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# Congo Basin Nature-Based Tourism Assessment


Central African Republic



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# Destination Snapshot: Central African Republic

*Target Country*



## National Tourism Strategies & Policy

There are no publicly-available tourism policies, plans, or official strategies.

No plans are found within CAR's Ministry of Tourism website.

There is no mention of tourism development found incorporated within other National Development Strategies.

## Tourism Visa Information

E-Visa: ~~X~~  
No.

### Tourist Visa Cost:

- US Citizens: \$150 short stay visa (<1 month)
- UK Citizens: \$163 short stay visa (<1 month)
- EU Citizens: ~\$100 short stay visa

### Supplementary Requirements:

- Letter of invitation
- Bank statements (3 months of originals)
- Pay Slips (3 months of originals & copies)
- Booked return flight (with proof)
- Booked accommodation (with proof)

(These extra steps increase the burden on visitors and hosts)

### Nuances of the visa process:

Visa applications are estimated to take approximately 10 days and require the passport at the Embassy during processing.

## National Tourism Associations

None Found

## The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report, 2019

*World Economic Forum*

Central African Republic was not included in this report due to insufficient data.

## The UNWTO Tourism Dashboard & WTTC's CAR Country Report

### Inbound Arrivals:

90,000 (2019)

*High: 120,000 (2015), Low: 80,000 (2013)*

### International Visitor Spending:

\$17.3M USD (2019), \$8.9M USD (2022)

### Domestic Visitor Spending:

\$86.3M USD (2019), \$69.0M USD (2022)

### Top Source Markets (2022):

France (#1), Cameroon, DRC, Senegal, USA

### Estimated

### Travel & Tourism Jobs:

40,200, 2.2% of country total (2019)

34,900, 1.8% of country total (2022)

### GDP Contribution:

\$120M USD/5.5% (2019)

\$91.6M USD/4.1% (2022)

# Destination Snapshot: Central African Republic

## Target Country

### Online Presence

#### TripAdvisor

23 properties listed, very low volume  
315 hotel reviews

Product variation:

Budget: 0, MidRange: 4, Luxury: 2

17 'Things to Do' listed  
3 tours linked for booking



#### Lonely Planet

3 'Must-See Sights'  
No linked activities for booking

1 National Park listed:  
Dzanga-Sangha



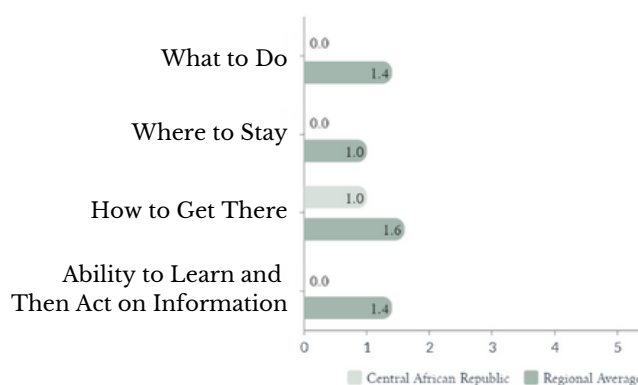
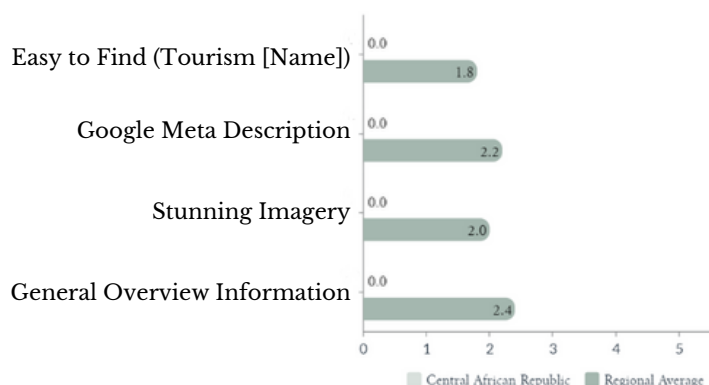
#### National Tourism Website: None

No site found in search engine top  
60 results.

*Embassy website has visa notes.*

**Overall Score: 3%**  
**Regional Average: 35%**

### Tourism Website Ranking Criteria: *No official website*



### Major International Hubs



#### Bangui M'Poko International Airport (BGF)

Located in: Bangui, CAR's capital city

Flight Volume: 8 direct destinations

#### Major routes:

- Paris, France
- Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Nairobi, Kenya
- Casablanca, Morocco

#### Non-major routes:

- Yaounde, Cameroon
- Douala, Cameroon
- Entebbe, Uganda
- Juba, South Sudan

### Top National Parks for Tourism, based on traveler content on TripAdvisor (2023)

#### Dzanga-Sangha Reserve



5/5 stars  
26 Reviews

#### Manovo-Gounda St. Floris National Park



4.5/5 stars  
2 Reviews

#### Bamingui-Bangoran National Park

No ratings or reviews



# Country Analysis: Central African Republic

## Overview

The Central African Republic has 38 total protected areas, covering 112,827km<sup>2</sup>. 18.06% of the country's landmass is designated as protected according to Protected Planet. This landlocked country is considered to be the middle point of the African continent with a terrain of, flat to rolling land with varied forest and savanna ecosystems.

According to publicly available data, the Central African Republic receives by far the lowest number of international visitors compared to the other countries in the Congo Basin, with a reported 87,000 international arrivals in 2019 (most recent data available) and a 5-year average of 101,000. This number should also be taken in context, as it includes all border crossings for trade, business, travel for international organizations as well as leisure tourism, the latter of which is likely a very small portion of this total.

These extremely low numbers can be most attributed to the country's security issues, with recurring civil unrest and political instability since the early 2000's. According to the 2023 Global Peace Index, the country ranks #152/163 [1], earning it the title of one of the least peaceful countries in the world. Most national travel advisories warn travelers that this is a 'Do Not Travel' region, formally recommending not to travel to the country (the advisories tend to cover the whole country) - a severe deterrent to tourism.

Though the country faces uncertainty and unrest, its ecological diversity and wild places are significant. It is globally ranked #47 for biodiversity [2] and #37 for bird diversity [3]. The country's instability creates challenges in the management of these abundant, diverse, and important natural resources, but partnerships with global NGO's in key protected areas are strengthening protection of these resources [4].

[1]<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/#/>

[2][The Swiftest Biodiversity Index](#)

[3] Data from BirdLife International. summarized at MongaBay.com <https://rainforests.mongabay.com/03birds.htm>

[4] <https://www.unep.org/topics/disasters-and-conflicts/country-presence/central-african-republic>

# Country Analysis:

## Central African Republic

### Nature-Based Tourism



Nature-based tourism is extremely limited in CAR, and tourism is not a significant part of the country's economy. The small market that does exist consists of wealthy, 'off the beaten path' and intrepid travelers, many with very specific nature-based interests (such as sports fishing or species-specific wildlife viewing).

Within the CAR a top-destination is the Dzanga-Sangha Complex of Protected Areas, of which WWF and the Cassidy Family operate well established tourism operations. Part of the success of these entities is that they manage and facilitate all traveler logistics from arrival to departure for visitors, taking the unknown out of a travelers experience.

Based on the screening process conducted by the assessment team, two protected landscapes have short and/or medium-term tourism potential in the country:

- Dzanga-Sangha Complex of Protected Areas (*Including Dzanga-Ndoki National Park & Dzanga-Sangha Special Reserve*)
- Chinko Nature Reserve

One protected landscape was recognized in the screening process, but ultimately not prioritized. Manovo-Gounda St. Floris National Park, the largest park in the Central African savannas, is recognized by UNESCO as one of only two World Heritage Sites in the country. Though it features impressive natural assets, competitive with those in the larger regional market, its total lack of existing investment and infrastructure make the tourism potential of the park a long-term endeavor.



# Country Analysis: Central African Republic

## Enabling Environment

### Security

As previously noted, the Central African Republic (CAR) is subject to nationwide travel advisories, cautioning against travel to the country from numerous nations. This presents one of the most significant barriers to tourism, as prospective visitors are understandably wary of venturing to areas under the highest travel warnings. While it seems improbable that these warnings will be lifted for the whole country in the short-term, there are noteworthy exceptions in regions such as the protected areas of Dzanga-Sangha and Chinko, where security conditions are comparatively more favorable.

There is a need for embassies to adopt a more nuanced, regional approach to their travel advisories, akin to approach taken for neighboring countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This entails delineating which areas pose genuine risks to travelers and which are relatively safer, facilitating informed decision-making for prospective visitors.

### Infrastructure, Access, & Services

There is one international airport in the country, Bangui M'Poko International Airport with eight flights to and from seven countries. Major international hubs include Paris (France) Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and Nairobi (Kenya), with additional regional connections to Douala and Yaoundé in Cameroon, plus other connections. CAR has the fewest connections in regards to international flights for all Congo Basin countries, which is both a result of low travel demand and also a limiting factor for future travel. International flights to CAR tend to be higher priced than regional peers, however with a focus on higher-end travelers this may not have a major impact on travel. Around 40 domestic airstrips also exist in the country, including Bayanga for Dzanga-Sangha and Kocho for Chinko protected areas.

CAR has 3.9km of roads per 100 km<sup>2</sup> of land mass, the lowest density of roads of all the Congo Basin countries where data is available (DRC data is not known). The Republic of Congo has 14 times more roads and Cameroon 4 times more roads than CAR. According to the Logistics Capacity Assessments (LCAs) by LogisticsCluster, "The whole network [in CAR] is in rather bad shape since no proper rehabilitation or maintenance programme is in place." In the short and medium-term roads in CAR are not a viable access route for most travelers and charter flights are the most practical and safest option.

# Country Analysis: Central African Republic

## Enabling Environment

### Other Enablers

Stakeholders have noted that, compared to other nations in the Congo Basin, the immigration process in CAR is relatively straightforward, though still not without its complexities. Despite the option for obtaining a visa upon arrival, most airlines typically mandate travelers to secure a visa prior to boarding. This necessitates engaging in the visa application procedure, which entails physically submitting the passport to a CAR embassy and completing extensive additional paperwork, including providing bank statements and pay slips. Understandably, this bureaucratic hurdle and often-frustrating process alone may deter some potential travelers.

Presently, visitors arriving in the country often rely on their host tourism operator to chaperone & guide them through the entire process, from arrival to departure—a practice likely to remain a standard practice in the short term. Nonetheless, concerted efforts to streamline the visa and immigration procedures would undoubtedly enhance the ease of travel to CAR in the long run.

CAR holds the challenging distinction of being ranked 184th out of 190 countries globally for 'ease of doing business,' placing it among the most daunting environments worldwide for entrepreneurial endeavors. Even within its regional context, where neighboring nations also contend with low rankings, CAR stands at the bottom of the list.

Despite its overall poor performance across various business indicators, CAR exhibits some relative strengths compared to its Congo Basin counterparts. Notably, it surpasses regional peers in safeguarding minority investors, streamlining property registration processes, and fostering a more open environment for cross-border trade. This latter aspect is particularly beneficial for the tourism sector, facilitating the smooth importation of goods necessary for operational activities. Additionally, there are provisions for customs duty exemptions tailored to support new entrants in the tourism industry, aiming to alleviate some of the financial burdens associated with starting such ventures.

The government also has some incentives to support the tourism sector including a 25% corporate income tax (CIT) reduction for businesses in tourism. Newly incorporated tourism companies can also apply their Industrial Fixed Assets to benefit from a 5-year CIT exoneration and an investment chart guarantees funds repatriation for non-resident companies. All of these initiatives are designed to incentivize investment and stimulate growth within the sector.



# Country Analysis:

## Central African Republic

### Recommendations

#### Lower Cost & Short-Term Actions:

**\*\*Lobby embassies on travel advisories.** Understand the procedures used by embassies to come up with their travel advisories and specific needs for making advisory determinations (e.g. regional specific data on security levels, incidents, etc.). Work with embassy staff to take a more regional approach to defining travel advisories, rather than a blanket, country wide approach so that Dzanga-Sangha and Chinko could have a re-designated travel advisory specific to their regions.

Support the government, private sector and civil society to develop and ratify a 10-year tourism strategy for the country. Through this work also analyze the potential economic and community impacts from tourism and socialize this within government to enhance awareness of the long-term potential of the sector. A 'Tourism Working Group,' that includes representatives from government and other relevant stakeholder groups could also be established to identify and address issues relating to tourism in the country (for example improving the implementation of the cross-border management initiative at the Sangha Trinational Complex). One organization should be identified as the 'facilitator' for these actions and play this role for at least 3-years to organize meetings, coordinate among representatives and share information with the broader network of stakeholders in the country.

#### Higher Cost & Medium-Term Actions:

**\*\*Develop a PR and marketing campaign for a tourism circuit between Dzanga-Sangha and Chinko,** with a focus on telling the story of the parks and their travel experiences to higher-end tour operators specializing in more 'off the beaten track' markets. Also target media and influencers with a similar area of interest (see separate recommendations relating to each park as well). This should focus on photographic tourism as well as fishing and hunting markets.

Targeted direct outreach and familiarization trips with specialty international tour operators and distinct global media outlets.

Support the government, private sector and NGO's working in the tourism sector to review the current visa and immigration procedures with the goal to streamline the visa/immigration process and ideally move it online (e-visa).





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## Central African Republic: Priority Protected Areas

*Destination Snapshots, Scorecards, Site Analyses, & Recommendations*





# Destination Snapshots Key

## Accessibility:

**International Air** = The closest &/or most popular international airport for tourists to the park

**Domestic Air** = The closest domestic airports or local airstrips for travelers to the park

**Ground & Water** = Details roads and waterways used to access the park, including route information from airports and nearby cities

**Within Parks** = How travelers move within park boundaries, including relevant roadways, waterways, hiking paths, and relevant modes of transportation

## Destination Maturity Scale:

**None** = No tourism facilities or tourist infrastructure in the park

**Basic** = Only simple, self-service facilities in the park

**Limited** = One serviced tourism facility operating in the park

**Diverse** = Multiple serviced tourism facilities & touristic infrastructure in the park

## Destination Maturity Definitions:

**Nearby park headquarters** = Within 5-10km of park boundary

**Self-serviced accommodations** = no staff, basic facilities. **Serviced accommodations** = Comes with some type of formal touristic service (i.e., staff, a restaurant, etc.)

**Visitor activities special request** =

They need to be organized through an NGO or other organization and are not readily commercially available

**Visitor activities openly available** =

They are commercially available to visitors, without the need for special connections

## Geographic Features:

Standout, iconic, or distinctive geographic features in or around the park

## Wildlife:

Key species that can be found in the park

## Human Capital:

Description of the technical expertise available in and around the park (i.e., conservation partners & NGOs) as well as the tourism capacities of local communities and residents.

## Seasonality Icons:

**Sun** = Dry season(s)

**Rain** = Wet/Rainy season(s)

When relevant, also includes important wildlife seasons and/or the 'best' time to visit.

# Destination Snapshot:

## Chinko Nature Reserve, CAR

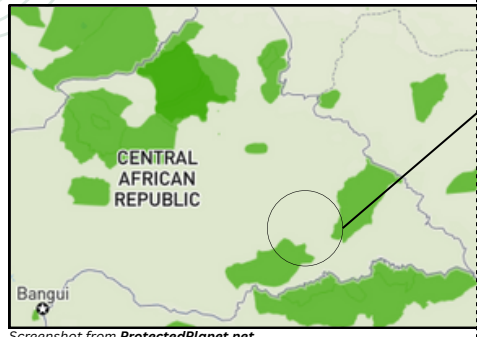
### Quick Facts:

- 2,430,000 Hectares
- Wooded savannah, Congolese rainforest, and the Chinko River basin
- IUCN Category - Not reported
- Park Entry Fee: None at present
  - *Considered “in the experimental phase” for tourism development*

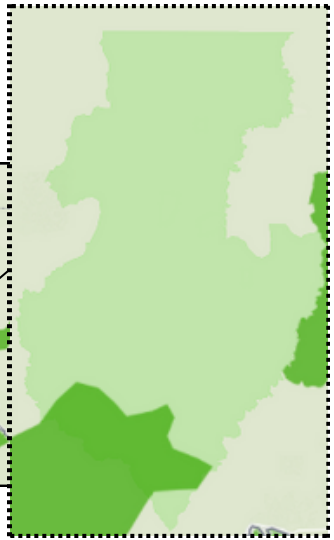
### Seasonality:

- ☀ December - May
- 💧 June - November

- There is no TripAdvisor page for this park



Screenshot from ProtectedPlanet.net



Transportation Infrastructure

Poor

Park Headquarters

Onsite

Availability of Accommodations

Serviced

Accommodation Product Variation

Low

Visitor Activities

Special Request

Activity Product Variation

Medium

None

Basic

Limited

Diverse

Site Destination Maturity

Relative to the Congo Basin Market

*Though the Central African Republic is a largely unstable and insecure country, Chinko Nature Reserve is a very stable, well-managed protected area. Within park boundaries, international travelers are considered to be extremely safe. There are little-to-no concerns about traveler safety, once inside the park.*

*This is why air transport into Chinko is so important, and will likely remain the best mode of transportation into the park for visitors.*

Accessibility:		
Int'l Air	<b>Bangui M'Poko International Airport (Bangui)</b> <i>Considered the only airport in CAR meeting international standards.</i> Guests staying with the Camp Chinko operation are met at the airport by a representative, aiding in customs, immigration, and hotel transfers.	
Domestic Air	Domestic air is the most popular and most viable mode of transportation into Chinko Nature Reserve.	
	<b>Charter flight from Bangui to Kocho:</b> (Chinko HQ)  ~ 2 hours, depending on aircraft type.  <b>To Camp Chinko from Kocho:</b> Transfer by road or helicopter to the camp.	<b>Airstrip in Kocho:</b> Extended to 1,500 meters in 2022. There are <b>three additional airstrips suitable for small aircraft in the park</b> : one in the west, center, & east.  There's an additional airstrip in an adjacent hunting block, just outside the eastern park boundary.
Ground	Overland travel to the park is extremely difficult, due to <b>bad road networks and general insecurity</b> .  Roadways around the park are considered impassable for over half the year.	
Within Park	Small, extremely basic road network in park. However, “walking & floating are the easiest means of transport” within park boundaries.	
	Camp Chinko has ~6 boats for river & fishing trips.	They also have a Helicopter for accessing the most remote sections of the park.



# Destination Snapshot:

## Chinko Nature Reserve, CAR

### Current & Potential Natural Tourism Assets:

#### Wildlife:

African Elephants, 20+ carnivore species (including African Wild Dogs, Leopards, & Lions), African Buffalo, Bongo, Chimpanzees, Waterbucks, Warthogs, and Crocodiles.

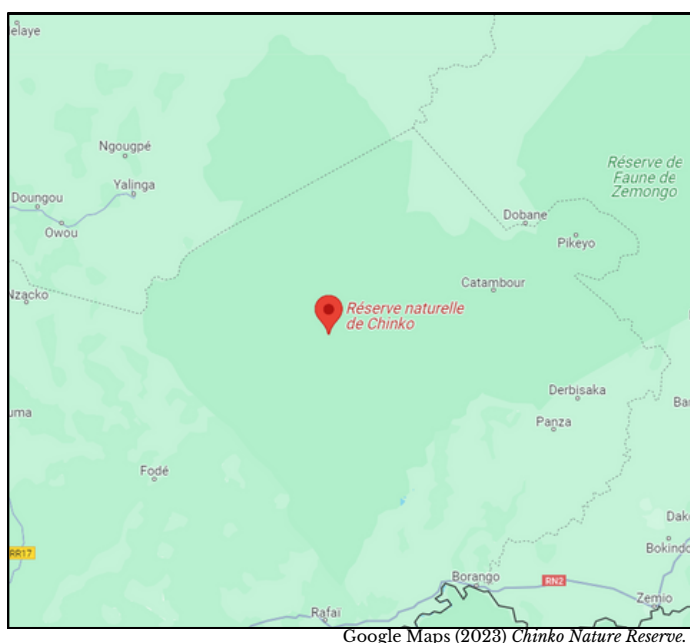
African Parks explains, “For the first time, a rich diversity of fish species is being documented in the Chinko River.”  
*Opens up opportunities for fishing & sports-fishing tourism product development.*

#### Geographic Features:

Mixture of Congolese rainforest & wooded savanna

Notably: The **Chinko River** & its wild riverbanks.

Shares a border with Zemongo Faunal Reserve - *Tourism circuit potential*



Google Maps (2023) Chinko Nature Reserve.

### Human Capital

**African Parks (AP)**  
AP has been managing Chinko since 2014. In 2020, they signed a revised agreement for an additional 25 years of park management duties.

Since AP took over management of wildlife numbers have increased, local value chains have been developed, and the core protected area has nearly tripled in size.

African Parks reports that Chinko NR is the largest employer (outside of the capital of Bangui) with over 350 nationals employed.

### Accommodations & Facilities

#### **Camp Chinko:**

Owned by African Parks, situated along the Chinko River.

Mobile tented camp. Consists of an insect-proof mess tent, up to 4 sturdy sleeping tents, and additional fly camping accommodation. Tents have an ensuite toilet and open air safari showers.

Hearty food is served to guests alongside cold drinks, thanks to an onsite solar-charged fridge and freezer.

Described as “adventurously old-school,” with no internet or cell signal. However, solar power does provide electricity for charging cameras and running small appliances.

#### **Park HQ:**

Located in Kocho, within park boundaries. Fully refurbished by African Parks in 2022, with new quarters for both rangers and visitors completed nearby.

*No other accommodation options or touristic infrastructure within park boundaries.*

# Destination Scorecard:

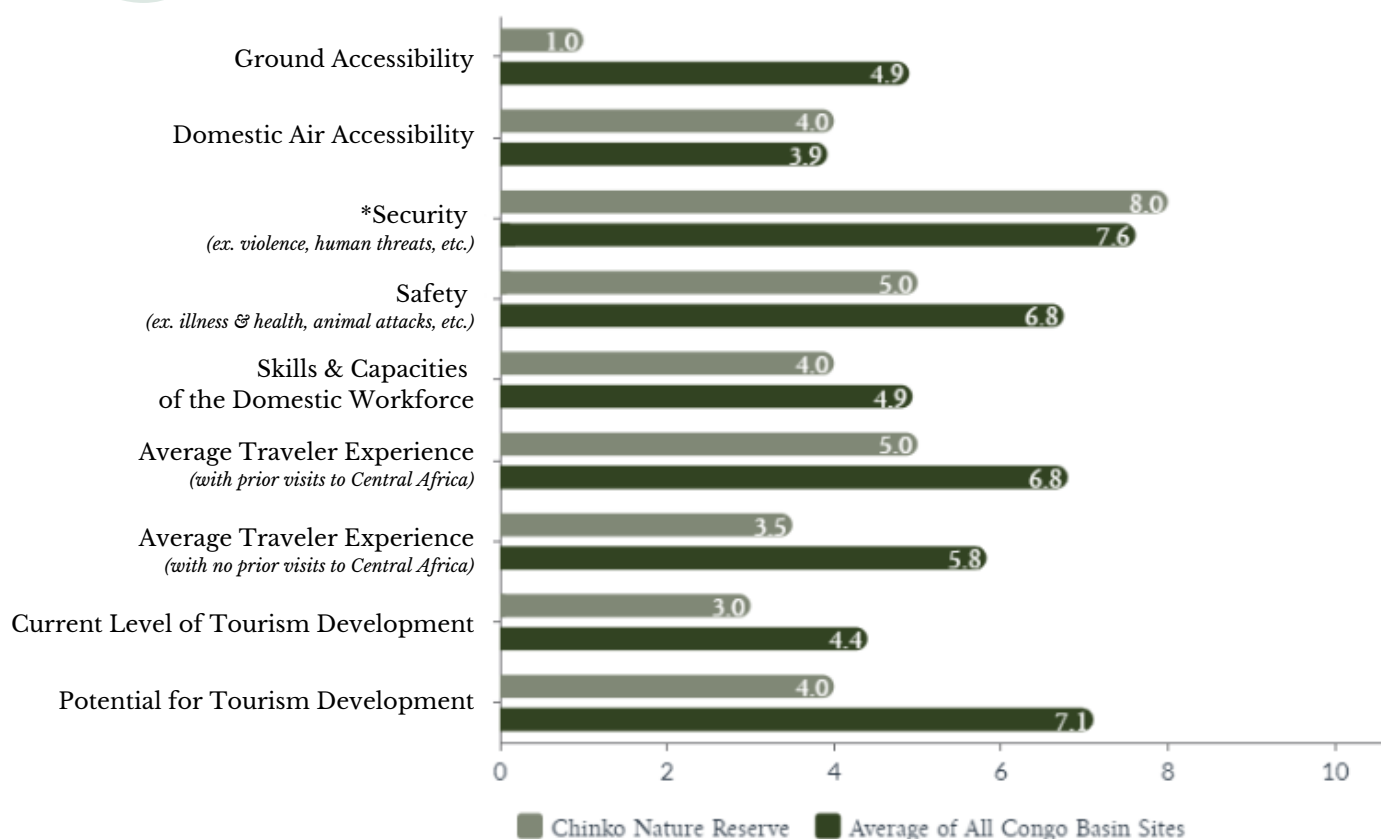
## Chinko Nature Reserve, CAR

Stakeholders with firsthand knowledge of the park were asked to rank different aspects of tourism in and around the landscape.

Ranking is based on a 1-10 scale:

'1' represents relative weakness in the field and '10' represents strength in the field.

### Chinko Nature Reserve Tourism Assessment Survey Results



#### Key Takeaways:

- Air accessibility is aligned with the regional average, but tourism to the park is more reliant on this service than in other locations, and therefore this is a critical point of weakness if issues such as fuel shortages occur.
- Despite the blanket international travel advisories, the site's security is ranked high by those with knowledge of the site.
- Stakeholders consider the potential for tourism significantly lower than the regional average.
- For travelers with no prior trips in Central Africa, the experience is considered lower than the regional average, indicating a need to focus on those that have traveled in the region before

#### Additional Insights from Survey:

- There is some initial formal interest from tourism investors and opportunities for expanded tourism in Chinko Nature Reserve.
- Stakeholders expressed beliefs that this site will never be accessible by ground transportation for tourists.
- Tourism circuit opportunities & site linkages, as suggested by expert stakeholders:
  - Dzanga-Sangha Complex
  - Manovo-Gounda St. Floris National Park

Responses collected via Qualtrics surveys, from October 2023 - March 2024

\*For additional information on security, see site analysis below.

# Site Analysis: --- --- Chinko Nature Reserve, CAR

## Overview

Chinko Nature Reserve (CNR) is located in the east of the Central African Republic (CAR) and is one of the largest protected areas in Central Africa. Its core area covers over 2.4 million Hectares [1], but it sits within a much larger 5.57 million Hectare region known as the Chinko Conservation Area [2]. CNR and its neighboring protected lands form part of the largest continuous protected wilderness area on the African continent [3].

CNR's landscape is primarily a mixture of uninhabited Sudano Guinean wooded savannah and Congolese rainforest. This site is the region's only refuge for the African wild dogs, is home to all four species of the African pangolin, and has other key species such as elephants, lions, chimpanzees, buffalo, bongo, and the iconic giant eland [4].

The reserve was severely denuded of wildlife until about a decade ago when African Parks (AP) took over, investing in management and policing that has resulted in a remarkable recovery of wildlife populations. Referred to as a 'burgeoning conservation success story,' Chinko Nature Reserve, according to African Parks, holds "the greatest conservation potential in all of Africa." Recent highlights include stabilizing elephant populations, rising numbers of lions and other carnivores, documented diversity of fish in the Chinko River, and the emergence of giant eland and bongo populations as "the largest under effective protection in Africa" [5].

The U.S. Department of State has issued a '*Level 4: Do Not Travel*' advisory for the whole country [6], including all of the protected areas within it. Other countries have issued similar blanket warnings, notably the UK, Canada, Germany, Australia and France (with the exception of the capital). The security situation in CNR is the most stable it has been in decades and park management is considered 'a beacon of hope' assisting in both regional and local security in and around the protected area. The Reserve hosts international travelers with no issues within park boundaries and a number of highly regarded tour operators offer trips to the park. Many people refer to these areas as 'safe zones' within the broader, more volatile national landscape. These sentiments are not reflected by the blanket travel advisories issued by embassies.

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[1]<https://www.africanparks.org/the-parks/chinko>

[2]<https://www.africanparks.org/chinko-story-once-forgotten-land>

[3]<https://journeysbydesign.com/destinations/central-african-republic/chinko-nature-reserve>

[4]<https://www.africanparks.org/chinko-story-once-forgotten-land>

[5]<https://www.africanparks.org/the-parks/chinko>

[6]<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/CentralAfricanRepublic.html>

# Site Analysis: --- --- Chinko Nature Reserve, CAR

## Nature-Based Tourism Development Opportunities

AP has been supporting Chinko Nature Reserve since 2014, initially under a Memorandum of Understanding and later, in May 2020, through the signing of a new 25-year public-private partnership (PPP) with the CAR government. This partnership formalizes African Parks' management responsibilities for the Reserve [7], enabling them to implement their vision for the park. This vision includes expanding the core conservation area, advocating for National Park status, and fostering employment and sustainable development opportunities for local communities [8]. AP reports that they are the largest employer in the country, outside of the capital city Bangui, with over 350 nationals employed [9].

In January 2024, AP representatives emphasized that developing tourism on a large scale in Chinko is not a current priority, however smaller scale activities are part of their plans. AP has recently established a Chinko Commercial Development Manager (CCDM) position on the staff, tasked with formulating a comprehensive business plan to capitalize on tourism and other opportunities in eastern CAR. Once filled, the CCDM is expected to seek consultation and partnerships for further tourism development initiatives. Partnering with investors and/or concessionaires could be pivotal in advancing small scale nature-based tourism in reserve.

AP foresees tourism in Eastern CAR remaining a luxury destination for the extremely wealthy in the coming years, a sentiment shared by stakeholders across the Congo Basin landscape. The reserve's only significant tourism facility, 'Camp Chinko,' has been largely successful, with some stakeholders explaining that historically, in order to secure a reservation, travelers must book well in advance. The reserve also boasts an extraordinary natural asset in the form of its diverse fish population, particularly within the Chinko River where the iconic Tiger Fish, Africa's largest trophy fish, can be found [10]. Sport fishing is a current market that Camp Chinko caters to and AP is considering the potential for further development in this area. They are also considering the potential for trophy hunting through external partnerships.

If well zoned and separated, the size of the park certainly allows for certain areas to be designated for hunting concessions as well as others for fishing and more general photographic tourism. Due to the remoteness of the park and the border security concerns in the country, tourism to the reserve will likely remain small-scale, high-end and targeting specialty groups that are not deterred by the board security alerts put out by embassies. There is opportunity to expand on the current camp as well as to other locations, with additional accommodation, activities and private operator partnerships. This would allow for a more diversified tourism experience and greater visitation (although still small in nature). Many travelers are also looking for a variety of locations on their trip, so promotion of packages between CNR and Dzanga-Sangha Complex of Protected Areas also has potential, through charter flights.

[7]<https://www.africanparks.org/african-parks-signs-new-agreement-chinko>

[8]<https://www.africanparks.org/the-parks/chinko>

[9][https://usfscentralafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Assessment-of-Protected-Area-Management-Partnerships-in-Central-Africa\\_USFS\\_2021.pdf](https://usfscentralafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Assessment-of-Protected-Area-Management-Partnerships-in-Central-Africa_USFS_2021.pdf)

[10]<https://www.africanparks.org/the-parks/chinko/park-revenue-generation>



# Site Analysis:

## Chinko Nature Reserve, CAR

### Enabling Environment Constraints

#### Security

The issuance of blanket travel advisories on travel to the entire Central African Republic poses a significant hurdle to tourism development in Chinko Nature Reserve (CNR). Despite the Reserve's enhanced security measures and stable operating environment, these advisories restrict the potential traveler market to only the most adventurous individuals. The majority of travelers are simply scared off by the advisories and for others it may be impractical due to insurance issues (i.e. tour operators unwilling to take on the liability cost and therefore not promoting the product). Although the warnings are valid for many parts of the country, they do not accurately reflect the safety and security within CNR's borders. Thus, addressing the disparity between the advisories and the actual conditions in the Reserve remains crucial for the growth of the tourism industry in CNR.

#### Access & Infrastructure

Traveling from Bangui to Chinko Nature Reserve by ground vehicle isn't recommended due to security concerns. Visitors therefore charter flights to Kocho, where there is an airstrip and park headquarters. Visitors get to Camp Chinko from Kocho by road or helicopter. By nature this is an expansive process, limiting the pool of visitors to high-end travelers. Challenges with the availability of fuel, weather and reliability of operators and their equipment can also impact the tourism experience. The park has no touristic infrastructure outside of Camp Chinko, and there are no plans for major developments of infrastructure that would support tourism. Any future investors in tourism would therefore have to establish this themselves.

#### Activities & Tourist Services

At its current experimental stage, Chinko Nature Reserve offers a limited touristic experience, with small scale sports fishing and photographic tourism at Camp Chinko. Despite the challenges, there is likely opportunity for growth in sports fishing and hunting, where the market tends to be more adventurous, high-end and small scale. To expand the high-end photographic markets an effort to package itineraries with Dzanga-Sangha may yield results as it offers diversity of places and habitats for visitors.

Chinko, Dzanga-Sangha and CAR in general have a brand image problem. To attract more visitors, efforts that build on the foundation that AP, WWF and others have build to tell the story of the parks is important. This could target high-end bespoke international travel companies, similar to Journeys by Design who already offer trips to the region. Targeted messaging could also focus on expat markets in the border Congo Basin that are already familiar with the regional context and are an easier sell to travel within the region (See Congo Basin Landscape recommendations for more on targeting this market).

# Site Analysis:

## Chinko Nature Reserve, CAR

### Recommendations & Considerations

#### Lower Cost & Short-Term Actions:

Upgrade website for Camp Chinko as well as develop visual and written content to better tell the story of the park to potential visitors. Include the camp and visitor experiences on the AP website about the park.

**\*\*Develop a specific tourism plan, as a part of the business plan that will be developed by the Chinko Commercial Development Manager (when hired). This should primarily focus on three market segments, high-end, small scale sports fishing, hunting and photographic tourism. In the short term, the likely best opportunities for growth are in spots fishing and hunting, so engagement with potential third party partners (hunting and fishing companies) in the planning process to gauge what they feel will be needed to develop/expand operations will help the planning process. As development of tourism will likely require co-investment with any third party investor, engage with donor partners on potential matching grants to attract investment.**

**\*\*Zoning for reserve to define areas for potential hunting and fishing/photographic tourism in the short and medium term.**

#### Higher Cost & Medium-Term Actions:

**\*\*Develop a PR campaign for the park, with a focus on telling the story of the park as well as the tourism experiences that can be had in the landscape. This should focus on the three markets outlined in the short-term recommendations, but with priority to the fishing market to attract a sport fishing show or influencers to the park to highlight the fishing opportunities in the park**

Based on the business and tourism plan, package near term tourism development opportunities in 'investment prospectus' that summarize the opportunity and engage with potential investors. Targets may be specialized fishing operators, such as African Waters as well as hunting operators.

Targeted direct outreach and familiarization trips with specialty and bespoke high-end tour operators, similar to Journeys by Design who are looking for unique 'off the beaten track' destinations. This may also include packaging with Dzanga-Sangha.

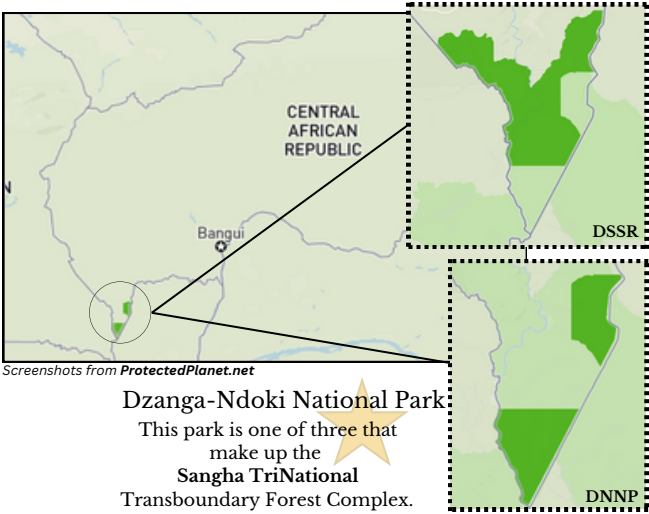
# Destination Snapshot:

## Dzanga-Sangha Complex, CAR

*Includes: Dzanga-Ndoki National Park (DNNP) and Dzanga-Sangha Special Reserve (DSSR)*

### Quick Facts:

- 458,100 Hectares Total
  - DNNP: 122,200 Hectares, DSSR: 335,900 Hectares
- Evergreen tropical rainforests and swamp forests
- IUCN Categories:
  - DNNP, Category 2 - 'National Park'
  - DSSR, Category 6 - 'PA with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources'
- UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site\*
- Park Entry Fee: **30 Euro per person, per day**
  - Gorilla tracking fee: 300 Euro per person
  - Dzanga-Bai admission fee: 60 Euro per person
- Gorilla Habituation: Successful
- Seasonality:
  - ☀ January-March *Period of low rainfall: March-May*
  - ☔ August - December *Period of avg. rainfall: May-August*
  - Best time to visit: December - July**



### Accommodations & Facilities

Two full-service, luxury-style safari lodges:

**Sangha Lodge:**  
Operated by the Cassidy family, along the Sangha River.  
Has **7 bungalows**, each with private terraces and ensuite bathrooms. There's a communal lounge, bar, and restaurant serving high quality meals.

**Park HQ & Visitor Center:**  
Located in Bayanga.

**Doli Lodge:**  
Operated by WWF, along Sangha River.  
*Located close to Park HQ & the airstrip.*  
Has **4 bungalows**, each with a terrace, internet, and solar-powered hot water. There is an onsite shared dining bungalow serving high quality meals.

For travelers visiting the park without a tour operator, this is where they can easily pay entry fees, plan their itineraries, hire guides, and book accommodations. Plans to renovate the Visitor Center in 2024.

### Accessibility:

Int'l Air	<b>Bangui M'Poko International Airport (Bangui)</b> <i>Considered the only airport in CAR meeting international standards.</i>  Representatives from the lodges will meet travelers at the airport to facilitate the entry & immigration processes.  Bangui is ~520kms from Bayanga.	
Domestic Air	<b>From Bangui to Bayanga Airstrip:</b> Private charter flight to the park, ~1 hour.	<b>Airstrip in Bayanga:</b> Good quality, 1.4km long. ~5 mins from Park HQ & Doli Lodge.
	Park & lodge management have a good working relationship with the charter flight company.  There's ~1 flight per week on average and they are usually very consistent and reliable.	
Ground & Water	<b>From Republic of Congo:</b> <i>Usually coming from Odzala or Nouabale-Ndoki NPs</i>  Boat ride up the river, ~6-7 hours to Bayanga from Ouessou.	<b>From Cameroon:</b> <i>Usually coming from Lobeke NP</i>  Boat ride up the river, or more commonly, a private driver.
	The drive from Bangui to Dzanga Sangha is possible, but road conditions are very poor, instability and insecurity is high, and it is a very long route (14 hours in dry season, ~2 days in rainy season). Many experts recommend against this option.	
Within Park	There are some limited roadways within the protected areas, facilitating a somewhat easier experience for travelers to and from activities.  Notably: Dzanga Bai has a 'parking lot' ~40 minute drive from Park HQ. From the lot, travelers must walk an additional 45 minutes into the rainforest.	

Transportation Infrastructure

Park Headquarters

Availability of Accommodations

Accommodation Product Variation

Visitor Activities

Activity Product Variation

Good

Onsite

Serviced

Medium

Openly Available

High

None

Basic

Limited

Diverse

**Site Destination Maturity**  
Relative to the Congo Basin Market

\*Sangha TriNational is a UNESCO World Heritage site, so Dzanga-Ndoki National Park falls under this designation.



# Destination Snapshot:

## Dzanga-Sangha Complex, CAR

*Includes: Dzanga-Ndoki National Park (DNNP) and Dzanga-Sangha Special Reserve (DSSR)*

### Current & Potential Natural Tourism Assets:

Wildlife:

Western Lowland Gorillas,  
Forest Elephants,  
Forest Buffalo, Bongo,  
& Pangolins.

350+ bird species,  
designated an **Important Bird Area**  
by BirdLife International.

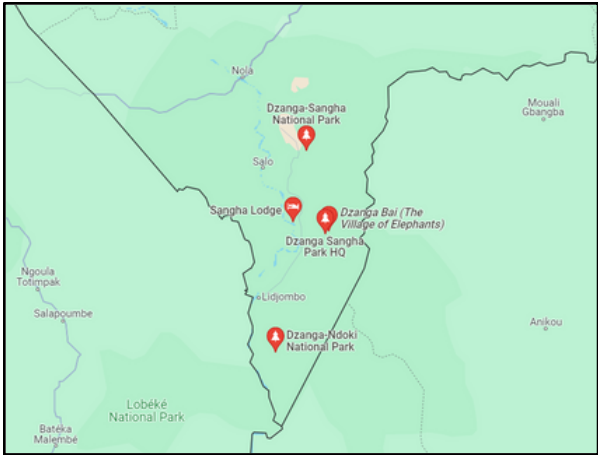
Geographic Features:

Mosaic of rainforest, semi-evergreen  
forest, and swamp forests.

Sanga River & Dzanga Bai are  
outstanding natural assets.

Adjacent with two other parks  
(Sangha-TriNational)

*Cross-border tourism circuits are  
popular with major growth potential.*



Google Maps (2023) Dzanga Sangha Complex.

Google Reviews Rating: ★★★★★  
1 Total Review  
TripAdvisor Rating: ●●●●●  
26 Total Reviews

### Human Capital

**WWF**

WWF helped develop Dzanga Sangha in 1989, and have been working in the landscape ever since (*over 30 years*).

Their main areas of intervention include anti-poaching & ecological monitoring, sustainable development of the Complex, habituation of gorillas, and the promotion of indigenous rights for the local Ba'Aka.

**Cassidy Family**

Pillars of the community & region for over 15 years. Developed Sangha Lodge in 2009, stewards of ecotourism.

*At present, the park entry fees are split up: 50% to park management, 10% to Central government, and 40% to local communities. This helps incentivize the continued growth of ecotourism in the region by offering the local communities real, tangible benefits.*

"It was a very interesting and unusual experience."

"Extraordinary natural reserve unique in the world. Its primary jungle forest is possibly one of the best on the planet. [...] We will repeat a thousand times."

"Price is reasonable and cheap compared with other activities in central africa."

"Visit the western lowland gorillas and forest elephants. Learn about the BanAka's forest culture!"

"If you're into wildlife, this place is truly, truly wild!"

"Very rugged trip that involved extensive hiking, but it was very much worth it."

### TripAdvisor Reviews 2019 - 2022

"Do not miss this incredible place. No problems at all getting here from the US, though it's a long journey. Felt completely safe the entire time."

"We felt completely safe there, constantly supervised by the ecoguards who are remarkably well organized."

"All lovers of nature, silence and wildlife must go to Dzanga so that the last African forest elephants still live in peace."

"The best travel in Africa! The saltworks, the pygmies, the elephants and all the activities offered are magnificent!"

### TripAdvisor Reviews 2019

"I have been on 19 safaris all over Africa and I have to say that this was one of the most fabulous ever."

"We went to see nature and fell in love with the people. We enjoy an imposing and powerful nature: landscapes to dream of."

"Just go, travel advisories be damned."

"I showed up at the park headquarters, was immediately able to sit down with the touristic director and come up with an itinerary for my time in the reserve."

"As for the infrastructure, it is excellent for the region and given current investments, it should be able to reach the level of the famous lodges of East Africa."

### TripAdvisor Reviews 2018 - 2019



# Destination Scorecard:

## Dzanga-Sangha Complex, CAR

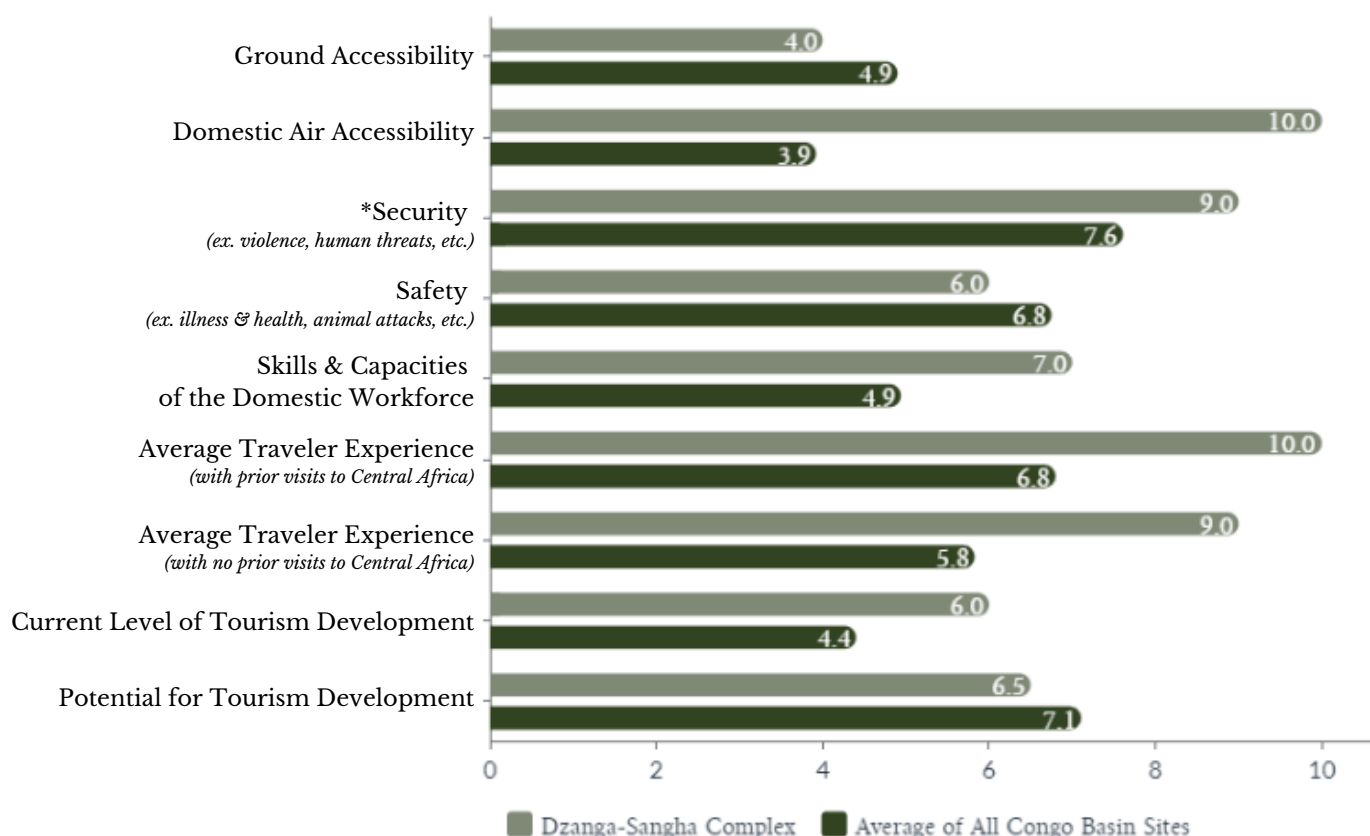
*Includes: Dzanga-Ndoki National Park (DNNP) and Dzanga-Sangha Special Reserve (DSSR)*

Stakeholders with firsthand knowledge of the park were asked to rank different aspects of tourism in and around the landscape.

Ranking is based on a 1-10 scale:

'1' represents relative weakness in the field and '10' represents strength in the field.

### Dzanga-Sangha Complex Tourism Assessment Survey Results



#### Key Takeaways:

- The protected areas are accessible by air transportation, an incredibly important enabling factor for this site.
- The average traveler experience, for those with and without prior travel in Central Africa, are higher than the regional average, indicating strong market potential.
- The potential for additional development is lower than the regional average, signaling that investments in current infrastructure, activities, and marketing is more important in the short-term than new development ventures.

#### Additional Insights from Survey:

- Tourism to the park is heavily reliant on air services than in other locations, and therefore this is a critical point of weakness if issues such as fuel shortages occur.
- There is some interest from tourism investors for expanded tourism in the Dzanga Sangha Complex of Protected Areas.
- Tourism circuit opportunities & site linkages, as suggested by expert stakeholders:
  - The other two Sangha Trinational Parks
  - Odzala-Kokoua National Park
  - Salonga National Park

Responses collected via Qualtrics surveys, from October 2023 - March 2024

*\*For additional information on security, see site analysis below.*

# Site Analysis: --- --- Dzanga-Sangha Complex, CAR

## Overview

The Dzanga-Sangha Complex of Protected Areas (DSCPA) is located in the southwest corner of the Central African Republic (CAR), bordering Cameroon to the west and the Republic of Congo (ROC) to the east. The full complex covers over 450,000 hectares, split between both the Dzanga-Ndoki National Park (DNNP) & Dzanga-Sangha Special Reserve (DSSR), which have 122,000 & 335,900 hectares respectively [1]. Additional noteworthy zones include, the 2 km-wide buffer zone surrounding DNNP, a 50,000 hectare Community Hunting Zone, and 4,000 hectares dedicated to rural development [2].

This complex is one of three parks that make up the Sangha Trinational (TNS) transboundary conservation complex, one of the most important conservation areas in Central Africa [3]. This includes Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park in ROC and Lobéké National Park in Cameroon. The whole of Sangha Trinational was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2012 because of its ecological importance, including its mostly intact and diverse ecosystems, ongoing ecological and evolutionary processes within the landscape, and its endangered species [4].

The Dzanga-Sangha Complex of Protected Areas boasts a diverse landscape including rainforests, semi-evergreen forests, and swamp forests, earning it the nickname 'the Green Heart of Africa.' Key natural features include the Sangha River and Dzanga Bai, a significant forest clearing known for its ecological importance and wildlife. The term "Bai" originates from local communities and languages in Dzanga-Sangha, with Dzanga Bai serving as a 'the' iconic location to observe bongo, forest elephants, attracting between 50 to 150 elephants daily and other wildlife [5]. Anti-poaching and conservation efforts have helped stabilize the elephant population, estimated at 4,000 individuals in DSSR [6] and 1,000 individuals in DNNP [5]. The landscape is also noted as the best place in the world to view Bongo and has 350 species of birds across the landscape [7]. Western Lowland Gorillas also find refuge in the park, with three habituated groups for tourism [8].

The U.S. Department of State has issued a 'Level 4: Do Not Travel' advisory for the whole country [9], including all of the protected areas within it. Other countries have issued similar blanket warnings, notably the UK, Canada, Germany, and Australia. and France (with the exception of the capital). The Dzanga-Sangha Complex of Protected Areas, it far from the country's 'problem areas,' and is considered safe by all those surveyed. In fact, stakeholders explain that there has never been any incidents of crime or violence against foreigners in the area, "even during the height of CAR's troubles" [7]. These sentiments are not reflected by the blanket travel advisories issued by embassies.

[1][https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNADM949.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADM949.pdf)

[2]<https://dzanga-sangha.org/stories/a-national-park-in-the-congo-basin/>

[3][https://2017-2020.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/CAFE\\_C\\_Sangha\\_Tri-National\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](https://2017-2020.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/CAFE_C_Sangha_Tri-National_Fact_Sheet.pdf)

[4]<https://whc.unesco.org/document/152527>

[5]<https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/149945/dzanga-bai-elephant-enclave>

[6]<https://www.forestelephants.org/dzanga-sangha-car>

[7]<https://www.sanghalodge.com/frequently-asked-questions>

[8]<https://dzanga-sangha.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/DESCRIPTION-OF-ACTIVITIES-Dzanga-Sangha-Nov-2020.pdf>

[9]<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/CentralAfricanRepublic.html>

# Site Analysis:

## Dzanga-Sangha Complex, CAR

### Nature-Based Tourism Development Opportunities

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has been instrumental in the establishment and management of the Dzanga-Sangha Complex of Protected Areas for over three decades. In 2019, WWF and the CAR government formalized a co-management agreement to enhance site management and funding [10] [11]. WWF's responsibilities encompass infrastructure management, conservation, rural development, and ecotourism [12], including the operation of Doli Lodge within the landscape and management of the Park HQ and Visitor Center in Bayanga. With deliberate placement near the village, WWF facilitates a better work-life balance for local employees. They oversee key infrastructure, including roads and observation platforms at bai sites, and have recently announced initiatives such as rehabilitating the platform at Dzanga Bai, acquiring a new 12-seat boat for tourism, and securing contracts with charter flight operators [13], highlighting their significant role in tourism development within the complex.

The Cassidy family plays an equally significant role in the Dzanga-Sangha tourism industry, having established Sangha Lodge in 2009, situated 5 kilometers from the park and on the Sangha River. Operating within an exclusive 72,000-hectare concession of which they pay the annual use right fees. This concession is actually a hunting concession, yet the Cassidys emphasize their commitment to sustainable tourism and conservation in their operations and have not, nor plan to, hunt the land [14].

Compared to accommodations in the broader landscape they receive relatively consistent visitation, yet from a sustainability perspective this is still limited and a major goal is to increase visitation to the lodge and the landscape. This is mirrored for the DSCPA as a whole, which needs greater tourism activity and financial support to sustain the existing commercial and conservation activities in the area.

The Dzanga-Sangha Complex offers exceptional opportunities for wildlife-based tourism, boasting habituated gorillas, renowned elephant viewing at Dzanga Bai, and the potential for bongo viewing and birding. This is reflected in WWF's promise to guests - 100% guaranteed elephant sightings - enhances the appeal of the park and represents a significant marketing advantage for continued tourism development.

The challenges tourism in the park faces is the brand/image of the country in tourism markets, the travel advisories and the fact that its difficult to package with other destinations and experiences. Many travelers, especially those traveling to long-haul destinations on trips that are complex to organize, want to visit multiple places. This is possible with Chinko National Reserve, which has a small-scale camp, but this is also very expensive and therefore near term opportunity is limited.

[10]<https://dzanga-sangha.org/facts-infos/>

[11]<https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/intpa/items/690551/en>

[12]<https://abcbg.org/files/documents/2ae0eb55-29fb-4f61-bf97-f9672109386a.pdf>

[13]<https://dzanga-sangha.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/DSPA-newsletter-March.pdf>

[14]<https://www.sanghalodge.com/frequently-asked-questions>

# Site Analysis:

## Dzanga-Sangha Complex, CAR

### Nature-Based Tourism Development Opportunities, *continued*

Greater opportunity lies in packaging trips with Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park in ROC and potentially in the future with Lobéké National Park in Cameroon. A tri-national agreement exists for the Sangha Trinational parks, allowing for visitors to move between parks without a visa, although this is currently underutilized and in many cases poorly understood by border control authorities. The opportunity exists to develop and promote packaged itineraries between the TNS parks that would add a distinguishing element to a travelers experience (three parks and three countries in one trip).

Travelers can reach Bomassa near Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park in about 4-5 hours on the Sangha River. A new lodge, run by Kamba Africa is about to be built in this location. An additional 30 minutes by boat would also allow travelers to reach Djembe in Lobéké National Park. This site is currently poorly developed, but if enhanced in the future may provide opportunity. Lobéké can also be reached by road. Further itineraries have already been made, although to date only in very few instances, with Odzala-Kokoua National Park in the ROC. Collectively, by building a broader tourism destination, each individual part of that destination becomes more viable and the destination as a whole becomes more recognized in the markets.

Work is needed with border control and park agencies from all three countries to ensure the MOU that allows the movement of visitors between parks is understood and the procedures to travel between parks is easy for a visitor. Streamlining this process and providing for document processing at locations that make sense for visitors (near lodges) would facilitate package itineraries in the region and greater tourism overall. In the short term visitors arriving from one country will need to return the same way, but in the longer-term true cross border travel may be possible.

The Sangha Trinational Trust Fund (FTNS), established in 2007, supports conservation and community wellbeing in the region [15]. Involving FTNS, other key conservation NGO's, private operators, park officials, and government representatives from all three countries will be crucial for collaborative decision-making and management of tourism circuits.

Marketing and storytelling for the region presents a significant need and opportunity for Dzanga-Sangha, given its already established facilities and attractive tourism experiences. For the Dzanga-Sangha Complex itself this includes attracting and engaging with targeted influencers that reach the higher spending adventurous travel markets as well as more direct engagement with international operators on understanding and packaging trips to the region. This could also be significantly enhanced if approached as a region, promoting the whole Sangha Trinational as a destination (once crossing logistics are improved). In addition to long-haul international markets, there are also expats in the Congo Basin countries that are already familiar with the regional context and more readily accessible for regional trips. If promoted to as a Congo Basin grouping of travelers, this may also be a potential market (see Congo Basin Landscape Recommendation on reaching this market).

[15] <https://fondationtns.org/en/mission-and-vision/>



# Site Analysis:

## Dzanga-Sangha Complex, CAR

### Enabling Environment Constraints

#### Security

The issuance of blanket travel advisories on the entire Central African Republic poses a significant constraint to tourism development in Dzanga-Sangha, despite the safe environment provided within the park. The park itself is protected by eco-guards, supported by a reputable NGO and has not had any security issues, however, these realities are not reflected in major travel advisories. Lobbying embassies to take a more regional approach to the travel advisories and reduce the advisory for the Dzanga-Sangha region would go a long way to boosting visitation to the region (and country).

#### Accessibility

Access by road is not recommended due to security issues between the park and Bangui, so the majority of travelers fly into the park, through private charters. This is costly but the reality in the short and medium-term, meaning that the market that can be attracted through Bangui will predominantly be a small scale, high-end market. This may vary more if the landscape can attract visitors from Nouabalé-Ndoki or Odzala-Kokoua National Park in the ROC as this market has the potential for a mix of drive and fly markets.

Within CAR, ensuring reliable air transportation remains a priority. Lodge representatives assist travelers at the Bangui International Airport, facilitating entry and immigration processes, and arranging flight connections to the park. This is a key process for enabling tourism as the immigration process can be daunting for travelers. Challenges have also arisen with fuel shortages, causing flight and trip cancellations as well as unpredictable pricing.

# Site Analysis:

## Dzanga-Sangha Complex, CAR

### Recommendations & Considerations

#### Lower Cost & Short-Term Actions:

**\*\*Harmonization** between stakeholders throughout the Sangha Trinational Complex to make the cross-border management initiative and its subsequent MOU on the movement of tourists within the complex, usable as a tourism circuit. This would include an initial analysis of existing structures and operating procedures for cross border tourism to fully understand the operational context.

A cross-border Sangha Trinational Complex tourism plan focused on the facilitation of cross-border tourism in the complex should then be developed. This may also include defining the unique tourism offer of each location to ensure diversity of the cross-border experience as well as a common brand theme that connects them together, matching this with the markets likely to travel to the area.

*For example:*

Dzanga-Sangha: Famous Dzanga Bai forest elephants, bongo and good lodging options.  
Nouabalé-Ndoki: Habituated gorillas, tall rainforest canopy and fledgling community-based ecotourism & new high-end lodge  
Lobeke: Still need defining, but possibly birding and mobile camping under the stars, etc.

*This action should focus only on travel within the borders of the parks with visitors entering and existing through the same country as this is easier and quicker to achieve. See recommendations on implementation in medium-term actions for longer-term more complex steps regarding cross-border travel.*

**\*\*Marketing and storytelling** campaign for Dzanga-Sangha that would include content generation to capture high quality visuals and written content, packaging these materials for promotion and a travel trade outreach program targeting international markets as well as regional expat travelers to inform, engage and excite them about the park. This may include sales missions to meet directly with high potential international tour operators as well as familiarization trips to bring these potential sales channels to visit the landscape.

Continued support of anti-poaching & elephant protection efforts, including community engagement on human wildlife conflict mitigation. This may also include community enterprise efforts and tourism experiences that can be offered by the community.

**\*\*Critical Enabler**

# Site Analysis:

## Dzanga-Sangha Complex, CAR

### Recommendations & Considerations

#### Higher Cost & Medium-Term Actions:

**\*\*Building on the marketing efforts described in the short-term recommendations, develop a marketing, branding and sales program to engage with tour operators and key stakeholders in Nouabalé-Ndoki, Odzala-Kokoua and possibly Lobeke National Parks. This collaboration would define optimal itineraries and circuits between the parks and logistics relating to this. This may include current plans as well as future opportunities for circuits. Continued marketing and storytelling content should then focus on promotion of these itineraries with tour operator partners, influencers and branding the region. Through this process gaps and needs will be identified along with what is needed to address them (*see next recommendation*).**

A challenge grant program could be established to address product development and investment needs in addition to addressing gaps and needs for the development of circuits between Dzanga-Sangha, Nouabalé-Ndoki, Odzala-Kokoua and Lobeke. This may include new tourism activities and experiences. It may also include support for trail development, viewing and camping platforms, logistics (boats, roads, etc.), training and marketing. Where grant funds are used to support private investors, grant funds should be provided as an equity stake in a tourism investment for local communities, although the private operator would maintain management control of the operation.

Building on initial cross-border travel facilitation within the park boundaries, expand this effort to efforts to facilitate full board crossing for travelers that would allow for entry in one country and exit in another.

Training of police, border control agents, other regulatory personnel and park staff, to ensure they are aware and can facilitate effective border crossings between the three TNS parks.