



Rwanda Travel-Information

Geography

Rwanda is a landlocked republic in Equatorial Africa, situated on the eastern rim of the Albertine Rift, a western arm of the Great Rift Valley, on the watershed between Africa's two largest river systems: the Nile and the Congo. Much of the country's 26,338 km² is impressively mountainous, the highest peak being Karisimbi (4,507m) in the volcanic Virunga chain protected by the Volcanoes National Park. The largest body of water is Lake Kivu, but there are other numerous lakes around the country, notably Burera, Ruhondo, Muhazi and Mugesera, some of which have erratic shapes following the contours of the steep mountains that enclose them.

Travel documents and Visas

A valid passport with visa is mandatory. In view of the bilateral agreements, nationals of the following countries may visit Rwanda without visa for a period up to 90 days: USA, UK, Germany, Canada, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sweden, Mauritius, South Africa and Hong Kong. Visas can be applied for online or bought upon arrival.

Currency

The unit of currency is the Rwanda Franc. The US dollar is the hard currency of preference. It may be impossible to exchange travellers' cheques away from the capital. Credit cards are usually only accepted at the major hotels in Kigali.

Languages

In addition to the indigenous language of Kinyarwanda, French and English are official languages. French is widely spoken throughout the country. In the capital and other tourist centres, many people speak English.

When to visit

Rwanda can be visited throughout the year. Gorilla trekking and other forest walks are less demanding during the drier months. The European winter is the best time for birds, as Palaearctic migrants supplement resident species. A combination of tropical location and high altitude ensures that most of Rwanda has a temperate year-round climate. Temperatures rarely stray above 30 degrees Celsius by day or below 15 degrees Celsius at night throughout the year. The exceptions are the chilly upper slopes of the Virunga Mountains, and the hot low-lying Tanzania border area protected in Akagera National Park. Throughout the country, seasonal variations in temperature are relatively insignificant. Most parts of the country receive in excess of 1,000mm of precipitation annually, with the driest months being July to September and the wettest February to May.

What to wear

Dress codes are informal. Daytime temperatures are generally warm, so bring lots of light clothing, supplemented by light sweaters for the cool evenings and heavier clothing for the Parc des Volcans and Nyungwe. When tracking Gorillas, wear sturdier clothing to protect against stinging nettles, and solid walking shoes. A hat and sunglasses provide protection against the sun, and a waterproof jacket may come in handy in the moist mountains.

Communications

Rwanda has an excellent cell phone network covering almost the entire country. International phone calls can be made easily. Appropriate SIM cards for the network are readily available everywhere, even in remote towns, and cell phones can be purchased or rented from major shops in Kigali. Most towns of any size will have several Internet cafes and computer centres.

Health

A certificate of yellow-fever vaccination is required. Much of Rwanda lies at too high an elevation for malaria to be a major concern, but the disease is present and prophylactic drugs are strongly recommended. It is advisable not to drink tap water. Bottled mineral water can be bought in all towns. Hospitals are located in all major towns.

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