

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

Republic of the Congo

The Republic of the Congo is one of Africa's last great rainforest frontiers. Odzala-Kokoua and Nouabalé-Ndoki shelter western lowland gorillas and forest elephants in swampy clearings called bais, while Brazzaville faces Kinshasa across the Congo River. Infrastructure is thin and costs are high, but the reward is primate tracking with almost no other visitors.



The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to parts of 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 2 June 2026.

 CAPITAL Brazzaville	 CURRENCY Central African CFA franc (XAF) £1 ≈ FCFA 781	 LANGUAGE French, Lingala Kituba	 BEST TIME Jun-Sep
 DAILY BUDGET £60–£450 £££ Expensive	 PLUGS Type C, E 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 10h 30m via Paris or Addis Ababa ~£750–£1,250 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+1 standard time

Often called Congo-Brazzaville to distinguish it from its huge neighbour, the country is mostly equatorial forest drained by the Congo and Sangha rivers. The far north holds its great draw: Odzala-Kokoua, one of Africa's oldest national parks, and Nouabalé-Ndoki, part of the Sangha Trinational UNESCO site, where elephants, gorillas and situngu gather at bais. Most visitors fly into Brazzaville, spend a day or two by the river, then join a lodge package with charter flights north. The coast around Pointe-Noire adds beaches, the Diosso gorges and the slave-trade memorial at Loango.

This is expedition travel. Tourist infrastructure barely exists outside a handful of lodges, prices are high and French (or Lingala) is essential away from the camps. In return, wildlife encounters are intimate and unhurried: only a few visitors a day track a habituated gorilla group, and you may have a bai to yourself. Brazzaville is calmer and greener than most visitors expect, with riverside bars, Congolese rumba (UNESCO-listed in 2021) and the immaculately dressed sapeurs of La Sape. It suits experienced Africa travellers with flexible plans and generous budgets.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

WILDLIFE

Odzala-Kokoua National Park

Established in 1935 and covering about 13,500 km², this is Central Africa's flagship gorilla park. Track habituated western lowland gorillas from Ngaga camp, canoe the Lécoli river and watch forest elephants at bais.
- 2

WILDLIFE

Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park

An almost untouched lowland forest in the far north and part of the Sangha Trinational UNESCO site. From the viewing platform at Mbeli Bai, watch gorillas, forest elephants and situngu feeding in the open.

3

WILDLIFE

Lésio-Louna Reserve

About 140 km north of Brazzaville on the Batéké Plateau, this reserve, co-managed with the Aspinall Foundation, returns orphaned gorillas to the wild amid rolling savannah and gallery forest; the easiest wildlife trip from the capital.

4

NATURE

Gorges de Diosso

Red and ochre cliffs eroded into a jagged amphitheatre above green forest, about 25 km north of Pointe-Noire. Combine with the Ma-Loango museum in the former royal palace and the slave-trade memorial on Loango's shore.

5

ARCHITECTURE

Basilique Sainte-Anne du Congo

Brazzaville's landmark church, built in the 1940s to designs by the French architect Roger Erell, with a steep roof of shimmering green tiles and soaring pointed arches inspired by local forms.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Brazzaville

≈ 2.1 million people

A low-key capital on the Congo River's north bank, with the green-roofed Basilique Sainte-Anne, Poto-Poto's painting school and views of the rapids and Kinshasa's skyline.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Pointe-Noire

≈ 1.4 million people

The oil capital on the Atlantic, with beaches, seafood restaurants and a 1930s railway station; the base for the Diosso gorges and the Tchimpounga chimpanzee sanctuary.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Dolisie

≈ 178,000 people

A railway and road junction in Niari, useful as an overnight stop between Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire or as a gateway to the Mayombe forest hills.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

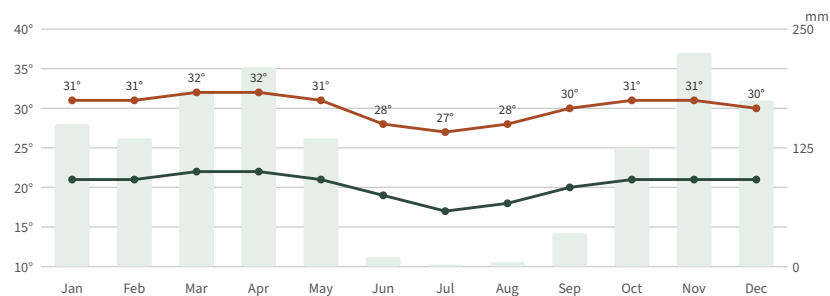
When to go to Republic of the Congo

Best time: **Jun–Sep**.



Average climate in Brazzaville

— High °C — Low °C — Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jul	FESPAM The Pan-African Music Festival, held in Brazzaville in July of odd-numbered years, fills the city with concerts, rumba and traditional ensembles from across the continent.
Aug	Independence Day On 15 August the country marks independence from France with parades, music and street celebrations, especially along Brazzaville's main avenues.

How much does Republic of the Congo cost?

SHOESTRING £60 per person / day ≈ FCFA 46,848 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £140 per person / day ≈ FCFA 109,313 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £450 per person / day ≈ FCFA 351,364 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

Saka saka Cassava leaves pounded and simmered for hours with palm oil, peanut paste and smoked fish, served with cassava bread or rice.	Liboké Fish or meat seasoned with chilli, onion and tomato, wrapped in banana or other large leaves and steamed or cooked over embers.	Chikwangue Fermented cassava dough wrapped in leaves and steamed into dense, slightly sour loaves, eaten alongside almost every stew.
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Getting around

Domestic flights link Brazzaville with Pointe-Noire and northern towns, and lodge packages for Odzala include charter flights. The paved RN1 highway connects Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire, served by buses, while the old Congo–Ocean railway runs slow, irregular passenger trains. Taxis in Brazzaville are cheap; agree fares first. Speedboats cross the river to Kinshasa, but expect heavy paperwork.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  C E 230V — bring a UK-to-C/E adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS There's no central number for emergency services in the Republic of Congo. You can report crimes to local police on 06 665 4804 . Few police will speak English. Source: FCDO "Getting help"
DIALLING CODE +242	TIME ZONE UTC+1 (standard time)
TAP WATER Not safe — drink bottled or treated water	DRIVING On the right

TIPPING

Not customary in local places; leave about 10% in upmarket restaurants. Tips for guides, trackers, porters and lodge staff are expected.

ETIQUETTE

Carry your passport for police checks, ask before photographing people, and never photograph government buildings, bridges, the airport, port areas or military sites.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Maya-Maya Airport (BZV), Brazzaville; Agostinho-Neto International Airport (PNR), Pointe-Noire

Visas & entry for Republic of the Congo

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to enter the Republic of Congo.

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 Rabies Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK. 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 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 Republic of the Congo

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

Sun 1 Nov 2026	All Saints' Day
Sat 28 Nov 2026	Republic Day
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day

Mon 29 Mar 2027	Easter Monday
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Thu 6 May 2027	Ascension Day
Mon 17 May 2027	Pentecost Monday
Thu 10 Jun 2027	Reconciliation Day
Sun 15 Aug 2027	National 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

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required for entry; carry the original, and check the FCDO travel advice for current entry rules before booking.

Bring euros in cash to exchange: card payments are rare outside big hotels and ATMs are few. CFA francs are hard to obtain before you arrive.

Book Odzala-Kokoua through the lodge operator well ahead; gorilla-tracking places are limited, departures fixed and charter flights fill quickly in the dry season.

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.