

AFRICA · OFF THE BEATEN PATH · CULTURE · WILDLIFE · BEACHES

 Burundi

Burundi is a small, hilly and rarely visited country where royal drummers still pound out rhythms at the Gishora sanctuary and Lake Tanganyika's sandy shore runs right past Bujumbura. Hippos wallow in the Rusizi delta, chimpanzees roam the Kibira forest, and a stone pyramid marks a claimed southernmost source of the Nile. Infrastructure is thin, so a local guide helps.

 **The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to parts of Burundi.**
Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.
FCDO advice last updated 21 May 2026.

 CAPITAL Gitega	 CURRENCY Burundian franc (BIF) £1 ≈ BIF 3,987	 LANGUAGE Kirundi, French Swahili, English	 BEST TIME Jun–Aug
 DAILY BUDGET £30–£140 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, E 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 14h via Nairobi, Addis Ababa or Brussels ~£750–£1,200 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+2 standard time

Burundi packs mountains, lake shore and highland plateau into an area about a third larger than Wales, and most of its 12 million people farm the steep green hills. The west is defined by Lake Tanganyika, the world's longest freshwater lake, with Bujumbura, the economic capital, on its northern tip. Inland, the Congo–Nile ridge carries tea estates and Kibira's montane forest, and the plateau beyond holds Gitega, political capital since 2019, with its national museum and the drum sanctuary at Gishora. A typical trip starts with a few days on the lake, then loops through Gitega and south to the Nile source, often as an extension of Rwanda.

Travel here is slow, personal and largely unpackaged. There are few hotels outside Bujumbura and Gitega, roads wind endlessly over the hills, and fuel shortages have regularly disrupted transport, so a driver-guide is the easiest way to get around. Day-to-day costs are low, but foreign cards are rarely accepted and you'll need cash. French opens doors in towns, Kirundi greetings win smiles everywhere, and English is limited. The reward is a country almost free of other tourists, with lakeside sunsets over the Congolese mountains, extraordinary drumming and a warmth that surprises visitors braced for a difficult destination. Check the FCDO advice before planning.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

CULTURE

Gishora Drum Sanctuary

On a hill near Gitega, drummers keeping up the royal tradition perform on huge drums carried on their heads, leaping and chanting in a ritual inscribed by UNESCO as intangible heritage.
- 2

BEACH

Lake Tanganyika beaches

North of Bujumbura's port, sandy beaches such as Saga Plage are lined with bars and grills where locals swim, eat grilled fish and watch the sun drop behind the Congolese mountains across the lake.

3

WILDLIFE

Rusizi National Park

Just outside Bujumbura, the reedy delta where the Rusizi River meets Lake Tanganyika shelters hippos, Nile crocodiles and abundant waterbirds, best seen from a boat with a local guide.

4

NATURE

Kibira National Park

Burundi's biggest montane rainforest runs along the Congo–Nile ridge and adjoins Rwanda's Nyungwe. Guided walks may turn up chimpanzees and colobus monkeys, and the edges are framed by the tidy tea estates of Teza and Rwegura.

5

NATURE

Source of the Nile

A small stone pyramid near Rutovu, in the southern hills, marks the nearby Kasumo spring, claimed as the southernmost source of the Nile. The sweeping views over the rolling southern highlands justify the bumpy drive.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Bujumbura

≈ 1.2 million people

The economic capital and only real city spreads up the hills from Lake Tanganyika; come for lake beaches, lakeside bars, grilled-fish restaurants and trips to the hippos of the Rusizi delta.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Gitega

≈ 135,000 people

Burundi's political capital since 2019 is a quiet, cooler highland town, worth a night for the National Museum and the royal drummers of nearby Gishora.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Ngozi

≈ 60,000 people

A university and market town amid the coffee hills of the north, Ngozi is pleasant enough for a night but has few sights of its own.

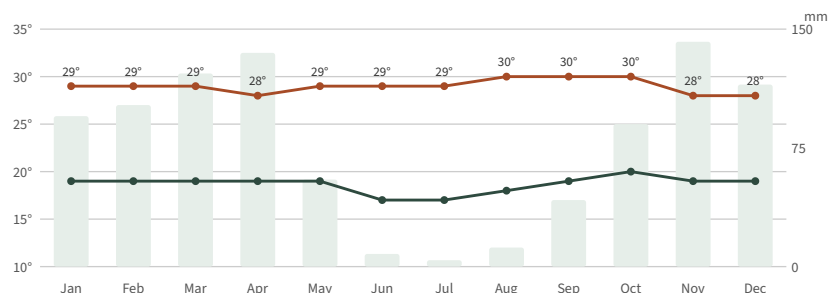
Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Burundi

Best time: **Jun–Aug.**

**Average climate in Bujumbura**

— High °C — Low °C — Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jul	Independence Day Celebrated on 1 July with official parades, music and drumming, marking Burundi's independence in 1962 after decades of Belgian administration.
Aug	Umuganuro The ancient royal sorghum festival, abandoned under colonial rule and since revived as a national celebration, honours the harvest each August with dancing, drumming and exhibitions of farm produce.

How much does Burundi cost?

SHOESTRING £30 per person / day ≈ BIF 119,613 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £70 per person / day ≈ BIF 279,097 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £140 per person / day ≈ BIF 558,195 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
---	---	--

Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Ibiharage Beans fried with onion, garlic and often palm oil — Burundi's everyday staple, eaten with rice, plantain or ubugali, a stiff cassava paste.	Mukeke A prized Lake Tanganyika fish, usually grilled or fried whole and served with chips or rice at Bujumbura's lakeside restaurants.	Goat brochettes Skewers of goat meat grilled at roadside bars and eaten with fried plantain or chips, ideally alongside a cold Primus beer.
---	---	---

Getting around

There are no trains. Minibuses and larger buses link Bujumbura with Gitega, Ngozi and other towns, leaving when full from roadside stations, but routes are slow and fuel shortages can disrupt services. Most visitors hire a car with a driver through a hotel or agency. In Bujumbura, use taxis arranged by your hotel; motorbike taxis are banned from the city centre.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  C E 220V — bring a UK-to-C/E adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Telephone: 112 (ambulance, fire, police) You can also request help from the Red Cross by calling 109 . Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +257	TIME ZONE UTC+2 (standard time)
TAP WATER Not safe — drink bottled or treated water	DRIVING On the right

TIPPING

Tipping isn't traditional, but 5–10% is appreciated in Bujumbura's better restaurants, and drivers and guides expect something at the end.

ETIQUETTE

Greet people before any request — 'amahoro' (peace) or 'bonjour' — and shake hands, sometimes supporting your right forearm with the left hand. Never photograph soldiers, police or government buildings.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Melchior Ndadaye International Airport (BJM), Bujumbura

Visas & entry for Burundi

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to visit Burundi.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations

 See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

- Hepatitis A
- Tetanus
- Typhoid
- Yellow fever

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

- Chikungunya
- Dengue
- Hepatitis B
- Measles
- Meningococcal disease
- Rabies
- Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required for all travellers (usually over 9 months or 1 year old). There is a risk of yellow fever in parts of the country — vaccination may be advised.

MALARIA

High risk of malaria

- There is a high risk of malaria in Burundi: antimalarial tablets recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Burundi

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Wed 21 Oct 2026	Commemoration of the Assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye
Sun 1 Nov 2026	All Saints' Day
Mon 2 Nov 2026	All Saints' Day (observed)
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day

Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Fri 5 Feb 2027	Unity Day
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Tue 6 Apr 2027	Commemoration of the Assassination of President Cyprien Ntaryamira
Sat 1 May 2027	International Labour Day
Thu 6 May 2027	Ascension Day
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (observed, estimated) (date may shift)
Tue 8 Jun 2027	National Day of Patriotism and Commemoration of the Death of President Pierre Nkurunziza
Thu 1 Jul 2027	Independence Day
Sun 15 Aug 2027	Assumption Day
Mon 16 Aug 2027	Assumption Day (observed)
Wed 13 Oct 2027	Commemoration of the Assassination of National Hero, Prince Louis Rwagasore

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in French

ENGLISH	FRENCH	SAY IT
Hello	Bonjour	<i>bon-ZHOOR</i>
Thank you	Merci	<i>mair-SEE</i>
Please	S'il vous plaît	<i>seel voo PLAY</i>
Excuse me	Excusez-moi	<i>ex-kew-ZAY mwah</i>
How much is this?	C'est combien ?	<i>say kom-BYAN</i>

Know before you go

Bring enough cash in clean, recent US dollars or euros; ATMs rarely accept foreign cards and few businesses take card payments.

Check the FCDO travel advice before booking and again before you travel, and carry your passport for police checkpoints on main roads.

Learn a few Kirundi words — 'amahoro' (hello, literally peace) and 'murakoze' (thank you) — because French is rarely spoken outside the towns.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.