HELLO

KIGALI



George Baguma

“The soul of a city is unveiled to those who roam its streets with a sense of discovery.”

Anonymous.

HELLO

KIGALI



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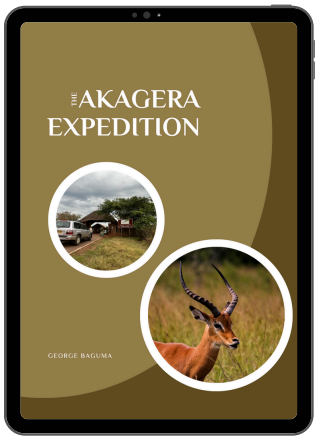

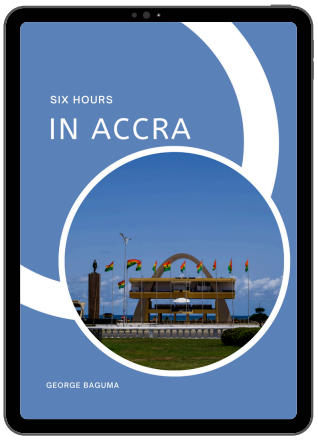

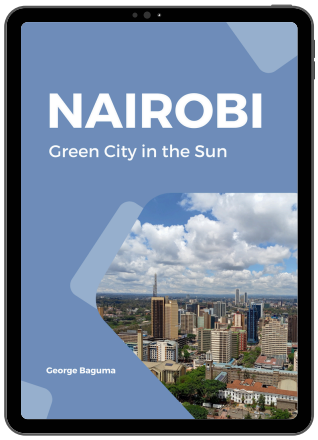



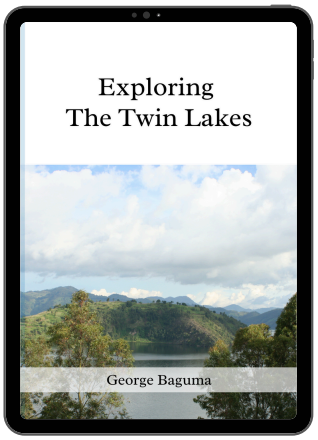

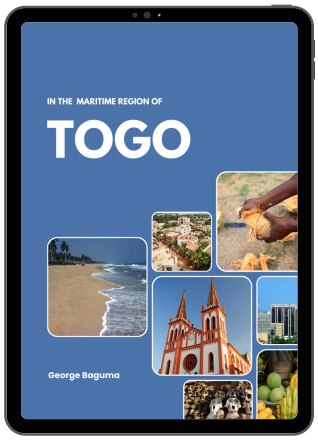



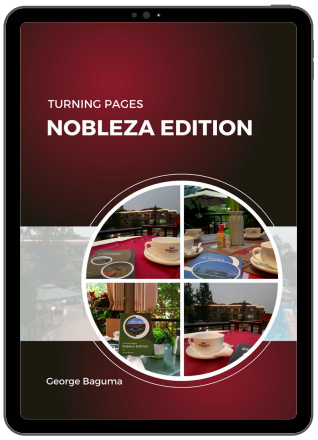

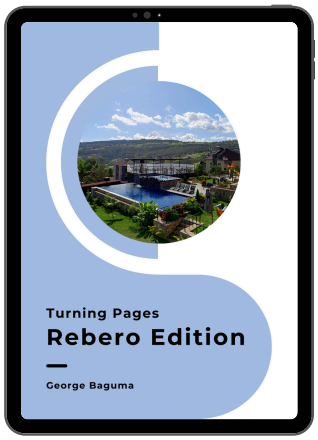

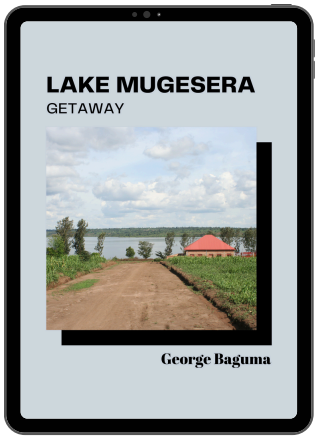



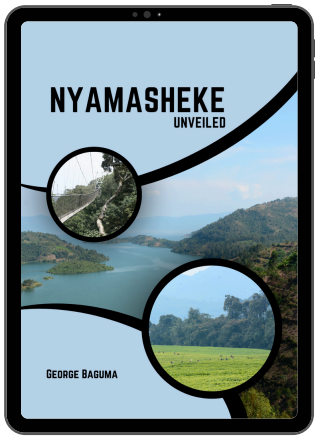



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PREFACE



ver the past seven years, I have written numerous short stories sharing my experiences in Kigali. Since this booklet can't even scratch the surface, I will be releasing the content gradually. *Hello Kigali* is the newest addition to the growing collection of Exposure Publishers' titles. The said collection includes *Memories*, *The Akagera Expedition*, *Six Hours in Accra*, *In the Maritime Region of Togo*, *Nyamasheke Unveiled* and *Nairobi: Green City in the Sun*.

This compilation of randomly selected moments in the capital of Rwanda will be followed by similar booklets featuring a wide range of activities. Furthermore, plans to convert the materials into e-books, audiobooks and documentaries are underway.



KANDT HOUSE MUSEUM

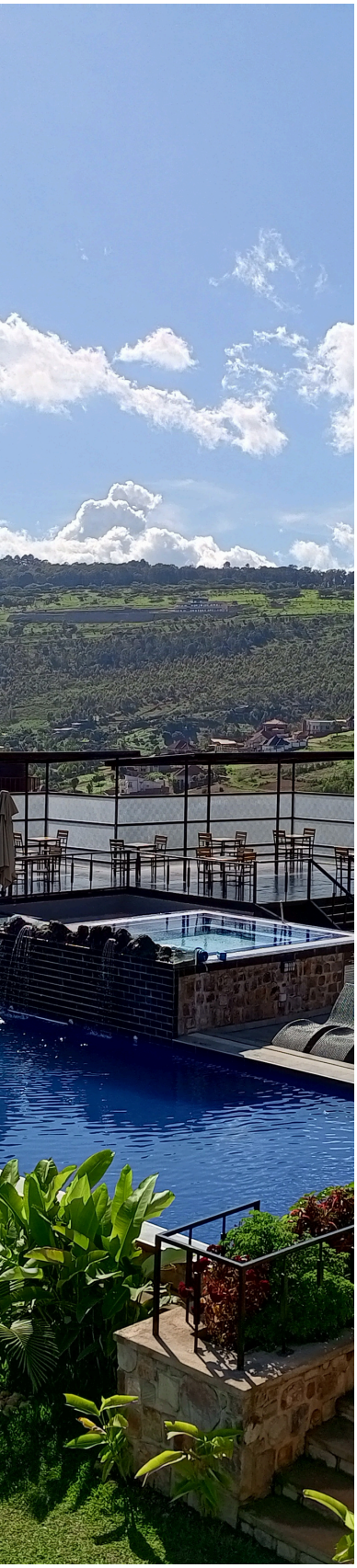


The Kandt House Museum is an oasis of knowledge. The facility exhibits the landscape, habitat and economic activities carried out in pre-colonial Rwanda. Traditional art, social life and the Rwandan monarchy are also documented. Other covered topics include the introduction of Christianity, colonization and World War I.

Kandt's choice of the land on which his house was built is responsible for the location of Kigali. He is portrayed as a colonial administrator who got along with the Rwandan king and the local populace.

I left this museum with mixed feelings. Part of me was questioning the honor accorded to the manipulative colonial agent by setting up his museum. However, I also recognized the fact that his story is interwoven with our history.

REBERO RESORT



I came to Rebero Resort for the first time about a year ago. Since I was in a hurry, I grabbed a cup of coffee and left. As brief as it was, that stopover left me yearning for a second visit. The plan was to return sooner, but I have been busy touring the Land of 1,000 Hills extensively. There is always a new place to visit, something new to see and new activity to partake in.

Almost twelve months down the line, I am back. This time around, I am here to do much more than grab a cup of coffee. I have dropped by to nurse sore muscles after a strenuous hike.

Yesterday, I climbed one of those towering volcanoes straddling Rwanda's northern border. As a result, I skipped this morning's street ball game organized by fellow hoops veterans.

I am the first customer to arrive. Tables are still unoccupied. After mopping the floor thoroughly, cleaners are wiping every piece of furniture. On the terrace, someone is repainting rusting railings. Preparations for another day of business are in full swing.

After breakfast, I walk to the infinity swimming pool and the jacuzzi. Then I proceed to the showers and changing rooms.

Rebero Resort is quite serene. The tranquility and peace of mind experienced here are seldom found in the city. The resort is recommended for those who prefer quiet suburbs without compromising proximity to the city center.

Taking care of your physical and mental health should be at the top of your list of priorities. The wellness facilities found here are designed to help you do just that.

ABRAHAM KONGA COLLECTIONS



It's a quiet Sunday evening here in Kigali, Rwanda. Offices are closed, but Abraham Konga has had a busy day. The plan was to see him earlier. That didn't happen because he couldn't find a slot for me until his latest customer left.

What exactly does the founder of Abraham Konga Collections sell? What's so special about his products? I will get back to you on this later. Meanwhile, let's delve into his journey and find out how he got here.

After graduating with a degree in information technology from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), Abraham returned home and landed a job right away. Two weeks later, he had come to the conclusion that employment wasn't for him.

His resignation was followed by a trip to his hometown in the Southern Province. While trying to find his calling, he visited a cooperative of women who weave baskets for a living. A business idea, conceived during an encounter with the artisans, turned him into a vendor of baskets and other artifacts.

In the beginning, business was slow. Sometimes he would spend days without selling anything. When boredom kicked in, he started playing with wires — coiling them up to form objects of all shapes and sizes. The flexible nature of wires stimulates creativity.

A couple of decades down the line, his brand is gaining recognition globally. Before we conclude our discussion, a bunch of foreign tourists pop in, prompting me to pack my notebook and leave. It's encouraging to see entrepreneurs grow.

EL VISTA CAFÉ



When I passed by El Vista Café to grab a cup of cappuccino, my coffee was served in an aesthetic, made-in-Rwanda cup. As I marveled at the mug, my nosy self spotted similar products in a pottery boutique set up on the same premises. Smelling more than the aroma of coffee, I decided to tour the entire building. Just like that, what was supposed to be a short coffee break became a memorable learning experience.

I took advantage of my extended stay to squeeze in a tailor-made coffee brewing experience. By doing so, I picked up where I left off during my previous coffee experiences.

Through visits to several plantations and washing stations, I developed a knack for planting, harvesting and processing coffee. Surprisingly, I had never brewed my own coffee before that memorable El Vista experience.

Hello Kigali I11



In the beginning, my instructor showed me all the basic equipment and accessories. What followed was a step-by-step practical training designed to simplify the process. His hands-on teaching methodology unleashed the barista in me.

I made single and double shots of espresso. Then I prepared some cappuccino. Finally, I rustled up some latte. It seems like I already have a plan B if writing doesn't work for me.

The science behind the distinct flavors of coffee is quite intriguing. Required ratios, weights, temperature and other equations are strictly observed to ensure the finished product meets the lofty standards of coffee enthusiasts.

After making my coffee, I sat down and sampled it. Again, the self-brewed beverage was served in a ceramic pot handcrafted in Rwanda.

There is an inspiring story behind the transformative journey of the magical pot, but that's a story for another day.

Coffee is not the only thing El Vista offers. The establishment encompasses a wine outlet, a pottery store, a gift shop and an artistically designed backyard bar.



UMUSAMBI VILLAGE



musambi Village is a safe haven for a huge flock of grey-crowned cranes. The endangered species are saved from a cartel of illegal pet trade. While in captivity, the majestic birds lost their wings, and hence, their ability to fly. Although incapacitated, the rescued cranes are finally back in their natural habitat.

When I visited the Village, I indulged in a nature walk along the Umusambi Trail. I was impressed by the successful transformation of a mosquito-breeding swamp into a nature reserve area. The project brings another dimension to urban recreation.

Umusambi is a Kinyarwanda word that means crane. However, cranes are not the only animals calling Umusambi Village home. There are more than 100 species of birds in this sanctuary, making it a true birding paradise. Furthermore, plans are underway to introduce antelopes.

After strolling along the wooden path, I sat on the bench and soaked up the beauty of the green swath of land. As I quenched my thirst, I listened to beautiful songs produced by different species of birds. The longer I listened, the more I noticed distinct tones, patterns and pitches.

The yellow-fronted canary, known for its silvery twitter, is the true definition of a songbird. The red-chested sunbird produces a very entertaining, high-pitched jumble. The sunbird's call includes a short chek, chek, chek -- followed by a long cheee, cheee, cheee.

Umusambi Village is one of a kind. Hopefully, the conservation model applied here will be emulated elsewhere in the country.



THE GOVERNOR'S RESIDENCE





hile running errands in Kigali, I visited a few secluded accommodation facilities. The purpose of the visits was to identify an ideal sanctuary for a specific clientele. After a tour of the Governor's Residence, I looked no further. The Governor's Residence is located in Kimihurura Sector, Gasabo District. The palatial property is surrounded by residential houses, restaurants, cafés and a handful of hotels.

Kimihurura is popular with both business and leisure travelers, thanks to a variety of fine dining spots and proximity to the Kigali Convention Center (KCC), museums, art galleries and everything else Kigali has to offer. To ensure the privacy of the esteemed guests, the Governor's Residence limits access to residents only. Privacy is not the only thing the establishment guarantees. As you are about to find out, security is a top priority.

Upon arrival, I felt the calming effect of the tranquility experienced on the premises. At a glance, I saw a quiet haven seldom found in commercial hubs of Kigali's magnitude. In today's fast-paced world, stress and anxiety levels are unprecedented. No wonder, investors in the tourism sector are doing their best to restore serenity.

As I exchanged pleasantries with the manager, the allure of the basketball court, sandwiched between the swimming pool and the tennis court, made me feel like unpacking my sneakers.

I resisted the temptation to step on the court because I was scheduled to leave for Bugesera in about thirty minutes. Had I picked up a basketball, the Bugesera plan would have been canceled. The last time I had an impromptu solo basketball game, I spent hours crossing over an imaginary defender and hitting shot after shot, over and over again.

After catching up with my host over coffee, she ushered me to the deluxe rooms. Following her lead, I proceeded to the Royal Suite. Finally, I checked out the Governor's Suite. Plush bedding, fine linens and ambient lighting blend perfectly to complement each room's interior design. Jacuzzis, on the other hand, provide a blissful and rejuvenating experience.

The tour of the residence felt like an introduction to the finer things in life. From one room to another, the grandeur of opulence was on full display. Apart from the usual upscale elegance and style, I noticed the installation of bullet-proof windows and combination lockable safes. As hinted above, safety is taken seriously here.

After inspecting the rooms, I strolled down the garden and proceeded to the gym. Although I was running out of time, I doubt if I would leave without using the gym. Luckily, its setup wasn't complete yet. If you have been reading my chronicles for a while, you are probably aware of my obsession with all things fitness.

Exercising is key in cultivating physical and mental wellness. As I always say, regular and consistent workouts bring money-can't-buy health benefits. When it comes to sporting activities, visitors hosted by the Governor's Residence are spoiled for choice.

Finally, I kicked back and relaxed on a poolside lounge chair. It was at this moment when I wished I was a resident on vacation rather than a trespasser who had to drive to the Eastern Province shortly thereafter.







BK ARENA



Although I am seated near a bunch of Al Ahly fans, behind their team's bench, I am rooting for AS Douanes. This clash of the titans will culminate in the crowning of the Basketball Africa League (BAL) Season 3 champions. As the clock ticks towards the end of the first quarter, one thing is clear: Al Ahly has better chemistry. Led by the eventual winner of the Hakeem Olajuwon MVP award, Nuni Omot, the Egyptian giants take an early lead and maintain their composure even after AS Douanes ties the game late in the second quarter.

Win or lose, I am proud of my boy, Jean Jacques Boissy. A few years ago, I said he was not ready to suit up for my Rwandan team, the Patriots. When he eventually joined UGB, I thought we made the right decision to let him go.

While studying and playing basketball in Rwanda, Boissy demonstrated an unparalleled work ethic. I used to see him sharpening his axe every morning. I would show up at 6 o'clock expecting to be the first person to arrive, only to find him already drenched in sweat.

Thanks to his regular and consistent workouts, Boissy has always been in a superb shape. Even my skeptical self never questioned his conditioning from day one. Fast-forward to 2023, he has added a couple of inches to his frame. The fiery competitor is ready to take his game to the next level. After seeing him leading Papi Gueye's side to the BAL final, the phrase "hard work pays off" sounds more convincing than ever before.

It has been a great week of hoops here in Kigali. Whether you are a basketball fan or not, you have to admit, the BAL paints this city red. Hopefully, we will host the tourney again in a near future. Meanwhile, congratulations to this year's champion, Al Ahly.

CHEMCHEM RESTAURANT





About a year ago, I featured Chemchem Restaurant on Exposure's travel blog. Today, I am visiting the new branch of the same business. The launch of the second outlet could be the beginning of an extensive chain of coffee bars and restaurants operating under the Chemchem brand.

Last year's dining experience took place within the premises of Jalia Garden in Kabuga suburb, but the venue of the ongoing coffee break is Mlimani Garden. The latter is located in Rebero area. Both properties encompass wedding facilities and artistically designed Chemchem joints.

It's a cloudy Sunday morning here in Kigali, but excitement is in the air. I am in the neighborhood to witness glory. Shortly after gulping some cappuccino, I will join a magnitude of *Tour du Rwanda* fans at Canal Olympia, where the winner will be crowned.

Today's dose of caffeine is administered when I am glued to the TV hanging on the wall. The gigantic screen is tuned to RTV, the official broadcaster of the aforementioned event. After spinning their spokes around the country, the vigorous participants are approaching the finishing line. All roads lead to Rebero. Literary.

NYANDUNGU URBAN WETLAND ECO-TOURISM PARK



The Nyandungu Urban Wetland Eco-tourism Park covers an area of more than 120 hectares. It is home to more than 100 bird species and 60 plant species. The splendid park has cycling and walking/running lanes spanning the distance of 10 kilometers, across 5 sectors.

Scientific and Kinyarwanda names of different plants are displayed along the lanes. So are the families and medicinal values of vegetation. Plants have been used to produce medicines since time immemorial. From the immunization of diseases to the treatment of a plethora of ailments, a tree is a gift that keeps on giving.

Apart from trees, the birding paradise encompasses ponds, gardens, a gift shop and a restaurant. The transformation of this wetland into an ecotourism park is redefining recreation.

TWISTIBLENDZ SMOOTHIES







Over the past few years, I have been featuring coffee shops in my digital magazine's "Coffee Break" segment. As I travel around the land of a thousand cups, I spend a great deal of time in cafés. It is in these joints where my stories are written.

Well, this is not a coffee story. It is an anecdote about my new-found craving for smoothies. I don't mind developing another addiction, as long as whatever I am getting hooked on is healthy.

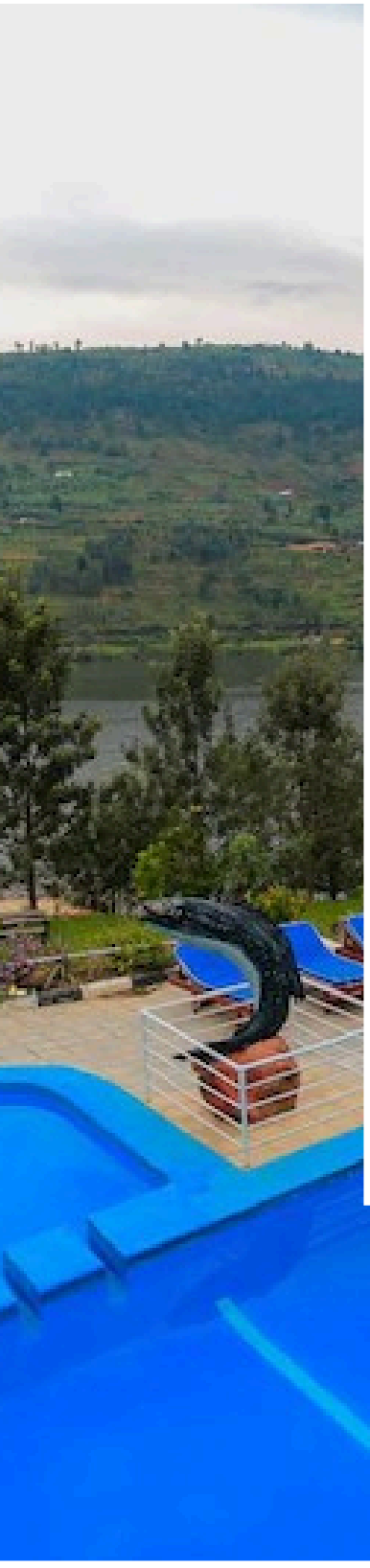
Speaking of healthy stuff, fruits are major components of smoothies. They are low in calories and rich in nutrients, including vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. From boosting immunity and improving digestion to aiding weight management and reducing the risk of chronic diseases, the health benefits of fruits are undeniable.

As a nomad who is always on the road, I find it easier to consume fruits in a cup. That explains why cherries are not the only fruits from which my favorite beverages are processed.

I am writing this from Twistiblendz Smoothies, located on KG 680 Street, Kigali. I am here to savor my favorite smoothie delight, Sweet Peanaco. Served in a big mug, the energy booster is made of bananas, peanut butter and coconut milk.

As mentioned above, I am a regular fixture at different coffee shops around the country. Lately, I have noticed the emergence of juice bars. Is this trend here to stay? The growing brood of health freaks suggests so.

KINGFISHER RESORT



The southwestern tip of Lake Muhazi is in Gasabo District, within the City of Kigali. Other districts that own slices of the said water body are Gicumbi, Rwamagana, Kayonza and Gatsibo. The most popular attraction on the Gasabo side of the lake is Kingfisher Resort.

As an adventure rider who prefers off-road trails, my favorite route to the resort is through Bumbogo, Gikomero and Rutunga.

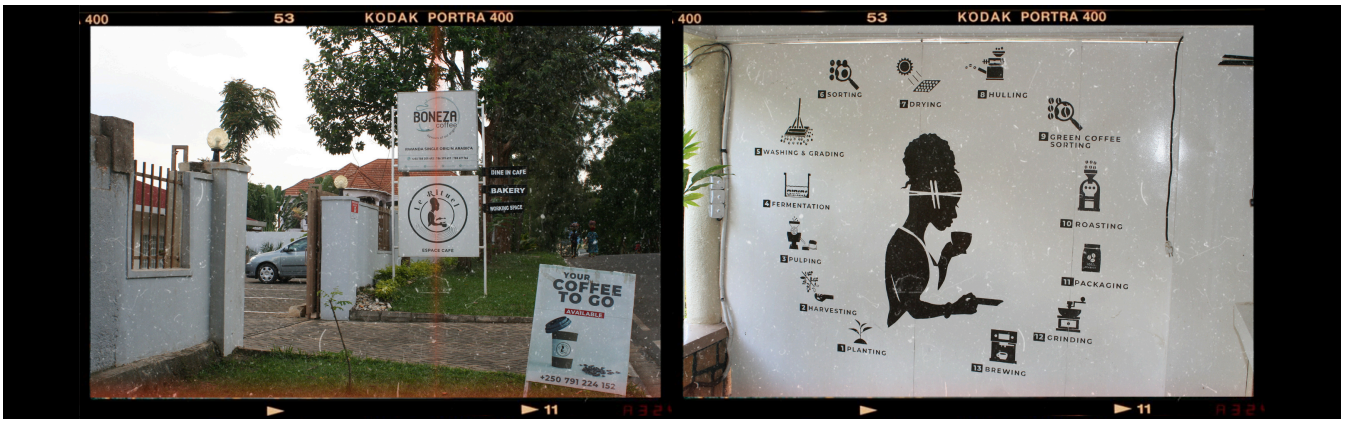
Kingfisher offers convenient getaways for Kigali dwellers, thanks to its proximity to the city. Unlike me, most patrons use the highway through parts of Rulindo and Gicumbi.

You can branch off from the Kigali - Gatuna highway at a village known as Kajevuba. Alternatively, you can proceed to the next village, namely Cyamutara, before leaving the tarmac. I would recommend the second route because of the limited parking space at the resort. Those who drive through Cyamutara, park their vehicles on the Gicumbi side and cross the narrow lake by boat.

Activities offered by the resort include beach volleyball, children's games and a wide range of water sports.



LE RITUEL CAFÉ



The aroma of fresh coffee is in the air. The ceiling board is embellished with a touch of tradition. On the wall, framed images of coffee growers, farms and washing stations are hanging. Speaking of the walls, one of them is a step-by-step illustration of how coffee is processed. You can learn a lot about coffee and its transformation from crop to cup right here.

While visiting different parts of Rwanda, I do have frequent coffee breaks. These pauses enable me to slow down and digest my observations. As mentioned on Page 19, it is during these caffeine-infused stopovers when I pen down my experiences.

Today's coffee break venue is Le Rituel Café, found in the affluent Kiyovu neighborhood. Rituel is a French word that means ritual. Coincidentally, I am here to observe my long-standing ritual: the consumption of coffee.

Le Rituel's coffee is grown in the Western Province by Kinunu Wonders Ltd. The holding company trades roasted coffee under its Boneza Coffee brand. Having tapped into the regional market, Kinunu Wonders distributes coffee all over East Africa. Plans for expansion are underway.

Le Rituel's clientele comprises employees of the surrounding organizations and tourists hailing from all corners of the world. Also in the mix are digital nomads and freelance workaholics in need of a serene working environment and a stable internet connection.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The tour that led to the publication of this booklet was sponsored by afrikanzuri.com.

