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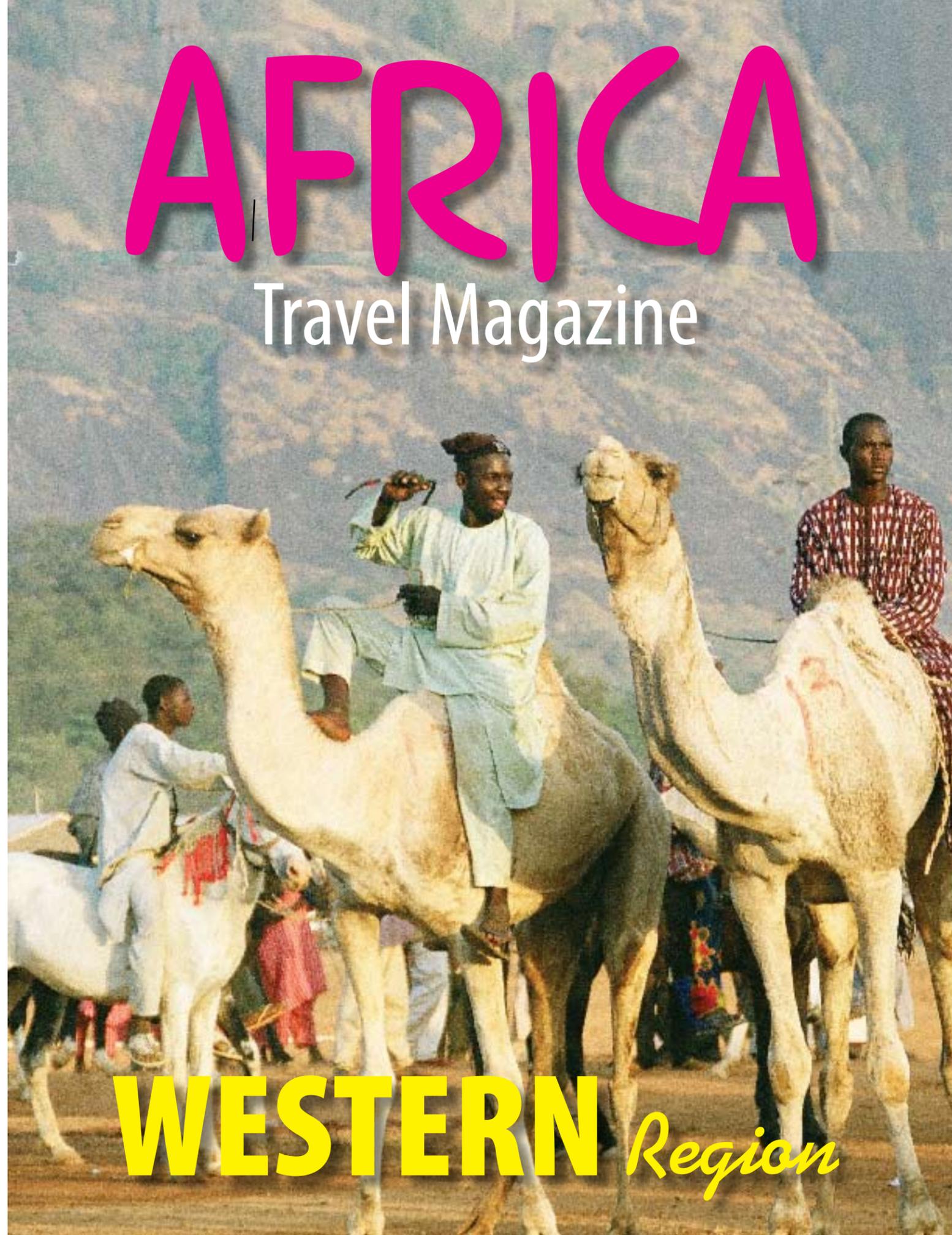
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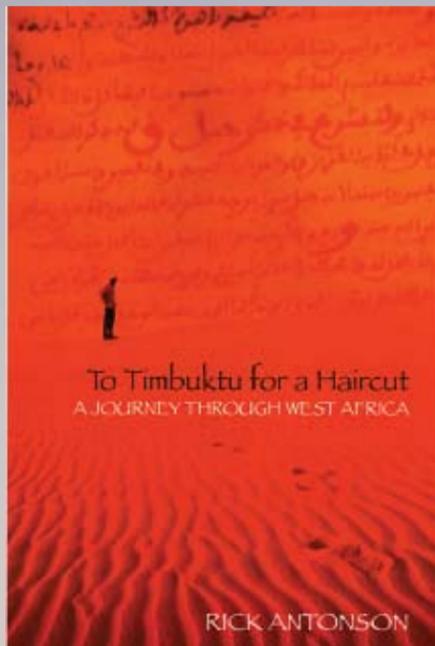
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# AFRICA

## Travel Magazine



**WESTERN** *Region*



## The Road to Timbuktu, the Forbidden City...

The **Africa Travel and Nature Library** features selected chapters from the book "To Timbuktu for a Haircut: A Journey through West Africa," by Author Rick Antonson of Vancouver, Canada. The book is available from [www.amazon.ca](http://www.amazon.ca) and [www.chapters.indigo.ca](http://www.chapters.indigo.ca)

These choice book selections will appear in Western Africa and Global Venues Editions of Africa Travel Magazine, first as digital issues and later in print. To celebrate this innovative project, escorted West African tours inspired by Rick Antonson's book will begin prior to and following the Africa Travel Association's 35th Annual Congress in Banjul, The Gambia. Hosted by ATA member and popular tour operator **Mariama Ludovic de Lys** of Bamako, the tours are described in this issue and detailed on Africa Travel Magazine's Website - [www.africa-ata.org/wa\\_tours.htm](http://www.africa-ata.org/wa_tours.htm)

## What they say about "To Timbuktu for a Haircut," by Rick Antonson



*Historically rich, remote, and once unimaginably dangerous for foreign travellers, Timbuktu still teases with "Find me if you can." Rick Antonson, an internationally respected tourism executive, coaxes the reader with charm and knowledge into joining his personal quest in West Africa. His encounters with entertaining train companions Ebou and Ussegnou, a mysterious cook called Nema, and intrepid guide Zak, all make you want to pack up and leave for Timbuktu tomorrow.*

*As Antonson travels in Senegal and Mali by train, four-wheel drive, river pinasse, camel, and foot, he tells of fourteenth-century legends, nineteenth-century explorers, and today's endangered existence of Timbuktu's 700,000 ancient manuscripts in what scholars have described as the most important archaeological discovery since the Dead Sea Scrolls.*

*Think Eric Newby's A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush or Redmond O'Hanlon's Into the Heart of Borneo and you begin to see what kind of writer Rick Antonson is. To Timbuktu for a Haircut combines wry humour with shrewd observation to deliver an armchair experience that will linger in the mind long after the last page is read.*

*Over the centuries, ignorance has impeded the preservation of the 700,000 Timbuktu manuscripts. A continued lack of awareness facilitates their slow disappearance — the loss of history's book one page at a time. Without these paper treasures we will know immeasurably less about a glorious time for Africa some six hundred years ago.*

*Literally, it is a race against time to save these irreplaceable riches, which in this book are described as "Islamic pamphlets covered with sand ... scholarly pages a phase away from dust." A portion of the author's royalties from To Timbuktu for a Haircut will be donated to the Timbuktu Educational Foundation to assist its Preserve-a-Manuscript Campaign, which can be found at [www.timbuktufoundation.org](http://www.timbuktufoundation.org). Additional information on preserving the Timbuktu manuscripts is available from Libraries of Timbuktu at [www.sum.uio.no/timbuktu](http://www.sum.uio.no/timbuktu).*

*"The remarkable combination of Rick Antonson exploring the ancient mysteries of Timbuktu, matched with the rich culture of Mali that he captures so well makes a page-turner from start to finish. Rick's underlying story confirms my own experience in that amazing land."*

Jerry W. Bird, Editor, Africa Travel Magazine



# TO TIMBUKTU FOR A HAIRCUT: A Journey through West Africa

## The Forbidden City

It surprised me how reachable Timbuktu was. I'd been willing to put up with sporadic travel and delays, to accept cramped and stuffy spaces, to be hot to the point of suffocation, to adjust to communication gaffes, to accept "price surprises," and even to eat sand. None of this was easy for anyone. Nevertheless, "the Forbidden City" was, after all, accessible."

I had taken a day — one day only — in the middle of my life and set it aside for Timbuktu. This was that day and its evening and the night.

The Bouctou Hotel, low and unassuming as a sand dune, seemed to attract litter into piles wherever people sat or squatted. An irascible Mohammed, determined to remain aloof from the scattered groups around him, leaned alone against a tree, where my Land Cruiser stopped just short of his scowl. "Rick!" he shouted at my open window, commanding the scene and muting the hubbub of conversation. I shoved the vehicle's door open and swung my feet to the ground. I was a titch taller than him; his eyes were darker. He held the advantage. "The boat must leave today at three," he smiled.

"Nope." I said this quickly, and noticed that the bystanders gasped that someone would dare disagree with this forceful Arab. The air quickened.

"It would be good," he continued with self-serving self-assurance. "You have lots of time in Timbuktu. Then the pinasse can leave."

In the ensuing silence, he knew that I knew that this change was necessary to make a related itinerary work for him. The River Niger could wait. I said nothing. People looked away. Zak scraped the sand with the heel of his sandal. Then, all eyes turned toward Mohammed. Finally. "Rick?" It was sharp, the way he flung it. "It's not going to happen, Mohammed." I breathed for the crowd. "The boat leaves tomorrow."



## Unesco World Heritage Site

Tagged with labels such as "The Town of 333 Saints," Timbuktu no longer receives accolades. Those who call it home do not share the foreigner's fascination. The city's mystique is powerful only until you arrive. I'd like to pretend it's different, but it isn't.

Nothing prepares the naive visitor for the absence of intrigue quite like the question Malians consistently ask when they find out that one is travelling to Timbuktu: "Why?"

UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites grew in 1988 with the designation of Timbuktu and the specific inclusion of its three mosques, of which the Djinguereber Mosque, built in 1325, is the most prominent. Its reputation rests on its history and its current state of disrepair, as well as for its periodic acceptance of visitors. The Sankoré Mosque, part of a school, attended by 25,000 university students at its peak in the sixteenth century, is also notable. Its colonnades and courtyard were rebuilt in 1582, though it was first constructed a century earlier, and the mosque is cited as "unique earthen architecture." The Sidi Yahia Mosque, which takes its name from one of Timbuktu's saints, is in the best condition of the three, but non-Muslims are denied entry. All three mosques, however, are crumbling away. In Timbuktu, the restoration of monuments is a continuous process, and the drift of earth among them relentless. Timbuktu, once the "Pearl of Africa," also has the dubious distinction of being on the United Nations' List of World Heritage Sites in Danger. Surviving there to this day are homes of the three earliest European explorers to reach the fabled city and live among its inhabitants. Each feared for his personal safety and was eager to return to Europe and relate his achievements. In the nearly two hundred years since then, the mud houses of Laing, Caillié, and Barth have been, as they were



## The Trans-African Routes by Explorers mentioned in Rick Antonson's book

- ..... Mungo Park's Routes, 1795 and 1805
- Robert Adams's Route, 1813
- Gordon Laing's Route, 1825
- · - · - René Caillié's Route, 1827
- Heinrich Barth's Route, 1850-1855





before the arrival of their historic guests, shelter for residents of Timbuktu. And they remain intact, despite the desert's continued attempts to erode them.

Scuffed by history, Mali benignly accepts its diminished status. The Ma-

lian Empire is no more, and the country vies with Bangladesh as the world's poorest nation. Desertification is Timbuktu's greatest threat; Mali's nemesis, the Sahara — with 7 million square kilometres of sand — assaults every man-made structure. The Sahara gave birth to Timbuktu. Now its sands are trying to bury it with a persistence more treacherous than the heat's.

### Priceless Timbuktu Manuscripts

Endangered, too, are the rarest of writings — pieces of history-on-paper that form one of the world's great treasures — the Timbuktu manuscripts. Many crumble at the touch of a well-meaning hand; others wither simply because of their exposure to air. Without them, we will know immeasurably less about a glorious time for Africa, some six hundred years ago. The manuscripts provide a portrait of life, of religion and science, of law and architecture, and of a society that thrived like none other at that time. Before leaving on my journey, while researching Timbuktu's fourteenth-century history and its extensive libraries, I was disheartened to read about thousands of ancient manuscript pages that today lay tattered and unattended in mud homes and deserted buildings. Images of ancient books and furled pages falling apart for lack of care provided a powerful incentive for visiting Timbuktu. My newly gained awareness of their existence, and their peril, infused my journey with a worthy purpose: to find the manuscripts and find a way to help with their preservation.

### Old Timbuktu

Once known as "The Eyes of the Desert," old Timbuktu was quite the sight. In 1933, William Seabrook wrote, "It is, I believe, the only city in the whole wide world which has none of the banal blessings, or curses, of what we choose to call 'white civilization.'" Old Timbuktu, the inner part of the city, was innocuous and compact, its walkways the now-trampled swells of desert. Few markings or signs designated its streets or paths. Travellers and travel books said it would be wise for a visitor to hire a



Caillié had noted another reality in his journal: "I visited the great mosque on the west side of town. The walls are in bad repair, their facing being damaged by rain. Several buttresses are raised against the walls to support them. I ascended the tower, though its staircase is almost demolished." Since 1325, when the poet and architect Es Saheli created this unique design, Timbuktu's most important mosque has needed constant reworking and repair. Wooden support beams poke through its slanting walls, acting as stabilizers for the wall and for mudding crews. Though Mansa Musa directed its construction upon his return from Mecca, it was Saheli, brought from Egypt, who created the striking pyramid base that now defines Timbuktu, Djenné, and Mali generally in photographs. Musa

local guide, if only to rid oneself of pestering youngsters. I asked Zak to come with me that morning. We walked away from the Bouctou Hotel's drabness to a wider dirt road and along its rim into the old city, a district neglected by charm.

### Famous Landmarks

The Djinguereber Mosque was an exceptional find, though it does not loom physically as it does historically. To imagine that it had once been a centre of learning, filled with fervent adherents and peopled night and day with scholars as well as those in prayer, paints a picture of a vast house of worship. But we found it was not much over twice the height of the other buildings in the neighbourhood of the Place de l'Indépendance, off the Boulevard Askia Mohammed, and that it had a modest entrance. Centuries earlier, Leo Africanus wrote, "There is a most stately temple to be seen." In those days it must have been more impactful on its surroundings.

also encouraged broader belief in the tenets of Islam, and building libraries and universities known as madrasas, most of them no longer in existence.

### A Rare Opportunity

Non-Muslims are generally not invited into mosques, so when the opportunity arose to enter this one, we took it. The caretaker waited inside the house of prayer, his mood as solemn as the dusty light.

Quiet. The caretaker gestured to me to shed my leather thongs. Streams of sunlight were the only other intruders as he showed Zak and me along the passage where prayers were uttered. He indicated privacy hollows, fortified by wood and carved mud, where worshippers made penance. We entered three inner courts. Rows of pillars, twenty-five in all, stood in an east-to-west alignment. Zak whispered the translation as we walked. "Islam too has pillars. Five. Primary belief, 'Is no god but Allah,' and Mohammed his prophet."

"Second, Muslims face Mecca and pray. Must at daybreak, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset. Again nightfall."

"And they give alms," I added, happy to contribute.

Walking within the mosque, with no one else about, the austere expanse made it seem less a place of worship and more a magic hall where, when I stopped and let Zak drift on, I could imagine a throng of prayer-makers, hear the shout of calm from the Imam and, in my own way, feel compelled to kneel and give thanks.

"Another, Ramadan," Zak said, no longer repeating the caretaker's words, and only then noticing me pondering prayer behind him. But I'd heard, and nodded, so he continued. "Commemorates first revelation to Mohammed. Muslims fast. One month. Dawn to dusk."

"And Mecca," I added, to complete the fifth pillar of their faith.

"Yes," Zak said. "Every Muslim. Pilgrimage. If they afford. If healthy." Religion has long been a travel motivator: the seeing of sites, the paying of tributes, homage given to deities or a pilgrimage. Faith led to travel as surely as a current carries water. If you are fortunate, you travel with two





religions: your own and that of your host, from whom you learn. Many people travel to learn the rituals of other religions rather than to comprehend the beliefs underlying these rituals. “Zak,” I asked, “do you believe in God?” “Yes,” he said. He did not elaborate.

The caretaker left us alone, and we ascended the mosque’s stairs to the roof. The architect Es Saheli had invented the mud brick, a revolutionary technique in a land where previously mud and weeds were slapped on wood frames. The stability of this brick, augmented by upgrades over the centuries, accounted for the sturdiness of the stairs. Caillié too had climbed those stairs, two centuries ago.

### Life and Commerce in Old Timbuktu

Throughout old Timbuktu, narrow, shallow ditches line the centre of every street. We strolled with one eye to the ground and noticed the locals stepping carefully to avoid dipping a foot into those sewers. It meant we were not able to fully appreciate the buildings that bordered the walkways.

Leo Africanus’s memories of Timbuktu inspired centuries of envy. “Here are many shops of artificers and merchants, and especially of such as weave linen and cotton cloth.” We did not find that splendour; rather, we witnessed the eking out of a life.

I asked Zak, “What does everyone do here?”

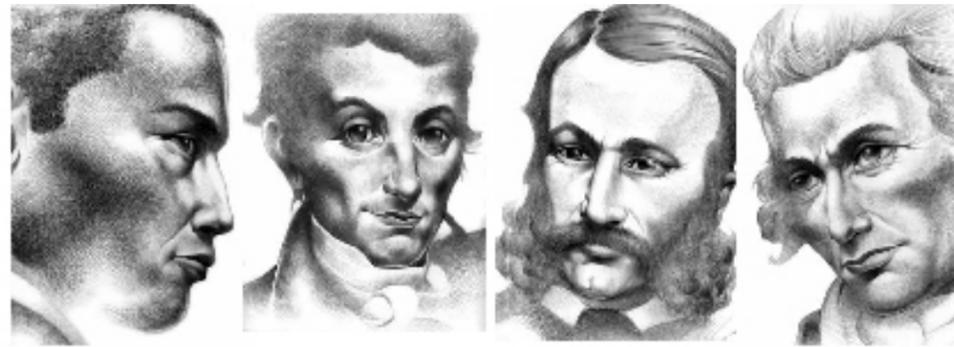
“They sell.” It was true. Everyone sold. I wanted the guy who sold haircuts.

But the shops were not defined. Nothing said, “Come in ...” Nothing on the streets recognized the visitor or the need for rest, or refreshment. Residents set a pot of still-cooking food on the bunting of their homes, or used a table to promote their wares: fried fish, individual cigarettes, old tools. Bread was stacked three loaves high and four deep on a rickety chair in front of the flat-sided mud house where it was baked. I bought one and handed half to Zak.

Children played tag, the world’s most affordable game. Centuries have transformed the personality of Timbuktu and her people. Africanus noted, “The inhabitants are people of a gentle and cheerful disposition.” He continued with something I’d not noticed, that they “spend a great part of the night in singing and dancing.” Those were the days, my friend ...

The sun dictated that we hide. Zak and I dawdled over fried chicken, smoked tomatoes, and what tasted like sawdust at the Poulet d’Or. Sheltered from the midday heat, we snoozed a little in our straight-back chairs. My thoughts drifted to the morning’s conversation with Mohammed, in which I’d challenged him. He was unkind, arrogant. “Police, your embassy, these people can do nothing to me.” I did not agree, but it was his country. I asked him, “What if a traveller wrote about you? It might not be favourable.”

He was contemptuous. “People can write whatever they want. It is nothing. I have no care for it.” He acknowledged that the hotels and transport



Quest for Timbuktu: Explorers featured in the book and route map:  
From left, Robert Adams, Rene-August Caillié, Heinrich Barth, Mungo Park

were not as he’d portrayed them and agreed to reimburse me: “I’ll do that.” I scribbled an address on a piece of paper and handed it to him. He said, “I will look at everything and wire money Western Union to Janice. You and me can then meet in Ségou on the twenty-sixth.”

Mohammed might still shirk his responsibilities, but I did not want that possibility to colour my mood, to spoil my lunchtime rest, or to detract from further adventures in Timbuktu.

I sensed that my greatest discoveries were ahead of us that hot afternoon. Hidden down old roads were the places that Laing, Caillié, and Barth had temporarily called home; I had to find them. More poignantly, there was my immediate need to find even a portion of the Timbuktu manuscripts. I knew that within this old city, centuries of neglect had allowed a wealth of literary and scientific writings to age, deteriorate, and disappear.

Would this day provide a way for me to help reverse that trend, to be a part of recovering and saving these documents?

Lunch was over, and so was my reverie. “Zak,” I said, “let’s go find the manuscripts.”

We headed out to search for the bibliothèque. For thirty minutes we stepped carefully around garbage, urine, and feces on the streets of Timbuktu. The scene did not reconcile with Caillié’s description: “The streets are clean, and sufficiently wide to permit three horsemen to pass abreast.” After we had walked into the same empty square for the third time, I was becoming exasperated.

“Zak, do you know where the bibliothèque is?”

“Here,” he said with a guide’s overconfidence. He led us into yet another alley, and for ten minutes I followed. We circled nicely. Then the same deserted surroundings appeared.

“Zak, have you ever been to the bibliothèque?”

“No.” He sulked, unwilling to admit defeat.

“Do you know if there is one?” “No.”

### Search for Historical Residences

I had thought that patience was my strong suit, but it was running low. Near us was a dilapidated warehouse. Its loading platform gave us some shade. “Zak, sit down,” I said. “Listen.”

He cast his eyes at the ground.

“There are a few things that are going to happen here,” I began. He listened as a child would under reprimand. “One, we’re going to find

Laing’s house. Two, Caillié’s home. Three, Barth’s place. They say it’s a museum.” I trumped that many fingers in front of him. “Then we’re going to find the bibliothèque.” I flipped a fourth finger to catch up. “Zak, if we don’t, you get to tell Mohammed that I’m staying tomorrow in Timbuktu.”

He nodded, the fear of Mohammed evident on his face, and then he smiled, up for the alternative task of helping me find these places.

“And,” I added, my full hand flat, the count clear: “We’ll find the centre where I can get my passport stamped.”

“I don’t know where that is,” he confessed.

One of the demons of travel is hesitation. “Let’s ask,” I suggested.

“No, we’ll find it.” (I read that there’s scientific proof that males of our species don’t ask for directions. This was proved by the fact it takes a

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thousand sperm to find and fertilize one egg.)

I spotted a boy watching us nearby, and asked him. He looked halfway down the street, at a bend, and there it was: Gordon Laing's place. His guidance to Caillié's home was clear, and his directions to Barth's sounded unimpeachable. I should have hired a local guide.

### Visiting the Laing Residence

Laing's house was before us. A crooked Mission Culturelle plaque was stuck to the middle of a mud wall, and, to my delight, a carved Moorish door was lodged open.

In this alcove of time there was silence. This building had been Laing's home for most of his stay in 1826. Now owned by a local, it did not seek passers-by. As I stood before it, there was no one in view to ask if I might enter, so I did under the pretense of obtaining that permission. The mud walls did not differentiate this building from other homes; neither did the height of its ceiling nor its crowded passageway set it apart. It did have a notable street presence accented from the second storey by two Moorish windows of carved wood.

"The Timbuctoo Mission," as Laing's expedition was officially known, reflected its leader's ambition. It offered the journey he sought and the fame he craved. Laing complained in his writings from the desert that he was continuously pressed for money by those he'd hired and already paid. He wrote that one intransigent chief "insisted I should go no further if I did not pay." Death was common in these parts, and robbery convenient. Threats, putrid food, hostilities, and ransom requests were impediments long registered by Africans, Arabs, and the few Europeans who'd ventured this far.

Laing arrived at Timbuktu in a terrible state, destitute after being attacked in the desert by Tuareg, shot in the side with a musket ball, slashed on his upper leg, crippled by a knife thrust that sliced his ear and cut his face. His companions fled, and the explorer was left for dead. The rest of the caravan's merchants were unharmed. They patched him up as well as they could, lashed him to his camel with rope, and let him trail the caravan. They believed he would soon die.

Laing survived the one-thousand-kilometre trek to Timbuktu. With what energy he could muster, and despite the squalid surroundings, he sent optimistic dispatches with native couriers accompanying the northbound caravans. Once he was settled in Timbuktu his wounds healed slowly, and meals of fish and bread helped his recovery.

Only one of Laing's letters from Timbuktu arrived in Tripoli at that time. He wrote of Timbuktu that the city had "completely met" his expecta-



Using his own turban, they strangled the man who loved Africa and decapitated him. His remains were left uncovered in the desert. Birds, insects, and sand had their way with him. Laing's servant, who survived the attack, over the next two years made his way to Tripoli, where he reportedly delivered some of Laing's letters and told of his murder. The explorer's journals, which are thought to have been exceptional records of observation and history, were, however, missing. Often presumed to still exist, no trace of these artifacts has yet been uncovered.

Laing's former home in Timbuktu was on a street corner and was two storeys high. The house appeared vacant on the lower level; not abandoned, just not in use. Finding no one to give me permission to enter, I walked up a narrow stairway to the second floor. A shaft of sun picked its way through an ornamental window frame and cast an eerie pall on the room's three-metre-by-four-metre space. There was a complete absence of furniture or any evidence of occupation. Out of all of the potential ghosts of Timbuktu's European explorers, Laing's was the most likely to stay in the vicinity. I imagined the two of us sharing a moment in that dank space, separated by 178 years, and I envisioned him writing his last journal notes in this room: "I fear I shall be involved in much

tions. I chose to believe that Laing had penned that line within the walls where I stood. Those words contrasted with his later accounts portraying "bitter disappointment" with Timbuktu. He was under constant pressure from the Fulan sultan to leave, though he had freedom of movement about the town. He sketched a city plan of Timbuktu and spent his time "searching the records in the town, which are abundant." This man, the first European to knowingly stay in Timbuktu, spent five weeks in the city before receiving permission to leave. A few days out of Timbuktu, heading for Europe, Laing was attacked by his African protectors.

trouble after leaving Timbuktu."

### Finding René Caillié's house was exhilarating.

It stood (if this can be said of an often re-mudded structure, 174 years after his visit) to the west of the fifteenth-century Sidi Yahia Mosque. The building, still lived in, was not set for visitors. I was more in awe of the man than the structure, yet it was a Mecca-like destination for me.

Caillié has been called "one of the oddest figures in the history of travel." He departed for Timbuktu (calling it "the mysterious city which was the object of all my curiosity") full of ambition and a sense of adventure, and was unknown to the other prominent competitors seeking the glory of first arriving in the fabled city. He travelled without official sanction, having been refused support for his "preposterous" plan. He studied the Koran, learned to speak Arabic, and presented himself, convincingly, as an Egyptian born of Arab parents. In that guise, he ventured through hostile land, attired as an Arab.

No one responded to my asking, in French, "Is anyone home?" Zak, bemused, offered up Bambara's version of the phrase. The door was ajar and I sensed it bid me enter. For the moments I spent in Caillié's former home, I was a tourist in history, not a traveller in the present. With a deferential nod to the past, I walked into the open part of the house and replicated a two-century-old sliver of time, feeling like an imposter. While I travelled far beyond the bounds of my own skimpy knowledge, Caillié travelled with an understanding of places and lands far beyond that of his contemporaries, even beyond that of the local guides who passed him on to more local locals when he journeyed across their territory. He battled scurvy and deprivation. His urge to be self-sufficient was at the heart of his explorations. On camel, with the assumed name of Abdallahi, the twenty-seven-year-old son of a French baker approached Timbuktu from the port of Kabara, now Korioumé, riding north under the watchful Tuareg. "My idea of the city's grandeur and wealth did not correspond with the mass of mud houses, surrounded by arid plains of jaundiced white sands," he observed. "I looked around and found that the sight before me did not answer my expectations. I had formed a totally different idea of the grandeur and wealth of Timbuctoo."

When he arrived in 1828, Caillié heard details of Laing's desert misfortunes, his arrival in the city and his death, and he discovered that the explorer had lived in the house behind his only two years earlier. Caillié continued to avoid arousing suspicion of his Christianity. His host, Sheikh Al Bekây, provided sanctuary, freedom of movement, and food while Caillié rested in Timbuktu. Caillié's candour still resonates: "I cannot help contemplating with astonishment the extraordinary city before me, created solely by the wants of commerce, and destitute of every resource except what its accidental position as a place of exchange affords." He resolved to leave the city.

His desire to leave Timbuktu, however, exceeded the willingness of his hosts to let him go. It was Caillié's goal to travel to Morocco to make the outside world aware of his amazing accomplishments. His efforts to persuade his hosts to allow his departure became increasingly assertive,



and he was eventually given leave. Four days' travel away from that Timbuktu house, en route to Tangiers, Caillié's caravan stopped near the camp where Laing was killed. There, the Moors showed him confirmation of that terrible deed.

René Caillié was the first European to return safely home from Timbuktu. He received the Société de Géographie de France award of ten thousand francs, offered in 1826 to the first European to reach Timbuktu and return safely. It was an award he'd heard of in

Freetown, Sierra Leone, and of which he'd said: "Dead or alive, it shall be mine ..." In addition, France's King Charles X made him Chevalier of the Legion of Honour.

Caillié's residence in La Mystérieuse had been short, his observations picaresque, and the eventual telling of his rediscovery reliant on jotted memories and scrupulously kept notations, secretly scribbled after excusing himself from the company of others, requesting time for quiet meditation. Although his writings covered his entire travels, they were not able to persuade a skeptical world that Timbuktu was without the charm and stature created by legend. Controversy would swirl around Caillié's book, *Travels Through Central Africa to Timbuctoo*, which appeared in both France and England in 1830. But public acclaim continually fought with scholarly disdain. As Brian Gardner noted, "René Caillié's book did little to stop the Timbuctoo Rush."

### **Boctou's Well Still in Use**

Circling the Sidi Yahia Mosque, I inadvertently found Bouctou's well. My guess is that most visitors don't find it, and don't bother to believe that the propitious well is even marked. Yet that hole in the ground at my feet was the origin of the name Timbuktu.

I politely shooed Zak away. I wished to be alone in my travel fantasy. The two keepers of the place, oblivious to my presence, talked in their sleep. The Ethnographic Museum encircled its namesake "Tin," the Berber language's grammatical kin to "well." A recent construction, it showcased Tuareg and Songhai artifacts of music and costume. Standing over the well of the woman whose name became the byword for remote, I stared into the hole, its shallow depth blocked by mud. At the end of a rope swung a camel-skin bucket that dropped from a wooden winch, itself secured by tree branch props. I looked within the well and sensed Bouctou contemplating her distorted navel.

Zak sloughed along a block away and waved to me.

Bolstered by our logistical success in matching a street name with an explorer's home, it made sense to Zak that we chance Barth's Lane to find the house of the man who finally convinced skeptics that Timbuktu's fame was founded on exaggerated claims.

### **Heinrich Barth in Timbuktu**

Sweating and covered with a day's dust, we stopped outside the home of Heinrich Barth, to the northeast east side of the Sidi Yahia Mosque. I breathed deeply. Barth's stay in Timbuktu was the signature piece in his five-year crossing of the Sahara. If there was a hint that Timbuktu might have a tourism future, this house was it: we paid an entrance fee. Pictures on the walls had descriptions in English, French, and German. Barth's maps and sketches were displayed. Framing was elusive, but some of the documents were protected behind glass, where the heat had melded them to the surface. A pamphlet on Barth's exploits was for sale. Was the furniture his? Did he slouch in that corner, surrounded by curious and untrusting observers looking on in silence? Did the tall German feel the urge to hunch over, given the lowness of the ceiling, as I did? Was the air as tight in his lungs as it felt in mine?

Barth arrived in Timbuktu with a debilitating fever and recuperated as a

guest in this house, close to Sheikh Al Bekây. He stayed here for the first month, during which the competing authority, the local chief, who challenged the sheikh for power over the Christian, made many attempts to expel Barth. Among other reasons, it was suspected that he was Laing's son. The result of this competition between two conflicting and influential local rulers was that Barth was unable to move freely about the city. Sheikh Al Bekây eventually moved him to an encampment in the desert, from where Barth, on occasions, visited Timbuktu's mosques and spent hours among the townspeople and visiting the "lively markets." But political pressure mounted for this symbol of foreign intrusion, the infidel, to leave. It culminated in a late-night conference between the



sheikh, the Tuareg, and the Fulani. The Fulani gained control over Barth and held him for two months in another camp while he tried to resolve the compromises that kept him from departing.

He remained a total of six months, a stay that resulted in the most thorough European-recorded observations of Timbuktu, including notes on the city's commerce and customs. Barth undertook language and vocabulary documentation, and wrote of tribes, place names, and daily habits. His restricted movement meant that he had time for letter writing. Half-way through his visit he wrote, "You will have heard, I think, of my happy arrival in this ill-famed place." And, predating today's urban anti-smoking bylaws, he noted, "Amongst other things they have smoking a capital crime, so that even in Timbuctoo, except near the house of Al Bekây, a man smoking is in great danger ..."

His prolonged absence, and the African rumour trade, resulted in an erroneous report of Barth's death in Berlin. His obituary was published, and all hope of knowing his whereabouts disappeared. He was still 2,700 kilometres from safety. Sheikh Al Bekây, whose father had protected Laing in Timbuktu, travelled with Barth along the River Niger's north shore for weeks to ensure his safety. Finally, in September 1855, five years and five months after his journey began, Barth wrote from his north African camp: "I set out on my last march on the African soil in order to enter the town of Tripoli."

London and the world responded excitedly to Barth's triumph. Oxford bestowed an honorary degree on him, the Geographical Society of Paris awarded its Gold Medal, and Queen Victoria presented the Order of Bath. Heinrich Barth became president of the Berlin Geographical Society. But his five-volume work, *Travels in North and Central Africa*, although popularly received, disappointed its readers. Barth's reputation as a scholar and scientist was strong enough that his portrayal of Timbuktu as a mundane and dilapidated backwater was believed. He validated Caillié's descriptions of Timbuktu's unimportance in modern African trade. Barth's great achievement was that the public and politicians finally accepted the truth about Timbuktu. The myths of the "City of Majesty" began to lose their duel with reality.

We dawdled in the dust, letting our accomplishments settle in with satisfaction. "Thanks," I said to Zak, who had recovered his confidence.

In a narrow street, above the doorway of a building, hung a faded sign, tinged with mud that had been whipped high in the rains and dried by the wind: Bibliothèque Manuscrits — Al-Wangari. Feeling euphoric, I pointed to it and smiled at Zak. Just then, a blue robe appeared on the path, seemingly brought by the breeze. It came closer to reveal a tailored fit on the lanky frame of a scholar.

**STORY CONTINUES ON PAGE 29**



# OUR SPECTACULAR CULTURAL TOURS OF A LIFETIME FEATURE THE TWO DAY 'FESTIVAL AU DESERT' IN NORTHERN MALI

*Photos and tour itineraries by Mariama Lydovic de Lys of Bamako, Mali..*

When our Vancouver colleague Rick Antonson, author of "To Timbuktu for a Haircut," went to the map of Africa and settled on Senegal and Mali for his coming trip, he not only caught our attention, but his latest efforts would shed some positive light on a part of the Continent that deserves the spotlight, even though in recent



years it has not been considered a prime tourist location. Those interested in history and cultural tourism know that there are three main World Heritage sites. These are Timbuktu, Djenne and Bandiagara. In this and coming editions of Africa Travel Magazine, we will treat our readers to many choice excerpts from Rick's exciting book, along with a selection of tours by Mariama Ludovic de Lys that you can take this year or later. Most follow the same route Rick Antonson took as he was



gathering background on fascinating area and city that has been shrouded in mystery for centuries.  
**About Rick Antonson's book**  
 "To Timbuktu for a Haircut is a great read - a little bit of Bill Bryson, a little bit of Michael Palin, and quite a lot of Bob Hope on the road to Timbuktu." - Professor Geoffrey Lipman, Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations World Tourism Organization. Historically rich, remote, and once unimaginably dangerous for travellers, Timbuktu still teases with "Find me if you can." Rick Antonson's encounters with entertaining train companions Ebou and Usseignou, a mysterious cook called Nema, and intrepid guide Zak will



## OUR TOURS FOLLOW THE STEPS OF RICK ANTONSON IN HIS FASCINATING BOOK, "TO TIMBUKTU FOR A HAIRCUT."

tomorrow. As Antonson travels in Senegal and Mali by train, four-wheel drive, river pinasse, camel, and foot, he tells of fourteenth-century legends, eighteenth-century explorers, and today's endangered existence of Timbuktu's 700,000 ancient manuscripts in what

scholars have described as the most important archaeological discovery since the Dead Sea Scrolls.

### Cultural Diversity

Here, diverse Western African cultures reflect the empires and kingdoms that

day Senegal and Mali, and their neighbors. over the centuries. As Mariama Ludovic de Lys mentions in the introduction to the series of tours, "Between Senegal and Mali, Senegal is undoubtedly known as the most touristic country in West Africa. It has the advantage of an



extraordinary ecosystem owing to its position on the junction of the oceanic, desert and tropical climates. From the pure sand beaches to the borders of the savanna, and from the rainy Fouta Djalon foothills to the edge of the Sahara desert, there is very varied scenery in Senegal:

More than 30 nature reserves and national parks, astonishing lagoons and beaches as pretty the ones as the others.

Beyond this natural beauty one will also discover the typical colonial architecture of its towns Dakar and Saint Louis "the Eternal town" which

their authenticity.

### Slave Trading Era

We cannot visit Senegal without remembering the Goree Island with its history deeply marked by the sad slave trade. You will then cross the border to go into the neighboring country, Mali which gathers some historical cities (Djenne, Timbuktu, Mopti...) and one of most astonishing people in Africa "The Dogon". They cut off since from the centuries to the chaotic universe of cliffs of Bandiagara as in a fortress and they knew to safeguard their culture which is deeply influenced by a single cosmogony. This trip mixes nature and culture and we invite you through it to experience the hidden charm of the authentic Africa. National projects

currently being pursued in Mali seek to open up and develop tourism resources, so as to allow new as well as existing forms of tourism. In terms of tourism development, which heads the Malian government's list of priorities, ecotourism combined with conventional tourism, and a policy of utilizing the festivals held in various regions as tourism resources, are projected to contribute to an increase in visitor numbers. Steps are being taken in various parts of Mali to set up a pleasant environment geared towards tourism. In addition to several hundred hotels 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. Active steps are now being taken in the wake of economic liberalization and the privatization of various government bodies, to improve facilities, train staff, and support and manage tourism resources by means of tourism associations and other organizations.

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BAMAKO /MALI

# AUTHOR RICK ANTONSON INTERVIEWED ON TRAVELTALK RADIO



**Sandy Dhuyvetter:** My name is Sandy Dhuyvetter of TravelTalkRADIO. We are talking to Rick Antonson. Rick is President and CEO of Tourism Vancouver in his day job, but he did something wonderful. I shouldn't say this is your night job, but did you do it at night? Was it labor of love? What was it, this wonderful book that you wrote called To Timbuktu for a Haircut?

**Rick Antonson:** Well when I first went to West Africa I wasn't thinking about doing a book, and then sometimes you just find that something is emerging, and that's where it was with this. I had a remarkable trip particularly in Mali, but also in the country of Senegal on the way to the country of Mali where Timbuktu is, and I found an absolute fascination with the old manuscripts from hundreds and hundreds of years ago that are still there and in many cases falling apart, and there are some strong actions trying to preserve those manuscripts, that intrigued me and the early explorers, but it was such a remarkable part of the world that I found I was writing, and eventually I realized there is a book in it, and that's where To Timbuktu for a Haircut came from, and it covers the journey through West Africa.

**Sandy:** It's awesome. Did you do it for therapeutic reasons too, by any chance? I mean you work really hard I know, was this kind of like a little bit of a diversion for you?

**Rick:** I think one finds the time to do the things that are important to them in life, whether it's a sporting activity or it's an avocation, of some other sort. I do find a nice release in the telling of travel antidotes, but importantly here I have met such remarkable people, and it was their stories that I worked to try and tell, and as I did that I realized that it came together book-length and then publisher expressed interest in it, and there we were. The book was on its way to coming out, and thankfully it has been well-received by the public, and people like Africa Travel Magazine and just really fine supporters of it, and that gave out a validation that I couldn't bring on my own, and I just love that.

**Sandy:** Speaking of the Africa Travel Magazine, we put them in our newsletter every week and that of course is published by Jerry Bird and Muguette Goufrani. They do such a fascinating job and a spectacular job, we've actually been able to travel all over Africa with them and we were so excited when they told us about you and the book, and we are forever thankful for that. Did you actually get a haircut in Timbuktu?

**Rick:** I did, and the title comes from when I was a child, 5 years old, my brother and I would say every time dad left home we would say "where you going daddy where you going?" and he would say "I'm going to Timbuktu to get my haircut" and as a kid, that just brought whatever or any notions that I had of travel, and I presumed because he came back so quickly, whether he was going to church or the store, he always said "I'm going to Timbuktu to get my haircut," he returned and one day I thought, well, one day I better go there and get my haircut, so I did. Paid a dollar for it.

**Sandy:** Oh that is fascinating, it is so hilarious, my father always said to me "I'm going to see a man about a horse" and he said that no matter where he went, so that is hilarious that our dads just had that little line! And I love that you made a book out of this. When did it actually get published?

**Rick:** It came out a year ago, published by Dundurn Publishing of Toronto, and available all over the world because of the online ordering that people can do nowadays, so if it's not in bookstores it's available online, as it is easy to Google and see the reviews. Part of what became important about it being a book was, as I mentioned the people the countries that I was traveling through, it was such a sense of being welcomed, of people without in any cases much, what we would call in the way of comforts, who had such genuine spirits, such an openness, such an eagerness to share and talk about where they live and how they live, that I found myself quite humbled by the entire experience. I had a fellow named Zack who was my guide, he was from the Dogon?, he was a young fellow and through him, I saw his country but I learned from him, the way he spoke, and funny, because I worked at trying to practice my French, and he one day looked at me and he said "Reek?" its what he called me, "Reek, I have broken English, you have unfixable French."

**Sandy:** All well what are friends for after all.

**Rick:** And things like that are when you see the coming together of their society and our society and you shed all of your prejudgment and you just try to be open. What I found there is that they welcomed people who wanted to know about their lives and their countries, and that's what gave me this book.

**Sandy:** Well, I could see you doing maybe a book even on tourism in Vancouver; you have a lot of stories up there too.

**Rick:** Well it's just an amazing destination, and with the Olympics coming, ones reminded of the admonition "one should be involved in the great events of their time" and this is our great event, and Vancouver and Whistler and British Columbia will just do a absolutely extraordinary job of hosting the world. The Vancouver Organizing Committee for the games is just stellar. This has been now a dozen years in the works, it's about to happen on February 12th of 2010.

**Sandy:** Rick, thank you so much for joining us, we've had a great job talking about Vancouver and of course your book, To Timbuktu for a Haircut, we will talk soon I hope!

**Rick:** Thank you very much, would love to talk again



## About Rick Antonson

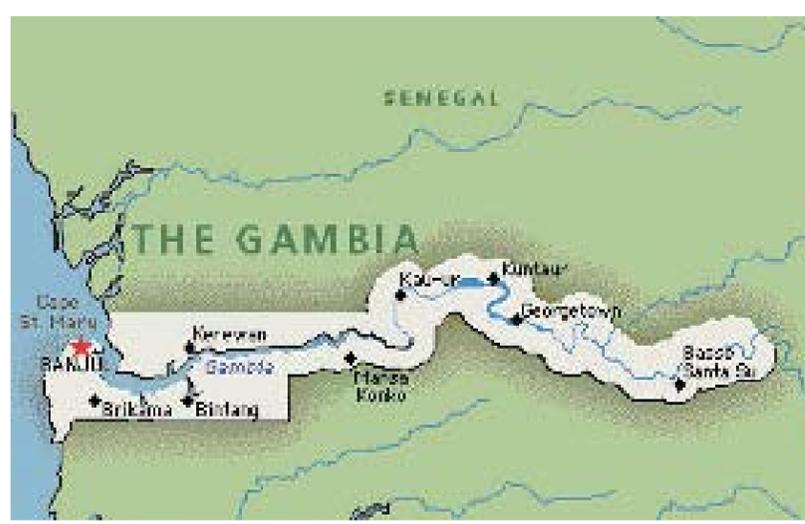
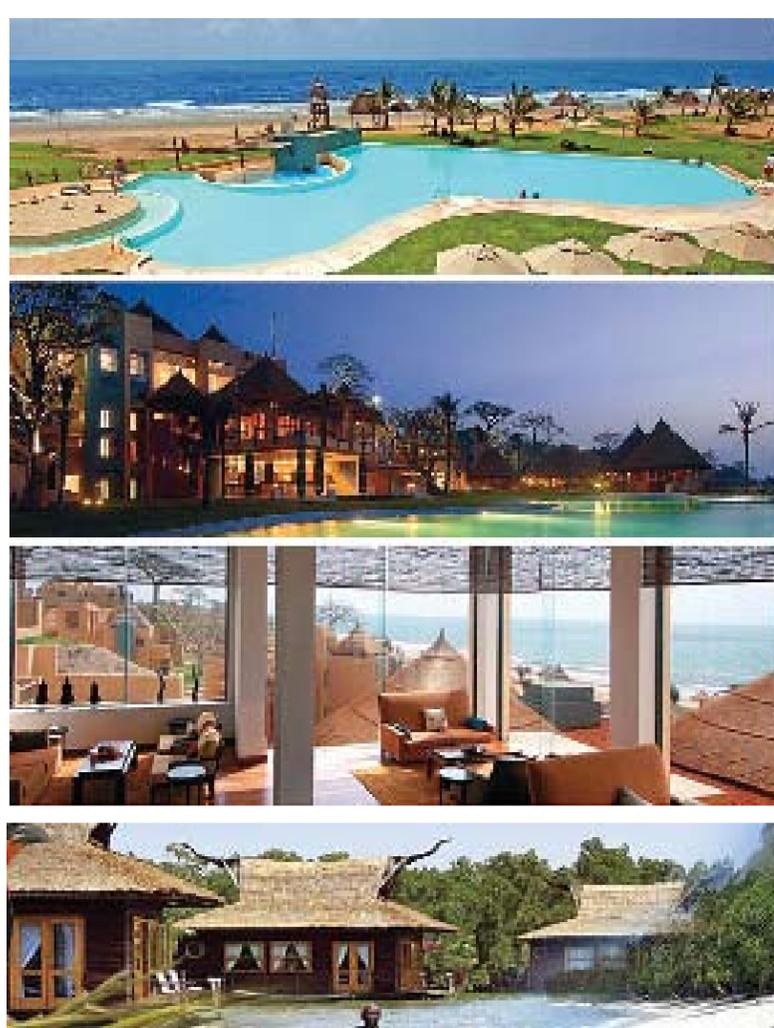
Tourism Vancouver president and CEO Rick Antonson travels for a living, "flying a hundred thousand kilometres each year for two decades," moving from conference to air-conditioned hotel room with seasoned thoughtlessness. When it came time for him to take a month-long solo expedition, however, he decided almost on a whim to journey to one of the most fabled -- and forbidding -- destinations in the world: Timbuktu.

Few places are quite as evocative and mysterious. A centre of Islamic scholarship and culture during the 15th and 16th centuries, Timbuktu has long been a beacon for travellers. Once thought of as a source of unimaginable riches, the city today is impoverished, threatened by the encroaching Sahara Desert.

For this trip, Antonson decided against his usual air travel and instead made the journey on the ground: by train, boat, car, camel and foot. The result, as recounted in his impressive new book, To Timbuktu for a Haircut, is a quixotic quest, alternately funny and thought-provoking.

Readers follow his journey chronologically as he moves toward the city and then as it recedes behind him. His account is threaded through with historical and cultural information. Curiously, his encounter with the city itself is almost anticlimactic. He clearly relishes the journey, and his fellow travellers, more than the destination.

From a ride up the River Niger to an open-air music festival in the desert, from the sudden close friendships that bloom during such travel to the machinations of an unscrupulous tour coordinator who seems intent on foiling his travel goals at every juncture, Antonson handles the joys and occasional frustrations of his trip in vivid, straightforward prose and with a wry sense of humour.



# I AM THE GAMBIA, HOST COUNTRY FOR THE AFRICA TRAVEL ASSOCIATION 35TH ANNUAL CONGRESS, MAY 17-20, 2010

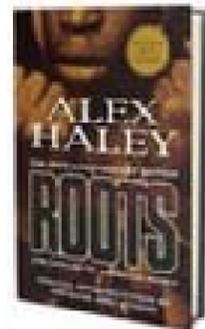


I am the West African Republic of The Gambia, proud host country for the Africa Travel Association 35th Annual Congress in May, 2010. I was named for one the continent's most navigable rivers. I occupy a narrow area on the Gambia River, surrounded by Senegal to the north, east and south. My western boundary along the Atlantic Coast offers visitors some of Africa's most beautiful beaches with warm coastal waters and a tropical climate that is warm and humid year round.

**My Vision 2020 Plan**  
A former British colony, I be-

came independent on February 18, 1965y. My President, H.E. Yaya A.J.J. Jammeh instituted "The Gambia Incorporated" a vision 2020 plan that aims to transform me into middle income status by offering a stable investment environment, an efficient banking sector, and a competitive private sector.

**My Ethnic Roots**  
Many Americans know about me thanks to Alex Haley's bestseller and epic television docu-drama "Roots," which tells the story of Kunta Kinte and his ancestral homeland of Juffureh. My population of 1.5 million includes



the Mande, rural Mandinka and Atlantic peoples - Wolof and Fulani. They live harmoniously in mixed communities, freely exercising their religious and cultural traditions. My people are also widely recognized for their genuine friendliness and hospitality. While English is the official language, Wolof and Fulani are spoken in towns and Mandinka in rural areas. About 85% of my population is Muslim, with a fairly large Christian minority. My capital, main port and and commercial center along the River Gambia is Banjul ( 300,000 population).

**My Economy**

Tourism and Agriculture account for 23% of my gross domestic product and employ 75% of my workforce. In 2000, around 100,000 tourists visited me, providing an estimated 10,000 Gambians with stable employment.

**Gateway to Success**  
Fishing and manufacturing industries offer opportunities for expansion, with plastics and confection-



aries as key products. I am an important entry point for goods to be distributed to neighboring countries - the logical "gateway" into West Africa for the trans-shipment of imports and exports. .

**My Rich Heritage**  
The World Heritage Committee In-scribes 24 New Sites on the World Heritage List, including the West African Re-



public of The Gambia. New natural sites include James Island and related locations, which present a testimony to the main periods and facets of the encounter between Africans and Europeans along the River Gambia, a continuum that stretched from pre-colonial and pre-slavery times to independence. The site is particularly significant for its relation to the beginning and the abolition of the slave trade. It also documents early access to the interior of Africa.

*Photos from top left: Coastal resorts, Map of the Gambia, Arch 22 at the entrance to Banjul, Banjul International Airport , Albert Market, Banjul King Fahad Mosque. Sources - Wikipedia, Sheraton, The Gambia. To learn more about me check out www.visitthegambia*



# ABOUT THE AFRICA TRAVEL ASSOCIATION 35TH ANNUAL CONGRESS

NEW YORK, NY: Honorable Nancy Seedy

Njie, The Gambia's Minister of Tourism and Culture, and Edward Bergman, Executive Director of the Africa Travel Association (ATA), today announced that the Republic of The Gambia will host ATA's 35th Annual Congress in the capital city of Banjul in May 2010.

"It is with great pride that we are once again partnering with ATA to invite the world to visit and explore The Gambia," said Minister Njie. "The Gambian government places great priority on tourism, which has contributed significantly to our country's growth and stability. We hope that the ATA Congress will help us continue to promote our country in new marketplaces and attract new investment in the sector."

### Smiling Coast

The Gambia, known as the "Smiling Coast of Africa," is famous for its luxurious beach resorts, quaint fishing villages and magnificent coastline, but there is much more to the affordable and safe West African country, including peaceful and friendly peo-

ple, eco-tourism, sports fishing, bird watching and safaris, music, dancing and traditional wrestling matches, and visiting trans-Atlantic slave trade sites.

"The Gambia has made amazing progress with its travel and tourism industry by building public and private-sector partnerships, where the government creates the conditions for the private sector to invest in the industry," said Bergman. "By combining The Gambia's ability to attract tourist arrivals, particularly from Europe, with ATA's ability to engage diverse travel professionals from around the world, particularly in North America and across Africa, the congress holds tremendous promise for turning tourism into a continental economic driver."

ATA's hallmark international event will be attended by African tourism ministers and industry experts representing tourism

boards, travel agencies, ground operator companies, airlines, and hotels. Many participants from the travel trade media and the corporate, non profit and academic sectors are also expected to attend.

The four-day event will engage delegates in discussions on a range of industry topics, such as public-private sector partnership, marketing and promotion, tourism infrastructure development, industry trends, and social media. ATA member countries will organize a few evening networking receptions and ATA's Young Professionals Network will meet with local hospitality professionals and students. For the second year, the congress will also include a marketplace for buyers and sellers specializing in Destination Africa.

Delegates will also have the opportunity to explore the country

on pre or post congress trips, as well as on

### Host Country Day

The Gambia, the smallest country on the African continent, has an estimated population of 1,600,000. With the

exception of a small shoreline, the English-speaking country is surrounded by Senegal. Approximately 120,000 charter tourists, mainly from Europe, arrive annually. The Ministry plans to attract 500,000 arrivals by 2012, by targeting the US marketplace and "up-market" tourists, and to lengthen the tourist season to all year round. Public-private sector plans to increase the accommodation stock and to build a conference center are currently underway. The travel and tourism economy accounts for sixteen percent of Gambia's GDP.

### Encore from 1984

The 2010 Congress builds on the success of the West African country's longstanding ties with ATA. In 1984, ATA held its ninth congress in Banjul, immediately following the association's eighth congress in Cairo, Egypt.

"ATA is excited to return to Gambia and anticipates that the 2010 congress will help Gambia reach its goal of bringing in more tourists and industry investment," said Bergman. "We are especially grateful to our private sector partners, particularly Starwood Hotels, who have been instrumental in bringing the Ministry and ATA together to organize this important continental event."

To prepare for the annual event, ATA will send a delegation to Banjul in November for a site inspection. During the visit, the team will meet with representatives from the public and private

sectors and ATA-Banjul chapter members, as well as visit the proposed conference, lodging and entertainment venues.

ATA, in cooperation with the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and the Egyptian Tourism Authority (ETA), organized the 2009 congress at the Conrad Cairo Hotel in Egypt in May 2009. Under the banner "Connecting Destination Africa," the event brought travel specialists and experts to Egypt to help shape Africa's tourism agenda during the global economic downturn. EgyptAir served as the official congress carrier.

### About the Africa Travel Association (ATA)

The Africa Travel Association (ATA) was established as an international travel industry trade association in 1975. ATA's mission is to promote travel, tourism and transport to and within Africa, and to strengthen intra-Africa partnerships. As the world's premier travel industry trade association, ATA provides services to a broad range of members including: tourism, diaspora, culture, and sports ministers, tourism boards, airlines, hoteliers, travel agents, tour operators, travel trade media, public

relations firms, consulting companies, non-profit organizations, businesses, small and medium-sized enterprises, and other organizations engaged in tourism promotion. For more information, visit ATA online at [www.africatravelassociation.org](http://www.africatravelassociation.org) or call +1.212.447.1357.

For more information on Gambia, visit the Gambia Tourist Authority (GTA) website at <http://www.visitthegambia.gm/>.

**SAVE THE DATE** to meet, network, hear and learn to navigate thru the current economic storm. If you sell or buy FIT, group or bulk travel and hospitality of Africa, you should plan to attend!

### AFRICA TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

# 35th ANNUAL All-Africa/International CONGRESS

**BANJUL, THE GAMBIA MAY 17-20, 2010**

Hosted by the **MINISTRY OF TOURISM OF THE GAMBIA**



FOR MORE INFO CONTACT: E-mail: [info@AfricaTravelAssociation.org](mailto:info@AfricaTravelAssociation.org)

Tel: +1-212-447-1357 Fax: +1-212-213-4890

OR VISIT ON LINE: [www.AfricaTravelAssociation.org](http://www.AfricaTravelAssociation.org)





**Ghana, the Gold Coast and Ashanti Empire**

**ROADSIDE COMMERCE: KENTE CLOTH AND OTHER COTTAGE INDUSTRIES**



**ROADSIDE COMMERCE IS THE HEART OF GHANA'S THRIVING COTTAGE INDUSTRIES**

One of the most impressive facets of Ghana Tourism in my mind was the variety and creativity we encountered during our Grand Tour of Ghana with Yao Dridze. This top professional guide is a Ghanaian we will long remember and never forget. He made our drive from Accra to the Volta region and Kumasi a wonderful learning experience, mile after mile, town after town. The Kente cloth industry is a key part of Ghana fashion, you see it everywhere from my simple cloth hat (that never wears out and I've worn around the

world) to the head-to-toe designs that one sees at ceremonial events and gala evenings. The photos above are as follows: Left- the making of Kente Cloth, from local roadside family enterprises to the factories near Kumasi. On this page are items made of wood, cars, trailer trucks, ceremonial stools and even unusual coffins to celebrate an ancestor's rite of passage. Imagine! We saw everything from A pink Cadillac Convertible to a Coca Cola bottle. Another family cottage industry is palm oil processing - a product of 1001 uses, so practical and readily available. Beadmaking is an art that earns a living for thousands of families - and we discovered that there were towns where the mainstay of commerce was the baking and selling of delicious breads. More of the following pages of this World Edition,



# GHANA IS THE SMILE ON THE FACE OF AFRICA

Elmina Castle, a reminder of the Slave Trade on Ghana's Atlantic Coast.  
*Photo by Muguette Goufrani*



Ghana Tourist Board: [gtb@africaonline.com.gh](mailto:gtb@africaonline.com.gh) .  
<http://www.ghana.gov.gh/tourists/>

# GHANA'S SUCCESS STORY CONTINUES...



*I am Ghana. Many travelers call me "the smile of the face of Africa." Ghanains that are living, working and traveling overseas have been my warm and friendly ambassadors, spreading the good word about my many charms. In case you were unaware, I have had the pleasure of hosting Africa Travel Association delegates from the USA, Canada and Africa at its Annual Congress in 1994, 1999 and 2006. My tourism community awaits your happy return on any occasion and its members will roll out the welcome mat, woven in traditional Kente cloth, naturally. My blessings, beauty and bounty are well known to members of ATA who have visited my sunny shores, but for others an exciting surprise awaits. Here are some interesting, complimentary comments the editors have to say about me:*

*Warm Friendships Blossom*

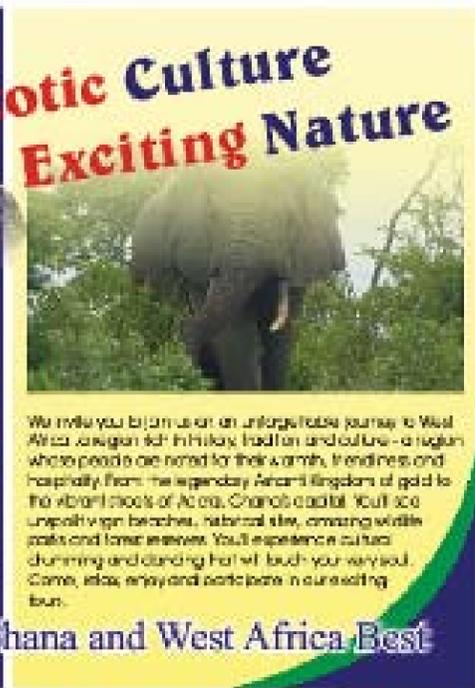
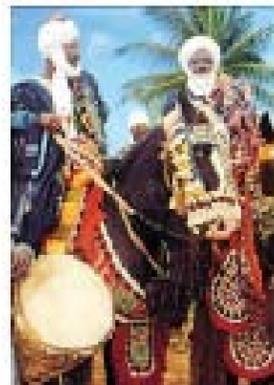
Years before we set foot in West Africa, we had met many Ghanaians and found them to be one of the most outgoing, friendly races of people on the planet. During the combined ATA- WTO World Congress, we were impressed by the way Accra prepared for the millennium, with an infrastructure of wide highways, overpasses and boulevards, plus buildings, a new sports stadium and convention facilities, of which any nation would be proud. Stories of the sights we saw and folks we met would fill volumes, so be prepared

for our next few issues, where we can expand. Colorful Festival, Enchanting Vistas Here are a few of my most memorable experiences: (1) Koforidua and the colorful Durbar ceremonies. (2) Our motor coach trip along the Cape Coast. (3) Kakum National Forest, with its six swinging bridges. (4) Historic Kumasi with its king's palace and weavers of famous Kente cloth. Among our many purchases in Ghana were multicolored Kente caps, which attract attention at home or away, especially at the travel trade shows we exhibit in across North America. We could have sold those

Kente caps and shirts many times. What we saw en route, on the highways and byways was a story in itself. Small wonder we kept running out of film for the cameras.

### Looking Back with Pride

Here's a capsule profile of Ghana, courtesy of Joe Nyarko of Sagrenti Tours: A darker era saw many of our people, and those of other African lands, leave our shores for the plantations of America and the Caribbean, creating the biggest Diaspora the world has ever seen. Today, citizens of many states around the world still acknowledge and treasure their family links with Ghana, returning to explore those links and to experience the soul of their motherland. Today, come home to Ghana, the gateway to that African Heritage. Our celebrations, with great durbars of chiefs in full regalia, full of dancing and drumming, reverberate with images of our rich cultural traditions and reflect the passage of nature's calendar, so important in the preservation of our culture. Throughout the year and throughout the Country, our people love to celebrate, and the great sights and scenes reflected in these festivals. For more information visit [www.africa-ata.org/ghana.htm](http://www.africa-ata.org/ghana.htm)



ATA CONGRESS FLASHBACK 1999



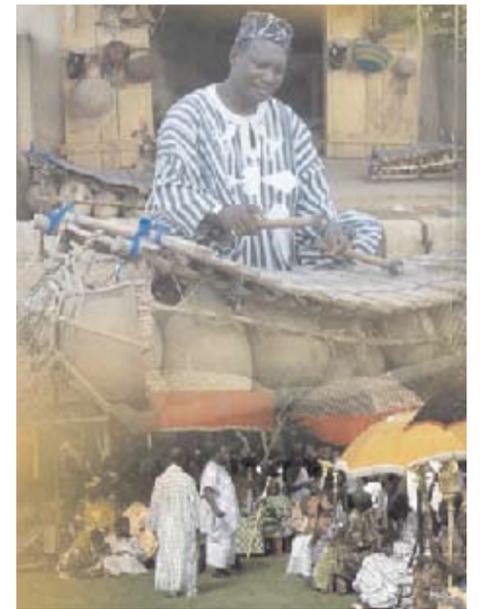
*The above photo is from the Africa Travel Association World Congress of 1999, which was held in Accra,*

*Ghana. Our last Ghana Congress was in 2006, after which our editors made a circle tour of the country, hosted by the Ghana Tourist Board. Our highly capable, knowledgeable guide was Yao Dzide, with whom we stay in touch.*

### Historical Ghana

Formerly the Gold Coast, Ghana is a young republic which became independent from Britain on March 6, 1957, the first black African colony to achieve its independence. Ghana occupies the pinnacle spot in Pan-African history having hit the torch for African Emancipation and became home for famous Pan-Africanist such as W.E. B Du Bois and George Pad more. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah whose mausoleum adds to Accra's landscape was Ghana's first President. European power struggle between the 15th

and 19th centuries started with the Portuguese who built Elmina Castle in 1482. They were followed by the Dutch, Swedes, Danes, Prussians and the British looking for fortunes in gold and ivory. This intense commercial rivalry ended with the growth of the tragic trade in silvery - all 42 European castles and fortifications were used as dungeons for the millions most of whom lost their lives or whose descendants compose the African diaspora today. Over 42 forts and castles including Elmina and Cape Coast Castles are recognized by UNESCO as the World No. 1 Heritage Monuments. Sites of wars between the British and indigenous population especially the Ashanti peoples. Ancient artistry in fabrics with the colorful and popular Ashanti Bonwire Kente Cloth now adopted as a focus of identity by many people of African descent the world over. An antique collector's haven for ancient terra-cotta work. Traditional



gold jewelry, Krobo beads, northern leather and straw product, woodcarving of Ahwiaa-Ashanti.

The practice of ancient herbal and alternative medicine side by side with orthodox medical practice throughout the country; herbariums preserve the ancient medical heritage, colorful traditional festivals full of pomp and pageantry with Chiefs and Queen Mothers riding on lushly gilded palanquins. Colorful traditional open markets and lorry parks provide the sounds and sights of the African bazaar.

### GHANA TOURIST BOARD

The Ghana Tourist Board was set up by Legislative Instrument (NRC Degree) 224 in 1973. It is the sole government agency set up to implement government's tourism policies. It is purely a Research, Marketing and regulatory body under the Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations. Contact [gtb@africaonline.com](mailto:gtb@africaonline.com).



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## The Devil's Elbow at Obudu Ranch, Nigeria



In travel and tourism as in life, there are more than one ways to get to the top! In Cross River State, Nigeria there's the long and winding way up the Devil's Elbow. Then there's the high speed gondola - and for the high and mighty there's a helicopter pad near the conference center. You can also land at a nearby airfield. My first visit to Nigeria was in the fall of 2006, and as luck would have it, the city that won the opportunity to host our ATA Eco Cultural Symposium was Calabar in Cross River State. What is so unique about Calabar? For one thing it is an example of good management, zero tolerance in some key areas and a spirit of optimism far ahead of most destinations we have visited. Credit must go to our host for the event, Governor Donald Duke, who introduced and championed a number of creative ideas. One of them is pictured on this page - a state-of-the-art gondola lift that whisks visitors up to the high plateau where the Obudu Cattle Ranch, established decades ago, has been transformed into a spectacular tourism and world class attraction for important meetings and summits. The lodge operated by South Africa's Protea Hotels group has been resorted and, as expected, the hospital-

ity is outstanding. More information? Please visit <http://crossriverstate.com/obudu.htm> - or [www.africa-ata.org/nigeria.htm](http://www.africa-ata.org/nigeria.htm)

### Tinapa - Birth of a Super Oasis in Nigeria

In fall of 2006, our magazine's editorial team was part of an ATA group that was privileged to visit and inspect Calabar's exciting Tinapa project that was in its final stages at the time. Our current mandate is to make sure Africa Travel Magazine's readers and internet viewers in North America and around the world know the true facts about Nigeria's newest treasure of cooperative enterprise. Tinapa is a resort that means business - the business of combining business, pleasure and leisure! Tinapa is the resort that means business - the business of combining business, pleasure and leisure! This will be the first time that anything like this has been experienced in West Africa. No longer will you need to go to Europe, the Far East



or America to enjoy the best entertainment, shopping and leisure facilities the world has to offer! The total Tinapa complex is massive - 80 000 m2 of retail and wholesale emporiums alone. The emporiums feature a borderless, seamless shopping environment - a unique concept that unfolds a new dimension in retailing for the first time in Africa's history!

These massive 21st century shopping emporiums will be supported by a vast array of retailers offering everything from exclusive bookshops, specialty CD and DVD outlets, pharmacies to beauty salons, banks and jewellery stores! Plus an incredible entertainment centre including cinemas, food court, internet cafe and games arcade! There will be a dazzling range of six hotels to choose from - accommodation to suit a variety of lifestyles and budgets. The magnificent waterfront devel-

opment incorporating a Fisherman's Wharf, will showcase even more restaurants, bars and tourist kiosks. Imagine, after an endless night of fun, enjoying a champagne breakfast whilst watching a beautiful sunrise over the azure waters of the Calabar River! And as if that's not enough entertainment there'll be added attractions to indulge in, including a golfer's paradise with driving range and putting green, a jungle carting track, quad biking route, plus a clay pigeon and archery course! Water activities, including water-skiing, parasailing, rowing and canoeing will take place in a luxurious oasis environment! Agri and eco tourism attractions will include a sizeable exotic bird sanctuary, a crocodile farm, a tropical fish farm, a primate rehabilitation centre and much,

much more in the sun-drenched waterways of Tinapa! It is the ultimate shop and party till-you-drop leisure centre - a world that is alive twenty-four a day with a never-ending choice of activities to choose from. Tinapa will provide visitors with a unique tourism experience and the development will fast track growth of the tourism sector in Calabar, Cross River State and Nigeria.

*"Tinapa will Regenerate Lost Trading History of Old Calabar;"* President Olusegun Obasanjo.

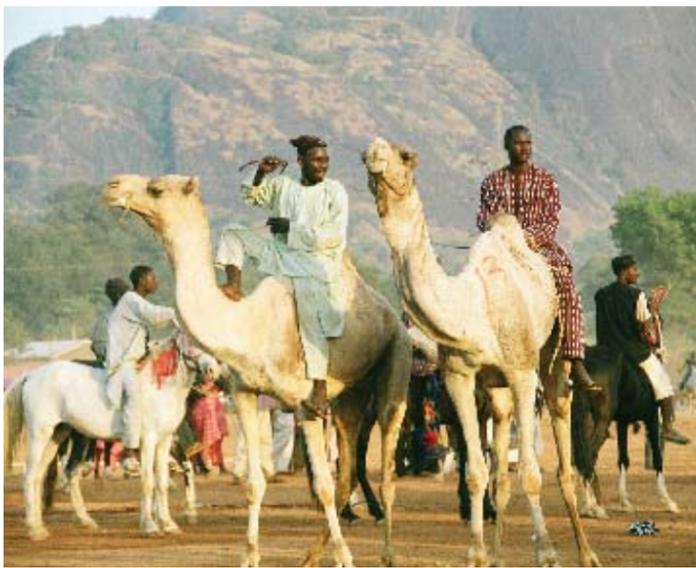
#### Governor Donald Duke

We thank our host from the ATA Eco Cultural Tourism Symposium, Governor Donald Duke for a week of surprising and delightful experiences - and for welcoming us to the Governor's mansion for a wind up dinner.



Recent Events: Nigerian Minister of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation, Prince Adetokunbo Kayode (San), invited ATA delegates to participate in the launch of the country's Tourism Master Plan October, 2007 in Abuja, the capital city. The plan aims to position Nigeria as the continent's leading cultural, historical and business tourist destination. Minister Kayode said the plan "was borne out of the Government's firm conviction on the opportunities offered by the sector for sustainable development, especially at the grass roots level, its high potential for enhanced foreign exchange earnings and the environment friendly nature of tourism programmes". He emphasized that tourism provides a variety of new opportunities for improving socio-economic conditions, diversifying the economy, and achieving stability. For more information fax 604 681 6595 or visit our web site: <http://www.africa-ata.org/nigeria.htm>

# CREATIVE CONCEPTS DESIGNED TO ENHANCE NIGERIA'S TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE



# ABUJA CARNIVAL: NIGERIA'S CAPITAL 'SWINGS' AROUND THE CLOCK IN A ROLLICKING WEEK OF FESTIVITIES

By Jerry W. Bird

I am Abuja, capital of Nigeria, which is Africa's most populous country. I am confident about my future as a world center and a magnet for cultural, adventure, culinary, educational and leisure tourism. My broad, well maintained paved streets, attractively landscaped boulevards and modern overpasses keep the traffic flowing smoothly, morning, noon and night. With my wide, cinematic vistas in every direction, you won't feel hemmed in by gridlock. Being in Nigeria's heartland, I am adjacent to Kogi, Niger, Kaduna and Nassarawa states. Carnival week in late November showcases the culture of all 36 states, with rhythmic, pulsating music, exotic tribal dances, durbars on horseback and camels from the far Sahara. It's an unending kaleidoscope of colorful regalia, fun

activities, parade floats, tribal masks and costumes unique to various states. Born in 1976, I am considered a model city for all of Africa, and one of the world's handful of totally planned cities.

I am proud of my position as a magnet for world class meetings and events. For example I just finished receiving visitors from over 60 countries, including heads of state, at the Africa- Latin America Summit.

## Visitors Comments

Here are some current comments about my lifestyle and attractions from a variety of U.S. visitors and residents from other countries:

*"Originally from Africa Travel Magazine*



*France, I have lived and taught school in Abuja for five years, and appreciate the easy going lifestyle and friendliness of the people. Here, we enjoy a comfortable year round climate and really appreciate the absence of mosquitoes and similar insect pests. It's good to know that this city is virtually malaria free."*

*"I was very impressed by the recent renovations that were being made at Nnamdi Azikwe International Airport and was pleased to learn that the Nigerian government was really serious about improving the infrastructure of its airports for incoming tourists and business people."*

*"Your exciting Abuja Carnival rivals those in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and Mardi Gras in New Orleans." Many*

*say, Latin America's carnivals and music originated here in Nigeria."*

*"My impression of Abuja was that it is truly a 'City of the Future' set in a scenic environment." " Located approximately one hour by air from Lagos, Abuja has excellent conference and accommodation facilities."*

*"Throughout Abuja there is much construction going on and the people truly exhibit an excitement about living in what is perhaps the most modern city in Africa."*

*"We were quite surprised at the relative ease in our processing through immigration and customs. Much to our pleasure, we were told that both the Ministry of Aviation and the Ministry of Tourism have done an excellent job in alleviating the extreme bottlenecks that travelers were accustomed to experience upon arriving in Nigeria."*

## Excerpts from The Guardian

(Nigeria) by Andrew Iro Okungbowa and Stella Agbala *"Here in this country where we have well over 350 ethnic and linguistic groups, diversity of culture, diversity of*

*language, diversity of foods, and unity in diversity. We owe it a duty to ourselves, the rest of Africans and to African in Diaspora to showcase what is authentically Africa and what is authentically ours."*

## Former President Obasanjo comments on Abuja Carnival

*"In the next four days, you will see the different forms of art, dances, different aspects of our way of life, boat regatta, masquerades, that would be breathtaking in one spot."*

Referring to the unique nature of the carnival, he added; *"We have come together, all as Nigerians, in one spot; we have brought together what will take anybody who has to go over Nigeria days and even months in a space of few days."*

## Dream Becomes Reality

The Carnival debuted in 2005 as part of the Government's dream to promote Nigeria as a tourist destination and to expose Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to the

world as a promoter of tourism as well as showcase to the world the cultural beauty and business opportunities that abound in the country. Last year's celebration was almost marred by outcries and criticisms by some Nigerians, especially religious organizations, which saw the event as fetish and profane. But the President addressed these charges when he informed the nation that among others, it was meant to promote Nigeria and her people to the global community. With nothing short of joy and excitement, the President said the carnival is to be entrenched as a yearly celebration that would give people room to explore Nigeria.

*We plan to expand on this feature in coming editions of Africa Travel Magazine, in both its formats - printed and electronic (pdf). Keep up to date daily by visiting our web-site: [www.africa-ata.org/mag.htm](http://www.africa-ata.org/mag.htm)*



**Western Africa  
will Shine at the  
World Travel Market,  
ExCel Centre, London  
8-11 November, 2010**



**world  
travel  
market**

The image shows a close-up of a glass award with the World Travel Market logo. The logo consists of the words "world travel market" in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font, followed by a stylized globe icon made of curved lines in shades of orange, yellow, and blue.

**'The Oscars of the Travel Industry'**

The Wall Street Journal



**WORLD  
TRAVEL  
AWARDS**

The image shows the World Travel Awards logo, which features the words "WORLD TRAVEL AWARDS" in a bold, uppercase sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized globe icon with a hand holding it, all in a golden-yellow color.

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## NIGERIA EVENTS

### Black History Month (BHM)

February 26, 2009 - March 8, 2009

### Black History Week Convention

Expo & Osun Festival, August 2009

### Abuja Carnival January 2010

Photo of Abuja 2008 Carnival

by Muguette Goufrani.



Africa Travel Magazine

# Discover the Slave Route in Nigeria

By Dr. Beryl Dorsett

A darker historical era saw many people of West Africa leave their shores for plantations

in Europe, North and South America and the Caribbean. The infamous slave trade in Nigeria is not known to many people like the slave trade in Ghana, Senegal, Togo and Benin. Nigeria and Ghana were former British colonies. Senegal, Togo and Benin were former French colonies.

In December 2000, I attended the Fourth Eco-tourism Symposium in Nigeria as a delegate of the Africa Travel

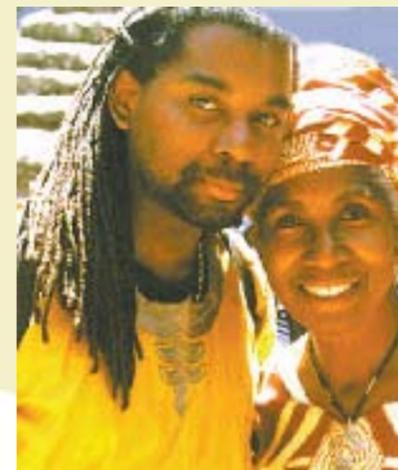
Association. The Lagos State Waterfront and Tourism Development Corporation invited conference delegates to a two-day pre-symposium tour of Lagos States. On the first day, we toured the city of Lagos. On the second day, we toured the town of Badagry and learned that Badagry was an important slave route in West Africa. Badagry is one of five divisions created in Lagos State in 1968

This ancient town of Badagry was founded around 1425 A.D. Before its existence, people lived along the Coast of Gbrefu and this area later gave birth to the town of Badagry. It is the second largest commercial town in Lagos State, located an hour from Lagos and half hour from the Republic du Benin. The Town of Badagry is bordered on the south by the Gulf of Guinea and surrounded by creeks, islands and a lake. The ancient town served mainly the Oyo Empire which was comprised of Yoruba and Ogu people. Today, the Aworis and Egun are mainly the people who reside in the town of Badagry as well as in Ogun State in Nigeria and in the neighboring Republic du Benin.

In the early 1500's, slaves were transport-

ed from West Africa to America through Badagry. It is reported that Badagry exported no fewer than 550,000 African slaves to America during the period of the American Independence in 1787.

In addition, slaves were transported to Europe, South America and the Caribbean. The slaves came mainly from West Africa and the neighboring countries of



Benin and Togo as well as others parts of Nigeria. The slave trade became the major source of income for the Europeans in Badagry. Today, Badagry is an historic site because of the significant

role it played as a major slave port in Nigeria. The town of Badagry is promoting an African Heritage Festival in May, 2001 to enlighten the world to its historic sites, landscapes, cultural artifacts and relics of human slavery. Badagry wants to share this world heritage site with others. They are preserving buildings, sites and memories of this iniquitous period so those tourists can unearth the dark impact of this era. Places of interest include the Palace of the Akran of Badagry and its mini ethnographic museum, the early missionaries cemetery, the District Officer's Office and Residence, the First Storey Building in Nigeria constructed by the Anglican missionaries, relics of slave chains in the mini museum of slave trade, cannons of war, the Vlekte slave Market, and the Slave Port established for the shipment of slaves before the 16th century.

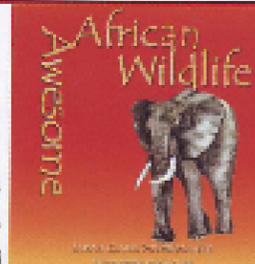
The Lagos State Waterfront and Tourism Development Corporation is sponsoring the African Heritage Festival, May 2001, in collaboration with Nigerian Tourist Development Corporation, Badagry

Local Government and some NGOs. Chief Moses Hungbo Owolabani is the Executive Chairman of Badagry Local Government Council. The tentative program of events encompasses initiation into Nigerian tribes, boat regatta, educational and economic forums, music and dance festivals, and numerous recreational activities and picnicking on miles of beach front property. For further information, contact Lagos State Waterfront and Tourism Development Corporation, 3B Itinrin Court, Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria. Tel. 234- 1-774-1886 or 234-1-775-4192.

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# OUR TRAVELS IN GUINEA, FROM CONAKRY ON THE ATLANTIC COAST TO THE HIGHLAND COUNTRY AND SENEGAL BORDER



By Muguette Goufrani



The story of my journey with a driver and guide from the Gulf of Guinea on Africa's Atlantic Coast to historic Mali Ville in the northern highlands was like one of Nat King Cole's famous songs ... Unforgettable! Or as the Maurice Chevalier would say ... C'est Magnifique! Some call Guinea the "Switzerland of Africa" and one of your first pleasant surprises when touring the Republic of Guinea is that the country is uncrowded. Large in size, yet small in population with 7.5 million inhabitants. Guinea is also described as the land of contrasts. Those apt comparisons became evident to me a few days into our journey. The route selected by our gracious host Hon. Sylla H. K. Diakite, Guinea's former Minister of Tourism, and her General Manager Ibrahima Diallo, covered a vast expanse of geography, stretching northeast by highway from the capital, Conakry, via

Kindia, Dalaba, Pita and Labé, to our final destination at Mali Ville near the Senegal border. I had many opportunities to capture the spirit and flavor of the country, its people, history, culture, cuisine, colorful costumes, lifestyles and breathtaking scenery.

**Precious Jewels**  
Famous African Ballet and Malinke Music to charm the soul are several of the jewels in Guinea's abundant treasure chest that make it an attractive tourist destination that's loaded with potential. A key facet is the rich vibrancy of the culture. Another charming jewel in Guinea's tourism crown is the romantic and captivating Malinke music heard literally everywhere you go. It's a rhythmic style that gives inspiration to many West African artists, even "Les Ballets Africains," Guinea's musical goodwill ambassadors to the world and Africa's foremost touring dance company. What a sight they are on stage! Our applause rocked the auditorium in Conakry following this group's spectacular, energy-filled, two hour command performance for the Africa Travel Association delegates. Before leaving

Guinea, I purchased several albums of West African Malinke music for our library and hope to make these songs available for our viewers to enjoy online.

**Bridal Veils, Smoking Dogs and Mountain Maidens**  
Following the ATA 27th International Congress in Conakry, which literally burst with African flavor and color, I began my long-awaited media tour of Guinea's plateaus and northern highlands. Directed by Lamine Diallo, a professional tour guide and his driver Karim, I boarded the Ministry of Tourism bus and we headed east, making our first stop at Coyah, a bustling village that is where Guinea's bottled water is processed. Naturally we had to gather a plentiful supply for the journey ahead. Close to Coyah is Dubreka Ville, which we visited several days previously. It is the home of "Les Cascades de la Soumba," which features a spectacular waterfall, watersports and a resort complex with dining room and comfortable cabins. Beyond Coyah a side road, Route de Fria, leads to one of the country's better known tourist sites, Mount Kaloulima,

which in French we call "Le Chien Qui Fume," or the Smoking Dog. Look closely at the mountainside and you will see the strange resemblance. At certain times, like when a thick fog hugs the mountainside, a wispy smoke seems to rise from the animal's mouth.

**Kindia and the Falls**

Our first overnight stop was at the town of Kindia, (140 km from Conakry) where we visited the spectacular Bridal Veil Falls or "Le Voile de la Mariée." The falls are at their most appealing during the rainy season, when the flowing water resembles a delicate bridal veil. Here in the heart of West Africa, Guineans offer all the ingredients of a "Dream Vacation," if you long for an uncrowded, unspoiled, visitor-friendly country. In a class by itself is Guinea's unending selection of spectacular landscapes, which unfolded around each bend, like a cinema-scope movie, as we motored through the hilly 'Fouta Djallon' region. Many travelers say that the Fouta Djallon offers the most striking vistas in all of West Africa. Put this fact together with the charming, hospitable people I met along the

way, and you have a winning combination. Our hosts from the Guinea Ministry of Tourism, working in close harmony with the Africa Travel Association and magazine as its media arm, hope to make these dream vacations a reality for travelers from around the world.

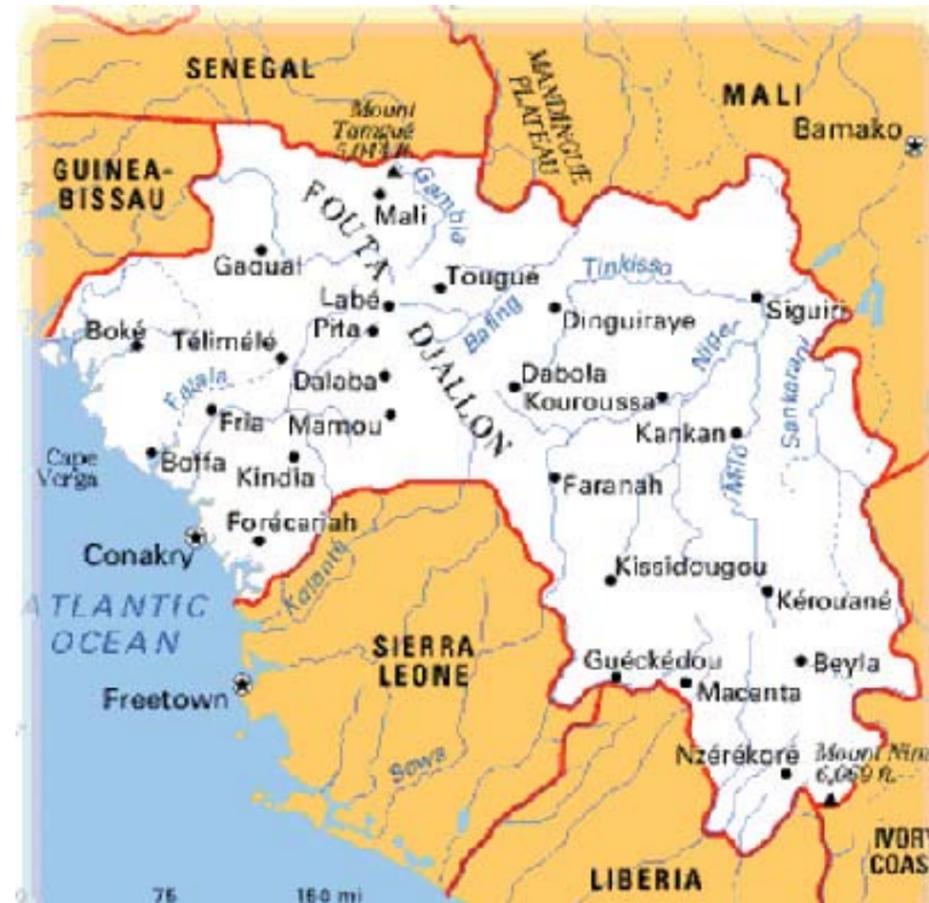
**Did you know?**

- Guinea's major ethnic group the Malinke also reside in parts of Mali, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal, and ruled one West Africa's great empires. Malinke are also known to have originated the best kora musicians in West Africa. The kora is a unique and popular musical instrument in the area. For details on the amazing kora- visit this informative website: <http://www.coraconnection.com/>
- Guinea is called the Switzerland of Africa, thanks to its lofty mountains and high plateaus, plus a temperate climate. The highest peaks are Mount Loura at Mali Ville (1515 m) and Mount Tinka

near Dalaba (1425m).

**Abundant Water**  
Some writers call Guinea the "Water Tower of Western Africa," because many rivers take their origin (River Gambie, Senegal, Niger, etc.) from it. These rivers and churning rapids, hurtling down the mountains create beautiful waterfalls.

**Fouta Djallon Gateway**  
The second important leg of my journey inside Guinea followed a stretch of highway heading north, between the towns of Kindia and Mamou, which is known as the "Gateway to the Fouta Djallon." When night falls, Mamou becomes one of the country's liveliest towns, and an ideal place for delicious street food. We sampled a variety of items, from barbecue to Guinean style couscous. I was impressed by the festive atmosphere. These proud, assertive people, walked the streets decked in their bright flowing robes, as if to say "Guinea is subject to no sovereign power." While Guineans represent a combination of the Muslim, Christian and Animist faiths, they have learned to live together in harmony - an example for the



**Continued on next page**

# Exploring Guinea, the Switzerland of Africa and home of Les Ballets Africains

entire world. For example, how many are really aware that West Africa was thriving with well established empires and trade routes long before the first Europeans came?

## Mamou's Typically Guinean Marketplace

The merchants and artisans in their stalls and various places of business struck me as being confident and strong minded, yet gentle in nature. These are ideal qualities for business success anywhere, but especially in Guinea. In the busy open-air public market and many roadside stands, women traders stood behind large trays of merchandise, looking elegant in their bright robes and always anxious to please. Even the small children approached us with trays of delicacies, sweets or fruits balanced on their heads. The vibrancy of town life, plus contact with the outside world and external trade, has stimulated Guinea to reach a higher standard of civilization than Africa's more isolated people. Shopping for clothing is a real delight. See the wide variety of attractive West African robes in our photo section. Most households in the area have a selection of indigo plants and the locals dye their own clothing, often with interesting patterns. It is an imposing sight, dozens of shop women, each with her selection of palm-oil, soaps, fabrics or yogurt in front of her. Many of these people work at farms in the countryside, so there is a vast system of petty trade. These people have trade in their blood, and bargaining is a favorite sport- an ideal opportunity to fine tune their skills.

Note to Readers: We checked Webtrends and Guinea is attracting more readers than any other section on this site, which scores thousands of pages read weekly.

**Dalaba Mountain Retreat:** Taking the main route north, Dalaba was our overnight stop. A key tourism site since the Colonial period,

the Dalaba Mountain Resort was a major therapeutic center, thanks to its fresh air at 1000m altitude and gently rolling hills. Set amongst lush vegetation in the Foutana highlands, it is a charming town, with an average temperature of 10 degrees c. Guinea's President and the First lady, holiday here often, however when they are not visiting, tourists can stay in the rooms used by his entourage and enjoy fantasies of grandeur. In the commercial area of Dalaba, I spent some quality time chatting with, and learning about local customs from a talented group of artisans. We visited the co-op shoemaker shop (see photo section), where they make a wide variety of colorful sandals, plus intricate leather work and other crafts made from indigenous materials.

## Le Jardin Chevalier

At the park like setting of Jardin Chevalier, we saw splendid examples of horticulture, with its selection of trees and shrubs from around the world. Guineans are excellent gardeners. Lawns are carefully nourished, irrigated, and terraced to slope down to the lagoon. Sitting in a lawn chair that evening, with the sunset reflecting in the water and shining through a fringe of oil-palms and slender coconut palms, I could catch the vanishing glamour of the tropics. My night was a fantasy of pleasant dreams

On solid ground: During this journey and my entire three weeks in Guinea, I got the distinct feeling from many people I spoke to at length, that the country is in capable hands. This feeling of confidence, energy and enterprise was illustrated last spring by the solid support our magazine received from the nation's business community. Our website has just added a Business Directory Section that will connect the reader with Guinea's business leaders, and there's much more to come. Encouraged by

this support, we plan to reprint the current edition - to keep up with the demand. As the first travel guide in our new Africa Travel Library series, it will be a valuable marketing tool to sell Guinea Trade and Tourism worldwide. One section will cover Guinea's "Slave Road" a joint project of UNESCO and OMT.



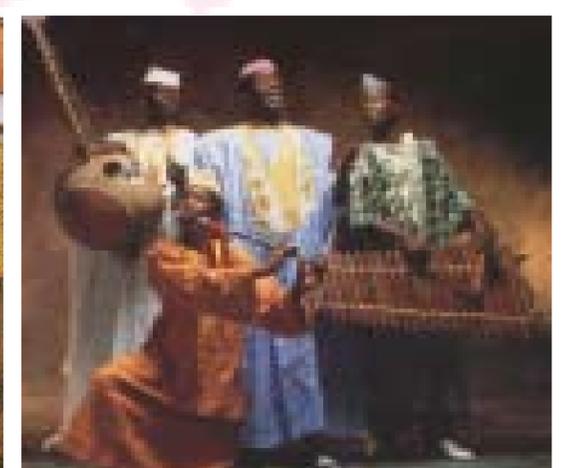
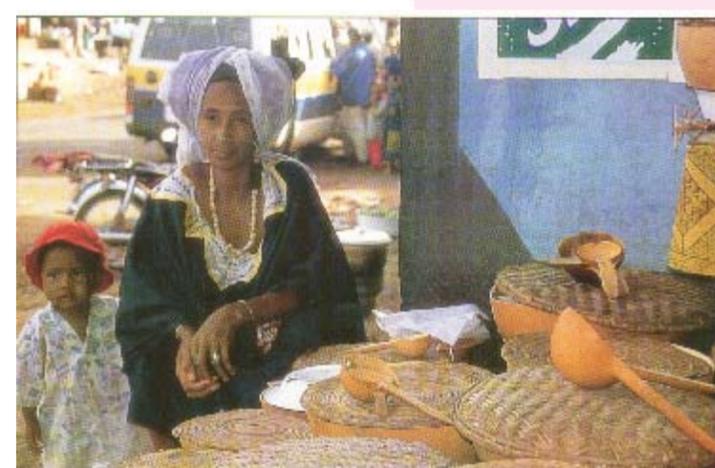
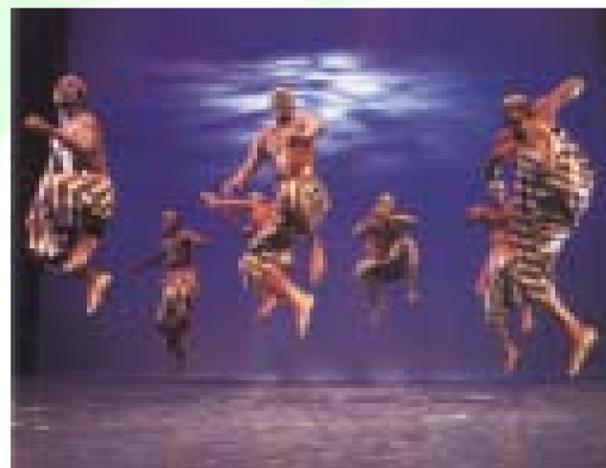
## Footnotes

- The young lady is from Guinea's Peuhl clan. She is wearing the distinctive hairdo and head dress. Migrating from ancient Egypt the Fulani or "Peulh" are said by some to be of Jewish origin, some having light complexions, with Caucasian features.

The Republic of Guinea is located along 300 km of the Atlantic Ocean in West Africa. Thanks to its abundant natural resource base, there are business and investment opportunities in all sectors of the economy

Guinea is a country that has shaped history while conserving its distinctions. Intersection of civilizations of the African Middle Ages, the country was the center of birth, the extension, and the successions of the grand West African empires. Guinea, always protective of its liberty, was the last to be colonized in West Africa and the first to recuperate its independence.

- Guinea's major ethnic group the Malinke also reside in parts of Mali, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal, and at an earlier time ruled one West Africa's great empires. Malinke are also known to have originated the best kora musicians in West Africa. The kora is a unique and popular musical instrument in the area. For details on the amazing kora- visit this informative website: <http://www.coraconnection.com>





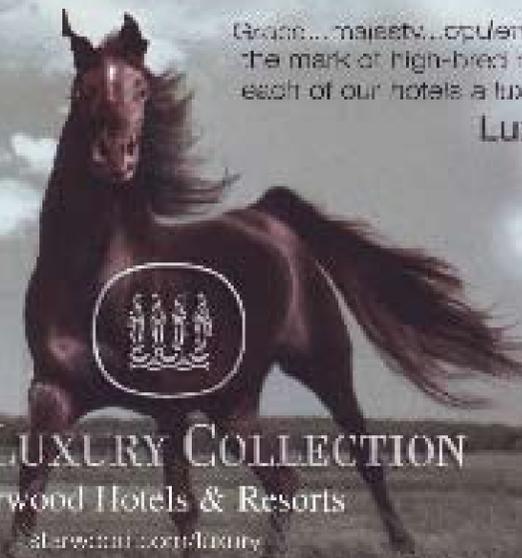
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# Reasons to Visit and Invest in Senegal



One of Senegal's best known sons in North America and the Caribbean is Ogo Sow (right), better known as "Mister

Africa" to his thousands of radio listeners. Ogo is a long-time friend and constant contributor to our magazine and website. He is also playing a huge part in the global awareness of the Africa Travel Association as its Director of Diaspora Affairs. He and his family live in Atlanta, GA. The following is a brief profile of Mr. Africa's native land.

## About Senegal

Senegal was the first African Country our Editor Jerry W. Bird visited after founding the magazine - and it also became the first country to host the Africa Travel Association (ATA) Ecotourism Symposium. The prestige event took place at Saly/Dakar, 1992. A large share of the thanks should go to our good friend and loyal ATA member from California, the late Eunice Rawlings. Eunice lived and worked in Senegal for several years and remained devoted to West

Africa and to the Africa Travel Association. We miss her warm smile and wonderful companionship. Travel and Tourism in Senegal Senegal has been developing its tourism since the early 1970s and is now receiving some half a million tourists a year. There a WTO project, financed by UNDP, aimed at studying tourism's impact on the country's economy. "We will be assessing what new opportunities there are, and how to improve management to increase the benefits from tourism said Mr. Ndiaye. With most of the travel industry run by foreigners, one objective will be to seek ways for easing bank lending facilities to enable the Senegalese themselves to play a greater role. He hopes that cooperatives can be set up to promote



cultural tourism, giving visitors a change to stay in villages and join in everyday rural activities. The University of the Future African will receive between 2500 and 5000 students. The University of Future for Africa (UFA) will have a capacity of 2500 students in the first three years of its opening and 5000 students in the long term, for his maxi-

mum capacity, announced President Abdoulaye Wade the Head of the Republic of Senegal.

According President Wade who is the originator of the establishment, the students will come from all countries without distinction of origin. They will receive, at the beginning, a teaching on public administration, management, New Information Technologies. The University of Future for Africa will allow, thanks to inter-academics agreements, African students to follow by satellite in real time the same courses as the students of the university institutions with which it will have to sign these agreements.

For President Abdoulaye Wade that will make it possible for African students of the UFA to obtain not equivalent diplomas, always prone to discussion, but instead identical

diplomas. The diplomas are co-signed by the foreign university chosen and the UFA. The students will have access to affordable housing, as an option, Wade underlined whose article was illustrated by several photographs showing the model of the university establishment in its various facets.

(Source: APS) Here is a brief outline of the country and its benefits to visitors:

**A stable and open country**

**A healthy and competitive economy**

**Human resources of quality**

**Modern and performance infrastructures**

**A lawful framework and fiscal renovated**

**A privileged access to the regional and international markets**

**A life quality exceptional**

**Contacts:**

**Ministry of Tourism, Senegal**  
<http://www.tourisme.gouv.sn/>

**Senegal Tourism Office USA**  
<http://www.senegal-tourism.com/>

**Senegal Embassy USA**  
 The Embassy of Senegal in Washington, D.C. has jurisdiction in United States, Mexico, Jamaica, Haiti and others.

For more information visit [www.africa-ata.org/senegal.htm](http://www.africa-ata.org/senegal.htm)

# Cote d'Ivoire

*From the Paris of Africa to its Roman Basilica*

by Jerry W. Bird

## Lobster Man of Abidjan

Abijan, Cote d'Ivoire: Having heard our Associate Editor Muguette Goufrani sing the praises of her life and times in Cote d'Ivoire and other West African countries, I was full of anticipation as we boarded the Air Afrique jet at the Cotonou, Benin Airport, bound for the legendary Ivory Coast. As serendipity plays a big part in many of my African journeys, the first Ivorian we chanced to meet en route was a Mr. Gakpo, "The Lobster Man of Abidjan" (a possible song title), who kindly invited us to stay at his seaside inn the following week. That opportunity was a special treat for several reasons, one being that the Inter Continental Hotel Ivoire was full to the rafters and rooftops, due to an Africa-wide financial summit. I'll never forget Mr. Gakpo's stadium sized outdoor dining area, open to the moist Atlantic breezes, and topped by a traditional West African thatched roof. While wining, dining and cracking red lobster shells, one can watch the ever-present fishing boats bobbing up and down in the waves, in search of fresh seafood for tomorrow's table.

Photo of the Atlantic coast, courtesy of Best of Africa Hotel. Photo below courtesy of Haury Tours < Abidjan.

What's more, the place never seems to close - allowing us to visit well into the wee hours. Thus, Abidjan's "Lobster Villa" became our staging point for one of the most event-filled weeks in my lifetime. At the time there was a major renovation and expansion of Mr. Gakpo's Beach Hotel in progress. For reservations and information phone (011) 225-27-40-86, fax 225-211-08 Meeting Therese Haury was another milestone. Like Mother Teresa of another era, this travel agent extraordinaire is dedicated to helping Ivorian villagers equip and supply local health clinics. Her souvenir-filled residence overlooks Abidjan, the Paris of West Africa. I plan to devote an issue to the elegant new homes and modern lifestyle I saw emerging, as this young giant of a city, the Paris of Africa, enters the new millennium.

We visited every district by taxi, which proved to be a relatively low cost mode



of travel. Haury Tours operates two travel agency offices - one in the central lobby of Abidjan's 750-room Inter \*Continental Hotel Ivoire (below right).

During my first visit to the hotel, Manager Peter Janssen suggested we visit the 'basilica' at Yamoussoukro (the capital). Air Afrique showcased this 'wonder of the world' on Africa Travel Magazine's back cover in 1996, the same year as our trip. "You've come this far," I told myself, "why not go all the way?" So, when the sun rose over the coconut palms at Lobster Village the next morning, I decided, rather than fly or drive, we'd 'go native' and purchase tickets on the local bus.

Indiana Jones in Abidjan: A taxi took us to the bus station at Adjame, which was like something out of a Bogart or Indiana Jones movie - mingling crowds, a cacophony of sounds, street vendors everywhere - even a special room for the Muslim population to perform its ritual prayers. I didn't know it then, but there are several classes of buses available, and we chose the bargain version, a half day milk run, with countless stops and some unexpected adventures, which in retrospect made the journey more memorable.

Yamoussoukro the Capital Arriving at Yamoussoukro, the elegant Hotel President, another Inter \*Continental, became our center for a taxi tour of the city. After a refreshing lunch of aloco (bananas, onions and grilled fish), foutou (yams) topped by an icy cold, long-necked bottle of Flag beer at a local 'maquis,' (open air restaurant) we drove by the walled Houphouet-Boigny residential palace. Its version of a moat is a series of ponds occupied by a horde of hungry crocodiles. What a fantastic setting for the next James Bond or Indiana Jones movie. Speaking of classic, grandiose settings, Yamoussoukro's basilica, a replica of

St. Paul's Cathedral in Rome, lived up to its billings in the Air Afrique advertisement. Palatial grounds and marble columns gave it a regal presence - and 36 giant giant stained-glass windows, splashed a kaleidoscope of colors across the interior, in changing patterns. We vowed to spend at least one Christmas week in Cote d'Ivoire, to hear the choir and enjoy the

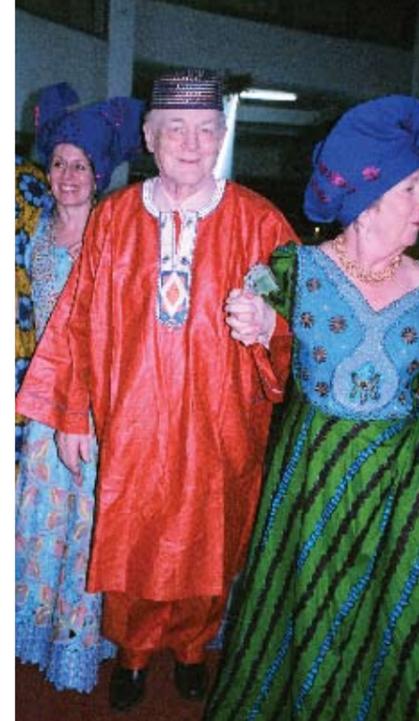
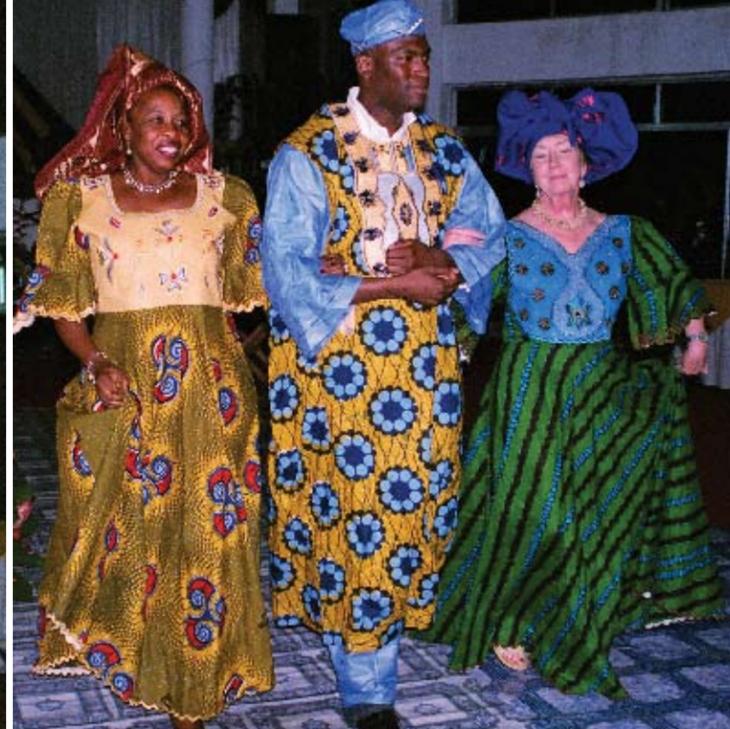
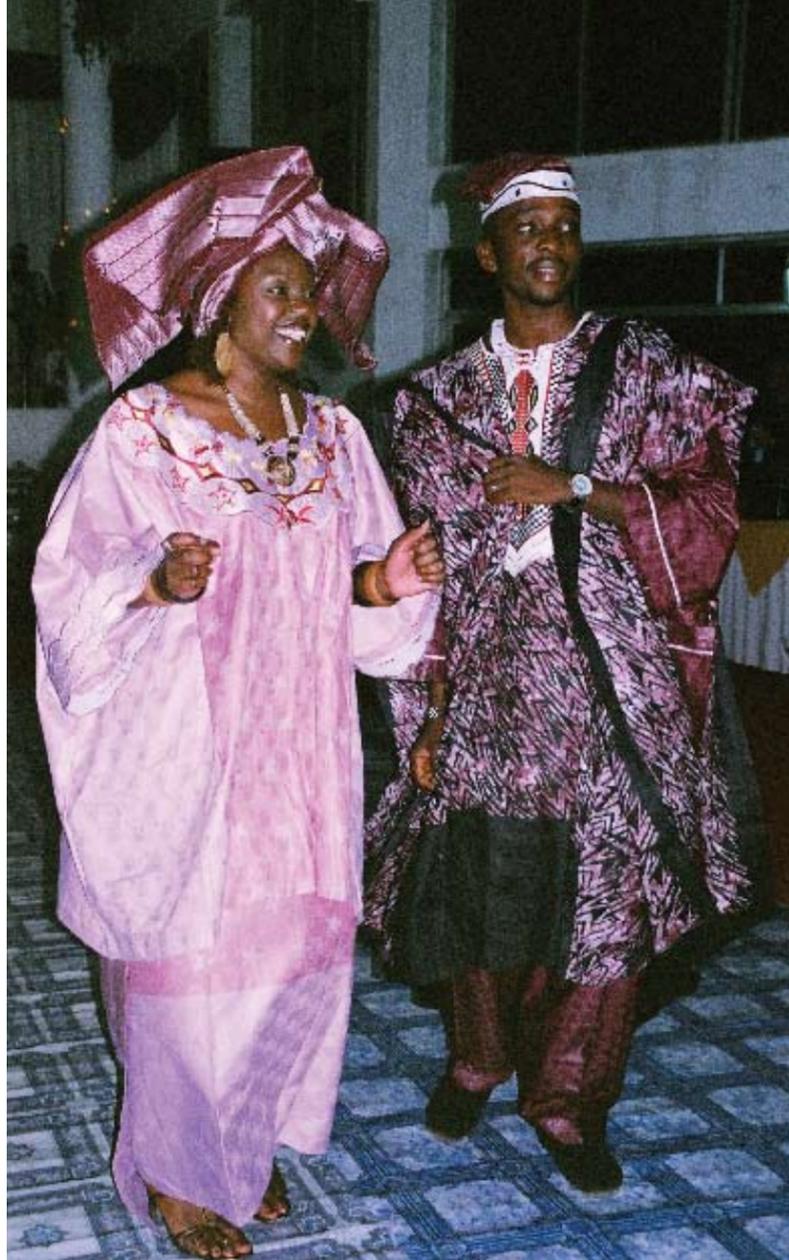
blend of traditional Euro-

pean and exotic West African music. I congratulated myself for turning over my camera to a local volunteer who stayed by our side for almost two hours. That way, for \$30 US, we were free to take in the atmosphere, and visit every corner of one of Christianity's most awesome sites, while he recorded the occasion for posterity and future publication such as this. From these 36 treasured photographs, we have enough images to produce a fine coffee table style book. With much more to see and do in Abidjan, we chose a speedy bus for the return trip. E-mail Muguette with your travel experiences in Cote d'Ivoire and other West African destinations [africa@smartt.net](mailto:africa@smartt.net) or visit [www.africa-ata.org/mag.htm](http://www.africa-ata.org/mag.htm)



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## WEBISCO NIGERIAN FASHIONS MAKE AN OUTSTANDING STATEMENT AT THE ATA 33TH WORLD CONGRESS FASHION SHOW, ARUSHA, TANZANIA



### Nigeria's Chief of Fashion

We first met Chief Margaret Bolanle Fabiyi in 1997 at the Africa Travel Association World Congress, a year after our partnership with ATA was confirmed. The location was in Cotonou, Benin, West Africa. At the next congress in Arusha, Tanzania, we were treated to the first of a series of fashion shows this talented lady has organized for Africa Travel Association events. While enjoying luncheon at Arusha's Impala Hotel, it was suddenly announced that a fashion show was about to take place. To everyone's surprise, the models turned out to be our own delegates - and the variety of fashions for men and women, large and petit, young and not so young - was superb. Chief Margaret has staged

encore presentations at ATA venues in various locations ever since, including the event in Arusha, Tanzania (above) in which our editor, Jerry W. Bird, modeled a flaming red costume. In addition to being an accomplished fashion designer, Chief Margaret is active in ATA and ASTA in Nigeria and is a tour organizer, well known for her annual BLACK HISTORY MONTH TOURS. For times, dates and booking arrangements check the e-mail address and website on the opposite page or visit the Africa Travel Magazine website - [www.africa-ata.org/bulletins.htm](http://www.africa-ata.org/bulletins.htm)

For your TRAVEL AGENDA  
**(1) Black History Month (BHM)**  
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**(2) Black History Week Convention & Expo & Osun Festival, August 2009.**

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 P. O. Box 4313, Surulere, Lagos, Nigeria.



WEBISCO NIGERIAN FASHIONS MAKE AN OUTSTANDING STATEMENT AT THE ATA 33TH WORLD CONGRESS FASHION SHOW IN TANZANIA





Above: 1. Map of Benin. 2. Benin Fashion. 3. Ganvie -Village on stilts. 4. Benin Marina Hotel, site of 1997 ATA Congress. Below- Cotonou, Benin's major city and air gateway.

## The Benin Story: Welcome to West Africa

by Jerry W. Bird

Being part of the Africa Travel Association brings rewards throughout the year, the very pinnacle of which is the privilege of attending an ATA Congress and experiencing the delights of a different African country every year. Nothing could have prepared me for the pleasant surprise I received on the eve of ATA's 22nd Congress in Cotonou. In fact, the entire fortnight in Benin was a whirlwind affair... one that has become a permanent bookmark in a lifetime of surprises and serendipity. Our group from North America stepped right off the Air Afrique jet into the heat of the night and what seemed like an exotic Arabian Nights style movie set. Imagine the scene in cinemascope and high fidelity, wraparound sound; an exotic garden party on the spacious patio of the Benin Sheraton in Cotonou (now under new management). The scene was lit by a big tropical "paper moon, that seemed to hang in the sky for our personal benefit. ATA's opening gala was a riot of colorful costumes - a whirling dervish with high energy dance routines, leaping and spinning to the ever present beat of African drums. How's that for an introduction to AfriJet-Setters

Meet : While strolling through the Medina in Marrakech, Morocco in December, 2002, we had the pleasure of a chance meeting with a familiar friend, Marie-Elyse Gbedo, former Tourism Minister of Benin. Later that day we visited with her at the Imperial Borj hotel for an interview session regarding her visions for West Africa in the coming decade. This meeting was timely, since Ms. Gbedo was in the Marrakech for the African Professional Women's Association (details to come Conference. Watch for her comments and a description of the Imperial Borj hotel later in this section.

### **Benin, West Africa offers many delights**

By the late Eunice Rawlings

If you're looking for an unusual, affordable vacation, be sure to put Benin on your "Agenda Africa" for the coming year. Benin is an enchanting West African nation roughly the size of Pennsylvania, yet it is a complete destination with enough variety to fill a two-week vacation. From the drier northern

elevations, to the lower lying south, this hospitable country is a safe and a friendly place to explore. After gaining independence from France in 1960 Benin went through some difficult times. Today Benin is a multi-party democracy made up of six provinces. The president, who is the head of the government and chief of state, is elected for a five year term. In 1999, voters went to the polls and elected members of parliament, reinforcing the stable political atmosphere. Benin Memories When it comes to business as well as pleasure the Benin Marina Hotel offers you all that's best in Africa. As a business traveler, you'll be presented with superb surroundings providing confer-

ence facilities and versatile meeting rooms, all designed to make a comfortable and efficient environment, and adaptable enough to suit individual needs. Then, when work is done for the day, the recreation begins.

Situated right on the beach, the Benin Marina Hotel is an idyllic spot - the perfect setting for you to unwind. Perhaps you'll choose to enjoy an energetic game of tennis, or just order lunch by the pool, In addition, the hotel prides itself on its superb cuisine, attentive staff and luxurious accommodation.



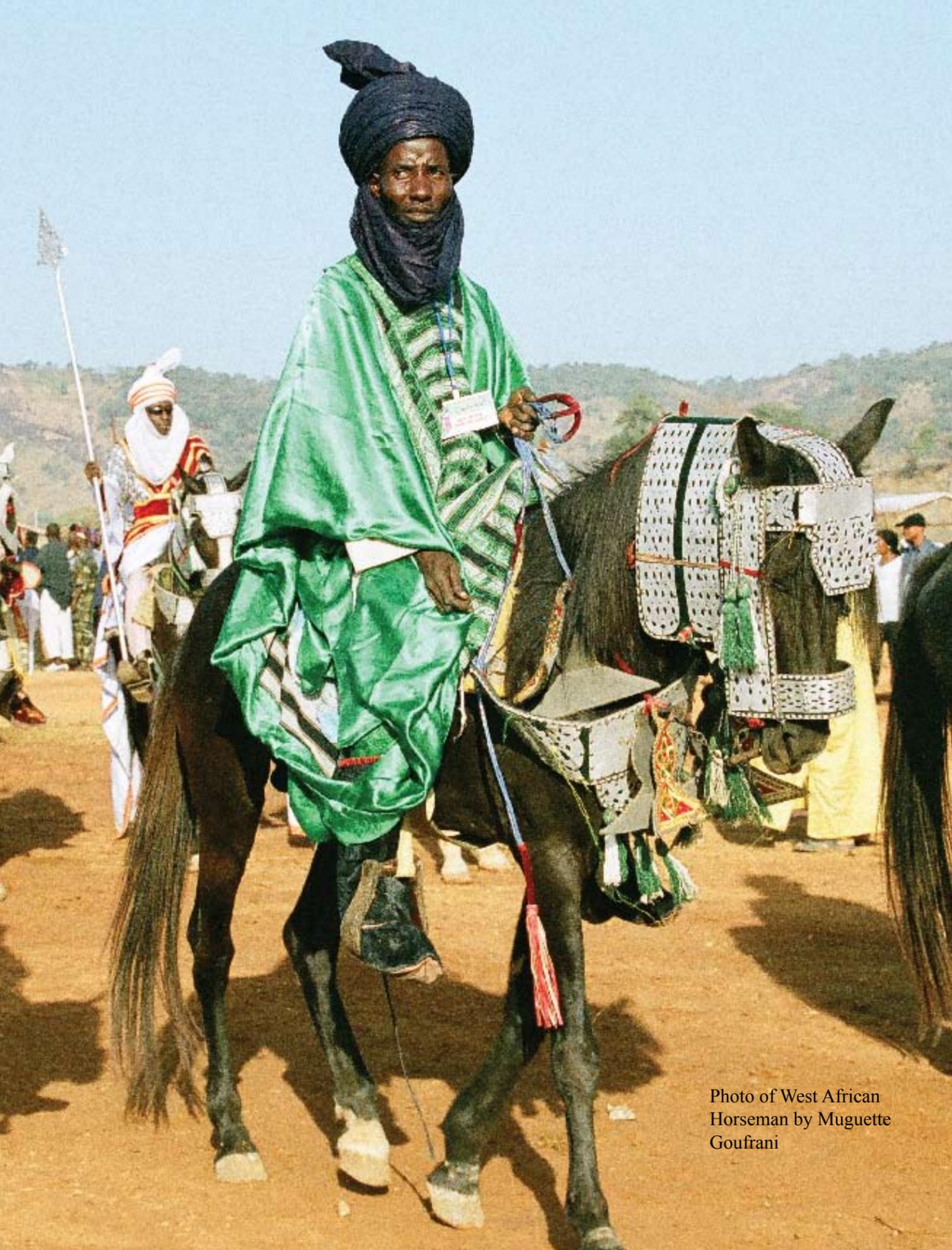


Photo of West African  
Horseman by Muguette  
Goufrani



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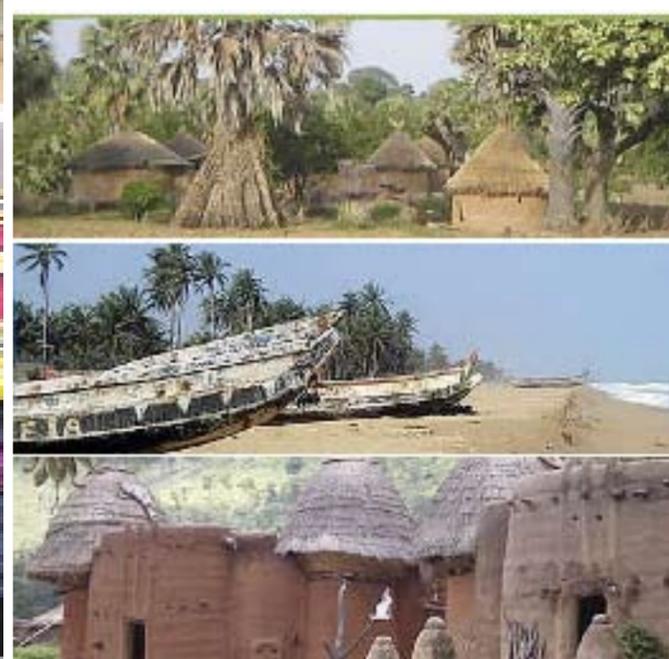
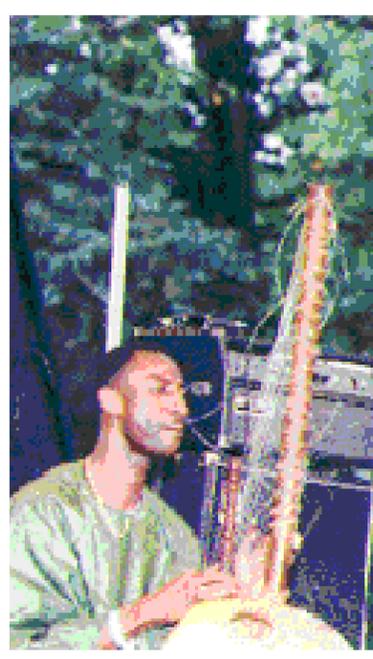


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# LOME, REPUBLIC OF TOGO WOULD BE AN ATTRACTIVE HOST CITY FOR GLOBAL TRAVEL AND TOURISM EVENTS



*ATA members look forward to adding Lome, Togo in the heart of Western Africa, as a future host city. Having enjoyed events in Dakar Senegal, Cotonou Benin, Conakry, Guinea, Calabar, Nigeria*

*and Abuja, Nigeria, Accra, Ghana and Conakry, Guinea in the last few years, I would highly recommend Togo and hope that an ATA event occurs there in this decade. For information on coming events, in Africa and worldwide, visit the ATA website - [www.africatravelassociation.org](http://www.africatravelassociation.org) or download our Western Africa World Edition magazine - [www.africa-ata.org/waf.htm](http://www.africa-ata.org/waf.htm)*

## **Pearl of West Africa** by Muguette Goufrani

Where do many West Africans go for an extended holiday or weekend fun? Chances are better than average that Togo tops many of their agendas. While we were living in West Africa, my family and I will never forget the Togolese hospitality we enjoyed dur-

ing our visits to that friendly country. Some say, should a popularity contest be held today, amongst all West African countries, Togo - "Pearl of West Africa" would come first. Lome, the capital city, with several five star hotels and acres of sandy, sun-drenched beaches, has become a highly popular vacation center for Europeans. For most Americans and Canadians, it's still a well kept secret. Visitors hardly need to leave their hotel area; the Atlantic ocean is one block from the heart of the city.

...Map of Togo.  
Lome's central market, where we bargained for many of my favorite keepsakes and wardrobe items, rates as one of the five best shopping sites in Africa. At Maison Royale, my friends and I were dazzled by an elegant gold Mercedes-Benz, parked at the entrance, gleaming in the mid-day sun. A symbol of wealth and success in North America, these upscale autos are commonplace in Lome, many being owned by "Nana Benz"—women traders, so named because they all appear to be Mercedes Benz owners. Most taxicabs are owned by this enterprising group. Mini buses are another popular means of transport, and the prices are fair. To insure the safety of its visitors, Togo has the most police checkpoints of any

democratic West African country.

## **Vin du Palm et Sauce des Legumes**

If you enjoy the delights of dining, each Togolese district has its own culinary specialties. One of my favorites is 'sauce des legumes' (vegetable sauce), with crab and foutou (mashed yams). Or how about something completely different? Try snails cooked like a brochette, or sit down to a dinner of smoked goat meat. Many visitors top off their meal with a glass of 'vin du palme' (palm wine), a popular, clear-colored drink that will knock your socks off. A big surprise on my first visit to Togo was 'Chateau Viale,' an astonishing, medieval style stone fortress. Perched high on a hill, this African castle was created by a visionary Frenchman in 1944 as a retreat for his wife. For some reason unknown to me -- she spent three days in palatial grandeur, then split for France. Today, Chateau Viale serves as the Togolese President's weekend retreat.

Information: [www.republicoftogo.com](http://www.republicoftogo.com)  
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Site available in English & French

## **Aneho**

For a change of venue, make a trip to Aneho, where you will experience life in a typical Togolese fishing village. You'll see fisher folk on the beach,

hauling in their long nets, accompanied by an enchanting rhythm and singing. It's like an epic Hollywood movie scene. French is the official language of Togo, which has a population of 5 million. The two largest ethnic groups are the Ewe and the Kabye. Ewe consider the birth of twins a great blessing, while the Bassari consider twins a misfortune. This same contrast is seen in their eating habits; the



Ewe eat cats, and consider anyone who eats dog meat to be barbarians. The Kabye enjoy dog meat, but refuse to eat cats.

Voodoo and fetish cults: While in Haiti (1997) as part of a media video production team, comprised of Africa Travel Magazine, National Geographic and Radio Lumiere, I advised my colleagues on how Voodoo culture came

to the Caribbean from Togo and other parts of West Africa. While in Togo, we spent a full day at Akodessewas, the world's largest fetish market, with its array of sorcerers' potions; roots, bark, monkey skulls, wart hog teeth, porcupine skins, leopard hides, antelope horns, bones of crocodiles, horses, pigs and monkeys, plus various parts of human anatomy. Such concoctions are used to cure everything from diarrhea and the flu, to cuts, impotence and rheumatism. I tried on a gris gris (necklace), which is said to work its magic when blessed by a fetish priest. Part doctor, part psychic, the priest

relies on herbal medicines, charms and a healthy dose of positive thinking. They believe that the spirits are everywhere -- in the air, the trees, the water - even buildings. A priest calls on his favorite god to predict future events, and keep evil forces at bay. He sits on a stool in his colorful robe, holding a regal staff, receiving gifts of gin, which he sips as a troupe performs ritual chanting and dancing. A sacrificial offering is made as a show of loyalty and respect to the spirits, and to gain special favors, such as the birth of twins.

## **Muguette Goufrani**

Africa Travel Magazine's Francophone Editor covers West African destinations and events in detail. Her native language is French and she has lived in five West African countries, working for Air Afrique, Royal Air Maroc and Citroen. As a Travel Agent, she worked in North Africa, where her family operates an inbound tour company, and later in Tahiti and Cambodia. Muguette has been a partner in the magazine since it was founded in 1995. E-mail Muguette with your travel experiences in Cote d'Ivoire and other West African destinations. We welcome your input. E-mail Muguette with your travel experiences in West Africa.

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## To Timbuktu for a Haircut Continued from page 7

Ahmed al-Hadj grinned in greeting and unlocked the door to the library. He was pleased that I should enter it. The first two rooms were empty and I immediately remembered a photograph of a similar setting with stacks of crumpling sheets and broken books browned with dust and weather, poorly stored and in ruin. Then the man opened another locked door and we entered a larger, mud-walled room with furniture. A ceiling

fan started when the electric switch went up. Immediately, I breathed air that had the aroma of old paper. The keeper of the library, magisterial in his movement, went behind his makeshift desk and motioned for me to sit on a wooden chair with a woven brace. Zak, not used to the setting, shyly bridged the language gulf. “My father was Imam at the mosque. His father before him. Our family values the old writings.” The seated man leaned his chest forward on the desk, his palms open in the air, not far from either side of his face as though to narrow my eyes on his own. Then he gestured toward a bookcase along the wall. “These manuscripts, these books, I save for them, for my family. And for Africa.” He was a man of letters saving historic writings for those who could not read.

I wanted to touch the pages, feel an ancient book, open history. “There are many manuscripts in Timbuktu. It is important that they be kept,” he said, not smiling. “But first they must be found.” Most endangered were the unregistered, unknown sheets of paper stashed in closets or loosely stacked writings without bindings, without containers, a sheaf held only with a wrap of tired leather. A wooden case full of books relied on the wall for support and stood beside two unmatched sets of shelving. Glass doors housed rather than protected the bindings and papers. The wall beside me had a larger case of shelves that sagged under the weight of a hundred volumes. Each shelf



displayed pastel bookbindings. A bundle of papers was neatly stacked in an opened drawer. This trove of literary riches was merely a fragment of the challenge. I felt both encouraged and helpless; at once a believer that something was being done to rescue the manuscripts while also feeling that these efforts were woefully insufficient.

“It is difficult to protect these,” Ahmed al-Hadj said through Zak. His left arm’s wave covered a tiny portion of the “Timbuktu manuscripts” I’d heard about. “My family wrote on astrology,” he explained, carefully lifting an old book from the collection and passing it to me. “Now, I wish to save everything.” I took heart from his reassurance, yet struggled to comprehend his perspective. “But it is not possible,” he said of the dilemma. This man in blue stared as though gauging trust in my eyes. He rose slowly, and walked to a mud alcove behind his desk to share a secret. He concentrated on me, his long arms carrying a burnt-wood box. He set it on the ground at my feet, where he knelt, the smoothed earth not dirtying his robe. He pried loose the top, shifted it off, and the carbon smudged his pink palms. The chest held eight damaged books and he removed one of the more intact volumes, its leather cover charred and flaking, and passed it to me.

“The Koran,” Ahmed al-Hadj whispered. I cradled it in my arms as Zak interpreted with reverence: “It is from the twelfth century.” It would be hard to find the soul of Timbuktu, but the search, I thought, might begin in this room.

He showed me another book and, through Zak, described how the paper withered from dampness during the rainy season. “These books — many, many — were not properly stored.” When I asked how he found this particular book, he said, “There was a home hurt in the rains. This was in it.” A pamphlet, dry and curled, rested on his desk. He pointed to it but did not lift it, telling Zak, “I cannot let him touch this one. The binding had bugs.” When I asked where they went, he replied that they were shaken

out. He went to a small pile of individual colophons, single sheets of history, and said of them, “Need more room for storage.” It was not a complaint. A recent acquisition, papers without binding, was piled in studied disarray with no place to file them properly yet or to protect them from changes

in temperature or humidity. They left a mark on the mind as would a stand of old-growth forest, a cove of pristine water, or the glimpse of an endangered species. I felt that this might be why I had come to Timbuktu; to assist, to make things better, to help save these precious manuscripts. I felt embarrassingly “Western”: the only way to help immediately in this place seemed to be with cash. And I gave. He accepted. It was not his wish; it was his need.

### Importance of Manuscripts

There are 700,000 manuscripts in Timbuktu. Their discovery has been called “the greatest archeological find since the Dead Sea scrolls.” Included in the cache are Moorish books with bug-riddled bindings, Islamic pamphlets covered with sand, ninth-century treatises baked by time, and scholarly pages a phase away from dust.

These literary remnants are mostly from Timbuktu’s glorious fifteenth century, tucked untidily between Africa’s Muslim encounter and the rancour of European exploration. They are the evidences of a proud, if not widely known, heritage.

Ignorance impeded their preservation over the centuries, and continued lack of awareness facilitated their slow disappearance — the loss of history’s book one page at a time. Were they housed together, collected in temperature-controlled rooms, and catalogued from Arabic to Tuareg to Zahara, these manuscripts would be esteemed one of the world’s bibliographic miracles. They are considered less a treasure only because of their scattered and deteriorating condition.

Such was the commerce of writing in Timbuktu that the city’s trade routes in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries became known as the Ink Road, a tribute to more than the manuscripts that made their way along them. Respected marabouts (religious teachers) and scholars were regarded as “ambassadors of peace” for their acumen in negotiations and Koran-based dispute resolution, not only in Timbuktu but in Gao, on the River Niger, and in Djenné. With their scholarship and mediation skills, they were respected as the ideal adjudicators. Sought when arbitration was required, they travelled the routes, figuratively and literally, of parchment and peace.

When Askia the Great ruled Mali in 1468, after his Songhai defeated the Tuareg, his rule was built upon Timbuktu’s strengths in trade. The city then became the epicentre of learning and Islamic education. Arab scholars wrote and collected books and created large libraries in its universities and synagogues. The vast collections of writings were maintained, protected, and revered. They sustained a learned society and a community of understanding. Thus the phrase “Timbuktu trades in gold, salt, and ink.”



# TO TIMBUKTU FOR A HAIRCUT AND OTHER HAIR-RAISING ADVENTURES



In Timbuktu's golden age, sophisticated travellers would arrive with books known to be rare. During this period, manuscript-collecting was popular in Timbuktu, and caravans were forcibly detained while their written works were copied by hand by students at the universities. Texts from distant universities were often borrowed, studied, and copied.

Timbuktu's libraries grew. At the same time, the city's private libraries flourished with copies of written contracts, religious books, legal texts, and letters. The marginalia of the day recorded

everything from wedding plans to the previous night's shooting stars, providing a fascinating insight into the culture's everyday concerns. Seeing those manuscripts today causes dismay. Often they lie in the homes of those who cannot read, and who perhaps do not know of the treasures they possess. Or the documents are crammed into the forgotten corners of mud buildings. Individual manuscript pages have been sold to travellers for food, thus disappearing from their family, from Timbuktu, from the public domain.

The protected manuscript collections that do exist, dating from as early as the second century, have prevented a cornerstone of Africa's history from sifting through careless hands. That 700,000 manuscripts have survived largely untended is astonishing. International travellers make their plans for Mali, browse a few websites, arrive, sightsee, and depart, oblivious to this literary conundrum: a wealth of historic manuscripts almost accidentally still available. But time is not a friend of these writings; the annual rains bring damaging humidity, the books in dry storage harbour insects, words erode. In the race against time to save these irreplaceable treasures, Mali has attracted serious attention, irregular assistance, and modest funds from Norway, South Africa (where a major business consortium plans a new library to house hundreds of thousands of the manuscripts), the United States, and Spain. There is no small amount of controversy in the salvage work, with competing claims of authority and confusing mandates.

## The Ahmed Baba Centre

This facility, named for the fifteenth-century scholar,

stores nineteen thousand manuscripts that range from philosophy, mathematics, and Islamic law to geography and the sciences. This is the written history of Africans in Africa. It is of them, by them. Not the French, the British, or the Portuguese.

Restoration teams face a fascinating dilemma in deciding how to protect the brittle pages. Their work barely makes a dent in one of the desert's greatest challenges. "Rare book boxes" have been designed to house those manuscripts beyond reclamation. Repair and restoration work is risky, too. Sometimes turning a page makes more dust than sense. The key to preserving the knowledge, if not the documents, is to transfer the words to another technology. Microfilming has been problematic, because the ubiquitous sand tends to erase key data components. And the supply of electricity is sporadic.

## The U.S.-based Timbuktu Educational Foundation

This organization was created in 2000 for "the sole purpose of preserving, restoring, and disseminating the important intellectual contributions of the early African scholars from the famous Timbuktu University of Mali, West Africa." Those noble objectives for Timbuktu's disintegrating heritage are farsighted yet time-pressured. The foundation proposes to "translate and publish the manuscripts of Timbuktu" and "restore the historical buildings which house the University of Timbuktu," which they intend to "reopen with its classical methods of teaching." It also wants to open a branch of the University of Timbuktu in a major city in the

United States with "the ancient, classical architecture of Timbuktu's great universities." There, it will recreate the famed Timbuktu "Circle of Knowledge," the sharing of complex decision-making through the inter-generational training of scholars who mentor professors who, in turn, study with Imams. The scholars deliberate contentious matters together and, in this flow of information, learn and decide. When their deliberations are complete they make a decision, perhaps issue a fatwa. Given these aims, it is understandable that the Malian government, mindful of the co-operation it needs from other well-intentioned groups, made the foundation "the legal custodians and caretakers of the manuscripts."

Musa Balde, of Oakland, California,

is president of the Timbuktu Educational Foundation. He warns that "this entire African intellectual legacy is on the verge of being lost." While many of the volumes and decaying materials have been identified through the main universities of Timbuktu, Jingere Ber, Sankoré, and Sidi Yahia, much more work must be done. Balde has launched the foundation's Preserve-a-Manuscript program, setting a fundraising goal of one hundred U.S. dollars for each artifact that remains from the time when "Timbuktu flourished as the greatest academic and commercial centre in Africa." Meanwhile, in this antiquarian gold mine, the sheets curl and crack where the ink has set. Documents of a dozen warped pages are filled with hundreds of broken words. Africa is known as a land with a rich oral tradition, infused with song and dance; this trove of manuscripts establishes it as a continent with rich traditions in literature as well.

We emerged from the dilapidated Old City onto a wider street, which made the area feel new, that is, less than a hundred years old.

"Zak, had you ever been to Barth's home before?"

"No."

"To Caillié's?"

"No."

"To Laing's?"

"Yes, but only stand outside."

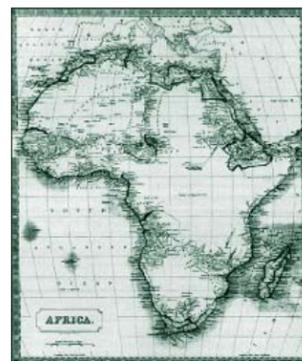
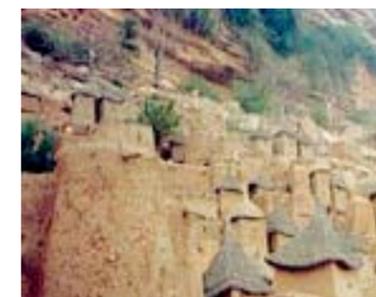
We stopped at a home that sold woven baskets. On its porch a pot of fish parts was at a boil. Farther along, a chair held dirty bottles filled with gas oil, each bottle holding just the amount needed to top up one of the motorcycles that were so common on this roadway. Zak stopped to buy a single cigarette, and we asked the boy selling it whether there was another bibliothèque nearby. Zak lit his smoke, puffed, and listened to the explanation as the boy pointed to a nearby building.

We left the dust-packed road and entered a courtyard thirty metres along. Inside, we found half a dozen one-storey buildings that looked to be residences. A colonnade appeared, and there was a raised walkway made of mortar. A sign hung around the corner: Salle des manuscrits. That was it. We woke the man we took to be the custodian. He said the man we wanted was bathing.

## Library Represents a Noble Cause

Apparently not. Djibril Doucouré sauntered toward us with such fresh enthusiasm that I felt as if I were the first to visit his library. The man was Chef de Division Restauration & Conservation des manuscrits a l'Institut Ahmed Baba de Tombouctou. He knew of Western interest in the manuscripts, corresponded with university students in Canada and the United States and, as he showed us to his rooms, was evidently proud of the manuscripts and books he had assembled as part of the preservation effort. Hundreds of protected volumes lined the walls. These books were





intimates of his. Doucouré removed a bedsheet covering the glass display case in the middle of the room. In the case, a dozen books lay opened and labeled. “Islamique en 601/1204” was indicative of their ages. The Koran rested in two treasured copies respectively indicating both Muslim and Christian dates, 639 and 1241. “These titles, they are about pharmacie,” Doucouré explained, gingerly holding two aged books. “The spines, they crack because of heat.”

The temperature had created dry wrinkles, and both books were torn. “May I?” I asked, extending my hands. Doucouré placed a book many hundreds of years old across my wrists.

“This one, it is on optics.” He pointed to an illustration of a conical sphere with lines running through it and measurements indicating magnification. Arab calligraphy is among the most beautiful to be found, and it radiated here as well, though this book’s lines ended with aborted words, as page edges were worn away by heat and humidity. When Doucouré showed us a side room, we discussed the limited project funds he had. The library was large and cool and had sturdy shelves. The books were well racked, and I saw titles dealing with history and chemistry and mathematics. I thought if more Westerners visited, more would leave money. More Timbuktu manuscripts would be saved.

My Timbuktu day was ending. There was an office here that stamped international passports with an imperial-looking blotch. But it needed to be searched out, and soon.

I turned to Zak. “Shouldn’t we hurry?”

“Why?” he replied.

“It will close at five.”

“At five?”

“At five o’clock.”

“Rick,” he stated. “Is Timbuktu. Nothing closes at five.”

We picked up a couple of bottles of mineral water, a Diago for me, and Roc Vert for Zak. At a visitors’ room in a courtyard behind a sign for Mission Culturelle, there were a few brochures in French and, more curiously for a non-country, the presumption of a passport stamp: Tombouctou. It marked more than my travel document, it marked an accomplishment. Each year fewer than five thousand travellers (Europeans, Arabs, North Americans) — an average of thirteen a day — make their way to Timbuktu. To have been one of them was satisfying. It pleased me nearly as much not to have seen even one of the other twelve visitors that day.

The day turned to night. Zak and I separated, him returning to the hotel.



In the dust that shouldered the Route de Kabara, a yellowed building boasted of access to the Internet, a commercial courtesy of MaliNet. I’d read warnings that in Mali such signs, like those proclaiming VISA cards, were often meant as intentions, not facts. Inside was a table with computers, three of which apparently

were functioning, others anticipating such a day.

The one I chose booted slowly. After all, this was the end of the world; I had to manage my expectations. French keyboards were understandably *de rigueur*. The uniqueness of this one lay in its individual keys. Each character on the keyboard was handwritten on paper, using different pens and pencils, implying that such “fixes” had been made over time. These pieces of paper were secured to the keys with Scotch tape, the heat making “secured” a tentative concept here. Two tags were on the floor. After three reboots, I was ready and sent my mother and father a brief e-mail: “Have arrived healthy and safe. Dad, I’m in Timbuktu and going to get my hair cut.”

I left the Internet room. Outside, it was

dark; a dim light bulb hung from a cable beside a merchant’s doorway ten metres away. In beleaguered French I negotiated access to the shop’s telephone. It was kept under lock and key in a wooden box. The merchant twisted the key and pulled hard on a sand-encrusted bolt. The phone was old, but in Timbuktu, what isn’t? To ensure that I’d not misjudged the agreed cost, I placed seffe on the table and the shopkeeper gave me change, though he set it to the side in a gesture I understood to mean “In case it is more.” I telephoned Janice with all the emotion of far-off love and, after three rings, reached the answering machine, on which I left a historically placed romantic message.

The occasional flickering light from a shop or candles in streetside homes lit my way back to the hotel. Periodically, a vehicle drove by, a dog barked. People scuttled along. The sand at my ankles slowed a walk that was already unhurried. Then it was quiet.

I found the barber’s tiny shack at the roadside, marked by a hand-lettered sign that leaned against the outside wall and displayed the word *coiffeur*. When I poked my head in the open doorway, the barber was midway through a child’s haircut. At the sight of me, he jettisoned the local and cleared the chair below an electric bulb. I waved my willingness to wait, but three other kids had gathered behind me as I walked in. I was not an inconvenience; I was the evening’s entertainment.

At the British Library, I had browsed through Zigzag to Timbuktu, a 1963 travel story by Nicholas Bennett, who said, “I had always thought of Timbuktu as the most remote place in the world; that’s why I wanted to go there.” Another of his observations came to mind as I sat in the barbershop beneath the barber’s sharp clippers. “The children, and this was a thing I had noticed in Timbuktu, had a strange kind of haircut. Half the head is shaved at one time, and it’s not until the shaven half has grown



again that they have the other half shaved off.” I’d watched for this “Timbuktu hairstyle” and wondered if that was the origin of my dad’s saying. Nothing I saw validated that, and I was not concerned about a strange trimming of my locks. Too late, I realized that all the five faces looking at me in the barber’s chair were below closely trimmed pates. This awareness was confirmed by the mirror. I couldn’t remember my dad ever coming home with this hairstyle until he went

bald.

In the deep dark, I overshot the lane that led off the road to my hotel and instead walked on for a kilometre in increasingly unfamiliar territory. Occasionally I passed the huts of street merchants. At one, I was flirtatiously asked by a young woman for un cadeau and she touched my pack. Then there were three, and to each I presented my country’s flag on a pin. Their giggles were genuine, and in trade they offered me meat they had cooked for the evening meal. It tasted of grit and grease and reminded me that I was hungry. Their men joined us, and in French I asked about the way to a nearby hotel. They said there was none. They sent me away from the light and companionable warmth of their fire and into the night, alone. I was barely able to see. Then three goats suddenly jumped across the road, startling me with the reminder of my vulnerability. I passed large mounds of dark dirt that were actually mud homes, and finally found the narrow road that led into incredible darkness. At its end I stopped and stood at the edge of the Sahara, where the hotel Hendrina Khan was tucked into the sand.

I had spent a day rummaging through history to find some simple truths. Timbuktu is not an imaginary place, it is an embellished one. Its legends neither sought nor needed my sanction. Timbuktu is more a passage than a destination; more a pilgrimage than a journey. I thought, let the Timbuktu myth be.

Timbuktu does not long to be loved; it shrugged at my arrival. It did not judge my entry; it would as soon have let me pass. My coming meant nothing; it never would. Timbuktu is of consequence to me, not me to it. No one is drawn to Timbuktu by today’s realities. All come with knowing illusions. Timbuktu’s aura will not crumble like its buildings. I felt, with

René Caillié, “Still, though I cannot account for the impressions, there was something imposing in the aspect of a great city raised in the midst of sands.”

The spell of Timbuktu would remain on the Niger’s shore when I left Korioumé the next morning, it would not follow me on the river. If there was a sadness in my discovery, it was this: there is no quest for Timbuktu.



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