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Sub Saharan Africa

Congo (Democratic Republic)

Still current at: 10 November 2009
Updated: 03 November 2009



This advice has been reviewed and reissued. The overall level of the advice has not changed.

(see [travel advice legal disclaimer](#))

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Travel Summary

- **We advise against all travel to eastern and north eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This includes entering DRC from Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda. The only exceptions to this are within the town of Bukavu and Goma, where we advise against all but essential travel. You should avoid entering or leaving DRC overland via Goma or Bukavu unless essential. This is due to continued insecurity and lawlessness in these areas. Military operations by the Congolese army against foreign armed groups in North and South Kivu provinces have led to very high numbers of civilians being displaced. See the Local Travel section of this advice for more details.**
- **We advise against all but essential travel to the rest of DRC because of continuing tension and insecurity. The situation can deteriorate at short notice. See the Local Travel section of this advice for more details.**
- **There is a risk of political demonstrations and politically-motivated violence. For immediate, specific information about planned demonstrations or any other events which may affect the local security situation, you should register with/contact**

Contacts

Congo (Democratic Republic), Kinshasa, British Embassy

Address:

British Embassy
Kinshasa
Democratic Republic of the Congo
BFPO 5319

Telephone:

(243) 81 715 0761
(243) 81 715 0724 For genuine emergencies only

Fax:

(243) 813 46 4291

Email: ambrit@ic.cd

Office hours:

GMT:
Mon-Thur: 0630-1330
Fri: 0630-1300

Local Time:
Mon-Thur: 0730-1430
Fri: 0730-1400
Out of hours, Embassy answer machine gives a contact number

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the British Embassy in Kinshasa. See the General (Registering with the British Embassy) section of this advice for more details.

- **Ndjili airport (Kinshasa's main airport) and Kinshasa's ferry terminal can close at short notice. You should check with your operator before travelling.**
- **There is a low threat from terrorism. But you should be aware of the global risk of indiscriminate terrorist attacks which could be in public areas, including those frequented by expatriates and foreign travellers.**
- **Seven British nationals required consular assistance in Congo (Dem Rep of) in the period 01 April 2008 – 31 March 2009 for the following types of incident; deaths (1 cases); hospitalisations (2 cases); and arrests, for a variety of offences (4 cases). During this period assistance was also requested with regard to lost or stolen passports (7 cases). Robbery, including by individuals posing as plainclothes police, is also common. You should also be aware of gangs promising you cut price gold and diamonds. We have received reports of crime targeting international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Goma.**
- **We recommend that you obtain comprehensive travel and medical insurance before travelling. You should check any exclusions, and that your policy covers you for all the activities you want to undertake. See the General (Insurance) section of this advice and [Travel Insurance](#) for more details.**

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Safety and security

Terrorism

There is a low threat from terrorism. But you should be aware of the global risk of indiscriminate terrorist attacks which could be in public areas, including those frequented by expatriates and foreign travellers.

For further information see [Terrorism Abroad](#).

Crime

The global economic downturn has hit DRC hard. You should be alert to the risk of street crime and armed robbery at all times, including being targeted by armed gangs when driving. Foreigners are at particular risk of street robbery in Kinshasa, often in the vicinity of hotels and supermarkets. Some gangs and confidence tricksters use girls to lure the unwary into traps; others promise cut-price gold and diamonds or pose as police to rob foreigners, including in daylight. Western expatriates have been robbed of money and mobile telephones in Kinshasa and elsewhere in DRC this year. There is also a risk of arbitrary arrests of foreigners by security authorities who demand payment for release.

There have been violent and well planned attacks on foreign nationals, including aid workers in Goma, most recently on 23 May 2009. Police are still investigating. You should take sensible security precautions. Do not walk in the streets alone or after dark. Safeguard and avoid displaying valuables and cash. Deposit them in a hotel safe, where practical. Keep copies of documents, including your passport, separately. On the road, you should keep doors locked and windows shut while driving. Do not drive off the main thoroughfares or park in unsupervised areas.

For more general information see [Victims of Crime Abroad](#).

Political Situation

[Democratic Republic of Congo Country Profile](#)

Five years of civil war in DRC officially ended on 29 June 2003, when the Congolese parties to the conflict signed accords sharing military and political responsibilities in a transitional government. Democratic elections were held on 30 July and 29 October 2006 and the newly elected President was inaugurated on 6 December 2006. During the election period there was armed conflict in Kinshasa, which resulted in civilian casualties.

In the months following the elections, there were further public demonstrations related to the political process, some of which turned violent (see [Local Travel](#)). Protests have in the past spilled over into attacks on international targets. You should avoid crowds and popular gathering points, and contact the Embassy if there are signs of trouble.

For immediate, specific information about planned demonstrations or any other events which may affect the local security situation, you should register with/contact the British Embassy in Kinshasa (see [Contact Details](#)).

The agreement reached in January 2008 between the DRC government and armed groups offered the chance for peace in the provinces of North and South Kivu, where conflict has continued beyond the end of the civil war. However, issues remain to be resolved, a heavy United Nations peace keeping presence is deployed and the internal peace process remains fragile. Since April 2009, the Congolese army has been carrying out operations against foreign and armed groups operating in North and South Kivu province. Large numbers of civilians remain displaced as a result of the conflict and the current military operations in the Kivus. Acts of violence, including killing, rape and looting continue against the civilian population across wide area in conflict zones.

Local Travel

We advise against all travel to eastern and north eastern DRC. This includes entering eastern DRC from Uganda or Rwanda (some gorilla-trekking operators in these countries cross into DRC). This includes entering the DRC from Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda. The only exceptions to this are within the towns of Bukavu and Goma, where we advise against all but essential travel. You should avoid entering or leaving DRC overland via Goma or Bukavu unless essential. Although the Congolese insurgent groups in North and South Kivu signed a peace accord with the government in March

2009, some groups remain outside the process and a threat to stability. The Congolese army has been carrying out military operations against Rwandan rebels present in North and South Kivu since April 2009. This means that outside of Bukavu and Goma, the security situation remains volatile. There has also been an increase in banditry by armed men against NGO convoys travelling out of Goma and Bukavu. Even in these two towns, tensions remain and the situation can deteriorate rapidly.

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group originating in northern Uganda, are currently operating in north eastern DRC and across the border in Southern Sudan and Central African Republic. Following regional military action in the area, there has been an increase in LRA attacks against the civilian population. This has resulted in an estimated 1,200 casualties, over 1,000 abductions and the displacement of 200,000. Military action is ongoing and the situation remains unpredictable.

We advise against all but essential travel to the rest of DRC because of continuing tension and insecurity. This can mean that the DRC's borders with Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda close at short notice. You should consult the British Embassies in Kinshasa and Kigali if in doubt.

Politically-motivated violence can break out from time to time in Kinshasa. The DRC army clashed violently over several days with rebel troops loyal to the defeated presidential candidate Jean-Pierre Bemba inside the city in March 2007. There was widespread loss of life. If you have not already done so, you should register with/contact the British Embassy for local updates on the security situation in Kinshasa.

Violent clashes took place in Bas Congo province (south western DRC) between a local political group, the BDK, and Congolese security forces in late February and early March 2008, resulting in a number of deaths. These followed confrontations between the BDK and the police on 5 January in which six people were reported killed and over twenty seriously injured; some as a result of gunfire. The BDK and government troops fought in Bas Congo at the end of January and early February 2007, when over 100 people are reported to have been killed. The situation in Bas Congo remains tense but for the moment without incident. Particular care should be taken when travelling to the Bas Fleuve region.

The north eastern district of Ituri, near the frontier with Uganda, remains an area of continued inter-factional conflict. Despite the presence of UN peacekeepers and the Congolese army violence continues sporadically.

The border with Angola can close at short notice. You should check with your travel agent before attempting to cross the border into Angola. Obtaining visas for Angola in DRC is difficult. You are advised to arrange them before travelling to DRC.

Road Travel

An international driving permit is required to drive in DRC. Car hire with international companies is possible in Kinshasa.

There is no reliable public transport system in DRC. Over-crowded and unroadworthy vans serve as buses in Kinshasa. There are few taxis, available from the large hotels, but these do not meet western safety standards. Outside Kinshasa and other main cities, most roads are barely drivable even with a 4x4, especially during the rainy season (September to May).

In DRC, you should be aware of the vehicle theft and car-jacking, and take sensible precaution. You are advised to drive with the doors of your vehicle locked and windows closed at all times. DRC's security forces operate roadblocks, particularly after dark. If you are asked to produce documents for inspection at a check point, you should remain in your vehicle and show them through closed windows.

For further information see [Driving Abroad](#).

Rail Travel

A train accident occurred in Katanga Province in south-east DRC on 10 June 2009. 10 people were reported to have been killed, and 28 injured, as a result. The dilapidated state of the railways has been blamed for the accident

Air Travel

The European Commission has published a list of air carriers that are subject to an operating ban or restrictions within the European Union. This is regularly updated. You should check the following link to see whether this will affect your travel - [European Commission Transport - Air](#).

An aircraft chartered by the humanitarian flight operator AirServ crashed near Bukavu in eastern DRC on 1 September 2008. A flight operated by the domestic airline Hewa Bora crashed in April 2008 in Goma, with extensive loss of life. Currently, the only air operators British Embassy officials are authorised to use within DRC are United Nations (MONUC and UNHAS), ECHO and ICRC flights. It is recommended that you avoid flying with any DRC airline. If you already have a flight booked with any DRC airline you should consult your travel agent.

On 30 March 2009, the DRC authorities introduced a departure tax of \$50 per passenger on international flights and \$10 per passenger on domestic flights. Payment of this tax should be made at the time of check-in, before boarding. Passengers and visitors also have to pay \$12 to enter the car park at the international airport of N'djili.

For more general information see [Airline Security](#).

River Travel

The ferry service between Kinshasa and Brazzaville is currently operating, but is subject to cancellation at little notice. It stops running in the late afternoon, and there is no service on Sundays.

You should be aware that the boats and ferries, which serve the rivers and lakes, are poorly maintained and often overloaded. Strong currents, shifting sandbanks and poor maintenance contribute to low safety standards. A makeshift boat ferrying passengers on the River Lubilanji near

Mbuji-Mayi in southern DRC sank in early April 2008. Over thirty people were reported killed as a result. On 22 July 2008, at least 42 people were killed when a river boat sank on the River Oubangui in north western DRC, close to the border with the Central African Republic. Two boats are reported to have sunk on Lake Tanganyika during December 2008. In the second of these, in which thirty people died, overloading is thought to have been a factor.

For more general information see [River and Sea Safety](#).

Local laws and customs

Taking photographs in public places risks arrest and detention. Journalists should not conduct interviews or film without the necessary local permits.

For more general information for different types of travellers see our [Your Trip page](#).

Entry requirements

Visas

All British passport holders need a valid visa to travel to DRC. This must be obtained before travelling. To arrange this, you should contact the Embassy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo:

281 Gray's Inn Road
London
WC1X 8QF

Telephone no: 0207 278 9825

A Rwandan or Ugandan immigration stamp in your passport should not prohibit admission, but you may still experience difficulties on arrival in the DRC via Kinshasa if you do have them. Visitors arriving from the UK have recently experienced problems on arrival at N'djili airport, Kinshasa.

Satellite phones, GPS receivers or Military clothing

You are advised not to bring satellite phones, GPS receivers or military clothing into the DRC as this could lead to difficulties with the security authorities.

Yellow Fever vaccination certificate

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is mandatory and you will be asked to produce one on arrival. You are advised to produce your yellow fever vaccination certificate when applying for your visa to enter DRC.

Health

The Centre Prive d'Urgence (CPU) clinic in Kinshasa is able to cope with basic health problems and to stabilise a patient after most serious accidents. Outside Kinshasa, western standard medical facilities are practically non-existent. Medical evacuation to South Africa (or elsewhere) is advisable as soon as possible. You should ensure that you have comprehensive medical and travel insurance, to include specifically the very high costs of evacuation by air ambulance. Minimum turnaround time for evacuation by air ambulance is 10 hours. If you regularly take medication, you should bring in a properly-marked supply, sufficient for the time you will be in DRC, with you. You may find it difficult to

locate the medicines you need in the country.

Malaria, rabies, polio, meningitis and cholera are common in DRC.

In December 2008 and January 2009, an outbreak of Ebola haemorrhagic fever was reported in West Kasai province (southern DRC). Ebola is a severe, and often fatal disease. The likelihood that you will contract Ebola is low unless there has been direct contact with the blood or body fluids of an infected person, or with objects, such as needles, that have been contaminated with body fluids. You should avoid all contact with infected patients and avoid any contact with ill or dead animals. Further information can be found on the [NaTHNaC](#) website.

Monkey pox occurs in DRC. The monkey pox virus is usually transmitted to humans from infected ground squirrels and rodents. Symptoms include a fever, the appearance of pus-filled blisters all over the body, and lymph node swelling. You should avoid contact with people suffering these symptoms and with animals.

Large numbers of cases of typhoid fever have also been diagnosed in DRC in 2008. Plague has been reported in Orientale Province (north-eastern DRC).

Large numbers of cases of acute watery diarrhoeal syndrome were reported among people living in camps for internally displaced people in North Kivu province (easter DRC) since September 2008. In many instances these have been fatal. In areas of poor sanitation it is not advisable to drink water unless it has been treated by boiling and filtration or with a chemical purifier. You should avoid drinks with ice in them and food which has been rinsed in water from unknown or unhealthy sources.

You should exercise normal precautions to avoid exposure to HIV/AIDS. For more general information on how to do this see [HIV and AIDS](#).

You should seek medical advice before travelling to DRC and ensure that all appropriate vaccinations are up-to-date. For further information on vaccination requirements, health outbreaks and general disease protection and prevention you should visit the websites of the National Travel Health Network and Centre [NaTHNaC](#) and [NHS Scotland's Fit For Travel](#) or call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.

For more general health information see [Travel Health](#).

Natural disasters

Volcanoes

The Nyiragongo and Nyamulagira volcanoes in the north east of the country (near Goma) have been showing signs of renewed volcanic activity. As of the end of March 2009, vulcanologists predict that an eruption of Nyamulagira was imminent. Nyiragongo (20km from Goma) is also showing signs of increased activity. UN agencies and local NGOs are

preparing themselves for this possible eventuality. If you are in the area (against our travel advice) you should follow local advice.

Earthquakes

On 3 February 2008 an earthquake struck Eastern DRC with its epicentre 20kilometres north of Bukavu. It measured 6.1 on the Richter scale. The earthquake and its aftershocks could be felt in neighbouring Rwanda and Burundi. Five people were reported dead in DRC with over 200 casualties. A further tremor in the same area, measuring approximately 5.0 on the Richter scale, was reported on 9 June.

On 19 February 2007 an earthquake measuring 5.7 on the Richter scale was felt in parts of eastern DRC (mainly north Kivu and southern Ituri).

General

Insurance

We recommend that you obtain comprehensive travel and medical insurance before travelling. The cost of medical repatriation from DRC to the UK is extremely high. You should check any exclusions, and that your policy covers you for all the activities you want to undertake. See [Travel Insurance](#) for more details.

If things do go wrong when you are overseas then this is [how we can help](#).

Consular Assistance

The lack of reliable air transport and continued insecurity may prevent the British Embassy in Kinshasa from being able to extend normal levels of consular assistance to British nationals anywhere in DRC other than Kinshasa.

If you do decide to visit or work in DRC you are advised to have your own evacuation plan, to regularly review its viability in the light of changing circumstances, and to provide details of it to the British Embassy at ambrit@fco.gov.uk.

Registering with the British Embassy

We strongly recommend that if you are visiting or are resident in the DRC, you should register with the British Embassy in Kinshasa. You can do so in person or, if you prefer, via our secure online registration service at: Consular Online Registration on the FCO website or with our [LOCATE](#) service. Notwithstanding our inability to guarantee consular assistance and advice against travel in the east, we would strongly recommend you to register and give us your contact details if you intend to visit DRC, so that we can pass on information that may be of use to you concerning the security situation in your area. You should also consider having a visa for the Republic of Congo if you are planning to stay in Kinshasa for a considerable period of time. More information about registering with LOCATE can be [found here](#).

Temporary Passport service

The British Embassy in Kinshasa offers only a Temporary Passport service. These are valid for up to one year only. The Embassy provides a full replacement passport service via the British High Commission in Nairobi. This can take up to six weeks, unless you are prepared to meet courier costs.

Mobile phones

DRC has a GSM network on which most dual-band (or better)

UK mobile phones will work. Coverage is not complete. If in doubt, contact your UK service provider. Local 'pay as you go' SIM cards are available.

Money

The British Embassy cannot provide emergency cash advances to UK nationals. You are advised to have arrangements in place before leaving the UK to have funds sent to you in case of need. Some brands of credit cards are accepted in DRC. If you have a card which can be used in the country, you should consider bringing it with you. The currency in DRC is the Congolese Franc but US Dollars can be used. US Dollars should be presented in good condition.

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