

# Rwanda

Mention Rwanda to anyone with a small measure of geopolitical conscious, and they'll no doubt recall images of the horrific genocide that brutalised this tiny country in 1994. In the span of 100 days, an estimated one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were systematically butchered by the Interahamwe in one of the most savage genocides in the history of mankind.

While the scars still run deep, Rwanda has done a remarkable job of healing its wounds and turning towards the future with a surprising measure of optimism. The government has taken measures to eliminate tribal identities, and successfully rallied the country under the unifying Rwandan banner. And, in the hopes of stimulating its developing economy through ecotourism, the country is protecting its most vital natural resource – the mountain gorilla.

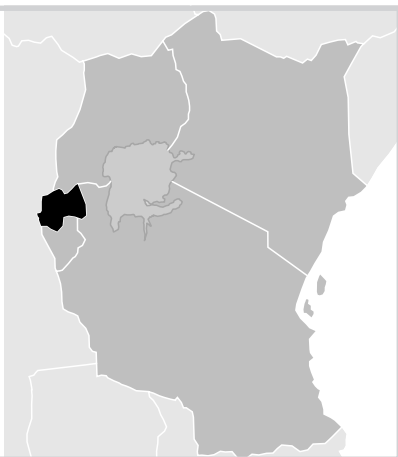
Forming a natural frontier with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC; formerly Zaire) and Uganda, the Virunga volcanoes are home to some of the world's last remaining mountain gorillas. Tracking these primate relatives through bamboo forests and equatorial jungles is for many the highlight of their African travels.

Of course, 'Le Pays des Mille Collines' or the Land of a Thousand Hills as it is frequently known, isn't all monkey business. On the contrary, Rwanda is a lush country of endless mountains and stunning scenery. The shores of Lake Kivu conceal some of the best inland beaches on the continent, while Parc National Nyungwe Forest protects extensive tracts of montane rainforest.

Given its dark history, travellers in East Africa are often unsure about crossing the border into Rwanda. However, the country remains stable and peaceful, and its attempts to build a sustainable ecotourism industry are certainly worth your support.

## FAST FACTS

- **Area** 26,338 sq km
- **Birthplace of** Paul Kagame
- **Capital** Kigali
- **Country Code** 📞 250
- **Famous for** Dian Fossey, mountain gorillas, *Hotel Rwanda*
- **Languages** Kinyarwanda, French and English
- **Money** Rwandan franc (RFr); US\$1 = RFr552; €1 = RFr710
- **Population** 10.2 million



## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Parc National des Volcans** (p562) Hike along the forested slopes of the Virungas in search of silverback gorillas and golden monkeys
- **Parc National de Nyungwe** (p579) Trek through steamy rainforests in search of colobus monkeys and chimpanzees
- **Parc National de L'Akagera** (p585) Have a Rwandan-style safari experience in this up-and-coming game park
- **Gisenyi** (p572) Kick back with a passionfruit cocktail on the sandy shores of Lake Kivu
- **Kigali Memorial Centre** (p553) Confront the horrors of the genocide at this haunting memorial on the outskirts of the capital

## CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The average daytime temperature in Rwanda is around a pleasant 24°C with a possible maximum of 30°C. In the higher mountainous regions, which take up a lot of the country's space, the daytime range is as low as 10° to 15°C. There are four discernible seasons: the long rains from mid-March to mid-May, the long dry from mid-May to September, the short rains from October to mid-December and the short dry from mid-December to mid-March. It rains more frequently and heavily in the northeast, where volcanoes are covered by verdant rainforest. The summit of Karisimbi (4507m), the highest of these volcanoes and the highest peak in Rwanda, is often covered with snow and is prone to sleet.

For more information on Rwanda's climate, see the climate charts on p606.

Rwanda can be visited at any time of year – if you don't like getting wet however, you will want to avoid the long rains of mid-March to mid-May. The dry season from mid-May to September is easier for tracking mountain gorillas, but the endless hills can look quite dry and barren, a contrast to the verdant greens of the wet season. Peak season for gorilla tracking is July and August; travelling outside this time means it is easier to arrange a permit.

For details about planning your trip, and what to bring, see the boxed text, p14.

## HISTORY

For detail on Rwanda's history prior to independence in 1962, see p25.

## Decolonisation & Independence

Rwanda and neighbouring Burundi were colonised by Germany and later Belgium, both of whom played on ethnic differences to divide and conquer the population. Power was concentrated in the hands of the minority Tutsi, with the Tutsi *mwami* (king) playing the central role in political and legislative decision-making.

In 1956, Mwami Rudahigwa called for independence from Belgium, which influenced Rwanda's colonial occupiers to switch allegiance to the Hutu majority. The Tutsi favoured fast-track independence, while the Hutus wanted the introduction of democracy followed later by independence.

After the death of Rudahigwa in 1959, tribal tensions flared as the 'Hutu Revolution' resulted in the deaths of an estimated 20,000 to 100,000 Tutsis. Another 150,000 Tutsis were driven from the country, and forced to resettle as refugees in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania.

Following independence in 1962, the Hutu majority came to power under Prime Minister Gregoire Kayibanda, who introduced quotas for Tutsis that limited their opportunities for education and work. In the fresh round of bloodshed that followed, thousands more Tutsis were killed, and tens of thousands fled across the borders.

Intertribal tensions erupted once again in 1972 when tens of thousands of Hutu were massacred in Burundi by the Tutsi-dominated government in reprisal for a coup attempt. The

### HOW MUCH?

- **Tracking the mountain gorillas** US\$500
- **Fresh fish at a decent restaurant** US\$5 to US\$10
- **Internet access per hour** US\$1 to US\$2
- **New Times newspaper** US\$0.50
- **100km bus ride** US\$2

### LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** US\$1 to US\$2
- **Litre of bottled water** US\$0.75
- **Primus Beer 720ml** US\$2
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$10
- **Street snack (beef brochettes)** US\$1