

BY MARIA JACINTA KANNYANGE

KAMPALA. As Christmas carols fill the air and Kampala slowly empties, a quiet tug-of-war unfolds behind closed doors in several urban homes. While offices wind down and families plan village trips, for nannies and daycare centres, the festive season often marks the busiest—and most emotionally charged—time of the year.

For working parents, the Christmas rush goes beyond shopping and travel. It is a frantic search for childcare as trusted nannies announce plans to head up-country, sometimes weeks before December 25. For the caregivers themselves, the season presents a difficult choice: return home for long-awaited family reunions or stay behind for extra pay and job security.

Increasingly, daycare centres are stepping in to bridge this gap, transforming into holiday childcare hubs. At Nanaville, a 24-hour daycare centre in Kampala, operations continue un-

How daycare centres, nannies manage the Christmas rush

interrupted through Christmas. A staff member who spoke on condition of anonymity said the centre remains open throughout the year to meet the needs of parents with tight schedules.

"We work all the time, even during Christmas. Parents are free to bring their children during the festive season," the source said.

But not all centres operate the same way. At Cradle Day Care Centre in Ntinda, Christmas offers the only break staff have all year. A source at the centre said they close for a week to allow workers to spend time with their families.

"This is the only time we close. Parents have to find ways of staying with their children," she said, adding that after Christmas and New Year's Day, a few staff members remain on standby in case parents urgently need help.

While centres adjust their schedules, negotiations at home can be even more

delicate for some nannies.

Ms Hellen Nabbosa, a nanny in Kampala, had planned to spend the holidays with her parents upcountry. Her plans were interrupted when her employer asked her to stay on and care for the children, promising to negotiate extra pay.

Open for business.
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— An employee worker at Nanaville 24hr Babycare Centre

Caught between family obligations and job security, Ms Nabbosa chose to stay. "It's always hard to decide but you don't want to risk losing your job," Ms

Nabbosa said.

For parents like Ms Linda Akuguzibwe, a mother of four, the possibility of a nanny leaving during Christmas is a major source of anxiety. "I am always in crisis whenever my maid asks to go for the Christmas holiday. She wanted a whole month off, but I am already disorganised. We agreed she would go after the busy time," she said.

In Kasokoso, a Kampala Suburb, housewife and mother of five, Ms Melissa Nakasolo, said Christmas forces her to rethink household arrangements every year.

"Treasure [a maid] has been with me for three years. She can be annoying sometimes, but she takes good care of my children," she said. "When Christmas comes, I start looking for relatives to help me because I know she will want to travel." Ms Nakasolo said she often shops for

her maid every Christmas as an incentive to return quickly, but the strategy has not always worked. "She usually comes back after a month. It stresses me. This time, I cautioned her," she said.

Yet not all nannies are eager to travel. Ms Christine Nalweyiso, a mother of one, said she expected her maid to go home for Christmas, only for her to decline.

"I bought her a package to take home, but she said she preferred to stay in Kampala and plait her hair," she said.

As Christmas is already with us, these negotiations—between parents, nannies and day-care centres—highlight an often overlooked side of the festive season. Behind the celebrations lies a complex balancing act, where care, compromise, and survival intersect, reminding many families that Christmas joy depends as much on childcare as it does on carols and cuisine.