



Rediscover the
meaning of travel

Tour Notes

Congo River Expedition

Tour Duration – 28 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●●● | Culture ●●●●● | History ●●●○○ | Wildlife ●●○○○

Tour Pace - Relaxed

Tour Highlights

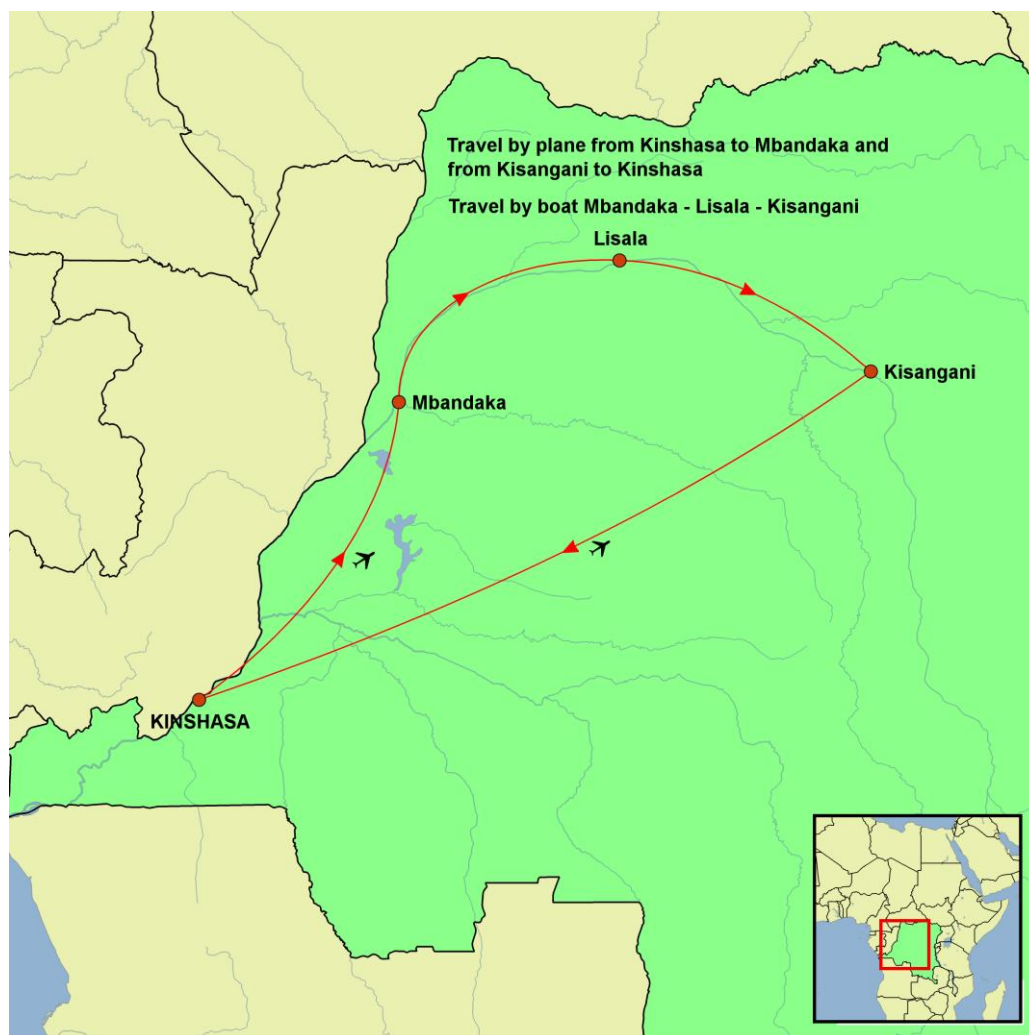
- ✓ The ultimate Congo experience – an epic 1,000-kilometre voyage on the mighty Congo River.
- ✓ Experience the different sights and sounds of the real Africa as you travel through a land few travellers have yet discovered.
- ✓ Discover remote villages, some of the country's important historical sights, rainforests and of course a chance to meet the local people.





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Tour Map - DR Congo - Congo River Expedition



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Mix of basic hotels and camping
Included Meals: Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary.
Group Size: Maximum of 10
Start Point: Kinshasa
End Point: Kinshasa
Transport: 4WD, Boat, Plane
Countries: Democratic Republic of the Congo





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Congo River Expedition

Holiday in DRC? It's not an obvious choice and certainly not Africa for beginners. In fact, this is Africa for the very experienced. The turbulent, surging flow of the Congo reflects the country which currently shares its name. Indeed, the journey from Kinshasa, now a larger French-speaking city than Paris, to Kisangani must surely be the world's most adventurous river cruise. Of course, take a copy of Conrad's Heart of Darkness, read its record of 19th century brutal colonial exploitation, but day by day record your own experiences. Africa's rivers all have stories, the Congo has inspired more than most.

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

Itinerary

Day 1 - Kinshasa

Arrive in Kinshasa, capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and transfer to hotel accommodation. Overnight Hotel Invest or similar.

Day 2 – Kinshasa City Tour

After breakfast visit the wonderful Lola Ya Bonobo chimpanzee project, just beyond Kinshasa's southern suburbs. Later, in Kinshasa we explore the districts, markets and buildings that characterise one of Africa's most fascinating megacities. Formerly referred to as 'Kin La Belle' - meaning 'Beautiful Kinshasa', many years of turmoil have tarnished the city's image. However, slowly Kinshasa is striving to regain its splendour. Overnight Hotel Invest or similar. (B)

Lola Ya Bonobo

Bonobos are a great ape species found exclusively in the Democratic Republic of Congo. They are an endangered species and it is thought that as few as 50,000 individuals may remain in the wild. The project rescues and rehabilitates injured Bonobos caught up by the problem of poaching and the bush meat trade. Up to 60 Bonobos are being rehabilitated here in 75 acres of primary tropical forest. It is the aim of the project to release some of the animals back into the wild. The sanctuary also has award winning educational programmes with around 30,000 visitors each year, raising crucial awareness of the plight of these apes and the pressing need to ensure their future existence.

Kinshasa

The capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kinshasa (formerly known as Leopoldville) is an enormous city, and some say the largest francophone city in the world, beating Paris. From its humble beginnings as a small village, Nshasa, it was identified by Stanley as an important base for the development of the Congo Free State and began to attract both European and Congolese settlers, expanding quickly to





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become a goliath among African cities. Although previous years have seen many troubles in Kinshasa, it never lost its place as a cultural hub of Central Africa, spawning the renowned Congolese rumba music which remains popular today. In the 1960's it was the site of the famous 'Rumble in the Jungle' boxing match between Mohammed Ali and George Foreman, the largest sporting event in Africa then and ever since. Situated on the banks of the Congo River, it faces the capital of Republic of Congo, Brazzaville, a unique location for a capital city. Kinshasa is recovering from its chequered past in the 21st century, with infrastructure continually improving and investors returning. Kinshasa is hectic, it is brash, it can be at times intimidating, but one cannot understand the history of this intriguing country without a visit here.

Day 3 - Kinshasa to Mbandaka

Today we fly to Mbandaka, capital of DRC's Equateur Province and the starting point for our Congo river expedition. We camp overnight in the city, ready to embark in the early morning on our voyage to Lisala. Overnight tented camp. (BLD)

Mbandaka

Mbandaka, formerly known as Coquilhatville until Mobutu's 'authenticite' campaign, sits on the edge of the Congo River and is perhaps the most important city between Kinshasa and Kisangani. A busy, bustling city and important river port, it is endowed with few actual sights but gives a fantastic snapshot of central Congo and the trade that plies the river. Founded in 1883 by the explorer HM Stanley and originally named simply 'Equator', the large stone that Stanley placed near the river bank, to mark the spot where he believed the river to cross the equator remains there today. During the era of Belgian rule, efforts were made to modernise the city with factories and infrastructure being built, but subsequent conflict left the city neglected.

Days 4 to 13 – Congo River Expedition: Part One

The first part of our voyage, upriver from Mbandaka to Lisala, is expected to take 10-nights. We travel through a vast area, without roads or airports. The river is a vital lifeline for the communities we visit en route. We will observe how they go about their everyday lives, buying and selling produce from small boats that criss-cross the Congo. The people we meet have little, if any, contact with the outside world, and certainly no concept of tourism. Genuinely spontaneous encounters make this pioneering journey a must for intrepid travellers. There are increasingly few places on the planet where this kind of experience is possible. (BLD)

Our vessel is a 34m wooden boat, equipped with two powerful outboard engines. Although traditional in design, it is of course equipped with full safety equipment, toilet facilities, a generator, lighting and freezers for food and drinks. A cook and an English-speaking guide accompany the voyage throughout.

Each night is spent ashore or close to a village where we buy fresh produce, prepare dinner and set-up our tented camp. Walk-in tents are large and comfortable, and equipped with a self-inflating mattress, cotton mattress covers and pillows. Travellers should bring their own sleeping bag, sleeping sheet, as well as towels and toiletries.

The Congo River

The Congo is central Africa's greatest geographical feature, an enormous body of water snaking its way through the rainforest to disgorge its contents into the Atlantic Ocean. Acting as a massive drainage channel for the rainforests of the Congo Basin, it is measures almost 3000 miles in length, is the second most powerful river in the world after the Amazon and is also the deepest river in the world. The Congo is fed by a number of other rivers, each giant in their own right but which pale into insignificance in comparison – the Lualaba and the Oubangi among others. The river was first discovered by Europeans in the 15th century when Portuguese sailors noticed that the water was fresh some miles out into sea, prompting them to investigate and so 'discover' the river. The river was however unexplored for many centuries, largely due to unnavigable rapids not far into the interior. A British expedition sent in the 19th century explored 150 miles further than had been done before but failed to make further progress. The first known European to chart the



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course of the river was the famous explorer HM Stanley. Setting out with a caravan provided by Arab slave traders, Stanley and his men faced warlike and cannibalistic tribes, sickness, lack of supplies and exhaustion, and often had to carry their boats through the jungle when they came to rapids and waterfalls. Despite huge difficulties, Stanley eventually emerged at the Atlantic Ocean. Travelling on the river today is of course nowhere near as hard as it was then, but make no mistake, this is still a challenging journey where few western travellers have trod. Those lucky enough to travel through this region will discover cultures largely untouched by the outside world – a rare thing in this day and age.

Day 14 and 15 – Lisala

Today we expect to arrive in Lisala, the hometown of Mobutu Sese Seko, President of Zaire from 1965 to 1997. Much can be written about the cruelty and excess of Mobutu's despotic rule. Lisala is also the halfway point between Mbandaka to Kisangani. Some passengers will be returning to Kinshasa, taking a plane back to the capital tomorrow. At the same time, others will be joining the boat, flying from Kinshasa to Lisala, in order to travel on to Kisangani. Overnight tented camp a few kilometres outside Lisala. (BLD)

Days 16 to 25 – Congo River Expedition: Part Two

The second part of our voyage takes us upriver from Lisala to our final destination, the city of Kisangani. The journey is expected to take 10-nights and, as with the voyage to Lisala, each night will be spent ashore at or close to a village where we can buy fresh produce, prepare dinner and set-up our tented camp. Highlights include Bumba, where the Congo is at its widest, some 20 kilometres across, and covered with water hyacinths. Closer to Kisangani we travel through Yangambi, an important Biosphere Reserve which hosts 32,000 tree species. Wildlife in the reserve includes elephants, river hogs and monkeys. (BLD)

Day 26 – Kisangani

Founded, as Stanleyville, by journalist and adventurer, Henry Morton Stanley in 1877, Kisangani is the farthest navigable point upstream on the Congo River – over 2,000km from its mouth on the Atlantic coast. Within the last fifty years the city has seen more than its fair share of troubles, being seized by Simba rebels during the Congo crisis in the 1960s and witnessing the war that gripped the DRC in the 1990s. Today Kisangani's half a million inhabitants are edging their way towards recovery. A visit here is not only fascinating but integral to gaining a greater understanding of DRC. After exploring the town, we visit Tshopo River Falls, and the village of Wagenia, whose fishermen maintain a unique system of bamboo fish traps set among the Congo's rapids. Overnight Hotel Triangle or similar (BLD)

Day 27 – Kinshasa

Today, after almost a month, the end of the journey may be hard to reconcile. Transfer to Kisangani's airport for a scheduled flight back to Kinshasa. Overnight Hotel Invest or similar. (B)

Day 28 - Kinshasa

After breakfast the tour ends with transfers to the airport for onward flights. (B)

****** PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS SCHEDULE MAY CHANGE EN ROUTE DUE TO LOCAL FACTORS ******

Tour Inclusions/Exclusions

Inclusions:

Arrival and departure transfers
Domestic flights
All accommodation
Services of English-speaking guide / tour leader



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Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

Excluded:

International flights
Any airport taxes
Travel Insurance
Visas
Drinks

Important Information

Foreign Government Travel Warnings

Before booking your tour please familiarise yourself with the country specific information provided by the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) - <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>. This includes important information such as latest immigration requirements, and details of any travel advisories.

At the time of writing the British Foreign Office (FCO) currently advises against all travel to most north eastern and eastern areas of the Congo, although these are not areas visited on this tour.

Furthermore, it is the clients' responsibility to ensure that they hold full travel insurance which includes medical repatriation.

You should check the validity of your insurance with your provider, given the travel warnings in place. We can however, help you organise insurance which will continue to be valid.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Non UK nationals should check with their own government, as the information and advice may differ to that provided by British authorities.

Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.



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Accommodation Rating

Please note that this is mostly a camping based tour. Nights will be spent ashore or close to a village where we can buy fresh produce, prepare dinner and set-up our tented camp. Tents are large and comfortable, 2m in height. Each tent is equipped with self-inflating mattress and cotton mattress covers and pillows. Travellers should bring their own sleeping bag or sleeping sheet, as well as a towel and toiletries. Please be prepared to assist with setting up the camp.

Hotel accommodation will be provided in Kinshasa, which will be of moderate standard. Rooms will be en-suite with a private bathroom. Generally hotel accommodation will also be provided in Kisangani but as options are limited, camping may be a more comfortable option.

We welcome solo travellers, and single rooms and sole occupancy tents will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

Food & Drink

On our tours in the Congo you will be accompanied by a cook. Breakfast is usually continental style, including sliced bread and rolls with butter, cheese, ham/salami and jam. Lunch and dinner consist mainly of local specialties. Fresh fruit and local snack foods are served as lunch on board. The main course of dinner normally consists of meat, poultry, fish or pasta with vegetables, rice, potatoes or 'Foufou', a local side dish made from the manioc plant.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch £8
Dinner £10

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Bottle of Beer £1
Water £1

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is common practise in Africa. If your local guide has been helpful then you could think about tipping. This amount can obviously be left to you. When tipping a driver, a guide or hotel staff a few dollars will always be gratefully received.



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Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: ATMs which accept Visa cards are available in Kinshasa and Mbandaka only but may be unreliable. For other cards please check with the issuer

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: The use of cards is limited to the top hotels in Kinshasa

Local Currency: Franc Congolais

Recommended Currency for Exchange: US Dollars

Where to Exchange: Exchange facilities are available at Kinshasa's airport and the capital's major banks. Outside of Kinshasa facilities will be limited.

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a free airport transfer, both on arrival and departure. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

Visa Information

Most nationals will require a visa to visit the DR Congo. Congolese Embassies or Consulates can be found in major cities around the world including London and Washington. You will be required to produce a 'notarised' Letter of Authority. In addition, the London embassy and possibly others will require an 'Engagement de Prise en Charge' document authorised by the country's Interior Ministry. These documents will be provided by Undiscovered Destinations. We start this process around 3 months before departure.

Please allow at least 8 weeks for these documents to be issued.

NOTE: The Prise en Charge is only valid for 3 months. Therefore, we cannot request this any earlier than 3 months before the start date of the tour.

You may also be asked to produce a letter from your employer and possibly a recent bank statement as proof of sufficient funds. A valid Yellow Fever certificate will also be required to obtain your visa. Regulations do frequently change though, so we advise that you check the current requirements with your nearest embassy or visa agency.



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Please be aware that visa information is subject to change, therefore please refer to your nearest embassy for up to date advice. Please note that the price of your tour does not include visa costs.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to the UK.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

As with travel to most parts of Africa, we strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice and the necessary vaccinations. For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A and B, Polio and Typhoid. In addition you must hold a valid Yellow Fever Certificate and this will be required to support your visa application.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on [best practice when travelling with medicines](#). For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.

Preparing for your tour

Climate

Apart from high altitude areas, most of the country is hot the year round, lingering around 30°C during the day, with some relief at night. Rainfall is scant along the tiny coastline and increases further inland. A dry period affects most of the country between June and September.

As a general guide the best time to visit is December to February for north of the equator and April to October when travelling south of the equator.

Clothing

When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, and warmer ones at night. A hat is also advised to be worn through the day to protect from the sun, along with at least one piece of waterproof clothing for any days that the weather may be wet or windy.

Equipment

Sun cream/sunblock is a must. When out on tour, it is important to have sun cream with you, as there will not be any services nearby in which to provide it. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will be useful to have. As our tours in the Congo involve camping, a torch (flashlight) is essential.





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Sleeping Bag

Please bring your own lightweight sleeping bag, or sleeping sheet.

Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable walking shoes/boots are recommended.

Service Standards

Service Standards Please note that standards of service in much of Africa are not comparable to those of more developed countries, especially in the more off the beaten track locations. Service is often slow and lacks the same attention to detail, and your patience and understanding will be appreciated.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable. We advise you to travel with a rucksack or soft bag rather than a suitcase.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Generally electrical supply is 220-240V AC (50 Hz) and uses European two circular pin style plugs.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated 17 January 2020