

Dear Elspeth

Hereby I send you updated information on Cameroon as I promised you a couple of days ago.

January 24 we came back from a 53 days trip through Cameroon and as we heard you are working on a new edition of the Bradt guide, we thought you might be interested in some update information.

Cameroon 2-12-2010 until 24-1-2011

Our trip was organised by the Dutch travelagency Zwinkels Tours who are based in Bamenda. For the whole trip we had a 4wheeldrive car with driver and guide.

Douala: we stayed 1 night in the Akwa Palace Hotel which was good

Trip to the west:

Limbe: 2 nights in the Seme Beach Hotel which was a little disappointing

Buea: we went to the Mount Cameroon Ecotourism Board, who provided us a guide for a so called cultural tour. The tour included a visit to some of the German colonial buildings, like the Bismarck fountain, the post office, the former palace and the German graveyard. We walked up Mount Cameroon a bit, passing the prison, to see the water reservoir. We went to see the Tole tea plantation and a banana plantation. The whole tour, mostly by car, took about 3 hours and they charged us 18.000 CFA for 2 people.

Kumba: 2 nights in the Elongo Gardens Hotel which was good, but no other guests, food was good. We went to see the crater lake of Barombi and walked in 1,5 hour to the village at the other side of the lake and came back by pirogue which took 1 hour.

To get to Melong we had to go back to the coast first and then take the road to Douala for a while and then we took the main road to Nkongsamba. The short cut road from Kumba to Loum was too bad, even for a 4wheeldrive car.

Melong: 2 nights, the hotel Villa Luciole is very nice, we stayed in a comfortable bungalow, they have 8 rooms and 5 bungalows, the food was very good. Opposite of Villa Luciole is another option to sleep, Villa Kleber has rooms and bungalows, even a swimming pool, but this was not clean, as they did not have chemicals, there are good views from Villa Kleber. We preferred the smaller and more intimate Villa Luciole.

From Melong visit to the Manenguba craterlakes near Bangem, lunch in the Prestige Inn. Road to Bangem is very bad, it took us 2 hours to drive the distance of 30 km from Villa Luciole to Bangem.

Foumbot: Road from Melong to Foumbot is a good tarred road. Visit to the chefferie of Bandjoun, interesting museum.

Foumban: About 5 km outside Foumbot on the way to Foumban, we took a side road to the left which after 30 dusty minutes leads to the luxury Domaine de Petpenoun right at the lake. Here you have accommodation in rooms (55.000 CFA) or very luxury bungalows (80.000 CFA). You can either swim in the lake or in the pool, there is also a 18 hole golf course. There is a good but expensive restaurant, the place is beautiful but we were the only guests for 2 days.

On Friday visit to Foumban, from Petpenoun it takes about 1 hour to get to Foumban, we went to see the museum and waited for the sultan to leave the palace to go the mosque (about 12.30) and when he came back after something more than an hour, there was a big ceremony in front of the palace in which the sultan was receiving a lot of people.

After 2 nights in Petpenoun we drove to Kumbo (Banso), on the way very nice visit to a Fulani family, very friendly and inviting people who live in very clean and nicely decorated houses. Lunch stop in the dusty little town of Jakiri.

Kumbo, 1 night in the Fomo '92 hotel which is o.k., but no more than that, but we preferred this hotel to the Merryland Hotel which had no customers, in the best rooms the light was not working and the boy at the reception was not very interested in doing something.

Together with a local guide from Green Tours, we went to a waterfall and cave 10 km (almost 1 hour by car) outside Kumbo passing the hospital where they do heart surgery. This local guide did not know about a cave with skulls as you mentioned in your Bradt guidebook.

Drive from Kumbo to Bamenda: 2 hours to Ndop, road is very bad. From Ndop it is less than 1 hour to Bamenda, road is good (tar)

Bamenda

We stayed 3 nights and later on another 2 nights in the guest house of the Zwinkels family, called Zwinkels House. There are only 4 bed rooms in the house, so if they have a smaller private tour, they let people stay in their guest house. There is a Cameroonian lady living in the house, she also does the cooking. It is a beautiful house more or less at the entrance of Bamenda (coming from Ndop on the left side), but not on walking distance from the town center, we loved to relax on the veranda. The main road is only a couple of minutes walk and we bought our wine over there in a little shop, there is also a pleasant bar next to the little shop.

We have been visiting the interesting palaces of Bafut and Mankon, but also worthwhile was the visit to the sisters of the Saint Joseph's Children and Adult Home (SAJOCAH) in Bafut, where handicapped children and some adults are treated for their handicap. Twice a year, doctors from Holland come to operate these children/adults and the sisters take care of the treatment after the operation. They provide physiotherapy and also train them to support themselves. They do a very good job.

Belo

After 3 nights in the Zwinkels House in Bamenda we went for 3 nights to the Zwinkels Trekkers Camp in Belo, 1 hour drive from Bamenda. Although not completely finished yet (building a beautiful pavilion for eating and relaxation is in progress), the camp is located on a wonderful spot completely in the nature. and they have in total 2 bungalows (2 twin rooms) with own bathroom and 5 bouckaroos with 10 rooms (5 twin and 5 double rooms) with shared facilities. Lodging is on full board basis.

On the way from Bamenda to the camp, we took a side trip to see the impressive Ndawara Highland Tea Estate, where they showed us the whole process of the tea making. The pottery at Ndop of the Presbyterian Church is also worthwhile a visit.

The area around the Zwinkels Trekkers Camp is wonderful for walking and together with the manager of the camp, Nicolas, who is a sub chief, we walked for a day passing different villages. Also horse riding and other walks are provided. By car we went to see Lake Nyos, because of the very bad road, this was a very long drive of 4 hours and 4 hours back, but through a great scenery.

Yaounde: After more than a week in the area of Bamenda we drove in 6 hours to Yaounde, here we stayed in the very nice Jully Guest Hotel. The hotel is located at a quiet spot in the center of town, about 300 meters from the restaurant La Terrasse and a 7 minutes walk from the Cafe de Yaounde restaurant. The intimate hotel provides beautiful and clean apartments with bedroom, living room, kitchen and bathroom. There is a pleasant garden with a small, but very clean swimming pool. Prices of the apartments vary from 50-70.000 CFA including breakfast for 1 person. You can also park your car safely at Jully Guest. Highly recommended.

Trip to the north:

We took the train from Yaounde to Ngaoundere, we had first class tickets for the couchette, which sleeps 4 people. The train station in Yaounde was very well organized, including a brand new air conditioned waiting room for first class passengers. On each car there was a guard, so nobody without a ticket could get on board, there was a reasonable meal provided in the evening and you could also have breakfast. The train is old, but the beds were clean, it was a rather pleasant train ride which took 15 hours.

Ngaoundere, we stayed 1 night in the Transcam Hotel, which is o.k. We visited the palace of the Lamido in Ngaoundere.

We spent 2 nights at the Benoue National Park in the Campement du Buffle Noir and were pleasantly surprised by the accommodation. They have been doing some renovation work, the bungalows are freshly painted and the restaurant provides good food and the staff is very friendly. Apart from the hippos and crocodiles, some antelopes and baboons, we didn't really see many animals which is a pity, because the park is very beautiful.

Garoua, hotel Le Relais de st. Hubert, the rooms in the main building are not very nice, the bungalows in the garden behind are much nicer and some have been renovated. The restaurant does not have much choice.

At the bridge over the Benoue river in Garoua you can find a guy who is able to call a hippo called "mama Africa" He is the only person who can call this female hippo and after a while she will come to him. They are asking far too much money, but he will finally do it for 10.000 CFA, with the guy in the back of our pick-up, we drove to the beautiful and very peaceful place where this hippo family lives. And indeed after a while the hippo came to him although she was rather shy.

Alantika Mountains

From Garoua it was a 6 hour drive (fast driver) to Wangai at the Alantika Mountains. Here we pitched our tents at the palace of the very friendly lamido of Wangai. Next morning we left early on foot to visit the villages of the Koma people. By 10 o'clock it was too hot to continue, but we were at a nice stream where there was a beautiful natural pool with wonderful cool and fresh water. A great place to swim and to wait until it gets cooler, around 4 o'clock we continued our walk for another hour before we pitched our tents in a Koma village. Early next morning we walked back in 2,5 hours to Wangai and drove to Garoua.

Maroua

The drive from Garoua to Maroua takes about 3,5 hours. We spend 2 nights in the lovely Le Relais de Porte Mayo. The place is well run, bungalows are good, garden is a pleasant place to spend the afternoon and the food is excellent as is the service. The breakfast is also very good, but takes some time. If you have your own laptop, you can use the internet, they provide a cable and you pay 1000 CFA for a day use. Price of a bungalow is 19.000 CFA.

During the day in Maroua we visited the "forgery" at the foot of the montagne de chevre, near hotel Maroua Palace, where people make utensils out of old car parts. Also interesting is the place where you can see the process of leather making, it is a bit smelly.

On the way to Waza we visited the palace in Oudjilla, road from Mora to Oudjilla is rather difficult and you need a 4wheeldrive car. Impressive visit to the palace, we met the king who seems to be 99 years old, his youngest wife is 26 years old and the youngest child is 4 years old!??

From Maroua to Mora takes 2 hours, road is in bad condition, a lot of potholes. From Mora to Waza you need 1,5 hour.

Waza, Campement de Waza, the bungalows have recently been painted, but overall this accommodation, although on a beautiful location, is not maintained, poor service as well.

We were lucky to see a lion couple on the first of January at 7 o'clock in the morning! Other animals we saw include a group of 15 elephants, the famous horse antelope, 2 giraffes, some warthogs.

After 1 night in the Campement de Waza we drove through the park to Maga, which is a very nice route. By 2 p.m. we arrived at the well maintained and friendly Safari Danay which is owned by a Frenchman married to a Cameroonian lady. Very nice bungalows on a nice piece of ground with some antelopes walking around. The restaurant serves good food.

Pouss

Next morning we visited Pouss and watched the wood and fish market in Maga, had lunch in Safari Danay before driving back to Maroua (2 hours) for another night in Le Relais de Porte Mayo.

The triangle Maroua - Waza - Maga and back to Maroua was very nice, much better than driving from Maroua to Waza and the same way back.

Rhumsiki

From Maroua we drove to Rhumsiki (3 hours). We enjoyed the Campement de Rhumsiki, clean and comfortable bungalows, nice swimming pool and good restaurant. There is a French manager at the moment.

Before leaving the North we wanted to spend 1 night at Lagdo, but the Lagoon Hotel is totally run down, there is only 1 man at the spot who has a key of the rooms and there seems to be a lady who does cooking for guests, but there were no guests and we left the hotel after seeing the place. It is such a pity, because the location is great, hopefully there will be someone in the future to renovate the hotel.

Many times flights from Maroua are cancelled and people are transported by bus to Garoua to take the plane from there to Yaounde and Douala.

Trip to the south:

Yaounde to Bertoua, 4,5 hours excellent road, overnight in Christiana Hotel, rather modern hotel, good clean rooms, reasonable food.

Bertoua to Yokadouma, 6 hours red gravel road, we came across a lot of trucks with big trees leaving the rainforest. We slept in the friendly Elephant hotel, rooms are rather basic, but clean.

Lobeke National Park

From Yokadouma we drove through the rainforest to Mambele near the Lobeke National Park, 4 hours. We stayed 1 night at the Kombo Base Camp. There were beautiful new wooden bungalows with private bathroom, the camp has a generator, there is a comfortable open air dining room, you have to bring your own food. In the night we enjoyed a real concert of birds and insects.

Lobeke National Park, our car drove us to the drop off point, 40 km from the Lobeke N.P. office and here we started our walk, together with our Pygmy guide Petit Jean, a ranger and some porters, to the first viewing tower which took us about 2,5 hours crossing several little streams.

The tower is rather old and shakes with every step, on the top about 6 meters off the ground, there are 2 rooms. We stayed 2 nights at the tower, there is nothing at the tower, so you have to bring your own mattress and sleeping bag, as well as food and water.

The tower gives a good view to an open field on which Sitatunga's come to graze and buffalos at night. Unfortunately we didn't see gorilla's although we could hear and smell them.

Lomie

Driving back to Yaounde we took a different route and we drove the road through Lomie, 4 hours from Yokadouma on a reasonable gravel road. In Lomie we stayed in the friendly Raffia Hotel, good rooms and restaurant. Rooms cost about 15.000 CFA, older rooms are cheaper. From Lomie to the main road near Abong Mbang takes 3 hours (120 km) and then another 2,5 hours from Abong Mbang to Yaounde.

Kribi

Our last destination in Cameroon was Kribi, we chose to drive through Ebolowa, 2 hours on an excellent road. From Ebolowa there is a gravel road to Kribi which is good until Akom II (half way) and then the road becomes bad, but they are working on the road, as the trucks with wood have to drive this road as well. Ebolowa to Kribi takes 4 hours.

In Kribi we stayed in the excellent Ilomba Hotel, excellent service and food, very comfortable rooms. We once had lunch in the Jully Guest hotel in Kribi, but were disappointed, very nice was a dinner at the fish market at the small harbour of Kribi.

During our whole trip through Cameroon we had 2 different, but both excellent, guides from Zwinkels Tours and our drivers were very safe and reliable drivers. We are very satisfied with the service of this Dutch owned tour company which we highly recommend.

We hope this information will be useful for the new Bradt guide.

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