

AFRICA · WILDLIFE · OFF THE BEATEN PATH · ADVENTURE · BEACHES

 Gabon

Gabon set aside roughly a tenth of its territory as national parks in 2002, and it shows: rainforest still covers most of the country, forest elephants and red river hogs wander Loango's beaches, and mandrills, gorillas and humpback whales reward the few visitors who make it. Travel is expensive and logistics are complex, but the wildlife is among Central Africa's finest.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Gabon and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 10 December 2025.

 CAPITAL Libreville	 CURRENCY Central African CFA franc (XAF) £1 ≈ FCFA 781	 LANGUAGE French, Fang Punu, Nzebi	 BEST TIME Jun–Sep
 DAILY BUDGET £90–£450 £££ Expensive	 PLUGS Type C, E 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 11h via Paris, Addis Ababa or Istanbul ~£700–£1,150 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+1 standard time

Gabon is a thinly populated, oil-rich country straddling the equator on Africa's Atlantic coast, with about 2.5 million people, most of them in Libreville and a handful of other towns. Its 13 national parks protect rainforest, lagoons, savannah and a largely empty coastline, and trips are built around two or three of them rather than around towns. A classic circuit heads from Libreville to the lagoons and beaches of Loango, takes the Transgabonais train inland to Lopé's savannah and mandrills, and perhaps adds the waterfalls of Ivindo or a weekend across the estuary at Pongara. Lambaréné, where Albert Schweitzer built his hospital, makes a rewarding stop on the road south.

This is not a budget or spontaneous destination. Lodges are few, prices track the euro, and most visitors book packages that bundle small-plane transfers, boats and guides; independent travel by bush taxi is possible but slow. The reward is wildlife without crowds: you may share a beach with forest elephants and nesting leatherbacks, or watch hundreds of mandrills cross a track in Lopé. Libreville itself is pricey, French-influenced and pleasant enough for a day of seafood and markets. Expect humidity, heavy rain outside the dry season and a strong sense of being somewhere few outsiders reach.

Top 5 highlights

- 1**

WILDLIFE

Loango National Park

A strip of lagoons, savannah, forest and wild Atlantic beach where forest elephants, buffalo and red river hogs emerge onto the sand. Boat safaris, gorilla tracking and, from July to September, humpback whales offshore make it Gabon's flagship park.
- 2**

WILDLIFE

Lopé National Park

Gabon's oldest protected area mixes rainforest with rolling savannah, so wildlife is easier to spot. Mandrill hordes hundreds strong are the star, and the park is UNESCO-listed partly for its ancient rock engravings.

3

BEACH

Pongara National Park

Just across the Komo estuary from Libreville by boat, Pongara's beaches are an important nesting site for leatherback turtles, mainly from November to February. Mangroves, coastal forest and the weekend resort of Pointe Denis complete the picture.

4

NATURE

Ivindo National Park

Deep in the north-eastern rainforest, the Ivindo river thunders over the Kongou and Mingouli falls, and remote forest clearings draw elephants and gorillas. Access involves long boat journeys from Makokou, so it suits committed adventurers.

5

HISTORY

Lambaréné and the Albert Schweitzer Hospital

On the Ogooué river, the hospital the Nobel laureate founded in 1913 still treats patients, and his original wooden buildings now form a museum of his house, pharmacy and piano. Pirogue trips explore the surrounding lakes.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Libreville

≈ 850,000 people

The capital spreads along the Komo estuary, with a seafront boulevard, the sprawling Mont-Bouët market and good French-Gabonese restaurants. It is the base for boats to Pongara and trips to Akanda's mangroves.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Port-Gentil

≈ 140,000 people

Gabon's oil capital sits on Mandji Island in the Ogooué delta and is reached mainly by plane or boat; useful chiefly as a gateway to Loango and the Fernan Vaz lagoon.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Franceville

≈ 110,000 people

The south-east's main town and terminus of the Transgabonais railway, in rolling hills near the Batéké Plateau; a staging post for the plateau's national park rather than a destination itself.

Populations are estimates; Gabon's last full census was in 2013, and Libreville's figure includes its suburbs.

When to go to Gabon

Best time: **Jun–Sep.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

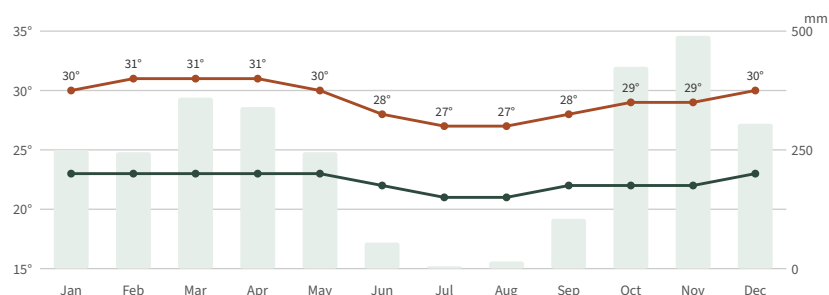
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Libreville

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan, Dec

Christmas and New Year

The biggest family celebration in this largely Christian country, with midnight masses, beach outings to Pointe Denis and Libreville's restaurants and nightclubs at their busiest.

Aug

Independence Day

On 17 August Gabon marks independence from France in 1960 with a military parade and official ceremonies in Libreville, plus music and celebrations in towns across the country.

How much does Gabon cost?

SHOESTRING

£90

per person / day

≈ FCFA 70,273

hostels, street food, buses

MID-RANGE

£200

per person / day

≈ FCFA 156,162

3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis

COMFORTABLE

£450

per person / day

≈ FCFA 351,364

4-star+, guided trips, private transfers

Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Poulet nyembwe

Gabon's national dish: chicken simmered in a rich orange sauce of palm-nut pulp, often with okra or greens, served with rice, plantain or cassava.

Bâton de manioc

Fermented cassava paste wrapped in leaves and steamed into firm, slightly sour sticks; the standard accompaniment to stews, grilled fish and smoked meat.

Atanga

The purple safou or 'bush butter' fruit, softened in hot water or on embers and eaten with bread; a favourite snack from roadside sellers in season.

Getting around

In Libreville, shared taxis charge a flat fare per seat; agree a price before longer or private journeys. The Transgabonais railway, run by Setrag, links Owendo with Lopé and Franceville and is the easiest way to reach Lopé. Elsewhere roads range from good tarmac to mud, bush taxis are slow, and the parks usually require lodge-arranged transfers by small plane, 4x4 or boat. Domestic flights serve Port-Gentil and Franceville.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



C E

220V — bring a UK-to-C/E adapter

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance: **117**. Depending on your mobile network, call: **1300**, **0174** or **0880** for SOS Médecins. Operators may only speak French.

Fire: **177**

Police: **177**

Source: FCDO "Getting help"

DIALLING CODE

+241

TIME ZONE

UTC+1 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Not traditionally expected, but around 10% is appreciated in Libreville restaurants, and lodge guides, boat crews and drivers are usually tipped at the end of a stay.

ETIQUETTE

Greet people with 'bonjour' before asking anything, carry your passport for police checkpoints and ask before photographing people. Never photograph the presidential palace, military sites or government buildings.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Léon M'ba International Airport (LBV), Libreville

Visas & entry for Gabon

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to enter Gabon.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A Tetanus Typhoid Yellow fever

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya Dengue Hepatitis B Measles Rabies Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required for all travellers (usually over 9 months or 1 year old). There is a risk of yellow fever in parts of the country — vaccination may be advised.

MALARIA

High risk of malaria

- There is a high risk of malaria in Gabon: antimalarial tablets recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Gabon

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Sun 1 Nov 2026

All Saints' Day

Fri 25 Dec 2026

Christmas Day

Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Sun 28 Mar 2027	Easter Sunday
Mon 29 Mar 2027	Easter Monday
Sat 17 Apr 2027	Women's Rights Day
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Thu 6 May 2027	Ascension Day
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha · Pentecost (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Pentecost Monday
Sun 15 Aug 2027	Assumption Day
Mon 16 Aug 2027	Independence Day
Tue 17 Aug 2027	Independence Day Holiday
Mon 30 Aug 2027	Liberation Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in French

ENGLISH	FRENCH	SAY IT
Hello	Bonjour	<i>bon-ZHOOR</i>
Thank you	Merci	<i>mair-SEE</i>
Please	S'il vous plaît	<i>seel voo PLAY</i>
Excuse me	Excusez-moi	<i>ex-koo-zay MWAH</i>
How much is this?	C'est combien ?	<i>say kom-BYAN</i>

Know before you go

The CFA franc is pegged to the euro, so bring euros in cash to exchange; card acceptance is limited outside upmarket Libreville hotels, and ATMs can be unreliable.

Malaria is present year-round and Gabon has yellow fever entry requirements; check vaccine and certificate advice on TravelHealthPro well before you travel.

Book parks through established lodges or operators working with the national parks agency (ANPN): permits, guides and transfers are hard to arrange independently.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.