

# NORTH FROM LUANDA

Angola's northwest has become more easily accessible from the capital, thanks to a newly-rebuilt highway. *Universo* looks at the broad range of exciting investment and travel opportunities in the region →



**L**uanda now enjoys continuous direct overland access to M'banza Kongo in Zaire province, close to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) border. The highway north linking Luanda to the province completes the last major artery from the capital.

On its way, the 340km road penetrates a promising area of investment and tourist options. Once clear of the intensely busy port and Sonils offshore service area at Luanda, the road soon turns into a six-lane-wide avenue as far as Cacuaco on the edge of the densely-packed urban area. From there it passes through sparsely populated countryside to Caxito, Ambriz and Nzeto before turning inland and on to M'banza Kongo. A variant from Nzeto continues along the coast to the important oil industry centre of Soyo. This crucial Nzeto-Soyo 250km highway is still under construction.

### M'banza Kongo heritage

M'banza Kongo is the administrative capital of Zaire province. It also has strong ambitions to develop its tourist industry based on its history as home to the kings of the Kongo. To this end it has been seeking UNESCO World Heritage Site status since 2007. The Angolan government has designated it a 'National Cultural Heritage City' in preparation for its UNESCO status bid with Minister of Culture Rosa Maria Martins da Cruz e Silva guiding the process.

Portuguese explorers first made formal contact with African royalty at M'banza Kongo in 1483. The city now aims to recover part of its past greatness by rebuilding and modernising its infrastructure. In recognition of M'banza Kongo's importance to Angola, President José Eduardo dos Santos laid the first stone for a monument

commemorating Kongo king Dom António I there in September 2012.

Apart from showcasing its ruins, the city is developing a museum to tell the Kongo kings' story. Tourists can also visit Sunguilua on the River Zaire, where the kings were ceremonially washed before burial.

The city also has great significance for Angola's main religion, Catholicism. In 1992, Pope John Paul II visited the ruins of M'banza Kongo's Sé Cathedral. Built in 1491, the cathedral was the first below the equator.

Thanks purely to its natural beauty, the M'brige waterfalls at Kuimba, 50km east of M'banza Kongo, is another tourist attraction.

Apart from its political and historic importance, M'banza Kongo has promising agribusiness potential, thanks to its location at the edge of Angola's plateau.

Farms around the city produced 170,000

tonnes of crops in 2013, including cassava, groundnuts, maize, beans, bananas, sweet potatoes, citrus fruits and pineapples.

Zaire's highland areas also have excellent timber products potential as the area is part of the Congo rainforest. Angola's Forestry Development Institute (IDF) has tree nurseries near M'banza Kongo at N'kunga a Paza and at Nkiende to ensure sustainability.

The 225km Nzeto-M'banza Kongo highway, recently completed by German firm Gauff Engineering, goes through Tomboco, where there is a sawmill and carpentry industry fed by timber cut in the Kuimba area.

### Soyo: investment magnet

Lying at the mouth of the mighty River Zaire some 440km from Luanda, Soyo is northwest Angola's economically most

important city and has recently attracted substantial new investment.

Soyo hosts the landward terminal for most of the oil and gas piped from Angola's offshore fields. It is also where a \$10 billion Angola LNG plant is now producing liquefied natural gas, LPG, butane and condensate for sale at home and abroad. The environmentally friendly plant uses gas formerly burned off as a waste product.

The city is also home to major oil industry base, Kwanda. Here oil companies Texaco, BP, Fina and Sonangol and service companies Bechtel, Halliburton and Petromar operate support facilities and shipyards. This cluster of service companies means Soyo is well placed for vocational training and one speciality developed so far is metalworking.

Recently GLS Oil & Gas, a joint venture led by General Electric, announced a \$175



Pope John Paul II visited Angola in 1992



The Mouse of Mussara

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Timber is plentiful in Zaire province

Caxito is famous for its bananas



# Angola's northwest



million investment in a factory making undersea oil and gas equipment at Soyo.

Soyo has also attracted a \$500 million investment for a gas-fired generation unit. The plant is scheduled to supply 400MW of much-needed energy to the main towns in Zaire and Luanda provinces in 2016, providing a welcome boost to manufacturing and food processing in the region.

Oil, gas and their associated infrastructure are the foundation for a number of industrial projects earmarked for Soyo. These include plans for an oil refinery and a fertiliser plant using ammonia and urea derived from hydrocarbons. There are also projects for the production of methanol, pesticides, ethylene, polymers, phosphoric acid, and tyre retreading and steel for construction.

Soyo is not all work, and the highly skilled workforce also has leisure time options. There are nature reserves for ecotourism and deserted beaches within easy reach, such as Kimbriz Beach, only 70km south of the city. There are also

nautical activities such as sailing and sports fishing on the Zaire estuary. The city boasts the largest concentration of restaurants and hotels in Zaire province.

River cruises are also available; Pedra do Feitiço – a sacred site – and Ponta do Padrão, the exact spot where Portuguese explorer Diogo Cão landed in 1482, are within easy reach of Soyo. Porto Pinda, the scene of the first Christian baptism south of the equator and a former slave export point is also tourist destinations near Soyo.

## New links

Despite the undoubted economic importance of Soyo, only now is it in the process of gaining good overland road access. Freight transport has depended on the sea and air for many years. However, the high-tech oil industry with many expatriate specialists is well served by the newly-rebuilt and expanded Soyo Airport which registered 18,508 take-offs and landings in 2013, an extra nine flights a day compared with 2012. It can handle 2,000 passengers

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simultaneously and, with its 24 shops and three restaurants, rivals Luanda's airport in terms of comfort.

Soyo will undergo a communications revolution when the new Nzeto road is completed, which will likely have a strong impact on cutting food prices and increasing the flow of tourists. The new road will also form an energy corridor as it will have running alongside it a gas pipeline and transmission lines from the Soyo generation plant currently under construction.

The port of Soyo will also shortly benefit from a fast catamaran service, which began operating along the coast of Luanda province in April 2014. Eventually this service will extend from the capital to all major towns along Angola's northwest coast: Cacuaco, Barra do Dande, Ambriz, Nzeto, Soyo and Noqui on the Zaire estuary. This alternative to the road also

opens up the coast's tourism potential where a day out on the beach and sampling Angola's bountiful seafood is most visitors' idea of a good time.

### Nzeto awakens

Roughly halfway between Luanda and M'banza Kongo lies Nzeto, at present a sleepy fishing town on an important road junction just two hour's drive from Luanda on a newly-resurfaced road. When the Nzeto-Soyo road is completed later this year, the town's economy is likely to experience a boom as new traffic passes through and allows the easier distribution of farm products. For example, some 2.5 million eggs will soon be produced each year by the Agrarius agribusiness concern at Nzeto in addition to cassava flour and corn.

A sugar refinery at Kinzaú just north of

Nzeto is planned which will also produce alcohol and generate power from its waste materials. There are also plans in place for salt, tile, brick and cement works in the town.

The whole of Angola's northwest is blessed with good beaches, and Mussera Bay – just 56km south of Nzeto – is one of the best.

### Mineral wealth

Angola's northwest has rich mineral potential, including copper, silver, bauxite, mercury, lead, granite and mineral water.

One of the region's major resources already being developed is phosphates from the Lucunga Basin, just north of Nzeto. Vale Fértil Limitada is developing the \$82 million first stage of a \$1 billion project to exploit the estimated 130-million-tonne deposit. Phosphates are a key fertiliser ingredient and are also



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used in toothpaste, detergents, soft drinks, vitamin supplements and animal feed.

The project consists of a mine, a processing plant and storage units. A new port in the Nzeto area will be built and a power generator installed when the project is completed in 2017.

World demand for phosphates is very high, and Angola's deposits have the advantage of a coastal location, allowing easy access to overseas market as well as the promising domestic farming sector.

Ornamental stones are already quarried at Tomboco and at Mussera, halfway between Nzeto and Ambriz. An Angolan-South Korean joint venture works quarries at Mussera and also at Caxito further south. The company is also interested in developing metals mining in Angola's northwest.

Just over the border from Zaire province in neighbouring Uíge there are large areas of mineral deposits, stretching from Bembe, a copper mine before 1974, to Mavoio near Maquela do Zombo on the DRC border. Copper reserves are estimated at around 16 million tonnes. Intensive mineral surveying is currently underway. Geology and Mines minister

Francisco Queiróz has revealed there are long term plans to build a 400km-long railway from the mining area to the port of Soyo.

### Bengo: thriving province

The port of Ambriz in Bengo province lies just off the Luanda-Nzeto highway and is home to another oil industry facility. Here Petromar, a joint venture of ENI's Saipem and Sonangol, builds metal structures for the oil industry.

Nearer Luanda, Barra do Dande hosts an Angoflex yard where umbilicals are manufactured and loaded for use in deep-sea oil and gas production. Umbilicals are sheaves of pipelines that connect to and control suites of valves on the seabed.

The busy little fishing area of Barra do Dande nearby has been chosen as the site of the new port of Luanda which has now no extra capacity. The new deepwater port will have plenty of room to expand and will have a bulk terminal for future iron ore and manganese exports from the Dondo region. This port will likely have a rail link to the existing Luanda-Malange line.

Not far from Barra do Dande is Caxito, capital of Bengo province. Caxito forms a

natural gateway and service centre for the farming areas in Zaire and Uíge, given its location at the road junction of the two provinces. The city is already developing as a centre for agribusiness and aims to form a cluster of support industries that can manufacture and repair tractors, farming implements and irrigation equipment.

Caxito itself has a thriving and expanding irrigated farming area and food processing with its own power dam, Mabubas (27MW output). Caxito produces increasing yields of fruit and vegetables, with bananas and tomatoes in the forefront, for the nearby Luanda market.

### The road ahead

There are many investment opportunities in Angola's northwest that the new highways and power supplies will make even more attractive. Electricity will boost mining, manufacturing and food processing. It will also aid the distribution of foodstuffs by powering cold storage, a boon for fishermen and farmers who often suffer from inadequate refrigeration of their surplus produce.

Fasten your seatbelts: Angola's northwest is on the road to prosperity. ■