

Heritage Tourism and Local Capacity in NW Tanzania

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What is the current state of heritage tourism in Tanzania? What future options for expansion of heritage tourism offerings are viable in Kagera Region of northwestern Tanzania? This summer I traveled with my advisor, Dr. Peter Schmidt, and fellow student Malia Billman to Tanzania on a CIBER grant in order to answer these questions. Our team began by working closely with a local tour company in the town of Bukoba, with an assessment of the tour company's infrastructure upon which development of heritage tourism might be built. Our assessments included customer surveys and customer evaluations of services delivered. We joined tourists on various local guided tours, as we also wanted to assess tour company representations of local histories and determine customer appetites for these heritage themed excursions.

In conjunction with these activities, we also collaborated with the village of Katuruka, Tanzania, which has recently created a village-based preservation committee to oversee the development of three key

heritage sites within its jurisdiction. Working with the committee, a development plan was drafted with specific and prioritized action points. Among these action points was the restoration of Mugasha's shrine as a logical developmental starting point because of its highly visible remains. The focus of the shrine of Mugasha is a laterite rock upon which can be seen the footprint of Mugasha, the patron of the lake and the rains, as well as that of his child. These rocks sit on a triangular piece of communally owned land centrally located in the village, a perfect location to maintain community support and interest in the revitalization of these historical areas as possible tourist destinations. While in Katuruka, I also assisted the village in surveying 67% of the households to determine how many elderly "keepers of oral history" remain available to add to the repository of knowledge needed to create a narrative history for visitors attending these sites.

By the end of two weeks,

Mugasha's shrine was complete and a consecration ceremony was held. Guests attended the festivities from the local tourism industry, as well as the Regional Development Director. A senior member of the Katuruka Preservation Committee, Benjamin Shegesha, gave guests a guided tour of the shrines, explaining in detail the rich histories of these places. First impressions of this day are that the visitors and villagers alike were delighted by the great potential of a reemergence of Katuruka's unique history, both parties expressing the desire to realize a partnership of sustained and dedicated commitment to the revelation of these histories as being beneficial to the village, the nation, and the broader world.

Rachel Iannelli is a doctoral student in the Department of Anthropology. Her research was made possible through a summer 2009 UF Center for International Business & Economic Research (CIBER) grant.

