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WELCOME TO RWANDA

Pre-Arrival Guide

Welcome to the CMU-Africa community!

CMU-Africa is in Rwanda's beautiful capital of Kigali, home to about 1.2 million inhabitants. Like many capitals, it is the heartbeat of the country, and it is where you will find most of what you need to get comfortable in your new home. It is an urban center with vibrant neighborhoods, each offering a wide range of accommodation options and surrounding essential amenities. Kigali is home to the major national hospital, modern health centers, government offices and plenty of restaurants, cafes, art galleries and lively spaces.

This guide is designed to give you an overview of life in Rwanda, highlight useful tips and resources and give you a taste of what you can expect as you settle in Kigali.

Bear in mind, Rwanda is a fast-moving nation and things frequently change. For this reason, it is important that this document be considered as a guide only. We therefore encourage you to do some research on your own so you can familiarize yourself with aspects that are most important to you, on an individual level.





BEFORE COMING TO RWANDA

Accommodations

If it's your first time traveling to Rwanda, you may be hesitant about committing to a home rental or purchase without first getting a lay of the land. You may consider booking short-term accommodation prior to arriving in the country. This could be an Airbnb, a guest house or a short-term rental advertised through online platforms¹. As you undertake your search, keep in mind that the areas closer to campus are Zindiro, Kimironko, Kibagabaga and Kanombe.

Preparing to Travel

You should take some time to familiarize yourself with your home country's health advice to travel to Rwanda. They should have a comprehensive list of immunization required ahead of your trip.

Entering Rwanda

In order to enter Rwanda, you must request an entry visa in person at the Kigali International Airport.

Rwanda grants visas on arrival to all international travelers, regardless of nationality. Applicable fees must be paid in person at the immigration desk at the Kigali International Airport. Visa fee exemptions are granted to citizens of select countries. Further information is available on the website of the Directorate General of Immigration & Emigration².

The above pertains to an entry visa which is the first requirement to enter the country.

Applications for work permits can only be done once in-country. This means you would have to travel to Rwanda and apply for a visa on arrival at the Kigali International Airport. Once you become eligible to apply for a visa, you may follow the process outlined in the separate document named **How to Apply for a Visa**.

¹<https://www.airbnb.com/rwanda/stays>

²<https://www.migration.gov.rw/visa>



Traveling under COVID-19 restrictions

Prior to traveling, you should review the latest requirements and guidelines available on the Rwanda Biomedical Centre website³ which is the national agency overseeing all COVID-19 related matters, on behalf of the government. It is important that you review the website within 5 days of traveling as they are updated frequently.

What To Bring

Essential Goods & Personal Products

Most essential goods (food, water, medicine, and clothing) can be found in Kigali. Keep in mind that some goods considered essentials in your home country could fall under a luxury good category in Rwanda, i.e., costly, or in low supply. Thus, you should take stock of the type of products you consume regularly (clothing, food, cosmetics, appliances, etc.) and determine which ones to bring along with you out of necessity and which ones you can look for alternatives in Kigali or live without. It would not be possible to provide an exhaustive list due to individual needs and preferences, so doing some research is encouraged.

Prescription medicine should be brought in extra quantities *in case* it is not available locally.

³ <https://www.rbc.gov.rw/index.php?id=745>



ABOUT RWANDA

About Rwanda

Rwanda is a sunshine year-round, beautiful hilly country with matching high-level altitude throughout the land. Kigali, the capital city, has been ranked the 2nd safest city in Africa and 15 of 20 greenest travel destinations in the world. This makes it a lovely place to live, with a good environment for people who love to walk or jog and enjoy fresh air.

Fun fact: every last Saturday of the month, residents come together to practice Umuganda⁴, nation-wide community work that takes place in one's respective neighborhood.

History

The history of Rwanda can be broken down in 4 major periods: pre-colonialism, colonial period, Independent Rwanda leading up to the 1994 Genocide Against Tutsi and post-genocide Rwanda. The open platform Rwandapedia⁵ provides a good overview of the country's history and other interesting facts about the country.

The 1994 Genocide Against Tutsi marks the darkest period of Rwanda's history. Many have written about it, movies have been made, all presenting isolated accounts of the event that unfolded. While it is normal that one may experience curiosity about it and even may be tempted to ask their peers about their ethnicity, please refrain from it. A good place to start in terms of learning more about the history and about its implication on society today is the Kigali Genocide Memorial and other smaller memorials around the country.

Languages Spoken

Rwanda has 3 official languages: Kinyarwanda, English and French. Kinyarwanda is the most widely spoken language in the country and it is the only native one. You will be able to get by using English or French but there will be limitations. You should consider pursuing some basic Kinyarwanda lessons for ease of navigation in the country, relationship building with Rwandans and to gain a better understanding of the culture in your new home.

⁴ <https://rwandapedia.rw/hgs/umuganda/overview>

⁵ <https://rwandapedia.rw/country/history>



Social Norms

Rwanda is a collectivist culture, where the welfare of people is a community concern in contrast to an individualistic culture where each person is concerned with their individual wellbeing. This community-centric approach is displayed through initiatives like Umuganda and Umushyikirano (a national dialogue between Rwanda's leadership and its citizens). Rwandans give a lot of respect to elders and authority figures, in the community and at government level. They are often seen as the keepers of wisdom and the ones in charge of making important decisions for the country. Rwandans can be quite formal in how they address people especially in professional settings, opting for titles instead of using people's first names. This combined with minimal eye contact is viewed as a sign of respect.

As people, Rwandans tend to be reserved, soft spoken and slow paced. For example, when meeting someone new they may simply greet them and go back to their business without initiating or probing further discussion, choosing instead to observe this new individual from a distance. In the same token, greeting people is given a lot of value, even while passing someone on the road. A common greeting will include a handshake and 3 kisses on the cheeks, hello's and how are you's and often will extend into a brief conversation. Since COVID, the standard greeting has evolved to an elbow bump to minimize hand contact between individuals but the quick chat remains. Rwandans like to dress for the occasion and the style of wear can be considered formal for some, especially if you're coming from an environment where casual wear is an everyday norm. In the workplace, business casual attire is the standard whereas for special events ranging from a conference to a wedding, the style could vary from semi-formal to formal.

Weather and climate

Due to its altitude, Rwanda has a pleasant tropical highland climate year round; temperatures in Kigali range consistently from 18 to 30°C (65F to 85F) with moderate humidity. Being just slightly south of the equator, the sun rises every day at approximately 6AM and sets every day at approximately 6PM. There are two rainy seasons, one long and one short. The long rainy season lasts from about March to May, when the rain is heavy and more persistent; September to November is a shorter rainy season. During the rainy season, the temperature drops to between 20-25°C and night time feels a bit chilly. On those cooler nights, a scarf or light sweater would keep you sufficiently warm.

Time Zone

Rwanda's time zone is Central Africa Time (CAT), which is two hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT+2). There is no daylight savings time in Rwanda.

Electricity

220/230 volts and 50 hertz, with both continental European and UK plug types being common. North American appliances would require use of a plug adapter and, depending on the type, a transformer that switches your power from 220v to 110v to allow safe use of your appliances. Both can be purchased locally.

LIVING IN KIGALI



Where to Live

As you begin the search for your new home in Kigali, some things you may want to consider are the neighborhood of your residence, the proximity to campus, and surrounding amenities. Personal preference will tell you which of those are priorities but it's worth investing some time researching to maximize your efforts. Kigali is a small city, and generally getting from Point A to Point B in off-peak hours will take a maximum of 30 mins, by car. When it comes to rush hour, you will encounter some tragic jams and your commute time can increase by 1.5-2-fold. Note that the speed limit enforced on all major roads is 40 or 60km/h.

Most neighborhoods in Kigali are calm, and quiet unless you live near a main road or in an entertainment district. Homes located on the main road or paved roads, in general, tend to be costlier compared to those located on unpaved roads.

If your priority is proximity to...		
Campus	Cafes, Gyms, Entertainment	Daycare or School
Zindiro, Kimironko, Kibagabaga, and Kanombe	Gacuriro, Kimihurura, Nyarutarama, and Remera	Kimihurura, Nyarutarama, Gacuriro, or Kagugu

As you narrow the search for your ideal home, it will be your responsibility to ensure that the home you choose meets your requirements or standards of living. Meaning, do not assume that the broker (often called commissionaire) or the homeowner will be forthcoming about every detail. For this reason, you may want to make a checklist of your 'must-have's' and 'nice-to-have's' and use that as a point of assessment for the residence of your choice and negotiation with the homeowner. Some examples include but are not limited to, inquiring about the water situation (frequency of supply, water tank, pump, and heater installations), electricity supply, furnished vs unfurnished, rent payment terms and currency, internet access, cable access, mosquito nets on windows, etc. There are no universal standards when it comes to home rental therefore it is important that you cover all your bases to minimize disappointment down the line. Note: It is common for a tenant to be responsible for paying all bills related to the home unless explicitly stated otherwise in the rental agreement. Electricity payments are on a pay-as-you-go basis, water is paid at the end of the month based on consumption and cable and internet bills follow the issuing company's respective billing cycles. In unique circumstances, landlords may rent out their properties with 'utilities included', in such cases you would not have to pay for water and electricity.



Getting Around the City

Take a couple weeks to take in your new surroundings, observe the road habits in Kigali and determine the accessibility and safety level for your preferred mode of transport. There are advantages to all types of transportation, and you can mix and match according to your personal preference.

By foot

You'll clock in some steps and take in serene sights as you discover the hilly roads of Kigali. Unfortunately, gusts of windy dust from the roads or mud during the rainy season, will be part of the package.

By bicycle

You'll get an incredible workout but will need to exercise extreme caution as you navigate the shared road with multiple users. Currently, there are no designated bike lanes in the country.

By taxi-moto

You'll quickly whiz by traffic and arrive at your destination without a hitch since motos do not fear obscure roads. You may get swept in by windy dust. Moto riders are required to carry their own scarf, hairnet, or hat to wear under a helmet provided by the moto driver.

By bus (public transport)

You'll move around leisurely and enjoy the communal aspect and exposure to the local language spoken by other riders. Some limitations include no time guarantee and since drop-off is on main roads you may end up having to walk or take a moto to your destination. Payments are made using a TAP & Go pre-loaded card⁶.

By car (personal or taxi)

You'll get from point A to point B dust-free and on your own time. You can make pit-stops along the way. If you plan to drive in Rwanda, you should carry your valid foreign driver's license and a photocopy of your passport in case of random police checks.

Taxis often referred to as taxi-voiture are available through 2 main providers, VW Move⁷ and YEGO Cabs⁸. There are taxi parks around the city's most busy areas, you will recognize them based on their yellow stripes on the side and YEGO logo.

⁶ Tap&Go – RW by AC group, download the app. on your mobile device

⁷ VW Move, download the app. on your mobile device

⁸ Yego – Ride Hailing, download the app. on your mobile device or call 9191.



Buying food

Food is available in abundance in many places city-wide. Fresh fruit and vegetables are best obtained straight from the market. The most popular open-air market is located in the heart of Kimironko and appropriately named, Kimironko Market. There you'll find a wide variety of fresh produce, meat and fish on one side and find fabric, seamstresses, clothing, artisans, homeware, decorations, and more on the other side. At the market, prices are not set in stone, so be ready to negotiate for the best offer but not to the detriment of the seller. **Tip: the market is a crowded place, and it can be overwhelming to navigate as a first-time visitor. Feel free to tackle this task with a seasoned companion so they can guide you along.**

Most residential areas boast at least one supermarket that is well stocked in terms of fresh produce, meats, bread, condiments, and other dry goods. Depending on your personal needs, you may have to visit multiple shops to purchase your weekly or monthly household needs.

Store Name	Location
Simba Supermarket	Kicukiro – Gishushu – Kigali Heights – Town
Samba Supermarket	Kibagabaga
Marine Supermarket	Kimironko
Deluxe Supermarket	Kimironko - Kicukiro
MTN Butcher	Nyarutarama
Gacuriro Supermarket	Gacuriro
Woodlands Supermarket	Gacuriro
Patel's	Kimihurura
Frulep	Gikondo
Deli Store	Gikondo
Best Friend Supermarket	Kisimenti

If you prefer to order your groceries online, there are plenty of online supermarkets to choose from. Meals on order from a variety of restaurants across the city are also available through two primary delivery apps: Vuba Vuba and Rush Foods, both accessible through App stores on your mobile device.

Shopping for your home

This is where you'll have to move around and get to know what's available in the city. Kigali is constantly evolving and it's not uncommon to find something one day and not the next.

If you prefer order and structured shopping sites, feel free to browse the following shopping centers:

1. Kigali Heights (Simba, Bossini, Siesta Rwanda, dining)
2. KBC (Danube Home, adult and kids clothing, toys, banking, cafes, dining)
3. CHIC Mall (adult and kids clothing, furniture, décor, banking, cafes, electronics)
4. MIC Mall (adult and kids clothing, furniture, décor, banking, cafes, electronics)
5. UTC (décor, banking, cafes, electronics)
6. Kigali City Tower (adult and kids clothing, furniture, décor, banking, cafes, electronics)

Alternatively, feel free to ask your peers for recommendations. For example, many people like to get their furniture custom made, so they may be happy to share their carpenter's contact with you.



Setting up personal accounts

A standard practice with service providers when it comes to opening new accounts is for an individual to provide a copy of their passport along with proof of residence and 2 passport photos. Though the country is hard at work with the digital agenda, many institutions are still paper heavy in their administrative processes so bear with them.

Banking

The local currency is the Rwandan Franc (RWF) and all transactions are done in RWF unless stated otherwise. ATMs across the country dispense RWF only, though you can withdraw cash using a bank card from a foreign account, subject to fees. Most major banks offer foreign currency accounts, but the fees (maintenance and transaction based) are relatively high.

Cashless transactions are highly encouraged so whenever you open a bank account, make sure to request that they sign you up for online banking and mobile banking. There may be more paper forms involved in the process.

Please note that a bank may require you to present a valid work permit prior to opening a bank account. The type of documentation commonly requested for opening a bank account is: a proof of local address like your lease, an employment contract or proof of employment letter, a work permit and your passport. Each bank has its unique requirements so it's best to visit a branch where you can get the most current information in person.

Telephone

There are two cellular service providers, that is, MTN and Airtel. It used to be that people would have 2 phone lines and use the MTN line to call other MTN subscribers and likewise with Airtel, but nowadays both providers offer packages to call any number at a reduced rate. Still, some individuals enjoy the freedom of having a subscription with both providers as a back-up for when the network is patchy or down in some areas. To purchase a SIM card, you can visit the MTN or Airtel storefront closest to you, you will be required to present your passport. While you're there, it is encouraged to set up mobile banking which will allow you to transact cashless. Airtime is purchased on a pay-as-you-go basis and can easily be topped up using mobile banking or by paying cash to an MTN or Airtel agent stand. They are in most neighborhoods and can be spotted by their branded umbrellas.

A mobile device purchased outside Rwanda should work in the country if it is unlocked.



Internet

Rwanda is among the top three African countries in terms of internet connectivity, with an ever-growing fibre optic network. There is high speed 4G LTE wireless broadband in major cities¹⁰.

Both MTN and Airtel allow you to load internet on your phone on a pay-as-you-go basis, and offer daily, weekly or monthly bundles.

There are several home internet providers available so some quick research would help you establish the best option for you. Look into Liquid Home Rwanda, Canal Box, MTN Home Internet, Popconn and others.

Utilities

If you are renting a home, the electricity meter and water account will be under the homeowner's name, but as a tenant you'll be responsible for making payments. All payments can easily be made through online or mobile banking by following a few prompts.

Fun fact: local developers have created apps to ease the transition to cashless banking. Check out some favorites like HeptaPay and NoKanda to help you manage your mobile transactions.

Access to healthcare

There are many health clinics in the city and plenty of them with a range of non-emergency services, including obstetrics, dentistry, internal medicine, and laboratory testing. Some specialized fields have a small number of practitioners therefore their services would be limited to fewer health establishments, notably King Faisal Hospital, and Rwanda Military Hospital¹¹.

Tip: take the time to ask questions until you feel suitably informed and comfortable with the process of different hospitals as the level of service varies greatly from one place to another.

¹⁰ <https://www.visitrwanda.com/facts/connectivity/>

¹¹ <https://www.livinginkigali.com/hospitals-in-kigali/>

WHAT TO DO IN RWANDA



<i>If you're into...</i>	<i>Check out...</i>
Dining Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Head over to the stone road in Kimihurura where you'll find a lot of cafes and restaurants to pick from.
Outdoor Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Go hiking at Mount Kigali and Rebero• Visit Fazenda Sengha (outdoor recreation center)
Heritage and Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visit any of Rwanda's Museums• Participate in the Nyamirambo Walking Tour
Watching Movies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Catch the latest box-office hits at Kigali City Tower & Canal Olympia
Developing new skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take Kinyarwanda lessons through www.gusomaeducation.com• Learn how to make traditional art pieces through Azizi Life Studio
Sports and/or health living	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attend a yoga class,• Join a walking or running club• Workout at the gym• Watch a game at the Kigali Arena
Exploring the art scene	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visit one of Kigali's many arts galleries• Attend a Spoken Word event• Shop at Caplaki Craft Village
Vibing to music	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check out one of Kigali's live music events• Attend weekly kizomba/salsa nights at rotating locations in the city

Places to Visit in Rwanda

Rwanda is famously known as the home of the mountain gorillas, located in the Volcanoes National Park but the country has many more touristic attractions to discover. From a safari trek to see the Big Five in the Akagera National Park to a hike in the lush Nyungwe forest, you can easily plan a long weekend getaway and take time discovering the natural beauty of Rwanda. Tons of resources are available online, primarily through visitrwanda.com the official website for Rwanda Tourism.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

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National Numbers

Traffic Accidents: **Call 113**

Emergency: **Call 112**

Fire Department: **Call 111**

Gender Based Violence: **Call 3512**

Abuse by a Police Officer: **Call 3511**

Child Help Line: **Call 116**

Traffic Police Queries: **Call 118**

Anti-Corruption: **Call 997**

Appendix

Please note: CMU is not affiliated with any companies, services or products listed below. The information was crowdsourced and is provided to showcase some of the options available to you in Kigali. All information is subject to change.

Places to Learn Kinyarwanda

Inzora Café: <http://bit.ly/KinyaFAQ>

Vuga Neza: www.vuganeza.com

Gusoma Education: <https://www.amasomo.com>

Ubumenyi Language Centre: <https://www.facebook.com/ubumenyilanguagecentre/>, ubumenyilanguagecentre@gmail.com, 07850740007

Groups to join on social media for general info

Living in Kigali: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/218647351983360/>

Expats in Rwanda: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ExpatsinRwanda/>

Kigali Expat Social: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/728342290541855/>

<i>Schools</i>	<i>Phone Number</i>	<i>Website</i>	<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Location</i>
Discovery International School	+250 788 306 754	https://sites.google.com/view/discoveryparents/home	Nursery, Primary	Kagugu
Kigali International School (KICS)	+250 788 125 018	http://kicsrw.org	Nursery, Primary, Secondary	Gacuriro
Happy Hearts Day Care and Nursery	+250 788 300 512	http://www.happy-hearts.rw/	Nursery	Kimihurura
Iwacu Academy	+250 781 889 070	https://iwacuacademy.org/	Nursery, Primary	Gacuriro
Green Hills Academy	+250 735 832 348	http://www.green-hillsacademy.rw/	Nursery, Primary, Secondary	Nyarutarama
International School of Kigali (ISK)	+250 786 725 369	https://iskr.org/	Primary, Secondary	Nyarutarama
Wellspring Academy	+250 786 162 427	https://www.wellspringacademy.org/	Nursery, Primary, Secondary	Nyarutarama
Lead International School/ Little Bears Academy	+250 781 423 577 +250 788 634 182 +250 788 637 884	https://leadschoolrwanda.com/	Nursery, Primary, Secondary	Kimihurura and Kagugu

Appendix cont.

Local Brands

Clothing

[House of Tayo](#)
[Rwanda Clothing](#)
[Haute Baso](#)
[Sonia Mugabo](#)
[Moshions](#)

Accessories

[Dokmai](#)
[Ktsobe](#)
[Uzuri K&Y](#)

Skincare

[Kandaka Naturals](#)
[Ami Body Organics](#)

Home

[Beelght Rwanda](#)
[Wood Habitat](#)
[Tugirimana Wood Works](#)
[Kigali Farmers & Artisans Market](#)

Real Estate

Name: Royalco Real Estate Mobile: +250 788306464 Email: eare.ltd@gmail.com https://royalcoestate.com/	Name: Plut Properties Ltd Mobile: +250 788411423 Email: info@plutproperties.com https://plutproperties.com/	Name: Century Rwanda Real Estate Mobile: +250 732 000211 732 000212 Email: info@centuryrwanda.com https://centuryrealestategroup.com/
Name: Vibe House Mobile: +250 788 639 023 Email: info@vibehouse.rw https://vibehouse.rw/	Name: Homeland Real Estate Mobile: +250 733347133 Email: homelandly@gmail.com http://www.homeland.rw/	Name: World Real Estate Mobile: +250 788519658 https://worldrealestate.business.site

Car Rental Contact Details

Car rental rates range from 30,000-50,000rwf/day, depending on the car size, duration, and owner's rates. If you rent for a period above one month you may be able to negotiate a better rate.

Kigali Car rentals: **+250 783008990** Vava Tours: **+250 788557701**

Guest Pro Tours: **+250 788505353** Access Car Rental Kigali: **+256 772057087**