

# What to do in Rwanda's capital? Hike Mount Kigali

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By **Lilys Njeru**

I am always amazed by people who enjoy hiking. Having grown up around hills that were as much companions as they were obstacles, the concept of willingly embarking on a hike was hard for me to understand.

There are many studies that suggest that hiking has potent health benefits – from helping you lose weight to enhancing your mood, but it is the thought of navigating tiny stones, gnarled tree roots, an array of prickly bushes and uneven terrains that holds me back.

The exhaustion, oh the exhaustion! There is something that ascending hills and moun-



Mount Kigali offers stunning views of Kigali city. The hike is about eight kilometres long.

tains does to your body that makes every muscle begin to protest and ask for a reprieve. Why would I willingly put myself through that?

I hadn't got an answer to that question when a friend from Mauritius that I had made during the Women Deliver Conference in Kigali, Rwanda extended an invitation to join her and her friends to hike Mount Kigali. A part of me wanted to release a hearty chuckle and pose the very question that had been echoing in my mind all these years. However, my outward response was a silent nod. After all, I had an entire free day.

I had spent the previous day exploring the city, mostly on foot as it is quite a small city. Kigali puzzled me with its orderliness, cleanliness, and its serene demeanour. I saw only a handful of buses and boda boda in their dozens. It was interesting to observe that each of the riders and their pillions wore helmets "casks" as they

called them. In Kigali, helmets are obligatory by law.

Unlike here in Nairobi where they are accompanied by a cacophony of honking horns and aggressive manoeuvres, riders here seemed to adhere to a different rhythm. I marveled at the silent choreography of the city's traffic and the gentle cadence of conversations among individuals.

As I perambulated the corners of the city, this "uptight" state left me slightly disoriented. Until this moment, I didn't know that even I, a rather order seeking person, could crave chaos. Along the streets, I felt like someone was watching my every move. You should have seen me stash a banana peel into my handbag when I didn't see a trash can where I was standing.

Another thing that shocked me was the language barrier even at the heart of the city. I had read many things about Kigali and interacted with a few who had been there before, but none had told me about this. A handful of residents spoke English and French but many, especially those operating boda boda, spoke in Kinyarwanda. Thank God for google maps!

The mellowness of the city was my main driver in accepting the hiking invitation. I wanted to experience life outside the capital and maybe, unravel the enigma that was Kigali. Also, our tour guide had promised us breathtaking views of the city as we ascended the mountain. The guide was also quick to clarify that the mountain itself was a large hill surrounded by other rolling hills. For someone in sneakers, soft jeans and a tumultu-

ous relationship with mountain climbing, this was a wave of delight.

We set off at 7am and navigated through dense housing in Nyamirambo for about 20 minutes before we started the climb. The villagers were very affable and gave us encouraging nods as we passed their homesteads while the children shouted excitedly at my friends "Wazungu, how are you?" This was followed by hearty laughter.

If you are a frequent hiker, the journey to the top will be an easy one. With a tour guide, the routes are straightforward and there are barely any hurdles along the way. The way down is, however, a bit steep in some areas. The entire hike was about eight kilometres.

Atop Mount Kigali, you get amazing views of the city's buildings and its neighbourhoods. This was like nothing I had seen before.

We were amazed to find a local market, schools, and churches there. We saw some of the locals trek down the hill to fetch water.

At the summit, you find Fazienda Sengha, an outdoor recreational centre where you can see horses in Rwanda and ride them. We were told that this is the only place you can ride horses in Kigali. You could also opt for other activities such as zip lining, archery, and quad biking or visit the military base.

We however did none of these activities as we needed to head back and shop at the famous Kimironko market for souvenirs before we all parted ways to our different destinations.

Lnjeru@ke.nationmedia.com

## Eating out



Passion lemonade and Chicken wrap served with French Fries and guacamole.

## Karen Kitchen, the place where art and appetite meet

By **Kemzy Kemzy**

I recently stumbled upon a hidden gem that boasts of having the best soul food in Nairobi. Karen Kitchen is a quaint and artsy restaurant in One Stop Arcade, directly across the Vice President's residence in Karen. It provides an outstanding one-of-a-kind dining experience that seamlessly blends art and gastronomy. From the moment I stepped into this haven of culinary and artistic delights, I knew I was in for a memorable adventure. Soft instrumental music wafts through the air, setting the perfect mood for an afternoon of relaxation and creativity. As I waited for my African-timer friends to come, I sat and ordered passion lemonade.

When they arrived, we ordered the wrap - mouthwatering grilled chicken pieces and bell pepper wrapped in a tortilla wrap served with a side of French fries and guacamole (Sh600). It was extremely tender, juicy, and superb, and the fries were well-seasoned and crunchy. We got beef samosas for bites, which were equally wonderful and affordable - Sh150 for a pair.

Afterward, we were ready to unleash our inner artists. There was a dedicated art section where every table was equipped with a canvas, brushes, and a palette of vibrant colours, inviting guests to channel their artistic spirit. A dedicated team of skilled artists takes their time explaining the painting materials and techniques, making sure even beginners feel comfortable venturing into the world of art. They strike a perfect balance between being attentive and allowing patrons to immerse themselves in the painting experience without feeling rushed. They tailor-make lessons to individual preferences and skill levels, ensuring that even novices can create a masterpiece they'll be proud to take home. As beginners, we used carbon paper to trace our paintings to acquire a suitable layout and ease the process. The instructors foster a non-judgmental and encouraging atmosphere, allowing guests to express themselves freely and authentically.

The lamb chops were the only thing that disappointed us. They were overly greasy, and when we sent them back to be redone, they simply removed the oily areas and returned them, making the servings smaller for the price they were charging, which was Sh1,250. If you are looking to savor a delicious meal while unleashing your inner artist on a Saturday afternoon, head over to Karen Kitchen.

This picture taken on March 11, 2014 shows a motorcycle taxi driver waiting for a customer in the Rwandan capital, Kigali. PHOTO | AFP

