



A Day
on

Bugarura Island

George Baguma

“

Island whispers the secrets of freedom for those who listen.”

Anonymous

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I ♥ Bugarura Island



Some journeys announce themselves loudly. Others reveal their meaning slowly, step by step. My visit to Bugarura Island belonged to the latter.

Just off the shores of Kinunu, in Boneza Sector of Rutsiro District in Rwanda's Western Province, the island sits quietly on Lake Kivu, unassuming at first glance. Yet once you cross over, it becomes clear that Bugarura is not defined by spectacle, but by rhythm—of water and land, of work and rest, of tradition and adaptation. It is a place best understood on foot, through conversation, observation, and unplanned pauses.

This booklet is a record of that experience. From lakeside trails and fishing camps to farms, streets, and shared moments with the people who call the island home, it captures impressions gathered slowly and honestly. Rather than offering a checklist of sights, it reflects a walk through daily life—where landscapes and livelihoods are inseparable, and where the island reveals itself one encounter at a time.

Kinunu Villa



Before setting foot on the island, I spent the night at Kinunu Villa, a refined lakeside retreat offering both comfort and commanding views of Lake Kivu. Perched above the shoreline, the villa enjoys a quiet vantage point that immediately slows you down.

Inside, the spaces are generous, bright, and thoughtfully arranged for rest. Comfort is evident everywhere—from the well-appointed bedrooms to the inviting living areas—while large windows and open terraces ensure the lake is never out of sight.

Kinunu Villa sits directly along the Congo Nile Trail, making it an ideal sojourning place for hikers, cyclists, and travelers tracing Rwanda's most scenic route. At the same time, its calm atmosphere and lake-facing setting make it equally well-suited for weekend getaways along the Kivu Belt, whether for couples, small groups, or anyone seeking a quiet escape by the water.

En Route to the Island



After breakfast, my host and I made our way to the water and boarded a boat bound for Bugarura Island. It wasn't a private charter, but a public boat operated by a local transporter, already carrying other passengers.

The operator picked us up directly from Kinunu Villa—a small convenience that I'm sure my host paid a little extra for. Either way, it worked seamlessly.

Sharing the ride with members of the local community turned out to be part of the charm. There was no ceremony, no exclusivity—just a simple crossing across Lake Kivu, traveling the way locals do. That alone made the journey feel honest, unfiltered, and deeply authentic.

Bugarura Market



We didn't arrive at a jetty or a lodge. The boat eased into a lakeside market—busy, practical, and alive with movement. This was where the rest of the passengers disembarked, some delivering goods to the island, others arriving to buy what they needed.

The market became my first encounter with Bugarura Island.

By coincidence—or perhaps by habit—I often begin my journeys in markets. That's where conversations happen without effort, where purpose is visible, and where the rhythm of daily life reveals itself. Standing there, surrounded by trade and exchange, I felt immediately connected.

There were no formal welcomes or rehearsed narratives, just the honest choreography of daily survival: goods changing hands, voices calling out, boats unloading and preparing to leave again. In that unfiltered setting, the island introduced itself through motion and necessity, offering a welcome that felt both practical and deeply human.

After a brief pause at the dock, which also serves as the island's market, we set out to explore.

Hitting the Trail



A narrow trail wraps around Bugarura Island, closely following the lakeshore and forming a natural ring around the island. At roughly ten kilometers, it invites exploration without feeling overwhelming.

The path stays close to the water, offering uninterrupted views as the island slowly reveals itself. With each step, the scenery shifts—Kinunu’s shoreline in the distance, the shimmering surface of Lake Kivu, and smaller islands scattered across the lake.

Beyond the water, rolling hills rise on the Congolese side, completing the panorama. From this single trail, the island opens up in every direction, promising a journey rich in perspective and discovery.

A Glimpse into Fishermen's Life



Early into our walk around Bugarura Island, we paused briefly at a fishermen's camp along the shoreline. It offered our first glimpse into another rhythm of life on the island—one shaped by the lake and the hours after sunset.

Fishing is a primary livelihood for many men on the island, most of whom work through the night. Their days begin when the lake grows quiet, and their routines follow a schedule very different from the rest of the community. The methods they use, simple yet effective, reflect deep knowledge of the water and its moods.

Standing there, listening and observing, it became clear that island life doesn't slow down when darkness falls—it simply shifts. That brief stop revealed a nocturnal world of patience, endurance, and dependence on Lake Kivu, adding yet another layer to the island's story.

An Unscripted Detour



At one point along the trail, we noticed a tiny islet resting just off the shoreline of Bugarura Island, separated from the main island by a narrow stretch of shallow water. It was close enough to invite curiosity and impossible to ignore.

We took off our shoes and crossed over, wading carefully through the cool water. The little islet felt exposed and delicate, almost as if it were only temporarily spared by the lake—low-lying, quiet, and seemingly at the mercy of shifting tides.

That brief deviation added an unexpected thrill to the walk. Stepping away from the main trail, even for a moment, brought a sense of play and discovery, reminding me that travel often becomes most memorable when plans are bent just enough to let curiosity lead.

Captivating Trail



The farther we walked, the more captivating the trail became. With every turn, the island revealed a fresh perspective, as if it were gently rewarding patience and curiosity.

A cool, lake-borne breeze swept along the path, invigorating and constant. It carried with it the soft, rhythmic sound of waves brushing against the shoreline—a natural soundtrack that settled the mind and set an unhurried pace.

The scenery was endlessly generous. Water shimmered to one side, while the land rose quietly on the other, dotted with greenery and occasional clearings that invited pauses. It was the kind of walk that encourages reflection as much as movement.

On this trail, time seemed to stretch and loosen. The act of walking became secondary to simply being present, absorbing the calm, and allowing the island to reveal itself one step at a time.

Coffee Experience



This wasn't part of the plan. As we followed the trail around Bugarura Island, we stumbled upon a small group of islanders in the middle of processing coffee.

What immediately caught my attention were the machines they were using. Locally made and ingeniously simple, they spoke of resourcefulness and deep familiarity with the craft. There was nothing polished or industrial about them—just tools shaped by need, experience, and creativity.

Watching the men at work was quietly fascinating. Before asking questions or trying my hand at coffee processing the Bugarura way, I simply stood there and observed. Moments like this are often the most revealing.

Encounter with Inyambo



We didn't complete a full circle around the island. After covering roughly three quarters of the lakeside trail, we veered off, leaving the water behind and heading toward the heart of the community. The path changed almost immediately.

What followed was a sharply ascending trail that demanded effort. This was no longer a leisurely walk—it felt like proper hiking, the kind that makes you conscious of your breath and every step forward.

With every gain in elevation, the views grew more rewarding. Eventually, we reached a modern farm, and the mood softened again. There, grazing calmly, were long-horned Inyambo cattle—elegant, statuesque, and impossible to overlook. Seeing them up close was quietly impressive. Their sweeping horns, slow movements, and regal presence added a cultural depth to the journey, reminding me that this island's story is shaped as much by tradition and pride as it is by landscape.

Strolling Along the Streets



From the farm, we descended into the busier parts of Bugarura Island, where the mood shifted once again. The quiet of the trail gave way to streets alive with movement and purpose.

Here, daily life unfolded openly. Small shops stood with doors wide open, conversations flowed freely, and mobile money agents operated beneath bright yellow MTN umbrellas, serving a steady stream of customers.

Strolling through these streets, we felt the island's pulse most clearly. This was not a place on pause, but a living, working community—resourceful, connected, and fully engaged in the rhythm of everyday life.

What struck me most was how familiar it all felt. Despite the island setting, the streets echoed scenes found across Rwanda—enterprise at every corner, neighbors checking in on one another, and technology blending effortlessly into daily routines. Walking through these streets, it became clear that island life here is not isolated, but connected, dynamic, and evolving.

Encounter with a Local Farmer



Farther along the path, we paused to speak with Protais Hakizimana, a 47-year-old farmer who has lived on Bugarura Island his entire life. The conversation unfolded naturally, offering a window into the rhythms and realities of island life.

At the time, Protais was processing his crops using traditional methods, preparing them for sale at the market we had passed earlier. His work was deliberate and practiced, shaped by years of routine and knowledge passed down over time.

From that market, he explained, local traders transport agricultural produce onward to Rubavu and beyond—sometimes even across the border. In that simple exchange, the island revealed its wider connections, showing how local effort feeds into regional and cross-border networks.

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