

# NYANZA

THROUGH THE EYES OF A DOMESTIC TOURIST



GEORGE BAGUMA



“

**The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes,  
but in having new eyes.”**

**Marcel Proust**

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# I ♥ NYANZA



This journey to Nyanza began, as many of my stories do, on two wheels and with an open mind. What followed was not just a ride to another part of Rwanda, but a layered experience shaped by history, creativity, community, and the quiet moments in between.

Nyanza revealed itself gradually—through royal heritage preserved in museums, thoughtful conversations at the Visitor Center, contemporary expressions at the African Art Museum, and the energy of young people shaping their own futures at the Youth Center. Between these stops were roads that invited reflection and hills that reminded me why traveling slowly often reveals the most.

Coffee breaks, welcoming encounters, and unhurried pauses stitched the experience together, grounding the journey in both movement and stillness. This booklet is a personal exploration of Nyanza, shaped by the people, places, and stories that define this historic district.



## ROYAL NYANZA VISITOR CENTER



My stop at the Visitor Center turned out to be far more important than I had anticipated. Established to support tourists exploring Nyanza, the center serves as a central point for understanding the district—its royal history, cultural experiences, and practical logistics for getting around.

At the time of my visit, the center was still a work in progress. Even so, the guidance I received proved invaluable. The team shared clear information about key attractions, helped put the district into context, and offered insights that shaped my journey. Beginning here made the entire exploration more structured and intentional.

Beyond basic orientation, the Visitor Center plays a broader role. It helps tourists plan itineraries, connect with guided tours, and discover cultural and community-based experiences that go beyond the main attractions.

## KINDI'S COFFEE SHOP



Before setting out to explore Nyanza in earnest, I made a brief but essential stop at Kindi's Coffee Shop. It felt like the right place to pause, gather my thoughts, and fuel up for the day ahead.

With a cup of coffee in hand, the town seemed to slow down just enough to allow for planning and anticipation. This was a caffeine boost before taking to the streets of a remarkable town layered with history, culture, and modern transformation.

Kindi's Coffee Shop offered exactly what that moment required—a calm, welcoming space to recharge before the day unfolded. Refreshed and focused, I stepped back onto the streets, ready to begin discovering Nyanza one stop at a time.



## STOPOVER AT THE MARKET



I chose to begin my Nyanza tour by immersing myself in everyday life—interacting with members of the local community, feeling their vibes, and capturing their spirit. For me, there is no better introduction to a place than its market. It is where the town breathes most freely, where routines, conversations, and quiet negotiations reveal the true rhythm of daily life.

I walked into the market without the slightest idea of what I would buy. On most tours, limited space in my bike's panniers prevents me from buying stuff. This time, however, having already unloaded my clothes at the hotel, I had created just enough room for something practical, something I would consume during my stay.

Moving from stall to stall, I exchanged smiles, greetings, and a few light conversations. The experience felt unforced and familiar. Eventually, I settled on a variety of fresh fruits, guided more by instinct than intention. It was a simple purchase, yet it anchored me to the place, turning my visit into participation rather than observation. That brief market encounter set the tone for the rest of my time in Nyanza.

# CHRIST THE KING PARISH



From the market, I made a reflective stop at Christ the King Catholic Parish, one of Nyanza's enduring spiritual and historical landmarks. Built in 1935, its serene grounds are marked by a towering statue of Christ the King, guarding the spot where King Mutara III Rudahigwa offered a humble prayer in 1946 and dedicated Rwanda to Christ the King.

Standing there, I felt the weight of historical events on my shoulders. As someone who honors King Rudahigwa as a national hero and shares the Christian faith, I felt a deep connection to the place. Yet, I couldn't ignore the uncomfortable truth lingering in my mind: those who brought the good news of salvation to Rwanda were, at the same time, closely aligned with colonial occupiers of the land. The damage caused by their disruption and manipulation runs deep.

I left the parish with a blend of reverence and contemplation. It was a pause that added depth to my trip, reminding me that even places of worship can hold stories that reach far beyond what we can see at first glance.

# NYAMAGANA DAM



When I made my way to Nyamagana Dam, I was met with tranquility and gentle breezes. Built in the 1940s as part of a fish-farming project initiated by Mutara III Rudahigwa, the dam reflected the king's determination to feed his people during the devastating famine of 1943–44. This was not merely a fishing pond, but a practical response shaped by compassionate leadership—an example of decision-making grounded in responsibility, foresight, and action during a time of profound hardship.

There is, however, a darker layer to this place. During the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, the dam became a site of unspeakable cruelty, as bodies of some victims were thrown into its waters. Encounters with such spaces inevitably invite deep reckoning—reminders that Rwanda's landscape, as serene as it may appear today, carries memories of profound pain alongside stories of resilience.

Today, Nyamagana Dam stands as a place of quiet contrast—born out of leadership and care, yet marked by loss and remembrance. In its still waters, Rwanda's history converges: compassion and cruelty, survival and sorrow. Standing there, I was reminded that places like this ask not only to be seen, but to be acknowledged—honestly, respectfully, and with an enduring commitment to remember.



# KWIGIRA MUSEUM



The building that houses Kwigira Museum was constructed in the late 1950s. It was meant to be the royal palace for King Mutara III Rudahigwa. Unfortunately, he passed away before moving in. Today, it has been transformed into a cultural space that celebrates Rwanda's heritage and journey toward self-reliance.

The name Kwigira, meaning "self-reliance" in Kinyarwanda, reflects the museum's focus. Inside, thoughtfully curated exhibits highlight homegrown initiatives that have helped shape the nation's progress and unity, from traditional practices to modern community programs. Through photographs, texts, and displays, the museum invites visitors to reflect on the resilience and innovative spirit of Rwandans.

My time at Kwigira Museum was both educational and inspiring. Wandering through the exhibits offered a deeper understanding of how Rwanda's history and cultural values interweave with contemporary efforts to build a shared future. It was a place not just to learn, but to appreciate the determination that continues to define this resilient nation.

## KING'S PALACE MUSEUM



I spun my wheels toward the popular King's Palace Museum, eager to close out my day in Nyanza with a deeper look into Rwanda's royal past. This museum invites visitors to step back in time and imagine life at the royal court, where traditions and authority once shaped the nation's history.

My tour began with a walk through the replica traditional palace, its thatched structures and carefully arranged spaces offering a vivid glimpse into how kings and their households lived long before the monarchy ended. Nearby stands a colonial-era mansion built in 1932 for King Mutara III Rudahigwa, reflecting his efforts to blend Rwandan heritage with the changing influences of the time.

Before I left the grounds, I paused to admire the famed Inyambo cattle, the majestic long-horned cows that once accompanied royal ceremonies and still embody a living link to the past. That quiet moment among history's echoes was an unforgettable way to reflect on how Rwanda's monarchy, its traditions, and its transitions have shaped the country I continue to explore.



# AFRICAN ART MUSEUM



Before I called it a day in Nyanza, I made one more stop that left a lasting impression — the African Art Museum. What I found inside went far beyond what I had anticipated, leaving me with more questions than answers — in the most thrilling way possible.

This isn't just another museum filled with objects behind glass cases. Instead, it's a space that invites you to think differently about Africa's stories and artistic expressions. Rather than presenting a neat narrative, the collection encourages you to ponder and feel — to let the art raise questions inside you and open your mind to fresh perspectives.

Walking through the galleries, I sensed a dialogue between traditional forms and contemporary ideas, between heritage and individual creativity. It's the kind of place where each piece seems to speak with you, rather than at you — and that's what made the experience so memorable.

By the time I stepped back out into the warm Nyanza evening, I understood why this stop stayed with me. The museum doesn't just show art — it invites you to meet it, to be moved by it, and to carry a piece of that encounter with you long after you've left.



## NYANZA YOUTH CENTER



My next stop was the Nyanza Youth Center, where I took time to explore the computer lab and the library—two facilities that play a meaningful role in supporting youth from the local community.

The computer lab will be useful for some of the sessions I conduct through the Turning Pages initiative, offering practical support beyond traditional reading spaces. The library, on the other hand, sparked plans to donate books and organize book club sessions involving the young people who benefit from the facility.

While in the lab, I interacted with the youth, exchanged a few words, and offered encouragement. It was a simple yet uplifting moment that highlighted the importance of spaces like this in nurturing curiosity, confidence, and opportunity.

## QUALITY INN HOTEL



While in Nyanza, I stayed at Quality Inn Hotel, where serenity and comfort played an important role in shaping my experience. After long days of exploration, the quiet setting made it easy to unwind and enjoy a good night's rest—an often overlooked but essential part of meaningful travel.

The hotel also offered a conducive working environment, allowing me to begin working on this booklet even before the tour came to an end. Having a calm space to sit, organize notes, and write while impressions were still fresh proved invaluable.

What further stood out was the hotel's affordability. Quality Inn Hotel provides comfortable accommodation at reasonable rates without compromising on standards. With practical amenities, an on-site restaurant, and a convenient location within Nyanza, it strikes a balance between comfort, functionality, and value—making it a dependable choice for both business and leisure travelers.

# GOODBYE NYANZA



Just as the journey to Nyanza set the tone for this experience, the ride back to Kigali felt like a fitting conclusion. This time, I chose a different route—via Bugesera—and it quickly proved to be the right decision.

The road was smoother, straighter, and noticeably less congested. With fewer vehicles and long open stretches ahead, the ride felt effortless and freeing. The landscapes unfolded beautifully, mile after mile, offering yet another reminder that Rwanda is truly a biker's paradise.

After another coffee break at Gisa's Coffee in Nyamata, I crossed Nyabarongo River and returned to Kigali. With the road behind me and the journey fully lived, the experience settled into memory—complete, unhurried, and deeply satisfying.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While in Nyanza, I was graciously hosted by Quality Inn Hotel, and I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the entire team. From the warm welcome to the comfortable stay, the hotel provided exactly what a traveler needs after long days of riding, exploring, and writing. The calm atmosphere, attentive service, and thoughtful hospitality made it easy to rest, reset, and prepare for each new day on the road.

Quality Inn Hotel was more than just a place to sleep—it was a dependable base and a welcoming home away from home. My gratitude goes to the management and staff for their generosity and for making this journey even more memorable.

I am also thankful to the staff at the Royal Nyanza Visitor Center for their invaluable information and guidance. Their insights added depth and direction to my exploration and helped shape a more informed and meaningful experience of Nyanza.



