

My name is Charles Hopkins. This post is about the exciting city of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Don't worry, I'll give you a second to locate it on the map before we continue. I lived in the DRC from August 2017 to July 2021. I arrived in a distance relationship before being reunited with my partner two years later. I had the wonderful opportunity to work at The American School of Kinshasa (TASOK) and we both look back with fond memories.

Living in Congo is not for the faint of heart. Right after arriving at the airport you can experience the amount of poverty and chaos the city holds. During the ride into the city you will experience the amount of people living there. It is the most populated French speaking city in the world. However, the people in Kinshasa are amazing, the adventures are endless, and once you let Kinshasa in, it becomes part of your heart forever.

Living at TASOK means starting your morning on a 42 acre campus with wildlife, running trails, and a botanical garden. You also have to dodge the biting flies and malaria mosquitos, but if you wear socks and bug spray you're fine. At TASOK you live on the school campus, which has its advantages and disadvantages, but walking from your house to your classroom in less time than it takes to wait for an elevator is nice. Families love it because they can have their kids roam outside all day and not worry because of the walls and guards at the gates at all times. In my time there, international grocery stores became more abundant, and access to more restaurants and "comforts of home" were becoming more available. English is not widely spoken, most people speak French as their international language, but Lingala is the native language spoken in Kinshasa. You can spend your time working in Kinshasa on campus and going on a rare outing to the grocery store, or spend the weekends exploring for yourself, but either way life is not convenient. This is not the African safari dream most expats think of, it is amazing, but you need to work at becoming part of the city and culture and getting things you need.

There are events in the city, and if you meet locals or speak French they are abundant. We did drumming lessons, saw soccer matches, played American football, enjoyed congolese singing and dancing, attended weddings and funerals, and celebrated different cultures when being invited to the embassy's celebrations. These were occasional, but I was always available to go to the Congo river or to the street corner to enjoy a cold libation and local dishes. Getting out of the city takes a long time because of traffic, but if you are patient, or hire a driver, you can go see the bonobos, see beautiful waterfalls, or camp and float down the rivers.

I loved working at TASOK. The people there were amazing, throughout all that happened from presidential elections to COVID there was always a community feel at the school. You don't have everything that a more developed country international school has, but you have enough to teach what you need to. The internet is slow. No matter how many times it becomes "better" when you get there, if you are not used to the really slow internet, it is still slow and not reliable. It gets better every year, but every new teacher complains, every year. The school is now an IB world school and takes the program seriously, if you are passionate about the IB and inquiry this school will work with you. I would recommend teaching there, as long as you are positive and

resilient. I have seen Kinshasa become a difficult place when someone isn't ready for the struggles.

Some international schools host mostly locals of the host country with an expat student or two, but TASOK is a mixed bag of students from 50-60 different countries. The students are amazing, but have been known to not be academically inclined. Each class usually had less than 20 students in MYP and DP and in the PYP they were usually under 30. You will have to have a good grasp on differentiation and both accommodation and modification are allowed for student assessments. There are opportunities for after school clubs and sports, students enjoy them, but parental support for international tournaments is hard and involves much parental prompting.

Your salary usually starts between 30-40 thousand USD a year. This is very livable, besides food and fun you don't have to pay for anything else really besides internet and phone. You can even check out cars. If you go out to expat bars and restaurants you will spend a lot of money, leaving little for savings if you travel as well, which is expensive. If you eat local, go out local, and occasionally do expat things you can save  $\frac{1}{3}$ - $\frac{2}{3}$  of your salary.

If you love adventure, are passionate about the IB, don't mind overcoming obstacles, and have a positive mindset Kinshasa will be one of the best experiences of your life.