



A section of Lugard Road in Fort Portal town. The town nestles on the slopes of Rwenzori Mountains

# Fort Portal town, the tourism hub

By Geoffrey Mutegeki

All roads lead to Fort Portal town in Western Uganda as the country celebrates the 30th anniversary of the National Resistance Movement (NRM).

Fort Portal nestles on the slopes of the Mountains of the Moon, commonly known as Mountain Rwenzori. The town, which is hosting the national celebrations this year, is the only one in Uganda with an English name.

The celebrations are being held at St Leo's College, Kyegobe, grounds in the town.

The town, which is found in Kabarole district derives its name from a British diplomat, Sir Gerald Portal, who was a consul-general of Zanzibar in 1891. He came to Uganda in 1892 and died two years later after returning to England in 1894.

The town was formerly called Fort Gerry, by Captain Lugard, but in 1900, the name was changed to Fort Portal, in honour of Gerald Portal.

Fort Portal is different from many towns in Uganda in more ways more than just a name. It is situated at an elevation of about 5,000 feet making it one of the coolest towns in the country.

According to the countrywide *New Vision* clean town survey of 2013, Fort Portal emerged second only after Entebbe.

**SOME ATTRACTIONS: KINGS PALACE, RWENZORI MOUNTAINS, KARAMBI ROYAL TOMBS, AMABERE GANYINA MWIRU AND KIBALE NATIONAL PARK**

In the Uganda 2040 vision, Fort Portal has been identified as a tourism city. The town became a municipality over 40 years ago and according to local leaders, it is ripe for elevation as a city.

Alex Ruhunda, the Fort Portal municipality MP, notes that the town offers a lot to the tourism sector.

"From the climate to the surrounding tourism attractions, the location, the ongoing development and hospitality of the people, this area was blessed. And we need a city status to boost our economy," Ruhunda says.

Today, Fort Portal is a major commercial and tourism hub and its climate is one the best in the world.

Kabarole district, where the town is found, has over 52 crater lakes. Major attractions include the Kings Palace, the Rwenzori Mountains, Karambi royal tombs, *Amabere*

*Ganyina Mwiru* and Kibale National Park.

The town is also a gateway to other tourism attractions like Rwenzori National Park, Queen Elizabeth National Park and Semliki Game Reserve.

Fort Portal is also a major educational centre, with many prestigious universities and colleges, including Mountains of the Moon University, Uganda Pentecostal University, Uganda Martyrs University and Makerere University.

The town has a population of 54,275 people according to the 2014 Population Census figures and the main language spoken in the town is Rutooro.

This is also where the seat of the Toro kingdom is found. Oyo Nyimba Kabamba is the reigning king of Toro having ascended to the throne aged three after his father passed on.

Visitors to the town can find budget accommodation for as low as sh20,000 per month and restaurants serve a variety of meals, both local and international.

Lilian Kansime, a vendor at Mpanga market boasts that all the food stuff sold at the market is fresh.

In addition, all the major roads that lead to Fort Portal have been tarmacked, including the Kampala-Fort Portal road, Fort Portal-Kasese-Mbarara road, Fort Portal-Bundibugyo-Lamia road.

President Yoweri Museveni is the chief guest and the theme is 30 years of NRM's committed stewardship; a remarkable legacy for Uganda.

## Karamoja 30 years later

By Geoffrey Mutegeki

We will not wait for Karamoja to develop," is a quote infamously attributed to former president Dr. Apollo Milton Obote concerning the northeastern region bordering Kenya and South Sudan.

Time seemed to have stood still for the conservative Karimojong warriors who were still gathering fruit and leading a pastoral lifestyle on about 27,000sq kilometres of land. The Karimojong were governed by traditional ways based on a patriarchal system led by the *ngigetei* (warriors) and the area was characterised by what the rest of the world saw as lawlessness, resulting from their armed cattle rustling ways.

A community tour of *manyattas* (homes) close to Kidepo Valley National Park was a revelation of their culture.

"It is here in a desert-like land, that our forefathers survived for centuries," states Mariam Nyagan, 26, a chef at the park bandas. "And sometime back survival was all that mattered in this part of the world. Little was known of our ways. We were misunderstood."

"Fortunately, a lot has changed. For example, I would have been tackled into sexual submission by an admirer and married away. But the practice has now been outlawed. Men are more romantic today. If a suitor admires a girl, he will buy her necklaces, a mobile phone or a colourful wrapper to shield her against the cold nights," observed Nyagan.

A man may also request for a pinch of tobacco snuff from a girl. If she gives it to him, the gesture is interpreted as acceptance of his relationship proposal.

The region's turning point came with the disarmament exercise effected by the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) in the late 1990s. Conclusively, Karamoja is evidently changing as the notorious cattle raids or small arms trade have significantly reduced. Former rustlers pooled capital and began cattle trading. Their capital has multiplied. They now buy and sell cows, instead of raiding. Karamoja has good relations with

the neighbouring Bagisu, Langi and Sabiny tribes.

This is in addition to the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF II) programme, which was implemented by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). It has changed lives slowly, but consistently, for the better.

"Animal traction like ox ploughing has been introduced," staid Raphael Ojok in Kareng village. "The men do the ploughing and the women sow the seeds. Weeding and harvesting are unisex ventures. The onus is upon all to store enough food in the granaries to prepare for the regular droughts."

Previously, it was the women's duty to provide food in a home as the men grazed and watered the livestock.

Water was brought closer to Karimojong homes with funds raised through an MTN Marathon to construct boreholes, while and OPM also built valley dams. The women and children no longer have to trek long distances to fetch water for domestic use. Men too, do not have to live their family in search of water points.

"Previously, the Karimojong lived and died for cattle. This is what drove many to live on the edge in search for pasture and water for their livestock," recounted a Uganda Wildlife Authority ranger, Zakaria Logwe. "Women often stayed at one central settlement called a *manyatta* to oversee small farms and raise the children. But this is no more after valley dams were constructed in each sub-county," Logwe says.

The First Lady and Minister of Karamoja Affairs, Janet Museveni, who has been instrumental in the development of the area, said during the launch of NUSAF 3 that Karamoja was now safe and secure like any other part of Uganda.

"People of Karamoja and all Ugandans as well as visitors and partners in the region can go on with their normal business without any fear, shadow of doubt or uncertainty," she stressed. "Water shortages, restocking and nutrition are being addressed by the Government and several development partners."



Karamoja now has several boreholes. Photo by Titus Kakembo