

NEIGHBOURHOOD L. Victoria's biggest island hosts many tribes

Kalangala: The ferry is waiting for you

BY TUS KAKEMBO

Come International Tourism Week (September 22-27) under the theme, "Unlocking the potential", all boats, ferries and ships on Lake Victoria will lead to Kalangala district.

Covering an area of 9,066sqkm, Bugala is the biggest island, covering 452.1sqkm squared of the 84 islands on the Victoria. The inter-connecting murrum roads are smooth. There are diversified economic activities, from what was solely a fishing economy, to oil palm farming and now tourism. Ferry transport and electricity connections have made life here easier.

Tourists find Kalangala irresistible, and this has attracted hotels like Brevad, Mirembe, Habitat, Pearl and many others to set up shop as they compete for clients. A price war rages with charges ranging between sh100,000 and sh250,000 per night.

As the ferry docks, hotel staff with placards move forward to assist their clients with their luggage. Consequently, the fleet of motor boats has shot up to shuttle guests for the four-hour journey from Nakiwogo, Luzira and Bukakata, to Kalangala. With a population of 55,000 people as per the 2014 census, the profile of residents and businesses is changing. Most landing sites were upgraded.

Mention any mover, shaker of the economy and political bigwig in the country and they have acquired property there. A golf course, Rotary club and houses of worship for different religious denominations are in place to make life much more comfortable.

It is the home of former Democratic Party president Paul Kawanga Semogerere, former minister Tim Lwanga and National Resistance Army revolutionary Andrew Lutaya.

History

John Magato, a teacher who was one of the first Ugandans to go to Rome, has a lodge which has been overshadowed by bigger players lately. Christianity got to the island before reaching the main land. Buganda kingdom army had its military base on the island with the soldier who was said to fight in the air before aeroplanes were discovered. Before that, there was the legendary Kibuka Owomubire who was betrayed by a Munyankole woman about his military prowess.

She leaked information and he was brought tumbling from the skies by arrows. Today, his

treasured symbol of Buganda manhood is kept in the Uganda Museum.

According to Rev. Lukyamuzi, one of the oldest churches in the country is based in Kalangala because the missionaries camped there as they prepared to hold court with the Kabaka on the main land. Caleb Tukaikiriza, the resident district commissioner, says the fishing industry is recovering after years of plummeting.

"Kalangala borders Kenya and Tanzania and suffers from piracy, as well as theft of boat engines and fishing nets," Tukaikiriza says.

"In future, we need

administrators from either country to meet and share notes on security, Lake

IN NUMBERS

Rent is between sh150,000 and sh250,000 for a self-contained unit per month. A plot of land measuring 50ftX100ft is priced at sh10m and sh60m, depending on the location. Fish price is sh10,000 a kilogramme. A bodaboda ride is between sh1,000 and sh20,000, depending on the distance.

Victoria conservation and population control."

During the International Tourism Day, the guests are expected to enjoy boat races, bird watching, nature walk, hunting and encounters with crocodiles. The beaches with white sand are ideal for beach volleyball and sunbathing or fishing expeditions.

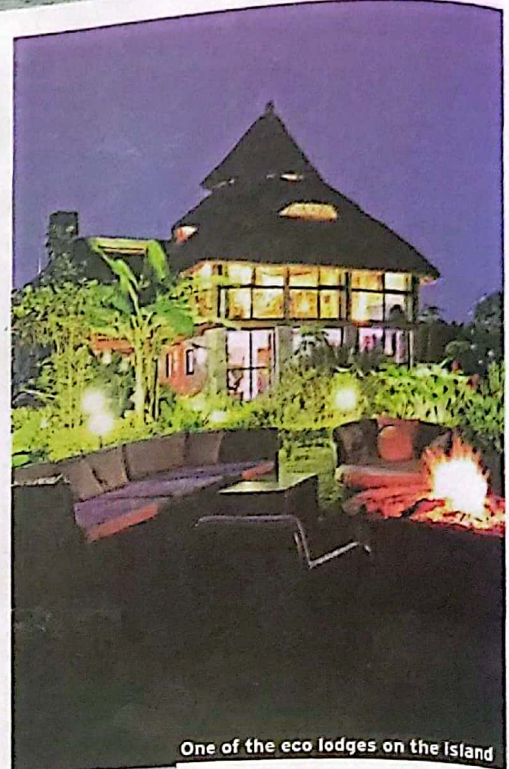
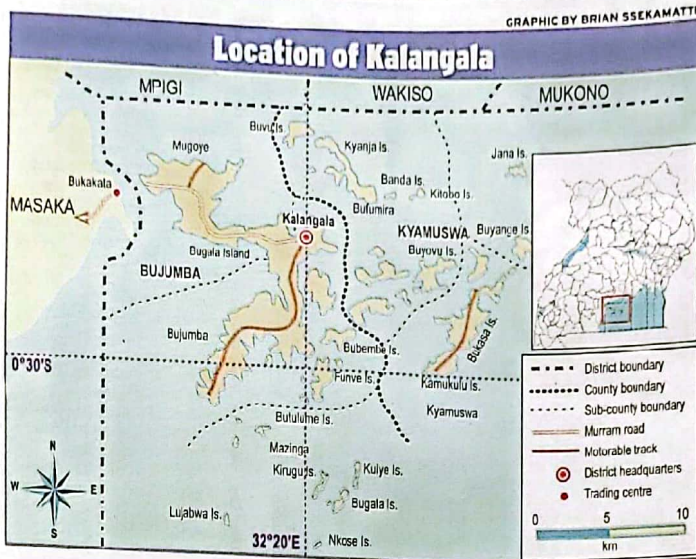
Kalangala is a melting pot of tribes and nationalities. Swahili is used more often in busy sections and at landing sites.

Uganda Tourism Board's John Sempebwa likens it to the biblical Garden of Eden.

"There is a wealth of religious and oral literature



A ferry docking at Kalangala. Different ferries move from Bukakata, Nakiwogo and Luzira to the island daily. Photos by Titus Kakembo.



One of the eco lodges on the island

here," Sempebwa says. "If you are tired of the usual life, a break in Kalangala is irresistible. The air is fresh. The smiles are genuine. And Karibu is authentic (you are welcome) not like what you get in Kampala city or other urban centres. Time spent in Kalangala means being away from the flurry

on the mainland, although all telephone networks are connected with internet services available."

Otherwise, the people are humble and courteous. However, there are also women and men looking for fortune or running away from the long arm of the law on the main land.