

## Rwanda's tourism chief: "Switzerland is an important market"

During the Rwanda Tourism Week, TRAVEL INSIDE spoke to the Director General, Rwanda Chamber of Tourism.



Frank Gisha Mugisha ©SM

As part of Rwanda Tourism Week, the Chamber of Tourism Board invited Rwanda to the country. TRAVEL INSIDE was the only Swiss medium to visit Rwanda Tourism Week in December. The week-long event brought together around 1000 stakeholders to promote tourism in regional and global markets.

Since 2021, Rwanda Tourism Week has positioned itself as an annual platform. The event provided great networking opportunities among the numerous stakeholders from the regions, Africa, Europe and Asia. The first edition of the Africa Tourism Business Forum also brought together around 400 delegates from 19 countries.

TRAVEL INSIDE reporter Silvia Mettler spoke there with tourism CEO Frank Gisha Mugisha, Director General, Rwanda Chamber of Tourism, about his personal conclusion and about his assessments and plans on the Swiss market.

**Frank Gisha, you invited a delegation from Switzerland. Do you intend to expand the European market, especially the Swiss market?**

Yes, we are already present in the European market under the brand VisitRwanda, and I would say that with such marketing initiatives as the Rwanda Tourism Week, we are

strengthening and expanding our European market, of course with a special focus on the Swiss and German markets.

Switzerland is important for us. I am happy that we have hired Jackie Helfenberger, who is currently working as a business partner of the Rwanda Chamber of Tourism for Switzerland and German-speaking countries.

She has done an incredible job so far. For the main Swiss tour operators, we will launch another Fam Trip in November 2023 in combination with Rwanda Tourism Week. There is still a lot to do. This was now a first step to make Rwanda known in Switzerland.

### **How many guests travel to Rwanda from Switzerland per year today?**

In 2019, a good base year before the pandemic, Rwanda recorded 2680 visitors from Switzerland, compared to 1410 in 2007. The numbers are increasing and are expected to reach 2019 levels by 2024.

### **The tourism infrastructure still has some deficits, for example in hotels, sightseeing and public transport. Do you have any further plans?**

In terms of tourism infrastructure, the government plays a big role. Rwanda is currently developing its niche as a regional and international conference centre with its world-class Kigali Convention Centre.

Also, the new open visa regime with visa on arrival is a big advantage. In addition, Rwanda has a state-of-the-art cricket stadium, the golf course has been upgraded to an 18-hole facility and the Kigali BK Arena enables international sporting events to be held.

An excellent and growing transport network and diverse entertainment options are also in focus. This has also attracted foreign hotel chains such as Marriott, Radisson Blu, Park Inn by Radisson, One & Only, Singita and Wilderness Africa. These play a crucial role in improving service quality in the hospitality industry.

The national airline Rwandair flies to over 30 destinations across Africa, Asia and Europe (also with Qatar Airways codeshare partnership). Another 7 international airlines connect Kigali, Rwanda's capital, with the rest of the world. The capacity of Kigali International Airport is being expanded. By 2024, twice as many travellers are to be handled. In addition, a new Bugesera international airport is being built.

### **By the way, Switzerland and Rwanda have some things in common: Landlocked, four languages, lots of nature with hills and agriculture. So is Switzerland something of a good role model?**

We invest in our people, in education, technology and tourism, just like Switzerland does. As we rebuilt our country after the genocide in 1994, we are very grateful for the support of Swiss experts, as our population is currently about 70% under the age of 30.

Interview: Silvia Mettler, Kigali