



Gabon

TRAVEL GUIDE



Overview

Gabon sits on the equator on Africa's Atlantic coast. Rainforest covers most of the country, and a network of 13 national parks protects much of it. Forest elephants, gorillas, chimpanzees and mandrills live here, and the coast has wide empty beaches where forest meets the sea. Tourism is small and often expensive, so most trips are organised through lodges or local operators.

Most visitors arrive in [Libreville](#), the capital, and then travel inland by train, small plane or 4x4. Since a military takeover in August 2023, Gabon has been through a political transition. A presidential election was held in April 2025 and legislative elections in autumn 2025. The country is generally calm, and no government advises against travel to any part of it. Gabon suits wildlife lovers, birdwatchers and travellers who are ready for basic transport and a high budget.

Money & payments

The Central African CFA franc has a fixed exchange rate to the euro. It is shared with five other Central African countries, but it is not the same currency as the West African CFA franc.

Currency

CURRENCY	1 XAF	1 XAF
XAF	0.001524 EUR	0.001712 USD
	1 EUR = 655.96 XAF	1 USD = 584.08 XAF

 Cash preferred

- **Cash first:** Gabon runs mainly on cash. **Cards are rarely accepted** outside large hotels and a few restaurants in Libreville, and card fraud is common.
- **ATMs:** you find them in Libreville, Port-Gentil and Franceville, but few elsewhere. Use ATMs inside banks or hotels, and take out enough cash before you go to the national parks.
- **Euros:** euros are the easiest foreign currency to exchange.
- **Costs:** Gabon is one of the most expensive countries in Africa for visitors. Hotels, park lodges, guided trips and domestic transport cost more than in most neighbouring countries. Street food and local eateries are cheap.

Typical costs

Rough prices in touristic areas, per person

 Hotel (double room, per night) mid-range hotel in Libreville, double room	40,000 – 90,000 XAF €61 – €137
 Dinner (mid-range restaurant) main course at a sit-down restaurant	10,000 – 25,000 XAF €15 – €38
 Inexpensive meal local eatery or maquis	2,500 – 6,000 XAF €4 – €9
 Local beer local beer	700 – 2,500 XAF €1 – €4
 Coffee	1,000 – 3,000 XAF €2 – €5
 Water 1.5 l bottle	500 – 1,000 XAF €1 – €2
 Transit ticket shared taxi ride in Libreville	100 – 500 XAF €0 – €1

Tipping

Tipping is not a strong custom in everyday life. It is more common in upmarket places and on guided trips.

Restaurant about 10 % in upmarket restaurants	Optional
Taxi	Not customary
Tour guide at the end of a safari, boat trip or forest walk	Expected
Hotel small tip for porters and housekeeping	Optional
Bar	Not customary

Tip wildlife guides, boat crews and trackers at the end of a trip. Lodges sometimes have a shared tip box for all staff.

Electricity

Gabon uses European-style round-pin sockets. Power cuts happen, and remote lodges often use generators or solar power for only part of the day, so bring a power bank.

⚡ ELECTRICITY



Type C

⚡ 220 V · 50 Hz

Language

French is the official language and is used in business, government and daily life. English is not widely spoken, even in Libreville, outside large hotels and some lodges. Learn a few basic French phrases before you arrive. Many people also speak a local language, such as Fang, Myènè or Punu, at home.

Useful phrases

Hello	Bonjour bon-ZHOOR
Goodbye	Au revoir oh ruh-VWAHR
Please	S'il vous plaît seel voo PLAY
Thank you	Merci mair-SEE
Yes	Oui wee
No	Non noh
Excuse me	Excusez-moi ex-kew-zay MWAH
How much?	C'est combien ? say kom-BYAN
Where is...?	Où est... ? oo AY
Help	Au secours ! oh suh-KOOR
Cheers	Santé ! sahn-TAY

Staying connected

- **SIM cards:** the main mobile networks are Airtel and Moov Africa. A local SIM card is cheap and useful, and mobile data works well in the cities.
- **Coverage:** outside the main towns and along the railway, coverage is patchy. In most national parks there is no signal at all, and lodges may have only slow satellite internet.

Safety & emergencies

No government advises against travel to Gabon. The US asks visitors to **exercise increased caution** (Level 2, March 2026) because of unrest, crime and limited medical care. The UK has no regional travel warnings for the country.

- **Crime:** robbery, pickpocketing and car break-ins happen, mostly in [Libreville](#) and Port-Gentil. Do not show expensive items or large amounts of cash. Avoid walking in poorly lit areas after dark. If someone tries to rob you, do not resist.
- **Taxis:** violent robberies in taxis have been reported. Use licensed taxis and ask to have the taxi to yourself, without other passengers.
- **Demonstrations:** protests can happen without warning, mainly in Libreville and Port-Gentil. Avoid all rallies and crowds, and follow local news.
- **Beaches:** avoid quiet or isolated beaches near Libreville, especially at night.
- **Photography:** it is illegal to photograph the presidential palace, government and military buildings and airports. You can be arrested for it.
- **Documents:** always carry your passport and visa, or certified copies. Police checkpoints are frequent.
- **Sea travel:** piracy is a risk in the Gulf of Guinea. Take great care on boat trips far from the coast.

Emergency numbers

 POLICE**1722** AMBULANCE**1300** FIRE BRIGADE**18**

Emergency services are not reliable, especially in remote areas, and operators may speak only French.

Health

- **Yellow fever:** proof of vaccination is **required for entry** for every traveller from the age of 9 months. Get the vaccine at least 10 days before you travel, because the certificate is valid only from then and carry the certificate.
- **Malaria:** malaria is present all year in the whole country. Take antimalarial tablets and use insect repellent and a mosquito net. Dengue and Zika also occur, so protect yourself from mosquito bites during the day too.
- **Water:** do not drink tap water. Drink bottled or filtered water.
- **Medical care:** facilities are limited in quality, especially outside Libreville, and may lack basic medicines. Bring a well-stocked medical kit and any prescription medicines you need.
- **Insurance:** buy travel insurance that covers medical evacuation. Serious cases usually need evacuation abroad.
- **Pharmacies:** there are good pharmacies in Libreville and Port-Gentil, but few in the countryside.

Visas & entry

Most visitors need a visa for Gabon, and this includes citizens of the UK. Citizens of the neighbouring Central African (CEMAC) countries do not need a visa.

- **How to apply:** apply before you travel, either through a Gabonese embassy or high commission, or online on the eVisa portal, evisa.dgdi.ga, run by the immigration authority (DGDI). British citizens apply through the Gabon High Commission in London. With an eVisa approval, the visa is placed in your passport when you land at Léon Mba International Airport in Libreville.
- **Documents:** tourists should carry a hotel booking or an invitation letter.
- **US citizens:** since 1 January 2026, Gabon has suspended visa issuance for US citizens. Check with a Gabonese embassy before you plan a trip.
- **Passport:** it must be valid for at least 6 months after your arrival date and have a blank page for the visa.
- **Yellow fever:** you must show a valid yellow fever vaccination certificate on arrival.

Visa and entry requirements change frequently. Verify current requirements with the official immigration authority or your country's embassy before travel.

Etiquette

- **Greetings:** greet people before you ask a question, with a handshake and "Bonjour". Take time for greetings; going straight to business feels rude.
- **Respect for elders:** older people and village chiefs get special respect. When you visit a village, ask to meet the chief first.
- **Dress:** people dress neatly in towns. Keep swimwear for the beach, and cover your shoulders and knees in churches and mosques.
- **Photography:** ask before you take pictures of people. Never photograph government buildings, military sites, police or airports.
- **Bwiti:** Bwiti is a traditional spiritual practice. Its ceremonies are sacred. Attend only when invited, and follow the rules you are given.
- **Society:** Gabonese society is conservative. Same-sex relationships are legal, but same-sex marriage is not recognised and discrimination can occur. Public displays of affection of any kind are best avoided.

Holidays & opening hours

On public holidays, government offices, banks and many shops close. Muslim festivals are also usually declared public holidays, on dates announced shortly before.

Public holidays

Jan 1	New Year's Day
Mar 12	Renovation Day
Apr 17	Women's Day
May 1	Labour Day
May 6	Martyr's Day
Aug 15	Assumption Day
Aug 17	Independence Day
Nov 1	All Saints' Day
Dec 25	Christmas Day
movable — Mar/Apr	Easter Monday
movable — May/Jun	Whit Monday

Shops usually open from about 8:00 to 12:00 and again from about 15:00 to 18:30, from Monday to Saturday. Supermarkets in Libreville stay open at lunchtime. On Sunday, most shops close, but markets and small corner shops often stay open.

Getting around

Distances are long, roads are often poor, and many parks have no road access at all. Plan extra time for every journey.

- **By train:** the Transgabonais railway runs about 650 km from Owendo, near Libreville, to Franceville. It stops at Ndjolé, Lopé, Booué, Lastourville and Moanda. It is the easiest way to reach [Lopé National Park](#). Night trains are common, so check timetables and book a first-class or sleeper seat in advance with [SETRAG](#).
- **By air:** small domestic flights link Libreville with Port-Gentil and Franceville. Port-Gentil is hard to reach by road, so most visitors fly or take a boat.
- **By boat:** boats cross the Komo estuary from Libreville to Pointe Denis and [Parc National de Pongara](#). Pirogues and small boats are also the main way to reach [Parc National de Loango](#) and the lagoons of the south.
- **By bus and shared taxi:** minibuses and shared taxis ("clandos") run between towns. They leave when full and are often crowded and poorly maintained.
- **In Libreville:** use licensed taxis or a ride-hailing app such as Gozem. Avoid public buses because of the high accident risk.
- **Tours:** most visitors book national-park trips as packages with a lodge or local operator, including transport, guides and permits.

Driving

Many visitors hire a car with a driver instead of driving themselves.

- **Licence:** carry your national licence and an International Driving Permit.
- **Road conditions:** roads in central Libreville are acceptable, and some main roads inland are paved. Many other roads are unpaved, with deep potholes and few signs. You need a 4x4 away from the main roads, especially in the rainy seasons.
- **Night driving:** avoid it. Roads are unlit, and you may meet people, animals or broken-down trucks on the road.
- **Checkpoints:** police checkpoints are frequent. Stop, stay calm and show your documents.
- **Phones:** it is illegal to use a mobile phone while driving.
- **Carjacking:** it has been reported in Libreville. Keep doors locked and windows up in traffic.
- **Fuel:** stations are attended, and cash is the usual way to pay. Fill up in towns before long trips, as stations are far apart in the interior.
- **Electric vehicles:** there is no public charging network.

 PETROL**Super, Essence** DIESEL**Gasoil** Drive on the right

Food & drink

Gabonese cooking is built on cassava, plantain, rice, fish and smoked meat, often cooked in rich palm-nut or peanut sauces. Breakfast is light, usually bread, coffee or leftovers. Lunch is the main meal, and dinner is often grilled fish or meat. **Poulet nyembwe**, chicken in palm-nut sauce, is the national dish. Odika, a dark sauce from wild mango seeds, is another local favourite.

In towns, people eat at small local restaurants called *maquis*, at market stalls and at roadside grills that sell skewers and fish in the evening. Libreville also has French, Lebanese and Senegalese restaurants. Bushmeat is sold in many markets, but much of it comes from protected species, so do not buy or order it. Popular drinks include Régab beer, palm wine and ginger juice.

What to eat & drink

🍴 DINNER

Grilled fish · poisson braisé

Whole fish grilled over charcoal, with chilli sauce and plantain or cassava.

🍷 SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Cassava sticks · bâton de manioc

Fermented cassava paste wrapped in leaves and steamed; the everyday side dish.

Brochettes

Grilled meat skewers sold at roadside stalls in the evening.

🍹 DRINKS

Régab

The most common local lager, sold everywhere.

🍽️ SIGNATURE DISHES

Poulet nyembwe · poulet nyembwé

Chicken cooked in a rich sauce of palm-nut pulp, served with rice or plantain.

Odika sauce · odika

Smoky, dark sauce made from wild mango seeds, often served with fish or meat.

Cassava leaves · feuilles de manioc

Pounded cassava leaves slowly cooked, often with fish or meat and palm oil.

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Where to explore

Libreville and the coast

- **Libreville:** the capital sits on the Komo estuary. Visit [Musée National des Arts et Traditions du Gabon](#) for masks and traditional art, the busy Mont-Bouët market and the seafront. It is the base for most trips.
- **Parc National d'Akanda:** mangroves and mudflats just north of the city. It is a good place for birdwatching, best explored by boat at high tide.
- **Parc National de Pongara:** across the estuary from Libreville, with forest, mangroves and long beaches. Leatherback and olive ridley turtles nest here, mainly from November to February. Pointe Denis, a beach area with weekend lodges, lies nearby.

The south-west coast

- **Parc National de Loango:** Gabon's most famous park. Elephants, buffalo and even hippos walk on the beaches, and hippos sometimes swim in the surf. Humpback whales pass along the coast, mainly from July to September. Access is by boat or small plane via Port-Gentil or Omboué, usually with a lodge package.
- **Mayumba National Park:** a remote marine park in the far south, known for nesting turtles and whales offshore.

The interior

- **Lambaréné:** a river town on the Ogooué, a few hours by road south-east of Libreville. *Albert Schweitzer* founded his hospital here in 1913, and the hospital still works today. The Albert Schweitzer Museum shows his house and grave. Boat trips go to the nearby lakes.
- **Lopé National Park:** a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** of forest and savanna, with ancient rock carvings. It has some of the largest groups of mandrills in the world. The park is easy to reach on the Transgabonais railway.
- **Parc national d'Ivindo:** a UNESCO-listed park of untouched rainforest. Highlights are the huge Kongou Falls and Langoué Bai, a forest clearing where elephants and gorillas come to feed. Trips need careful planning and a specialist operator.
- **Parc national de Waka:** dense mountain forest in the centre of the country, for experienced travellers only.

DATA SOURCES

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