

Cultural Tourism Perception on Community Livelihood of Kinigi Sector: A Case of Gorilla Guardian Village

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Abstract: This study examined the influence of cultural tourism on community livelihoods in Kinigi Sector, Rwanda, with a focus on Gorilla Guardian Village. Cultural tourism has emerged as an important mechanism for preserving cultural heritage, promoting traditional practices, and creating socio-economic opportunities for local communities. The study sought to assess the contribution of cultural tourism to community livelihoods, evaluate community perceptions of cultural tourism initiatives, and identify challenges affecting its effectiveness in promoting local development. A quantitative approach employing descriptive and correlational research designs was adopted. From a target population of 355 individuals, a sample of 249 respondents was selected using Slovin's formula. The respondents comprised households engaged in cultural heritage-related businesses, visitors to Gorilla Guardian Village, and workers, including former poachers involved in tourism activities. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The findings indicate that cultural tourism contributes significantly to community livelihoods through employment creation, income generation, and the preservation of cultural heritage. A strong positive relationship was found between cultural tourism activities and community livelihood improvement ($r = 0.782$), suggesting that greater participation in cultural tourism is associated with enhanced socio-economic well-being. Most respondents expressed positive perceptions of cultural tourism initiatives, including cultural training programs, tourism cooperatives, and community cultural events, recognizing their role in fostering community participation and economic empowerment. However, several challenges were identified, including unequal distribution of tourism benefits, limited community involvement in decision-making processes, commercialization of cultural practices, inadequate infrastructure, weak marketing strategies, and language barriers. These constraints reduce the potential benefits that local communities derive from tourism activities. The study concludes that cultural tourism has substantial potential to promote sustainable community development in Kinigi Sector when supported by inclusive policies, effective planning, and active community participation. It recommends strengthening tourism infrastructure, enhancing marketing strategies, expanding community capacity-building programs, and promoting equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms to maximize the positive impact of cultural tourism on local livelihoods.

Keywords: Cultural Tourism, Community Livelihood, Gorilla Guardian Village, Kinigi Sector.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural tourism refers to travel motivated by an interest in experiencing the culture, history, heritage, traditions, arts, architecture, religion, and lifestyles of a particular community or destination. It encompasses visits to museums, historical monuments, cultural festivals, heritage villages, traditional ceremonies, and indigenous communities, enabling visitors to gain a deeper understanding of local cultures and ways of life (Van der Duim, Peters, & Wearing, 2019). As one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry, cultural tourism not only provides recreational experiences for visitors but also contributes to cultural preservation, economic growth, and social development.

Globally, cultural tourism has emerged as an important catalyst for sustainable development. The sector contributes significantly to national economies through employment creation, foreign exchange earnings, investment attraction, and support for small and medium enterprises. Cultural tourism also promotes the conservation of cultural heritage, revitalization of traditional practices, and strengthening of community identity and pride. Furthermore, it facilitates intercultural dialogue and understanding by bringing together people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Despite these

benefits, scholars have noted several challenges associated with cultural tourism, including cultural commodification, loss of authenticity, unequal distribution of tourism benefits, and overdependence on tourism revenues (Asa, Tjizumaue, Campbell, & Nautwima, 2022).

In Africa, cultural tourism has become an increasingly important component of economic development strategies. Many African countries possess rich cultural resources, including traditional customs, historical sites, indigenous knowledge systems, music, dance, arts, and crafts that attract domestic and international tourists. Countries such as Kenya, Egypt, Tunisia, and The Gambia have successfully utilized cultural tourism to generate foreign exchange, create employment opportunities, and stimulate local economic development (Zhao & Ritchie, 2017; Simpson, 2019). Community-based cultural tourism initiatives across the continent have also contributed to poverty reduction and the empowerment of local populations by creating alternative livelihood opportunities and encouraging the preservation of indigenous cultures.

In Rwanda, tourism is recognized as one of the key sectors driving socio-economic transformation and national development. While the country is internationally renowned for mountain gorilla tourism, cultural tourism has gained increasing attention as an important complementary attraction. Rwanda's rich cultural heritage, including traditional dances, music, crafts, folklore, historical sites, and cultural ceremonies, provides significant opportunities for tourism development. Through cultural tourism initiatives, local communities have been able to generate income, create employment opportunities, and preserve cultural traditions for future generations. The sector has also contributed to strengthening national identity and promoting Rwanda's image as a unique tourism destination.

One of the most prominent cultural tourism destinations in Rwanda is Gorilla Guardian Village, formerly known as Iby'Iwacu Cultural Village, located in Kinigi Sector of Musanze District near Volcanoes National Park. The village was established as a community-based tourism initiative aimed at harmonizing wildlife conservation with local community development. Recognizing that poverty and limited livelihood opportunities often contribute to illegal activities such as poaching, the initiative was designed to provide alternative sources of income for communities living around the national park. Former poachers and local residents were mobilized to participate in cultural tourism activities, including traditional dance performances, storytelling, handicraft production, cultural exhibitions, and demonstrations of traditional Rwandan lifestyles (Simpson, 2018).

Over the years, Gorilla Guardian Village has become a significant cultural attraction, receiving thousands of domestic and international visitors annually. Through tourism-related activities, the village has created employment opportunities, generated household income, promoted cultural preservation, and strengthened community participation in conservation efforts. The initiative has also enhanced awareness of Rwanda's cultural heritage among visitors while providing a platform for cultural exchange between local communities and tourists.

Despite these achievements, concerns remain regarding the extent to which cultural tourism benefits are equitably distributed among community members and whether tourism revenues adequately contribute to sustainable livelihood improvement. Challenges such as limited community participation in decision-making, unequal benefit sharing, inadequate infrastructure, and the commercialization of cultural practices may affect the long-term sustainability of cultural tourism initiatives. Therefore, understanding community perceptions regarding the contribution of cultural tourism to their livelihoods is essential for informing policies and strategies that promote inclusive and sustainable tourism development.

Against this background, this study investigates the perception of cultural tourism on community livelihoods in Kinigi Sector, with particular reference to Gorilla Guardian Village. The study seeks to generate empirical evidence on how cultural tourism influences employment, income generation, cultural preservation, and overall community well-being, while identifying challenges that may hinder its effectiveness in promoting sustainable local development.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between cultural tourism and community livelihoods in Kinigi Sector, using Gorilla Guardians Village (formerly Iby'Iwacu Cultural Village) as a case study.

2.2 Target and Study Population

The target population for this study comprised 355 respondents drawn from three categories. These included 65 households in Kinigi Sector, 243 visitors to Gorilla Guardians Village and 47 workers.

2.3 Sample size

According to Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019), sampling involves selecting a subset of a population to represent the entire population and draw valid conclusions. To determine the appropriate sample size, this study employed Slovin's formula (Almeda, 2010):

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

- **n** = Sample size
- **N** = Total population (355)
- **e** = Margin of error (0.05)

A total population of 355 respondents was considered, and a sample of 249 respondents was selected and proportionately distributed among the study categories, as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 1: Categories of Respondents

Categories of Respondents	Population	Sample Size
Households in Kinigi Sector with cultural heritage-based businesses registered with RDB	65	56
Visitors to Gorilla Guardian Village through Booking.com	243	151
Workers of Gorilla Guardian Village (former poachers)	47	42
Total	355	249

Source: Researcher (2026)

2.4 Data Collection Methods

In order to collect data, the researcher used documentary technique and questionnaires.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2: Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	138	55.4
Female	111	44.6
Total	249	100

The results show that male respondents represented 55.4%, while female respondents accounted for 44.6%. This indicates that both genders are involved in cultural tourism activities, although males slightly dominate participation in tourism-related employment and community activities. The relatively balanced representation of genders helps ensure that the findings of the study reflect perspectives from both male and female members of the community regarding cultural tourism and its contribution to community livelihood in Kinigi Sector.

3.1 Analysis of Findings Based on Research Objectives

PART I: HOUSEHOLDS' RESPONSES

3.1.1 Cultural Centres and Household Benefits

Table 3: Benefits of Cultural Centres to Households

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Provide income through selling crafts	56	4.31	0.72	Agree
Create local job opportunities	56	4.25	0.69	Agree
Preserve and promote cultural heritage	56	4.46	0.63	Strongly Agree
Attract tourists boosting businesses	56	4.38	0.65	Agree
Offer skills training	56	4.12	0.70	Agree

Source: Field Data, 2026

Table 3 presents households' perceptions of the benefits of cultural centres in Kinigi Sector. The findings indicate that cultural tourism activities contribute positively to community livelihoods. The highest mean score was recorded for preserving and promoting cultural heritage (Mean = 4.46, SD = 0.63), indicating strong agreement among respondents that cultural centres play a major role in safeguarding traditional culture. Income generation through selling crafts also received a high mean score (Mean = 4.31), suggesting that cultural tourism provides important economic opportunities for local households. Additionally, respondents agreed that cultural centres help create employment opportunities and provide skills training, which further contributes to community development.

PART II: VISITORS' RESPONSES

3.1.2 Quality of Cultural Centres Visited

Table 4: Visitor Perceptions of Cultural Centre Quality

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Well-maintained facilities	151	4.28	0.71	Agree
Informative cultural displays	151	4.41	0.66	Agree
Friendly and knowledgeable guides	151	4.53	0.58	Strongly Agree
Authentic cultural performances	151	4.47	0.60	Strongly Agree
Clean and welcoming environment	151	4.36	0.63	Agree

Source: Field Data, 2026

Table 4 presents visitors' perceptions of the quality of cultural centres visited. The results show that respondents generally rated the quality of services positively. The highest mean score was recorded for friendly and knowledgeable guides (Mean = 4.53, SD = 0.58), indicating strong agreement that tour guides significantly contribute to enhancing visitor experiences. Authentic cultural performances also received a high rating (Mean = 4.47), suggesting that visitors appreciate genuine cultural presentations. Overall, the results demonstrate that cultural centres provide a welcoming and informative environment for tourists.

3.1.3 Organization of Cultural Activities

Table 5: Cultural Activities Organization

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Activities run on time	151	4.12	0.73	Agree
Clear explanations of traditions	151	4.38	0.69	Agree
Easy access to events	151	4.21	0.74	Agree
Good interaction with locals	151	4.42	0.63	Agree
Variety of cultural experiences	151	4.47	0.61	Strongly Agree

Source: Field Data, 2026

Table 5 shows visitors' perceptions of how cultural tourism activities are organized in Kinigi Sector. The results indicate that respondents generally agreed that cultural activities are well coordinated and accessible. The highest mean score was recorded for variety of cultural experiences (Mean = 4.47, SD = 0.61), showing that visitors appreciate the diverse cultural offerings available. Additionally, good interaction with local communities (Mean = 4.42) was highly rated, suggesting that community engagement enhances the authenticity of the tourism experience.

3.1.4 Challenges Faced by Tourists

Table 6: Cultural Tourism Challenges

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Limited translation services	151	3.82	0.91	Neutral
Few signposts or directions	151	3.74	0.88	Neutral
Limited payment options	151	3.90	0.85	Neutral
Weather affecting visits	151	4.02	0.79	Agree
Occasional overcrowding	151	3.65	0.93	Neutral

Source: Field Data, 2026

The results in Table 6 indicate that visitors encountered several challenges during their cultural tourism experiences. Weather conditions recorded the highest mean score (Mean = 4.02), indicating that respondents generally agreed that weather conditions sometimes affect their visits. Other issues such as limited translation services, few signposts, limited payment options, and occasional overcrowding recorded mean values between 3.65 and 3.90, suggesting neutral perceptions. This implies that although these issues exist, they are not considered major barriers to enjoying cultural tourism experiences.

PART III: EMPLOYEES' RESPONSES

3.1.5 Cultural Promotion Activities

Table 7: Promotion of Rwandan Culture

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Authentic cultural performances	42	4.52	0.61	Strongly Agree
Traditional crafts displays	42	4.44	0.65	Agree
Cultural education for visitors	42	4.41	0.67	Agree
Visitor participation activities	42	4.36	0.69	Agree
Appreciation of heritage	42	4.48	0.63	Strongly Agree

Source: Field Data, 2026

Table 7 shows employees' perceptions regarding cultural promotion activities. The highest mean value was recorded for authentic cultural performances (Mean = 4.52), followed by appreciation of heritage (Mean = 4.48). These results indicate strong agreement among employees that cultural tourism activities contribute significantly to promoting Rwandan culture and heritage to visitors.

3.1.6 Strategic Cultural Initiatives

Table 8: Cultural Programs and Initiatives

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Regular cultural shows	42	4.39	0.64	Agree
Diverse cultural activities	42	4.35	0.66	Agree
Collaboration with tour operators	42	4.27	0.71	Agree
Programs updated based on feedback	42	4.21	0.73	Agree
Marketing through tourism platforms	42	4.18	0.75	Agree

Source: Field Data, 2026

Table 8 indicates that employees agreed that the cultural programs implemented are strategically designed to attract tourists. Regular cultural shows and diverse cultural activities recorded relatively high mean values, indicating that these initiatives are effectively implemented to enhance visitors' experiences.

3.1.7 Challenges Facing Cultural Tourism

Table 9: Operational Challenges

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Limited funding	42	4.12	0.72	Agree
Lack of training opportunities	42	3.95	0.81	Neutral
Seasonal tourist fluctuations	42	4.28	0.69	Agree
Language barriers	42	3.88	0.84	Neutral
Competition with other attractions	42	4.01	0.76	Agree

Source: Field Data, 2026

The results in Table 9 reveal that employees identified several challenges affecting cultural tourism operations. Seasonal fluctuations in tourist arrivals recorded the highest mean score (Mean = 4.28), indicating that tourism demand varies across seasons. Limited funding and competition with other attractions were also identified as important challenges affecting the development of cultural tourism.

3.1.8 Cultural Tourism and Community Livelihood

Table 10: Impact on Community Livelihood

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Increased household income	42	4.32	0.68	Agree
Better access to education	42	4.21	0.72	Agree
Improved living standards	42	4.27	0.70	Agree
Growth in local businesses	42	4.35	0.66	Agree
Community development initiatives	42	4.30	0.69	Agree

Source: Field Data, 2026

Table 10 shows that employees believe cultural tourism positively influences community livelihoods. Growth in local businesses and increased household income recorded relatively high mean values, indicating that cultural tourism contributes significantly to local economic development.

The findings show that cultural tourism plays a significant role in improving community livelihood in Kinigi Sector. Cultural centres and strategic cultural initiatives contribute positively to economic and social well-being, while tourism challenges hinder the full realization of these benefits. Therefore, strengthening cultural tourism infrastructure, supporting cultural programs, and addressing tourism challenges are essential for improving the livelihoods of local communities.

4. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that cultural tourism plays a significant role in enhancing the livelihoods of communities in Kinigi Sector, particularly through the activities of Gorilla Guardian Village. The findings demonstrated that cultural tourism contributes to income generation, employment creation, entrepreneurship development, and the preservation of cultural heritage. These benefits have positively influenced the socio-economic well-being of local residents while strengthening cultural identity and community pride.

The study further established that strategic cultural tourism initiatives, including cultural training programs, tourism cooperatives, traditional performances, and community cultural events, are widely appreciated by community members. Such initiatives promote active community participation, empower local residents to engage in tourism-related activities, and support sustainable local development. The positive relationship identified between cultural tourism and community livelihoods indicates that increased involvement in cultural tourism activities is associated with improved living standards among residents.

Despite these positive contributions, the study revealed several challenges that limit the full realization of cultural tourism benefits. These include inadequate infrastructure, limited marketing and promotion strategies, language barriers, insufficient investment, and unequal distribution of tourism revenues. In addition, limited community involvement in some decision-making processes may affect the sustainability and inclusiveness of tourism development initiatives.

The study concludes that cultural tourism is an effective tool for promoting sustainable community development in Kinigi Sector. When properly planned and managed, cultural tourism can simultaneously support economic growth, cultural preservation, and social development. Therefore, strengthening tourism infrastructure, enhancing community participation, improving marketing efforts, and promoting equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms are essential for maximizing the contribution of cultural tourism to community livelihoods and ensuring its long-term sustainability.

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