

Mali national day

Stable West African democracy continues growth, development

Every Sept. 22, the Republic of Mali and its people celebrate the anniversary of the country's independence, which they gained from France in 1960.

Mali has an area of more than 1.2 million sq. km with a population of 14.5 million. A landlocked country in West Africa, Mali shares borders with Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal and Mauritania. The north of the country is part of the Sahara Desert. The Niger River runs through the south of the country, through the capital Bamako.

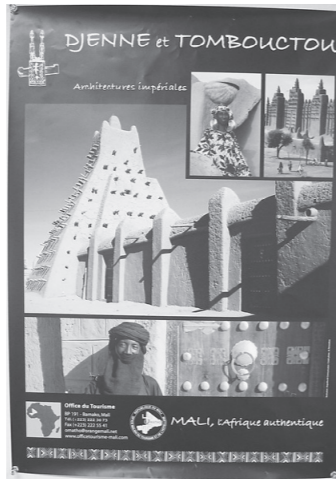
The Mali Empire flourished in the 13th century, with the city of Timbuktu on the banks of the Niger River as an intellectual, artistic and religious center. The Songhai Empire reigned in the 15th century, followed notably by the Bambara Kingdom in the 17th and 18th centuries. From the latter half of the 16th century, Mali experienced a period under Moroccan control in the north.

In the 19th century the

French Army advanced into the region, making Mali a part of French West Africa from 1898 to 1960.

After independence, a long period of one-party rule followed. In 1991, a coup led to the writing of a new constitution and Alpha Oumar Konaré won Mali's first democratic, multi-party presidential election in 1992. President Konaré was reelected in 1997. After serving his two-term limit as president, Konaré was succeeded in democratic elections by current President Amadou Toumani Touré, a retired general, who had been the leader of the military aspect of the 1991 democratic uprising. President Touré was reelected in 2007. Today, Mali is one of the most politically and socially stable countries in Africa.

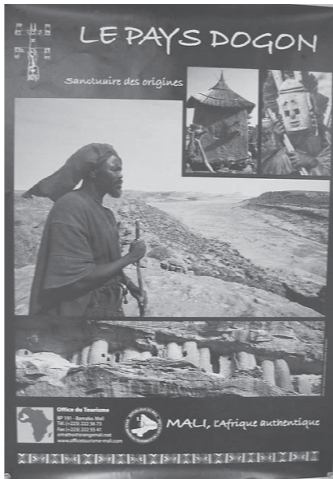
The great Moroccan geographer Ibn Battuta wrote about Mali's people and society after visiting the country in 1352 and his notes on the country's virtues remain unchanged even today. While Malians are strongly reli-



Vitalizing tourism: Official posters advertise the attractions of Mali to potential visitors from around the world. EMBASSY OF MALI

gious, the fact that other faiths and ideas are also flexibly accepted makes it possible for Islam and Christianity, for example, to coexist peacefully.

Although Mali's 23 ethnic groups — each with its own culture, language and social etiquette — appear unconnected, the individual groups actually have an



amicable relationship in which they thoroughly permeate one another, both culturally and socially. The family, forming the nucleus of Mali's social structure, possesses a strong sense of solidarity.

It is a tradition in Mali to welcome people with tea. In the Malian-style tea ceremony, green tea is simmered together

with mint leaves in a small teapot, and the resultant tea, with plenty of sugar added, is drunk from small glasses. It is an indispensable part of enjoying the company of family and friends. The considerable time required to make the tea is passed by chatting and relaxing.

Foreign direct investment has been limited until recent years. Now there is investment in steel by Japan, Australia, Canada and South Africa, and in manufacturing and processed foods by France, Germany and China. Investment figures reveal a dramatically expanding trend in manufacturing. Mali presents extremely attractive business opportunities due to its political stability and excellent administrative body, its participation in the UEMOA (West African Economic and Monetary Union), its huge potential in terms of natural resources and agriculture, and its low labor and other costs. Predictions are for growth in a variety of directions into the future.

Travelers to Mali come mostly to see the UNESCO World Heritage sites of Timbuktu, Djenne Bandiagara and the Tomb of Askia. However, there exist numerous other attractions for tourists relating to the diverse cultures of the empires and kingdoms that have flourished over the centuries.

National projects currently being pursued in Mali seek to open up and develop tourism resources in new and existing forms.

Steps are being taken in various parts of Mali to set up a pleasant environment geared toward tourism. In addition to several hotel and tourism operators, there have been increases in the number of car rental companies, hospitals accepting foreigners, insurance organizations and financial institutions handling foreign exchange. Airports, roads and railways linking these areas are also under expansion.

Information provided by the Embassy of Mali.

**Congratulations
to the People
of the Republic of Mali
on Their
Independence Day**



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