



10-DAY GORILLA SAFARI IN THE DZANGA-SANGHA RESERVE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC



In the very heart of the African continent lies the Dzanga-Sangha Reserve, a cross-border protected area within the habitat of the western gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*). Although they were the first to be discovered, by Savage and Whyan in 1848, this sub-species has eluded primatologists. Their isolation in the Congo River Basin and difficulty in observing them in the dense rainforest has meant we are only just now learning about the behavior of these remarkable apes.

This vast region, spanning three countries sparsely populated with Bantu tribes and nomadic groups of Pygmies, will not disappoint the adventurer and wildlife lover. You will be travelling in chartered aircraft, 4x4 vehicles, motorised pirogues, small pirogues powered by Pygmy and Bantu tribesmen, and on foot into the remotest parts of the jungle. And yet amazingly the accommodation will be comfortable with private bathroom facilities and cold drinks throughout the safari. You will enter a pristine region full of wildlife, including gorillas, chimpanzees, elephants, bongo, and many of the smaller primates, small mammals, forest birds, and a wealth of flora.

We will spend time watching elephants and other animals from the comfort of a mirador (a large covered viewing platform) at the famous Dzanga Bai. We will trek to see gorillas on foot with the local Baáka tribe of pygmy trackers. We will also have an opportunity to spend time with the Baáka, follow them on a net hunt, learn about medicinal and food plants of the forest, hut building and food preparation.



DZANGA-SANGHA RESERVE 10-DAY SAFARI ITINERARY

- DAY 1 :** The tour begins in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic, where you will be met at the airport and transferred to your charter flight to Dzangha-Sangha Reserve, for the first of six nights at Sangha Lodge.
- DAY 2 :** Gorilla tracking. Today you head down to Bai Hokou where you'll spend time tracking a group of Western Lowland Gorillas. Dzangha Sangha and its neighbor in Congo Nouabale-Ndoki National Park are the only places in the world where you can find habituated Lowland Gorillas.

WESTERN GORILLA



The western lowland gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*) is the most numerous and widespread of all gorilla subspecies. Populations can be found in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Equatorial Guinea as well as in large areas in Gabon and the Republic of Congo. The exact number of western lowland gorillas is not known because they inhabit some of the most dense and remote rainforests in Africa. Significant populations still exist, including in isolated swamps and the remote swampy forest of the Republic of Congo.

Western lowland gorillas can be distinguished from other gorilla subspecies by their slightly smaller size, their brown-grey coats and auburn chests. They also have wider skulls with more pronounced brow ridges and smaller ears. Large numbers have not protected the western lowland gorilla from decline. Because of poaching and disease, the gorilla's numbers have declined by more than 60% over the last 20 to 25 years. Even if all of the threats to western lowland gorillas were removed, scientists calculate that the population would require some 75 years to recover.

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DAY 3 : Visit to Dzangha Bai, a large mineral rich clearing in the middle of the rainforest where forest elephants gather in large numbers to indulge in drinking the mineral rich waters that bubble up in places in this Bai. The interaction between so many different groups of forest elephants ensure that no one can ever get bored at this place, while the possibility of some of the other normally shy forest creature like bongo, giant forest hog, red river hog, Sitatunga and forest buffalo visiting the Bai keep us alert.



DAY 4 : Today you head out with a group of Ba'aka net hunters as they go about their daily hunter-gatherer lifestyle. It is fascinating and a joy in itself to see how well adapted and comfortable the Ba'aka are in the forest while you may find it overwhelming and almost intimidating. You will be shown several of their medicinal plants while the hunt goes along in the background, and the excited cheers will alert us if they do catch something.



DAY 5 : River activities and trekking. Heading upriver by boat you will hike to a series of waterfalls in the area. These will take us through the best examples of prime rainforest that you would ever see. Apart from the amazingly beautiful waterfalls, you will see some of the most spectacular trees imaginable. Climbing to the top of the falls will provide vistas over the canopy of the forest while the possibility of seeing the extremely rare and endangered grey-necked rock fowl will excite any birders.



SPECIES OF DZANGA-SANGHA

Elephant (*Loxodonta Africana cyclotis*): The forest elephants in Dzanga Sangha are present in such densities that they modify the landscape by opening clearings and paths and digging water holes on which other animals, such as forest buffalos, Hartlaub ducks and antelopes, depend. It is extremely difficult to observe elephants in the dense rainforest but between 50-100 at a time can be seen at the Dzanga Bai forest clearing. The elephants go there daily to consume the mineral-rich soil.

Forest buffalo (*Syncerus caffer nanus*): The forest buffalo has a reddish brown coat and can reach about 500 kg. They feed on grasses and are dependant on clearings created by elephants. Elephants, in their search for clayey soils, high in mineral content, actively maintain open clearings that are in turn used by forest buffalos.

Bongo (*Tragelaphus eurycerus*): The bongo is the largest antelope found in the African rainforest. It is known for the characteristic white lines on its reddish-brown coat. Aside from its coat, equally remarkable are its large ears, constantly moving to keep the flies off. One can regularly see traces of bongo gorillas and hiking around the clearings.

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BAÁKA PYGMIES



The Baka are a hunter-gatherer people. Groups establish temporary camps of huts constructed of bowed branches covered in large leaves (though today more and more homes are constructed following Bantu methods). The men hunt and trap in the surrounding forest, using poisoned arrows and spears to great effect. They sometimes obtain honey from beehives in the forest canopy. The men also fish using chemicals obtained from crushed plant material. Using fast-moving river water, they disperse the chemical downstream. This non-toxic chemical deprives fish of oxygen, making them float to the surface and easily collected by Baka men. Another method of fishing, performed only by women, is dam fishing, in which water is removed from a dammed area and fish are taken from the exposed ground. Women also gather wild fruits and nuts or practice beekeeping while tending to the children. The group remains in one area until it is hunted out then abandon the camp for a different portion of the forest. The group is communal and makes decisions by consensus.

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In the evening you may do a night walk near the lodge with the hope of finding some of the more elusive nocturnal animals such as potto, Thomas's galago, tree pangolin, African palm civet, Frazer's eagle owl, vermiculated fishing owl and many more.

DAY 6 : Back into the park today with picnic lunches and you will do a walk around a series of clearings in the forest. The chance of finding buffalos, elephants and several monkey species on this trek are good. You will also visit a group of habituated monkeys called Agile Mangabey and spend some time photographing their interesting antics.

DAY 7-9: Today we journey deep into the forest to join a Baáka forest camp for three days. This is arranged through Louis Sarno, who has lived with the Baáka for nearly 30 years. He joins you and helps them interpret all the rituals and culture in the forest. Return to Sangha Lodge

DAY 10 : Transfer by chartered aircraft back to Bangui.



GORILLA LAND

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