

Kāmbā

AFRICAN
RAINFOREST
EXPERIENCES


Photography Tips



The Congo rainforest can be a challenging place to capture great wildlife images, but can also be immensely rewarding. To help you get the very best out of your Kamba experience, we've consulted a number of experienced photographers for their advice.

The most important consideration is an understanding of the low light conditions in the forest understory and the often backlit situations when shooting subjects in the canopy. This is most relevant when photographing Western Lowland Gorillas as well as arboreal monkey species – especially since gorilla welfare protocols prohibit flash photography.





A few general tips to ensure you enjoy your experience in the rainforest – and record it beautifully:

Equipment

- Familiarize yourself with your equipment in advance, anticipating the challenging lighting conditions in the forest: relatively low light at ground level and much brighter sunlight coming through the tree canopy.
- Primates are generally sighted in the tops of the trees, so they will inevitably be silhouetted against a blue/white sky. Try spot metering in these backlit situations. Your camera's custom functions will allow you to quickly change settings between backlit and "normal" settings.
- Camera body and lens are a matter of preference, but given typical distances from the wildlife (between 10m and 30m), we recommend carrying one zoom lens (in the 28-400mm range) and one body.
- A wide-angle lens (25-105mm) is useful for capturing forest and landscape scenes, while a macro lens (100mm) is excellent for insects, flowers, and butterflies.
- Anticipate the damp and humid conditions by using weather-sealed bodies and lenses. Also consider placing silica gel/desiccant sachets in your camera bag to absorb moisture. Some form of rain protection, such as a Vortex rain cover, will allow you to continue shooting in light rain conditions.
- Remember that you will be required to carry all your own camera equipment, so pack as light and portable as possible.

Shooting Formats

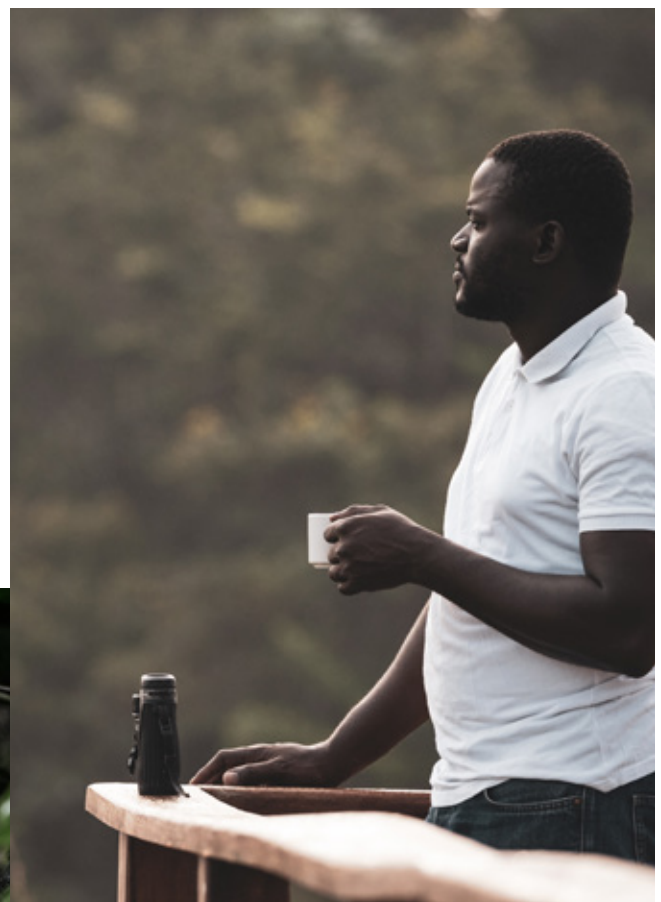
- Shoot in RAW, which captures more information than JPEG and gives you more options when editing. If you must shoot in JPEG, set your camera to the largest file size and be sure to adjust your white balance according to the light conditions.
- Metering: As a "default" starting point, use center-weighted metering, aperture priority, and an aperture of f/5.6. Look at the histogram of your initial shoots and adjust from there. If you see a lot of dark gorilla in the viewfinder, you may need to underexpose by up to two stops of light to avoid overexposure.
- Focus Point: Single point focus is usually always best: You don't want the camera focusing on the tree instead of the gorilla, and usually you will want to lock your focus on the eyes. With a group of gorillas, focus about 1/3 into the picture. You may want to change to multi-point if you have lots of moving subjects, but single focus points will give you more control.
- ISO and Shutter Speed: There is not much available light below the rainforest canopy, so ISO 800 and 1600 will be the norm; you may often need to push to ISO 3200 and higher. Consider using the AUTO ISO setting on your camera and dialing in an appropriate minimum shutter speed. A rule of thumb is trying not to shoot below 1/200th of a second with a 200mm lens. If you are using an 80mm lens then you can shoot at slower speeds (1/80th and so on). If the gorillas are on the move, up your shutter speed to 1/1000th of a second or more.
- DO NOT use flash photography: Flashes startle the wildlife and could result in a stressful situation.
- Tape over any lights or bright screens on your camera body, which can also distract the wildlife.

Photographing Gorillas

- Take a few moments to observe the gorillas before starting to shoot. Mix close-up portraits (when possible) with wider shots, capturing the gorillas in the context of their unique habitat.
- Stay attuned to special moments – like when a ray of sunlight illuminates the gorillas.
- Spend less time reviewing your images in the field and rather watch the gorilla group’s movements all the time. They can easily pop out into the forest path in front of you or start climbing trees around you.
- Consider using your camera’s video function to capture different footage as well as the sounds of the forest.
- Listen to your guide and tracker, who will be attuned to pre-empting primate movements and putting you in the best place for taking photographs.
- Be patient! Perseverance can result in an incredible gorilla encounter!

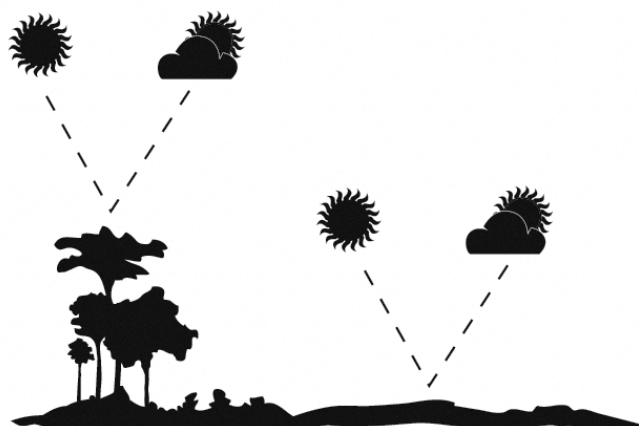
Photographing People

- Many Congolese are reluctant to take photographs, so always ask for permission (or ask your guide) before taking their picture. Where allowed, a zoom lens will allow you to distance yourself from the subject and capture more natural, spontaneous images.
- Especially in Brazzaville, avoid taking pictures of anything that could be remotely considered a “military” or “government” facility or vehicle, or any Police or Army personnel.



Quick Reference Guide

Weather Conditions



Under The Canopy

Overcast: Very high aperture (f 1.4 / f 2.0), high ISO

Sunny: High aperture (f 2.8 / f 4.0), high ISO

Out In The Open

Overcast: Medium aperture (f 5.6 / 8.0), medium ISO

Sunny: Low aperture (f 11.0 / 16.0), low ISO

Aperture & depth of field

Aperture (f-stop) is a width the camera lens opens when snapping a picture. Larger aperture (smaller number) lets more light pass through the lens.



Large
f1.4 - f2.8

Normal
f5.6 - f11

Small
f16 - f22

In the forests,
under canopy

In the bai, full
sunlight

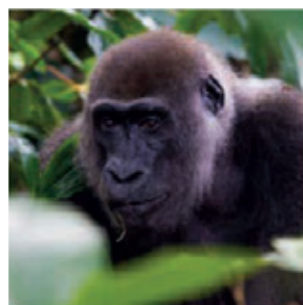
If your image is:

Blurry: increase your shutter speed

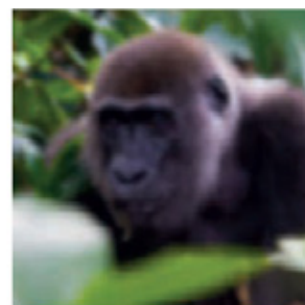
Dark: decrease your shutter speed or open your aperture

Bright: increase your shutter speed or close your aperture

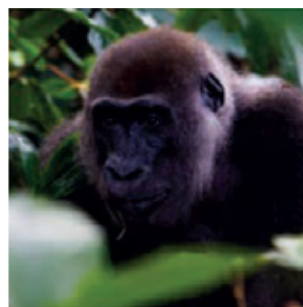
A higher ISO will allow you to increase shutter speed and stop action.



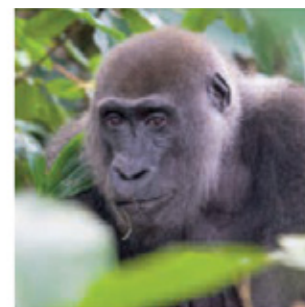
Good



Blurry

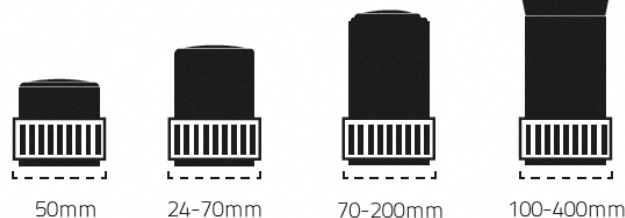


Dark



Bright

Lenses



24-70mm & 100-4000mm (for gorilla sightings)

50mm, f1.4 (for low light shooting and a great standard lens)

85 - 135mm with a focal length of over 50mm for macro /close-up shots

If you have any further questions,
please visit our comprehensive
FAQs, or just reach out at
info@kambaafrica.com.