

MBALE CITY'S HISTORICAL BUILDINGS, SITES AND MONUMENTS



This map has been created to bring Mbalé City's history to life as you walk down the streets and to raise the profile of historic properties for their preservation and promotion.

Please check out our other resources on Uganda's built heritage:

- Uganda's Built Heritage mobile app (available on Google Play and Apple App Store)
- Beyond the Reeds and Bricks – Historical sites and buildings in Kampala, Jinja and Entebbe – a photo book available in most bookstores.
- Maps of historical buildings, sites and monuments in Kampala, Entebbe, Jinja and Fort Portal – available on our website

For further information, contact

**The Cross-Cultural
Foundation of Uganda**

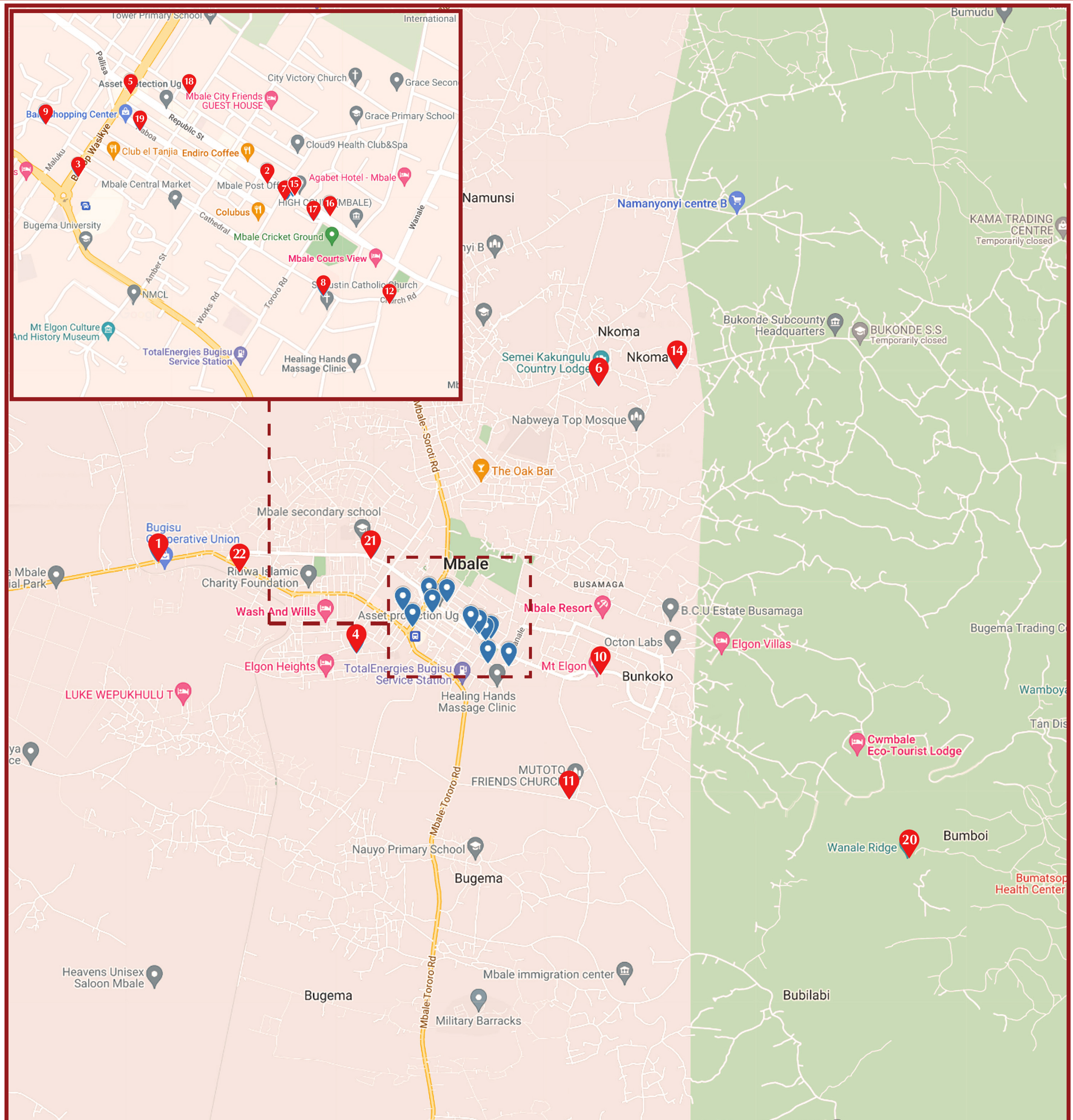
Makerere Hill, Off Bativa Rd,
P.O. Box 25517, Kampala, Uganda
Tel. +256-393 294675/7

ccfu@crossculturalfoundation.or.ug
www.crossculturalfoundation.or.ug



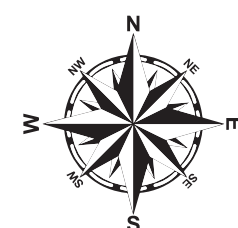
This map was developed with the financial support of the Irish Embassy in Uganda and Brot für die Welt, and other individual cultural enthusiasts in Uganda and Europe. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU) in partnership with Mbalé City Council and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders.

A Journey through Mbalé City's Heritage



KEY

- Historical Building or Sites
- Water body
- Vegetation/Gardens
- Major Highways
- Main Roads





Bugisu Cooperative Union Factory (1950s)
Following the amalgamation of four unions: Bubulo Cooperative Union, Masaaba North Cooperative, Bulambuli Kikobero, and Bungokho Cooperative to form Bugisu Cooperative Union (BCU) in 1954, the cooperative acquired land on Pallisa Road in 1956 and embarked on the construction of their first coffee milling factory known as John Gordon. The building attests to the history and contribution of coffee to the growth of the city.



Kitutu House (1950s)
Named after Bugisu Cooperative Union (BCU)'s founder/Chairman, Samson Kitutu, the building located on Republic Street was initially meant to house a cooperative bank for coffee farmers, however, the idea was abandoned when the central government took it up. When it was commissioned on January 30th, 1953, the building had been repurposed to house BCU offices, with a conference hall that was utilized for public functions. Kitutu House was turned into a public library until the late 1980s when Barclays Bank (now Absa Bank) started renting it.



Musundi House (early 1970s)
The four-storeyed building on Bishop Wasiky Road was the first tallest building in Mbale. Named after Enock Musundi, former BCU Chairman (1964-1982), it is the only building equipped with a lift in Mbale, though it is said to have worked for a few days. The building served as a residence for the African Textile Mill officers and later lecturers of the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU). The building is currently under renovation.



Old Lukhobo House (1956)
Built in 1956 by the British colonial government, it was the council hall for Bukedi and Bugisu districts. The building gets its name from a Lumasaba/Lugisu word -Lukhobo, which means parliament or council hall. It is reported that whenever Bugisu had their council meetings in the morning, the Bakedi would be expected to meet in the afternoon. In 1967, Bukedi district headquarters were moved to Tororo town and the land in Malukhu was vested in the Bugisu Land Board and all assets given to the Bugisu District Administration. The building temporarily houses the Inzu Ya Masaaba cultural institution.



Clock Tower (1932)
Built in 1932 in memory of King George VI, the monument is the symbol of the city, given its central location. It was constructed by an Indian architect, Kassim Jamal Esquire. In 2021, Mbale City authority in partnership with Capital Outdoor, an advertising company, renovated the monument, adding coffee beans on the top and repairing the gong (bell), which had not worked for over 30 years due to vandalism.



Semei Kakungulu (1915-1920)
The former residence of Semei Kakungulu, a prominent agent of the British government, located on top of Gangama Hill maintains most of its original features such as the roof, windows and walls. Built with sun-dried bricks between 1915 and 1920, on a 147-acre estate, it was a grand accomplishment at the time. Kakungulu is remembered for building many towns in Uganda including Mbale.



Post Office (1950s)
Constructed to ease communication for the colonial government, the building was established towards Uganda's independence. It was under the East African Common Services, a company that was responsible for post offices, railways and telephones. For a long time, the Post Office and BCU buildings were the biggest in Mbale City.



St. Austin Catholic church (1944)
The church was the third of its kind in Bugisu, established by the Mill Missionaries led by Fr. Van der Steen. It was built to bring Parish services closer to the people of Mbale who previously moved to Nyondo and Budadiri. The church previously served only Europeans and Goans (Indian community). Inside the church, the seats were marked with names and there was no random sitting.



St. Andrew Cathedral—Church of Uganda (1961)
The cathedral was constructed in 1961 with a unique architectural design in the shape of a chief's hut. There is a panel mounted at the hall of the cathedral composed of pieces of stone donated by cathedrals in England. Behind the cathedral is Mbale's oldest church constructed using stones. It is currently used by UCU as a students' chapel. The first African Bishop of Mbale Diocese was Rt. Rev. Erisa Masaaba MBE.



Mt. Elgon Hotel (1958)
Constructed in 1958, it was the second oldest hotel in Uganda after Masindi Hotel (1920), under the then Uganda Hotels. Located in the Senior Quarters, it was built to cater to the interests of the colonialists; no Africans were allowed in the hotel. The hotel was President Obote and Amin's favourite for meals as it is a walk away from the State Lodge.



Bamasaba Culture Centre, Mutoto (1980s)
Named after ficus natalensis (barkcloth trees), traditionally known as mitoto among the Bagisu, Mutoto is believed to be the ground where the first Mugisu known as Mwambu was circumcised. It serves as a ceremonial ground where circumcision events and activities are launched before spreading to the rest of Bugisu. Previously, this ceremony was held at Malukhu but it was moved to Mutoto in the 1980s because Malukhu was in a town setting, which was not favorable for the circumcision activities. At Mutoto, the circumcision calendar is issued.



Sports Club (1953)
It was established in 1953 during the British colonial government. Located in Senior Quarters on 96 acres of land, it was exclusively for the whites as a recreational/leisure park where they would retire after work for leisure. The swimming pool at this site is among the first ones in East Africa at a sports club.



Umuyinga's residence
This house was a home to the first Umuyinga. This Bugisu/Bamasaba cultural leadership title changed to Umukuuka. Yonasani Mungoma was the first Umuyinga from 1963 to 1966. Mr. Mungoma is said to have been a professional teacher. He was a member of the Legislative Council (Legco) from 1958-62 before he got elected as Umuyinga.



Abayudaya synagogue (2016)
Since 1919 when Semei Kakungulu rejected Christianity to start his religious sect, Mbale is known as home for the black Jews known as "The Abayudaya", who practice Orthodox Judaism. Semei laid the foundation for the first synagogue at his home on Gangama Hill but this was later moved about 3 kilometers away to Nabugoye where a grass-thatched synagogue was constructed. The new synagogue known as Nabugoye Stern Synagogue, was built in 2016 (at the original site of the former synagogue) following the ordaining of a new Rabbi, Hon. Cershom Sizomu Wambede. It is also the headquarters of the Abayudaya community in Africa.



High Court building (1950s)
Built before independence in the 1950s, it was among the first modernist buildings. It served the entire Bukedi and Bugisu (which also included the Sebei region). The court only resolved criminal cases at that time. All magistrates were white and Asian until the late 1950s. Africans were admitted in preparation for Uganda's independence.



Regional block (1950s)
It housed the regional offices for the Eastern Province, which stretched from Busoga to Karamoja. At the time, Uganda had four provinces: Buganda, Western, Northern and Eastern. Behind the building, people gathered to witness the raising of the Uganda flag in 1962, following its independence.



Municipal building (1951)
Now known as the City Council Building, it was constructed by Indians who were the majority in the council. The Israelites developed the architectural plan. The building has a water fountain, with four faces, representing the first black councilors who made it to the council.



North Road Primary School (1932)
The first school to be inspired by Asian architecture in Mbale City was constructed in 1932 following the growth of the Asian community in Mbale. Its foundation stone was laid by Sardar Wazir Singh Rais Ludhiana. It was opened to Ugandans in the 1970s when President Idi Amin expelled Asians.



Elgon cinema (1956)
Mbale and Eastern region's first cinema hall was constructed in 1956 by the British under the instructions of the Indians. It has a seating capacity of 500 to 900 people and was open to all classes of people. The sitting arrangement was clustered to cater for VIPs and ordinary people.



Wanale Ridge
The ridge was previously known as Nkonkonjeru because of the belief that Wanale, the last-born son of Masaaba (the founding father of the Bagisu) only reared white chicken. It is one of the natural symbols of significance in Mbale. It is also home to many cultural heritage sites of the Bamasaba such as the Khaukha cave.



Hindu Temple (1956)
One of the symbols of Asian history in Mbale was designed by Civil Engineer and Architect Mr. Rashaikant. J. Patel. It was constructed for 400,000 Uganda Shillings, fundraised mainly through Rotary Clubs, and it was officially opened on 26th December 1957. The temple has a capacity of 500 worshippers.

The foundation stone was laid by Mr. Githdharbhai V. Kotecha in memory of his late father Mr. Vallbhdas Gordhandas Kotecha.



Mbale Railway Station (1931)
The station was constructed when the railway line reached Mbale, the then-collecting centre for cotton and coffee, in 1931. Until the early 1990s, the trains used to ply this line from Kampala via Tororo to Gulu and Pakwach in west Nile. The station is still in use for freight services.

Mbale City: The Pride of Bugisu



Located at the foot of Wanale Ridge on the ranges of Mountain Elgon, the area known as Mbale was largely uninhabited, comprising mainly grasslands, forests and marshlands by the end of the 19th century. It is reported that at that time, Semei Kakungulu had extended British rule to Eastern Uganda, curving out Bukedi, which comprised Bugwere, Budama, Bukedea, Bunyole, Sebei and Mbale with their headquarters at Budaka. In 1903, however, the British directed Semei Kakungulu to transfer the administration offices from Budaka, further east to Mbale.

On June 26th, 1906, Mbale was declared a township, and by 1951, the town had built modern offices on plots 62-68, on what is now called Republic Street. After Independence in 1962, Mbale Municipal Council was the first town to be granted official status as an urban authority. Eventually, Mbale became the Uganda government's administrative centre for the Eastern region. The town was racially structured, with the Senior Quarters, meant for the white nationals, Indian quarters for the Asian community, and Busamaga and Namakwekwe quarters for the Africans. Mbale gained a reputation as the cleanest town in East Africa, and the then President Apollo Milton Obote referred to it as the 'Jewel of East Africa'. It steadily grew over the years, gaining city status in 2020.

