

## Congo & Central Africa

### FOREST ELEPHANTS & LOWLAND GORILLAS

- Explore the rainforests of the Congo, on foot and by boat, home to forest elephants and lowland gorillas
- Gain unique access to wildlife research stations in Central Africa and see firsthand their vital work
- Join local Ba'Aka communities living in the region and experience their unique forest culture
- First company in the UK to offer this trip 10 years ago in support of W.W.F. and W.C.S. research



## Summary

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Stepped Discovery, in conjunction with the World Wild Fund for Nature and the Wildlife Conservation Society is offering you the chance to explore the original heart of darkness, stepping deep into the virgin rainforests of the Congo basin. The forest clearings of Nouabale Ndoki National Park (Republic of Congo) and Dzanga-Sangha (Central African Republic) are unique features that allow you to observe some of the largest concentration of lowland gorillas and forest elephants in Africa and alongside experienced primate and elephant researchers.

You will also have the rare opportunity to explore the forests with the Ba'Aka communities that live in the area as they explain their way of life and gain an insight into their unique hunting techniques and hear their haunting songs. A true adventure taking you into one of the least explored areas on the planet.

# Overview

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Whilst most places on Earth have long since been explored, the forests of the Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic have remained wild and out of reach, home to some of the world's best kept wildlife secrets.

Alongside WCS and WWF researchers you will have the privilege of being able to spend hours tracking and observing lowland gorillas, forest elephant, bongo, sitatunga, giant forest hog, bushpig and forest buffalo, as well as a host of other unique flora and fauna, not to mention some stunning birdlife.



Not only will you be accompanied by wildlife researchers and experts in their field, but you will also be invited to explore the forest homes of the Ba'Aka communities as they show you the various plants they use for medicine as well as accompany them on a traditional hunt. If you want 5 star luxury and the Big Five bagged before breakfast, head south or east. If, however, you're prepared to rise to the challenge and explore prehistoric landscape that allows you to experience places rarely seen by the outside world, then this is the trip for you!

This programme is deliberately aimed at those who have experience of Africa or have already seen primates in the wild and are prepared to travel with an open mind and a flexible attitude.

# Your Guide

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## Jean-Pierre

Working closely with Steppes Discovery, Jean Pierre has been instrumental in opening up this new area to sustainable tourism and has worked tirelessly to establish excellent relationships between the researchers, our clients and ourselves. Since first helping us develop tours here in 2002 Jean-Pierre has been our man in the Congo, ensuring our clients are well looked after and that the trip runs as smoothly as possible.

His excellent knowledge of the region and his friendship with the researchers, many of whom he knows personally, means that you gain an insight and understanding into the region and its people that is quite simply not possible with anyone else.

From working out the complicated logistics arranging planes and pirogues, to the cold beers at the end of the day waiting for you on your return from the Bai's, Jean Pierre's local knowledge and enthusiasm are a huge part of what makes these trips such a success and is an invaluable part of the team.

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# Itinerary



## Day 1 - Arrive Central African Republic

On arrival at M'Poko International Airport in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic, you will be met by your guide and transferred to the Residence JM hotel, by far the best local hotels in the area with all the facilities you would expect from a hotel of this standard. This evening you will enjoy a welcome dinner as Jean-Pierre discuss the adventure which lies ahead and you get to know your fellow travelers. Overnight Residence JM on a bed and breakfast basis.

## Day 2 - Fly to Bayanga / boat to Bomassa.

This morning after an early breakfast, you will be driven to the airport for your 1 -1 ½ hour flight to the landing strip at Bayanga in the heart of the Central African Rainforest in a Cessna 12 seater Caravan. On arrival here you will again be met by the local team and taken to the Sangha River where you board the motorised pirogues (local boats) to Bomassa in the Republic of Congo - a journey of around 3-4 hours, along the lazy Sangha River surrounded on all sides by the lush rainforest. En-route, you will pass remote riverside villages before arriving in Bomassa in the early evening. Overnight Conservation Society guest house. This is the head quarters of the W.C.S. project that runs Nouabalé-Ndoki National park and is the research and logistical support centre for the region.



Situated in the north of the Republic of Congo, the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park was created in 1993 to conserve, in its natural state, one of the last examples of an untouched wilderness. Covering an area of just under 4,000 square kilometres, nearly double the size of Luxembourg, the N.N.N.P. is one of the largest parks in the forested regions of central-west Africa, containing almost 2 % of all Congo's forests. In partnership with the Congolese government, WCS-Congo is helping to ensure that these forests are protected by managing three Protected Areas, of which N.N.N.P. is one, as well as a protective 'buffer zone' around the park. This partnership between the Congolese government and WCS ensures that these zones are effectively managed, working towards the sustainable management of the region's natural resources.

## Day 3

Today during your time in Nouabalé Ndoki you will be split into two groups, with one group staying in Mbeli and the other group continuing on to Mondika. Please note bedding is provided at both destinations.



**For those going in Mbeli:** You will drive for one hour through the buffer zone of the Park to Ndoki river where you will meet with Mbeli camp staff who will transfer you by pirogue on the Ndoki and Mbeli rivers for around an hour before a short 20 minute walk to Mbeli camp itself. Mbeli Camp is very basic camp with 4 twin bedded bungalows on raised stilts, with a small veranda outside with washing facilities. Whilst the rooms have no electricity, there are facilities to charge your cameras and the bush shower and long drop toilet are located a few metres away from the rooms themselves.

**For those going to Mondika:** You will continue by car for around an hour to the Djeki river. Here you will meet with the Mondika staff who will help with transporting your luggage and guiding, before embarking on a 3 hour walk through the forest. Part of the track goes through a swamp so sandals and shorts are recommended and whilst you will not be carrying your main luggage, you should be prepared for a tough trek, carrying your daypack. The rest of walk is through thick rainforest, arriving at Mondika tented camp around lunchtime and after settling in to camp the rest of the day is spent at leisure to relax or enjoy a walk around the camp itself. Mondika Camp is a very basic camp with tents (two beds per bungalow). No electricity, bush shower and long drop toilet, situated a short walk from the tents themselves, with basic washing facilities.



## Day 4

### Mbeli Bai:



After an early breakfast at around 6:30 am, you begin your walk to Mbeli Bai, a walk of around 45 minutes. Research at Mbeli focuses on the social dynamics of western lowland gorilla groups and a continuous research presence means that observers can now identify over 130 individuals, comprising 13 social groups and 8 solitary silverbacks. Researchers have compiled detailed life histories for all the groups that have used the bai regularly during the duration of the project, providing a unique insight into the social behaviour of these elusive apes. The researchers themselves spend much of their time here and will be happy to talk to you about their work.

Whilst the main attraction is the lowland gorilla, there are opportunities to see forest elephants, sitatunga, red river hog, buffalos, Brazza monkey, black and white Colobus, otter, crocodiles and fishing eagle. Observations are made from an 8m high viewing platform situated on the edge of the bai which, along with the adjacent 'crow's nest', gives an unobstructed view across almost the entire bai. Gorillas are now completely habituated to the presence of observers on the platform, enabling far greater levels of observation than would be possible using more traditional methods such as tracking through the forest. Picnic lunch is served at the platform and you return to camp at around 4:30pm



**Mondika Gamp:** After an early breakfast at 6:30 you leave the camp and depending on where the gorillas are, the first party of two members join the research team to track the gorillas on foot. Once found, you will spend one hour in their company. You then return to camp, allowing the other two members of the group to join the researchers with the gorillas before returning to camp. The afternoon is free at the camp to enjoy some bird watching, or you can enjoy an optional walk in the forest surrounding the camp.

## Day 5

Groups switch from Mbeli to Mondika.

## Day 6

As day 3 & 4



## Day 7 - Enter the Central African Republic

Today is a travelling day as you are transferred from Mbeli / Mondika back to Bomassa from where you catch the motorized boat for a journey of around 5 Hours on the Sangha river, stopping for breaks along the way to enjoy the fascinating riverside communities. You then reach the Lidjombo border check point for your entry into the Central African Republic.

After visa formalities here, you will continue for around one hour to Bayanga, the small village near Dzanga-Sangha National Park and on to Sangha Lodge, your home for the next 5 nights. Here you can relax and enjoy the stunning setting overlooking the banks of the Sangha river and watch the fisherman glide past in their own pirogues as the sun sets.

## Day 8 - 11 Dzanga-Sangha National Park activities.

The Dzanga-Sangha Reserve is a jewel in the crown of the Northwest Congolese Lowland Forest Eco region and a WWF Global 200 site that spans parts of Gabon, the Congo Republic, Cameroon, C.A.R and the Democratic Republic of Congo.



The reserve is home to one of the African continent's largest intact forest elephant populations, western lowland gorillas, 16 of the country's 20 primate species, hundreds of bird species and thousands of plant species and is also home to the Ba'Aka community, indigenous hunter-gatherers whose knowledge of the forest is extraordinary.

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### Visiting Dzanga Bai

During your time here you will have the opportunity to enjoy 2 half day visits to Dzanga Bai. Visiting this fascinating park at least once in the morning and once in the afternoon enables you to observe the timid forest elephants in the wild - an experience usually reserved to a limited circle of researchers. From the specially built wooden platforms you can observe the elephants as they venture out of the forest to feed on the mineral rich soil, fight, play and occasionally mate and you can often observe herds of between 50-100 elephants in a day all set against a backdrop of lush forests and flame trees, where flocks of African grey parrots can be found along with colourful sunbirds.

At the same time other animals will come to the saline such as the forest buffalo, the elusive bongo, and the largest antelope to be found in Africa's rainforests, highly sought after by trophy hunters because of its beautifully shaped horns.

### Net hunting with Ba'aka



Threatened by the modern world and an unsympathetic government, the Ba'Aka people are fast disappearing. After much of their traditional way of life was changed by the arrival of logging companies, many of the Ba'Aka are now instrumental in developing eco-tourism acting as guides and trackers for the wildlife found in the region. The Ba'Ka people are traditional hunter-gatherers and hunting with nets is a collective activity. You have the opportunity to join the large group of men and women whose subsistence hunting is a way of life and is not for the faint-hearted.

Normally each family will bring with them their own long nets, made from strips of liana bark and you join the group as they depart on the hunt, with each departure preceded by joyous singing and haunting melodies. The Ba'aka will guide you through the forest in search of shy forest duikers, mangabey monkeys and raucous hornbills. The women will also show you the medicinal use of many of the plants found in the forest as well as how to build a protective shelter from the rain.

### Gorilla Tracking at Bai Hokou



You will also have the chance track gorillas once in Dzanga-Sangah in the Bai Hokou area, joining researchers in the forest. After a very early start and briefing at the WWF headquarters, you will head out into the forest to look for these fascinating creatures, which can sometimes take 2-3 hours to locate. The Ba'Aka themselves locate the gorillas through almost imperceptible signs on the forest floor. Observing wildlife is often challenging, particularly in this environment, however there is usually ample opportunity to observe gorilla families in more open forest or feeding in the trees.

### Day 12

Today you retrace your steps back to Bayanga where you will catch the Cessna flight back to Bangui around lunchtime to arrive back in Bangui late afternoon. You then transfer to your hotel for the night to enjoy a farewell meal.

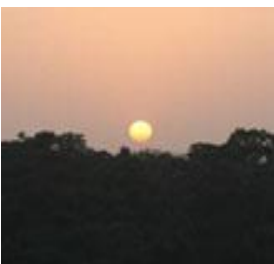
Please note we recommend you book your international flight for the following day (Day 13) to allow for unexpected delays leaving the rainforest, caused by weather or other circumstances beyond our control.

### Day 13

Transfer to the airport for your flight home.

**PLEASE NOTE: THIS ITINERARY IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE DUE TO PREVAILING CIRCUMSTANCES.**

**YOUR ARE TRAVELLING IN AREAS THAT SEE FEW TOURISTS SO THE INFRASTRUCTURE IS POOR AND DELAYS CAN BE COMMONPLACE ALTHOUGH WE HAVE DESIGNED THE ITINERARY TO MAKE ALLOWANCES - PLEASE REMAIN FLEXIBLE.**



# Date

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## 2012

10<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> August  
07<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> September

## 2013

07<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> June  
06<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> September

# Main tour cost

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From £3,995 per person in twin share rooms in 2012\*

From £4,095 per person in twin share rooms in 2013\*

\* costs based on group of 8 people travelling

### Cost includes

All transfers as shown, including return airfare from Bangui to Bomassa, road transfers in 4WD, motorised and non-motorised pirogues, all accommodation and meals as specified in the above itinerary, expertise of specialist English speaking tour leader, access to researchers, local guides and trackers. Two half day visits to Dzangah Bai, net hunting with Ba'Aka community, visits to Mbeli Bai, ONE gorilla track at Mondika and ONE gorilla track in Dzangah-sanga, bottled water when travelling (NOT in lodges), contributions to both the WCS and the WWF to enable them to continue their much needed work in the region.

### Cost excludes

Long-haul international flights to Bangui, travel insurance, visas, extra meals, vaccinations, items of a personal nature, soft drinks other than those shown, alcohol, laundry, gratuities and departure taxes, additional gorilla tracking at Mondika and Dzangha at 250 euro and 280 euro per person respectively

### Single Supplements

Given the limited number of rooms at Mbeli Bai, we are unfortunately unable to offer single rooms here but are happy to arrange single rooms for the rest of the trip on payment of a £595 single supplement.

### Age Restrictions

Due to the nature of the tour and the age restrictions for tracking gorillas in the region, the minimum age limit for this tour is 18 yrs old.

### Flights

We are happy to book the international flights for you should you wish as we hold a full ATOL license. The tour is designed to coincide with flights arriving in Bangui on Ethiopian Airlines (from Addis Ababa) and from Kenya Airways flights (from Nairobi) on Day 1. The same airlines fly out mid morning on Day 13.

We are aware that when it comes to booking international flights there are a number of different options available to you but please bear in mind that when booking international flights with Steppes in conjunction with your holiday you are afforded a much greater level of financial protection.

This additional insurance against unforeseen circumstances, particularly when travelling somewhere as remote as the Congo can offer not only peace of mind but valuable cover should the unexpected occur.

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# Important information

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## Important notice on travelling in the region

This trip aims to go where few have gone before, where infrastructure is poor or non-existent and where services are difficult to obtain. The itinerary is subject to change dependent on prevailing conditions at the time - all participants should see the venture in this light. Accommodation is VERY basic.

Given the nature of the transport (wooden pirogues and 4WD's) combined with the rugged terrain and challenging environment, means that delays and inconveniences should be expected, particularly during rainstorms and you should travel with an open mind and a sense of humour to get the most from this tour. You will be travelling in an emerging destination and if you expect things to run like clockwork, you are on the wrong trip! However, this is very much part of the appeal of spending time on such a pioneering tour as you will be venturing to places little visited by researchers, let alone tourists.

Furthermore we must stress that while you have a chance of seeing lowland gorillas, forest elephants and a host of other wildlife, success is NOT guaranteed. They are wild creatures with no fixed routine and finding them takes skill and patience of the trackers and guides, as well as a lot of luck!

## Weather

Congo and the Central African Republic are situated in Tropical Africa along the equator so are permanently hot and very humid at around 28 centigrade and it will take time to acclimatise.

## Visas and Vaccinations

A single entry visa is required for the Republic of Congo and a double entry visa is required for the Central African Republic. Please allow around 3 weeks and approx £300 to get the requisite visas. We will also send you through a letter of invitation from our ground agents which you will also need to process the visas. A full passport is required and it is recommended that this is valid for up to six months from return date of travel. We recommend the following inoculations: typhoid, tetanus, hepatitis A. If you are a regular traveller abroad we would recommend that you are up to date on all childhood inoculations and vaccinations including polio. Malaria is present in C.A.R and the Republic of Congo and all precautions must be taken. It is important that you consult a medical practitioner for specialist advice or call MASTA on 0906 8224 100. A yellow fever certificate is compulsory for entry into the area.

The Wildlife Conservation Society in the Republic of Congo have a new policy on vaccinations required for people looking to visit the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park as part of the tour .

Listed below are the required vaccinations .

- polio
- yellow fever
- measles
- proof of negative TB test

## Fitness and Health

A good level of fitness is necessary to enjoy this challenging venture - you should come prepared for several hours walking whilst tracking the gorillas and must be comfortable in small wooden canoes for long periods as well as long drives on challenging roads in 4wd. We advise you take some exercise in preparation for the challenging tracking in hot and humid conditions. Whilst our agents will have medical provisions, we also suggest taking a small personal medical kit, details of which we will send through nearer the time.

## Security

Please note that these tours are subject to security clearance and have in the past and/or currently have Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice associated with them, which can be seen on <http://www.fco.gov.uk>. You will be asked to sign disclaimers as part of your participation on these tours.

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## Our commitment

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An unavoidable consequence of travel is the emission of carbon dioxide into the high atmosphere and while Steppes Discovery takes measures to reduce the carbon footprint of its holidays, regrettably it is not yet possible to make them carbon neutral. If you are able to, we suggest you consider offsetting the carbon emission of your long haul flight by using Rainforest Concern's Forest Credits scheme. Details can be found at [www.forestcredits.org.uk](http://www.forestcredits.org.uk)

Rainforests have a central role to play in the slowing of climate change and yet we are removing forests from the planet at a faster rate than they can grow back. Rainforest Concern supports projects that look to preserve the forests that we have rather than replanting new ones, working to safeguard biodiversity and local communities and in so doing mitigate climate change.



The Wildlife Conservation Society saves wildlife and wild lands through careful science, international conservation, education, and the management of the world's largest system of urban wildlife parks. These activities change attitudes toward nature and help people imagine wildlife and humans living in sustainable interaction on both a local and a global scale. Steppes Discovery works in cooperation with WCS researchers in regions like the Congo and CAR in West and Central Africa.



World Wide Fund For Nature

The largest independent nature conservation organisation in the world founded in 1961 with over 5 million supporters. In the past ten years they have spent over £211 million on conservation work and currently have more than 1000 international projects. Steppes Discovery has worked closely with the UK organisation in the past and visits a number of project regions within its travel programmes.

## Want to discuss this trip?

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Please call Chris on (00 44) 1285 880 936 for more details or drop him an e-mail at [chris@steppesdiscovery.co.uk](mailto:chris@steppesdiscovery.co.uk)

Having travelled extensively through some of the world's rich primate habitats, including Borneo, Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, Central African Republic and the DRC, Chris has developed a passion and understanding for these wild and captivating areas. Having come face to face with gorillas, chimpanzees and orangutans on numerous occasions he will be more than happy to share his enthusiasm for the most intelligent and fascinating of animals.

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