

RUDEC

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



The purpose behind this handbook is to give you some background information about Cameroon, the Northwest region and the history and aims of RUDEC. Hopefully it can answer many of the questions you may have about living and working in central Africa, what to expect when you arrive and how you can best prepare for your adventures.

We suggest you have a good read through all sections, (printing it out often makes it easier to digest the information), take note of tips and advice and think about how the information here may help you get ready for the experience. Of course feel free to contact us at any time with any questions that you may have.



CAMEROON

Cameroon is situated on the west coast of Africa, running north to south from the Sahara Desert to the Atlantic Ocean. It has 6 neighbours and like most African countries it was created by Europeans drawing lines on a map, which didn't coincide with any pre-existing geographical or cultural divisions. Cameroon has an extreme diverse terrain, encompassing tropical rainforest, lush rolling hills and arid desert and savannas. It is often called Africa in miniature because of this huge variety of landscapes. It is also home to more than 275 ethno-linguistic groups, although official languages are French and English, with French being by far the most prevalent with English only being spoken by around 20% of the population.

Cameroon has a population of around 20 million people living in a country about twice the size of the UK. Life expectancy is 55 years with around 43% of the population under 14 years of age. It has a general higher standard of living than many of its neighbours and a higher percentage of children receiving primary education. This said there are still numerous social problems and many people living below the poverty line.

It is a good idea to read up more about the history of Cameroon and its people before arriving. It will help you to understand some of the things that you will experience and how the country has come to be as it is today. If you are considering travelling around the country the Bradt Guide to Cameroon is a very useful book, with a comprehensive overview of the country's history.

THE NORTH-WEST REGION

Cameroon was colonized by the French and the English. Now of the 10 regions in the Republic of Cameroon, 2 are officially Anglophone. One of these is the North West region of which the capital is Bamenda. It has beautiful hilly scenery and a cool, comfortable climate. The rich volcanic soil means that agriculture is successful with coffee and cocoa being widely grown. Belo, the home of RUDEC, is in the North West region. You will rarely hear French being spoken, except by government officials. In Bamenda most people communicate in Pidgin and in Belo, it is Kom, one of the many tribal languages of Cameroon, although English is the language used in schools and any official capacity.



GETTING HERE

Most international flights arrive into Douala international airport in the south of the country. It is not a particularly big airport by Western standards but it can be quite confusing on arrival, especially if this is your first time to Africa. Signs are limited and officials not always the most friendly. It is often good to ask a fellow passenger for some guidance. When disembarking from the plane, make sure you have your passport and yellow fever certificate handy. The first thing you have to do is fill in an arrival form, so ensure you have a pen with you. Then proceed to the health official who will control your yellow fever and from there onto immigration, they need your passport and completed form. The airport can be pretty hot and queues don't always move fast but just have patience. After immigration it is onto baggage claim. This is notoriously slow and confusing. Bags from 1 plane often come on the 2 carousels at once. Lots of people will offer to help you but they will expect payment for this service. Again, have patience; it is not unusual for bags to take more than an hour. Another good tip is to pack a couple of changes of clothes, any medication and mosquito repellent into your hand luggage as bags do go missing more frequently than in the west.

When leaving the baggage area, officials will collect the luggage stub tags from you, after that you proceed outside and if you arranged for Joshua to meet you, you will find him waiting with a RUDEC sign.

From Douala to Belo, is a day's journey so you will most likely spend the night of your arrival in a guesthouse in the city. Take this opportunity to get some local currency from an ATM and to buy a local SIM card and credit. Please note that ONLY Visa cards are accepted at ATMs. Also travellers cheques are not accepted anywhere in Cameroon. Bring any cash in larger notes of Euros, Dollars or Pounds.

The next morning is an early start to the bus station. You will get there early to buy tickets but then it will be a few hours until you depart, African buses leave when they are full and not according to a timetable. Make sure you buy some water and something to eat for the journey. It is about a 7 hour ride to Bamenda, usually with 1 short stop. It is really interesting to watch the scenery change as you leave the humid, low lying south and start climbing into the mountainous, cooler Northwest. Bus journeys in Africa are always a colourful experience, sit back and observe!

When you reach Bamenda, you will take a short taxi ride to Bambui and from there it is about 45 minutes more in a shared taxi. In Cameroon, taxis always overload passengers so be prepared to be a little squashed, but again it's all part of the adventure! When you reach Belo, Joshua will take you to the volunteer house and get you settled in.

If you are arriving by a different route or aren't arranging to be met, please contact us for more detailed information about getting to Belo.

THE VOLUNTEER HOUSE

RUDEC rents a house in the centre of Belo for volunteers. It is a very modern house in a gated courtyard within walking distance of shops, bars and the office. There are 3 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms, depending on the number of volunteers you may get your own room or be sharing. The house has electricity and running cold water, although for both the supply can sometimes be erratic. There is a large living room and a kitchen with a gas stove. Your rent includes water and electricity but volunteers must buy cooking gas.

If there are more than 5 volunteers then a neighbouring house can also be rented so as to increase the number of possible volunteers.

It is important to remember that services like electricity and water can be intermittent and sometimes off for more than a couple of days, so be flexible.

BELO

Belo centre is a five minute walk from the house; here you will find small stores, market stalls and bars. You can buy basic supplies in Belo as well as credit for your phones but many items are only available in Bamenda, which is an hour away. There are a couple of small internet places but the connection is not always great. There are plenty of local bars serving a wide choice of beers but not many other varieties of alcohol. There are also many stands selling lots of different kinds of street foods.

Walking around Belo you will be greeted by all kinds of people from school children to village elders. People here are genuinely friendly and welcoming and its great way to help you settle in when you see this open warmth. The office is about 20 minutes walk from the house.

The other way to get around Belo is by motorbike taxi, they are great to getting about quickly. Many of them wait around the centre for business. They may carry several passengers at once or any manner of oversized cargo. At the beginning it is best to check the price before agreeing, especially when going on longer journeys. You will soon pick up the prices for local rides.

Walking around Belo in the daytime is completely safe and during the evening moving around in a group is fine. However, although Belo is a safe community to be living in, in the night please exercise the same common sense as you would everywhere and dont walk down dark roads alone. Also it makes sense to not walk about carrying all your valuables. It is law in Cameroon to always carry ID with you, in your case your passport. To avoid having to carry this important document with you, bring a colour photocopy with you and then Joshua will take you to the police station to get it authorized, then you can carry that with you.

BAMENDA

For more supplies, supermarkets or for banks you need to travel to Bamenda. It is about 1 hour by share taxi, broken into 2 stages. It is best the first time to go with someone as the taxis can be quite confusing, but once you have been, it's simple. Bamenda is a city so you need to be much more careful of your bags etc especially in crowded areas. Also be cautious when withdrawing money from any ATMs.

THE CLIMATE

As well as having many diverse geographical regions, Cameroon also has many different weather patterns for different areas. What we talk about here is for Belo and the North-West Region.

One mistake people often make is to think that this part of the world is always hot, it isn't! When packing you need to pack for different weathers depending on the time of year but you will always need some warm clothes, coat, shoes etc as in Belo it gets cool at night! Yes, you can wear your shorts and t-shirts in the day but if that is all you bring you will be cold in the evenings!

November to February is dry season. There is blue sky almost every day and no rain. The landscape becomes increasingly dry and dusty. The sky becomes kind of hazy with the dust. This is a good time to travel around as roads are passable and hiking trails are accessible. The days are warm and the nights are cool.

March to October is rainy season. July and August are the months of heavy rain. It can rain at any time during these months and the rains are often preceded by hot, humid weather, which cools when the rain comes. Mornings and evenings are warmer than in dry season. The biggest challenge is mud, as many of the roads/paths are just steep dirt tracks which turn to mud slides during this season. However visibility is better, the vegetation is lush and there is no dust.

THINGS TO DO AROUND BELO



There are lots of opportunities around Belo for hiking. The mountains are easily accessible in the dry season but less so in the wet season. There are many waterfalls, some of which you can swim in. For example, the Mbingo cliffs are a beautiful scenic day hike with lots of places for picnics, photo stops and the chance to swim. Lake Oku is a crater lake about an hour from Belo and Mount Oku is the second highest mountain in Cameroon at 3011m. Ndawara tea estate is one of the biggest tea plantations in the country and you can get a guided tour, they also

have a small zoo. The Belo area is great for outdoor activities. Joshua will be able to advise you about

different options...make sure you bring your boots!

FURTHER AFIELD

Cameroon is a very diverse country and therefore offers so many different experiences. You can relax on the beaches in the south, visit the game parks in the dry north, explore the rainforests or climb Mount Cameroon. However, many of these places become inaccessible in rainy season and some are several days travel so it is a good idea to research possibilities if there is something you are set on doing, but sometimes it's just best to come and then go with the flow, see what other volunteers are doing, what local people recommend and what the weather does.

LIVING IN AFRICA

Living and working in any African country is an incredible experience. It offers you a chance to really immerse yourself in another culture that is very far removed from that what you are used to. It is a life full of surprises, challenges and rewards. In order to make the most out of your time here, here are a few pieces of advice.

The key to enjoying life here is remaining flexible. Don't get frustrated if things don't go according to plan or if they run late – it is just part of life, people aren't in such a hurry here and you should be prepared to slow down to match their pace of life a little. If you get frustrated the only one you will be winding up is yourself!

Have patience! Things take time and waiting is a good skill to have when working here!

Respect local customs and cultures. We are visitors in another country and in order to integrate we need to be sensitive and respectful of the ways of the people we are living amongst.



WHAT TO BRING

Packing for an adventure of this kind needs some careful planning. You need to consider how much of your baggage allowance you want to bring for yourself and how much to use for donations/resources for RUDEC and your projects. Quick drying clothes are much more practical than heavy items and white clothes turn orange in the space of a few minutes, so best to avoid them!

Some things to consider;

Don't forget

Torch – a head-torch is especially useful

Any medication you may need

Toiletries – these are only possible to buy in Bamenda and are very expensive

Good shoes – for hiking

Mosquito net (if travelling around Cameroon)

Rain gear – essential in rainy season

Photocopies of your passport and other important documents

Needs of RUDEC

Old mobile phones – to enable communication with rural orphan families

Old but working computers/cameras – to enable to office to communicate with the world

Children's clothes

School Stationary

Arts and Crafts supplies

Toothbrushes

Children's vitamins

KEEPING IN TOUCH

It is possible to buy a Cameroonian SIM card to allow you to text home relatively cheaply and to receive calls from friends and family at no cost. They are all pay as you go and you can just buy credit almost anywhere. They will work with any unlocked phone or alternatively you can buy a cheap and basic phone here that will accommodate the SIM card. Network is usually quite good but it can be unpredictable sometimes.

Internet is available by using a dongle and a local SIM on your own computer. The speed of the connection is very slow and good for checking emails but not downloading large files or internet banking etc. Otherwise you can try one of the small internet cafes in town where the connection is a little better; it is possible to Skype from here, although not always with video.

WHEN YOU ARRIVE

After your arrival in Belo, Joshua will take you to introduce you to the local police and the District Officer, so they are aware of your presence in the area. This is just a formality. Here you will need a copy of your passport which will be authorized and can then count as the formal ID that you are required to carry with you, meaning that you don't have to always be moving with your passport.

Then either Joshua or another volunteer will show you around Belo and give you a small orientation about where to find things, how much to expect to pay, how to get around and to answer any questions that you may have.

THE HISTORY OF RUDEC

RUDEC – the Rural Development centre in Belo, North-West region of Cameroon was the idea of one man, Joshua Chiamba. He grew up in this area, but it was while in the South-West in 2001 that he first had the idea of doing something for the underprivileged in his home community. It wasn't until February 2006 that the organisation became a reality when it was registered as a Common Initiative Group (CIG) within Cameroon. It began doing small scale projects and supporting a few orphans with school fees. Through Joshua's hard work and dedication, RUDEC has grown from strength to strength, attracting increasing numbers of international volunteers who have contributed greatly to its growth. Joshua is aware that exchange of knowledge and skills from people from different backgrounds and walks of life can only bring benefits. In December 2011, RUDEC was upgraded and registered as a not for profit organisation (NGO) with the government of Cameroon and it continues to work towards being a driving force behind social projects and community development within Belo.

WORKING WITH RUDEC

You will have plenty of time in your first few days to learn about RUDEC, its projects and where you can fit into these. If you are here for a short space of time it may be best to help out with an existing project but if you are here long term it is entirely possible, with support from Joshua, to implement your own project. You can think about the kinds of things that you might like to be involved in and how you may help RUDEC fulfill its mission and work towards its aims.

RUDEC VISION

A community where ALL residents have access to basic education and health resources, enabling them to improve their quality of life and achieve their full potential.



RUDEC MISSION

To actively seek resources, volunteers and the methods to effectively employ these in community development programs and towards the empowerment of underprivileged residents.

RUDEC AIMS

- To research and implement viable and sustainable projects aimed at promoting self help and encouraging the transfer of skills.
- To welcome international volunteers, expose them to Cameroonian culture, whilst exchanging knowledge and skills and utilizing their time and expertise to help us work towards our mission.
- To offer support to orphaned children living within their extended families to enable them to continue in education and have access to healthcare.
- To be a highly respected, transparent, effective and sustainable organization.

The most important thing about working with RUDEC is ensuring that what you are doing is benefiting the community, that it is sustainable and at the same time, both financially and practically viable. Working with RUDEC may be unlike any other volunteering you may have done in the past. There is much more emphasis on individual thought and ideas, and although you will be guided and helped you must be prepared to work independently. Don't just come with a fixed idea of what you are going to do or how it is going to be, come with suggestions but be prepared to be flexible and let your ideas be fluid. Talk to people around Belo; see what challenges they face and how you may be able to help them. Listen to other volunteers stories and learn from their experiences. Being part of RUDEC is learning curve for everyone involved, be ready to adapt, change, learn from others and share your skills.



We look forward to welcoming you in Belo!

APPENDIX

PRICES AS OF JANUARY 2013

Here is a price list of a few of the costs associated with living in Belo. It is just to give you a rough idea of living costs. These prices are correct as of January 2013 but do be prepared for them to change, depending on supply and demand as well as currency exchange fluctuations!

Below we have used 1GBP = 820 Francs / 1USD = 500 Francs / 1EURO = 650 Francs

	Francs	GBP	USD	EURO
Rent PP for one month in RUDEC volunteer house	30,000	37.00	60.00	46.00
Cooks salary for one month (6 days a week)	30,000	37.00	60.00	46.00
Gas Bottle (approx 1 month)	8,000	9.75	16.00	12.50
Return Taxi ride to Bamenda PP	2,000	2.50	4.00	3.00
Motorbike ride from town to Office	150	0.20	0.30	0.25
One text abroad with local SIM	150	0.20	0.30	0.25
One hour at Internet Café	400	0.50	0.80	0.60
1.5 litre bottled water	400	0.50	0.80	0.60
Large bottle of lager	550	0.70	1.10	0.85
Small soft drink	350	0.45	0.70	0.55
6 eggs	600	0.75	1.20	0.90
Bread	500	0.65	1.00	0.80
6 Tomatoes	200	0.25	0.40	0.30
Grilled Fish & Cassava in town	700	0.85	1.40	1.05
Plate of rice and beans in town	200	0.25	0.40	0.30

Eating local food is very reasonable but once you try to start buying imported things (mostly only available in Bamenda) prices climb. It is possible to get the cook to do the shopping for the meals he prepares, and then you can budget with approximately 10,000 Francs *about 12GBP for the month of 6 days a week, 3 basic meals a day (mostly vegetarian, as meat is hard to come by and is expensive). You really can't do this cheaper yourself!