

# Rwanda

Mention Rwanda to just about anyone with the smallest 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 just three months, an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were systematically butchered by the Interahamwe in one of the most savage genocides recorded in modern history.

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 the labels associated with a tribal identity and successfully rallied the country under the unifying Rwandan banner.

Forming a natural frontier with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly Zaïre) 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.

Travellers in East Africa are often unsure about crossing the border into Rwanda, given the country's grim history. 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
- **ATMs** None that accepts international cards
- **Borders** Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly Zaïre), Tanzania, Uganda
- **Budget** US\$50 to US\$75 per day, but tracking gorillas will cost some serious cash
- **Capital** Kigali
- **Languages** Kinyarwanda, French and English
- **Money** Rwandan franc (RfR); US\$1 = RfR571, €1 = RfR828
- **Population** 10.2 million
- **Seasons** Wet (mid-March to mid-May, mid-October to mid-December), dry (mid-May to mid-October, mid-December to mid-March)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 250; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC +2
- **Visa** US\$60 for three months; available on arrival; single East African tourist visa expected to be introduced soon (see p737)



**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**

- **1L petrol** US\$1 to US\$2
- **1L bottled water** US\$0.75
- **Bottle of Primus beer 720ml** US\$2
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$10
- **Beef brochettes** US\$1

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- **Parc National des Volcans** (p750) Hike along the forested-slopes of the Virungas in search of silverback gorillas.
- **Parc National de Nyungwe** (p752) Hike through steamy rainforests in search of colobus monkeys and chimpanzees.
- **Gisenyi** (p751) Kick back with a passion-fruit cocktail on the sandy shores of Lake Kivu.
- **Kigali Memorial Centre** (p747) Confront the horrors of the genocide at this haunting memorial on the outskirts of the capital.
- **National Museum of Rwanda** (p752) Get educated at one of East Africa's best ethnographic museums in Huye (Butare), Rwanda's intellectual capital.

**CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO**

The average daytime temperature is around 24°C, except in the higher mountains, which take up a lot of the country, where the range is 10°C to 15°C. Rwanda can be visited at any time of year. The dry season from mid-May to mid-October is easier for tracking mountain gorillas, but the endless hills are barren, a contrast to the verdant greens of the wet season. Peak seasons for gorilla tracking are July and August and December and January; travelling outside this time means it is easier to arrange a permit.

It rains more frequently and heavily in the northeast, where the volcanoes are covered by

rainforest. The summit of Karisimbi (4507m), the highest peak in Rwanda, is often covered with sleet or snow.

**ITINERARIES**

- **One Week** Concentrate on the north of the country. Pay your respects at the Kigali Memorial Centre (p747) before heading for the brooding volcanoes that form the border between Rwanda, Uganda and the DRC. Track the gorillas at Parc National des Volcans (p750), one of life's ultimate experiences. Head west to Gisenyi (p751), the coastal riviera town on Lake Kivu, and chill out on the sands.
- **Two Weeks** Kick off from the capital Kigali, and head south to the intellectual heartland of Huye (Butare; p752) and its magnificent national museum. Spend a few days at Parc National de Nyungwe (p752) to see the huge troupes of chimps and Angolan colobus monkeys. Continue up the shores of Lake Kivu to Gisenyi (p751) before heading east to Parc National des Volcans (p750) to meet the majestic mountain gorillas.

**HISTORY****Early Days**

The original Rwandans, the Twa pygmies, were gradually displaced by bigger groups of migrating Hutu tribespeople from AD 1000. Later came the Tutsi from the north, arriving from the 16th century onwards. The authority of the Rwandan *mwami* (king) was far greater than that of his opposite number in Burundi, and the system of feudalism that developed here was unsurpassed in Africa outside Ethiopia. Tutsi overlordship was reinforced by ceremonial and religious observance.

**European Meddling**

The Germans took the country in 1890 and held it until 1916, when their garrisons surrendered to Belgian forces during WWI. During Belgian rule, the power and privileges of the Tutsi increased, as the new masters found it convenient to rule indirectly through the *mwami* and his princes.

However, in 1956 Mwami Rudahigwa called for independence from Belgium and the Belgians began to switch allegiance to the Hutu majority. The Tutsi favoured fast-track independence, while the Hutus wanted the introduction of democracy first.