

# An Insight Into Anthropogenic Tourism Potential Of West Nile Sub-Region For Livelihood Improvement

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## **Abstract**

Tourism has become a favored development strategy for improving the livelihood of local communities by providing employment opportunities, market for local products, improving infrastructure, providing investment opportunities and so on. The study intended to understand the anthropogenic tourism potential of West Nile Sub-Region and create awareness so that it can be harnessed to promote tourism growth for livelihood improvement opportunity of people in west Nile sub-region.

The study adopted qualitative approach research design to investigate the phenomenon. Primary data was collected by observation, focus group discussion and interview of key informants; and secondary data was collected by literature review.

The findings indicate that West Nile Sub Region is extolled with abundant anthropogenic tourism potential that are under exploited. Most of the attractions lack basic facilities and services for visitor use, there is limited awareness about the potential, the available services and facilities are inadequate and in sorrow state, the accessibility to some of the sites are poor, there is limited capital for the improvement of the sites. The study recommends need for increased awareness, more investment in facilities and services to tap the potential, improvement of accessibility to some of the sites, more attention to be given by the government to the sector in budget.

**Key words:** *Anthropogenic Tourism potential, Tourism growth, and Livelihood improvement.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism potential of the region basically refers to all exploited and unexploited possibilities that the region offers to tourism, including all resources owned by the area that can be developed into a tourist attraction to generate gain (Riana & Fajri, 2024) (11). These vary in time and space depending on the needs of the society, the evolution of tourist market, and socioeconomic and political context of the region that manifest sometimes as challenges to the sector. The components of tourism potential consist of the anthropogenic, natural, and material resources and conditions necessary for a destination management. According to Sainu et al (2023) (12) the uniqueness of a destination is influenced by the culture and natural environment of the area that determines tourist activities in that particular region. The existence of attractions, availability of facilities and infrastructure, accessibility, and promotion greatly influence the growth of tourism sector of an area that can contribute to improvement of people's welfare, preservation of natural resources and biodiversity among other benefits (Fadahunsi, 2011) (6). The purpose of the study was to provide an insight into anthropogenic tourism

potential of West Nile Sub-Region for livelihood improvement. Specifically looked at the status of anthropogenic tourism potential in the region and how it has been utilized for livelihood improvement. The status of key anthropogenic tourism attractions of the selected Districts of west Nile region were assessed pointing out the attracting features, the status in terms of infrastructure, facilities, and services availability, challenges they face, and the way forward.

### **Background to the study**

Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world, largest export sector and most promising for future growth potential (English and Ahebwa, 2018) (9). It was observed that before Covid-19 pandemic the sector registered a growth of about 4% from the previous year contributing about 6.4% to the world economy and generated more than fifty million jobs (Mutaliyeva et al, 2020) (8). Shpak et al (2021) (13) also perceived tourism as determinant of many countries' economies, as it plays crucial role in driving development in the countries and Prajitna & Fathoni (2023) (10) emphasized the role of tourism as the primary source of income through foreign exchange that has the capacity to boost the national economy and significantly impact on community livelihood. Yusran et al (2023) (15) views tourism as one of the most profitable industries that can champion development of a particular area and improve livelihood of people. Also, Oliver Valentine Ebo (2017) (5) observed the multi-sectoral nature of tourism that offers a range of opportunities to improve the livelihood of the people in a particular area as it consists of activities, facilities, services and industries that deliver travel experience to travelers away from home. In a nutshell, tourism is a sum of phenomena and relationships arising from interaction of tourists and host communities in the process of attracting and hosting tourists that widens opportunities for local people to improve their welfare (Fadahunsi, 2011) (6). It is clear the diversification of economic activities in rural areas is essential for stimulating development that improves livelihood in the area that tourism is capable of offering (Mănescu et al, 2024). Soeswoyo et al, (2021) (14) complements that the development of tourist villages can be an initiative for promoting equitable growth in various parts of a region that improves community's economy and promotes conservation of environment. That is the reason the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) encourages communities to maximize participation in community-based tourism for livelihood improvement and promotion of sustainable development (Sainu et al, 2023) (12).

In Uganda tourism is a key growth sector generating about US Dollar 1.53 billion in revenue, contributing nearly 10% of GDP and 6.3% of total employment and the World Bank's assessment of the country's full potential is in excess of US Dollar 12 billion annually (Ministry of Tourism, 2018) (16). That means the tourism potential of Uganda is still under exploited and west Nile region is not exceptional.

West Nile region is constituted by twelve districts and a city making total administrative units of thirteen. However, the study focused on selected administrative units namely Moyo, Terego, Arua city, Nebbi, and Obongi Districts and selected sites were considered for the study. The region is blessed with both anthropogenic and natural attractions. The anthropogenic attractions are constituted by cultural heritage which according to Ancuța & Jucu (2023) (1) is more impressive in rural settlement forming a significant cultural capital that has the strength to ensure sustainable development of the areas when wisely used. The cultural heritage of rural communities for tourism development remain serious resource and instrument for

development since their capitalization can sustain local economic development and turn rural area into attractive place for both tourist and investors. However, all these have remained unused or underused over the years in many regions including west Nile due to various factors. Some of the factors for underuse include limited fund for the development, limited knowledge about the potential, poor accessibility, inadequate marketing, lack of government support, limited skilled personnel among other factors yet investment in the sector could translate into increased growth and improvement in the livelihood. The Annual Tourism Sector Performance Report financial year 2018/2019 (16) reported the earning of Uganda at US Dollar 1.66 billion (about 5.8 trillion) from tourism. What is the percentage earned by west Nile region out of this?

### **Statement of the problem**

The promotion of tourism growth of a particular region requires the region goes through the stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation that require assessment of the pre-existing physical condition of targeted attractions supported by social, economic, technological, legal, and other environmental factors (Irawan et al, 2023) (7). The consideration of the above-mentioned factors makes planning more reasonable, applicable, and easily implemented (Chen et al, 2021) (4) and the physical assessment of the attractions helps to determine prioritization of the amenities such as infrastructure and facilities development that support tourist activities. Uganda was declared "Pearl of Africa" by one of the former presidents of USA Winston Churchill who visited the nation in 1907 because of its friendly people and their culture plus the natural beauty, the reason tourism is a key growth sector in the country contributing about 10% to GDP and in 2022 the related revenue and foreign exchange earnings totaled to 2.7 trillion Ugandan shillings (US Dollar 0.736) (Ministry of Tourism, 2022). Despite the fact that the World Bank's assessment of the country's full potential is in excess of US Dollar 12 billion annually (Ministry of Tourism, 2018) (16). Ngingo Safari Experts and a team of safari experts in 2023 pointed that, out of ten commonly visited destinations in Uganda seven are in western region, two in central, one in northern, and zero in west Nile regions that shows west Nile is really lacking behind in terms of tourism growth and yet Uganda National Development Plan III and Vision 2040 focus more on tourism as strategy for development. More so there is scanty literature about tourism potential of west Nile region including anthropogenic tourism potential signifying limited knowledge and awareness that the study intends to bridge.

### **Objectives of the study**

- To identify the anthropogenic tourism potential of west Nile sub-region that can be harnessed for tourism development to improve livelihood of the locals
- To assess the status of the anthropogenic tourist attractions of the region in terms of services and facilities
- To suggest possible way forward to exploit the potential for livelihood improvement

### **Research questions**

- What are the key anthropogenic tourism potentials of west Nile region?
- What facilities and services are available to tap the potentials?
- What should be done to fully tap the potential to improve the livelihood of people in west Nile region

## **Hypothesis**

West Nile sub-region is endowed with significant anthropogenic tourism potential that can be harnessed for livelihood improvement.

## **Methodology**

The study adopted exploratory research design and qualitative methodology due to the nature of the study that require multiple data collection methods. Primary and Secondary data sources were used. Primary data was collected by field observation where the physical conditions of the sites, the facilities and services on the ground were observed and analyzed, focus group discussions, and interview of key informants specifically District tourism officers. Whereas secondary data was obtained from the result of literature review and documentation.

## **Literature Review**

The anthropogenic and natural resources of an area determine the uniqueness of the place that can be tapped for tourism development in the area to improve the welfare of the locals (Riana & Fairi, 2014; Samu et al, 2023). It is clear Tourism has the potential to provide numerous benefit if well managed according to Charles & Brent (2003) (3) given its multi-sectoral nature including provision of employment opportunities for skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled labor as the sector is labor-intensive industry, increases incomes, provides market for the local produce, utilizes the local products and resources, diversifies the local economy, increases government revenue, improves the quality of life related to a higher level of income hence improves standards of living, reinforces preservation of heritage and tradition, and justifies environmental protection and improvement. However, its overdevelopment and mismanagement can cause inflation, unbalanced economic development, social problems, degrades the natural physical environment and creates pollution, degrades the cultural environment, increases the incidence of crime, prostitution, and gambling, increases vulnerability to economic and political changes, threatens family structure, commercializes culture, religion, and the arts, creates misunderstanding, creates conflicts in the host society, contributes to disease spread and so on. There is therefore need to mitigate against these associated evils of tourism for it to effectively contribute to livelihood improvement.

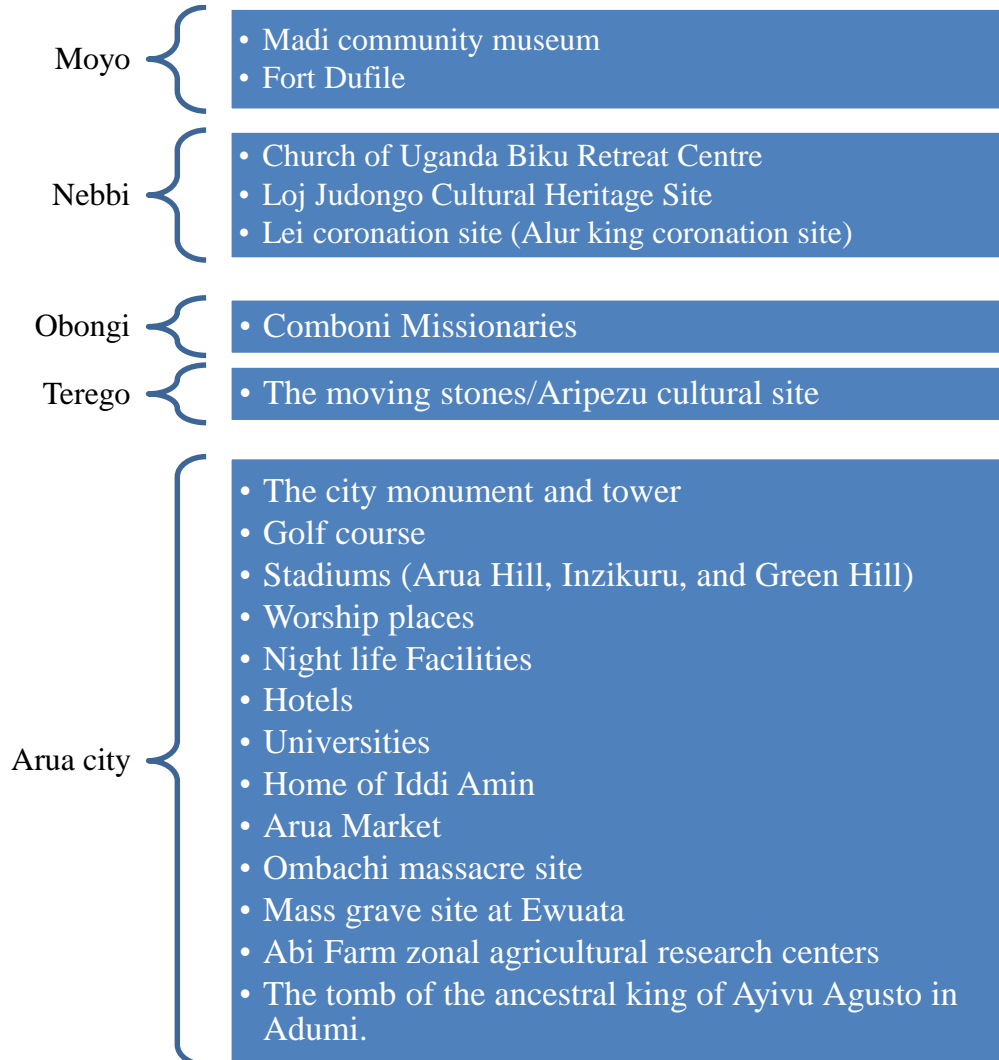
There is no doubt that tourism can improve the livelihood of people in a particular region as it is one of the largest industries in the world, largest export sector and most promising for future growth potential (English and Ahebwa, 2018) (9). It is also labor intensive, utilizes the local products and resources and has the potential to provide numerous benefits if well managed (Charles & Brent, 2003) (3).

To realize the benefits of tourism, the attractions provided by the anthropogenic and natural resources of the area must be complemented by the availability of facilities and infrastructure, accessibility, and promotion (Fadehunyi, 2011) (6). Which is a requirement for west Nile region tourism sector to contribute to livelihood of the locals. There is therefore need to create awareness about the tourism potential both anthropogenic and natural that exist in the region to draw the attention of investors and deliberately encourage them to invest in facilities and services to tap the potential. Draw the attention of the government so that accessibility to some of the sites can be improved and budget share of the sector increased. Create awareness about the tourism product the region can provide to potential visitors so that they can visit.

## Findings

There is a considerable anthropogenic tourism potential in west Nile region that has mostly remained untapped over the years due to several factors such as limited information on the potential, lack of aggressive marketing, lack of facilities and services at the sites, limited skilled man power, financial constraint for development, poor infrastructure hindering accessibility to some of the sites.

**Some of the anthropogenic attractions of the region include:**



Some of the key anthropogenic attraction sites of the sub-region are clearly highlighted district by district with their specific attractive features, available facilities and services, challenges, and the way forwards

### **Madi community museum**



It is cultural attraction owned and managed by Madi community, exhibiting the cultural heritage of Madi community and considered to be the mother museum in west Nile region. Located in Metu trading center, Pameri parish, Metu Sub- County, Moyo District, along Moyo-Laropi-Adjumani road. It was started in 2014 but launched in 2018 displaying musical instruments and the modest traditional regalia. The site has a sign post and writing of the name on the wall, easily accessed by road since it is along the main road, there is nearby health center III, the site is safe to visit as Madi community is believed to be peaceful tribe and welcoming to visitors. The museum has a guide trained in museum management and five other people on management team with Diploma, Bachelors, and Masters who can also guide visitors. Despite these the area receives very few visitors mostly students as a result very little revenue are realized by the site annually making it difficult for the management to put in place other facilities and services required by the visitors and yet the ultimate goal of museum is audience development (Calina & Lin (2017) (2) hence need to devise strategies to reach a wider and more diverse market. There are no information/visitor center, rest room, canteen, and craft shop. Visitors use toilet of nearby communities, get some of the basic items from nearby shops, and crafts are supplied directly by local communities. There is no accommodation at the site, guests get the services from Guest Houses, Inns, Lodges in Moyo town. The main activities at the site include traditional dance performance by the local dance groups, storytelling/Madi folks, craft selling by local communities, exhibition of musical instruments and other traditional regalia. The site experiences challenges of limited space, financial challenge, mindset of locals especially nearby people do not value the museum only schools visit the site, information management challenge, language problem, lack of essential skills particularly in guiding since the guides do not have knowledge in guiding, preservation and marketing challenges, lack of power and entertainment facilities. Some of the training needs for the site that need to be addressed include marketing skill, communication skill, content creation, and proposal writing skill trainings.

### **Fort Dufile**

The Fort is located along the banks of river Nile in Dufile Sub- County, Moyo District and was established by Sir Gen. Charles Gordon who was the governor of Equatoria province as a military fort in 1874 later in 1889 reoccupied by Emin Pasha after succeeding his predecessor Charles Gordon as the governor and used it to stop worrying slave trade horror in Northern Uganda and South Sudan. The larger steamer vessels were introduced by Emin Pasha that included Khedive which was carried by about 4800 people from Gondokoro to the fort, and Magungo that was also brought in the same year where Angalia chini currently located in Obongi District was the filling station. The fort sits on 12 acres of land and water that is up to 15 feet high from the defensive line. It is one of the first docking harbors for steamer ships in the country also believed to be the oldest and largest fort in the country out of 19 established. The first construction brick in Uganda orange in color was seen here in the construction of the fort which was built in between 1876 and 1888. The population at the fort comprised of over four thousand troops with their families, the workers, and camp followers hence dense population by then.



### The moving stones

The moving stones are found in Aripezu village, Onzoro parish, Katrini Sub- County, Terego District. The densely populated area to the site is Wandi 2.5 km and the city is Arua 10 km. These stones are not original stones of the area, they are believed to have been brought from mountain Luku located currently in Madi Okollo District. The stones are in various shapes of tools used by people in stone age period and they were used to pay dowries by the traditional people. It is believed a daughter of a grand-grandparent got married in that area of mountain Luku who died and yet the bride price was not paid. The father of the lady who is believed to have known about the supernatural powers of these stones asked for the moving stones as a bride price to be taken to mountain Wati that is located currently in Terego District, 21 stones were given to him as bride price. As they traveled back, they got tired and rested at the current location of the stones that is Aripezu village, Onzoro parish. They ended up settling at the place. The people were from Orube clan in Yole community; therefore, the stones belong to them but currently the stones are managed by a church established in the area and Lugbara Cultural Institution is closely following the developments associated with the stones. As these stones were worshiped at mountain Luku, the people continued worshipping them. The stones were used to make rituals for war fighters to win wars indeed the wars were won by the fighters. When the whites heard about that they came to find more about the stones and wanted to take the stones but the people resisted as a result six people died and scores were arrested. Although the people resisted the whites successfully, a pot associated with the stones and some stones still got lost. There was then a resolution that ritual was to be conducted after every two years to prevent possible atrocities associated which resolution was not followed as a result at least some body dies every November of the year. It is also believed there used to be a very big snake associated with the stones that used to come from mountain Wati and food was given to it by the custodian of the stones. In the community, the stones were also used to punish people who married other people's wives and whenever there were problems between people, offended persons picked the stone leading to punishment like drought experienced in the area. Anybody who picked the stone was to bring it back with a goat to be slaughtered. According to an elder, the fight between Alur and Lugbara in Barifa forest reserve in Arua city where Alurs were seriously killed was because of the power of the stones. As mentioned earlier, a church is established in the area and the powers of the stones diminished and currently the stones are under

the custody of the church and the powers are believed to have gone since the people now believe and worship the true God.

There are other attractions close to the site that include mountain Wati, Olewa falls, Miriadia falls, Ajai wildlife reserve, etc. However, the site lacks information center, clean toilet, canteen, better accessibility and there is need for improved infrastructure, better shelter for the stones, sanitary facilities, training for the guides as there are untrained local guides. There is also the challenge of fear in people to associate with the stones since Christianity is now the dominant religion.



The moving stones/Aripezu cultural site

### **Church of Uganda Biku retreat center**

Located in Agweci lower village, Pacaka parish, Erusi sub county, Nebbi district about 14 km from Nebbi town and can be accessed by road from Goli or Erusi along Panyimur -Erusi-Goli road. It is 2km from the main road to the prayer center. The most outstanding tourist attraction in the district and attracts tourists all over the country and world blessed with the following attractive features the prayer points with spiritually assigned prayer intentions that help believers during the prayer session, the smallest modern church ever constructed that houses only three people including the preacher, the unique architectural designs of the buildings on site that give an excellent photography opportunity, the beautiful scenic view of the area well maintained with trees some of which are over 150 years' old, the adulating rocks and land form structure of the area that gives memorable experience to visitors, Biku Hill that offers a rock climbing challenge as one moves from one prayer point to another, wildlife species such as lizards, butterflies, monkeys and birds. The key activity at the site is touring the prayer points that can take about three hours, there are opportunities for nature walk, wildlife viewing and photography. The site is managed by the Church of Uganda Nebbi diocese. The site has all the tourism enabling infrastructures such as kitchen and all cooking facilities for guests who camp at the site, accommodation is provided in the chapels, there are well maintained trails connecting the prayer points, security is fine, water source and guiding service are available. There is no restaurant on site and accommodation is in the chapel not in descent accommodation facility. All the activities at the center including visiting the prayer points, accommodation, water, guiding services are free of charge, management only accepts gifts and donations. However, there is need for marketing to promote both domestic and



international tourism, establishment of Lodges/Guest houses, restaurants near the site, development of itinerary with other sites, empowerment of local communities to benefit from the opportunity.



The beautiful scenery of the area

### **Loj judongo cultural heritage site**

Located in Loj Judongo village, Padwot parish, Padwot sub county, in Nebbi district, east of Nebbi town, approximately 25km from the district headquarter. The place is where Nyipir the ancestor of the Alur people together with his team settled after he separated with his brother Labongo at Wang Lei in Puvungu-pakwach in the year 1039AD. On arrival they set up “Loc” big logs fixed in to ground to tie their animals that they moved with. The logs (Loc) later grew in to big trees which were referred to as Loc pa Judongo, the origin of the name of the place. The elders built a shrine at the site where they used to worship their gods and the spot of the shrine up to now has remained bare. It is also believed that there was kidi kot placed by the elders Nziri and Ngira for rain making that was later taken away by Abok of Padwot which brought a lot of misery and suffering to the people during that time. According to one of the elders the government of Iddi Amin wanted to construct a road through the area but the people who were doing the construction work encountered series of strange happenings and they abandoned the plan. The key attractive features of the site include the tree-Loc pa Judongo, water pond where kidi kot for rain making was placed, the spot of the shrine, the place under a tree where elders from the Alur kingdom would rest while cooking their food when they go to perform rituals at Wang lei and the cooking stones are visible up to date, the board game (Umweso/soro) that was made by the elders on a piece of stone for their leisure time after grazing their animals, the oral history/story of the place through storytelling specifically the stories of the spear and the bead, the separation at Wang Lei, and the settlement at Loc pa Judongo, and guided community walk. The site can be accessed through a community road from Nyaravur trading center about 10km from the main tarmac road at Nyaravur. However, there are no tourism support services at the site.



Loc pa Judongo the tree with white stem

### **Lei coronation site (Alur king coronation site)**

Located on Jukia hill in Nebbi municipality 2km from the roundabout. The site that belongs to Alur kingdom with the history dated back to the colonial administration when Alur chief used use the place as the administrative center and most important recent history about the place is the coronation of the current Alur king Philip Olarker that took place here. The site is still not well developed, a part from the good road network, no other support services exist at the site.



Lei Coronation site

### **Comboni missionaries site at Obongi**

This is Agro and Faith based tourism site established and managed by Faith based organization that first established in Lomin, South Sudan. The 2017 civil war that broke in Southern Sudan forced many of its clients to run to Uganda for their safety and settled at Palorinya refugee camp in Obongi District, Uganda. The missionaries followed them to Obongi to help improve their livelihood by running a number of projects including animal husbandry, growing of vegetables, carpentry, fabrication and welding, bakery, cooking oil refinery all with modern technology making it an area of interest to visitors. Also, the variety of crafts made by the clients of the missionaries and local people placed in an established Art and Craft shop that can be purchased by the visitors as souvenirs provides un forgettable memory to the visitors. It was also the place where communities celebrated Uganda martyrs' day of June 2020 during Covid-19 pandemic making it an area of historical importance.



The symbol of the site

### **Arua city**

The city located at the north western corner of Uganda lies between latitude 030 10` N and 300 50` N and longitude 300 30` E and 310 30` E. it is a regional city of west Nile sub region created by parliament of Uganda on 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2020 and became operational on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2020. The city is bordered by the Democratic Republic of Congo on the west and about 75 kilometers from South Sudan border which creates an opportunity for international tourism. The diversity of ethnicity, religion, and race creates opportunity for cultural and religious tourism whereas the location at the border with Democratic Republic of Congo and closeness to South Sudan border also creates an opportunity for business tourism. The main attraction features in the city include Arua hill where the city derived its name that also served as administrative center in colonial period, Ombachi massacre site where 90 civilians were killed by UNLFA soldiers and buried in a mass grave in 1981, the beautiful scenery of west Nile golf course plus stadiums such as Arua hill still under construction, Green Light, and Docus Inzikuru stadiums providing opportunities for sport tourism, Adumi rock, the various worship places including cathedrals, mosque, and temples such as Ediofe and Emmanuel cathedrals, the Muslim mosques and Hindu temple which have iconic historic buildings that promote faith tourism in the city, the night life boosted by the location of the city near the borders promoting constant flow of human traffic coupled with particular revelers pots such as Casablanca, Capital One, Bamboo village, and many others entertaining both locals and visitors that keep the city awake throughout the night. The good number of hotels, guest houses, and inns such as Desert Breeze hotel, Confidential hotel, Golden Court hotel, Delambiance hotel, the Slumberland hotel, Tropical Suite hotel, Heritage Court Limited, and so on offering facilities for MICE tourism

Other sites within the city include the city monument and tower, mass grave site at Ewuata where murdered teachers of Muni Girls Senior Secondary School were buried during 1980 civil war, the home of the former president of Uganda Iddi Amin who was believed to be brutal in his reign, the airport, Arua main market, the universities in the city with Muni university being the main and public university in the region plus many other private university branches, Abi Farm one of the zonal agricultural research centers, and the tomb of the ancestral king of Ayivu Augusto in Adumi.



The city monument and tower

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

In conclusion, West Nile region has a considerable anthropogenic tourism potential that has remained underexploited over the years due to several factors including lack of awareness, lack/limited marketing, lack of facilities and services at the sites, limited skilled man power, financial constraint for development, poor infrastructure hindering accessibility to most of the sites. Addressing these challenges can change the history of tourism in the region and improve the economy and livelihood of the people since the sector has the capacity.

There is need for more research especially on the psychometric combination of the potentials, attitude of the people, the contribution of the sector to generate information to plan for tourism growth of the sub-region as the sector has become increasingly relevant in every region's economic system playing a crucial role in driving the economic development of many countries. There is information gap evidenced by the limited literature on the region that needs to be bridged by encouraging more research in the sector.

Awareness should also be intensified to make the stakeholders understand the available potential in order to attract their support and contribution. And effort should be put on promotion of the region through aggressive marketing.

More investment should be encouraged in facilities and services to fully tap the potential since most of the sites lack the basic facilities and services.

Accessibility to some of the sites should be improved especially accessibility to Aripezu cultural site is very poor among other sites.

More budget for the sector should be lobbied from the government to address part of the financial constraint challenge.

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