

COUNTRY BRIEFING: Gabon

Gabon is a little-known country on the west coast of Africa with a rich diversity of national parks and wildlife. Ruth Milligan discusses what it has to offer the seasoned traveller



Red river hog



Frog in the rainforest



Lowland Gorilla

In 2002, President Bongo created 13 new national parks in order to preserve Gabon's stunning natural environments. However, the country remains relatively unknown even to seasoned Africa travellers. Gabon's habitats range from the huge areas of tropical forest that cover 80% of the country to mangrove swamps, lakes and waterfalls, and long tracts of wild beach where Atlantic rollers crash on to completely untouched shores.

The wildlife is the ultimate draw for visitors to Gabon. There are forest elephants, lowland gorillas, chimpanzees and over 680 bird species. There are monkeys, mandrills, buffalos, bongos, civets, sitatungas, porcupines, leopards, flying squirrels and more. Offshore, large numbers of humpbacked whales can be seen, turtles nest on the beaches and you can occasionally see hippos in the surf. The wildlife, including the gorillas, is completely unhabituated so sightings are never guaranteed or staged, but you can expect some truly unique wildlife experiences.

Loango National Park

This park is undoubtedly the jewel in the crown of Gabon's national parks, stretching over a huge area encompassing forest, savannah, coastal scrub and nearly 100 kilometres of beach. I loved seeing elephant and buffalo by the ocean having previously only seen them on plains and in forests. There are also red river hogs, hippo and, if you are lucky, lowland gorilla and chimpanzees. Offshore is the largest concentration and variety of whales and dolphins beyond South Africa, and killer whales can also be seen. As the majority of the animals live deep in the forest, the wildlife in Loango is not a big game experience. Rather, it is about seeing unusual species in unusual settings.

Ivindo National Park and Lope National Parks

Ivindo National Park is a remote and undeveloped park of dense forests, rough walking tracks and waterfalls in east-central Gabon, bisected by the Equator. Here you find elephant, buffalo, gorillas and monkeys and more than 430 species of birds. My favourite part of Ivindo is Langoue Bai, a huge clearing in the dense forest whose mineral

waters attract much game. I watched elephants, lowland gorillas and sitatunga from a vantage point on a viewing platform, which made the four-hour walk worth every step. Lope National Park is located to the west of Ivindo. The park is made up of a striking patchwork of savannah plains and forest and is home to a wide diversity of primates, birdlife and wildlife, including 1,500 mandrills.

The Lakes Region

The Ogooue River splits into two channels at Lambarene to the east of Libreville before rejoining in a large alluvial plain with a series of beautiful lakes fringed by papyrus marshes, reedbeds and forests in one of Africa's largest deltas. Lambarene is famed for the hospital set up by Nobel Peace Prize winner Albert Schweitzer and the Lakes region is a lovely place to relax, enjoy the scenery, and the myriad of aquatic bird species. The Evaro Lodge has a lovely swimming pool that was very welcome after my safari.

In Gabon you should expect the unexpected. Tourism is still in its infancy so you need to bring plenty of supplies, resourcefulness, a grasp of basic French and a good sense of humour to get the best out of your trip. However, for the self-sufficient traveller Gabon offers an amazing chance to experience a truly unspoilt wilderness with unique wildlife in stunning and unusual habitats. Where else can you see elephant and buffalo on the beach, observe un-habituated lowland gorilla troops in the heart of dense forests or search for the elusive surfing hippos?

Ruth Milligan
Gabon Specialist

New brochure

To order a copy of our new Africa & the Indian Ocean brochure which is out in early November, please contact our specialists on 01869 276 250.



Forest elephant in Loango National Park

FACT FILE

A ten night trip to Gabon based around the Loango National Park and including all return flights and internal transfers costs from £3,300 per person.



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