

Burundi

Beautiful Burundi has been blighted by a generation of ethnic conflict, but with the advent of peace, this charming country may at long last be able to put its dark past to rest. A tiny little nation of soaring mountains and languid lakeside communities, Burundi is sandwiched between the African giants of Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) and Tanzania. The scenery is stunning and the welcome warm and it may once again begin to receive a trickle of travellers as the word gets out that the war is over.

The steamy capital Bujumbura has a lovely location on the shores of Lake Tanganyika and just outside the city are some of the finest inland beaches on the continent. Burundians have an irrepressible *joie de vivre* and this has carried them through the crises of the last decade. They know how to party like there is no tomorrow and a weekend in Bujumbura is a lesson on life in the fast lane.

The tourist industry died a quick death with the outbreak of civil war in 1993 and many of the upcountry attractions have been off limits for more than a decade. Choose from the southernmost source of the Nile, the ancient forest of Parc National de la Kibira or the spot where Stanley was reputed to have uttered those timeless words 'Dr Livingstone I presume?' Yes, you've guessed it, there's not a lot to see, but the stunning scenery and warmth of the Burundians more than compensates.

Intertribal tensions have devastated the country since independence in 1962 and there is always a chance things could kick off again. It is a young peace, so make sure you check before embarking on an adventure in Burundi.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 27,835 sq km
- **Capital** Bujumbura
- **Country code** 257
- **Famous for** Les Tambourinaires
- **Languages** Kirundi, French and Swahili
- **Money** Burundi franc (BFr); US\$1 = BFr924; €1 = BFr1118
- **Population** 7.3 million



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Bujumbura** (p607) Dine out in style before dancing the night away in this city where people love to live it up.
- **Saga Beach** (p612) Hit the best inland beaches in Africa for some fun in the sun.
- **Source Du Nil** (p612) Journey to Burundi's very own pyramid, marking the southernmost source of the Nile at Kasumo.
- **Being in Burundi** (p607) Enjoy the novelty of being pretty much the only tourist in the country.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The climate in Burundi varies widely depending on whether you are in the hot and steamy lowlands around Lake Tanganyika, where temperatures average 30°C, or the more mountainous north, where the usual temperature is a much milder 20°C. The rainy season in Burundi lasts from around October to May, with a brief dry spell in December and January. See Climate Charts p621.

HISTORY

For information on Burundian and East African history prior to independence, see p28.

Independence Days

Burundi, like Rwanda, was colonised first by Germany and later by Belgium, and like the northern neighbour, the Europeans played on ethnic differences to divide and conquer the population. Power was traditionally concentrated in the hands of the minority Tutsi, with the Tutsi *mwami* (king) playing the central role.

In the 1950s a nationalist organisation based on unity between the tribes was founded under the leadership of the *mwami's* eldest son, Prince Rwagasore. But in the lead up to independence he was assassinated with the connivance of the colonial authorities, who feared their commercial interests would be threatened if he came to power.

Despite this setback, Hutus began to challenge the concentration of power in Tutsi hands following independence in 1962, and it appeared that Burundi was headed for a majority government. But in the 1964 elections, Mwami Mwambutsa refused to appoint a Hutu prime minister, even though Hutu candidates attracted a majority of votes. Hutu frustration soon boiled over, and Hutu

HOW MUCH?

- **Cheaper hotel room with bathroom** US\$20 to US\$40
- **Plate of garnished brochettes** US\$2
- **Internet access per hour** US\$1 to US\$2
- **Local newspaper** US\$0.50
- **100km bus ride** US\$2

LONELY PLANET INDEX

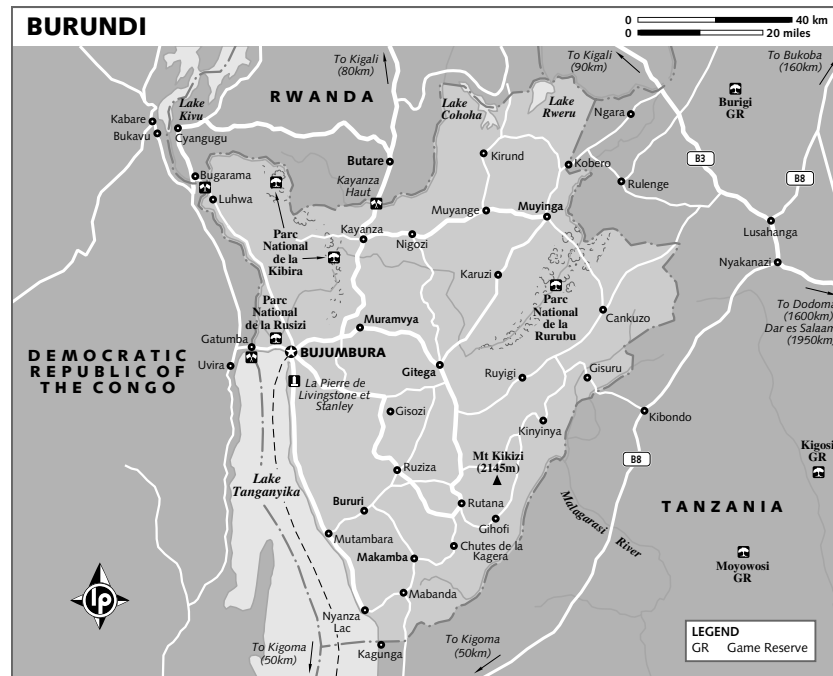
- **Litre of petrol** US\$1
- **Litre of bottled water** US\$0.50
- **Primus beer** US\$1
- **Souvenir T-shirt** There aren't any!
- **Street snack (grilled goat brochettes)** US\$0.50

military officers and political figures staged an attempted coup. Although it failed, the coup led to the flight of Mwambutsa into exile in Switzerland, and he was soon replaced by a Tutsi military junta.

A wholesale purge of Hutu from the army and bureaucracy followed, and in 1972 another large-scale Hutu revolt resulted in more than 1000 Tutsi being killed. The Tutsi military junta responded with selective genocide: any Hutu with wealth, a formal education or a government job was rooted out and murdered, often in the most horrifying way. After three months 200,000 Hutu had been killed and another 100,000 had fled into neighbouring countries.

The Bagaza Years

In 1976 Jean-Baptiste Bagaza came to power in a bloodless coup, and three years later he formed the Union Pour le Progrès National (Uprona). As part of a so-called democratisation program, candidates (for the most part Tutsi and all approved by Uprona) were voted into the National Assembly during the elections of 1982. The elections gave the Hutu a modicum of power in the National Assembly, but it was very limited. During the Bagaza years, there were some half-hearted attempts by the Tutsi government to remove some of the main causes of intertribal conflict, but these were mostly only cosmetic.



In 1985 the government tried to lessen the influence of the Catholic Church, which it believed was sympathetic to the Hutu majority. Its fears of a church-organised Hutu revolt were heightened by the fact that Hutus were in power in Rwanda and were discriminating against Tutsis. Priests were put on trial and some missionaries were expelled from the country.

Bagaza was toppled in 1987 in a coup led by his cousin Major Pierre Buyoya. The new regime improved relations between the government, the Catholic Church and international aid agencies. It also attempted to address the causes of intertribal tensions yet again by gradually bringing Hutu representatives back into positions of power in the government. However, there was a renewed outbreak of intertribal violence in northern Burundi in summer 1988; thousands were massacred and many more fled into neighbouring Rwanda.

A Bloody Civil War

Buyoya finally bowed to international pressure, and multiparty elections were held in

June 1993. These brought a Hutu-dominated government to power, led by Melchior Ndadaye, himself a Hutu. However, a dissident army faction, led by a Tutsi, Colonel Sylvestre Ngingaba, staged a bloody coup in late October the same year, and assassinated president Ndadaye. The coup eventually failed when army generals disowned the plotters, but in the chaos that followed the assassination, thousands were massacred in intertribal fighting and almost half a million refugees fled across the border into Rwanda. Several days after the assassination, surviving members of the government, who had holed up in the French embassy in the capital, Bujumbura, were able to reassert some degree of control with the help of loyal troops.

In April 1994 Cyprien Ntaryamira, the new Hutu president, was killed in the same plane crash that killed Rwanda's president Juvenal Habyarimana and sparked the planned genocide there. Sylvestre Ntibantunganya was immediately appointed interim president. Nevertheless, both Hutu militias and the Tutsi-dominated army went on the offensive. No war was actually declared, but

at least 100,000 people were killed in clashes between mid-1994 and mid-1996. In July 1996 former president Pierre Buyoya again carried out a successful coup and took over as the country's president with the support of the army.

Intertribal fighting continued between Hutu rebels and the Tutsi-dominated government and Tutsi militia. Hundreds of thousands of political opponents, mostly Hutus, were herded into 'regroupment camps', and bombings, murders and other horrific activities continued throughout the country. No-one is sure exactly how many lives the conflict has cost Burundi, but estimates put the death toll at around 300,000.

Peace talks were held on and off throughout the conflict. The original mediator was former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere but he passed away in 1999. Nelson Mandela took up the reins and he successfully negotiated for the installation of a transitional government, which took power in late 2001. The fighting continued, but at the end of 2002 the Force for the Defence of Democracy (FDD), the largest rebel group, signed a peace deal. In April 2003 prominent Hutu Domitien Ndayizeye succeeded Pierre Buyoya as president and a road map to elections was hammered out.

Burundi Today

In 2004 the UN began operations in Burundi, sending more than 5000 troops to enforce the peace. Parliamentary elections were successfully held in June 2005 and the former rebels, the FDD, emerged victorious. Pierre Nkurunziza, leader of the FDD, was sworn in as president in August. One rebel group, the Forces for National Liberation (FNL) remains active in the country, but it remains to be seen how long they will hold out, as they are now fighting their former allies and a Hutu majority government. Burundi is finally on the road to stability and all sides need to embrace the spirit of national unity to bring Burundi back from the brink.

THE CULTURE The National Psyche

Like Rwanda to the north, Burundi has been torn apart by tribal animosities, and the conflict between Hutus and Tutsis has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives since inde-

TRAVEL IN BURUNDI

Burundi was engulfed in civil war for more than a decade and although progress towards peace has been steady in the last couple of years, it remains a potentially unstable country in a potentially unstable region of Africa. Travel to the capital Bujumbura was safe at the time of research, as was the main road north to Rwanda. However, one rebel group remains outside the peace process and has continued to launch attacks against government forces. Assuming things stabilise, Burundi may once again find itself on the overland map of Africa, as it is a great way to link Uganda and Rwanda with western Tanzania and Zambia. Check, double check and triple check on the latest security situation before heading into the country or travelling anywhere beyond Bujumbura.

pendence. However, like most conflicts, it is more about politics than people, and it is the people that end up the victims of political manipulation. The Belgians masterminded the art of divide and rule, using the minority Tutsis to control the majority Hutus. Generations of intermarriage and cooperation went out the window, as the population was forced into choosing sides, Hutu or Tutsi. The pattern continued into independence as the minority Tutsis clung to power to protect their privileges, and only with the advent of peaceful elections in the summer of 2005 does it look like this cycle may come to an end.

Unlike Rwanda, Burundi debates its divisions. In Rwanda, there are only Rwandans, and the history is being reinterpreted in the spirit of unity. In Burundi, there are Hutus and Tutsis and they work together in political parties and drink together in bars and are happy to discuss their differences. Two very different approaches to the same problem of ethnic division, both countries could probably learn a little from each other. For now, Burundi and its people deserve all the support they can get as they try to forge a Burundian identity that transcends the tribalism of the past.

Daily Life

Like the other countries of East Africa, there is a huge difference between urban and real

life. Burundi is more Francophone than any other country in the region, and as a result the city dwellers take their siesta very seriously. Shops and businesses shut down from noon to 3pm and consequently it is hard to get anything done. Do as the locals do and save some energy for the evening.

Out in the countryside, most people are engaged in farming, at least when they have not been fleeing the civil war as refugees in neighbouring countries. Coffee and tea are popular crops, but most people are growing to survive and subsistence crops include cassava, bananas, sweet potatoes, maize and sorghum.

Population

The population is around 7 million, of which approximately 84% is Hutu, 15% is Tutsi and 1% is Twa Pygmy.

ARTS

Burundi is famous for its athletic and acrobatic forms of dance. Les Tambourinaires du Burundi is the country's most famous troupe; it has performed in cities such as Berlin and New York. Its performances are a high-adrenaline mix of drumming and dancing that drowns the audience in waves of sound and movement.

ENVIRONMENT The Land

Like Rwanda to the north, Burundi may be a minnow of a country by African standards, but it is incredibly beautiful. Taking up a mere 27,835 sq km, most of the country is made up of mountains that vanish into the horizon. Mt Kikizi, in the southeast of the country near the border with Tanzania, is the highest peak at 2145m. Lake Tanganyika dominates the west of the country and here the landscape is flat and fertile. The capital, Bujumbura, is on the northeastern tip of this great lake.

National Parks

Burundi's tourist infrastructure is in tatters after the long war, and most of the national parks have been closed for more than a decade.

Assuming the situation improves with the coming of peace, it may be possible to visit Parc National de la Kibira, essentially a continuation of Parc National Nyungwe For-

est in southwestern Rwanda and the largest rainforest in Burundi, home to colobus monkeys and chimpanzees, and Parc National de la Rurubu, the largest protected area in the country, with wonderful hiking and views.

The most accessible national park – and the only one currently open – is Parc National de la Rusizi, just 15km from Bujumbura. It's a wetland environment and provides a habitat for hippos, sitatungas (antelopes) and a wide variety of birds.

FOOD & DRINK

Bujumbura is a contender for gastronomic capital of East Africa, as locals take their food very seriously. Brochettes (kebabs) and frites are a legacy of the Belgian colonial period, but there is also succulent fish from Lake Tanganyika and serious steaks. The local diet in the countryside is much the same as elsewhere in the region. When it comes to drink, Burundi is blessed with a national brewery churning out huge bottles of Primus and a very drinkable version of Amstel. Wine and spirits are widely available in the capital but are much more expensive than beer.

BUJUMBURA

Long considered the land of the lotus eaters before the intractable civil war, Bujumbura may be on the verge of a rebirth. 'Buj', as many foreign residents refer to it, has a striking location on the shores of Lake Tanganyika and many of its suburbs sprawl up the looming mountains that ring the city to the north and east.

Frozen in time thanks to the war, there has been almost no development here since the 1980s, a stark contrast to the changes in Kigali and Kampala to the north. The Burundian capital is a mixture of grandiose colonial town planning, with its wide boulevards and imposing public buildings, and the sort of dusty, crowded streets found in many African cities. It is also one of the most important ports on Lake Tanganyika.

Bujumbura has a freewheeling reputation and the dining, drinking and dancing scene can compete with the best in the region. Despite the official midnight curfew, people usually manage to party on long into the night. That said, it's not the safest city in the region by night, so it is important to take

taxis after dark. Security has improved with the influx of UN peacekeepers, but robberies are still common.

A short way out of the city are some of Africa's best inland beaches. White sand, turquoise waters and beachside bars. Pinch yourself, this is Burundi, not the Caribbean? Sipping a cold beer on the shores of the lake, Ethiopian peacekeepers to your left, local surfers to your right, maybe Burundi is not so bad after all.

ORIENTATION

Bujumbura is a fairly small city and most of the action takes place on Chaussée Prince Rwagasore and the streets nearby. Blvd de l'Uprona, Blvd de la Liberté and Chaussée du Peuple Burundi are the main roads in and out of the city and house some government buildings, embassies and hotels and restaurants. To the west of the centre is Lake Tanganyika and some popular restaurants and residences, but there are also some edgy areas near the port. North of town along the lakeshore are beautiful white-sand beaches, which draw huge crowds at the weekend.

INFORMATION

Emergency

The official emergency number for police is ☎ 17, but most expats and locals alike say that the police aren't much help. Try and make contact with your embassy in the event of an emergency.

Internet Access

There are Internet cafés throughout the city centre.

Cyberposte (cnr Blvd Lumumba & Ave du Commerce; ☎ 8am-10pm) Cheap and fast Internet access in the city centre.

Face à Face (Blvd de l'Uprona; ☎ 8am-10pm) A stylish Internet café with a fast connection and tasty snacks.

Tropicana Net Café (Chaussée Prince Rwagasore; ☎ 8am-10pm) Under the same ownership as Face à Face, another sophisticated spot to surf.

Medical Services

In the event of a medical emergency, it is best to get out of the country to somewhere with first-class medical facilities like Nairobi.

Money

Banque du Crédit de Bujumbura (Rue Science) and **Interbank Burundi** (Blvd de la Liberté) both offer

credit-card cash advances but commissions are high. Both charge 2.5% plus a flat fee of €10. Interbank Burundi has several branches around town and represents Western Union if you need an urgent transfer. For more information on getting your hands on money in Bujumbura, see p614.

Post

Main post office (cnr Blvd Lumumba & Ave du Commerce; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 8-11am Sat) Postal and telecommunication services.

Tourist Information

Office National du Tourisme (☎ 222202; Ave des Euphorbes; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 2-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Not many tourists in Burundi equals not much information in the tourist office. It's just off Blvd de la Liberté near the cathedral. The more centrally located 'tourist office' on Blvd de l'Uprona is actually just a government craft shop with no info available.

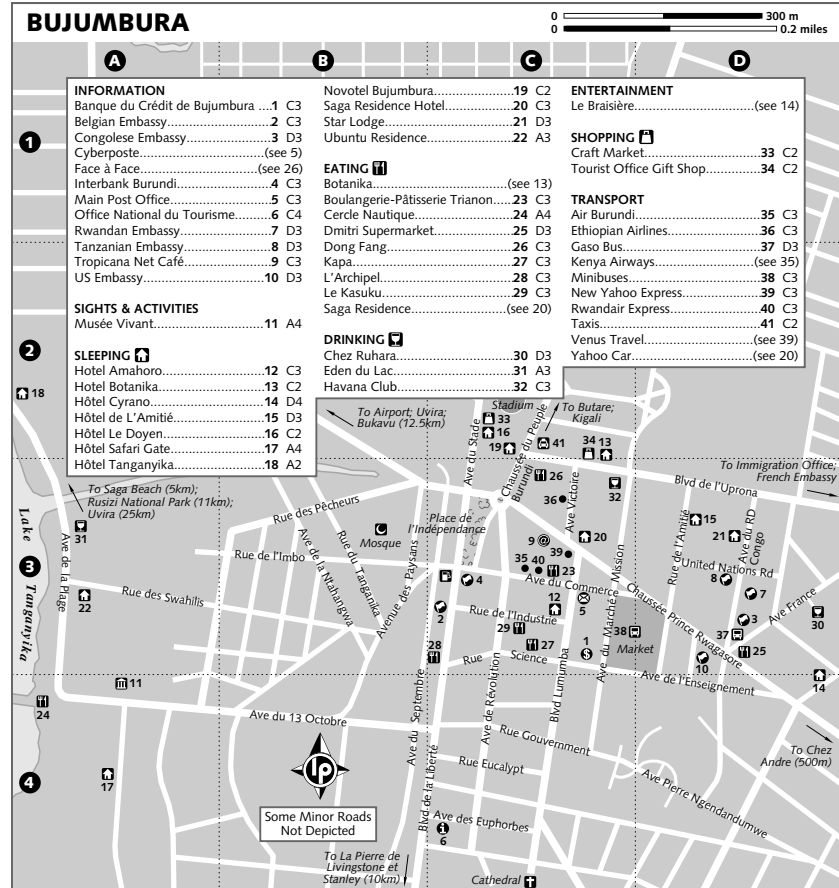
DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Bujumbura is a more dangerous city than Kampala or Kigali, but is not quite in the league of Nairobi. It is generally safe to wander about on foot during the day, although it is best to avoid the rough-and-ready port area. The character of the city changes around 8pm, as the streets empty and 'les petits bandits' move in. These gangs of youths are not averse to robbing people daft enough to be walking the streets at night, so take a taxi. Take particular care around popular nightspots, as you never know who is lurking in the dark.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The so-called sights of Bujumbura aren't really up to much. There was a world-famous chimpanzee sanctuary here before the war, but the chimps were relocated to safety more than a decade ago. The biggest drawcard are the beaches (see p612) on Lake Tanganyika, by far the best in the region and comparable with those in Malawi to the southeast.

None of the so-called museums are really worth the time to visit, as they have been long neglected. Opening times are as erratic as the collections. The **Musée Vivant** (Ave du 13 Octobre; admission BFr2000) is a reconstructed traditional Burundian village with some exhibits about baskets, pottery and drums, but it's also a part-time zoo and the animals aren't kept in very impressive conditions.



SLEEPING

Hotel prices in Bujumbura have shot up with the arrival of the UN in town. This is a good city to splash out on something a bit nicer. There are also a couple of options out at the beaches on Lake Tanganyika (see p612) for those with no pressing need to be in the city centre. There are a few cheaper hotels dotted about the centre, which are a good option for those trying to stick to a budget.

Hotel Amahoro (☎ 247550; Rue de l'Industrie; r US\$30-70; ☎) One of the newer hotels in town, the Amahoro has rapidly established a name for itself as a comfortable, centrally located place to stay with a good range of amenities. More expensive rooms include

air-con, but all have satellite TV, fridge and hot water in the bathroom.

Saga Residence Hotel (☎ 242225; Chaussée Prince Rwagasore; r US\$35-49) Under the same ownership as the popular Saga Beach complex on Lake Tanganyika, this is the most atmospheric of the cheaper hotels. The friendly owners extend a warm welcome to all guests and the decoration is a cut above the competition in town. There are also some budget rooms available at US\$26. The restaurant, Saga Residence, is a good venue for dinner.

Hôtel Cyrano (☎ 223886; Blvd de l'Indépendance; d/apt US\$40/50) Formerly the Nikamor Hotel, this apartment-style place is popular with long-term residents in Bujumbura. It is also a good option for those wanting a bit more

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Botanika (☎ 226792; hotelbotanika@hotmail.com; Blvd de l'Uprona; s/d US\$60/70; 🏠) Bujumbura's very own boutique hotel, the Botanika is a charming retreat from the rigours of life in Burundi. There are only seven rooms and all come equipped with satellite TV, minibar and beautiful bathroom. Four-poster beds round off the atmosphere, making this the residence of choice in town. There is also an excellent European restaurant, called Botanika, here.

space than a standard hotel, as the rooms include a lounge, bathroom and fridge, and are tastefully decorated. It may be ageing a little, but it still smacks of character. There is a popular restaurant here and a lively bar, called Le Braisière.

Hôtel Le Doyen (☎ 224378; Ave du Stade; r BFr20,000, with air-con BFr35,000; 🏠) This rambling colonial-era building, set amid verdant grounds, has the cheapest rooms in town, as it is still charging in local currency rather than US dollars. Rooms have high ceilings and big bathrooms at the top end, but the cheaper options involve a shared bathroom.

Hôtel de l'Amitié (☎ 226195; Rue de l'Amitié; r US\$20-45) Once the cheapest place in the city centre, the new US dollar rates make it less alluring than it was. Still, there is a good selection of rooms, all with their own bathroom. Bigger rooms include a little balcony, but be aware that the so-called 'satellite TV' is limited to one channel.

Star Lodge (☎ 226868; Ave du RD Congo; r US\$20-35) One block east of l'Amitié, the Star is one of the best budget deals, with large, clean rooms, including TV, fridge and hot water.

Novotel Bujumbura (☎ 222600; novobuja@chinf.com; Chaussée du Peuple Burundi; s/d US\$120/135; 🏠) The only international chain hotel in town, the Novotel has all the four-star facilities you would expect from this sort of place. The only problem is that said facilities haven't been upgraded for years due to the long civil war, making it not such good value as it might first appear. Great cakes in the patisserie, however, and the best pool in town.

Hôtel Safari Gate (☎ 214779; r US\$30-40) A colonial building with character near the shores of Lake Tanganyika, Safari Gate is an op-

tion for those with a vehicle. It's not far out of town, but locals say the surrounding area can be unsafe at night. Set in extensive grounds, the rooms include bathrooms and the rooftop restaurant and bar here are popular come sunset.

Ubuntu Residence (☎ 244064; ubuntu.residence@usan-bu.net; Ave de la Plage; apt US\$80-120) Tucked away on the corner of Rue des Swahilis near the lakeshore, this apartment complex comes highly recommended by locals and expats alike. The cheapest options are lacking a balcony, while the more expensive pads include a bathroom and bedroom upstairs, plus parking. Best to book ahead.

Hotel Tanganyika (☎ 224433; Ave de la Plage) Just a short distance north along the lakeside is Hotel Tanganyika, a beautiful Art Deco building set in elegant grounds. It was closed for a long summer break during our visit, but looks to be well worth considering.

EATING

One of the best things about Bujumbura is the food. There are great bakeries, lively cafés and some of the best restaurants in the region. It may sound surprising, but it's all down to the fine folk of Bujumbura, who love to eat out.

Boulangerie-Pâtisserie Trianon (Ave du Commerce; BFr500-2000) This place is packed out for breakfast thanks to a great combination of fresh croissants, healthy omelettes and local coffee. The ham and cheese croissant washed down with a hot chocolate is a good way to start the day. Solo women should note that the clientele was all male, but it was a friendly atmosphere. Strangely, it's closed at lunchtime.

Kapa (Rue Science; BFr 500-2000) Another colossus on the café scene, this little bakery turns out pastries, sandwiches and some of the best coffee in town. Again it is popular in the morning and afternoons, but closed for lunch. Alright, siestas and all that, but one of the bakeries is missing a market.

Le Kasuku (☎ 243575; Rue de l'Industrie; mains BFr4000-10,000) A little garden oasis in the heart of the city, Kasuku has a hearty range of European dishes, including tender steaks with pepper, red-wine or blue-cheese sauce. The pizzas here are also some of the best in the city.

L'Archipel (Blvd de la Liberté; mains BFr3000-7000; 🏠 closed Mon) This huge restaurant is a popular

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Cercle Nautique (☎ 222056; Ave de la Plage; mains BFr 3000-10,000) Probably the most famous spot in Bujumbura, the Cercle is one of those colonial-era clubs that remains resolutely popular with expats and locals alike. Set on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, this is a great place to sip a cold beer and watch the sun go down. There is also a good restaurant here serving fresh lake fish and other continental classics. A must when passing through Buj.

stop with locals on the hunt for good-value food with good company. Partly set outdoors, at weekends they bring in the DJs, crank up the music and it rocks on all night.

Chez André (Chaussée Prince Rwagasore; mains BFr5000-15,000) Housed in a huge villa on the eastern extreme of Chaussée Prince Rwagasore, this is one of many contenders for the best restaurant in the city, with a flamboyant menu that wouldn't look out of place in Brussels or Paris. The wine list and desserts are well worth a closer look. There is also a popular health club here if you feel the belt busting after a major meal.

Botanika (☎ 226792; Blvd de l'Uprona; mains BFr4000-12,000) Located in the Hotel Botanika, this excellent restaurant has an intimate courtyard setting and some of the most expressive French cuisine in the city.

Saga Residence (☎ 242225; Chaussée Prince Rwagasore; mains BFr4000-7000) Also a hotel restaurant, this impressive place has a large menu of steaks and fresh lake fish and is exquisitely decorated with Congolese crafts and local textiles.

Dong Fang (☎ 241529; meals BFr3000-8000) Proving the theory that every capital city in the world has a Chinese restaurant, Dong Fang brings the reasonably authentic flavours of the Far East to Bujumbura. Crispy fried duck, *mapo tofu* (marinated pork, mashed black beans and bean curd) and cheap noodles make it a bolt hole for the brochettee out.

Dmitri Supermarket (Chaussée Prince Rwagasore; 🏠 8am-12.30pm & 2.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat & Sun) Another of Bujumbura's unexpected treats, this supermarket is the best stocked in town, selling Swiss chocolate, superb salami, European cheeses and wines from around the world.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Nightlife in Bujumbura is legendary and despite the curfew and long civil war, the party goes on. At the time of research, there was still a midnight curfew (*couvret feu* in French) in place, but most expats say this is only an issue in the suburbs. In the centre you should be alright moving about, although given the suspect security situation at night, use a taxi or private vehicle. Otherwise, it's a case of 'go hard or go home', as several clubs and restaurants have 'lock-ins' at the weekend.

Eden du Lac (Ave de la Plage) A little way north of the Cercle Nautique, this garden bar is a local institution and is namechecked by most young Burundians when you ask them where to go. Drinking with a view and discerning dining.

Havana Club (Blvd de l'Uprona) Back in town, Havana Club is a popular nightspot throughout the week, but do take care in the surrounding area, as 'les petits bandits' are lurking.

Chez Ruhara (Ave France) The ultimate club in Buj, Chez Ruhara is a cross between an underground rave in Africa and a scene straight out of Mad Max. Set in the basement of an unfinished tenement block on the back streets, there are steel poles sticking out and leaks on the stairs. But once inside, it really rocks and has deservedly earned the nickname 'Jazz Club'. African and international tunes, a steady flow of drinks and the option to go all night – welcome to the alternative Burundi.

Le Braisière (Blvd de l'Indépendance) For a bit of live music, try Le Braisière at Hôtel Cyrano, which usually has a local band playing on Saturday night from 7pm.

SHOPPING

Burundi is hardly famous for its handicrafts, but a lot of excellent work makes its way across the border from DR Congo and is cheaper than in Rwanda or Uganda.

The best place to browse for souvenirs is the small craft market near Hôtel Le Doyen on Ave du Stade. You'll need to haggle hard to get a good price, but there are bargains to be had.

The tourist office gift shop has a few basic pieces for browsers, but is noteworthy for having some of the only Burundian postcards around town. That's something your friends don't receive every day!

GETTING THERE & AWAY

For contact details of the international airlines serving Burundi, see p615.

Minibuses ply the major routes around the country, and leave from the minibus station near the market area. They usually dry up around lunchtime due to the security situation upcountry.

GETTING AROUND

To get to central Bujumbura from the airport costs about US\$10 or the local equivalent. It may be possible to negotiate a cheaper fare on the return or you could take a taxi-motor, essentially a motorbike that doubles as a two-wheeled taxi, for about BFr2500. You might get some strange looks from airport security, however.

The centre of Bujumbura is small and negotiable on foot by day. After 8pm, always take a taxi in the city, no matter how short the distance, as robberies are common. Taxi fares range from BFr1000 for short hops in the centre to BFr5000 to Saga Beach. Taxi-motors are another good option.

AROUND BUJUMBURA

It is all about the beaches around Bujumbura. Just a short distance along the lakeshore are some strips of sand that are more Bahamas than Burundi.

BEACHES

Bujumbura's beaches are some of the best found in any landlocked country in Africa. The sand is white and powdery, and the waves should keep the bilharzia at bay. The stretch of beach that lies about 5km north-west of the capital is the most beautiful and used to be known as Plage des Cocotiers (Cocnut Beach). However, a number of resorts are located along the road and most locals now call it **Saga Beach** (pronounced Sagga), in honour of the most popular restaurant and bar here.

Saga Beach Resort (☎ 241540) has a couple of large restaurants and a brilliant beach-front bar turning out cold Primus at bargain prices. It draws huge crowds at the weekends and the whole complex rocks on as a club by night. Rooms were under construction during our visit. Another definitive stop on a visit to Bujumbura.

Next door is **Karera Beach** (☎ 246818; r US\$40-60), a smaller bar-restaurant complex that offers some attractive *banda*-apartments in its garden. They are almost small houses, complete with a kitchen, lounge and raised bedroom. Oh for someone to build something similar in Rwanda or Uganda. For those with transport, this could be the best accommodation in Bujumbura.

Minibuses to Gatumba can drop you off at the beach and charge about BFr200. A taxi-motor will cost more like BFr1000 and a normal taxi is about BFr5000.

LA PIERRE DE LIVINGSTONE ET STANLEY

This large rock is alleged to mark the spot where the infamous 'Dr Livingstone, I presume?' encounter between Livingstone and Stanley took place. Ujiji, across Lake Tanganyika in Tanzania, makes the same claim to fame. Come on Tanzania, play fair, you have Kilimanjaro, Ngorogoro and Zanzibar, can't you let Burundi bank this one? Some graffiti, along the lines of 'Livingstone and Stanley woz 'ere' records the date as 25 November 1871. The rock is at Mugere, about 10km south of the capital.

SOURCE DU NIL

Burundi lays claim to the source of the Nile (see the boxed text, opposite). It is not quite as obvious and impressive as Jinja in Uganda, but this insignificant-looking little spring at Kasumo, southeast of Bujumbura, may well be the southernmost source of the Nile. In a nice touch, it is marked by a stone pyramid, but unless you have your own transport it is almost impossible to reach. There are also some security question marks until peace is fully established in the country.

GITEGA

Gitega is the second-largest town in Burundi. It is home to the **National Museum**, which, although small, is educational and worth a visit.

A good day trip from Gitega is to the **Chutes de la Kagera**, near Rutana. These waterfalls are spectacular in the wet season (especially from October to January), but there's no public transport there, so you'll have to charter a vehicle.

Minibuses from Bujumbura make the run to Gitega throughout the day (BFr2000,

THE SEARCH FOR THE SOURCE

The mighty Nile River is the world's longest river, snaking from the heart of East Africa for 6650km through Uganda, Sudan and Egypt before spilling into the Mediterranean Sea. It is the river that gave birth to one of humanity's earliest civilisations in ancient Egypt, and the quest to find its source was an obsession for a generation of explorers in the 19th century.

John Hanning Speke is widely credited with having 'discovered' the source of the Nile on 28 July 1863, when he set eyes on the Ripon Falls near what is today Jinja in Uganda. 'Discovered' because local tribes assert they knew the importance of this river long before white explorers came to town. Earlier generations of explorers had tried and failed to find the source, including the Romans, who sent an expedition south but became bogged down in the marshes of the Sudd, today part of southern Sudan.

However, Speke's discovery was not the end of the story. Several explorers were drawn to the murky brown currents that flow through Lake Victoria from the Kagera River in Tanzania. Following its waters upstream in 1898, German doctor Richard Kandt located the source of the Nile in the remote Nyungwe Forest in southwest Rwanda. Four decades later in 1937, another German explorer, Burkhard Waldecker, followed the same waters to a remote mountain-top spring known as Kasumo, near the equator in Burundi.

This leaves us with three contesting claims to the source of the Nile and in the spirit of East African unity, there is room for everyone. Burundi boasts the southernmost source of the Nile, Rwanda can claim the longest source of the Nile and Uganda has the major source of the Nile. That said, you'd have trouble rafting the source of the Nile in Burundi and Rwanda, so for marketing purposes Uganda takes the trophy.

one hour). As with all road journeys in Burundi, it is imperative to check the security situation before travelling, as ambushes are still a possibility as long as one rebel group remains at large.

BURUNDI DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

The choice of accommodation is reasonable in Bujumbura but fairly limited elsewhere in the country. The arrival of the UN in Burundi has, as it always does, inflated the prices. Rooms in the capital range from cheapies around US\$20 to a couple of places of international standard charging around US\$100.

BUSINESS HOURS

They value their siestas in Burundi, so ministries, banks and the like tend to close for a couple of hours at lunch. Most eateries are open from 7am to about 9pm.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

At long last Burundi's civil war appears to be nearing an end. With the new government in power, the last rebel group has few reasons to continue its fight. As long as

they remain at large, then it is well worth approaching a visit to Burundi with caution. Travel overland as little as possible and consider restricting your visit to the capital. Should a full peace prevail in Burundi, overland travel should rapidly become no more dangerous than anywhere else in the region...down to the driver of course! Bujumbura is safe by day due to a massive UN and military presence, though the mood changes at night, as 'les petits bandits' take to the streets and robbery is a real possibility.

Kigali (Rwanda) and Kigoma (Tanzania) are probably the best places to pick up reliable information about current events in Burundi.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Burundian Embassies & Consulates

For Burundian embassies in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania or Uganda, see the relevant section in those chapters. Useful Burundian embassies worldwide:

Belgium (☎ 02-23 045 35; 46 Place Marie-Louise, Brussels)

France (☎ 01 45 20 60 61; 24 Rue Raynouard, Paris)

UK (☎ 020-8381 4092; 26 Armitage Rd, London)

USA (☎ 202-342 2574; 2233 Wisconsin Ave, Washington DC)

Embassies & Consulates in Burundi

Foreign embassies in Bujumbura include the following:

Belgium (☎ 233641; Blvd de la Liberté)

DR Congo (Ave du RD Congo)

France (☎ 251484; 60 Blvd de l'Uprona)

Rwanda (☎ 226865; Ave du RD Congo)

Tanzania (☎ 248636; 4 United Nations Rd)

USA (☎ 223454; Chaussée Prince Rwagasore)

HOLIDAYS

Some of these holidays may change with the formation of a new government of national unity.

New Year's Day 1 January

Unity Day 5 February

Easter (Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Monday)

March/April

Labour Day 1 May

Independence Day 1 July

Assumption 15 August

Victory of Uprona Day 18 September

Anniversary of Rwagasore's Assassination 13 October

Anniversary of Ndaye's Assassination 21 October

All Saints' Day 1 November

Christmas Day 25 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access is widespread and inexpensive in Bujumbura; see p608.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The official UN website covering the Burundi mission is www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/onub/.

MAPS

It is hard to get hold of decent maps of Burundi. Currently the best map of Rwanda is *Rwanda Burundi – International Travel Map* published by ITMB Publishing at a scale of 1:400,000.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the Burundi franc (BFR). This is a cash economy and the US dollar is king. Unless you like giving up lots of money in commissions to banks, carry cash with you.

There's an open black market in Bujumbura. Dealers hang around the market and along Chaussée Prince Rwagasore. Rates vary according to the official exchange rates and the amount to be changed (large bills are preferred). At the time of research, the

PRACTICALITIES

- Burundi uses the metric system and distances are in kilometres.
- Electricity in Burundi is 240V, 50 cycles, and plugs are mainly two-pin.
- The local press has traditionally been subject to government control and includes French-language *Le Renouveau*.
- Government-controlled Radio Burundi broadcasts in Kirundi, French, Swahili and English.

street rate was perhaps 10% better than at banks.

The commission for changing travellers cheques is bad news at most banks – most charge around 7%. Travellers cheques can also be changed at the large hotels in Bujumbura.

There are no ATMs in Burundi at the time of writing. For banks in Bujumbura, see p608.

POST

The postal service is reasonably efficient and things take about one week to get to Europe or North America. Postcards to worldwide destinations cost BFR650.

TELEPHONE

Rates for international telephone calls are quite reasonable, working out at about US\$1 per minute. Phonecards are available from the telecommunications office behind the post office.

There are no telephone area codes within the country. The country code for Burundi is ☎ 257.

VISAS

One-month tourist visas cost US\$40 and are now available on arrival at both the international airport and international land border crossings. Visas can also be arranged from a Burundian embassy or consulate before arrival, requiring two photographs.

Visas for Onward Travel

There are slim pickings for other visas in Burundi, and visas for neighbouring countries – DR Congo, Rwanda and Tanzania – are all available on the borders.

TRANSPORT IN BURUNDI

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Bujumbura International Airport (BJM) is located about 12km north of the city centre. There are very few international airlines still serving Burundi, as flights were severely disrupted during the long civil war.

AIRLINES IN BURUNDI

Air Burundi (airline code 8Y; ☎ 223460; airbdi@cbinf.com; Ave du Commerce) Hub: Bujumbura.

Ethiopian Airlines (airline code ET; ☎ 226820; www.flyethiopian.com, Ave Victoire) Hub: Addis Ababa.

Kenya Airways (airline code KQ; ☎ 223542; www.kenya-airways.com) Hub: Nairobi, sold through Air Burundi.

Rwandair Express (airline code WB; ☎ 251850; www.rwandair.com; Ave du Commerce) Hub: Kigali.

TO/FROM KENYA

Kenya Airways offers daily services between Bujumbura and Nairobi.

TO/FROM RWANDA

Air Burundi and Rwandair Express both connect Kigali and Bujumbura.

Lake

TO/FROM TANZANIA & ZAMBIA

Typical, isn't it? Just as things start to finally settle down in Burundi, the popular lake ferries linking Bujumbura with Kigoma in Tanzania and Mpulungu in Zambia stop calling here. Ask around in Bujumbura, as this service may resume with the advent of peace. In the meantime, it could be worth visiting Bujumbura's busy docks to see if there is any space on a cargo boat. Crew members might be willing to give up a cabin if you can negotiate a deal.

Land

Burundi shares land borders with DR Congo, Rwanda and Tanzania. However, due to the long-running civil war, very few travellers have crossed this way in the last decade or more. Before deciding to cross by land into Burundi, read the boxed text, right.

TO/FROM DR CONGO

The main crossing between Burundi and DR Congo is at Gatumba on the road between Bujumbura and Uvira, about 15km west of

CROSSING BY LAND INTO BURUNDI?

Burundi was long wiped off the overland map due to the intractable civil war in the country. That war looks to be drawing to a close at the time of writing, but one rebel group is still active. This means ambushes remain a remote possibility and you should check the security situation very carefully from the safety of Rwanda before venturing down here. That said, we were able to travel safely by land between Bujumbura and Kigali during research on this book. Day crossings to Uvira in DR Congo should be fine, although it would be unwise to venture further into the country unless you are 100% certain things have stabilised over there. Crossing into Tanzania should be fine as and when the last rebel group join the peace process. In the meantime, the safest bet is to follow the road south along the Tanganyika lakeshore, as the flat landscape and lack of forest cover isn't suitable for staging ambushes. Assuming security stabilises, travelling overland through Uganda and Rwanda, down into Burundi and along the lakeshore to Gombe Stream National Park and Kigoma in Tanzania will be a great way to avoid backtracking.

the capital. Almost no travellers have crossed this way in recent years due to the long civil wars in both Burundi and DR Congo. However, if peace settles in both countries, it could be an option for linking Bujumbura and Bukavu (Rwanda). UN staff and NGOs cross this way every day. For more on visiting DR Congo see p559.

TO/FROM RWANDA

The main crossing point is between Kayanza (Burundi) and Butare (Rwanda) on the main road linking Bujumbura and Kigali. The border is at Kayanza Haut and both Burundian (US\$40) and Rwandan (US\$60) visas are available on arrival here. We were able to use this crossing during research on this title, but as long as one rebel group remains at large it would be prudent to check the security situation on the road from the safety of Bujumbura or Kigali.

The safest and quickest option for travel between Bujumbura and Kigali is to use one of the scheduled bus services that

CROSSING INTO THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO?

Think twice, maybe even three times, before crossing into DR Congo. Things have been very volatile in DR Congo during the terrible years of civil war, so it is extremely important to do your own homework before visiting this country.

depart daily. Yahoo Car, New Yahoo Express, Venus Travel and Gaso Bus all run buses in both directions. Most companies have the choice between a big bus and a minibus, the latter costing less as it is more crowded and considered less secure. Prices range from BFr9000 to BFr12,000 and departures are all around 8am. It is also possible to get off in Butare in southern Rwanda, handy for visiting Parc National Nyungwe Forest, and this costs BFr8000.

There is also a direct road from Bujumbura to Cyangugu at the southern tip of Lake Kivu in Rwanda, but this is not in such good condition and should be considered unsafe as long as one rebel faction remains at large.

TO/FROM TANZANIA

There are several border crossings between Burundi and Tanzania, including one near Kobero in the north of the country and one

near Nyanza Lac in the south of the country, which connects with Gombe Stream National Park and Kigoma in western Tanzania (see p211). However, due to the uncertain security situation in the east of the country during research, we were unable to travel to these areas. Ask around in Bujumbura for more details.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Air Burundi, the national airline, does not operate regular internal flights.

Road

As in Rwanda, most major roads in Burundi are sealed. Public transport mostly consists of modern Japanese minibuses, which are cheaper than shared taxis and not overcrowded. Destinations are displayed in the front window, and minibuses depart when full. You can usually find a minibus or shared taxi heading in your direction any day between early morning and early afternoon at the *gare routière* (bus station) in any town.

However, travelling around the countryside should be considered highly risky as long as rebels remain at large in the countryside. Ambushes are common, so ask around before heading out of Bujumbura, even to the second city of Gitega. Assuming the war finally comes to an end, road travel should be safe as locals are very friendly.