

Real Estate / Travel & Leisure

# Home & Away

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Pullout Section B Thursday, October 6, 2011



Kizingoni Beach: Haven in troubled Lamu, P14

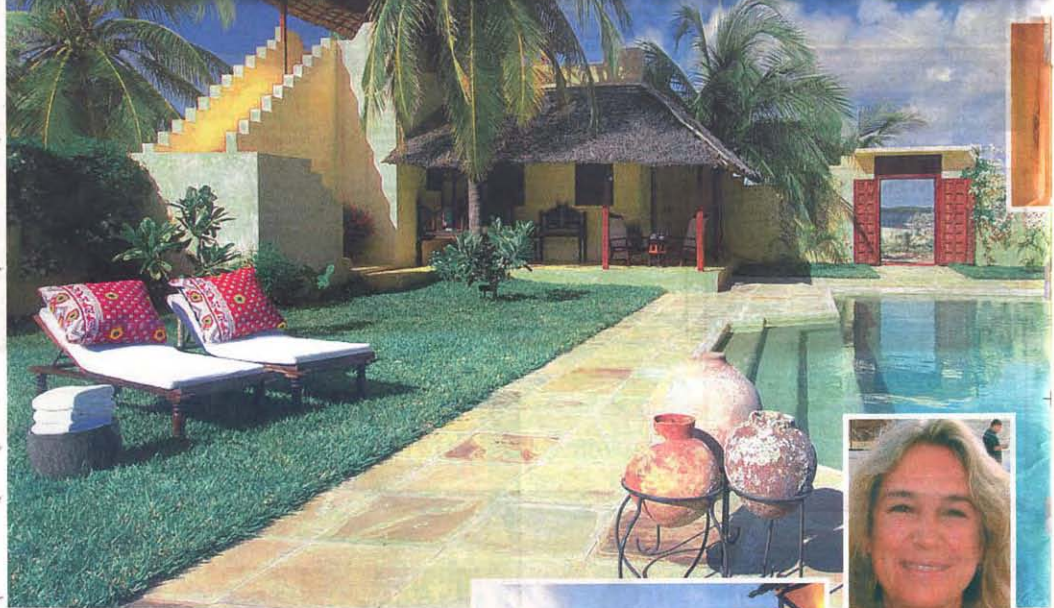


## Puzzle of posh suburbs and their ugly twin, P8



outandabout

# Exploring Idyllic Kizingo Beach in troubled Lamu



These exclusive holiday houses at the tip of Lamu archipelago offer a cocktail of refreshing cultural experiences and ocean views that will leave you gasping, writes **PETER MUIRURI**

**T**he speedboat roars as it cuts through the warm, turquoise waters of the Indian Ocean as nearby mangroves sway gently from the force of the waves crashing against the coastline.

Far into the distance, on the southernmost tip of Lamu archipelago lies Kizingo Beach, with a cluster of seven artistically designed holiday houses that offer the perfect getaway from the hustle and bustle of city life.

Set on 24 acres of pristine beachfront, the houses — named Kaskazi, Pepo, Kuni Jigoo, Wazi Dubu, Kusini, Lahazi and Kizingoni — are perfectly positioned for guests to take full advantage of the gorgeous sunsets that are the hallmarks of Kenya's coastline.

Putting out of a coconut and doum palm forest, the enormous

villas are imaginatively constructed using locally available materials such as coral rocks for the walls and dried palm fronds (*niakuti*) for the roofs.

I have one thing to spare in Lamu and intend to use it in this secluded and idyllic enclave of the island.

I am welcomed by Clemence, a subdued young woman and the Kizingoni's assistant manager, who takes me on a brief tour of Kaskazi, a house with four ensuite double rooms, which will be my home for the next two days. When full to capacity, each house can accommodate between eight and 12 people, but on this night, I have the privilege of sampling the delights of Kaskazi all by myself.

From the ornate lounge and the intricately carved Lamu doors that lead to the bedrooms,



Kaskazi, like the other houses, is perfectly woven around a Swahili theme, retaining the authenticity that has characterised Lamu for centuries.

#### SCRUMPTIOUS DINNER

After a refreshing twilight stroll along the sandy beach, I head back to the house where John, the chef, indulges my taste buds with some bruschetoes — well... pieces of toast with tomato and cheese toppings.

Kaskazi's 16-metre infinity swimming pool, fully bathed in the glow of lanterns, provides the

perfect backdrop for a small chat with Elijah Mwangi, the chief steward, as we wait for dinner.

Born and bred in Nanyuki, he notes the difference: "I've gained a world of experience coming from the slopes of Mount Kenya to the sea level. Though far from home, my working here has given me a lot of exposure, both local and international," he tells me.

For dinner, John has prepared a grilled lobster in garlic and butter sauce, steamed rice and stir-fried vegetables grown in the home's gardens. With such a sumptuous meal under the stars,



#### WOMAN WHO BUILT IT

- Leslie Duckworth is a trained graphics designer who came to Kenya in 1973.

- Her first developments in Kenya were in Shela, Lamu, where she personally designed and developed four holiday houses.

- She later bought and rebuilt a house in Nanyuki now known as Mukima House, a private retreat home resting on 360 acres.

- The Kizingoni Beach houses were developed between 2004 and 2008.

- Her latest development is Mukima Ridge, a collection of ten ranch-style houses for sale in Nanyuki.



## outandabout

## travel tips

## HANDLING CULTURE SHOCK

Sometimes a traveller can have bouts of homesickness or culture confusion while in a new country. The difference in regions brings about new lifestyles that contrast the habits that travellers are used to at home.

Below are tips on how to handle them:

**1. Acceptance:** It's important to accept that operating in a new setting with strange sights, sounds and possibly a new language is a different experience. Embracing this might ease the culture shock.

**2. Sensitive:** It's important to be sensitive to the host peoples' feelings and communicate with them with a lot of patience and understanding.

**3. Distraction:** The lack of proper rest, diet and exercise can aggravate culture shock stress symptoms. Establish a distraction, like an exercise schedule, which will divert your thoughts away.



**4. Support systems:** Many countries have support systems for foreigners. Try to participate in the life of the new country. This will help with accepting the host country's culture. Go to sightseeing expeditions, attend concerts, church functions and so forth.

**5. Social networks:** Using the social networks and the Internet will allow you to keep in touch with your folks back home. This will make it much easier to cope and can also keep memories of your home country fresh as it makes you feel at home.

**6. Creature comforts:** Bring along some creature comforts that will make you feel close to home. Carry books, family photos, videos, music, teddy bears and such. It will come in handy when the feeling of homesickness hits you.

**7. Learning:** It's important to learn about the attractions of the country or countries that you are visiting, and also study the downsides of their cultures. Try to also learn a few common phrases in the native language to help you assimilate better. This will make the hosts feel comfortable as opposed to when you cannot communicate at all.

Compiled by Allan Otingo



a glass of Culemborg white wine from South Africa becomes an irresistible temptation.

While time may appear to stop in lovely Lamu, morning comes too soon, to my discomfort. Nevertheless, I intend to use the few remaining hours after breakfast taking a whirlwind tour of the other houses that define Kizingoni Beach before heading back to Nairobi.

Despite their vast and varied design repertoire, the houses share some common characteristics. In addition to each having a glittering pool as a centerpiece, most rooms enjoy amazing ocean views thanks to the wide and open spaces. An intricate web of staircases links up the spacious, mirrored master suites.

Well placed in all verandas are

swinging beds that some guests, I am told, prefer to spend the night sleeping on.

Mesmerising too, is the elaborate fabric work, some of it sourced from nearby Lamu town, Morocco and the Far East but woven by an in-house tailor. Done in a colonial Arab Swahili style, the furnishings beautifully adorn the communal lounges, commonly known as the *baraza*.

## BEACH VOLLEYBALL

Like Kaskazi, each house is manned by a team of seven; a head steward, chef, room steward, laundry person, gardener, boat captain and a security guard, all ensuring that you enjoy Swahili living by international standards.

Some light showers provide much relief to my body already

drenched in sweat after the two-hour tour of the property. I regret the fact that I do not have enough time to engage in the many beach activities such as donkey riding, kite surfing, fishing along the creeks or joining the local boys in beach volleyball.

My morning gone, I head back to Kaskazi for some light lunch of crab cake and potato chips. I try to ignore the revving of the boat engine by Mwana, the captain who is supposed to take me to Mada Island for an afternoon flight to Nairobi. I must visit my room in Kaskazi one more time and pick my belongings, which I had deliberately left behind in the morning.

With nostalgia, I reluctantly saunter to the boat, escorted by my house crew and the resident Samburu dancers. Despite the unfinished beach, my brief stay in Kizingoni Beach leaves a memorable imprint that could not be wiped out by the salty Indian Ocean breeze.

MAIN: The Kusini Pool and (inset bottom) Wazi Dubu poolside. INSET RIGHT: Jabazi pool. Wazi Dubu terrace. A shot of the interiors. (PHOTOS: PFFER MUIRURI)

## Lamu abductions threat to tourism industry

Last Saturday's abduction of Marie Dedieu, a wheelchair-bound French woman from her beach home on Manda Island in the Lamu archipelago has once again brought into sharp focus the safety of visitors to the remote Indian Ocean Islands.

Coming hot on the heels of the recent killing of British tourist David Tebbutt and kidnapping of his wife Judith in Kiwayu, 70 kilometres north of Lamu, the latest incident which occurred deep within Kenya's legal territory has thrown local security forces into a spin.

Both incidents, suspected to be carried out by armed militia from Somalia, are threatening to cripple tourism activities in the hitherto tranquil islands and reverse gains made in the country's tourism industry that is just recovering from the post-election violence.

"The incidents are affecting



Mary-Jo Van Aardt

Lamu as a tourist destination," said Tourism Minister Najib Balala.

His Internal Security counterpart Professor George Saitoti has hit out at the suspected Al-Shabaab militia, warning that Kenya reserves the right to defend her territorial integrity.

Prior to the latest incident, area residents and tour operators

were still upbeat about the security situation in Lamu and could hardly contemplate the islands being targets of criminal gangs from a neighbouring country.

"It is highly unlikely that Somali pirates or other lawless groups from the war-torn country would make their way to Lamu Island unnoticed. It seems illogical that such characters would pass through the naval base at Manda Bay undetected," says Mary-Jo Van Aardt, the proprietor of Kizingo Safari Limited in an interview two weeks ago.

Following the two incidents, area residents have called on the Government to beef up security within the local tourist resorts.

"The entire town relies on the proceeds of tourism whether directly or indirectly. While residents will always be on the lookout for any suspicious characters, we urge local security

personnel to increase their regular patrols along the entire Lamu tourist establishments," says Van Aardt.

Talking to *Home & Away*, deputy police spokesman Charles Owino says Kenya's proximity to war-torn Somalia puts the country directly in the line of fire, but quickly adds that Kenya's security forces are up to the task.

"Our security forces are able to maintain security in such circumstances. We take the safety of our visitors seriously and are studying any security lapses that may have contributed to the unfortunate incidents with a view to preventing similar episodes," says Owino. Without disclosing specific security measures taken, Owino says his department has put in place elaborate systems to protect life and property in Kenya's holiday destinations.