



# Central African Republic

POP 4.6 MILLION / 📄 236

## Includes ➔

Understand Central African Republic .....	503
Central African Republic Today.....	503
History .....	503
Culture .....	505
Environment .....	505

## Fast Facts

**Capital** Bangui

**Population** 4.6 million

**Languages** French, Sango

**Area** 622,984 sq km

**Currency** Central African franc (CFA)

## Introduction

Central African Republic (CAR) is a country with staggering rare natural beauty and some wonderful wildlife. Not so long ago it was one of the best places in Africa for encounters with huge forest elephants and western lowland gorillas, and the best place in the world, some say, to see butterflies. However, since 2012 political problems and religious-fuelled civil war have made the country completely off limits to travellers for safety reasons, with all Western governments warning against any visits here.

One of the most impoverished and least developed countries on the continent, CAR endured centuries of rapacity from colonisers and then from its own leaders. Yet the people of this plundered nation remain incredibly open and friendly; and their conversations are more full of hope than despair.

## Central African Republic at a Glance

**Dzanga-Sangha Reserve** Western lowland gorillas and elephants inhabit this pocket of virgin rainforest.

**Bangui** A scenic river frontage and the old town's wide colonial boulevards that radiate out from the Point Kilometre Zero monument.

**Bayanga** The Baka (a pygmy tribe) depart for traditional hunts outside the Dzanga-Sangha Reserve from this small village.

**Chutes de Boali** A 50m-high waterfall that bursts to life in the rainy season.

**Bouar** Megalithic stone monuments dot the landscape around this market town.

**Traditional storytelling** Ancient folklore is sung to the music of drums, *ngombi* (harp) and *sanza* (guitar).

## UNDERSTAND CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

### Central African Republic Today

Today, with continuing widespread violence throughout the country, the Central African Republic teeters on the edge of the abyss. The recent violence is estimated to have uprooted nearly 1.2 million people and by late 2016 the World Bank estimated that there were still some 384,000 internally displaced people and 467,000 refugees in neighbouring countries. In addition, around 76% of the population continues to live in extreme poverty and around half the population are considered in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. Health facilities within CAR have been devastated by the recent violence with only 55% of health facilities remaining in a functional state.

Economically speaking the situation improved slightly in 2015–16, but that was only in comparison to 2013 when the real GDP of the country fell by 36%, which led to economic collapse.

Perhaps the only bit of good news in the entire mess is that a new constitution

has been approved and in February 2016 Faustin-Archange Touadera became the first ever freely elected president in the CAR's history.

### History

Although stone tools provide evidence of human life from 6000 BC, the most notable ancients resided around present-day Bouar some 2500 years ago. Little is known about them, though it must have been a highly organised civilisation because it left behind about 70 groups of megaliths, some weighing three or four tonnes. The country's present cultures most likely arrived in the 15th century, probably fleeing Arab slave traders, but by the 18th century they, too, were sending their captives across the Sahara to markets in Egypt or down the Congo River to the Atlantic Ocean. This industry, which didn't completely end until 1912, decimated entire cultures and largely depopulated the eastern half of the country.

### Colonial Days

France launched into CAR in 1885, finding a shattered society rich in agricultural potential and under the rule of Sudanese-born

### Central African Republic

