

RED ROCKS ECOTOURISM INITIATIVES

"Where cultural tourism leads to community development"

About Us

Red Rocks Ecotourism Initiatives is an organisation that is steeped in history. Its name is derived from the red rocks that resulted from historic events that took place in northern Rwanda about 700 years ago.

Back in the 14th Century when the volcanic mountains of Muhabura and Sabyinyo were still active, they used to erupt and send red rocks rolling down the southern part of Ruhengeri (now Musanze district), and residues of these rocks can still be found at our headquarters in Nyakinama village, Musanze district.

Passionate about conserving our cultural heritage and protecting our natural environment, we christened our organisation Red Rocks as a way of reminding people about the historical and environmental importance of the volcanoes.

With the current desperate competition for land and natural resources between people and wildlife, we find it imperative than ever before that we strive as an organisation to bring to our people the message of protecting and conserving the Virunga massif, an incredible range of eight volcanic mountains that straddle Rwanda, Uganda and the DR Congo.

For the uninitiated, it's the Virunga massif that offers refuge to the unique and charismatic mountain gorillas, whose numbers dwindled dramatically in the '70s and '80s due to war, disease, habitat loss and human-wildlife conflict.

Our Mission

To support training, capacity building, environmental protection, nature conservation, and promotion of good practice.

Our Vision

To protect our cultural heritage and develop ecotourism research and information to stir socioeconomic development.

Gorilla Trekking

Red Rocks Ecotourism Initiatives organises gorilla trekking expeditions that aim to promote conservation, social-economic development and tourism. We specialise in forms of sustainable tourism that focus on local socioeconomic development and natural/cultural heritage conservation.

We work with local communities to create awareness of the region's unique cultural heritage and the benefits that accrue from protecting the environment through conservation.

Indeed, Red Rocks Ecotourism Initiatives offers huge potential to create employment and help achieve regional development objectives of poverty alleviation, economic growth, and conservation of our abundant natural and cultural resources.

Red Rocks Camps

With campsites nestled in all the three countries that share the Virunga massif — Rwanda, DR Congo and Uganda — Red Rocks Ecotourism Initiatives also caters to the needs of adventurous campers.

And our campsites offer more than just camping; they also teem with women enjoying banana beer and others involved in various activities such as basket weaving, which offer guests a peek into the unique and interesting cultures of the peoples around the Virunga massif. What's more, in the evenings, our guests get to sit around the bonfire and swap stories with friends and strangers.

And then there is the food! When it comes to this department, our campsites offer guests an opportunity to taste delicious traditional cuisines, which they can also prepare themselves — if they wish to.

Cultural Tourism

Red Rocks Ecotourism Initiatives offers tourists an insight into Rwanda and its culture and traditional practices. Tour packages such as homestays take visitors on a trip through our history and culture as they journey through the beautiful scenery in Rwanda, DR Congo and Uganda.

Each year since 2012, Red Rocks Ecotourism Initiatives organises the Cultural Tourism Week, which brings together local communities, conservationists, safari tourists, and tourism industry players for a week-long celebration of cultural tourism at our headquarters in Nyakinama village, Musanze district.

This one-of-a-kind event has brought about positive gains to Musanze communities by using tourism as a tool for conflict resolution.

In fact, the tourism department at the Rwanda Development Board endorsed this annual event as a curtain raiser for Kwita Izina, the annual baby gorilla naming and conservation ceremony.

Activities within the seven-day event include different cultural music performances, the Yoga Gorilla Camp, conservation debates, and more.

During the event, participants, communities and exhibitors get a chance to discuss the future of conservation and tourism. In addition, attendees are regaled with testimonies from locals that have directly or indirectly benefited from the event since its inception in 2012.

Conservation Debates

Given the short history of the Virunga's ecotourism, there is a need to promote a greater awareness of ecotourism concepts and approaches within the government machinery and to set up institutional mechanisms to encourage growth, development and diversification throughout the sector.

In this regard, we organise regular conservation debates targeting policy makers, conservationists, philanthropists, civil society and local communities, who gather at the Red Rocks Ecotourism Initiatives headquarters in Musanze to discuss the state and future of the Virunga massif conservation.

The Challenges

Of course setting up a programme like this doesn't come without its challenges.

The various activities that we are engaged in come with certain difficulties and sometimes it feels like there is a mountain to climb. However, with the right partnerships, we believe that we will continue to achieve our goals.

The major challenges we are facing include networking, partnerships, promotion and difficulty in cross-border visits. Also, development of new ecotourism products, services and destinations is a complex process.

Success will demand commitment, coordination and cooperation among a host of public and private sector organisations. Only by working closely together will lessons be learned and the many potential benefits shared.