

Diani Beach: Idyllic Resorts Welcome Visitors

By: Karen Dabrowska



Colobus monkey

Diani Beach, one of Kenya's most beautiful beaches, 30km south of Mombasa is ideal for relaxation by the sea. Many of the resorts are located along the 25km long, white-sanded beach which merges with the small town of Ukunda.

Apart from the beach, the main attractions are the coral reefs, the Shimba Hills National Reserve the black-and-white colobus monkeys and the idyllic islands in the middle of no where.

Visitors in search of a tropical paradise with fascinating wild life can fly into Ukunda airstrip on the beach and stay in an hotel, cottage, guest house or apartment, depending on the length of the holiday and the budget. The hotels

on Diani Beach are world class establishments and have almost every facility imaginable. Among the most popular are Papillon Lagoon Reef, Spice of the Coast, Forest Dream, Water Lovers, The Sands at Nomad, Southern Palms Beach Resort, Tiwi Beach Resort and the Leopard Beach Resort & Spa.

Papillon Lagoon Reef is built in traditional Swahili style, and nestles within exotic gardens,



Coral reef

Cycad plants



where colobus monkeys populate ancient baobab trees. Bush babies, cute furry opossum-like creatures, make occasional visits and there is no shortage of well fed, pet cats. The residents are warned not to feed the monkeys and the hotel staff do not hesitate to chase them off with stones fired from slingshots if they get too close to the diners. The monkeys may look cute to Western tourists who have not seen them before but they are mischievous and can turn vicious if they are fed once and then ignored.

Papillon's beach-side location makes it ideal for a wide range of water sports including windsurfing, snorkelling and beach fishing. It is possible to book a diving trip with the resort's resident dive team to explore the nearby coral reefs. The pool is a great place to relax and there's also a separate pool for children.

Walks on the beach are relaxing and enchanting. The local beach boys offer trips in glass bottomed boats to see the coral reefs. They also sell a variety of handicrafts including key rings where the



Diani sea resort

Ukunda airstrip



Zebra at Shimba Hills National Park



Mwaluganje elephant sanctuary



owner's name is carved into the wooden animal: an elephant, monkey, tiger, rhino etc

Solomo has spent many years selling handicrafts made by his step father, to tourists on the beach. A natural entrepreneur with a polished sales pitch he does not give up easily. Originally from Tanzania he moved to Kenya when his mother re-married and now has a thriving small business with a workshop near the hotel.

In the evening, the spectacular Makuti-roofed baobab restaurant serves a plentiful buffet of delicious Kenyan cuisine and international classics. After dinner there is a varied programme of uniquely East African performance and staff

from the snake farm nearby transport the reptiles, including the deadly mamba, in sacks for the tourists to look at.

As well as the beach and the pool, this resort is ideally located for combining a beach holiday with a safari or making the most of a wide range of day trips.

Julius Safaris collect tourists from their hotel and drive them through the bush to a nearby village where they visit a school and a medicine man. African dancers and coconut plantations are also on the itinerary before lunch in Mombasa, Kenya's second largest city. After lunch the old town delights tourists who can also see Fort Jesus built by the Portuguese An arch that



Bush baby

resembles a pair of giant intersecting elephant tusks and a wood carvers' village are also on the programme. Shopping malls are the last stop before returning to the hotel.

An exciting day excursion can also be made to Funzi Island, a lost paradise. The meandering estuary of the Ramisi River, is home to thousands of crocodiles, rare beautiful birds including the fish



The sands at Nomad

Panoramic view of Diani Beach



eagle, and colobus monkeys. The sand bar in the middle of the ocean is ideal for relaxation after a barbecued seafood lunch. There is a chance to swim with dolphins and take a mangrove tour on the Ramisi River.

The Shimba Hills National Reserve provides an interesting insight into

Kenya's wildlife. It is a small national park, home to over half of the 159 rare plants found in Kenya including some endangered species of orchids. It is also a nationally important site for birds and butterflies and has the only population of sable antelope in the country.

The 700 elephants on the reserve

The author with Solomo



are one of the main attractions. This population is unsustainably high and causes significant damage to vegetation, threatening the endangered plant life. Conflict between humans and elephants has reached critical levels- hence the establishment of the Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary north of the reserve which provides an escape route for the elephants. Kenya's multifaceted attractions

cater to the needs of the most discerning tourists but above all, the friendliness of the locals ensures the holiday will be an unforgettable experience. When they say «karibu» (Swahili for welcome) it comes with a broad smile a genuine desire to ensure visitors enjoy their holiday and leave Kenya with pleasant memories.



Sable Antelope