

AFRICA · WILDLIFE · ADVENTURE · OFF THE BEATEN PATH · HIKING

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Africa's second-largest country is the only one where mountain gorillas, Grauer's gorillas and bonobos all live, alongside the volcanoes of Virunga, the continent's oldest national park. Kinshasa's rumba and art scene is among Africa's most inventive. Travel is difficult and expensive, arranged largely through the parks and specialist operators, and FCDO advice must be checked first.



The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to parts of Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice. FCDO advice last updated 8 October 2026.

 CAPITAL Kinshasa	 CURRENCY Congolese franc (CDF) £1 ≈ CDF 3,088	 LANGUAGE French, Lingala Swahili, Tshiluba	 BEST TIME Jun–Sep
 DAILY BUDGET £70–£350 £££ Expensive	 PLUGS Type C, D, E 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 12h 30m via Brussels, Paris or Addis Ababa ~£650–£1,100 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+1, UTC+2 standard time

The DRC is roughly the size of Western Europe, and few visitors see more than one corner of it. Tourism has long centred on the eastern borderlands next to Rwanda: Goma for Virunga's mountain gorillas and the overnight climb of Nyiragongo, Bukavu for Kahuzi-Biega's Grauer's gorillas, with Lake Kivu boats linking the two. The west is a separate trip — Kinshasa, the largest French-speaking city on Earth, its bonobo sanctuary and the cataracts of the lower Congo. Between lie rainforest, river towns such as Kisangani and the copper belt around Lubumbashi, reached mainly by air or slow river barge.

Travel here is slow and costly, and patience with paperwork, checkpoints and shifting schedules is essential. Park permits, guides, armed rangers and transfers are usually bundled by the parks themselves or by specialist operators, which explains the high daily cost. In return, encounters with great apes can be startlingly uncrowded, and Kinshasa's live rumba, street art and immaculately dressed sapeurs reveal a confident city few outsiders see. It suits experienced Africa travellers rather than first-timers; security in the east can change quickly, so anyone considering a trip should follow FCDO advice closely.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

WILDLIFE

Virunga mountain gorillas

Founded in 1925, Virunga is Africa's oldest national park and protects about a third of the world's mountain gorillas; when the gorilla sector is open, habituated families are tracked from Bukima on the forested slopes of the Mikeno volcano.
- 2

ADVENTURE

Nyiragongo volcano

When treks are running, a steep climb of five to six hours from Kibati leads to simple huts on the rim of this 3,470-metre volcano, whose crater has held one of the world's largest lava lakes.

3

WILDLIFE

Kahuzi-Biega National Park

West of Bukavu, this UNESCO-listed park is the best place to track Grauer's (eastern lowland) gorillas, the largest gorilla subspecies, through bamboo and montane forest below Mount Kahuzi and Mount Biega.

4

WILDLIFE

Lola ya Bonobo

On Kinshasa's southern fringe, the world's only sanctuary for orphaned bonobos cares for survivors of the bushmeat trade; bonobos live only in the DRC, so this is often the one chance to see them.

5

CULTURE

Wagenia Falls, Kisangani

On the last of the Boyoma Falls cataracts at Kisangani, Wagenia fishermen lash wooden tripods across the rapids to hang huge conical fish traps, a technique handed down for generations.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Kinshasa

≈ 17 million people

A sprawling capital facing Brazzaville across the Congo. Hear live rumba in Matonge, visit the National Museum and Lola ya Bonobo, and move around with trusted local contacts.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Mbuji-Mayi

≈ 2.9 million people

The diamond capital of Kasai-Oriental, built around artisanal and industrial mining; it has almost no tourist infrastructure and is visited mainly by traders and aid workers.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Lubumbashi

≈ 2.6 million people

The copper-belt capital of the south-east, with broad colonial-era avenues, a national museum and a well-kept zoo; mainly a business city close to the Zambian border.

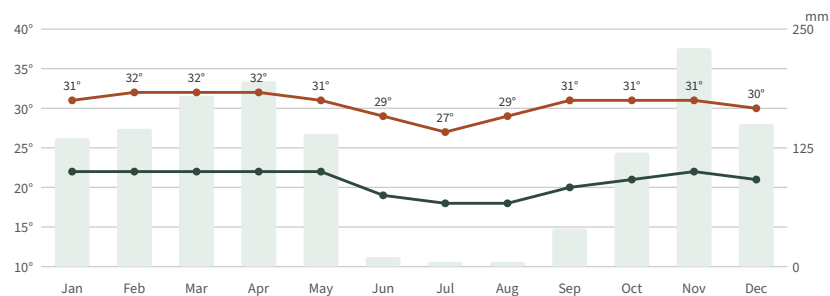
The DRC has not held a national census since 1984, so city populations are estimates; sources disagree on whether Mbuji-Mayi or Lubumbashi is larger.

When to go to Democratic Republic of the Congo

Best time: **Jun–Sep**.

**Average climate in Kinshasa**

— High °C — Low °C — Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Feb, Apr	Amani Festival Founded in Goma as a festival for peace, Amani brings Congolese and East African musicians together, traditionally each February; the 2026 edition moved to Lubumbashi in April, so confirm dates and venue.
Jun	Independence Day On 30 June the country marks independence from Belgium in 1960 with parades, speeches and street parties, loudest in Kinshasa's boulevards and bars.

How much does Democratic Republic of the Congo cost?

SHOESTRING £70 per person / day ≈ CDF 216,143 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £160 per person / day ≈ CDF 494,042 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £350 per person / day ≈ CDF 1,080,716 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Moambe chicken The national dish: chicken stewed in moambe, a rich sauce of palm-nut pulp with garlic and chilli, served with rice or fufu and greens.	Pondu Cassava leaves pounded and slow-cooked with palm oil, onion and sometimes smoked fish — the everyday green served alongside almost every meal.	Liboké Fish such as capitaine or tilapia seasoned with chilli, tomato and onion, wrapped in leaves and cooked over charcoal until fragrant and tender.
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Getting around

Roads between regions are few and often impassable in the rains, so travellers fly: Air Congo and CAA link Kinshasa with Lubumbashi, Kisangani and other cities, though schedules shift. Visitors to the east have historically entered overland from Rwanda at Gisenyi–Goma or Rusizi–Bukavu, travelling by operator 4x4 and by boat across Lake Kivu. Barges ply the Congo. In Kinshasa, use a driver arranged by your hotel.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



220V — bring a UK-to-C/D/E adapter

DIALLING CODE

+243

TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

If you have a medical emergency which requires an ambulance, contact a hospital to make this request. If you are in Kinshasa, you can contact the fire service on **118**, and the police on **112**.

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

TIME ZONES

UTC+1, UTC+2 (standard time)

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Tips in US dollars are expected by rangers, trackers, porters, guides and drivers; in Kinshasa restaurants leave around 10% if service isn't included.

ETIQUETTE

Never photograph soldiers, police, government buildings, bridges or airports. Greet people before getting down to business, use your right hand to give and receive, and dress smartly in Kinshasa, where appearance matters.

MAIN AIRPORTS

N'djili International Airport (FIH), Kinshasa; Lubumbashi International Airport (FBM), Lubumbashi

Visas & entry for Democratic Republic of the Congo

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to visit DRC.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations

See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic 6–8 weeks before you go. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A Tetanus Typhoid Yellow fever

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya Dengue Hepatitis B Measles Meningococcal disease Polio Rabies Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required for all travellers (usually over 9 months or 1 year old). There is a risk of yellow fever in parts of the country — vaccination may be advised.

MALARIA

High risk of malaria

- There is a high risk of malaria in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: antimalarial tablets recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Democratic Republic of the Congo

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Mon 4 Jan 2027	Martyrs' Day
Sat 16 Jan 2027	National Hero Laurent Désiré Kabila Day · National Hero Patrice Emery Lumumba Day (observed)

Sun 17 Jan 2027	National Hero Patrice Emery Lumumba Day
Tue 6 Apr 2027	Day of the Struggle of Simon Kimbangu and African Consciousness
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Mon 17 May 2027	Revolution and Armed Forces Day
Wed 30 Jun 2027	Independence Day
Sat 31 Jul 2027	Parents' Day (observed)
Sun 1 Aug 2027	Parents' Day
Mon 2 Aug 2027	Congolese Genocide Memorial Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in French

ENGLISH	FRENCH	SAY IT
Hello	Bonjour	<i>bon-ZHOOR</i>
Thank you	Merci	<i>mair-SEE</i>
Please	S'il vous plaît	<i>seel voo PLAY</i>
Excuse me	Excusez-moi	<i>ex-KOO-zay MWAH</i>
How much is this?	C'est combien ?	<i>say kom-BYAN</i>

Know before you go

Bring crisp, recent-series US dollar notes in small denominations: torn, marked or older bills are routinely refused, and card payments are rare outside top Kinshasa hotels.

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required on arrival, and malaria is a year-round risk; carry the certificate with your passport and take antimalarials.

Read the FCDO travel advice before booking, and arrange gorilla treks or volcano climbs only through the parks' official channels or established operators who monitor conditions closely.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.