



**DOMESTIC TOURISM IN RWANDA. UNTACKLED POTENTIAL**

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**ABSTRACT**

*As a continuously growing industry worldwide, tourism has often demonstrated its role as a vital tool in the advancement of economies through direct domestic and foreign exchange earnings and through the employment and investment opportunities it can generate. African countries, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa, often over-reliant on one or two sectors for economic development, have recognized the potential of the tourism industry to diversify local economies and contribute to poverty alleviation, economic regeneration and stability, affording many Africans the opportunity to participate in and benefit from tourism. This paper provides an overview of domestic tourism in Rwanda, highlighting its significance, attractions, and initiatives undertaken by the government to promote this sector. By understanding the potential and benefits of domestic tourism, Rwanda aims to stimulate economic growth, enhance community livelihoods, and foster a sense of national pride among its citizens. The participation of local populations in Africa's tourism industries, however, is often limited to employment opportunities. Travel by local tourists is often overlooked by members of the tourism industry, and is often considered a luxury by many in the local population. The role of domestic tourism and its importance for the creation of a sustainable tourism industry has been widely acknowledged, but limited writings on the subject exist and few tourism policies include domestic tourism, neglecting its potential. The emergence of a new African middle-class, equipped with more of a disposable income and influenced by Western lifestyles, has proven that such potential does in fact exist. Those living in Africa as well as members of the Diaspora have shown more of an interest in leisure travel and represent a new tourism market. Globally, the impact of domestic tourism has been shown to have had a great impact on the tourism economies of several countries, demonstrating that African countries can only serve to benefit from participating in domestic tourism. This research report provides a case study of Rwanda, an African country emerging from 1994 Genocide against Tutsi war and devastation, aiming to rebuild itself economically, socially and politically. The country has chosen tourism as one of its main economic drivers for poverty reduction and economic development. While the industry is succeeding, an over-reliance on international visitors in such a volatile region threatens the sustainability of the industry. The development of a domestic tourism industry, as has been demonstrated in other countries, offers the opportunity to generate a more diverse and economically sustainable domestic tourism industry. This research focuses on the potential*

*impact of such a domestic tourism industry on Rwanda's tourism economy and as a result, on the country's economy as a whole. Tourism is a major source of Rwanda's foreign exchange earnings and tends to generate a higher proportion of formal sector jobs than other sectors and could make a substantial contribution to growth. Within tourism, strengthening the provision of nature-based tourism, which accounts for 80 percent of leisure and conference visitors in Rwanda would also help protect biodiversity and advance Rwanda's efforts to adapt to climate change. Nature-based tourism faces significant challenges, including potential limits on expansion of revenues from one of the primary international attractions - gorilla trekking, degradation of the natural assets that underpin the sector, risks presented by infectious diseases, habitat change and overexploitation, and the impact of climate change on tourism demand. Key measures to promote nature-based tourism will need to include expanding the network of protected areas and improving management of the natural assets within and outside protected areas and diversifying the nature-based tourism's offering while complementing efforts to diversify tourism activities. Efforts are required to enhance revenue sharing mechanisms to increase incentives for local communities to conserve natural assets and unlock new opportunities and community-led enterprises that generate revenue from tourism and sustainable management of natural resources, including forests. This is essential to address poverty, to mitigate poaching threats, other illegal activities, and reduce unsustainable exploitation of resources. It is also imperative to secure private sector participation in financing and operation of facilities by introducing innovative financing methods to secure the necessary investment, strengthening capacity and management of tourism facilities and services, and removing subsidies that contribute to environmental degradation. Despite the significant challenges posed by the pandemic, these efforts have enabled the economy to maintain stability and set the stage for continued growth. In 2022, Rwanda's GDP grew by an impressive 8.2%, with the services sector accounting for 46% of the growth and the industry sector contributing 21%. To sustain this growth trajectory, key priority sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, and construction need to be boosted through the Manufacture and Build to Recover Program. This program has mobilized investments of USD\$1.75 billion and created 35,000 jobs since its inception in 2020. These sectors are crucial enablers of value addition, job creation, and enhanced production, essential for recapturing the domestic market and diversifying exports. Tourism, saw a rebound to nearly pre-pandemic levels in 2022, generating USD\$455 million. Continued investment and support are necessary to build on this impressive performance, which has significant ramifications for the service sector, contributing to almost half of the GDP. The government's unwavering focus on key priority sectors and sustained investment in tourism will be critical to sustaining and accelerating economic growth. With ongoing efforts and strategic planning, Rwanda is well-positioned for a prosperous economic future. Rwanda Development Board remains committed to supporting investors and businesses (domestic and foreign) who have chosen to be part of Rwanda's journey towards sustained and accelerated growth.*

**Keywords:** Domestic Tourism, Rwanda, Sustainable Economic Growth

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) predicts that during the next 20 years the expansion of domestic

tourism will be especially strong in several developing countries, most notably China, India, Thailand, Brazil and Mexico. These countries are evidence that

domestic tourism already constitutes a large and growing industry in several parts of the developing world (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2020). Across many countries of the developing world, travel for purposes of leisure, pilgrimage or business is no longer the exclusive prerogative of the upper classes. Participation in leisure travel extends beyond the growing middle class to include the lower middle classes. For both Hall, and Gössling, (2016), however, the key factor in the surge of domestic tourism in many developing countries is the rise of a middle class with reasonable affluence and dis-posable income and a strong desire for travel.

According to WTO projections, the number of domestic tourists could soon be 'as much as ten times greater than current international tourist arrivals' (UNWTO, 2021). This observation serves to underline the need for 'policy makers to look at what benefits such forms of tourism could bring to their countries' World Travel and Tourism Council (2022) and for more serious research and analysis of domestic tourism across the developing world. Zhang, Fu, Cai, and Lu (2018). argues that 'countries searching for an alternative, less exploitative form of tourism development than that dominated by the interests of multinational capital, should encourage domestic tourism as this results in greater community ownership of tourism enterprises'

Although domestic tourism accounts for approximately 80 per cent of all tourism activity worldwide United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2019), it is still the case that 'governments of most developing countries would rather promote international instead of domestic tourism' (United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). (2021) because of the much-needed foreign exchange earnings the industry generates for the host country. The general trend across Africa is a systematic bias in national tourism development planning towards international as opposed to regional or domestic Tourism (Gibson & Yiannakis,

2018)). For example, tourism policy in Nigeria, as is true of so much of Africa, gives priority to planning for international tourism (Rodriguez & Garcia, 2018). Indeed, even though Kenya has introduced measures to support domestic tourism (United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). (2020) and Zambia has acknowledged its potential role in tourism planning (Hall, (2017), government resources in both countries are still channelled primarily towards the promotion of international tourism. The case of South Africa is exceptional in Africa as here the national government has launched a number of coordinated initiatives designed to maximize the impact of domestic tourism for the country's tourism economy (Kapoor & Singh, 2019).

Currently the majority of Africa's tourism products, be they 'safari tourism, beach tourism, "roots" tourism, marine tourism [or] cultural and heritage or ethnic tourism' (African Development Bank Group, 2021), are geared towards international tourists. While these tourists bringing significant foreign exchange earnings, mass tourism is a highly volatile industry and often seasonal in nature (Njoroge & Weaver, 2018), posing a threat to job security and consistent earnings within the industry. By diversifying the base of a national tourism economy, domestic tourism can often maintain a country's tourism industry during volatile periods for international tourism.

Domestic tourism refers to the act of individuals or groups traveling within their own country for leisure, recreation, or business purposes. It plays a significant role in the tourism industry and contributes to the economic growth of a country. Domestic tourism offers several benefits, including the stimulation of local economies, job creation, infrastructure development, and cultural exchange. Understanding the trends and dynamics of domestic tourism is crucial for policymakers and businesses to develop effective strategies and promote sustainable tourism practices.

One key aspect of domestic tourism is its economic impact. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), domestic tourism accounted for 73.6% of the direct travel and tourism GDP worldwide in 2019, highlighting its substantial contribution to the global economy. Domestic tourism expenditure generates revenue within the country, benefiting local businesses such as hotels, restaurants, transportation providers, and attractions. It also creates employment opportunities for the local population, thereby reducing unemployment rates.

To effectively promote and manage domestic tourism, governments and tourism organizations need to implement various strategies. These may include marketing campaigns targeting domestic travelers, offering incentives and discounts for local tourism activities, improving infrastructure and accessibility to different regions, and developing diverse and engaging tourism products and experiences. Collaboration between the public and private sectors is essential to ensure the sustainable growth and development of domestic tourism.

Rwanda's strong growth continued in 2022. GDP increased by 8.4 percent in the first three quarters of 2022 (year-on-year), down 2.5 percentage points from the strong recovery in 2021 but only a half a percentage point slower than the average of the two years before the pandemic. Spurred by the revival of tourism, the services sector drove growth, while industry and agricultural sectors saw their growth eased, largely owing to a decline in construction and as poor weather and the rising price of fertilizers respectively. On the demand side, growth was mainly driven by the private consumption. Employment indicators improved in the third quarter, to levels similar to those at the beginning of the Covid 19 pandemic. However, the improvement was much more significant for men than for women, whose unemployment rate remained much higher, and labor force participation rate much lower, than that of

men. Domestic tourism plays a crucial role in the socio-economic development of a country, contributing to local economies, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. Domestic tourism plays a crucial role in the development and economic growth of countries, including Rwanda. As a small landlocked country in East Africa, Rwanda has made significant efforts to promote domestic tourism as a means to enhance its socio-economic development and create employment opportunities for its citizens.

Nature-based tourism (NBT) has grown rapidly, but future growth faces important challenges. NBT, or tourism to experience natural resources in a wild or undeveloped form, is estimated to have constituted 80 percent of the visitors entering Rwanda for leisure or conferences. NBT plays an important role in job creation: for every US\$1 million (about Rwf1,050 million) that NBT activities inject into the economy, an additional 1,328 new jobs are created. Tourism tends to provide higher-quality jobs than many other sectors, as the accommodations and food sector has a larger share of formal jobs and of women workers than in the rest of the economy, and through NBT can create employment and income opportunities in rural areas.

Information from various sources (MBendi, 2003; Government of Rwanda, 2005; Institute for Security Studies, 2005; CIA World Factbook, 2006) provides insights into Rwanda's economic profile. The country is described as landlocked and lacking in natural resources and industrial development. It spans an area of 26,338 square kilometers and has a population of 8.4 million people, with 59% living below the poverty line. Rwanda is considered one of the world's poorest nations and has the highest population density in Africa, with 500-700 people per square kilometer (Plumptre, Masozera, and Vedder, 2001, p.1). The majority of the population, approximately 91%, is engaged in subsistence farming, making agriculture a vital sector. Land is a

valuable resource, often prioritized over other developmental initiatives (World Wildlife Fund, 2002). Traditionally, coffee and tea have been the country's main sources of foreign exchange. However, the devastating war and genocide against Tutsi from 1990 to 1994 significantly weakened the already fragile economy and negatively impacted the livelihoods of the population. This led to a tarnished image of the country, affecting both private and external investments. Since 1994, Rwanda has faced the immense challenge of economic reform. These reform efforts have resulted in significant growth over the past decade, particularly in the agriculture sector, which now constitutes 41.6% of the GDP and employs the largest portion of the working population (OTF Group, 2005a).

Tourism is expected to support economic diversification and drive social-economic development goals (Valle & Yobesia, 2009). Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, consider tourism a viable export on account of the destinations' competitive pristine natural attractions, rich cultural and historical heritage. This advantage is projected to sustain tourism's growth; for instance, in the East African sub-region, Rwanda's inbound tourist arrivals grew at an average 7%, three percentage points above the African average in the period between 2012 and 2015 (UNWTO, 2016). According to the Rwanda national tourism policy, the country projects to grow international tourist arrivals to 2.2 million visitors in 2020 from 1.2 million in 2014. This is expected to earn Rwanda \$627 million in revenues (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2009). Under Rwanda's Vision 2020 and the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS II), tourism is anticipated to contribute to increased government revenues, better balance of payments and a sustained economic growth with equitable distribution of benefits to all Rwandan nationals. In addition to generating foreign exchange earnings and creating jobs for the economy, tourism is projected to

promote trade, investment and significantly spur development of other sectors of the economy.

Despite Rwanda's heavy reliance on foreign aid to address its numerous development challenges, significant progress has been made in stabilizing its emerging economy over the past decade, positioning it as one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa. Moreover, Rwanda recently benefited from debt relief through the IMF-World Bank Heavily Indebted Poor Country initiative in 2005. Nevertheless, poverty remains a pressing issue, and the government's primary economic goal is to foster new sources of growth that can effectively reduce poverty rates. The persistent trade deficit, with exports significantly trailing imports, continues to impact negatively the country's current trade deficit. Additionally, Rwanda's overdependence on the production of tea, coffee, and coltan (Columbite-Tantalite) leaves it susceptible to market fluctuations, highlighting the urgent need for economic diversification beyond these sectors. Recognizing the potential for growth, the Rwandan government increasingly acknowledges that the country's blossoming tourism industry could offer significant opportunities due to its current stability, well-developed travel infrastructure, and various potential tourist sites and attractions.

### **The Case Study**

Rwanda is a landlocked country situated in central Africa, literally in the heart of Africa. It is known as 'the land of a thousand hills'. The population of Rwanda is approximately 12million people (NISR, 2012), of whom 88% are engaged in the agricultural sector and rely mainly on subsistence farming. It has five volcanoes, twenty-three lakes and numerous rivers, some forming the source of the River Nile. Rwanda is bordered by Uganda to the North, Tanzania to the East, Burundi to the South and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the West. The country has a variety of the green landscapes of hills, dominated to the north by volcanoes and bordered by Lake Kivu to the west. The great animals of the

wild are protected from poachers and roam free in the national parks. The Volcanoes National Park is world famous for mountain gorillas, teeming with wildlife both large and small, while Lake Kivu to the west offers beautiful beaches, jutting peninsulas and an archipelago of islands (Grospietsch, 2004).

The land of thousands hills offers tourists a home to one third of the world remaining Mountain Gorillas, one third of Africa's birds 'species, several species of primates, volcanoes, game reserve, resorts and islands on the expansive lake Kivu, graceful dancers, artistic crafts and friendly people. According to Grospietsch (2004), "Rwanda is a thriving, safe country with one of the lowest crime rates in Africa. All major attractions are located within 1-5 hour drive from the capital, Kigali. In a short vacation, a tourist can reach volcanoes, rainforests, savannah, lakes and the beautiful city of Kigali". The land is a very precious natural resource, the need for which often overrides other development initiatives (World Wildlife Fund, 2002).

The catastrophic 1990-1994 war and Genocide against Tutsi decimated a fragile economic base and badly affected the livelihood of the population. The image of the country was damaged, which in turn impacted on both private and external investments. After 1994, the country was faced with the task of reforming its economy. This reform effort has subsequently brought about a surge of growth during the last twenty years, particularly in the tourism sector which has currently taken the lead as a foreign earner income since 2008 (RDB, 2009). Poverty nonetheless remains there and the government's main economic challenge is to stimulate new sources of poverty-reduction. More significantly, the persistent lack of economic diversification, keeps the country vulnerable due to market fluctuations. While the development of the primary agricultural sector as well as that of manufacturing and other service industries is badly needed, it is assumed that tourism industry could have greater potential impacts given

Rwanda's current stability/travel infrastructure and several potential tourist sites and other attractions. Rwanda's history, its distinct culture and varied natural attractions come together to form a unique experience for any type of tourist. Over the twenty years in particular, the country has transformed itself into an interesting destination with rich experiences for any visitor. Rwanda's tourism has mainly been based on its natural endowments which coincided with nature conservation and preservation efforts (Grospietsch, 2004, p.8).

The majority of Rwanda's natural attractions are located within its three National Parks. These are the Volcanoes National Park in the northwest, where gorillas can be viewed in their natural habitat, in the southwest is Nyungwe Tropical Forest which offers good opportunities for hiking and bird watching and the Akagera National Park in the north east, a popular destination, but still short on game that could be boosted in numbers for competitive advantages. The three National Parks have been the industry's and the country's biggest attractions thus far. Nearby the Volcanoes National Park are the "seldom visited", but beautiful lakes; Burera, Ruhondo and Karago (ORTPN, 2005a). These attractions and incredible views have made Volcanoes National Park Rwanda's most popular national park, particularly for international tourists. The Virunga national park, known as a haven for the mountain gorilla, is home to five of the eight volcanoes of the Virunga Mountains (Karisimbi, Bisoke, Muhabura, Gahinga and Sabyinyo), which are covered in rainforest and bamboo. The park was first gazetted in 1925, as a small area bounded by Karisimbi, Bisoke and Mikeno, intended to protect the gorillas from poachers and is one of the very first National Park to be created in Africa. The park later became the base for the American zoologist Dian Fossey to carry out her research into the gorillas. She arrived in 1967 and set up the Karisoke Research Centre between Karisimbi and Visoke. From then on, she spent most of her time in the park, and is widely

credited with saving the gorillas from extinction by bringing their plight to the attention of the international community (RDB T&C, 2010)

The Volcanoes National Park became a battlefield during the Rwandan the 1990-1994 War, with the park headquarters being attacked in 1992. The research centre was abandoned, and all tourist activities were stopped. They did not resume again until 1999 when the area was deemed to be safe and under control. The RDB runs several activities for tourists, including: Gorilla visits - as of 2012, there are ten habituated groups open to tourists, allowing for a total of 80 permits per day. The majority of revenue from tourism goes towards maintaining the park and conserving the wildlife. The remainder goes to the government and 10% to local projects to help local people benefit from the large revenue stream generated by the park. The baby gorilla naming ceremony takes place every year during the month of June in Rwanda. For the sport enthusiast there are a number of hiking trails in the Virunga Mountains where you can enjoy cycling the area, boating on the twin lakes or even try your hand at fishing. Development is proposed of further extreme sports in the area, such as mountain climbing (RDB T&C, 2011).

Nyungwe rainforest is another National Park placed in the southwestern Rwanda, at the border with Burundi, and Lake Kivu and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west. Nyungwe rainforest is probably the best preserved rainforest in the mountains throughout Central Africa. It is located in the watershed between the basin of the river Congo to the west and the basin of the river Nile to the east. From the east side of the Nyungwe forest comes also one of the branches of the Nile sources. Nyungwe Forest National Park was established in 2004 and covers an area of approximately 970 km<sup>2</sup> of rainforest, bamboo, grassland, swamps, and bogs. Nyungwe forest has a wide diversity of animal species, making it a priority for conservation in Africa.

The forest is situated in a region where several large-scale bio-geographical zones meet and the variety of terrestrial biomes provide a great span of microhabitats for many different species of plants and animals (RDB T&C, 2012). The park contains 13 different primate species (25% of Africa's total), 275 bird species, 1068 plant species, 85 mammal species, 32 amphibian and 38 reptile species. Many of these animals are restricted-range species that are only found in the forests Eco region in Africa<sup>1</sup>.

The third National Park is Akagera National Park. It was founded in 1934 to protect animals and vegetation in three eco-regions: savannah, mountain and swamp. The park is named for the Kagera River which flows along its eastern boundary feeding into several lakes the largest of which is Lake Ihema. The complex system of lakes and linking papyrus swamps makes up over 1/3 of the park and is the largest protected wetland in central Africa (RDB T&C, 2010). Although much of the best savannah grazing land is now outside the park boundaries, what remains of Akagera is some of the most diverse and scenic landscape in Africa.

In 2009, the RDB and the African Parks Network entered into a 20 year renewable agreement for the joint management of Akagera. Over the next 5 years a US\$10 million expenditure is planned for Akagera including the construction of a 120km western boundary fence and the reintroduction of lion and black rhino. Large herds of buffalo, giraffe and zebra move across the savannah, lucky visitors might catch a glimpse of elephants emerging from the woodland to drink at the lakes. Akagera is home to more than a dozen types of antelope, most commonly the handsome impala, but also oribi and bushbuck, as well as the ungainly topi, the rare roan and the world's largest antelope, the cape eland. Leopard and hyena might be seen on a night drive as well as other

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.rwandatourismguide.com/blog.html>



secretive creatures of the night. Hippo and crocodile are almost guaranteed on a boat trip in Akagera's largest lake, Ihema. Lining the lakes are some of the continent's densest concentrations of water birds and with a species list of 525; Akagera is birders paradise. Camping alongside the picturesque lakes of Akagera, or a top Muyumbu ridge overlooking the lakes and Tanzania in the distance, is a truly Akagera's diversity (RDB, 2022).

Developing a more diverse industry has been a recent occurrence, based on the need for the country to create a name for itself in the international tourism market, but also to open space for more diverse group of visitors into the country. The 3 national parks of Rwanda are protected ecosystems and wildlife reserves located within the borders of Rwanda in east central Africa.

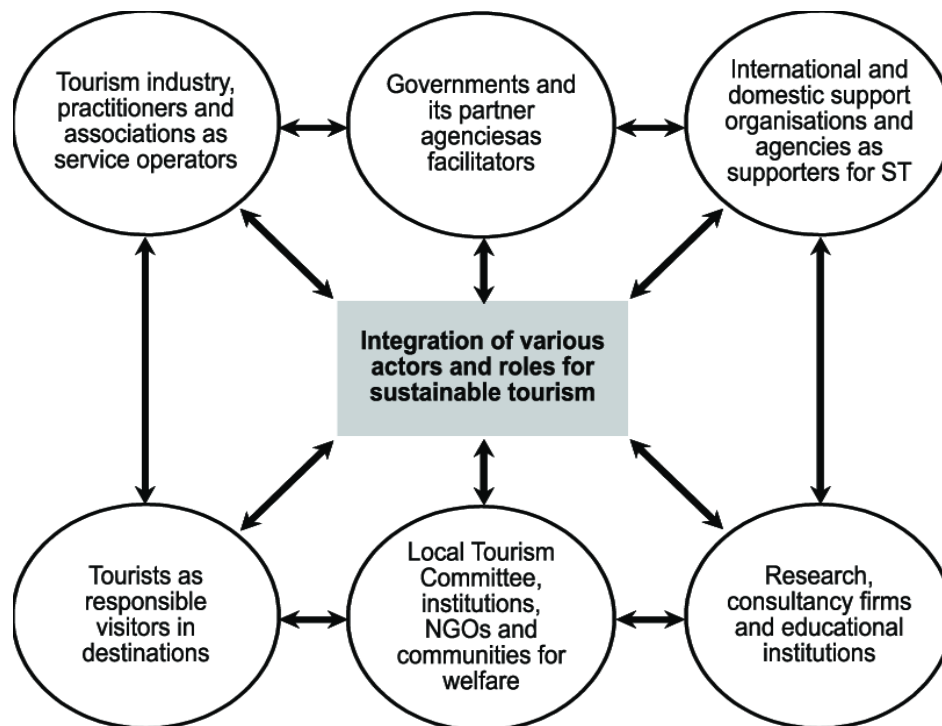


Figure 1: Tourism actors in Rwanda

### History of Tourism in Rwanda: An Overview

Rwanda offers an intriguing history, a distinctive culture, and a range of captivating natural attractions, creating an exceptional experience for all kinds of travelers. In recent years, the country has undergone a remarkable transformation, becoming a compelling destination that provides enriching encounters for every visitor. Booth and Briggs (2004, p.vii) enthusiastically portray Rwanda as a vibrant, secure, and dynamic nation, well-equipped to meet the challenges of the modern era and warmly welcome

tourists. However, it's important to note that this enthusiasm for Rwanda's tourism industry wasn't always the case. In the past, the focus and direction were different. Since 1994, significant changes have taken place in the industry, including strategic efforts to establish Rwanda as a distinctive African destination, despite its small size and proximity to popular tourist spots like Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania. Rwanda's tourism primarily revolves around its natural resources, which aligns with the country's conservation and preservation initiatives.

### **Development of Tourism in Rwanda:**

Tourism in Rwanda has undergone significant development over the years, marked by various phases and initiatives. One of the pivotal moments in Rwanda's tourism history was the establishment of national parks and protected areas to conserve its rich biodiversity. Volcanoes National Park, Nyungwe Forest National Park, and Akagera National Park have become renowned tourist destinations, attracting visitors from around the world.

### **Post-Genocide against Tutsi Tourism:**

The 1994 genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda brought immense tragedy and devastation to the country. However, in the aftermath of the genocide against Tutsi, Rwanda embarked on a remarkable journey of recovery and reconciliation. Tourism played a vital role in this process, as the government recognized its potential to contribute to economic growth and national healing. Efforts were made to promote Rwanda as a safe and attractive destination for international visitors, focusing on its unique wildlife, cultural heritage, and scenic landscapes. In 2019, contribution of travel and tourism to GDP (% of GDP) for Rwanda was 15.1 %. Contribution of travel and tourism to GDP (% of GDP) of Rwanda increased from 4.7 % in 2000 to 15.1 % in 2019 growing at an average annual rate of 7.02%. In 2019, contribution of travel and tourism to GDP for Rwanda was 1.6 billion US dollars. Between 2000 and 2019, contribution of travel and tourism to GDP of Rwanda grew substantially from 0.1 to 1.6 billion US dollars rising at an increasing annual rate that reached a maximum of 71.72% in 2006 and then decreased to 8.72% in 2019 (NISR, 2020).

### **Benefits of nature-based tourism**

The overall tourism sector has been a major source of quality jobs in the formal sector in Rwanda, although its potential to reduce poverty could be further improved. The latest WTTC data ("total contributions of travel and tourism to employment") suggest that tourism employment fell from 385 thousand in 2019

to 262 thousand in 2020, and recovered to 302 thousand in 2021, still below its pre-pandemic level. Based on annual Labor Force Survey (LFS) data, total employment in the tourism sector fell from about 10.4 percent of employment in 2019 to 8.2 percent in 2021. More than 24 percent of jobs in accommodations and food services are formal, compared to 13.5 percent for national average. The accommodation and food sectors are also more likely to employ women compared to the rest of the economy. However, tourism jobs have been mainly urban (74 percent for transport and 60 percent for accommodation).

Nature-Based Tourism (NBT) and conservation activities in national parks contribute to the livelihoods of people living around the park. In Volcanoes National Park (VNP) these activities contribute in different ways to the livelihoods of approximately 70 percent of people around the park (Benitez et al., 2021). The jobs range from park staff, porters, hotels, artisans, food merchants, landlords, shops, and bars. Many of these jobs engage local community members in formal sectors, for example the Porters Cooperative operating in Kinigi (VNP) is composed of former poachers (Benitez et al., 2021). In ANP, 50 percent of the park revenue in 2019 (US\$1.25 million) paid salaries to 273 staff. 90 percent of the people employed in the park are Rwandan (Africa Geographic, 2022). To improve tourism's economic benefit and its pro-poor potential, and considering the geographic location of NBT, a strategy should be formulated to increase job opportunities via NBT in poorer areas. That requires thinking about districts and provinces that have deep pockets of unemployment and how their jobless workers can gain the skills and subsequently the access to tourism related job opportunities, ensuring that they are both sufficiently mobile and qualified.

Tourism has a high job multiplier effect in Rwanda's economy. This is because tourism has multiple direct and indirect connections to employment-generating

activities in other economic sectors (e.g., agriculture, hospitality, transportation, etc.). A preliminary World Bank analysis of this multiplier effect indicates that for every US\$1 million (about Rwf1,050 million) that NBT activities inject into the economy, an additional 1,328 new jobs are directly and indirectly created.<sup>16</sup> These are spread across the transport, accommodation, and hospitality sectors and generated across the country, with the multipliers being found mostly in Kigali, followed by the eastern part of the country, and less prominently the western part.

### **Recovery in tourism activities**

A continued recovery in tourism activities in 2023, which is expected to boost several services and private consumption, supports the near-term outlook. Tourism is expected to benefit from several events (meetings, conference, and sports) expected to take place in Rwanda. At this time, there are already 30 events scheduled for 2023, including the 73rd Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) congress, Airports Council International (ACI) meeting, the Tour du Rwanda (an international cycling tour); the 2023 Basketball Africa League (BAL) season, the gorilla naming ceremony (Kwita Izina), etc

Compared to other destinations, there appears to be relatively fertile ground for engaging with the private sector on actions that provide net benefits to the poor. Many hoteliers or lodge owners are already implementing initiatives in this direction. Some of the initiatives are philanthropic 'add-ons' to core business, rather than an attempt to restructure core functions of staffing and procurement. Several studies have found that a number of hotel managers and tour operators took guests to visit schools, orphanages and community groups. 30 to 40 percent of these guests leave donations that range from US\$10 to US\$300, and sometimes include long-term sponsorship of specific children or classes (Ashley, 2007). Other studies have found that the average

amount for cash donations was US\$61 per tourist, and the average total value for cash and in-kind donations was US\$118 per tourist (Grosspietsch, 2007). On average domestic tourists spent US\$19.37 per trip on donations to the community, and international tourists spent US\$32.14.

Such an arrangement, where the community owns the land, and ideally the lodge, is the single most powerful way to substantially increase financial flows to the poor. For example, the Sabyinyo Lodge can generate roughly three times as much community benefit per bed-night as other forms of accommodation. This is not without its challenges, which have been extensively described in existing studies (World Bank Group and World Wildlife Fund. 2014)

This is one of the largest flows of income to poor people around Rwanda's Parks, but it is also the flow per bed-night that shows highest variability among enterprises. Improving opportunities for local people, and people from poor backgrounds, to gain employment in tourism would quickly increase incomes of the poor. Improving vocational hospitality training in Rwanda is a priority.

The smaller luxury and budget ventures cannot hope to match the larger ventures or partnerships for local revenue flow. Hotels, however, can multiply their own local economic impact by developing enterprise linkages. Helping local farmers to gain market access could greatly boost incentives for conservation around the Rwanda's Parks, while having minimal impact on other farmers because the hotel vegetable market accounts for less than 1 percent of the overall market trade. Some of the challenges with implementing this approach are related to consistent quality of the supply and effectively connecting producers and buyers.

### **Tourism policy in Rwanda**

Sustainable Tourism: Rwanda has been actively promoting sustainable tourism as a core principle of

its tourism policy. The government aims to preserve the country's natural resources, cultural heritage, and biodiversity while ensuring that tourism development benefits local communities.

**Conservation and Ecotourism:** Rwanda is known for its efforts in conservation and ecotourism, particularly for the protection of mountain gorillas. The country has implemented strict conservation measures to safeguard gorilla populations and their habitats in Volcanoes National Park. Gorilla trekking is a popular ecotourism activity that generates revenue for conservation efforts.

**Community-Based Tourism:** Rwanda emphasizes community-based tourism initiatives, encouraging local communities to actively participate in tourism activities and benefit from them. This approach aims to empower communities, reduce poverty, and foster sustainable development.

**Infrastructure Development:** The Rwandan government has invested in improving tourism infrastructure to enhance the visitor experience. This includes upgrading roads, airports, accommodations, and other facilities to support tourism growth and attract more tourists.

**Marketing and Promotion:** Rwanda actively promotes its tourism offerings through marketing campaigns and international partnerships. The country has a strong focus on attracting high-end and eco-conscious tourists, positioning itself as a unique and sustainable tourism destination in Africa.

**Visa and Entry Requirements:** Rwanda has implemented measures to facilitate tourism, including a visa-on-arrival policy for most countries. However, it is advisable to check the latest visa requirements and entry regulations before traveling to Rwanda.

**Safety and Security:** Rwanda has made significant strides in ensuring safety and security for tourists. The government has implemented measures to

combat crime and maintain stability, making it a relatively safe destination for visitors.

#### **Tourism Vision 2024**

Rwanda has been actively developing its tourism sector in recent years, leveraging its natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage. One of the key attractions in Rwanda is its population of mountain gorillas, which has contributed significantly to the growth of the country's tourism industry.

In terms of past initiatives, Rwanda has implemented strategies such as the Rwanda Development Board's "Rwanda Vision 2020" and the "Rwanda Tourism Strategy 2013-2024" to promote sustainable tourism development. These initiatives aimed to enhance infrastructure, improve service quality, and diversify tourism offerings in the country.

Rwanda's tourism sector has placed a strong emphasis on eco-tourism and conservation, highlighting its national parks, including Volcanoes National Park, Nyungwe Forest National Park, and Akagera National Park. These parks offer opportunities for wildlife safaris, bird watching, and other outdoor activities.

Additionally, Rwanda has also invested in promoting cultural tourism, showcasing its rich heritage and traditional practices. The country has various cultural sites and events that provide visitors with an insight into Rwandan traditions and history.

The Rwanda Tourism Strategy 2020 aimed to position Rwanda as a premier global tourism destination, focusing on sustainability, conservation, and high-end experiences. The strategy highlighted the following key objectives:

**Conservation and preservation:** Rwanda aims to protect and preserve its natural resources, including its national parks and wildlife. This involves sustainable tourism practices and initiatives to protect endangered species like mountain gorillas.

**Cultural tourism:** The strategy emphasized the promotion of Rwanda's rich cultural heritage and traditions. It aimed to develop community-based tourism initiatives that allow visitors to engage with local communities, experience their culture, and contribute to their economic development.

**Infrastructure development:** Rwanda recognizes the importance of modern infrastructure for tourism growth. The strategy emphasized the development and improvement of transportation networks, accommodation facilities, and tourist amenities to enhance visitor experiences.

**Marketing and promotion:** The strategy focused on extensive marketing and promotion efforts to raise international awareness about Rwanda as a tourism destination. This includes targeted campaigns, participation in travel trade shows, and collaboration with international tourism stakeholders.

### **Wildlife**

Rwanda, a country located in East Africa, is known for its diverse and unique wildlife. Despite its small size, Rwanda offers several opportunities for wildlife enthusiasts to observe a variety of species. Rwanda's economy has shown promising potential in the field of nature-based tourism, which has become a significant contributor to the country's economic growth. Rwanda's commitment to environmental conservation and sustainable development has positioned it as a prime destination for eco-tourism and wildlife enthusiasts.

The country's diverse and breathtaking natural landscapes, including national parks, rainforests, and volcanoes, have attracted a growing number of tourists seeking unique experiences. One of Rwanda's most renowned attractions is the Volcanoes National Park, home to endangered mountain gorillas. The gorilla trekking experience has become a major draw for visitors, providing an opportunity to encounter these magnificent creatures up close while contributing to their conservation.

In addition to gorilla trekking, Rwanda's other national parks, such as Akagera National Park and Nyungwe Forest National Park, offer rich biodiversity and exciting wildlife encounters, including lions, elephants, zebras, and various primate species. These parks provide a unique and authentic safari experience, attracting both domestic and international tourists.

Rwanda's commitment to sustainable tourism practices is reflected in its conservation efforts. The country has implemented initiatives to protect its natural resources and promote responsible tourism. For instance, Rwanda has banned single-use plastic bags to reduce environmental pollution. Additionally, the revenue generated from nature-based tourism is reinvested in conservation projects, community development, and the improvement of tourism infrastructure.

The economic benefits of nature-based tourism in Rwanda are significant. The industry creates employment opportunities for local communities, fosters entrepreneurship, and contributes to the country's overall economic growth. It also helps diversify Rwanda's economy, reducing its dependence on traditional sectors.

To further harness the economic potential of nature-based tourism, Rwanda has been investing in infrastructure development, including the expansion of airports, improvement of road networks, and the construction of eco-lodges and tourist facilities. These initiatives aim to enhance accessibility to natural attractions and provide comfortable accommodations for visitors.

Furthermore, Rwanda has been actively promoting its tourism offerings through marketing campaigns, participation in international tourism fairs, and collaborations with tour operators and travel agencies. The country's proactive approach in showcasing its natural beauty and cultural heritage

has resulted in increased international visibility and tourist arrivals.

However, it is crucial for Rwanda to maintain a delicate balance between tourism development and environmental conservation. Sustainable tourism practices should continue to be prioritized to ensure the long-term viability of nature-based tourism and safeguard Rwanda's natural assets for future generations.

Here are some notable wildlife species found in Rwanda:

**Mountain Gorillas:** Rwanda is famous for its population of critically endangered mountain gorillas. The Volcanoes National Park, located in the Virunga Mountains, is home to several habituated gorilla families. Gorilla trekking in Rwanda provides a chance to encounter these majestic creatures in their natural habitat.

**Golden Monkeys:** Another primate species found in the Volcanoes National Park is the golden monkey. These playful and endangered monkeys inhabit the bamboo forests and can be observed during guided treks.

**Chimpanzees:** Nyungwe Forest National Park, situated in southwestern Rwanda, is a haven for chimpanzee populations. Visitors can embark on chimpanzee tracking expeditions to witness these intelligent primates in their lush rainforest environment.

**African Elephants:** Akagera National Park, located in eastern Rwanda, is home to a growing population of African elephants. These magnificent creatures can be spotted during game drives or boat safaris along the Akagera River.

**Lions:** In recent years, lions have been reintroduced to Akagera National Park after being absent for decades. The park now boasts a small but growing lion population, providing visitors with the opportunity to see these majestic big cats.

**Zebras, Giraffes, and Antelopes:** Akagera National Park also hosts a variety of other savannah wildlife, including zebras, giraffes, impalas, topis, buffalos, and several species of antelopes. Game drives in the park offer a chance to encounter these animals.

**Birds:** Rwanda is a birdwatcher's paradise, with over 700 bird species recorded. The Nyungwe Forest and Volcanoes National Park are particularly renowned for their rich avian biodiversity, including various species of sunbirds, turacos, hornbills, and the iconic African grey parrots.

#### **Mountain Gorilla Conservation and Tourism:**

Rwanda's mountain gorillas, an endangered species, have become a significant attraction for tourists. The conservation efforts, spearheaded by organizations like the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International and the Rwanda Development Board, have not only contributed to the protection of these majestic creatures but also generated revenue through gorilla trekking permits. The revenue generated from gorilla tourism has played a crucial role in sustaining conservation efforts and supporting local communities.

#### **Community-Based Tourism Initiatives:**

Rwanda has also embraced community-based tourism initiatives, empowering local communities and creating opportunities for them to participate in the tourism industry. Projects such as the Iby'Iwacu Cultural Village have allowed visitors to experience Rwanda's vibrant cultural heritage while directly benefiting local residents. This approach has helped foster a sense of ownership and pride among communities, leading to sustainable tourism development.

#### **Significance of Domestic Tourism in Rwanda:**

Domestic tourism in Rwanda holds great importance due to several reasons. Firstly, it allows citizens to explore and appreciate their own country's rich cultural heritage, natural wonders, and historical landmarks. Secondly, domestic tourism provides

opportunities for local communities to generate income through various tourism-related businesses such as accommodation, transportation, and handicrafts. Moreover, it reduces dependency on international tourists, making the tourism sector more resilient to global economic fluctuations.

#### **Attractions and Activities:**

Rwanda offers a diverse range of attractions and activities for domestic tourists. The country is renowned for its breathtaking landscapes, including the Virunga Mountains, Lake Kivu, and Nyungwe Forest National Park. These natural wonders provide opportunities for hiking, mountain biking, bird watching, and wildlife viewing, including the iconic mountain gorillas. Additionally, Rwanda's vibrant cities, such as Kigali, feature cultural sites, museums, markets, and culinary experiences that showcase the country's rich heritage.

#### **Government Initiatives:**

The Rwandan government has taken proactive measures to promote domestic tourism. One such initiative is the "Tembera U Rwanda" (*meaning Visit Rwanda*) campaign, launched by the Rwanda Development Board. This campaign aims to encourage Rwandans to explore their own country by offering discounted rates for accommodation, transport, and tourist activities. Furthermore, the government has invested in improving tourism infrastructure, including the development of eco-lodges, visitor centers, and hiking trails, to enhance the domestic tourism experience.

Rwanda is a beautiful country located in East Africa, known as the "Land of a Thousand Hills." Despite its small size, Rwanda offers a wide range of domestic tourism opportunities that showcase its stunning landscapes, unique wildlife, rich culture, and tragic history. Here are some popular domestic tourism destinations and activities in Rwanda:

**Volcanoes National Park:** This park is famous for its population of endangered mountain gorillas. Visitors

can participate in gorilla trekking tours, where they hike through the lush forest to observe these majestic creatures in their natural habitat.

**Akagera National Park:** Located in the eastern part of Rwanda, Akagera National Park is home to a diverse range of wildlife, including elephants, lions, giraffes, zebras, and various bird species. Game drives and boat safaris on Lake Ihema are popular activities here.

**Nyungwe Forest National Park:** This ancient rainforest is one of the largest montane forests in East Africa. Visitors can enjoy activities like chimpanzee tracking, canopy walks, bird watching, and hiking through the lush trails.

**Lake Kivu:** This beautiful lake is located in the western part of Rwanda and offers stunning views and various water activities. Visitors can relax on the beaches, go swimming, kayaking, boat cruises, or visit nearby islands.

**Kigali:** Rwanda's capital city, Kigali, is worth exploring. It has a vibrant cultural scene, excellent restaurants, and interesting historical sites. The Kigali Genocide Memorial and the Caplaki Crafts Village are popular attractions.

The Nyandungu Eco-Park is a popular recreational area located in Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda in East Africa. The park is known for its beautiful natural surroundings and its focus on environmental conservation and sustainable practices. Here's some information about Nyandungu Eco-Park:

**Location:** The Nyandungu Eco-Park is situated in the Nyandungu neighborhood of Kigali, Rwanda. It is conveniently located near the city center, making it easily accessible to both locals and tourists.

**Natural Beauty:** The park is known for its lush greenery, offering visitors a serene and peaceful environment. It features rolling hills, a small lake, and well-maintained gardens. The park's landscape

provides a perfect setting for relaxation and outdoor activities.

**Ecological Importance:** As the name suggests, the Nyandungu Eco-Park emphasizes environmental conservation. It serves as a sanctuary for various plant and animal species, contributing to the preservation of Rwanda's biodiversity. The park's management focuses on sustainable practices to ensure the long-term health of the ecosystem.

**Recreational Activities:** The Nyandungu Eco-Park offers a range of recreational activities for visitors of all ages. These include walking trails, jogging paths, and cycling routes, allowing people to enjoy the park's natural beauty while engaging in physical exercise. Picnic areas are available for families and friends to gather and enjoy outdoor meals.

**Facilities and Amenities:** The park provides amenities to enhance visitors' experiences. These may include seating areas, playgrounds for children, and designated spots for yoga or meditation. Some areas within the park may have designated barbecue spots where visitors can enjoy grilled food amidst nature.

**Educational Programs:** The Nyandungu Eco-Park aims to raise awareness about environmental conservation. It often organizes educational programs and workshops to educate visitors, particularly school children, about the importance of protecting the environment and adopting sustainable practices.

**Community Engagement:** The park actively involves the local community in its activities. It may collaborate with local organizations, schools, or universities to promote environmental initiatives and engage the community in conservation efforts.

**Events and Festivals:** The Nyandungu Eco-Park occasionally hosts events and festivals that celebrate nature and sustainability. These events may include art exhibitions, live music performances, or cultural

showcases, providing a platform for artists and performers to connect with the community.

**Cultural experiences:** Rwanda has a rich cultural heritage, and visitors can engage in cultural activities such as traditional dance performances, visiting local villages, learning about traditional crafts, and tasting local cuisine.

**Genocide memorials:** Rwanda's tragic history of the 1994 genocide against Tutsi is an important part of its identity. There are several memorial sites across the country, such as the Kigali Genocide Memorial and the Murambi Genocide Memorial, where visitors can learn about the history and pay respects to the victims.

### **Role of Tourism in African Economies**

Tourism plays a significant role in the economic development of African countries. It has emerged as a key sector that contributes to employment generation, foreign exchange earnings, infrastructure development, and socio-cultural integration.

### **Employment Generation:**

Tourism is a labor-intensive industry, providing direct and indirect employment opportunities to local communities. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the tourism sector in Africa supported over 24 million jobs in 2019 (WTTC, 2020). These jobs span a wide range of sectors such as hospitality, transportation, tour guiding, and handicrafts, thus creating income-generating opportunities and reducing unemployment rates.

### **Foreign Exchange Earnings:**

Tourism generates foreign exchange earnings through international tourist arrivals and their spending on accommodation, food, transportation, and leisure activities. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reported that international tourist arrivals in Africa reached 67 million in 2019, generating over \$38 billion in international tourism receipts (UNWTO, 2020). These earnings contribute to improving the balance of



payments and supporting economic growth. The revenue generated from tourism helps to strengthen foreign reserves, reduce trade deficits, and promote economic stability. In 2019, travel and tourism directly contributed USD 177.6 billion to Africa's GDP, accounting for 8.1% of the total GDP (WTTC, 2020).

#### **Infrastructure Development:**

To meet the demands of tourism, African countries invest in infrastructure development, including airports, roads, hotels, and other tourist-related facilities. These infrastructure investments not only enhance the tourism experience but also have spillover effects on other sectors, such as transportation and construction, stimulating economic growth and attracting further investment (Archer et al., 2012).

#### **Economic Diversification:**

Tourism contributes to economic diversification by expanding the revenue base beyond traditional sectors such as agriculture, mining, and manufacturing. It allows countries to tap into their unique cultural, historical, and natural resources, creating niche tourism products and attracting a diverse range of visitors. The development of tourism-related infrastructure and services stimulates investment, fosters entrepreneurship, and encourages the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

#### **Regional Development:**

Tourism has the potential to drive regional development and reduce regional disparities within African countries. It promotes the development of remote and less economically advanced regions by creating opportunities for infrastructure development, job creation, and income generation. The presence of tourist attractions in rural areas can help to alleviate poverty, support local communities, and empower marginalized groups.

#### **Socio-Cultural Integration:**

Tourism encourages cultural exchange and understanding between tourists and local communities. Visitors often engage in cultural activities, visit historical sites, and participate in local traditions, promoting cultural preservation and appreciation. This interaction fosters social cohesion, cultural diversity, and mutual respect, leading to socio-cultural integration and peaceful coexistence (Scheyvens, 2002).

#### **Conclusion:**

Tourism plays a crucial role in African economies, contributing to employment generation, foreign exchange earnings, economic diversification, and regional development. Maximizing the potential of tourism requires strategic planning, investment in infrastructure, promotion of sustainable practices, and collaboration among stakeholders. By harnessing the power of tourism, African countries can achieve inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Tourism plays a vital role in African economies, contributing to employment generation, foreign exchange earnings, infrastructure development, and socio-cultural integration. Governments and stakeholders should continue to prioritize the sustainable development of tourism, leveraging its potential to drive economic growth and improve livelihoods in the region.

#### **Factors that contribute to the untackled potential of domestic tourism in Rwanda:**

1. **Diverse Attractions:** Rwanda is blessed with a diverse range of attractions that appeal to both international and domestic travelers. From the stunning landscapes of the Volcanoes National Park, where visitors can encounter the endangered mountain gorillas, to the serene shores of Lake Kivu, and the rich cultural heritage in cities like Kigali and Huye, Rwanda offers a wealth of experiences for domestic tourists.

2. **Accessibility:** Rwanda's small size and well-developed infrastructure make it easily accessible for domestic travelers. The country has a network of well-maintained roads, making it convenient for people to explore different regions. Additionally, Rwanda's national carrier, RwandAir, provides domestic flights to various destinations within the country, further enhancing accessibility.
3. **Conservation and Eco-Tourism:** Rwanda's commitment to conservation and eco-tourism presents an opportunity for domestic tourists to experience the country's natural wonders. The successful efforts in gorilla conservation have drawn international attention, but there is potential to raise awareness and interest among Rwandan residents. Initiatives that promote domestic visits to national parks and protected areas can foster a sense of pride and environmental stewardship among the local population.
4. **Cultural Experiences:** Rwanda's rich cultural heritage provides a unique opportunity for domestic tourists to explore their own history and traditions. From vibrant traditional dance performances to visiting historical sites like the Kigali Genocide Memorial, Rwandans can deepen their understanding of their own culture and heritage through domestic tourism.
5. **Economic Benefits:** Developing domestic tourism can have positive economic impacts on local communities. It can create employment opportunities, support local businesses, and stimulate the growth of ancillary services such as accommodation, transportation, and dining. By encouraging domestic tourism, revenue can be generated within Rwanda and contribute to the country's overall economic development.

## The Current Situation of Tourism in Africa

### Tourism in Africa: Benefits

Several economic benefits of tourism have already been mentioned, and remain potentially the most significant benefits offered by the industry. These include:

- Economic stability and diversity;
- Job creation; and
- Economic and social benefits for disadvantaged members of society in developing countries (less-skilled workers, women, etc.)

The capacity of the industry to benefit a variety of sectors, previously neglected environments and several social groups is what makes it an intriguing option for many countries, particularly developing countries. The tourism industry creates links with construction industries, transportation sectors, agricultural sectors, and cultural and historical institutions. Such far-reaching connections create more prospects for sustainable development in an overall economy. The Tourism Action Plan document states that in addition to the sector having the potential to catalyze growth in other economic areas such as horticulture, agriculture and the service sector, "more importantly, the tourism sector has a huge potential to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and ultimately eradicate poverty" (NEPAD, 2004, p.3). The document stresses that for Africa in particular, if these economic benefits are realised, they can be used to "overcome resource problems, increase the region's economic well-being, and improve the opportunity and quality of life of its inhabitants" otherwise the continent will continue to "depend on international aid to support development efforts" (NEPAD, 2004, p.5). Tourism has the ability to flourish in previously neglected regions that may have been considered "unattractive" or "hostile" environments. Often "the gains of tourism are ploughed back into the development of areas where they are generated"

(Ankomah and Crompton, 1990, p.14). The ability of the industry to develop in poorer areas that lack other export and diversification options (Ashley, Boyd and Goodwin, 2000, p.1-2) has been a significant benefit for many countries. Revenues from wildlife tourism in many countries are used to support the running of national parks and game reserves as well as to support the development of the surrounding communities. As Ankomah and Crompton argue, "tourism can also validate traditional culture and help local people see some value in preserving and restoring historical artefacts and cultural traditions" (Ankomah and Crompton, 1990, p.15), bringing a sense of pride to the people of the host nation.

#### **Tourism in Africa: Constraints and Hindrances**

There are several negative aspects affecting tourism in developing countries in general. The benefits of employment were outlined above, but some negative aspects to employment in tourism do exist. Employment is a major aspect of the impact tourism has on countries, particularly in the developing world. The "seasonal character" of the industry presents a danger to direct employment and creates general economic problems in the form of "job [and therefore income] insecurity, usually with no guarantee of employment from one season to the next; difficulties in getting training; employment related medical benefits and recognition of their experience; and unsatisfactory housing and working conditions" (UNEP, 2001). Nevertheless, while these dangers are very real, employment opportunities offered by the tourism industry can and have been very beneficial.

Dependency on external factors and influencers can have great consequences for a developing nation. Current global political and social problems have not meant that the tourism industry has come to a stand-still; however, African host countries must be aware that continuing threats to larger economies can mean dips in their tourism industries every now and then. Before the tragic events of September 11th, world

tourism was set for an increase of 3-4% in 2001. After the attacks, in 2002 the WTO estimated that year-end results would show a growth of just 1% of tourist arrivals as worldwide travel reservations dropped by 15% at the end of October 2001 (Neto, 2002, p.3). The war in Afghanistan and a global economy that was weakening even before the attacks also contributed significantly to the drop in world travel. The situation was grim for the tourism industry and, according to the WTO, industry revenue dropped from US\$475 billion in 2000 to US\$463 billion in 2001 due to the attacks (Neto, 2002, p.3). While the initial reaction from tourists after this international tragedy was to remain at home, the secretary-general of the WTO stated that "hundreds of millions of people still traveled overseas in 2001 [and] made shorter journeys closer to home" (Tourism Queensland, 2001). The WTO expected the industry to make a comeback as the global economy was anticipated to improve by the second half of 2002. Indeed, tourism numbers did bounce back from revenues of US\$463 billion in 2001, as mentioned above, to US\$474 billion in 2002, nearly reaching revenues of pre-September 11 tourism (Vantage Communications, 2000, p.4). In December 2004, a Tsunami in the Indian Ocean devastated many coastal nations, and greatly impacted three economies in particular: Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand. These countries, all heavily reliant on tourism, faced significant declines in tourist numbers. The WTTC found that the total impact of the Tsunami on travel and tourism numbers in 2005 would cost around US\$3 billion, and more than one quarter million jobs (WTTC, 2005b, p.2). While the impact was great, the WTTC (2005b, p.2) underscores that this impact is expected to be limited to specific destinations. While the industry continues to bounce back after seemingly impossible circumstances, it is nevertheless affected.

Developing more stable industries through the strengthening of domestic and regional tourism efforts, for example, can help mitigate some of these

problems. Domestic and regional tourism can often maintain a country's tourism industry during otherwise harmful times. As Neto (2002, p.3) notes, after the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, it was travel within the same country or region that weathered the worst effects of the crisis and at times, benefited from it. As regards the potential exploitation of natural and cultural resources, since African countries tend to focus their tourism products on their natural and cultural assets, policies need to be put in place to protect these assets and ensure sustainable development efforts. The pressure put upon a country's natural resources, which are often the major attractions for many countries, makes tourism industries extremely vulnerable. Several sources (Brown, 1998; Shaw and Williams, 1994; Neto, 2002) stress the importance of protecting natural resources. At times, intensive tourism development can threaten natural landscapes causing deforestation, loss of wetlands and soil erosion (Neto, 2002, p.7).

Cultural tourism often means developing tourist experiences and products within local communities, but countries have to be aware of its potential to have negative effects on the community itself and the surrounding environment, such as over-exploitation of both natural and cultural assets. As Brown (1998, p.8) asserts, "Tourism should play the role of preserving these attractions." While tourism offers one of the few legal avenues by which those living in rural communities can derive economic benefits from wildlife and natural attractions, most rural entrepreneurs and community organisations who are interested in the tourist market "possess neither the skills nor the know-how to operate successful tourism establishments" (Victurine, 2000, p.1). Communities can be exploited and often lose out on land and former areas in which they grazed animals or grew crops either for consumption or as a means to earn an income. Often tourism offers minimal links with local economies and those that exist are often weak,

with the possible exception of employment (Ashley, Boyd and Goodwin, 2000, p.1). At times tourism development not only leads to economic difficulties for those living in these communities, but, as Harrison (1995, p.24) states, it can also lead to an increase in social inequality and other unacceptable consequences if not approached in a positive, constructive manner at an early stage.

The volatility of the tourism industry is a major factor. Poirier states that "tourism operates as an 'elastic' commodity that can shrink rapidly under political pressures and economic constraints often outside of the government's control" (Poirier, 2000, p.31). The industry can be affected by events overseas in the source country, like a recession or the fluctuating prices of oil, or terrorist threats that have been occurring more recently. Threats in the host or receiving country, including political instability in developing nations, for example, bring pressure on the political authorities to maintain domestic stability (Poirier, 2000, p.31). For some, these threats are considered to be a strong warning against incorporating tourism into the economies of some developing countries. However, as mentioned above, while the tourism industry is affected by many external influences "fluctuations in demand for tourism are less severe than for the commodity exports on which many developing countries depend" (Christie and Crompton, 2001, p.15). While tourism is less volatile than many other industries in Africa, significant development in the industry, particularly in the domestic sector, still has not transpired.

### **Growth of Tourism in Rwanda**

Rwanda's natural attractions have always been the country's primary tourist attraction. Developing a more diverse industry has been a recent occurrence, based on the need for the country to create a name for itself in the international tourism market, but also to open space for a more diverse group of visitors into the country. The attraction of the country for international visitors began early. While there is very

limited historical information on the growth and development of Rwanda's tourism industry due to lack of records and data, some sources show its evolution as having started in the late 19th century-early 20th century (World Wildlife Fund 2002, Booth and Briggs 2004), though its impact economically was not much felt. This could be because the sole purpose of the British and German scientists and explorers, who came to the region, came mainly for environmental research within the chain of the Virunga volcanoes and to study the mountain gorillas living within them. Rwanda's varied flora and fauna, diverse primates, and its rare mountain gorillas, including the country's famous Silverback gorillas, attracted several visitors to the country from all over the world, but only as naturalists, scientists, and zoologists. In 1925, the Albert National Park, renamed the "Volcanoes National Park" after Rwanda's political independence in 1962, was created (World Wildlife Fund, 2004). The park, located within the Virunga Volcanoes mountain chain, had since been the site of many studies of gorillas and their surroundings well into the 1960s and beyond (Booth and Briggs, 2004, p.177). At the time of independence, the gorillas were already well known internationally, and despite the problem of overpopulation, the then Rwanda's new leadership vowed to maintain the park for tourists and researchers (Booth and Briggs, 2004, p.177). According to the World Wildlife Fund and ORTPN, several projects and studies were carried out over the years by different organisations promoting conservation efforts mainly in the Volcanoes National Park. Nevertheless, it was not until the zoologist Dian Fossey began her work in 1967 that the study of the mountain gorillas was made most famous. Her life and work were depicted in the 1988 film *Gorillas in the Mist*, "which drew global attention to the plight of the mountain gorilla, and generated unprecedented interest in the gorilla tourism program" (Booth and Briggs, 2004, p.178). Fossey was killed under mysterious circumstances on December

27th, 1985 in her cabin at the Karisoke Research Centre in the Volcanoes National Park where she is buried. Her grave remains an important site for tourists, conservationists, and fellow researchers.

Rwanda Government's dedication to foregrounding tourism as well as conservation was demonstrated on June 18th 1973 when ORTPN was formed with a mandate to focus on and ensure the promotion of sustainable tourism and the conservation of wildlife (ORTPN Strategic Plan, 2004c, p.3). The new organization enabled Rwanda to create new and much needed regulations on national parks, hunting and tourism (World Wildlife Fund, 2002); its main focus, however, remained the conservation of the national parks and of the mountain gorilla. During the 1970s and 1980s, several members of the tourism industry participated in a number of international tourism fairs and exhibitions, but while other attractions were promoted as well, the main selling point for Rwanda was the only well known tourism product: the mountain gorilla. The preservation of the mountain gorilla habitat and the dedication to the conservation of the country's National Parks was tested in 1979 when plans were announced to clear a large area of Volcanoes National Park for cattle grazing. Conservationists and researchers mainly from the Karisoke Research Centre were determined not to allow this plan to progress further, so they developed the Mountain Gorilla Project headed by the WWF. The project, which began in 1979, was aimed at the protection of the flora and fauna in the PNV, the creation of "gorilla tourism", and education for local people in both these regards (World Wildlife Fund, 2002). It also helped to facilitate conservation and initiate Rwanda's gorilla tourism effort (Williamson, 2001).

Research efforts by several international conservation groups plus several private organizations interested in nature conservation continued within the parks throughout the 1970s into the early 1990s. Through projects such as the

Mountain Gorilla Project and the growing popularity of Dian Fossey's research and lifestyle, eco-tourists in particular became more interested in the region, and tourism in the country began to grow. The positive relationship between conservation projects and eco-tourism could work both ways. As Kruger (2003) indicates, "flagship species" like the gorillas in Rwanda, are often strong drivers of successful eco-tourism efforts and they are often so appealing that related projects frequently thrive. Gorilla research and gorilla tourism started to bring Rwanda into the international spotlight during the mid-1970s. By the end of the 1980s, "gorilla tourism was a major source of foreign currency for the government, second only to coffee and tea exports" (Plumptre, Masozera and Vedder, 2001, p.1). Gorilla tourism has continued to be an important aspect of tourism in Rwanda over the years, and is still very significant to the tourism economy up to now (2005).

#### **The Tourism development in Rwanda**

The development of the tourism industry is a relatively recent phenomenon, driven by the dual goals of helping the country gain recognition on the global stage and welcoming a wider range of tourists. The fall in tourism revenue that was shown in 2009 has been reversed thanks in large part to recent improvements in the business, such as the canopy at Nyungwe National Park. More people are visiting Rwanda now than ever before thanks to the airline's expansion to additional locations, including Dubai, the Congo, Ghana, and Nigeria, as well as the introduction of bird-watching tours. Large investments in the hospitality sector totaling US\$69.3 million were made in the first half of 2011. "Since the introduction of 2010's new products and the opening of the world-class Nyungwe Forest Lodge, the park's visitor numbers have doubled (RDB, 2011). In addition to a convention Bureau that was established in May 2014 to promote MICE (meeting, incentives, conferences, and events), additional bird paths have been developed to promote bird watching as a new

tourism product. Foreigners are increasingly interested in visiting Rwanda's national tourism attractions; in 2010, foreign tourists made up 69% of visitors, compared to 22% of Rwandans and 9% of foreign residents. Authorities in Rwanda have lowered entrance fees for Rwandan citizens to national parks in an effort to increase tourism.

While the aforementioned steps have been taken, more can be done to diversify investment, particularly in the smaller and medium-sized tourism facilities that cater to nationals with low revenues and thus attract more domestic tourists to Rwanda's tourist attractions, such as the country's national parks. Especially outside of Kigali, investments may be required in the sector to meet rising demand for lodging and the introduction of new products.

travellers from Kenya and Uganda can now use their national ID cards to enter the country, and travellers from outside the East African Community can now enter all three countries with just one single visa. Rwanda welcomes all Africans without requiring a visa. It appears that the realisation of these improvements during the past 20 years has contributed to raising Rwanda's profile as a premier tourism destination on the global stage. Recently, Rwanda became the first country in East, Central, and North Africa to join the International Council of Tourism Partners (ICTP), further solidifying the country's status as a top tourism destination. Being included on the ICTP's list is seen as a badge of excellence since it indicates that the destination is part of a worldwide alliance that supports best practises in destination cooperation and marketing. Rwanda is a unique and promising tourist destination because of its responsible behaviour as a participant in the international tourism business (Rwigamba, 2011).

From September 29th to October 2nd, Rwanda Development Board was present in Tokyo, Japan for the 2011 JATA Tourism Forum and Travel Showcase,

Asia's largest travel-industry event. Keeping a strong presence at the JATA Expo, the most important worldwide conference of tourism in the Far East, is consistent with Rwanda's plan to capitalise on the huge potential of the Japanese tourist sector, especially given the Japanese penchant for leisure travel. Since 2006, when Rwanda first joined, it has provided the country with the best opportunity to break into the Japanese market at the lowest possible price. The number of Japanese visitors to Rwanda has skyrocketed in recent years, and this comprehensive communication tool is largely responsible for this surge (RDB, 2011). The number of Japanese tourists spending money on vacations abroad increased by 275% in 2010, moving them from the thirteenth spot to the eighth spot behind Germany, the United States, China, the United Kingdom, France, and Canada, but ahead of the Netherlands, France, Sweden, Spain, and Switzerland. The Japanese are in accordance with Rwanda's goals of high-end customers, and they are widely regarded as the top tourists in terms of expenditure. A trip by Japan's largest travel agency to film and chronicle Rwanda's under-the-radar tourist attractions is set to provide the industry a significant boost. A Rwandan tourism delegation and private sector representatives attended. The Rwandan booth at JATA, where many tourism initiatives were displayed, was one of the busiest. There were also exhibits of tourist services and handicrafts.

While Rwanda's tourism sector has grown, it has been criticised for focusing too heavily on the country's iconic mountain gorillas; the sector's present expansion must be sustainable if it is to continue luring tourists and investors. In areas where tourism-related enterprises can turn a profit, those profits will naturally rise. Research shows that in today's globally interconnected economy, the tourist industry stands to benefit greatly from further

development as a dynamic sector. The tourism business provides a number of advantages, including economic ones, which have already been stated.

The Government of Rwanda (GoR) has prioritised a number of economic areas since 2001, with tourism among them as a potential means of alleviating poverty. GoR acknowledged this need to develop other engines of growth and to transform the economy, including the encouragement of the development of tourism, in the PRSP document itself (Government of Rwanda, 2002, p.9). "tourism is an important opportunity to diversify local economies" (Ashley, Boyd, & Goodwin, 2000, p.1).

Rwanda is a small country with few tourist attractions, but its parks and woods are already popular attractions (Rutagarama, 2001). Kigali Economic Development Strategy (2002) notes that there is room for development and that there would be substantial benefits to developing the industry in the form of new jobs and ancillary growth.

An uptick in visitors is proof that Rwanda is making progress on the above tourism plan. The tourism strategy, however, suggests that the duration of foreign visitors' stays should also be a point of emphasis.

### **Rwanda Names 20 Baby Gorillas in Colourful Ceremony**

Rwanda has named 20 baby mountain gorillas born in the Volcanoes National Park over the last 12 months and one new habituated gorilla group in a colourful "Kwita Izina" gorilla naming ceremony held at the foot of the Volcanoes National Park in the Northern District of Musanze. The named baby gorillas belong to Noheli, Musilikali, Ntambara, Mutobo, Igisha, Susa, Kureba, Pablo, Sabyinyo, Muhoza, Amahoro, and Hirwa families while the new group was named Kwisanga.



**Figure 2: Rwanda mountain gorillas of Susa group in Volcanoes National Park**

Themed, “Conservation and sustainable tourism for sustainable development,” the 18<sup>th</sup> gorilla naming edition attracted over 50, 000 guests both national and international after two years of virtual naming due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Rwanda’s Prime Minister, Rt Hon Dr. Edouard Ngirente who officiated at the event, “This year’s celebration showcases Rwanda’s conservation efforts and presents an opportunity to bring to the fore efforts by the Government of Rwanda to improve the livelihoods of park communities while enabling wildlife conservation through the Tourism Revenue Share Program.”

The baby gorillas were given diverse beautiful names with great meaning portraying unity, resilience, strength, conservation achievements, among others. “The name I give my baby gorilla is Ubwuzuzanye, which means Harmony since the restoration of harmony between nature, people and

planet is the most critical issue facing humanity,” HRH Prince Charles, Prince of Wales.

Since 2005, 354 baby gorillas have been named through the “Kwita Izina” ceremony, an event that creates awareness about mountain gorilla conservation and the challenges these primates face. “By naming these magnificent creatures, we give them the value they truly deserve.”

#### **Rwanda tourism revenue more than doubled to \$445m in 2022**

Tourism revenues rose by 171.3 per cent from \$164 million in 2021 to \$445 million (about Rwf496 billion) recorded in 2022, according to the 2022 annual report by the Rwanda Development Board (RDB). This growth represents a remarkable 89.3 per cent recovery compared to pre-Covid-19 pandemic period, indicated the report published on RDB’s website on May 3. The growth in tourism revenue is also above the earlier projected revenues (\$350 million) of 2022.



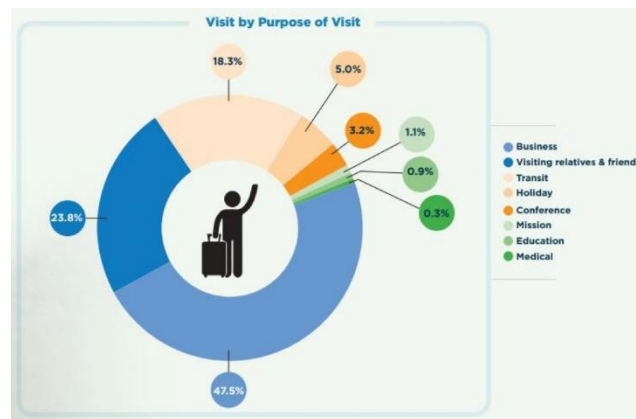


**Figure 3: Tourism revenue trends from 2018 to 2022 (Source\_ 2022 RDB annual report)**

“This substantial increase can be attributed to the global lifting of Covid-19 induced travel restrictions, and increased connectivity by RwandAir, as well as other airlines, specifically to and from Kigali International Airport,” the report reads in part.

Rwanda’s tourism revenues amounted to \$498 million in 2019 – before Covid-19 hit in March 2020

but plunged to \$121 million in 2020 as per RDB data, which implies a reduction of more than 300 per cent or three times. As noted, the country’s tourism sector faced a very challenging year (2020) as global tourism and travel fell sharply in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic.



**Figure 4: Visit by purpose in 2022 (Source\_ 2022 RDB annual report)**

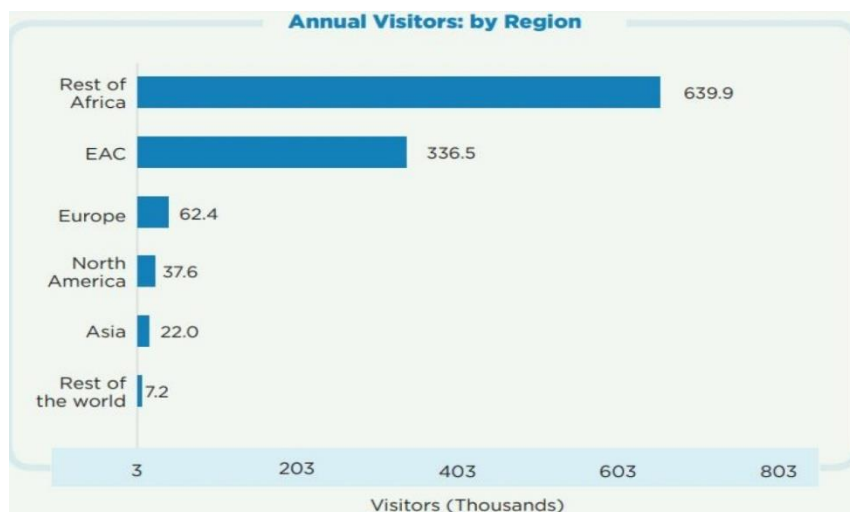
According to the report, in 2022, Rwanda welcomed a total of more than 1.1 million international visitors. Of these, the report showed, more than 60 per cent

came from African countries, highlighting the country’s growing popularity as a destination within the continent. Furthermore, 47.5 per cent of the

visitors came for business purposes, reflecting Rwanda’s positioning as a hub for business activities, it added. Gorilla trekking, a unique tourist attraction in the East African country, generated revenues of 113 million dollars, the government institution, Rwanda Development Board (RDB). The country attracted about 110,000 visitors to its national parks in 2022, registering an increase of 142.4 percent from 2021, the report said. It added that the country aims to increase tourism receipts to 800 million dollars by 2024.

For a few years now, Rwanda has been promoting domestic tourism as a major, rolling out different pocket-friendly packages for nationals to visit various destinations across the country. This is part of a

broader effort to take tourism to another level, with the sector emerging as a major contributor to the economy in the years leading up to the pandemic. Indeed, creativity and innovation will continue to be key as the country bids to revive the sector amid continued uncertainty surrounding international travel. The latest addition to the country’s tourism offerings is the launch, on Wednesday, of Rwanda’s first-of-its-kind hot air balloon experience at the Akagera National Park. The new product, announced by Royal Balloon Rwanda and Rwanda Development Board, includes two hot air balloons that can accommodate four-six people climbing to heights as high as 1000m above the safari park destination, home to the Big Five.



**Figure 5: Annual visitors by region in 2022 (Source, 2022 RDB annual report)**

“The national parks attracted 109,800 tourists, an increase of 142.4 per cent from 2021. Gorilla tourism, which drives high-end tourism in Rwanda, generated

revenues of \$113 million, exceeding the performance in 2019 by 6 per cent, (RDB, 2022).

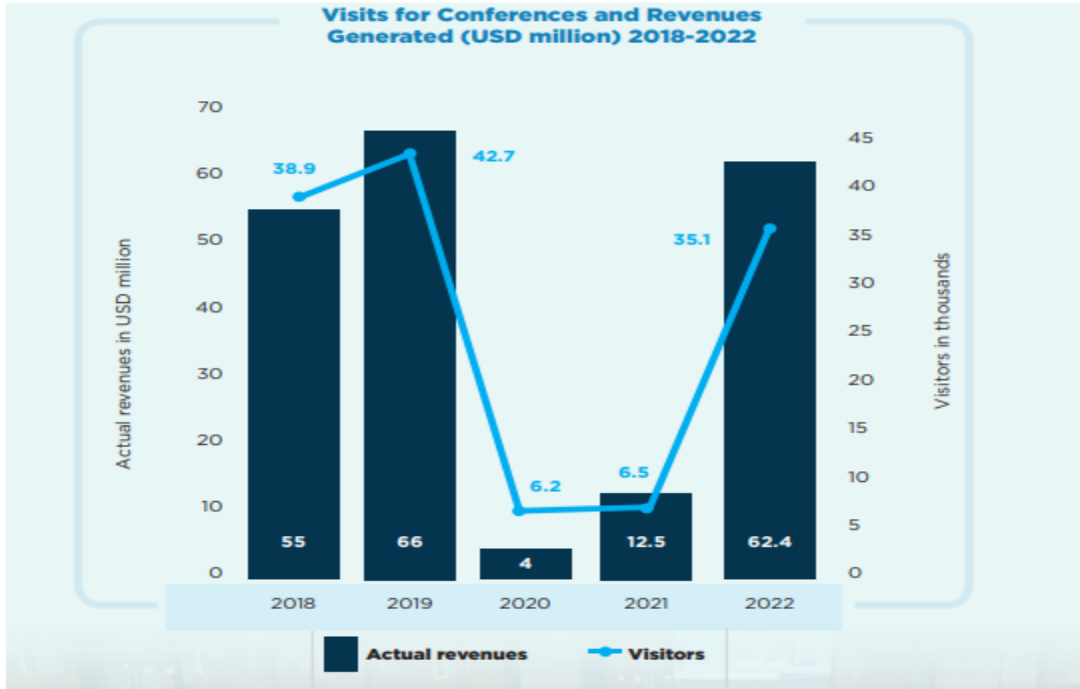


Figure 6: Visits for Conferences and Revenues Generated (USD million) 2018-2022

Domestic and international tourists boosted National Parks visits. In 2022, total National Parks revenues stood at US\$ 27 million, a significant increase from US\$ 8.1 million in 2021.



Figure 7: Key Events held in Rwanda in 2022

### **Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)**

As the English-speaking world convened in Rwanda in June 2022, global leaders and agenda setters in different fields discussed and took actionable decisions to shape the future of governance, trade, gender equality, and youth inclusion, among other important matters. During the conference, Africa showcased its contribution and demanded its rightful seat on global decision-making tables. Also highlighted were the benefits common to all members. Rwanda assumed the role of Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth for the next two years.

### **Youth Connekt Africa**

President Paul Kagame addresses over 9000 young people attending the Youth Connekt Summit in Kigali on Thursday, October 13, 2022. The continental summit attracted more than 9,000 young people in Rwanda to unravel issues that matter to the African youth such as education, unemployment, and active participation in decision-making processes. It was highlighted that governments need to invest in the young people that make up 60 percent of the African population. Calls were made for youth to be proactive in innovating solutions tailored to the environment and development they need.

### **Basketball Africa League (BAL) 2022**

US Monastir players celebrate after winning Basketball Africa League champion. The sports tourism industry generated over \$6 million, accounting for 13 per cent of the total generated revenues earned from the MICE. Rwanda has marked its place in becoming a top sports tourism destination in Africa, for at least the past two years. After successfully hosting the first edition of BAL, Kigali also hosted the second edition finals where thousands of spectators crowded the BK Arena for a weeklong performance showcased by eight African finalists. Tunisia's US Monastir was crowned champion of the continental basketball league.

### **Africa Green Revolution Forum (AGRF)**

The 12 African Green revolution Forum took place in Kigali in September 2022. The need to bridge the gap in African food systems – with a global mobilization of \$200million annual investment – was highlighted during the 12 African Green revolution Forum that took place in Kigali in September. The Covid-19 pandemic, ongoing conflicts, and the global supply chain and energy crisis, are all placing unusual strain on African food systems, as noted by President Paul Kagame. To address the issue, he noted, countries need to jointly invest in transport and storage infrastructure, and move faster to harmonize tariff systems. The Summit was attended by 6,467 participants in a hybrid model.

### **World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC)**

Affordable internet, access to digital devices, and bridging the digital divide have been on top of discussions in different summits on technology including the 8th edition of WTDC that took place in June. In Sub-Saharan Africa, only 28 per cent of the population is connected to broadband, 19 per cent are not covered with mobile internet and the usage gap is as high as 53 per cent. Young leaders, entrepreneurs, social change-makers, engineers, policy specialists, students, business leaders, among others, convened to chart ways of connecting the unconnected in order to achieve sustainable development.

### **Citizen Outreach**

In 2022, H.E. President Kagame the President of the Republic of Rwanda resumed his Citizen outreach initiative that had been halted by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. He made a four-day tour of Nyamagabe, Nyamasheke, and Ruhango Districts where he interacted with citizens to hear and solve some of their concerns as well as deliver timely messages to them regarding the country's development journey. At the end of each day, the

President met with opinion leaders in the Southern and Western Provinces.

#### **Kwita Izina (Ceremony to give names to newborns).**

After two years of virtual events, Rwandans and foreigners were glad to finally attend the annual Kwita Izina ceremony where 20 baby gorillas were named by different leaders and celebrities from different walks of life. The initiative seeks to conserve one-third of the world's mountain gorillas. The government announced that it will invest \$2 million in the development of communities surrounding national parks as part of the tourism revenue-sharing programme for the year 2022-2023.

#### **Impact of Domestic tourism in Rwanda**

##### **Economic Impact:**

Domestic tourism has contributed significantly to Rwanda's economy by generating revenue, stimulating business activities, and diversifying income sources. According to the Rwanda Development Board (RDB, 2021), domestic tourism accounted for 14% of the total tourism revenue in 2020, representing a substantial portion of the country's tourism income. The expenditure of domestic tourists on accommodation, transportation, food, and other services has stimulated the growth of various sectors, including hospitality, transportation, and retail, thereby boosting local businesses and creating job opportunities.

For close to 30 years, Rwanda's mountain gorillas have been the country's most recognisable tourism asset. As mentioned on the country's national tourism website, "there are only 700 mountain gorillas left in the world, and Rwanda is home [to] about one third of the total population" (ORTPN, 2005a). The gorillas live in stable family groups with a dominant silverback male, his harem of females, and their offspring (Rutagarama, 2001). As several sources state, the gorillas are peaceful, non-aggressive creatures and usually only become hostile when one of their group is perceived to be

threatened or when directly provoked. Being a rare species, they continue to attract tourists from around the world and to contribute strongly to Rwanda's tourism economy. As Shackley (1995) stated, in 1995, they were estimated to account for 75% of all tourism income. This number had increased to 93% of tourism income by 2004, greatly aiding the tourism industry in achieving their tourism targets of nearly US\$2.5 million (ORTPN, 2005c, p.3). Gorilla tourism has contributed significantly to both the national and local economy of Rwanda, and prior to 1990, gorilla tourism was the third largest source of foreign income for Rwanda (GRASP, 2002, p.2). Fine (1995) also emphasises this point, stating that before the war, with few other options, this form of tourism was a way of garnering much-needed foreign currency.

Conservation efforts, particularly as regards the gorillas, have been stepped up in recent years, "thanks to the renewed efforts of the national authorities and the local populations of the three countries harbouring mountain gorillas" (ORTPN, 2005a). Increased protection of the parks and daily observations of the gorilla families has been critical for the success of Rwanda's tourism efforts thus far (Williamson, 2001). The efforts put into promoting the gorillas and maintaining their habitats are critical and, as Williams (2001) states, "research on population demographics carried out at Karisoke Research Centre indicates that tourism has not been deleterious to the gorillas' overall health, behaviour and ecology". Rutagarama (2001, p.2) makes a strong point regarding Rwanda's conservation efforts and effort in Africa overall: "Conservation in Africa and especially during a crisis period is very challenging. It is important to be committed and to face to the situation with a big picture of conservation, a picture which reconciles the need of natural resources conservation with the human concerns (staff and local community) and a good but non-compromising understanding with the political leaders".

The international popularity of the mountain gorillas in Rwanda has brought great attention to the country, and while leaders in Rwanda's tourism industry are enthusiastic to promote other tourism products, they are not about to distance themselves from the gorillas that have made the country famous. As Williamson states, the gorilla has become a national symbol with images of the gorilla being used on bank notes, and national companies and organisations (Williamson, 2001). ORTPN underscores this point: "gorillas play an essential role in contributing to the positive image of Rwanda and act as an [sic] ambassadors on the international scene by raising the profile of the country" (ORTPN, 2005a).

The gorillas still remain Rwanda's main attraction, and even though more recently Akagera National Park has been receiving more tourists both locally and internationally, gorilla tourism in Volcanoes National Park has brought the largest numbers of international tourists to the country and continues to do so. In this regard, the gorilla tourism experience has proved to be fundamental to the growth of the national economy. Tourism has been beneficial for the mountain gorillas as well, as it "provides a mechanism for ensuring that the parks and the gorillas are valued for many reasons, and has probably saved the gorillas in the Virunga Volcanoes from further habitat loss or degradation" (Williamson, 2001). Immediately after the 1994 war genocide against Tutsi, tourism was essentially a non-existent contributor to the economy, but efforts to preserve Rwanda's natural attractions and increase tourism awareness has driven tourism forward once again to third place in terms of industries set to generate the greatest foreign currency after the war (ORTPN, 2005a). International visitors not only contribute through tourism revenues, however. Conservation efforts over the years designed to ensure the long-term survival of the gorillas have contributed "substantial human and financial resources, and continue to do so" (ORTPN, 2005a).

The protection of the gorillas' habitat is a strong priority for Rwanda tourism.

As the main draw for the more than 20,000 tourists from around the world (African Wildlife Foundation, 2005), the gorillas are an economic asset to the country. ORTPN strongly argues that they represent an environmental and social advantage for the country, advising that "the whole country should remain mobilized to keep this remarkable...asset as untouched as possible for future generations" (ORTPN, 2005a). It is in this vein that ORTPN launched its first annual public Gorilla Naming and Fundraising Ceremony on June 25th, 2005, a day that "will become an annual celebration [and] play a major role in rewarding and recognizing the country's conservation efforts" (ORTPN, 2005a). Twenty-nine gorillas were named at the Volcanoes National Park in an official ceremony. Children from the communities near the park proposed names for each of the gorilla infants and officials selected the final names (African Wildlife Foundation, 2005). The ceremony led into the Gorilla Fundraising Gala and both events launched an annual Gorilla Fundraising Campaign designed to attract those interested in Rwanda in general and gorilla conservation in particular. The gorilla adoption concept is designed for individuals or companies/organisations to adopt a gorilla and have the opportunity to contribute their donations directly to the preservation of that gorilla's natural habitat. Specific projects include conservation efforts, preserving Rwanda's endangered gorilla population, and assisting in the development of local communities (ORTPN, 2005a).

#### **Social Impact:**

Domestic tourism has had a positive impact on the social fabric of Rwanda. It has facilitated cultural exchange, increased national unity, and promoted community engagement. Through domestic tourism, Rwandans from different regions and ethnic backgrounds have had the opportunity to visit and appreciate their country's natural and cultural

heritage. This has fostered a sense of pride and belonging among citizens, promoting social cohesion and cultural preservation (Hakizimana et al., 2022). Additionally, the influx of domestic tourists has encouraged the development of community-based tourism initiatives, allowing local communities to actively participate in tourism activities and benefit from the sector's growth.

#### **Environmental Impact:**

While domestic tourism in Rwanda brings various economic and social benefits, it also poses potential environmental challenges. The increased number of tourists visiting natural attractions and protected areas may put pressure on ecosystems and biodiversity. Therefore, sustainable tourism practices and environmental conservation efforts are essential to minimize the negative impacts. The Rwandan government, in collaboration with conservation organizations, has implemented measures to promote responsible tourism, including environmental education, waste management, and the establishment of protected areas (RDB, 2021). These initiatives aim to balance tourism development with environmental conservation, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the sector.

#### **The role of state in tourism development**

The government sponsored tourism developments are reported to be considerable. They include the construction of Kigali Convention Centre and purchase of new planes for Rwandair, which IMF (2012) described as imperative step in business tourism promotion in Rwanda. The other state-sponsored tourism development, which Collins (2004) highlighted, is the construction of the Kigali Serena Hotel and Lake Kivu Serena Hotel. There is also the long-mooted construction of new roads south to Rusizi and north to Rubavu, of which the southern leg is nearing completion as part of a long-term plan to divert most incidental traffic away from the main road connecting Huye to Rusizi via Nyungwe Forest National Park (Briggs, Booth & Connolly, 2014). The

Akagera National Park electric fencing is among the government sponsored tourism development. The African Parks has been contracted to manage all aspects of the Akagera National Park, both on the conservation side (wardens) as well as tourism development. The RDB administers a revenue sharing program, whereby 5% of the revenues from park permit fees are deposited in a fund, which is used to support economic and social development initiatives in the communities adjacent to the three national parks. The community associations are supported directly through the revenue sharing scheme. A number of other projects such as beekeeping and basket weaving have been implemented (Nielsen & Spenceley, 2010). A focus has also been on training for income generating activities (Hansen, 2012).

The government also funded formulation of a sub-master plan for tourism along the Kivu belt, an area that offers many untapped opportunities. The plan identifies a selected number of landmark investments for further tourism development and highlights five key tourism investment zones along the Kivu belt (Ndahiro, Rwagatare & Nkusi, 2015). It is also noticeable with regard to how government has continued to support private sector represented by the tourism chamber, which consists of four industry associations: accommodation, tour operators, transport and private education establishments. The tourism chamber is still supported by the government due to insufficient resources. However, Rwanda is still constrained with shortage of diverse information about the tourism attractions, products and services to make it a competitive destination for tourists and private tourism operators. The compilation of important information on trends in tourism market also requires government sponsorship. This is because, private sector still faces challenge of not having in place a tourism marketing levy fund which could be supported in partnership with the government. The Ministry of Trade and Industry, (2009) proposed that the tourism businesses could be

charged levy and the government is willing to support such exercise.

#### **Effects of the Genocide against Tutsi on Tourism:**

**Decline in Tourist Arrivals:** The Genocide against Tutsi resulted in a significant decline in tourist arrivals to Rwanda. The country's image was tarnished by the horrific events, leading to a widespread perception of instability and insecurity. Tourists were hesitant to visit a nation associated with such violence, resulting in a sharp decline in tourism numbers (Okello & Friedrich, 2018).

**Negative Perception and Brand Image:** The genocide against Tutsi had a lasting impact on Rwanda's brand image. The country was widely viewed as a place of conflict and violence, making it unattractive for potential tourists. Negative media coverage and international perceptions hampered efforts to rebuild the tourism industry in the aftermath of the Genocide against Tutsi (Koumbourlis & Carlsen, 2019).

**Infrastructure Destruction:** The Genocide against Tutsi resulted in widespread destruction of infrastructure, including hotels, roads, and tourist attractions. This physical damage further hindered the recovery of the tourism sector in Rwanda. The lack of adequate infrastructure made it challenging to provide essential services and attract tourists to the country (Rutayisire, 2016).

**Loss of Cultural Heritage:** The Genocide against Tutsi caused the loss of a significant portion of Rwanda's cultural heritage, including traditional practices, rituals, and historical sites. This loss deprived the country of valuable cultural assets that are often major attractions for tourists. The absence of these elements impacted the overall tourism experience in Rwanda (Ruhindi, 2017).

**Recovery and Revival Efforts:** Despite the challenges posed by the Genocide against Tutsi, Rwanda has made significant strides in rebuilding its tourism industry. The government has implemented various

strategies to promote the country as a safe and attractive destination for tourists. Efforts such as the preservation of cultural heritage, investment in infrastructure development, and aggressive marketing campaigns have been instrumental in the recovery and revival of tourism in Rwanda (Ritchie & Ko, 2021).

The genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda had severe and long-lasting effects on the tourism industry. However, through determined efforts and strategic initiatives, Rwanda has managed to overcome many of the challenges and rebuild its tourism sector. While the scars of the Genocide against Tutsi still remain, the country has successfully transformed its image and emerged as a thriving tourist destination.

#### **The Development of Tourism in Rwanda**

Even though gorilla tourism in particular and the country's national parks and other natural attractions put Rwanda on the map, in terms of government strategy and the potential economic significance of the industry, tourism still did not take precedence over other industries such as agriculture (Werabe, 2004). As Werabe comments, the tourism industry, outside the various conservation projects, was never considered an economic priority for the country (Werabe, 2004). Although ORTPN was charged with the promotion and strengthening of Rwanda's tourism industry in 1973, the first Strategic Plan for the development of the industry was not set until 1989, and even then, the plan concentrated mainly on the development of the country's National Parks (ORTPN Strategic Plan, 2004c, p.15). Not only that, but when ORTPN was established, it took long to find a permanent place of its own. From interviews conducted with the Director of Research and Development within the Rwanda Tourism Agency of ORTPN, the tourism sector was moved from Ministry to Ministry and office to office, taking on as it were, a place of secondary importance (Werabe, 2004).



From 1974 when ORTPN was ratified up to 1992, the organisation was placed under the supervision of the Office of the President, but at the beginning of 1992, it fell under various ministries at different stages in the restructuring of the government. Initially, it had been placed under the then Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MINETO) but was later moved to the Ministry of Small Scale Industries, Mines and Tourism (MINAMIT) until it finally fell under the current Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism (MINICOM). With these destabilising relocations and no permanent home of its own, the tourism sector could not have thrived. Instead, it took a back seat to the other sectors with which it shared the Ministry's roof. While the popularity of Rwanda's mountain gorillas grew, thereby increasing visitor numbers in the country, without an official, visible home for years, it is safe to say the pre-1994 tourism industry was still not considered as a significant factor in the economic growth of the country as it could have been.

Furthermore, despite the growth in the tourism sector noted above, the ability of the industry to actively promote a diversified tourism industry in Rwanda was limited. As stated earlier, hardly any literature or records on tourism development existed in the country, and those that are available, have insufficient data. The emergence of a few guidebooks on Rwanda published in the 1950s (focusing mainly on Belgian African territories) and in the 1970s were one point of reference for anyone interested in the country. These guidebooks were an attempt to promote the region, giving general descriptions of the country, including accommodation sites and other practical information (Booth, 2004). One of the main books on Rwanda, *Rwanda: Land of Eternal Spring*, produced by ORTPN in 1974, was the organisation's strongest attempt at the time to promote tourism in the country. Describing Rwanda as "a land of fabulous tourist attractions" and "a land once visited, never forgotten" (Booth, 2004), the book focuses on

the country's natural attractions including its chain of volcanoes, wild animals and hunting facilities (at the time hunting was permitted), the country's lake region, cultural attractions and handicrafts, and, of course, the mountain gorillas. A painting of Rwanda's tourism offerings from 1979 still hangs in the Novotel Hotel in Kigali, Rwanda.

### **Hindrances to the Growth of Rwanda's Tourism Industry**

The majority of Rwanda's population since independence in 1962 until today has earned a living from subsistence farming and other agricultural activities. Indeed, with 90% of its population involved in the agricultural sector, land is a very precious natural resource. At times the need for land often overrides other initiatives, as was demonstrated most significantly in 1968 when the Rwandan government converted more than one-third of the Volcanoes National Park towards agricultural development (World Wildlife Fund, 2002). According to ORTPN, the still compelling need for the country's dense population to acquire land and natural resources, such as firewood from the parks and forests, means that the pressures on the environment continue to be very serious indeed (ORTPN Strategic Plan, 2004c, p.12). This puts great pressure on the country's remaining natural ecosystems, whether forested, savannah or wetland (Plumptre, Masozera and Vedder, 2001, p.1), and leads to environmental problems, such as the loss and degradation of precious ecosystems and key habitats, reduction in water levels, erosion and the diminishing of the country's biodiversity (ORTPN Strategic plan, 2004c, p.12). According to a study conducted by Masozera and Alavalapati (2004), in order to resolve this issue, it is critical that "protected areas management must be consistent with overall socioeconomic development plans." These problems notwithstanding, "two national parks and several forest reserves had been established by the mid-1950s for either complete protection or for

sustainable management” (Plumptre, Masozera and Vedder, 2001, p.1). Though a large section of these areas were, over time, converted to agricultural land, “even in 1990 more than 10% of the country was still under some form of protection” (Plumptre, Masozera and Vedder, 2001, p.1). Research within the national parks had continued to develop throughout the 1970s and beyond, in accordance with some conservation efforts on the part of the Rwandan government.

### **National parks and museums to visit in Rwanda**

Attractive and beautiful is what comes to everyone’s mind when they first set foot in the land of a thousand hills. When it comes to places to visit in Rwanda nearly every tourist thinks of mountain

gorillas however, there are other places everyone should put on their bucket-list while visiting Rwanda. Rwanda is a country filled with beautiful hills, wildlife, springs, culture sites and many others.

### **Akagera National Park**

Akagera National Park is central Africa’s largest protected wetland and the last remaining refuge for savannah-adapted species in Rwanda. The park is located in the north east of Rwanda and is named after the Akagera river that flows around its eastern boundaries, it is known by its richness with various wild species including the big five such as lions, leopards, rhino, elephant, African buffalo and many others.



**Figure 8: Different animals at Akagera National Park.**

### **Volcanoes National Park**

Without a doubt, the number one thing to do is gorilla trekking at Volcanoes National Park which is located in the north western part of Rwanda. It covers 160km of rain forest and encompasses five of the eight volcanoes in the Virunga Mountains namely Karisimbi, Bisoke, Muhabura, Gahinga and Sabyinyo. It is home to mountain gorillas and the golden monkeys, and was the base for the primatologist

Diane Fossey. Experts estimate that there are about 600 gorillas in the park.

### **Nyungwe National Park**

Nyungwe National Park, located in south western Rwanda, is one of the most important forest conservation areas in Africa. It contains a spectacular array of birds and 75 types of mammals. Most tourists come to this rainforest to track chimpanzees which have been habituated to humans by park

rangers. The park is also home to the only canopy walk in East Africa.

### **Gishwati Mukura National Park**

Rwanda's fourth national park, Gishwati Mukura is made up of two separate forests, the larger Gishwati and small Mukura, forming a total of 34 square

kilometres plus a buffer zone. The forests sit on the ridge which divides the Congo and Nile water catchment areas, along the incredibly biodiverse Albertine Rift in the west of the country. It is made up of 60 species of trees, including indigenous hardwoods and bamboo.



**Figure 9: A golden monkey at Gishwati-Mukura forest national Park. Due to its biodiversity haven.**

Gishwati is home to a group of 20 types of chimpanzees which live alongside golden monkeys, L'Hoest's and Blue Monkeys.

### **Museums**

#### **Kigali Genocide memorial**

The museum reflects into the timeline that led to the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi; there are halls of photography, art facts and information. The museum continues with another permanent exhibit on the history of Genocide around the world and intervention efforts from international communities helping to put the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi into context. Visiting the Kigali memorial site is an important part of understanding the country's history. Give yourself time to contemplate the experience and have a moment of silence for the

victims resting at this site which is located in Gisozi, Kigali.

#### **Campaign against Genocide of Tutsi, Museum**

The Campaign against Genocide of Tutsi Museum is located in Kigali's Parliamentary building. The 600 Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA) soldiers were housed at this place when they traveled to the capital in December 1993, to help implement the new transitional unity government agreed upon under the Arusha Accords of 4<sup>th</sup> August 1993.

However, the Genocide against Tutsi broke out before the government could be instated, leaving the soldiers as the Tutsis' only defense after first-world nations largely failed to come to their aid. Its exhibitions and statues commemorate the soldiers' bravery, and the lives they managed to save by

eventually bringing the Genocide against Tutsi to an end in July 1994. The RPA was led by Major General Paul Kagame, now H.E the President of Rwanda, who opened the museum in his comrades' honor in 2017.

#### **Kandt House Museum**

Richard Kandt was the first colonial governor of Rwanda, on behalf of Germany, until the early 1900s. At present, the Kandt House Museum in Kigali comprises three main parts. The first part presents Rwandan life in all its aspects, social, economic, and political before the colonial period.

The second part traces the experience of the Rwandan people during the colonial period. Following the Berlin Conference in 1884, the Germans ruled Rwanda until 1916, when the Belgians took over under the League of Nations Mandate after World War I. Richard Kandt's life and deeds in Rwanda are covered here.

The third part covers the history of Kigali, before, during and after the colonial era. Kigali was made the capital upon independence in 1962.

#### **Rwanda Art Museum**

Established in 2018 and located east of Kigali International Airport, the Rwanda Art Museum is located within the former Presidential Palace. It is primarily a contemporary art museum, with pieces ranging from paintings and sculptures to ceramics and mixed media. In addition to the permanent collection, which features artworks from both Rwandan and international artists, the museum hosts regular temporary exhibitions. It also has an Art Kids' Studio, where children can enjoy a hands-on creative experience. In the garden of the former palace, the remains of an airplane can be seen. This is all that is left of the presidential jet that was shot down above Kigali on April 6, 1994, killing then-president Juvénal Habyarimana and President Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi and their representative delegation.

#### **King's Palace Museum**

The King's Palace, located in Nyanza, Huye district, was the traditional seat of Rwanda's kingdom. In olden times, Nyanza was the heart of Rwanda. According to oral tradition, it was the site of battles and power struggles.

The King's Palace Museum, located in Nyanza, Rwanda, stands as a cultural treasure that vividly encapsulates the nation's rich history and traditional heritage. Once serving as the royal residence for the Rwandan monarchs, this architectural gem has been transformed into a captivating museum. Set against the scenic backdrop of lush landscapes, the museum offers visitors a unique opportunity to delve into Rwanda's pre-colonial past. Exhibits within the King's Palace Museum showcase an impressive array of royal artifacts, regalia, and traditional crafts, providing a glimpse into the ceremonial and daily lives of the Rwandan monarchy. The museum not only serves as a testament to Rwanda's cultural resilience but also serves as an educational hub, fostering an understanding of the nation's vibrant history and traditions.

#### **Ethnographic Museum**

Ethnographic Museum of Rwanda was a gift from Belgium's King Badouin in the late 1980s, the Ethnographic Museum now houses one of Africa's finest ethnographic collections. Seven galleries display historical, ethnographic, artistic and archaeological artefacts accompanied by visual aides, giving visitors a rich insight into Rwandan culture.

The exhibits open with geographical and geological displays, moving on to items used in hunting, agriculture, animal husbandry, pottery, weaving and woodwork. Traditional clothing and architectural methods are also illustrated, as well as the social importance of cattle. Descendants of the royal herd can be seen to this day at the King's Palace in nearby Nyanza

### **A New Vision for Rwanda Tourism**

Rwanda, located in East Africa, has emerged as a vibrant and promising destination for tourism. The country's stunning landscapes, diverse wildlife, rich culture, and commitment to sustainable development present an opportunity to develop a new vision for Rwanda's tourism sector. This paper proposes a comprehensive approach to harnessing Rwanda's tourism potential, focusing on sustainable practices, community engagement, and leveraging technology to create a unique and enriching experience for visitors.

#### **Sustainable Practices:**

To ensure the long-term viability of Rwanda's tourism sector, a strong emphasis on sustainable practices is crucial. Conservation efforts should be prioritized, including the protection of national parks, wildlife reserves, and endangered species. The government should enact stringent regulations to prevent over-tourism, promote responsible tourism behavior, and encourage eco-friendly initiatives such as waste management and renewable energy adoption (Rwanda Development Board, 2021).

#### **Community Engagement:**

Inclusivity and community engagement are key components of a successful tourism strategy. Local communities should be involved in decision-making processes, benefit from tourism revenue, and have the opportunity to showcase their culture and traditions. This can be achieved through the promotion of community-based tourism initiatives, where visitors can interact directly with local communities, participate in cultural activities, and support local businesses (Rwandan Community Tourism Network, 2022).

#### **Leveraging Technology:**

Technology plays a vital role in enhancing the tourist experience and facilitating sustainable tourism practices. Rwanda should invest in innovative technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and

augmented reality (AR) to provide immersive experiences that showcase the country's natural beauty and cultural heritage. Additionally, the use of digital platforms and mobile applications can improve communication between tourists and local communities, provide real-time information, and facilitate bookings while minimizing the environmental impact (Rwanda Convention Bureau, 2023).

#### **Preservation of Natural and Cultural Resources:**

Rwanda's natural and cultural resources are its most valuable assets. Efforts should be made to protect and preserve these resources, ensuring their integrity for future generations. This can be accomplished through the establishment of protected areas and wildlife conservation programs. Additionally, the promotion of responsible tourism practices, such as limiting visitor numbers and implementing sustainable trekking protocols for gorilla tourism, will help minimize the impact on delicate ecosystems. Similarly, preserving cultural heritage sites and supporting local artisans and craftsmen will showcase Rwanda's rich cultural identity and contribute to the country's unique tourism offerings.

The priorities for the finalization of coordinated protocol on Tourism and wildlife management, evaluation of the implementation of the tourism recovery intervention after Covid-19 pandemic, enforcement of the strategy to combat poaching and illegal trade and trafficking of wildlife and wildlife products. The tourism and wildlife is one of the sectors that was hardest hit by the Covid 19 pandemic. The pandemic led to a drop of about 70% of all international tourist visiting EAC region.

#### **The contribution of tourism to national economic development**

At the unveiling of the Africa Competitiveness Report 2011 in Cape Town, Rwanda was recognised for the development of the Tourism sector. Earnings from the sector have been increasing each year, which has

contributed to Rwanda's recognition. The arrival of 666,000 additional tourists in 2010 contributed to a fourteen percent rise in the revenue generated by tourism as compared to the previous year. The tourism industry contributed sales of US\$56 million in the first quarter of the year 2014, which represents additional growth to the sector. This amount represents an increase from the US\$43 million contributed by the industry during the same time period in the previous year.

According to RDB, the expansion in the sector was primarily brought about by the advent of canopy tourism in Nyungwe National Park. Additionally, items including as bird viewing, conference tourism, and cultural tourism brought about direct advantages to the economy. Over the course of the past seven years, there has been a 26.3% rise in the mountain gorilla population, and the annual gorilla naming ceremony has continued to draw hundreds of people from all over the world.

After showcasing its diverse tourism products at the ITB in Berlin, which is the largest tourism trade fair in the world, Rwanda was chosen the best African exhibitor for the fourth year in a row last year. Meanwhile, the 2010 FESPAD attracted over 200,000 local and foreign spectators. There is no question that the industry as a whole has made significant growth; yet, there is certainly opportunity for further development. As a result, it is essential to make improvements to the already existing items while simultaneously expanding into new fields. E-tourism and product and market diversification, as well as relevant marketing and research, may be able to help connect the country to tourists, which would result in an increased contribution of tourism to the nation's GDP.

Domestic tourism helps maintain the viability of a country's tourist business by building a tourism market that is able to continue travel despite these concerns. This is something that many developing

countries desperately need, hence domestic tourism is extremely beneficial to these nations. It also increases awareness of tourism and a culture of tourism inside the host country, so providing the people with a greater understanding and appreciation of what their country has to offer and creating pride among the people who are a part of that particular nation. While it is essential to emphasise the benefits of travelling within one's own country, it is also essential to identify and address the challenges that prevent the growth of domestic tourism. Because the growth of domestic tourism is still faced with major opposition in many nations, it is imperative that the advantages and disadvantages of the domestic tourism industry be thoroughly investigated in order to ascertain the strategies that will be most effective in ensuring the industry's continued prosperity. Countries are able to diversify their tourist goods and appeal to a wider target audience when they place more of an emphasis on their domestic tourism markets. However, there is an incredibly limited amount of information available on domestic tourism in poor nations. In point of fact, Ghimire (2001, page 2) points out that very little information is known at all on tourists in the southern region. There is a general understanding among the limited body of research that does exist that one of the primary advantages of domestic tourism is that despite the fact that domestic visitors often spend less money during each visit, they travel more frequently and contribute significantly more to the overall economic expansion, particularly in the towns that they visit.

Domestic tourists provide a more direct contribution to the services that are provided by the local population. This helps the informal tourism sector retain the strength of the industry, promotes pro-poor tourism, and contributes to the country's efforts to alleviate poverty. Countries like South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, China, and India have realised the significant benefits of improving the domestic

tourism market, especially with regard to the growth of this market (Ghimire and Li, 2001; Mustapha, 2001; Rao and Suresh, 2001, Kenya News Agency, 2004; Rogerson and Lisa, 2005). This has been shown previously in a survey of the literature on tourism in developing countries.

Domestic tourists are less likely to be discouraged from travelling as a result of political, social, or economic issues in the region, which is another advantage of the growth of the domestic tourism industry. International tourists are more likely to be affected by such issues. According to Rao and Suresh (2001), "domestic tourism is not vulnerable to bad publicity, internal security problems, and poor infrastructure"

Most significantly, it satisfies the demands of the local population for leisure activities, contributes to the development of a culture of tourism, and raises knowledge about the natural resources of the country and the importance of preserving them. In spite of these great qualities of domestic tourism, various restrictions get in the way of its growth and development. One of these constraints is a significant prejudice that still exists in favour of foreign tourism. The dearth of statistics about domestic tourism on a worldwide scale is particularly reflective of the fact that domestic tourism-related projects have frequently been pushed to the background in favour of international tourism-related initiatives. In addition, the continued success of the domestic tourism business is strongly dependent on the presence of a tourism culture that fosters a positive attitude towards travelling among the populace of the destination location. This culture is still not present in many countries that are still developing. Policies concerning domestic tourism are typically impromptu and unofficial, and there are no long-term objectives in place; as a result, sustainable growth is not conceivable. The majority of tourism policies have a strong preference for the expansion of international tourism. This preference, which Ghimire

(2001) refers to as the "Northern Bias," is what discourages the development of local tourist initiatives that could be feasible. These limitations, which will be described in more detail further below, bring to light elements that need to be addressed before a nation's domestic tourist business can become effective.

In order for governments to be able to facilitate the growth of domestic tourism, they need to have access to information about how the business has developed up until this point. Although the significance of domestic tourism has been acknowledged by a large number of people, there is still a dearth of important research and information regarding the role that domestic tourism plays today. This gap stems from the fact that most developing countries view domestic tourism as secondary to attracting the international market, which brings in much-needed foreign currency. This gap is a major constraint to the growth of domestic tourism, and it arises from the fact that most developing countries view domestic tourism as secondary to attracting the international market. As a consequence of this, there are very few records of domestic tourism initiatives. "as a dominant official concept of tourism in developing countries focuses on receiving wealthy foreign visitors, most governments have put significant effort into promoting international tourism," and most governments put significant effort into promoting international tourism, which makes it difficult to find domestic tourism, particularly in developing countries, and impedes the development of a viable domestic tourism industry.

On the other hand, Rao and Suresh (2001, page 208) state that domestic tourism "is usually the predecessor to international tourism as it helps to create tourism awareness and tourism culture that can sustain international tourism over the long term." Unfortunately, despite the fact that the establishment of such a tourist culture is essential to the development and expansion of domestic tourism,

it is still lacking in a great number of developing nations. This is due to the perception that travelling is a luxury good, which a great number of residents of these countries are unable to buy. However, many of these same developing countries have a sizable middle class that has the ability to engage in and make use of their country's tourist attractions. This is despite the fact that developing countries that are experiencing economic hardship will naturally have difficulty producing a significant local tourist population.

Despite this, only a small handful of policy initiatives relating to domestic tourism have been put into effect (Shaw and Williams, 1994, page 21). In addition to this, "media presentations of desirable lifestyles are leading to an increase in domestic tourism as well as a greater use of both active and passive leisure time." The urge to travel for leisure purposes is growing as a result of an increase in the number of locals who are becoming increasingly influenced by the lifestyles and consumerism of Western countries. As a direct result of the growing number of natives who are venturing out into their home nations on their own initiative, the development of public policies that are geared towards enhancing the experiences of these individuals is necessary in order to construct and maintain this market.

The effect of many existing policies in developing nations has meant that the general bias for supporting the development of international tourism has resulted in the tendency to ignore large domestic flows within developing countries and the emergence of these same countries as major sources for tourism. This has been the result of the tendency to ignore large domestic flows because the general bias for supporting the development of international tourism has been the result of the effect of many existing policies. Ghimire (2001, page 2) asserts that the Northern Bias is the factor that continues to prevent the full realisation of the potential role that domestic

and regional tourism could play. Creating a thriving domestic tourist business can be a challenging endeavour, but it is especially difficult in nations, like those in Africa, where the generation of foreign cash is essential for the further expansion of the economy.

If it is not properly managed, the tourism industry can have an effect not just on a nation's economy but also on the social fabric of the nation. In Africa, tourism is considered not just as a tool to boost the economies that already exist, but also as a means to reconstruct economies that have been destroyed. Because of this rebuilding process, the community will need to make a significant contribution to the advancement of the project, and one way that this might be accomplished is through the town's involvement in the tourism business. It is imperative that the people of Rwanda take responsibility of their country's tourism sector. The participation of all Rwandans in tourism, whether through travel or work or education, has long-reaching benefits that extend far beyond the economic gains that can be realised.

According to Kacou (2005) of the OTF Group, the concept of pride plays a significant role in domestic tourism in Rwanda, making it about more than just travel. Tourism has a significant part to play in encouraging Rwandans to view their country as their own, as a place which they have helped to restore and which they can now enjoy, and the leadership of the country has put a lot of effort into reestablishing the nation as "one people, one nation and one culture."

Members of the tourist sector in Rwanda are obligated to investigate options for domestic tourism if they wish for this awareness to have any real impact on the country's tourism economy. The higher the number of people who participate in something, the better the odds are that it will continue to exist. Although Rwanda's domestic tourist industry has begun to show signs of development so far, many people working in the tourism industry of the country



believe that it is still not being utilised to the fullest potential that it possesses.

#### **Achievements of the tourism sector in Rwanda.**

The tourism sector in Rwanda has achieved significant growth and success in recent years, contributing to the country's economic development and promoting its image on the global stage. Here are some key achievements of the tourism sector in Rwanda:

**Gorilla Conservation and Trekking:** Rwanda is renowned for its mountain gorilla conservation efforts, particularly in Volcanoes National Park. The country has successfully increased the population of critically endangered mountain gorillas through conservation initiatives. Gorilla trekking experiences in Rwanda have become a major attraction, drawing tourists from around the world.

**Unique Wildlife Experiences:** Rwanda offers diverse wildlife experiences beyond gorilla trekking. Akagera National Park has undergone significant restoration, reintroducing key wildlife species such as lions and rhinos. Visitors can now enjoy game drives and boat safaris, witnessing the beauty of Rwanda's savannah landscapes and its rich wildlife.

**Cultural Tourism:** The tourism sector in Rwanda has embraced cultural experiences as an integral part of the visitor's journey. Traditional dance performances, village visits, and community-based tourism initiatives allow visitors to engage with the local culture, traditions, and daily life of Rwandans.

**Sustainable Tourism Development:** Rwanda has prioritized sustainable tourism development, focusing on preserving the country's natural and cultural heritage. Initiatives like the "One Village, One Product" program encourage local communities to develop unique handicrafts and products, providing them with alternative livelihoods and reducing pressure on natural resources.

**Infrastructure and Accessibility:** Rwanda has invested in improving its infrastructure and accessibility, making it easier for tourists to explore the country. The expansion of Kigali International Airport and the construction of new roads have enhanced connectivity within the country and with international destinations.

**Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) Tourism:** Rwanda has positioned itself as a premier destination for MICE tourism in Africa. The Kigali Convention Centre and other world-class conference facilities attract international conferences, boosting business tourism and creating opportunities for economic growth.

**Sustainable and Luxury Accommodations:** Rwanda offers a range of accommodations, including eco-lodges and luxury resorts, that blend comfort and sustainability. Many properties prioritize responsible tourism practices, supporting local communities and minimizing their environmental impact.

**Tourism Partnerships:** Rwanda has formed strategic partnerships with international organizations, tourism boards, and private sector stakeholders to promote the country's tourism offerings. Collaborations with airlines, travel agencies, and tour operators have expanded Rwanda's reach and visibility in the global tourism market.

These achievements demonstrate Rwanda's commitment to sustainable tourism, conservation, and cultural preservation. The country's tourism sector has played a vital role in boosting economic growth, creating employment opportunities, and positioning Rwanda as a top tourism destination in Africa.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Domestic tourism in Rwanda plays a pivotal role in fostering national pride, stimulating economic growth, and preserving cultural and natural heritage. Through its diverse attractions and government initiatives, Rwanda is successfully encouraging its

citizens to explore their own country and contribute to the growth of the tourism sector.

Domestic tourism in Rwanda has emerged as a significant contributor to the country's economy, social cohesion, and cultural preservation. It has created employment opportunities, supported local businesses, and enhanced national unity. However, sustainable practices are necessary to mitigate potential environmental impacts. By implementing responsible tourism strategies, Rwanda can continue to harness the benefits of domestic tourism while preserving its natural and cultural heritage.

By embracing sustainable practices, prioritizing community engagement, and preserving natural and cultural resources, Rwanda can cultivate a new vision for its tourism industry. This vision will not only attract conscientious travelers seeking authentic and immersive experiences but also contribute to the country's economic growth and the well-being of its communities. By implementing these strategies, Rwanda can emerge as a leading sustainable tourism destination in Africa, setting an example for other nations to follow.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

While Rwanda's tourism sector has achieved notable successes, there are areas where further improvements can be made. The following recommendations can help enhance the sector's future growth and sustainability:

**Marketing and Promotion:** Continue investing in marketing and promotional activities to raise awareness about Rwanda as a tourism destination. Targeted campaigns, both domestically and internationally, can highlight the diverse attractions and unique experiences available in the country. Rwandan Government must take the step of prioritizing youth engagement and sector development, mobilizing resources to support youth to shape the agenda, and developing a supportive policy structure to deliver this. Training institutions

must take a stronger leadership role in the sector, helping to develop industry standards that respond to priorities identified by and delivered for young people. Organizations in civil society and those working in communities must play a connecting role, working with young people to raise awareness of sector opportunities at the community level and convening strategic discussions of how to approach sector solutions that incorporate all actors, including young people.

**Skill Development and Training:** Invest in training programs to enhance the skills of individuals working in the tourism industry. This includes training guides, hospitality staff, and service providers to ensure a high standard of service delivery and visitor satisfaction.

**Sustainable Tourism Practices:** Maintain and strengthen sustainable tourism practices to protect Rwanda's natural and cultural heritage. This involves supporting community-based tourism initiatives, promoting responsible wildlife tourism, and implementing environmentally friendly measures across the industry. Training institutions should design curricula that target the priority soft skills identified above, establishing standardized guidelines on how they are instructed and how student performance is measured. They should consult the private sector in designing curricula to ensure that they are responsive to employer environments and needs. They should also design training programs that are more flexible in duration and content, providing a diverse menu of training programs, including professional development opportunities for mid-career young practitioners in the sector.

**Regional Collaboration:** Strengthen collaboration with neighboring countries and regional tourism bodies to promote tourism circuits and itineraries. Cooperative efforts can help attract longer stays and encourage tourists to explore multiple destinations within the region, benefiting all countries involved.

**Infrastructure and Accessibility:** Continue investing in infrastructure development, particularly in remote areas and national parks, to improve accessibility and visitor experiences. This includes upgrading roads, providing reliable transportation options, and expanding accommodation options to cater to different budgets.

**Tourism Research and Data Collection:** Invest in comprehensive data collection and research on tourism trends, visitor preferences, and market demands. This information can inform strategic decision-making, policy formulation, and targeted marketing efforts.

**Regional policy on wildlife conservation and management:**

The EAC community has embarked on the development of a regional policy in wildlife conservation and management and development of Trade in wildlife exchange system for wildlife law enforcement officers and economic valuation of natural capital in prioritized trans-boundary wildlife landscapes. The current priorities for the tourism and wildlife sector for the region must include: finalization of the protocol on tourism and wildlife management; implementation of the tourism recovery interventions after the hit by the Covid-19 pandemic; finalization of the review of the classification criteria for tourism accommodation establishments; continued implementation of the strategy to combat poaching and illegal trade and trafficking of wildlife and wildlife products. At the end the EAC region wildlife must finalize the regional policy on wildlife conservations and management.

**Considerations**

To tap into the untackled potential of domestic tourism in Rwanda, the following measures can be considered:

1. Promotional Campaigns: The Rwandan government, in collaboration with tourism stakeholders, can launch targeted promotional

campaigns to raise awareness about domestic tourism opportunities. These campaigns can be conducted through various media channels, including television, radio, social media, and community outreach programs.

2. Special Packages and Incentives: Offering special packages and incentives, such as discounted rates or exclusive experiences, can encourage Rwandans to explore their own country. Collaborating with tour operators, accommodations, and other tourism businesses to create attractive domestic tourism packages can incentivize local residents to travel within Rwanda.
3. Education and Awareness: Increasing awareness about the country's tourism attractions and their significance through educational programs in schools, community workshops, and cultural events can foster a sense of pride and interest among Rwandans to explore their own country.
4. Infrastructure Development: Continued investment in infrastructure development, including road networks, public transportation, and accommodation facilities, will enhance accessibility and comfort for domestic travelers.
5. Collaboration with Local Communities: Engaging local communities in the development and promotion of domestic tourism can help ensure their active participation and benefit from the industry. Encouraging community-based tourism initiatives can empower local residents and promote sustainable practices.
6. Tourism exposition organized annually; the expo bringing together tourism stakeholders and other service providers along the value chain presenting them with a unique opportunity to meet new tourists' network and

discuss business deals with potential and international buyers.

7. Participation by EAC Partner States in Rwanda Tourism Expos organized by Rwanda in Tourism Promotional events will better interpret the region for sustainable and responsible tourism.
8. The EAC Treaty attaches a lot of importance to the tourism sector because of the role it plays in the social – economic development of the

EAC region. The tourism sector contributes an average of 10% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 17% foreign exchange earnings, and about 70% to employment.

By harnessing the untapped potential of domestic tourism, Rwanda can further diversify its tourism sector, create new opportunities for local communities, and cultivate a deeper appreciation for the country's natural and cultural heritage among its residents.

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