



SUN KISSED KIZINGONI

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for a weekend of grand surprises

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"Where exactly are you on Lamu?" I asked. "Just south of Kipangani. We're looking after these three luxury houses right on the beach but you'll see it all when you come down. When can you?" Forever the impulsive type I replied, "How about this coming weekend?" and within three days I was walking off the Air Kenya flight onto a sweltering Lamu airstrip.

I just knew the place was going to be delightful as Ed Jarvis has an eye for quality. Formerly manager of the exclusive Hippo Point on Lake Naivasha, where only the likes of Angelina Jolie, Danny Devito and Whitney Huston frequent, I suspected that Kizingoni would be of a similar ilk... I had to see it to believe it.





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Ed and Jojo were there to meet me in the golden light of evening, their faces beaming. We whisked off on one of the Kizingoni boats from the jetty. "It's about a 25-minute boat ride," Ed hollered over the noise of the engine, the wind in our faces. "It would be shorter to go to the east but it's really choppy out in the open sea so I prefer to go between the mainland and the island where it's a bit calmer." Indeed as we passed the mangrove swamps on either side, the water flattened out until it became like glass. "Are you up for some skiing tomorrow?" I heard Ed say. "It's absolutely perfect around here."

The beach came into view just as the sun was going down. There on an immaculate point of golden sand set back only 20 metres, the house awaited our arrival. Two members of staff stood patiently on the beach to help us with our bags. In bare feet we strolled up the beach, washing the sand off in the mini footbaths at the front of the house. We then climbed one big step to behold the entrance to our mansion. It was large and airy, the walls painted brilliant white, the floors a smooth yellow concrete finish. In classic Lamu style, all the doors and

windows beautifully made by local craftsmen and the furniture imported from Java. Immediately one could tell - I was also informed later - no expense had been spared in the building of these houses.

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From the main entrance we then walked through another set of double doors and there I found the most beautiful design I have ever seen in a house: a long, narrow swimming pool below ground level in the centre of an open courtyard. At the far end a small coconut tree had been preserved behind which an altar style sitting area was placed. Four bedrooms with bathrooms en-suite branched off from the pool, two on either side. In mine, I could open up louvered doors to my own private verandah and look down the Kizingoni Beach to the sea just a few metres away.

Upstairs, where I was to spend the majority of my stay, comprised a large flat open area, partly covered by a high *makuti* roof and from this elevated position I had a 180-degree view of the coastline. This is also where we had breakfast, lunch and dinner but, most importantly, sundowners: for unlike anywhere else on the Kenya coast, >

Kizingoni Beach faces west so you can experience some of the best sunsets in Kenya.

The sun, now a huge ball of fire just above the horizon sank slowly as four of us sat in safari chairs and chatted quietly. "So, how does this actually work Ed, the leasing of these properties?" "Well, these three houses were built on this section of beach and then sold to private investors. The company then manages the houses for their owners leasing them out when they are not here. We're in the process of finishing off a fourth right now. All of them have different designs but sleep between eight to 10 people. Each house has its own pool, seven staff and own boat for snorkelling or skiing. There's also a great place to go if you want to see dolphins about 20 minutes away, and of course most visitors like to visit Lamu town itself while they are here."

That night a small leaving party was held for a young guy who had been temporarily helping to run the place. Before dinner Ed approached me with a look of concern on his face. "I'm afraid

we're only having prawn curry tonight," he said. "It's not what we would normally feed our guests but it's what Jamie has requested as his last dinner here," and he raised his eyes to heaven.

The night ended jumping from the top floor into the pool below, practicing a variety of acrobatics on the way down. As I lay on the side of the pool after a particularly bad landing, I surveyed the scene. Seven or eight

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paraffin lamps that had been placed carefully around the pool now cast a warm yellow glow onto the white walls. Without asking, I was brought a large rum and coke by the waiter, who managed to keep a straight face: I suddenly felt as though I had gone back in time and was now a Centurion enjoying a Roman Bath.

Sadly, I was only there for a couple of nights but, as a place to totally unwind, Kizingoni beats them all. I went into Lamu town with Ed the following morning to buy some fresh veggies for the evening's meal. What a place. For those who haven't ever been, it's like looking at a seaside town that has been stuck in a time warp for the last two centuries. The hustle and bustle is quite remarkable with local fishermen bringing in their catch for the day, shop owners quarrelling and hundreds of donkeys and carts to dodge as you make your way through the famous narrow streets. I had little time to learn about the Fort which dominates the town centre but hear it has been converted into a museum containing a wealth of history.

All too soon it was evening again and my last night. We had spent the rest of the day waterskiing back from Lamu town, sleeping and wandering aimlessly along the beach. I took a brief look at the other houses too, which were all unique but equally as beautiful. What I enjoyed about them all was their simplicity. No pictures on the walls, no artefacts or clutter lying around, just simple and clean.

Dinner was a spread of oysters, lobster and prawns with rice - truly the best of coastal cooking. A more low-key event than the night before, I ended up lying on one of the sun loungers, looking up at the starry sky trying to think of the one word that would sum up the place. A cliché no doubt but the only one that kept springing to mind was simply "Paradise". ☺



AT A GLANCE

Kizingoni House (sleeps 8). Built and positioned to take full advantage of the west facing view for its spectacular sunsets and seascapes. The large central drawing and dining room is simply designed in Swahili style with traditional plasterwork and thick-set wooden beams. The house has four bedrooms all with their own bathrooms. The large master bedroom has spectacular views.

Jahazi House (sleeps 10). Named after historical trading dhows that brought Lamu its trading wealth stands right on beach in two acres of garden. Tinted with a soft yellow ochre, Jahazi has a distinctly Moroccan feel with an arched inner courtyard pool with four ground floor bedrooms.

Kusini House (sleeps 8). The house of the south monsoon wind has a unique style. The main house has two large verandahs, one overlooking a frangipani studded courtyard and large freshwater pool whilst the other offers a magnificent dining area with ornate Swahili plaster work. The splendid master bedroom has its own traditional-style wallowing bath.

NEED TO KNOW

20-minute boat ride from Lamu jetty.
Self-catering option available. Exclusive bookings only.

LOW SEASON (Minimum 3 nights)
15th September – 23rd November:
US\$2,625 per week

STANDARD (Minimum 3 nights)
6th January – 20th April & 24th
November – 15th December
US\$5,250 per week

SUMMER SEASON (Minimum 7 nights)
15th July – 14th September
US\$7,875 per week

PEAK SEASON (Minimum 14 nights)
16th December – 5th January
US\$16,800 per week

TO BOOK

Nairobi Tel: 020 882763/45
Nairobi Mobile: 0733 444144
info@kizingonibeach.com

www.kizingonibeach.com