



# **Volunteer Handbook**

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## **Welcome!**

Welcome to Ape Action Africa - we hope that you have a fantastic experience with us in Cameroon!

This volunteer guide has been prepared to help you understand Ape Action Africa and Cameroon before you join the project. We have tried to cover everything but if you have a question that has not been answered here, please do not hesitate to ask your volunteer co-ordinator. Please ensure that you read the whole handbook, particularly if you have been accepted as a volunteer because there is a lot of information here to help you to prepare for your trip and to understand what to expect in Cameroon.

Please note that the information in this handbook is not exhaustive and further detailed guidance will be given to you on arrival at the project. This will include our health and safety policies and some house rules that will ensure your stay with us goes smoothly and is enjoyable for everyone.

## **1 About Ape Action Africa**

Ape Action Africa is a charity committed to great ape conservation in Cameroon. Our front line conservation work includes rescuing gorillas, chimpanzees and monkeys who have been orphaned as a result of the illegal bushmeat trade and the pet trade. We provide them with individual care, and give them a safe forest sanctuary home where they can live with their own kind.

It is important that we work directly with local communities to help them to develop alternative sources of income and ensure a greater understanding of primates and the importance of their long-term protection. We have a thriving education programme working with schools and adult groups in the area around Mefou and in Yaoundé, reaching out to thousands of children and adults every year.

Ape Action Africa is based at two sites:

- **Mvog Betsi Zoo**  
The zoo is run by the Cameroonian government and Ape Action Africa takes care only of the primates which includes mandrills, drills, baboons and several different species of guenon, all primates native to Cameroon. The zoo is in the heart of Yaoundé in a district called Melen.
- **Mefou Primate Sanctuary**  
This is our main site, approximately 30km south of Yaoundé and encompasses a 900 hectare area of swamp and forest, partially degraded through deforestation.  
Mefou is our forest site and will be your home for the duration of your stay on the project. Ape Action Africa is based in a village called Ndangang where there is accommodation for the workers and volunteers. The

accommodation for everyone is basic – see section 4.2 for more information about your accommodation.

There are several enclosures at Mefou, home to gorillas, chimpanzees and monkeys in groups of various sizes. There is a quarantine area for our new arrivals and a vet clinic where we care for our sick animals. We also have a nursery group of young chimps.

Both sites are open to visitors, and we are working with the Government and local companies to attract more visitors to Mefou. This allows people to see the native animals in a more natural environment and educate them about the need for conservation, while also providing us with a much needed source of income.

There is a lot more information about our project on our website at [www.apeactionafrica.org](http://www.apeactionafrica.org)

### **Charity details**

UK Registered charity:	Cameroon Wildlife Aid Fund
Charity working name:	Ape Action Africa
Registered charity number:	1057061

Address	Guthrie Rd Clifton Bristol BS8 3HA
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US 501(c)(3)	Ape Action Africa Inc
Tax id	76-0834562
Address	123 S. 10th Street Salina, KS 67401

Email	<a href="mailto:volunteer@apeactionafrica.org">volunteer@apeactionafrica.org</a>
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### **Senior management team:**

Caroline McLaney	Chief Executive
Rachel Hogan	Director
Bibila Tafon	General Manager & head of veterinary services

## 2 About Cameroon

### 2.1 Overview

Cameroon is a diverse country and there are many websites that can give you lots of information before you travel. As you can see from the map below, you will be living and working in the south of Cameroon, where the climate is not as arid as in the north.



Yaounde has a population of about 1.68m and is a very busy, hectic place. You will often hear of Yaounde referred to as ‘the town’. The forest is completely different, even though only 30 minutes away from the city.

Some facts about Cameroon:

- Population: 18.9 million (UN estimate, 2008)
- Capital: Yaounde
- Area: 465,458 sq km (179,714 sq miles)
- Major languages: French, English, languages of Bantu, Semi-Bantu and Sudanic groups
- Major religions: Christianity, Islam, indigenous beliefs
- Life expectancy: 45 years (men), 46 years (women) (UN)
- AIDS/HIV: 5.5% of the adult population is estimated to be living with HIV (UN report, 2010)
- Poverty: 50% of the population lives on US\$2 a day or less (UN 2008)
- Monetary **unit**: 1 CFA (Communaute Financiere Africaine) franc = 100 centimes. This is currently fixed to euro at €1 = 655.957.

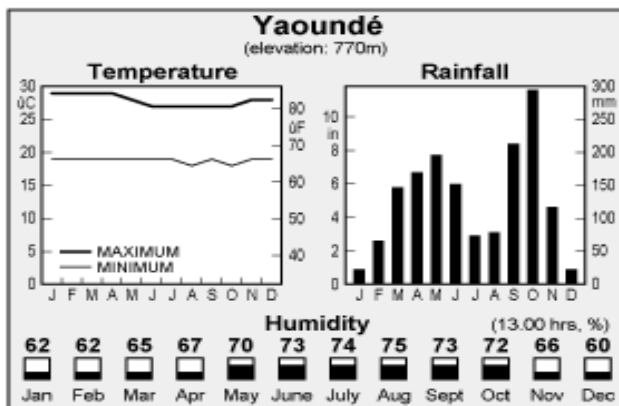
- Main exports: Crude oil and petroleum products, timber, cocoa, aluminium, coffee, rubber
- GDP: US\$ 25.07bn (UN estimate 2008)
- Internet domain: .cm
- International dialling code: +237
- President: Veteran leader Paul Biya won a new seven-year term in presidential elections in October 2004, with more than 70% of the vote. He has been in power since 1982, representing the Cameroonian People’s Democratic Movement.

## 2.2 Cameroon climate

The climate in Cameroon varies across the country, with desert plains and savannah in the north, mountains in the central regions and tropical rain forest in the south and east.

You will be living in a tropical rain forest, which is hot and humid. The temperature is relatively constant throughout the year, the main seasons being defined by the rain. There is a small rainy season that usually starts towards the end of March and lasts until June. The main rainy season is in September and October which means that the forest becomes very muddy!

Typical weather patterns in Yaounde are:



However, the weather patterns are changing and are far less predictable than used to be the case. It is therefore advisable to take waterproofs with you at any time during the year.

## 2.3 Language

Most of our workers in the forest site are Francophone, which means that their first language is French. Some of them can understand some English, and a minority are Anglophone (first language is English), but it is preferable if you can speak French. We do not expect you to be fluent but we expect you to be able to make yourself understood in French – if French is not your strong point, we ask that you make every effort before you join the project to improve your language skills. It is advisable to take a dictionary and/or language books with you to assist you as you may be working directly with a worker who only speaks French.

In addition to French and English, there are 24 major African language groups. Among the many African languages spoken in Cameroon, the five major ones are Bamiléké, Ewondo, Bamoun, Fulfulde and Arabic. Some of our workers also speak pidgin English. We don't expect to you to be able to communicate in any of these languages but if you can learn some basics while you are with us, it will be greatly appreciated by our workers!

### **3 Recruitment of volunteers**

#### **3.1 The recruitment process**

You can download an application form from our website at <http://www.apeactionafrica.org/get-involved/volunteer>

We have a two-stage interview process, which will be either by phone or Skype, in English. If you are successful at the first interview, a second interview will be arranged for you as soon as possible.

You will be informed quickly whether you have been successful or not. If you are offered a placement, we will ask you to pay your deposit within 2 weeks and we will take up your references. The deposit is not refundable if you cancel or request to move your placement.

Please note that everyone involved in the recruitment and management of the volunteer programme also have demanding full time jobs. This means that emails cannot always be answered immediately so please be patient if you are experiencing a delay - we will reply to you as soon as possible.

#### **3.2 The costs**

We ask our volunteers for a donation to the charity for two reasons:

- We are a small charity with a lot of animals to care for so we always need help with fundraising. Volunteer donations go directly to the project to fund our running costs.
- Fundraising events are an important method of raising awareness about the project and the issues facing the great apes in the wild. It is therefore a good way for volunteers to get involved and help the charity in positive ways before arrival.

The donation is:

- £1,000 for a 2 month stay
- £1,250 for a 3 month stay.

If you are successful at interview, we ask for a non refundable deposit of £100 within 2 weeks of being accepted as a volunteer. This will secure your place and we cannot reserve a place for you until we receive your deposit.

Our programme is very popular and we only accept a small number of volunteers at any one time. We therefore cannot guarantee that we will be able to accommodate a request to change the dates of your visit after a place

has been reserved for you. We are always as flexible as possible but if we cannot rearrange your date, the deposit remains non-refundable.

The balance of the donation is payable at least 8 weeks before you leave for Cameroon. The donation is not refundable in the event of cancellation or early return.

If the final donation has not been received before the deadline we reserve the right to release your place and offer this to other volunteers who are able to cover these periods.

In addition to the donation, it will cost you €305 Euros for every month in Cameroon for your food and accommodation. This is payable on arrival at Ape Action Africa. We ask that you take this with you **in cash**, in Euros, and give it to the Director when you arrive – this is so that they have sufficient money to buy your food for the duration of your stay. If you leave the project before the end of your placement, these costs are not refundable because we cannot fill your vacated place at short notice.

On departure you will need to pay a departure tax of 10,000 CFA. You will need to bring sufficient euros to cover this cost.

Other costs to budget for are your flights, visa, insurance and vaccinations – these vary from country to country so you will need to research these costs yourself.

There is not a lot to spend money on in the forest so once you have paid for your board and lodgings, additional living costs should be minimal. If you would like things such as soft drinks, beer, cigarettes etc, you will need to bring additional money with you to cover the cost of these items. You will also need reserve funds in case you need any medical treatment. Further details are provided later in the money section.

We reserve the right to increase the donation and the current cost of accommodation in the future. Increased costs will not apply to people who are already accepted on to the programme but not yet departed for Cameroon. If the costs are increased before being offered a place and you have been sent an earlier edition of the handbook or downloaded one from the website, the revised costs will apply. Costs are updated on the website immediately so the website always has the most recent information. It is therefore important to check the website before your interview to see if there have been any increases in costs that might have an impact on your decision to continue with your application.



## **4. Preparing for your trip**

### **4.1. Flights**

Volunteers who wish to be collected from the airport by our driver must fly into Nsimalen Airport, Yaoundé. Several airlines fly into Yaoundé, including Air France, Swiss, Kenya Airways and Brussels Airlines.

We cannot collect people from Douala so If you choose to fly into Douala airport, you will have to make your own travel arrangements to Yaoundé, which is approximately 4 hours' drive.

Air Maroc flies into Yaoundé but lands in the very early hours of the morning (3/4am) and also departs very early. We cannot collect people in the early hours of the morning. We will collect people from 7am so if you choose an airline that arrives in the very early hours, you must remain in the airport building until our driver arrives.

We recommend that you buy a ticket that allows you to change the return date. On occasion, volunteers have had to leave Cameroon earlier than planned and they had booked non-transferable tickets. This meant that they had to purchase new tickets to return home and the cost was not covered by insurance. A flexible ticket is more expensive, but nowhere near as expensive as a new ticket.

### **4.2. Visas**

You will need a visitor visa for the length of your stay with us but before you can get a visa, you need a letter of invitation from Cameroon. This is what you need to do:

- Once you have been accepted onto the programme and we have discussed available dates, book your flight.
- When your flights are confirmed, email your flight details to the volunteer co-ordinator together with a scan of your passport, passport number and date of expiry.
- We will send these details to Cameroon and they will organise your invitation. Your volunteer co-ordinator will normally apply for your invitation about a month before departure.
- Your invitation will be emailed back to the volunteer co-ordinator to forward on to you.
- When you have received your invitation, send it with your visa application form and other required documents to your Cameroon embassy.

Please speak to your embassy to find out what other documents they might ask for in addition to your application form, invitation and passport (which must have at least 6 months before expiry). The requirements vary from country to country so we cannot set out all the details here. They also change their requirements so it is essential that you check for up to date information. There will be a fee for your visa that also varies between countries so please ask your embassy.

Visas are normally turned round fairly quickly but it is advisable not to leave it to the last minute as things can go wrong. However, if you are applying for a visa in the UK, you cannot apply too early because they have stopped using 'valid from' dates so visas start from the date of processing. We have had several visas from the UK expire while volunteers are in Cameroon and it costs in the region of £55 to extend visas in Cameroon.

### **4.3. Health requirements**

There are many diseases that can be transmitted from primates to humans and vice versa. Our animals have all had health checks and screenings but they are very susceptible to diseases brought in by volunteers.

All vaccinations must be at least 2 weeks old on arrival at the project. This is to allow your immunity levels to rise so please don't leave vaccinations to the last minute.

The following are **mandatory** requirements before being allowed to work at Ape Action Africa:

#### **4.3.1. The following vaccinations must be up to date:**

- Tetanus
- Polio
- Yellow Fever (compulsory for entry into Cameroon, certificate required)
- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- Typhoid
- Meningococcal meningitis A and C
- Measles, mumps and rubella

#### **4.3.2. TB**

You must have proof of a negative TB skin test that is not more than 6 months' old or proof that you have been vaccinated against TB.

#### **4.3.3. Malaria prophylaxis and treatment**

Malaria is very prevalent and is a high risk in Cameroon. Prophylactic medication such as Mefloquine (Lariam), Malarone or Doxycycline is mandatory. Please check with your doctor to make sure that you are taking the most suitable malaria preventative treatment – chloroquine resistance is a problem in Cameroon so it is essential that you have up to date medical advice.

You should also discuss treatment options with your doctor ie which drugs should you take and which should you avoid with the prophylactic medication you have chosen. Drugs usually available in Cameroon include: quinine (Quinimax), Artesunate and Artemether compounds including Coartem (combination Artemether and Lumefantrine), Fansidar.

NB Malarone is not available in Cameroon.

The most effective prevention for malaria is taking your prophylaxis without fail, wearing long sleeved shirts, long trousers and socks to keep skin covered, using insect repellent especially from dusk until morning, and using mosquito nets sprayed with insecticide.

The following are optional but recommended:

#### **4.3.4. HIV test**

We recommend that you have an HIV test prior to your arrival to ensure that your immune system is competent to ward off tuberculosis, malaria and a variety of other potentially deadly diseases that are prevalent in Cameroon.

#### **4.3.5. Rabies**

As far as we know, there have been no instances of rabies at the project or in the surrounding villages since the project was established in the forest in 2001. There are several dogs in the local villages and we therefore recommend that you are vaccinated against rabies.

You must also check this list with your doctor to make sure you are getting the most recent advice and medication.

Your yellow fever certificate will be checked at the airport before your passport and they will not let you in the country without it. It is therefore a good idea to keep your certificate with your passport. If you cannot present your certificate on arrival, they will vaccinate you at the airport. This will be administered by the local authorities at a charge and may not be to the same hygienic standards that you may be used to.

It is your responsibility to make sure that your vaccinations are complete and up to date. You must ensure that vaccinations and test results are written in your vaccination certificate or you have a letter from your doctor stating that you have had the mandatory vaccinations above and you are TB negative.

We will ask to see your vaccination record on arrival in the forest and if it is not complete, you will not be allowed to work with the animals. This is for your protection as well as theirs.

If you are on specific medication, you need to make sure that you bring sufficient for the duration of your placement, as supplies of your medication may not be available. We also need to know about any medical conditions in case you may need treatment whilst in Cameroon. This should be discussed with us before you leave for Cameroon as, whilst we make every effort to help people during their stay with us, we cannot be responsible if you do not disclose medical conditions to us before you leave your home country.

#### **4.4. Insurance**

Volunteers cannot begin a placement without medical insurance that includes cover for emergency hospital treatment for medical and accidental risks and

medical evacuation and repatriation costs. We recommend a minimum sum insured of £5,000,000.

You must also be covered for working with primates. Trailfinders is one company that will cover you for working with primates for a small additional premium.

We will require sight of your insurance documents and you will be required to complete a form on arrival at the forest with your insurance details, emergency contact details and any medical issues that we need to be aware. If you do not have medical insurance on arrival or the policy that you have is inadequate, we will take you town so that you can buy a policy online. Ape Action Africa is not responsible for any potential medical bills for you.

#### **4.5. Packing**

We have given you some idea of things to bring with you in section 6. There will be very limited opportunity to purchase items once you are in Cameroon and we cannot organise for parcels sent from home to reach you, so please ensure that you bring everything you may need. Please also try to minimise any packaging you bring with you to reduce your impact on the environment in the forest.

#### **4.6. Keep in touch**

If you are not sure of anything before you leave, please contact your volunteer co-ordinator. Please also make sure that we have contact details for you if you are travelling before arriving at Cameroon so that we can contact you up to the date of departure if required.

### **5. In Cameroon**

#### **5.1. Airport arrival**

On arrival at Nsimalen Airport in Yaoundé, a representative of Ape Action Africa will be there to collect you. They will be holding a sign with the charity's name on so that you can easily identify them.

In very rare circumstances, you may find that there is no one at the airport when you arrive but please do not worry! The only reason that this would happen is because of an emergency on the project. If there is no one there, please wait and for your own safety **please do not leave the airport buildings.**

If you have not been collected within an hour, please call the emergency contact numbers that we emailed you in the week before your departure.

After you have been collected from the airport, you will be taken straight to Mefou Primate Sanctuary, which is about 30 minutes drive from the airport. This is where you will live and work during your stay with us in Cameroon. Mefou is on the airport side of town and so you will not have the opportunity to visit Yaoundé or its amenities on your way to the forest.

## **5.2. Induction**

The General Manager will arrange to meet you at the start of your placement to give you an introduction to the project, explain our policies and go through your allocated work programme.

Chimpanzees and gorillas are unpredictable and potentially very dangerous wild animals that can cause serious injuries. It is therefore absolutely essential that you follow all instructions given to you by our staff. We have written health and safety policies and a protocol that must be followed if animals escape. The General Manager will go through these with you and you must make sure that you fully understand them for your health and safety and that of the animals.

Volunteers must never go within 'grabbing' distance of enclosures housing adult chimpanzees. This also applies to returning volunteers who wish to see animals they know from a previous visit who now live with adult chimps. You will not understand the group dynamics and it is very dangerous to assume that because an animal remembers you from a previous visit, it is safe to go near them – it isn't safe and you must not go near enough for the chimps to be able to touch you.

The General Manager will also ask to see your vaccination record, negative TB test and insurance documents. As noted above, you will be asked to complete a form with any medical issues we need to be aware of, details of emergency contact details and insurance policy details.

When you are happy and have understood everything that the General Manager has explained to you, you will be asked to sign to confirm that you have read and understood the project policies and animal escape protocol.

## **5.3. Health**

As stated in paragraph 4.4, volunteers cannot begin placements without adequate medical insurance.

It is essential that you check with your doctor about all health matters before leaving for Cameroon. Many diseases are transferable from humans to primates and vice versa. It is essential that you have had all the necessary vaccinations listed in paragraph 4.3 but please also check with your doctor. In addition to telling your doctor that you are going to Cameroon, tell him/her that you will be working with primates.

You must tell the General Manager or the Controller immediately if you feel unwell at any time during your stay. **All contact with the animals, including preparing food, must be stopped until you have fully recovered, even if it is just a mild cold.** Diseases can be transmitted very easily to the animals and this can be fatal to baby chimpanzees or monkeys, many of whom arrive with compromised immune systems.

It is not uncommon for people to feel unwell during their first few weeks in Cameroon, much of which is likely to be due to the change in climate. The heat and humidity can be exhausting and you will need some time to acclimatise. We recommend that you drink as much water as possible and rest if you need to.

We can organise for you to purchase any medication that you need and if necessary, we will take you town to see a doctor. We recommend that you bring lots of paracetamol, ibuprofen, anti-diarrhoea tablets and antihistamines. Note that doctors will charge for every visit and the cost of all treatment and medication is your responsibility. Ape Action Africa cannot buy drugs for you.

There are many biting insects in the forest and even though you are covered up, it is inevitable that you will have itchy bites. Some volunteers have shown strong allergic reactions as a result of over scratching so we recommend that you bring antihistamines creams as a minimum, cortico-steroid, antibiotic creams if possible (not available in all countries without a prescription).

Intestinal parasites (protozoa and worms) are common amongst humans and non-human primates, even though staff and animals are regularly de-wormed. If you are contaminated, treatment can be purchased from town. Maintaining good hygiene and washing your hands regularly will help to prevent contamination.

For the good health of our animals, volunteers and workers, good personal hygiene is essential. This is not always easy as there may not be running water and no constant supply of hot water but it is important that basic hygiene rules are followed to prevent cross contamination and sickness. This includes keeping areas clean and tidy and keeping animal and human food and utensils completely separate. We recommend you bring antibacterial hand wash with you.

Cuts and scratches can become quickly infected because of the hot and humid climate so wounds must be disinfected immediately.

If you are unwell when you return home, please make sure that you tell your doctor that you have spent some time in Cameroon so that tropical diseases can be considered. You should also tell the doctor that you have been working with primates.

#### **5.4. The work**

Life is likely to be very different to anything that you are used to. The work is physically demanding, it can be emotionally draining and the days are long and hot so this is definitely not a holiday. Volunteering for us requires flexibility, resilience, patience, enthusiasm and a lot of dedication. However, the rewards from working with amazing primates outweigh the difficulties that you will encounter.

Volunteers work 7 days a week. You will be given a day to rest after your arrival because the forest climate is hot and humid and it will take time for you to adapt and you will inevitably be tired after your flight.

It is generally not possible to organise days off during your stay because caring for animals is a 7 day a week job. If you wish to leave the project a few days early to go travelling, you must discuss this with the General Manager at the start of your placement.

The General Manager will go through the work programme with you. The work allocated to you will depend on the needs of the project at the time. However, your programme is not set in stone and can change on a regular basis. You must be adaptable and able to respond to the needs of the project at any given time. Some examples of the work our previous volunteers have been involved in are:

- Chimpanzee or monkey nursery animal husbandry – cleaning and feeding
- Cleaning satellite cages
- Cleaning food magazines (containers for storing food)
- Quarantine animal husbandry
- Construction work

Sometimes you will be working with other volunteers, sometimes on your own or with our local workers.

If you have any concerns with your work programme, please talk to the General Manager so that we have the opportunity to address any problems you may have.

We must stress that we cannot guarantee that you will get direct, hands on contact with the animals. It is our policy to minimise human contact with the animals but when they arrive on our doorstep, most of them need 24 hour care. This job will go to a Cameroonian keeper as this helps with the long term recovery of the animal but if there is not a Cameroonian available, we do ask our long term volunteers to hand rear - so the possibility is there but it is by no means guaranteed. This type of role is very demanding and should not be taken lightly – it's a 24 hour day, 7 days a week job.

Despite their appearance, gorillas are not robust animals, particularly when they arrive with us, usually in a very physically and emotionally traumatised condition. They therefore require the specialist care of our experienced



keepers. Our volunteers therefore do not work with the gorillas, which again is solely in the interests of the welfare of the gorillas.

However, you will live near the animals in our care, including the gorillas, so even if you are not involved in hand rearing, you will still be able to spend time near them and have a memorable experience in their company.

A typical day could be:

6.15	breakfast
6.45	start to work on your daily duties.
12.00/13.00	you have one hour for lunch and rest
17.00	the working day finishes

However, anyone hand rearing will be expected to work around the clock as young primates require 24 hour care. If you are fortunate enough to be hand rearing, you must accept that your primary responsibility is for the care of the animal that you have been trusted with. If the animal is sick, you will not be able to socialise with other volunteers and, depending on the nature of the illness, you may have to spend your days in the hospital in the forest.

19.00-20.00	Dinner
21.30	Generator turned off, the day finishes

This is not intended to be a rigid timetable - these hours are a guide only and may change, but this gives you some idea of how your day could be planned. Please note that working with animals is unpredictable and we expect all our volunteers to be flexible in their approach to the work required.

Please remember: volunteers are here to assist our workers, not supervise them. All volunteers are asked to respect the Ape Action Africa management and all workers. If you have a problem with any worker or their work, please speak to the General Manager or Controller and do not attempt to try to resolve the issue yourself.

### **5.5. Relaxation**

At the end of the working day and before dinner, volunteers usually have a shower and relax. Dinner is served at 19.00. We have a local cook who will be responsible for preparing your food. If there are any problems with the food, please speak to the General Manager or the Controller.

There are 2 bars in the village where you can purchase alcoholic and soft drinks. Volunteers are asked to return to the volunteer kitchen, known as the Little Hilton, after purchasing drinks for evening relaxation.



## **5.6. Alcohol, drugs and smoking**

Volunteers are not allowed to drink alcohol during working hours. In the evening after work has completed for the day, volunteers can drink alcohol in moderation in the Little Hilton. Volunteers who are hand rearing animals are not allowed to drink alcohol at anytime because you must be able to respond quickly to the animal in your care. Alcohol decreases your reaction times and this could be fatal for a sick infant animal.

We work with potentially very dangerous animals and you must be able to follow safety protocols and react quickly at all times. We therefore cannot allow volunteers to be drunk or using drugs on site.

Volunteers who are drunk or are under the influence of drugs at any time of the day or night will be asked to leave the project immediately.

Using, buying or distributing illegal drugs (including marijuana) or any other controlled substances is strictly prohibited and any such activity will result in immediate dismissal from the project.

Smoking is not allowed in any of the project's buildings, including your bedroom and the volunteer kitchen. If you are hand rearing an animal, you are not allowed to smoke at all. Smoking is allowed outside but you must not smoke anywhere near an animal enclosure. Please dispose of matches and cigarettes carefully, particularly in the dry season.

## **5.7. Accommodation**

Volunteers live in purpose built accommodation near the village in the forest. There are four rooms furnished with a bed and a cupboard. You will need to bring your own sheet, pillow, sleeping bag and mosquito net.

Each room has a bathroom comprising a toilet, sink and shower, all of which operate using rainwater collected in a tank. If there has been little rain, you will have to wash and flush the toilet using a bucket of water.

You must expect to share your room and bathroom facilities with other volunteers. Depending on the number of volunteers at the time, male and female volunteers may have to share rooms but we endeavour to avoid this situation. Bathroom facilities could also be mixed.

You will also share your accommodation with insects (cockroaches are common) and the occasional small mammal, as mice and rats are common in the forest and have no respect for walls and doors!

If you or another volunteer is providing 24 hour care to an animal, animals will be sleeping in your room or in adjacent rooms. Sound travels very easily from room to room in the volunteer accommodation. Clearly, animal welfare is our

priority so it is essential that you are quiet at night so that the young animals are not disturbed, which can be distressing for them.

Please be thoughtful of your fellow volunteers by keeping personal belongings tidy, remove all rubbish and keep your area clean at all times. All volunteers are required to clean the living areas, bedrooms, and the shower and toilet – the rooms are your living environment for the duration of your stay with us so please help everyone to enjoy the surroundings by rolling up your sleeves and sharing the cleaning responsibilities. Typically we suggest that a rota is put into place so that everyone takes his or her turn.

Please also bear in mind that we are in the forest and so at times things may not operate as they should. We ask that you take as much care as you can with our buildings and equipment and please bear with us as we will try and mend/replace anything that breaks as quickly as possible.

A generator supplies electricity and, in order to conserve resources, it is only on between 17.00 and 21.30. After the generator is switched off, you will need a torch. The generator comes on before nightfall to make sure that our team's radios are fully charged. Please therefore make sure that you unplug or switch off all appliances after the generator is turned off so that they don't turn on when the generator is running the following day.

When the generator is running, you will be able to recharge batteries etc. It is up to you if wish to stay up after the generator is switched off, but the days are long, the work is hard, the climate is tough and you will need to be fresh for work the following day. We also ask that you be respectful of other volunteers who may be choosing to go to bed at this time.

### **5.8. Food and water**

Food is provided for you and will typically be:

Breakfast: tea/coffee, French bread with butter and chocolate spread  
Lunch: rice and peanut (ground nut) or vegetable sauce or rice and beans  
Dinner: potatoes, spaghetti, omelette, salad, fruit etc

Meat is available but it is expensive, so please be aware that your diet will be vegetarian. Please remember that we are in a tropical rain forest in West Africa – supermarkets are not round the corner so we provide nutritious food using the resources available to us.

If you have any particular dietary requirements, please let us know and we will try to accommodate your needs, but you must remember that available resources are limited. If there is something you need that is unlikely to be unavailable in Cameroon, you must bring it with you. Volunteers sometimes like to bring some food items with them so that they have treats to supplement the food we provide. Popular items include peanut butter and cereal bars. Please bear in mind that you will not have access to a refrigerator to store

items. If you bring food, we recommend that you bring solid plastic storage containers otherwise it will be eaten by ants, cockroaches, mice and rats.

There is a pump in the village that provides a source of clean water. It is not uncommon for people to have a bout of diarrhoea in the first few days in Cameroon – if you have a problem beyond 2/3 days, then you must tell Ape Action Africa management and we will be able to advise you of the next course of action. Bottled water is available from the town and we can arrange to get this for you but it is clearly cheaper for you if you drink water from the well.

### **5.9. Clothes and laundry**

You will need clothes for work and clean clothes for after work. It is essential that you change your clothes and wash after work to minimise the risk of spreading potentially infectious illnesses. You must also change clothes if you are moving between animal groups during the day in order to prevent cross contamination.

There are lots of biting insects in the forest so we recommend that you always wear long-sleeved shirts or t-shirts, long trousers and long socks. This is particularly important at dawn and dusk to minimise mosquito bites. You should wear boots (walking boots, work boots or wellington/rubber boots) during the day in order to prevent bites, infections and to keep you dry when cleaning cages.

Although it is a tropical climate, it can get cold at night so we recommend that you bring a couple of sweaters or sweatshirts. If you are with us in the rainy season (see section 2.2 for details of the climate) you should bring a lightweight, waterproof coat and waterproof boots. Flip flops are useful in your rooms so that mud/dirt is not carried around and sandals or old trainers will come in useful in the evenings.

For work, you will need about 5 pairs of lightweight trousers and 5 long-sleeved t-shirts. We recommend dark coloured clothes that will dry easily. Sometimes it is very hard to dry clothes in the forest due to the humidity so it is important to bring sufficient clothes with you and to keep on top of your washing! We also recommend that you bring a hat to shade you from the sun and keep off biting insects.

You are responsible for doing your own laundry by washing your clothes in the traditional way – bucket, soap and lots of scrubbing! Soap powder is available to buy in the town and it's useful to take a laundry bag with you.

If you wear glasses, it is a good idea to bring a spare pair. The primates love to play with anything they can pinch from you. They can be destructive so if you lose your glasses to them, it is unlikely that you will get them back in one piece. A spare pair is therefore essential.

### **5.10. Personal belongings**

You will have time in the evenings to read, write and listen to music so bring with you what you think you will need for your leisure time. Batteries are expensive in Cameroon and you will need them for your torch, MP3 player, CD player, camera etc so please bring them with you. Batteries can be recharged when the generator is running between 17.00 and 21.30. The electricity in Cameroon is 220W and the sockets are 2 pin round.

Volunteers are asked not to lend money or personal belongings to any members of staff or to bring gifts for individuals because it causes problems amongst the rest of the workers who do not receive anything. Volunteers who lend things to workers do so at their own risk and Ape Action Africa is not responsible for trying to recover the money or items involved.

### **5.11. Communications**

There are no landline phones and there is no internet in the forest. The postal service to Cameroon is poor – parcels will be opened and items are frequently stolen. If the goods are not stolen, the tax required to receive the parcel is usually more than the value of the goods. We don't have the time and resources to recover packages for you so we cannot arrange delivery of letters or parcels to volunteers.

There are some areas in the forest where there is limited mobile phone reception for text messages but generally the signal is not good enough to make calls. So please, make sure that you understand that communication is very limited and you could go for long periods without being able to contact people from home. You will need to bring a mobile phone with you to use. It is sometimes possible for us to arrange for one to be bought for you in Cameroon but you will need to bring sufficient money to cover this and you must bear in mind that it may not be possible to arrange this as soon as you arrive so this may lead to a delay before you can contact people. We can organise for you to purchase Cameroon sim cards.

However, in the event of an emergency, the management in Cameroon will contact our volunteer co-ordinator so that your family or friends will be contacted, so please don't feel that you will be completely isolated.

We will give you contact numbers for emergency use together with instructions for collection at the airport one week before you leave for Cameroon. These numbers should also be left with your friends and family so they can contact us in case of emergencies. Please note that 2 of these numbers are outside Cameroon and they are personal phone numbers so please only use them in emergencies.

### **5.12. Money**

The local currency is CFA franc (Communaute Financiere Africaine) which is not available to purchase outside Cameroon.

You will need to bring Euros or US dollars in cash with you. Please bring sufficient money to cover your accommodation fees (€305 per month) and anything you would like to purchase locally. We will arrange for the euros to be changed into CFA.

Please note that there are currently no cash dispensing facilities at the airport and as you will be taken directly to the forest, you will not have an opportunity to withdraw cash locally and so you must bring cash with you. In addition, Travellers' Cheques are very difficult to convert to currency and attract very poor exchange rates and so are incredibly expensive. Please do not bring these with you other than as emergency funds or for future travelling needs. Credit cards also have very limited acceptability, including at hotels.

Life in the forest is not expensive but you might like to be able to buy drinks, biscuits etc. Volunteers typically spend 5,000 to 10,000 cfa per month on 'luxury' items.

If you need something from town while you are in the forest (e.g. cigarettes, biscuits, soft drinks etc) we may be able to get them for you. This is dependent on what else is happening in the forest as we have limited vehicles available for trips to town. Additional items such as this are not included in your board and lodgings.

Some typical prices:

Chocolate biscuits	950 cfa
1.5 litre coca-cola	700 cfa
Cheapest cigarettes	500 cfa
Internet café (in town)	500 to 1,000cfa for 1 hour

Current exchange rates are about 750 cfa per pound sterling but please check current rates to give you some idea of prices in Cameroon (oanda.com is a good site to use)

Please make sure that you take sufficient money with you for your stay and do not put our management in the difficult situation of asking to borrow money from the project. All requests to borrow money will be refused.

### **5.13. Safety and security**

Our volunteers spend all of their time in the forest and we have not had major safety or security issues. Thefts can occur and you should take care of your personal belongings and do not leave things unattended. Make sure that your room is locked when you are not there. Cash should be given to the Director to be stored in the safe.

It is rare for volunteers to visit Yaoundé during their placement but if you are in town, you need to be very aware of your personal safety because the risk of theft and personal assault is greater than in the forest. For your own safety:

- Never go out without letting someone know where you are going and when you expect to be back;
- Volunteers do not go to town to socialise but if you are in town in the evening, do not go out alone. Volunteers do so at their own risk and Ape Action Africa cannot be held responsible.

If you are in town you will need to keep all money and expensive items such as mobiles, mp3 players, cameras etc out of sight. In addition do not get into any taxi alone, particularly if it has blacked out windows.

Wherever you travel in Cameroon you must take your passport with you. The police will stop and search for no reason and if you do not have it with you, you will be liable to a fine. Ape Action Africa cannot be held responsible for such fines.

#### **5.14. Relationships with project personnel**

It is very important that you maintain professional relationships with our staff. You must maintain appropriate boundaries with staff, villagers and security guards. It is incredibly disruptive for the workers if relationships are anything but professional and problems continue after the volunteer has returned home. This applies to both male and female volunteers.

Close personal and intimate relationships between volunteers and Ape Action Africa employees, local villagers or the security guards are not allowed. This may sound quite draconian but we have had major problems in the past when such relationships have developed during a volunteer placement.

The workers know that it is a disciplinary/potentially sackable offence for them to have a relationship with a volunteer, so we respectfully ask that you conduct yourself appropriately with our workers and guards. Anyone found to be having a relationship with our staff, the villagers or the security guards during a volunteer placement will be asked to leave the project and the worker will be sanctioned.

## **6. What to bring with you**

### **6.1. Clothing**

These must be practical and easy to wash and dry. It is advisable to avoid light colours.

- sturdy boots (such as walking or work boots)
- wellington boots/rubber boots
- trainers
- flip flops/sandals (but be aware of biting insects)
- long socks
- waterproof jacket
- sun-hat / base ball cap
- long trousers
- long sleeved shirts/t-shirts

- lightweight sweaters or sweatshirts
- underwear
- nightwear – even in central Africa, nights can be chilly

Insects bite all day long so we strongly recommend that you cover up as much as possible. Don't wear your best gear in the forest – chimps and gorillas can be quite destructive so if you are lucky enough to spend time with them, your clothes could be in tatters!

## **6.2. Bedroom**

- mosquito net (with hooks and plenty of string to hang it up)
- light sleeping bag
- torch – head torches are particularly helpful
- alarm clock
- pillow
- sleeping sheet / sheet to cover the mattress
- earplugs (not essential)

## **6.3. Personal care**

- laundry bag
- 'quick dry' towel – try to avoid thick towels as they take days to dry
- anti-bacterial hand gel
- shampoo
- shower gel
- toothpaste and toothbrush
- razor
- deodorant
- moisturiser
- sunscreen 30+ - the sun is fierce so you are advised to protect your skin
- tampons and other feminine care products – mooncups are particularly environmentally friendly
- any other personal toiletries you regularly use

## **6.4. Medication**

You must bring all essential medication with you and bring sufficient supplies for the duration of your stay.

Useful items to include in your personal first aid kit include:

- painkillers such as Paracetamol and/or Ibuprofen
- antihistamine tablets
- anti diarrhoea tablets
- insect repellent (at least 45% DEET)
- sun burn cream
- plasters/ band aid
- multi vitamins
- throat lozenges



- eye drops
- tiger balm
- sterile dressings and Bandages
- thermometer
- rehydration fluids

### **6.5. Other items**

- Gardening / work gloves
- waterproof watch
- water bottle
- spare pair of glasses
- sunglasses
- spare contact lenses and liquid
- adaptor plug
- camera, memory cards, spare batteries or charger
- camcorder, spare tapes and batteries, battery charger
- mobile phone and charger
- books to read
- French dictionary / language books
- notebook, pens
- mini sewing kit
- MP3 player, walkman etc
- Scissors / Pen knife / Swiss army knife
- Duct/duck tape – useful for emergency repairs!

## **7. Departure**

You will be taken to the airport by Ape Action Africa staff on the day of departure. You will need 10,000cfa to pay for the airport tax.

We find lots of our volunteer enjoy participating on our volunteer Facebook page where they share photos and receive updates on animals they have cared for. Please be mindful of the messages you are giving by the photos that you post on your own Facebook page or otherwise share with people – it is in our health and safety policy that you should not kiss the animals, particularly on their lips, so if you have ignored this advice and have got photos of you or other volunteers kissing the animals, we would appreciate it if you did not publish them on the internet.

### **And finally...thank you!**

We hope that you enjoy your stay with us and we want you to have a memorable experience with Ape Action Africa and the animals in our care. We

really appreciate the time that people give to the project and the money that is raised by our volunteers. The work that you do and the contribution you make



to primate conservation is valuable and appreciated by everyone at Ape Action Africa, both human and non-human primates... thank you!

## 8. Recommended reading

A vast amount has been written about the conservation of primates in Africa and we could not possibly list them all. Some books that might be of interest to you are:

### Primates and conservation

- Eating Apes Dale Peterson
- Patterns of chimpanzee behaviour Dr Jane Goodall
- In the Shadow of Man Dr Jane Goodall
- Great Ape Societies William McGrew, Linda Marchant and Toshisada Nishida (editors)
- Gorillas in the Mist Dian Fossey
- In the Kingdom of Gorillas Bill Weder and Amy Vedder

And for fantastic pictures:

- In Praise of Primates Steve Bloom

### Cameroon

- Travels with Egbert
- Mango Elephants in the Sun Susana Herrera