

Rwanda Country Information

Murakazaneza mu Rwanda! Welcome to Rwanda, the 'Land of a Thousand Hills and a Million Smiles' in the heart of Africa. Our visitors can look forward to a highly unique and inspiring journey to a largely unexplored part of Africa with a rich and intriguing history, exceptionally strong and proud people, and an incredible natural beauty that is rarely matched.

A visit to Rwanda is an excellent introduction to the entire African continent – particularly because of the country's pleasant climate, the high levels of security and stability, the general friendliness of the people, and the ease of getting around and reaching all major attractions within a few hours. But beyond being a part of Africa, Rwanda is a small microcosm of its own. Due to its remoteness and hilly terrain, it was one of the last places to come into contact with the rest of the world. Rwandans are a patriotic people, often introverted and extremely hardworking, which is why a very distinct national culture was able to thrive within the country. The current government's strong embrace of modern economic development and increasingly liberal values has led to a fascinating mix of old and new, of tradition and change. It is our wish and great pleasure to offer you deep and very personal insights into this unique environment that will most certainly challenge your previous perceptions of Africa and of the developing world overall.

Physical Geography

Rwanda is a small and landlocked country on the border of East and Central Africa, its size roughly matching the state of Maryland. Its neighbors include the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to the west, Tanzania to the east, Uganda to the north and Burundi to the south.

Despite the proximity to the Equator, Rwanda enjoys a rather mild climate with an average annual temperature of around 24°C (75°F) and regular rainfall, with two rainy seasons from the middle of September to December and from the end of January to May. This is mainly due to the country's high altitude, ranging from below 1,000m (3,280 feet) to 4,507m (14,786 feet). Rwanda is literally the Land of a Thousand Hills, owing to its position on the eastern rim of the Albertine Rift Valley, a part of the Great Rift Valley that cuts through the continent from the Red Sea to Mozambique and forms the watershed of the Nile and Congo rivers.

The country's natural environment is highly varied. It is dominated by a central plateau with seemingly endless hills and depressions, which is surrounded by mountainous forests in the southwest, the large inland sea Lake Kivu in the west, five volcanoes in the northwest and more moderate eastern slopes that extend, at gradually reducing altitudes, to the plains, swamps and lakes of the eastern border region. Despite some slight local differences, there is a general pattern of increasing temperatures and declining rainfall from west to east, reflecting the decreasing altitude.

History

Rwanda's history can be divided into roughly four periods, namely pre-colonial times, the colonial era, the period from independence leading up to the 1994 genocide, and the reconstruction and transition phase from 1994 onward.

The population of Rwanda is comprised of three ethnic groups: the Tutsi (about 14%), who had been the dominant political and economic force until independence, the majority Hutu (about 85%), who took power after 1961, and the minority Twa (about 1%). Differences between these groups are small and some scholars speculate that Hutu and Tutsi all share the same ethnic heritage, though its exact origins are disputed. In addition, individuals from both groups have been intermarrying for centuries, so the "exact" ethnicity of any Rwandan is fairly dubious. The initial relationship between these groups is said to be based on interdependency and shifting power dynamics. Over decades, ruling powers emphasized distinctions between Tutsi and Hutu. For example, the Rwandan King Rwabugiri, who ruled during the late nineteenth century, reportedly created an ethnic class system that distinguished the Hutu agriculturalist from the Tutsi cattle pastoralist and established the Tutsi as the dominant ruling class of the Kingdom. German colonial masters further exploited the division between the groups, using the Tutsi as their chosen native overlords in an often brutally enforced system of colonial control. When Belgium took power over Rwanda after World War I, it further reinforced 'ethnic differences', counting Hutu and Tutsi in a 1933 census, and marking Rwandans as one or the other with state-issued identity cards. In the years after independence, the Hutu government, being put in place by the Belgians just before independence, sought greater power after having been oppressed by the Tutsi for years, and Hutu politicians regularly attacked Tutsi power holders and those related to them, which caused many Tutsi to resettle elsewhere or to take temporary refuge in neighboring countries.

Meanwhile, subsequent generations of Tutsi refugees in Uganda formed the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) and launched a military offensive against government troops inside Rwanda in 1990. The attack was not successful, but led to peace negotiations resulting in a formal peace agreement in 1993, known as the Arusha Accords, which were backed by a United Nations (UN) peace-keeping force set in place to assist a peaceful transformation to a democratic sharing of power. Nevertheless, ethnic rivalry had become so entrenched in Rwandan society by this time that the planned peace agreements only led to more violence, as both parties shared a fear of renewed oppression by the other. In addition, the President of Rwanda at the time, Juvenal Habyarimana, did not uphold his agreement in the peace accords to allow Rwandan Tutsi refugees in neighbouring countries to safely return to Rwanda, and rather than honour the peace accords by installing a functional democracy, he set about arranging a puppet government with a false multi-party system that consisted of weak and hollow political parties controlled by himself behind closed doors.

On April 6, 1994, President Habyarimana and the President of Burundi, along with several government officials, were killed when their plane was shot down as it approached the main airport of Kigali. To this day, those responsible for the assassination remain unidentified. The death of President Habyarimana tipped the

scales enough to spark a full-blown genocide of the Tutsi people, supported by heavy government propaganda and explicit state encouragement of the violent obliteration of the entire Tutsi population. Moderate Hutu citizens opposed to the government's orchestrated genocide were also targeted for slaughter. In the first ten weeks after April 6th, an estimated one million people were massacred by government forces and rebel Hutu militias, while millions of Hutu and Tutsi refugees fled to neighboring countries, primarily the DRC, after RPF troops took control of the capital city, Kigali, and ousted the Hutu government in July 1994. Tragically, the Rwandan genocide is marked as the most efficient targeted killing of any ethnic group, with the highest number of people being murdered in the shortest amount of time ever in recorded history.

It is impossible to imagine the physical and psychological impact on a nation of such a horrifically violent event. Tens of thousands of people were displaced, hundreds of thousand were brutally raped and tortured, wounded or orphaned, and the physical and social infrastructure of the entire country was decimated to the point of total collapse, including all public institutions such as hospitals, schools, and courts of law. Despite all of this, on a continent where war-affected countries face a high risk of recurring conflict, since 1994 Rwanda has shown impressive development efforts in a relatively stable political context.

The social, political and economic evolution of the country since the time of the genocide is truly beyond remarkable; in many ways, Rwanda has become the poster-child for extremely successful post-conflict development.

Human Development Indicators and Economic Growth

With its Vision 2020 objective of combating poverty, the Government of Rwanda is embarking on a comprehensive program of privatization and liberalization with the goal of attaining rapid and sustainable economic growth. The state seeks to shift the nation's economy from nearly 90% dependency on subsistence agriculture into a modern, broadly based economic engine focusing on technology and services, welcoming investors from around the world while creating employment and new business opportunities for all Rwandans.

Rwanda's entry into the East African Community (an economic bloc comprising Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Burundi) is sure to improve its international standing. Rwanda's primary exports are coffee, tea, minerals (tin, coltan, cassiterite, wolframite), and pyrethrum. Tourism is the country's fastest growing industry, and visitors enjoy some of the unique and fascinating features of this small country, including the rare mountain gorillas of Volcanoes National Park, and the wide variety of animal species in Nyungwe and Akagera National Parks. Coffee is responsible for the bulk of export revenue, making up a quarter of total export value, while the country's mountain-grown tea is considered to be one of the finest in the world.

Since 2007, The Government of Rwanda has made achieving the MDGs fundamental to its policy framework. As the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS) 2008-2012 wrapped up in February 2012, the government launched EDPRS II in a ceremony to evaluate the progress made by the implementation of EDPRS I;

EDPRS II will run from 2013 to 2017. One of the most lauded advancements made by Rwanda since the implementation of EDPRS I is a significant reduction in the poverty rate, which has dropped by nearly 12% over the course of five years. Other contributing factors are the notable improvements made in agricultural production and national infrastructure, the slowing of population growth, and an increase in non-farm wages and income transfers. Net primary school attendance has increased from 86.6% in 2005 to 2006 to 91.7% in 2010 to 2011, bolstered by the 9-year free basic education policy implemented since 2010. Due to these encouraging results, the government began implementation of its 12-year free basic education program in February 2012, to augment net secondary school attendance, which grew from 10.4% in 2005-2006 to 20.9% in 2010-2011.

Nationwide, the percentage of the population with access to safe drinking water from community pumps was 74.2% in 2010 to 2011; however, the population with access to electricity for lighting was only 10.8% in 2010 to 2011 measurements. Maternal health has also improved considerably: the percentage of births assisted by a skilled provider rose from 39% in 2005 to 69% in 2010. Delivery in a healthcare facility also increased from 30% in 2005 to 69% in 2010, consequently maternal mortality dropped drastically from 1071 deaths per year in 2000 to 487 in 2010. Contraceptive use has grown from 10% in 2000 to 45% in 2010 to 2011. In terms of child health, the percentage of children aged 12-23 that are vaccinated has increased to 90% in 2010, from 75% in 2005. Under-5 mortality has dropped from 152 deaths per year in 2005 to 76 in 2010. The HIV prevalence rate has been stable at 3% since 2005, and HIV prevalence rate is currently at 1% for the 15-24 years age group.

According to the latest statistics from the World Bank, Rwanda's GDP grew at 8% in 2012, despite a weak global economy. There are currently 5.1 million people active in the labour force, with an average life expectancy of 58 years. GDP is comprised of agriculture at 33.3% (coffee, tea, pyrethrum, bananas, beans, sorghum, potatoes, livestock), industry at 13.9% (cement, agricultural products, small-scale beverages, soap, furniture, shoes) and services at 52.9%. Exports totaled \$351.8 million in 2012, primarily to Kenya, Malaysia and China, while imports totaled \$1.414 billion in the same year, primarily from Kenya, Uganda and the United States. Though many challenges must still be addressed in order to achieve lasting and meaningful socioeconomic development, Rwanda has come an incredibly long way from the devastation of 1994, and the dedication and commitment of its people coupled with the political will of the government is truly unparalleled in any other developing country in the world today.

Helpful terms in Kinyarwanda and French

English	French	Kinyarwanda
Hello	Salut / bonjour	Muraho
Good morning	Bonjour	Murahomoze
Good afternoon / evening	Bonsoir	Miliwe
How are you?	Cava?	Amakuru (formal); Bite (casual, like "hi, what's

		up”)
I am well.	Cavabien	Ni meza (formal); Ni Byiza (casual)
Thank you (very much).	Mercia (beaucoup)	Murakoze (cyane)
What is your name?	Quelestvotre nom?	Witwande?
My name is...	Je m’appelle...	Nitwa...
Nice to meet you	Enchante	Nishimiyekukumenya
Enjoy your meal	Bon appetite	Muryoherwe
Goodbye	Au revoir	Murabeho
Yes	Oui	Yego
No	Non	Oya
Foreigner (“white person”)	Etranger	Muzungu
Water	Eau	Amazi
Hot	Chaud	Gishush
Cold	Froid	Ikonje
Where are you?	Vousetesou / tuesou?	Uri he?
Here	Ici	Hano
Let’s go	On y va	Tugende