

onwards & upwards

Rwanda has come a long way since the terrible days of 1994. **Beatrice M Spadacini** outlines the country's ambitious vision and meets the Rwandans taking their country forward into a bright and positive future

Reconciliation is not magic," says Rwandan Bishop John Rucyahana. "It is a slow and painful process that has many ups and downs. We don't have time to wait until all the healing has been done. We must dig and do the work with one hand while we wipe away our tears with the other."

Even though Rwanda is still mourning and dealing with the consequences of the 1994 genocide, when close to a million people were brutally murdered over a period of 100 days, its determination to move on and heal is a testament to the resilience of humankind.

Rwanda has taken a quantum leap forward into the 21st century. What used to be known as the 'Land of a Thousand Hills' or the 'Land of Milk and Honey' is now more frequently being coined the 'Singapore of Africa'. Not all Rwandans are comfortable embracing a term that draws upon a foreign economic model, but most agree that it aptly conveys the rapid development of one of the continent's latest success stories.

With a gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of about 7 per cent, Rwanda is one of the top performers in sub-Saharan Africa. What is most remarkable about this small, densely-populated and landlocked nation in the heart of Africa is how far it has come in the last 15 years.

Rwanda now has the highest number of female parliamentarians in the world and the largest solar farm in sub-Saharan Africa. It is also one of the cleanest countries on the continent and is the only one that implements a zero tolerance policy on corruption.

CHOOSING INVESTMENT AND REFORM OVER AID

Rwandan President Kagame has established an Advisory Council, much like US President Barack Obama has done, to help him solve the current financial crisis.

President Kagame's inner circle includes influential business people such as Jim Sinegal, CEO of Costco; Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks; Joe Ritchie and Dan Cooper, both partners in Chicago's Fox River Financial Resources firm and Google CEO Eric Schmidt. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair also sits on the Advisory Council as does Pastor Rick Warren, author of *A Purpose Driven Life*. If you believe in the 'six degrees

of separation' principle, you can imagine how far and wide President Kagame's network of contacts extends and how useful this could be for propelling his country forward, luring the best minds to foster innovation and establishing training programs for young Rwandans all over the world.

Although economic recovery has substantially reduced the amount of foreign aid coming into the country, it still accounts for over 20 per cent of national income – a major improvement when one considers that between 1994 and 2000 Rwanda's budget was wholly dependent on overseas support. The leadership's goal is to wean the country off aid as soon as possible by offsetting it with direct investment and private sector reform.

In a recent opinion piece published in *The Financial Times*, President Kagame, who has a reputation for not mincing his words, told leaders of the rich world and multi-lateral institutions that they need to "have a mind for the poor" instead of just having a heart. He hails entrepreneurship over aid because it "unlocks people's minds, fosters innovation and enables people to exercise their talents." →

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THE ROADMAP: VISION 2020

While the rest of the world was savouring the dawn of the new millennium, Rwanda was busy finalizing its roadmap for development: Vision 2020. Barely out of a war, Rwanda was quick to conceptualize and articulate its recovery program.

It's an ambitious plan that aims to raise Rwandans out of poverty and transform the country into a middle-income economy. Key features include boosting GDP sevenfold, finding paying jobs for half of Rwanda's subsistence farmers, quadrupling per capita income to US\$900 and turning the country into a technology hub for Africa.

According to Vision 2020, Rwanda has no choice but to aim high. It states: 'To remain in the current situation is simply unacceptable to the Rwandan people.' It is no surprise, therefore, that for the past nine years the country has marched steadily forward with a sense of purpose and a healthy dose of pride.

"The leadership of this country has charted a vision of where Rwanda wants to go," says Josh Ruxin, assistant professor at Columbia University and the founder and director of the Access Project, a public health and economic development initiative in Rwanda. "Although it may be challenging to get there, if any country is going to make it, Rwanda will, because it has already come far in a very short period of time."

ATTRACTING FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Rwanda is an example of the dividends of peace and good macro-economic policies. At the end of 2006 it joined the East African Community, and since then, has taken a leading role in promoting regional unity and favorable business conditions. During the last decade the country has been among the most active reformers of business regulation worldwide.

In 2001 Parliament introduced a new labour law as part of a national reconstruction program, and in 2002 it launched property-titling reform. In 2004, lawmakers simplified customs, improved the credit registry and undertook court reforms. In 2007, Rwanda continued with property registration and customs. Although some things took longer than expected they have all created an environment conducive to business.

Over the last few years, many new businesses have set up shop in Kigali. One of them is Nakumatt Holdings, the Kenyan supermarket chain that has an annual turnover of over US\$300 million. Thiagarajan Ramamurthy, Nakumatt's operations director, "We make an average of KSh70 million per month, which is close to US\$800,000. We have about 2,500 transactions a day, which is comparable to what a similar size supermarket would have in Kenya."

As to whether the country's landlocked location or population size have been a hindrance to business, Ramamurthy says that the investment in Rwanda actually taps into a larger regional market where people make weekend trips from neighboring Burundi and →



ABOVE: Stunning baskets at Gayaha Links Training Centre in Kigali. RIGHT: Valenthine Sebahire, member of the Maraba Coffee Co-operative at work in the plantation near Butare. BELOW: Wake up and smell the coffee - Claire, chief cupper smells the many varieties. OPPOSITE: Coffee and a connection, a winning combination. BELOW: Arthur Karuletwa, owner of the Bourbon Coffee Shop in Kigali.



Arthur Karuletwa CEO, BOURBON COFFEE

Coffee, it seems, runs in Arthur Karuletwa's blood. After obtaining a degree in marketing and international business, he began an internship at Green Bean in Seattle, Washington. After a brief stint at Millstone Coffee (Proctor and Gamble), he returned to his native Rwanda to work in the Ministry of Agriculture on a project that focuses on micro-poverty reduction strategies for the rural sector. And guess what his portfolio was? Coffee.

Karuletwa moved to the Coffee Board of Rwanda, where he was in charge of marketing and branding Rwandan coffee abroad. The opening of Bourbon Coffee in February 2006 was the natural next step for Karuletwa who turned 33 this year.

"The concept of Bourbon Coffee was birthed within the fabric of the leadership's 2020 Vision for the country," he says. "It aims to reduce poverty at its core, while educating the growers and the local supply chain of the value of this economic backbone."

According to Karuletwa, coffee consumers have to learn to distinguish and appreciate the different varieties of coffee that are on the market, much like they do when they

purchase wine. Karuletwa is introducing a program that enables consumers to trace coffee production from the farmer all the way to the bar code. His idea of specialty coffee is to brand Rwandan coffee regionally and to be very specific about where it comes from and how it was grown. Not doing this, he believes, would undermine the uniqueness of Rwandan coffee and its production process.

"It would be as if we dumped all French wine into one big barrel. Specialty coffee tries to be more micro. With French wine you become very specific. You buy a Sauvignon from a farm in central France. I believe that coffee is at the same level as wine and should be treated equally."

Rwanda's micro-climatic terrain produces very different coffee flavors. Karuletwa explains that the country has five main coffee regions and that within each one there are more than 20 washing stations that have a distinct impact on how coffee beans are processed. "These five regions represent a people, a community, an economy, a touristic emblem and a social domain with its own standing," asserts Karuletwa.

True to its mission, Bourbon Coffee provides a relaxing atmosphere for savoring Rwanda's delicious brew and learning about the history of signature coffee and the communities that depend on its production. Ever since Bourbon Coffee opened at the UTC Center in Kigali in early 2006 it has attracted a large crowd of coffee aficionados. Its elegant décor, comfortable seating arrangement and softly carved wooden tables lure customers from all walks of life. There are now three Bourbon Coffees in Rwanda, with one planned to open in the US.

Karuletwa plans to introduce in all its coffee shops a 32-inch flat screen that will bring to life his traceability program. Consumers will get a virtual tour of the supply chain by swiping the bar code on their coffee bag or by activating a micro-chip embedded in their coffee cups.

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the DRC to shop at Nakumatt in Kigali, which is open 24 hours a day.

Goods that cannot be produced locally such as bread, dairy products and meat come by road from Uganda, Kenya or Tanzania. Transporting goods takes an average of five days and there is a mark-up in price of between five and ten per cent on what is imported. But, according to Ramamurthy, this far outweighs the cost of making a trip to Kenya or Uganda for consumers who want to stock up on supplies.

Another important foreign investor is Ecobank, one of Africa's largest and most successful banking services. Ecobank began operating in Rwanda in 2007. Driven by its mission to develop world-class banking in all African countries that have good growth and business potential, Ecobank found a perfect candidate in Rwanda.

"The investment climate is positive, the country is politically stable and there is good governance, a characteristic that is missing in many other African countries," says Dan Sackey, managing director of Ecobank in Kigali. "The level of transparency is also very high."

Rwanda's main disadvantage is that it is a landlocked country. But, according to Sackey, the country makes up for this with good governance and less red tape. He believes that investors find a simplified process in Rwanda. They are facilitated by specific government bodies and get all the information that is necessary to set up a business in a short period of time. The government's anti-corruption policies also reduce the cost of doing business.

Ecobank is one of eight commercial banks in Rwanda. Its main clients include the telecommunications network MTN and the Heineken Group. "The fact that multinationals invest here is a sign of confidence in the country and what it has to offer," says Sackey.

FROM AGRICULTURE TO A KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY

About 80 per cent of Rwanda's population of approximately nine million is made up of subsistence farmers. The government is well aware that, in order for Rwanda to have a modern economy, the country's labour force has to be transformed. From recipients of food aid, Rwandan farmers must become engines of small and medium enterprise development, investment and economic growth.

One way to achieve this is to invest in education and Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) development. Government officials and business leaders see technology as one of the best ways to make Rwanda a more competitive player in the global market.

Attending a conference of the World Summit on the Information Society in Ghana a few years ago, President Kagame underscored the need to make ICT accessible to all. "If ICT is to be made important," he said, "it has to be accessed by a majority of our people. It should not remain in the hands of only the privileged."

The government has taken steps to make this →

RWANDA NOW HAS THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF FEMALE PARLIAMENTARIANS IN THE WORLD AND THE LARGEST SOLAR FARM IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



Carol Karemera ARTIST, MUSICIAN & ACTRESS

Professionals are desperately needed in Rwanda today as most were killed during the genocide. Unlike people from neighbouring countries – especially Kenya and Uganda – who mainly see Rwanda as a good place to do business, young Rwandese born in exile represent a genuine promise for the future of the country. Their fresh talent and enthusiasm can be harnessed to bring life back into the land of milk and honey.

Carol Karemera is one such person. She is a stunning and slender javelin of a woman born in Brussels from Rwandan parents. In Belgium she studied jazz – saxophone and soprano – at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Belgium. She is also an actress, has a contemporary dance background and has worked in TV.

Karemera has performed in the widely acclaimed Rwanda94, a powerful six-hour play produced by Philippe Tashman in association with Grupov, a Belgian experimental theatre which recalls the tragedy of the genocide and its impact on ordinary people. The performance toured Rwanda in 2004 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the genocide. "It was really intense. Thousands of people cried silently. It was one of the most powerful and difficult experiences of my life," says Karemera.

In 1995 Karemera claimed her Rwandan citizenship and in 1996 she made her first trip back. Three years ago she decided to move permanently to Rwanda. Last year she was the Director of Festpad, a pan-African dance and music festival that has taken place in Kigali every couple of years since 1998. Karemera feels strongly that art and culture have an important role to play in the healing of the nation. She believes artists have a responsibility to nurture and protect creativity in this new and fast-paced Rwanda.

"Through the arts we can create a vital space for feeling, reflecting and questioning," she says. "Art can talk to the soul and the brain at the same time. It can help us share. People cannot carry so much sadness inside. We need to let this out and art can help us."

For this purpose she has established Ishyo, an association of women artists that aims to make culture accessible to everyone and to create a safe space for people to express their feelings. The Three Bs is their first substantial project. It consists of Baracommandos or artist gangs that storm into classrooms and engage students into specific art projects; Bibliobus, a travelling library that serves over 1200 children in Kigali city; and Ba-B'art, another initiative for young people.

MAIN: Rwanda's revival brings many new jobs.

MIDDLE: The new shopping mall in Kigali, the UTC.

BELOW LEFT: A construction site in central Kigali. Social Security houses in "New Kigali" neighbourhood.

KIGALI CAPERS

14 things to do in Rwanda's capital

- 01 Visit the **Kigali Genocide Memorial** for a deeply moving human experience.
- 02 Eat some of East Africa's best **pizza at Sole e Luna Restaurant**.
- 03 Admire the high quality artisan pieces made by women at **Amahoro arts and crafts lab**.
- 04 Cradle a cup of signature Rwandan coffee at **Bourbons**.
- 05 Book dinner at **Heaven Restaurant** with a spectacular view of the city.
- 06 Get in shape at the **Novotel gym** with one of its superb afternoon aerobics classes.
- 07 Drop in at **Milles Collines Hotel** for a gin and tonic and a dip in the pool.
- 08 Join **Hash House Harriers** for an organized Saturday afternoon walk in the city.
- 09 Pitch up at **Pasadena** for live entertainment and excellent brochettes (grilled meat).
- 10 Browse **Dancing Pots** for great rustic pottery made by the Batwa Association.
- 11 Delve into **Kimirongo Market** for a splash of colour and easy shopping.
- 12 Visit **Republika** for the best brochette in Kigali and a cozy African ambience.
- 13 Head out to **Lake Muhazi** for a picnic by the lakeshore.
- 14 Visit **La Boulangerie** for the most tempting chocolate croissants in Kigali.

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ABOVE: Wooden bicycles can take a heavy load.
LEFT: Lakes Remera end Ruhondo.

happen, with fibre optic rings in place around Kigali, and cable being laid across the country. Rights have been purchased to the East Africa Submarine Cable System, commonly known as the ESSy project, which should dramatically expand communication capabilities and reduce internet subscription rates.

ICT is also being used to promote initiatives that invest in human capital and generate economic development. One of the most successful of these is the Rwandan peace baskets made by women survivors of the genocide.

Thanks to Fair Winds Trading, a company established by American social entrepreneur Willa Shalit, the Rwandan peace baskets are now a cultural trademark and are being sold in the US through Macy's website, one of America's largest retail stores.

Over the coming years the government plans to link up every primary and secondary school in the country to the internet. "Our vision is to strive for academic excellence so that all children can work towards rebuilding this nation," says Bishop Rucyahana. "I want our young people to exploit the internet libraries of the world and to be connected with a fast-moving market."

THE RWANDA BRAND

Rwanda's best-known tourist attraction is the majestic mountain gorilla. About a third of the world's mountain gorilla population of around 700 lives in Rwanda. Every year in June the Rwanda Office of Tourism and National Park hosts the Kwita Izina, or Naming Ceremony of baby gorillas – an opportunity to monitor individuals and boost awareness of the →

OVER THE COMING YEARS THE GOVERNMENT PLANS TO LINK UP EVERY PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL IN THE COUNTRY TO THE INTERNET



ABOVE: The naming of the gorilla ceremony **RIGHT:** The mountain gorilla - Rwanda's best-known tourist attraction

importance of this critically endangered species.

"The naming of baby gorillas is a long-standing tradition in Rwanda," says Rosetta Chantal Rugumba, deputy CEO of the Rwanda Development Board, Tourism and Conservation. "We currently have 13 habituated groups and we are witnessing births in all of them."

"We also use the event to sensitize the local community and to involve them in the protection of one of our closest human relatives," explains Rugumba. This year's ceremony coincides with the International Year of the Gorilla, hence Rwanda's chosen theme 'Celebrating the Year of the Gorilla'.

What most tourists don't realize, is that Rwanda has much more to offer than the extraordinary experience of seeing mountain gorillas in their natural habitat.

"We have come from a one-product gorilla-driven mono-tourism," says Rugumba, "to a complete adventure experience which includes scenic tours of our One Thousand Hills, forest trails, primate trekking, cultural tourism and renowned bird watching."

This is a welcome development, since not everyone is willing to spend US\$500 for the daily permit required to see mountain gorillas. Alternative tourism schemes that provide more interaction with local people are also on the rise. Investment from major companies and hotel chains is also increasing all the time.

Local company Dawn Associates offers daily tours where people can visit health centres and schools, while Kiboko Tours offers mountain bike tours across tea and coffee plantations.

"You have the possibility of plucking the tea leaves yourself, of experiencing the entire production process, including drying leaves and flavoring teas, while mixing with the local people," says Kiboko's founder, Rajan Tiwari. "Next time you are back home, you will be looking to buy Rwandan tea." ☕

Rajan Tiwari FOUNDER & MD OF KIBOKO TOURS

When Rajan Tiwari arrived in Rwanda in 1994 as a volunteer relief worker, he did not expect to stay there for the next 15 years. But then the unthinkable happened. He fell in love with the country, quit his job as a captain on merchant ships, worked a few years for a Dutch international aid agency and eventually left to start a travel and tour company.

"I fell in love with the place, saw many positive sides to it and decided to promote it through the tourism industry," says Tiwari, whose personal background is an exotic trip in itself. Born in Bombay, India from an Iraqi Jewish mother, he is now married to a French woman, has two children and is entirely committed to promoting tourism in Africa.

Kiboko Tours officially opened in 2000 when the tourism industry in Rwanda was just picking up. At the time, he was competing with only a handful of other companies. Today, he says, there are at least 30 established tour companies in the country.

This is just one of the signs indicating that the country is becoming a highly-prized tourist destination in Africa. Other indicators are the number of daily and weekly flights to and from Rwanda to regional hubs such as Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Entebbe, Johannesburg and Brussels.

"When I first arrived here there was just a flight twice a week to Brussels and three flights a week to Nairobi," says Tiwari. "There were no direct flights to Kampala, Johannesburg or Addis. Now there are four daily flights to Nairobi, one to Addis, Johannesburg and several to Burundi. During the high season there are four flights per week to Brussels."

Other indicators that Rwanda is becoming a tourist destination are the burgeoning numbers of hotels. Tourists now have a range of budget options to choose from, including several five-star hotels (such as the Serena Kigali and Serena Kivu) and high-end lodges.

One of the main attractions in Rwanda is the mountain gorilla. "This country has worked hard to protect gorillas and is proud to have the largest number of 'habituated' gorilla groups (13)." Rwanda is home to over 300 mountain gorillas, of which close to a third are familiar with human presence in close proximity. "It is almost guaranteed that the visitor will see gorillas when tracking," says Tiwari.

"My goal is to promote Rwanda as a VAT destination: Value Added Tourism," he explains. "Most people who come all the way from the US or Europe to East and Central Africa want to combine their destinations. They want to see the Big Five in Kenya/Tanzania and gorillas and chimps in Rwanda or neighboring Congo and Uganda."

RWANDA HAS MUCH MORE TO OFFER THAN THE EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCE OF SEEING MOUNTAIN GORILLAS IN THEIR NATURAL HABITAT

REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL: 10 FACTORS THAT PUT RWANDA IN THE LIMELIGHT

1 SECURITY Probably one of the safest countries to travel to in sub-Saharan Africa. Crime rates are low and there is a zero-tolerance policy for corruption, which makes the country an attractive business destination for potential investors.

2 SMALL SIZE, BIG VARIETY It's possible to see a lot in a short space of time. A three-day package could include gorilla tracking, volcano trekking and a boat ride across Lake Kivu.

3 ENDANGERED GORILLAS Rwanda has the largest number of habituated gorilla groups in the world; you are almost guaranteed a sighting.

4 BEAUTIFUL BIRDS Akagera National Park and the Nyungwe Forest National Park are birdwatching hotspots. Bird lovers make special trips to catch sight of the African Pitta and other rare species.

5 INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES Because so few goods and services are locally produced, the country remains virgin territory for investors. Political stability, intolerance for corrupt practices and streamlined processes for setting up a business make Rwanda an attractive business destination.

6 AFRICA'S LARGEST SOLAR FARM Kigali Solaire on Mount Jali is a 250KW solar power plant established in June 2007 as a

partnership between the German State of Rhineland-Palatinate and the Government of Rwanda. This photovoltaic power station will be expanded up to produce up to 1 million KW.

7 ICT HUB Ambitious plans seek to turn Rwanda into the Information, Communication and Technology capital of sub-Saharan Africa. Plans are under way to set up a TechnoPark near Kigali to attract investors and fulfil this goal. Kigali is on its way to becoming a wireless city.

8 THE RWANDESE PEOPLE Friendly and welcoming, the Rwandese have a lot to offer the outside visitor. Their resilient spirit, willingness and capacity to forgive are a testament to the power of humankind.

9 OVER 100 SPECIES OF ORCHIDS Nyungwe is a high altitude mountainous rain forest in southern Rwanda. In the heart of this national park lies one of Rwanda's best kept secrets: a sea of magnificent orchids that's testament to the forest's rich biodiversity.

10 SPECIALITY COFFEE The country produces some of the most delicious coffees on the continent. Not for the faint hearted, they have a full-body and a sweet after-taste. Plenty of varieties are available.