

TURNING PAGES

ECO AIR EDITION

George Baguma



“

A book is a gift you can open again and again.”

Garrison Keillor

TURNING PAGES

ECOAIR EDITION



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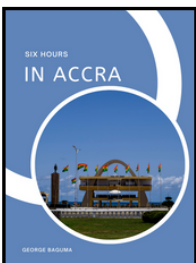
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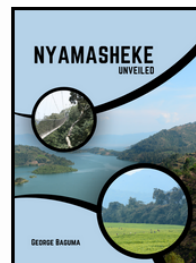
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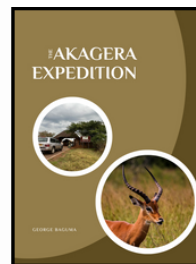
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TURNING PAGES

BACKGROUND

Over the past seven years, I've been exploring different parts of Rwanda and other destinations in Africa while documenting my travel experiences, observations and encounters. So far, I have published more than a dozen digital and print booklets. The said publications showcase the beauty of Africa and endorse a wide range of businesses.

My books are used in the implementation of a campaign dubbed *Turning Pages*. It is a series of book club sessions staged to cultivate the culture of reading and stimulate travel enthusiasm. In addition, the initiative provides impactful visibility for the benefit of local businesses.

In partnership with different stakeholders, I host regular book club sessions. The said sessions bring together business leaders, tour operators, government officials, investors, tourists, entrepreneurs and students, among others. Each meet-up commences with a brief preview of the featured book, followed by an engaging roundtable discussion and broader viewpoints. Books are distributed free of charge, courtesy of Exposure Publishers and its generous partners.

Turning Pages is building a community of readers who appreciate the beauty of Africa. In addition, the distributed materials arouse their thirst for exploration.

Apart from promoting tourism and literature, this project is fostering social interactions, building brands and providing diverse perspectives. In a nutshell, the project aims to nurture intellectual growth and economic empowerment.

Book clubs, often overlooked in our fast-paced, digital world, serve as invaluable pillars of intellectual and social enrichment. As members share their thoughts and insights, they engage in critical thinking and in-depth analysis. Furthermore, they forge strong social bonds.

So far, I have organized more than fifty book club sessions in Rwanda and Kenya. In this booklet, I share what transpired during the four sessions hosted by Ecoair Apartment Hotel in Kimihurura Sector, Gasabo District.



ECO AIR EDITION

INTRODUCTION

Turning Pages: Ecoair Edition is an overview of four book club sessions that took place at Ecoair Apartment Hotel in September and October 2023. The engaging, roundtable discussions brought together travel enthusiasts from diverse backgrounds. While Kigali-based participants attended in person, those living abroad joined us via technology.

Known for its serenity and conducive working environment, Ecoair Apartment Hotel is ideal for business travelers. Throughout the month-long series, we had the privilege of convening in the hotel's lavish meeting room, equipped with video conferencing technology. Having access to the ultra-modern facilities enabled us to connect with readers from different countries seamlessly.

During the vibrant sessions, we dissected selected titles fetched from Exposure Publishers' rapidly growing collection. The interactive gatherings put me in a position to receive feedback from a small sample of readers and pick their brains. In addition, the sessions provided an opportunity to make new friends and expand my network.

We turned the pages of four books titled *Six Hours in Accra*, *Nyamasheke Unveiled*, *Hello Kigali* and *The Akagera Expedition*. From Accra to Kigali and Nyungwe to Akagera, we explored a wide range of attractions without leaving our chairs. Books are truly magical.

The Ecoair Edition sheds light on the aforementioned promotional products. While the four books highlight my experiences as a tourist on the ground, this edition expounds their storylines with input from readers. The final product presents a thought-provoking outlook.

Throughout my awe-inspiring journey as a travel writer, I have relied heavily on the facilitation offered by hospitality establishments. The role of these businesses in the successful implementation of my projects is undeniable. This edition is a continuation of the long-standing cooperation between Exposure Publishers and hotels scattered around the Land of 1,000 Hills.



SESSION I

SIX HOURS IN ACCRA

September 6, 2023

The focal point of our first session's discussion was a book titled *Six Hours in Accra*. The said publication highlights my memorable half-day exploration of the capital of Ghana. As expected, the self-guided tour was highly informative.

After downing a bowl of *Hausa koko* oatmeal at RockWoods African Restaurant, I strolled on Ring Road Central all the way to the Kwame Nkrumah Interchange. From the interchange, I dropped by Makola Market before proceeding to Black Star Square. Then I sampled Ghanaian food at Labadi Beach during the lunch break.

When the tour resumed, I headed to a neighborhood known as Tudu. While in the hood, I interacted with future soccer stars and gave them words of encouragement.

Between walking under the scorching sun and playing soccer on a dusty street, I traced the genesis of the spark that ignited Africa's independence struggle and the rebirth of Pan-Africanism.

Six Hours in Accra uncovers key events in the aftermath of WWII and the ensuing momentum in decolonization movements across Africa. In addition, the book showcases modern Accra as a vibrant metropolis.

It is impossible to tour Accra's major tourist attractions in six hours. I chose to visit the city on Sunday because traffic flows faster on the day of the Lord. Unfortunately, I made it to the Kwame Nkrumah Water Park when the caretaker had gone to church, leaving the gate locked. The Osu Castle was also closed, and so was the Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park. Despite the disappointments caused by temporary closures, I made the most out of my limited time in Accra.

We kicked off the session with customary introductions. Then we delved into the book and immersed ourselves in its narrative. In the beginning, we discussed the historical significance of the sites I visited while in Accra. Subsequently, our conversation shifted towards the bottlenecks that hinder travel within the continent.

The ensuing exchange was quite enlightening. It broadened our horizons and enriched our perspectives beyond the realm of tourism.



SESSION II

NYAMASHEKE UNVEILED

September 22, 2023

This gathering attracted one government official and a couple of investors in agribusiness and tourism. The book that brought us together is titled *Nyamasheke Unveiled*. It is a recollection of memorable moments during my tour of Nyamasheke District, found in the Western Province of Rwanda.

Nyamasheke is sandwiched between Lake Kivu and Nyungwe National Park. The strategically located district comprises fifteen administrative areas known as sectors. Eight of those sectors cover parts of the biggest lake in Rwanda, while the rest stretch deep into Africa's best-kept rainforest.

Apart from contributing to the development of tourism, the two attractions stimulate the growth of other sectors across the board. From the lake to the forest and everything in between, the district is striving to unlock its economic potential.

I spent the first twenty minutes or so presenting the book's brief preview. Having brought the attendees up to speed, we delved into the discussion revolving around the existing and potential tourism products in Nyamasheke.

As the conversation picked up steam, we brainstormed ideas on the quest to showcase the beauty of Nyamasheke on a bigger stage. Furthermore, we examined the role of the private sector in the promotion of tourism, investment, entrepreneurship and the overall socioeconomic transformation of our communities.

The tour that ultimately led to the publication of *Nyamasheke Unveiled* took place two years ago. In the meeting, I was informed that a lot has changed since I left.

There is so much more the district has in store that couldn't be squeezed into the pages of the aforementioned book. Although the first trip didn't even scratch the surface, it paved the way for the upcoming promotional projects.

Nyamasheke Unveiled focuses on nature-based tourism, agro-tourism, heritage, and community-driven experiences. Plans are in motion to revisit the area for a more in-depth exploration.



SESSION III

HELLO KIGALI

September 29, 2023

Hello Kigali is a compilation of randomly selected moments in the capital of Rwanda. Again, since the booklet can't cover even a fraction of my stored memories, Kigali chronicles will be shared gradually. The session in which *Hello Kigali* was featured involved six in-person attendees and a handful of virtual participants.

After our customary introductions, I spent the next twenty-five minutes or so reviewing the book. When I was done, I gave the floor to the participants. The plan was to talk less and listen more. However, this group turned the meeting into a Q&A session, bombarding me with a myriad of questions.

The book features a museum, an ecotourism park, a nature reserve park, an art gallery, coffee shops and a couple of resorts, among other establishments. Most importantly, it contains cherished memories.

Every participant in this session was familiar with Kigali. However, some hadn't been to a few places endorsed by the publication. One of them asked why Kingfisher Resort, found on the southwestern flank of Lake Muhazi, appears in the Kigali book. Apparently, this resident of Gasabo District didn't know that his district owns a slice of Lake Muhazi.

Abel Nson, an international basketball scout who visits Kigali often, is impressed by the transformation of the city over the years. During the session, he pointed out cleanliness and orderliness as qualities that make the capital of Rwanda stand out from the crowd. However, he sees the need to invest in zoos, amusement parks and other recreational activities.

"*Hello Kigali* has rekindled memories of my previous visits to my beautiful country." Said Steve Rutagarama, a member of the Rwandan diaspora community. "I can't wait to come back home." The US-based medical practitioner told us.

Before leaving the boardroom, we reaffirmed our commitment to embrace domestic tourism, starting with roaming the streets of our own city with a sense of discovery. As avid travelers, we are driven by a desire to explore the world, discover new places and immerse ourselves in unfamiliar cultures. While satisfying this wanderlust, we shouldn't overlook the place we call home.



SESSION IV

THE AKAGERA EXPEDITION

October 6, 2023

On this day, I had more virtual participants than physically present ones. However, not all callers were available at the time of the gathering. Conflicting schedules compelled me to conduct several online meetings before and after the meet-up.

Aye Sawadogo, a Burkinabe national, shared her own experiences in the Akagera National Park when she visited Rwanda in 2018. Having learned from *The Akagera Expedition* that hot air balloon tours have been introduced to the park, she is planning to return and explore the wildlife habitat from the sky.

Anita Nzamu, who joined us from the Czech Republic, took advantage of the meeting to gather all the information she needed about Akagera. As a Rwandan living abroad, she faces a lot of questions from her Czech friends and colleagues who need to know more about Remarkable Rwanda.

The Akagera Expedition highlights my epic adventure in the home of the Big Five. Founded in 1934, Akagera was much bigger than it is today. Over the years, population growth and the arrival of returning refugees led to land utilization challenges. Poaching and other illegal activities became rampant. Eventually, the park lost a big chunk of land and a significant percentage of its flora and fauna.

The last couple of decades have seen successful efforts to turn the situation around. When the government joined forces with partners and members of the surrounding communities, the ensuing ecological and economic revival was nothing short of spectacular.

Under the management of African Parks, the Big Five status has been restored. The numbers across the board are rebounding. An area survey conducted in 2021 recorded almost 12,000 animals, a significant increase from 2010, when the park's wildlife population had plummeted to less than 5,000. The best is yet to come.

The Akagera Expedition highlights my adventure-filled day in Rwanda's only Savannah national park. After a thrilling hot air balloon flight, I embarked on an unforgettable south-north game drive. Along the way, I marveled at a wide range of wild animals and studied birds inhabiting the wetland area that encompasses ten lakes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Ecoair Apartment Hotel for making *Turning Pages: Ecoair Edition* possible. Your generous sponsorship of all four sessions, provision of a welcoming meeting space, and refreshments created an inspiring environment for our discussions. This edition stands as a testament to your commitment to fostering learning, community engagement, and the love of reading.

Thank you for your unwavering support and for being an integral part of this journey.

