

# PREPARING FOR YOUR PILGRIMAGE TO KIBEHO WITH IMMACULÉE

Thank you for saying, “Yes!” to Our Lady of Kibeho! We are so pleased that you will be joining us on this spiritual journey in Immaculée’s homeland. Our time together honoring The Blessed Virgin and her son Jesus will unite us as brothers and sisters of Our Lady of Kibeho.

Rwanda is called “The Place Where God Sleeps” and when you get there, you will see why. However, this adventure still requires preparation and awareness to make this journey as comfortable as possible. With this in mind, we have assembled the following list of tips and helpful travel information to consider while preparing for your pilgrimage. We hope you find it useful.

God bless you and we are looking forward to seeing you in Kigali!

## Flights

As pilgrims will be joining us from around the world, we do not have a specific airport of origination. Flight choices, purchasing process, and expenses are not part of the pilgrimage registration package. However, we do have a few recommendations that will assist in your experience, comfort, and enjoyment of traveling to Rwanda:

- Consider booking your flight with our travel agent, Kim Bedford. She has booked hundreds of flights to/from Kigali over the years. This knowledge and experience are helpful with finding the best international flights.

Kim Bedford, Carrousel Travel  
[kbedford@carrouseltravel.com](mailto:kbedford@carrouseltravel.com)  
612.798.1427 or 888.992.1026

Please contact Kim only if you will be booking through her agency and willing/able to pay a standard travel agency fee.

- If you book your own flight, consider arriving in Kigali, Rwanda (airport code: KGL) through Amsterdam (AMS) on KLM/Delta (preferred) or through Brussels (BRU) on Brussels Air/United.

These two flights arrive and depart into KGL around the same time every evening and are very reliable. Often, pilgrims begin to meet each other at the Amsterdam gate area. This has been a very nice way for individuals to start connecting with your fellow pilgrims!

- If you choose to book on an alternate carrier/flight and are unable to arrive on the day indicated in the pilgrimage schedule, consider coming a day earlier, versus a day later.
- Be sure to forward via e-mail your official itinerary (as provided by the airline, website or travel agent) to David once purchased.

**NOTE:** When looking at flight options on-line, you may see a stop listed as Entebbe, Uganda (EBB). This is not a true layover, as there is no plane change involved. If your flight stops in EBB, it lands, re-fuels, has several people get on/off, and then departs.

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## **Passport, Visa and Entry Requirements**

Please ensure you have a current passport that is valid six months beyond your return date. We also recommend you keep a photo of your passport on your phone and a color copy in your luggage. This will be of incredible assistance if your passport is lost while in Rwanda. Visas are required for U.S. citizens and are purchased upon arrival into the Kigali airport. Visas for U.S. citizens are purchased at the customs desk/checkpoint in KGL airport for \$60USD (cash recommended),

As of 2023, Rwanda no longer requires any vaccinations, including COVID-19, to enter the country.

You are personally responsible for ensuring your valid entry into Rwanda. This may include changes to the visa requirements that may occur at any time at the discretion of the Rwandan government.

Finally, you will require an invitation letter from us. This letter simply states that Immaculée is inviting and hosting you during your stay. This helps expedite your processing through customs. While this may all seem like a lot, and perhaps even scary, please know that in 16 years of organizing pilgrimages to Kibeho, we have never had a pilgrim denied access to Rwanda. But we want to make sure everyone is aware of the requirements in advance of your travels.

## **Vaccinations and Medications**

At least 21 days prior to your trip, we recommend you schedule an appointment at a travel clinic or a physician to discuss and receive vaccinations and medications. No vaccines are required for entry into Rwanda. For detailed information, you can visit the Center for Disease Control website:

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/rwanda.htm>

In addition to the recommended preparations listed in the CDC link, we suggest bringing some Advil/Tylenol as well as a “Z-Pack” or “Tri-Pack”. These packs are high-dose, three-day supplies of antibiotics prescribed by a travel clinic or physician. It allows you to treat yourself for bacterial-related illness including minor G.I. related issues. We recommend you visit a travel clinic or physician for specific directions and requirements.

## **Other Health Related Considerations**

- While there are few mosquitos during the dry season, we do recommend you bring repellent spray or wipes. There are also some clothing options that have repellent built into the fabric.
- You will be provided only bottled water or direct well water to drink while in Rwanda, so there is no need to bring a water purifier. Remember to use bottled water when brushing your teeth.
- If you have a significant health issue that we should be aware of in case of an emergency (i.e., diabetes, pacemaker, etc.) please send David Steffen an e-mail describing your condition and any recommended actions in the case of an emergency. This information will be completely confidential and would only be disclosed to Rwandan medical professionals, if necessary.

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- Some travelers have asked about the risk of contracting Ebola. Rwanda is Ebola free, and is located over 1,000 miles from the countries that dealt with last decade's outbreak. In short, we feel Ebola is a non-issue for the residents and visitors of Rwanda.

## Clothing

- Rwanda is just 200 miles south of the equator. Yet, it is incredibly comfortable year-round. This is primarily due to its elevation (about 6000 ft. above sea level). Daytime temperatures will average be about 75–85° F and evenings will be between 55-65° F.

A light sweater or jacket is recommended for chilly evenings. We also recommend light, breathable, long-sleeve tops and similar comfortable pants. Do not bring sleeveless shirts, very short or tight shorts and tops as it is a very modest culture. A brimmed hat and/or umbrella is also recommended, especially if you sensitive.to the sun.

- Shoes – please bring a pair of sturdy, very comfortable hiking shoes or athletic shoes. Leave your high-heeled shoes at home. Feel free to bring sandals for riding on the bus or wearing around the pilgrimage center.

**NOTE:** Blue Veil Villa staff will gladly launder clothing for you, if requested. The cost is \$3USD per item.

## Lodging

- We will be staying at the Blue Veil Villa—Kigali, and the Blue Veil Villa—Kibeho while we are in Rwanda. These are very comfortable, clean and modern facilities. Each room has two single beds (some double beds for couples), WiFi, and a private bathroom with a shower.

## Meals

- We will dine together for meals, and the food is wonderful. (Prepare for the most amazing bananas in Kibeho! They are picked right from the local trees.)
- If you have blood sugar issues, we recommend you bring snacks for the bus or in your room.

## Electricity

While electricity is only available in 4% of homes in rural Rwanda, you will have access to it in both Kigali and Kibeho. Rwanda uses the European standard, two-prong socket and voltage, so adapters are necessary for phones. For computers and hairdryers, we recommend purchasing voltage converters.

**Important:** Please ensure to check your electrical devices (hair dryers, phones, etc.) for voltage needs while in Rwanda. We typically have at least one hair dryer per trip burn out due to incorrect voltage. Prepare and protect your electrical items by reviewing voltage requirements, adapter and converter needs on websites like this one: <http://whatplug.info/from/usa/to/rwanda> or by visiting a local electronics store.

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## **Mobile Phones**

Most mobile phones work very well in Rwanda. Please check with your service provider. You may need to change to a different plan for the period of your trip to avoid excessive charges. expenses limited.

Helpful hint: Consider adding WhatsApp to your mobile phone. This is an internet-based mobile phone service that is widely used in Rwanda.

## **Internet Access**

Wifi service is available both in Kigali and Kibeho. However, the service reliability can be inconsistent. For this reason, we recommend you plan for sporadic internet access.

## **Money**

The Rwandan Franc is the official currency of Rwanda, and you will not find a bank outside of Rwanda to convert your cash without a large fee. For the best exchange rate, we recommend you bring cash in denominations of \$10USD, \$20USD/EUR and/or \$50USD/EUR for conversation.

We will go to an exchange location the day after you arrive in Kigali, and there is no need to have Rwandan currency before then. Visa (not MasterCard, AmEx, or Discover) is accepted at several places in Kigali, but only cash in Kibeho. In general, we recommend you plan to use cash for smaller transactions. Please inform your credit card company of your travel location and dates prior to departure.

All your lodging, meals, and ground transportation are covered by your registration fee; so, your need for cash will be limited to personal items, gifts, and excursions not related to the pilgrimage. We may also pass the hat at the end of the pilgrimage for gratuities for the cooks, drivers, porters, and the Blue Veil Villa staff. Of course, gratuities are always optional and the amount is up to you, with \$5USD to \$10/USD being a typical amount.

For reference, most pilgrims spend less than \$400USD while in Rwanda for gifts and other related incidentals.

## **Gifts**

When visiting Rwanda, there is a strong desire by all of us to bring gifts for the children and people you will meet. Please know that Immaculée's strongest desire is that we provide them with our greatest gift – friendship and prayers. These gifts are always greater than anything we can provide materially.

However, if you do choose to bring a gift or gifts, we do recommend it be in the form of cash to the organizations we visit. Other options are shoes, bars of soap, or a deflated ball (soccer or basketball) for Fr. Leszek's school grounds. Do NOT bring clothing or blankets. The Rwandan government has been overwhelmed with used clothing donations and no longer wish to accept these items.

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Again, financial gifts for CANA, the orphanage, memorials, or schools are the best option. Gifts will likely be collected by Immaculée in Kigali or Kibeho, and distributed by other, to ensure it is done in an orderly way to those who need it.

## **Packing**

Your packing choices are certainly up to you, but we recommend you consider the following:

- Ensure your luggage count does not exceed a carry-on bag and one larger bag/per person.
- Consider bringing a small (3 oz. or less) container of Woolite to hand-wash a few items.
- Check your baggage weight prior to going to the airport – overweight luggage fees can be hefty, especially for international flights.
- Sunscreen – the temperatures are mild in Rwanda, but you are still 200 miles from the equator.
- A travel umbrella is also highly recommended. On the feast day, we will be out in the open for quite some time, and an umbrella is also a great solution for sun protection.
- Consider bringing a personal bar of soap and a small container of shampoo. While this is provided at the locations, they are Rwandan items and may not meet your typical expectations.
- A book to donate - a library is being established at the Blue Veil Villa in Kigali. We welcome pilgrims to bring a favorite book to add to the collection for future travelers to enjoy.
- Snacks – You will have three meals every day, but if you like to snack or have blood sugar issues, you'll need to bring your own. Trail mix, nuts, and other dry snacks are good options.
- DO NOT bring any plastic disposable shopping bags into Rwanda unless you will ensure that you re-pack and return with them. Rwandan law prohibits them from being left in the country.

## **Safety**

Some people have asked, “How safe is Rwanda?” Rwanda is a very safe place to visit with very little crime. We have not had a single incident in our 15 years of pilgrimages to Rwanda. However, like any city or county you visit, please be mindful of your surroundings and personal belongings.

That should cover it! Please reach out with any questions. Again, we are so pleased you are joining us on this amazing journey and look forward to seeing you “in the land of a thousand hills.”

Many blessings and safe travels to you!  
- Immaculée and David