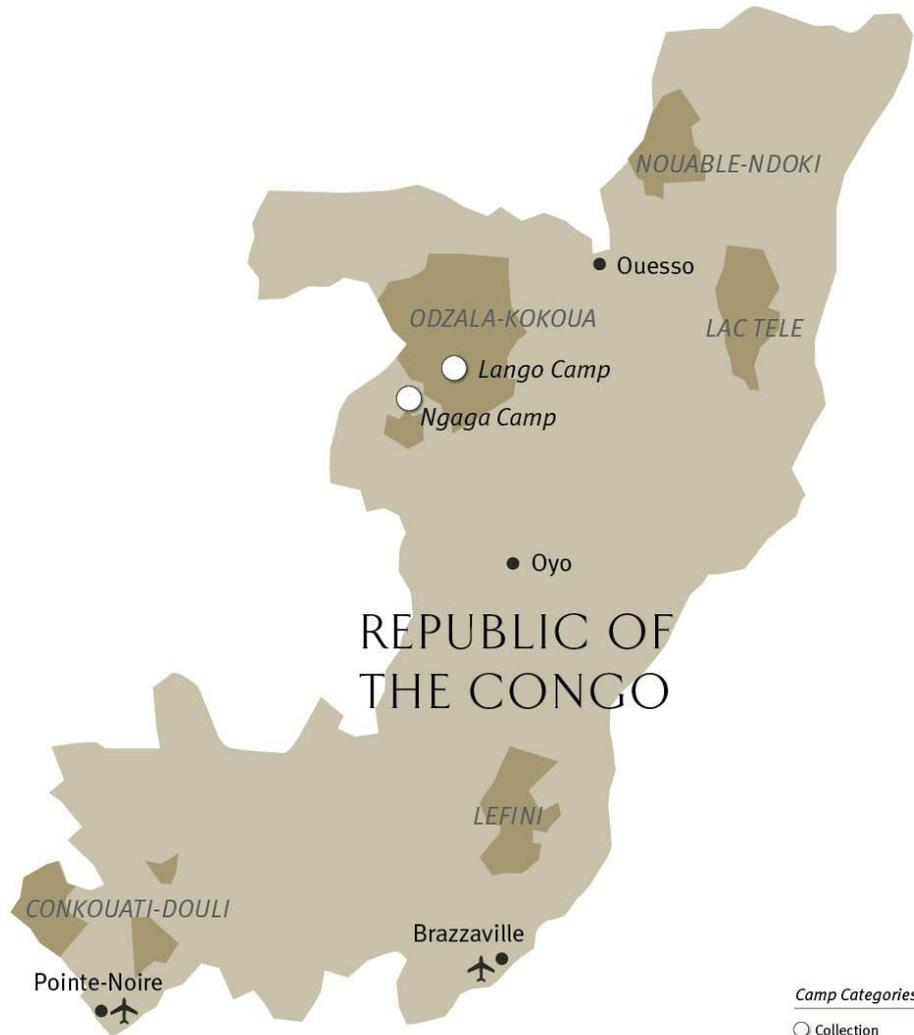


CONGO

As a guest of the Wilderness Collection, the following information has been compiled to provide you with guidelines and interesting facts about the country you will be visiting. Further information is available to you on our website www.wilderness-collection.com.



The Republic of Congo is surrounded by five countries: Cameroon and the Central African Republic in the north, Gabon to the west, the enclave of Cabinda (Angola) to the south and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to the east. This former French colony is a sparsely populated, little-known nation, with a population of just over 4 million people, 2 million of which are located in the capital of Brazzaville. The Republic of Congo spans an area of 342 000 square kilometres (133 000 square miles) – with the rainforest in which Odzala is situated covering more than half the area of the country.

INTERESTING FACTS



The current flag of the Republic of the Congo was originally adopted on 18 August 1958 but was then abandoned in 1970 at the beginning of the socialist period of the "People's Republic of Congo". It was adopted again on 10 June 1991. The colours are the traditional Pan-African colours, and stem from the colours of the flag of Ethiopia. The distinctive diagonal pattern sets it apart from other Pan-African flags.

Government

From 1885 until independence in 1960, Congo was part of French Equatorial Africa, its system of government similar to that of the French. After a spell as the People's Republic of Congo, Congo became a multi-party democracy in 1992. In 2002 a new constitution was agreed upon by referendum, introducing a new bicameral assembly. The constitution provides for a 7-year presidential term, limited to a maximum of two sequential terms, with a parliament of two houses that include a National Assembly and a Senate. This new system of governing has created stability within the country. President Denis Sassou N'guesso has remained in power since 1997 and is one of Africa's longest-serving leaders.

Economy

Some 70% of the population live in urban areas, with Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire being the two main population centres. The resources of the Republic of Congo include: petroleum, timber, potash, lead, zinc, uranium, copper, phosphates, gold, magnesium, natural gas, and hydropower. Once one of Africa's largest petroleum producers, the production of fuel has declined as its' oil resources have been depleted.

Currency

The currency in the Republic of Congo is the Communauté Financière Africaine Franc (XAF), popularly known as CFA francs. Euro 1.00 is equivalent to approximately CFA 650.00 while USD 1.00 buys you around CFA 500.00.

Language

French, Lingala and Kituba are the most common languages spoken with French being the official language. English is spoken in some hotels and tourist areas but is not at all widely spoken.

Time

Standard time in the Republic of Congo is 1 hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time – (GMT) +1 hour all year round. Daylight savings time is not observed.

Climate

The Republic of Congo lies on the Equator, so temperatures vary very little year round. The seasons can be divided into two green seasons when more rainfall occurs, and two 'drier' seasons of December to February and June to August respectively.

It is important to remember that while game viewing can never be guaranteed, trends have been observed as we combine our knowledge of seasons, habitats and water availability with animal distribution, their numbers, and thus where they can be found. The below gives some insight into these:

Green Seasons: March to May and September to November

Rainfall during this period means that the air is clearer and humidity higher. Daytime temperatures are typically higher owing higher humidity. November in particular can be very wet.

Water levels in the Lekoli River are high as well, allowing for boating activities on the lookout for primates, buffalo, elephant, slender-snouted crocodile (for the lucky) and exciting birdlife like Cassin's flycatcher.

A scarcity of ripe fruits during this period results in smaller ranges and daily movements by western lowland gorilla, central chimpanzee and elephant. Elephant are particularly prolific, with good numbers visiting Lango Bai daily to obtain minerals. The resident birdlife is excellent – for example black-collared lovebird, vermiculated fishing-owl fire-crested alethe, yellow-lored bristlebill and Guinea turaco with many species breeding at this time.

Photographically, between bouts of rain, clear blue skies are common, with good light penetrating the forest interior.

All year round, primates such as western guereza colobus, grey-cheeked mangabey and putty-nosed monkey are seen regularly with infrequent sightings of bongo, western sitatunga and red river hog on the periphery of Lango Bai. Night drives may yield galagos, palm civet and spotted hyaena – the latter in savannah areas.

Transition (Dry) Seasons: December to February and June to August

With limited rain during this period, the air can be relatively hazy, a white film of clouds covering the sky most days. Humidity however is lower than in the green season. Daytime temperatures are typically cooler. Water levels on the Lekoli River are lower but boating is still possible.

Ripe fruits during this period (especially February and August) mean that elephants and gorillas wander more widely to obtain these, with gorillas feeding primarily in trees – thus allowing easier sightings.

Photographically, conditions are typically overcast with muted light. Focus on photographing subjects against greener forest backdrops where possible at this time.

Aside from the 'usual' sightings of western guereza colobus, grey-cheeked mangabey and putty-nosed monkey, harnessed bushbuck often sighted at Lango Bai together with several herds of forest buffalo moving between the various bais in the Park. Chimpanzee sightings are good all year.

Birding is excellent in both rainforest and savannah areas with intra-African migrant species present from June to August. Some highlights may include shining-blue kingfisher, Hartlaub's duck, great blue turaco, bare-cheeked trogon, black-casqued wattled hornbill, streaky-throated barbet, black and white flycatcher, shining drongo, yellow-mantled widowbird, yellow longbill and banded prinia.

Temperature (°C) – These are the average lows and highs:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
BZV	21/30	21/31	21/32	21/31	21/31	20/30	20/29	20/29	20/29	20/30	20/30	21/30
ODZ	19/29	19/30	19/31	19/31	19/30	18/28	18/27	18/27	19/29	19/29	18/29	18/29

Temperature (°F) – These are the average lows and highs:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
BZV	70/86	70/88	70/90	70/88	70/88	86/77	68/84	68/84	68/85	68/86	68/86	70/86
ODZ	66/84	66/86	66/88	66/88	66/86	64/82	64/81	64/81	66/84	66/84	64/84	64/84

Average Rainfall (mm) – This varies according to the year and your location:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
BZV	154	140	162	201	174	77	29	129	226	253	195	128
ODZ	90	125	175	175	175	90	40	60	200	250	110	110

Average Rainfall (inches) – This varies according to the year and your location:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
BZV	6.1	5.5	6.4	7.9	6.9	3.0	1.1	5.1	8.9	10.0	7.7	5.0
ODZ	3.5	4.9	6.8	6.8	6.8	3.5	1.6	2.4	7.8	9.8	4.3	4.3

BZV = Brazzaville

ODZ = Odzala

Public Holidays

The dates of certain public holidays change from year to year – refer below. If a public holiday falls on a Sunday, then the Monday is also declared a public holiday. During this time, most shops are closed – only some grocery shops are open for limited hours.

01 January	New Year's Day
08 March	Congolese Women's Day
Varies	Good Friday
Varies	Easter Monday
01 May	Labour Day
Varies	Ascension Day
10 June	Commemoration of the Conference on National Sovereignty
15 August	National Day
01 November	All Saint's Day
25 December	Christmas Day

USEFUL INFORMATION

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Wilderness Safaris, that you have the correct comprehensive travel and medical insurance to cover yourself, as well as any dependents/travelling companions for the duration of your trip to the Republic of Congo. This is the sole responsibility of the traveller. This insurance should include cover in respect of, but not limited to, the following eventualities:

Compulsory Insurance:

- emergency evacuation expenses,
- medical expenses,
- repatriation expenses,
- cancellation or curtailment of trip,

Note:

Due to a lack of access to international-standard medical facilities within the Republic of Congo, medical evacuation cover when travelling here **must be for a minimum of USD 100 000.00 per person**. Cancellation and curtailment cover is also crucial – particularly in the event that you miss the connecting flight to Odzala as you will need to pay for a private charter in full.

Recommended Insurance:

- damage/theft/loss of personal luggage, money and/or goods.

The reason for stating this is twofold:

- If you have not bought or do not carry insurance, you will be personally and solely responsible for any services rendered to you as a result of any or all of the above, including all costs incurred and;
- When travelling to Africa, existing cover is often inadequate for these remote destinations.

Wilderness Holdings and its subsidiary companies, and any person or agent acting for, through or on behalf of said companies, will not take responsibility for any costs, losses incurred or suffered by the guest, or guests' dependents or travelling companions. This is with regards to, but not limited to, any of the above mentioned eventualities.

Visas

All visitors need a visa, which is to be obtained from their nearest Congolese embassy or consulate prior to travel. Requirements for a visa are:

- A passport that is valid for at least 6 months beyond your intended departure date, together with onward travel documents, proof of accommodation and sufficient funds for the duration of your stay.
- Sufficient blank VISA pages (not endorsement pages) in your passport, with at least 2 consecutive/side by side blank pages.
- Two visa application forms per applicant properly completed and signed. Signature must be original on each application. Improperly completed forms may delay the processing of your visa.
- Two recent passport photographs in colour, front view and with a plain/light background.
- Computer generated flight itinerary from the airline or a travel agency or copy of airline tickets. A signed letter on the travel agency's letterhead confirming round-trip booking may also be acceptable.
- International certificate of vaccination against Yellow Fever (see notes below).
- A "Letter of Invitation" is required to apply for a visa. We need a scanned copy of the guests' passport to complete this letter, which includes information regarding date of arrival, voucher numbers, trip code.
- Once the letter is complete, we forward this to our office in Brazzaville, along with a copy of the passport, to action accordingly.
- All letters need to be stamped by a Congo Customs Official and there is a charge of USD 40.00 per person for this service which is added to your quote.
- A stamped copy of this letter will then be sent to you and must be given to the guest to apply for their visa.
- All guests must carry a printed copy of this letter of invitation with them, along with the visa, when they travel to Congo.

Visas are usually valid for one month from the date of issue. No countries are exempt and it takes at least 3 working days. Please obtain relevant visa costs from your nearest Congolese Embassy or Consulate. For details of Congolese embassies and consulates worldwide: <http://www.embassypages.com/congorepublic>.

Vaccinations and Malaria

The following vaccination is compulsory:

- Yellow Fever – you will need the relevant certificate as proof to enter the Republic of Congo. Please be aware that it takes 10 days for the vaccination to be deemed effective. If you have the vaccination at short notice and arrive within those 10 days, the doctors at immigration at Brazzaville Airport may refuse entry.

Plasmodium falciparum malaria is the dominant type of malaria in the Republic of Congo. It is resistant to the anti-malarial drug chloroquine and travellers to the Republic of the Congo are advised to speak with their medical practitioner or to contact their nearest travel-health clinic for suitable alternatives.

Travellers who become ill with a fever or flu-like illness while travelling in a malaria-risk area and up to one year after returning home should seek prompt medical attention, informing the physician of their travel history and the anti-malaria drugs they have been taking.

Revised Gorilla Welfare Protocols – Guest Vaccination Record Requirements

The Odzala Wilderness camps in the Republic of Congo offer guests the unique opportunity to track habituated groups of western lowland gorillas. These close relatives of humans are considered Critically Endangered because of commercial bush-meat hunting, disease epidemics and habitat loss – exacerbated by a slow rate of reproduction. Gorillas are vulnerable to catching human diseases, and we want to take every step possible to minimise any risks to these endangered primates. In accordance with international gorilla-viewing protocols and on the advice of specialist vets, guests will be required to provide evidence that they have been vaccinated against measles and polio, and that they are free of any active tuberculosis (TB) infections. This updated protocol will come into effect on 1 January 2015 and is in addition to our existing gorilla welfare procedures regarding flu, and other respiratory complaints typically treated with antibiotics. As children are more susceptible to infections, there is a heightened danger of transmission to the gorillas – hence the reason for the minimum age for these camps being set at 15.

We would stress that Congo is a safe destination for our guests with an overall low risk of disease. These requirements are all about protecting the endangered gorillas, and are not due to any increased risk to the guests' health. We recommend that all guests visit their physician or travel clinic well in advance of their travel date, as this will enable them to easily comply with this protocol (by having a doctor certify their completed vaccination record or issue a certificate of health), and use the opportunity to discuss malaria prophylaxis and other sensible health precautions. Note that a valid yellow fever certificate remains an entry requirement for the Republic of Congo.

In addition to the above, the following vaccinations are recommended:

- Typhoid fever – vaccination is particularly important because of the presence of *S. typhoid* strains resistant to multiple antibiotics in this region
- Hepatitis A or Immune Globulin (IG)
- Hepatitis B or Immune Globulin
- Meningitis
- Rabies – if coming into contact with wild or domestic animals
- Tetanus/diphtheria

Payment

The Communauté Financière Africaine Franc (XAF) has notes in denominations of CFA 10 000, 5 000, 2 000, 1 000 and 500 and coins in denominations of CFA 500, 100, 50 and 10. The responsible authority is the Bank of the Central African States and the Republic of Congo forms part of the French Monetary Area.

US Dollars and Euros in large denominations can be exchanged in the main cities. It is, however, not recommended and all necessary money exchange should be made prior to travel. Travellers Cheques are not recommended as they carry a high commission rate and it is a very lengthy procedure to exchange them.

Please note that the Euro is the preferred foreign currency accepted in the Republic of Congo. Due to various limitations in the country, our recommendation is to travel with and use Euro cash for all payments.

The Odzala Wilderness camps accept Euros and US Dollars as payment for drinks, gratuities, etc.

Credit Cards

Diners Club and MasterCard have limited use in the Congo and cannot be depended upon. Hotels in Brazzaville do accept major credit cards but prefer cash. The few ATMs that do exist in Brazzaville only accept Visa. Please note that the maximum amount of cash one can withdraw is the equivalent of USD 1 000.00.

Credit card facilities are not available at the Odzala camps – payment can be made in cash only.

Banks

Banks are open Mondays to Fridays from 09:00 to 15:00 and may close for lunch.

Shopping

Shopping in The Republic of Congo is very expensive, with prices being much higher than most places in the world. If you wish to go shopping, however, the markets are the place to go where you can buy traditional arts, baskets, brass work clothes, wood carvings and souvenirs. The most popular markets are Marché du Plateau-Ville and Tala Na Miso, both which are on the same road. Casino and Park & Shop are the largest supermarkets.

Value Added Tax (VAT)

Goods and services in the Republic of Congo are priced to include value added tax (VAT) of 19%.

Power Supply in the Wilderness – Odzala Camps

Our camps are situated in a remote area and have to generate their own electricity. The camps primarily use solar panel farms with generators for back-up. These generators charge a bank of batteries, known as an inverter system, which provides 220V power in each room for lighting and fans. Avid digital photographers are recommended to bring appropriate storage devices, such as a laptop, for downloading of images. Laptops must be able to accept 220V power or have an adaptor to convert 220V to 110V. You are advised to bring a spare battery for use while the other is being charged, a power converter/adaptor if applicable, cables for computers or cameras and at least 4 x 2GB flash cards.

In major cities all electrical appliances run on 220V with 2-pin round sockets. While some adapters may be supplied, it is advisable that you carry your own.

Video, camera batteries, laptops as well as sleep apnoea machines can be charged in guest rooms or in the main area. Please ensure that you bring a spare battery/ies as a back-up for your sleep apnoea machine as power outages may occur. Power points in the camps have the standard South African “three round pin” sockets while in Brazzaville the most common socket is the European “two round pin” type.

Sightseeing

If you are overnighing in Brazzaville, there are options available. Please contact your Journey Specialist for further details.

Light Aircraft Transfers

Access to Odzala is by light aircraft and safety is the number one priority. Adhering to aviation regulations, whilst taking into account the following, means that there have to be strict measures in place to ensure weight allowances are not exceeded.

Physical limitations of the aircraft we use take into consideration:

- Size and type of aircraft
- Size of the luggage pod and seats

The strict weight restrictions in place on any itinerary which includes light aircraft transfers are for the following reasons:

- The aircraft are designed with a maximum bodyweight and luggage weight allowance.
- Most of our airfields are at a fairly high elevation and located in the warm to hot tropics. Therefore the permissible aircraft carrying capacity is reduced.
- The aircraft have physical space restrictions. Please refer to the images below for an indication on the cargo hold compartment limitations.

These important guidelines below must please be noted for all air transfers within Congo:

- Luggage, including camera equipment and hand luggage, is restricted to 20 kg (44 lb) per person.
- **There will be no option of excess luggage accompanying the guest to the camp and any excess weight will have to remain in Brazzaville.**
- Only soft bags will be accepted – no wheels, frames or rigid structures can be transported as they physically cannot fit into the aircraft.
- The maximum dimensions of the soft bags which can be accommodated are as follows: 25 cm (10 inches) wide x 30 cm (12 inches) high and 62 cm (24 inches) long. Should your guest require a bag, we do have a supply of soft nylon carry-all bags at a reasonable cost. These bags are ideal for use on light aircraft and are the correct dimensions. Please keep in mind that the baggage compartments on the light aircraft are only 25 cm high (10 inches), so the pilots must have the ability to manipulate the bag into the compartment.
- A collapsible wheeled luggage frame/trolley (separate to the bag) is allowed, as long as basic dimensions are similar to that of the bag.

Whilst these weight and size allowances appear minimal, please bear in mind the following:

- Basic toilet amenities are provided and laundry can be done – although due to the climate, we cannot guarantee a same day turnaround.
- More formal attire is usually required only when staying in the more prestigious city hotel establishments. On a wildlife safari, casual clothing is the order of the day. Please refer to our suggested packing list as a guideline.

Important passenger weight information below must please be noted for all our air transfers within the Republic of Congo:

- Each and every aircraft has a legal take-off and landing weight. This includes fuel, luggage and **per seat** passenger weight. We are unable to combine passenger weights as this may affect the weight and balance of an aircraft due to unknown variables of the group of passengers on the day. Any deviations from these weight regulations could affect the take-off and landing capabilities of the aircraft.
- Wilderness Air operates relatively small aircraft in wilderness areas where a number of factors influence the weight limitations of the aircraft: the length and condition of the runway, temperature and weather conditions, accessibility to fuel in these areas, as well as the distances flown. As safety and a quality air service are a strict focus for us, it is vital that we manage all weight and balance calculations ahead of time. **We therefore require the weights of all guests prior to travel.**

Packing Suggestions

While our general travel information includes a suggested packing list, the area and conditions in the Republic of Congo are different to our other areas of operation. As the African rainforest and the bai environment can be very muddy and wet, it is recommended that you bring enough suitable clothing (including socks) to allow time for laundered items to dry in the often humid and wet conditions. Please also take special note that T-shirts, short pants and sandals are NOT suitable attire for the Odzala camps. Ideal clothing is that which is quick drying, lightweight, in greens or browns and that has long sleeves/trouser legs.

Clothing:

- At least three fast-drying, collared shirts with long sleeves.
- Three pairs of fast-drying, long pants.
- One pair of closed walking shoes – lightweight/quick drying are ideal (note that heavy boots can be difficult to dry)*.
- One pair closed river/waterproof shoes or “wellington boots” or lightweight fishing waders.
- One pair of comfortable shoes for when in camp.
- Socks – calf length or longer to avoid exposing ankles.
- Comfortable, casual and cool clothing for when in camp.
- One light fleece/jumper for cooler evenings.
- Raingear.
- Sun hat and swimming costume.
- Slightly more formal attire for your stay at prestigious city hotels.

*Should you wish to bring “old” shoes that you don’t mind getting wet or muddy and decide to leave them behind at the end of your stay, please feel free to do so.

Equipment/Other:

- Good quality sunglasses, UV protected, preferably polarised. Tinted fashion glasses are not good in strong light.
- Toiletries (basic amenities are supplied by most establishments).
- Personal toiletries such as contact lens solution and female hygiene products.
- Sunscreen – non greasy types are recommended for the tropics.
- Insect repellent – tropical grade. Those containing DEET work best. Natural products (citronella, eucalyptus, etc.) are not recommended.
- Any required medication – enough for all of the time spent in Congo.
- Anti-itch/anti-allergy cream, antiseptic cream, adhesive plasters, “EpiPen” injection kit for anyone who has a serious allergy to insect bites, bee stings, food products, etc. Consult your doctor for further information.
- Head torch” or flashlight for night walks and moving around after dark.
- Camera equipment including spare batteries, chargers, film, flash cards, memory sticks, etc.– please see below for advice on camera equipment.
- Plug adaptors (Congo generally uses the two-round-pin European plugs while our camps use the three-round-pin South African plugs).
- Anti-fog for camera lenses.
- We highly recommend that you bring your own pair of binoculars for viewing both wildlife and birds. The recommended general purpose binocular specifications are 8x40 or 10x42.
- Day pack for walks/gorilla tracking. Include “zip lock” bags or a lightweight dry bag for electronic equipment and items vulnerable to moisture.
- Visas, tickets, passports, valid yellow fever vaccination certificate, copies of your letter of invitation, money, credit cards, insurance details, etc.
- A printed copy of your travel, medical and evacuation insurance that includes the policy reference number, name of insurer, name/s of persons covered and the contact telephone number/s in the advent of a medical emergency. A list of any relevant medical conditions, medications and allergies.
- Vaccination record as per new gorilla welfare protocol (please see above), certified by a doctor or other medical professional.

NOTE 1: Bright colours and white are not advisable whilst at Odzala as this will contrast very strongly with the prevailing forest colours, and could well disturb gorillas at sightings. Camouflage clothing is also not recommended for travel in African countries.

NOTE 2: There may be a restriction on luggage limits on your safari – please ensure that you have the details from your agent according to your itinerary and ask your agent ahead of time if you would like details on the feasibility and costs of taking excess luggage with you on any of these restricted luggage safaris.

NOTE 3: We have reference materials in our camps, so it is not necessary to bring these with you.

NOTE 4: Camera equipment – We recommend that any camera equipment that you bring with you is suitable for use in very humid environments. Lighting conditions can be challenging in the forest, with relatively low light at ground level and much brighter sunlight coming through the tree canopy when photographing subjects in trees.

Gorilla welfare protocols dictate that we cannot approach closer than 7m (24ft). These protocols also state that the maximum group size that can view gorillas at any one time is six (four guests, one guide and one tracker) which means that there is no option for porters or additional staff to accompany the gorilla viewing group. Guides and trackers are required to carry various refreshments, first aid equipment, etc. and need both hands free to assist with clearing a path for the guests through the forest vegetation so you will be required to carry all their own camera equipment, lenses, etc. When selecting camera equipment for gorilla viewing, you should take into account the typical distances at which gorillas are viewed, the contrasting lighting conditions at different levels in the forest, the generally humid conditions and likelihood of rain, the fact that flashes cannot be used when taking photographs of gorillas, and finally the fact that there are many interesting smaller things that may be encountered in the forest, so some form of macro lens might be helpful.

You should also take into account the strict baggage weight limits for charter flights into the Congo camps.