

In the heart of Nyamata town, where transformation is steadily reshaping Rwanda's economic landscape, one hotel has grown alongside the district's ambitions. What began as a simple observation during a field visit has evolved into one of Bugesera's most recognisable hospitality brands: Palast Rock Hotel.

For its founder, Aimable Rutagarama, the journey started long before the hotel officially opened its doors in 2013.



Aimable Rutagarama, the founder and owner of Palast Rock Hotel

A trained construction engineer and founder of civil engineering consultancy firm Hycogec Consultants, Rutagarama had spent years working on infrastructure projects across Rwanda. Towards the end of 2008, he had an opportunity of being part of a technical task force in charge of following up the proposed Bugesera International Airport project.

At the time, Nyamata was still a quiet town with limited infrastructure and few hospitality services.

"After field visits, we struggled to find a place where we could sit, work, or even hold discussions," Rutagarama recalls. "That is when I realized that if Bugesera was going to host an international airport, people would eventually need quality hospitality services," notes Rutagarama.

That realization planted the seed for what would later become Palast Rock Hotel.



Starting Small, Dreaming Big

Rutagarama purchased a small piece of land from a friend in Nyamata, initially planning to build apartments or office spaces. But as Bugesera's development plans became clearer and Rwanda's economy continued to expand, the vision gradually shifted toward hospitality.

Rutagarama started small, building step by step with limited resources. "I believed Bugesera's future would change," he says. "The district already had development plans, and I knew that investing early would matter."

When Palast Rock Hotel officially opened on New Year's Day in 2013, it became the first fully-fledged hotel in Nyamata, offering services that were previously unavailable in the area.



The hotel initially featured 27 rooms, a restaurant, a bar, and the area's first swimming pool — amenities that immediately filled a gap in the growing district.

For Rutagarama, community response became one of his strongest motivations. “It touched me deeply when people in Bugesera told me they were happy to finally have a place where they could access hotel services,” he says.

Expanding with Bugesera

As Bugesera continued to attract investors, businesses, and travellers, Palast Rock Hotel expanded alongside the area's growth.

In 2017, the hotel earned a three-star classification, but Rutagarama believes the hotel has since evolved far beyond that level through continuous upgrades and investments.



Additional facilities were added over the years, including 20 more rooms, conference halls, Spa, GYM, Tennis Court, and multiple restaurants and bars spread across the property.

Today, one of the hotel's most notable additions is a modern events tent capable of hosting more than 1,000 guests, making the facility one of the district's leading venues for conferences, weddings, and large gatherings.

Surrounded by spacious gardens and equipped with a large parking area, the hotel still has room for future expansion — something Rutagarama says remains part of the long-term strategy.

The revival and acceleration of the new Airport project have also reignited economic activity in the district, bringing renewed optimism to businesses.

“There was a period when the airport project slowed down, and many businesses,

including ours, faced challenges,” he explains. “But today Bugesera’s economic activities are growing rapidly again.”

Positioned close to the new airport site, Palast Rock Hotel already serves professionals and workers involved in the project. Rutagarama says the hotel is preparing for even greater opportunities ahead, including partnerships with airlines and services tailored to transit travellers.



Beyond Hospitality

Over the years, the business evolved into the broader Palast Group, which now includes hospitality, travel, logistics, and real estate ventures.

Among its growing portfolio is Palast Tours & Travel, an agency that promotes Rwanda’s luxury tourism experiences. The company offers cultural tours, community-based tourism activities, visits to genocide memorial sites, and excursions around Bugesera’s lakes and natural attractions.

“We want travellers, especially those in transit, to experience Bugesera instead of simply passing through,” Rutagarama says.

The district’s improving road network, tourism potential, and peaceful environment have contributed to increased interest in Bugesera as both a destination and investment hub.

The group is also involved in one of Nyamata’s largest urban development projects — the construction of a modern market, a major business complex being developed in partnership with the district and local investors.

Estimated at nearly \$20 million, the project is expected to include shopping malls, warehouses, restaurants, offices, and commercial spaces that could significantly reshape the town’s business environment.

Rutagarama says remaining committed to the project, even as some investors withdrew, reflects his broader belief in long-term development.

A Community-Centered Vision

Today, Palast Rock Hotel employs around 70 permanent staff members, alongside casual workers, and supports local farmers and suppliers who provide fresh produce and food products.

The hotel has also become an important training ground for students seeking internships in hospitality and tourism, with some eventually securing permanent employment.



For Rutagarama, success is measured less by profit and more by impact.

“What motivates me most is seeing something you started grow successfully and benefit people,” he says. “Whenever a project becomes part of solving community challenges, that gives me fulfilment.”

That philosophy continues to guide the Palast Group’s broader ambitions.

“Our long-term vision is for every subsidiary company to achieve excellence in its own sector,” he says. “For the hotel, at minimum, we want it to become a four-star establishment.”

As Bugesera continues its rapid transformation into one of Rwanda’s emerging economic corridors, Palast Rock Hotel stands as a reflection of how local entrepreneurship, patience, and vision can grow alongside national development.

From a simple need identified during a field visit to a hospitality landmark preparing for the arrival of an international airport, the story of Palast Rock Hotel mirrors the story of Bugesera itself — ambitious, evolving, and looking firmly towards the future.

