

# OVERSEAS SPECIAL

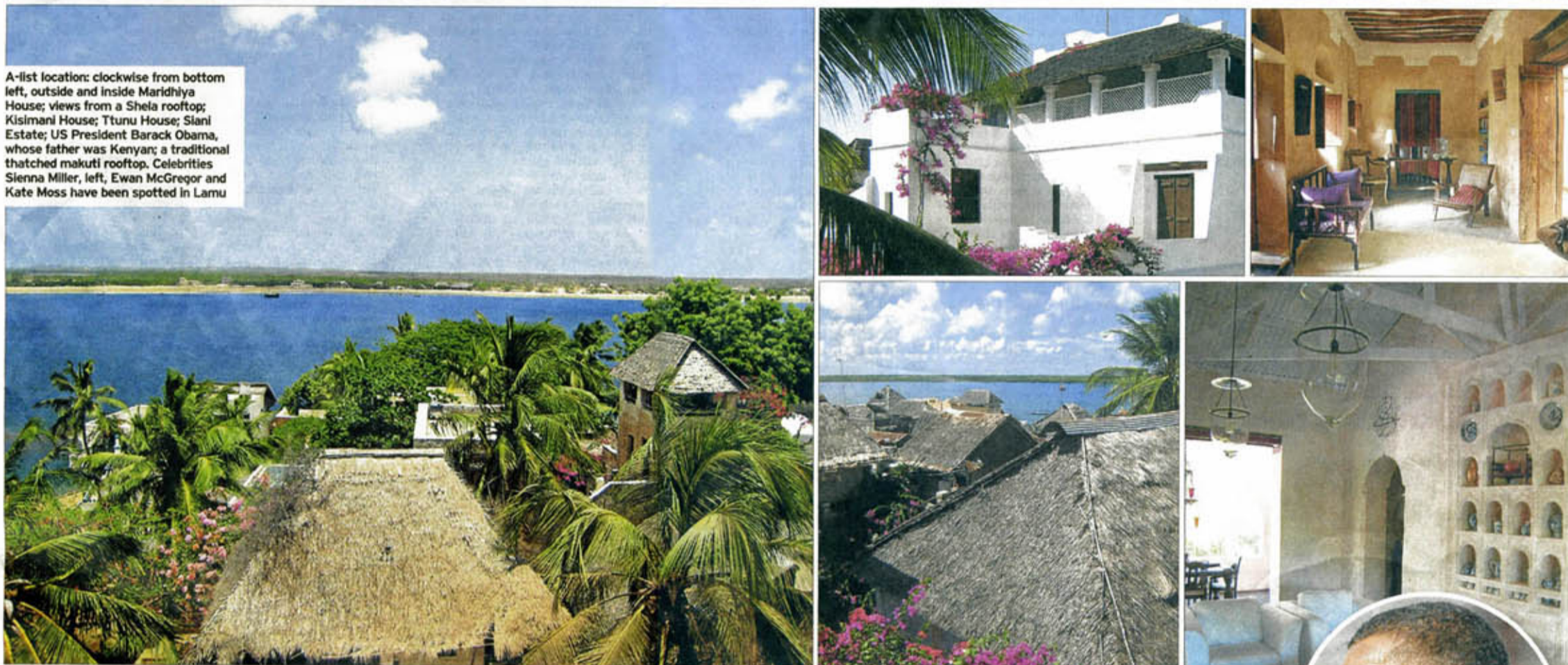
»» **For sale** Mike Oldfield's home in Majorca PAGE 5

»» **Crash pads** The rise of sofa surfing PAGE 7



# property

A-list location: clockwise from bottom left, outside and inside Maridhiya House; views from a Shela rooftop; Kisimani House; Ttunu House; Siani Estate; US President Barack Obama, whose father was Kenyan; a traditional thatched makuti rooftop. Celebrities Sienna Miller, left, Ewan McGregor and Kate Moss have been spotted in Lamu



## Laid-back in Lamu



Prices have trebled here and the glitterati flock to the beaches. But this ramshackle Kenyan island keeps its low-key charm, says **Anna Tyzack**

**D**onkeys are the mode of transport on Lamu island, off the coast of Kenya – yet the place is a magnet for A-list celebrities. Sienna Miller, Ewan McGregor and Kate Moss have been spotted there. Barack Obama is a regular on the island and Princess Caroline of Monaco and Prince Ernst of Hanover own several large houses. The fact that Lamu is cluttered and ramshackle, with no proper roads (or electricity in places) does not deter the glitterati. They rather like the crumbling Swahili buildings, the deserted

beaches and lack of mass tourism. "It's very low key," says Andrew McGhie who runs a property company on the island. "If you'd lived here 400 years ago you'd still recognise it now." Lamu's house prices have trebled in the past five years but are still tuppence compared to popular Caribbean destinations; large town houses cost £90,000 while an eco home with infinity pool is on the market for £1.3 million. There's a small and select



community of British home owners on Lamu. They live in Robinson Crusoe-style homes with thatched roofs, solar power and infinity pools. They get about by donkey or on foot and use small motorboats to zip through the mangroves. Lamu island measures 10 miles by five miles, and is part of the Lamu archipelago. "It's a pretty cool lifestyle here – like living in a film set, with amazing food and sun everyday," says Rachael Feiler, who set up an eco

lodge called Diamond on nearby Manda island when she graduated from Bristol University. "We have a bizarre expat lifestyle which I couldn't be part of anywhere else. It can be social if you want it to be; it's very international." But Lamu is also the ultimate place to chill out; massages cost £8 per hour and a house isn't complete without at least three lounging areas. The population is predominantly Muslim. There's call to prayer five times a day; the men wear kanzu robes and women often wrap themselves in black buibui. The

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

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## MARKETPLACE

## IN BRIEF



**DJ Paul Oakenfold** has put his six-bedroom house in Connaught Square up for rent while he works in LA. It

costs £3,350 per week, but some fun parties could be had in the reception rooms. So long as you don't mind the

neighbours turning up - **Tony Blair** lives in the house next door. Chesterton: 0207 298 5950.



Footballer **Paul Gascoigne's** former home is for sale for £1.25 million. He lived at Greystones in

County Durham while he was playing for Middlesbrough in the nineties. It's been

redecorated since, but the kitchen is still black and white. Strutt and Parker: 01670 516123.

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architecture is a mixture of Moorish, Indian, Swahili and Colonial styles. "Most people who come here have a feeling for the architecture and the culture. It's the oldest Swahili trading port and a World Heritage Site," says Andrew.

The narrow streets in Lamu town (most only wide enough to accommodate a laden donkey) are lively early in the morning, and then later in the afternoon, when the temperature is cooler and people have woken from siesta.

"Most people are in bed by 10pm but there's a low-key nightlife and you can drink as much alcohol as you like in the tourist bars," says Andrew. A number of restaurants have sprung up in town and on the beaches, mainly serving fresh fish and fruit. "You can spend very little or a fortune," he says. "But everything is very healthy."

There is no package tourism or resort development. "The longer I'm here the more perplexing it becomes," says Andrew. His original plan was to write a book on Lamu's colonial history but he fell in love with the island the moment he arrived and ended up buying and restoring a Swahili house in Lamu town. A team of local fundis (masons and plasterers skilled in ancient building techniques) worked on it for two years, using local coral limestone blocks and mwangati hardwood beams. "It dates back 250 years and it's very ornate," says Andrew. "But now you can live in it in a modern way."



**Kenyan dream: the pool at Kazkazi House; and a view of the house from the beach**

The rooms are on a variety of levels, with smooth white walls and thatched makuti rooftops. Curtains made of local kikoi fabrics hang in the living room, study and three bedrooms; there's a thatched dining room

and a garden with sweet jasmine, banana and papaya trees. Andrew has now finished restoring a second house, which he's selling for £207,000 ([www.lamu-island-property.com](http://www.lamu-island-property.com)).

While Lamu town attracts an arty, bohemian crowd, Shela, a village two miles along the coast, is more star-studded. "It's become quite chic and the houses are among the most expensive in east Africa," says Andrew. This is where Peponi hotel is located, the centre of Lamu social life (sometimes referred to as "Groucho-Club-on-sea"). The white sand beach stretches as far as the eye can see and there is scuba diving, waterskiing and windsurfing. Ernst of Hanover's

houses are in Shela, and the former home of the Sultan of Zanzibar, the largest house in Lamu, is for sale for £695,000 (see below).

Sienna Miller, Sting and Ewan McGregor rent houses on the southern tip of the island at Kizingoni beach, (named after the summer monsoon wind that once carried the dhows to Lamu from Asia). It is more remote here than Shela (African wild, not Caribbean chic), with houses and a rustic bar set back from an untouched eight-mile beach. "You can watch the most spectacular sunsets," says Leslie Duckworth who is building 10 large eco homes on a 24-acre beachfront plantation.

Leslie first came to Lamu in the Seventies and bought a house in Shela. "I came to Kizingoni to escape the crowd," she says. "Here you have the beach to yourself but you're not alone in the bar." The first six houses were bought by American, British and

Irish families. "There's a great community here. I've been lucky with the houses. People have just walked along the beach and bought them." Kazkazi House, the seventh to be finished, is on the market for £1.3 million. Designed to be the ultimate in "away-from-it-all luxury", it has large tropical gardens and numerous lounging areas. The accommodation is in four towers around an elevated infinity pool; the bedrooms each have a private terrace and bathroom.

Electricity comes from solar panels and windmills, and fresh water from wells in the dunes. The asking price includes locally crafted furniture, and access to a sailing dhow and staff.

Hopefully Lamu Island is not too good to last. It is attracting more tourists and there's talk of a new port further along the coast.

"I can see it becoming more popular," says Andrew. "But it's still remarkably unspoilt. No one's building anything ugly." He believes Lamu is far enough from Europe to risk being over-run (a nine-hour flight from London to Nairobi, plus a two-hour connecting flight).

For the time being at least, the donkeys and the dhows are unlikely to be replaced by anything more sophisticated. To quote one British homeowner's visitors book, the island is one of the best places in the world to come and do absolutely nothing. "I don't miss much about the UK, but I do miss broadband," says Andrew. "The internet here is as slow as a Lamu donkey at siesta."

✦ [www.kizingoni.com](http://www.kizingoni.com); +254 (0)733 444 144  
✦ [www.diamondbeachvillage.com](http://www.diamondbeachvillage.com)

## WORDON THE STREET

**Anna Tyzack**



Turn to Google, not HIPs, for a real picture of the place you want

My flat had its Home Information Pack put together this week. A woman came on Monday to do the energy-performance and environmental-impact rating. Quite honestly, I didn't hold out much hope. The flat is in the basement of a period building with no double glazing, no energy-saving light bulbs and no thermostats on the radiators. From what I gather, even the most swanky newbuild ecohome fails to score more than a B grade. The highest-scoring flats are those in the middle of buildings, rather than at the top or bottom.

I was thus pleasantly surprised when my little flat was given a D (they grade as far as G). It lost marks for its "solid brick walls, no insulation [assumed]" and "windows single-glazed" but it scored "very good" for its community hot-water and heating system.

Plus, there is room to improve. Rather like a school report, the document states how energy-efficient my property could be in an ideal world. Also a D, unfortunately. Even if a new owner pulled out all the stops, it would be on 62/100 rather than 60. But, this is not to be snubbed; there would be financial gain. If the next owner installed energy-saving light bulbs, they would save £21 per year,

and if they went to the trouble of fitting double glazing, they would be £44 in pocket.

My estate agent assures me that no one will judge my flat on its HIP - or at least not on its Energy Performance Certificate.

Much more influential is the image of it on Google Street Map - and I didn't even have to pay £200 to get it. Obviously, as a buyer this is the first check you're going to carry out on a property (if you live in a major city).

As I typed my postcode into [www.maps.google.co.uk](http://www.maps.google.co.uk) I dreaded what I would find. An estate agent told me that one of her properties is pictured with a rival's sale board outside it with another agent carrying out a viewing, while a second is covered in scaffolding. The buyer of a friend's flat asked for a price reduction when they spotted damage on the roof via the Google Street View image.

Thankfully, if there were grades for a property's Google street map image, my flat would score an A. The weather is sunny, there are no cars parked outside, and the busy road at the end of the street is miraculously empty. They must have taken the picture on a Sunday in August. Phew.

Jane Arthy wrote to me this week saying her Homebuyer Survey failed to mention that the tube runs under the building: "You can both hear it and feel it from inside the flat."

All we need is Google Street View to feature sound, night vision and interior images. Then it will be much more useful to a buyer than a Home Information Pack.

## HAVE YOUR SAY

[telegraph.co.uk/propertyblog](http://telegraph.co.uk/propertyblog)

## FOR SALE Homes to hang a hammock on Lamu Island



£375,000

## Ttunu House

A 19th-century Swahili mansion in the quiet part of Lamu town. Five bedroom suites, an open air courtyard

dining room, numerous sitting areas and sea views. (All properties for sale through [www.lamu-island-property.com](http://www.lamu-island-property.com); +254 (0)720 859 599).

## Siani Plantation Estate

A 13-acre seaside estate with coconut groves, mango plantations and a

colonial-style house reconfigured by interior designer Marie-Paul Pelle. It also features a guesthouse, swimming pool and comes with staff quarters.



£3M



£207,000

## Maridhiya House

A restored 18th-century town house with high ceilings and decorative

plasterwork. There are three large double bedrooms and roof terraces with views over neighbouring gardens, plantations and the sea.

## Kisimani House

The largest and grandest Swahili mansion in Shela village, built for the Caliph of

Zanzibar. This unique property features carved plasterwork, harem quarters, four bedrooms, roof terraces, walled garden and lounging areas.



£695,000