

Country Info: Rwanda

This information is provided by Encompass Africa as a guideline to the country you will be visiting. Further information is available to you on the Rwanda Tourism website www.rwandatourism.com

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

Australian passport holders require a visa for Rwanda and it costs US\$30 per person payable on arrival in cash only. We recommend small denominations, as officials often do not have necessary change.

DEPARTURE TAX

Departure taxes are included in airfares subject to change without notice.

CURRENCY

US Dollars cash is the preferred option in Rwanda. Local currency is the Rwandan Franc. We suggest you take both small denomination notes (US\$ 1, 5, 10) for tips etc. as well as US\$ 50 and \$100 bills for currency exchange - make sure they are post 2006 and in good condition. You will be offered less for small denomination notes and less for notes that are in poor condition. Your driver/guide will take you to change money in Kigali – this is a better rate than the rate at the airport.

American Express, Visa and MasterCard are accepted in some camps and lodges and in larger hotels and shops. Additional charges are sometimes levied. *Travellers' cheques are sometimes difficult* to exchange and poor rates often apply.

Most of our holidays are fully inclusive, however you will need to allow for drinks, curios, etc.

LANGUAGE

Kinyarwanda is the official language. French, and to a lesser extent English, are widely spoken.

TIME

Rwanda is GMT + 2 hours.

ELECTRICITY

230/240 volts at 50 Hz. 2-pin (round) sockets. It is best to travel with your own adaptor. At Volcanoes lodges these are provided. Most camps/lodges, even if they do not have power, can make arrangements for recharging batteries. Consult your guide.



HEALTH PRECAUTIONS

Rwanda itself isn't a particular unhealthy country for tourists and you will never be far from some kind of medical help. The main towns have hospitals (for anything serious you'll be more comfortable in Kigali) and all towns of any size have a pharmacy.

Outside of Kigali, Rwanda has 34 district hospitals and over 380 health centres spread around the country. A health centre is generally staffed by one or two nurses and supported by medical assistants. In rural areas traditional medicine is also wide used. As you should for any trip to a tropical or remote area, visit your doctor about eight weeks before leaving for Rwanda to discuss your plans and requirements.

Preparations to ensure a health trip to anywhere in Africa should include checks on your immunisation statuses: it is wise to be up to date on tetanus (ten-yearly), polio (ten-yearly), diphtheria (ten-yearly), hepatitis A and typhoid.

An International Certificate of Vaccination for Yellow Fever is required for those travelling in or through the following countries: Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Angola and South America. You will be denied entry into Rwanda if you have travelled to any of these countries and do not have proof of vaccination so please carry your certificate with you and present to immigration.

Please consult your GP or visit a specialist Travel Doctor well in advance of your departure.

FOOD AND DRINKS

Rwandan food is neither spicy nor hot. People eat simple meals made with locally grown ingredients.

Umutsima (a dish of cassava and corn), isombe (cassava leaves with Eggplant and spinach) and mizuzu (fried plantains) are common dishes. Dinner is the heaviest meal. Between meals, Rwandans often snack on fruits. Tropical fruits such as avocados, bananas, mangos and papaya are abundant in Rwanda. Roadside vendors in urban areas sell roasted corn and barbecued meat. (The barbecued meat can be either fish, beef, etc.)

As a tourist, you will experience international cuisine of a good standard. Rwanda has a large commercial brewery that makes Turbo King, a brown beer that's strong and rich in colour. It's certainly worth a try. The other popular local beers are Primus and Mutzig.

GEOGRAPHY

Rwanda is a small, landlocked republic in Equatorial Africa. Yet it is the most densely populated country in Africa. Rwanda is situated on the eastern rim of the Albertine Rift, a western arm of the Great Rift Valley, on the watershed between Africa's two largest river systems: the Nile and the Congo.

Much of the country is impressively mountainous; the highest peak is Karisimbi (4,507m) in the volcanic Virunga chain, which is protected by the Parc National des Volcans. Altitude ranges from 1000 – 4500m and vegetation varies from rainforest to savannah and papyrus swamps. The largest body of water is Lake Kivu, but numerous other lakes are dotted around the country, notably Burera, Ruhondo, Muhazi and Mugesera, some of which have erratic shapes following the contours of the steep mountains that enclose them.

Parc National des Volcans (PNV) consists of the Rwandese side of the Virunga volcanoes. There are five volcanoes that can be accessed from on the Rwandese side, some of which have specific attractions and trails to the summits.

The park currently has 7 gorilla groups and 56 permits available per day. The number of permits can change without notice if the gorillas go across the border. PNV's seven habituated gorilla families are Group 13, Sabinyo, Amahoro, Umubano, Susa; Kwitonda and Hirwa.

Most groups are half-day walks but Susa can take 5-7 hours. You can also climb a volcano, visit the remains of Dian Fossey's grave and the graves of the gorillas which she studied, and see the endangered golden monkey. Clients stay at Volcanoes Virunga Safari Lodge. The lodge is in Rwanda and faces the Virunga Mountains but is not in the mountains and it should not be confused with Virunga National Parc in DRC.

Golden Monkey trekking is another popular activity. An elusive treasure in the Virunga Mountains, this little known monkey is one of the most endangered primates in Africa and it is now thought that the only viable population of these monkeys is in the Virunga Volcanoes. A smaller population may exist in the Nyungwe Forest in Southern Rwanda but this has yet to be verified. The golden monkey is a distinct species of guenon - *Cercopithecus Kandti* and is endemic to the Albertine Rift.

Two groups are being habituated for visitors in the Virungas. The Kabatwa group is found in the east of the park, on the flanks of the Sabinyo volcano and has about 40 in the group and can be viewed already. The Musongo Group lives higher up on the flanks of the Karisimbi volcano at an altitude of about 2800-3000 meters and has about 100 individuals. This will be open to visitors shortly.

Habituation has been a slow process as acceptance to humans has not been easy but was finally achieved in 2003. The monkeys now chatter and play quite happily while being observed. They spend a large proportion of their time climbing the vegetation, some 2-3 meters above ground, feeding on bamboo leaves and shoots. The juveniles are quite small and fluffy and their infectious good humor makes them charming to watch. They live near the lower reaches of the park and it is usually only a short walk to reach them.

Seeing the Golden Monkey makes a fantastic short excursion into the misty Virunga forest and it is a great addition to the activities clients can do in the magical afro-montane forest. As with the gorillas, only one hour is allowed with the Golden Monkeys and six

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visitors are allowed per visit. There is one visit a day, which starts at 7.30am from the park office at Kinigi.

Nyungwe Forest is a massive montane forest, in southern Rwanda, the largest in Central Africa, has thirteen species of primate including chimpanzee, Rwenzori colobus and l'Hoest's monkey. The colobus live in large groups, including a four hundred-strong semi-habituated group thought to be the largest troop of arboreal primates in Africa. Around 300 bird species, 24 of which are regional endemics and over 100 varieties of orchids and butterflies are other attractions.

EQUIPMENT FOR GORILLA TRACKING

Warm clothes, fleece or light wool sweater, moisture wicking undergarments, lightweight wool socks, long-sleeved shirt, strong waterproof walking boots (comfortable for going up and down steep hills), sturdy trousers, sunglasses, a torch, fast film, binoculars, sun screen, a sun hat, a breathable lightweight rain poncho or parka with a rain hat, gloves to grip vegetation (inexpensive gardening gloves work well) and a small backpack to carry water and a packed lunch.

It is best to have layers of clothing as temperatures tend to change. The guides will make you a walking stick if needed.

GORILLA INFORMATION

Gorilla Tracking and Permits are US\$750 per activity.

Gorilla tracking is limited to people aged 15 or above and all trackers must be in good health; please note that if you are ill you may be forbidden to track the gorillas. This is due to illnesses being passed directly from humans to gorillas.

Tracking is not easy however is possible by most people in a reasonably healthy state. A percentage of each permit goes back into the local community and park infrastructure. Tracking of gorillas can be denied at short notice due to security in the area or as a result of park authority regulations.

You are tracking wild animals and therefore the purchase of a gorilla permit does not guarantee seeing them. Please obey your guide at all times, they know what to do and not to do around these animals and it is for your safety and security that they are there. Please keep a minimum distance of 7 metres at all times from the gorillas.

Flash photography is not allowed. Professional filmmakers must purchase the relevant permits however personal video recorders are permitted.

You will be designated your guide at the park office. Your guide will explain the rules as to how to behave when around the gorillas.

CLIMATE

The combination of tropical location and high altitude ensures that most of Rwanda has a temperate climate year round. Situated 120km south of the Equator, Rwanda experiences a mean annual temperature of 24 - 27°C. Temperatures rarely stray above 30°C by day or below 15°C at night.

The exceptions are the chilly upper slopes of the Virunga Mountains, and the hot low-lying Tanzania border area protected in Akagera National Park. Seasonal variations in temperature are relatively insignificant. Most parts of the country receive in excess of 1,000mm of rainfall annually. The driest months are July to September and the wettest February to May.

LUGGAGE

Luggage restrictions apply if you are travelling on light aircraft. The per person allocation is 15 kilograms in soft sided duffel bags or similar. Please note this includes hand luggage and camera equipment.

Most of our Rwanda safaris are with private guide and 4x4 vehicle so no luggage restrictions apply other than your main carrier, either South African Airways or Rwanda Air / Air Rwanda. See our separate luggage document located in **Preparation | Important to Know | Luggage Guidelines**.

LAUNDRY

Standard 24-hour laundry services are available at most hotels and lodges.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Do not photograph government buildings, police or military posts. *Rwandans do not like to be photographed without first having been asked. They call these 'stolen pictures'.* Your driver guide is always happy to ask for you first and you would be expected to pay something – maybe 100 to 500 Rwandan shillings depending on the circumstances.

RECOMMENDED READING

We recommend the following books specific to Rwanda.

1. In the Kingdom of Gorillas – Bill Weber & Amy Vedder,
2. The Dark Romance of Dian Fossey - Harold & Hayes
3. Gorillas in the Mist - Dian Fossey
4. The Impenetrable Forest – Thor Hanson
5. Rwanda Brandt Travel Guide – Philip Briggs