

Congo

Not to be confused with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly Zaïre) across the Congo River, Congo (officially known as the Republic of Congo and also sometimes called Congo-Brazzaville) offers a friendlier and less-threatening version of its sprawling neighbour, though the crumbling infrastructure makes travel here just as tough.

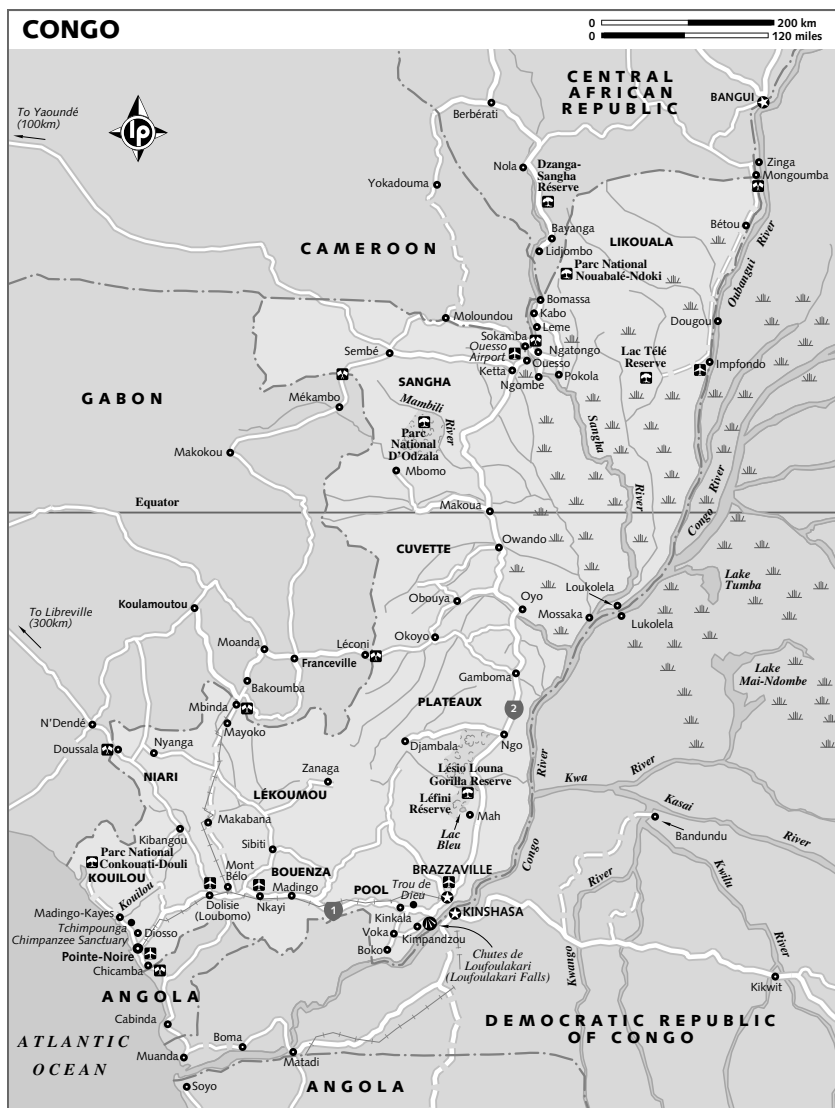
Congo remains an unknown quantity to most outsiders, but you're probably aware of its vast rainforests; home to at least half the world's lowland gorillas. Parc National Nouabalé-Ndoki is one of the most pristine preserves in Africa and a highlight of the whole of Central Africa, not just Congo. The vast tropical plains of the north are juxtaposed against a 169km-long coastal strip that plays host to a nascent oil industry, but also has a wild side of its own at Parc National Conkouati-Douli. And then there are the French-flavoured cities of Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire, which are both low on excitement, but high on allure.

Congo has much to offer those who make the effort to explore it, and now that the civil war is largely over, expect a growing number of people to take up the challenge.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 342,000 sq km
- **ATMs** Available in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire
- **Borders** Angola (Cabinda), Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Gabon
- **Budget** A minimum of US\$20 per day; far more if you visit national parks
- **Capital** Brazzaville
- **Languages** French (official), Lingala (north), Munukutuba (south)
- **Money** Central African CFA franc (CFA); US\$1 = CFA463, €1 = CFA656
- **Seasons** Wet seasons are October to May (south) and June to September (north)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 242; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC +1
- **Visa** Available on arrival, but to avoid hassles, get it from an embassy beforehand if possible





HIGHLIGHTS

- **Parc National Nouabalé-Ndoki** (p571) One of the world's great wildernesses.
- **Chutes De Loufoulakari** (p570) Feel the power of this hidden waterfall.
- **Parc National Konkouati-Douli** (p571) Explore beach, savannah and jungle all on the same day.

- **Barge travel** (p574) Journey for the sake of the journey.
- **Brazzaville** (p566) Relax in this big city's small-town feel.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

It gets hot, often over 30°C, during the rainy months (October to May in the south) but