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**GABON, DEMOCRATIC RE-
PUBLIC of CONGO, REPUBLIC
OF CONGO & THE CENTRAL
AFRICAN REPUBLIC**

February 13 – 28, 2023

Led by Professional Tour Lecturer Michel Behar

Can be combined with pre-tours to Nigeria & Cameroon (January 22-February 05)
followed by Niger (February 05-13, 2023)

Travel to some of the least explored parts of Africa on this journey visiting these beautiful countries: Gabon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo & Congo. Gabon features internationally celebrated masks, such as the N'goltang (Fang) and the reliquary figures of the Kota people. A small population, as well as oil and mineral reserves, has helped Gabon become one of Africa's wealthier countries. The country has generally been able to maintain and conserve its pristine rainforest and rich biodiversity. The C.A.R. consists of Sudano-Guinean savannas, but the country also includes a Sahelo-Sudanian zone in the north and an equatorial forest zone in the south. What is the Central African Republic today has been inhabited for millennia. However, the country's current borders were established by France, which ruled the country as a colony starting in the late 19th century. You will visit the wonderful and vibrant city of Kinshasa in the D.R.C. Once a site of small fishing and trading villages, Kinshasa is now a mega-city with an estimated population of over 14 million. Kinshasa has a flourishing music scene which, since the 1960's, has operated under the patronage of the city's elite. The Congolese culture has been influenced by a wide variety of natural landscapes, stretching from the savannah plains in the North Niari flooded forests, to the great Congo River, to the rugged mountains and forests of Mayombe, and including 106 miles of beaches along the Atlantic coast. The presence of numerous ethnic groups and various political structures (the Kongo Empire, the Kingdom of Loango, the Kingdom Teke, and the Northern chiefdoms) has provided an enormous amount of diversity in the traditional cultures, as well as in many ancient artistic expressions. Join us to discover the magic of Central West Africa...

Ihab Zaki

Managing Director, Spiekermann Travel

Monday, February 13
Arrive Bangui (C.A.R.)



Upon arrival at the Ombella M'Poko International Airport, you will be met and transferred (25 min overland) to the **Ledger Plaza** for check-in, briefing, dinner and overnight. **(D)**

Note: Above is based on premise of arriving on Air France A775 at 3:15 PM

Tuesday, February 14
Bangui (Ubangi River & Boali Falls)



Start your first thrilling escapade in the **Central African Republic** today by embarking on a morning excursion to the mighty **Ubangi River**. After an early breakfast, we will take a short drive to the wharf and hop into a wooden boat for a 1.5-hour river excursion for an exclusive look into the lives of the local people. Watch the excitement of the river traffic: farmers transporting their subsistence agricultural products to **Bangui Markets**; artisanal fishermen on duty or sailing downstream to the harbor with their catches; cargo boats sailing to and from **Zongo**, the small DRC town opposite **Bangui**; overcrowded boats headed to **Brazzaville** and **Kinshasa**; sand diggers diving in the river bed to dig for sand; women and young girls busy doing laundry, washing dishes, or soaking cassava in the water for 'fufu'; etc. The harmonized blend of colors along the banks of the Ubangi River, coupled with the cool breeze and the water flowing in the background is a revelation in itself as we make our way back to the harbor as the sun is about to rise. From the pier, we will board the bus and make our way to the Northwestern side of Bangui, traversing the city and the **M'Poko River Bridge** to **Boali**. Driving through the chaos on this side of Bangui allows us the chance to soak up the local ambiance of the city. The scenic road to Boali passes a series of village clusters such as **Ndere** where the remains of the country's fourth president, Felix Patassé, lies within an architecturally distinguished tombstone surrounded by palm trees and decorated with withe, blue painting, and quartz stones. We will pass other villages where the road is encumbered by roadside markets exhibiting materials such as firewood, charcoal, manioc (gozo by local name), sweet potatoes, bananas, plantains, papayas, and sour salt just to name few. At **Mandjo** we will cross the rubber plantations of **André Kolimba**, the country's third president. We will reach Boali just in time for lunch then head out to the core highlight of the day - **Boali Falls!** These falls are majestic, even in dry season (Nov – Mar). The waters churn from the 820-foot altitude, crashing down in a deafening sound as the snow-white colors are engulfed in the surrounding green forest and black rock ridges.

Next to the cascades are the hydraulic power plants controlled by a large dam from the Mbari River. We will quickly visit the nearest Dam, Boali I, before continuing on to **Bangui**. With its total capacity of just 8.75 megawatts, this power plant is the main power supplier of a 240,540 square mile country with five million inhabitants. It's about a two-hour drive back to our **Hotel** in Bangui for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Wednesday, February 15
Bangui (Pygmy Camp & "Bush Meat" Market)



Early this morning we will leave the hotel, cross the city of Bangui and drive southwest towards the prefecture of **Mbaiki** to the land of the Aka Pygmies. The road to Mbaiki is dotted with several Aka Pygmies encampments, with the closest located at **Bossongo** located about 34 miles from Bangui. Although the road is paved, it is full of potholes and run-down in some areas, making this short drive a few hours long. However, the bustling scenery will not disappoint as we encounter many Lorries full of goods coming from Cameroon or going to Chad, melodramatic derelict cars and motor bikes overloaded with firewood, charcoal, manioc, bananas, plantains, and 'Kangouea', the local name for palm wine. This is the most popular alcoholic drink for the majority of Central Africans - both men and women, young and old, villagers and urban dwellers... The **Bossongo Pygmy settlement** is a forest camp ideally situated in the heart of a dense tropical forest adjacent to the **Bantu village** located on the banks of the main road leading to Mbaiki. The camp is home to about 30 Aka families under the guardianship of a chief and its spiritual counsellors. Despite the fact that they have been encouraged to leave the forest and a modern lifestyle, the people here are still very attached to their ancestral ways, preferring to remain in their traditional habitat (Mongulu), surviving on a hunting-gathering and foraging lifestyle, wearing traditional clothing, making music part of their daily life, and using traditional plants for their medicinal needs. We will be welcomed by the headman of Bossongo Camp who will then usher us into his settlement. We will spend a very intriguing three hours learning about the Aka Pygmies lifestyle as they show us how to use medicinal plant to heal their ailments, hunt for proteins (net hunting) and harvest honey. Later, we will have an exclusive meeting with the chief of the village who will answer all sorts of questions we may have in relation to the encampment and then we will be honoured by a series of themed traditional dances. Our visit comes to an end with a visit to the local school attended by some 60-80 students that include the Bantu from a nearby village. By late morning, we will make our way back to Bangui in time for a late lunch. In the afternoon, we will visit the **bush meat market** at

the PK-12 suburbs, a roadside market that exhibits a wide variety of wild game found throughout the country. Whether partially or completely protected or prohibited for poaching, you will see it all at the PK 12 market that may consist of porcupines, elephants, lions, hippopotamus, civets, hedgehogs, chimpanzees, gorillas, eagles, and pythons just to name a few. After spending about a half an hour here, we will return to the **Hotel** in Bangui for the rest of day. **(B,L,D)**

Note: The bush meat market is an integral part of the culture, but may be a sensitive subject for tourists. Please keep an open mind when visiting the market.

Thursday, February 16 Bangui (City Tour)



Today we will explore Bangui, the capital and largest city in CAR, and visit the best the city has to offer. Bangui is ideally flanked on the southern boundary of the country, formed by the **Ubangi River**, a tributary of the majestic **Congo River**. It boasts a small array of highlights including the **Cathedral Notre-Dame-De-l'Immaculée Conception**, the **Paroisse Notre-Dame de l'Afrique**, the **Central Mosque**, the **Boganda Museum**, a small **handicraft market**, the **park of former presidents**, and past the lively sites of the city. Lunch will be served at a restaurant in the city (**Le Relais De Chasse or similar**), and dinner will be served at the **Hotel**. **(B,L,D)**

Friday, February 17 Bangui - Bayanga - Sangha River



After breakfast, we will depart for airport for a one and a half hour chartered flight to the protected area of **Dzanga Sangha** in the town of **Bayanga**. On arrival at the airstrip, we will be welcomed and immediately transferred to **Doli Lodge (or similar)**, ideally located and overlooking the **Sangha River**. After lunch, we will explore Bayanga by pirogue (long narrow canoe) on the Sangha River with an optional stroll in the village before returning to our Lodge for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Saturday, February 18 Bayanga - Gorilla Safari at Dzanga Ndoki N.P.



After an early breakfast, we will leave the lodge and embark on a one-hour drive through the lush forest to the research camp in the heart of the **Dzanga Ndoki National Park**. At **Bai Hokou**, we will begin our hike in the dark rainforest to track the Lowland gorilla. The walk can last in between 45 minutes and a couple of hours, which depends on how far the gorillas nested the night before. Under the leadership of our Pygmy host and guide, we will trek through the jungle with many chances to encounter other wildlife species such as the forest elephant, dwarf buffalos, monkeys, birds, pangolin, butterflies, and much more. Upon reaching the Lowland gorilla group, we will be allowed to spend one hour watching the them. Bai Hokou gorillas sometimes allow close contact with visitors and the curious younger gorillas even come closer! Afterwards, we will trek back to camp with more opportunities to spot wildlife along the way. From the camp, we will freshen up and go for a short walk close to the camp to watch a huge flock of agile mangabey monkeys interacting in their natural habitat. In the afternoon, we will return to the lodge for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Sunday, February 19 Bayanga - Dzanga Bai



After breakfast, we will climb aboard our 4-WD and drive about

an hour and a half across a bumpy forest trail to **Dzanga Bai**. From the entry point of the Bai, we will embark on a 20-minute forest walk across a shallow stream (water levels can reach the knees) to a stilt platform erected in the middle of the forest. From this elevated watchtower, we will spend the morning watching a huge number of African forest elephants in the Dzanga clearing as well as numerous other species such as the rare bongo, sitatunga antelope, dwarf buffalo, and a varied number of birds, all interacting in their natural habitats. By late morning/early afternoon, when the wildlife activities begin to slow down, we will leave the watchtower and trek back to the vehicle and then drive back to the lodge. After lunch, we will have the rest of the afternoon free to relax at the lodge bar/restaurant and enjoy the breath-taking views of the Sangha River and surrounding forest. In the evening, you'll be entertained by series of spectacular Ba'aka Pygmy traditional dances and chants around a gigantic bonfire. Dinner will be at the lodge restaurant. **(B,L,D)**

Monday, February 20 Bayanga - Ouesso (CONGO)



Early in the morning, we will set out on a cultural expedition to the **land of the Ba'aka Pygmies** where a wide range of cultural activities will be available for us to witness and experience. Perhaps join a **net-hunting expedition**, a special hunting technique of the Ba'aka people that has been passed down from generation to generation for many millennia. The experience begins with a competitive selection of skillful hunters, both men and women, followed by a musical drive to the hunting spot and the setting of the nets - all accompanied by a contrapuntal or yodelling chants and songs that evoke the spirit of the forest. The net hunting activity is simultaneously carried out with a traditional medicine lesson and gathering of plants and wild food such as mushrooms, grains, spices, seeds, wild vegetables, etc. under the leadership of one of the most knowledgeable traditional doctors in the tribe. She will know the use of all the plants whether for medical purpose, protection, blessings, or perhaps charming that someone, you secretly love. We will return to the lodge to freshen up, and then depart on a five- to six-hour boat journey downstream on the Sangha River to **Ouesso**, a town situated on the banks of the Sangha River in the **Republic of the Congo**. From the pier in Ouesso, we will be transferred overland to the **Onanga Hotel or similar** for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Tuesday, February 21 Ouesso - Brazzaville - Kinshasa (DRC)



Depending on the flight time, we will have a quick city tour of Ouesso before driving to the airport for the 1.5-hour flight to **Brazzaville**, the capital and largest city in the Congo. On arrival, we will transfer overland to the pier and take a ferry ride across the river to **Kinshasa** in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**. Kinshasa was once a small fishing and trading village turned megacity. Transfer to **Fleuve Congo Hotel or similar** for check-in, dinner and overnight **(B,L,D)**

Wednesday, February 22 Kinshasa (Bonobo Visit)



Early this morning, depart for the **'Land of Bonobos'** a few hours away from Kinshasa over unpaved, bumpy roads. Bonobos, also known as 'Pygmy Chimpanzees' are more active in the morning. According to the latest scientific research, the Bonobo are the closest primates to Humans with a similar DNA around 98%. They are notoriously known for their highly sexual behaviour which may explain the low aggression in the Bonobo realm compared to other primate species. The Bonobo society is highly matriarchal and females will use sex as a way to impose the law to the males. We will

spend the morning on the Bonobo Safari and before leaving, we will visit the **Ma Vallée Cascades** that lie just a stone-throw from the sanctuary. We will return to Kinshasa for lunch, and then head out on an afternoon city tour of Kinshasa. Visits may include the **'Marché aux Voleurs'**, the **Symphony Des Arts**, the **Laurent Desiré Kabila Monument**, as well as other places of interests that our short time may allow us to visit. Overnight in **Fleuve Congo Hotel or similar**. **(B,L,D)**

Thursday, February 23 Kinshasa (N'sele National Park)



We will rise again early for the 1.5-hour drive to **N'sele National Park** for an exciting safari in search of giraffe, elephants, rhinoceros, and many other introduced game. We will have lunch at the park restaurant and then return to Kinshasa, stopping at the **Kinkole Fish Market** to see a wide range of catches from the **Congo River**. Dinner and overnight at the **Fleuve Congo Hotel or similar**. **(B,L,D)**

Friday, February 24 Kinshasa City Tour – Brazzaville (CONGO)



In the morning, we will have a comprehensive city tour of Kinshasa visiting some of the most interesting places and attractions we were not able to get to earlier due to time constraints. Sometime in mid-afternoon, we will drive to the **Ngobila Port** for exit formalities and take a ferry across the Congo River back to Brazzaville. At the Brazzaville port, we will undergo entry formalities and immediately drive to the **Mikhael Hotel or similar** for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Saturday, February 25 Brazzaville - Congo River Exploration



Today, a short drive takes us to **Mami Wata Pier** where we will board a boat for a day of exploration along the majestic **Congo River**. Highlights of this voyage will include a series of stops on exotic islands including **M'bamou Island**, **Faignond Island**, and **Falaise Du Douvre Island**, as well as the shore-side village of **Manguenguengue**. Our first stop on M'bamou Island will include a visit to the world renowned **Malebo Pool**, formerly known as Stanley Pool in honor of the famous English explorer and journalist Henry Morton Stanley. The pool faces the fishing port of Yoro, an enclave in the presidential district of **M'pila** in Brazzaville. Because February is towards the end of the dry season, the island offers breath-taking views surrounded by thousands of sandbanks crisscrossed by a multitude of channels. With its population of predominantly fishermen and subsistence farmers, the island receives more than 5,000 local migrants each year who periodically congregate here during the peak of the fishing campaigns when the river recedes. They settle here in clusters of various villages (fishing camps) including **M'bamou**, **Talangaï**, **M'boulamountombo**, **Montouyngombé**, and **Kitengué**, some of which we will visit, time permitting. The locals will honor us with a dazzling cultural show performance before our return to Brazzaville by early afternoon. Time permitting; we will have a swift city tour of Brazzaville before checking back into the **Hotel Mikhael or similar** for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Sunday February 26 Brazzaville - Libreville (GABON)



We will have a comprehensive tour of Brazzaville today that includes the **De Brazza Museum**, the **Potopoto Market**, the **St Anne Basilica**, **Mayumba Tower**, the cataracts, and much more. After lunch, we will drive to the airport and check-in for the domestic flight to **Pointe Noire**, then check-in again for the flight to **Brazzaville** with Afrijet flight that leaves at 8:00 pm, arriving in **Libreville** at 9:30 pm. From Libreville, the capital and largest city in **Gabon**, we

will be met and transferred to the **Radisson Hotel or similar** for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Monday, February 27 Libreville - Lambarene



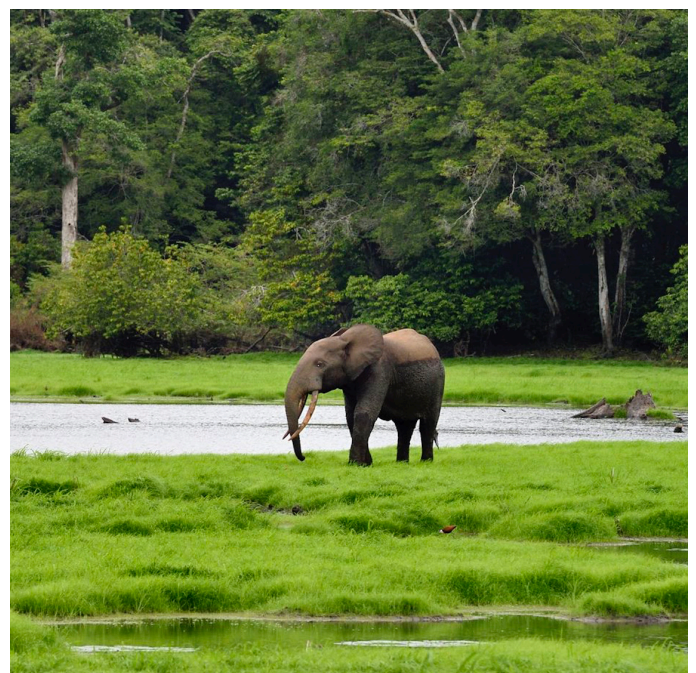
We will set out early for **Lambarene**, the capital city of the **Middle Ogooue Province** on the western side of the country. The drive to this cozy town takes approximately five hours given the poor state of the road, but the ride will be very rewarding as we encounter many interesting small **villages** along the way. Traversing many river bridges and thick forest landscape, we may stop at **Ekouk**, a small village where a **Bwiti shrine** regularly hosts foreign Bwiti followers for initiation rites. A stop here will give us the opportunity to experience the Bwiti religion that will include some demonstrations of spiritual dance, the use of Iboga and others. We will expect to reach **Lambarene** sometime in the evening and check-in at the **Ogooué Palace Hotel or similar** for dinner and night. **(B,L,D)**

Tuesday, February 28 Lambarene - Libreville - USA



Lambaréné is a picturesque city dotted with tranquil and bountiful lakes and thick dark rainforest, but is perhaps best known for the **hospital** built in 1913 by **Albert Schweitzer**, the famous theologian and humanitarian mission doctor who enthusiastically dedicated part of his life to fighting against Africa's tropical diseases. Today the old hospital has been transformed into a **museum** and sits next to a well-equipped and working modern hospital. The museum contains paintings, photographs, and personal items that belonged to Dr. Schweitzer. We will spend time at the museum, followed by a visit to **Francois Xavier Cathedral**, the **lakeside fish market** and other places of interest as time permits. After lunch, we will return to Libreville where we will have use of a day room at the **Radisson Blue Hotel (or similar)**. After dinner, we will be transferred to the airport for the Air France flight connecting flight to Paris. **(B,L,D)**

"We reserve the right to change the order of activities or places visited due to unforeseen schedule conflicts or in order to make the itinerary run smoothly"





About your Lecturer, Michel Behar... boasts an impressive list of credentials and just reading through it will make you want to meet him and share the road with him. A Dutch citizen, after his studies of Russian and Arabic in the Netherlands he took a course of advanced Arabic at the University of Khartoum in Sudan. Fluent in 12 languages including Farsi, English, Turkish, and Hebrew, he has an understanding of seven others. He has been a tour manager since 1987 leading groups for US, Dutch, Swiss, German, and British companies. He has accompanied custom tours as a leader/photographer for many prestigious museums, universities, and other institutions. He has traveled extensively throughout the world and visited all 21 Arab countries and for the last 20 years has turned his passion for photography into a second career. He currently lectures on current affairs related to the Near East and the ethnic groups inhabiting this region. During this time, he has dabbled in journalism writing for several European newspapers on topics as varied as technology and economics. He writes travel blogs and has done freelance work for travel guides and likes of course, what else, World Music. He also is an expert in Sahara led tours such as Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Mali, Niger, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, and West Africa.

Tour Cost (Land Only):

For group size 11-14 people: \$13,500.00

For group size 8-10 people: \$14,500.00

Per person sharing in double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$1,800.00

Price based on group size minimum of 8 participants and maximum of 14 participants

Trip Grade: II Lodging Level: ***

Tour includes:

- All airport/hotel/airport transfers.
- Accommodation at best available hotels.
- Meals as mentioned in the itinerary (B: Breakfast, L: Lunch and D: Dinner).
- Bottled water with meals and in vehicles on touring days.
- Overland transportation in A/C busses & 4-WD.
- English speaking guides in each country.
- All pirogue excursions and boat transfers.
- Flights between the cities, including Charter plane Bangui to Bayanga and commercial flights Ouassou to Brazzaville then to Libreville.
- All visits, tours and entrance fees to sites, museums, and parks, including the Bayanga gorilla permit and bonobo permit in Kinshasa.
- Approvals required to obtain your various visas (separate from actual visa cost.)
- All tips and gratuities to guides, drivers, etc.
- Cultural experiences with the Bwiti and the Babinga Pygmies in the C.A.R.

Tour does not include:

- International flights from USA to Bangui and out of Libreville to USA. (best option is Delta/Air France)
- Cost of obtaining the four necessary visas.
- Beverages other than water with meals and meals not specified in the itinerary.
- Any required pre arrival & pre departure PCR tests.
- Items of a personal nature (camera fees, laundry, phone calls, emails, excess luggage, etc.).
- Dayroom/overnights necessitated by changes in airline schedules.
- Transfers if not arriving/departing on scheduled flights/tour dates.
- Trip surcharge to operate below required minimum participants.
- Travel protection insurance (**STORNGLY RECOMMENDED**)

Trip Grade:

II Active: Some hikes, slightly more demanding walks at or to sites, comfortable but busy schedule and some long rides. Many walks into villages require walking in muddy areas, over dirt piles, and/or unpaved paths. The trip requires reasonably good physical stamina in order to participate in all the activities. Some flexibility is also required in the event that we need to alter the program for any unforeseen reasons.

Lodging Level:

*****Superior:** Lodges and hotels with additional amenities, refined service and comfort level acceptable to western standards. With a few exceptions you can expect properties to be suitable and matching western standards though a couple of smaller properties in towns and villages to be a bit simpler while still rooms with private bathroom and when necessary air-conditioning. In general, you will find your hotel has a restaurant and/or bar. We require that all the properties and transport we use comply fully with local regulations, but we do not guarantee the same standards as in your home country (3-4*).



Special Tour Remarks:

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible. Anyone in good health can join this trip. Many of the activities do not require previous experience and are not fitness related. Participating in this trip necessitates being in reasonable health and able to climb steps, walk on uneven terrain and handle sightseeing in warm weather.

Hotels: Hotel accommodation provided will be of moderate standard. Rooms will be en-suite with a private bathroom. Generally, hotel accommodation options are limited. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration. Services at such hotels can be rather inefficient at some hotels and should not be compared to western style properties.

Roads: There are lots of paved roads in Gabon, if you are staying in one of the major cities. Roads to outlying cities are usually unpaved and in poor condition, with large potholes. You will encounter unpaved roads throughout CAR with large potholes and degraded asphalt. In the Republic of Congo, most roads are dirt tracks and require an off-road vehicle. In DRC, outside of main cities, most roads are not drivable, even with an off-road vehicle. Road conditions are poor.

Photography: In Gabon, taking photographs of the Presidential Palace, airport, and military or other government buildings is strictly forbidden. In CAR, taking photographs of police or military installations, airports, or any other government buildings is prohibited. Unauthorized photography may result in the seizure of photographic equipment by the CAR authorities. Locals in the CAR may be very sensitive to all photography; you should obtain permission first. In the Republic of the Congo and in DRC, it is illegal to take pictures of government buildings, military installations, key infrastructure such as ports, train stations, and airports, and along border areas. Please be warned: you could be detained or arrested, fined, and have equipment confiscated. Do not take photos of Congolese, adults or children without their permission. If a confrontation occurs, it can be easily diffused by apologizing profusely and not engaging in the argument. Sometimes a small bribe might be needed to "grease the wheels", too.

Health: In Gabon, malaria is common, so visitors should take malaria pills. Some areas of Bangui have clean and filtered drinking water, so it is safe to drink water served at some restaurants and bars. However, the purity of the water is not reliable and thus we provide bottled water in all countries. In DRC You will need a yellow fever vaccination in order to enter the country. In the Republic of Congo, the likelihood of contracting malaria is high if effective, preventative medication is not taken.

Government: Corruption remains a serious problem in all countries among the security forces, some members of which have harassed travelers for bribes. At night, the roads in the capitals are often manned with impromptu checkpoints, at which police or soldiers ask motorists and travelers for money. Police manning checkpoints will demand bribes; expect no less than US\$5; in Republic of the Congo, armed soldiers or national police may conduct vehicle searches and check passengers for identity papers. These roadblocks often are poorly marked, and local authorities may target foreigners to solicit bribes.

Flights & transportation: Please note that the flights might change and we will have to rearrange the itinerary to fit the correct flights. Ferry service between Brazzaville and Kinshasa may close completely with minimal notice. A visa for the destination country (Republic of Congo or DRC) is required to cross the Congo River between Brazzaville and Kinshasa.

Participation: To participate in this trip you need to be tolerant and flexible and have an easy going attitude. We expect participants to accept any last minute changes and show an adventurous spirit. Anyone who feels they can easily get uptight and annoyed at facing any inconveniences should not join this sort of pioneering tour.

