

= Bangui =

Bangui (French pronunciation : ? [b? ? ?i]) , or Bangî in Sango , formerly written Bangi in English , is the capital and largest city of the Central African Republic . As of 2012 it had an estimated population of 734 @, @ 350 . It was established as a French outpost in 1889 and named after its location on the northern bank of the Ubangi River (French : Oubangui) ; the Ubangi itself was named from the Bobangi word for the " rapids " located beside the settlement , which marked the end of navigable water north from Brazzaville . The majority of the population of the Central African Republic lives in the western parts of the country , in Bangui and the surrounding area .

The city forms an autonomous commune (commune autonome) of the Central African Republic which is surrounded by the Ombella @-@ M 'Poko prefecture . With an area of 67 square kilometres (26 sq mi) , the commune is the smallest high @-@ level administrative division in the country , but the highest in terms of population . The city consists of eight urban districts (arrondissements) , 16 groups (groupements) and 205 neighbourhoods (quartiers) . As the capital of the Central African Republic , Bangui acts as an administrative , trade , and commercial centre . It is served by the Bangui M 'Poko International Airport . The National Assembly , government buildings , banks , foreign enterprises and embassies , hospitals , hotels , main markets and the Ngaragba Central Prison are all located here . Bangui manufactures textiles , food products , beer , shoes and soap . Its Notre @-@ Dame Cathedral is the seat of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Bangui . The city is also home to the University of Bangui , inaugurated in 1970 .

Bangui has been the scene of intense rebel activity and destruction during decades of political upheaval , including the current rebellion . As a result of political unrest , the city was named in 1996 as one of the most dangerous in the world .

= = History = =

Archaeological studies in and around Bangui have yielded at least 26 ancient Iron Age sites that contain many metallurgical tools and objects , illuminating the pre @-@ European history of the city and surrounding area . The archaeological sites were added to the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List on 11 April 2006 in the Cultural category . The site closest to Bangui is Pendere @-@ Sengue , 800 metres (2 @, @ 600 ft) from Independence Avenue , where archaeologists and conservation agencies have carried out studies . It is a paleo @-@ metallurgical site where several thousand shards of ceramics , iron tools , pottery , and an iron spatula weighing 9 kilograms (20 lb) have been unearthed . Its dating , compared with similar sites in Nigeria and Sudan , could be close to the 9th century BC .

Bangui was founded by Albert Dolisie and Alfred Uzac on June 26 , 1889 , in what was then the upper reaches of the French Congo , the present @-@ day Congo (Brazzaville) . The original site was 6 miles (9 @. @ 7 km) south of the Ubangi rapids . Its territory was organized first into the territory of the Upper Ubangi (Haut @-@ Oubangui) and then as the separate colony of Ubangi @-@ Shari . The initial capitals of these areas were at les Abiras and Fort de Possel further upstream , but the rapids at Bangui blocked them from direct communication along the river and caused the settlement there to grow in importance until , in 1906 , it was chosen as the new headquarters for the French administration . Bangui retained its importance as a military and administrative centre when the colony was folded into French Equatorial Africa and under both Vichy and Free French control during World War II . The French operated a radio transmitter in Bangui , which was described in 1932 as " the most remote radio station in Africa " .

The colony of Ubangi @-@ Shari received its autonomy in 1958 as the Central African Republic and this became independent from France in 1960 . In 1970 , President Jean @-@ Bédél Bokassa inaugurated the University of Bangui . He established the national airline Air Centrafrique the following year and ordered the construction of two new luxury hotels in Bangui . With tensions mounting between Bangui and Paris as a result of Bokassa 's uncontrollable expenditures , western banks refused to lend him any more money . Relations with the French worsened still further in April 1974 , when Brigitte Miroux 's body was discovered in a hotel room in Bangui . It was reported in

the French media that she had been Bokassa 's mistress and that he was responsible for her murder . As a result , Bokassa banned imports of French newspapers and assumed control of the Agence France @-@ Presse office in Bangui . By 1975 , Bangui had a population of 300 @,@ 723 .

In March 1981 , widespread violence took place in Bangui following elections , after Operation Caban led the French to drop Bokassa (who had begun to call himself Emperor Bokassa I) , and replaced him with David Dacko . Opponents of the President met in Bangui and were forced to flee the country . After returning voluntarily to Bangui in the autumn of 1986 , Bokassa went on trial . Initially faced with the death penalty , in February 1988 he was instead sentenced to life imprisonment . His successor was General André Kolingba , army chief of staff of Decko ? s army , who took over control from the local French military on 1 September 1981 under the pretext that the country was heading towards civil war . Although he attempted to combat corruption and control the national economy , he was unable to achieve his reforms . By the middle of the 1980s the country ? s economic situation had deteriorated as 80 % of the revenue went towards meeting the salaries of the staff . Under pressure from France and other western countries , Kolingba restored democracy in the country in 1991 with a multiparty government but elections could be held only three years later in August 1994 . During the elections , Ange @-@ Félix Patassé was elected to the post of president . Since he was from northern CAR , the southern group of Kolingba started a rebellion during 1996 .

In May 1996 , about 200 soldiers of the Central African Republic mutinied in Bangui , demanding salary increases and the abdication of Ange @-@ Félix Patassé . In the aftermath , the renegades plundered and killed more than 50 people . Following this , the French troops stationed in the country suppressed the rebellion and restored the dictatorial power . After being elected , President Patassé announced a national unity government in early 1997 . The Patassé government , the opposition parties , and religious groups signed the Bangui Agreements in January 1997 which were a series of measures designed to reconcile competing political factions , reform and strengthen the economy . The same year , the rebel troops refused a military base in Bangui and in June a new revolt broke out .

In view of frequent political unrest the city was named in 1996 as one of the most dangerous cities in the world . On 25 October 2002 , several towns in the country and later Bangui itself were attacked by the forces of General François Bozizé , backed with international support . Bozizé refused to accept an arrest warrant and " defected with about a hundred troops , engaged in street battles in the northern neighborhoods of Bangui (traditionally supporting Patassé) " and went north . Bozizé went into exile in Chad but his troops returned to Bangui and fighting continued . Peace @-@ keeping forces were ineffective , leaving Patassé isolated , and with support from Chad , Bozizé 's troops were successful in removing Patassé 's government . Patassé , who was returning from Niger after attending a conference , was not permitted to land in Bangui and he took asylum in Togo , and Bozizé seized power and suspended the constitution . An all @-@ party National Transitional Government was set up which functioned as an interim legislative body . However , the ? climate of distrust continued . ?

= = = 2013 rebellion = = =

In late 2012 , the Séléka coalition rebelled against his autocratic rule and entered the city . After capturing Bria , Sibut , and other important towns , they were on the verge of capturing Damara , the last strategic town before Bangui . France and the US refused to support the president and neighbouring countries reinforced the Central African Multinational Force (Fomac) .

In January 2013 , the rebels terminated their operations , hoping for a negotiated settlement . Following a ceasefire and a power @-@ sharing agreement , Séléka and Bozizé agreed to honour the rebel 's demands for the release of rebel prisoners and the expulsion of foreign troops from the country . The agreement allowed Bozizé to complete his term in office and to include members of Séléka in a new government . It was also agreed that fresh elections would be held in 2016 . The agreement was not honoured and the rebels captured Bangui on 23 March 2013 , forcing Bozizé to

flee the capital .

As of early January 2014 , " around 500 @, @ 000 have fled their homes " in Bangui , " almost half the city 's population . "

= = Geography and climate = =

Bangui , close to the country 's southern border , lies on the northern banks of the Ubangi River just below a series of rapids that limit major commercial shipping upriver . The only major city located on the river , it covers an area of 67 square kilometres (26 sq mi) . The navigable Ubangi River , with the backdrop of lush green hills , turns sharply south below Bangui and connects to the Congo River just south of the equator near Brazzaville as its chief northern tributary . The Ubangi river marks the border between the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo . The Congolese town of Zongo is situated across the river from Bangui . The river flows to the east of downtown Bangui . During the rainy season the discharge in the river is three times higher than during the rest of the year . The city was also known as La Coquette (the beautiful city) in the 1970s .

Close to the river , the city centre features a large arch dedicated to Bokassa as well as the presidential palace and the central market . Lying 5 kilometres (3 @. @ 1 mi) further north , the heart of the residential area has the largest market and most of the nightlife . Many of those in the suburbs live in houses known as Kodros , built of mud bricks with a thatched roof .

The Bangui Magnetic Anomaly , one of the earth 's largest crustal anomalies and the largest in Africa , has its centre in Bangui . " It takes the form of a huge ellipse of 700 kilometres (430 mi) x 1 @, @ 000 kilometres (620 mi) , with its central point at 6 degrees north and 18 degrees east . It consists of three parts or segments , which comprise the northern , the southern and the central anomalies . The magnetic equator passes through the feature 's centre . Although it is well documented , the feature 's origins are not fully understood .

The Central African Republic is situated just north of the Equator with daily temperatures normally reaching at least 30 degrees Celsius . Bangui , close to the Equator in the south of the country is slightly hotter and wetter than the northern regions . It has a tropical savanna climate (Köppen : Aw) with dry winters . While the warm season is from 23 January to 18 March , the cold season lasts from 20 June to 27 August , when rainfall is frequently accompanied by thunderstorms . The city is bordered by thick tropical rainforests along the river banks . Several of its neighbourhoods are in low @- @ lying areas prone to recurrent flooding . Severe rains in June and July 2009 left 11 @, @ 000 people homeless .

= = Demographics = =

After the Central African Republic attained independence in 1960 , developmental activities began , and the urbanization of Bangui ensued . This is evidenced by the population growth from 279 @, @ 800 in 1975 to 427 @, @ 435 in 1988 to 524 @, @ 000 by 1994 @. @ and to 652 @, @ 000 in 2001 . Apart from the ethnic people of the country , the city is also home for a minority group of Greek , Portuguese and Yemeni traders , and also has a small community of French people . The Bangui resident community includes diamond traders from western Africa and Chad , traders from many African countries , and refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria .

The official languages of the country are French and Sango ; the latter (originally a language from the Ubangi River region) is spoken by 90 % of the population . Some of the other languages spoken are Baya (Gbaya) , Banda , Ngbaka , Sara , Mbum , Kare , and Mandjia . Sango was simplified by Christian missionaries and is widely used to this day .

= = Economy = =

Bangui serves as an administrative , trade , and commercial centre . During the Second World War the country became wealthier as exports of rubber , cotton , coffee , uranium and diamonds

increased . After the war , the employment of local people in mainstream administration led to the development of the country 's infrastructure , which increased trade while slowing the national movement for independence .

During David Dacko 's presidency from 1960 to 1966 , there was a significant increase in the production of diamonds . This occurred when the monopoly of the French concessionary companies was ended with a law allowing local citizens to dig for diamonds . After Dacko set up a diamond cutting factory at Bangui , diamonds became the country 's leading export . But by the end of his five year 's tenure , rampant corruption and financial indiscipline had resulted in workers being left unpaid and civil unrest ensued . Bokassa then seized power in a military coup in 1966 . Concurrently , Bangui also became the key centre for social and cultural activity in the region , when new institutions were established in the city . However , political turmoil in the country , rampant corruption , and the dictatorial rule of President Bokassa centred in the city , brought in economic recession in the 1970s exacerbated by a fall in international prices for its major exports . This caused impoverishment of the people and severe conflict , further compounded by refugees migrating from troubled neighbouring countries .

Bangui received its first bank in 1946 when a branch of the Bank of West Africa was established there . Arab sellers dominated the city , and it was historically an important centre for ivory trading . Bangui manufactures include textiles , food products , beer , shoes , and soap . The main exports are cotton , rubber , timber , coffee , and sisal . Because of the ongoing strife , unemployment hovered near 23 % in the city as of 2001 . Ngaragba Central Prison , the national prison for men is located in Bangui . As of 2007 , it had 476 inmates ; prison conditions are reported to be poor .

= = Landmarks = =

The old town of Bangui has retained its colonial town planning with wide boulevards leading towards central market square . Attractions in Bangui include Boganda Museum , Bangui Zoo , and the Presidential Palace , formerly the Bokassa Palace . Notre @-@ Dame Cathedral is the seat of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Bangui . Boganda Museum (Musée de Boganda) has displays of traditional musical instruments , weapons , rural architectural features , ancient hunting tools , pottery , and also many religious antiques . It has a collection of bark cloth , the material used to cover Bokassa 's bed .

There are several hotels up to international standards . The Ledger Plaza Bangui on the outskirts claims to be a five @-@ star hotel , and has an outdoor swimming pool and tennis court . The National Hotel was established in 1970 with 30 rooms . Also of note are the Golf Palace Hotel , the Hotel du Centre with 72 rooms , JM Residence , the Oubangui Hotel , established in 1985 , and Hotel Somba with 23 rooms .

= = Culture = =

= = = Customs = = =

Polygamy is an accepted practice among men , but is not encouraged among women . When someone dies in Bangui , a representative from his or her village always attends the funeral . " This person is charged with indicating to the deceased the way back home so that the deceased may avenge himself and herself and demonstrate the power of the family " . The representative who attends the funeral also carries a little dust from the grave to the village , and gives it to the village 's holy medicine man so that he can ascertain the reasons for his death .

Most of the holidays in Bangui are festivals related to the Christian and Muslim faiths and are the same as those observed in other parts of the world . National holidays include independence day and the birthdays of Boganda and several other national heroes .

= = = Cuisine = = =

The cuisine of CAR is referred to as Centrafrican and the staple diet in Bangui includes cassava , rice , squash , pumpkins and plantains served with a sauce and grilled meat . Okra or gombo is a popular vegetable . Peanuts and peanut butter are widely used . Game is popular , as are the fish @-@ based dishes maboké and soussou . Manioc flour is used for preparing fufu . There are three types of restaurants in Bangui . Some focus on foreign cuisine , such as ' Relais des Chasses ' , ' La Tentation ' and ' L 'Escale ' , which are orientated towards French food , and ' Ali Baba ' and ' Beyrouth ' , which serve Lebanese food . There are a large number of African restaurants , such as the " Madame M 'boka " , a favorite of the locals . A number of bars and street food stalls compliment Bangui 's culinary scene . Alcoholic beverages served are locally brewed beer , palm wine and banana wine . Non @-@ alcoholic beverages that are drunk include ginger beer .

== = Art == =

Bangui ? s artisans ? market has traditional wares representing the art products from different regions of the country . Handicrafts include woven mats and baskets , wooden utensils of simple design , carved stools , pottery , musical instruments , tanned skins , and wood products . The balafon , similar to a xylophone , is made out of the horns of animals . Innovative designs include butterfly wings stuck with gum on paper , and ebony and hardwood carvings of wood from the tropical region . Artwork also covers carved animals and human figures . The crafts center in Bangui provides training to about 100 students in artistic crafting in leather , ivory and ebony wares .

== = Music == =

Bangui has a rich music tradition and showcases the country 's music . Its musicians also perform in many countries abroad . The Bangui band groups were influenced by Zokela in the 1980s . The innovative music is based on dance bands who have adopted the Congolese music with electronic support . The music is rhythmic and blends with the Congolese rumba (soukous) , which was influenced by son cubano , cha @-@ cha @-@ cha , and merengue . Popular Central African music groups or dance bands who perform in the city are Musiki , Zokela , Makembe , Cool Stars , Cannon Stars , and Super Stars . Bokassa , during his tenure as President , established a music recording studio in Bangui and employed musicians to sing his praise with songs extolling his qualities as an emperor and to develop his cult image among his people .

== = Sports == =

The popular sports are football (soccer) and basketball . Both men and women from Bangui and throughout the country have participated in the Olympic Games since 1968 as well as in many international events . The locals also organize boat races with hundreds of participants on the Ubangi River , which is a significant attraction .

== = Education == =

The French system of education is the norm and French is the language of teaching , although the Sango language is promoted in schools . A substantial percentage of the population is literate . Schooling is compulsory for children aged 6 to 14 . Bangui is home to the University of Bangui , founded in 1969 by President Jean @-@ Bédél Bokassa who named it after himself ; it started functioning in 1970 . A public institution , the university provides non @-@ agricultural education in the Central African Republic . The other educational institutions are the National School of Arts and the Central School of Agriculture , in addition to many religious and technical schools . Since 1981 , the University Library has been located in a separate building that houses its science , literature , and law collections . The medical school of the university has its own library . The Université Palais des Sports complex is the largest sports complex in the city .

A school in the eastern part of the city , Lycée Charles de Gaulle , was established by the French and is named after President of France Charles de Gaulle . Several notable Africans , including writers such as Calixthe Beyala , have studied in the city . Beyala studied at the Lycée des Rapides .

= = Religion = =

There is no state @-@ prescribed religion in the country . The religious groups in the urban centre of Bangui , in the order of their population representation , are the Christians which form the majority , Animists following ancient beliefs , and Muslims . The Cathedral of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception under the Roman Catholic Metropolitan Archdiocese of Bangui is located in Bangui . The archdiocese was established as the Apostolic Prefecture of Oubangui Chari on 8 May 1909 . Pope John Paul II visited Bangui in August 1985 . The seat of the archbishop is Notre @-@ Dame Cathedral in Bangui . Islam is the last in the order of religious beliefs with about 20 @,@ 000 Muslims in Bangui . However , prior to sectarian violence in the country , more than 100 @,@ 000 Muslims lived in the capital . The late president Bokassa converted to Islam as a political compulsion under the guidance of the then Libyan President Gaddafi . He also assumed the Muslim name of Sala Eddine Ahmed Bou Kassa , but it was short @-@ lived as he wanted a cathedral to be built in Bangui . The Church of Fatima and Notre Dame D 'Afrique are located in KM 5 .

= = Transport = =

Bangui is the transport hub of the Central African Republic . As of 1999 , eight roads connected the city to other main towns in the country , Cameroon , Chad and South Sudan ; of these , only the toll roads are paved . During the rainy season from July to October , some roads are impassable . The road network in the city emanates from the Palace de la Republique .

River ferries sail from the river port at Bangui to Brazzaville and Zongo . The river can be navigated most of the year between Bangui and Brazzaville . From Brazzaville , goods are transported by rail to Pointe @-@ Noire , Congo 's Atlantic port . The river port handles the overwhelming majority of the country 's international trade and has a cargo handling capacity of 350 @,@ 000 tons ; it has 350 metres (1 @,@ 150 ft) length of wharfs and 24 @,@ 000 square metres (260 @,@ 000 sq ft) of warehousing space .

The first airstrip in Bangui was built between 1920 and 1925 . Bangui M 'Poko International Airport (IATA airport code BGF) is located on 600 hectares (1 @,@ 500 acres) of deforested land 7 kilometres (4 @.@ 3 mi) off the Avenue of Martyrs to the north of the old town , between the Koudoukou Avenue and the University of Bangui . There are plans to connect Bangui by rail with the Transcameroon Railway which would be beneficial to the country .

= = Healthcare = =

A general hospital is located in the eastern side of the city . Modern health care facilities exist only in Bangui but are poor , providing only minimal care . Wealthier citizens make use of private clinics . The risk of catching HIV in the city is reportedly high , and many truck drivers stopping in the city for sexual services pose a major risk of spreading the disease to other parts of the country . The risk of catching malaria in Bangui and pygmy camps is also much higher than in the rest of the country .

A conference of public health officials including representatives of the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization was held in Bangui in October 1985 . The conference evolved a diagnostic definition of AIDS which came to be known as the Bangui definition for AIDS . The conference defined symptoms of AIDS in Africa as " prolonged fever for a month or more , weight loss of over 10 % and prolonged diarrhea " . The Bangui definition proved problematic as immune suppression can also be caused by malnutrition .

= = Media = =

Several periodicals and three daily newspapers are published in Bangui : E le Songo , the country 's first newspaper , began publication in 1982 . The other main newspapers are Le Novateur , Le Citoyen and L ? Echo de Centrafrique . Most of the country 's institutions have offices in Bangui , including French ones such as Électricité de France (EDF) .

Radio stations operating in Bangui include Radio Centrafrique , Radio Nehemie , Radio Notre @-@ Dame , Radio Voix de la paix , Radio Ndeke Luka , RFI , Radio Voik de la grace , Radio Linga FM , Africa no.1 , and Tropic FM . BBC World Service is the only English broadcasting station that is heard in the city on 90 @.@ 2 FM , as all other local channels broadcast in either French and / or Sango . For reliable news , the channel of UN run Radio Ndeke Luka is on 100 @.@ 8 FM .

= = Notable people = =

Élie Doté , politician and prime minister

Eloge Enza Yamissi , football player

Manassé Enza @-@ Yamissi , football player

André Kolingba , president

Anicet Lavodrama , basketball player

Joachim N 'Dayen , archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Bangui

Nathalie Tauziat , French tennis player

Romain Sato , basketball player