

OVERCAME FEAR

BY VIVIAN AGADA

DEFYING WATER PHOBIA TO SEE PUNISHMENT ISLAND ON BUNYONYI

Lake Bunyonyi is arguably one of the loveliest and most breathtaking places in Uganda. Located in southwestern Uganda between Kisoro and Kabale districts, the lake is a magical sight. The lush green vegetation, the surrounding terraced farms and 29 dotted islands in all shapes and sizes make it a sight to behold.

However, I have always shied away from touring this lake because of my great fear for water bodies. I have visited the shores several times, but have never got the guts to take a boat ride and venture on the lake.

Bunyonyi is the second deepest lake in Africa and this fact has always scared me to the bone marrow. I fear that if I ever take a boat ride on the lake, it would be the end of me. I always picture myself in a boat capsizing, with me screaming for dear life. So I avoid those boats. I would painfully watch my friends take off in the boats to adventure on Lake Bunyonyi islands, and then wait for them to return and tell me stories of their exploits, which made me even more mad and envious.

Though I continuously pushed aside any idea of a boat ride, I felt a strong desire to venture away from the shores to see the legendary Punishment Island in the lake. Recently, with a group of friends, we again went to camp at Lake Bunyonyi. As we hit the road, I kept telling myself that come what may, I would get on a boat this time. I was tired of missing out on all the fun every time we visited.

So I joined my friends to go and see the much-talked-about Punishment Island.



Although it is small, Lake Bunyonyi is one of the deepest in the world

UGLY HISTORY

The Punishment Island, locally known as *Akampene*, is a 215-square-foot raised muddy platform, which is home to two trees; one which is long dead and the other is about to give up on life.

The dark history of this small island was set in the 20th century, but is still told to date.

It is where the native Bakiga girls who became pregnant before marriage were taken, abandoned and left to die as a punishment for disgracing their family. They would either starve to death or drown trying to swim back to the main land. The practice was abandoned in the 1940s. But what an unfair punishment it was; for the males responsible for the pregnancies were never punished.

As soon as we got on the boat, my friends asked the guide to make sure he shows us the famous 'punishment island'. The birds that used to roost on these trees waiting to feast on girls' dead bodies

have since abandoned the place.

Though some wished to get off the boat and step on the island, they talked of fearing the ghosts of the innocent girls who had died there. For my case, just looking at the 'punishment island' was enough, it was worth the trip.

The trip was fulfilling because I got to conquer my fear of water. I guess fear is conquered by directly confronting what you fear.

WRAPPING UP THE TRIP

Despite the fact that I hail from Kabale district, I have failed to get used to its weather. It is always cold. So

a bonfire was just the perfect idea on reaching the camping site.

The warmth and the dancing made the evening great. There was no need for a sweater. However, the minute I got into bed, the cold was shocking. The bed sheets felt ice cold. I had to put on all the shawls and a jacket I had carried, but it was still cold. In turn I got chest congestion which only cleared in the morning when I got to sun-bathe. If you are ever going to visit Lake Bunyonyi, which everyone should, because of its breathtaking beauty, carry enough warm clothing to cover yourself, the coldness is real.



The Punishment Island has one tree still standing



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