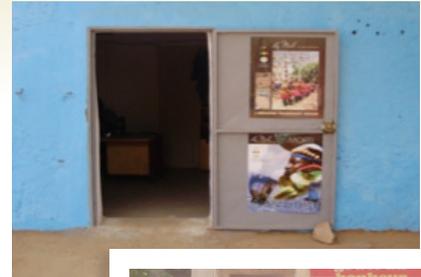




Tourism Center Opens : a Toguna for the tourism industry in Pays Dogon

Traditionally in Mali Dogon culture, a Toguna is a central meeting place for village elders. The opening of the Bandiagara Tourism Information Center serves the tourism industry in much the same way. In addition to giving more visibility to the Syndicat d'Initiative et de Tourisme de Bandiagara, a tourism association, the new Center physically serves as an essential information point and marketplace for visiting tourists.



The Tourism Information Center is centrally located within the town, close to a prominent restaurant and to the road to Sangha (a village which is a principal tourist attraction). The facility is a clean and organized space with posters and wall hangings that offer invaluable information for tourists, ranging from suggested prices for obtaining services (such as tour guides) within the region, maps with the distance between villages to help tourists plan their trip into Pays Dogon, as well as a brief overview of what various sites and villages have to offer as tourism destinations. Also on display is information on the wildlife and biodiversity to be found in the Pays Dogon. Finally, the Center serves as a marketplace, selling tourism products like postcards, local fabrics and handicrafts, all of which have been created by local artisans.

Officially, the Syndicat was created on September 28, 2008. Its principal objective was to unite the efforts of the principal players in the Pays Dogon tourism industry, in particular by offering a meeting place for these professionals. The association is comprised of the heads of the Bandiagara tour guides' associations, hotel-owners' associations, transporter's association, handicraft-makers' association, traditional healers, the Mission Culturelle de Bandiagara, and the Bandiagara Mayor's Office.

To ensure that the association members had the technical capacity to function properly, the Global Sustainable Tourism Alliance/ Pays Dogon (GSTA/PD) provided training in May of 2008 on organizational management and administration, and continues to offer technical support for the group. More specifically, the group has attempted to organize and standardize a variety of tourism issues and products, from prices related to the procurement of guide services, to the sale of tourism products, to hotel costs.

Thanks to increased visibility, the Syndicat recently announced World Bank support for its activities, and a recent news program on local Malian television indicated the association will soon be receiving a photocopier, computer, and motorcycle, among other equipment.

To ensure its sustainability, the Center will assume full financial responsibility for its activities (obtained via sale of tourism products). In its first month of operation, the Center boasted a net profit.

The Tourism Information Center is the new hub for activity for the Syndicat, a local association created by the Malian Ministry of Tourism with support from the USAID-funded GSTA/PD.