

Renovated Mugaba Palace opens doors to the public

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MBARARA. The Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities has reopened the historic Mugaba Palace in Ankole following extensive renovations, in a move aimed at boosting cultural tourism in western Uganda.

The palace, a former residence of the Omugabe (king) of Ankole, has been refurbished at a cost of about Shs7.5 billion under the 2017/2018 financial year budget. Officials said its reopening marks a significant step in diversifying Uganda's tourism products beyond wildlife and natural attractions.

Constructed on Kamukuzi Hill, the palace fell into disrepair after the abolition of traditional kingdoms in 1967.

by the government of Apollo Milton Obote. The move, which followed political tensions over federal arrangements and land disputes, rendered the palace inactive, with parts of the property later occupied by squatters.

Although cultural institutions were restored in 1993 under the NRM government, the Ankole Kingdom remains unrecognised, leaving its cultural heritage sites largely neglected until recent government intervention.

Speaking at the reopening at the weekend, the Acting Commissioner for Antiquities and Monuments, Ms Jackie Nyiracyiza, said the restoration is part of a broader strategy to grow tourism revenue through cultural heritage.

"We have set a target of 15 years to generate up to \$50 million, but this requires expanding our tourism offerings.

claims, noting that they reportedly academically but are talented in sports,



The Mugaba Palace on Kamukuzi Hill in Mbarara City. PHOTO/ FILE

Ankole has a rich story that can be marketed locally and internationally," she said.

Ms Nyiracyiza added that the ministry is now focusing on promoting agro-tourism alongside cultural tourism, highlighting Ankole's iconic long-horned cattle as a unique attraction.

"Our aim is to tap into agro-tourism. The long-horned cattle symbolise wealth and pride in Ankole. If we package and promote such heritage, we can attract more visitors and generate income," she added.

She also emphasised the role of the palace as a centre for cultural dialogue

and unity, adding that its historical architecture and exhibits reflect past interactions among different kingdoms.

"This palace should serve as a space for dialogue on heritage and culture. Historical records here show how kingdoms interacted through visits, intermarriages and exchange of gifts. We want to revive that unity," she said.

Mr Umar Muwonge, a senior tourism development officer, urged leaders to embrace cultural tourism as an economic activity.

"This is the way to go. Investments in cultural tourism can generate revenue while restoring pride among communities," he said.

Mbarara City Tourism Officer Allan Karakore Buhanda said opening the palace to the public will preserve Ankole's cultural identity and promote domestic tourism.

"Mugaba Palace is central to the history of the Omugabe. By preserving it, we are safeguarding our heritage. Tourism is not only about national parks; visitors can also experience culture," he said.

He added that the palace showcases traditional artefacts.