

Rwanda Development Board (RDB) and Premier League club Arsenal have confirmed that their eight-season “Visit Rwanda” sponsorship deal will end in June 2026 by mutual consent.

The deal, which began in 2018, saw Rwanda’s tourism brand on training kits and generated international exposure for the country. Under the partnership, Rwanda saw visitor arrivals reach 1.3 million in 2024 and tourism revenues climb to US \$650 million, a 47% increase since the arrangement began.

During the partnership, there were numerous high-profile moments: Rwanda Heritage Day at Emirates Stadium, and visits from Arsenal figures such as Alex Scott, Mathieu Flamini, Bacary Sagna, Jurrien Timber, Caitlin Foord, Katie McCabe and Laia Codina. These guests experienced Rwanda’s natural and cultural highlights — from mountain gorilla trekking and Big Five safaris in Akagera, to canopy walks in Nyungwe, lake leisure on Kivu, and participation in the annual Kwita Izina gorilla naming ceremony.

The deal also supported Rwanda’s ambition to become a sporting hub in Africa, with grassroots football programs that helped hundreds of young players and coaches develop their skills.

However, not all Arsenal supporters welcomed the partnership. A fan group called “Gunners for Peace” campaigned actively against renewing the deal, citing human rights concerns connected to Rwanda’s alleged backing of the M23 rebel movement in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Rwanda denies the allegations.

In an open letter to Arsenal’s board, the group wrote: “The Rwandan government has blood on its hands, and we don’t want it on our sleeves ... This great club deserves better, and anything’s better than Visit Rwanda.”

They also added: “We understand ... It must be tempting to hold your noses, wave this one through and hope that nobody notices.”

As part of their protest, they unveiled a billboard outside the Emirates Stadium reading “Visit Tottenham”, a satirical jab at their local rivals, and distributed black armbands for fans to cover the Visit Rwanda logo on matchday shirts.

Gunners for Peace argue that Arsenal’s values are at odds with continuing the sponsorship, especially given the wider ethical implications. “We believe in its

values ... We refuse to wear this advertisement on our shirts. We urge the club to find a more ethical partnership," they stated.

Jean-Guy Afrika, Chief Executive Officer at RDB, praised what had been achieved: "We are proud of what this partnership has achieved over many years of collaboration ... driving awareness and visitation for Rwandan tourism at a pace traditional campaigns could never match. ... We remain grateful to Arsenal for its support, partnership, and shared belief in Rwanda's story."

He added that Rwanda would continue its relationship with the wider "Kroenke Sports & Entertainment Group", citing recent ties with the LA Rams and SoFi Stadium, and expressed commitment to Arsenal's men's and women's teams through the remainder of the current season.

Arsenal's Chief Executive, Richard Garlick, said: "Our first ever sleeve partnership with Visit Rwanda has been a significant journey ... The commitment and support of Visit Rwanda throughout our partnership has ... helped us invest in our long-term vision to win major trophies, in a financially sustainable way. We thank the Rwanda Development Board for their partnership and what we've delivered together."

While the deal ends in mid-2026, the legacy of the partnership is likely to be debated. Analysts suggest it leaves a blueprint for how African nations can use sports to build global brand recognition, but also how ethical concerns increasingly matter in football's commercial alliances.

For Arsenal, the challenge now is to find a new sleeve sponsor that aligns not only with their financial goals, but with the values their fans say they hold dear.