



Hope Shines Volunteer FAQ



Hello, from the Hope Shines Team! THANKS SO MUCH FOR THINKING ABOUT MAKING THE LIFE OF A CHILD BETTER! You are what makes this world GREAT!

We know it can be an overwhelming idea to travel all the way to Rwanda, Africa. But guess what? We will be there every step of the way. From the moment you submit your application to the minute you depart from Rwanda, we are there for you!

We all have been in your shoes. Most of our staff is now made up of former volunteers...and our Executive Director, April Riegler, who went there on vacation in 2007 and has returned to Rwanda every year since then! We have all felt the butterflies about making a trip like this. From our own experiences of traveling to and working in Rwanda, now going on our 4th consecutive year, we have been able to tailor the trip to make it easy and fun for you. You need to concentrate on the kids and having a wonderful experience. Let us worry about the things like transportation to and from the airport and booking hotels!

The FAQ's below are by no means comprehensive but just a starting point to ease your mind and help you to think about planning your trip. If you have more questions and/or concerns, we are here to talk via phone or shoot us an email. You can reach April at april@hopeshines.net or Kathleen at kathleen@hopeshines.net.

Q: Is visiting Rwanda safe these days?

A: Yes it is. There are no travel restrictions on Rwanda. Since the 1994 Genocide the Rwandan Government has made many improvements with security. Please visit the following U.S. State Department website regarding travel information on Rwanda:

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1007.html

Q: Where is Rwanda located?

A: Rwanda is described on their Country Specific page, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1007.html, in the following manner: “Rwanda is a landlocked developing country in central Africa. Although it continues to recover from the 1994 civil war and genocide in which up to one million people were killed, it is currently safe, clean, and well-organized. Economic activity and tourism are on the rise in Rwanda. Hotels and guesthouses are adequate in Kigali, the capital, and in major towns, but are limited in remote areas.”



Q: What languages are spoken in Rwanda?

A: Kinyarwanda – Hope Shines will provide you with some easy vocab words to help you navigate purchases and greeting people. French is spoken as well as English. English is spoken more sparingly.

Q: Who will book our hotel rooms? Where are we staying?

A: Hope Shines will book your hotel rooms. Once you are officially signed on as a volunteer, meaning you have purchased your airfare, you will send us your itinerary. We will then book your hotel room. We have a block of rooms at the Iris Hotel that we will all be sharing.

Hotel prices have skyrocketed over the last couple of years to upwards of \$120/night! Iris Hotel has two suites which sleep 9 people comfortably.

We have options for all budgets:

If you are on a very tight budget, you can opt to share a room and a double bed in the suite (no male and female combos allowed unless you are coming as a couple) for a rate of \$45/night. You will be sharing a bathroom with other volunteers.

There are single rooms in the suite, with twin beds, available in the suite and those will be \$60/night. You will be sharing a bathroom with other volunteers.

Also, in the suites there are nice common areas (Fun! For games, bonding, talking, eating – there is a nice kitchen, too!).

If you elect to stay in the suite you will pay for your room in **cash** to Hope Shines, for we will handle the check out. If you absolutely need to charge the room to a credit card (only VISA is accepted) you can. But please be aware that the exchange rate on credit cards is MUCH lower than when you exchange cash. Exchanging cash will give you the top exchange rate whereas a credit card will give you a much, much, much lower rate – this will end up costing you more money. This is why we recommend paying in cash – to save you money! The Hotel reps only speak English sparingly and will become confused and overwhelmed with multiple people trying to pay separately for their portion. We have tried to do this in the past at another local hotel and it was extremely confusing to the hotel.

If you would like a private room with its own bathroom, the rate is \$80/night. You will settle up this room directly with the hotel for it will not be confusing. You can pay in cash or with VISA. But, just be aware that you will pay more for it because the exchange rate is lower on the credit card.

We recommend bringing a **mosquito net** to use at the hotel. It can be purchased at any sporting goods store. Or, can be purchased for about \$7.00 in Rwanda. If you do not want to take the net home with you, we will donate it to the orphanage!

This hotel has a restaurant and complimentary breakfast. There is also a cheap market/grocery shop and a pizza restaurant right up the street.

Q: What are the most important items I should bring with me?

A:

Passport – check now to see if it is current!

Yellow Fever card

Visitor’s VISA if staying longer than 3 months

CASH – cash is king in Rwanda. VISA credit card is accepted only sparingly. You can exchange USD, EURO, GBP etc.

Malaria pills

Mosquito Net – or you can purchase one in Rwanda for about \$7.00US

Other personal medications you take regularly

Pepto Bismal and Imodium AD

Tampons

Contact Lenses and Solution – if you wear them

Sunglasses

Snacks like granola bars or protein bars /nuts

Hand Sanitizer

Baby Wipes

Camera and battery charger

Outlet converters – can be found in any drug store.

Sunscreen

Sneakers

Comfortable clothing

Refillable Water Bottle

A “can do” attitude and an open mind!

Q: Is there anything I should not bring with me?

A: Plastic bags are banned in Rwanda. The State Dept advises that your luggage may be inspected at the airport and plastic bags will be confiscated. You should also not bring expensive/flashy jewelry.

Q: Should I bring a bathing suit?

A: Not necessary. The Iris Hotel does not have a swimming pool, however there are a handful of hotels in the Kigali area that do have swimming pools which allow visitors to sunbathe with a towel charge. However, if you are only volunteering at one camp you will most likely not have time to sun bathe. Additionally, Lake Kivu, the largest lake in the country, is a popular tourist

site about 3 hours outside Kigali City, by bus. A bathing suit is recommended when making this trip.

Q: You say to bring cash. How much? How will I exchange my country's currency?

A: Yes, you need to bring cash for you cannot rely on credit cards. VISA credit card is only accepted sparingly. You will need enough money for hotel, depending on the room type you choose, food (\$10-\$15 a day for meals) and gifts. Rwanda has a rich heritage of crafts and we will be taking you to markets where you can purchase goodies like baskets, keepsakes, textiles and jewelry. So, if you want to bring gifts home for yourself or friends/family you will want to bring extra cash.

We will be taking you to exchange your currency as soon as you arrive. The Rwandan currency is the Rwandan Franc. Click here to understand the current exchange rates of \$1.00 to 1 RWF. <http://fms.treas.gov/intn.html#rates>

Q: Can I fundraise for my trip?

A: Yes! Many of our vols in the past have raised money for their trips. We have some examples of letters from former vols, which they have used in the past to raise money for their trips. We can send these examples to you. However, please note, that the person (friend, family, etc) who donates to your trip is giving the money directly to YOU and not to Hope Shines. We cannot accept donations on your behalf to pay for your trip.

If you reach out to your friends, family, church, sports team etc and ask for money towards your trip you will need to tell them they are giving the money directly to you and checks should be written out to your name. Cash should be given straight to you. They will not receive a tax receipt for their donation to you.

We recommend that you keep in touch with your donors and tell them about your trip. Sending pics of you working with the kids will warm their hearts!

Q: What is the food like?

A: Kigali is a very modern city where you will be able to find many different types of cuisine (Rwandanese, American, Italian, Chinese, and Indian). Rwandan cuisine varies but usually consists of a meat (beef or goat) braised in a tomato and herb broth along with rice or potato

and other fresh vegetables. Occasionally, visitors experience some travel stomach problems as they acclimate to the cuisine. Make sure to bring Pepto Bismol and/or Imodium AD. Your travel Doctor will give you more specifics about what not to eat.

Q: Will the hotel have clean water?

A: You will be given bottled water that you should use to brush your teeth and drink. The hotel will have running water clean enough to in shower but you should not drink or use this water to brush your teeth. We will take you to the local market to purchase more bottled water for drinking. Your travel Doctor will tell you more about this, too.

Q: Will I need immunizations?

A: Yes. You will need to go to a travel Doctor/clinic to get the immunizations you need. Please see the US Center for Disease Control's (CDC) page about traveling to Rwanda.

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/rwanda.aspx> for the info you need about immunizations.

Q: Who will be picking me up from the airport?

A: A Hope Shines representative will pick you up at the Kigali International Airport. Please forward your itinerary to April Riegler upon confirmation. Additionally, please check your itinerary prior to departure and forward any flight changes to April Riegler. If you go through our suggested travel agent, Tim Burke, he can be reached at tburke@tmbconciierge.com or 816-423-8045. He will provide you with constant updates.

Q: I don't have any long skirts, do I really need to buy some?

A: As foreigners we acknowledge our cultural differences. Kigali has become a very modern city however exposure of legs in females is still a new development. We highly suggest pants or long skirts on females to wear when out in town. Shorts are fine to wear when in camp; although we suggest wearing shorts that go below mid-thigh. We seek to respect their culture.

Q: I'd like to do some traveling on my own. Is this possible?

A: Yes and we highly suggest it! The week of camp is can be very tiring. Any travel plans should be scheduled before or after the week of camp. Should you like any travel suggestions please contact a Hope Shines representative. We will not be able to book your personal travel but can make suggestions for what you might like to do.

Q: Do I need a VISA to enter the country?

A: Only if you plan to stay within the country for more than 3 months. This may cost you about \$50USD. Many visitors who plan to stay in the country for more than 3 months leave the country before the 3-month date and re-enter, thus re-starting their three month stay. Should you have any VISA related questions please visit the Office of Immigration and Emigration's website. <http://www.migration.gov.rw/page.php?article11>

Q: I'd like to continue contact with the children I meet. Can I give my contact information to the children before I leave the camp?

A: Hope Shines loves fostering volunteers who want to continue mentoring! However, we'd like to create a healthy and constant mentoring experience. We advise not to give any personal contact information and to please speak with a Hope Shines representative to discuss the best way to continue contact.

