

GQ

BRITISH

GENTLEMEN'S QUARTERLY

DAISY LOWE:
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SEXIEST
ROCK CHICK

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MILES ALDRIDGE

20

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★ APRIL

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HIGHER PLATEAUS

HOLIDAY LIKE A CASTAWAY (BUT WITH YOUR OWN PERSONAL CHEF)

Less spoilt and cheaper than the Caribbean, Lamu is also far from Kenya's political instability, sharp-toothed wildlife and perilous roads. Instead it offers exotic days filled with lime sodas, sea breezes and the odd stroll in the dazzling surf. No wonder it continues to attract eccentrics, artists, dreamers and romantics.

If you're doing it right, you reach Lamu via a scenic trip over the African bush by helicopter that puts you directly outside your beach-front door. Alternatively, you can take a small plane from Nairobi, (20-ish people, taking one to two hours depending on stopovers) followed by a speedboat transfer.

Either way, if you're staying at Jahazi, a Swahili-style house on a deserted beach, you're welcomed at the water's edge by five staff, including your own boat captain and chef.

With its private pool, *baraza* (meeting area) and *kikoi* (sarong)-strewn beds swinging from coconut fibres overlooking the Indian Ocean, you are inspired to take it easy.

But the more energetic can water-ski, snorkel and swim the channel between the house and the mainland. Or you can walk about three hours (or go by donkey or camel) in the cool of dawn the eight miles along a beach to Shela, the Notting Hill of Lamu.

Shela is clean, gentrified and quaint, and it's the place to buy formerly dilapidated Swahili

houses, most now fashionably renovated. Go and see a few and look over their *makuti*-thatched roofs at the biblical scene, then head for the bar at the famed Peponi Hotel.

For the full castaway effect, head to the Kizingo *bandas* – thatched cottages just a few yards up the beach from Jahazi. Set amid sand dunes, the *bandas* are eco heaven with intermittent electricity, walls of woven *pandanus* and no doors. Here you wake up to the call of tropical birds and spend your days in a hammock or walking the beach.

For a little action, you can speedboat 20 minutes to Lamu Town, a bustling port and Unesco World Heritage site where you'll find *dhow*s in full sail, donkeys laden with panniers of coral rock and a throbbing market whose vendors, seated on the ground, will sell sweet potatoes and papayas.

● Kizingoni Beach Houses

From £1,965 per person (including flights and transfers) based on four couples sharing a house for seven nights on a fully inclusive basis.

● Kizingo

From £1,795 per person based on two sharing for seven nights on a full-board basis including flights and transfers.

● Lady Lori helicopters

can also be booked through Scott Dunn. 020-8682 5070, africa@scottdunn.com



Kiwayu Safari Village,

on the sandy lush shores of the Lamu archipelago, is where you come to recover from the stress of the early mornings, spa treatments, afternoon swims and game drives of your exhausting bush safari. George Moorhead and his Italian wife, who run Kiwayu with effortless charm and insouciant efficiency, have taken the concept of flip-flopped indolence and turned it into a fine art. I have never been anywhere quite so laid-back, carefree and so beautifully under-appointed. Judging by their floral comments in the visitors' book, Tracey Emin and Roberto Cavalli seem to agree.

This is one of those places that flaunts its lack of modern facilities and anti-blingness with breezy, contrapuntal pride. You sleep in beach-side, Robinson Crusoe-luxe *bandas* that are mostly open-sided (the occasional "wall" is made of air-conditioning palm thatch) but bereft of doors, telephones, fax machines, Wi-Fi connections and TVs. After all, why would you want a 42ins plasma when there's a widescreen sea view in front of your bed?

Minutes after our bag drop (the airstrip is only a sandy, ten-minute Land Rover ride away) we quickly established a gruelling schedule of delightful lethargy punctuated with epicurean catering. One day we took out a lovely old *dhow* boat for a slow and lazy sail up the coast. Another time we went on what Kiwayu grandly terms a "foot safari" (a walk) up the beach. But that was about as active as we got for four wonderful days. Otherwise we lay around, ate, read and slept until the



Shore bet: open-side beach huts in Kiwayu

general awfulness of the outside world had receded completely.

Still, by day four, the agenda-free programme of Kiwayu got to us. So we were lucky the handsome Sharp family – Chris, Suzanne, Nick, Jack and Boo, Holland Park-based proprietors of designer carpet empire the Rug Company – were there to provide perfect society.

"We now hold the guilty title of being the most frequent visitors to Kiwayu," Chris told me over lunch. "But we don't give a damn: we swim, we fish, we play, we're happy."

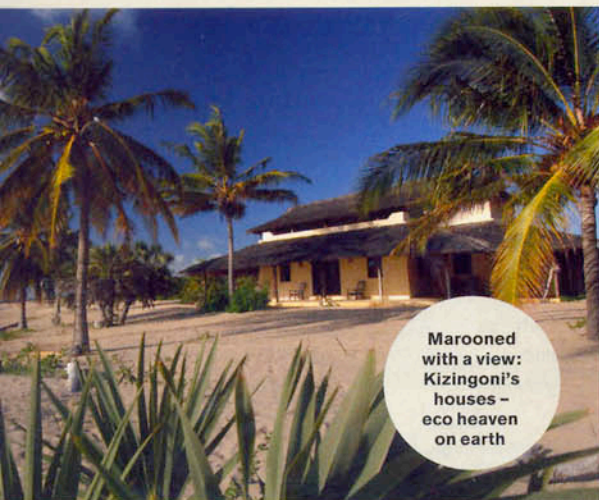
There will be plenty more happy returns, too, now that the Sharps are building a house just a conch shell's throw away from Kiwayu.

"At every and any opportunity, we're on the Hammersmith flyover, factor 50 in our pockets and the lightest of suitcases," grins Chris. "We crave the clear starry nights, balmy ocean breezes and the bluest, warmest water on earth. Like an iron filing drawn to a 100 tesla magnet, like a spider down the drain, we're sucked back to Kiwayu."

The terminal travel sickness that is *mal d'Africa* has now spread to the UK. GO

➔ **GO INFO: Getting there** Aardvark Safaris offers a week-long holiday in Kenya combining Saruni Samburu and Kiwayu for three nights each from £2,599 per person, on a full board basis. The trip includes all flights, transfers and safari activities. aardvarksafaris.co.uk The properties are part of the Cheli & Peacock collection. cheliandpeacock.com

● **Kenya Airways** operates daily flights from London Heathrow to Nairobi. Economy returns start from £460 including tax; Premier World returns from £1,810.60. kenya-airways.com



Marooned with a view: Kizingoni's houses – eco heaven on earth