

Amuru Hot Springs: A gem in

DISCOVERING THE POTENTIAL: The Amuru Hot Springs have the potential to turn into a tourist attraction if they are improved, writes Cissy Makumbi & Josline Adiru.

To many, Amuru District invokes memories of naked women who stripped before government officials over alleged land grabbing.

Yeah, that was a scene that will be told for years.

However, away from the stripping, Amuru is a land of beauty blessed with lush green vegetation that is characterised by wild scenes, protecting life and productivity in the northern district.

Here, you find features such as Amuru Hot Springs that are not only mesmerising but are also a talking point among locals and tourists.

The springs, which are located three kilometres out of Amuru Town Council, are surrounded by a tranquil environment.

Birds chirping into the adventure are reminiscent of a love story taken out of a Hollywood movie script.

The green tall interlocking trees over and above the village paths provide a shade that stretches for about three kilometres.

The air that pushes through the trees is another offer that brings a feeling of freshness and relaxation.



"We are proud of our cultural heritage. We have plans to make these springs better to benefit the current and future generation."

MICHAEL LAKONY, THE AMURU DISTRICT CHAIRPERSON

50

THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE THAT VISIT THE SPRINGS. THE SPRINGS ARE AN INFORMAL TOURIST SITE THAT DOESN'T GENERATE MUCH INCOME FOR AMURU.

The trees overlap moulded rocks that have fountain-like formations. The fountains, which are filled with water, give off vapour that progressively disappears into the air in a beautifully curved pattern.

This is Amuru Hot Springs, one of the symbols that give Uganda its true definition – the Pearl of Africa. The springs are located in Amoyo-Koma Sub-ward in Amuru Town Council. Amoyo-Koma, which literally means "feel relaxed", feeds into the irony of a natural beauty that lies in silence but offers a rare form of satisfaction for both local and international tourists.

A hot spring is a result of the emergence of naturally heated underground water that rises above the rocks onto the earth's crust.

While some of the springs contain water that is a safe temperature for bathing, others are extremely hot and can result in injuries once it gets into contact with human skin.

However, the springs hold an uncommon form of remedy. Some locals believe has magical powers.

According to Aloysius Okumu, an

elder in Amuru Town, the warm water from the springs were until recently a remedy for a number of sicknesses that were difficult to heal.

"People would come from within and far to take a bath in the springs. Some would heal and others would not. This is rare nowadays but it is something that we can revive. However, we need to perform some rituals," Okumu says.

Apart from that, he says, the springs had a number of rituals but most of them are now disregarded.

For instance, he reveals, no one would cross the spring with a knife, spear or a gun.

One would only cross with such items if they were sure that they were not going to point them in the water.

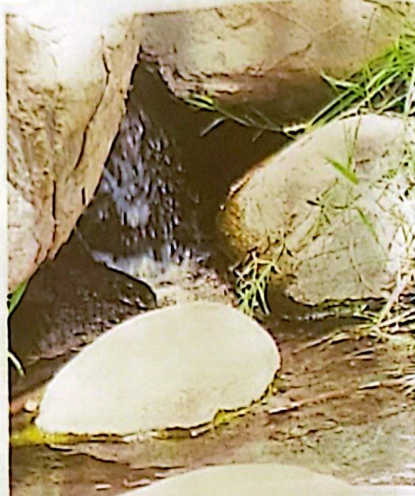
However, when the war broke out, he says, this was disregarded and people have since been crossing without regard to the traditional beliefs.

According to Okumu, district authorities need to gazette it as a tourist site through which resources can be mobilised.

The initiative, Robert Onyut, the Anaka Youth Town Council chairperson believes, must be all-inclusive in order to develop something that will be useful to the communities but at the same time attract tourists.

"We can get money from the springs through tourism. If they are improved, people will be coming here to have a feel of them [the springs]," he says.

Water from Amuru Hot Springs is believed to heal wounds and make infertile women pregnant. FILE PHOTO



A woman feels the temperature of the water at a section of the Amuru Hot Springs. PHOTO BY CISSY MAKUMBI



the wilderness

PLANS

What was once the Amuru Acholi district can be developed through assistance from the Ministry of Tourism given that it has a larger mandate and better plan for tourism sites across and within Uganda.

"We are proud of our heritage. We have plans to make these springs better to enhance current and future generations," he says.

Recently, the district sent a proposal to the Acholi Tourism board seeking advice on the best way through which they would attract donor support to develop the springs.

According to Lakony, the springs receive more than 50 visitors, some of whom come from outside Uganda.

"We want to streamline management of the springs. We shall find a way of keeping records and see how we can make each visit better with varied targets," he says.

Winnie Lawoko-Owe, is the vice chairperson of the Acholi Tourism Cluster, and she says the springs are among the potential tourists sites that have been and are being identified by the cluster.

These, she says, will be improved with the help and consultation with surrounding communities.

"We want the communities to be part of the development process. We also want the district to develop a budget that can be used to improve the springs as well as maintain such sites," Lawoko-Owe says.

This, she says, can be achieved through public private partnership, which can eventually turn such sites into income generating ventures.

The Ministry of Tourism recently embarked on the promotion of local tourism, which earns the country around Shs300b in foreign earning annually.

A man washes his feet on a rock that sits above the springs. PHOTO BY CISSY MAKUMBI



Amuru Hot Springs have potential to become a tourist attraction if they are properly developed. PHOTO BY HENRY MANGENI



If I had to be somewhere in Uganda right now, it would definitely be...



KISEDI NATIONAL PARK: The Park consists of two major valley systems of the Kidepo and Narus rivers. In there, is also a hot spring - Kanangopuk - which is the most permanent source of water in the park. The clay in the park, makes it a nice place to try out molting. **SAM NJERU, TAXI OPERATOR.**



NYERO ROCK PAINTINGS: The rocks are part of a homogeneous tradition often showed in most of the art that spreads across Africa. The art is attributed to the Batwa (Twa) hunters who are of Pygmy origin. The paintings enrich the cultural identity of the people of Teso. **ASSUMPTA NANNZOI, TAILOR.**



BWINDI IMPENETRABLE FOREST: It is a biodiverse and mountainous home to many of the world's mountain gorillas. It also has many tree and fern species, although there is restricted numbers of viewing to help protect the endangered gorilla families. The forest also has rough paths that weave in dense forests, which are home to butterflies and birds. **GEORGE WILLIAM NSINDA, BUILDER.**



BUJAGALI FALLS: The falls streams into the mountain curves that are beautiful to watch and sail through for the more daring ones. It is also believed that a native god called Jaja Bujagali lives around the falls and gives blessings to everyone who visits the falls. The falls have a beautiful view of the misty formation as the water hits and bounces off the rocks. **HARRIET NAMBI, TEACHER.**

Compiled by Godfrey Lugaaju