

Important Festivals In Mali

The people of Mali celebrate two very important festivals: the Dama and the Sirige. Every person in the village attends each of these festivals. These ceremonies are important because they teach Dogon children (Dogon refers to a region in southern Mali) about the community's most sacred religious beliefs. These ceremonies also remind the adults in the Dogon community of the beliefs that they share. Attending these ceremonies is similar to attending important services and ceremonies in other religions.

One of these highly important ceremonies is called the Dama (DAH-mah). A Dama is a sort of memorial festival held at least a year after a person's death. Some villages hold Damas every few years in which they honor all of the people who passed away during that period. In addition to celebrating the lives of people who have passed away, Malians also believe that the Dama will help their spirits move into the next spiritual realm.

The other highly important festival in Mali is called the Sirige (See-REE-gay). The Sirige is held after a generation of village elders has passed away. The purpose of the Sirige is for the younger generation of the village (teenagers and young adults) to present a Sigi (SEE-ghee) to the village. A Sigi is a very tall mask made by the young people of the village. This mask is made of wood and is often as tall as 20 feet. It is worn at Damas and Siriges by highly trained dancers. The Sigi is meant to capture the essence and character of the generation that created it. When the new Sigi is presented at the Sirige, the old Sigi is retired and placed in a consecrated cave area where it will never be viewed again.