

## **GENERAL INFORMATION ON RWANDA:**

### **GEOGRAPHY:**

Nestled just south of the equator, Rwanda is commonly known as ‘Le Pays des Mille Collines’ or ‘The Land of a Thousand Hills’ and is home of the mountain Gorillas. Rwanda is a small, land locked country in eastern / central Africa. It has five volcanoes and 23 lakes as well as several rivers.

- Land area: 26,340 sq km
- President: Paul Kagame
- Official languages: Main languages spoken are Kinyarwanda, French, English and Kiswahili. There are 80 trained gorilla trackers many of whom speak French or English.
- Population: Approximately 13 million
- Capital: Kigali
- Natural resources: Tin, gold and natural gas
- Average temperature: 24 – 27 degrees. Hottest in August – September
- Elevation: 1,000 – 4,500 meters above sea level
- Vegetation: from equatorial forest in northwest to savanna in the east
- Land use: 48% agriculture use, 23% forest, 20% grazing land, 9% other
- Main exports: Coffee & Tea
- Local Currency: Rwanda Franc
- Credit cards: Only accepted at few major establishments

### WHEN TO VISIT RWANDA:

Rwanda can be visited any time of the year. The wet season is the best time to trek chimpanzees in Nyungwe forest as they during dry season's wander further away into the forest and consequently are harder to spot. There are two rainy seasons. The long rains from mid-February to beginning of June and the short rains from mid-September to mid-December. The main dry season lasts from June to September and is the best time to trek the gorillas in Volcanoes National Park. It is also worth noting that with the above mentioned, the climate is not uniform throughout the country. It is drier in the east than in the west and north. Sometimes the volcanoes can even be capped in snow. Kigali and Volcanoes National Park can become rather chilly. The areas around Lake Kivu are generally rather sunny and pleasant all year round.

### HEALTH:

Rwanda is a pleasant country to visit and does not present any major health hazards. The main towns have hospitals although for any serious problems Kigali is the best place to get help. All towns normally have a well-stocked pharmacy although the individual traveler should bring any known personal medication along. As one always should when traveling to any remote area, it is wise to consult your doctor 6-8 weeks prior to departure for updated advice on health care and precautions. It is strongly recommended to update personal immunization protection for tetanus, polio, diphtheria, hepatitis A and typhoid. Yellow fever vaccination is required for all visitors over 1 year of age and as the vaccination is not valid until 10 days after vaccination it is important to have this done in good time as this will be checked upon arrival to Rwanda. This dangerous virus is spread by mosquitoes and is on the increase in the world.

Malaria is less prevalent in Rwanda than in many other African countries but as it does exist in most parts of Rwanda. Anti-malaria tablets and mosquito repellents are essential.

Please drink bottled water only.

### VISA

A valid passport with a minimum of 12 months validity on arrival is mandatory.

All Nationalities can get visa upon arrival without prior application. The Visa fee is at USD.50.00 per person and is valid for a period of 90 days. However for better planning purposes one can apply in advance through their respective embassies. If you decide to get one upon arrival please ensure you have the correct change with you and allow for queues. Nationals of Hong Kong, Philippines, Mauritius,

Singapore and the Democratic Republic of Congo may visit Rwanda without a visa for a period up to 90 days.

### PLASTIC BAN

Please refrain from bringing plastic bags to Rwanda. Banned by law since 2008, any plastic bags in your luggage will be confiscated at the airport or other point of entry.

### MONEY AND CREDIT CARDS

Come prepared - how to make the financial aspect smooth during your visit.

The local currency is the “Rwanda Franc” and there are several denominations of RWF 500, 1,000, 2000 to 5000 notes. One US\$ = Approximately 950 RWF (as of December 2019). There is only one Forex Bureau at the Airport but several of them are available in Kigali town offering similar rates. The most widely accepted currencies are US\$, Euro and to a certain extent also French Francs and Sterling Pounds. Important to note is that US\$ bills produced before 2000 are not accepted, while those produced between 2001 – 2004 will fetch a lower exchange rate. Selected bank branches are open half days on Saturdays and queues can here be long and rather slow. Few establishments accept credit cards so be careful to check this before running up a bill at for example restaurants. Major hotels, restaurants and lodges do although accept some credit cards, sometimes with an extra charge added on top of the bill. Travelers’ cheque are not recommended.

### VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK:

“In the heart of Central Africa, so high up that you shiver more than sweat”, wrote the eminent primatologist Dian Fossey, are great old volcanoes towering up to almost 15,000 feet. They are nearly covered with rich, green rainforest, “The Virungas” .

Situated in the far northwest of Rwanda, the Parc des Volcans protects the steep slopes of this magnificent mountain range, home of the rare mountain gorilla, and the rich mosaic of the montane eco-system, which embraces evergreen and bamboo forest, open grasslands, swamp and heath.

An exhilarating trek through the cultivated foothills of the Virungas offers stirring views in all directions. Then abruptly, the trail enters the national park, immersing trekkers in the mysterious intimacy of the rainforest, alive with golden monkeys, all littered with fresh spoor of the mountains elusive populations of buffalo and elephant.

Through gaps in the forest canopy, the magnificent peaks are glimpsed, easily accessible and among the highest in Africa, beckoning an ascent. In the Volcano National Park there are now fully habituated Golden Monkeys and they are accessible to tourists since June 2003.

### **The Mountain Gorilla:**

Around half of the world's population lives in Volcanoes National Park, including 12 habituated groups. The families are known as Susa, Igisha, Karisimbi, Sabyinyo, Amahoro, Agashya, Kwitonda, Umubano, Hirwa, Bwenge, Ugyenda and Muhoza.

A silverback (mature male) weighs up nearly three times as much as the average man which is up to 200 kgs.

The Mountain Gorilla is a distinct species from its cousin the western lowland gorilla and was unknown to western science until 1902.

Gorillas share 97% of their genes with mankind; they are highly sociable, moving in troops of between 5-50 animals typically comprising a silverback, three or four wives and several young.

Females reach sexual maturity in their eighth year, males when they are around 13.

Gorillas have few natural enemies and can live up to 50 years in the wild.

A female gorilla has a similar gestation period to humans and may raise up to six offspring if she live to old age.

Gorillas spend most of their waking hours on the ground, but sleep in trees, each building itself a temporary nest for the night.

### **Gorilla Watching Etiquette:**

Gorillas are very vulnerable to human illness, please always wash your hands before you visit them. If you are unwell or carry a contagious disease, please stay behind to protect them. If you are unwell, you will not be allowed to track the gorillas.



Tracking commences every morning from the Volcanoes National Park headquarters in Kinigi from between 7:30-8:30 AM. There is a daily maximum of 8 visitors to each gorilla group, and each group is accompanied by a guide and by porters who will help carry your day-pack for you.

The gorillas cover reasonably large distances and they are never continuously in one area. Because of this, the time taken to track the gorillas varies, from as little as half an hour to as much as 6 hours before returning to the headquarters. The terrain is exceptionally difficult, which steep slopes covered in dense vegetation. In addition, the altitude of 1,500 meters and more means participants do need to be physically fit to enjoy the track. Once the gorillas are located, your group will be permitted ONLY one hour with them.

Turn your head away if you need to sneeze; never spit in the forest.

Stay in a tight group when near the gorillas speaking only of whispers.

Don't eat or drink near them, nor leave any rubbish.

For your safety and their health keep seven meters away from the gorillas, but stay still if they approach you. Never touch a gorilla.

Although non-aggressive, they are wild animals and can sometime charge. If this happens, crouch down, don't look them in the eye and wait for them to pass.

Rash photography is forbidden. Point and shoot cameras are inadvisable as picture quality will be poor in these conditions and the flash can go off inadvertently.

If a gorilla stares at you, look away or down.

Children under the age of fifteen (15) are not allowed on gorilla tracking excursions

Pls. do not use your flash when taking pictures. It MUST be off!



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### Personal trekking equipment:

The following is a suggested list of items to bring along, specifically if your safari includes trekking the gorillas and / or the chimpanzees. It is highly recommended that visitors prepare themselves and attain a reasonable level of physical fitness prior to doing a trek, as the terrain is mountainous and at times fairly steep. During periods of rainfall the terrain can be muddy and slippery.

- Good, waterproof hiking footwear. Good grip soles important.
- Change of shoes, we recommend comfortable sports shoes or similar
- Comfortable socks & T-shirts
- Raincoat or rain poncho, preferably also covering head.
- Long trousers / jeans of good quality to protect against scratches and stinging nettles
- Long sleeved summer jacket for nettle protection and a sweater for chilly evenings
- “Day back pack” to carry change of T-shirt, socks, sweets, camera, tissues, raincoat, snacks etc.
- Camera with plenty of light sensitive film, for digital cameras extra memory card!
- Hat and high level sunscreen
- Leather gloves are recommended
- Water container - 2 liters capacity suggested
- Sweets, chocolates etc.

- Walking sticks are available at the park head quarters
- Re-hydration mixture, paracetamol and any personal medication
- Gaiters to protect against stinging nettles.



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