



UBER LUXE SAFARIS

The Ultimate Bespoke Safari Experience

TRAVEL TIPS AND PACKING LIST TO RWANDA

Rwanda, a tiny landlocked country in central Africa (in the centre of the Albertine Rift), characterized by undulating hilly and mountainous terrain, with rainforest on the western heights and heavily cultivated fields in the valleys below – not for nothing known as “The Land of a Thousand Hills”. From the centre, the land slopes away to the savannahs and marshes of the east. The legendary Virunga Mountains in the north-east are home to volcanoes, swathes of cloud forest and half the world’s total population of Critically Endangered mountain gorillas. To the west lies Lake Kivu, one of the world’s deepest lakes, with a depth of 475 metres (1 558 feet.)

It has Uganda to the north, Congo to the east, Tanzania to the west and Burundi to the south. The country covers 26 338 square kilometres (10 169 square miles) – slightly larger than Vermont; the size of Macedonia – with an estimated population number of 11.9 million (reported figures as of 2017). The renowned Volcanoes National Park is part of the Virunga Mountains and home to the mountain gorilla and golden monkey. Kigali, the nation’s capital, known to be green, clean and safe, is conveniently located in the centre of the country. The flying time from Johannesburg, on a scheduled commercial air flight is approximately three hours and forty five minutes. From Nairobi it is approximately one hour and thirty minutes.

The country supports impressive diversity and endemism which is conserved by its national parks, including the Volcanoes, Akagera, Gishwati-Mukura and Nyungwe national parks. Aside from more than a thousand plant species, 670 bird species and myriad reptiles and amphibians, Rwanda boasts some 151 mammal species, amongst which are 15 primates.

Considered the most densely-populated country in Africa with a predominantly rural population, Rwanda is known for the traumatic genocide of 1994, as well as for its courageous recovery to become a stable, well-run and united country with a truly inspiring story. The pressure on natural resources in this populous yet beautiful country means that eco-tourism plays a critical role in the conservation of the remaining islands of central African rainforest biodiversity.

INTERESTING FACTS

The blue band represents happiness and peace, the yellow band symbolizes economic development and the green band symbolizes the hope of prosperity. The sun represents enlightenment. The Rwandan Coat Of Arms – The national seal of Rwanda was restyled in 2001 to match the colour scheme of the new national flag. The tribal devices in the centre is surmounted on a cog wheel and encircled by a square knot. The motto at the top is “Ubumwe, Umurimo, Gukunda Igihugu” (“Unity, Work, Patriotism”).

Government

Rwanda has a multi-party system and is ruled by a president, officially and democratically elected by the citizens. The country encompasses two chambers of parliament, The Senate and The Chamber of Deputies.

Economy

Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, with tea and coffee playing leading roles. Tourism has grown considerably and is now also a significant contributor to the country’s economic growth.

The mining of gold, cassiterite (tin ore), wolframite (tungsten ore) and the exploitation of energy through methane and hydropower are more recent developments, which are also proving to be vibrant emergent sectors.

Currency

The local currency is the Rwandan Franc (RWF) and the most common exchange transactions are Rwanda Francs to US Dollars. Bank notes are in 500, 1 000, 2 000, and 5 000 denominations. The currency is formally issued and controlled by the National Bank of Rwanda (BNR). Note that when exchanging US Dollars to Rwanda Francs, the higher amount of currency you change, the more favourable the exchange rate will be.

Language

All Rwandans share two national languages which are Kinyarwanda and Swahili. English and French are the official languages. In 2008, the government changed the medium of education from French to English.

Time

The Rwanda time zone standard is two hours ahead of the Greenwich Mean Time – (GMT) + 2 hours – all year round, in the Central Africa Time Zone (CAT).

Climate

Most of Rwanda has a temperate year-round climate due to the combination of a tropical location and a high altitude. Seasonal variations in temperature are relatively insignificant and temperatures rarely stray above 30°C by day, or below 15°C at night throughout the year. The exceptions are the chilly upper slopes of the Virunga Mountains. Most parts of the country receive in excess of 1 000 millimetres (39.37 inches) of rainfall annually – with the driest months being June, July and August; with March, April, May, October, November and December being the wettest. Gorilla trekking in Volcanoes National Park and game drives through Akagera National Park are good year round.

Public Holidays

Based on the Ministry of Public Service and Labour, official public holidays that have been declared are listed below as follows:

- 01st January New Year's Day
- 01st February National Heroes Day
- April Good Friday (actual date differs yearly)
- 07th April Tutsi Genocide Memorial Day
- 01st May Labour Day
- Eid El Fitr (actual date differs yearly – date to be announced each year by The Rwanda Muslims' Association)
- 01st July Independence Day
- 04th July Liberation Day
- 15th August Assumption Day
- 25th December Christmas Day
- 26th December Boxing Day
- (Note that with public holidays that fall on a Sunday, the following Monday automatically becomes an additional public holiday.)

Cultural & Special Events

Monthly: Umuganda (Public Cleaning Day)

Umuganda is a day of communal work done in Rwanda, on every last Saturday of the month. Basically, this activity requires full participation of each citizen in their specific cells. In addition, it is done to keep the country clean and conserve the environment.

Tour du Rwanda

This is a cycling event which happens twice every year, with specific dates confirmed each year.

Fespad

This is the Pan-African Dance Festival which celebrates cultures from different countries through unveiling their traditional dances. This is a week-long event which happens in Rwanda every two years, with dates to be confirmed.

Car Free Day

Taking place on the first and third Sunday of every month, no vehicles are allowed in certain areas of Kigali city and in other cities in the country. This is a general sports event in the country to encourage Rwandans to maintain fitness and health. In addition, Car Free Day brings the community together as a way of encouraging unity.

07 April: Kwibuka (Genocide Memorial Season)

Kwibuka is the period of paying due respect to the Tutsi who were massacred in the 1994 genocide. While Kwibuka takes 100 days, Rwanda has set aside a specific memorial week during that time to focus on different memorial activities such as a walk in remembrance and discussions about genocide in each sector of the country.

May: Kigali Peace Marathon

Rwanda is known as the "Land of a Thousand Hills", making it an ideal venue for a challenging run. This marathon for peace is open to all who are interested in participating.

August: Umuganura (Cultural Harvest)

This is a festival celebration about Rwandan cultural expressions. It happens in the first week of August where we recognize Rwanda's traditions, customs and positive values. It is a great time to reflect on Rwandan culture and set measures of how to preserve them.

September: Kwita Izina (The Gorilla Naming Ceremony)

This is a momentous occasion in Rwanda where we recognize and name new gorilla babies born every year. The specific date of Kwita Izina is announced every year.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Visas & Entry Requirements

Citizens of countries members to the following international organizations; African Union, Commonwealth and La Francophonie get visa upon arrival and are waived visa fees for a visit of 30 days - Albania, Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belize, Belgium, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Cambodia, Comoros, Congo, Cyprus, Dominica, Djibouti, Egypt, Eswatini, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, France, Gabon, Grenada, Greece, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, India, Kiribati, Jamaica, Laos, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritania, Maldives, Monaco, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nauru, New Zealand, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Principality of Andorra, Romania, Republic of Macedonia, Saharawi Republic, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, The Bahamas, The Gambia, Tonga, Tuvalu, Trinidad and Tobago, Saint Lucia, St Vincent and The Grenadines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, United Kingdom, Vietnam, Vanuatu, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

A citizen of East African Community Member States (Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and South Sudan) shall be issued a pass/entry visa free of charge upon arrival to stay for the period of six months.

The following countries to be granted 90 days valid visa free of charge upon arrival: Angola, Benin, Central African Republic, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, The Federation of Saint Christopher and Nevis, Ghana, Guinea, Indonesia, Haiti, Mauritius, Philippines, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Sao Tome and Principe, Singapore and the state Qatar.

Citizens of all countries that all not visa exempt have also option to submit application online or at the Rwanda Diplomatic Missions of the country of residence before departure. Those applying online have the option to pay online or upon arrival. There is no single affiliated Agent that is authorised to apply for visa on your behalf. Such Agents may mislead you and charges more than the required visa fees.

The visa fees must not exceed 50 USD for single entry visa or 70 USD for multiple entry.

Vaccinations & Malaria

Malaria prophylactic recommendations for travelers to Africa:

Expert opinion differs regarding the best approach to malaria prophylaxes. It is important to bear in mind that malaria may be contracted despite chemoprophylaxis, especially in areas where chloroquine resistance has been reported. Both chloroquine-resistant and normal strains of malaria are prevalent in Africa.

In Rwanda specifically, mosquitoes and malaria can be found in more populated, lower-lying areas such as Kigali, Gisenyi or Akagera. Akagera National Park lies in a malaria zone. It is, therefore, recommended that necessary precautions are taken to avoid being bitten (insect repellents, as well as long sleeves and trousers in the evenings and mornings). Please contact your general practitioner or travel clinic for advice regarding prophylaxis medication should you have any further concerns. At higher altitudes there are no malaria mosquitoes and therefore no malaria.

Vaccines commonly recommended for travelers to Africa include:

- Tetanus
- Diphtheria
- Polio
- Typhoid
- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- Rabies
- Meningitis

Yellow Fever (While the Yellow Fever vaccination is not a requirement when visiting Rwanda, only, proof of inoculation in the form of a certificate is required by all SADC countries for any traveller arriving from Rwanda. This onward travel includes Botswana, Kenya, Namibia, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe amongst others.)

Please consult your medical practitioner, travel clinic and/or The World Health Organization (WHO) for all health advisories.

Payment

Regarding the payment system in Rwanda, all banks accept all currencies in subject to the preference of a customer. Payment may be effected by cash (US Dollars, GBP Sterling and EURO). Electronic transactions are fully applicable as well. While the foreign currency of choice is the US Dollar, it is important to note that US Dollar currency will only be accepted when printed prior to 2006 and when in a good state, i.e. no stains or torn paper.

Credit Cards

MasterCard, Visa Card and Union can be used in Kigali. A mandatory 3% credit card charge applies. Note that Diners Club and American Express are often not accepted, nor are Bank Cheques and Travelers Cheques. Elsewhere it is advisable to use cash (Rwanda Francs). Please note Wilderness Safaris camps/lodges are unable to accept American Express and Diners Club cards.

Banks

Bank of Kigali (BK), Commercial Bank of Kigali (BCR), Rwanda Development Bank, Eco Bank, Access Bank, Banque Populaire du Rwanda, Coge Bank, Equity bank, GTBank, Urwego Opportunity Bank, Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB), Unguka Bank, Zigama CSS.

Banks are widely available and operate Monday to Friday, 08:00 – 19:00, with some branches open on Saturdays 09:00 – 16:00. Rwanda's banks are closed on Sundays and public holidays.

Shopping

Shopping in Rwanda is dominated by souvenir sellers. Handmade items may be purchased at market stalls, roadside stands and from street peddlers. Rwanda is a polythene-free country. For environmental reasons, plastic bags are illegal and have been banned. The customary plastic duty-free bags included. Usage of said bags carry a US\$ 100.00 - US\$ 150.00 fine. Thus, Rwanda is one of the least littered countries in Africa.

Value Added Tax (VAT)

The standard VAT rate in Rwanda is 18%, with exemptions and zero rating available in certain cases. Taxable transactions – VAT is imposed on the sale of goods and the provision of services.

Gorilla Permit

As advised by the Rwanda Tourism Board (RDB), the cost of gorilla permits in Rwanda is US\$ 1 500.00 per person with immediate effect. These permits must be obtained prior to arrival and are facilitated by Uber Luxe Safaris. This is to ensure the sustainability of the conservation initiatives in place and to contribute more to the development of communities living around the Volcanoes National Park. Herewith the official RDB statement for more details:

<http://www.rdb.rw/home/newsdetails/article/increase-of-gorilla-permit-tariffs.html>

Excess Luggage

Due to the nature of the safari and the aircraft, guests are limited to 20 kg (44 lb) including carry-on luggage. Luggage must be in the form of a soft bag, i.e. no wheels/frame/rigid structures, dimensions 40 x 40 x 80 cm (16 x 16 x 31 inches), and able to physically fit into a light aircraft storage space.

Wilderness and staff will not accept responsibility for luggage kept in any offices/hotel on behalf of our guests. Guests must ensure that they are in possession of full travel insurance including luggage cover.

Dress Code

Rwanda has no strict dress code on what to wear, although women travelers are advised to dress conservatively. In business areas, people tend to dress smartly. Cotton clothing is the most comfortable during the day, as it gets quite hot, but the nights tend to be chilly, so a heavy sweater and boots are essential.

For gorilla trekking, you will be in rainforest, so it will more than likely than not, rain. Warm clothing is required as well as walking/hiking boots, a hat and lightweight parka/raincoat. Garden gloves, to avoid stinging nettles, and gaiters, are recommended.

Power Supply

Electricity is provided from the national power grid and supported by a back-up generator power system. Each forest villa has 220V plug points (multi plug adaptor charging facilities, including USB) for charging of mobile devices, batteries and for the use of sleep apnoea machines. Please bear in mind that power needs to be carefully conserved – lights and electronic equipment should be turned off when not in use. Should you have a device that is 230V at 50 Hertz, you will need a voltage converter.

Most Lodges use ENERGIE Thermodynamic Solar Systems for the heating of water. Thermodynamic Solar Panels are capable of capturing the heat from the sun, or even from the rain and wind, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. One of the innovative aspects is that an ecological fluid at freezing temperatures circulates through the solar panel, allowing a greater uptake of the solar energy and a higher absorption of the environmental energy, which is then released to the water through a heat exchanger. Thus, ENERGIE's Thermodynamic Solar Panels surpass the limitations of the traditional solar panels and make possible a more efficient increase of the water temperature.

Please remember that even in the rainforest, water is one of Africa's most precious resources. Please be frugal in your usage and close any taps when you have finished.

Avid digital photographers are recommended to bring appropriate storage devices, such as a laptop, for downloading of images. You are advised to bring a spare battery for use while the other is being charged, a power converter/adaptor if applicable, cables for computers or cameras and at least 4 x 2GB flash cards.

At most lodges, it is 100% solar powered with generator back-up for emergencies. Multi-plugs adaptor charging facilities (230V) for mobile devices with USB ports, charging facilities (available on request and prior notice essential) for the use of sleep apnoea machines (guests to provide own device, spare battery/ies, charging unit and adaptors), Basic charging facilities (230V) in the main areas.

Water Supply

For the drinking water most lodges have the Natura® water purification system and sparkling water maker which will provide consistently fresh and pure water that is an on-demand offering and an environmentally-friendly alternative to bottled water. The hi-tech water purification system dispenses chilled sparkling, still and ambient water through a patented three-step filtration process eliminating impurities while retaining healthy, thirst-quenching minerals. In addition, the Natura® water purification process removes sediments, chlorine and pollutants as well as reduces heavy metals, pesticides, chemicals, bacteria and viruses leaving a pure and crisp taste, every time.

While others like in Akagera the water supply will be provided by a borehole with a Natura® water purification process for drinking water. The hot water geysers will be powered by an evacuated tube system.

Sightseeing

If you are overnighing in Kigali, there are optional tours available. Please contact Uber Luxe Safaris for further details.

Gorilla Viewing Protocol

Thirteen habituated groups that are interchangeably utilized to provide access to twelve groups per day that may be tracked and observed in the Volcanoes National Park. While trekking expeditions do not necessarily cover enormous distances, these can range in length between 1.0 – 8.0 kilometres (0.5 – 5.0 miles) over very steep country and at high altitudes ranging between 2 500 – 3 500 metres (8 202 feet – 11 483 feet). The undergrowth can be thick, the ground beneath muddy, and, including the time spent with a gorilla group, excursions can last between approximately 2.0 and 8.0 hours. Park Headquarters is at an approximate altitude of 2 300 metres (7 546 feet). Gorilla viewing protocol is based on the guidelines issued by the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) for great ape viewing. Such protocols are designed specifically to limit stress and behavioral impact, as well as potential disease transmission from humans to gorillas. These are critical for gorilla conservation.

- Maximum viewing duration of any group is 1 hour per day
- Maximum number of guest per gorilla trekking excursion is 8
- Consumption of food and drink while in the presence of gorillas is not allowed
- Smoking is not allowed
- Please keep the surroundings clean and free of litter
- Spitting in the park is strictly prohibited

While gorilla sightings and encounters are very reliable, viewing is dependent on variables such as weather and tracking conditions. Gorilla trekking, itself, is undertaken regardless of prevailing weather conditions.

- When with the gorillas, please keep voices low. Do not make any rapid movements that may cause alarm.
- Should one need to cough or sneeze, mouths and noses must be covered and one must turn away from the gorillas.
- If a gorilla should charge or vocalize, do not be alarmed. Stand still, look away from the gorilla and follow the guide's instructions
- The minimum age for gorilla viewing is 15 years – this is for reasons of safety and possible disease transmission, with children under this age being more prone to infection.
- Again, to minimise possible transmission of human diseases, visitors are requested to maintain a distance of 7.0 metres (23 feet) from the gorillas. Guests that display cold, flu or other respiratory tract symptoms will not be allowed to join a gorilla trek as the park office have the authority to deny any such guest/s access. In such instances, the cost of the gorilla tracking permit will be refunded.
- Gorilla trekking is strenuous and should guest have any condition that could be triggered by high altitude or vigorous exercise, we recommend that all guests consult with their general practitioner well in advance of their travel date as this will enable them to comply accordingly with said protocol (by having an issued certificate of health) and utilize the opportunity to discuss other sensible health precautions.
- No flash photography is permitted when taking images of the gorillas

Altitude Sickness

Most Lodges in Volcanoes National Park are situated at an altitude of around 2 650 metres (8 695 feet) above sea level, with Kigali at 1 567 metres (5 142 feet). As such, some people may feel the effects of high altitude. We recommend that you read the altitude information provided for advice on how to prevent altitude sickness as well as how to recognize and treat symptoms.

Depending on your travel programme and your previous destination it is likely that you have arrived at a higher altitude than where you came from.

Travelers going from lower altitude or sea level to higher elevations such as Bisate, Virunga Volcanoes or Sabyinyo Silverback Lodge may suddenly experience shortness of breath, fatigue, headaches, nausea, and other symptoms resembling flu. This condition, called acute mountain sickness (AMS), is the most common type of altitude sickness. It can occur at elevations as low as 1 500 metres (5 000 feet), where it is likely to last only a day or so, however, is more common above 2 400 metres (8 000 feet). At elevations over 3 050 metres (10 000 feet), three out of four people will have symptoms.

Mountain sickness or altitude sickness results from a lack of oxygen caused by going too high, too fast. Barometric pressure decreases as you go higher – that is, the air gets thinner – and you inhale less oxygen per usual breath. Trying to compensate for this, you breathe more deeply. The likelihood of symptoms increases the higher you go.

Not everyone feels sick at higher altitudes and there is no way to predict a person's highest comfortable altitude. Being physically fit is not necessarily a protection.

Donations

Should you wish to donate any of your trekking items that you no longer need to members of the local community, this would be greatly appreciated. These donations are very welcome and would be put to good use. Please speak with the Lodge Manager or your guide who will keep these items aside for distribution.

Gratuities Guidelines

We would like to reiterate that tipping is not compulsory. Please do not feel obliged to do so, however it is highly appreciated. We have enclosed a brief guideline to assist you.

In addition, you may wish to add a nominal amount ranging between US\$ 15.00 to US\$ 30.00 per day for incidentals (subject to personal budget choice) – i.e. if additional activities are booked once on your journey, if travel arrangements change for any reason, in acknowledgement of good service received in another area, etc.

Professional Guides/Local Tour Leaders – We recommend US\$ 20.00 per group per day.

Drivers/Guides – We recommend US\$ 50.00 per person, per day.

Transfer only Drivers – We recommend about US\$ 5.00 to US\$ 10.00 per group, per transfer.

The General Safari Camp/Lodge – We recommend about US\$ 10.00 per guest, per day. This should be placed in the communal tipping box to be distributed equally amongst all the staff.

Gorilla Tracking Guide/s – We recommend US\$ 20.00 per person, per trek (usually there are two guides and it is standard practice to tip after each trek).

Porters on Gorilla Tracking – We recommend US\$ 10.00 to US\$ 20.00 per porter, per day (this is wage paid for porter to their association you may tip more according to your satisfaction).

Hiking/Trekking Guides – We recommend US\$ 15.00 per group, per day. (Usually there are two guides and it is standard practice to tip after each trek).

Baggage Porters – We recommend US\$ 5.00 per person, per movement at hotels and airports.

Massage Therapists – We recommend about US\$ 3.00 to US\$ 5.00 per treatment.

Meals in Restaurants and Hotels – 10% of the bill which is customary on meal accounts if you are satisfied with the service.

We recommend tipping your guide directly and making use of the gratuity box in the main area for the general camp/lodge staff. With regards to being hosted by Camp Management and/or Assistant Camp Management, tipping separately for said staff is purely optional and per guests' discretion. We would like to suggest that you tip only once, at the end of your stay.



www.uberluxesafaris.com

info@uberluxesafaris.com

+250 788 318 153

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[@uberluxesafaris](#)