

A new kind of partnership: Visit Rwanda, Arsenal Football Club's official tourism partner

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I am not a football fan, but I do have a partner who shares the devotion for Arsenal. While I caught a glimpse of one of the games with him a few weeks back, I noticed something. 'Visit Rwanda' as a logo that is now featured on the left sleeve of Arsenal's team shirt.



© Arsenal Football Club.

Beyond the team's shirt, the 'Visit Rwanda' brand was in full display on LED boards at the Emirates stadium, was a visible backdrop during interviews and popped up in between the duration of the match and Ad breaks. This got me asking myself what the partnership means and Why Rwanda?

A new and unique trigger

According to the Visit Rwanda website, the Arsenal t-shirt is guaranteed to be seen 35 million times in a day globally. The football club is one of the most watched teams around the world, which makes the promotion of tourism and investment in Rwanda more visible and far-reaching.

According to Deloitte's Football Money league report in 2018, Arsenal is the sixth largest football club in the world based on financial and non-financial metrics. The financial metric measures the club's ability to generate revenue from the matchday; ticket and corporate hospitality sales, broadcasting rights; distribution to commercial; sponsorship, merchandising, stadium tours etc. Non-financial metrics includes as attendance, worldwide fan base, broadcast audience, and on-pitch success.

Arsenal is at the heart of many Rwandans, including President Kagame, who contribute to its strong following. Backed by the Rwanda Development Board, the partnership will have a new and unique trigger on people's minds about Rwanda with its association with the football club. Rwanda enjoys 1.2 million visitors every year, attracted by endemic and rare species like the Mountain Gorilla in National Parks with volcanoes, Rainforests and epic scenery with excellent road networks.

Committed to practising responsible tourism

Rwanda has a vibrant culture and heritage and is committed to practising responsible tourism. In 2008, Rwanda banned the

use of plastic bags and packaging material, alternatively using biodegradable material like banana leaves, cloth and papyrus. The plastic ban has earned Rwanda a reputation for being one of the cleanest cities in Africa. The ban has created opportunities for the local communities in producing alternative packaging.

Proceeds earned from tourism activities like Safaris and Gorilla permits that cost 1,500 Euros each are redistributed to improving the lives of local communities. Rwanda is also committed reforestation, tree-planting drives and training schemes in forestry management. Rwanda has established a Green Fund to support the best projects that have the potential to transform Rwanda's commitment to building a green economy.

The Rwandan tourism industry contributes 12,7% of the country's GDP and supports 132,000 jobs. In 2017, British visitors grew by 21 %, which is over 16,000 people on the overall annual total of 1,2 million tourists. One of the reasons why there was a growth in British visitors was the introduction of a direct flight by RwandAir from London to Kigali.

Last year, luxury hotel and resorts brand One & Only launched Nyungwe House alongside a rainforest in Rwanda, to appeal to travellers who have been everywhere but wanted something different and uniquely customized to provide a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Fostering empowerment and community building

As part of the partnership, Arsenal players from the men and women's team and club coaches will visit Rwanda and host coaching camps to support the development of football for boys and girls. Fostering empowerment and community building. This changes the perception of Rwanda past the tragedy of genocide and its aftermath to the resilient progress it has made today.

It is ranked the 5th safest country in the world according to Gallup's Global Report in 2015, and the 2nd safest country in Africa. Rwanda has also ranked the second easiest place to do business in Africa. Investors can register their businesses in six hours and benefit from the free trade agreements Rwanda has signed with over 50 countries.

Tourism has boosted Rwanda's development efforts in the past two decades and is the country's leading source of foreign exchange earnings with an annual growth rate of 11% in the past five years. Rwanda has put efforts into sustainable tourism and conservation that has led to being awarded for leadership in tourism and economic competitiveness by the World travel and tourism council and the world economic forum.

Rwanda places innovation at the forefront as part of its drive to the 4th industrial revolution in its development. It is a tech incubator that has welcomed initiatives like Silicon Valley company Zipline, that delivers critical blood products to rural medical clinics across mountainous areas via drones.

One of the distinct attributes to Rwanda's tourism and investment approach is the ambition of inclusive growth and development that stretches beyond life in the city and into rural areas as well. The Rwandan government has strongly invested in the promotion of ICT through e-government and infrastructure reaching remote areas too. This has brought

significant impact on service delivery in health care and entrepreneurship in mobile technologies that provide financial services and more.

Electronic World Trade Platform

Jack Ma, the co-founder of Alibaba, one of the world's largest e-commerce businesses, most recently visited Rwanda to finalise and announce a first-of-its-kind-in Africa deal with the Rwandan government at the Kigali Convention Centre. The deal is to establish an electronic World Trade Platform, enabling Rwandan products to be sold in the Chinese market and boost cross-border trade.

The core of the eWTP partnership tourism, capacity-building, and e-payments. The partnership will ultimately enhance capabilities of small to medium enterprises, producing and exporting competitive quality products to the world, while supporting the development of Rwanda's digital economy. Products exported will initially be handcrafts and coffee.

These are exciting times for Rwanda. Innovation City located in the city of Kigali is a tech hub linked by high tech industry ecosystems, research and education with capital investment. The hub is aimed at connecting youth to role models, providing resources, skills development, job creation and reducing Rwanda's current account deficit. Rwanda has positioned itself as a place to meet, do business and a place worth experiencing.

That said, major criticisms towards this initiative are the limited freedom of speech and expression by media and civil rights groups in challenging the government and its policies and he lacks pluralism in leadership representation. Will the partnership with Arsenal and the openness to integration with the world socially, economically and technologically stir more democratic behaviour? Governments and businesses can incentivise for this behaviour as a condition to work with Rwanda.

Perhaps I should watch football more often, it seems to have something in for me too.

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ABOUT LIVHUWANI CLEMENTINE MUKHONDO

I was named Livhuwani by my parents, which means 'give thanks'. It is an expression of gratitude and I have found it to be the prominent theme in my life. I love writing and expressing my thoughts and feelings on paper. For the longest time that I can remember I kept a little notebook. I'd include my wildest dreams on it like being a famous fashion designer and an economist at the World Bank at the same time. I have always been ambitious.

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