

Pilli Pipa Dhow Safari: A glimpse into the underwater world

By: Karen Dabrowska



Swahili women in colourful traditional costumes bring a variety of delicious dishes, including mangrove crab dressed in a ginger butter sauce to a huge table. One of the cooks welcomes visitors and proudly introduces the various delicacies. The sweet, crispy seaweed is magnificent.

The Swahili seafood banquet on Wasini Island is one of the highlights of the Phlli Pipa Dhow Safari along the coral reef in and around Kisite-Mpunguti Marine Park one of the most beautiful marine parks after Great Barrier Reef in Australia. The warm, pristine waters are host to dramatic coral formations, dolphins, turtles, sting rays, moray eels and a bewildering variety of sea life that comprise a unique eco-system: a garden under the sea. There are

two fishing villages on Wasini Island (Waisini and Mkwiro) off Diani Beach a popular tourist resort in Mombasa. The island is 6km long and 1km wide. The ten-minute bush walk from the jetty to the Robinson ~Crusoe hideaway provides an interesting insight into the plant and bird life

On nearby Mwazaro Beach Hans von Loesch introduces the traditional way of life and craft skills of the Kenyans first hand. The dhow safari is a whole day



On board the
Philli Pipa

Raising the sails



outing which focuses on diving and snorkelling from the first dhow built in Shimoni seven years ago which can accommodate 25 people.

"The dhows are normally built in Tanzania but we built ours here to make sure it was exactly what we wanted", explained Yatin Patel the diving instructor. The dhow is an Arabian Red Sea Sambuk made of teak. The company also has two other boats the Pilli Pipa,, the first boat and Ali Khalas which can

accommodate 16 people.

The safari begins early in the morning when visitors are collected by mini bus from their hotels and taken to Shimoni a sleepy fishing village whose main attraction is the slave caves where captives were held awaiting transport to Zanzibar or Pemba. The bus passes through Gazi, headquarters of the Mazrui leader Sheikh Mbaruk bin Rashid who led an uprising against British authority in the 19th century and was notorious

for half suffocating prisoners in the fumes of burning chillies.

From the jetty at Shimoni there is a quick ride by motorboat to the dhow where visitors are welcomed with coffee, tea, soft drinks and biscuits. Yatin is eager to emphasise the personalised service. All equipment is provided including fins and prescription masks and there is professional assistance for beginners and less confident swimmers.

"We can help beginners enjoy snorkelling as a recreational activity", said Selina Lutjeboer who took over the dhow safari company from Bruce and Pipa 15 years ago

with her husband Harm. They are both marine biologists and qualified diving instructors who lived in Waisini Island before making their home in Shimoni.

"It was real learning experience on Waisini with no running water and no telephones", Selina recalls. If anything broke down we had to fix it ourselves".

Selina and Harm are concerned about the increasing shortage of fish which are sold on the Mobasa market or exploited by Japanese trawlers. There is a code of conduct for the marine parks and protecting the eco system has always been a top priority for Philli Pipa dhow

Selina's restaurant



The crew



safaris.

Two inhabited islets, Mpunguti ya Juu and Mpunguti Ya Chini are popular with divers. The Outer Kisite Marine Park is the place for turtles, moray eels, lobsters, spade fish, rays and interesting vertebrates within the sandy areas including varieties of pipe fish, rays, and pistol shrimps and gobies.

In outer Kisite Marine Park diving at five to 12 metres is possible. In Inner Kistie the shallower end of

Outer Kistie dives are a maximum of eight meters. It is great for beginners and refresher divers and those interested in having a better chance to spot turtles and crocodile fish.

Night diving is also possible off Selina's and Harm's residence on Wasini Island. The bizarre organisms that come out at night include octopus, squid and cuttlefish.

The dhow safari is an educational day out for amateur and

Yatin and Selina



experienced divers and snorkelers and anyone wishing to experience the amazing kaleidoscope of natural colour and beauty of the world under the sea.

The Philli Pipa



Waiting to dive



Waisini Island

