AFRIQUE UNIE · TRAVEL NOTEBOOK

Congo in 11 days: a day-by-day itinerary

The Republic of Congo remains one of Central Africa's best-kept secrets: a quiet capital facing Kinshasa, a vast forest home to gorillas and elephants, and an Atlantic coast steeped in history. In eleven days, this itinerary links Brazzaville, Odzala-Kokoua National Park and Pointe-Noire, flying to avoid long road journeys. It stays away from advised-against areas, notably the border with the Central African Republic, where Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park lies. Check the official travel advice before you leave.

Day by day

Days 1-2 · Brazzaville, on the banks of the Congo (night : Brazzaville)
You land in Brazzaville, a green and calm capital on the right bank of the Congo River, directly opposite Kinshasa. Start with the Basilica of Sainte-Anne, recognisable by its green tiles and its tall nave with soaring arches, then visit the Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza Memorial, which traces the founding of the city. The next day, stop at the Poto-Poto school of painting, where artists have worked and exhibited since the 1950s, then head to the river rapids south-west of the city late in the day for an impressive sight. Do not photograph official buildings, and stay alert in outlying districts.

Day 3 · Flight to the Odzala forest (night : Odzala-Kokoua National Park)
Take the charter flight linking Brazzaville to Odzala-Kokoua National Park, in the north-west of the country. It is usually arranged by your accommodation on fixed days: book the whole stay well in advance. Flying over the forest, which stretches as far as the eye can see, is already a highlight. Created in 1935, Odzala is one of the oldest parks in Africa and protects more than 13,000 square kilometres of dense forest, savannas and rivers. Settle into camp, then set out on a first outing with a guide, by boat or on foot, looking for birds, monkeys and the tracks of forest elephants.

Days 4-6 · Gorillas, clearings and rivers (night : Odzala-Kokoua National Park)
These three days are the heart of the trip. The park has one of the highest densities of western lowland gorillas in Africa, and a few groups used to human presence can be approached with trackers. Visits are strictly regulated: a limited number of visitors, a short viewing time, masks and distances to respect, and a minimum age is generally required. On the other days, walk to the marshy clearings known as bais, where forest elephants, buffalo and antelope come to drink and find mineral salts. Also travel down the river by boat or kayak, between forest and flooded meadows. Bring long clothes and sturdy boots.

Day 7 · Back to Brazzaville (night : Brazzaville)
Enjoy a final morning outing in the park before taking the flight back to Brazzaville. Back in the capital, spend the afternoon walking along the corniche, which follows the river and offers a view of the towers of Kinshasa on the other bank. The Congo River, one of the most powerful in the world, separates two capitals that face each other here. If you want to take souvenirs home, the city's craftspeople offer carvings, paintings and fabrics. In the evening, try grilled fish or saka-saka, made from cassava leaves. Avoid walking around late at night.

Day 8 · Flight to Pointe-Noire and the coast (night : Pointe-Noire)
Take a domestic flight to Pointe-Noire, the country's economic capital on the Atlantic coast: the flight takes about an hour, compared with a very long day by road or train, both of which cross the Pool department. In the afternoon, stroll around the town centre, near the colonial-style station at the end of the Congo-Ocean Railway, then head to the Grand Marché for its atmosphere. Late in the day, watch the sunset over the Côte Sauvage. Do not walk on the beach south of the old wharf: official advice warns against it at all hours. At night, stay careful in the centre, where traffic is dangerous.

Day 9 · Diosso, the old kingdom of Loango (night : Pointe-Noire)
Head north, around thirty kilometres from Pointe-Noire, towards Diosso, the former capital of the Kingdom of Loango. The Mâ-Loango Museum, housed in the former royal palace, displays objects linked to the kings, the Atlantic slave trade and the traditions of Kouilou. Continue to the Diosso Gorge, a vast amphitheatre of red and ochre laterite carved out by the rain, sometimes compared to a small canyon. The contrast between the colourful cliffs and the green forest is striking, especially in the late afternoon. Stay on the paths and away from the cliff edges, as the ground is crumbly. Return to Pointe-Noire before dark.

Days 10-11 · Kouilou beaches and departure (night : Pointe-Noire)
Spend the penultimate day relaxing on the beaches north of Pointe-Noire, towards Pointe-Indienne, which are quieter than those in town, swimming only where local people do, as currents are strong. If you like primates, ask in advance about visiting the Tchimpounga chimpanzee sanctuary, which takes in orphaned animals and is not always open to the public. On the last day, take your flight home from Pointe-Noire international airport, served by several international routes, or fly back to Brazzaville if your ticket leaves from there. Allow a margin in case of delays.

Getting around

Flying is the safest and simplest option: domestic flights between Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire, and a charter flight to Odzala. The road to Odzala from Brazzaville takes two long days. Between the capital and the coast, National Road 1 and the railway cross the Pool department, where increased vigilance is required: journeys must be made in daylight, ideally in a convoy of two four-wheel drives. In town, use a trusted driver.

When to go

The dry season, from June to September, is the best time: less rain, passable tracks and often overcast skies, which make the heat more bearable. The Odzala camps often operate for much of the year, and the period from December to February, slightly less rainy in the north, is also a good choice. From October to May, downpours are heavy on the coast and in Brazzaville, but the vegetation is then very green.

Practical information

Republic of the Congo

Entry	Depends on your passport: visiterafriqueunie.com/en/visa/republic-of-the-congo/
Yellow fever	Certificate required from all travellers
Malaria	throughout the country
Currency	Central African CFA franc (XAF)
Languages	French, Lingala, Kituba
Plugs	type C, E · dialling code +242 · UTC+1
Emergencies	police 117 ou 06 665 4804 · fire 118

Departure checklist

Documents

☐ Passport valid for at least six months after your return, with blank pages
☐ Visa or e-visa (printed if required)
☐ International vaccination certificate (yellow fever if required)
☐ Travel insurance certificate and assistance number
☐ Paper and digital copies of your passport and bookings
☐ Tickets, bookings and addresses saved offline
☐ International driving permit if you are hiring a vehicle

Health

☐ Travel consultation done and vaccinations up to date
☐ Malaria tablets if your doctor recommends them
☐ First-aid kit: plasters, antiseptic, anti-diarrhoea tablets, rehydration salts
☐ Mosquito repellent suitable for the tropics
☐ Sunscreen, hat and sunglasses
☐ Personal medication and prescriptions

Money and connectivity

☐ Bank told, Visa or Mastercard (and a backup card)
☐ Cash in euros or dollars, recent notes in good condition
☐ eSIM or local SIM card sorted
☐ Plug adapter for the country
☐ Power bank and cables
☐ Offline maps downloaded
☐ Afrique Unie app installed

In the bag

☐ Light clothes that cover up (sun, mosquitoes, places of worship)
☐ A fleece for evenings, dawn safaris and altitude
☐ Walking shoes and sandals
☐ Head torch
☐ Water bottle (ideally with a filter)
☐ Small daypack and waterproof pouches
☐ Luggage padlock

Before you close the door

☐ Your government's travel advice reread
☐ Trip registered with your consular service (if it offers this)
☐ Itinerary and contacts left with someone close
☐ Online check-in done and baggage allowance checked

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