

# PEARL of AFRICA

SPECIAL TRAVEL SECTION

## DRAGON BOATS DESCEND



The dragon boat festival attracted 30 teams from both Uganda and China and it took place at UWEC in Entebbe

By Jacky Achan

**D**ragons are only in fairy tales. But an effigy of a dragon on the race boat at the inaugural Dragon Boat Festival at the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC) in Entebbe seemed to make it real. As early as 8:00am, adventurers were gathered at the venue of the race. A few had already had a taste of the event the previous weekend when the trial race was held at Kinbulu beach in Entebbe.

There was so much excitement at the trial race, people cheered their teams on as they battled to show their prowess, no wonder at the main event the following weekend so many people turned up.

**INTRODUCING THE DRAGON BOAT**  
A huge water sport affair, the Dragon Boat Festival originates from northern China. It is one of the seven recognised public holidays in China every year and with the longest history.

It is also one of the three big festivals held dear by the Chinese nationals and Asians. It occurs on the fifth day of the fifth month on the Chinese lunisolar calendar. The dragon boat race traditionally arose from an attempt to rescue the patriotic Chinese poet Qu Yuan who, after falling



1. Participants in the traditional category of the dragon boat races. 2. Tourism State minister Godfrey Kiwanda (left) and Vice President Edward Ssekandi arrive at the Dragon Boat Festival.

out with his king, got banished from the kingdom. Qu Yuan later committed suicide by drowning in the Miluo River upon hearing the news that the Qin state had conquered the capital of Chu state in China, where he was adviser to the king, but had lost his trust.

Feeling betrayed by the turn of events, he drowned himself. But rather loved by his people, they tried to save him.

The Chinese threw bamboo leaves filled with cooked rice into the water so the fish could eat the rice rather than the hero poet. To commemorate Qu Yuan, this practice continues to date.

**THE RACING**  
The Dragon Boat Festival venue was a melting pot of Chinese, Ugandan and other foreign nationals eager to witness history.

Over 30 teams, including one professional team from Wuhan City University in China were lined to compete against each other and loads of prizes including cash and trophies were readied for the top teams.

The dragon boats were assembled and tested as revellers streamed into UWEC to



3. Participants during the dragon boat race. 4. Some of the revellers who attended the festival.



5. Participants during the dragon boat race. 6. Some of the revellers cheer on at the festival.

## ON LAKE VICTORIA



<< FAST FORWARDING AND SHIPPING COMPANY TEAM FROM MAYUGE WERE CHAMPIONS.>>



7. Participants during the dragon boat race. 8. Some of the revellers cheer on at the festival.

be part of the festival. By 10:00am, all was set and competing teams faced off. Teams raced in boats in the shape of dragons. Each boat had 22 people, 10 paddling on each side. There was also a leader at the front drumming to give their team momentum and a guide at the back giving direction to the boat.

The boats were as fast as engine boats given the power of the many paddlers. Each team was rowing their boats forward to the drumbeat, racing to reach the finishing line first.

At the end of the 200-metre race, the Ugandans proved too strong. Even the professional team from Wuhan City University could only manage to win one heat and did not make it to the finals.

Fast Forwarding and Shipping Company team from Mayuge were champions. It was Nalubaale Rowing Club that followed hotly on their heels coming second whereas Super Volcanoes also from Mayuge took third position to the delight of Ugandans and sports tourists.

**A TOUCH OF UGANDA'S TRADITIONAL BOAT RACE**  
On the day, Ugandans, the Chinese and all other foreign nationals present were to also witness the traditional boat race.

### BENEFITS

Kakooza said they want to revive water transport that was booming on Lake Victoria in the 1970s with more tourists coming into Uganda and more Ugandans exploring our diverse country.

The Dragon Boat Festival will also boost boat racing as a water sport in Uganda.

"There is every hope that the Dragon Boat Festival in Uganda will be added to the list of the International dragon boat festivals. If we achieve this, it will be a massive sports tourism attraction for the country."

Different from the dragon boats, the traditional boats were to give the adventurers a taste of Uganda and ensure both Ugandans and Chinese appreciate each other's culture.

The Dragon Boat Festival was happening only for the very first time in Uganda and



9. Participants during the dragon boat race. 10. Some of the revellers cheer on at the festival.

Participants during the dragon boat race. Some of the revellers cheer on at the festival. Rocksie Troupe on stage. Fiina Mugerwa aka Masanyalaze (left) dances with Minister Kiwanda. Chinese guitarist performing at the Dragon Boat Festival.

only the second time in Africa after South Africa.

**SPORTS TOURISM ALWAYS DELIVERS**

In an attempt to attract more tourists, especially the Chinese, the China Africa Friendship Association Uganda (CAFAU) could not think of anything better than the dragon boat festival in Uganda.

The secretary general of CAFAU, Dr Alex Kakooza, said many were delighted. The Chinese population of 1.3 billion is now more affluent and many want to explore the world.

He said their goal is to get many Chinese to visit Uganda. "Last year, Uganda received 1.2 million tourists from across the world, but our plan is to double the figure this year by attracting more Chinese tourists," he said.

The Dragon Boat Festival is our answer and it is also an international sport which



11. Participants during the dragon boat race. 12. Some of the revellers cheer on at the festival.

Participants during the dragon boat race. Some of the revellers cheer on at the festival. Rocksie Troupe on stage. Fiina Mugerwa aka Masanyalaze (left) dances with Minister Kiwanda. Chinese guitarist performing at the Dragon Boat Festival.

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