



NACD NEWSLETTER

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This edition

Being the 19th of the ever re-invigorating arts, culture and tourism guide of Nigeria, we bring to you the first in the series of "Revealing Abuja", the Centre of Unity, the power base of Nigeria.

As we lead you inside the capital city with its glow and adoring places, courtesy of pictures from The Heart of Africa Project, we urge you to stay with us as we strive to bring to you all that makes Abuja unique in subsequent editions.



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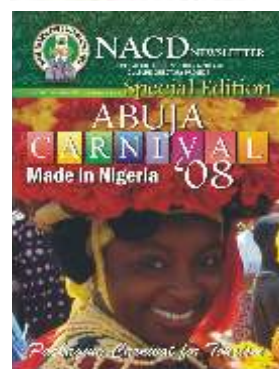
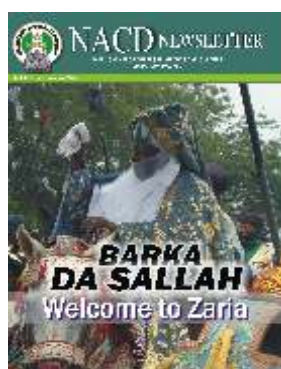
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Centre of Unity, Hub of Tourism

Abuja, Nigeria's seat of power has come to be regarded as a world-class administrative capital and with good reason. On relocating from Lagos in the early 90s, the then Babangida's military administration made its home within the Aso Rock Presidential villa.

This villa, located at the outskirts of Asokoro area of the city has remained home to subsequent administrations to date. The transition to civil rule has not changed this fact. It houses both the offices and residents of the President, the Vice President, and their aides.

Its precise location is known as Three Arms Zone; an extensive land area which accommodates the National Assembly Complexes, the Supreme Court and the Presidential Villa.

An interesting network of avenues, link different parts of the district and the urge to explore these is usually difficult for newcomers to resist. In just a period of a decade and half, Abuja has been transformed from a scantily inhabited jungle to a beautifully planned, sprawling metropolis. The pioneers were government agencies which needed to

acquire spaces for both office complexes and staff residential quarters.

These were quickly followed by business men who saw an opportunity to carve out new entities and either extend their empires or entirely escape the Lagos congestion.

In less than no time, the trickle became a deluge as Nigerians converged from all parts of the country to the city. This rush necessitated another kind of adjustment on the city's infrastructure which had to be evenly distributed in order to serve the maximum needs of the city's ever-growing population.



The Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) is an agency entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing the even distribution of infrastructure within the FCT. With the large influx of residents however, strident measures were required to maintain its aesthetic beauty. The FCTA rose up to this responsibility with admirable aplomb. The result is manifest in the all-inclusive municipality which is present-day Abuja; a capital city to be proud of, and which may be compared with any other of its kind in the world.

Much has been said and heard about Abuja in the international media, none unfavourable. During preparations for the 2003 All Africa Games, veteran journalists the world over came to Abuja to inspect the newly completed National Stadium, and departed with nothing but rave reviews of the city.



GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

Abuja is literally located at the centre of Nigeria, a heart-shaped land area bordered by four Northern States: Nasarawa to the East, Kaduna to the North, Niger to the West and Kogi to the South. It lies

at Latitude $9^{\circ} 13'$ North of the Equator, and Longitude $7^{\circ} 04'$ East of the Greenwich Meridian, and enjoys a tropical climate. Rainfall in Abuja usually begins from the month of April and lasts till October, after which the

dry winds of Harmattan take over, lasting another four months; from November to March. Its Sudan Savannah vegetation is largely responsible for the beauty of its topography which is captured from different perspectives in the body of this story.

Abuja is a lovely city to live and work in, no doubt about it. This being the opinion of its residents, it is their delight to watch the admiration on the faces of visitors on their first glimpse of the city's attractive layouts. Its undulating terrain, rather than detracting from this beauty is an added enhancement, creating suspense.

A visitor never knows what to expect on turning the next corner. Arriving by air or by land, a one is likely to access the City Gate and follow a ring road around the new National Stadium on his way to the city centre. Being the first point of entrance into Abuja, the City Gate area is delightfully welcoming, just as it should be, giving a good first impression. Besides its beautifully implemented infrastructure, there are many other features that make the city a complete centre of attraction.



Millennium Park

RECREATIONAL *Parks*

The FCT's naturally undulating terrain has created what is popularly known in Abuja as 'green areas'. They are low lands or mini valleys with which the whole city is speckled. Green Areas are strictly reserved as recreational parks, professionally landscaped with grass and flora to retain their natural splendor and at the same time avoid disrupting the eco system. Numerous parks of this kind dot the entire face of the city, all gorgeously inviting. They are managed by private developers who are in the best position to guarantee a very high standard of maintenance. Besides these minor parks, there are others which are landmarks of the city, meant for major entertainment and social functions; wedding receptions,

award ceremonies, Christmas and Sallah bashes. The most prominent of these are the Millennium Park close to the Three Arms Zone, the Abuja Zoological Gardens in Garki District, Maitama District Amusement Park and the IBB Golf Course in Asokoro District, among others. Each of these covers a very extensive land area of well-tended lawns, giving the impression of rolling hills.

In most cases as well, Abuja's parks are bordered by rivers or streams from which fountains are generated and through which its grasses, flora and trees are watered, preserving a cool and green atmosphere even in February and March - the city's hottest months. Recreation here makes a refreshing change after a busy working day or in the middle of one.



Central Bank Headquarters

LANDMARK BUILDINGS

Abuja's skyline is decorated with some extremely magnificent structures which have come to represent the essence of the city. Popularity of landmark buildings within the city depends largely on the public transportation network and its operators who adopt the names of these monuments as major bus stops. A newcomer to the city is easily educated through the instructions of bus drivers and conductors such as *"make you drop for NNPC take another bus to Berger"*, or to *"follow Wuse bus drop for Sheraton junction"*. They include the new Central Bank of Nigeria Building, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) Towers, the International Conference Centre, the Central Mosque, the National Ecumenical Centre, Radio House, Federal Secretar-

iat Complex, Office of the Head of Civil Service, Nicon Luxury Hotel, Louise Edet House (Police Force Headquarters), Churchgate Building, the United Nations House, etc, all located within the Central Business District. The National Assembly Complex, especially the "White House" is a notable monument as well, so are the Supreme Court and Federal Court of Appeal complexes in Three Arms Zone. The Aso Rock Presidential Villa is another renowned architectural masterpiece, barring the restriction of access to visitors for obvious reasons. Others are the ECOWAS Secretariat in Asokoro, and the new Nigeria Communication Commission (NCC) complex both in Maitama Area, Ministry of Defense Building (Ship House) in

Garki. In the Wuse Area, mention must be made of African Petroleum (AP) Plaza, and the Julius Berger edifice. As the construction company responsible for designing and building most of the monuments mentioned above, Julius Berger had erected for its own use, a structure worthy of its reputation. The marble structure with its detached roof has been featured in several documentaries done on the city. Some of the most stylishly designed and lavishly bedecked buildings in the world are found in Abuja. They are finished with gold plating, silver lining, marble, gem stone, latest aluminum roof designs, chrome and steel accessories and French glass etc, giving the city a wealthy façade.

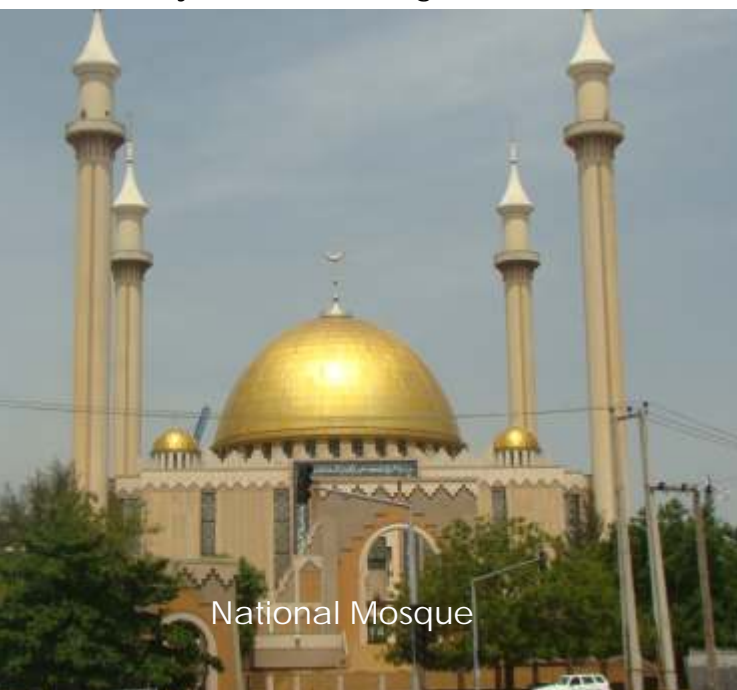


NNPC Headquarters

Abuja's residential buildings are not left out of the general description. Many of these are architectural masterpieces which can pass as tourist attractions in their own right. It is no surprise that its real estate industry is among the city's highest income earners. Living in the city is far from cheap. Rates of purchase and lease are the highest in Nigeria, and expectedly so, no different from other international capitals in its category. It is not unusual for Nigerians to regard their fellow compatriots resident in Abuja as occupying a superior social stratum compared to themselves. As a result of this assumption, they harbour a higher expectation of Abuja residents in every situation involving finance.



Ecumenical Centre



National Mosque



International Conference Centre

HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

The role of the hospitality industry in tourism development cannot be over-emphasised. Abuja operates a fully-developed hospitality industry, powered by the private sector. It is based on healthy competition which has ensured that standards are constantly being improved and best practices sustained. As a major international capital, a tourist can expect nothing but the best in entertainment, relaxation, cuisine and accommodation while in Abuja. Among the top players are five-star hotels including the Transcorp Hilton, Nikon Luxury and Sheraton Hotel and Towers. Others are Rockwiew, Agura, Chelsea, Bolingo, Royal Gubabi, Ibro, Valencia, Chida International, Arewa Suites, Nanet Suites, Reitz Continental, just naming a few.

The large presence of foreigners, expatriates and tourists in and around these large hotels testify to the industry's buoyancy. Guest houses, suites, lodging apartments in their categories are innumerable within the metropolis, catering to patrons according to the purchasing power of each. Most recreational parks equally operate a refreshment section where food, drinks, snacks and games are available for just a token under the coolness of shady trees. Classy and elegant fast-food eateries are reaping a bountiful harvest in Abuja with their attractive shop frontages beckoning irresistibly to the public. Restaurants, clubs, bars and joints are open at all hours of the day. However, weekends are the boom of the industry. Beginning from Friday evening at the close of work, Abuja's relaxation spots begin to draw the crowds, and continue to do so till Sunday night.



Transcorp Hilton Hotel



Sheraton Hotel



Nikon Luxury Hotel

While a number of residents pack up and head for the countryside, the local tourism industry is given a boost as businessmen, contractors, politicians and public servants from other cities descend on the Abuja and join forces with residents to let loose on the town as a means of unwinding from stress. Secondary markets that are the natural outcrop of tourism are not left out. A visit to some of the more popular joints in town would confirm the presence minstrels, going from group to group and performing to the delight of patrons in return for monetary rewards. Hawkers of cheap souvenirs, CDs and home wares have a field day among the crowds of frolicking merry-makers. Popular delicacies among Abuja's weekend crowds include cow-head and goat-meat pepper soup, nkwoobi (a cow hide and potash dish), isi ewu (goat head and potash porridge), suya (the popular grilled beef specialty of northern Nigerian tribes), kilishi (the dried variety), and full-size grilled fish, seasoned to mouth-watering taste. These are the guarantee dishes, staggering quantities of which are consumed daily. A few persons however may be seen enjoying the more conventional dishes of foofoo, garri, pounded yam and soup or rice cuisines.



Nanet Suites



Tantalizers, Wuse 2



The FCT Arts and Craft village

CRAFT CENTRES

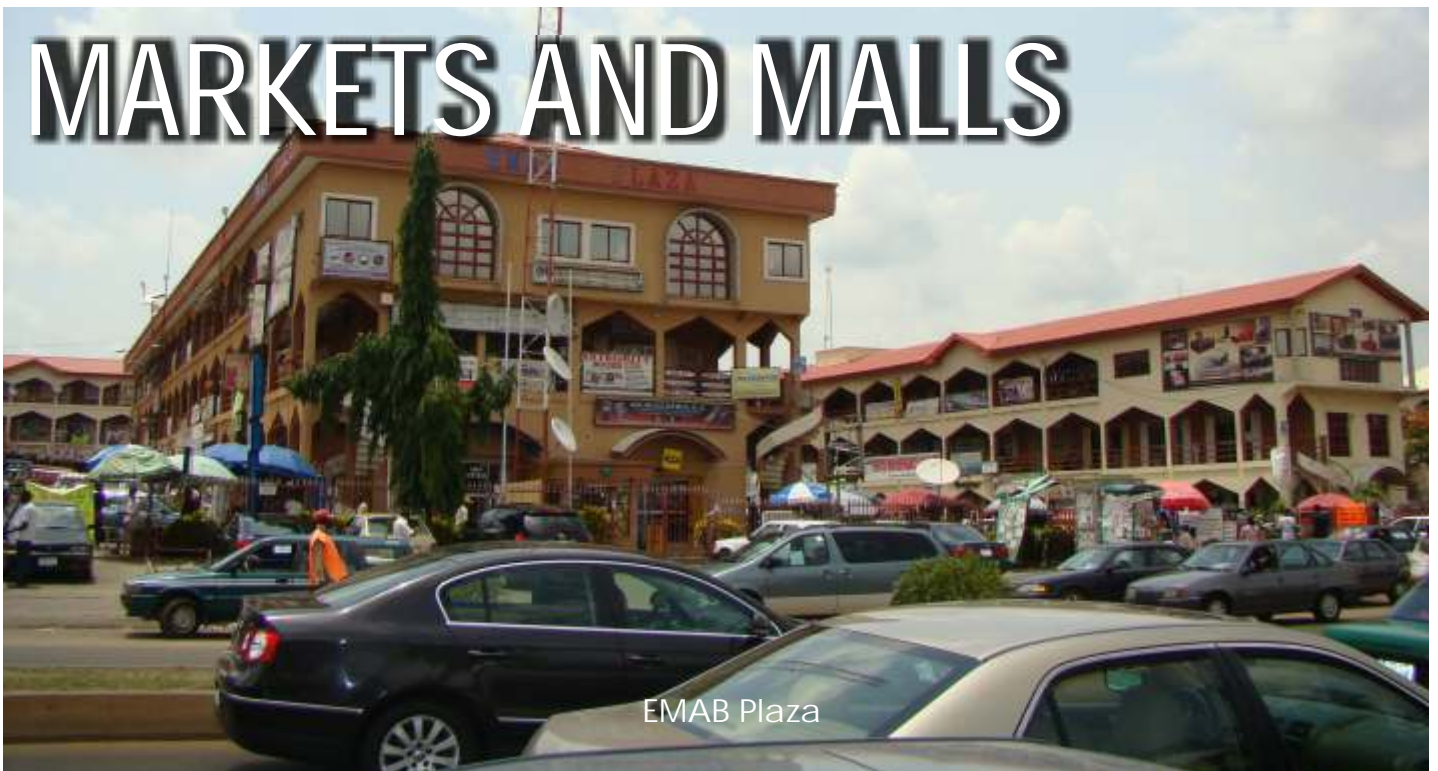
No tourist city worth its salt can exist without prominent craft centres which serve as the repository of its indigenous arts and crafts; the hallmark of its art-tourism development. Abuja boasts of some notable craft centres among which are the FCT Arts and Craft Village in the Central Business District. Built by the Federal Capital Administration, the Centre is occupied by local artists and craft practitioners who hold its shops on lease. Each shop consists of a round (Gwari-style) mud house with a thatched roof, ingeniously designed to portray

Nigeria's rich arts and cultural heritage. It is also a one-stop-shop for every locally-made work of art and craft, ranging from paintings to wood carving and sculpture, jewelry, fabrics, clothes and accessories, so incredibly gorgeous as to be quite astonishing. The Abuja Council for Arts and Culture Headquarters (Cyprian Ekwensi House) located in Garki District of Abuja is dotted with many attractive craft shops where a tourist may obtain the best made-in-Nigeria art works. Most prominent hotels in Abuja equally boast of craft shops which serve the needs of both local and international tourists. Added to privately-owned galleries and craft centres, Abuja is in no way deficient in the area of art-tourism development.



Inside a Craft shop

MARKETS AND MALLS

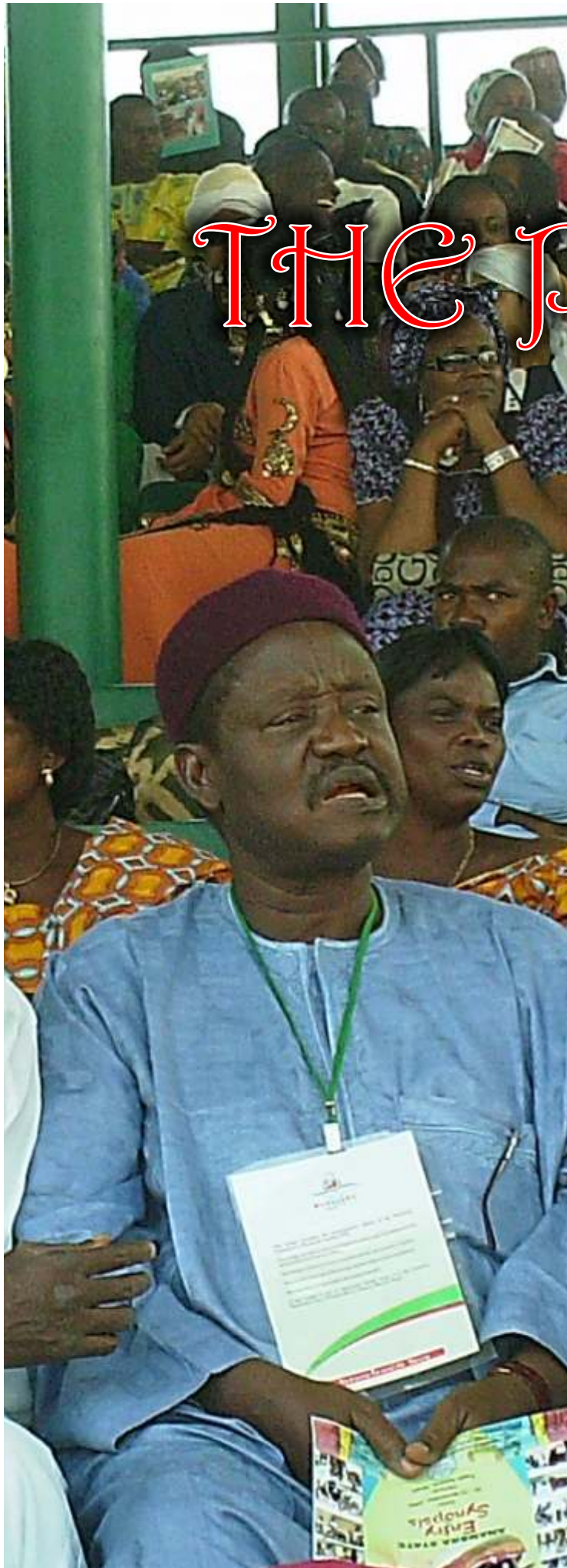


EMAB Plaza

Besides crafts, a visitor to a delightful city like Abuja has need for gift items, souvenirs and articles for personal use. These and more are available in Abuja's many ultramodern malls and markets. They afford both local and foreign goods of every conceivable type and make; household goods, electronic gadgets, food and beverages, cosmetics, clothing and textile, etc. Abuja's malls are of world standards, so a visitor needs entertain no fear of deficiency on this score. In the Wuse II area alone, Emab, Banex and Sharif Plazas represent goods and services worth billions of Naira so is the famous Wuse Market, also in this category. The FCT Administration has recently completed the construction of what is will be known as Abuja Ultramodern Market in Garki District. Malls and Markets form a major base of Abuja's economy as trade is a key occupation of its residents. Every district and area is complimented by several of these, making life complete and comfortable.



DUNES Shopping Mall



THE PEOPLE

Abuja's acronym as Nigeria's centre of Unity is very apt from the perspective of its population. It boasts of the largest representation of Nigeria's two-hundred and fifty tribes that can be found within one city. One can hardly board a public transportation medium within

the city or its suburbs without overhearing people discuss in all manners of languages which are identifiable but not understandable. Social gatherings are skewed the same way, with different cultural attires classifying them by their ethnic groups. Nigerians resident in Abuja prefer to converse in their native tongues and launch into same on immediately coming into contact with a tribes man or woman of theirs. This they believe gives them a measure of comfort in the big city where they are compelled to speak English in order to get along. The most pronounced evidence of Abuja's ethnic diversity nevertheless may be found in orthodox churches.

The Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) is known as the first Christian order to arrive the Gwari land and had taken root deeply into the peoples' religious practices, displacing most of the traditional religious beliefs for which the people were renowned. It is here that ethnic associations are formed and used as instruments of advancement and evangelization. A mild spirit of competition is introduced among these groups to encourage zealously and dedication.

In the Catholic Church for instance, groups such as St. James Arewanci (Hausa/Fulani States) exist. Others are St. Michael's Imo/Abia/Ebonyi Association, SS Peter and Paul Idoma Association, St. Theresa's Igbo Women Association, Holy Cross Akwa Ibom/Cross River States Association, St. Benedict Edo/Delta Association, St. Michael the Archangel Yoruba Community, etc. On special occasions, they appear in their traditional attire and prepare native cuisines with which to delight the congregation. No tribe is left behind as the strength of one is matched by the rest.



Islam is a force to reckon with in Abuja's social life. Muslim dress has become trendy and fashionable among the city's dwellers as even Christians take delight in this form of adornment. Fridays, meant for Juma'at prayers take a different turn from other week days. By an unwritten law of the city, Fridays are the shortest working days of the week. From 12:30pm, Muslim faithfuls begin to flock towards the Central Mosque and various others all over the city and its suburbs. Dressed in their long flowing caftans and designer caps, they spill into streets and major thoroughfares, which are then closed to traffic for the duration. The precision and uniformity of their formation is arresting, so is their colourful outfits. Fridays have become known as traditional days on which both Christians and Muslims appear in cultural garb, emulating the Juma'at mode of dress. Civil servants, bankers, traders and politicians come out in locally made and designed attire which are out of this world. The end of Juma'at prayers often spells the end of the day for many as they depart immediately for the quietness of their native towns away from the bustling city. Peaceful cohabitation of Christians and Muslims in Abuja is at its best as far as Nigeria is concerned, as all are together in the resolve to overcome the forces of division. Any issue that might initiate strife is swiftly dealt with.

The masses of Abuja happen to be some of the most enlightened among the Nigerian populace, majority of them having previously inhabited other parts of the country.

Abuja is fast assuming the qualities of a no man's land, informed by the relocation of the Gwari; native aboriginal tribe and owners of the land. In drawing up the now-famous Abuja Master Plan, the Federal Government of Nigeria decided to relocate the native Gwari Tribes to suburban villages, built for that purpose. Their presence is not immediately evident within the city or even its suburbs, except by special efforts made to come in contact with them. While they may not be described as anti-social, Gwaris of Abuja are definitely western civilization-shy and continue migrating further into the hinterland as it approaches. Not all members of the tribe however conform to this portrayal. The younger generation especially has proved more adventurous than their forebears, mixing quite freely with the diverse ethnic nationalities populating Abuja. The story of Abuja is the story of the Gwari people, and cannot be complete without it. This however must be dedicated to an entire newsletter edition if justice is to be done to the narrative, chronicling the lives and ways of Abuja's aboriginal tribe.



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NACD...an initiative of **The Presidency** aimed at documenting
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