

Rwanda Development Board (RDB) has announced that this year's 19th Kwita Izina Gorilla Naming Ceremony will be held on Friday, 1 September 2023.

This 2023 edition will take place on the foothills of Volcanoes National Park in Kinigi, Musanze District, joining the communities living around the home of the endangered mountain gorillas in the ultimate celebration of nature and conservation.

The ceremony will see the naming of 23 baby mountain gorillas born in the last 12 months. 374 baby gorillas have been named since the beginning of the naming ceremony first held in 2005.

This year's namers, who will be unveiled closer to the day, include notable partners, conservationists, international and local personalities, dignitaries and friends of Rwanda.

The celebration will showcase Rwanda's conservation efforts, including Rwanda's successful low volume, high value approach to gorilla tourism that has enabled the gorilla population to thrive and provide better trekking experiences to visitors.

Current tourism figures show that Rwanda generated US\$ 247 million in the first half of 2023, a 56% increase compared to US\$ 158 million in the same period in 2022.

RDB Chief Executive Officer, Clare Akamanzi, said:

"We are excited to return to Kinigi this year for the 19th Kwita Izina Gorilla Naming ceremony. This year we celebrate the gains made in our tourism and conservation efforts, notably the majestic mountain gorillas. Last year, Rwanda's gorilla tourism was the best performing segment and the trend shows that 2023 is expected to grow further and take us beyond recovery and towards our national targets. This means the communities are benefiting more, tourists getting enhanced experiences and the gorilla populations are thriving thanks to all stakeholders who actively participate in their daily conservation."

She added that Rwanda is diversifying its tourism revenues by promoting other tourist attractions and new offerings such as the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Events) and sports tourism industries.

Next month's Kwita Izina will also bring to the fore efforts by the Government of Rwanda to improve the livelihoods of park communities while enabling wildlife conservation through the Tourism Revenue Share Program.

Initiated in 2005, the Tourism Revenue Share Programme aims to guide investment in the areas surrounding the various national parks in Rwanda by ensuring that 10% of all park revenues is returned to the communities.

Over Rwf 10 billion (about US\$ 9 million) has been spent on more than 1,000 community-based projects around Akagera, Nyungwe, Volcanoes and Gishwati-Mukura National Parks since the start of the program.

This year, RDB will launch two community projects, including a maternity unit and potato seeds collection and conservation unit for residents to access maternal healthcare and quality seeds in Muganza Sector, Nyaruguru District in the Southern Province.

Additionally, RDB, in partnership with African Leadership University, will organise the 2023 Business of Conversation Conference on 29-31 August 2023. Registrations are currently ongoing at <https://sowc.alueducation.com/bcc-2023/>

Other events that will take place as part of this year's Kwita Izina celebrations include the Rhino Velo Race in Akagera National Park, countrywide familiarisation tours for international tour operators and travel media, and a Kwita Izina concert.