

Burundi

A tiny nation sandwiched between the giants of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Tanzania, Burundi is defined by a mix of soaring mountains, languid lakeside communities and ongoing ethnic conflict. Burundi has been devastated by intertribal tensions since independence, and, despite recent peace accords, violence could flare up at any time. Simply, Burundi remains a potentially unstable country in a potentially unstable region of Africa.

The tourist industry died a quick death with the outbreak of civil war in 1993. Since then, many of the upcountry attractions have been off limits, including the southernmost source of the Nile, the ancient forest of Parc National de la Kibira, and the legendary spot where Stanley was reputed to have uttered the timeless words 'Dr Livingstone, I presume?'

However, the steamy capital Bujumbura has a lovely location on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, and just outside the city are some of the best inland beaches on the continent. Burundians themselves also have an irrepressible *joie de vivre*.

At the time of research, travel to the capital Bujumbura was reasonably safe, as was the main road north to Rwanda, though greater caution needs to be exerted while travelling in the countryside. If the peace process holds and the situation stabilises, Burundi may once again find itself on the overland map of Africa. In the meantime, however, check, double-check and triple-check on the latest security situation before heading into the country or travelling anywhere beyond Bujumbura.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 27,835 sq km
- **ATMs** There are no international ATMs; come with cash
- **Borders** DRC, Rwanda, Tanzania
- **Budget** US\$20 per day
- **Capital** Bujumbura
- **Languages** Kirundi, French, Swahili
- **Money** Burundi franc (BFr); US\$1 = BFr1200, €1 = BFr 1800
- **Population** 8.7 million
- **Seasons** Wet (March to May, October to January) dry (May to October, January to March)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 257; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC +2
- **Visa** Required by all; US\$40 for one month; single East African tourist visa expected to be introduced soon (see p737)



HOW MUCH?

- **Hotel** US\$50 to US\$100
- **Plate of garnished brochettes** US\$2 to US\$3
- **Internet access per hour** US\$1 to US\$2
- **Local newspaper** US\$0.50
- **100km bus ride** US\$2

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1 to US\$2
- **1L bottled water** US\$0.50
- **Primus beer** US\$1 to US\$2
- **Souvenir T-shirt** There aren't any...
- **Street snack (grilled goat)** US\$1

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Bujumbura** (p637) Dine out in style before dancing the night away in this city where people love to live it up.
- **Beaches** (p639) Hit the best inland beaches in East Africa for some fun in the sun.
- **Source du Nil** (p640) Journey to the southernmost source of the Nile at Mt Kikizi.
- **La Pierre de Livingstone et Stanley** (p639) Visit the rock where those fateful words 'Dr Livingstone, I presume?' were uttered.
- **Being in Burundi** Enjoy the novelty of being pretty much the only tourist in the entire country.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The climate in Burundi varies widely depending on whether you are in the hot and steamy lowlands around Lake Tanganyika, where temperatures average 30°C, or the more mountainous north, where the usual temperature is a much milder 20°C.

ITINERARIES

It is hard to talk of itineraries in such a small country with a long history of civil war. Most people do a hit and run on Bujumbura, entering via Rwanda, and spending a few days exploring the capital and surrounding environs. Assuming peace holds, it is likely travellers will continue south along the shores of Lake Tanganyika to link up with Gombe Stream National Park (p803) in western Tanzania. However, the security situation in the coun-

tryside must be sized up on the ground before considering any overland travel in Burundi.

HISTORY

The original Burundians were the Twa Pygmies, but they were soon squeezed out by bigger groups. First came the Hutu, mostly farmers of Bantu stock, from about AD 1000. Later, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the tall, pastoral Tutsi from Ethiopia and Uganda arrived. Relations were cordial, but the Tutsi gradually subjugated the Hutu in a feudal system similar to that of medieval Europe.

At the end of the 19th century, Burundi and Rwanda were colonised by Germany, but after WWI the League of Nations mandated Rwanda-Urundi to Belgium. Taking advantage of the status quo, the Belgians ruled through the Tutsi chiefs and princes. The establishment of coffee plantations and the resulting concentration of wealth in the hands of the Tutsi elite provoked tensions between the two tribal groups.

Independence Days

In the 1950s a nationalist organisation based on unity between the tribes was founded under the leadership of the king's eldest son, Prince Rwagasore. But, in the lead-up to independence, he was assassinated with the connivance of the colonial authorities, who feared their commercial interests would be threatened if he took power.

Despite this setback, it appeared that Burundi was headed for a majority Hutu government following independence in 1962. But in the 1964 elections, Mwami Mwambutsa refused to appoint a Hutu prime minister, even though Hutu candidates were the clear winners. Hutu frustration boiled over, and Hutu military officers and political figures staged an attempted coup. A wholesale purge of Hutu from the army and bureaucracy followed.

In 1972 another large-scale revolt resulted in more than 1000 Tutsi killed. The Tutsi military junta responded with selective genocide: any Hutu with wealth, a formal education or a government job was rooted out and murdered, often in the most horrifying way. After three months, 200,000 Hutu had been killed and another 100,000 had fled the country.

Stalemate

In 1976 Jean-Baptiste Bagaza came to power in a bloodless coup. During the Bagaza years,