

RWANDA

COUNTRY INFORMATION

RWANDA is a relatively small East African country of 10,270 sq miles. It is bordered by the equally small Burundi to the south, the larger Uganda to the north, Tanzania to the east, and the enormous Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire) to the west. Rwanda has earned its nickname as the "Land of a Thousand Hills"; its mountainous landscape includes the volcanic Virunga range in the northwest and is a result of its location on the western edge of the upheaval-prone Great Rift Valley. Grasslands predominate in Rwanda, but there are small tracts of rainforest scattered around the western and northeastern edges of the country and tropical savanna in the east. The largest body of water in Rwanda is Lake Kivu. It is located on the western boundary and is shared with the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Rwanda's captivating natural features offer some hard-to-beat experiences, from the mountain gorillas in Volcanoes National Park to the hundreds of species of trees and birds in the magnificent rainforests of Nyungwe. Urban centers such as Butare and the capital, Kigali, have forged ahead, opening new places to stay, eat, drink, dance, and meet the local population, while the shoreline of Lake Kivu has sprouted relaxing new facilities for visitors.

Passport and Visa Information

- Visas are not required for a stay of less than 90 days for nationals of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the United States of America, Canada, Sweden, Great Britain, Germany, Hong Kong, South Africa, and Mauritius.
- Documented evidence of yellow fever vaccination is also required. Entry will be denied to those who fail to present documentation.
- Make sure that your passport has several unused pages for visas needed (**at least two**).
- Carry a few extra passport photos along with a copy of your passport/visa information, air tickets and traveler's check numbers separately from your passport, and leave a copy at home as well.

Please be aware that although Ker & Downey will advise you of the current information concerning visas and other requirements, it is your responsibility to reconfirm the information and obtain all necessary documents for entry to countries listed on your itinerary. Visa requirements change frequently.

Health Requirements and Information

Immunization:

Yellow fever vaccination is required for all travelers to Rwanda over one year of age. It is recommended for all travelers over nine months.

Malaria:

Malaria risk exists in the low-lying regions. Malaria prophylaxis is **strongly** recommended.

Bilharzia:

Bilharzia exists in the fresh water in this region. Do not swim in fresh water or come into contact with stagnant water.

Other concerns:

- There are periodic outbreaks of meningitis in Rwanda.

- Dengue fever, sleeping sickness, and other insect-borne diseases can occur in this region. Please take appropriate precautions against insect bites such as using insect repellent and wearing long sleeves and pants.

Customs Regulations

Travelers age 16 and over are allowed free import of:

- 2 cartons of cigarettes
- 2 liters of alcohol

Game trophies can only be exported with special permits from the government.

You may import up to RWF 5000 in local currency and an unlimited amount of foreign currency provided it is declared on arrival. You may export up to RWF 5000 in local currency and any amount of foreign currency up to the amount declared.

Airport Information

Kigali International Airport is located in the suburb of Kanombe, seven miles east of Kigali town center. There is one terminal, and car rental, restaurants, shopping, and currency exchange facilities are available.

Airport Departure Tax

The airport departure tax is included in the price of your ticket.

Domestic Baggage Limits

- Rwandair: 66 lbs total for all baggage

Note: Excess baggage weight can result in an extra charge at your own expense.

Safety

It is currently safe to travel around most of the country, but caution still needs to be exercised and the latest information sought. Travelers are advised to steer clear of the border with Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Pick-pocketing in crowded areas is not uncommon, and you are advised to remain alert at all times.

Climate

- Average daily temperatures range from 30-34°C (86-93°F), except in the highlands where 12-15°C (53-59°F) is more the norm.
- A hard rain falls from mid-March to mid-May. Temperatures are at their peak from mid-May to mid-October however in the gorilla-trekking areas of the highlands the temperatures are usually moderate.
- The rainforests blanketing the volcanoes in the northeast tend to see more rain than the rest of the country and snow is not uncommon on the highest peaks.
- There are 2 dry seasons in Rwanda. The long dry season lasts from June to September and the shorter season lasts from December to February.

- There are also 2 rainy seasons. The long rainy season lasts from mid-February to the beginning of June. The shorter rainy season lasts from mid-September to mid-December.

Kigali, Rwanda	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Ave. Max Temperature (°F)	81	82	80	79	79	80	81	83	83	81	79	80
Ave. Min Temperature (°F)	60	60	61	60	61	60	59	60	61	60	60	60
Ave. Precipitation (in)	2.70	3.90	4.20	7.20	3.60	.80	.40	1.30	3.40	4.00	5.00	3.90

Weather may vary depending on location in Rwanda.

Clothing

Please see our safari checklist for clothing suggestions

- Expect occasional showers even in the dry season, so always take a light rain jacket.
- You will be at a high altitude, and nights will be cool. A warmer jacket may be needed for the evenings.
- Avoid wearing shorts, as the local custom is to dress modestly.

Currency

- The local currency is the Rwandan Franc.
- It is recommended that you bring US dollars in cash rather than other currencies or traveler's checks.
- There are a number of options for exchanging money, including foreign-exchange bureaus in Kigali and moneychangers in shops or on the street, though the latter are only really advantageous for non-U.S. currencies.
- When it comes to banks, try to stick to those in Kigali or, if exchanging cash outside the capital, the branches of Banque Commerciale in other main centers such as Butare - avoid Banque de Kigali branches in regional towns as they tend toward the more extreme commissions for financial transactions.

Gratuities

In Rwanda tipping is acceptable in USD.

- Transfers to airport or hotel: \$5.00 per transfer
- Porters at hotel: \$1.00 per bag
- Gorilla Trekking porter: \$10.00 per person per day
- Lodge/Resort staff: \$10.00 per person per day
- Game guide: \$7.00 per person per day
- Driver/guide throughout: \$10.00 per person per day
- Gorilla Tracker: \$10.00 per person per day

Note: Tipping is a personal decision based on the service received. Please remember, there is no obligation to tip and American standards for tipping are some of the highest in the world. The above is only a suggestion for your convenience.

Wildlife

Although Rwanda is well-known for its variety of primate species including the endangered mountain gorilla, the country is also home to six hundred seventy species of birds. Game in the national parks ranges from the large elephant and lion to the small hyena, impala, and gazelle.

It is also a botanist's paradise, from the assortment of wildflowers to the over one hundred species of orchids on the mountains in Nyungwe alone.

Note: On gorilla treks, clients are not guaranteed to see gorillas; however gorillas are seen almost every time. Rangers keep track of the various groups and generally have each group located before guests arrive on location. It is not unusual for a gorilla group to relocate during the night making finding them the next day more challenging.

Food

Plantains, beans, and sorghum are the staples of Rwandan cooking. It is not common to eat meat often in Rwanda, especially rural areas, as only the wealthy can afford to, but the most commonly consumed meat product is barbecued goat. Beef is the most highly valued meat and is only eaten after ritual sacrifices.

The main meals of the day are lunch and dinner, but many snack on tropical fruits between meals as avocados, bananas, mangos, and papaya are abundant. Traditional dishes include: *umutsima*, which is cassava and corn; *isombe*, which is cassava leaves with eggplant and spinach; and *mizuzu*, or fried plantains.

Shopping

Look for traditional pottery, beadwork, and baskets. Rwandan culture did not originally revolve around mask making, so you will not be able to find antique Rwandan masks. However, due to their popularity in other countries, some artists have begun to make masks specifically for the foreign market, and you may also be able to find masks from Congo. In addition, they have also begun producing batik to compete with neighboring countries. Cow bone jewelry as well as Rwandan nesting baskets are also great finds.

Time Zone

GMT + 2

Language

Kinyarwanda, English and French are the official languages. Kinyarwanda is the language most widely spoken in Rwanda, followed by English and French. Swahili is also useful in some parts of the countryside.

Voltage

220/230/240V, 50Hz

Emergency Numbers

Fire: 112

Police: 999

International Air Ambulance: (0312) 200508

International Calling

To call Rwanda from the U.S. or Canada, dial (011 + 250) before the number.

To call the U.S. or Canada from Rwanda, dial (00 + 1) before the number.

Suggested Reading

Briggs, Philip and Janice Booth. *Bradt Travel Guide to Rwanda*: A very informative guidebook to Rwanda.

Dalliere, Romeo. *Shake Hands with the Devil*: A heart-wrenching, day-to-day account of the 1994 genocide told through the eyes of the head of the UN peacekeeping mission in Rwanda.

Fossey, Dian. *Gorillas in the Mist*: The author's famous tale of studying and living amongst the rare mountain gorillas of the Parc National des Volcans. It was published in 1983, two years before her brutal and unsolved murder in Rwanda by those that disagreed with her passionate defense of the gorillas.

Gourevitch, Philip. *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families*: A painstaking and painful-to-read account of the disastrous ethnic events that took place before, during and after the 1994 attempted genocide of the Tutsi minority in Rwanda.

For an outsider's insider account of Rwanda, check out *Land of a Thousand Hills* by Rosamond Halsey Carr. Carr was a former New York fashion illustrator who ended up spending 50 years in the Rwandan hinterland after divorcing her hunter-explorer husband in Central Africa in the 1940s.