

PEARL of AFRICA SPECIAL TRAVEL SECTION

KASUBI TOMBS BACK TO LIFE

Restoration of this cultural site, seven years after it was gutted by fire, has revealed a beautiful masterpiece that should be welcoming tourists again, writes Jeff Andrew Lule

You cannot pass near the huge perimeter wall and elaborate gates without being curious about what is inside. Previously, trees marked the fence of the 64 acres of land that hosts the famous Kasubi Tombs located at Kasubi-Nabulagala in Rubaga division, Kampala.

The new wall is wrapped with reeds like an old-fashioned Buganda Kingdom palace, giving it the traditional touch. It also has fixed lighting at various points. Sheet metal sculptures of two lions dominate the main gates. Last month, the Katikiro of Buganda, Charles Peter Mayiga, led journalists and officials from Menzo, on a tour of Kasubi Tombs for an update on the ongoing restoration. It is seven years since the site and some of its artifacts were destroyed by a fire on March 16, 2010. Some of the items lost in the fire include spears, the stuffed leopard Mayanja, which was named by Sebaka Muteesa I, a lantern and chairs which had been sent by the Queen of England to Muteesa as gifts, and Ssekabaka Daudi Chwa's medals.

The kingdom, with support from the central government and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), embarked on the restoration of the site.

SIGNIFICANCE
Kasubi Tombs is a burial ground

<<KASUBI TOMBS IS A BURIAL GROUND FOR FOUR BUGANDA KINGS>>

for four great Buganda kings; Wahungembe Muteesa I, Muteesa II, Mwanga II, and Daudi Chwa. The site was also Muteesa I's palace in 1856 and then kingdom capital. When Muteesa I died in 1884, following the Buganda burial customs of the kings, he was buried in his house in the palace.

It was inscribed on UNESCO's world heritage list in 2001 because of its rich culture, making it an outstanding tourist site globally.

The kingdom's treasurer and finance minister, Waggwa Nsubirwa, says they intend to complete the restoration this financial year 2017/2018. Reading the kingdom's budget for this financial year recently, Nsubirwa said the tombs have been allocated sh1b.

Nsubirwa explains that progress was slow due to various cultural norms central to the construction, adding that other works have been completed and they are now focusing on the completion of the main resting place of the late kings known as *Muzibu ezala mpyaga*.

WORK ON SITE

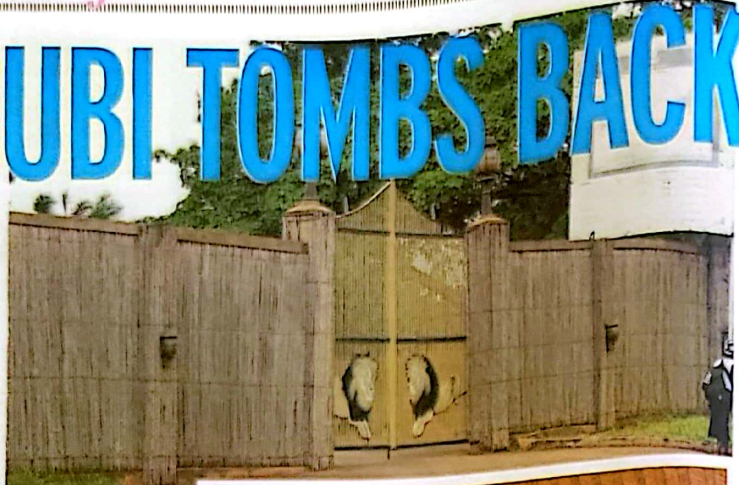
A big circular dome has already been raised to roof the *Muzibu ezala mpyaga* house, although still enclosed in blue tarpaulin sheets. On the inside, traditional thatchers have already raised a number of rings to the roof as per the tradition.

The rings must correspond with the number of clans in the kingdom.

One of the thatchers says even the natural materials like the grass and reeds are hard to find nowadays.

Aisha Nanyonga, a guide, explains that the reeds used to make traditional rings must be

selected carefully and spruced. After gathering them into a required number, they are tied and pounded to make them lax for flexibility during the time of thatching. Roofing is done by 52 clans and supervised by Wabulakayole (a traditional contractor-thatcher).



TO LIFE

BUGANDA'S CORONATION SITE

THE NEW FACE OF NAGGALABI CORONATION SITE

Tomorrow marks the 34th coronation anniversary of Kabaka Ronald Muwenda Mutebi II. Jeff Andrew Lule revisits the site of his coronation which got an uplift last year.

As you advance towards the gate of King's College Budo, you will immediately see a blue signpost with an inscription "Budo Naggalabi". About 100 metres ahead of a graded murrum road leads to the historical Naggalabi coronation site.

A small grass thatched hut with metallic doors and windows marks the entrance and new signposts welcome visitors. The last time we visited this place, it was hard to find the site because the road was bushy and there was no signpost. Naggalabi is often referred to as the heart of Buganda because of its significance to the kingdom.

Rose Nasuuna, 67, a guide at the site, said the refurbishment of the site became necessary to promote tourism.

OTHER PROJECTS
The kingdom has fixed solar power panels to generate electricity for use at the tombs, and also fixed water

- 1. One of the gates at Kasubi Tombs
- 2. Katikiro Charles Peter Mayiga (in a black suit) and other officials at the main house
- 3. The main house at Kasubi Tombs under construction

Each clan is required to make a traditional ring. Wabulakayole was subcontracted by the Omega Construction Company, the main contractor. A half concrete wall with strong pillars has also been put in place to support the steel roof. Previously, a big wooden pole and other few small ones were used to support the roof. The pole, according to one of the thatchers, has a cultural significance and will be fixed anywhere. "You do not just get this pole anywhere. It is only sourced from Kasubi-Kyaggwe in Mukono district as per tradition," the thatcher says.

ENTRANCE TO THE MAIN SITE
Visitors are subject to thorough checks by royal guards at the main gate before accessing the cultural gate house called *Bujabuka*.

The gate is also guarded by Nsigo from the Bufalao clan and Mulamba from the Mushororo clan. A reception office and crafts shop stand on the immediate left.

Next to them is another grass thatched house called *Ndaga Obukaka*, where different royal drums are

kept. These drums have existed for over 130 years. They include *Mwajogwe* played at the enthronement ceremony of the king, *Banabale*, which is sounded to announce the arrival and departure of a royal family member at the palace, and *Kanaba* drum, which announces the death of royal family members. Women are prohibited from going in there and the keeper of this house, called Kawulu, must live a celibate life.

There are other modern and traditional houses around the main house which have been given a facelift. They are said to have belonged to Muteesa I's 84 concubines. There is also the house of *Mwatalya* (Kabaka's sister who takes care of the tombs).

In the middle of the main compound opposite the main house, is a burning fireplace, an indication that the king is still flourishing.

HOW TO GET THERE
It takes about 20 minutes by commuter taxi from the city centre and less on a boda boda.



Naggalabi, the coronation ground of Buganda kings, it dates back to the 14th century

BUGANDA HOUSE

Enyumba ya Buganda (Buganda House) is another significant building within Naggalabi and, it too, got a facelift with a fresh coat of paint, thus changing it from its previous ugly and rusty looks. A wire mesh fence and visible signpost set it apart. The house signifies the one set up by Kintu when he became king. Kimbowa says every new king has to stay in Buganda house for nine days after coronation. During this period known as "Enaku ezobwelinda" (days of lesson), no man in this area is supposed to touch a woman until the nine days are over. The king uses this period to select his cabinet and make strategies on how to run the kingdom affairs.



Buganda House in Naggalabi

The once circular traditional structure of grass and reeds, was reconstructed with an iron sheet roof and other modern materials to protect it from destruction.

Kintu is said to have killed Bemba, cut off his head and allegedly buried it at the exact spot where the king sits (antihill) during his crowning. After winning the battle, Kintu reportedly declared that every king of Buganda had to be crowned at the very spot.

During coronation, the prince travels with his people using short cuts through Mutundwe, Bunamwaya and Katale, where other rituals are performed, before arriving at Naggalabi for the main event. Wakiso district local government started construction of this traditional route as part of the move to promote tourism.

Kimbowa said a crown prince also has to go through a demo fight with the Semanobe, a fight he must win.

FACELIFT OF BWANIKWA HOUSE
About half a kilometre from the main site is Bwanika house, where the prince goes for secret rituals before being crowned. This house used to be fenced with reeds and surrounded by dilapidated structures. Today, there is a signpost and houses have been re-

thatched to maintain the heritage element. According to Lubowa, the rituals in this place are performed by the daughter of Semanobe. It is after these rituals that the prince goes to the antihill to be crowned.

During the ceremony the antihill is covered by animal skins while the prince is dressed with a barkcloth and given a spear called *kanuuna* signifying the one Kintu used to kill Bemba. He is also given a knife, among other items.

After being crowned, the king spears a white cow to death as a symbol that he is ready to protect his people.

MBOHELEDE TREE

This tree is said to have been used as a court by Kintu. It is tall, bulky, with huge long branches some bending to the ground. It is believed to be one of the oldest trees in the country, estimated to be over 600 years. During court sessions, people pleaded for mercy saying "Mbohelede" meaning they had learnt their lesson, thus giving the tree its name.

Naggalabi is 14km from Kampala, off the Masaka Highway.