

WALKING THROUGH TIME.

Located in Naggalama Mukono City, the Ewaffe Cultural Center stands as a portal to a heritage long cherished, beckoning travelers like myself to traverse the currents of time. A mere three months old, this enchanting haven connects the pulsing present to the hallowed days of my ancestors, inviting a journey into the depths of Buganda's soul. Before this trip, I had never experienced the Buganda culture in such a holistic manner.



A troupe of young girls, adorned in their bikoyi attire with sashes elegantly wrapped around their waists, graced us with an expressive welcome dance. I felt like a Queen entering her Kingdom. Hospitality saturated the atmosphere as we set foot on these grounds.

“Abaggenyi baffe,” a lady called, and the unison response was “Ewaffe.” We had found a sanctuary, a second home, a direct conduit to the very roots of my culture. An anticipation of unforgettable experiences coursed through my veins. Not only were we welcomed by the rhythmic sound of Buganda drums, but also offered a small sack of dry coffee beans and a signature welcome beverage (Omubisi) served in a small, brown calabash.



Amid this enchantment, a venerable gentleman, draped in the regal kanzu, was introduced as one of the custodians of this ground. His voice, soft but

firm, delivered a poignant message: "Africans! We must tread carefully, for the Europeans continue to erode our culture." It was a sentiment I wholeheartedly shared, realizing that my familiarity with the ways of the white man far surpassed my understanding of my motherland and tribe.

To keep by the clock, our guide, Justine, ushered us to the medicinal garden to enrich us with ancestral wisdom on health. Before the discovery of modern chemistry that led to the white man's medicine, our ancestors boosted their immunity with plants like aloe vera, ginger, rosemary, hibiscus, and pomegranate, to mention but a few. The benefits that cut across most of these plants were their fertility advantages for both females and males.

During the garden tour, the scorching sun melted away the chilly weather. It was time to move on to the next page of our exploration.



Time has shifted, and the way human beings do things has evolved. Unlike recent times that have a percentage rise in tap water usage, once upon a time, people, especially girls, walked long journeys to collect water in their clay pots. Justine led us down a path reminiscent of those times. Our shoe soles bore the weight of rain-soaked mud from the previous night as we walked down a small pathway through the forest while avoiding the attack of red ants. Light streaks pierced through the leaves of the trees as the clouds parted way for the sun. Minutes later, the path led to an open clearing, and the well came into sight. We found a deep, wide hole with murky water, covered by bright green water lettuce floating on top of it. The only direct access to the well was a three-logged bridge. One had to embrace a ballet of grace and composure to ensure they didn't topple into the water for an impromptu bath.

As virtuous as a dove, the girl would return home, taking deliberate steps, for even the slightest misstep could yield double losses, and a shattered pot held no water.

Taking up a different route on our way back to the Ewaffe main quarters, we traveled through the livelihood of the neighboring community, where the economic activities practiced included bricklaying and animal grazing. A whiff of cow dung stung my nostrils as we made our way past the kraal, and I wrinkled my nose as a reflex.

Further along our journey, we discovered that the local community lent its unwavering support to the heritage center by providing fruits and other homegrown delights. It was a testament to the spirit of teamwork and the value of community.

To rejuvenate our lost energy from the walk, the Ewaffe team prepared a fruit feast, set upon a table lain with a lush banana leaf. Plenty of fruit like watermelon, pineapples, jackfruits, sugar canes, soursop, tangerine, and bananas were served. The hosts urged us to pick fruit after fruit until our stomachs were filled.



Following this short culinary break, we delved into a learning session guided by the respective “sengas,” the aunties. They engaged us in the traditional way of preparing the Buganda staple food Matooke and Luwombo. What struck me was the recurring theme of patience and virtue that permeated both food preparation and the sanctified confines of the marital bedroom.



This tour taught me how the barkcloth from the Omutuba tree has preserved a dead body for millions of years. The bereaved family wraps the corpse in barkcloth to provide it warmth in the cold, silent ground.

My highlight of the tour was the bountiful lunch. We received a King's platter comprising matooke, yams, sweet potatoes, cassava, and pumpkin served with chicken luwombo and the special groundnut luwombo. It was the tastiest groundnut luwombo I had ever eaten, and I couldn't help but ask for more. A glass of passion juice served as the harmonious conclusion to this meal.

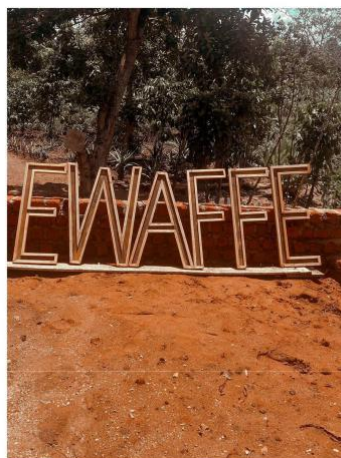
After lunch, there was one activity left on the itinerary.

It has always been a custom for women to sit on mats while the men sit on chairs as a sign of respect. From here, we convened to have a "Senga talk" given to those intending to get married. There was an exchange of lessons, tips, and opinions amidst shared laughter. We created new memories amongst each other that we shall cherish for a lifetime.

The sun faded to signal the close of our remarkable day. My heart played a piano of feelings of happiness, gratitude, melancholy, and pride. The knowledge acquired in these few hours painted a vivid canvas of my culture that I had never seen before, instilling a profound respect for my heritage. At Ewaffe, I belonged. These were my people, and this was the legacy of my ancestors. It would be a great shame if I did not carry on the culture that they tried to preserve for all their lives.

"Abagenyi baffe"

"Ewaffe"



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