

How to Drive Like a Rwandan

Is driving in Rwanda easy? Not really. But that is part of the adventure, baby, and what an adventure it can be. However, you are going to need a few driving tips and the best place to begin is in Kigali.

Moto-taxis whizz behind, in front and beside. Cars weave in and out of lanes in no particular manner. Roundabouts are not for the faint of heart, people jaywalk in all directions, street sellers compete for attention and not all roads dutifully abide by Google maps.

There is a method to the driving madness in Kigali and it goes something like this: mental clarity and Rwandan instinct are your best friends.

And, use all automobile visuals; rear-view mirror, side-view mirror, and car windows. Keep a hand by the horn and use your blinker when turning or navigating through a roundabout. After a bit of practice, you'll settle into the Kigali driving groove and wonder what your initial fuss was about.

Driving in rural Rwanda, however, requires a different set of skills. Roads go up the hills, down the hills and around sharp curves. Streets are often lined with people walking, many defying nature by carrying all sorts of goods on their heads.

Bicycles, piled high and wide with everything but the kitchen sink, share road space with cars, trucks, buses, taxi-vans, moto-taxis, and motorcycles. Throw in some cows, goats and a few roosters and chickens, and well, you get the gist.

The most important rule for driving in rural Rwanda is, slow down. Do not exceed 60 km/h (speed limit) even when passing a vehicle, which by the way is required often, particularly when behind a truck chugging up a mountain.

When approaching rural towns, bunny-down your speed to 30 or 40 km/h. Eyes need to dart in all which-way to make sure you do not hit anyone or anything.

If you plan to visit certain remote rural areas, drive a strong four-wheel vehicle because the feeling of being in a washing machine while driving on the rocky roads require a car mighty enough to handle them.

Although your attention antenna needs to be heightened while driving in Rwanda, it is a super-cool way to plug into the land, people, and culture. And if you get lost, don't worry. Rwandans are ready to help even if their English is limited.