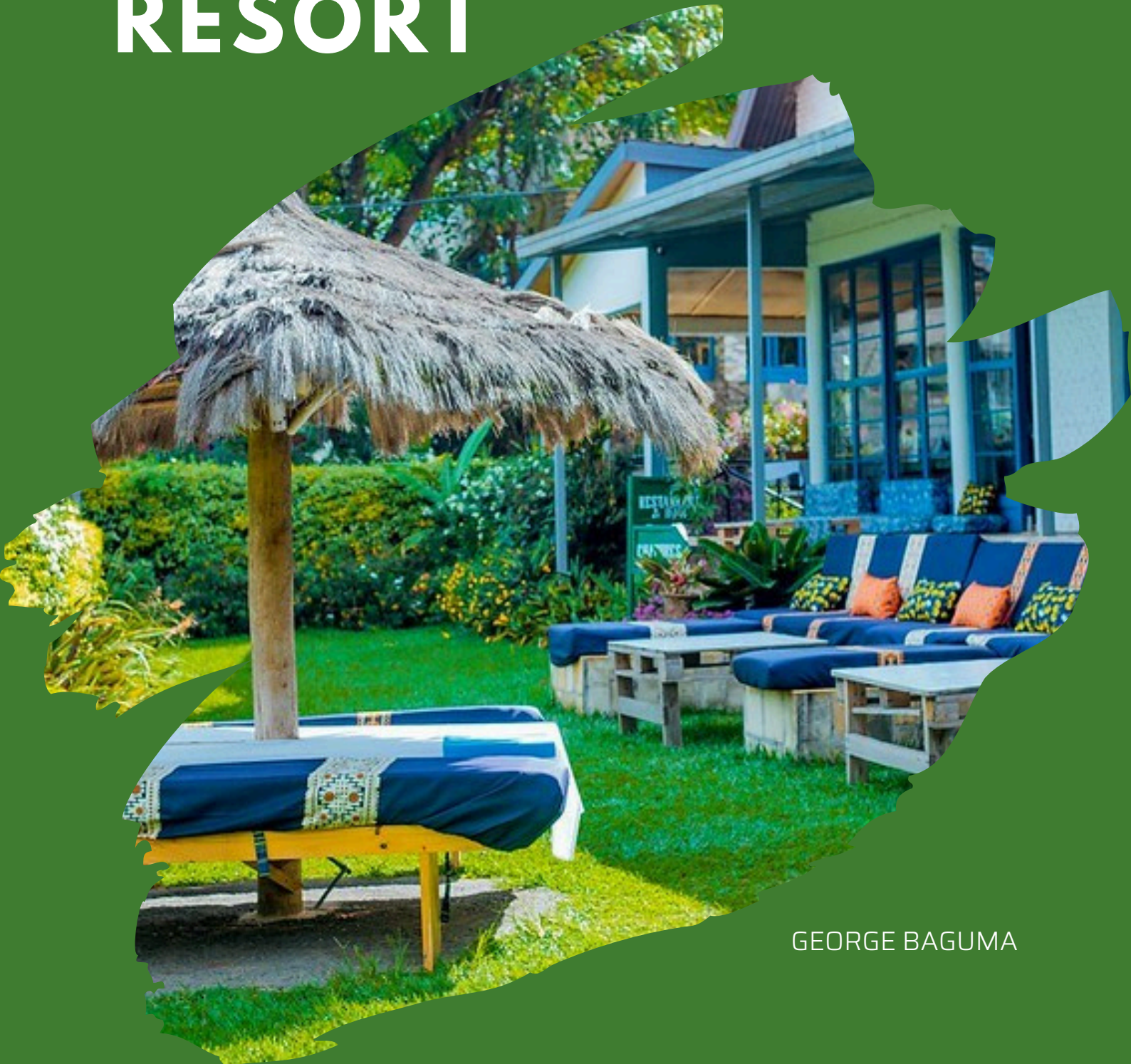


WEEKEND GETAWAY

PALM GARDEN RESORT



GEORGE BAGUMA

“

Escape the rush, find your hush.”

Anonymous

WEEKEND GETAWAY

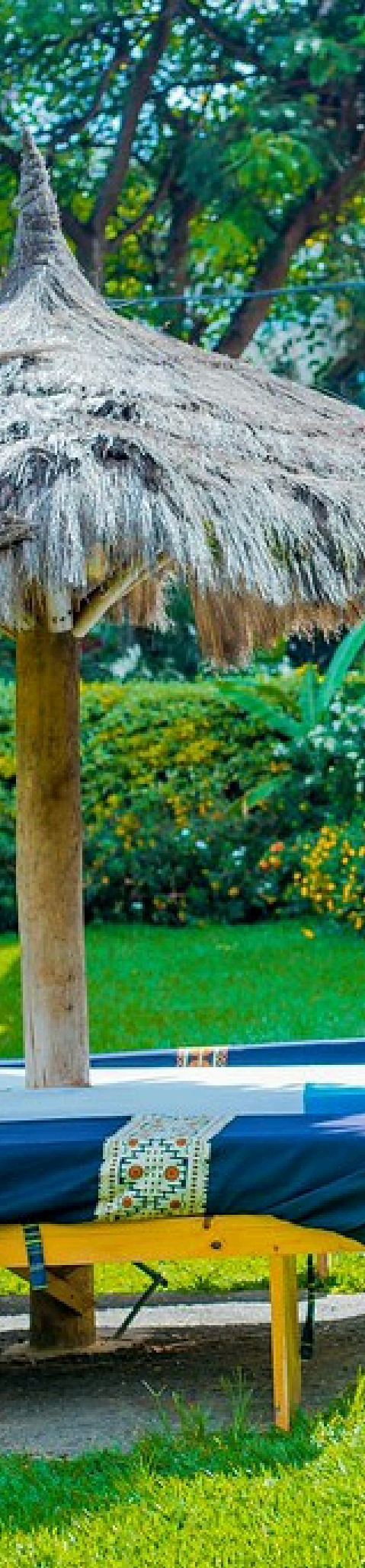
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INTRODUCTION




This publication highlights my memorable weekend at Palm Garden Resort, located in Rubavu District. It is a first-hand account of what transpired during the said weekend. The narration is an accurate description of my experiences and observations as a tourist on the ground, without any promotional hype. Although the booklet is a resourceful tool for those who need information about Rubavu, it only covers what I did in one weekend. There is so much more in store.

By sharing my Rubavu recollections, I hope to inspire you to visit the district and create your own memories. If you have already been there, you will undoubtedly agree with me that Rubavu never disappoints.

This is the first edition of Afrika Nzuri's Weekend Getaway series. The upcoming editions will feature other resorts in different parts of Africa.

KIGALI TO RUBAVU



 I left Kigali on Friday before sunrise. The early departure allowed me to indulge in a wide range of activities while leaving ample time for a much-needed rest. This time around, I used an adventure motorcycle.

The ride to Rubavu was simply exhilarating. As the saying goes, driving a car is like watching a movie, while riding a motorcycle feels like starring in that movie. Traveling on two wheels made the journey as captivating as the destination.

Rwanda is truly a biker's paradise. Cruising along winding roads that carve through majestic hills, I found myself swept up in a thrilling rhythm—spokes spinning and scenery unfolding like a living postcard.

TOUR OF DOWNTOWN RUBAVU



When I made it to Rubavu, I spent some time window-shopping along the corridors of the city's commercial streets. Then I went to the market, where I picked up my favorite fruits. While at the bustling market, I mingled with local vendors and shoppers, soaking in the community's energy and warmth.

After a brief stop at the market, I twisted the throttle to the border post commonly known as Petite Barrière. Despite occasional disruptions stemming from the volatility of eastern DRC, this remains one of the busiest land crossings in the world—serving mostly local traders from both Rwanda and the DRC. Just a short distance away stands the Grande Barrière—an imposing, modern structure that looks like an airport terminal.

Later, I headed to the public beach. After a short break on the sand, I proceeded to Saga Bay. Upon arrival, I kicked off my boots, slid into a pair of flip-flops, placed my lunch order, and let the afternoon unfold at an easy pace. As evening approached, I fired up my bike one more time and cruised toward Palm Garden Resort.

EN ROUTE TO NYAMYUMBA BEACH



Although Rubavu is famed for its vibrant nightlife, partying wasn't on my agenda. Quite the opposite—I was craving a peaceful night's sleep in a serene setting. Rest and stillness were non-negotiable, which is why I chose to stay at Palm Garden Resort. The sense of calm and peace of mind I found there is something rare and deeply refreshing. As I rode toward Nyamyumba Beach, I was awestruck by the scenery.

Lake Kivu shimmered under the sun, framed by a dramatic backdrop of lush, rolling hills. With each bend, a new vista unfolded—gentle waves lapping the shoreline, tiny islets that looked like floating gardens, and landscapes that stirred the soul.

The winding road demanded my full attention, keeping me alert and connected to the machine beneath me. As you are about to find out, the spin to Nyamyumba set the tone for the weekend ahead.

SOMETHING FOR EVERY ONE



Palm Garden Resort offers three distinct accommodation options: 14 rooms, a serviced apartment, and a campsite. These choices cater to a range of preferences and budgets, making it a place where everyone—from luxury seekers to budget-conscious backpackers—can enjoy quality service and hospitality. There's truly something for everyone.

Although I enjoy camping, this time I opted for the comfort of a cozy bedroom. As I mentioned earlier, getting a restful night's sleep was a top priority.

Before leaving Kigali, I had slept for only three hours. To make matters worse, the previous couple of nights had been spent shuttling travelers to and from the airport. As a result, I was running on fumes. So, giving my sleep-deprived self the gift of deep rest in Rubavu wasn't just a choice—it was a necessity.

While recharging my body, I was also preparing for vigorous activities: canoeing, hiking, and cycling. My experiences canoeing on the gentle waves of my favorite lake, climbing Rubona Hill, and cycling along the Congo Nile Trail are detailed on the next three pages.

SUNRISE CANOEING

On Saturday, I woke up at 5 in the morning. Having gone to bed early the night before, I was well-rested and eager to explore. More importantly, I wanted to kick off my adventure-filled day with a sunrise canoeing experience. This activity turned out to be an energizing start to an unforgettable day.

I shared a canoe with my instructor, Augustin Muhawenimana. Together, we swung around Akeza Island, which truly lives up to its name. Later, I paddled to a more haunting place—Akarwa k’Abakobwa, the “Girls’ Island.” This is where, in a less forgiving past, girls who became pregnant before marriage were abandoned. They were left alone until men from across the lake, the Abashi, came to claim them—rescue cloaked in coercion, often ending in forced marriages. Standing there, I could feel the weight of forgotten sorrow in the air.

Canoeing at sunrise around Rubavu’s picturesque islands wasn’t just an invigorating morning activity. It was a journey through beauty, history, and emotion. And as the sun rose over the lake—spilling gold across its glassy surface—I knew I had started my day the best way possible.



RUBONA VIEWPOINT



After breakfast, I laced up my hiking boots and made my way up Rubona Hill—a steep, challenging climb that offered both a solid workout and a feast for the eyes. With every step, I burned calories and soaked in sweeping views that made the effort worthwhile. And speaking of views, the summit of Rubona is pure soul food for any hiking enthusiast.

From my vantage point, I was awestruck by the stunning panorama: downtown Rubavu lay below, cradled between the hills and the lake. Across the border, Goma's most affluent neighborhood shimmered in the morning light. In the distance, a hazy silhouette of Nyiragongo loomed—the infamous active volcano with a fiery past.

Closer to this part of Rubavu, I spotted Akeza, k'Abakobwa, k'Abakingi, and Iwawa islands. Even the Amashyuza Peninsula looked like it had momentarily transformed into an island. It was truly a sight to behold.

Rubona Hill is a hiker's paradise. Though the trail is strenuous, a fit climber can conquer it in about thirty minutes. For those seeking a less demanding climb, the rocky track on the opposite side of the hill offers a moderate challenge.

CONGO NILE TRAIL



Canoeing and hiking were not the only physically taxing activities of the day. Barely an hour after the hike, I embarked on a cycling tour to and from Kivumu in the neighboring district of Rutsiro. The round trip covered about twenty kilometers. Along the way, I learned more about the watershed that separates the drainage basins of Africa's most iconic rivers: The Congo and The Nile.

The trail spans more than 200 kilometers. It snakes along Lake Kivu's shoreline—from Rubavu to Rusizi—through Rutsiro, Karongi, Nyamashuke, and Rusizi.

It takes cyclists up to five days to cover the entire trail. However, most tourists choose segments depending on their preferences, levels of fitness, and durations of stays, among other factors.

NYAMYUMBA HOT SPRINGS



When I woke up on Sunday morning, my muscles were sore. Luckily, the Nyamyumba Hot Springs are found a stone's throw away from Palm Garden Resort. In a bid to speed up the recovery process, I took a dip and stayed partially submerged in the mineral-rich water, known in Kinyarwanda as *amashyuza*, for about an hour. The magma-powered spa recharged my body and lifted my spirits.

My hot jacuzzi experience was followed by a thorough physiotherapy session. Buried in the sand from neck to toe, I felt the thrill of the steamy *amashyuza* liquid penetrating the organically composed sand and nourishing my skin.

BOATING



I had already checked out of Palm Garden Resort when I decided to squeeze in a sightseeing boat ride around the islands mentioned earlier. According to the unwritten Visit Rubavu scriptures, leaving without experiencing a boat tour is a cardinal sin. And who was I to defy such sacred travel wisdom? With the clock ticking toward my departure, I carved out just enough time for this thrilling finale.

The boat glided seamlessly over the lake, its gentle hum blending with the sounds of nature. We cruised past lush, untamed islands draped in mystery and charm—some cloaked in thick foliage, others dotted with birds that took flight as we passed. Each island looked like a scene pulled from a forgotten fairytale, suspended in time and waiting to be explored.

GOODBYE RUBAVU



An adventure-filled weekend is like candy. It slowly melts in your mouth, sweetening every taste bud, and making you wish it could last forever. If wishes were horses, beggars would ride. When my time in Rubavu was up, I had no choice but to hit the road and return to Kigali. The unforgettable weekend was coming to an end. The good news is that it left behind stories that are packaged to create this booklet.

On my way back to Kigali, I found myself coming to terms with the fact that regular life was about to resume. As I cruised past the breathtaking Nyabihu hills, the fresh memories of my just-concluded weekend getaway lingered in my mind.

Rubavu has much more to offer than what is showcased in these few pages. One weekend is not enough to experience what is in store. Although I had a fulfilling tour, my exploration didn't even scratch the surface.

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