



Inspiration
of Africa

An eXplorAction Cruise on the Congo River



From 03 till 19 September 2024
Escorted by Bruno Van den Bossche



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An eXplorAction Cruise on the Congo River

3rd till 19th September 2024



Contact: Bruno Van den Bossche - Email brunov@inspirationafrica.travel - Mobile: +32 499 334683



Itinerary

If the mysterious tropical forests of Africa fascinate you, then this expedition style cruise on the Sangha and the Congo rivers is the right exploration journey for you.

Expect a journey into the untouched rainforests Congo to discover some of the most charismatic wildlife observation and great apes tracking Africa has to offer. In addition to exploring iconic forest clearings called “Bai”s where large herds of forest elephants and bongo gather, the expedition will include tracking plains gorillas and chimpanzees. A short incursion into the DRC Congo is scheduled to observe the unique bonobos in their natural habitat.

This vast region, still sparsely populated with Bantu tribes and nomadic groups of Pygmies, both still living a fairly traditional lifestyle, will not disappoint. In Brazzaville, the contrast with the remote forests will be important, and you can expect to meet some of the famous “SAPEurs”!

This is no longer the “Heart of Darkness”! This is Africa unmasked, beautiful and powerful. This part of Africa is also my native land, and one I’d like to share with you on a journey I’ll be escorting in person.

Looking forward to host you on this once in a lifetime expedition,

Bruno Van den Bossche





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Day by day itinerary

Here's the itinerary, day by day. The cruise itself will travel down the Sangha and Congo rivers respectively, from Ouessou to Brazzaville. The first and last nights are in Brazzaville. 12 effective nights on board and 2 nights near key sites on the trip.

Flights are not included in the itinerary and will be booked separately according to your preference of airline and class; from Europe, the best flight options are offered by Ethiopian Airlines followed by Air France. Tourist visa applications are yours to apply for and must be made in advance on the basis of the invitation letters we will provide.

Although we'll do our utmost to make this itinerary a reality, the Congo is the Congo, and we may have to improvise to deal with the unexpected.

Day 1 - The 3rd September 2024

Arrival by air in Brazzaville, clearing of immigration formalities and collecting the luggage before the meet & greet at the airport. Followed by the transfer to the hotel for check-in. Rest of the day at leisure.

Welcome reception with a welcome drink and a short presentation of the trip and the team who will be escorting you. Welcome dinner at the hotel. Accommodation at the Radisson Blu M'Bamou Palace.

Day 2 - The 4th September 2024

Full breakfast at the hotel before check-out and a transfer to the airport for the domestic flight to the north of the country. The flight is likely to be operated in a 19-seater aircraft requiring 2 separate rotations.

Full breakfast at the hotel before departure and transfer to the airport for the domestic flight to the north of the country. From the destination airport, the journey will continue by road, which, although dotted with potholes, will allow you to appreciate this immensity of lush greenery all the way to the embarkation point aboard the RV Ducret Congo, our expedition vessel.

After settling in on board, the cruise begins on the Sangha River. A journey through a world of greenery, a veritable slalom between sandbanks as the depth of water diminishes. Lecture on the Congo Basin ecosystem during the cruise. Meals and accommodation on board.

Days 3, 4, 5 & 6 - The 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th September 2024

Having reached the north-western region of the Republic of Congo, where it meets Cameroon and the Central African Republic, we find ourselves in the region known as Sangha.



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Day by day itinerary

Days 3, 4, 5 & 6 - The 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th September 2024 (Continued)

This immense nature reserve encompasses 3 contiguous national parks across 3 nations, for a total of around 750,000 hectares. This region is still untouched by human activity and features a variety of tropical rainforest ecosystems with an impressive wealth of flora and fauna. The clearings are home to numerous herbaceous species, which in turn support a considerable population of forest elephants and other herbivores. The region is also home to the western lowland gorilla and the chimpanzee, both classified as endangered species. Visits will require division into three groups of maximum 10 to ensure discretion when approaching the various animal observation sites. Each group taking turns.

Visit 1 Morning departure for the Mondika scientific camp. The journey will take around 1 hour by car, then 2 hours on foot, in order to follow, in groups of 4, the groups of lowland gorillas tracked by the scientists (3 habituated groups). In order to follow, in groups of 4 maximum, the groups of lowland gorillas that have been researched and habituated by the scientists (3 habituated groups). Many other forest animals may be encountered during the walk, escorted by Ba'Aka pygmy trackers. Once we've reached the gorilla families, we'll spend an hour observing them from a distance, so as not to disturb the apes. The evening and night will be spent at the research station camp, providing an opportunity to interact with the scientists. All meals are included. Accommodation is under canvas in safari tents with appropriate bedding and access to showers and dry toilets.

Visit 2 Depart at dawn for a 3-hour expedition to reach the unique and famous Mbeli Bai. The journey takes about 1 hour by car, then about 1 hour by pirogue before another hour's walk. This clearing - scientifically known as Bai - is a gathering place for hundreds of animals, attracted by the mineral-rich soils. Perched atop an observation platform used by scientists, we'll have the opportunity to discover an unsuspected spectacle of wildlife. Mainly forest elephants, but also lowland gorillas, chimpanzees, bush pigs, bongos, sitatungas and forest buffalo frequent this salt-rich clearing. The whole morning will be devoted to observing this unique wildlife spectacle before returning to the boat. For the more adventurous, we strongly recommend arriving the day before and spending the night on the platform to witness the forest awakening at dawn.

Visit 3 This excursion will take us to the Dzanga-Sangha National Park, located in the Central African Republic, as part of the visa-free cross-border park agreements. The trip begins with a motorboat cruise up the Sangha River, lasting around 3 hours. From where we disembark, it's another 40-minute drive and 40-minute walk to the Dzanga bai, another clearing that is home to one of the largest populations of forest elephants. From the top of a platform, we watch the comings and goings of a wide variety of wild animals unfold before our very eyes. In the evening, we spend the night at Doli Lodge on the banks of the river.



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Day by day itinerary

Day 7 - The 9th September 2024

This day will be dedicated to discovering Cameroon's Lobéké National Park. From the Djembe camp on the Sangha River, a forest walk of around 1h30 takes us to the Djembe bai clearing for an additional wildlife observation experience. No additional visa is required, as the Sangha Tri National cross-border passport is included. In the afternoon, we return to the boat and begin cruising downstream on the Sangha River to Ouesso.

Day 8 - The 10th September 2024

Descending the Sangha River, we first arrive in Pokola, where we visit a sustainable forestry plantation. At the end of the day, our boat reaches the Ndoki River, where hippos can be seen. This is also the home of a Ba'Aka pygmy community. A conference will be held on board on pygmy populations in the face of modernity. All meals and overnight on board.

Day 9 - The 11th September 2024

In the morning, we head up the Mangui, a tributary of the Sangha, for around 15 kilometers. Following the northern boundary of Ntokou-Pikounda Park, we'll be on the lookout for Bouvier's red colobus, an endemic species.

Needless to say, we'll be spending a lot of time birdwatching in this ocean of greenery, home to some 1,000 different species. All meals and overnight on board.

Day 10 - The 12th September 2024

Descending the river to the village of Pikounda, we head for a local Pygmy village. Pygmies are one of two tribal groups living in this region. They are one of the world's last hunter-gatherer groups. The day will be devoted to discovering their harmony and understanding of the forest: we'll share their ancestral way of life, harvesting plant products, gathering medicinal plants, fishing and much more. We'll discover their incredible symbiosis with the forest. Dinner will be served ashore in an open clearing with the Pygmies. This is the time to share the stories of their people, and bring along songs and mimes for an evening that will live long in our memories.

Day 11 - The 13th September 2024

Descending the Sangha River, we slalom through lush green, rather impenetrable swamp forest. We're entering a sparsely populated territory, perhaps one of the wildest. This is where we'll meet the Sangha-Shanga fishing communities. We'll explore the tributaries in search of medicinal plants.



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Day by day itinerary

Day 11 - The 13th September 2024 (Continued)

Anyone interested is welcome to fish and try their luck. It's also the day we cross the equator line, and tradition calls for a kind of baptism. All meals and overnight on board.

Day 12 - The 14th September 2024

Today, we reach the point where the Sangha River flows into the Congo. We visit the fishing village of Mossaka, famous throughout the country for its smoked fish. Discover the vestiges of the colonial era, such as Mr. Trechot's house. We gradually leave the forest for grass-covered hills. This is also the ideal setting for a lecture on explorers such as Savorgnan de Brazza and Henry Morton Stanley.

Day 13 - The 15th September 2024

The Congo River widens considerably to over 10 km, and a multitude of islands are formed. Fishing communities settle here during the dry season. At the end of the day, we reach Mpouya, where we complete customs formalities to enter the DRC.

Day 14 - The 16th September 2024

It's a day dedicated to tracking Bonobos in Tshumbiri. Bonobos are a species of great ape endemic to the DRC Congo. From a genetic point of view, they are the closest species to humans, with up to 98.7% similarity in genotypes. Early in the morning, well before sunrise, we leave the RV Ducret Congo, drive for an hour and start walking at 5 a.m. in the forest to witness the awakening of the habituated Bonobo families. We'll be divided into 3 sub-groups, each visiting a different group of bonobos. In the afternoon, we'll spend time with the local communities. The night will be spent in basic tents on the Mbou Mon Tour property. A DRC entry visa will be required and letters of invitation will be provided. This visit also means that a multiple-entry visa for the Republic of Congo is required.

The Mbou Mon Tour project is the result of a few dedicated individuals and the support of the local community of villagers, without whom this bonobo population would simply not exist. It was only in 2008 that WWF and other sponsors began to support the program. actively monitored. Of these, 3 groups have been habituated to the wild and at least one other group is part of an ongoing project. at least one other group is part of an ongoing international study.



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Day by day itinerary

Day 15 - The 17th September 2024

Early in the morning, we go out one last time to track bonobos, before re-boarding the boat and officially returning to the Republic of Congo. A few kilometers further downstream, we reach the village of Ngabe, one of the ancient capitals of the Téké kingdom. Disembark in the village for a visit to the current Queen Ngalifourou. As guardian of "Nkwembali", the Batéké spiritual god, she is the person empowered to hand over power to the new king, the Makoko. The Makoko remains a highly influential figure in the Téké kingdom, one of the country's powerful kingdoms. We'll be invited to attend a ceremonial performance of several traditional Bateke dances. Back on board, we plan a lecture on the Téké kingdom and the history of the Congo. Dinner and overnight on board.

Day 16 - The 18th September 2024

Last breakfast on board before heading to Brazzaville. Disembark late morning and check-in at the Radisson Blu M'Bamou Palace. Next, a city tour is planned, starting with lunch in a local restaurant. Afternoon stops will include the Plateau market for traditional objects and crafts, the Poto Poto art school, the Congo Basin Museum and more. Expect to meet the S.A.P.E. - Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes!

Closing and farewell dinner in town. Overnight at the Radisson.

Remark: Those flying out with Air France are able to depart on the 18th already if so desired. Those flying with Ethiopian Airlines we would recommend to spend the night of the 18th in Brazzaville to avoid any departure stress?

Day 17 - The 19th September 2024

Everything comes to an end. This is the last day of the trip to Brazzaville. After a free morning, we'll transfer you to the airport for your afternoon or evening flight, depending on your choice of airline.

You'll return home with the memories of an unforgettable experience.

End of our services



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Watch the Video





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Great Apes

One of the main objectives of this exploration itinerary is to observe the natural environment of the tropical rainforest and adjacent biotopes, with particular emphasis on the great apes.

The program has been designed to offer good observation opportunities in their natural habitat. As nature remains unpredictable, we have optimized the visits to offer the best chances of seeing them:

Western lowland gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla*) are great apes living in the western part of central Africa, one of two species of the hominid genus *Gorilla*.

The chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*) is a species of great ape native to the forest and savannah of tropical Africa, whose range overlaps with that of the western lowland gorilla in the Republic of Congo.

Bonobos (*Pan paniscus*), also historically known as pygmy chimpanzees, are endangered great apes endemic to the Democratic Republic of Congo. The bonobo is man's closest relative. As the species are not good swimmers, the natural formation of the Congo River some 1.5 to 2 million years ago probably led to the isolation and speciation of the bonobo.



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Other Wildlife

The rainforest of Central Africa that makes up most of the Republic of Congo, is also home to over 400 species of mammal, around 1000 species of bird, 700 species of fish, etc.

Travelling along the rivers, canoeing up their tributaries and walking in the riverbeds, we'll have access to special clearings in the forest, called Baïs, where species of large mammals converge in search of soil rich in mineral salts.

Forest elephants, forest buffalo, bongos, sitatungas, bush pigs, etc. can all be seen here.

Along the way, the attentive eye can spot a multitude of birds, numerous butterflies, the elusive duiker and the monkeys that live in the canopy.



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People & Culture

A unique part of the trip will also be devoted to interactive encounters with local communities. We'll visit their villages, of course, but we'll also try to understand their way of life, their cultural heritage, their symbiosis with nature, their knowledge of medicinal plants and their unique ability to track down flora and fauna.

The boat trip is probably the best way to discover an impenetrable rainforest, and the journey will be punctuated by stops in the many fishing villages, tribal communities, pygmy villages, small towns, local kingdoms and so on.

Our expedition will also give us a better understanding of the Ba'Aka Pygmies and expose us to a different kind of wisdom, living in far greater harmony with nature than we do.

In complete contrast, Brazzaville will be exactly what Africa's big cities are. Vibrant and colorful... especially when it comes to the Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Elégantes.

As a companion on this trip, I'll also have the opportunity to share my own story of growing up in this part of Africa.



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The RV Ducret Congo

This RV Ducret Congo boat left a Belgian shipyard in Kinshasa in 2017. Its design is essentially based on that of the passenger boats that for decades carried passengers on the Congo River and its tributaries linking various cities. Of robust steel construction, it is powered by two new-generation 380 HP Caterpillar engines. With a draught of just 90 centimetres, it navigates easily in shallow waters and around sandbanks.

In 2023, as we speak, after several years of neglect by her former owners, she is currently undergoing serious renovations to launch the first 4* expedition cruises into the heart of one of the world's most mysterious forests, the Congo Basin.

By end of December 2023, she is due to start sailing up and down the Congo and Sangha rivers, reviving the long tradition of river cruising in the Congo.

Ship type: River expedition vessel

Length: 170 feet / 52 meters

Beam: 36 feet / 11 meters

Draft: 3 feet / 0.90 meters

Cruising speed: 12 knots

Electricity: 220 volts

Engine: 2 Caterpillar 375 HP marine engines

Generators: 150 KVA and 220 KVA

Water: 10,000-liter wastewater treatment plant



The RV Ducret Congo

Onboard living spaces: 600 m² of common areas including a dining room, an outdoor lounge, an outdoor Jacuzzi, a massage room and an observation deck.

A crew of 21, including a cruise director and 3 naturalist guides.

World-class cuisine: a culinary experience nourished by African and European influences. The menus have been specially designed by a French chef who has been awarded a Michelin star for his work in 2021. Emphasis is placed on the use of local produce.

Launch boats for shore excursions: 3 auxiliary aluminum launches equipped with low-emission four-stroke engines. Each boat has a capacity of 12 passengers. Kayaks for two people.

Safety on board: Radio communication with separate battery; satellite telephone; life jackets, fire extinguishers and smoke detectors in each cabin; flares and signals. Full first-aid kit.



Cabins on RV Ducret Congo

Guests are accommodated in 14 designer cabins on three decks.

35 m² owner's suite. Observation deck. Private balcony (9m²). Three windows, armchair, desk and chair, two bedside tables, sofa and wardrobe. En-suite bathroom. Air-conditioning. 1 cabin with two single beds convertible into a double bed. 1 cabin with double bed (401, 402).

Superior forward suite 30 m². Third foredeck. Public balcony. Four windows, armchair, desk and chair, two bedside tables and wardrobe. One bathroom. Air-conditioning. 2 cabins with two single beds convertible into a double (301, 302).

Forward master suite 23 m². Second foredeck. Public balcony. Four windows, armchair, desk and chair, two bedside tables and wardrobe. En-suite bathroom. Air-conditioning. 2 double cabins (201, 203).

Master suite 27 m². Second deck. Public balcony. Three windows, armchair, desk and chair, two bedside tables, sofa and wardrobe. Air-conditioning. 1 cabin with two single beds convertible into a queen-size bed. 1 cabin with queen-size bed. (202, 204)

Deluxe cabins 18 m². Second deck. Public balcony. Two windows, one armchair, one desk and chair, two bedside tables and one wardrobe. One bathroom. Air-conditioning. 3 cabins with two single beds. 3 double cabins (205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210).



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Observation Deck



Third Deck / Restaurant Deck



Second Deck



First Deck





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Prices

Owner Suite 35 sqm	€ 13,195	2 units (401 402)
Sup Suite Fwd 30 sqm	€ 12,640	2 units (301 302)
Master Suite Fwd 23	€ 11,010	2 units (201 203)
Master Suite 27 sqm	€ 10,780	2 units (202 204)
Deluxe Cabin 18 sqm	€ 9,480	6 units (205-210)
Single Room	On request	

All prices above are per person sharing. They cover the entire itinerary at destination from the 3rd till the 19th September 2024; inclusive of accommodation in Brazzaville and on board, all meals, a limited selection of drinks with meals, all park entrance fees, all activities specified as well as the invitation letters.

Single room accommodation is on request only due to the limited number of cabins available.

Are not included in the price: the cost of visa, the return air tickets to reach the destination, drinks outside the selection offered with the meals on board, tips, personal expenses, any service not specified in the itinerary.



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Information & Registration

Should you require further information or wish to discuss personal details concerning your participation, please do not hesitate to contact Bruno Van den Bossche directly on +32 499 334683 or by e-mail at brunov@inspirationafrica.travel.

For those wishing to register firmly, please contact us by e-mail and we'll send you an official registration link.

Early booking offer: a per person discount of €400 on Suites and €300 on Deluxe Cabins will be offered on bookings received by December 15, 2023.

A unique edition: given the need to charter an expedition vessel on a route including the Bonobos, please note that this is likely to be a unique edition; if exploring the Congo and its rainforest is on your bucket list, don't hesitate and don't put it off ... this is your chance.

Picture Credits: Expeditions Ducret, Scott Ramsay, Sean Brogan, Nicolas Ducret, Nuria Ortega and the Congo Conservation Corporation



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