

NYAGATARE

THROUGH THE EYES OF A DOMESTIC TOURIST



GEORGE BAGUMA

“

One’s destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things.”

Henry Miller.

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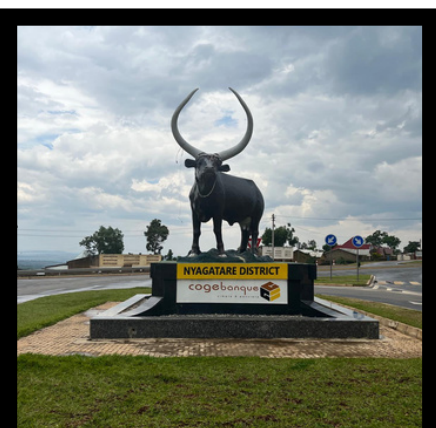


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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	06
Umuvumba Riverside Lodge	07
Umuvumba River	08
Liberation History Trail	10
En Route to Kagitumba	11
Irrigation Farming	13
Morning Hoops	14
Walking Tour	15
Mantis EPIC Hotel & Suites	17
Goodbye Nyagatare	18



I ♥ NYAGATARE



Nyagatare is often spoken of in broad strokes—its vast landscapes, agriculture, and distance from the capital—but experiencing it firsthand tells a richer story. This booklet captures a brief journey through the district, seen through the lens of a domestic tourist with limited time but an open curiosity.

These pages explore how Nyagatare is changing while remaining deeply rooted in its identity. It is not a comprehensive guide, but a personal narrative—one that invites readers to slow down, observe, and perhaps be inspired to explore Nyagatare for themselves.

This journey unfolded over a day and a half, reminding me that even the shortest trips can leave lasting impressions. In Nyagatare, every stop—planned or spontaneous—offered a glimpse into a district full of stories waiting to be discovered.

HOME AWAY FROM HOME



Nestled in the affluent Mukizungu neighborhood, Umuvumba Riverside Lodge offers a welcoming retreat where comfort meets affordability. Its competitive rates ensure guests enjoy quality accommodation and attentive service without sacrificing comfort or standards.

The lodge is named after the Umuvumba River, the longest and most significant river in the area. Flowing gently through the district, the river lends a sense of tranquility and natural beauty to the landscape, sustaining livelihoods and enriching biodiversity along the way.

With its combination of comfort, affordability, and serenity, Umuvumba Riverside Lodge is more than just a place to stay—it's a home-away-from-home for both business and leisure travelers.

UMUVUMBA RIVER



The Umuvumba River is one of the most important waterways in Nyagatare District. Its gentle yet steady flow nourishes the land, supporting agriculture, local communities, and small-scale industries along its banks.

Winding through rolling hills and open plains, the majestic Umuvumba offers picturesque views at every turn. Its waters reflect the sky and surrounding greenery, creating a serene atmosphere. For locals and visitors alike, the river provides a sense of calm and continuity, a natural presence that has witnessed generations of life along its shores.

Furthermore, the Umuvumba River is part of a larger network of rivers pouring into the Kagera River and eventually the Nile. This connection underscores its role not just locally, but as part of the vast hydrological systems that sustain Eastern Africa and beyond. Whether admired for its beauty or appreciated for its utility, the Umuvumba River remains a defining feature of Nyagatare's landscape.



Along its course, the Umuvumba River supports a delicate ecosystem that includes wetlands, riverine vegetation, and diverse birdlife. These natural habitats play a critical role in maintaining soil health, preventing erosion, and regulating water flow during both rainy and dry seasons. The river's presence encourages balanced coexistence between nature and human activity, especially in an area where agriculture is central to everyday life.

The river is deeply woven into the social fabric of Nyagatare. For many communities, it is a source of daily sustenance and a quiet witness to timeless routines. From early-morning water collection to farming activities along its banks, the river continues to influence how life unfolds in this part of the country.

As Nyagatare continues to develop, protecting the Umuvumba River becomes increasingly important. Sustainable water use, environmental conservation, and responsible development will ensure that the river remains productive for generations to come. More than just a geographical feature, the Umuvumba stands as a symbol of resilience, continuity, and the enduring relationship between people and their natural environment.

LIBERATION HISTORY TRAIL



The Gikoba stretch is part of Rwanda’s broader Liberation History Trail, a network of sites that trace the path of the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA) during the liberation struggle from October 1, 1990, to July 4, 1994. The trail highlights key landmarks, including the Kagitumba border post, where the first bullet of the liberation war was fired, and other historically significant sites in the district.

As a visitor with limited time to explore Nyagatare, I didn’t have the chance to hike the full trail. Even so, what I saw along the short segment I covered was enough to spark my curiosity. Walking along parts of the trail, seeing the markers, and imagining the history that unfolded there gave me a deep appreciation for the sacrifices and determination that bore the fruits we are enjoying today.

The thought of returning soon fills me with anticipation. Next time, I will lace up my hiking boots and explore more, taking in every landmark, hill, and historical spot. The Liberation Trail is more than a path through Nyagatare—it’s a journey through Rwanda’s story of resilience, courage, and liberation.

EN ROUTE TO KAGITUMBA



From downtown Nyagatare, I followed the road that winds gracefully through picturesque landscapes. The journey was more than just a drive—it was a window into life along the Umuvumba riverbank, with rolling hills, farmland, and small villages punctuating the wider scenery.

My first stop was in a village known as Matimba. In this village, I visited an old friend and enjoyed a fresh, locally prepared meal. A visit to the local market followed, allowing me to experience the vibrancy of community life firsthand.

As I drove on toward the Kagitumba border post, I made an emotional stop on the hill where Major General Fred Rwigema was shot, paying tribute to a hero whose sacrifice paved the way for our liberation.

At the border, I stood on the bridge connecting Rwanda and Uganda, gazing down at the river as it flows beneath. I was also shown the spot where the first bullet of the Liberation War was fired on October 1, 1990.

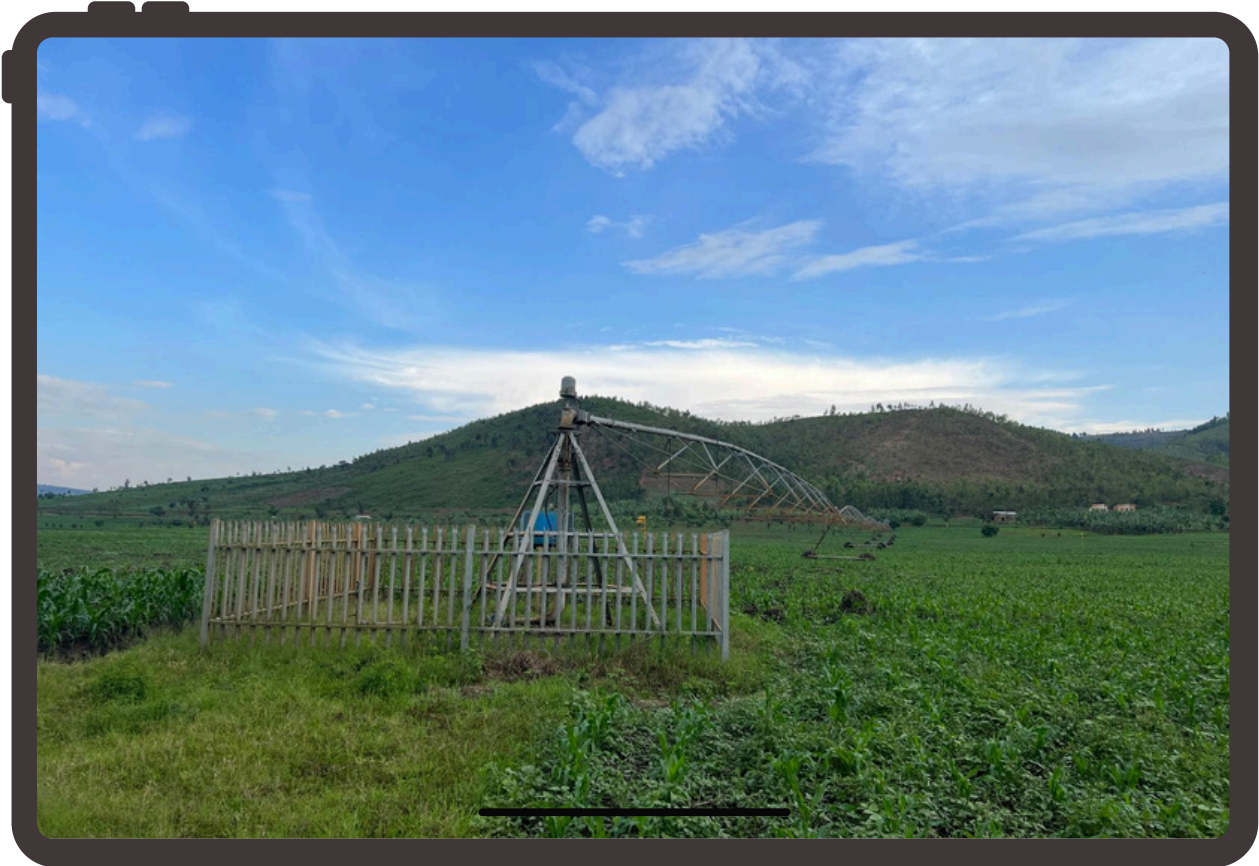


As the road hugged the river, I found myself slowing down more often, not out of necessity but appreciation. Farmers tended to their fields, children walked along the roadside, and cattle grazed peacefully in the distance. These everyday scenes painted a vivid picture of rural life shaped by the steady presence of the Umuvumba, reminding me how closely the river and the people are intertwined.

In Matimba, beyond the warmth of good food and familiar company, I felt a strong sense of belonging. Conversations flowed easily, punctuated by laughter and shared memories, while the nearby market buzzed with activity. Vendors' voices filled the air as exchanges were made and time seemed to slow down. The moment felt grounding, a reminder of the depth of community encounters easily missed when journeys are rushed.

Reaching Kagitumba brought the journey into sharper historical focus. Standing at the border, with the river quietly marking the line between two nations, the weight of Rwanda's past felt tangible. The calm flow of the Umuvumba contrasted deeply with the significance of the events that unfolded there decades ago. What started as a leisurely drive turned into a journey through landscapes shaped by memory and profound meaning.

IRRIGATION FARMING



Irrigation farming has emerged as a game-changer, enabling farmers to grow crops more efficiently and consistently, even during dry seasons. I had the chance to witness this firsthand and see how water management is reshaping rural life.

Much of this progress is supported by the Howard Buffet Foundation, which provides training, resources, infrastructure, and technical assistance to local farmers. Walking through the irrigated fields, I saw lush greenery and orderly plots, a testament to the ongoing transformation.

Irrigation farming in this corner of Rwanda is more than an agricultural practice; it is a symbol of resilience and innovation. It boosts the district's productivity while laying the foundation for sustainable development.

MORNING HOOPS



On my second day in Nyagatare, I followed my usual morning routine, kick-starting the day with a vigorous workout. With a basketball in hand, I ran to a nearby court, enjoying the stillness of the morning as the town slowly came to life. The court was empty, just as I had hoped. There's a certain freedom that comes with having the space all to yourself.

I went through my usual drills, dribbling coast to coast and finishing with layups, crossing over imaginary defenders and nailing jump shots. Playing alone allows me to focus, to move at my own rhythm, and to reconnect with the game in its purest form.

Maintaining my fitness regimen while traveling has become non-negotiable for me. Had I waited to return to my home city to exercise, I would have barely burned any calories over the past ten years.

STROLLING AROUND



A walk around Nyagatare revealed just how much the city has changed. Dusty, bumpy roads have given way to smooth tarmac, complemented by well-paved pedestrian walkways that make moving around on foot both easy and pleasant.

Like the rest of the country, Nyagatare is becoming a walking-friendly city, with improved urban planning and orderly streets. Strolling through town offered a chance to observe daily life up close and appreciate the city's positive trajectory.

Most striking is the gradual transformation of older, low-income neighborhoods into leafy suburbs, marked by better housing, trees, and infrastructure. It's a quiet but powerful sign of Nyagatare's ongoing urban renewal.

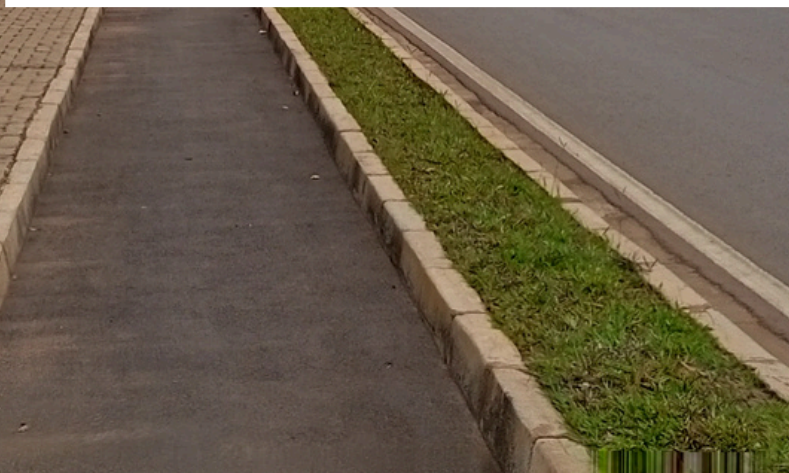


Walking through different parts of the city revealed thoughtful attention to detail in its development. Clearly marked roads, proper drainage, and dedicated lanes for cyclists and pedestrians reflect the country's broader vision.

As I always say, walking enables me to observe and absorb more. wandering up and down the streets of Nyagatare allowed me to not only witness its remarkable transformation, but also capture the spirit of the people.

Bordering Uganda and Tanzania, Nyagatare is positioning itself as a regional trading corridor, blending economic opportunity with thoughtful urban development. Walking through the city, I saw how its transformation—from improved roads and leafy neighborhoods to organized public spaces—mirrors the ambition of a town ready to connect communities and markets beyond its borders.

The city's progress is visible not only in its infrastructure but also in the spirit of its people, making Nyagatare a place where growth, opportunity, and daily life converge.



SWIMMING



Before leaving Nyagatare, I dropped by the splendid Mantis EPIC Hotel & Suites, intending to grab a cup of coffee before hitting the road. The plan quickly changed when I caught sight of the swimming pool, shimmering under a beautiful, sunny sky.

What was meant to be a short pause turned into the perfect way to cap my stay. I didn't swim laps; instead, I took a long, relaxing dip, letting the water wash away the fatigue of the journey. The moment felt refreshing and well-timed.

It was a simple but invigorating farewell to Nyagatare—one that reminded me how unplanned moments often become the most memorable parts of travel.

GOODBYE NYAGATARE



My time in Nyagatare may have been brief, but it was deeply enriching. From rivers and farms to streets, markets, and quiet moments of reflection, the district revealed itself in layers—natural, historical, and human. Each encounter added context, turning a short visit into a meaningful getaway.

Nyagatare is a place of transformation. Infrastructure is improving, agriculture is evolving, and communities are steadily shaping a more vibrant urban and rural landscape. Yet, amid all this progress, the district retains a calm rhythm—one that invites visitors to slow down, observe, and truly connect.

As a domestic tourist, this journey reaffirmed my belief that there is immense value in exploring our own backyard. Nyagatare is not a place to rush through; it is a place that rewards time and curiosity. I left knowing there is still much more to see, and with every intention of returning—next time, with more days and deeper connections.

