



CASE STUDY COUNTRY

| COUNTRY | POPULATION | FOREST RESTORATION TARGET | STATE OF RESTORATION IN 2019 |
|---------|------------|--------------------------------|--|
| RWANDA | 12,630,000 | 2 MHA BY 2030 (BONN CHALLENGE) | 708,629 HA UNDER RESTORATION (29% OF THE TARGET) |

“Visit Rwanda”, from a soft power strategy to a profitable business for forest and wildlife conservation

In 2011, Rwanda joined the Bonn Challenge, a global initiative led by IUCN, and pledged to bring 2 million ha under forest landscape restoration (FLR) by 2030. Amounting to 82% of its territory, this target is the highest national proportion committed under the Challenge. In the early 2010s, the Government of Rwanda also included a 30% national forest cover target by 2020 in multiple economic and development policies. In 2019, the country was estimated to have [708,629 ha](#) under restoration, meaning 29% of its target is achieved. Efforts are estimated to have led to the sequestration of more than 100 MtCO₂, according to IUCN calculations. \$531 million were invested, including 51% from domestic public expenditure (\$275 million) and 36% from co-financing of public funds and international grants. Private sector investment remains below 1%, but new tourism policies might be a game-changer.

Visit Rwanda, a communication strategy to attract visitors and private investments

Football fans across Europe might have felt a little bit closer to Rwanda these last years. Since 2018, players of [Arsenal FC](#) – President Kagame’s publically supported favorite team – have been wearing a “Visit Rwanda” logo on their sleeves, quickly followed by [Paris Saint-Germain](#), which has displayed the message in Parc des Princes stadium and on its training shirts since 2019.

These prestigious sponsorships with two of the most popular football clubs in the world are the results of a new strategic, soft power campaign launched by the Rwanda Development Board (RDB), the government’s institution dedicated to accelerating economic development through private sector growth. Visit Rwanda aims at promoting the country as a touristic destination for the global public. While 1.7 million people visited Rwanda in 2018, according to RDB, the country’s image abroad still suffers from the memories of the genocide. Both sponsorships were signed for a huge amount of money: US\$40 million over three years to Arsenal FC, and US\$8 to 10 million per year to PSG. An investment

that raised public [concern](#) in the United Kingdom, as the UKAid provides US\$80 million a year to Rwanda for development. But the government hoped for a return on investment and help to the private sector on the consolidation of the structuring of the tourism sector. And the strategy seems to work, as revenues indeed [spiked](#) by 17% from 2018 to 2019, after a surge of 42% from 2017 to 2018.

Luxury tourism to protect forests and gorillas

The campaign echoes a sustainable tourism strategy of the “Land of a Thousand Hills” to attract visitors, betting on luxury and gorilla tourism to generate more revenues rather than mass-market tourism. “*Rwanda aims to become the leading ecotourism destination on the African continent and is building a reputation as a luxury, high quality, low footprint destination*”, [reports](#) Francophone media Jeune Afrique. Indeed, [tourism](#) is currently the country’s largest source of foreign exchange. For that purpose, the country relies on its green landscapes and exotic megafauna to appeal foreign holiday visitors. According to RDB, Rwanda is home to nearly 35% of the world’s mountain gorilla population. In May 2017, the price of permits for gorilla trekking in the Volcanoes National Park was raised

from \$700 to \$1,500. 15,132 of them were issued in 2018, increasing the revenues from gorilla tourism by 25% in 2018, and 14% from 2018 to 2019. [Revenues](#) from park visits grew by 260% from 2008 to 2019, up to US\$498 million. Luxury resort hotels were also opened like the One&Only Gorilla Nest, next to Volcanoes National Park, with prices ranging from US\$3,000 to 15,000 per night. Two years ago, RDB also signed a 25-years concession [agreement](#) with Imizi Ecotourism Development Ltd for the development of a multi-phased conservation and tourism management program in Gishwati-Mukura National Park. Opened to the public in December 2020, the GMNP was designated a “[biosphere reserve](#)” by the UNESCO in October 2020.

Since 2005, [€5.2 million](#) have been used to finance local community projects, including to safeguard and protect wildlife, as a governmental policy dedicates 10% of the revenues from park visits to local women of close community. The conservation policy also benefits the fauna: in 2018, IUCN changed the [status](#) of mountain gorillas on its Red List from “critically endangered” to “endangered”, as the population across Congo, Uganda and Rwanda raised from 680 individuals in 2008 to over 1,000 in 2019.