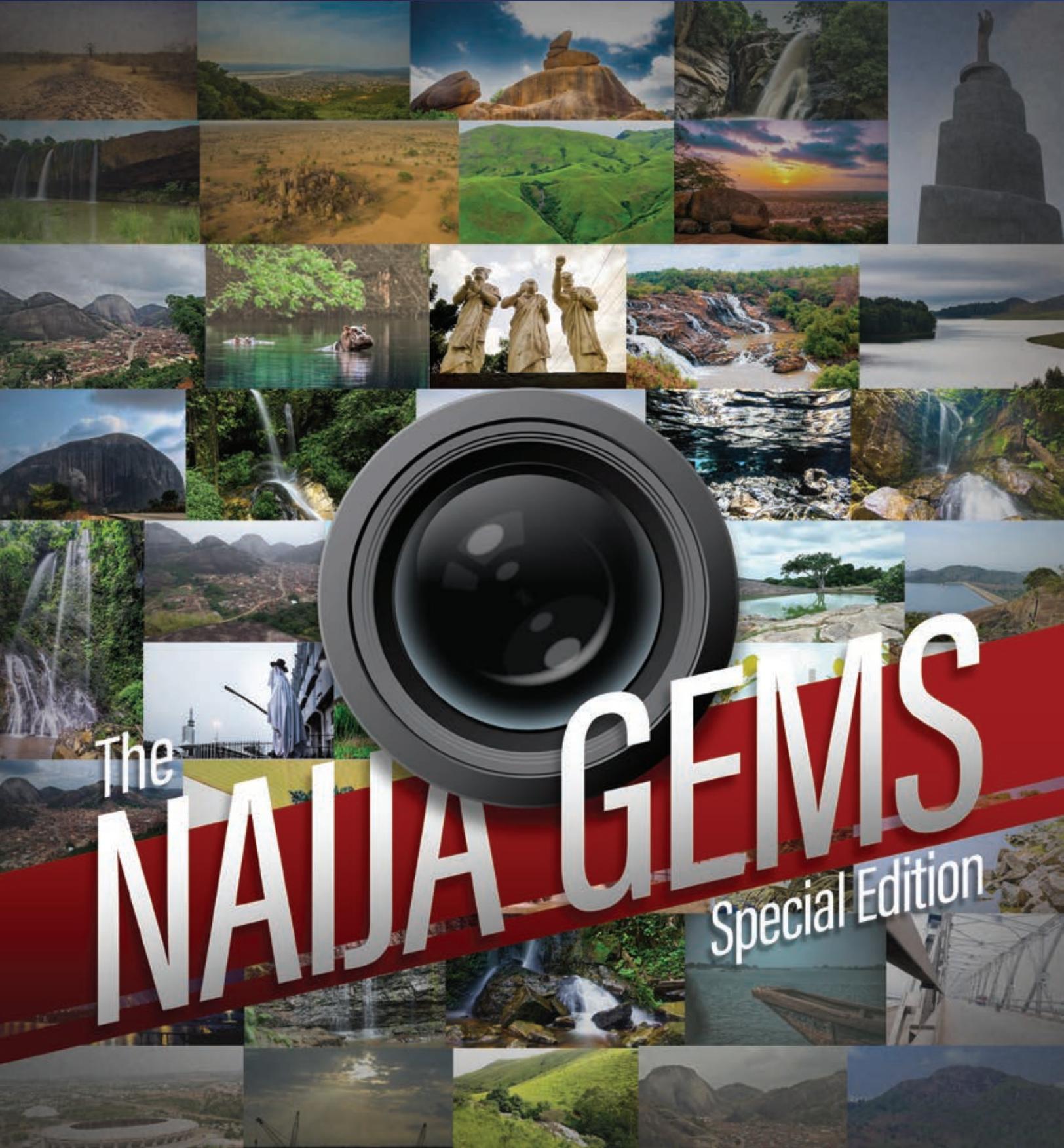


CROSSROADS



The NAIJA GEMS

Special Edition

The NaijaGEMs Exhibition, Abuja

July 6, 2018



Joseph Adah, NaijaGEMs contest manager, delivering remarks



Counselor for Public Affairs, Aruna Amirthanyagam delivers opening remarks before handing out certifications and prizes



A cross section of contest participants and guests



The Top 3 winners of the NaijaGEMs contest pose with some of their prizes



Jesse Ngur, a Top 20 contestant, poses for a selfie with his wife in front of his entry



Top 10 contestant, Ayobami Macaulay discusses with Russell Brooks during the exhibition



W. Stuart Symington
U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria

Welcome to another edition of Crossroads.

This one is truly special because in it you will see “NaijaGEMs,” the winners of a contest to photograph Nigeria’s natural and architectural treasures.

These pictures bring to life Nigeria’s spectacular beauty, and they show the exceptional artistry of the Nigerian photographers who made them. I have been truly fortunate to see first-hand many of these wonders. Each time, my reaction was simple: Wow!

You are about to embark on a virtual visual tour of selected treasures of Nigeria. I hope you will enjoy your ‘travel,’ and I ask you one thing in return. Please join those who are dedicated to sharing with all Nigerians the masterpieces found in nature and made by Nigerians. Please join, too, the efforts of those who seek to preserve them for all future generations. Finally, please join me in thanking the photographers and in saying of *NaijaGEMs*: Wow!

CROSSROADS

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In This Issue...

Vol. 22 No. 3

How it all went down Pg 5



King Kongs

Pg 6



The Winning Photo

Pg 8



The Runners Up

Pg 10



Top 10

Pg 12



Top 20

Pg 16

The Judges Pg 18



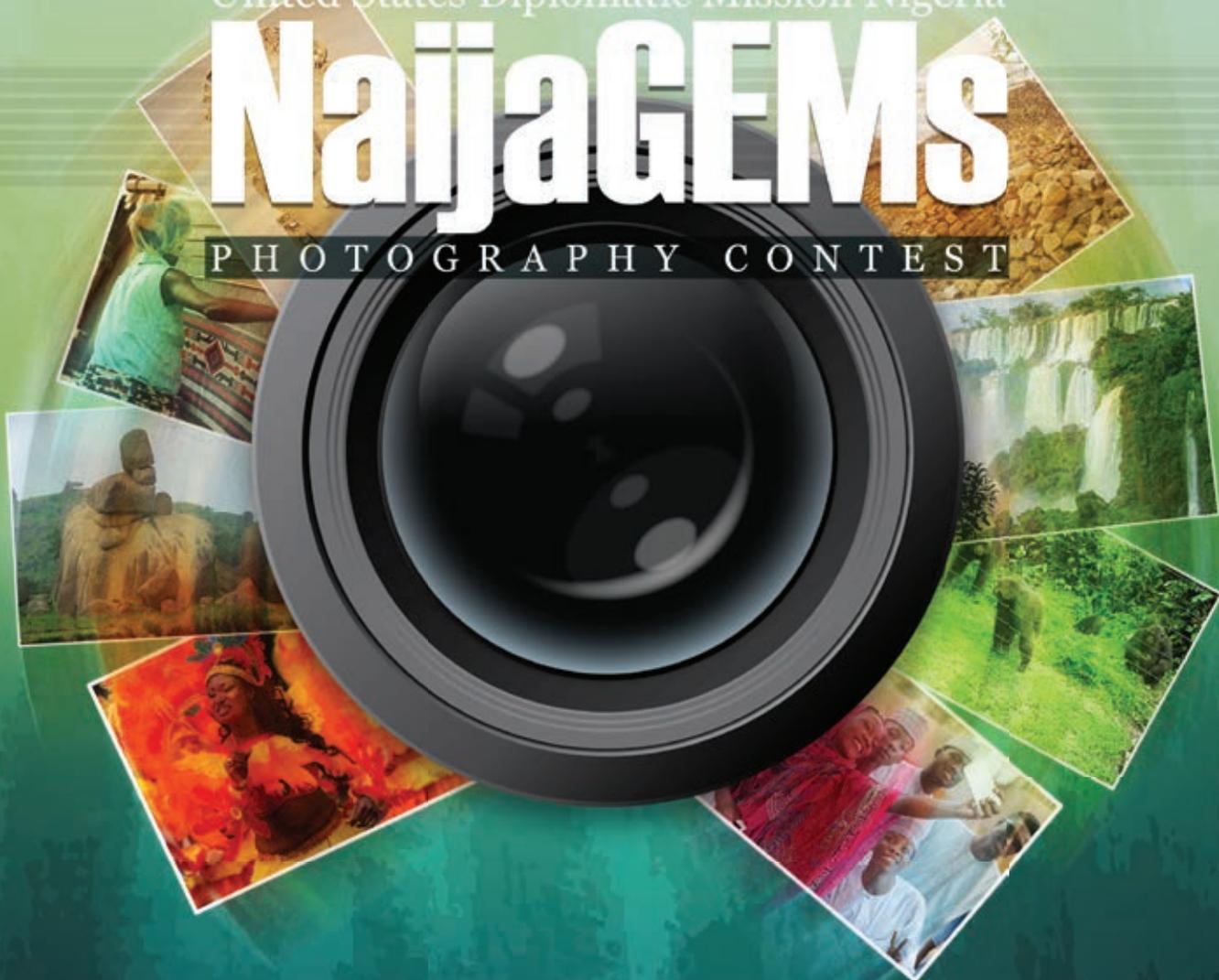
The Exhibition

Pg 2, 19

United States Diplomatic Mission Nigeria

NaijaGEMs

PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST



“

There are all across this country (Nigeria) places of spectacular beauty, including some of the rarest and most beautiful flora, flowers, fauna, rock structures, rivers, waterfalls, and historic structures, things created by God and things created by man from one end of this country to the other. We want you to take a picture of one of those Nigerian gems – things or places that cause every Nigerian and every other person in the world who sees it to go “WOW” – U.S. Ambassador W. Stuart Symington.

”



how it all went down

by Joseph Adah & Olaoluwa Aworinde

The blow-by-blow account of the execution of the NaijaGEMs contest.

The U.S. Mission Nigeria's *NaijaGems* photography contest is an initiative of the Ambassador W. Stuart Symington who has visited all 36 states in Nigeria and seen the beauty of the country. The contest offered Nigerians an opportunity to highlight this beauty through magnificent photography, to tell a positive story and raise national pride. In the Ambassador's words, "There are all across this country (Nigeria) places of spectacular beauty, including some of the rarest and most beautiful flora and fauna, remarkable rock structures, rivers and water falls, and historic structures. There are things created by God and by man from one end of this country to the other. We want you to take a picture of one of those Nigerian gems – things or places that cause every Nigerian and every

other person in the world who sees it to go "WOW".

Entry into the contest was categorized by producing high-resolution, original photographs of places of beauty that are peculiar to a region or state; the locations were to be symbols of pride to the people and culture of that state. Submissions were made via Flickr and Instagram between Friday, April 6, 2018 and Friday May 4, 2018. The Mission received 330 entries. Those were reviewed by a committee which selected a shortlist of the best 50. Those photographs were put to a public vote on the Embassy Facebook page and Instagram account. Over 42,200 votes were cast for the winners and the top 20 entries emerged. A panel of professional photographers, including the Nigerian President's Personal photographer, and Public Affairs staff then deliberated and selected the top three winning entries.

Ambassador W. Stuart Symington announced the winners of the *NaijaGEMs* photo contest in a video

on June 28. Country Public Affairs Officer, Aruna Amirthanayagam presented certificates of participation to the 'Top 20' participants, and prizes to the top three winners on July 6. Mr. Ikechukwu Okeagu won the third place prize. Mr. Matthias Aragbada took second place. The grand prize went to Mr. Rimamkongende Shamaki.

The top 50 entries featured in a seven-day photography exhibition in Abuja starting July 6 with the prize presentation ceremony. The opening was covered by the Nigerian press and was attended by the families of contestants, U.S. exchange alumni, Embassy contacts, and members of the public. A booklet of the Top 50 photos is in print and the *NaijaGEMs* top 50-photo exhibit will also be shown in other cities around Nigeria.

In the following pages, you will read the stories of some of the winners and see the 'Top 20' entries from the contest.

Buckle up, it's about to be a very visually appealing ride.

THE WINNER

King Kongs



Don't let the diminutive stature and shy demeanor fool you. Rimamkongende 'Kongs' Shamaki is a creative powerhouse and the NaijaGEMs winner has some bold ideas to share.

Words and photos by Olaoluwa Aworinde

Asked him how he got involved with photography and it was interesting to learn that he was first introduced to cameras as a filmmaker. Due to the fact that many of the same principles apply to both filmmaking and photography, it's usual to find filmmakers who started out as photographers, but unusual to see the process in reverse. Kongs' reason for going this route was pretty common sense. He needed to learn more about lighting, composition and lenses but in a more cost-efficient and less time-consuming way than filmmaking allowed... so he signed up for a photography course. In 2015, he embarked on a three month program at the University of the Nations campus in Kona, Hawaii. It was following this program that he chose to focus more on photography, though he manages to juggle it with filmmaking.

Kongs is based in Jos, Plateau state and runs Gowell Studios, a film

and photography outfit. Shooting documentaries is his strong suit; his preferences are for landscapes and portrait photography with a cultural slant. Inspired by the coffee table book he received as part of his winnings, he is embarking on a mission to document the tribes of Plateau. Already invested in the development of the next generation and his immediate community, he's teaching 10 young natives of Jos photography. He also teaches Computer studies at a secondary school in Jos.

Reflecting on his emergence as the winner of the *NaijaGEMs* contest, Kongs says he has been blessed with new recognition, to the extent of being stopped by strangers to congratulate him. The win has also boosted his levels of self-confidence and he is inspired to keep shooting landscapes, a venture that is not as commercially viable as some other genres of photography in these climes. He added "Every now and then, the contest reminds me of how a single picture gave me such

international recognition."

Perhaps more tangibly, he has gotten a few recommendations and been engaged in some consultations as a direct result of his win; not to mention the grand prize of a Canon EOS 5D Mark 4 - the flagship camera of Canon's DSLR lineup. With it, he's already executed projects for clients which have taken him as far as Lagos. Kongs said "I couldn't have done it better with any other cameras... the images that come out of it are so pretty. I have never used a machine as good as this camera." With it, he's also shot a short film titled *Falsehood*, which has been entered into the My Rode Reel film competition. We're here crossing our fingers alongside and in support of the young creative.

Regardless of the outcome of that competition, Mr Shamaki has already been established as a winner and without any doubt, there's going to be a lot more winning in his future.



Rimamkongende's father and other family members celebrate with him after he received his prizes

RIYOM ROCK

by **Rimamkongende Shamaki**

- @kongsshamaki

It is amazing to imagine that these rocks have been bonded together for thousands of years. They are known locally as 'Beta Betat', which means 'three stones'. This rock formation has attracted tourists from around the globe and has been a source of revenue for the local community. An elder of Riyom (a Berom community) shared the story with me. He explained that his generation grew up believing that the rocks were created by God, pointing to the fact that the tip is pointed towards heaven. As a long-standing tradition, boys from the age of seven will go to the rock and use a basket to trap insects. They will then fry them and present them to the extended maternal family. The family will eat the insects and will give the boy a chicken in return while pronouncing blessings upon him. The rocks have remained a symbol of pride for Plateau State.







OLUMO ROCK is a massive outcropping of granite rocks in primitive formation. The history of Olumo Rock dates back to the 19th century Oyo Empire when Abeokuta was inhabited by the Egba people who found refuge at Olumo Rock during inter-tribal wars. The rock functioned as a tower of strength for the Egba people during war-time, as well as a practical vantage point to monitor the enemy's advances. Olumo Rock symbolizes unity and freedom not just for the Egbas but for all the residents of Abeokuta in Ogun State.

Matthias

ARAGBADA
- @dudutoonznigeria

won second place in the *NaijaGEMs* contest with the photo above. He travelled through eight Nigerian states shooting photos before he settled on submitting the photo taken from atop Olumo rock which he loves mostly for the strong cultural heritage it portrays.

Interestingly enough, Matthias doesn't do a lot of landscape photography. Through his production company - Dudutoonz - beauty portraits and corporate head shots are his most covered areas of photography, though he's always had a strong urge to explore other areas. Which is why he accepted the challenge immediately he saw the contest announcement. Considering this was his first attempt at a photography competition, emerging in the Top Three makes this doubly

special to him. He said "this has helped to strengthen my confidence and made me realize that I need to push more on my photography process and not stay within my comfort zone."

Venturing out of his comfort zone is how Mr Aragbada got involved with photography. He was inspired by the story of foremost Nigerian photographer, Kelechi Amadi-Obi, who is a lawyer turned painter turned photographer.

With his new shiny Canon EOS 80D, Mr Aragbada is embarking on a project he calls *Dust to Roses*. He will go into the streets of Lagos and find three people in abject poverty who are willing to share their stories with the world, then assist them in doing so through photography. Through this, he aims to show his audience that you can find beauty anywhere, even in the most unexpected places.





Ikechukwu

OKEAGU

- @ikechukwuokeagu

began creating photographs while he was still in secondary school. His tool was a vintage Yashica film camera and naturally, he had to be a lot more prudent while shooting due to the cost and time involved in developing film. This early start led him to pursue photography and filmmaking professionally, enrolling in the prestigious National Film Institute, Jos, Plateau state. Presently, while he practices all kinds of photography, his preference is for shooting travel photos in the sub-genres of nature, landscape, and wildlife. For someone who states that he loves to be on the road, meet new people, and discover new places, travel photography comes naturally. This passion clearly came in handy in capturing the spectacular photo which won him third place in the

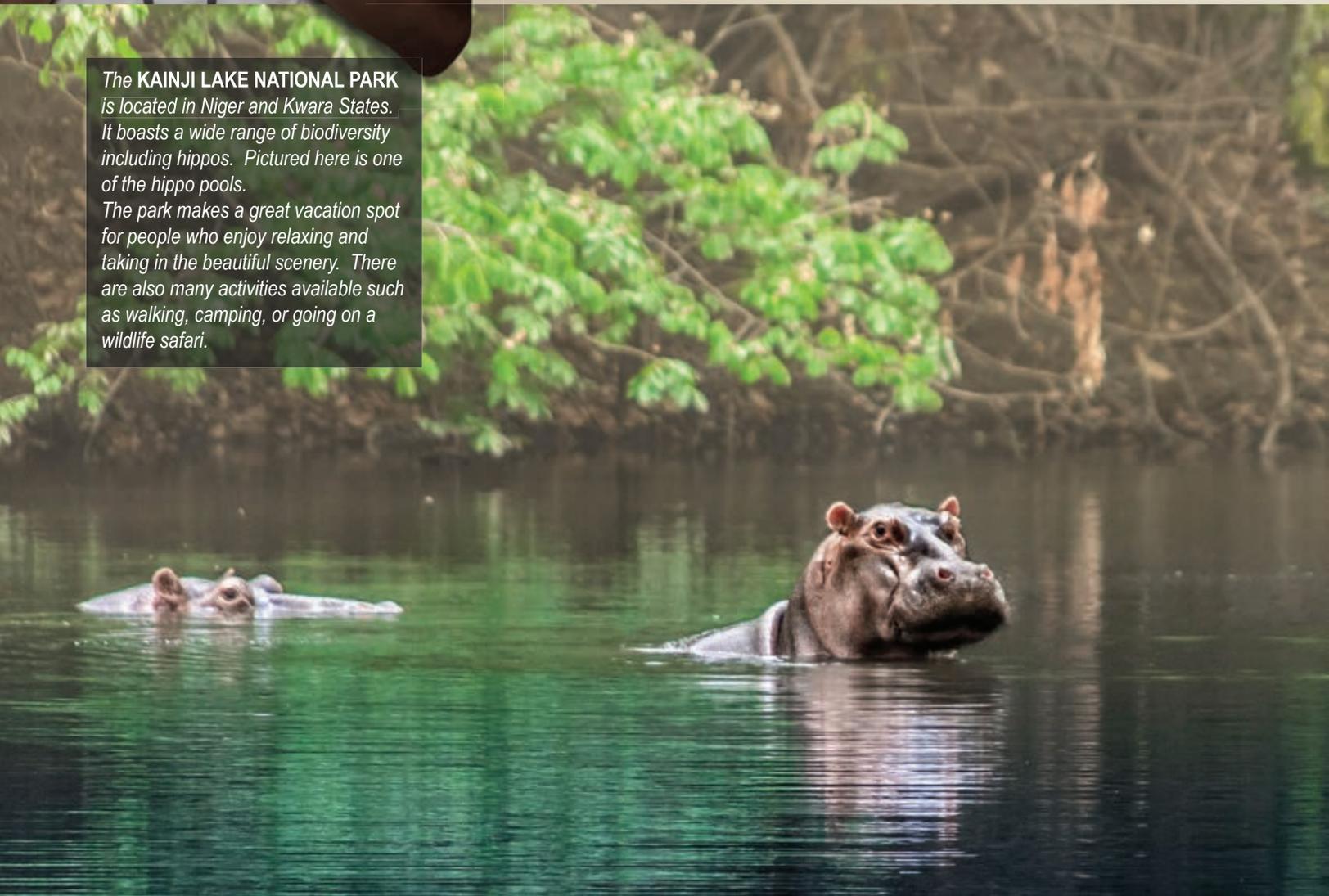
NaijaGEMs contest.

Besides heading Jabe Studios, a growing multimedia studio in Abuja, Ikechukwu is working on a yet untitled photo book in which he hopes to publish his travel photography and inspire the world at large by showcasing the unexplored beauties that can be found all over Nigeria.

When asked how the contest had impacted him, he responded "Participating in the contest exposed me to new people, cultures and places I am yet to explore. I am friends with other participants with whom I share thoughts and ideas. It has opened up a network of people interested in my activities and that has made me hungry for greater creative work."

Ikechukwu won a Canon EOS Rebel T7i for his entry into the contest and it is now his go-to camera on his trips as he shoots photos and videos.

The **KAINJI LAKE NATIONAL PARK** is located in Niger and Kwara States. It boasts a wide range of biodiversity including hippos. Pictured here is one of the hippo pools. The park makes a great vacation spot for people who enjoy relaxing and taking in the beautiful scenery. There are also many activities available such as walking, camping, or going on a wildlife safari.





RUINS OF THE OLD KEBBI KINGDOM

by Hamza Shaibu - @officialolobo

No upright structure remains at this UNESCO World Heritage Site except for an impressive baobab tree. The tree is said to be more than 500 years old, standing at the very center of Surame, the ancient ruins of the old Kebbi Kingdom; built by King Muhammadu Kanta in the 16th century.

Pictured here are the scattered remains of what used to be one of four paved paths leading up to the tree which was

the only one of its kind within the original walls.

The tree during its time served as a gathering point for inhabitants and elders of Surame where important issues were resolved, decisions were taken, and offenders were publicly disgraced. The ruins of Surame now lie abandoned in Sokoto State some four kilometers away from the Binji Local Government Area. This site

is important to the local inhabitants because it shows strong evidence of their roots, and it provides important clues as to how their ancestors lived and how their architecture and ways of life have improved over the years. Being a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the ruins attract many visitors from all over the world who contribute to the local economy.



ASSOP FALLS

by **Owoicho Nelson**
- @apochiowoicho

Assop Waterfalls is located at the top of Jos Plateau in Plateau State in an area surrounded by forests and grasslands. The waterfalls occur naturally at the bottom of the famous Hawan Kibo, a rocky uneven hill stretching a long distance below.

**IDANRE HILLS PANORAMA**

by **Macaulay Ayobami** - @ayobamitzu

Pictured here is a panorama of one of the most iconic cultural sites in Nigeria. Within this picture lies almost all the cultural marvels of the Idanre Hills which include The King's Palace and various shrines, the Belfry, and the Old Court. The Idanre Hills are located in Ondo State in the southwest of Nigeria.





OLUMIRIN WATER FALLS
by **Chukwudi Onwumere**
- @Guzeartworld_photography

The Olumirin Waterfalls were discovered in 1140 AD by Akinla, the granddaughter of Oduduwa, who founded the Yoruba people. The present day community regards the waterfalls as a sacred site and the means of purifying their soul. They are located in Erin-ijesha, Osun State, and are a well-known tourist attraction.



IDANRE TOWN
by **Omololu Aiyeola**
- @olayode_fortune

The top of Idanre Hill is about 4,000 ft. above sea level and features plenty of strange geology. The network of hills surround the town below and provide the neighboring community with tourist spots and vacationing possibilities.

IYAKE LAKE

by **Oluwatomisin Runsewe**
- @roluwatomisin



Oke-Ado Mountain is in the town of Ado Awaiye, Oyo State. On top of the mountain is Iyake Lake, one of only two recognized suspended lakes in the world. It sits at about 150m above sea level and is a two hour hike from the foot of the mountain. The lake is sacred to the people of the town below who believe that water from the lake has medicinal properties. In addition to the mysterious allure of the suspended lake, Oke-Ado Mountain is a tourist attraction with hiking, campsites, and cable cars that connect it to other mountains in the vicinity.

**THE CONFLUENCE**

by **Abalaka Philip Ejima**
- @mr universe_01

In this picture, you can see the majestic Benue River, a major tributary of the Niger river, and the scenic splendor of their confluence from the pinnacle

view of Mount Patti, with an altitude of 458.3 meters. Mount Patti is a wooded range of highlands, spreading about 15 kilometers and visible from every part of the city of Lokoja, the capital of Kogi State. The history of Nigeria as a nation is not complete without a reference to the distinctive role this location played in the creation of the country.

Sir Frederick John Dealtry Lugard conceived the idea of the Nigerian nation on Mount Patti and went on to form the northern and southern protectorates. Lady Flora Shaw Lugard also coined the name Nigeria (Niger-Area) from this mountaintop, after viewing the fascinating scenery. This confluence was represented on the National Coat of Arms. The two white stripes come together to form a "Y" shape, symbolizing the confluence of our two major rivers.



ABUJA CITY GATE
by **Makoji Samuel**
Idoko - @toviev



IDANRE HILLS by **Opeoluwa Adeyanju** - @olusolaope



JABI LAKE by **Jesse Ngur** - @jessengur



TUNGA RIVER by **Barnabas Wanapia**
- @b.wanapiaphotography



STEAM ENGINE by **Timothy Yisa**
- @tim.bbk



AKACHI
by **Ikechukwu Johnniyke**
- @johnniyke



THE HILL OF IDANRE
by **Itunu Ijila** - @Noblestar.it



BENUE RIVER
by **Ekikere-abasi Usoro**
- @eiu_kidos



THE MAMBILLA PLATEAU
by **Ayodeji Oyinloye**
- @icey_images



ABUJA NATIONAL STADIUM
by **Samuel Osondu** - @sampresto2000



SPECIAL THANKS



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The Canon photography
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Contest Judge



Bayo Omoboriowo
Personal Photographer to the
President of Nigeria
IG: @bayoomoboriowo
Contest Judge



Aruna Amirthanayagam
Country Public Affairs Officer
Contest Judge



Russell Brooks
Public Affairs Officer, Lagos
Contest Judge



Malate-Anne Atajiri
EducationUSA Assistant
Contest Judge



Amy Boyd
Office Manager
Research. Content curation. Judge.

U.S. MISSION, NIGERIA



Joseph Adah
New media specialist/Web master
Contest manager. Curator. Judge.



Olaoluwa Aworinde
Official Photographer/Editor, Crossroads
Contest assistant-manager. Judge.

Michelle Sorenson
Intern
Research. Content curation.

The NaijaGEMs Exhibition, Abuja July 6, 2018



Grand prize winner, Rimamkongende Shamaki receives his certificate from Counselor for Public Affairs, Aruna Amirthanayagam



Russell Brooks, Public Affairs Officer, Lagos, delivers remarks



A cross section of contest participants and guests



First runner-up, Matthias Aragbada receives his certificate from Aruna Amirthanayagam



Second runner up, Ikechukwu Okeagu receives his prize and certificate



Samuel Idoko Makoji and Philip Abalaka, two participants in the Top 20 in front of Philip's photograph

NaijaGEMS | The Exhibition

Showing between October 28 and November 15
in The Maker Lab at the African Artists' Foundation as part of the Lagos Photo Festival 2018



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