS is our own guesthouses that are in secure locations with all commodities available.

For Kayes, Sikasso and Mopti you will be accommodated in a secure hotel.

## Transportation

You will use most of the time a CRS vehicle.

If you wish to hire a taxi, please contact the office, we can refer you to some partners. Most of the taxis are second hand cars and the Drivers are knowledgeable. You can of course hail a taxi in the street, you will have to bargain for the fare and you will not obtain a receipt.

## Office hours

Our office hours are Monday to Thursday from 8.00am - 5.00pm and Friday from 8.00am to 12.30pm. Please do not expect the office to be open on Saturdays and Sundays.

## Telephones & Internet

A SIM Card and a phone will be available during the length of your stay. If you want to keep using your phone, we can provide you with a SIM Card.

## Hotels, Bars and pubs

In addition, there are many outside restaurants and fast food in the resort areas. Here are a few of them. Some of them offer international cuisine but others specialise in Malian, Africans, Lebanese Indian, Italian and Asian.

The team in Mali will provide you with the authorized list of restaurants and resorts security cleared.

The cost of food when eating out of your hotel is about CFA 3,000 – CFA 20,000 depending on the standards of your choice.

The staffs who serve you in restaurants will be on low salaries and will depend on your tips (even if a service charge is included in the bill). Pass the tip directly to the staffs who have served you.

## Arts and Crafts and Shopping

You can purchase beautiful hand-woven textiles, beads, brass work, gold and silver jewellery, ceramics, painting, sculptures and woodcarvings. The tourist markets sell the largest selection of crafts. Be prepared to bargain well and do not respond to the hard sell. Ask colleagues to take you.

## Touristic Sites

If you have a day to look around Greater Bamako area, you could visit the 'zoological park', the National Museum. If you want to spend a day relaxing, some of the major hotels have nice pools.

There are a few lodges in Bamako:

- Badalodge
- Campement Kangaba

There are organised trips to several important tourist sites. These can be booked through Mali tours by the office at your own costs.



## Other interesting things to know

### Clothing

It is very hot between March and June, but cold in November, December and January. Most hotels have air-conditioning or a fan.

It is best to wear cotton clothes - avoid synthetics.

As it is a Muslim and conservative country it's generally better when outside to avoid very short shorts or skirts. Women visiting Mali should keep their shoulders, cleavage, knees and thighs covered, especially in rural areas.

### Language

French is the official language.

### Communication

Remember that although French is the official language, it is not the mother tongue. Some expressions may therefore be literal translations from local languages and may not be easily understood by foreigners.

Learn Bambara here: <https://www.livelingua.com/project/peace-corps/Bambara/>

### Etiquette

The Malian people have an international reputation for being friendly and helpful. In your travels, you also may find that to be true. Travelling to various parts of the country is an excellent way to get to know the people and their culture. Here are a few hints to help you on your way:

- Smile at people you meet. Greet everyone in a friendly manner.
- Extend your RIGHT hand for a handshake
- Keep the LEFT hand away from greetings, eating or receiving anything from someone else. Do not use your left hand to give money - or indeed anything - to someone else.
- When entering a group, shake hands with all the people present.
- It is acceptable to interrupt and greet a group.
- Always invite a guest to eat with you when you are eating (this is an invitation only, it does not often mean that the guest is required to eat with you - you can politely decline). Eating together is socially significant and not a mere question of hunger and nutrition.
- Never sniff any food or beverage offered you.
- Younger ones must always relinquish their seats for older ones when seats are not available.
- As a visitor, you may be offered a seat - it is acceptable to accept it.

When arriving in a village you will be offered water. This acknowledges that the journey would have been long and perhaps dusty and difficult. The water will come from a well or a tap.

There is a dilemma - it is rude not to accept this, but the water could be of poor quality. Many people politely decline the water (including Malians who are travelling with you), others drink it with relief, while others take a small sip (we would suggest you approach the water to your mouth and fake to take a sip rather than declining it).

## Your suitcase essentials

### **Check temperatures before packing!**

### **You should pack a jacket or sweater for cooler evenings.**

- A scarf
- Sunglasses
- A hat
- Sunscreen
- Your own 1<sup>st</sup> aid Kit
- Your important medicine
- Anti-malaria medicine (ask your doctor)
- Anti-diarrheal pills
- Mosquitos repelling cream or spray (for the body and clothes) or essential oils
- Anti-itch cream
- A pair of sneakers
- A pair of sandals
- Swimwear
- Antibacterial spray and wipes
- Lip balm
- Protein bars

### **Your Documents and details**

- Your passport
- Several copies (in colour) of your passport
- A copy of travel insurance
- Your Mali constant companion
- The list of phone numbers of the team in Mali
- Vaccination card (yellow card)