The Republic of Congo lies on the River Congo in w-central Africa. The equator runs through the centre of the country. Congo has a narrow coastal plain on which stands its main port, Pointe Noire, which itself lies in the SW of the country on the Gulf of Guinea. Behind the plain are forested highlands through which the River Niari has carved a fertile valley. To the E lies Malebo (formerly known as Stanley) Pool, a large lake where the River Congo widens.

Central Congo consists of luxuriant savanna. Tree species include the valuable okoumé and mahogany. The N contains large swamps in the tributary valleys of the Congo and Ubangi rivers.

Climate
Most of the country has a humid, equatorial climate, with rain throughout the year. Brazzaville has a dry season between June and September. The narrow treeless coastal plain is drier and cooler than the rest of the country, because the cold Benguela current flows N along the coast.

History
The Loango and Bakongo kingdoms dominated the Congo when the first European arrived in 1482. Between the 15th and 18th centuries, part of Congo belonged to the huge Kongo kingdom, whose centre lay to the south. Portuguese explorers reached the coast of Congo in the 15th century and the area soon became a trading region, the main commodities being slaves and ivory. The slave trade continued until the 19th century.

European exploration of the interior did not occur until the late 19th century. In 1880 Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza explored the area and it became a French protectorate. It became known as Middle Congo, a country within French Equatorial Africa, which also included Chad, Gabon and Ubangi-Shari (now called Central African Republic). In 1910 Brazzaville became the capital of French Equatorial Africa. In 1960 the Republic of Congo gained independence.

Politics
In 1964 Congo adopted Marxism-Leninism as the state ideology. The military, led by Marien Ngouabi, seized power in 1968. Ngouabi created the Congolese Workers Party (PCT) and was assassinated in 1977. The PCT retained power under Colonel Denis Sassou-Nguesso. In 1990 it renounced Marxism and Sassou-Nguesso was deposed. The Pan-African Union for Social Democracy (UPADS), led by Pascal Lissouba, won multi-party elections in 1992. However, in 1997, Sassou-Nguesso, assisted by his personal militia and also by troops from Angola, launched an uprising that overthrew Lissouba, who fled the country, taking refuge in Burkina Faso. But forces loyal to Lissouba fought back, starting a civil war. Ceasefires were agreed in 1999 and, in 2002, Sassou-Nguesso was elected president, winning 89% of the vote. A peace accord was signed in 2003.

Economy
The World Bank classifies Congo as a 'lower-middle-income' developing country. Agriculture is the
most important activity, employing about 60% of the workforce. But many farmers function merely at a subsistence level. The chief food crops include bananas, cassava, maize, plantains, rice and yams, while the leading cash crops include cocoa, coffee and sugar cane.

Congo’s main exports are oil (which makes up 90% of the total, but has begun to decline) and timber. Manufacturing is relatively unimportant, hampered by poor transport links. Inland, rivers form the main lines of communication, and Brazzaville is linked to the port of Pointe-Noire by the Congo-Ocean Railway.

area 342,000sq km [132,046sq mi]

population 3,702,000

capital (population) Brazzaville (1,153,000)

government Military regime

ethnic groups Kongo 48%, Sangha 20%, Teke 17%, M'bochi 12%

languages French (official), many others

religions Christianity 50%, animist 48%, Islam 2%

currency CFA franc = 100 centimes
APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA