

RWANDA OFFERS ULTIMATE IN NATURE TRAVEL

With a focus on sustainability, country wows with wildlife encounters and luxury lodges



ROCHELLE LASH

The eco-conscious African nation of Rwanda was the ideal host for the recent Global Summit of the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), whose theme was Building Bridges to a Sustainable Future.

Rwanda is the personification of progress, a remarkable comeback kid that has developed exponentially since civil strife 30 years ago.

With astonishing wildlife encounters, rolling savannahs, tropical rainforests and precious national parks, the country is strongly focused on conservation and "green" tourism.

More than 1,500 delegates from the domains of travel and hospitality attended the WTTC's first African summit, and for three days brainstormed social, economic and particularly environmental issues.

Then, many of the conference-goers answered the call of the wild, jettisoned their business attire and donned wilderness gear to get up close and personal with silverback gorillas, lions and/or rare cranes.

Green theme: Rwandan President Paul Kagame addressed the WTTC crowd, noting in 2023 UNESCO awarded the country its first Heritage sites, including the splendid Nyungwe National Park, which encompasses some of Africa's oldest rainforests and mist-shrouded mountains.

"Visitors to Rwanda appreciate the country's unparalleled natural beauty," Kagame said. "We are a premier destination for global

IF YOU GO

World Travel & Tourism Council: wtcc.org

Rwanda tourism: visitrwanda.com

Qatar Airways flies directly from Montreal to Doha (qatarairways.com) and connects with partner RwandAir from Doha to Kigali (rwandair.com). Qatar Airways has been rated the world's top airline by Skytrax seven times since 2011 in recent years. Economy includes superior Quisine, one-hour free Wi-Fi and PressReader publications. Business Class adds exceptional airport lounges and inflight Qsuites with privacy doors (qatarairways.com).

travellers who are passionate about 'green' travel."

With environmentalism as the summit's theme, WTTC president and CEO Julia Simpson said: "Sustainability is at the centre of our industry and it remains top priority. Being environmentally conscious is about saving, protecting and loving our communities."

Safari hotels: National Geographic, Vogue, Condé Nast, Travel + Leisure and Forbes all have reported Rwanda is a compelling destination for its rare animal experiences, ecological focus and luxury safari lodges.

Primatologist Dian Fossey taught the world a lot about wild-



The captivating Wilderness Bisate Lodge in Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, an eco-conscious African country where the World Travel & Tourism Council held its 2023 summit on sustainability. WILDERNESS BISATE LODGE

life conservation and Rwanda's endangered gorillas during the 1960s to '80s. Today, visitors can learn more at the Ellen DeGeneres Campus of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund.

Representing the ultimate in green travel, Rwanda is a prized destination for jungle adventures. Safari companies organize excursions to Volcanoes National Park, Nyungwe National Park and Akagera National Park, each home to different wildlife, including the famed gorillas, as well as chimpanzees, hippos, giraffes, buffalo, impala, zebras, antelope and 500 species of birds. Akagera National Park, founded in 1934, is a haven for the safari world's Big Five (elephants, rhinos, African buffalo, lions and leopards).

Makario Safaris, Kingfisher Journeys, Mantis hotels and other companies offer one- to 10-day excursions, many using helicopters and/or 4x4 vehicles and involving towering canopy walks and substantial hikes. Visitors should gauge their fitness level and hiking experience before choosing a trip. The days can be

strenuous, but the wildlife experiences are fulfilling and the safari lodges provide welcome comforts at the end of the day.

With a wide range of prices, Kingfisher Journeys specializes in adventure activities with internationally qualified leaders and driver-guides, as well as self-drive options. In addition to gorilla observation and wildlife safaris, Kingfisher trips include trekking, luxury camping, kayaking, canoeing, cycling and mountain biking, all linked to cultural experiences and focused on sustainability (kingfisherjourneys.com).

Some of Makario's overnights are at luxurious outposts like Singita Kwitonda Lodge or Kataza House Kigali, which are both in the same compound and prized for farm-to-table cuisine, pools, rich local décor and superb views of jungles and mountains (makariosafaris.com).

Makario safaris also stop at the super-posh One&Only Nyungwe House, which offers exceptional dining, magical wildlife journeys, African tea ceremonies and spa treatments using native botan-

icals. Wilderness Bisate Lodge is another eco-chic boutique getaway in the rainforest of gorilla country. Its six thatched-roof villas recall giant birds' nests, with deluxe amenities, including a wine cellar, library, spa, tree nursery and gourmet restaurant using ingredients from nearby farms.

The eco-brand Mantis, an Accor affiliate, operates upscale hotels that support local communities and businesses in remote locations. Mantis Akagera Game Lodge is in Akagera National Park, home to Rwanda's only Big-Five reserve. Mantis EPIC Hotel & Suites in Nyagatare provides off-road biking and hiking. Overlooking Lake Kivu, the tranquil Mantis Kivu Marina Bay Hotel is a gateway to the wonders of Nyungwe Forest National Park.

On water, the floating hotel on Lake Kivu, Mantis Kivu Queen uBuranga, launched in December offering a deluxe, all-inclusive stay, along with enriching cultural experiences and gorilla and chimpanzee encounters. (mantiscollection.com)

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