

DID YOU KNOW?

WHY I LOVE UGANDA

By Arthur M. Katabalwa

Recently, I spent several weeks in the UK visiting family and friends. It was a very beneficial trip as I caught up with long lost friends. However, I found out in my interaction with many people, especially in London, that the prevalent views about Uganda were largely negative. Even where one had never visited the country, they had a negative view of Uganda. I love Uganda and I found myself defending her in any way possible. But what is it about Uganda that is so compellingly beautiful that one should defend it to the hilt?

One simple point that is undeniable is that Uganda is home. Many of us who have lived in other countries know that feeling when one comes back home; sometimes of trepidation, but many a time of sheer joy. As a Ugandan, when and where do you get that feeling from? From the weather-beaten airport staff that you meet at Entebbe? The heat? The crossing of the border from Kenya into Uganda? That is always unique to an individual. A family friend told me that on his way from the airport to Kampala, the traffic humps in Kitoro, Entebbe herald the return to proper Uganda. The manic driving after the relative calm of Entebbe is quintessentially Ugandan.

Paul Bagyenda, an old schoolmate, told me something in 2014 that has stuck in my psyche since. He said in Uganda, one is part of the "establishment." For those who may not be conversant with the usage of that term, it refers to someone who is recognised by the system. One who is a major stakeholder in that system. This means that you have a vested interest in that system; in this case Uganda. So, I, as a member of the Ugandan establishment, I have that interest and I see the beauty of this country.

There is a simplicity to this country that cannot be replicated easily anywhere. In the villages one is going to find a life so beautifully simple that we, who are urbanised, would want to be part of.

I was in Bakijulula recently and one question that I left with was: "What is it that I have that those people don't have?"

I may have electricity, running tap water and all the amenities that a modern life accords one. But then what next? The families that I visited ate fresh produce from the garden at the back of their house. When we were served lunch, they only spent money on the salt and the plates from which we ate the food. After that, the food had been cooked in traditional ways using banana leaves. The food was surprisingly very tasty and fresh. We had visited with the intention of getting some modernity to the area. But at what cost? Would the locals be able to afford modern stuff?

My father, the Rev. Laban Bombo (RIP), once told me that Uganda's weather is probably the yoke around our necks that is preventing us from developing. Anyone who has been in temperate countries will vouch for what I am saying. The weather in these countries is so temperamental. When it gets cold, it is life-threatening. The heat during the summer is so stifling at times it also threatens life. They have a limited crop growing season. It is, therefore, imperative that they learn to harness nature or work with nature. Ugandan weather? If you are in a room and it is too hot, you open the windows. Too cold? Close the windows. We build houses which, other than the occasional lick of paint and repairs where need be, cost next to nothing in running thereafter.

Uganda is a beautiful country. One cannot have enough space to write about it.

The Uganda that we have at the moment, warts and all, is a tremendously beautiful country. We must all be proud of it.