

Batwa Cultural Experience - A Living Museum



Knowledge and traditions

2012



The Batwa Cultural Experience – A Living Museum

In many parts of Uganda, museum owners, supporters and managers, passionate about culture and heritage, have collected artefacts, oral history and other elements of the local culture. Community museums also link past and future through their collections, which are accessible to schools, local residents and those from farther away.

The Batwa people initiated the Batwa Cultural Experience to preserve, promote and transmit their cultural heritage to future generations.

This living museum, part of the Batwa Development Program, presents an unusual perspective on community museums. For approximately five hours, the Batwa showcase

their traditional knowledge and skills within a forested environment located next to Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park. The Batwa are pygmy forest people, recently displaced from the rain forest habitat they shared with the endangered mountain gorillas.



The Batwa Cultural Experience Museum is located along the buffer zone of the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, in Buhoma, Kanungu District, South-western Uganda. For more information, contact:

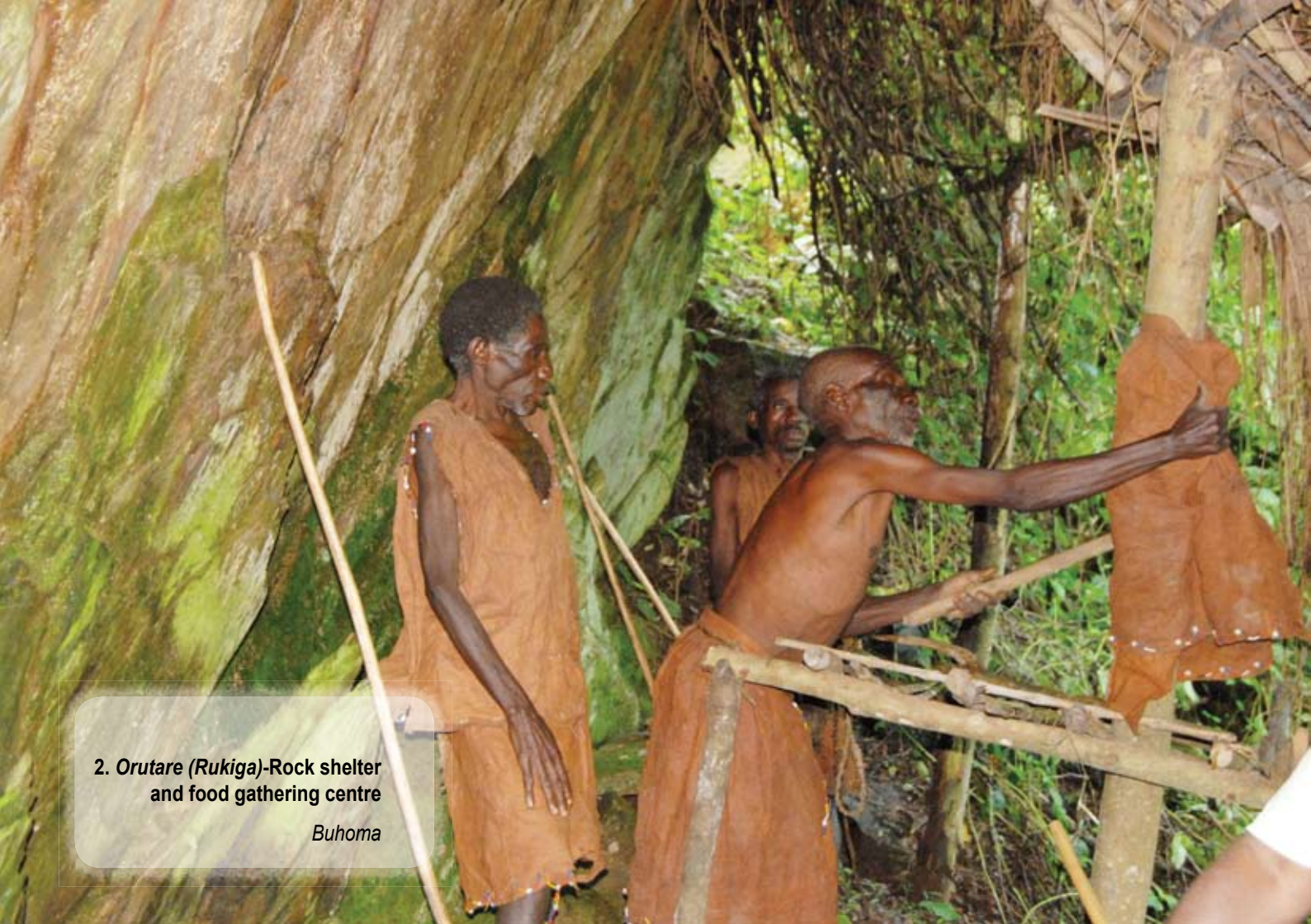
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1. Ekitoma (*Rukiga*)-Sacred tree

Fig tree, Buhoma, Kanungu District

(See detailed descriptions at the end of the catalogue)



**2. Orutare (Rukiga)-Rock shelter
and food gathering centre**

Buhoma

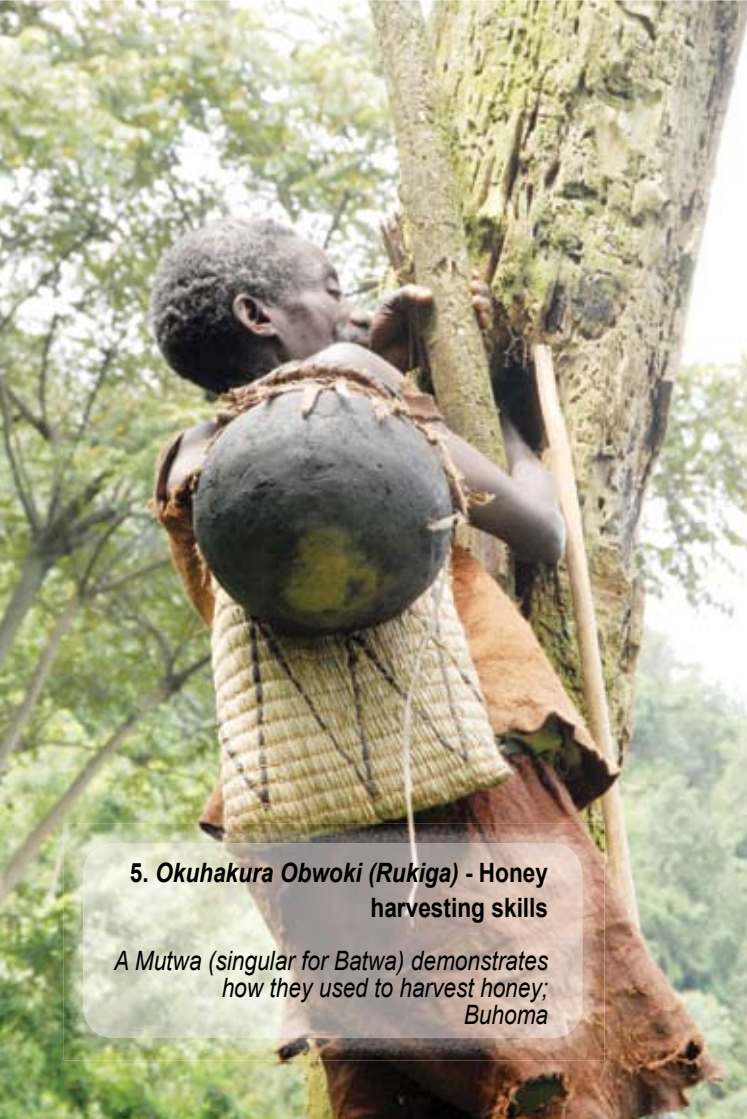


3. Omugogo (Rukiga)-Deadwood shelter
Buhoma,



4. *Okusinga omuriro (Rukiga)* - Fire making skills

Buhoma



**5. Okuhakura Obwoki (Rukiga) - Honey
harvesting skills**

*A Mutwa (singular for Batwa) demonstrates
how they used to harvest honey;
Buhoma*





6. *Oruziika Batwa (Rukiga)* - Grass for burying the dead.

Buhoma



Buhoma



8. Enzina ya Batwa (Rukiga) - Dance skills

Buhoma





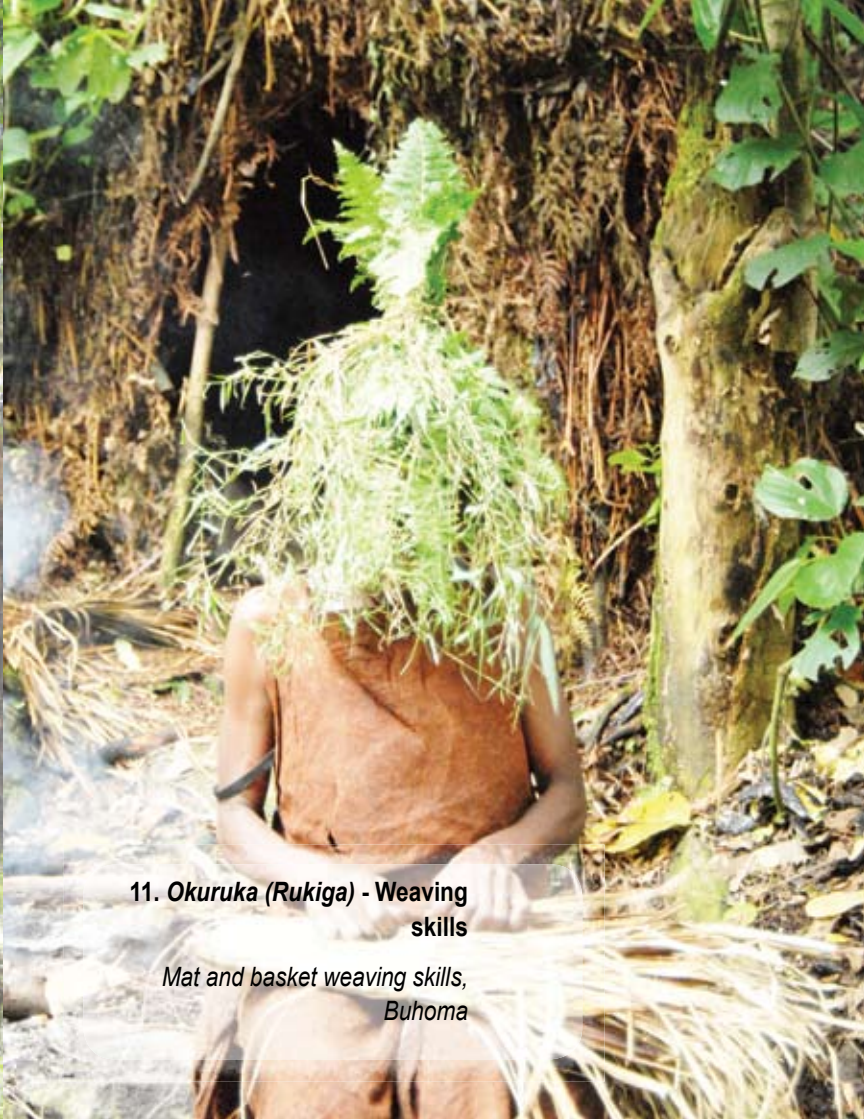
**9. Omuririmbo (Rukiga) -
Batwa Homestead**

Grass-thatched hut, Buhoma

10. Mwamba (Rutwa) - Tree house

*Tree house with grass and twigs;
Buhoma, Kanungu District.*

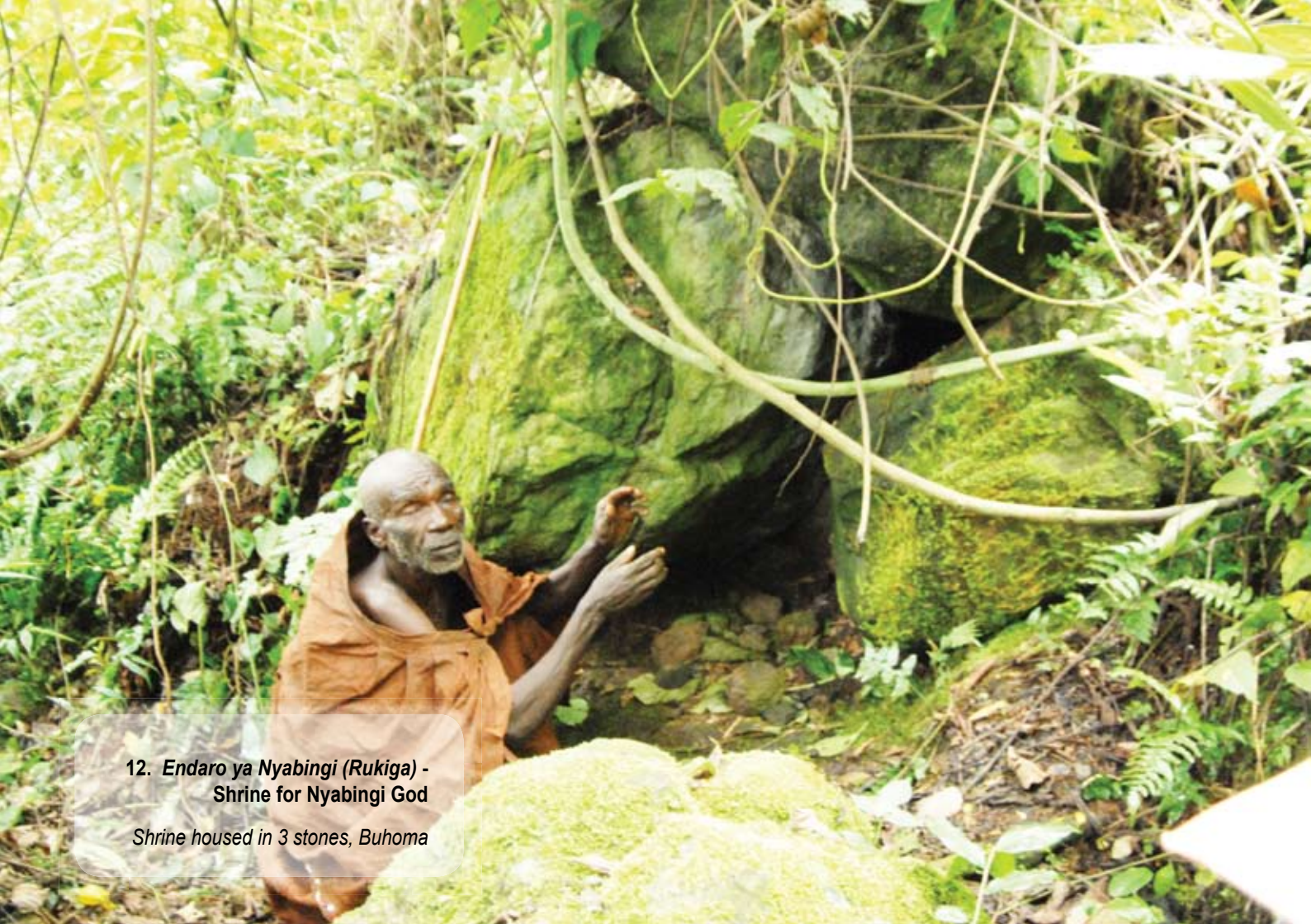




11. Okuruka (Rukiga) - Weaving skills

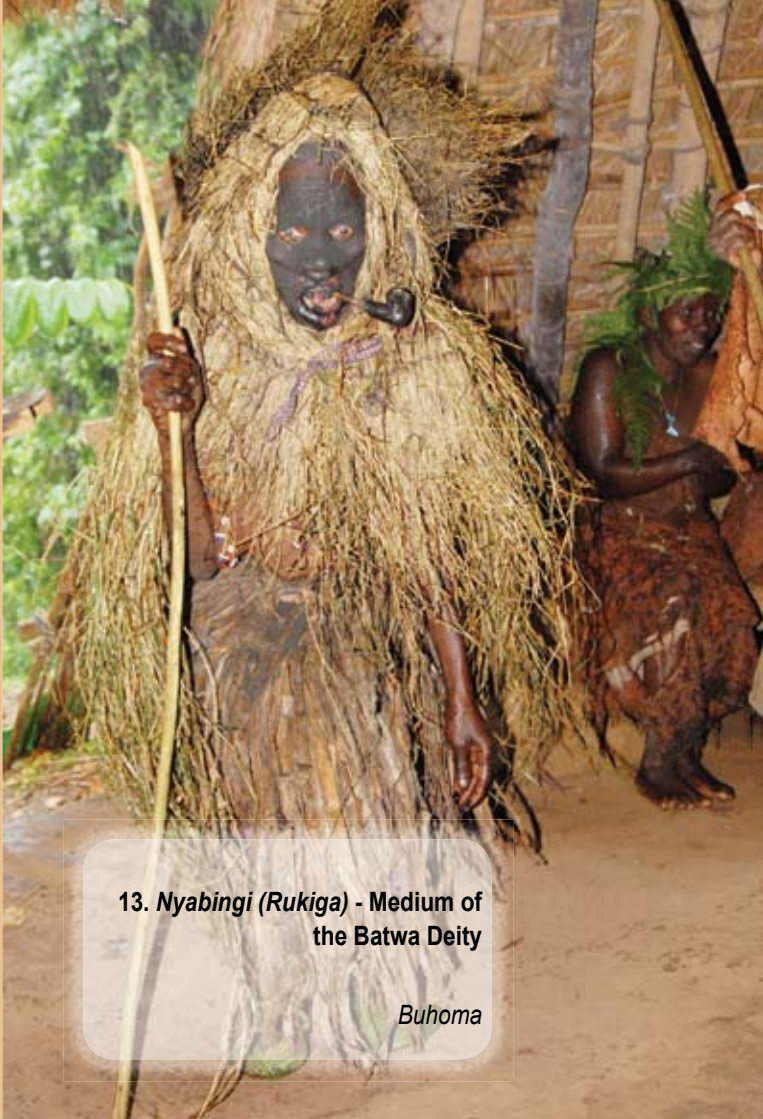
*Mat and basket weaving skills,
Buhoma*





**12. Endaro ya Nyabingi (Rukiga) -
Shrine for Nyabingi God**

Shrine housed in 3 stones, Buhoma



**13. Nyabingi (Rukiga) - Medium of
the Batwa Deity**

Buhoma





**14. Okutega (Rukiga) - rapping
wild animals skills**

*Animal trap made with sisal strings,
twigs and logs, Buhoma*



15. *Ekiikoomi (Rukiga) - Fire place*
Meeting at a fire place, Buhoma

A photograph of a Mutwa hunter in a forest. The hunter, an older man with grey hair, is wearing a brown animal skin tunic and shorts. He is in a crouched position, aiming a longbow with a thin arrow towards the right. The background is a dense forest with green foliage and a path. A semi-transparent text box is overlaid in the bottom left corner.

**16. Okuhiiga (Rukiga) -
Hunting and shooting**

*A Mutwa aims at a dyker,
Buhoma*

1. Until 1935, this tree was used as a place of worship by the Batwa and neighbouring communities. According to Batwa oral traditions, animal sacrifices were laid at the foot of this tree and a large snake would come and consume them

*Source: Levi Busingye,
Museum Guide and Translator,
Batwa Cultural Experience,
Date of data collection:
14th October 2011*

2. The shelter is used to store wild meat and other types of food (wild yams and honey). Food is roasted over a fire to preserve it. This shelter also serves as a place for blacksmithing and making of cloths from the bark of the fig trees and animal skins.

Source: as above

3. The Batwa often used fallen trees as temporary shelter. Ferns were used as cushions at night and a fire was lit to keep warm and ward off wild animals.

Source: as above

4. The Batwa use friction to make fire by rubbing two dry sticks together. They keep their sticks dry and ready for use whenever necessary. The Batwa use fire to protect themselves from dangerous animals, to warm themselves and to roast food.

Source: as above

5. Honey is part of the diet of the Batwa. They collected and used hollowed deadwood as beehives. Once the honey was ready for harvest, they constructed a ladder made from forest vines to climb up to the hive where they would smoke the bees out. The Batwa used honey as food and medicine to treat simple ailments such as cough, but only after offering libation to their god *Nyabingi*.

Source: as above

6. The Batwa used to wrap a dead body in a special type of grass, *oruziika Batwa*. They would hide the wrapped body in a shrub facing up to prevent the spirit from following other members of the family to haunt them. They believed that if a dead person was placed facing upwards his/her spirit would be busy looking for honey instead of haunting them. After losing a family member, they would abandon the 'house' and settle in a new area.

Source: as above

7. A number of medicinal plants can be found along the heritage trail of the Batwa Cultural Experience. Medicinal plants include: *Kamariranya*, to cure constipation; *Omurisano*- to treat people who are allergic to meat; *Enchenanchene* - to treat ailments of newly born babies including treating their umbilical cords; *Ekihomoro*- to cure wounds and *Omugiti*- to enhance production of breast milk. Some of the plants are believed to have spiritual qualities for instance *Omugiti*- used to protect a new born child in case the mother dies, while *Omubuza*- is used to confuse the Magistrate in case one commits a crime and is taken to court!

Source: as above

8. The *ekyembe* (thumb piano) and drums are musical instruments commonly used by the Batwa. They wear costumes made of bark-cloth and grass when performing traditional songs and dances. The Batwa may sing and dance in jubilation after a successful hunt; in thanksgiving to *Nyabingi* (their god) after a satisfying meal; in times of mourning for a fellow Mutwa and during marriage ceremonies. The Batwa also sing to communicate messages to their neighbours or enemies, and to signal warning.

Source: as above

9. The *omuririmbo* is a homestead for a large Batwa family of 10-15 people. It is composed of different types of houses for different members of the family. Notable among these houses is the *Kyamutwara bushya* (meaning the lion picked him in the wee hours of the night), the house of the person supposed to watch over the family.

Source: as above

10. The Batwa would identify trees with three or more branches at a single node and weave a nest in the middle of these branches. This type of house was specifically for children who would be protected from wild animals while their parents were away hunting. Children were often left in the tree houses during the night and brought down during the day. Parents would also stay by the doorway and light a fire around the tree to protect their children from tree climbing and dangerous carnivores such as leopards and lions.

Source: as above

11. Weaving was the main activity for the Batwa women especially when their husbands were away hunting. They would weave baskets and bags to carry and preserve food stuffs and mats to sit and lie on. During weaving, women cover their heads with grass to protect themselves from the sun.

Source: as above

12. The Batwa worship *Nyabingi*, their god, from this sacred place. Before going hunting the Batwa consult *Nyabingi* to seek protection against wild animals, and ask for blessings for big catches. On their return from hunting they would offer a portion of their catch as a sacrifice. The Batwa would also consult *Nyabingi* and seek protection against strange diseases. Newly wedded women and new born children were also taken to the shrine to be presented to the god for blessings and protection.

Source: as above

13. According to the Batwa oral traditions, *Nyabingi*, a female god visited them if she wanted something or if she was unhappy. If the Batwa wanted to see *Nyabingi*, they would sing to invite her for blessings and protection especially during difficult times (such as wars, famine and strange diseases). In case of death, the Batwa believed their god was annoyed so they would offer sacrifices and sing to appease. *Nyabingi* could get annoyed if one harvested honey and did not offer libation. The Batwa tried / try to keep *Nyabingi* happy to avert any calamities.

Source: as above

14. The Batwa used to survive entirely on wild meat and other forest resources, and this sharpened their knowledge and skills to trap wild animals for food. This snare would be placed in the path of animals such as wild pigs and duikers. Once trapped, a log would be released from above to crush the trapped animal. In case of unsuccessful hunting expeditions, the Batwa would consult *Nyabingi* about their failure.

Women were not allowed to leave their houses or to tell anyone that the men were out setting snares until they returned, for fear of misfortunes.

Source: as above

15. As in many African societies, the Batwa used to have meetings around the fire place especially in the evening. Elders used gatherings like this to pass on important information to the young people. Life saving and hunting skills, advice on marriage and other health messages were passed on at the fire place.

Source: as above

16. The Batwa developed specialised hunting and shooting skills to sustain their need for wild meat. The Batwa use arrows and bows to kill small animals, and snares to kill larger ones such as wild pigs. This Mutwa was photographed aiming at a dyker, the favourite meat among the Batwa.

Source: as above

Throughout Uganda, inspired individuals, families and groups of people have established *community museums* open to the public to preserve and promote the local cultural heritage.

This catalogue, one of a series for 11 community museums across Uganda, highlights the most important items held by the Batwa Cultural Experience-a Living Museum.

This publication is meant to publicise and record the collection of cultural practices, as well as to act as a reference point, reflecting Uganda's cultural diversity

This catalogue was produced by the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda, an organisation dedicated to promoting the recognition of culture as vital for human development that responds to the country's national identity and diversity. As part of its cultural heritage programme, the Foundation supports community museums in Uganda.

The Foundation gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of community museums operators and managers throughout the country, as well as the financial support extended by the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development that have made this publication possible.

[www. crossculturalfoundation.or.ug](http://www.crossculturalfoundation.or.ug)

