

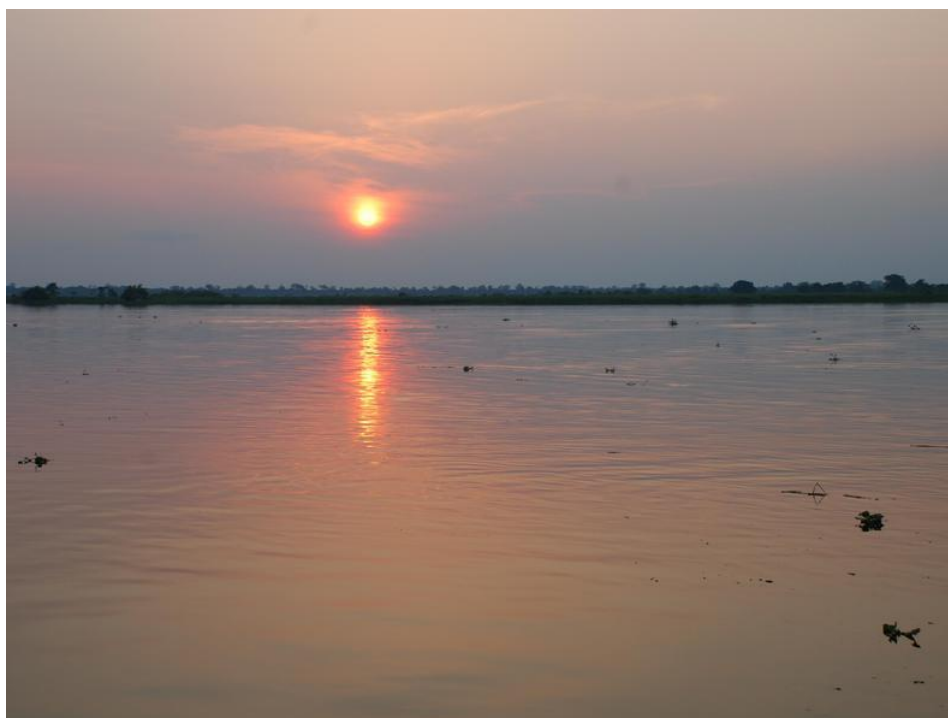


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# Tour Notes

**Congo River Journey – (Part 1) Mbandaka to Lisala**

**Tour Duration – 17 Days**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> August – 18<sup>th</sup> August 2024**



## Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●●● | Culture ●●●●● | History ●●●○○ | Wildlife ●●○○○

## Tour Pace

Relaxed

## Tour Highlights

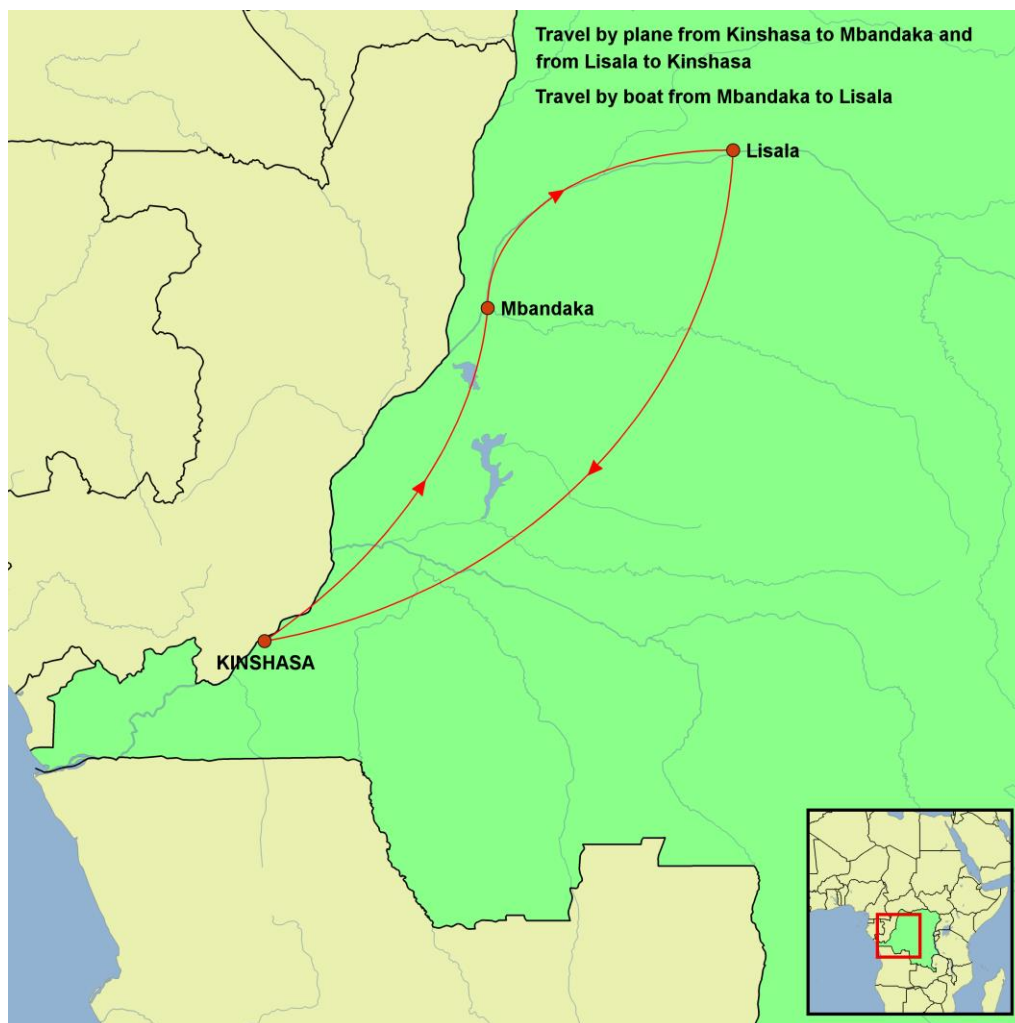
- ✓ Experience the different sights and sounds of the real Africa as you travel through a land few travellers have yet discovered.
- ✓ Discover remote villages, some of the country's important historical sights, rainforests and of course a chance to meet the local people
- ✓ Camping along the shores of the mighty Congo River





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## Tour Map



## Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Mix of basic hotels and camping  
**Included Meals:** Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary.  
**Group Size:** Maximum of 12 – you may be joined by travellers of different nationalities and from different companies than Undiscovered Destinations
- Start Point:** Kinshasa  
**End Point:** Kinshasa  
**Transport:** 4WD, Boat, Plane  
**Countries:** Democratic Republic of the Congo





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### **Congo River Journey - Mbandaka to Lisala**

*The Congo River oozes an alluring mystery that few other places can equal. Explore its hidden secrets on a two-week group trip from Mbandaka to Lisala, passing villages that have little contact with the outside world and camping overnight on its banks. We travel using our river cruiser, an 18-metre-long, wooden boat, equipped with two powerful outboard engines. The boat is further equipped with safety equipment, sanitary installation, a generator, lighting and freezers. It is operated by a licensed and experienced captain, a mechanic and a sailor. A cook and a tourist guide are present throughout. Evenings and nights are spent ashore, enabling cultural exchanges with the local population. There are few trips that can match this adventure.*

### **Tour itinerary notes**

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

### **Tour Guide**

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

## *Itinerary*

### **Day 1 – Kinshasa 2 August 2024**

Arrive in Kinshasa and transfer to the hotel. Overnight Hotel Invest or similar.

### **Days 2-3: Kinshasa – Mbandaka (Domestic Flight) 3-4 August 2024**

Fly to Mbandaka, capital of the Equator Province, and the starting point of river expedition. We stay 2 nights in the city, ready to leave shortly on our 11-day voyage bound for Lisala. Overnight tented camp or basic hotel in Mbandaka. (BLD)

### **Mbandaka**

Mbandaka, formerly known as Coquilhatville until Mobutu's 'authenticite' campaign, sits on the edge of the Congo River and is perhaps the most important city between Kinshasa and Kisangani. A busy, bustling city and important river port, it is endowed with few actual sights but gives a fantastic snapshot of central Congo and the trade that plies the river. Founded in 1883 by the explorer HM Stanley and originally named simply 'Equator', the large stone that Stanley placed near the river bank, to mark the spot where he believed the river to cross the equator remains there today. During the era of Belgian rule, efforts were made to modernise the city with factories and infrastructure being built, but subsequent conflict left the city neglected.

### **Days 4 to 14: Congo River Expedition: First Leg 5-15 August 2024**

The first leg of our voyage, upriver from Mbandaka to Lisala is expected to take 9 nights. We will be travelling through a vast area, without roads or airports. The river is a vital-life line for the communities we visit en-route. We will see how they go about their everyday lives, buying and selling produce from small boats that criss-cross the river. The people we meet have little, if any contact with the outside world, and certainly no concept of tourism. It is the genuinely spontaneous encounters which makes the trip so pioneering and a must for







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intrepid travellers. There are few places left on earth where such encounters are possible. It is a special experience shared by only an elite group of travellers a year. (BLD)

Each night will be spent ashore or close to a village where we can buy fresh produce, prepare dinner and set-up our tented camp for the night. Tents are large and comfortable, 2m in height. Each tent is equipped with self-inflating mattress and cotton mattress covers and pillows. Travellers should bring their sleeping bag or sleeping sheet, as well as a towel and toiletries.

Our transport is aboard a 18m long wooden boat, equipped with two powerful outboard engines. Although a traditional boat it is of course equipped with full safety equipment, toilet facilities, a generator, lighting and freezers for food and drinks. A cook and an English-speaking guide accompany the trip throughout.

### **The Congo River**

The Congo is central Africa's greatest geographical feature, an enormous body of water snaking its way through the rainforest to discharge its contents into the Atlantic Ocean. Acting as a massive drainage channel for the rainforests of the Congo Basin, it measures almost 3000 miles in length, is the second most powerful river in the world after the Amazon and is also the deepest river in the world.

The Congo is fed by a number of other rivers, each giant in their own right but which pale into insignificance in comparison – the Lualaba and the Oubangi among others. The river was first discovered by Europeans in the 15th century when Portuguese sailors noticed that the water was fresh some miles out into sea, prompting them to investigate and so 'discover' the river. The river was however unexplored for many centuries, largely due to unnavigable rapids not far into the interior. A British expedition sent in the 19th century explored 150 miles further than had been done before but failed to make further progress. The first known European to chart the course of the river was the famous explorer HM Stanley. Setting out with a caravan provided by Arab slave traders, Stanley and his men faced warlike and cannibalistic tribes, sickness, lack of supplies and exhaustion, and often had to carry their boats through the jungle when they came to rapids and waterfalls. Despite huge difficulties, Stanley eventually emerged at the Atlantic Ocean. Travelling on the river today is of course nowhere near as hard as it was then, but make no mistake, this is still a challenging journey where few western travellers have trod. Those lucky enough to travel through this region will discover cultures largely untouched by the outside world – a rare thing in this day and age.

### **Day 15 – Lisala – Kinshasa 16 August 2024**

We expect to arrive in Lisala today. Lisala is the home town of the former President Mobutu and the half way point between Mbandaka to Kisangani. We then transfer to the airport for a scheduled flight to Kinshasa. Overnight Hotel Invest or similar (B)

### **Day 16 - Kinshasa City Tour 17 August 2024**

After breakfast visit the wonderful Lola Ya Bonobo project outside of Kinshasa. Later in Kinshasa we explore some of the markets and buildings that make this such a fascinating city. Formerly referred to as 'Kin La Belle' - meaning 'Beautiful Kinshasa', the many years of turmoil has tarnished this image. But slowly, Kinshasa is regaining its splendour. Overnight Hotel Invest or similar. (B)

### **Lola Ya Bonobo**

Bonobos are a great ape species found exclusively in the Democratic Republic of Congo. They are an endangered species and it is thought that as few as 50,000 individuals may remain in the wild. The project rescues and rehabilitates injured Bonobos caught up by the problem of poaching and the bush meat trade. Up to 60 Bonobos are being rehabilitated here in 75 acres of primary tropical forest. It is the aim of the project to release some of the animals back into the wild. The sanctuary also has award winning educational programmes with around 30,000 visitors each year, raising crucial awareness of the plight of these apes and the pressing need to ensure their future existence.



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### **Kinshasa**

The capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kinshasa (formerly known as Leopoldville) is an enormous city, and some say the largest francophone city in the world, beating Paris. From its humble beginnings as a small village, Nshasa, it was identified by Stanley as an important base for the development of the Congo Free State and began to attract both European and Congolese settlers, expanding quickly to become a goliath among African cities. Although previous years have seen many troubles in Kinshasa, it never lost its place as a cultural hub of Central Africa, spawning the renowned Congolese rumba music which remains popular today. In the 1960's it was the site of the famous 'Rumble in the Jungle' boxing match between Mohammed Ali and George Foreman, the largest sporting event in Africa then and ever since. Situated on the banks of the Congo River, it faces the capital of Republic of Congo, Brazzaville, a unique location for a capital city. Kinshasa is recovering from its chequered past in the 21st century, with infrastructure continually improving and investors returning. Kinshasa is hectic, it is brash, it can be at times intimidating, but one cannot understand the history of this intriguing country without a visit here.

**Day 29: Kinshasa Departure 18 August 2024**

Tour ends with transfer to airport. (B)

\*\*\*\* PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS SCHEDULE MAY CHANGE EN ROUTE DUE TO LOCAL FACTORS \*\*\*\*

## *Tour Inclusions/Exclusions*

### **Inclusions:**

Arrival and departure transfers  
Domestic flights  
All accommodation  
Services of English-speaking guide / tour leader  
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)  
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

### **Excluded:**

International flights  
Any airport taxes  
Travel Insurance / Visas  
Drinks

## *Important Information*

### **Foreign Government Travel Warnings**

Before booking your tour please familiarise yourself with the country specific information provided by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) - <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>. This includes important information such as latest immigration requirements, and details of any travel advisories.

At the time of writing the British Foreign Office (FCDO) currently advises against all travel to most north eastern and eastern areas of the Congo, although these are not areas visited on this tour.





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Furthermore, it is the clients' responsibility to ensure that they hold full travel insurance which includes medical repatriation.

You should check the validity of your insurance with your provider, given the travel warnings in place. We can however, help you organise insurance which will continue to be valid.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Non-UK nationals should check with their own government, as the information and advice may differ to that provided by British authorities.

### **Accommodation and Meals**

#### **Hotel Check-in Times**

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.

#### **Accommodation Rating**

At Undiscovered Destinations we know our travellers prefer to stay in comfortable, mid-range accommodation which meets our own exacting standards. With a few exceptions you can expect rooms to be en-suite, with private bathroom and when necessary air-conditioning will be provided. In general you will find your hotel has a restaurant and/or bar.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

#### **Food & Drink**

On our tours in the Congo you will be accompanied by a cook. Breakfast is usually continental style, including sliced bread and rolls with butter, cheese, ham/salami and jam. Lunch and dinner consist mainly of local specialties. Fresh fruit and local snack foods are served as lunch on board. The main course of dinner normally consists of meat, poultry, fish or pasta with vegetables, rice, potatoes or 'Foufou', a local side dish made from the manioc plant.

#### **Dietary Requirements**

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.



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### **Budgeting for your Tour**

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

### **Food**

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch £8  
Dinner £10

### **Drink**

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Bottle of Beer £1  
Water £1

### **Tipping – Guide and Drivers**

Tipping is common practise in Africa. If your local guide has been helpful then you could think about tipping. This amount can obviously be left to you. When tipping a driver, a guide or hotel staff a few dollars will always be gratefully received.

### **Foreign Exchange**

**ATM Availability:** ATMs which accept Visa cards are available in Kinshasa and Mbandaka only but may be unreliable. For other cards please check with the issuer

**Credit and Debit Card Acceptance:** The use of cards is limited to the top hotels in Kinshasa

**Local Currency:** Franc Congolais

**Recommended Currency for Exchange:** US Dollars

**Where to Exchange:** Exchange facilities are available at Kinshasa's airport and the capital's major banks. Outside of Kinshasa facilities will be limited.

### **Joining your Tour**

#### **Flight Information**

Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

#### **Joining Tour Abroad**

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a free airport transfer, both on arrival and departure. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.





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### **Travel Insurance**

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

### **Visa Information**

Most nationals will require a visa to visit the DR Congo. Congolese Embassies or Consulates can be found in major cities around the world including London and Washington. You will be required to produce a 'notarised' Letter of Authority. In addition, the London embassy and possibly others will require an 'Engagement de Prise en Charge' document authorised by the country's Interior Ministry. These documents will be provided by Undiscovered Destinations. We start this process around 3 months before departure.

Please allow at least 8 weeks for these documents to be issued.

NOTE: The Prise en Charge is only valid for 3 months. Therefore, we cannot request this any earlier than 3 months before the start date of the tour.

You may also be asked to produce a letter from your employer and possibly a recent bank statement as proof of sufficient funds. A valid Yellow Fever certificate will also be required to obtain your visa.

Regulations do frequently change though, so we advise that you check the current requirements with your nearest embassy or visa agency.

Please be aware that visa information is subject to change, therefore please refer to your nearest embassy for up to date advice. Please note that the price of your tour does not include visa costs.

### **Passports**

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to the UK.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively UK citizens can visit [www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice)

### **Vaccinations & Protection**

As with travel to most parts of Africa, we strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice and the necessary vaccinations. For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A and B, Polio and Typhoid. In addition you must hold a valid Yellow Fever Certificate and this will be required to support your visa application.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on best practice when travelling with medicines. For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.





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# Preparing for your tour

## Climate

Apart from high altitude areas, most of the country is hot the year round, lingering around 30°C during the day, with some relief at night. Rainfall is scant along the tiny coastline and increases further inland. A dry period affects most of the country between June and September.

As a general guide the best time to visit is December to February for north of the equator and April to October when travelling south of the equator.

## Clothing

When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, and warmer ones at night. A hat is also advised to be worn through the day to protect from the sun, along with at least one piece of waterproof clothing for any days that the weather may be wet or windy.

## Equipment

Sun cream/sunblock is a must. When out on tour, it is important to have sun cream with you, as there will not be any services nearby in which to provide it. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will be useful to have. As our tours in the Congo involve camping, a torch (flashlight) is essential.

## Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable walking shoes/boots are recommended.

## Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable. We advise you to travel with a rucksack or soft bag rather than a suitcase.

## Service Standards

Service Standards Please note that standards of service in much of Africa are not comparable to those of more developed countries, especially in the more off the beaten track locations. Service is often slow and lacks the same attention to detail, and your patience and understanding will be appreciated.

## Electric Supply & Plugs

Generally electrical supply is 220-240V AC (50 Hz) and uses European two circular pin style plugs.

## Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated 27 November 2023.