

## Gabon

### AFRICA'S LAST EDEN

- Track lowland gorillas in the pristine rainforests of Gabon
- Enjoy some of Africa's finest whale watching along the shores
- Experience the rich culture and wildlife of West Africa
- Excellent birding and night walks for turtles on the beach



## Summary

Gabon is home to unexplored wilderness – rich forests contain a fabulous wealth and diversity of flora and fauna, including the elusive forest elephants, lowland gorillas, chimpanzees, mandrills and some fantastic bird life. The coastline also offers wild beaches, whale watching and a vast network of rivers that nourish and sustain some exceptional biodiversity. It has received much coverage in the press as Africa's last Eden and was championed by Mike Fay, the field scientist who spent time here as part of his Mega transect hike across the continent, but is still in its infancy in terms of tourism.

Therefore, Gabon is very much for those clients who have travelled to Africa before and have seen primates in the wild already, usually in Uganda or Rwanda. However, for those who are prepared to put these issues aside then Gabon can offer a fascinating glimpse into a very wild and untouched part of Africa.

# Quick reference itinerary

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- Day 1 Arrive Libreville / Le Meridien Hotel / BB
  - Day 2 Morning flight to Omboué via Port Gentil / Transfer to Evengue Island / FB
  - Day 3 Boat to Mpivié River / Visit to St Annes / Drive to Iguela / Loango Lodge / FB
  - Day 4 Transfer to Akaka Bush Camp (From May to September) / OR Tassi Savannah Camp (From October to April) / FB
  - Day 5 Akaka Bush Camp / OR Tassi Savannah Camp / FB
  - Day 6 Return to Loango Lodge / FB
  - Day 7 St. Catherine Beach Camp / FB
  - Day 8 Return to Loango Lodge / FB
  - Day 9 Afternoon flight to Libreville via Port Gentil / Depart
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# Detailed Itinerary

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## Thursday



On arrival in Libreville, after immigration and luggage collection, you will be welcomed by our representatives who will transfer you to Le Meridien Hotel for the remainder of the day. Established in 1849, Libreville (translated as Free Town) is a mixture of new buildings after the oil boom of the 1970s and the shanty towns behind them. Whilst the service at Le Meridien is seen as an international hotel, there service may be a little slow and it is a little tired looking, but is still the best option in the area and a good place to relax after the long flight. Overnight Le Meridien Hotel on a full board basis.

## Friday



This morning you fly to the town of Omboué , via Port Gentil and on arrival, you will then catch a small boat which brings you to Evengué Lodge only 10kms away. With small wooden bungalows set in in and around the forest and lagoon, there is also a raised restaurant and small lounge and waterside terrace. Evengué is the ideal starting point for your Loango experience, as it introduces all the landscapes you will encounter on the rest of your journey: forest, savannah and lagoon can all be found on the island and the beach is also close by. However, one of the main reasons people come here is to visit the island gorilla sanctuary and reintroduction centre for western lowland gorillas orphaned by the bush trade.



During your visit on the island, you will learn more about the Fernan-Vaz Gorilla Project, initiated to prepare orphaned western lowland gorillas for life back in the wild. These gorillas reside in the forest during the day with their keepers to learn wild gorilla behaviour. Prior to their departure into the forest for the day, you can pay a visit to the edge of the enclosed area where the gorillas stay at night.



The island also serves as a sanctuary for gorillas that have spent their whole life in captivity. These gorillas reside in a semi-natural captive setting and are fed and monitored by trained local keepers. To protect your own health and that of the gorillas, no direct contact is allowed.



Your Loango experience can either start or finish with a trip to this island, which forms part of a circuit that includes the St. Anne's Catholic Mission, designed by Gustav Eiffel, and the Mpivié River, whose dark waters are typical of the many small rivers that drain the coastal lowland forests. Fringed by a tangle of swamp forest, this river has a classic 'jungle' feel to it and is a photographers dream. A number of very rare bird species seldom seen anywhere else are often sighted along its banks including Pel's fishing owl, African finfoot, Hartlaub's duck and the white-crested tiger heron. On sunny days, slender-snouted crocodiles can also be seen basking on overhanging branches.

## Saturday



This morning you enjoy another boat ride across the Mpivie River, keeping an eye out for the wildlife along the shores, before arriving at St. Anne's Catholic Mission, designed by Gustav Eiffel and a great place to explore. You then continue by jeep to Iguela (an adventure in itself) before arriving in Loango National Park. Famously described by ecologist and conservationist Mike Fay as Africa's Last Eden, Loango offers an irresistible combination of scenery and wildlife, forest and savannah, ocean and lagoon and many different ways of exploring them – by boat, 4wd or on foot. Each experience can change, depending on the time of year you are there, with the whale season falling from around mid July to mid September. However gorillas, chimpanzees, hippos, crocodiles, manatees and elephants are there year round – you just need a little bit of luck (and a good guide!) to see them.



Loango National Park is one of the 12 national parks created in 2002 by Gabon's President Omar Bongo Ondimba. This coastline park encompasses some 1,550 square kilometres of land and is famous for its variety of unspoiled landscapes.

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Amidst these fascinating surroundings, you will be staying in the small but exclusive Loango Lodge with uninterrupted views of the wide tranquil river that separates the lodge area and the national park. Loango Lodge is still the main base for numerous science programmes coordinated by the WCS, WWF and the Max Planck Institute.



Ape, dwarf crocodile, forest elephant, western lowland gorilla, marine turtle and whale research is conducted here, as well as educational projects, cleaning of beaches, park management and illegal trawler control. More than 70 students are enrolled in the local village's well equipped school.

Overnight at Loango Lodge on a full board basis.

### Sunday



Today you are transferred to Tassi, in Loango National Park, is one of the last few places on earth where large mammals can still roam freely on the beach. Maybe that explains why it's only in Gabon that hippos have been seen swimming in the surf. Here, during the rainy season, buffalos and forest elephants can often be found grazing on the coastal grasslands and the beach. Occasionally, families of gorillas can also be spotted foraging in the trees alongside the beach. Many of the Gabonese beaches provide a significant habitat for migrant shorebirds, including African skimmers and Damara terns, whose numbers are quickly diminishing across the rest of Africa.



Camp Tassi is located on the savannah, surrounded by primary and secondary forest. The wide-open vistas here will give you a much more classical 'Africa feel', not easily found elsewhere in densely forested Central Africa. It's a place where you can catch the ocean breeze and, from the same position, watch the sun rising over the savannah and forest in the east every morning, and sinking below the Atlantic horizon in the west every evening.



Some have spotted wild chimpanzees around the camp, and every now and then a curious elephant might even come poking in! This attractive patchwork of savannah, forest, swamp, and small coastal lagoons in proximity to an endless stretch of beach is also perfect for turning adventurous. Discover the camp's various surroundings on one of our guided walks, cycle on the beach or kayak on Louri Lagoon.



For a truly wild experience, take the 4x4 and visit the research camp of the Max Planck Institute in Tassi Sud, 30 minutes from Camp Tassi, where researchers go out into the forest to carry out studies amongst the shy, elusive gorillas and chimpanzees. This also habituates the animals gradually to the presence of humans in the vicinity. In future, this habituation programme will allow a controlled form of tourism to track and view the gorillas and chimpanzees, while at the same time allowing researchers to gather data on all aspects of their behaviour and ecology. A truly wonderful area of wilderness.

### Monday

Another full days wildlife activities at Tassi.

### Tuesday

Today you are transferred back to Loango Lodge and in the afternoon you will be able to enjoy excursions in the park. Overnight Loango Lodge on a full board basis.

### Wednesday



This morning you can enjoy more wildlife activities at Loango before a 30 minute boat ride to Pte. Ste. Cathérine Beach Camp, situated on a great stretch of wild, pristine beach, nearly 100 kilometres long, where the only footprints in the sand besides your own are those left by scurrying crabs. The camp itself is situated in the north of Loango National Park with comfortable and well equipped tents nestling in the coastal forest right on the beach's edge.



Dine in the restaurant, on the lounge deck, or enjoy a feet-in-the-sand beach barbeque. The beach is lined by dense mangrove forests sheltering a whole range of wildlife and smaller mammals, perfect for taking long walks, collecting shells or watching the sun go down whilst enjoying a cold beer.



If you head south to Louri Lagoon, you have a good chance of spotting some buffalos and elephants on the beach. If you prefer the forest, you can also head into the mysterious mangrove area with one of our eco-guides.



Gabon is also home to one of the largest leatherback populations in the world and from October to February, you can venture out at night with our expert eco-guides to look for nesting marine turtles.

In total, four species of marine turtles can be found nesting on Gabon's beaches, with leatherback and the olive ridley nesting here regularly but the green turtle and the hawksbill turtle only nest here on rare occasions.

The point where the lagoon empties into the ocean contains some of the largest game fish in the world, making it an ideal spot for fishing – and only one minute's walk from your tent!



Pte. Ste. Cathérine Beach Camp

#### Thursday

This morning you return to Loango Lodge for another full days wildlife activities.

#### Friday

After another morning enjoying the wildlife in the region, you will be flown back to Libreville for your afternoon flight home.

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# Price

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**Cost:** £2,795.00 GBP per person

We do not charge single supplements unless you want a guaranteed single room, subject to rooming availability. The cost of a single supplement is £595.00

**Should you wish to book this trip we require a 20% deposit of the quoted price. This price is guaranteed for the next 14 days. Please note after this period the price is subject to currency fluctuations.**

**Includes:**

- All meals and accommodation as shown based on a twin / double room
- All park fees in Loango National Park
- Services of park rangers and researchers in Loango Park area
- All wildlife activities in the parks (with the exception of whale watching excursions)
- All transfers
- All domestic flights and taxes

**Excludes:**

- International flights to Libreville
- All drinks
- Insurance
- Gabon Visas
- Items of a personal nature
- Gratuities

# Important information

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- This is a quotation only – no reservations have been made. The rates quoted are subject to the availability of all services, currency fluctuations, and unexpected increases, written confirmation and Steppes Discovery' terms and conditions.
  - Please note that travelling in Gabon requires patience and a sense of humour. You will be visiting areas that are still new to tourism and there may well be delays and minor inconveniences. However, this is very much part of travelling to some of the wilder destinations in Africa and we would ask that you please bear this in mind. This is very much a trip for those who already have experience of travelling in Africa.
  - Given the nature of primate viewing here, we recommend that for those wishing to see gorillas and chimpanzees for the first time, Uganda and Rwanda are better options.
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# Why travel with us?

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## OUR LOCAL REPRESENTATION & IN COUNTRY SUPPORT

Our travel partners, accommodation and service providers and our ground agents are all carefully chosen to ensure the quality of service, their expert guides and their commitment to the environment. They are mostly small, very personal, privately owned businesses with whom we have built up long-term relationships and whose personalities reflect the unique character of the host countries, the abiding hospitality of its people and the remarkable spirit of the wilderness.

## OUR REPUTATION FOR QUALITY

Well over 70% of our clients have either travelled with us before or have been recommended by other satisfied travellers. Every one our clients will deal with their own exclusive Country Director who will take care of the booking, before during and after a trip to ensure a personal service from start to finish. We also pride ourselves on delivering privileged insight into the natural world and taking you beyond the conventional tours. This is why our staff regularly travel to their specialist area to explore new areas and find new experiences, ensuring their knowledge is constantly up-to-date. It is because we are so proud of our reputation, that we are very happy to put you in contact with our past clients, who have already travelled to the same parts of the world that await you. Just ask us.

## OUR EXPERT GUIDES & NATURALISTS

We never compromise on the quality of the guides and expert naturalists we use in wilderness areas. We know they will be a key part of your adventure and they have been specifically chosen because of their knowledge, enthusiasm and experience, allowing you to get the most out of your trip.

# Our commitment

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In 2007 we celebrated 10 years of spectacular achievement as internationally recognised award-winning pioneers in the field of nature travel. We have proved that responsible tourism can play a key role in conservation without compromising the environment or the quality and enjoyment of your holiday.

We have raised over £750,000 in support of the world's leading wildlife and conservation agencies researchers and experts, and increased awareness of travel and conservation through newsletters, lectures and consistent media coverage. Furthermore, we have voluntarily spearheaded collective action campaigns such as Travel Operators for Tigers in South Asia.

**Now come along and see for yourself. With us it won't cost the earth!**

# Want to discuss this trip?

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Please call **Chris Johnston** on **++ 44 1285 643333** for more details or to make a booking e-mail him at [chris@steppesdiscovery.com](mailto:chris@steppesdiscovery.com)

Having travelled extensively in Southern, East and Central Africa, Chris has developed a passion and understanding for this wild and captivating continent. From the endless plains of the East, the colourful wildlife of the rift valley region and the primates of the equatorial rainforest he will be more than happy to share his enthusiasm for the most wild and adventurous of continents.

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