



A complete guide to

The Congo Nile Trail

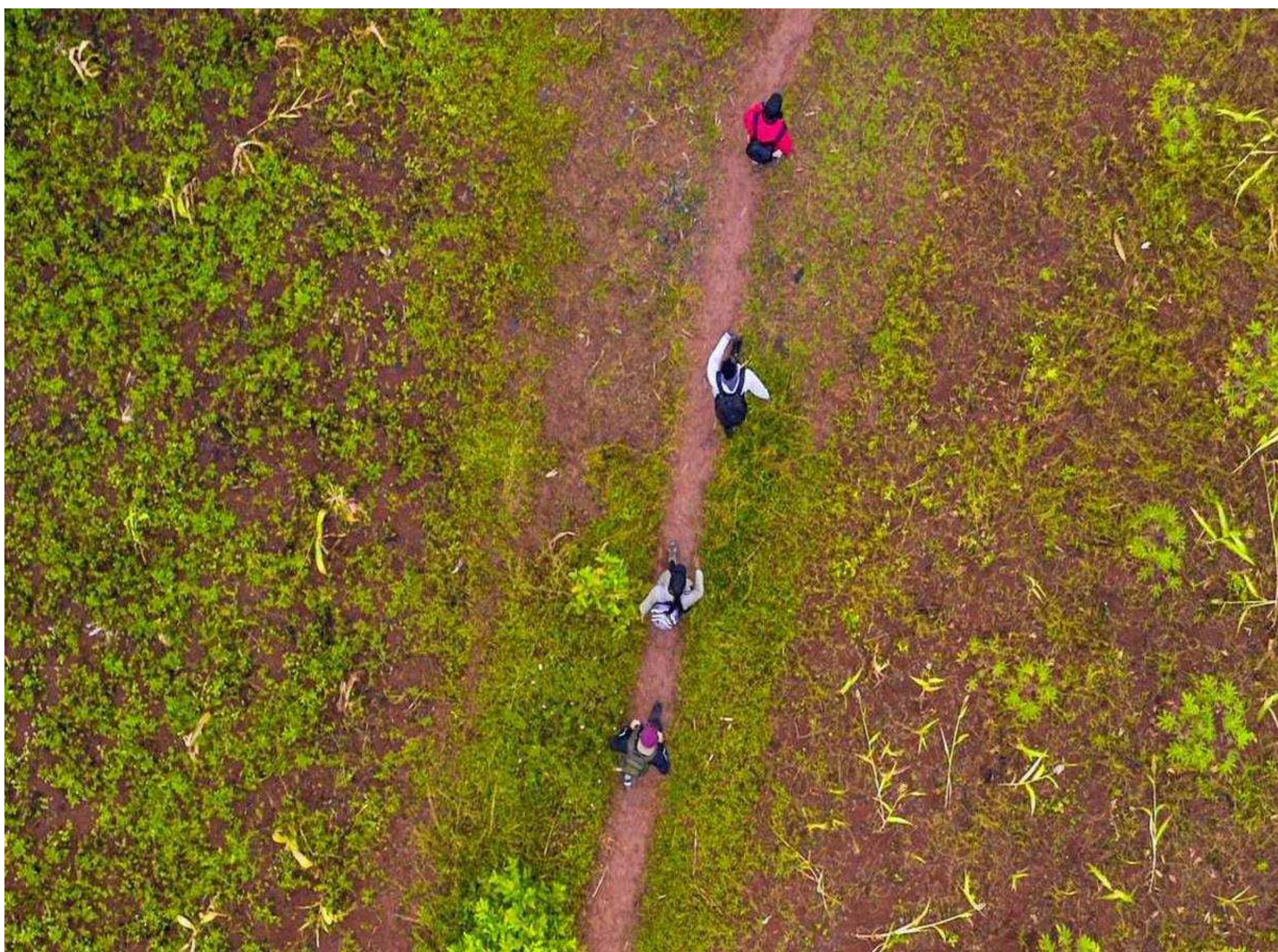
By

Destination Kivu Belt
www.kivubelt.travel

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2021 Edition

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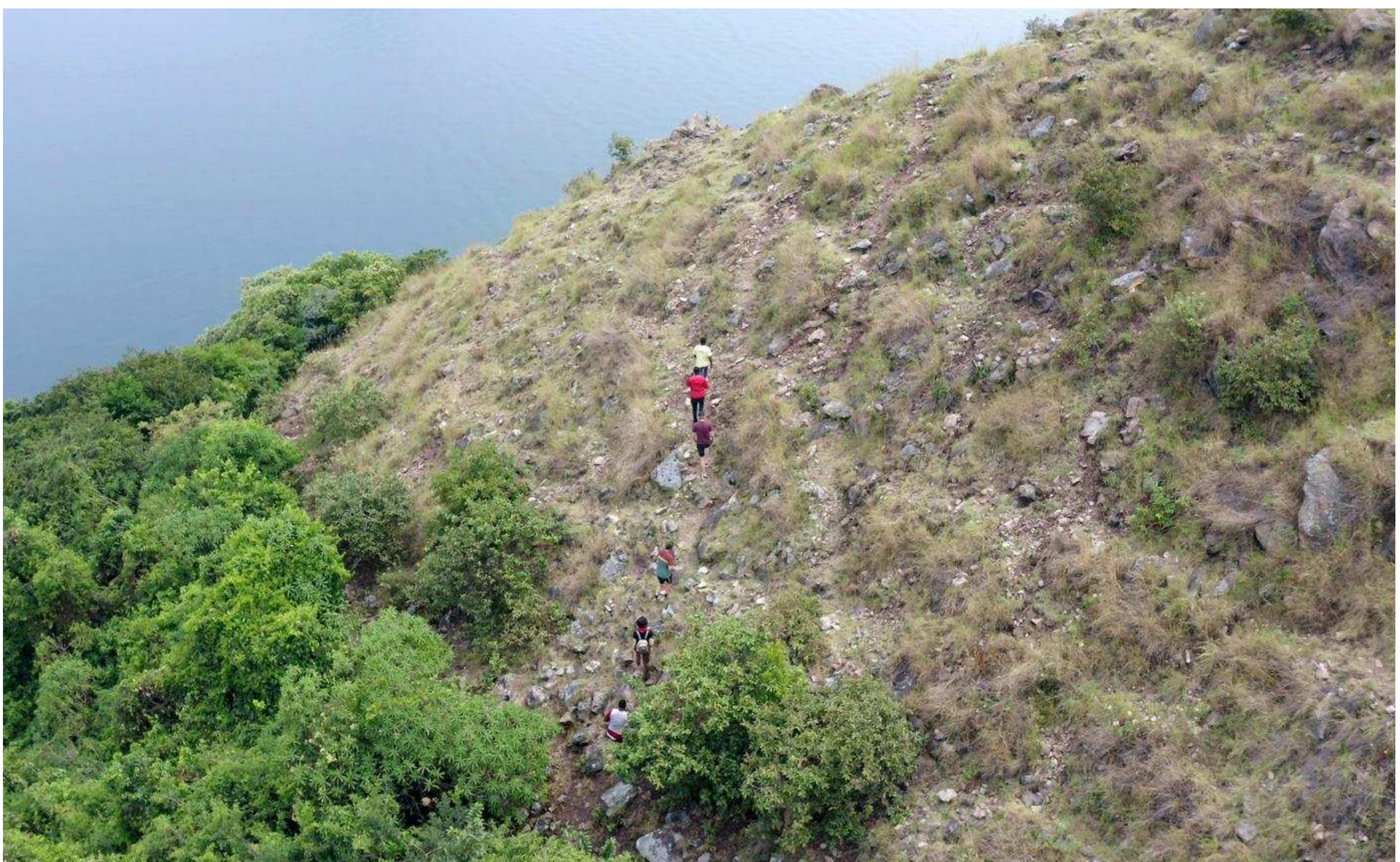
About this guide

This guide is written and kept updated by the team at Destination Kivu Belt. The main aim of this guide is to share information about the Congo Nile Trail to make it easier for more to discover and complete this epic adventure. The guide is 100% free to use and redistribute.

The guide is intended to be used during the planning stage, but also works on the Congo Nile Trail as a printed version or downloaded and kept on a mobile device.

Good complements to this guide are the online guides at the Destination Kivu Belt website, www.kivubelt.travel. Here you will find a comprehensive hiking and biking guide including interactive maps which you be opened in Google Maps on a mobile device and used on the trail.

/The Destination Kivu Belt Team



Introducing the Congo Nile Trail



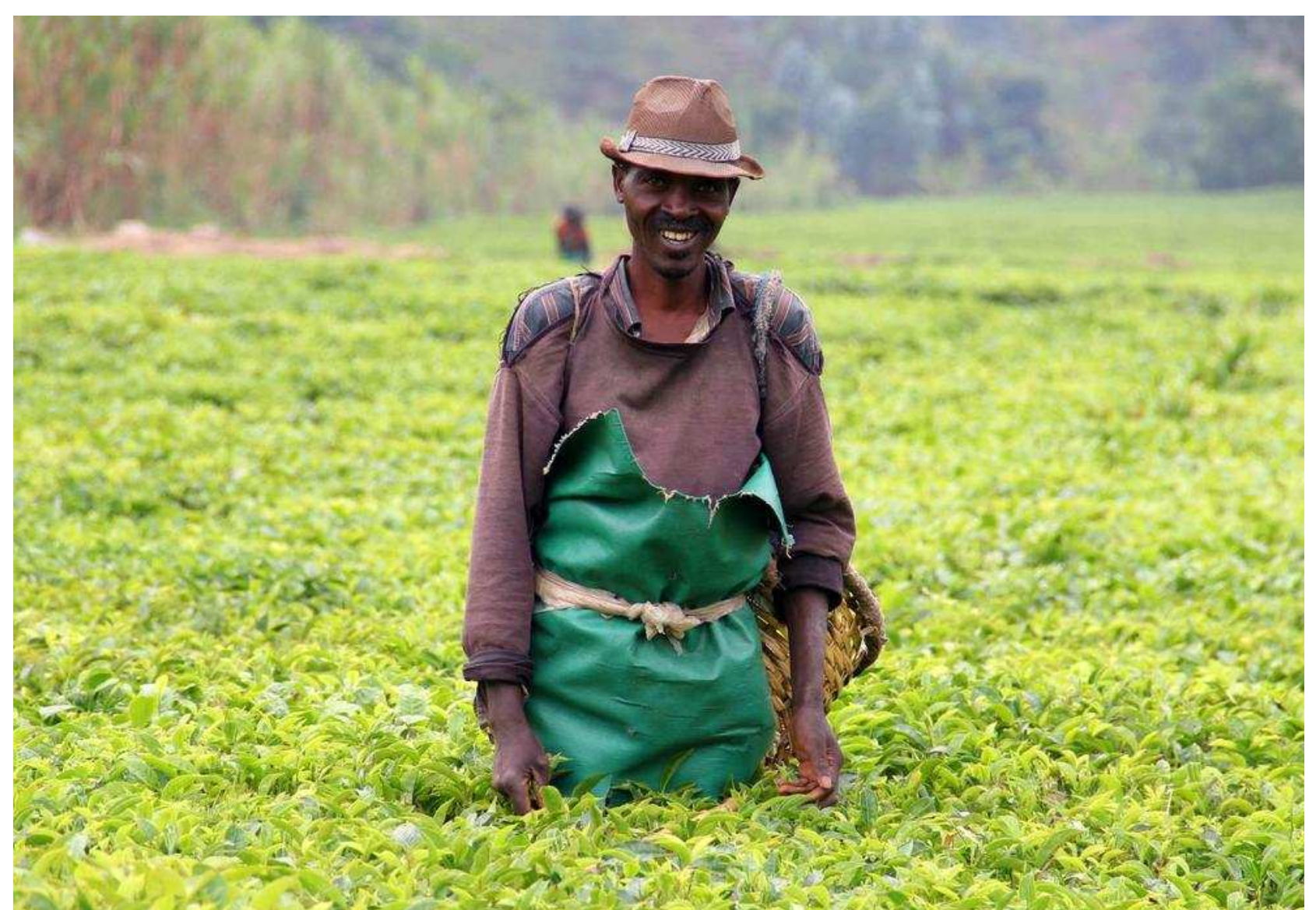
The Congo Nile Trail is without a doubt one of the most interesting trails in Africa. The trail can be completed on foot, by bike or by kayak. The trail traverses a series of interconnected single paths, dirt roads and hiking tracks through the tropical Kivu Belt Region in Rwanda. As it stretches along the scenic shores of Lake Kivu, hikers on the Congo Nile Trail trekk by some of Africa's few remaining tropical rainforests, vast coffee plantations and hidden beaches.

This Congo Nile Trail is scattered with unexplored experiences, often hosted by locals along the trail. For those looking for a genuine, yet safe African hiking or biking experience away from the beaten path, Rwanda's Congo Nile Trail is a hiking trail waiting for you to challenge her on foot, by bike or by kayak and is one of the most iconic hiking trails in Africa.

As it stretches along the scenic shores of Lake Kivu, hikers on the Congo Nile Trail trekk by some of Africa's few remaining tropical rainforests, vast coffee plantations and hidden beaches.

The Congo Nile Trail, the name is as exotic as it is confusing. As the name of an African hiking trail, the name makes you think of two completely different African locations. The name of the hiking trail comes from the fact that the hike passes along the mountain ridge of the African Congo-Nile Divide which divides the rainfall into two of Africa's largest rivers. All rainfall which falls to the west of the ridge trickles down and eventually ends up in the Congo River. All rainfalls which falls to the east of the ridge eventually ends up in the Nile River.

In the past years Africa and Rwanda has risen as one of the world's foremost upcoming ecotourism destinations. Even though Rwanda is mostly known for the Mountain Gorillas, the country has a lot more to offer than this. Known as the safest and cleanest country in Africa, it's thousands of rolling hills and a nice and welcoming people it has made itself known as of the best African countries for outdoor activities. Located in Eastern Africa, the tropical climate along with the elevation gives Rwanda constant year-round pleasant temperatures of around 25°C (77°F). Since Congo Nile Trail runs along the shores of Lake Kivu, one of Africa's great lakes, the views are magnificent and the friendly smiles of the locals from the villages are sure to charm every visitor. The rolling Rwandan hills and winding roads, have in recent years seen the rise of the cycling team Team Africa Rising which have started to have international success and Rwanda has also applied to host the 2025 World Cycling Championships.



What to expect along the trail

Part of the Congo Nile Trail consists of dirt roads while other parts the trail consists of single tracks only accessible by hiking or with a mountain bike. Rwanda is known as one of the safest country in Africa. There is no crime to speak of in the country and you can feel safe to pitch a tent just about anywhere without having to worry about being robbed. Compared to other places you might go hiking in Africa, there is no large wildlife in Rwanda outside of the national parks. You do no have to worry about bumping in to heards of buffalo while hiking or biking the Congo Nile Trail.

The lack of wild animals also goes for Lake Kivu. Many other African Lakes are full of hippos and crocodiles making them unsiutable for swimming and sometimes even the shoreline is not safe to approach. There are no dangerous animals in Lake Kivu and you can feel safe to refresh on one of the lake’s beaches after a days hiking or biking the trail.

People in Rwanda are very friendly and Rwandans are known to be more calm and timid compared to other countries in Africa. As a visitor to rural Rwanda you will stand out. For many people, seeing a foreigner is something exciting, so be prepared for many people to be curious about you, want to talk to you and great you. You will never be treated in a bad way, but in some places where you stop you might have a crowd nearby who are curious about what you are doing.

The language barrier in rural Rwanda is quite strong and most people except for staff at hotels speak only Kinyarwanda and a few words of English, French or Swahili. Despite the language barrier, people will often go out of their way to help you in case you are lost or if there is a problem.



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A Complete Guide to the Congo Nile Trail

Activities along the trail



While hiking or biking the Congo Nile Trail through the rolling hills, you will pass different plantations and villages. Rwanda is a large producer of both coffee and tea both of which you will see plenty of along the Congo Nile Trail. To learn more about coffee production, COOPROCACI Coffee Cooperative has a great coffee tour and both Rushel Kivu Lodge and Kinunu Guest House organizes coffee tours at the nearby plantation and coffee washing stations. To learn more about tea production, Pfunda Tea Factory organizes a tea tour which includes picking tea and a look inside the nearby tea factor. One thing which amazes along the Congo Nile Trail are the banana plantations. Banana is the most abundantly grown crops along the trail and bananas are cooked and eaten in many different ways in Rwanda.

Unknown to many, The Kivu Belt produces some of the world's best coffee beans

Another common sight along the trail are the traditional beehives made from banana fibers. These traditional beehives can be found hung in trees along the trail and are normally harvested a couple of times a year. Local honey can be bought in many places. Many communities along the Congo Nile Trail organize honey harvesting tours.

Sorghum is a crop commonly used to make beer in Rwanda as is common throughout Africa. This traditional brew, commonly known as kigage is thick and nutritious. Kigage is normally drunk during traditional ceremonies and weddings in Rwanda. In a village just outside Karongi, a local village organizes a very special Sorghum-beer experience. During the experience, guests are invited to take part in a sorghum beer making tour. The tour includes the entire process of beer making, from seed to drink and involves planting, harvesting and fermenting the sorghum. The experience ends with tasting the finished kigage along with traditional food.

Many of the villages along the Congo Nile Trail have specialized in making of traditional crafts. Common crafts are various types of traditional pottery and different types of weaving. The making of crafts in the villages are often organized in the form of cooperatives who support and train each other and share profits. Most of these craft making cooperatives are happy to have visitors to join them in craft making or who come to purchase some of their crafts

Activities along the trail



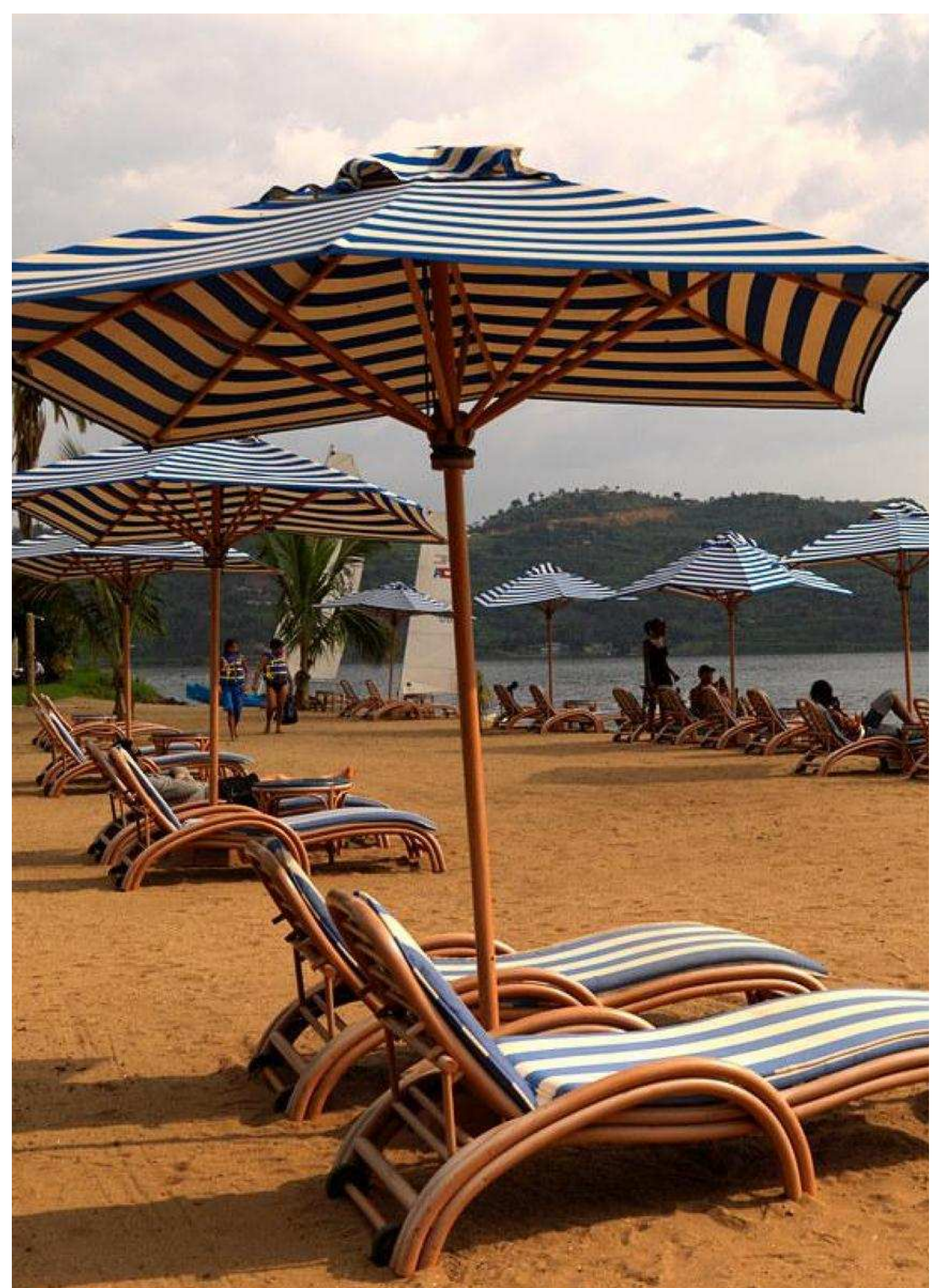
Nightfishing with Lake Kivu's singing fishermen gives a true insight into the lives of the people of the Kivu Belt

Nearby Gishwati Forest you will find a cooperative of women who weave baskets and other things. Young Women Destination in Rubavu is a cooperative of young women who meet every Saturday to make crafts which they sell in town. They are happy to have visitors join them in in craft making or one of their other traditional experiences.

Since you are close to the shores of Lake Kivu, a number of different activities will take you out on the lake. Most places where you stop close to the lake will offer boat trips. The best place for a boat trip is without a doubt Karongi which has numerous interesting islands to visit. The most interesting of the islands in Karongi is Napoleon Island which hosts a large colony of straw-colored fruit bats and a nice hike to the peak of the island with a splendid view of the surrounding archipelago.

One of the most unique experiences along the Congo Nile Trail is the Lake Kivu night fishing experience. The night fishing experience is an evening with the singing fishermen of Lake Kivu where you get to join the traditional fishermen as they spend the night fishing sambaza the same way as their ancestors have done for generations.

Since there are no hippos or crocodiles in Lake Kivu, many visitors will take the chance to swim in the lake. There are numerous beaches along the Congo Nile Trail where you can enjoy a dip after a long day on the trail.



National Parks along the Congo Nile Trail



The Congo Nile Trail passes on top of the mountain range which divides the Congo basin from the Nile Basin. This mountain range used to be covered in a unique montane rainforest which stretched from Congo to Burundi. This montane rainforest has generally been separated from the surrounding areas of similar habitats, causing many species to evolve separately. Many endemic species, which can only be found in this area evolved. Most of the forest has been cut down, but some large portions of this rainforest has been preserved as national parks. The Congo Nile Trail passes next to two of Rwanda's National Parks: Gishwati Mukura National Park and Nyungwe Forest National Park.

Gishwati, Mukura and Nyungwe Forests on the Congo Nile Divide are some of the oldest rainforests in Africa

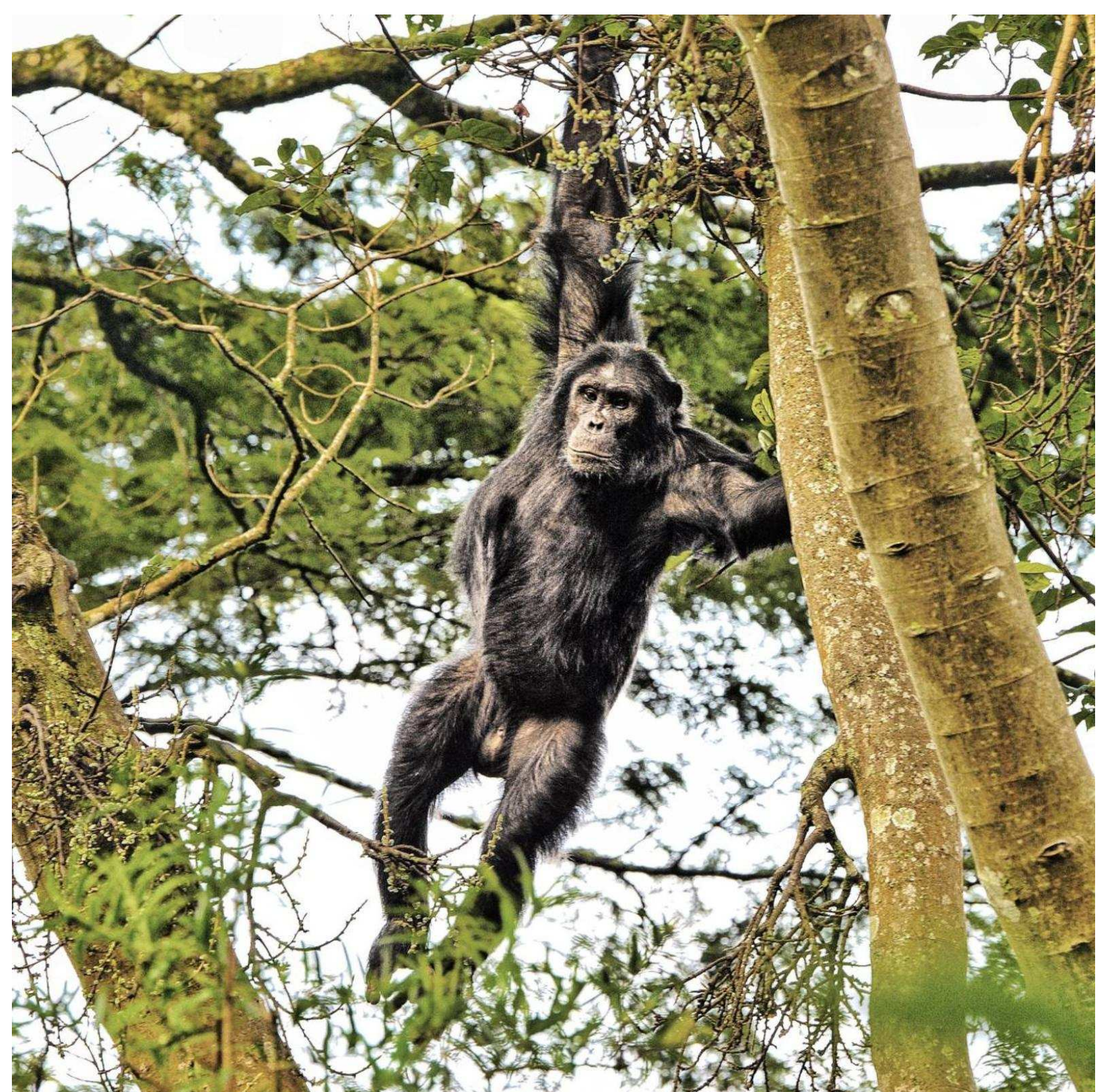
Nyungwe Forest National is a large area which contains some of Africa's oldest forests. It is full of hiking trails, waterfalls and has one of the world's largest population of the eastern chimpanzee. Gishwati Mukura National Park was recently made into a national park and is contains two separate pockets of rainforest. In Gishwati Forest a small population of chimpanzees can still be found and there are several hiking trails through the forest.

Apart from the chimpanzees, these forests contain another 12 species of primates, more than 300 species of birds, 30 of which are endemic, and several other large mammals including serval cats and jackals. There are also many exotic butterflies as well as endemic flowers and trees in these forests.

If you want to visit one of the national parks while on the Congo Nile trail it is possible to take a small detour and do so. A detour to the biking stage 3 of the Congo Nile Trail will take you past Mukura Forest. The 4th biking stage of the trail takes you to Giovu, which is very close to the northern part of Nyungwe Forest National Park. All park activities can be booked from the Gisovu Office located Gisovu Tea Estate. Be prepared that most of the activities start early in the morning and need to be pre-booked at least the day before.

Nyungwe National Park is best visited as a separate activity after the Congo Nile Trail and can easily be arranged with an operator from Rusizi or Kamembe. Most activities start early in the morning and require at least half a day to complete, so an overnight in or near the park is necessary. A good base

To do a proper hike through one of the national parks, chimpanzee trekking or other activities, you need to pre-book and organize this with a private tour operator, with RDB, or the the operator of the national park. Nyungwe is operated by African Parks and Gishwati Mukura is operated by Wilderness Safaris. All hiking inside the national parks require a guide and a permit. This can be bought at the park office or online in the online system Irembo.



Hiking The Congo Nile Trail

The Congo-Nile Hiking Trail is one of the most iconic hiking trails in Rwanda. The trail is popular with both cyclists and hikers, but there are two separate trails, one for hiking and one for biking. The hiking trail traverses rain forests, bracken fields and bamboo forests. The entire Congo Nile Trail passes along the hills of Lake Kivu with magnificent views of Lake Kivu and the rolling Rwandan hills. The Congo Nile trail takes 10 days to complete on foot combined with two short boat rides. It is possible to hike each single section or the entire trail, which is the longest trail for hiking in Rwanda. The hiking trail follows mainly the footpaths of the local people and is a wonderful way to soak up daily Rwandan life in traditional villages, very close to nature and experience Rwanda up-close.

Hiking the Congo Nile trail is a one of the most iconic experiences on the African continent

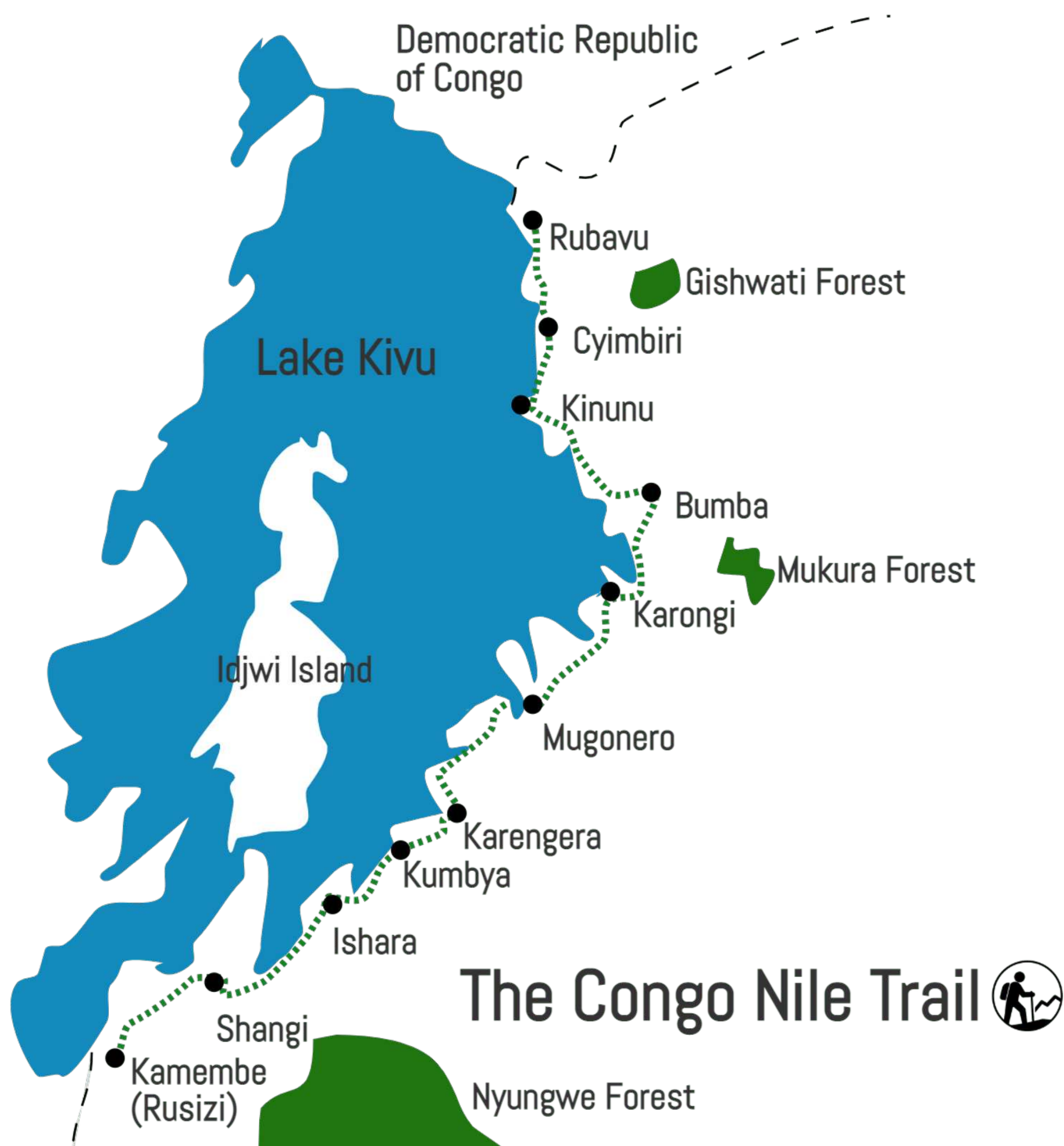
With interesting community-based tourism activities, coffee-washing stations, tea plantations, big towns, dozens of villages, and innumerable

-beaches, coves, waterfalls, valleys and vistas, the winding path of the Congo-Nile Hiking Trail offers some of the finest hiking in Rwanda and perhaps to be had anywhere in east and central Africa.

Winding its way along the fringes of the lake via the peaks of Rwanda's green hills, the Congo-Nile Trail as challenging as it is rewarding. With a peak elevation of 2,630m, like most hiking in Rwanda, it's a serious workout to boot.

There are camp sites along the trail or guest houses in the towns for those after a bit more comfort.

Refreshments are available along the route supplied by small shops. Active hikers can discover the coastal waters on kayaking tours and boat rides and visit the many islands of Lake Kivu. The Congo Nile Trail can be trekked from both directions (North to South/ South to North). Hikers are advised to book ahead for accommodation facilities and /or meals.



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Planning for the Congo Nile Trail



The Congo Nile Trail runs along the entire Kivu Belt Region in Rwanda. The towns of Rubavu, Karongi or Rusizi serve as good bases from where to start or end the Congo Nile Trail. These towns are easy to get to from Kigali by bus or your own car and offer everything you need in terms of service, food and accommodation. There are many bus companies with several daily departures from Kigali. The fastest and most reliable bus company who operate large, well maintained and modern buses is Ritco. Most buses depart from Nyabugogo Taxi Park in Kigali. Tickets can generally be bought in advance in the ticket offices at Nyabugogo but is often not needed and can also be bought by mobile money or cash directly on the bus.

The Congo Nile Trail normally starts in Rubavu and ends in Rusizi, but can be done in any direction. Plan for 10 days to hike or 5-8 days to bike the entire trail. There good options for shorter weekend trips or day hikes from one of the basecamps along the trail. Accommodation and food can be found at the end of each stage of the trail but should be pre-booked. Shops and other service like bike mechanics can be found in the villages along the trail. Do not expect supermarkets as food is generally bought at markets or in small street stals in Rwanda.

Located in the Albertine Rift Valley, The African Great Lakes Region is full of proof of past and present volcanic activity



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Hiking The
Congo Nile Trail

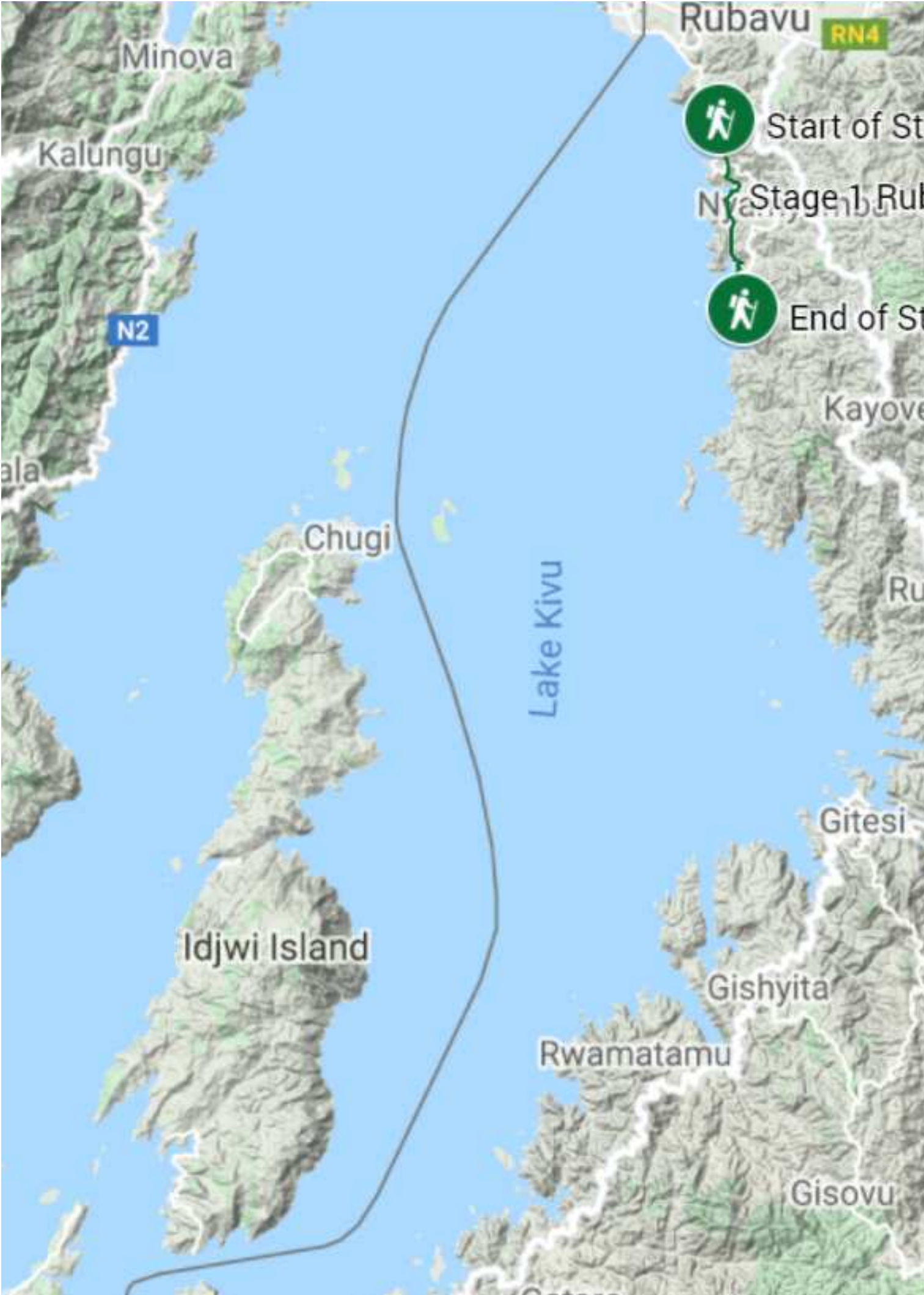
Good complements to this guide is the online guides at the Destination Kivu Belt website, www.kivubelt.travel where you will find a comprehensive hiking and biking guide for the Congo Nile Trail, include interactive maps which can be opened in Google Maps on a mobile device and used on the trail.

Stage 1, Rubavu - Cyimbiri

Starting point: BRALIRWA Brewery
Duration: 5 hours
Length: 16.5 km

The 16.5 km stage of the Congo Nile Trail starts from Rubavu, the largest beach town of Rwanda. The town has a range of accommodations from budget guest houses to four-star accommodation. Stage one ends at Cyimbiri Guest House located on the shores of Lake Kivu and surrounded mainly by coffee estates and other green plantations. In the middle of this stage, you can choose to do different community-based activities from traditional pottery, traditional healing and music to coffee and tea experiences.

Accommodation: Cyimbiri Guest House with possibility to camp or rent one of the apartments.

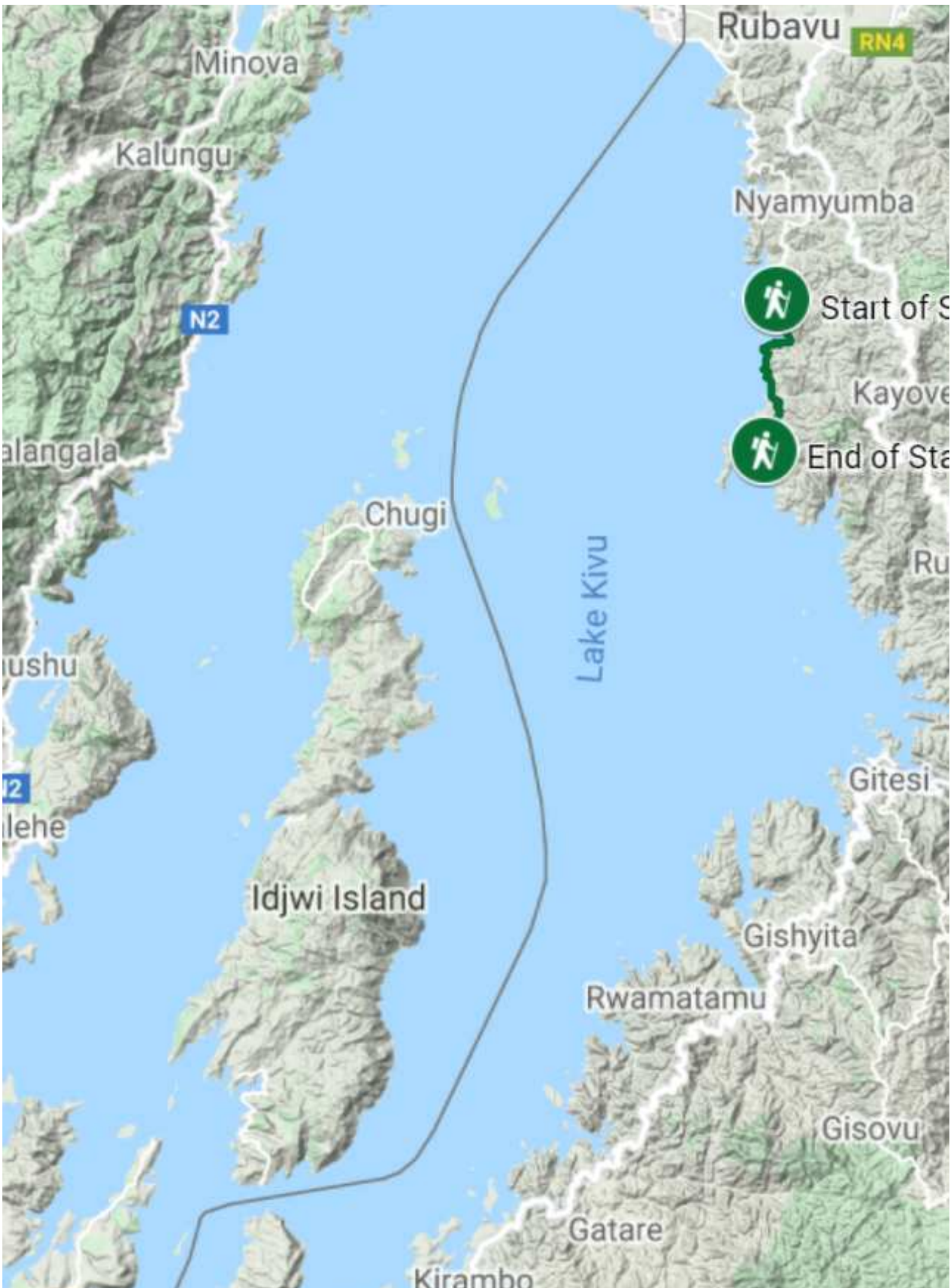


Stage 2, Cyimbiri - Kinunu

Starting point: Cyimbiri Guest House
Duration: 4 hours
Length: 13.4 km

The second stage of the Congo Nile Trail passes near or along Lake Kivu and offers some of the most varied hiking in Rwanda. The 13.4 from Cyimbiri to Kinunu passes through small villages and harbours. This stage of the Congo Nile Trail starts with the traditional healing trail and continues with the charming views of the amazing landscapes and coffee plantations of Kinunu. In the middle of this stage, hikers have opportunities to experience some community-based tourism products including the beekeeping experience, coffee experience as well as handcrafting experiences with a local women cooperative.

Accommodation: Kinunu Guest House or Rushel Kivu lodge



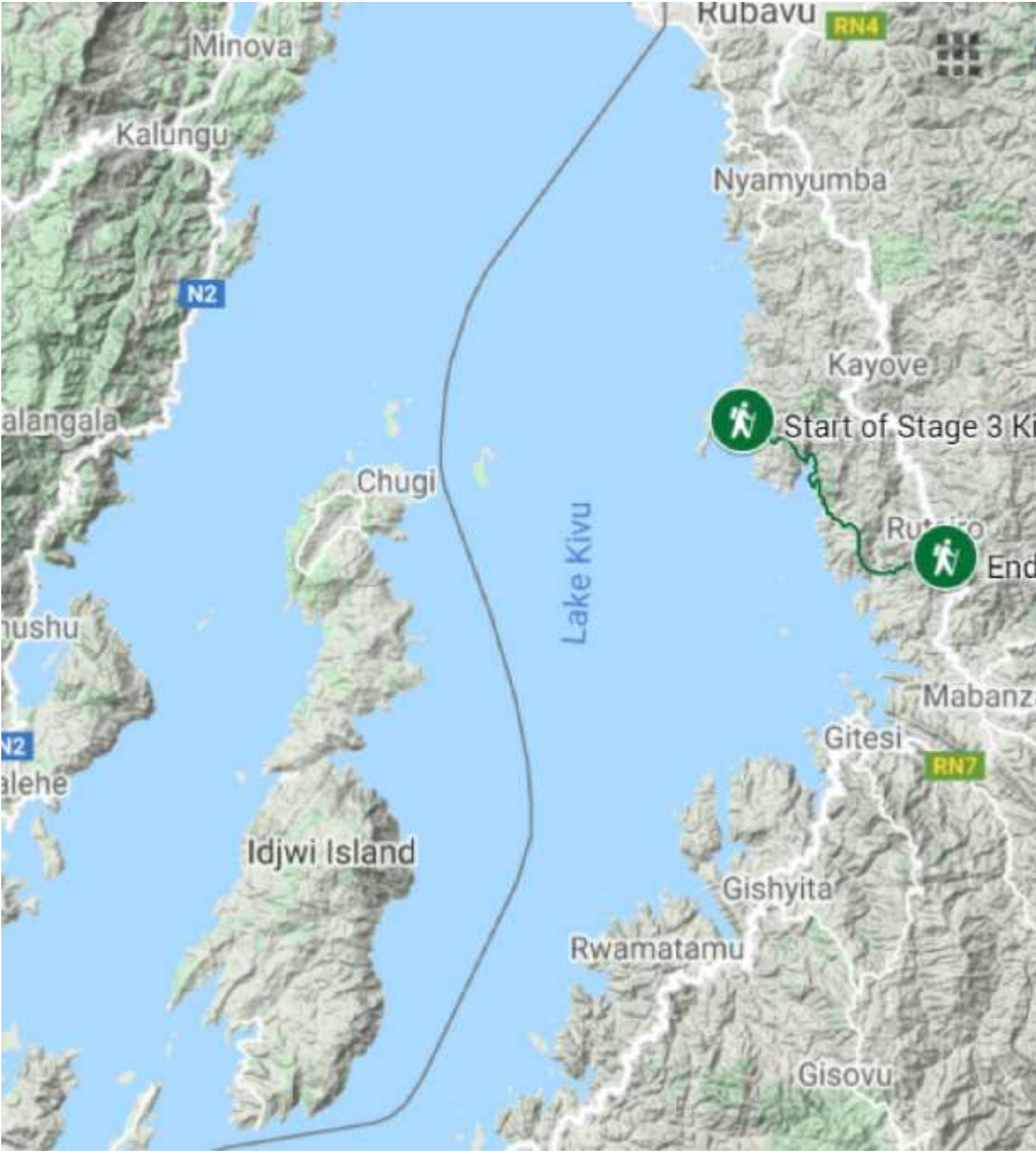
Hiking The Congo Nile Trail

Stage 3, Kinunu - Bumba

Starting point: Kinunu Center
Duration: 7 hours
Length: 24 km

This challenging but walkable stage of the Congo Nile Trail gives hikers an opportunity to walk around rolling hills and have a great view of the clear water of the Lake Kivu with some of the best views of hiking in Rwanda. Different agro-tourism activities are available for those who prefer to spend some time with the local communities in their daily activities. The hiking trail is high above Lake Kivu providing amazing views of the lake and the Koko-River Valley. This stage of the Congo Nile Trail has has some steep and challenging hikes.

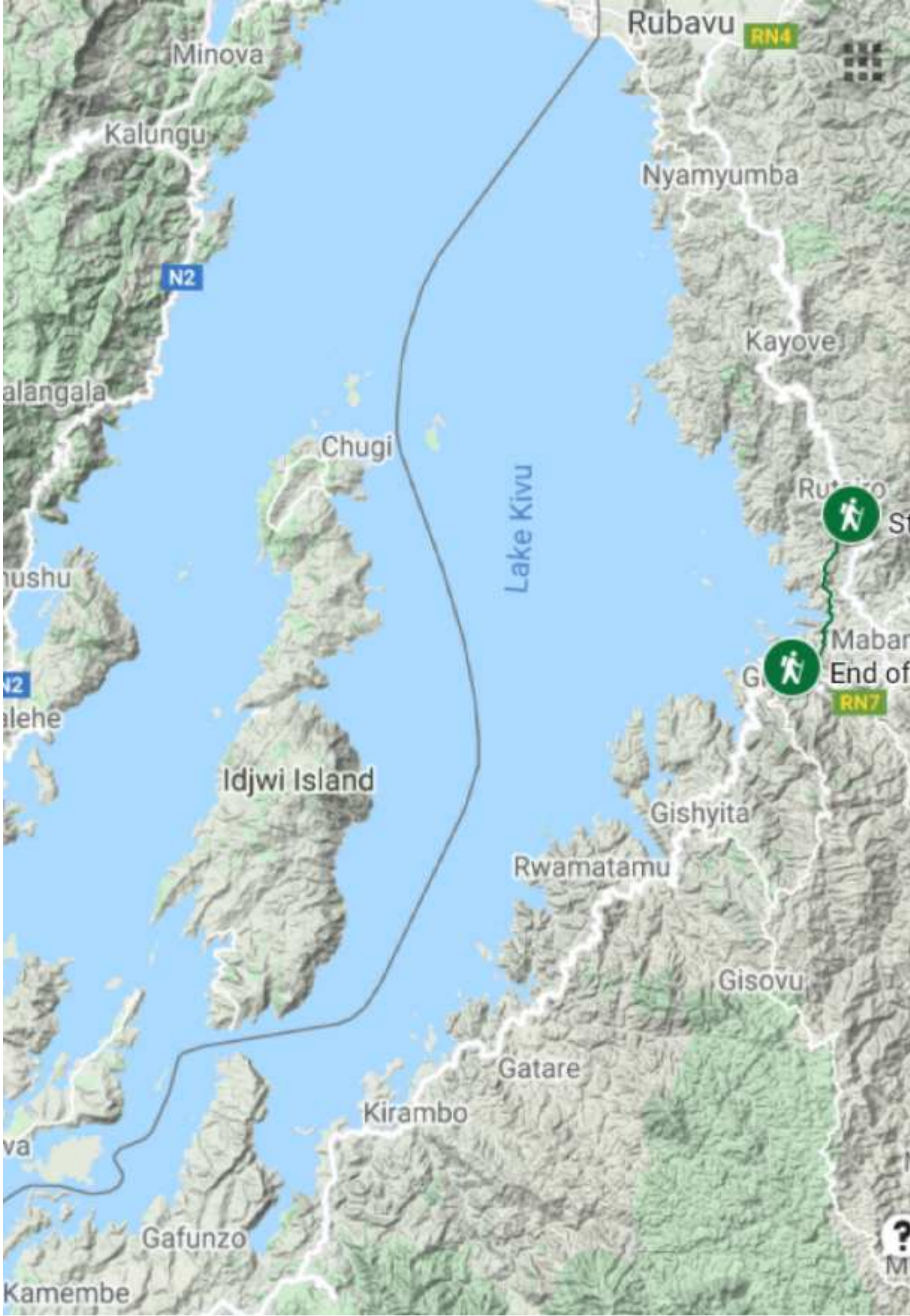
Accommodation: Bumba Base Camp or Dian Fossey Hotel Rutsiro



Stage 4 Bumba - Karongi

Starting point: Bumba Base Camp
Duration: 5 hours
Length: 15.9 km

This 15.9 km is the last stage of the northern part of the Congo-Nile Hiking Trail from Bumba to Karongi Town. Karongi is one of the most unique places for hiking in Rwanda as it has numerous of bays and islands. Before entering the calm town of Karongi, hikers take a short boat trip to Home Saint Jean, one of the many of accommodation options available in Karongi. One of the most iconic experiences in Rwanda is the Night Fishing Experience which we advise you to do during your stay in Karongi. There are also other community-based activities including the swimming cows, sorghum beer making and silkworms’ experiences as well as boat rides to different hilly islands available in Lake Kivu. Cross Muregeya-River on the suspension bridge, then follow small the footpaths of the local people up and down over some hills, down to the lake and up again. Pass banana forests and the rich diversity of landscapes. Observe! This stage requires a boat passage across the bay just before arriving at Home St. Jean which must be booked/announced in advance. Your local guide or the previous accommodation can help you book.
Accommodation: Karongi town offers different option for accommodation ranging from small guest houses to big hotels.



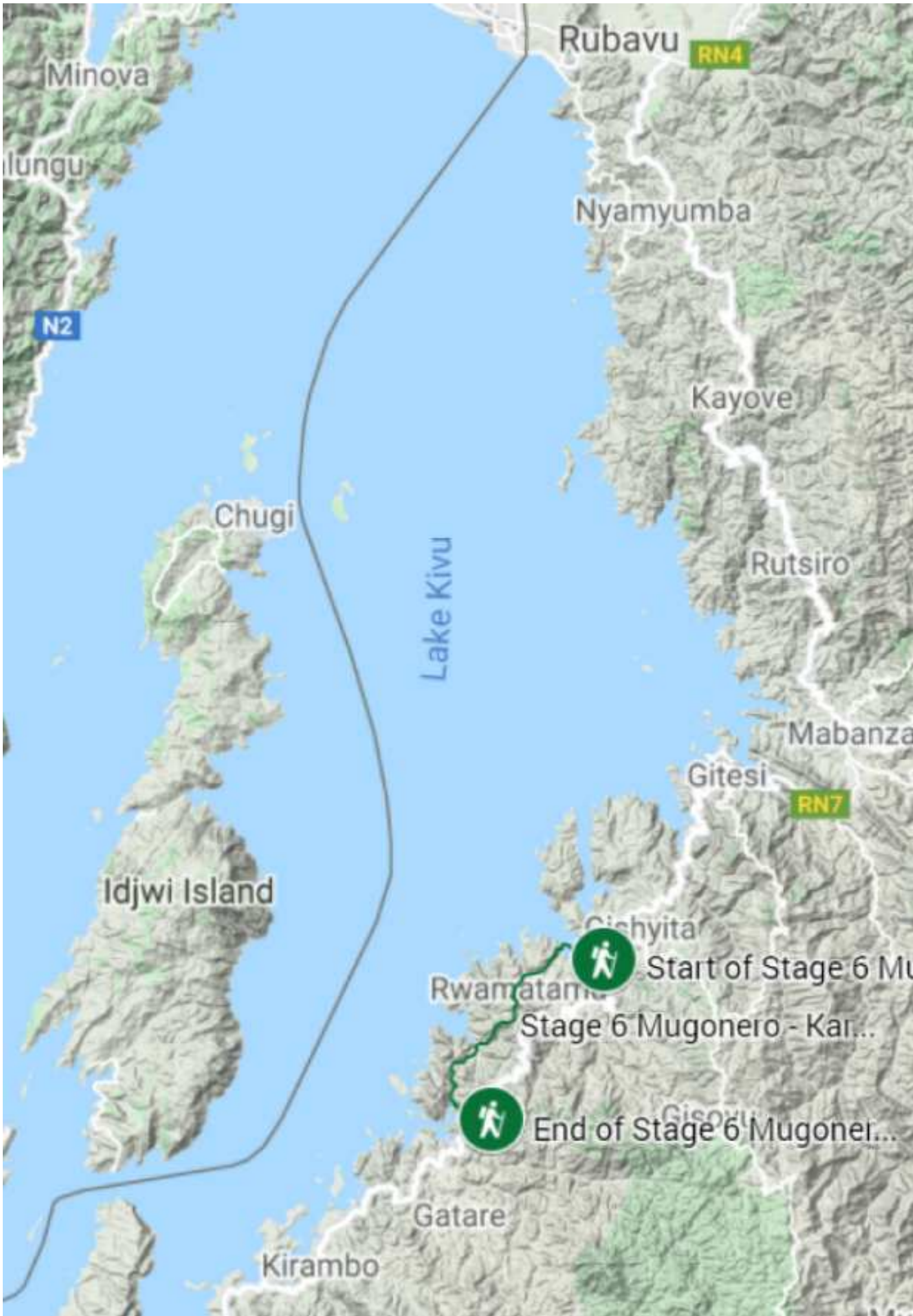
Hiking The Congo Nile Trail

Stage 5, Karongi – Mugonero

Starting point: Karongi Hospital roundabout
Duration: 6 hours
Length: 19.6 km

This 19.6 km stage of the Congo Nile Trail gives remarkable views of Lake Kivu and its beautiful islands. From this stretch of the Congo Nile Trail, you can see the fascinating Kivu Belt Road twisting on the shores of Lake Kivu a unique sight while hiking in Rwanda. The stage ends at Mugonero Orphanage, which also offers accommodation. For those who like to challenge themselves and want to extend their hiking in Rwanda for a few extra days, there is the possibility to make a detour and to hike up Mount Karongi to the Gisovu Tea plantations. This hiking trail continues up to Nyungwe National Park or you can re-join the Congo-Nile Hiking Trail the next day. Gisovu offers accommodation facility and tea experience in the middle of the tea plantations.

Accommodation: L' Esperance Orphanage Mugonero



Stage 6 Mugonero - Karengera

Starting point: L’Esperance Mugonero
Duration: 7 hours
Length: 22.5 km

This long but amazing stage of the Congo Nile Trail of 22.5 km offers you beautiful footpaths through hills, valleys and fields. There are several viewpoints to the Lake Kivu and the Kivu Belt road. The hike ends at Karengera High School. The start of this stage is a bit different than other hiking in Rwanda as it starts with a boat trip across Mugonero Bay, climb up small paths to a hill 1,800m high (350m above lake level) overlooking the lake, pass a valley with rice fields, follow a long and small valley framed by steep hills before climbing up through fields and small forests to Karengera. Observe! There is one boat passage across Mugonero Bay which must be booked/announced in advance. Your local guide or the previous accommodation can help you book.

Accommodation: Karengera High School

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Hiking The Congo Nile Trail

Stage 7 Karengera - Kumbya

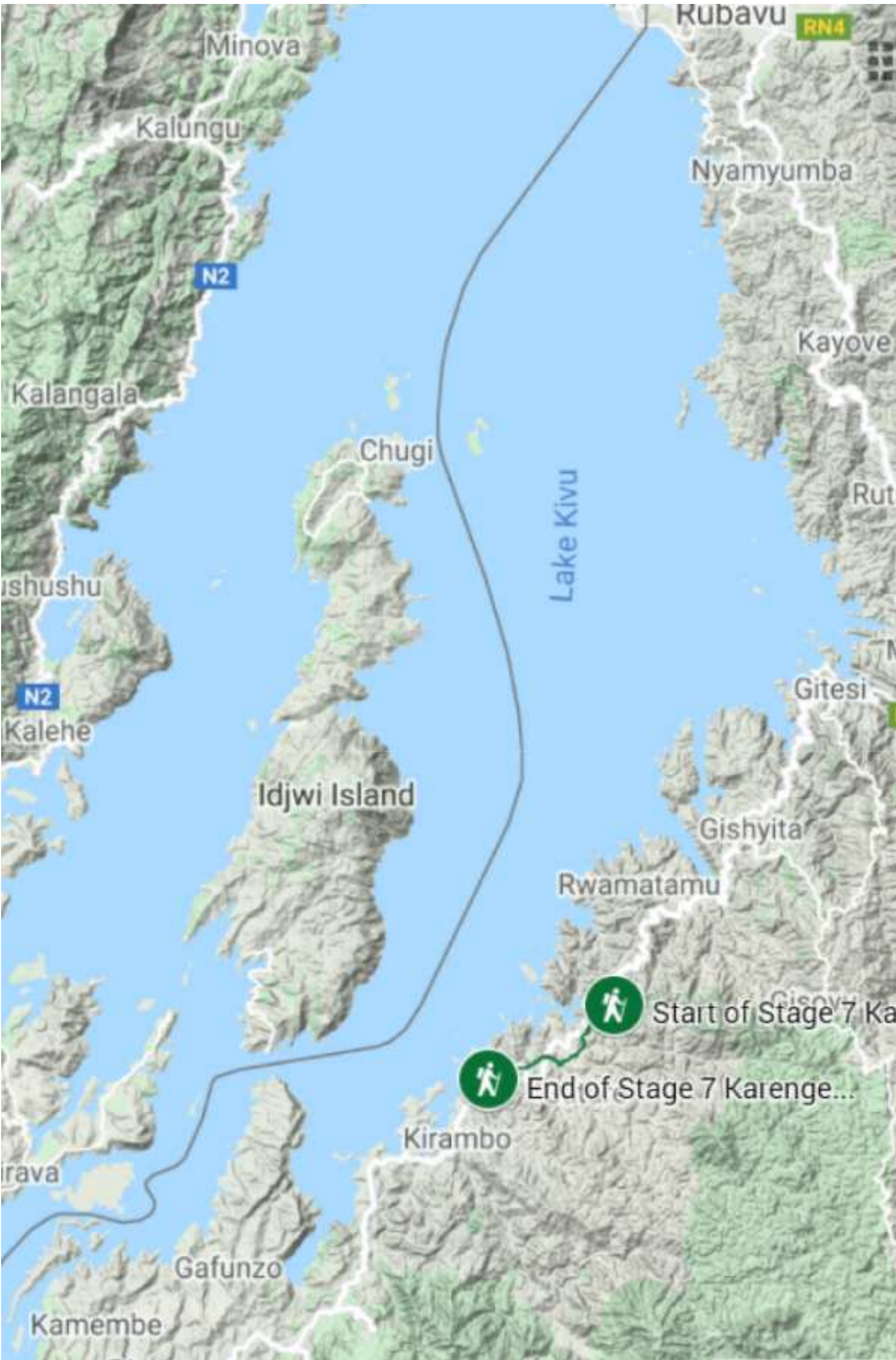
Starting point: Karengera High School

Duration: 4 hours

Length: 14.7 km

From Karengera, the 7th stage of the Congo Nile Trail of 14.7 km goes mainly through rice fields. This stage leads you to Kumbya, a hidden gem. This is one of the most serene of all hiking in Rwanda to the lovely, serene and peaceful retreat center on a little peninsula on Lake Kivu secluded away from the rest of Rwanda. This peninsula with a small forest of native trees is a birder’s paradise and offers two options for accommodation on the shores of the lake, either inside the retreat center or at the Kumbya Kivu Life Eco Lodge. Cross the rice fields of Kilimbi-River on small dams, jump over small ditches, watch the herons on the fields and the monkeys near Kumbya.

Accommodation: Kumbya Retreat Centre or Kumbya Kivu Life Eco lodge



Stage 8, Kumbya - Ishara

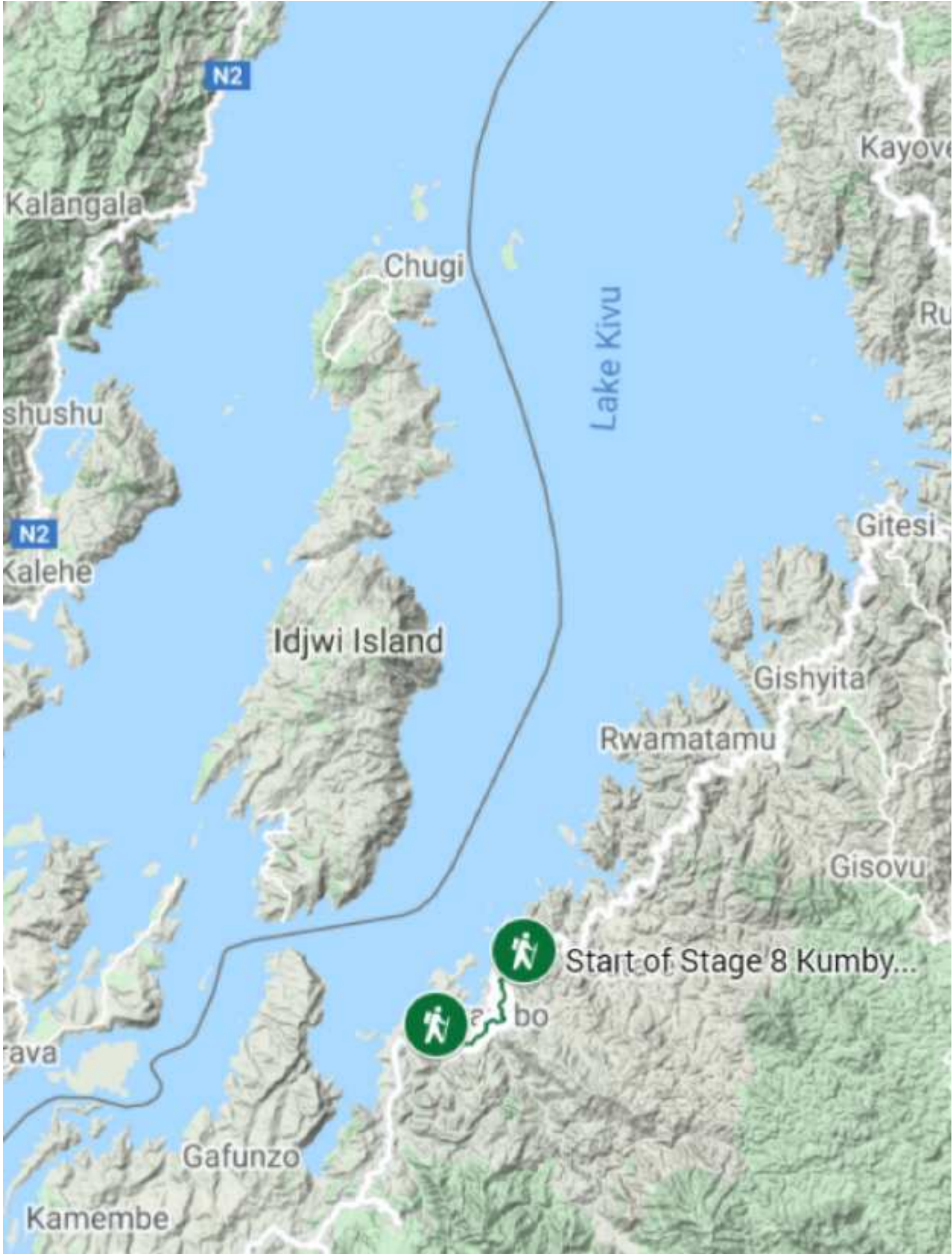
Starting point: Kumbya peninsula entrance

Duration: 3 hours

Length: 13 km

This 13 km of the Congo Nile Trail starts with a very beautiful footpath along the banks of the lake, continues through several villages where you come across charming smiles and greetings from the rural communities along the trail. The end of this stage is quite unique compared to other hiking in Rwanda as it ends with a walk through the rice fields of Kamiranzovu Valley. Ishara Beach Hotel in Nyamasheke is the main accommodation after this stage. However, one can choose to stay in other available guest houses in Nyamasheke. The trail follows the path on the shores of Karundura River.

Accommodation: Ishara Beach Hotel in Nyamasheke
Guest houses available in Nyamasheke Town



Hiking The Congo Nile Trail

Stage 9, Ishara - Shangi

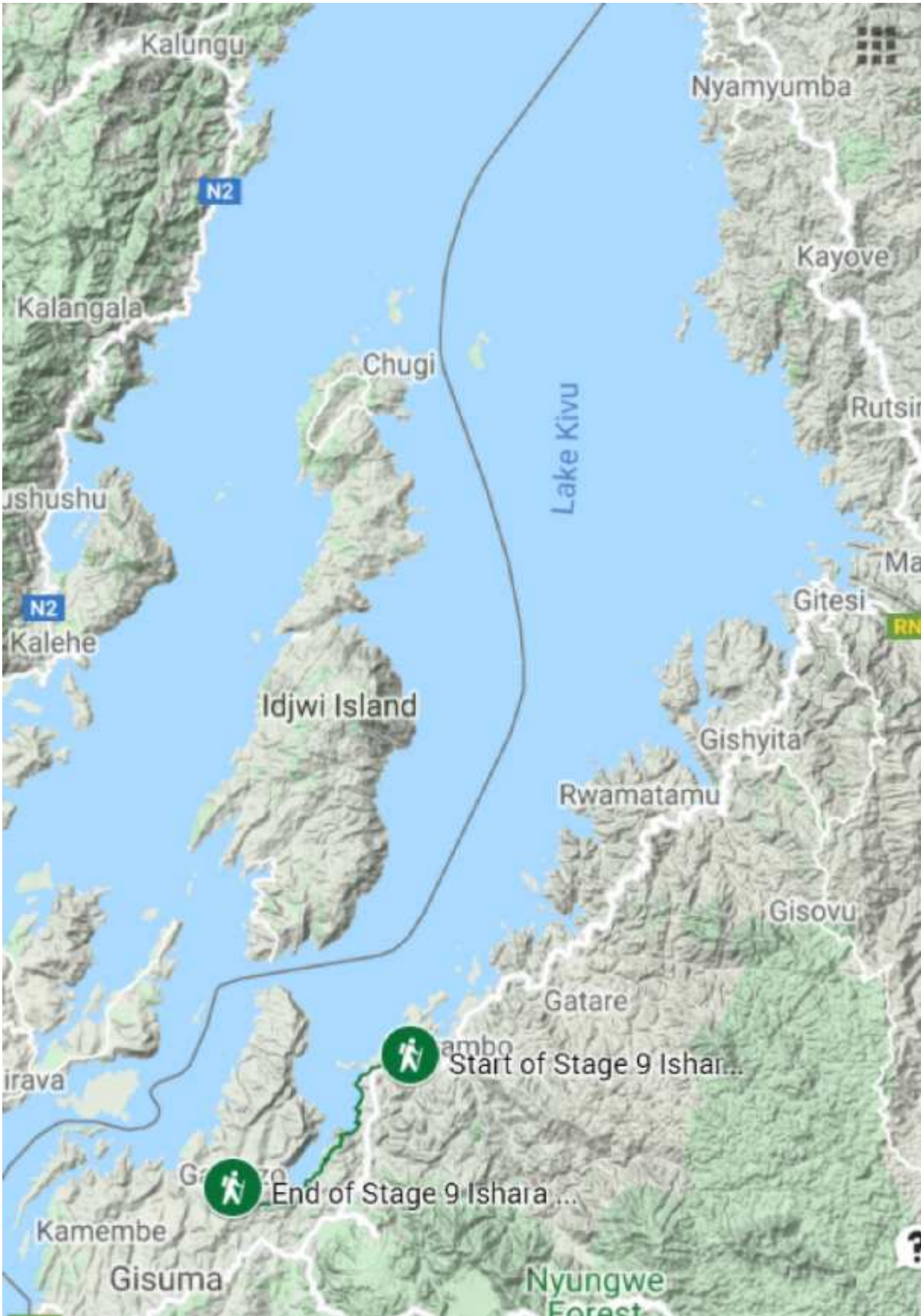
Starting point: Ishara Beach Hotel

Duration: 7 hours

Length: 24 km

Laying very close to Lake Kivu and surrounded by nature, this 24 km stage of the Congo Nile Trail is also a great trek through beautiful vegetations, including forests of eucalyptus trees. The stage of the Congo Nile Trail is mainly on narrow footpaths passing through villages and fields. This is one of the few trails for hiking in Rwanda which also offers astonishing lake views with long passages on the coastal path of Lake Kivu. The stage ends at Shangi Catholic Church where you can stay at St. Martin Parish in the priests ‘compound. In Shangi, you can visit one of the historical landmarks “Richard Kandt House”. For more info about this German explorer and first colonial governor of Rwanda, please download the Richard Kandt Trail App.

Accommodation: St. Martin Parish



Stage 10, Shangi - Kamembe

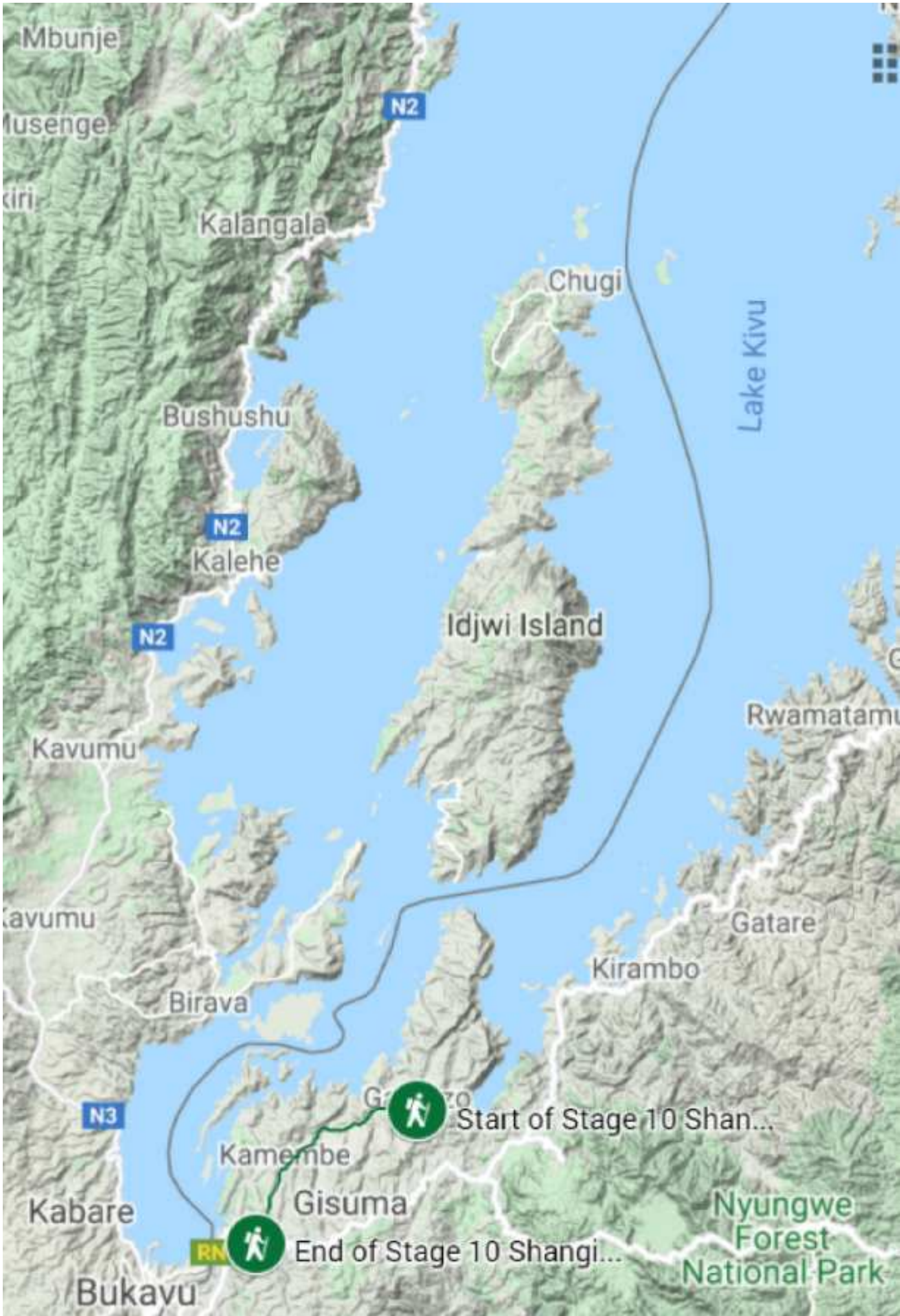
Starting point: Shangi Catholic Church

Duration: 5 hours

Length: 18.3 km

The last stage of the Congo Nile Trail stretches for 18.3 km from Shangi to Kamembe Town in Rusizi District. Rusizi is the largest town on the shores of the lake Kivu and only approximately an hour drive from Nyungwe National Park and home to Kamembe Airport, one of the two current operating Airports in Rwanda. The town offers different option for accommodation ranging from small guest houses to big hotels. There are many options for community-based tourism activities including night fishing, boat rides to the inhabited islands and other cultural experiences.

Accommodation: The town offers different option for accommodation ranging from small guest houses to big hotels.



Biking The Congo Nile Trail

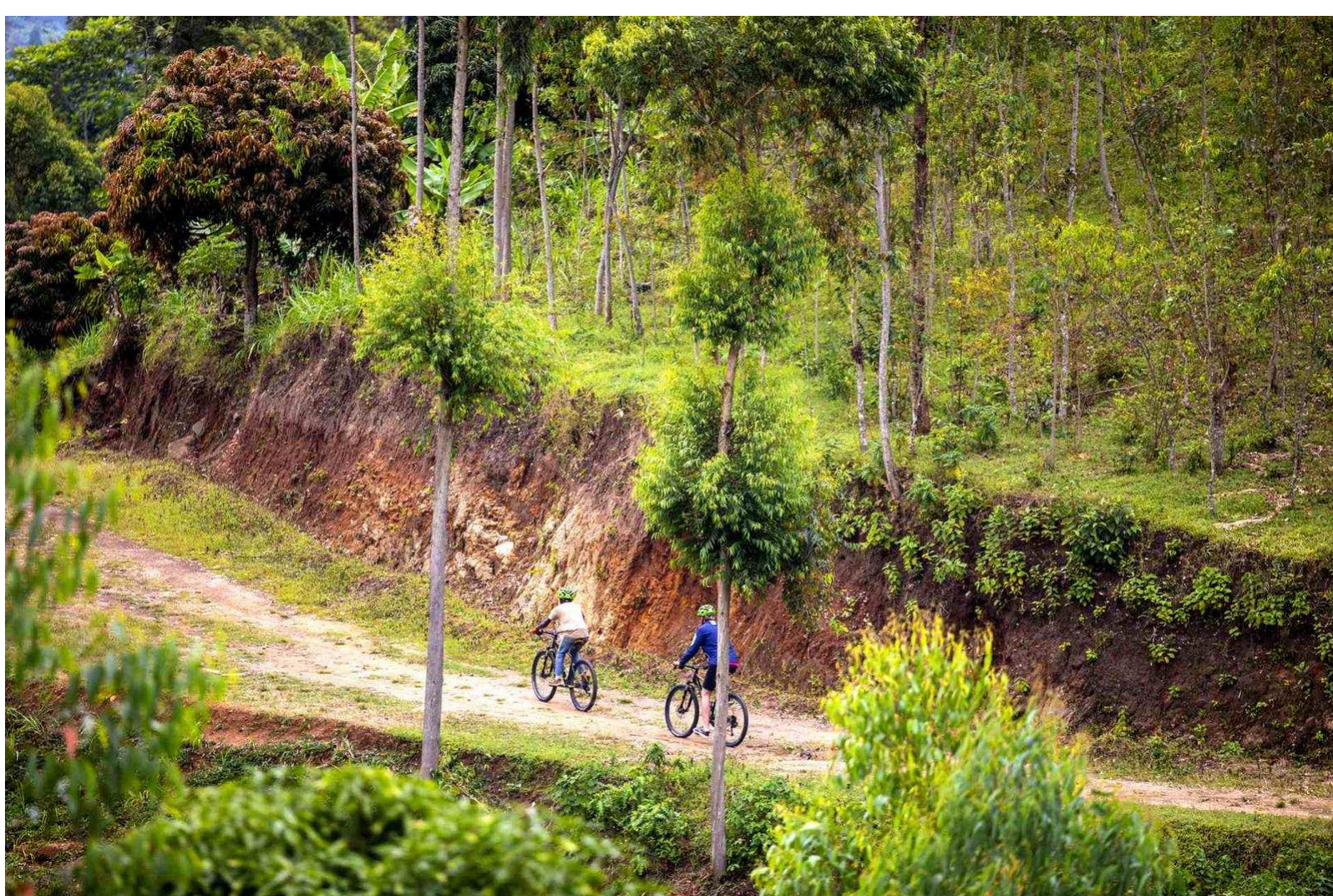
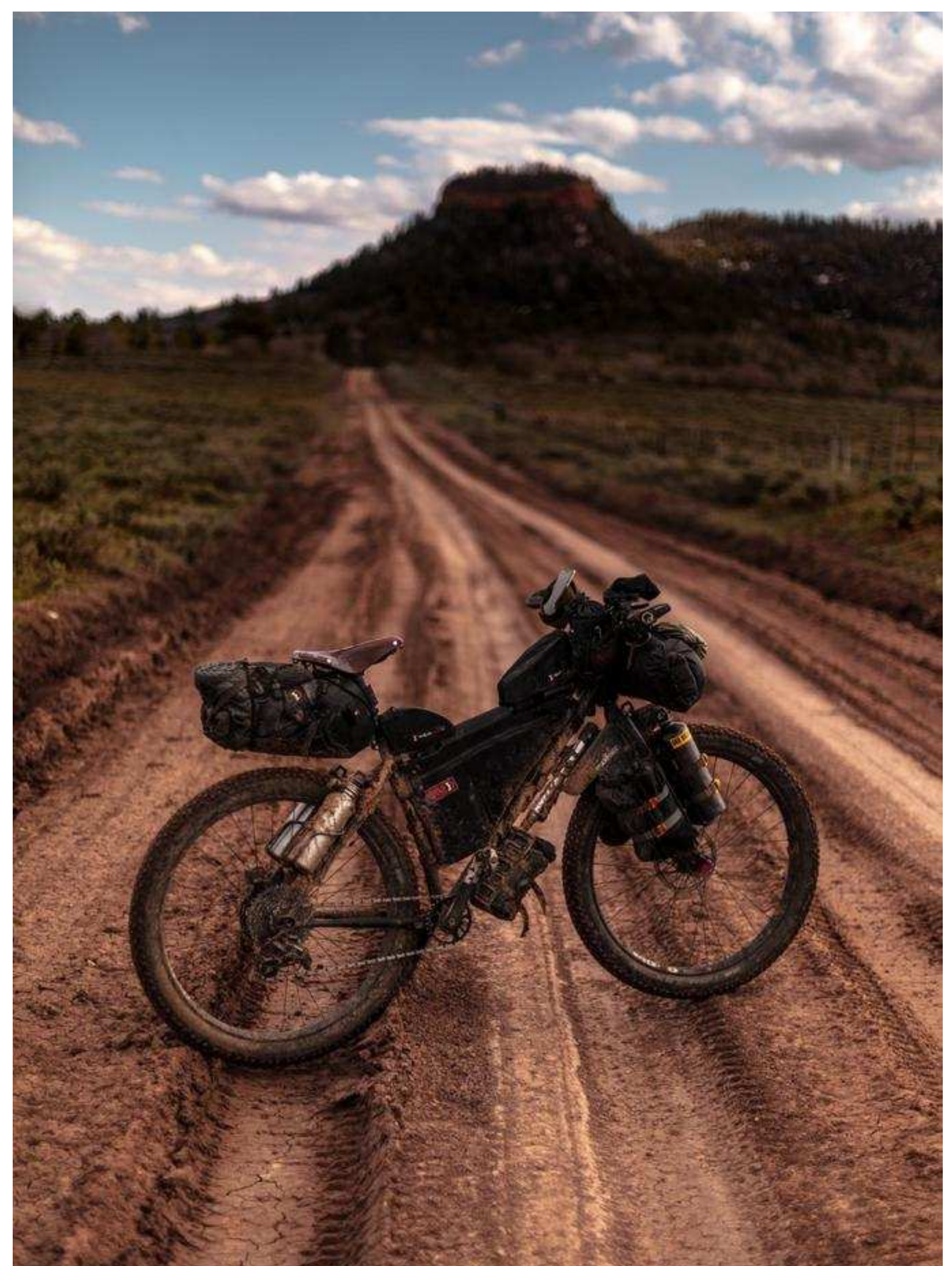


Any normally fit individual can complete the entire 280 kms of the Congo Nile Trail from Rubavu to Rusizi in 8 days on a bike at a leisurely pace without pushing themselves too much. Most people who bike the Congo Nile Trail will do so through a tour operator, but it is also possible to complete completely on your own with your own equipment.

Exploring Africa on a bike gives a totally different perspective from traditional safaris in a Land Rover

The 280-kilometer Congo Nile Trail from Rubavu to Rusizi lets you explore and discover the many delights of Rwanda's Western Province: Coffee, tea and banana, quiet natural beaches, and amazing views of the beautiful, often dramatic landscape. Along the way, you ride through rural villages, cooperatives invite you to visit community based projects and you get to know the three larger Rwandan towns on the shores of Lake Kivu.

Most of the trail runs on unpaved dirt roads or on thin single tracks. A good mountain bike is necessary to complete the track. Remember that Rwanda is known as the Land of a Thousand Hills for a reason and you will constantly be biking uphill or downhill. There are fully serviced accommodation options along the Congo Nile Trail and good camping facilities should you bring your own tent.



Biking The Congo Nile Trail

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Stage 1 Rubavu – Kinunu

Distance: 36.5km

Elevation:  ~1300m

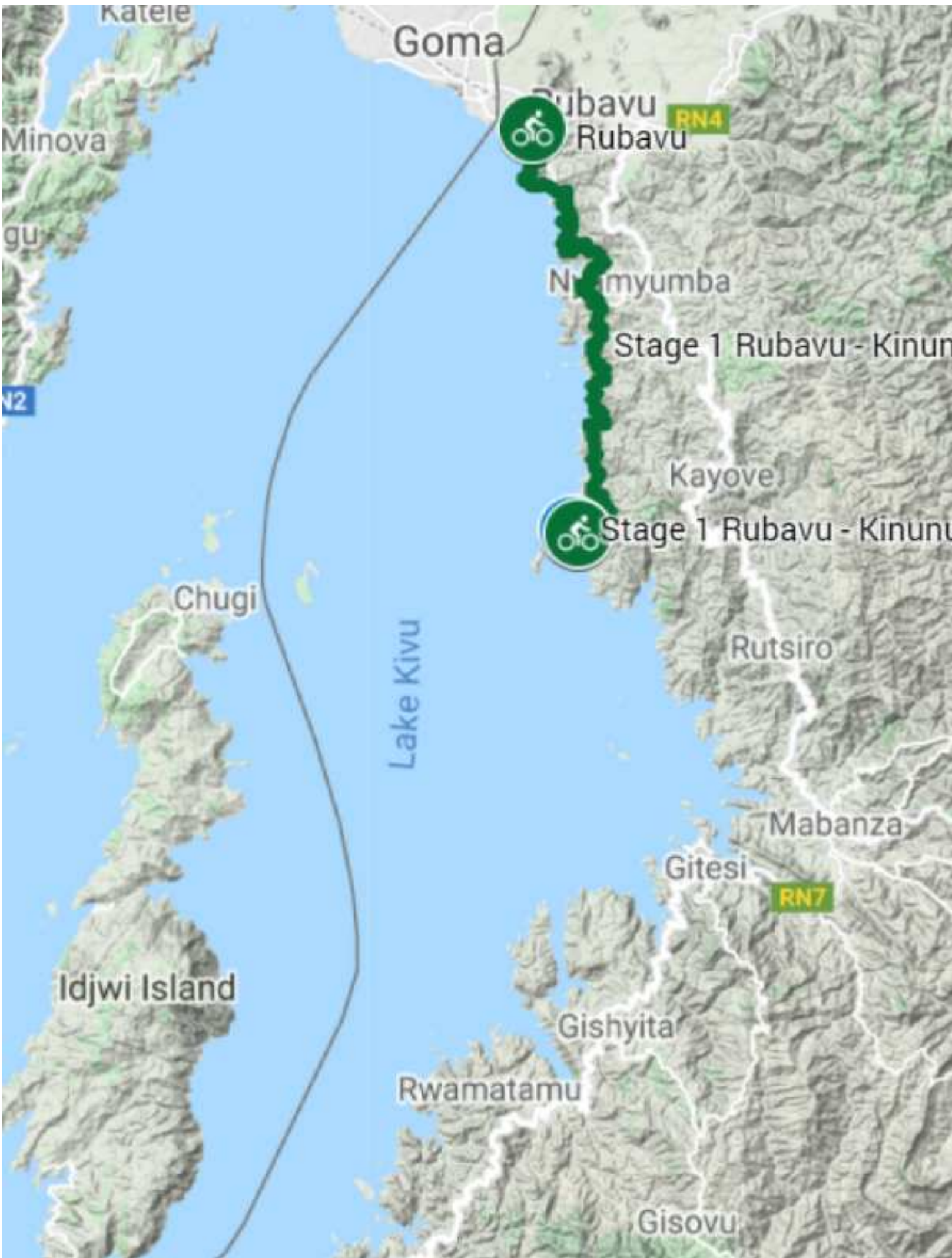
Effective Riding: 4h

This first stage begins some 7km south of Rubavu (formerly Gisenyi) in near the Braliwra Brewery. From the starting point after the Bralirwa Brewery, you ride overland to the agricultural village of Rwinyoni. Early birds enjoy the sunrise lighting up the lake shores.

The next village is Nkora Fishing Village where you may see fishermen returning from the traditional overnight fishing and children playing in the lake.

The trail then leads through coffee and banana plantations to Kinunu from where accommodation on the shores of Lake Kivu is available.

Accommodation: Kinunu Guest House or
Rushel Kivu lodge



Stage 2 Kinunu - Bumba

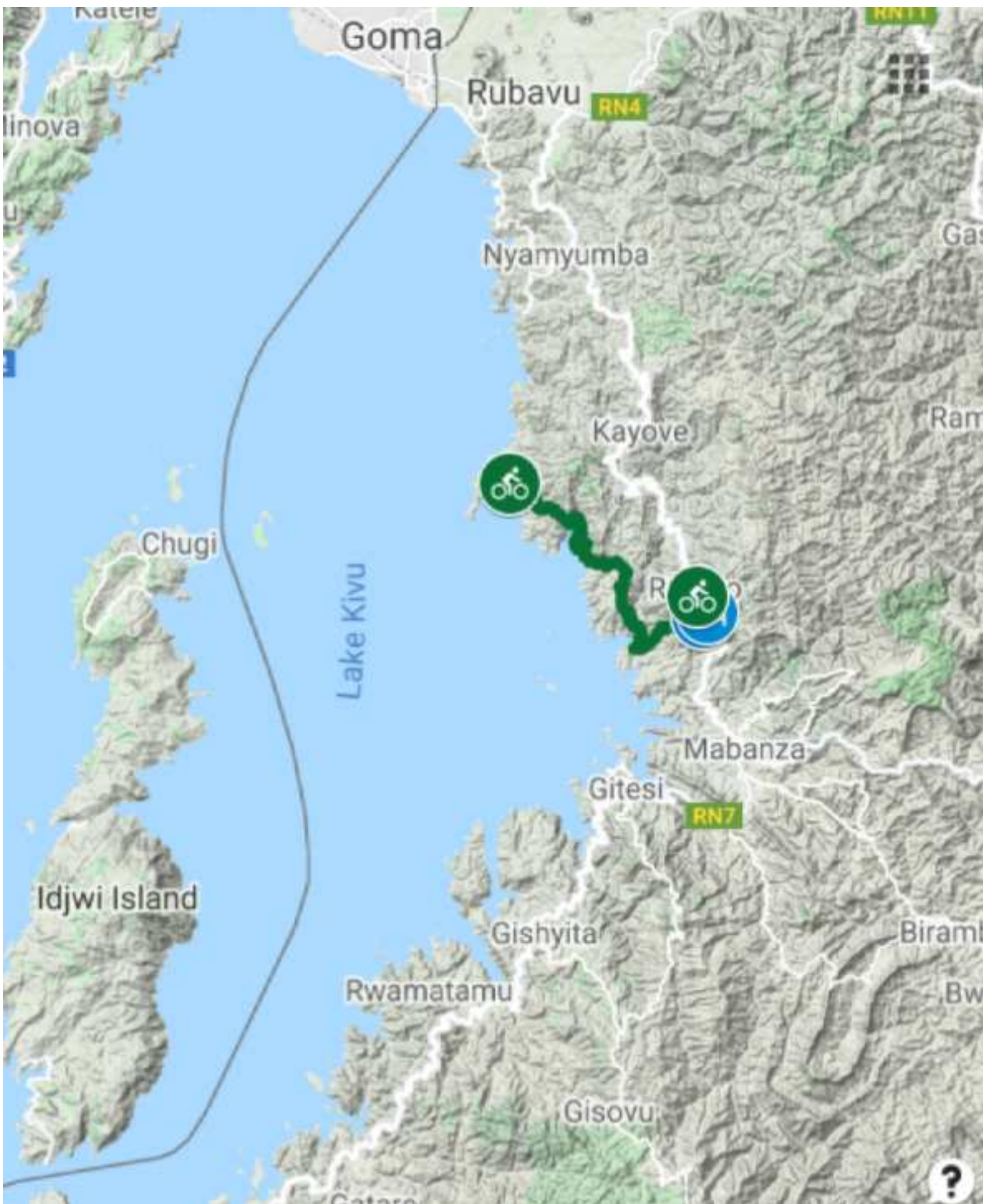
Distance: 28.5km

Elevation:  ~1250m

Effective Riding: 3h

A wonderful ride on the shores and hills above Lake Kivu, interacting with the local communities and enjoying the scenic views, you pass a coffee washing station before you reach Musasa where you can have lunch at Musasa Homestay which offers meals to bikers and hikers. Bike through the scenic Coko Valley renowned for its yams. In the valley the trail continues next to the Coko River. A steep climb on the far edge of the valley takes you up to Bumba and the Congo Nile Center makes you sweat as you conclude the day.

Accommodation: Bumba Base Camp or
Diane Fossey Hotel Rutsiro



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Biking The
Congo Nile Trail

Stage 3 Bumba – Karongi (Via Mukura Forest)

Distance 61.3km

Elevation: 📈 ~1700m,

Effective Riding : 7h

This is the more challenging stage between Bumba and Karongi as it passes uphill all the way to Mukura Forest. An early departure is highly recommended as the stage is long. At the beginning of your ride – while still fresh – visit Mary Mother of the Poor, the impressive church whose bishop Aloys Bigirumwami is also a pioneer and writer on the Congo Nile Divide.

From the Carvary hill of the Parish, a dirt road takes you on a climb through the tea plantations of the Rutsiro Tea Company. At the turn-off to the tea factory, you have already reached an elevation of almost 2450 m.

A series of descents to cross rivers, and ascents to climb out of the deep valleys, makes you reach the Continental Divide which gives the Congo Nile Trail its name. At an elevation of 2600 m you have a wonderful view of the valleys to the east which drain into the Nile River and those to the West which drain into the Congo River

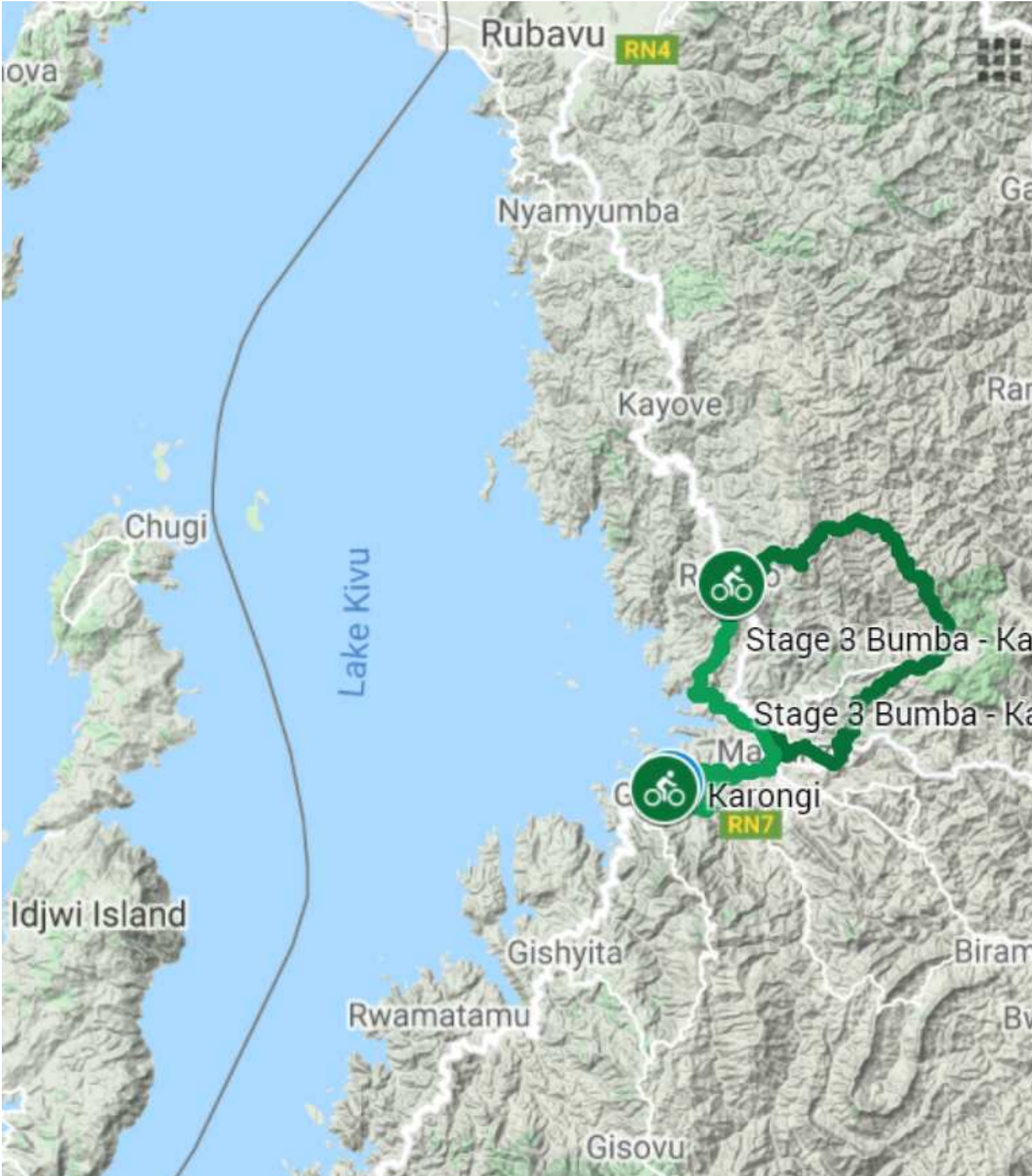
Straddling the Divide is Mukura Forest, a part of the new, Gishwati-Mukura National Park. A long descent through Mukura Center and past the Ntaruko Waterfall makes you reach the Muhanga-Karongi main road in Rwimpiri.

Rather than descending on the main road, the trail takes you through the irrigated lands of the Kwiperu community to Rubengera and – for some 2 km on tarmac – to Ryanyirakabano Center.

Turn sharp left to join the alternative trail coming from Sure for the final 16 kilometers to Karongi.

Head towards Kibirizi, a small town with a large market and shops. From there, the trail descends to cross Musogoro River and climb along the northern flanks of the impressive Sakinnyaga mountain chain to reach Matyazo Center. Lake Kivu welcomes you as you ride around the tip of Sakinnyaga. A 5km ride on the main road brings you to Karongi town – still referenced mostly by its old name Kibuye.

Accommodation: Karongi town offers different option for accommodation ranging from small guest houses to big hotels.



Stage 3 Bumba – Karongi (Via Sure)

Distance 31.2km

Elevation: 📈 ~800m

Effective Riding: 3.5h

This is the less demanding route to Karongi from Bumba. This stage of the Congo Nile Trail this beautiful alternative makes up for by-passing the Congo Nile Divide by bringing you much closer to the farming communities.

Descend to Sure on a different track than the one you used on the prvious day to climb to Bumba. Continue through banana plantations to the sandy valley of Musaho.

Cross Muregeya River on a suspension bridge and climb gently out of the Valley up to the main road at Ryanyirakabano.

Bend right to join the main trail coming down from the Congo Nile Divide and Mukura Forest for the final 16 kilometers to Karongi.

Head towards Kibirizi, a small town with a large market and shops. From there, the trail descends to cross Musogoro River and climb along the northern flanks of the impressive Sakinnyaga mountain chain to reach Matyazo Center.

Lake Kivu welcomes you as you ride around the tip of Sakinnyaga. A 5km ride on the main road brings you to Karongi town – still referenced mostly by its old name Kibuye.

Accommodation: Karongi town offers different option for accommodation ranging from small guest houses to big hotels.

Biking The Congo Nile Trail

Stage 4 Karongi (Kibuye) - Gisovu

Distance: 29.5km

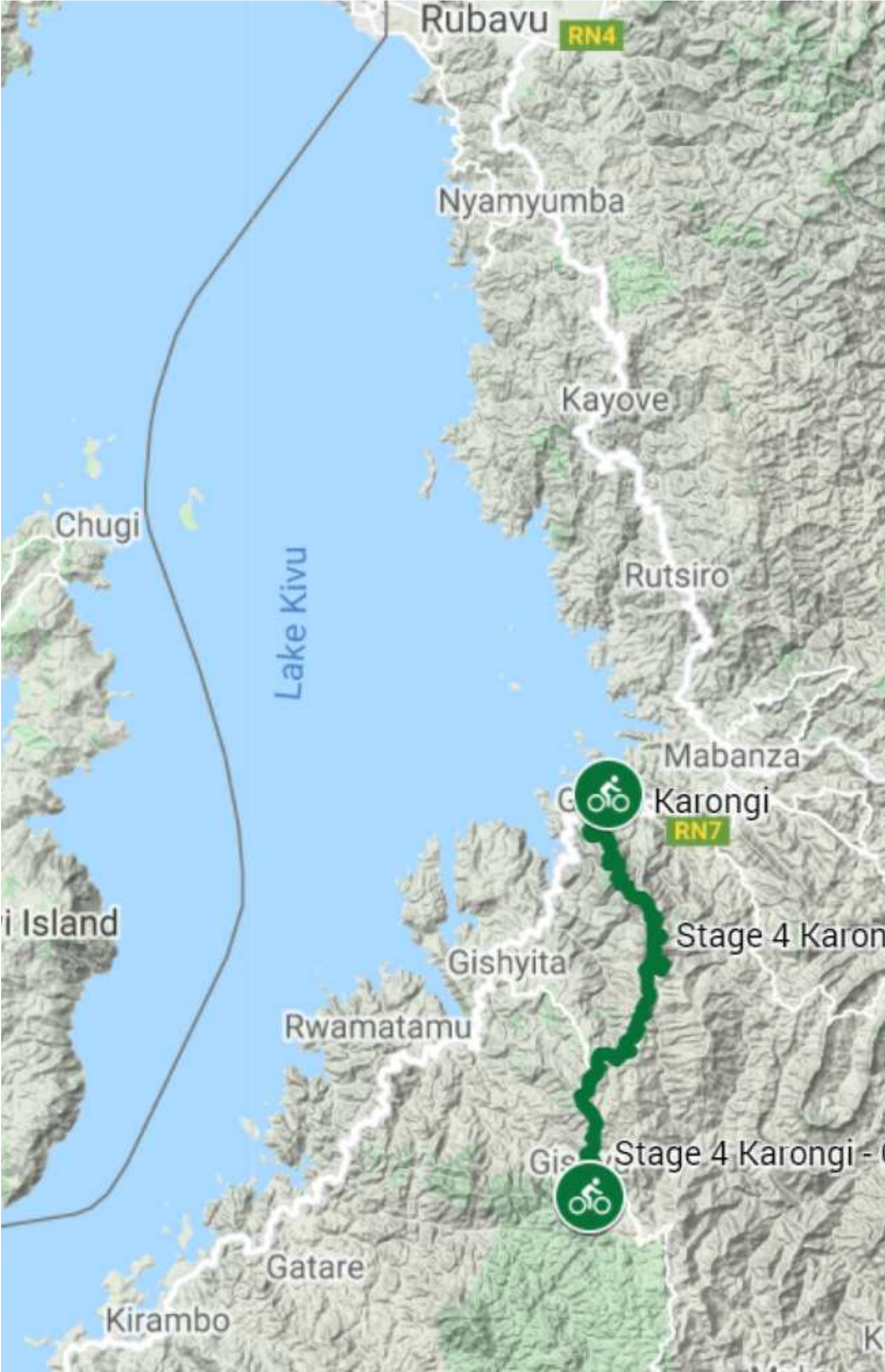
Elevation:  ~ 1375m

Effective Riding: 4-5h

Start at the roundabout in Karongi Town for the longest continuous ascent of the entire trail. See beautiful Lake Kivu behind as you climb on the dirt road. Tea plantations and fresh breezes announce you are getting close to the end of the climb on top of Mount Karongi. Bearing right through alternating rocky descents and slit ascents the trail carries you into the heart Gisovu, one of the most famous and largest tea estates in Rwanda.

Accommodation is available some 6-9km further towards the Source of the Nile. Set in a serene paradise of tea and with sunbirds fluttering in the crisp atmosphere, the Guest House of the Gisovu Tea Eactory receives visitors for an unforgettable stay while the guest house of the Catholic Church in Twumba has rooms for budget-minded riders.

Accommodation: Gisovu Tea Eactory or Twumba Catholic Church



Stage 5 Gisovu – Mugonero

Distance: 11.5km

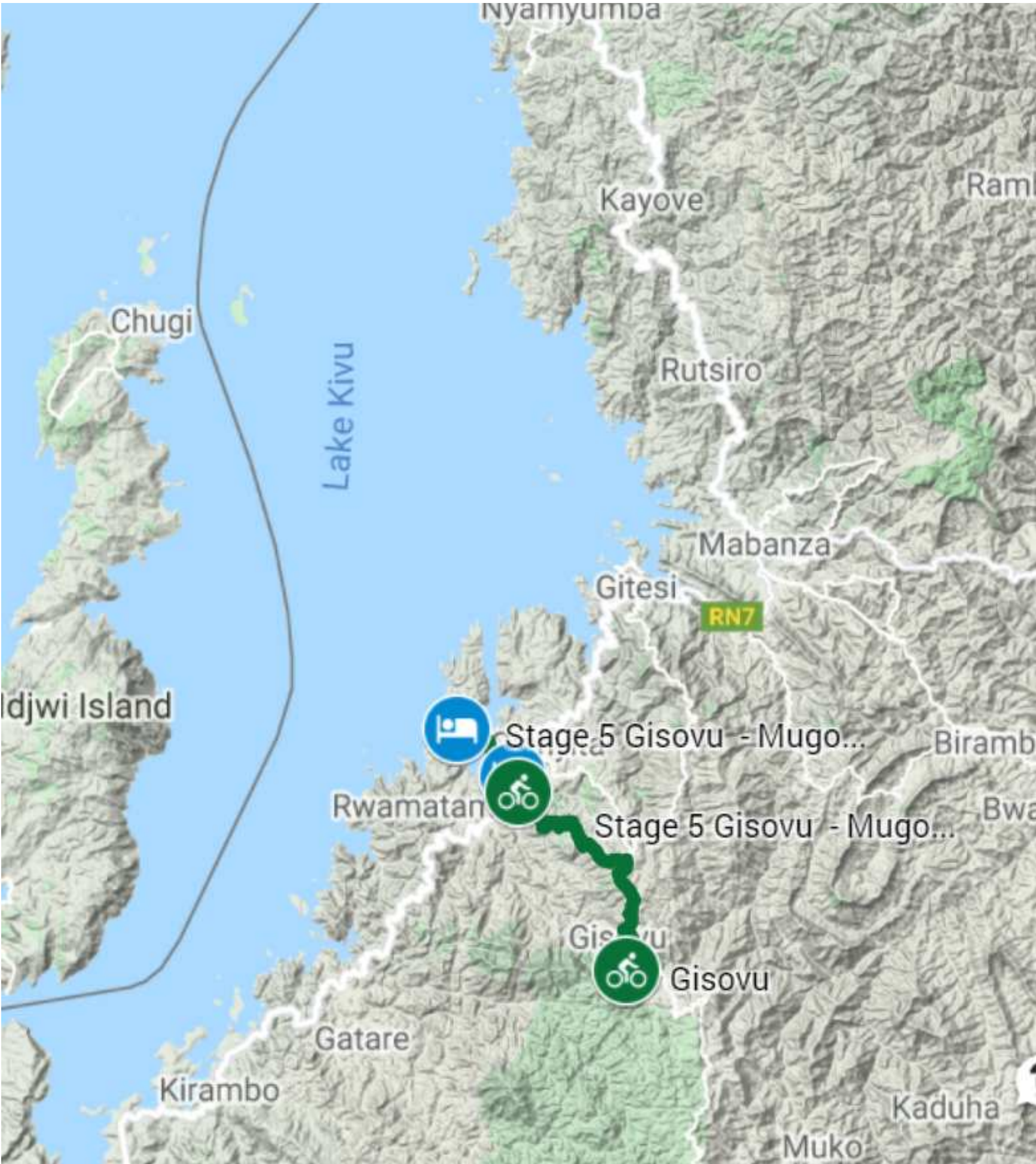
Elevation:  ~675m ( ~100m)

Effective Riding: 1h

After four days with much climbing, the 5th day is 95% downhill. Enjoy the long descent to Mugonero through forests and community farms. Refreshing winds blow from Lake Kivu and shade is provided by eucalyptus, pine and fruit trees.

This short stage ends in Mugonero at the tarmac road.

Accommodation: L' Esperance Orphanage Mugonero or Kivu Lodge(+8km)



Biking The Congo Nile Trail

Stage 6 Mugonero - Tyazo

Distance: 56.6km

Elevation:  ~1800m

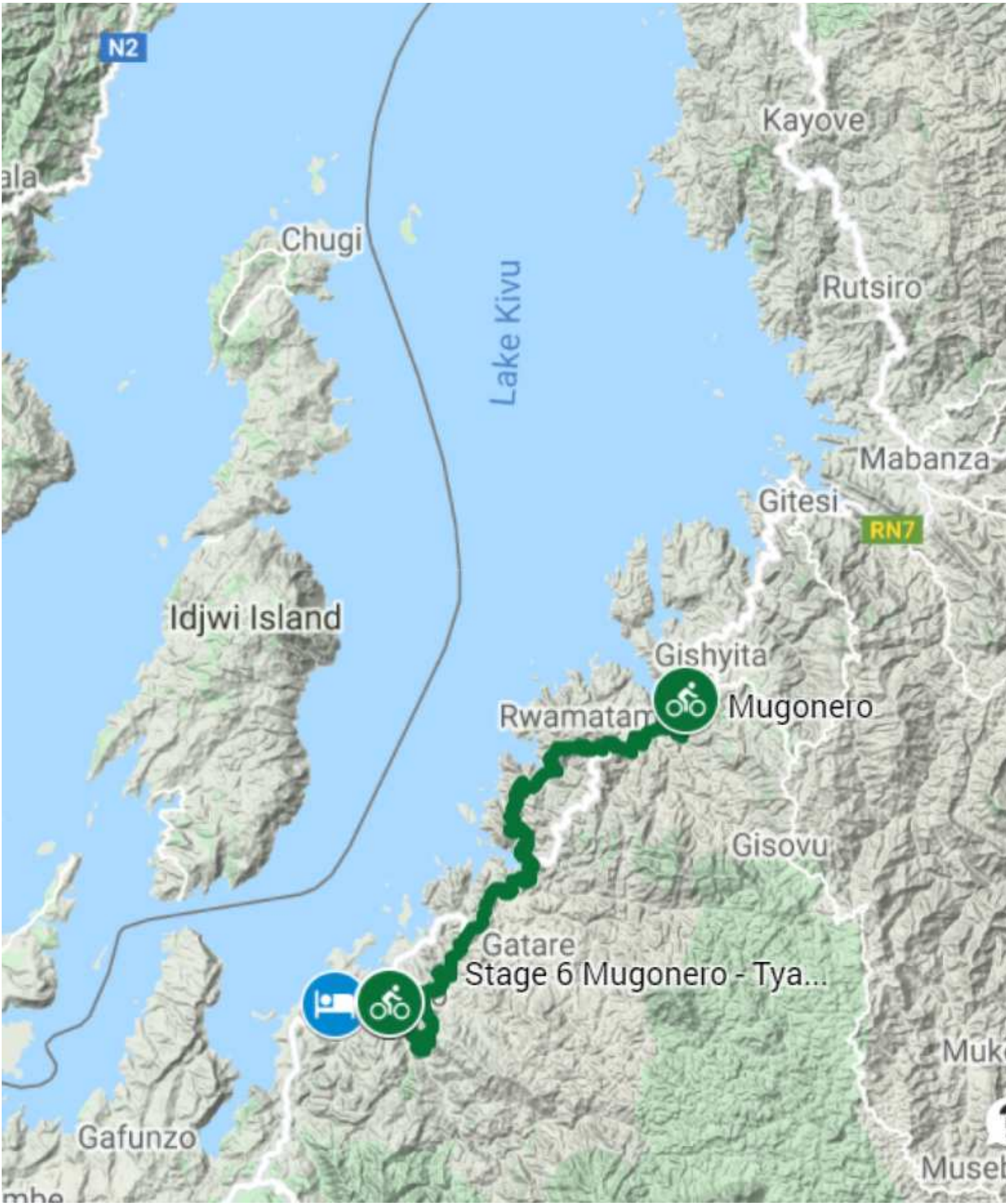
Effective Riding: 6h

Start day six by choosing between a boat ride from Kivu Lodge to Ku Rukunda or a thrilling downhill on tarmac around the famous Dawurimwijuru corner.

Whichever way you choose, you reach Dukoni center, from where you continue your ride through banana farms to descend to the rice fields in the estuary of Gisuma river. Then, the trail climbs to Muhombori and Mukamina, and brings you - via Mu Gakoma - back to the Lake for a beautiful stretch along the shores.

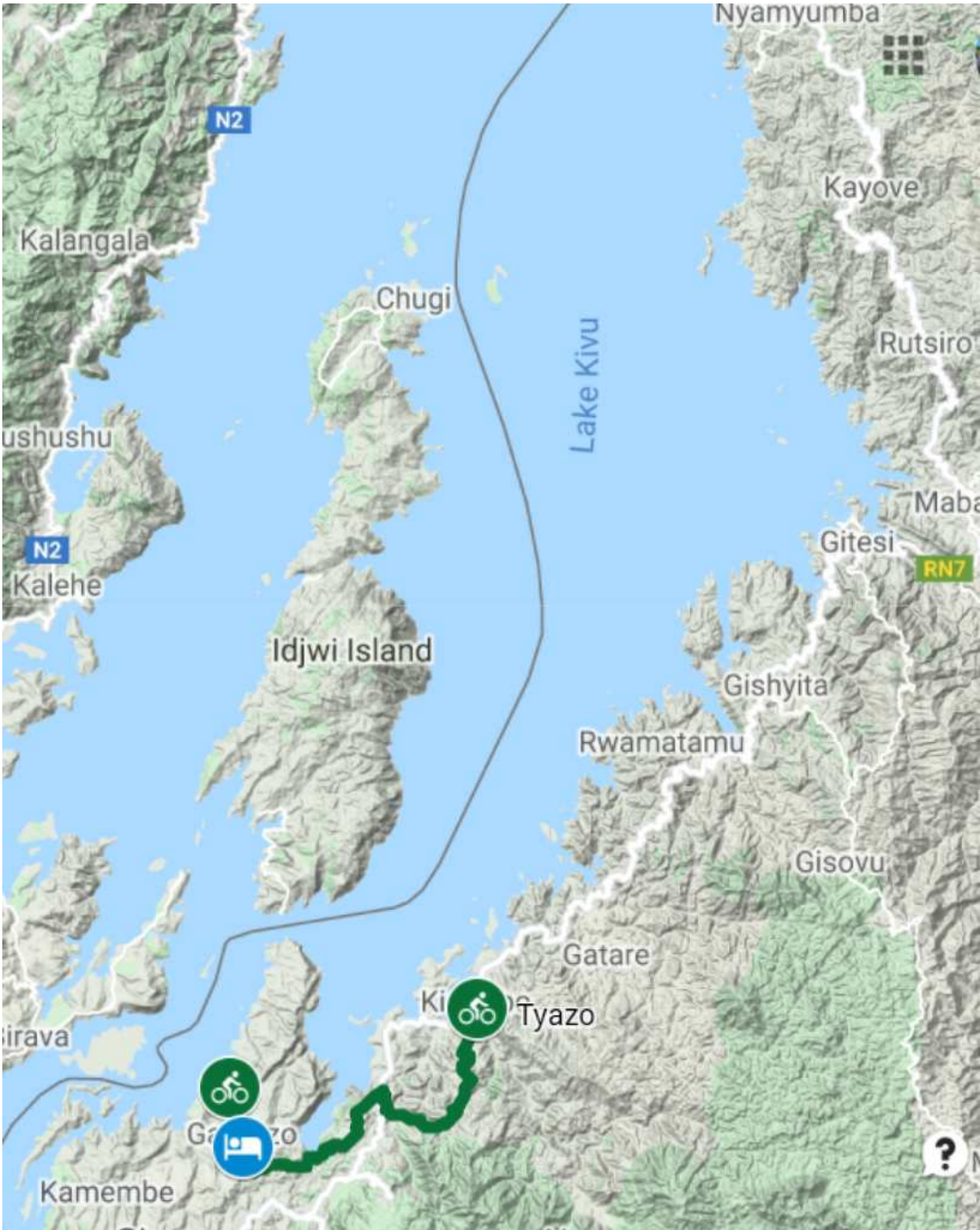
A rocky climb takes you to the main road in Ryadomori. 9km on tarmac to Kadehero let you relax and catch your breath, before looping again on dirt roads and single trails through hills and across community made bridges to arrive in Tyazo.

Accommodation: Plan A Motel, Tyazo Guest House or Ishara Beach Hotel 5.5 kms further



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Stage 7 Tyazo – Kigaga

Distance: 34.2km

Elevation:  ~1175m

Effective Riding: 4-5h

A good ascent to a center called “Kigali kwa Sebujiangwe” will warm you up for the pleasant descent to Kinini back on the main road.

Decide in Kinini, if you want to bear left to climb to Gisakura to visit Nyungwe Forest (8.8km), or continue on the main trail to Kigaga.

For Kigaga, continue on the other side of the main road through a stretch of villages to eventually descend into a wide valley. Crossing the rivers, you arrive at the so called “Olympic climb” – a very short, super steep climb, challenging even for Tour of Rwanda riders.

A series of descents and ascents will take you to Bushenge market, where a stop for refreshment is recommended. The last portion of this stage to Kigaga is mostly flat or downhill.

It is here on the shores of the Lake Kivu, the first German Post was founded in 1896 by Captain Berthe. Richard Kandt settled here and called the post "Bergfrieden", after having discovered in 1898 what he then believed is Caput Nili, the Source of the Nile.

Accommodation: St. Martin Parish

Biking The Congo Nile Trail

Stage 8 Kigaga - Kamembe

Distance: 20.2km

Elevation:  ~475m

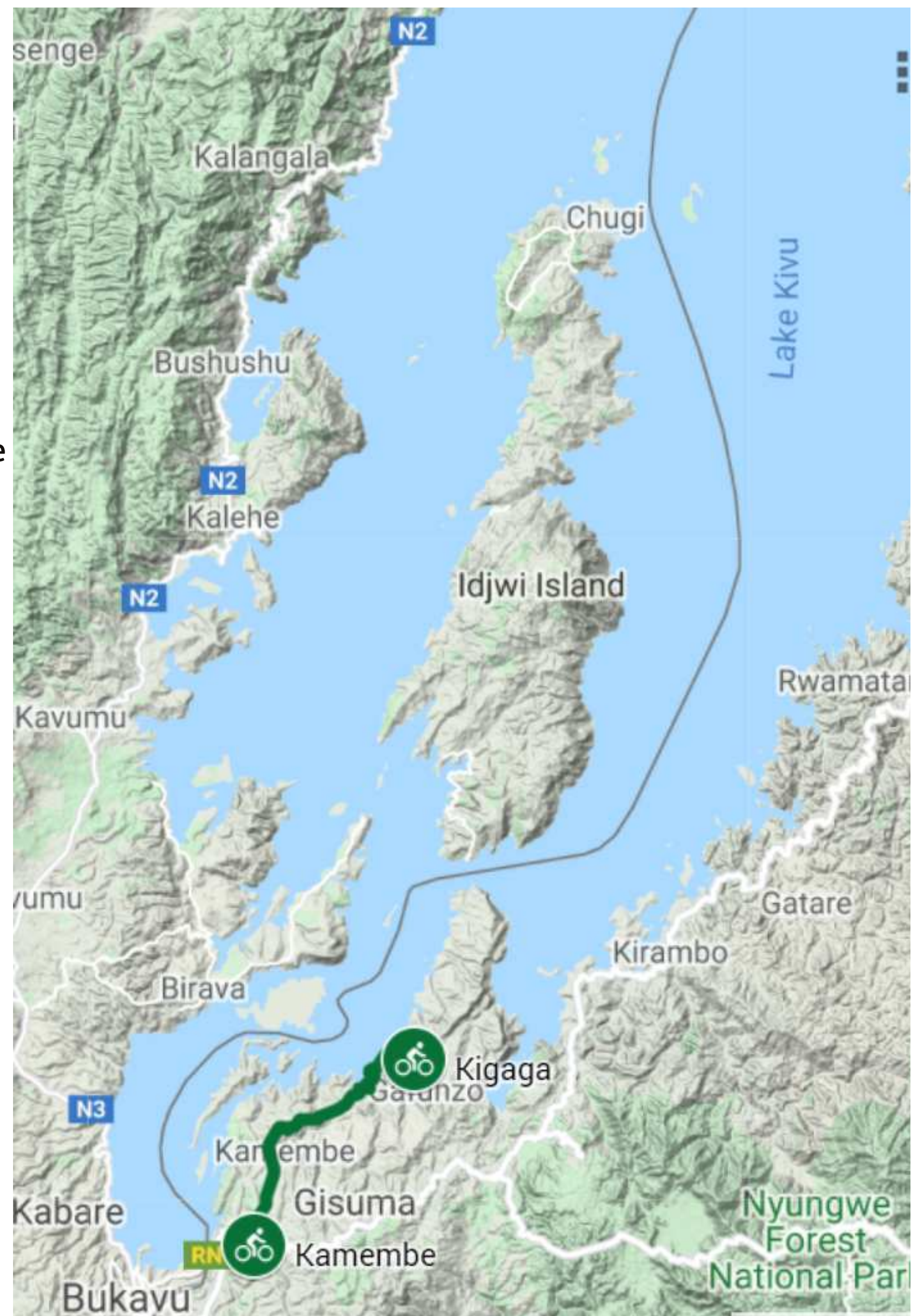
Effective Riding: 2.5h

Without too much elevation to gain, this short last stage of the trail ends your ride on a relaxing note. Descend to the beautiful rice fields in Cyunu Valley. Crossing the bridge, you arrive in Rusizi, the last of the five Districts you visit on this trail. As in Eastern DRC, you see villages (Nkaka and Gihundwe) with wooden houses lining the road.

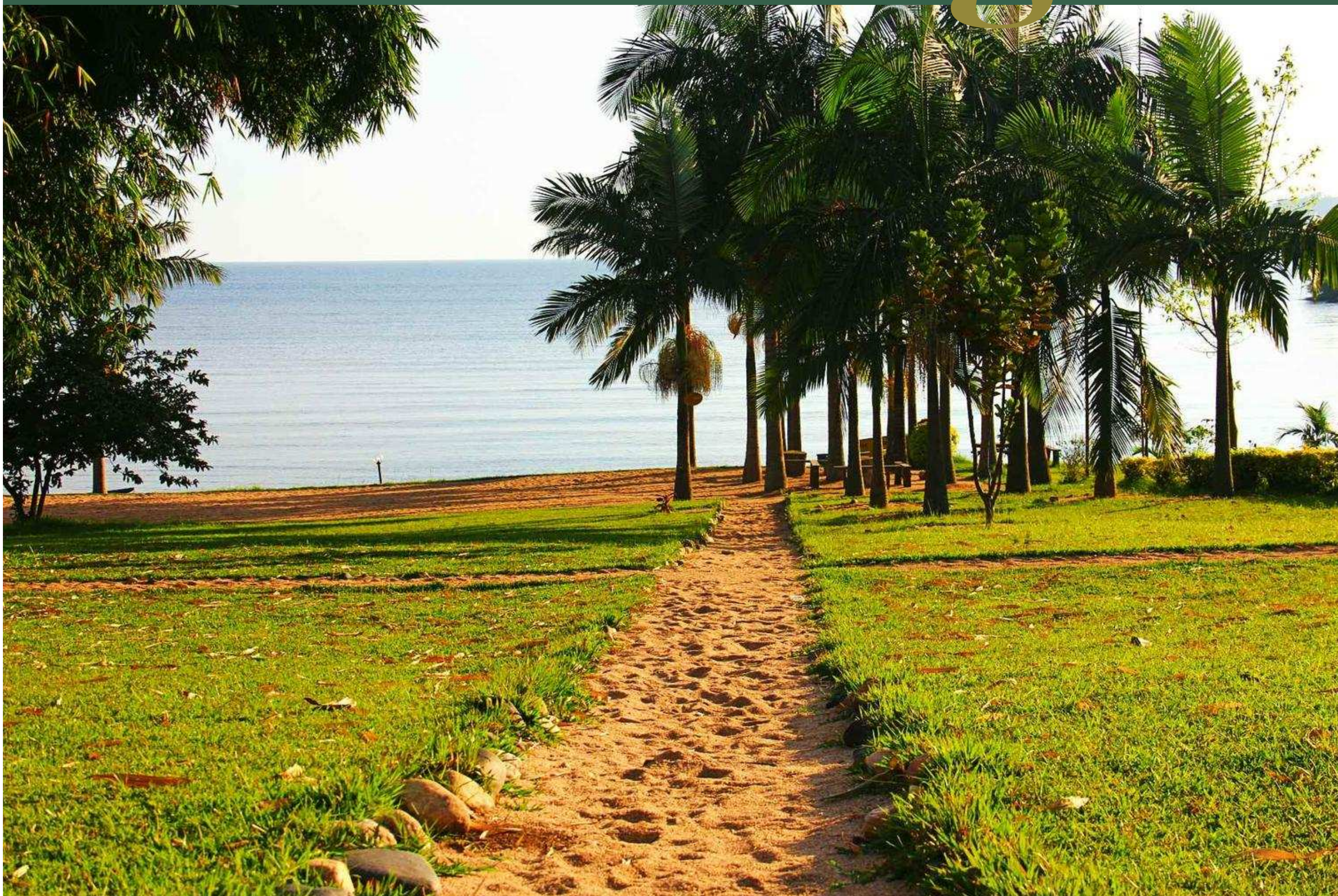
The Congo Nile trail ends in the middle of busy Kamembe Town, where accommodation in all categories and transportation back to Kigali is available.

Kamembe, formerly known as Cyangugu, always played important role in Rwandan History. Today the border post down at Rusizi River sees a bustling exchange with Bukavu.

Accommodation: The town offers different option for accommodation ranging from small guest houses to big hotels.



Further Reading



Destination Kivu Belt

More information about the Congo Nile Trail can be found at the
Destination Kivu Belt website www.kivubelt.travel

or

Visit Rwanda www.visitrwanda.com