



Let's Sail Up the Congo River with Chalo Africa

December 22, 2024 – January 7, 2025

14 cabins – 28 guests



We will visit:

**Republic of Congo, Brazzaville (ROC) – Cameroon – Central
African Republic – Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**

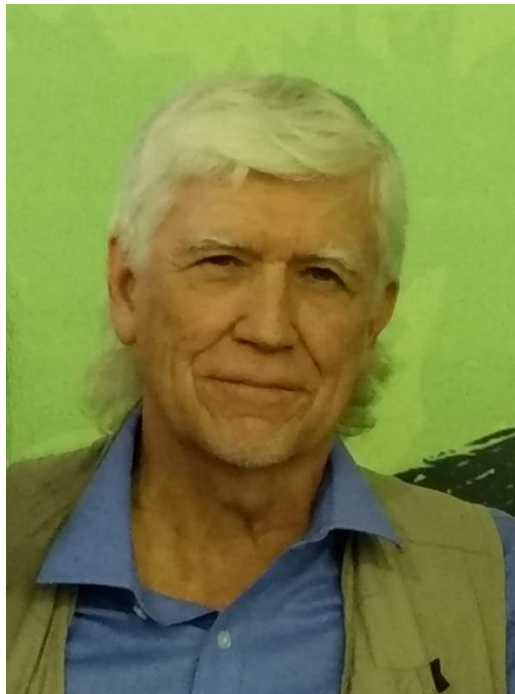
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Up A Lazy River...

Up a lazy river where the Picathartes' song
Awakes the bright new morning
Where we can move along
Blue skies up above, everyone's in love
Up a lazy river, how happy you could be
Up a lazy river-er with me
Up a lazy river with me...



Russell Mittermeier

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Dear All,

Here are the final updates on our Congo trip – I hope you will agree with me that despite the loss of the habituated gorilla trek from our original program, we now have many other highlights, and the current river cruise is as rich as it ever was, even richer.

- 1) To combat the threat of potentially low water levels in the Sangha river, we have inverted the direction of the cruise. Instead of starting the cruise by sailing upriver from Brazzaville to Ouessou, we will now fly first to Ouessou (thereby eliminating the need for any overland transfers), and then sail downriver to Brazza after our time spent at the TriNational Sangha. Aug -Nov are typically the rainy months in the Congo when water levels rise in the river system. These levels start to gradually fall again in January. By completing the shallower Sangha section of the trip right at the beginning, we hope to avoid this problem altogether. By the time the water levels start to drop, we will already be on the main Congo river!
- 2) In our original program, we were going to spend only 1 night in Dzanga Sangha NP in the CAR. We were trying to cram in a lot of activities into that one-night stop at Doli Lodge. In this new & improved program, we will be spending 3 full nights at the famous Sangha Lodge. This will give us the ability to visit Bai Hokou, do an agile mangabey trek, our birders can devote time in search of the elusive picathartes. We will also get to spend time at the famous platform at Sangha Bai and should there be any pangolins being rehabilitated at Sangha Lodge, we will get an opportunity to visit the pangolin project too. Needless to say, this is a serious upgrade to the original program & at no extra cost to you.
- 3) In the original program, all told, we were spending 4 nights in the Triparks area. In the amended program, we are now spending 7 nights in what we hope will be a very rewarding part of the cruise. These 3 bonus days are special and will allow us to explore without rushing.
- 4) In terms of logistics, and assuming that we are full boat of 28 people (right now we are at 22), we will be divided into 2 groups of 14 each, and these 2 groups will then be further sub-divided into two sub-groups of 7 for the various activities in the national parks, so that we are never too many people for any non-boat-based activity.

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- 5) Since we have lost access to the habituated gorilla groups because of the silverback deaths, we have added on an optional visit to the Aspinall Foundation's Lesio-Louna gorilla sanctuary at the very end. Should you decide to do this, you will need to tack on an extra night to the trip at the very end. We are offering this extension at cost, recognizing that this is an unanticipated extra. But it will bring you into close proximity with lowland gorillas in the process of being rewilded.
- 6) Mbeli Bai at Nouabale-Ndoki NP in ROC is currently under repair/construction and may or may not be ready by December. So we are now planning on visiting the nearby Wali Bai instead, where the last group had very good wild gorilla sightings.
- 7) Drumrolls- we are bringing along a very special guest scientist on this trip and we couldn't be more pleased. Russ Mittermeier is a renowned scientist who actually has a whole Wikipedia page devoted to his work – you can read more about him here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russell_Mittermeier He is one of the leading primatologists, herpetologists and conservationists of our times and chairs the IUCN Primates Group. Russ will present a series of lectures to us over the course of the cruise, and share his lifetime of knowledge with us. It will be such a privilege for us to have him on board.
- 8) We have tweaked the bonobos visit – instead of 2 groups doing this bonobo activity on 2 separate days, we will all disembark together for this trek. There are 3 habituated groups that we can track here, and by spending the night at the project HQ, we will have the opportunity to trek them once in the evening, and then once again in the very early morning. The bonobos are one of the highlights of this trip and one of the rarest great apes, and so we decided that it was better to maximize our chances with them.
- 9) As a result of this change, we have made the difficult decision of ditching the visit to the Téké queen. Instead, we have added additional ethno-cultural activities near Pikounda that were not there in the original itinerary.
- 10) As before, we are still offering the post-cruise Gabon extension. This may be of more interest to some of you now because habituated gorilla trekking is indeed included on this section of the trip, along with wildlife on the beach and nesting leatherbacks.

Everything else about the trip remains the same. We will still go briefly to Lobéké in Cameroon, look for the Bouvier's colobus along the Mangui river, and still spend an evening with the Congo dandies in Brazzaville.

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FLIGHTS: Because of pre-existing bookings at Sangha Lodge, we need to complete our visit at Sangha by the 29th of December, so we are requesting people to fly Ethiopian if they possibly can. The Ethiopian flight gets into Brazza at about 12:15pm on the 22nd, which allows the charter flight from Brazza to leave by 2pm so that you can be in Ouessou by 4pm and checked into the river boat in time for dinner. If any of you have already bought your tickets on Air France, then that flight arrives in the evening, and the AF people will fly to Ouessou the following day on Dec 23 on a commercial flight. But if you haven't bought your flights yet, then Ethiopian is the preferred option. If you want to go in group 1 but still want to fly Air France, then we suggest that you come in a day earlier. Please let one of us know.

VISAS: You only need to obtain an ROC visa for this trip. For those of you that have no embassy in your country of residence nor a country nearby that can handle this ROC visa, we will arrange your visa on arrival paperwork, but Ducret will only do this in the rarest of circumstances. For everyone else, please arrange to get your physical visas stamped in your passports from the ROC embassy near you. To do this, you will need an invitation letter from us, and the visa application must be filed with this paperwork in hand.

- For US guests, Sangeeta's daughter Nina lives in DC, and she can handle your visa submission & collection for a handling fee of \$100 per visa, should you wish to use her services (Nina is a responsible young lady and often handles complicated African visas for Chalo guests). She will fill out your visa forms, take your passport physically to the ROC embassy in DC and then collect your passport from the embassy in person. Should you wish to avail of her services, please let one of us know & we will let you know how to proceed.

The Triparks system allows for people with a visa from the ROC to visit their sister parks in Cameroon and CAR on the same visa. For the bonobo visit in the DRC, we had originally organized a simple day pass, so you didn't have to apply for an additional visa. Now, we are spending 1 night at the trailhead to catch the bonobos at their nest first thing in the morning, so we will need a different kind of authorization. You still don't need a visa, but this new authorization costs 50 Euro pp and this has been added to the final invoices.

For those of you who are taking the Gabon extension, you will need a Gabonese visa. Nina can handle this for US guests from her base in DC, or visas on arrival can be arranged for all guests with a visa on arrival letter that the team has already discussed with each of you. The Gabonese e-visa option is iffy at best & we don't recommend it.

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Ducret has now completed 3 Congo cruises, including 1 cruise that was a charter very much like ours, and many of the initial wrinkles have been ironed out. The cruises have all been completed successfully and we have received good feedback. Not everything went off as planned originally, but everything went off well. With pioneering expedition cruises of this type, we must be prepared to go with the flow, and have fun doing it. It is important to realize that this is not your usual well-oiled trip to sub-Saharan Africa, and I request you to please be patient and understanding on the trip. Tanvi is back from her recce trip in August and has made many excellent suggestions that we have now incorporated.

We are attaching the final itinerary in chart format to this descriptive itinerary for your easy reading. We will be making the group allocations closer to date of travel, once we have everyone's travel information in hand.

As you know, we have had a few cancellations since my last note, so we now have a few empty cabins. Should any of you have any friends who might like to join, please feel free to invite them on board. We are advertising these spots from our side as well, but it is always better to ask friends first.

Last but not least, since we will be ringing in the New Year on board the Princess, we have arranged a "White & Black Evening" at dinner on Dec 31st. This is the evening to shed your safari beiges and greens, and come to dinner resplendent in your all-black, all-white or black & white 'safari chic' or formal outfits! Please don't stress this, but come prepared for an evening of fun, festivities & to bring in the 2025 as we sail down the Congo River – honestly, I know not a single person who has ever quite done something like that! 😊 If we have any musicians or singers in our group, please contact me and we'll add you to the entertainment roster!

Thank you, all, for sticking with us through thick & thin. I promise – it will be a memorable and fun trip – and we'll talk about it for years to come!

Sangeeta

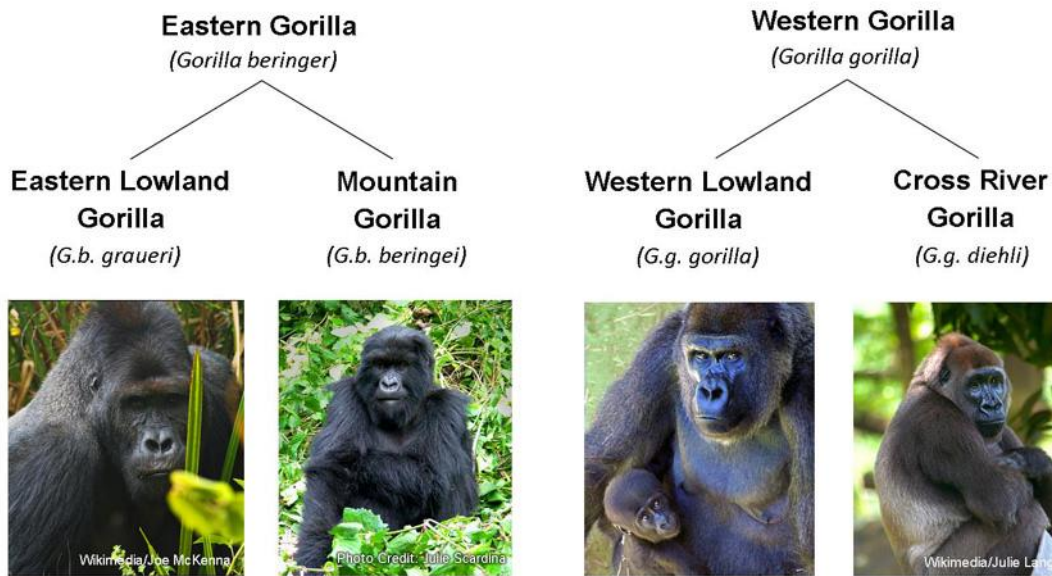
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Don't you love that the proper scientific name for western lowlands gorillas is...
gorilla gorilla gorilla

2001 GORILLA RECLASSIFICATION



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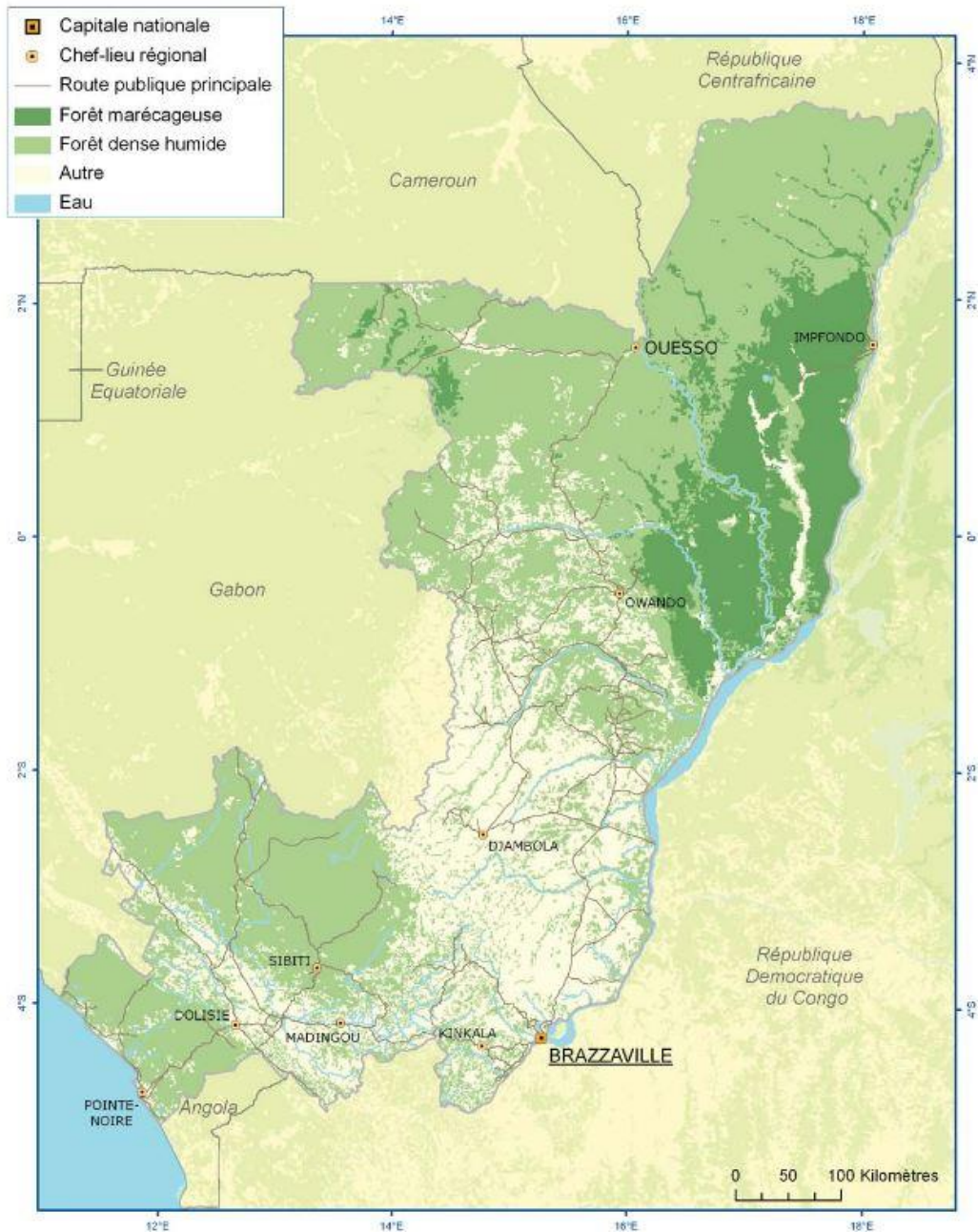
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Geographical Map of Congo Brazzaville

Legend: Country capital; Regional centers; Main public roads; Swamp forests; Thick rain forest; Other; Water.

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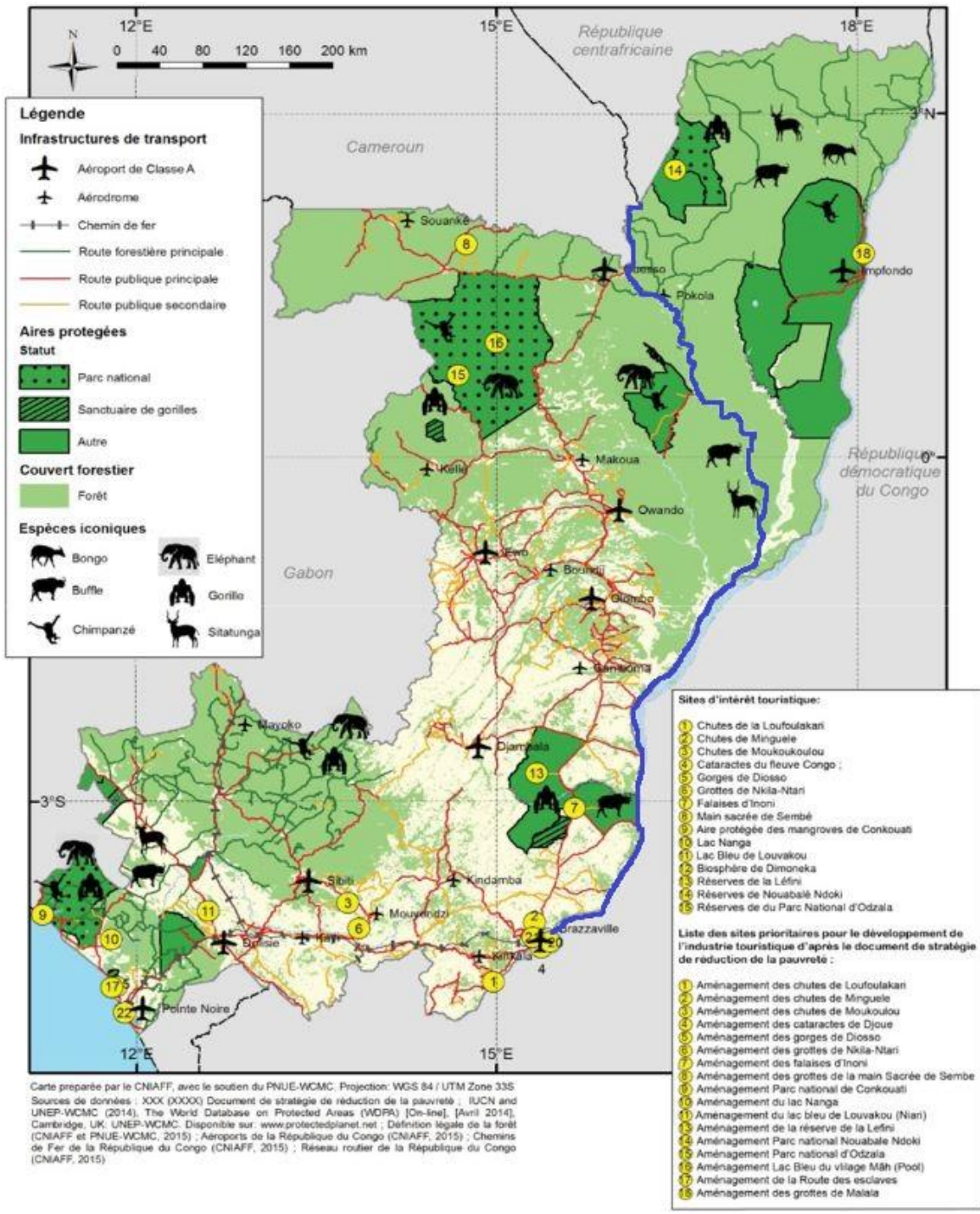
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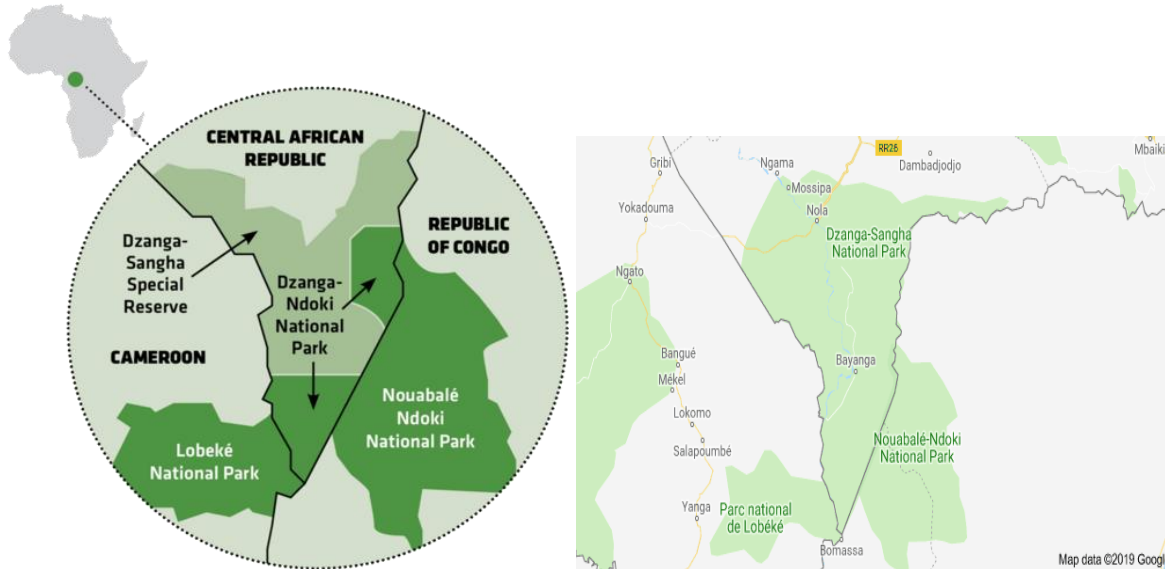
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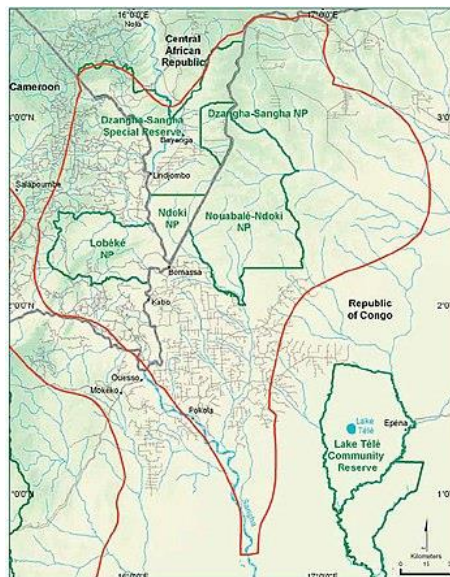
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The Triparks Area – Lobeké (Cameroon), Dzanga Ndoki & Dzangha-Sangha (CAR) and Nouabalé Ndoki (Republic of Congo)



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Plus Tshumbiri in DRC



The village of Tshumbiri is 180kms upriver from Kinshasa, south of Mbandaka, and the bonobo conservation project is in an area called Mbou Mon Tour.

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Trip Highlights

- Wending along the mighty Congo River in a comfortable river boat;
- Visiting colonial landmarks from the time of the Savorgnan de Brazza and Stanley expeditions;
- Botanical explorations among the more than 1000 species of plants along the river;
- Meeting the Ba'aka or the forest people, one of the last remaining groups of hunters and gatherers on our planet;
- Searching for the Bouvier's Red Colobus, until very recently thought to be extinct!
- Looking for wild lowland gorillas, bongo and forest elephants at Dzangha-Sangha;
- Forest walks & watching eles, buffalos and birds from Wali Bai;
- Exploring riverbanks at Lobeké NP in Cameroon;
- Visiting habituated wild bonobos at Mbou Mon Tour in DRC;
- Enjoying an evening of jazz and rumba with the Congo dandies themselves!
- Optional extension to Lésio-Louna, the gorilla sanctuary 2.5 hours from Brazzaville. You will see habituated gorillas from up close!
- Taking this river voyage to its natural conclusion with a few nights at Loango National Park in Gabon (optional extension).
- Whoa!

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DAYS 1-7: DECEMBER 22-28, 2024: IMMERSION IN THE TRINATIONAL SANGHA

In the north-western section of the Congo Basin, at the meeting point of Cameroon, CAR and ROC, lies an enormous tract of land, made up of 3 contiguous national parks in 3 different countries. Together, this protected area of over 750,000 hectares, harbors a wealth of flora and fauna, including considerable populations of forest elephant, lowland gorillas, forest buffalo, antelopes like bongo, duikers and sitatunga, as well as a host of other primates, including chimpanzees. Participants will be divided into 4 sub-groups, plus guides, and each sub-group will do all the activities in the 3 parks on a revolving basis.

- Each person will spend 3 nights at Sangha Lodge, visiting Sangha Bai, Bai Hokou, doing an agile mangabey trek, looking for picathartes & other special birds, and also overnighing on the platform at Sangha Bai, should they be interested;
- Each person will visit Wali Bai and Nouabale-Ndoki NP;
- Each person will visit Lobeké, Cameroon, however brief the visit;
- Forest and botanical walks, and a visit to Ouesso town.

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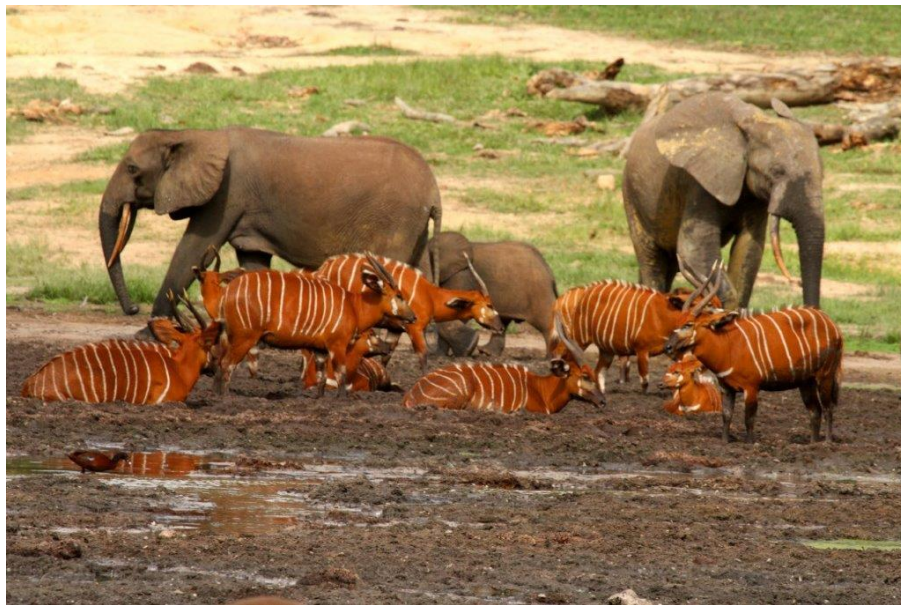
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Sangha Bai – © *Sinziana-Maria Demian/WWF*



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Day 8: DECEMBER 29, 2024: OUESSO – GATHER ON BOARD



Groups 1 and 2 gather on the boat for our first night all together aboard the Princess Ngalessa.



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Day 9: DECEMBER 30, 2024: START SAILING DOWNRIVER



We will explore the black waters of the Ndoki river. Fingers crossed for the Great Blue Turaco & other interesting birds. We will also meet the Tokou people today



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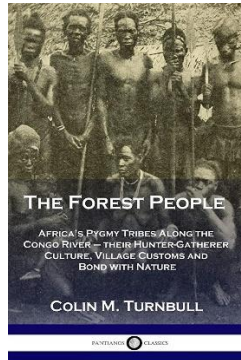
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Day 10: DECEMBER 31, 2024: SAILING TOWARDS PIKOUNDA – New Year’s Eve



We will pass the village of Pikounda en route to a Tokou village this afternoon, where we will meet the chieftain of a local village. These ethnocultural encounters will be some of the most enriching moments of the trip. We will be back on board in the early evening to get ready for an evening of fun and celebration as we ring in the New Year 2025. Please come dressed in all-white, all-black, or black & white outfits for our New Year’s Eve party on board!



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Day 11: JANUARY 1, 2025: LOOKING FOR BOUVIER'S COLOBUS ON THE MANGUI RIVER

Today, we will try to look for the Bouvier's Red Colobus monkey, which until quite recently had been thought to have gone extinct! In the morning, we will go 15 kms up a tributary of the Sangha, called the Mangui and follow the northern border of Ntokou-Pikounda NP. I must be honest and confess that our chances of actually spotting this colobus is very low, but if we don't try, then we have no chance at all. Who knows what magic lies in the forest here...



*Detail from the world's first photo of Bouvier's red colobus (*Piliocolobus bouvieri*) taken early March 2015 in the Ntokou-Pikounda National Park in the Republic of Congo. The photo shows an adult female with offspring. Photo by: Lieven Devreese.*

*"The last time there was a sighting of Bouvier's red colobus disco was all the rage, the Internet was non-existent, and Madonna still referred solely to the mother of God. But then the African monkey vanished and conservationists feared it had gone extinct—a victim of the bushmeat trade. For years, research groups called for an expedition to find out if Bouvier's red colobus (*Piliocolobus bouvieri*) still survived in the forests of the Republic of Congo. Earlier this year, a 27-year-old Belgian researcher, Lieven Devreese, did just that. And not only did he rediscover the lost colobus, he also took the first photos ever of this long-elusive species."*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EnUFP0miGI&t=118s>

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Day 12: JANUARY 2, 2025: CROSSING THE EQUATOR – SAILING DOWNRIVER

Presentations on board today as we cross the Equator. Swimming in the Congo river is strictly prohibited, so no Equator dunk, I am afraid, unless you're not loathe to meet the local underwater denizens who can look even uglier than this... 😊



Having said that, will have some opportunities today to kayak and explore some of the smaller tributaries of the Congo en route.



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Day 13: JANUARY 3, 2025: FISHING VILLAGES AND MOSSAKA



After a restful night on board, today we will have a relaxed day sailing to the rhythm of the river. The Congo river widens considerably at this point (more than 10 kms) and we see a hodgepodge of islands, where fishing villages pop up temporarily during the dry season. We will visit the fishing village of Mossaka, known throughout the country for its smoked fish, as well as the vestiges of the de Brazza and Stanley expeditions. Perhaps some hippos too.



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Days 14-15: JANUARY 4-5, 2025: BONOBOBOS AND NGABE

We will all disembark together at Tshumbiri for our bonobo tracking activity. There are 3 habituated groups of bonobos, so we will be sub-divided into groups of 7-8 people. We have planned for 2 treks – one on the evening of Jan 4, and the other very early morning on Jan 5.

We will overnight in very basic fly camping tents at the trailhead. Since the bonobos usually get active very early in the morning and since they can move extremely fast, the plan is to try to catch them at their nest as they bed down and as they wake up, and follow them as much as we can. If you would like us to organize local porters to carry your camera equipment, please let us know in advance. The tourism aspect of the bonobos is in its infancy and almost no one comes here, so there is no well-organized infrastructure here, as you have for gorilla and chimpanzee treks in East Africa. I encourage everyone to use porters – the money will be of great help to the local people who have supported this unique bonobo project.

Please do bring some wet wipes to freshen up at night and in the morning. There are no decent washrooms here and we will just have to manage as best we can, with bush facilities. Our bathroom awaits on the boat 😊



Photo credit @ Janos Rautonen

BONOBO TRACKING

Please note that this is a tough trek through thick forest, and the bonobos can move quickly. It's a good idea to train a little bit for this trek, like you would for a mountain gorilla trek. We are not

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expecting steep inclines, but the pace will be quick from all that I have heard. If at some point you wish to turn back, we can do that too.

A little bit about this project: Mbou Mon Tour is the result of a few dedicated individuals and the support of the villagers, without whom this population would simply not exist. It was only in 2008 that WWF and other sponsors started their support of the program that has now seen 6 Bonobo groups being actively monitored with 3 groups that have had extensive habituation, and at least one other group that is part of an ongoing international research study.

This is a very special activity, everyone – wild bonobos are holy grails of the safari world! 😊

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Day 16: JANUARY 6, 2025: BRAZZAVILLE

Afternoon in Brazzaville, visiting some local markets for traditional handicrafts and meeting with La Sape – Society of Ambiance Makers and Elegant People - or simply relaxing and getting ready for a fun evening ahead! We have planned an evening of jazz music and rumba in the company of the Congo Dandies to end the trip on a fun note!



Day 17: JANUARY 7, 2025: BRAZZAVILLE – LESIO LOUNA GORILLA SANCTUARY – BRAZZAVILLE

- For those not doing this extension to Lésio-Louna, nor doing the Gabon extension, please book your return flights home for January 7, 2025 at any time;
- For those doing this Lesio-Louna extension but not the Gabon extension, this will be an all-day trip and you will need another night in Brazza. Your return trip home should be booked for January 8, 2025. (return trip by road to the sanctuary, gorilla feeding and other activities, overnight at the Radisson in a standard room with breakfast included);
- For those who are doing the Gabon extension but would just prefer a down day in Brazza before heading off to Libreville on Jan 8, that is possible too and priced into the Gabon extension already. The flight from Brazza to Libreville is being booked for Jan 8 because

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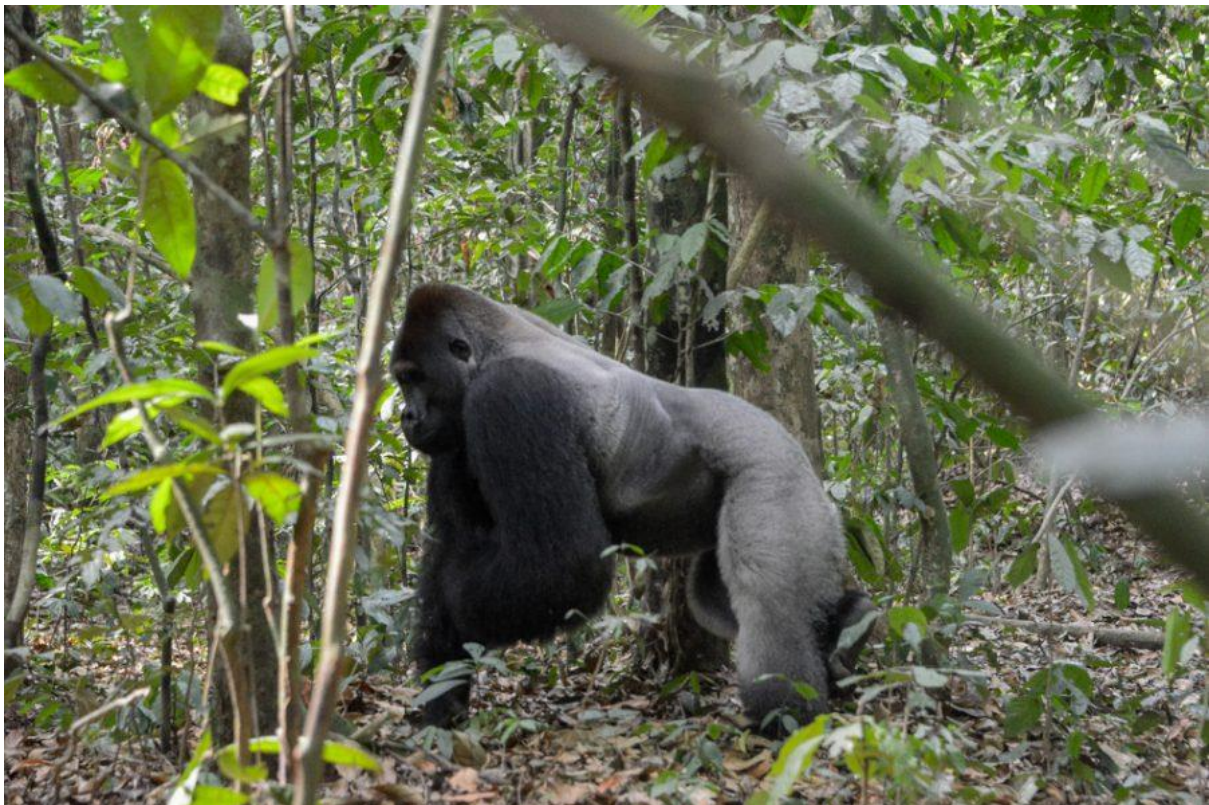
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there is no flight on Jan 7, 2025.

- For those doing the Gabon extension AND if you want to add on the gorilla sanctuary day trip, the extra will be 350 Euros per person.

LESIO-LOUNA GORILLA SANCTUARY



<https://www.aspinallfoundation.org/the-aspinall-foundation/working-around-the-world/congo-and-gabon/protection-management-of-the-l%C3%A9sio-louna-reserve/>

The most significant conservation success for the reserve has been the reintroduction of Critically Endangered western lowland gorillas, previously hunted to extinction in the area. Through the Gorilla Protection Project, The Aspinall Foundation has raised orphaned gorillas and, when old enough, returned them to live in the wild. In addition, UK-bred gorillas have been repatriated to Congo for release into the reserve. The result has seen breeding groups develop and currently the largest troop is formed of more than 30 gorillas headed by a silverback who came to the project as an orphan of the bush-meat trade in 1993, at that time he was less than two years old.

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Here's a nice little video link to help you decide:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53D6RvgCWbM>

This is not a wild experience, it is true, but I found it very intriguing that captive gorillas from Kent Zoo in the UK have been 'admixed' into the local gorilla groups of the Congo – it reminds me of the rewilding operations happening in Chad these days with the scimitar-horned oryx and addax.

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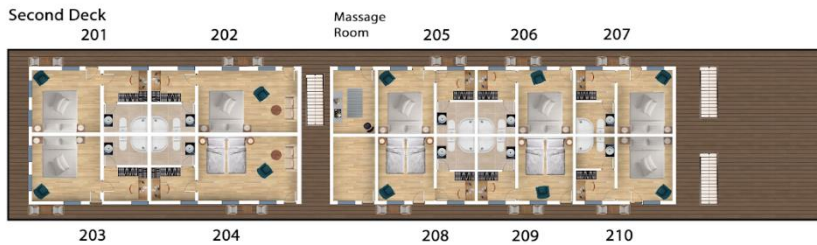
Observation Deck



Third Deck / Restaurant Deck



Second Deck



First Deck



Ship Layout

#SafarisWithSangeeta

Chalo Africa Inc.

128 N Guadalupe Street, Santa Fe, NM 87501, USA
 info@chaloafrica.com | +1-703-220-6393 | www.chaloafrica.com

Observation Deck :

2 Owner's suites with private balcony 35 m² Euro 11,570 per person on sharing basis

(1 twin cabin & 1 Queen cabin)

Private balcony, 3 windows, armchair, writing desk & chair, 2 bedside tables, sofa, closet, en suite bathroom, AC. 3 windows & easy access to Observation Deck.

Third Deck :

2 Classic Cabins 30 m² Euro 10,795 per person on sharing basis

(Each with 2 single beds that can convert to King)

Third deck – forward. Public balcony. 4 windows, armchair, writing desk & chair, 2 bedside tables, closet, ensuite bathroom, AC.

Second Deck :

2 Forward Master Suites 23 m² Euro 9,890 per person on sharing basis

(Each with a Queen bed)

Second deck – forward. Public balcony. 4 windows, armchair, writing desk & chair, 2 bedside tables, closet, ensuite bathroom, AC.

2 Master Suites 27 m² Euro 9,630 per person on sharing basis

(1 cabin with 2 single beds and 1 cabin with a Queen bed)

Second deck. Public balcony. 3 windows, armchair, writing desk & chair, 2 bedside tables, sofa, closet, ensuite bathroom, AC.

6 Deluxe Suites 18 m² Euro 9,245 per person on sharing basis

(2 cabins with 2 single beds & 4 with Queen beds)

Second deck. Public balcony. 2 windows, armchair, writing desk & chair, 2 bedside tables, closet, ensuite bathroom, AC.

Single Supplement is +50% on above prices (we are encouraging singles to please share if they possibly can).

Payment terms: 100% due upon booking. Please ask Malvika for details.

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Chalo  *Africa*
AFRICAN SAFARIS & ADVENTURE HOLIDAYS

INCLUDED:

All excursions throughout the core trip
Guidance and expertise of expedition staff
Park fees (these costs are subject to change if the park fees change)
Flight Brazzaville to Ouessou
Accommodations on board the Princess
3 nights at Sangha Lodge (all drinks and laundry are payable directly at Sangha Lodge. Meals and activities are included here)
All meals on board the Princess (beer, wine and soft drinks in limited quantities with meals)
We have negotiated a special rate of 100 Euros pp for 3-4 laundry items per day for the duration of the cruise. This can be settled along with the bar tab.
Hotel night in Brazzaville + dinner & dance evening with the Congo Dandies

NOT INCLUDED:

International flights
Bar consumption outside of meal times is extra and payable directly
Additional hotel nights in Brazza or elsewhere
Private transfers
Comprehensive travel insurance
Visas and visa invitation letter fees
Items of a personal nature (such as internet access and laundry)
Massage
Gratuities

FACILITIES:

Dining room
Indoor bar & lounge
Outdoor lounge
Outdoor jacuzzi
Massage room
Observation deck
World-class cuisine with locally sourced produce & fine wine

CREW & SAFETY:

20, including cruise director and 3 naturalist-guides. Two 15-pax motorboats & several canoes/kayaks. Radio; satellite phone; life jackets for everyone; fire extinguishers & smoke detectors in each cabin; flares and signals. First aid kit on board + crew with basic paramedical training.

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