

Central Africa



Central African Republic, Chad, Niger & Burkina Faso

April 2017



The Central African Republic...

... We landed at this very small and backwards airport in Bangui. We saw mostly World Food Program and UN aircrafts on ground. We were met by a guy, arranged for by Roland Mararv, whom we had had contact with through **Karakandji hotel**. The "meet-and-assist" helped us smoothly through customs and baggage clearance at this otherwise very disorganized airport.

He, Roland, is a Swedish citizen who has lived in the country for 39 years with his wife and now grown son and daughter. He runs to an establishment of flats for rent (for high UN officials) + a mid-term stay hotel arrangement, operated by his daughter. The daughter, Charlotte, is also Charche d'Affair (Swedish Consul) for Sweden and Norway here in C.A.R. We were then taken to **our hotel - Ledger** - which is said to be the top-rated and really only hotel for foreigners coming to town and wanting a safe and decent stay. Not cheap by any means at ca: 2500 sek per night for a double room. We were then picked up and transported over to the private home of Roland Mararv for a nice long lunch. We have been given one of his drivers and car, who is taking us around to show all interesting sights of Bangui - there are not may however. We have gone **through the Arabic quarters, the dangerous market: PK5** - where it is not recommended to walk around as a foreigner. We saw the cathedral, the **Presidential palace where also the former dictator: Bokassa** once lived. It is forbidden to take pictures anywhere in the country without a photo-permit. We did as we always do - take pictures and hope for the best. In a roundabout, when driving through the city, we took pictures inside from the car - then a policy motorcycle drove up next to us and pulled us over. We were then lectured and fined for taking pictures 10,000 CFA which is about 140 sek.

We went also for a short visit to meet with two swedes' working here in C.A.R. for MSB (Myndigheten for Samhällsberedskap) and doing so in collaboration with WFP. We hope to meet them once more for dinner on Sunday evening. The trip continued to the Oubangue hotel right on the river Ubangi. They had a nice bar here where we relaxed a bit and had a few cold beers. After resting up a bit at the hotel, we then went on to have **dinner at the top-restaurant in town the Le Relais des Chasses** - a French restaurant which is said to always be full (by UN, NGO's and other expatriates). We had a really nice meal with lots to drink for under 300 sek per person. Our driver then took us back to the hotel and we called It a night as we were a bit tired after a long flight coming down.





...A war-ridden with a bleak future.

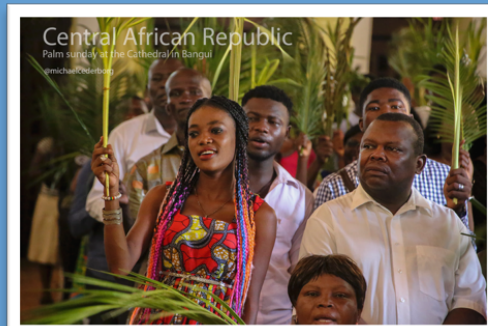
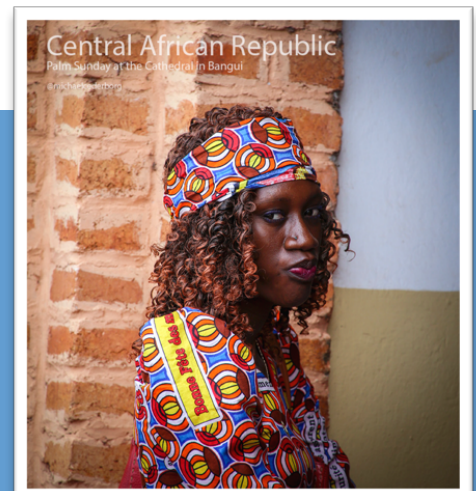
Location	
Flag	
Quick Facts	
Capital	Bangui
Government	Military junta
Currency	Communaute Financiere Africaine franc (XAF)
Area	622,984 km ²
Population	4,303,356 (June 2006 est.)
Language	French (official), Sangho (lingua franca and national language), tribal languages

... The day started with a visit to the Cathedral and the mass today. It was especially nice since it was Palm Sunday with a full church and everyone carrying a palm leaf. It was also ok to take pictures inside the church. After this visit, we went back to Roland and Gunnell who had arranged for special travel documents, needed when travelling outside of the city. They had also prepared a pick-nick lunch box to be brought along. We then set-off with our local driver and guide - Hippolyt - towards Bovali Waterfalls located ca: 2 hours' drive north of Bangui. The main road was very good and we were on our way.

In certain passages and areas, we were told to keep our cameras hidden. Not so much necessary because of the police as due to the local crowd. In areas in the country side – just like in the city – there are “pockets” with Muslim groups and also strong anti-government sentiments. In these areas, it was clearly unwise to even stop the car. There were also check-points/road-blocks military controlled along the way. In some we had to stop and show our papers in others not. We stopped on-route and distributed a couple of footballs and also watched as groups of people were singing and dancing to celebrate Palm Sunday.

We eventually arrived at Bovali Waterfalls. Here we were swamped with teenagers wanting to guide us and earning some money. The Waterfall was actually quite large and nice to see. We walked around and also took our lunch overlooking the magnificent view. The old hanging bridge which could be seen on pictures only some 6 months earlier, had now gone into pieces and was no more. On the way, back we were stopped at a couple of check-points. At one of them we had to pay a “fine” for not wearing seat-belts. The charged us 5000 CFA each. The funny thing was – or not so funny – that we were overtaken by a truck who passed us with a minimum of 10-15 people sitting on top of the roof. This country is thriving on bribes and corruption.

Back in Bangui, we finished up by having dinner with the three Swedish guys from MSB at the local restaurant: Le Brasserie. This establishment also had live music, but really terrible food. Don't eat here – a word of Warning.





Visiting Gaoui and a refugee camp

The country side is very poor with nomads living along the road....

Mustafa picked us all up. We were five people this day travelling together. Reine and Thomas Casswall who had arrived the day before and who only visits Chad decided to join us for today's excursion. We headed east out of N'Djamena – a city of 1,2 million. It is quite flat and spread out. I asked if we could also include a visit to a local camel market on the way it which we did. We also made a short stop to visit the home of Mustafa where we got to meet with his family.

We continued our trip out of town to more rural areas. The road went from paved to a dirt road with the usual potholes. We saw lots of women moving about on donkeys. It seems to be the main mode of transportation here for women. **We then stumbled on a UNHCR refugee camp on route.** Here I also asked to make a stop which we did. This refugee camp was filled with some 4900 Central African Republic citizens who had to flee during the war. They had been for 3-4 years and had no information on if/when they could move back home. Having been to a couple of UNHCR refugee camps before, I noted there were no guards/check point to get in – so we just walked straight through. I noted there were families with kids being mal nutrient. We spent some time, gave some money and bought a big bag of candy to be distributed among the kids.

We then continued to Gaoui, which was the main objective of the day. We had to report to the police check-point before entering – for our own safety as the security situation changes from day to day. We continued and then came into this rural and authentic village. We were immediately swamped by hordes of kids wanting to get gifts or candy. We walked through the small alleys and were welcomed into some of them. We also were guided into the former Sultans castle which was interesting with primitive painted walls in okra colours. It was extremely hot this day – 48 degrees we heard. We were quite tired after a hot day and decided to take dinner at **our hotel – Le Central. An establishment which is highly recommended to stay at when in N'Djamena.**





Dougia and Lake Chad district The Boko Haram areas around Lake Chad

Late the evening before we arranged with a recommended **tour guide organizer Mr. Hassane to take us up to places near Lake Chad**. But, as this area around and near the lake is partially controlled by Boko Haram and neighbours Chad, Cameroon as well as Nigeria – the security is very tense up here. We have asked around many different people and gotten as many answers about whether it is safe or not to go. In the end, we took a vote and out of the five guys we now were at the same place for these days – three of us decided to go. It was also quite complicated in getting the necessary permits to travel up to this region around the lake. At a cost of 150 € per person it was however agreed.

Hassane came and picked-us up and off we went, me, Reine and Thomas with Hassane in a 4-wheel vehicle. We filled up for gasoline and stocked-up with water and headed north. **We had ca: 65 km first to get to Dougia**. The roads were surprisingly good with asphalt almost intact all the way. We stopped and looked at many camel caravans, nomads/Bedouins along the way. Photography still being an issue of course. We eventually reached Dougia and a small resort near the river Chari. Here we stopped for lunch and watched the activities along the river. **In all fairness Dougia was not much to see**. We then pushed or guide/driver to continue the remaining 40 km to get to the actual Lake – Lake Chad. He was a bit weary, but eventually agreed. We had to pay an extra 20,000 CFA for this however. This was the highlight of the trip. **We continued along a paved road all the way to Guetté where the road changed into sand more than anything else. Lucky, we had a 4-wheel drive. This small village of Guetté on the lake was only mud-houses**. Fishing being the main source of revenue here. Half of the place was filled with military who were watching and being prepared should there be any incidents from Boko Haram groups. We were not allowed to enter on the lake, but could walk the shoreline and the village relatively freely. Again, we managed to take some nice shots of the local people here.

Republic of Chad
جمهورية تشاد
Jumhūriyat Tshād
République du Tchad




Flag Coat of arms

Area	
- Total	1,284,000 km ² (496,000 sq mi) ⁽¹⁾ (20th)
- Water (%)	1.9
Population	
- 2015 estimate	13,670,084 ⁽²⁾
- 2009 census	11,039,873 ⁽³⁾
- Density	8.6/km ² (22.3/sq mi)
GDP (PPP)	
- Total	2017 estimate \$29.730 billion ⁽⁴⁾ (123rd)
- Per capita	\$2,439 ⁽⁴⁾ (150th)





...another adventurous day in Chad

We took off on a 2-hour trip back to N'Djamena stopping on the way for more photos. When we bought some camel milk from some colourful women nomads along the road – we took some photographs. This was picked-up by a car with some local guys who reported to the police. In a short moment, the police came and was furious. After some pushing, shoving and pulling at our cameras we managed to get back into the car and took off. We took our memory cards out of the cameras as we suspected we could be stopped at the next check-point, should the police man have called ahead. Sure enough – when we arrived there was an angry welcome committee waiting for us, and they were not pleased. It was said to be the Chad Secrete Police. We had to step in to their office and show our pictures from mobile camera and system camera, and they were being very hostile. It did not get any better when I incidentally walked over their prayer mat with my shoes on. We spend an hour here and eventually got away with paying some 5000 CFA and a bottle of camel milk. No more pictures were taken on the way back to N'Djamena.



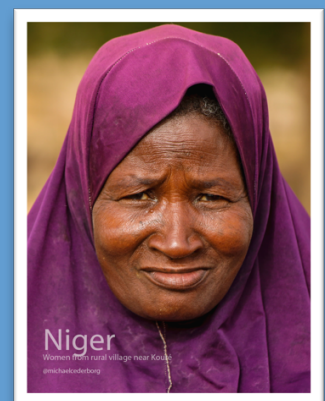
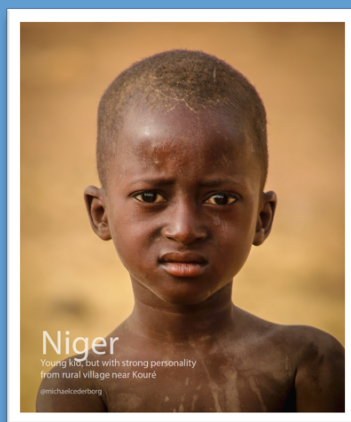


Parc du Kouré and Sunday market.... ...in the rural areas – country side – of Niger.

Our security detail picked us up early in the morning at ca: 06:30. We were ready to travel off to **Kouré Giraffe National Park** ca: 1 hours' drive from Niamey. We were travelling in two separate cars with a driver + an armed guard in each one. We reached the gate to the National Park, where a local guide joined us for the trip out to the National Park. They had improved the population of Giraffes' from some 15, 20 years ago to ca: 500 today. We had to drive out into the dessert/savanna for quite some time before being able to locate any number. We eventually found a group of some 15 Giraffes in one area. It was quite cool to be able to walk around and come so close to the Giraffes as we did.

We also visited a water-well where the locals were fetching water for the their heard. Very much the same set-up as I saw in the dessert of Sudan. We also visited some of the spread-out villages and managed to take some photos. Coming back out from the park we stopped at **the local Sunday market in Kodo, near Kouré**. This was really genuine with lots of people and products on sale including live stock. It might have helped that we had two military guys armed with us – as we were not messed with at all. We could also freely take pictures which was a blessing. We then drove back to Niamey and had our lunch on the shores of the mighty river Niger together with other locals. This was really nice. We then split up. The others went to a Cathedral and the local museum, whereas I stopped and looked at the Mosque and then headed for Gaweye hotel where I parked myself at the pool. Real nice as the temperature was approaching 45 degrees. **Dinner was taken at Cote Jardin**, one of the top ranked restaurants in town. I tried the Boeuf Bourguignon which was excellent.

Republic of Niger <i>République du Niger</i> (French)	
	
Flag	Coat of arms
Independence from France	
• Declared	3 August 1960
Area	
• Total	1,267,000 km ² (489,000 sq mi) (21st)
• Water (%)	0.02
Population	
• July 2016 estimate	18,638,600 ^(N) (61st)
• 2012 census	17,138,707
• Density	12.1/km ² (31.3/sq mi)
GDP (PPP)	
• Total	2016 estimate \$20,228 billion ^(N)
• Per capita	\$1,111 ^(N)





National Park du W.

The park which spreads into three countries in all...



This morning we had an even earlier start. We departed 05:45 AM and headed south towards **the National Park W ca: 150 km from Niamey**. I slept most of the time. We arrived around 07:45 and signed in at the park entrance also paying our park fee of 10,000 XAF per person. A guide joined us and off we went. The park stretches also into Burkina Faso. We spent until ca: 1 PM in the park. In all fairness, we did not see all that much game. We saw some antelopes, gazelles, warthogs, guinea fowls, crocs, baboons, various birds, buffaloes – but no giraffes nor elephants. We did stumble on some carcasses as well. On leaving the park, one of our two cars broke down and needed mending. We then switched so that the three of us and a driver could continue back to Niamey, and the rest remained to sort out the broken car.

The afternoon was spent again at **the Gaweye hotel pool**. We finished up at the last of the top three restaurants in town QC, run by a French woman. Very good food and wine again. They actually had two restaurants at the same place: One brasserie, where we ate, and a fine-dining gourmet restaurant – empty for the evening.



The Sunday market in the village of Kodo....





The ancient village of Tiébélé...

In the rural area, close to the border of Ghana in the south of the



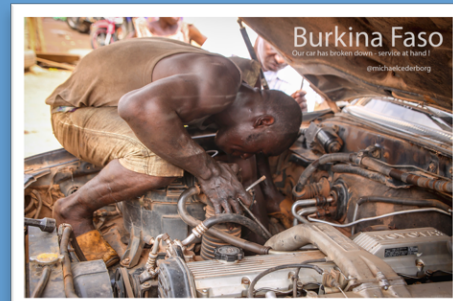
Area	
• Total	274,200 km ² (105,900 sq mi) (74th)
• Water (%)	0.146%
Population	
• 2014 estimate	17,322,796 ⁽¹⁾ (61st)
• 2006 census	14,017,262
• Density	64/km ² (165.8/sq mi) (145th)
GDP (PPP)	
• Total	2016 estimate \$32.745 billion ⁽²⁾
• Per capita	\$1,777 ⁽²⁾

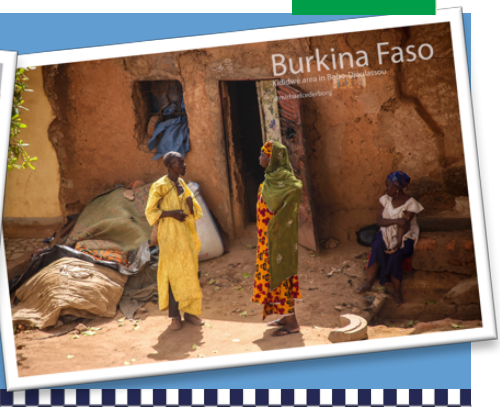
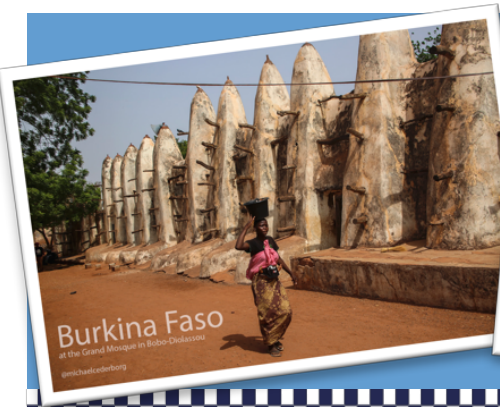
After a very nice breakfast we set-off to the south and the ancient and rural village of Tiébélé. We had some 200 km to cover on mostly good roads. We stopped along the way as always to have a look at things. On a stop half-way down, our driver could not get the car started again. We had to push-start the car as the starting-engine seemed out of order. We took a turn down at Pó and eventually reached our goal "The Royal courts of Tiébélé" near Corablé.

We were given two guides, one English for me and Bengt and one French for Hans. The entrance fee was 2000 CFA per person and 5000 CFA for the village improvements. We were then toured around the small village of some 100 houses and the home ca: 400 people. The Kassana people has their history dating back to the 15th century. We walked around the small alleys and did also have a chance to go inside to see the interior of the houses. The men build the houses whereas the women decorate the exterior with very beautiful motifs. This was a real treat and probably the best sight I have seen in Africa on all my travels. Absolutely amazing and really worth a visit from far away. Going back, we also saw a house being decorated on the outside by a group of some 10 women. When we stopped to photograph this activity, the become agitated and told us off. The even through cow-dung (used for the finishing layer of the house) in our direction, but fortunately without hitting us.

The car problems started again and in Pó we had to visit a repair shop. After spending a bit more than an hour there, they thought they had fixed the problem with leaking oil, but that was not the case. We had by this time, and after having had to push-start the car on a couple of occasions, had enough and decided to find another transport back home. We were extremely fortunate and got the first car passing to stop. We had our previous driver negotiate and pay for the transport all the 180-km trip back to Ouaga for us. Before taking off we had to fill-up for gasoline. This is done African style. We bought some 30 old bottles of Jim Beam Whiskey filled with gasoline, which were poured into the tank of the car – off we went. The guy drove like a mad man, but we did reach Ouaga in one piece thank god at around 5:30 PM. we decided to take dinner also this evening at the Yennenga lodge our lovely oasis and lodge in Ouagadougou.

We had a car-breakdown in the south and had to hitch a lift home....





Bobo Dioulasso and the southwest

The fine architecture of the Grand Mosque + Koumi village...



An early start this morning getting up at 04:50 AM in order to catch our domestic flight at 07:00 AM (45 minutes flight) down to Bobo. Fortunately, everything went very well. We left on time and landed at 07:35 already. Our driver, pre-arranged, Mr. Ismail (also known through LP) picked us up and transported us to the **hotel Les 2 Palmiers in the centre of Bobo**. We checked in had breakfast and negotiated the arrangement with Ismail for the day. He had his mind set on 50,000 CFA for the day, we had a figure more in line with 25,000 CFA in our minds. We planned to do a **visit to the Grand Mosque (main attraction of Bobo), the Kididwé area of Bobo, Kou Forest and Koumi village**. We figured this would take maximum 5 hours. This time we came a way winning the negotiations. Happens sometimes.

A first stop to the Grand Mosque where we paid an entrance fee of 1000 CFA to go inside and have tour around guided by the Imam himself. This was a nice visit. The mosque itself built in 1880 by mud. We then walked across the street and had to pay again 1000 CFA to enter into the poor and traditional quarters of Kididwé. This is not easily done without a guide as people then tend to be a bit hostile. Photography, is / can also be an issue. One has to ask before taking photos as a general rule. It was a very interesting tour around these old, but very poor quarters of Bobo. We also stumbled upon a wedding party with guests and music being played. We stopped and were invited to participate, take photos and even shake our booties a little bit.



From Bobo, we then went to Kou Forest and made a stop here to take a walking tour around the area. Nice and a bit cooler. We continued from Kou to the ancient village of Koumi. A rural and ancient village with both Christians as well as Animist. The village chief took us around for a small fee of 1000 CFA per person. Everything comes at a price in Africa. We were told: No pictures without asking first (strictly). The women here were quite hostile and we could not take photos as I would have liked. There was a funeral going on, but we were redirected not to interfere with this activity. There were some 3-400 people living in this old mud-house constructed village. The chief was also not very interested in explaining and showing us too much. We continued back to Bobo and parked at the L'Augerge Hotel in the centre. We had lunch and hoped for a nice afternoon in the sun by the pool. The heaven opened up and it started to pour down.

The evening was spent with first **taking dinner at our hotel – Les 2 Palmiers** – where we relaxed and had a couple of beers. We then walked ca: 1 km down to **the music club Le Bois d'Ebéné**. There was a local band playing for the evening west-African music. This was enjoyable and we then walked back to the hotel at mid-night after a good evening.

Pictures from a wedding party in Kididwé district of Bobo Dioulasso....

