

Destination Profile



THE INDIAN OCEAN COASTLINE, KENYA

Fact-file:

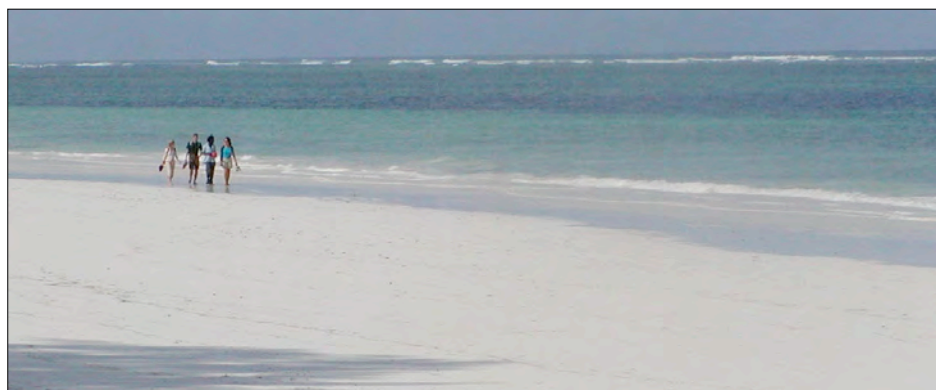
- Historically rich and varied
- Swahili/Arabic influence (largely Muslim)
- 480 km (298 miles) of coast
- International airport with regular flights from Nairobi (one hour)
- Tarmac road from Nairobi (526 km, 327 miles Nairobi-Mombasa) through Tsavo National Park
- Daily scheduled flights to Malindi, Ukunda and Lamu
- Historically fascinating port of Mombasa, now a bustling modern city
- Ruined "lost" cities along coast
- Excellent Big Game fishing
- Snorkeling, diving and other water sports
- Marine National Parks with wide variety of fish and marine life
- Coral-fringed beaches: warm, safe swimming

History: Kenya's coastal history is fascinating in its relative complexity: the comings and goings of European and Arab powers bringing new ideas and cultures. Ptolemy, the Egyptian astronomer and geographer who died in AD 168 first mapped Mombasa, Kenya's oldest known settlement.

For more than 2000 years the Arab dhows sailed to and from the East African coast with the prevailing Monsoon winds. By the 12th century many of the Swahili inhabitants of the towns had adopted Islam. The towns grew wealthy, gaining control of coastal and inland territory and developing into city-states by the time the next waves of immigration swept over them.

Dominated by this contact with Arabs from the Persian Gulf, who traded, settled, and intermarried with the indigenous peoples, before the end of the 9th century these Swahili-speaking Mijikenda people had established a number of towns between present-day Somalia and Mozambique, including Mombasa, Lamu, and Pate in what is now Kenya.

These were important trade centres that facilitated commerce between the interior and seafaring traders from Arabia, Persia, India, and elsewhere on the Indian Ocean. The most prized resources were ivory, timber and slaves.



Origins Safaris

Tel: +254 20 219759, 20 220500, 20 222075, 20 220535, 20 229009, 20 312137, 735 990707, 724 253861

Email: steveturner@originsafaris.info

Web Address: www.originsafaris.info



Thus the unique coastal Swahili culture evolved. The Swahili language, spoken throughout Kenya, but in its purest form at the coast, is a blend of Bantu and Arabic. Indeed the vibrancy and vigour of life along the East African coastline is a living testament to the variety of peoples and races that have made it their home over time.

In 1415 the Sultan of Malindi sent a giraffe as a gift to the Emperor of China and two years later the Chinese fleet sailed into Malindi with return gifts - and the giraffe's keeper, who doubtless returned to Malindi with a few stories!

The Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama successfully sailed around Africa to India and back between 1497 and 1499. The first European to arrive, he planted his cross in Malindi in 1498 and built the first Christian chapel. At first interested only in controlling trade on the

seas rather than dominating mainland territory in East Africa, by the end of the 16th century a new Portuguese policy of colonization arose. The construction of Fort Jesus, a massive fortress at Mombasa, guaranteed obedience for some time, securing the routes by which gold and slaves were exported from the interior. However as resistance to Portuguese rule became more widespread the local populations turned more and more to their blood relations in Arabia until the combined Swahili states, helped by Omani Arabs, succeeded in driving the Portuguese from the coast by the end of the 17th century. It seems however that one despotic ruler from abroad was only to be swapped for another. The Swahili states resisted growing Omani ambitions to control the coast and the lucrative trade that flowed from it, but by the 1840s the Omanis had established themselves as the dominant force along the entire coastline. Commerce expanded throughout the region as the slave trade boomed. The Omanis prospered in their new role, so much so that in 1832 Seyyid Said, the Sultan of Oman moved his entire court from Muscat to Zanzibar, off the coast of modern Tanzania.

By mid-19th century the East African coast began to feel the effect of growing European influence especially with British attempts to stamp out the slave trade. This issue along with a pre-occupation with the discovery of the source of the River Nile dominated European ambitions for Africa for the next few decades. As British influence in the region grew so too did the German desire to gain their colonial presence on the Continent, eventually culminating in the "Scramble for Africa."

At the Berlin Conference, held between 1884 and 1885, the European superpowers divided Africa along neat and tidy lines (regardless of the wishes or homelands of the indigenous populations). The hinterland supporting Lamu and Mombasa became the British East African Protectorate administered by the British and that across the straits from Zanzibar, Tanganyika, later the Republic of Tanzania.

Ludwig Krapf, missionary and explorer arrived in Mombasa in 1844 and within two years had established the first Protestant church at Rabai, a little way inland from Mombasa. He was soon joined by colleague Johan Rebmann. Twenty years before Krapf arrived the British navy had sailed into Mombasa: the Arabs were exporting up to 30,000 slaves annually from East Africa, and in 1895 over many freed slaves built Emmanuel Church at Freretown, Nyali, just north of Mombasa. But the British didn't succeed in finally abolishing slavery until 1907.

In 1895 Fort Jesus became a prison, and two years later the British had established the nearby Mombasa Club. In 1896 Mombasa was mainly snake-infested jungle, with leopards roaming the town at night, but by 1903 there were tramlines and the railway had reached Lake Victoria. By 1905 Mombasa boasted its beautiful white-domed cathedral, commemorating many early missionaries including Bishop Hannington, who was murdered in 1885.



The North Coast, reached by driving north of Mombasa over the Nyali bridge, also boasts many excellent beaches and popular resorts. Kilifi has a creek and natural deep water harbor, and is popular with yachts, as well as water-skiers and fishermen. Watamu has a beautiful beach and many private houses, as well as a few popular hotels. Malindi is a bustling town, which has become popular with Italian tourists, and has many hotels and an active nightlife..

Immortalized by Ernest Hemingway in the 30's, Malindi has remained one of the popular places to go big game fishing, its Fishing club walls boasting life-like casts of those monster fish and record catches: Blue and Black Marlin, Sailfish, Tunny, Falusi, Wahoo, various types of Shark, Barracuda and Kingfish are amongst those caught or tagged and released. Game fishing is also popular at Watamu, with impressive records all round.

Nudity, and topless sunbathing for women, are illegal in Kenya, and visitors are also requested to respect the Islamic culture, including codes of dress when in the towns.

People:

Alongside the Swahili and Arabic-descended peoples of the coast, the Mijikenda tribes originally came from further inland: driven out by fierce rivals. Mijikenda means "9 villages" and consists of 9 groups, including the Giriama people of the north coast and the Digo of the south coast.

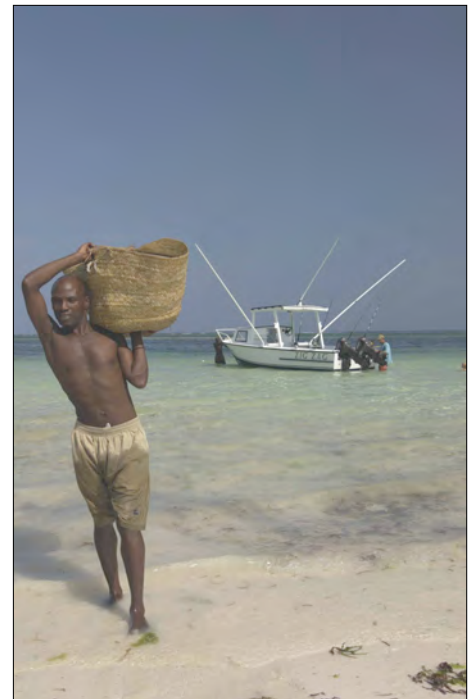
Marine National Parks and wildlife:

The significance of the reefs has led to them being protected by Marine National Parks, including those at Malindi, Watamu and Shimoni. The best time for to visit these is the dry-seasons: Jan – March, or June – October, as during the rains the rivers wash silt into the sea. During the rains the rough sea also affects visibility for those snorkeling, diving or viewing from glass-bottomed boats.

Snorkeling and scuba diving are well worth the effort, with over 200 species of fish from the tiny jewel like ones to 300 kg rock cod, those shy and harmless giants. Parrot, scorpion, and zebra fish are all common, and while its also possible to see sea urchins, stars, crabs, giant turtles, eels, octopus, rays and even a whale shark, amongst the exotic coral gardens.

It is an offence to disturb marine life or collect shells. Indeed all along the Kenya coast, starfish, shells and other attractive objects taken from the sea should not be purchased from the locals, as their sale is illegal.

Bird watching is excellent all along the coast and amongst the many migrant and resident water birds Terns, Sanderlings, Curlews, Sandpipers, Little Stints, Whimbrels, Greenshanks and Plovers can be spotted, while the beautiful carmine bee-eaters are often perched on telephone wires.



RECOMMENDED ACCOMMODATION: PRIVATE VILLA, WATAMU

There isn't a better or more exclusive way of enjoying the pristine sand beach of Watamu on Kenya's north Coast, than from a private luxury villa. We have a number of private properties which we recommend to clients subject to group size and preferences.

**Destination profile by journalist & author: Juliet Barnes; property notes from information supplied by the lodge owners*



Each villa has its own style but all come with a refreshing swimming pool, airy verandah and beachfront view & access. All have spacious fan-cooled (and air-conditioned) double bedrooms with bathrooms en-suite and have a team of staff including a skilled chef to wait on you and ensure you relax completely in this amazing beach hideaway. There are only 3 small hotels on this beach which is mainly dedicated to private villas and enjoys world-renowned fame as a deep sea fishing base. There are many other activities available and 2 very good restaurants in Watamu and more in the nearby town of Malindi.



Factfile

- **3-5 double bedroom suites (all airconditioned)**
- **Activity options for young guests**
- **Dedicated house staff & cook**
- **Ensuite bathrooms, airy verandahs**
- **Infinity pool**
- **Deep Sea fishing by arrangement (extra)**
- **Snorkeling & coral garden cruises in the Watamu Marine Park**
- **4 miles of sand beach**
- **Excursions available (dolphin watching, dhow sundowner cruises)**
- **Deep sea diving by arrangement (extra)**



NAISHI HOUSE, WATAMU BEACH

