

## TO TIMBUCTU

I first heard of Timbuctu when I was 8 years old and it so fascinated me that I dreamt of going there most of my life. Well, a “few” years later I managed to get there. What an adventure. How this came about is another story. I had the privilege of travelling with Alan Donovan, he of African Heritage and one of the world’s most renowned African art collectors and experts. We arrived in Bamako and headed north by road. It was a fascinating and interesting journey. Believe me it is a very big country. I enjoyed the peace and tranquillity of a lot of open spaces and a small population.

Timbuctu was more than I had expected. I had been told that there is nothing there. Well, there is a lot. It has a pulse that beats beyond what the eye sees.

Here is our story

At last.... On the road to Timbuctu



Long hours on the road led to a long long wait for the tiny ferry, aggravated by the Governor delaying it and taking it over.....



... to cross the mighty River Niger and onto our ultimate destination.....



.....TIMBUCTU.

Yes, it is bitterly cold at night and in the early morning!!!!



Finally, the reason for this mystical city – the Well of Buctu, the woman who started it all



Part of my dream to get to Timbuctu was also my fascination with the beautiful nomadic people of the desert; the Tuareg. They are proudly elegant and have an air of mystery as they travel through the desert with absolute ease and comfort in their harsh but magnificent environment.

My first encounter with a Tuareg



The architecture of the mud buildings is very interesting. It has such a neatness about it. The old carved doors inlaid with metals and carefully carved frames are truly splendid.



And then, just out of the city boundaries is the immense Sahara Desert.



Off we drove into the sands and over the dunes accompanied by camels and the caravanserais with their loads of salt, carrying on history forever.



Tuareg tents with their camels



Here we attended the Desert Festival. Both traditional and modern Malian music rang out all night across the sands and up into the starlit desert sky.



The beautiful Tuareg came out in all their regalia. They are truly gorgeous people.







Their camels, too, were bedecked and adorned.





The camel displays and movements were immensely fascinating and sublime.



Hundreds of camels and nomads appeared



Gearing up for the ultimate Camel race



Our trip to and from Timbuctu, took us across Mali, with its varying peoples and cultures. We were led through this enchanting country by our Dhogon guide Ogo.



Visiting the city of Djenné with the biggest mud structure in the world – its magnificent Mosque



And smaller mosques along the way



The noisy bustling town of Mopti



Buying magnificent fabrics and cloths en route





Watching them make their famous mud cloth



The lovely pottery, which sadly, we could not take home with us.



Meeting the nomadic Fulani on the move



Or in their temporary homes



The colourful markets along the roads



A culture to be seen and experienced!



By Annabella Francescon