

Rwanda National Day Special

A land of beautiful nature, amazing animals

Rwanda has long been seen as the premier destination for gorilla watching, but today — more than ever — there are dozens of reasons to extend one's stay, starting with the 13 species of primates and East Africa's only canopy walk, all to be found in the dense rainforests of Nyungwe Forest National Park.

Still, it's hardly a surprise that Rwanda developed its reputation for gorillas; experts estimate that there are only 780 mountain gorillas still in existence on earth, and one-third of these majestic creatures can be found in Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park alone.

With the recent reintroduction of lions to Akagera National Park in the east, Rwanda has truly come into its own as a full-fledged safari destination, and to top it all off, it's not even a day's drive between each of these world-class attractions.

Outside of the national parks, visitors can check out, or even participate in, a traditional Intore dance, tour one of Rwanda's dozens of world-class tea and coffee plantations and take a dip in Lake Kivu, all in the same day.

After all that, tourists can soak up the real Rwanda with a hike through lake-side villages on the Congo Nile Trail, pull out the binoculars to take a gander at the hundreds of species on Rwanda's ornithological checklist, or just get out on the water and hook a few fish for the evening brochettes.

Visitors should also set aside some time for Kigali's vibrant dining scene, dozens of historic museums, memorials and churches, as well as to meet the friendly people waiting to welcome guests to their homes.

Abundant nature

Beyond the gorillas that made Rwanda famous, wildlife junkies will be thrilled to know they can track three more species of primate on their Rwandan holiday — chimpanzees, black-and-white

colobus monkeys and the endangered golden monkey. Chimpanzee groups live high in the canopy of Nyungwe National Park, and catching the first glimpse of one crashing through the forest after hiking into their territory is nothing short of astonishing.

The black-and-white colobus live in Nyungwe as well, and these resplendent, long-haired creatures are every wildlife photographer's dream. Finally, like their neighbors the gorillas, the golden monkey can be found in very few places outside of Volcanoes National Park, and their rich colors, energetic demeanor and sizeable troupes of up to 30 individuals are truly a sight to behold.

When it comes to birding, Rwanda is among Africa's most exciting destinations. Within this relatively small and compact country, there over 1,450 bird species, with 27 being Albertine Rift endemics. Highlights include the red-faced barbet, shoebill stork, Bennett's Woodpecker, Papyrus Gonolek and the Miombo wren-warbler.

Rwanda has seven Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs), including the three National Parks — Volcanoes, Akagera and Nyungwe. The other IBAs are in Rugezi Marsh, Akanyaru, Nyabarongo and Cyamudongo.

Culture and activities

While it might have been the gorillas that entice visitors to Rwanda, it's the country's people who convince them to return. Ancient traditions of honor and hospitality run strong in Rwanda, and anybody who takes the time to discover Rwandan culture for themselves will find a proud and unique people, happy to welcome guests into their lives and introduce them to their traditions.

Music and dance play an indispensable role in everyday life and performances range from dashing demonstrations of bravery and prowess to humorous songs, light-hearted dances and rural artistry

with roots in traditional agriculture. Traditional songs are often accompanied by a solitary lulunga, a harp-like instrument with eight strings, while more celebratory dances are backed by a drum orchestra, typically comprised of seven to nine members who collectively produce a hypnotic and exciting explosive set of intertwining rhythms.

Moreover, guests can experience a classic African safari in beautiful Akagera National Park. With Lake Ihema in the background and cooler temperatures, this is a safari experience unlike any of Rwanda's neighbors.

Akagera is located approximately 110 kilometers from Kigali. The majority of the way is paved, and the last 28 kilometers are on a dirt road; making a 4x4 a must. For self-drive safaris, guests do not need to book.

Cars are available for hire, there is one seven-seater game viewing vehicle that can be hired out for either a half or full day, and all rentals include a vehicle, driver and guide.

Tea plantations

Good news for tea lovers — tea is Rwanda's largest export. The fertile volcanic soil and temperate climate are perfect for growing the plants that create this popular drink. Tea leaves can be seen covering the mountains, creating a stunning contrast to the blue skies, dirt roads and sunshine.

Visitors can discover how tea is harvested, processed and even get to taste the results. Tea plantation tours take place in a variety of locations across Rwanda, with the major ones being around Nyungwe National Park in Gisovu and Gisakura. This is a great family trip and travelers of all ages are welcome.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy, with material excerpted from tourism website: <http://rwandatourism.com/>.




A footbridge in Nyungwe Forest National Park. RWANDA DEVELOPMENT BOARD



Rwanda is known as a gorilla-watching destination. RWANDA DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Congratulations
to the People of
the Republic of Rwanda
on the 56th Anniversary
of the Independence
and 24th Anniversary
of the Liberation Day



from the president and staff of
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