WAYPOINT JOURNEYS



REPUBLIC OF CONGO · ABOARD PRINCESSE NGALESSA

Congo River Cruise

Brazzaville, the Congo and the Alima

8 OR 15 NIGHTS · MAY TO JANUARY · 16 CABINS

Eight hundred kilometers of river

The Congo Basin holds the second largest rainforest on Earth, and its river is the deepest in the world. For most of its length the Congo is a working highway of pirogues and pushed barges, with almost no visitors on it.

This cruise follows about 800 km (500 miles) of it aboard Princesse Ngalessa, a 16-cabin expedition ship: up the Congo from Brazzaville to the Teke kingdom at Ngabe, through a maze of islands to Mossaka, then into the forest-walled Alima to Oyo.

Every day the launches go out to fishing villages, hippo pools and the flooded forest of the Moye. The cruise ends with the rescued gorillas of Lesio Louna and the Sapeurs of Brazzaville.

Seven nights are on board and one in a riverfront hotel in Brazzaville. The cruise asks for no particular fitness. Some departures sail the same route in reverse, from Oyo down to Brazzaville; we will tell you which way your date runs.

AT A GLANCE

LENGTH
9 days, 8 nights
or 16 days, 15 nights (page 6)

ROUTE
Brazzaville up the Congo and the Alima to Oyo

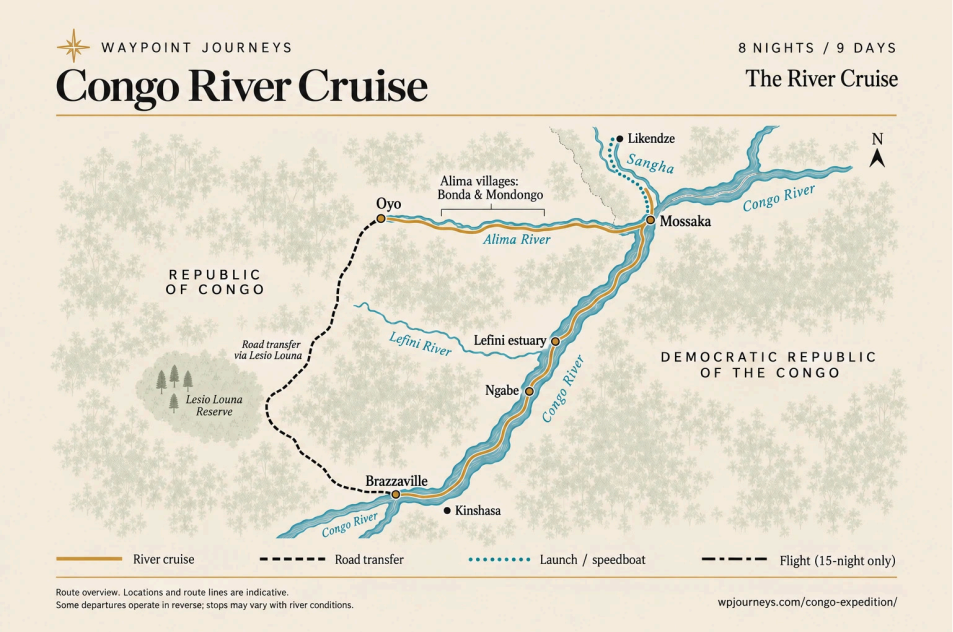
SEASON
Fixed departures, May to January, in the 2027 and 2028 seasons

SHIP
Princesse Ngalessa: 16 cabins, at most 28 guests

NIGHTS
Seven on board, one at the Radisson Blu in Brazzaville

GUIDES
A cruise director and three naturalist guides, in English

PRICE
From $6,195 per person, two sharing



The route

DAY 1
Brazzaville: arrival and boarding

DAYS 2–4
Up the Congo: Ngabe and the Teke kingdom, the Lefini, the islands

DAYS 5–7
Mossaka and Likendze, then the Alima and the Moye villages

DAY 8
Oyo, the Lesio Louna gorillas, back to Brazzaville

DAY 9
Brazzaville and the Sapeurs



THE SHIP

Princesse Ngalessa

16 cabins
on three decks, each air-conditioned, with a private bathroom

28 guests
at most, looked after by a crew of 21

8 or 9
guests to a launch on each outing, each launch with its own guide

On board

Built in Kinshasa in 2017 in the shape of the old Congo passenger boats and refitted in 2024, she is 52 m (170 ft) long and draws only 1.4 m, so she can push up shallow tributaries. Cabins run from 18 to 35 m², with windows on the river and mosquito nets. There is a dining room, an open lounge, a jacuzzi and an observation deck for the talks. Meals are Congolese and European, cooked on board, with wine and beer at lunch and dinner.

The pace

The 8-night cruise asks only for steady footing on the ship's stairs and in the launches. The outings go in small groups, each with its own guide, and the groups can be split by pace. The cruise director and three naturalist guides travel with you, and the ship carries a radio, a satellite phone, a first-aid pharmacy and an evacuation plan to Brazzaville. There is Starlink Wi-Fi on board.


THE OPEN LOUNGE


A MASTER SUITE


THE SUNDECK AT THE END OF THE DAY

DAY BY DAY · 8 NIGHTS

Brazzaville to Mossaka

DAYS 1–5



DAY 1 · BRAZZAVILLE

Arrival and boarding

Our guide meets you at Maya-Maya airport. Boarding opens at 5 pm; if you land in the morning, the lobby of the Radisson Blu on the riverfront is yours until then. The first dinner on board, with the lights of Kinshasa coming on across four kilometers of water.



DAY 2 · UP THE CONGO

The ascent begins

The ship turns upstream after breakfast, through green hills. A morning to learn the decks and meet the guides, with the first talk on the observation deck, and in the afternoon the first outing by launch, onto the clear green water of the Maipili River.



DAY 3 · NGABE

The Teke queen and the Kebe-Kebe

Ashore at Ngabe, an old capital of the Teke kingdom, to call on the queen: guardian of the deity Nkwembali, and the one person who can pass power to a new king. After lunch the Kebe-Kebe, dancers in raffia and feathers carrying painted heads on poles, then the Lefini estuary by launch for hippos and birds.



DAY 4 · THE ISLANDS

A thousand islands and the river barges

The Congo widens past ten kilometers and breaks into a maze of islands. Birding in the N'keni estuary in the morning, then the traffic of the river from the observation deck: whaleboats, and pushed barges up to 200 m long that carry goods and whole families between towns. Weather allowing, a bivouac on a sandbank.



DAY 5 · MOSSAKA AND LIKENDZE

Salted fish and cast nets

Mossaka in the morning with a local guide: what remains of the colonial town, the market and the alleys of salted-fish dryers that made its name. After lunch on board, Likendze on the Sangha, where the fishermen show their cast nets and traps, and anyone who wants to can try a hand line.

DAY BY DAY · 8 NIGHTS

The Alima and the gorillas

DAYS 6–9



DAY 6 · INTO THE ALIMA

Hippos, fish eagles and the Moye at Bonda

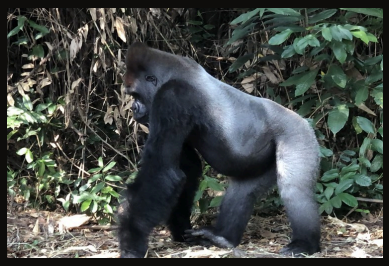
Launches at first light for hippos, then birding: ospreys, palm-nut vultures, African fish eagles, hornbills and kingfishers. The ship turns into the Alima, narrow and walled with swamp forest. At Bonda the Moye take you into the flooded forest by canoe or on foot, depending on the water, and dance on the bank at dusk. After dark, a slow loop with the engines low to listen to the forest.



DAY 7 · MONDONGO

The swamp-forest pharmacy

Bend after bend of the Alima, past villages built almost entirely of raffia. At Mondongo a healer explains which plants of the swamp forest treat which illness, and how the remedies are made. In the afternoon, a guided walk through the forest, from its great trees to its insects.



DAY 8 · OYO, LESIO LOUNA AND BRAZZAVILLE

The gorillas of Lesio Louna

You leave the ship at Oyo for the one long drive of the trip, south to the Lesio Louna reserve. Gorillas rescued from trafficking live on forested islands in the Louna River until they can be released. You go out by boat with their keepers to see them at close range, then continue to Brazzaville for a night at the Radisson Blu, with dinner on your own nearby.



DAY 9 · BRAZZAVILLE

The Sapeurs, and home

A morning in the capital: the Poto-Poto painting school, the Congo Basin Museum, the basilica of Sainte-Anne and the Brazza Memorial, where La Sape, the Society of Ambiance-Makers and Elegant People, meets us in their finest. After lunch, the art market and the rapids, then the afternoon transfer to the airport. Guests on next-morning flights need one more hotel night, which we can add.

The itinerary may also be revised before or during the expedition.

A river wide enough to lose an island in, and a ship small enough to stop for a fisherman.

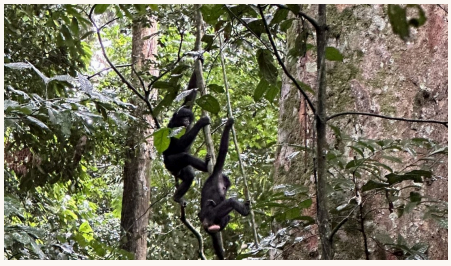


THE 15-NIGHT EXPEDITION

Bonobos, gorillas and Dzanga Bai

Sixteen days in three countries. The 15-night expedition sails the same river to the Alima and adds a night at a community bonobo camp in the DRC, then Ouesso and five nights at a lodge on the Sangha in the Central African Republic: western lowland gorillas tracked with BaAka trackers, up to 150 forest elephants in a day at Dzanga Bai, and a day in the forest with the BaAka. It asks for two- to three-hour forest walks on flat but uneven ground, and roughly double the budget. The itinerary may also be revised before or during the expedition.

DAYS 1–3	Brazzaville and up the Congo to Ngabe, as on the cruise
DAYS 4–5	Across the river to the bonobo camp near Nkala in the DRC; the bonobos at dawn. Optional: you can stay on board
DAYS 6–8	Mossaka and Likendze, the Alima and the Moye, Mondongo and a forest walk
NIGHTS	Seven on board, one in a tented camp, two in Ouesso, five at Bayanga
DAY 9	From Oyo by road to Ouesso, about six hours
DAY 10	By launch up the Sangha to Bayanga, seven and a half hours
DAYS 11–14	Gorilla tracking, Dzanga Bai, the Hokou bais and their mangabeys, a day with the BaAka
DAYS 15–16	Down the Sangha to Ouesso, then the flight over the forest to Brazzaville







Flying home to the United States?

Because of the Ebola outbreak in the northeast of the DRC, the CDC does not currently allow anyone who has been in the DRC in the previous 21 days to board a commercial flight to the US. The rule covers the whole country, so it applies to the bonobo night near Nkala, far to the west of the outbreak. The 8-night cruise never enters the DRC and is not affected, and on the 15-night you can stay on board for the bonobo night instead. We check the rule on the day you book; the latest is at wpjourneys.com/congo-ebola.

THE DETAILS

What the price includes

Included

- Seven nights on board in your cabin, with full board and beer, wine and soft drinks in limited quantities at lunch and dinner
- On the 8-night cruise, a night at the five-star Radisson Blu M'Bamou Palace in Brazzaville
- Every outing by launch, and every excursion and park fee, the Lesio Louna gorillas included
- The cruise director, three naturalist guides and a local guide at every village
- Airport transfers on program days, and the road transfer from Oyo
- Starlink Wi-Fi on board
- The visa invitation letter; we cover its EUR 70 a head
- On the 15-night expedition, the camp, hotel and lodge nights and their meals, and the flight from Ouesso to Brazzaville

Not included

- International flights to and from Brazzaville; flexible tickets are best
- The visa fee
- Medical evacuation and repatriation insurance, which is required
- Drinks at the bar, laundry and massage
- Gratuities: allow about EUR 12 per person a day for the team
- Dinner in Brazzaville, and extra hotel nights and transfers outside the program dates

Where you stay

Seven nights on Princesse Ngalessa in the cabin you choose (page 8) and, on the 8-night cruise, one at the Radisson Blu on the Brazzaville riverfront. Prices are per person, two sharing; single occupancy adds 30 percent.

Pace and comfort

The 8-night cruise needs no particular fitness, and the outings can be split by pace. The climate is warm and humid, around 26°C (79°F), with short rains most weeks. Bring soft bags; hard cases do not fit the launches. The 15-night's flight allows 20 kg (44 lb).

Visas and health

The Republic of Congo visa is issued on arrival, on the invitation letter we prepare from your passport copy, due three months before departure. Passports need six months' validity and two blank pages, and get no stamp in the DRC. Yellow fever vaccination is checked on arrival; malaria tablets and DEET repellent are advised.

Insurance

Medical evacuation and repatriation insurance is a condition of travel, with at least $100,000 of medical cover, valid in every country on your route, and we ask to see it before you sail. Cancellation cover is optional; if you want it, buy it when you pay the deposit.





BOOKING

Cabins, rates and departures

CABIN	DECK, SIZE AND BEDS	8 NIGHTS	15 NIGHTS
Owner's Suite	Observation deck, 35 m² (377 sq ft), private 9 m² balcony. Twin beds that convert to a king, or a queen (401, 402)	$7,795	$16,650
Forward Superior Suite	Third deck forward, 30 m² (323 sq ft), shared balcony. Twin beds that convert to a king (301, 302)	$7,295	$15,595
Superior Suite	Third deck, 30 m² (323 sq ft), shared balcony. Twin beds that convert to a king (303, 304)	$6,800	$14,995
Forward Master Suite	Second deck forward, 23 m² (248 sq ft), shared balcony. Queen bed, armchair and writing desk (201, 203)	$6,650	$13,850
Master Suite	Second deck, 27 m² (291 sq ft), shared balcony. Twin beds that convert to a queen, or a queen; sofa and desk (202, 204)	$6,650	$13,850
Deluxe Suite	Second deck, 18 m² (194 sq ft), shared balcony. Fixed twin beds or a queen (205 to 210)	$6,195	$12,495

US dollars per person, two sharing. Single occupancy adds 30 percent. A 50 percent deposit confirms your cabin, and the balance is due 90 days before sailing. Pay by card through the secure link on your invoice, with no card fee added, or by bank transfer.

Open departures

AS OF NOVEMBER 21, 2026

8 NIGHTS		15 NIGHTS	
May 21–29, 2027		Sept 11–26, 2027	LAST CABINS
Dec 4–12, 2027	LAST CABINS	Dec 27, 2027–Jan 11, 2028	LAST CABINS
Jan 15–23, 2028		May 14–29, 2028	
Jan 22–30, 2028		June 4–19, 2028	
June 4–12, 2028		June 25–July 10, 2028	
Aug 20–28, 2028			
Nov 30–Dec 8, 2028			
Jan 3–11, 2029			

15 NIGHTS
Sept 10–25, 2028
Oct 22–Nov 6, 2028
Dec 22, 2028–Jan 6, 2029
Jan 13–28, 2029

Scan to see every open cabin on the deck plans
wpjourneys.com/congocabin

To book

Write to us with the date and cabin you have in mind and how many of you are traveling, and we will confirm what is open. Or choose your own cabin on our deck plans online.

EMAIL
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WHATSAPP
+1 510 375 2741

OPEN CABINS
wpjourneys.com/congocabin

ITINERARY
wpjourneys.com/congo-expedition

Prices in US dollars, per person, and open departures as of November 21, 2026; cabins sell, so we confirm availability when you book. The day-by-day is the intended plan; river levels, weather and park rules can reorder a day, and the captain and cruise director decide. Images are illustrative.