

MTT Inc

Congo Wildlife Adventures

See *Another Africa*

Central Africa Series: Western Lowland Gorillas & Forest Elephants Republic of Congo & the Central African Republic

Quick Facts:

- Departing from: Brazzaville, Republic of Congo
- Transport: by air, motorized pirogue, and private 4 x 4 vehicle
- Accommodation: basic to simple.
- Adventure meter: off the meter
- Suitable for: adventurers; the physically fit; those prepared to rough it; those prepared for cultural immersion; those who are flexible, and who can handle delays; those who travel hopefully.
- When to go: You can visit the habituated gorillas all year round, but August/September/October provide better chances of spotting wild gorillas. July through November, the rainy season just above the equator, is when river levels are high and it is easier to get around by pirogue. February and March are when the river levels are at their lowest.
- How many days: minimum of twelve days is required. Delays must be expected.
- How many participants: minimum of two; maximum of six is best.
- Customizable?: can be altered slightly.
- Escort: French, English and Spanish speaking guide

Summary:

This tour focuses on the observation of the world's only habituated families of Western lowland gorillas; of gorillas in the wild; and of Africa's highest densities of forest elephants. It is a true adventure and unique wildlife experience—only a handful of visitors make it each year to Nouabale-Ndoki National Park in the Republic of Congo and Dzanga-Ndoki National Park in the Central African Republic. Conservationist J Michael Fay, who pioneered conservation efforts in this remote area, has said that there are few places left which are truly wild. He counts the Congo Basin parks among them.

Although some of the most rewarding travel you might ever undertake, Central Africa does not make for easy travel. A minimum of twelve days is required. Customized programs can only vary slightly since their timing is largely dependent upon the Republic of Congo's unreliable internal airline schedules. It can happen that either or both of the two domestic airlines flying between Brazzaville and Northern

Congo where Nouabale-Ndoki is located, can abruptly terminate. It can be weeks if not months for these flights to resume. The only access then is by local bus or by expensive private car hire, an 850 kilometer road trip which has become considerably easier with the opening of a new road in 2010. Transport issues add greatly to the already significant challenges to traveling to these parks, but they are also what send the adventure meter into outer orbit. Going by road allows you a more intimate look at the country and its people.

It is also possible to begin or end this tour to the Congo Basin parks in Bangui, capital of the Central African Republic. I suggest beginning in Brazzaville, where the CWA guide is located, and exiting through Bangui. It is a two day road trip by private vehicle hire between Dzanga-Ndoki National Park and Bangui. The advantage to doing it this way is that it eliminates backtracking. It does require, however, an open jaws ticket with either Air France, Ethiopian or Kenyan Airlines. The latter two carriers offer more economical tickets than Air France. Ethiopian has the more frequent flights too, to both Brazzaville and Bangui.

The cost of travel in Central Africa may seem at odds with the standards encountered, but to spend time in the Congo Basin parks is to understand that you pay for the privilege to enter a remote, pristine rainforest to experience one of Africa's most recent wildlife opportunities—and not for the five-star luxuries your per diem can provide elsewhere.

Details:

Culture: These forests are the ancestral homes of Ba'Aka pygmies, traditionally hunters and gatherers, who have been integral to the establishment of conservation efforts in their roles as trackers. Tour includes a day in Brazzaville to enjoy its local flavors. The road route to the north ensures total immersion in Congolese culture. The two day road trip back to Bangui provides a similar immersion.

Wildlife: Wild gorillas and forest elephants are observed at bais, swampy saline clearings in the middle of rainforest, from wooden viewing platforms. The habituated groups of gorillas are tracked on foot. Other wildlife that might be observed are a prolific bird life; forest hogs, forest buffaloes, antelopes such as bongo, sitatunga and duiker; many species of monkeys, and leopard (if you are very, very lucky).

Walking: Several hours of walking a day are required. Flooded forest and rivers are crossed. Very good levels of physical fitness and health are required.

Accommodations: Three star hotels in Brazzaville; local guest houses upcountry; rustic chalets and science camps in the ROC park; comfortable but simple lodges in the CAR.

Includes: internal air tickets if required; ground transportation and transfers; all food and accommodation upon commencement of the safari; accommodation per customized program in Brazzaville and Bangui (if undertaking the non-circular route); one gorilla tracking permit per national park; all activities in parks; the services of an English speaking CWA guide throughout. Second gorilla trekking permits are available at a reduced rate and are recommended for a visit to the Republic of Congo park.

Excludes: gratuities; international flights; visas to ROC and CAR.

Visa requirements:

- Double entry visa for Republic of Congo, if using the circular route, (approximately \$US150.00) and single entry visa for Central Africa Republic (approximately \$US130.00). These must be obtained in your home country. Both embassies will require a LOI (Letter of Invitation) which you will receive from CWA prior to visa applications.

Vaccinations:

- All recommended vaccinations for international travel to developing countries, including Yellow Fever. Your health certificate will be checked upon arrival in Brazzaville.
- In addition, all visitors must furnish proof of a negative TB test administered within six months of arrival at Nouabale-Ndoki National Park in the ROC, as well as proof that they are vaccinated against polio and measles. There will be no exceptions. Gorillas are highly susceptible to human diseases.
- If guests arrive ill, or show any symptoms of cold or flu, they will not be allowed to visit the habituated gorillas groups and may be barred as well from the observation platforms where wild gorillas are sighted.