



Congo, Democratic Republic of the Country Specific Information

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COUNTRY DESCRIPTION: The Democratic Republic of the Congo (Congo-Kinshasa), located in central Africa, is the third-largest country on the continent. The capital is Kinshasa. French is the official language. Years of civil war and corruption have badly damaged the country's infrastructure. Read the Department of State [Background Notes on the Democratic Republic of the Congo \(DRC\)](#) for additional information.

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ENTRY/EXIT REQUIREMENTS: A passport, visa, and evidence of [yellow fever vaccination](#) are required for entry. It is the responsibility of all travelers to obtain visas from an embassy of the DRC and arrange onward travel before arriving in the Congo. Americans entering the country without visas have been detained and deported. Likewise, travelers arriving in the DRC without proper proof of yellow fever vaccination have been temporarily detained, had their passports confiscated, or been required to pay a fine.



It is the responsibility of all journalists working in the Congo to obtain permission from the Congolese Ministry of Information in Kinshasa. The U.S. Embassy recommends that journalists enter the Congo via Kinshasa. Visitors who wish to travel in any mining areas must first obtain government approval from various government agencies or ministries, an often cumbersome and time consuming process.

Travelers to the DRC frequently experience difficulties at the airport and other ports of entry, such as temporary detention, passport confiscation, and demands by immigration and security personnel for unofficial "special fees." All resident foreigners, including Americans, are required to register at the office of the Direction General de Migration (DGM) in the commune of their place of residence.

For departure from the DRC, airlines will require a valid visa for all destination countries before they will issue a ticket or allow a passenger to board. Airlines also require that the passenger have the correct entry stamp in the passport they wish to use to exit the country. Dual nationals arriving in the DRC should carefully consider which passport they use to enter the DRC. Passengers who are unable to leave the country on the passport they used to enter the DRC may not be able to continue on their travel itinerary.

Additional information about visas may be obtained from the [Embassy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo](#), 1726 M Street NW, Washington, DC 20036, tel. (202) 234-7690, or the [DRC's Permanent Mission to the UN](#), 866 United Nations Plaza, Room 511, New York, NY 10017, tel. 212-319-8061, fax: 212-319-8232. Overseas, inquiries should be made at the nearest Congolese embassy or consulate.

Information about [dual nationality](#) or the prevention of [international child abduction](#) can be found on our web site. For further information about customs regulations, please read our [Customs Information](#) Sheet.

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SAFETY AND SECURITY: See the Department of State's Travel Warning for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Though the DRC is now significantly more stable than it has been over the past decade, security remains problematic. The first democratic elections in more than forty years were held in 2006, and a new government is now in place. Post-election disturbances occurred as recently as March 2007 in Kinshasa, resulting in deaths of civilians and military personnel. During civil disturbances in 2007 there were incidents of hostility towards U.S. citizens and other expatriates.

Both inside and outside Kinshasa, there can be roadblocks, especially after dark. Vehicles are often searched for weapons and valuables, and travelers are checked for identity papers. Security forces regularly seek bribes. If confronted with such a situation, it is suggested that U.S. citizens remain courteous and calm. If detained, report the incident to the U.S. Embassy in Kinshasa as soon as possible.

The United Nations has its largest peacekeeping operation in the world in the DRC. Known by its French acronym of MONUC, it has nearly 20,000 peacekeepers deployed in the country – primarily in the east. Violence nevertheless persists in the eastern DRC due to the presence of several militias and foreign armed groups, with sporadic outbreaks occurring in North Kivu, South Kivu, and northern Katanga provinces, as well as in the Ituri District of Orientale province, and sporadically in Bas-Congo province. Members of the Lord's Resistance Army entered into northeastern DRC from Sudan in 2005, and have camps in an isolated region of the DRC, Garamba National Park, where they killed eight MONUC peacekeepers in January 2006 and have terrorized and severely abused the civilian population. A joint military offensive against the LRA in Haut Uele District commenced in mid-December 2008. In March 2009, an American film crew in the Kivu provinces was robbed at gunpoint by Congolese government soldiers.

For the latest security information, Americans traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department of State, [Bureau of Consular Affairs' web site](#), where the current [Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts](#), as well as the [Worldwide Caution](#), can be found.

Up-to-date information on safety and security can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the U.S. and Canada or, for callers outside the U.S. and Canada, a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

The Department of State urges American citizens to take responsibility for their own personal security while traveling overseas. For general information about appropriate measures travelers can take to protect themselves in an overseas environment, see the Department of State's information on [A Safe Trip Abroad](#).

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CRIME: In the DRC, deteriorating economic conditions are fostering increased crime, especially in urban areas. Travel in many sections of Kinshasa, Kisangani, Lubumbashi and most other major cities is generally safe during daylight hours, but travelers are urged to be vigilant against criminal activity that targets non-Congolese, particularly in highly congested traffic and areas surrounding hotels and stores. Outlying, remote areas are less secure due to high levels of criminal activity and the lack of adequate training, supervision, and salary payments to the security forces present. Security officials and/or individuals purporting to be security officials have detained and later robbed American citizens and other foreigners in the city of Kinshasa. This type of crime has increased in recent months, but generally occurs more frequently during the Christmas and New Year's holidays.

Vehicle thefts, burglaries, and armed robberies occur throughout the country; there have been recent reports of after-dark carjackings in the North Kivu area, resulting in deaths. It is recommended to drive with doors locked and windows closed at all times. If confronted by members of the military or security forces, visitors should not permit soldiers or police officers to enter their vehicles nor get into the vehicle of anyone purporting to be a security official. It is recommended that in such instances U.S. citizens remain courteous and calm and, if threatened, not resist. All incidents should be reported to the U.S. Embassy in Kinshasa.

Consistency in administering laws and regulations is notably absent. Travelers should note that in cases of theft and robbery, legal recourse is limited. Therefore, valuable items may be safer if kept at home or another secure location.

Travelers using public transportation or visiting high pedestrian traffic areas of any type are advised to be vigilant

against robbery and pick-pocketing which is a persistent problem in all major cities in the DRC. The presence of "street children", who can be persistent and sometimes aggressive, remains a problem particularly in Kinshasa.

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INFORMATION FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME: The loss or theft abroad of a U.S. passport should be reported immediately to the local police and the U.S. Embassy. If you are the victim of a crime while overseas, in addition to reporting to local police, please contact the U.S. Embassy for assistance. The Embassy staff can, for example, assist you to find appropriate medical care, contact family members or friends and explain how funds could be transferred. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and to find an attorney if needed. See our information on [Victims of Crime](#).

There is no local equivalent to the "911" emergency line in the Congo.

Please see our information on [Victims of Crime](#), including possible victim compensation programs in the United States.

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CRIMINAL PENALTIES: While in any foreign country, a U.S. citizen is subject to that country's laws and regulations, which sometimes differ significantly from those in the United States and may not afford the protections available to the individual under U.S. law. Engaging in sexual conduct with children or using or disseminating child pornography in a foreign country is a crime, prosecutable in the United States. Please see our information on [Criminal Penalties](#).

Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe in the DRC than in the United States for similar offenses. Persons violating Congolese laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested or imprisoned. Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking in illegal drugs in the DRC are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. Accusations of engaging in crimes against the security of the State, which are loosely defined, often result in detention for prolonged periods without being formally arrested. The DRC's justice system remains plagued by corruption and uneven application of the law. Attorney fees can be expensive and are expected to be paid in advance of services rendered.

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SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES:

Photography: Travelers should note that photography in public places in Kinshasa and around any public or government building or monument in the DRC is strictly forbidden. Persons caught photographing such sites will likely have their photographic equipment confiscated and risk detention and possible arrest.

Travel to and from Congo-Brazzaville (Republic of Congo): Ferry service to and from Kinshasa and Brazzaville stops running in the late afternoon, does not operate on Sundays, and may close completely with minimal notice. If ferry service is functioning, a special exit permit from the DRC's Immigration Service and a visa from the Republic of the Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) are required for U.S. citizens to cross the Congo River from Kinshasa to Brazzaville.

Ferry and riverboat service to the Central African Republic is suspended due to rebel control of the Ubangui River.

Phone Service: In the DRC, cellular phones are the norm, as other telephone service is unreliable. Depending on the type of phone, it may be possible to locally purchase a SIM card to use an American-compatible cell phone in the DRC.

Currency: U.S. currency is widely accepted in the urban areas, but most vendors and banking institutions will accept only Series 1996 bills or newer, with the large, off-center portraits, that provide stronger protection against counterfeiting. In addition, bills must be in near perfect condition; even those with minor stains or small tears will be rejected. One dollar bills are rarely accepted, even if in mint condition. U.S. bills should be examined before they are accepted to ensure that they are legitimate, as counterfeit currency is widely circulated. It is recommended that currency exchange be conducted at reputable banks and not on the street where several schemes exist to either short-change the unwitting customer or to pass counterfeit bills.

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MEDICAL FACILITIES AND HEALTH INFORMATION: In the DRC, medical facilities are severely limited, and medical materials are in short supply. Travelers should carry properly labeled prescription drugs and other

medications with them and should not expect to find an adequate supply of prescription or over-the-counter drugs in local stores or pharmacies. Payment for any medical services required is expected in cash, in advance of treatment.

[Malaria](#) is common throughout the DRC; outbreaks of cholera, typhoid, yellow fever, the Ebola virus, and hemorrhagic fever also occur. [Tuberculosis](#) is an increasingly serious health concern in the DRC. Travelers should take appropriate precautions to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The U.S. Department of State is unaware of any HIV/AIDS entry restrictions for visitors to or foreign residents of the DRC.

Information on vaccinations and other health precautions, such as safe food and water precautions and insect bite protection, may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747) or via the [CDC's web site](#). For [information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad](#), consult the World Health Organization's (WHO) web site. [Further health information for travelers](#) is available from the WHO.

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MEDICAL INSURANCE: For planning purposes, the minimum estimated cost of medical air evacuation to the nearest suitable health care facility (in South Africa) is \$35,000.

The Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and whether it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. Please see our information on [medical insurance overseas](#).

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TRAFFIC SAFETY AND ROAD CONDITIONS: While in a foreign country, U.S. citizens may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the United States. The information below concerning the Congo is provided for general reference only, and may not be totally accurate in a particular location or circumstance.

Inter-city roads are scarce, and throughout the DRC roads are generally in poor condition, and often impassable in the rainy season. When driving in cities, keep windows up and doors locked. At roadblocks or checkpoints, documents should be shown through closed windows. In the event of a traffic incident involving bodily injury to a third party or pedestrian, do not stop to offer assistance under any circumstances. Attempting to provide assistance may further aggravate the incident, resulting in a hostile mob reaction such as stoning or beating. Proceed directly to the nearest police station or gendarmerie to report the incident and request official government intervention.

Presidential and other official motorcades pose serious risks to drivers and pedestrians in Kinshasa. When hearing sirens or seeing security forces announcing the motorcade's approach, drivers should pull off the road as far as possible, stop their vehicles, and extinguish headlights. Vehicles should not attempt to move until the entire motorcade has passed by; the security forces will physically indicate when this has occurred. Failure to comply may result in arrest, and/or vehicle damage with possible personal injury.

Public transportation of all forms is unregulated and is generally unsafe and unreliable. Taxis, mini-buses, and trains are in poor mechanical condition and are invariably filled beyond capacity.

Visitors who wish to travel in any mining areas must first obtain government approval from various government agencies or ministries, an often cumbersome and time consuming process.

Drivers should stop their cars and pedestrians should stand still when passing a government installation during the raising and lowering of the Congolese flag. This ceremony occurs at roughly 7:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Please refer to our [Road Safety](#) page for more information.

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AVIATION SAFETY OVERSIGHT: [The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration \(FAA\) has assessed](#) the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Civil Aviation Authority as not being in compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards for oversight of the DRC's air carrier operations. For more information, travelers may visit the [FAA's web site](#).

Civil aviation in the DRC continues to experience air incidents and accidents; more than a dozen crashes and

in-flight accidents resulted in more than 300 fatalities between 2000 and April 15, 2008. Incidents included hard landings, engine failures, collapsed landing gear, and planes veering off the runway. In-country air travel schedules are unreliable and planes are frequently overloaded with passengers and/or cargo.

The U.S. Embassy in the DRC has prohibited official travel by U.S. government employees and contractors on all DRC-owned and -operated commercial air transportation services due to concerns regarding safety and maintenance. International flights on foreign-owned and -operated carriers are not affected by this notice.

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CHILDREN'S ISSUES: For information see our Office of Children's Issues web pages on [intercountry adoption](#) and [international parental child abduction](#).

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REGISTRATION / EMBASSY LOCATION: Americans living or traveling in the DRC are encouraged to register with the U.S. Embassy through the [State Department's travel registration web site](#), so that they can obtain updated information on travel and security within the Congo. Americans without Internet access may register directly with the [U.S. Embassy](#). By registering, American citizens make it easier for the Embassy to contact them in case of emergency. The U.S. Embassy is located at 310 Avenue des Aviateurs; tel. 243-081-225-5872 (do not dial the zero when calling from abroad). Entrance to the [Consular Section](#) of the Embassy is on Avenue Dumi, opposite the Ste. Anne residence. The Consular Section of the Embassy may be reached, including after hours, at tel. 243-81-556-0151 or 243-81-884-6681; fax 243-81-556-0169.

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This replaces the Country Specific Information for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, dated September 23, 2008, to update sections on Entry/Exit Requirement, Crime, Information for Victims of Crime, Safety and Security, and Registration/Embassy Location.

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