

Africa: the Dark Heart Safari

Trip dates: 21-28 January 2021

Location: Congo Republic

Group size: 6; Cost GBP 9,495 per person

ANDY SKILLEN
PHOTOGRAPHY



A LIFE-CHANGING 8-NIGHT, 9 DAY ADVENTURE INTO THE VERY HEART OF AFRICA'S RAINFORESTS, WITH A FOCUS ON FOREST ELEPHANT, BONGO, FOREST BUFFALO AND OTHER DENIZENS OF THIS INCREDIBLE ECOSYSTEM. WHAT IS MORE...WE INCLUDE THREE TREKS TO SEE LOWLAND GORILLAS...A TRUE ONCE IN A LIFETIME EXPERIENCE (EXCEPT...WE'RE MAKING IT THRICE!). THE CONGO BASIN IS SECOND ONLY THE AMAZON IN SIZE....AND PROTECTS MANY SECRETS....

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- EXCLUSIVE GROUP SIZE OF JUST 6 GUESTS
- A TOTAL OF 7 NIGHTS ACCOMMODATION IN THE HEART OF THE REGION (3 CAMPS)
- EXPLORATION OF THE SAVANNAH, BAIS AND RAINFOREST OF THE ODZALA NATIONAL PARK
- ESCORTED THROUGHOUT BY ANDY SKILLEN
- THREE GORILLA TRACKING EXPEDITIONS
- AS MUCH, OR AS LITTLE, PHOTOGRAPHIC TUITION AS NEEDED!

COSTS AND LOGISTICS

- **Group size:** 6 guests only
- **GBP 9,495** per person, based on twin-share accommodation
- **Start point:** Brazzaville
- **End point:** Brazzaville

WHAT'S INCLUDED...

- **1 night** accommodation in Brazzaville before the adventure (B&B basis)
- **7 nights** accommodation in the camps within Odzala
- **Return charter flights** from camps to Brazzaville at the start and end of the trip
- All guiding fees and tracking permits
- **Full board**
- **Assistance for obtaining a Congolese visa**

WHAT'S NOT...

- International and/or any domestic flight to/from the itinerary start/end points
- Meals other than breakfast in Brazzaville (breakfast is included)
- Items of a personal nature

- Visa fees as appropriate
- Gratuities

YOUR ITINERARY....

Day 1: Arrive in Brazzaville and overnight (1 night)

Having arrived in the capital, Brazzaville...most likely at night...we will transfer you to the hotel and ensure you are all set for your adventure the next day!

Day 2-8: Fly to Odzala...and onto the camps (7 nights)

Our charter flight will leave Brazzaville and take us to Odzala, where we will transfer to our vehicle and game drive to our first camp. Having settled in and orientated, we will take the chance for a short stretch of the legs in the area.

The vast green wilderness that is Odzala-Kokoua National Park has a multitude of habitats. In general, the north of the Park has dense forest covering many steep-sloped hills, while in the west a major escarpment runs roughly north-south from which the altitude drops 350 metres into low swampy forest. The southern part of the Park is characterised by pockets of savannah dotted with forest islands, bisected by the rivers and their associated gallery forests.

A primary feature is the occurrence of “bais” or salines. These are swampy, grassy clearings in the otherwise dense forest that forest wildlife visit on a regular basis in order to drink, feed on sedges and grasses, and obtain minerals and salts. These bais range in size from less than a hectare to more than ten hectares and represent the best chance of seeing forest wildlife. The bais we visit in Odzala-Kokoua are relatively small and as a result offer the opportunity for close up viewing of various species.

This vast, wild region, with its wide range of landscapes, is home to an incredible diversity of life. It holds globally significant populations of Western Lowland Gorilla and Forest Elephant as well as a plethora of other species: 430 bird species and more than 100 mammal species of which around 50 are classified as medium- or large-sized. It has the highest number (11) of diurnal primates for any forest block in central Africa, as well as central Africa’s highest density of Chimpanzees.

Other species include Forest Buffalo, Leopard, Bongo, Giant Forest Hog and Hippo. Clouds of spectacular butterflies are characteristic of the region. The trees are spectacular: ancient giants well over 50 metres tall emerge from the canopy, delicate orchids cling to the branches, while the forest floor is littered with an incredible array of pods, fruits, flowers and fungi.

Our seven nights here will be organized according to wildlife and photo opportunity, but we will ensure that we have a full three lowland gorilla treks during our stay.

Led by skilled local trackers, we will use the network of forest trails to get close to the gorillas, and observe their behavior as they go about the daily routine.

Gorilla Tracking expeditions typically leave on foot from camp, although they may involve a short drive depending on where the gorillas are.

The marantaceae forest, which is favoured by the gorillas also supports an incredible array of life of every shape and size. Walking the forest trails you will feel as though you have stumbled into one of the workshops of evolution.

Lowland gorillas are also very at home in the trees, which can provide some very special sightings. Expeditions do not cover enormous distances and can range in length from 1 to 8 kilometres (0.5 to 5 miles) over undulating country. The undergrowth can be thick, however, and including the time spent with a gorilla group, excursions can last between 2 and 8 hours (including time spent with the gorillas). Nowhere else is it possible to experience the lowland gorilla in this way...

Moving between camps will involve game viewing vehicles, and we will also undertake savannah explorations for animals such as hyena, serval and armadillo (incredibly!) too. Other photo opportunities will involve walking the bais, where forest elephant are often seen, as well as on kayaks which might afford us other

opportunities. Each camp has excellent wildlife in its area, be it flocks of parrots, forest buffalo, colobus monkeys, forest elephant, bongo or others...and we will be sure to make the most of every possibility. The chance to night-walk in one of the bais is also an experience not to be missed...and could afford us some very special sightings.

Day 9: Depart for Brazzaville

Capture a few last shots in the early morning before our charter flight departs and gets us back to Brazzaville between 11am and 12pm. From here, we can drop you at a hotel if you decide you wish to spend some more time in the city (and a city tour is a real highlight and can be organized), or you will connect onto your international flight...full of memories of this extraordinary country.

GOOD TO KNOW...

Travel to areas such as this is not for everyone, and for me it is important that you do take into account the following when booking on this life-changing adventure:

What's it like to travel there?

The Congo Republic is NOT the Democratic Republic of Congo....(the DRC). The latter is the one you always hear the negatives about (Ebola, civil unrest etc). The Congo – where you will be going – is stable, safe and incredibly exciting. You are travelling to an area where there is no accommodation other than the camps we use...very very few people, no civilization save for the local tribes that still live in the forest and which we can encounter if we choose.

What's the weather like?

I have timed this trip to be at the end of the drier season...note the word “drier”. In theory, we will not get much rain at all, which makes moving around a lot easier for sure. That said, we can expect showers from time to time...so like all good scouts...be prepared ☺

What is the terrain like?

The Congo basin is a mosaic of savannah areas, Bais (open areas within forests where wildlife congregates), and thick rainforest. When tracking gorillas, we will move through generally flat terrain, BUT it will involve walking through rainforest and that can include ducking and diving through bushes and lianas.

Can we walk on our own?

Around the camps we have a number of walks that can be taken just to soak up the majesty of the environment...and who knows what else you might see?!

Is this the adventure for me?

This safari is perfect for anyone looking for a photographic adventure in some of the most pristine and remote parts of the world.. This is not a strenuous trip but you do need to have an adventurous spirit. Having a laid back, open-minded and patient demeanor is important. We will walk in water, take canoes, use vehicles and track gorillas amongst others. Our access is by charter flight in and out. This is not for the first time Africa-goer.

What about the clothing?

A year out, we will inform you of what to pack if you're unfamiliar with travel in this part of the world.

...and inoculations?

The International Yellow fever vaccination certificate is COMPULSORY FOR ENTRY into Congo.

For Gorilla Viewing, you need show that you've been vaccinated against polio and measles and are required to provide a certificate from a registered medical practitioner indicating that you are free of tuberculosis, as these are easily passed on to gorillas.

What will I see?

This trip could bring you face to face with forest elephant, forest hogs, sitatunga, bongo, forest buffalo, lowland gorillas, colobus monkeys, African grey parrot flocks and many many more. You will not see lions or cheetah and you are very unlikely indeed to see leopard (although at night they frequent areas around the camps). This is the heart of Africa – its green lungs and you should be ready for an immersive rainforest experience.

WHAT DO I DO NEXT?

To reserve your space on this very special adventure, either:

- a. send an email to Andy@faunavista.com or Carrie@faunavista.com to register your interest and receive a booking form
- b. download the generic booking form using the link on the page from where you obtained your itinerary, fill it out, and send it to either email address as above.

Charity...a permanent winner

Andy's photography is all about giving some thing back; back to a world that has given him such a wealth of memorable experiences and opportunities. As a result, a proportion of all the profits we make from every perspective of Andy's work is donated to some of the world's leading wildlife charities. These include the David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation (DSWF), Animals Asia and the Bushlife Foundation.