



The Coast

Be honest now, when you first thought of coming to Kenya, did you even remember it has a coast? Well if not, shame on you – it may seem at odds with the immediate mental image of safari Africa, but Kenya's Indian Ocean shoreline is one of its greatest assets, and the unique flavour of this steamy, sultry region never fails to weave a spell over its visitors. Even the most jaded beach bum can find something to delight in amid the palm-fringed white-sand stretches that run pretty much all the way from Tanzania to Somalia.

Don't be fooled into thinking it's all about the beaches, though. In fact, it's likely these will only play a minor part in your trip; for the adventurous independent traveller, the real draw of the coast is the Swahili culture that permeates every aspect of daily life here, from the bustling markets of Mombasa to the living history enshrined in Lamu's ever-captivating old town. Wandering narrow streets, exploring ancient ruins and setting sail in traditional dhows are the experiences that truly define a visit here, and you should take every opportunity to soak up the atmosphere that sets the region apart from the rest of Kenya.

For the active, the lure of coral reefs, remote islands and unlimited water sports is incentive to splash beneath the surface. Even away from the ocean, the region musters up enough surprises to enthrall its fans and convert its critics, with something unexpected at every turn. Sunbathing be damned – with coastal rainforest, tribal shrines, coral mosques, thumbless monkeys, elephants and elephant shrews, Kenya's coast should barely leave you time to relax, and, if you don't make the most of all it has to offer, well, shame on you again.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Chilling, drinking and dhow-tripping around the fantastic **Lamu archipelago** (p212)
- Strolling the narrow streets of **Mombasa Old Town** (p160)
- Pricking up your ears for bird calls in the **Arabuko Sokoke Forest Reserve** (p201)
- Breathing in the ancient Swahili air at the ruined city of **Gede** (p202)
- Diving into the life aquatic at **Kisite** (p180) and **Watamu Marine National Parks** (p199)
- Tracking down elusive wildlife in **Shimba Hills National Reserve** (p169) and **Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary** (p170)
- Exhausting yourself with the many activities on offer at **Diani Beach** (p174)



■ POPULATION: 2.5 MILLION

■ AREA: 83,600 SQ KM

History

The Swahili culture of the coast was a product of the trading routes initiated by Persian and Arab merchants. They used the monsoon winds to reach African shores and quickly established trading posts. By the 9th century, a series of fully fledged city-states had spread out along the coast from Somalia to Mozambique, and the first African slaves began to appear in Arabia (see below).

Intermarriage between Arabs and Africans gradually created the Swahili race, language and culture, and established some powerful dynasties. In the early 16th century the Portuguese swanned over the horizon, attracted by the wealth and determined to end the Arab trade monopoly. Unsurprisingly, the Swahilis did not take kindly to becoming slaves themselves and rebellions were very common throughout the 16th and 17th centuries.

It's fashionable to portray the Portuguese as the bad guys, but the sultans of Oman, who defeated them in 1698, were no more popular with the locals. Despite their shared faith, the Swahilis staged countless rebellions, even passing Mombasa into British hands from 1824 to 1826 to keep it from the sultans. Things only really quietened down after Sultan Seyyid Said moved his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar in 1832.

Said's huge coastal clove plantations created a massive need for labour, and the slave caravans of the 19th century marked the peak of the trade in human cargo. News of massacres and human rights abuses soon reached Europe, galvanising the British public to demand an end to slavery. Through a mixture of political savvy and implied force, the British government was eventually able to pressure Said's son Barghash to ban the slave trade, marking the beginning of the end for Arab rule on the coast.

Of course, this 'reform' didn't hurt British interests: as part of the treaty, the British East Africa Company took over administration of the Kenyan interior, taking the opportunity to start construction of the all-important East African Railway. A 16km-wide coastal strip was recognised as the territory of the sultan and was leased by the British from 1887. Upon independence in 1963, the last sultan of Zanzibar gifted the land to the new Kenyan government.

Today the coast province remains culturally and socially distinct from the rest of the country, still heavily influenced by its Swahili past. Indians are the largest minority, descendants of railway labourers and engineers brought here by the British, and the population as a whole is predominantly Muslim.

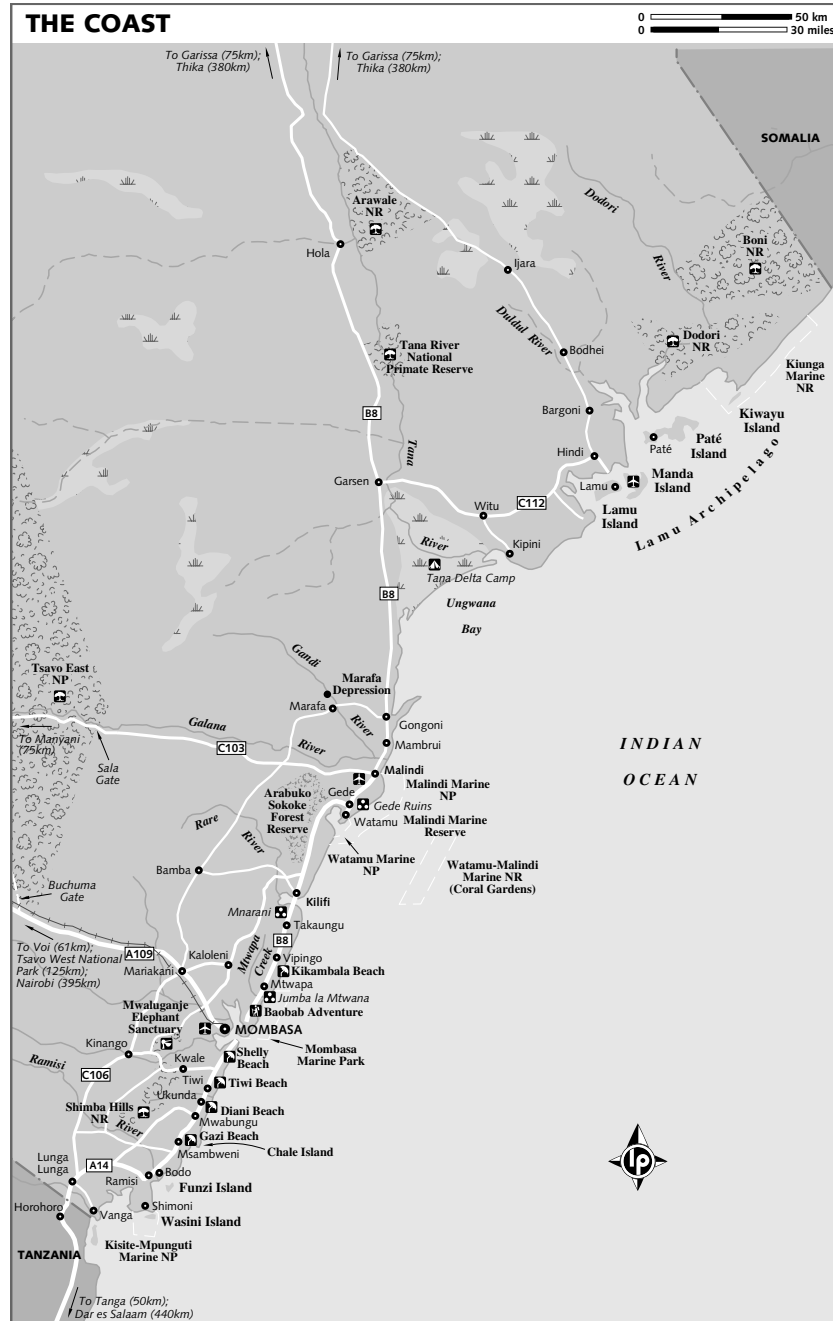
THE SLAVE TRADE

The Swahili coast may seem like the epitome of tropical paradise today, but the history of the region is inextricably linked to the Indian Ocean slave trade. Between the 7th and 19th centuries, Arab and Swahili traders removed somewhere in the region of four million slaves from East Africa, selling them for work in households and plantations across the Middle East and the Arab-controlled coastal states, which continued to use slave labour long after its abolition in Europe and the USA.

At first, slaves were often obtained through trade with the warlike inland tribes, but as the slave trade industry developed, vast slave caravans set off into the African interior, bringing back tons of plundered ivory and tens of thousands of captured men, women and children. Of these, fewer than one in five survived the forced march to the coast, most either dying of disease or being executed for showing weakness along the way.

Although some slaves married their owners and gained freedom, the experience for the majority was much harsher. Thousands of African boys were surgically transformed into eunuchs to provide servants for Arabic households, and an estimated 2.5 million young African women were sold as concubines for harems.

After the East African slave trade was finally brought to a close in the 1870s, the Swahili communities along the coast went into steady decline, although illicit trading continued right up until the 1960s, when slavery was finally outlawed in Oman. These days, this dark chapter of African history is seldom discussed by Kenyans except as a painful fragment of a past long left behind.



Climate

If you're coming from the cooler highland areas you'll notice the change in climate straight away – the coast maintains tropical temperatures of up to 32°C for most of the year, with humidity levels of around 75% and an average eight hours of sunshine per day between September and March. The coolest time of year is during the rainy season, from April to August. Conditions are also influenced by the monsoon winds, which reverse direction between March and April.

National Parks & Reserves

KWS parks in the region include Shimba Hills National Reserve (p169), Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary (p170), Arabuko Sokoke Forest Reserve (p201) and Tana River National Primate Reserve (p212). Offshore you'll find the Mombasa (p184), Malindi (p207), Watamu (p199) and Kisite (p180) Marine National Parks, and Kiunga (p228) and Mpunguti (p180) Marine National Reserves.

Getting There & Away

Mombasa is the gateway city for the coast, and most visitors will pass through here. The Nairobi–Mombasa highway provides the main access to the region, with plenty of bus services, though you can also take the overnight train to Mombasa from Nairobi, or get a domestic flight to one of the various airports (Mombasa and Lamu have the most frequent arrivals).

Getting Around

Matatus and buses cover the whole coastal strip, providing easy access to all points north and south. Boat and traditional Arabic dhow trips are also available in many places, though these are generally best suited to tours, excursions and ferry services rather than long-distance transport.

MOMBASA

☎ 041 / pop 653,000

For most people, Mombasa is best summed up as a feeling – love it or loathe it, there's something about the salty heat, the humid air, the sounds of the city and the sensation of the dust sticking to your suncreamed skin that evokes an instant sense of place.

If this is your first stop after visiting the interior, you could hardly ask for a more distinctive introduction to Kenya's coast, and it's the perfect place to help you fall into the naturally languid rhythm of Swahili life while still enjoying the modern comforts of home.

Mombasa is the largest city on the Kenyan coast and also the largest coastal port in East Africa. The city sprawls across a low-lying island at the mouth of a broad inlet, providing a natural anchorage for ships. Traders have been coming here since at least the 12th century and goods from Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and eastern Congo (Zaire) still pass through here on their way overseas.

The city's population is overwhelmingly African, many of whom are Swahilis, but there is a remarkable range of races and cultures here, from Africans to British expats, Omanis, Indians and Chinese.

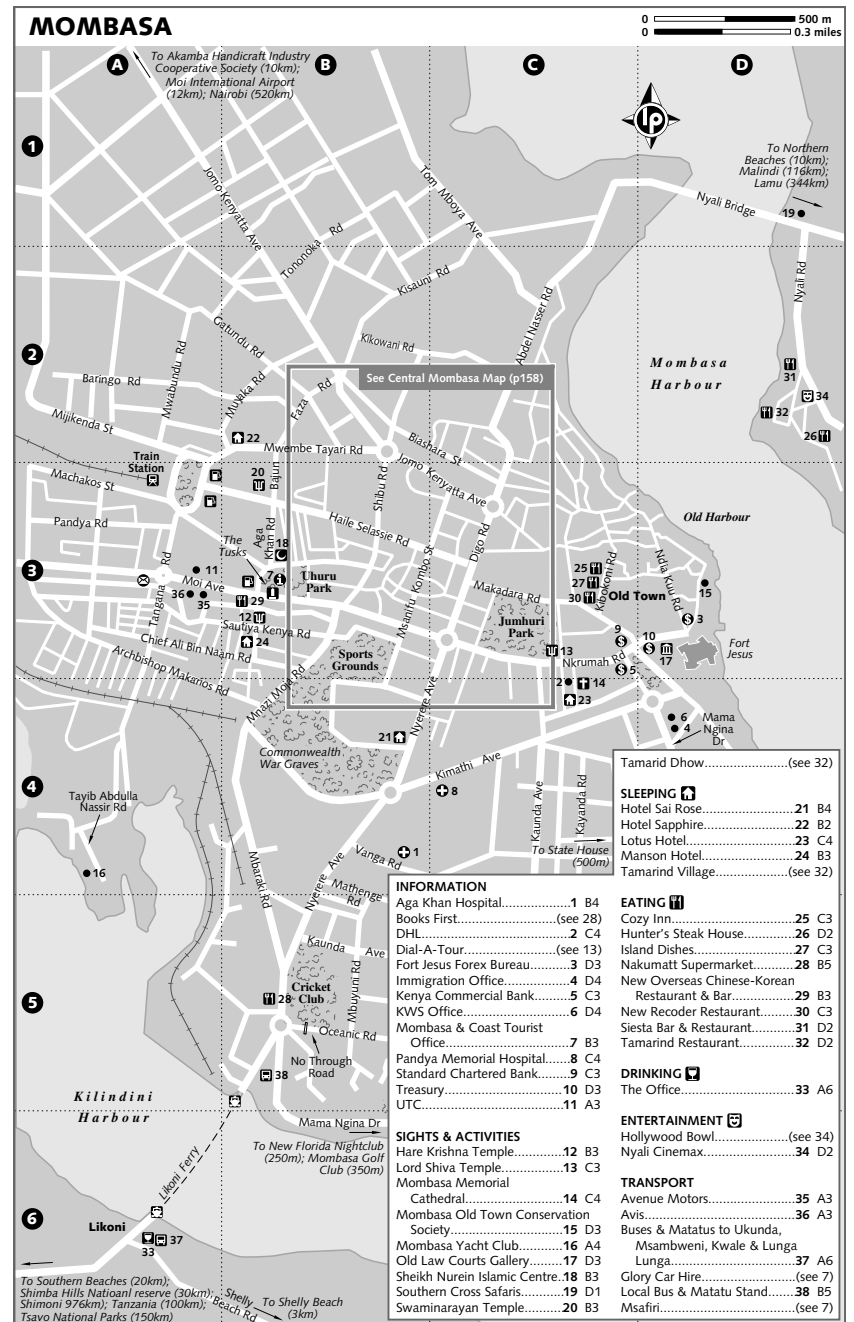
Most package tourists stay in the beach resorts north or south of town, but leaving Mombasa out of your itinerary completely would be a shame. The most interesting part is the characterful Old Town, with its narrow, winding alleyways, historic Swahili houses and the remains of the mighty Fort Jesus.

History

Mombasa has always been at the centre of the coast's key events, a crucial stronghold for local and invading powers ever since the Arab-Swahili Mazrui clan emerged as one of the most powerful families in 9th-century East Africa.

The first Portuguese forays into Arab territory took place here in 1505, when Dom Francisco de Almeida arrived with a huge armada and levelled the city in just 1½ days. The plundered remains were soon rebuilt, but in 1528 Lisbon struck again as Nuña da Cunha captured the city, first by diplomacy (offering to act as an ally in Mombasa's disputes with Malindi, Pemba and Zanzibar) and then by force. Once again Mombasa was burned to the ground while the invaders sailed on to India.

The Portuguese made a bid for permanency in 1593 with the construction of Fort Jesus, but the hefty structure quickly became a symbolic target for rebel leaders and was besieged incessantly. During the 17th and 18th centuries, Mombasa changed



hands dozens of times before the Portuguese finally gave up their claim to the coast in 1729.

Waiting to step into the power vacuum were the sultans of Oman, who had defeated the Europeans and occupied Fort Jesus after an incredible 33-month siege in 1698. The city remained in their control until the 1870s, when British intervention ended the slave trade and gained for the Empire a foothold in East Africa.

Mombasa subsequently became the rail-head for the Uganda railway and the most important city in British East Africa. In 1920, when Kenya became a fully fledged British colony, Mombasa was made capital of the separate British Coast Protectorate.

Today the cut and thrust of politics and power play largely passes Mombasa by, but it's still Kenya's second city and a crucial social barometer for the coast province as a whole.

Orientation

The main thoroughfare in Mombasa is Digo Rd and its southern extension Nyerere Ave, which run north-south through the city. The ferry to Likoni and the south coast leaves from the southern end of Nyerere Ave.

Running west from the junction between Nyerere Ave and Digo Rd is Moi Ave, where you'll find the tourist office and the famous sculpted 'tusks', two huge pairs of aluminium elephant tusks forming an M over the road, which were erected to mark a visit by Britain's Princess Margaret in 1956. Heading east from the same junction, Nkrumah Rd provides the easiest access to the Old Town and Fort Jesus.

North of the centre, Digo Rd becomes Abdel Nasser Rd, where you'll find many of the bus stands for Nairobi and destinations north along the coast. There's another big group of bus offices west of here at the intersection of Jomo Kenyatta Ave and Mwembe Tayari Rd. The train station is at the intersection of Mwembe Tayari and Haile Selassie Rds.

MAPS

Choices are limited if you're looking for a decent map, but your best option is the 1:10,000 *Streets of Mombasa Island* map (KSh350), which was updated in 2004 and is available from the tourist office. For more

detailed coverage seek out the *Mombasa A to Z* (KSh300), which was fully revised in 2003 – it may be easier to find in Nairobi than in Mombasa itself.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Bahati Book Centre (Map p158; ☎ 225010; Moi Ave)

Books First (Map p155; ☎ 313482; Nyerere Ave; ☒) Well-stocked outlet with separate café, in the Nakumatt supermarket.

City Bookshop (Map p158; ☎ 313149; Nkrumah Rd)

EMERGENCY

AAR Health Services (☎ 312409; ☒ 24hr)

Police (☎ 222121, 999)

INTERNET ACCESS

Blue Room (Map p158; ☎ 224021; www.blueroomonline.com; Haile Selassie Rd; per min KSh2; ☒ 9am-10pm)

Cyber Dome (Map p158; Moi Ave; per min KSh1; ☒ 8am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun)

FOTech (Map p158; ☎ 225123; Ambalal House, Nkrumah Rd; per min KSh1)

Info Café (Map p158; ☎ 227621; infomombasa@yahoo.com; Ambalal House, Nkrumah Rd; per min KSh1)

Wavetek (Map p158; ☎ 0735-295007; TSS Towers, Nkrumah Rd; per min KSh1) Also offers international calls from KSh15 per minute.

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.mombasainfo.com Descriptive tourist information.

www.mombasaonline.com Includes some useful features, such as maps and weekly tide times.

KENYA WILDLIFE SERVICE

KWS office (Map p155; ☎ 312744/5; Nguua Court, Mama Ngina Dr; ☒ 6am-6pm) Sells and charges smartcards.

LIBRARIES

Mombasa Area Library (Map p158; ☎ 226380; Msanifu Kombo Rd; ☒ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Thu, to 4pm Fri, to 5pm Sat) Has a fairly extensive English-language section.

MEDIA

Coastweek (www.coastweek.com) Weekly news and features from the whole coast province.

MEDICAL SERVICES

All services and medication must be paid for upfront, so have travel insurance details handy.

Aga Khan Hospital (Map p155; ☎ 312953; akhm@mba.akhmkenya.org; Vanga Rd)

Pandya Memorial Hospital (Map p155; ☎ 229252; Kimathi Ave)

MONEY

Outside business hours you can change money at most major hotels, although rates in the hotels are usually poor. Exchange rates are generally slightly lower here than in Nairobi, especially if you're changing travellers cheques.

Barclays Bank Nkrumah Rd (Map p158; ☎ 311660); Digo Rd (Map p158; ☎ 224573)

Fort Jesus Forex Bureau (Map p155; ☎ 316717; Ndia Kuu Rd)

Kenya Commercial Bank Nkrumah Rd (Map p155; ☎ 312523); Moi Ave (Map p158; ☎ 220978)

Postbank (Map p158; ☎ 3434077; Moi Ave) Western Union money transfers.

Pwani Forex Bureau (Map p158; ☎ 221727; Digo Rd)

Standard Chartered Bank (Map p155; ☎ 224614; Treasury Square, Nkrumah Rd)

PHOTOGRAPHY EQUIPMENT

Despite Mombasa being a major tourist centre, slide film and fast-print film (above ASA 100) can be hard to find – bring supplies from Nairobi.

Photocine (Map p158; ☎ 315438; Moi Ave) Usually has slide film in stock.

POST

DHL (Map p155; ☎ 223933; Nkrumah Rd)

FedEx (Map p158; ☎ 228631; Moi Ave)

Post office (Map p158; ☎ 227705; Digo Rd)

TELEPHONE

Post Global Services (Map p158; ☎ 230581; inglobal@africaonline.co.ke; Maungano Rd; ☒ 7.30am-8pm; ☒) International calls are around KSh85 per minute. Owner Rashmi is re-establishing his travel agency, and can act as a capable and friendly 'fixer' for travellers.

Telkom Kenya (Map p158; ☎ 312811) Locations on Nkrumah Rd and Moi Ave.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Mombasa & Coast Tourist Office (Map p155; ☎ 225428; mcta@kenya.com; Moi Ave; ☒ 8am-4.30pm) Provides information and can organise accommodation, tours, guides and transport.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Dial-A-Tour (Map p155; ☎ 221411; dialatour@ikenya.com; Oriental Bldg, Nkrumah Rd)

Express Travel (Map p158; ☎ 315405; PO Box 90631,

Nkrumah Rd) Amex agent – mail can be held here for card-holders.

Fourways Travel (Map p158; ☎ 223344; Moi Ave)

VISA EXTENSIONS

Immigration office (Map p155; ☎ 311745; Uhuru ni Kari Bldg, Mama Ngina Dr)

Dangers & Annoyances

Mombasa is relatively safe compared to Nairobi, but the streets still clear pretty rapidly after dark so it's a good idea to take taxis rather than walking around alone at night. You need to be more careful on the beaches north (p181) and south (p169) of town. The Likoni ferry is a bag-snatching hotspot.

Visitors should also be aware of anti-Western sentiment among some Kenyan Muslims: hostile graffiti and Osama bin Laden T-shirts abound, and demonstrations against Israel and America are increasingly common. Keep a low profile during any escalation of violence in the Middle East or terrorist activity in the West.

Malaria is a big risk on the coast so remember to take your antimalarial drugs (see p389).

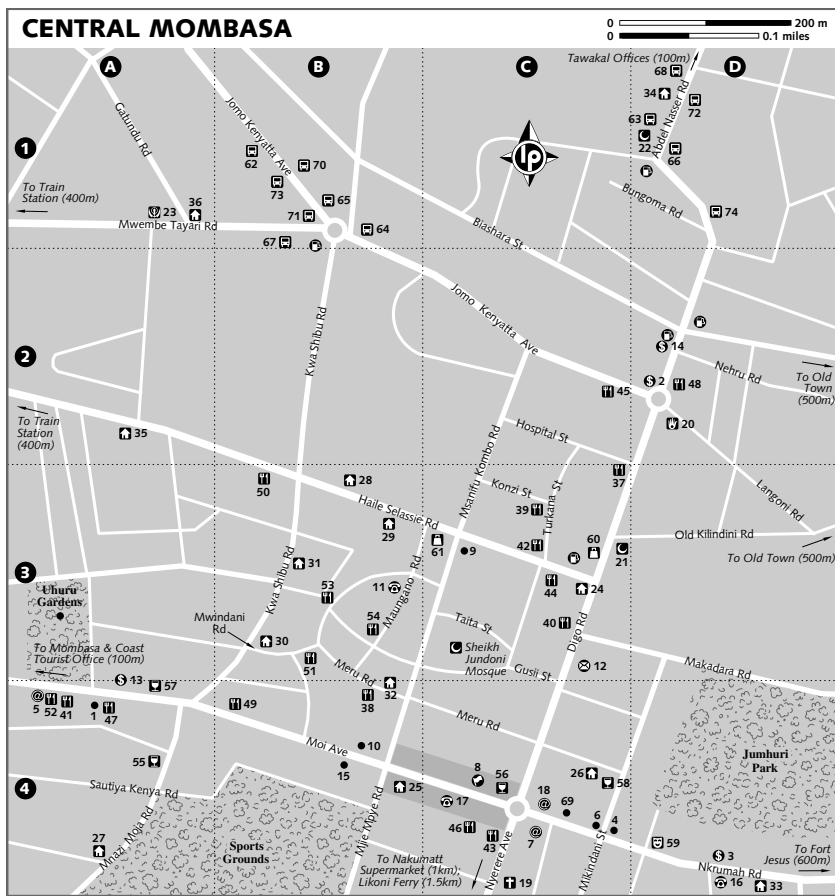
Sights & Activities

FORT JESUS

Mombasa's biggest tourist attraction dominates the harbour entrance at the end of Nkrumah Rd. The metre-thick coral walls make it an imposing edifice, despite being partially ruined. The fort was built by the Portuguese in 1593 to enforce their rule over the coastal Swahilis, but they rarely managed to hold onto it for long. It changed hands at least nine times in bloody sieges between 1631 and 1875, finally falling under British control.

The fort was the final project completed by Italian architect Joao Batista Cairato in his long career as Chief Architect for Portugal's eastern colonies. There are some ingenious elements in its design, especially the angular configuration of the west walls, which makes it impossible to attack one wall without being a sitting duck for soldiers on the opposite battlements.

These days the fort houses a **museum** (Map p155; ☎ 222425; nmkfortj@swiftmombasa.com; nonresident adult/child KSh200/100; ☒ 8am-6pm), built over the former barracks. The exhibits are mostly ceramics, reflecting the variety of cultures



that traded along the coast, but include other interesting odds and ends donated from private collections or dug up from sites along the coast. Also displayed are finds from the Portuguese frigate *Santo António de Tanná*, which sank near the fort during the siege in 1698, and the far end of the hall is devoted to the fascinating culture and traditions of the nine coastal Mijikenda tribes, including a map of sacred forests (see the boxed text on p160).

Exploring the battlements and ruined buildings within the compound is just as interesting, though the fort feels much smaller than it looks from the outside. The **Omani house** in the San Felipe bastion, in the northwestern corner of the fort, was built

in the late 18th century and houses a small exhibition of Omani jewellery and artefacts. Nearby is a ruined church, a huge well and cistern, and an excavated grave complete with skeleton. The **eastern wall** of the fort includes an Omani audience hall and the **Passage of the Arches**, a passage cut through the coral to give access to the sea.

Most coach tours arrive here late in the morning, so if you come early you may have the place to yourself. Many official and unofficial guides will offer their services, often for free, though a tip is always expected. Alternatively, you can buy the 1981 *Fort Jesus* guide booklet (KSh60) from the ticket desk and go it alone. At 7pm there's a daily 'sound and light show' illustrating the

INFORMATION	SLEEPING	DRINKING
Ambalal House.....(see 7)	Beracha Guest House.....24 C3	Splendid View Restaurant.....54 B3
Bahati Book Centre.....1 A4	Castle Royal Hotel.....25 B4	Casablanca Restaurant & Club.....55 A4
Barclays Bank.....2 D2	Dancourt Hotel.....26 C4	Casalamba Club.....56 C4
Barclays Bank.....3 D4	Evening Guest House.....27 A4	Sky Bar & Restaurant.....57 A4
Blue Room Cyber Cafe.....(see 42)	Excellent Hotel.....28 B3	Toyz Disco.....58 C4
City Bookshop.....4 C4	Glory Bed & Breakfast.....29 B3	
Cyber Dome.....5 A4	Glory Guest House.....30 B3	
Express Travel (Amex).....6 C4	Hotel Dorset.....31 B3	
FedEx.....(see 15)	Hotel Splendid.....32 B4	
FOTech.....(see 7)	New Palm Tree Hotel.....33 D4	
Fourways Travel.....(see 15)	New People's Hotel.....34 D1	
Info Café.....7 C4	Royal Court Hotel.....35 A2	
Italian Consulate.....8 C4	Tana Guest House.....36 A1	
Kenya Commercial Bank.....(see 56)		
Mombasa Area Library.....9 C3		
Photocine.....10 B4		
Post Global Services.....11 B3		
Post Office.....12 C3		
Postbank.....13 A3		
Pwani Forex Bureau.....14 D2		
Safari Seekers.....15 B4		
Telkom Kenya.....16 D4		
Telkom Kenya.....17 C4		
Wavetek.....18 C4		
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	EATING	TRANSPORT
Holy Ghost Cathedral.....19 C4	A-1 Supermarket.....37 C3	Akamba.....62 B1
Jain Temple.....20 D2	Anglo-Swiss Bakery.....38 B4	Buses & Matatus to Malindi.....63 D1
Khonzi Mosque.....21 C3	Aridi 4 Restaurant.....39 C3	Buses to Arusha & Moshi (Mwembe Tayari Health Centre).....64 B1
Noor Mosque.....22 D1	Baron Restaurant & Pub.....40 C3	Buses to Dar es Salaam & Tanga.....65 B1
Sikh Temple.....23 A1	Barrels Wines & Spirits.....41 A4	Busscar.....(see 72)
	Blue Room Restaurant.....42 C3	Busstar.....66 D1
	China Town Restaurant.....43 C4	Coastline Safaris.....67 B1
	City Grocers.....44 C3	Falcon.....68 D1
	Fayaz Baker & Confectioners.....45 C2	Kenatco Taxis.....(see 7)
	Fontanella Steakhouse & Beer Garden.....46 C4	Kenya Airways.....69 C4
	Little Chef Dinners Pub.....47 A4	Kobil Petrol Station.....(see 71)
	Main Market.....48 D2	Mash Express.....70 B1
	Mombasa Coffee House.....49 B4	Matatus to Voi & Wundanyi.....71 B1
	New Chetna Restaurant.....50 B3	Mombasa Raha.....72 D1
	Pistachio Café.....51 B3	Mombasa Raha.....73 B1
	Rozina House Restaurant.....52 A4	Oman Air.....(see 8)
	Shehmal Restaurant.....53 B3	Singh Restaurant.....(see 23)
	Singh Restaurant.....(see 23)	TSS Express.....74 D1

fort's history, organised by Jahazi Marine (see p161). Tickets cost US\$15.

RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS

Mombasa has some interesting mosques; non-Muslims are usually not permitted to enter, although you can look from the outside. The dozen or so mosques in the Old Town are the most traditional, while more modern examples in town include the **Sheikh Nurein Islamic Centre** (Map p155) opposite Uhuru Gardens and the **Khonzi Mosque** (Map p158; Digo Rd) on Digo Rd.

You'll get a warm reception at the Hindu **Lord Shiva Temple** (Map p155; Mwinyi Ab Rd), which has an interesting sculpture garden, and **Swaminarayan Temple** (Map p155; Haile Selassie Rd), which has some wonderfully ornate painted doors and vivid paintings from Hindu mythology. For even more esoteric design, there's a **Sikh Temple** (Map p158; Mwembe Tayari Rd), a **Jain Temple** (Map p158; Langoni Rd) and a **Hare Krishna Temple** (Map p155; Sautiya Kenya Rd). Shoes should be removed before entering any of these buildings, and it's worth asking about any other appropriate signs of respect.

The two main Christian churches are also worth seeing, for rather different reasons. The **Holy Ghost Cathedral** (Map p158; Nyerere Ave) is a very European hunk of neo-Gothic buttressed architecture, with massive fans

in the walls to cool its former colonial congregations. The **Mombasa Memorial Cathedral** (Map p155; Nkrumah Rd), on the other hand, tries almost too hard to fit in, resembling a mosque with its white walls, arches and cupola dome.

OLD LAW COURTS

The old law courts on Nkrumah Rd have been converted into an informal **gallery** (Map p155; Nkrumah Rd; admission free; ☎ 8am-6pm), with regularly changing displays of local art, Kenyan crafts, school competition pieces and votive objects from various tribal groups.

GOLF

Drive, chip and putt to your heart's content at **Mombasa Golf Club** (Map p155; ☎ 228531; Mama Ngina Dr), perched on the southeastern edge of the island. Day membership is KSh1500, clubs cost KSh800 per day and caddies cost KSh100 per nine-hole round.

SAILING

If you can sail, it may be worth joining **Mombasa Yacht Club** (Map p155; ☎ 223580; Tayib Abdulla Nassir Rd). Temporary membership cost KSh100/500 per day/week. Wednesday is club night, where qualified sailors may be able to talk themselves into some crewing, and there are usually races on Sunday. Those

COUNTING KAYAS

One belief that still persists among the Mijikenda (the nine coastal tribes) is the importance of sacred forests, known as *kayas*. There are strict rules about who can enter these mystical places, and sacrifices and ritual burials were regularly conducted in the forests in the past. Today few *kayas* remain, but you can still often see discarded bottles of rosewater used for offerings at particular spots. The incredible biodiversity of the coastal woodland outside Mombasa is partly a result of centuries of conservation by the Mijikenda, a welcome side-effect of their traditional respect for nature.

In 1992 the government designated all surviving *kayas* as National Monuments, and they have been listed by Conservation International as one of 25 conservation hotspots worldwide. However, with little protective infrastructure, deforestation continues to eat away at these sacred spaces. For a glimpse of the real thing, visit Kaya Kinondo, near Diani Beach (p173), or the Shimba Hills Triangular Forest Project (p169).

hoping to hitch a lift on a passing yacht will have a better (though remote) chance in Mt-wapa (p195) or at Kilifi Boatyard (p198).

Walking Tour

While Mombasa's Old Town doesn't quite have the medieval charm of Lamu or Zanzibar, it's still an interesting area to wander around. The houses here are characteristic of coastal East African architecture, with ornately carved doors and window frames and fretwork balconies, designed to protect the modesty of the female inhabitants. Sadly, many of these have been destroyed; there is now a preservation order on the remaining doors and balconies, so further losses should hopefully be prevented. The **Mombasa Old Town Conservation Society** (Map p155; ☎ 312246; Sir Mbarak Hinawy Rd) is encouraging the renovation of many dilapidated buildings.

From the outside there's little evidence of what any of these buildings were once used for. To flesh out their history, it's worth picking up a copy of the booklet *The Old Town Mombasa: A Historical Guide* (KSh200) from the tourist office or the Fort Jesus ticket office. This excellent guide features old photos,

a good map and a building-by-building account of the various structures – as well as a description of the unusual trolley service that used to run through the city.

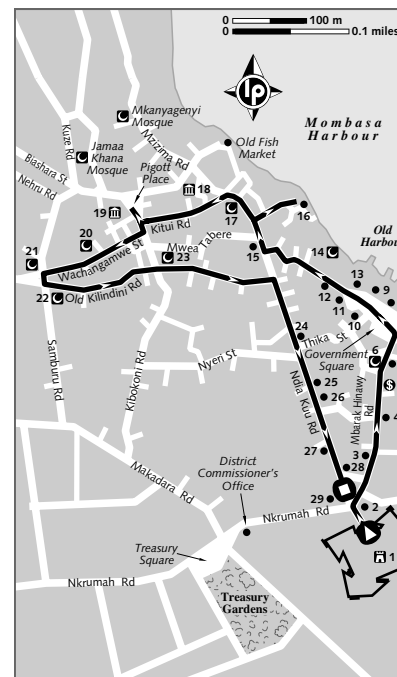
Early morning or late afternoon is the best time to walk around as there's more activity, although most houses are residential these days and the streets are rather quiet, except for the honking of horns as cars edge their way round blind corners. This tour can take anything from 30 minutes up to 1½ hours, depending how many stops you make along the way.

We start our walk at **Fort Jesus (1)**, the obvious gateway landmark for the Old Town area. When you've had your fill of the ramparts and relics, head past the colonial **Mombasa Club (2)** onto Sir Mbarak Hinawy Rd, once the main access road to the port and now a lively thoroughfare punctuated with shops and football graffiti.

On the left, **Anil's Arcade (3)** is a three-storey building that dates back to 1900, when it was occupied by a British shipping agency. Further along, **Dalal House (4)** was once the National Bank of South Africa; the pleasant orange facade was restored in 2000. Another former financial institution, the **Standard Bank (5)**, is just along from here, next to the Old Town conservation office. On the other side of the street you'll see the minaret of the 16th-century **Mandhry Mosque (6)**, one of the oldest still in use in Mombasa. The decorative freshwater **well (7)** for worshippers' ablutions is on the other side of the conservation office.

Turn the corner at the end of the street and you'll enter Government Square, the largest open space in the Old Town, facing towards the harbour. The buildings lining the square used to hold some of the city's key administrative offices, including the **Customs House (8)**, the **Dhow Registrar's Office (9)**, the **Treasury (10)** on Thika St and the **Italian Consulate (11)**. As you head northwest you'll also pass the **Scent Emporium (12)**, founded in 1850 and still trading today, and the rather less refined odours of the new **fish market (13)**, an annexe of the still-operational original market further north.

Uphill next to the market is the **Bohra Mosque (14)**, a prominent modern structure with a tall minaret, built on the site of a previous mosque. Turn left down the winding streets here to reach Ndia Kuu Rd, where



you'll see the former **Public Library (15)** in front of you, the first of its kind in Kenya. Heading north, a right turn takes you to the **Leven Steps (16)** by the waterfront, site of the former British colonial administration.

Returning to Ndia Kuu Rd, turn left past the **Ithna Asheri Mosque (17)** and head down Kitui Rd into the area known as Kitovuni. Just off this street is the **Pillar House (18)**, a three-storey building with unusual wooden pillars. At the end of the street you'll find Piggot Place, another colonial square. The building on the west side is **Glen's Building (19)**, which bears little resemblance to its original design and is chiefly noted for being named after a dog!

From here, mosque fans can detour down Wachangamwe St to catch the colourful, modern **Memon Mosque (20)** and the more traditional **Badala (21)** and **Badri (22)** mosques, before heading back down Old Kilindini Rd past the 16th-century **Basheikh Mosque (23)** to rejoin Ndia Kuu Rd.

Once you're on this straight home stretch, the final stages of your route can be as direct or as tangential as you wish – diverting

into side streets to see the real life of the Old Town is highly recommended, and it's hard to get truly lost. The winding alleyways linking the Old Town to Digo Rd are wonderfully lively, with market traders selling everything from *kangas* (printed wraps worn by women) and mobile-phone accessories to baobab seeds and fried taro roots.

If you do stick to Ndia Kuu Rd, there are a lot of nicely restored traditional buildings, most now occupied by souvenir shops. Heading south, you'll pass **Hansing & Co (24)**, the former German import/export office; the **Criterion (25)**, once a well-known hotel; an Indian-style house known as the **Balcony House (26)**, for obvious reasons; **Edward St Rose (27)**, the former chemist, which retains its original engraved glass panel; and **Ali's Curio Market (28)**, one of the better preserved balcony houses and formerly Mombasa's police headquarters. Pass the Muslim **cemetery (29)** and you're back at Fort Jesus, hopefully refreshed and enlivened by a glance into Mombasa's recent past.

Tours

A number of tour companies have branches in Mombasa (see p59 for more details) and offer standard tours of the Old Town and Fort Jesus (from US\$50 per person), plus safaris to Shimba Hills National Reserve and Tsavo East and Tsavo West National Parks. Most safaris are expensive lodge-based affairs, but there are a few camping safaris to Tsavo East and West.

Numerous activities are possible both north and south of Mombasa; most operators will pick you up from wherever you're staying for a small extra charge. See p181 and p169 for more details.

HARBOUR CRUISES

Luxury dhow cruises around the harbour are very popular in Mombasa and, notwithstanding the price, they are an excellent way to see the harbour, the Old Town and Fort Jesus and to get a slap-up meal at the end of it.

Topping the billing is the **Tamarind Dhow** (Map p155; ☎ 475074; www.tamarinddhow.com), run by the posh Tamarind restaurant chain of the same name. The cruise embarks from the jetty below the Tamarind restaurant in Nyali, and includes a harbour tour and a fantastic meal. The lunch cruises leave at 1pm and cost US\$40/20 per adult/child, or

US\$80/40 when combined with a city tour. Longer and more splendid evening cruises leave at 6.30pm and cost US\$70/35. There is a choice of seafood, steak and vegetarian dishes. Prices include a complimentary cocktail and transport to and from your hotel.

The other big operator is **Jahazi Marine** (☎ 5485001; www.severin-kenya.com), which offers evening trips for US\$75. The price includes transfers, a sunset cruise, a walk through the Old Town and entry to Fort Jesus for the light show and a five-course meal; for an extra US\$10 you can sample a casino and head on to the Bora Bora International Nightclub in Bamburi, on the northern beaches.

Festivals & Events

The **Mombasa Carnival** (zainab@africaonline.co.ke) is the city's major annual event, held every November. The festival sees *Moi Ave* come alive for the day with street parades, floats and lots of music from the diverse cultural groups of the coastal region and the rest of Kenya.

For sporty types or keen spectators, the **Mombasa Triathlon** (☎ 230658) in August is an open competition with men's, women's and children's races.

Beauty pageants also seem to do a lively trade on the beach strips during summer, with prestigious titles such as Miss Coast and Miss Morality Mombasa up for grabs.

Sleeping

There are plenty of budget choices in Mombasa, as well as some excellent midrange hotels, but there are few top-end options. Many people choose to skip Mombasa and head straight for the beaches to the north (p181) and south (p169). All the places listed here have fans and mosquito nets as a minimum requirement, though their condition varies widely.

BUDGET

Most of the really cheap choices are in the busy, noisy area close to the bus stations on Abdel Nasser Rd and Jomo Kenyatta Ave. Lone female travellers might want to opt for something a little further up the price scale.

Tana Guest House (Map p158; ☎ 490550; cnr Mwembe Tayari & Gatundu Rds; s/d/tr KSh400/500/600) A simple but friendly place in the slightly seedy area close to the Jomo Kenyatta Ave bus stations. Rooms are clean, tidy and

pretty much what you'd expect for the price.

New People's Hotel (Map p158; Abdel Nasser Rd; s/d KSh350/500, with shared bathroom KSh200/350) This basic dosshouse gets loads of noise from traffic and the Noor Mosque next door, but you can't argue with the prices. There's a good, cheap restaurant downstairs and it's very convenient for buses to Lamu and Malindi.

Evening Guest House (Map p158; ☎ 221380; Mnazi Moja Rd; s KSh700-800, d KSh1000, with shared bathroom s/d KSh600/800) Set in a thatched courtyard behind its own large restaurant area, the Evening does have something of the night about it but is still mostly good value, despite a few cramped singles. All rooms have power points 'for mobile phones only'.

Beracha Guest House (Map p158; ☎ 0722-673798; Haile Selassie Rd; s/d KSh500/750) This popular central choice has variable but clean rooms in a range of unusual shapes. There's a cheap restaurant, and ongoing building work should add a few more strange angles to the geometry.

Glory Bed & Breakfast (Map p158; ☎ 228282; Haile Selassie Rd; s/d/tr KSh700/1000/1400) Adequate, if a little cramped: rooms have fans but no nets, and rates include breakfast. Taking a room with shared bathroom knocks KSh200 off the price. There have been no reports concerning security issues lately, but always be cautious when travelling.

MIDRANGE

At all the following places breakfast is included in the price.

Castle Royal Hotel (Map p158; ☎ 220373; info@680hotel.co.ke; Moi Ave; s/d/tr KSh2300/3000/4200; ☎ 🚶) Quite simply the best hotel in town, and at these prices one of the best deals in the whole of Kenya. The newly renovated Castle Royal is a joy to stay in, with TV, phone, fridge, safe, iron-framed bed and stylish decor in every room, plus an excellent breakfast in the cool terrace restaurant at the front. A shop, travel agent and Chinese restaurant round out the amenities, and when the second wing is completed you'll get a gym, lifts and possibly even a swimming pool. High-speed Internet lines are available (US\$15 per day).

New Palm Tree Hotel (Map p158; ☎ 312623; Nk-rumah Rd; s/d KSh1160/1740) The appealing New Palm Tree may be a step down from the competition in facilities, but it has character

and charm in spades, with all the rooms set around a fantastic roof terrace. The nets are variable and hot water can be unreliable, but the rooms are big, the bar and restaurant are well priced and it has the most sociable atmosphere in town, ideal for travellers taking a break from budget slumming.

Lotus Hotel (Map p155; ☎ 313207; lotus_hotel@hotmail.com; Cathedral Rd; s/d/tr KSh1800/2500/3000; ☎) A welcome change from dull everyday hotel design – if bright orange isn't your thing you might want to avert your eyes on entering. The rooms don't quite live up to the delightful inner courtyard with its Muslim-style fountain, but they're quiet and well sized, with two bars and a restaurant catering amply for other needs.

Manson Hotel (Map p155; ☎ 222356; vnmulji@africaonline.co.ke; Kisumu Rd; s KSh1050-1650, d KSh1650-2300; ☎) This balconied block is hidden away in a quiet residential neighbourhood. It's well looked after, with plain, spacious standard rooms. Security is tight, and amenities include a restaurant, TV and pool room.

Hotel Dorso (Map p158; ☎ 22252; hoteldorso@africaonline.co.ke; Kwa Shibu Rd; s/d/tw KSh2500/3000/3500; ☎) Marketed at a conference clientele, this is a good low-lying building with balconies, big beds and showers designed for very tall people. As a minor downside, it's currently overlooked by shabby tenement blocks and a building site. Knock about KSh500 off the price in low season.

Hotel Sapphire (Map p155; ☎ 491657; hotel.sapphire@africaonline.co.ke; Mwembe Tayari Rd; s/d/tr KSh2200/3300/4200; ☎ 🚶) The Sapphire offers passable rooms conveniently close to the train station, but the big multistorey building looks better from outside than inside, and could do with a bit of a touch-up in places. The swimming pool's often empty.

Dancourt Hotel (Map p158; ☎ 226278; swam boi2002@yahoo.com; Meru Rd; s/d KSh1500/2000) Only half built, the existing rooms show laudable ambition, with carved doors and huge TVs, but blocked views detract. When the upstairs balcony rooms are finished they'll be much nicer and the charming pastel-orange patio café should come into its own.

Hotel Splendid (Map p158; ☎ 221694; Msanifu Komba St) This place was closed for renovation at the time of writing, but has always tried to live up to its name in the past. There's a range of rooms, and the rooftop restaurant catches a nice breeze.

Glory Guest House (Map p158; ☎ 228202; Kwa Shibu Rd; s KSh900-1500, d KSh1300-2000, tr KSh2100, s/d/tr with shared bathroom KSh600/1000/1400; ☎) This place shares a dodgy air with its fellow Glory properties, but most rooms are reasonable, especially the VIP rooms further up the scale. As the massive padlocks suggest, be conscious of the security of your belongings while travelling.

Excellent Hotel (Map p158; ☎ 227683; Haile Selassie Rd; s/d/tr KSh1000/1500/2100; ☎) Sadly standards here are not excellent – scummy bathtubs, dodgy locks and a fair bit of noise disappear at this price, though the rooftop bar is a nice touch. For air-con add KSh300. Somewhat optimistically, reception sells 'I loved my stay at...' bumper stickers.

TOP END

Royal Court Hotel (Map p158; ☎ 223379; royal.court@swiftmombasa; Haile Selassie Rd; s US\$60-70, d US\$75-95, ste US\$130; ☎) The swish lobby is the highlight of this stylish business hotel – executive rooms are reasonably plush, but the standard rooms are beaten hands down by those at the Castle Royal, which cost half as much. Still, service and facilities are good, disabled access is a breeze and you get great views and excellent food at the Tawa Terrace restaurant on the roof.

Tamarind Village (Map p155; ☎ 473161; www.tamarind.co.ke; Silos Rd, Nyali; apt KSh8000-16,000; ☎ 🚶) The highly superior Tamarind restaurant chain now has its own highly superior accommodation complex, with a range of luxury serviced apartments for anyone too full, rich or highly superior to stagger back to town. Full kitchenettes give you the option of cooking, but really, with Tamarind and the resort's private Harbour restaurant next door, why on earth would you want to?

Hotel Sai Rose (Map p155; ☎ 222897; hotelsairose@iconnect.co.ke; Nyerere Ave; s US\$30-40, d US\$40-60, ste US\$75; ☎) It has to be said that this is a bit of an oddity; a long narrow building with tight pastel corridors stuck between two patches of waste ground. For the price, though, rooms aren't bad at all, especially the Swahili-themed executive rooms and the blue honeymoon suite.

Eating

Eating on the coast can be a completely different experience from dining inland, with more variety, fresh seafood and a whole

new range of spices and flavours (see p89). There's a wide selection of restaurants in Mombasa, reflecting both Swahili tradition and the cosmopolitan ethnic make-up of the city itself.

RESTAURANTS

Kenyan & Swahili

Explore the Old Town for cheap, authentic Swahili cuisine; if in doubt, follow the locals to find the best deals. Most places are Muslim-run, so no alcoholic drinks are sold and they're closed until after sunset during Ramadan.

Island Dishes (Map p155; ☎ 0720-887311; Kibokoni Rd; mains KSh50-180) Once your eyes have adjusted to the dazzling strip lights, feast them on the tasty menu at this whiter-than-white Lamu-themed canteen. *Mishkaki* (kebabs), chicken tikka, fish, fresh juices and all the usual favourites are on offer to eat in or take away, though the biryani (curry and rice) is only available at lunchtime.

New Recorder Restaurant (Map p155; Kibokoni Rd; mains KSh50-180) A local favourite in a new location, slightly tattier than Island but with much the same coast cuisine.

Singh Restaurant (Map p158; ☎ 493283; Mwembe Tayari Rd; mains KSh50-150) The Sikh temple near the bus stands operates this small cafeteria restaurant, tipped by Mombasans in the know as one of the best places in town for vegetarians. KSh250 is more than enough to get you a massive feed.

Aridi 4 Restaurant (Map p158; Turkana St; mains KSh80-250) A friendly, popular and good-value local canteen, with superb juices and the standard Kenyan array of grills, burgers and fried chicken.

Indian

Shehnai Restaurant (Map p158; ☎ 224801; Fatemi House, Maungano Rd; mains from KSh290; ☎ noon-2pm & 7.30-10.30pm Tue-Sun) Mombasa's classiest curry house specialises in tandoori and *mughlai* (North Indian) cuisine and has a huge menu, complimented by a tasteful line in drapery. It's very popular with well-heeled Indian families and the food is authentic and very good.

Splendid View Restaurant (Map p158; ☎ 5487270; splendidrestaurants@yahoo.com; Maungano Rd; mains KSh100-300; ☎ 11.30am-2pm & 5.30-10.30pm) You'll be looking in vain if you expect magnificent vistas from the street seating here –

the name merely refers to the Splendid Hotel opposite. Luckily the food compensates for this sly misnomer, covering styles from tandoori to Chinese-influenced *pili pili*, a kind of curry.

New Chetna Restaurant (Map p158; ☎ 224477; Haile Selassie Rd; mains KSh200-300) This is a very popular South Indian canteen restaurant with a long list of vegetarian goodies, including *masala dosa* (curried vegetables inside a lentil-flour pancake) and *idli* (rice dumpling). The various *thali* (set meals) are great value.

Chinese

There are several good Chinese restaurants in Mombasa, although most also double as bars, so you may be the only person eating.

New Overseas Chinese-Korean Restaurant & Bar (Map p155; ☎ 230729; Moi Ave; mains KSh220-480) Despite the overblown name and the hilariously clichéd interior design, the New Overseas delivers on its Oriental promises and is particularly strong on seafood – a full Chinese or Korean feast will cost you up to KSh1000.

China Town Restaurant (Map p155; ☎ 315098; Nyerere Ave; mains KSh400-600) More incredibly chintzy decor, more great Korean and Chinese food. It's opposite the Holy Ghost Cathedral on Nyerere Ave.

International

Tamarind Restaurant (Map p155; ☎ 471747; Silos Rd, Nyali; mains KSh900-1800, lobster per 100g KSh330) Perhaps the finest of the various Tamarind ventures, eating on the terrace of this grand Moorish building overlooking the water is a romantic splurge you can't afford to miss. Seafood is the focus here, but meat eaters won't go hungry and vegetarians even get their own menu. The only bum note is the rather cheesy keyboard music, which takes a few *dawas* (vodka, lime and honey cocktails) to drown out. If you've got some spare cash there's a casino upstairs – just remember you'll need KSh350 for the taxi back to town.

Little Chef Dinners Pub (Map p158; ☎ 222740; Moi Ave; mains KSh100-210) Thankfully this funky green-hued pub-restaurant has nothing to do with the British motorway diners of the same name, dishing up big, tasty portions of Kenyan and international dishes from pilau to stroganoff. The 1st-floor bar has a pool table and a great breezy balcony, one of the

most relaxed places in town for a beer. The company has a couple more outlets in the area, but this is by far the nicest.

Baron Restaurant & Pub (Map p158; ☎ 314971; Digo Rd; mains KSh250-650) While it appears at first like a pretty average drinking hall, a glance at Baron's ambitious menu reveals a lot more than cold Tusker passing through the kitchen. Crocodile, ostrich, guinea fowl and lobster (KSh1750) all feature, and even the drinks list takes up a page or two.

Siesta Bar & Restaurant (Map p155; ☎ 474896; Nyali Rd, Nyali; mains KSh350-600; ☎ from 5pm Tue-Sun) You say *mzungu*, they say *gringo*...we just say *olé!* This is quite possibly the only Mexican restaurant in East Africa, set in a fine garden above the harbour by the Nyali Bridge. It's great for a sunset beer (or tequila if you've got the *cojones*) and the near-authentic food comes highly recommended.

Fontanella Steakhouse & Beer Garden (Map p158; ☎ 222740; City House, Moi Ave; mains KSh100-250) A popular open-air place in a courtyard off Moi Ave, with *nyama choma* (barbecued meat), steaks and Western offerings such as spag bol. There's a large bird cage for entertainment, though without many outside lights you can hardly see it (or the menus) at night.

Hunter's Steak House (Map p158; ☎ 474759; 'Königsallee', Mkomani Rd, Nyali; mains KSh450-1500; ☎ Wed-Mon) Hunter's is another high-class restaurant close to Tamarind, clearly displaying the influence of its German owners in the hefty parade of meat dishes. Aimed mainly at tourists, it's often closed for a month or so in June.

Rozina House Restaurant (Map p158; ☎ 311107; Moi Ave; mains KSh500-1200) Walk along Moi Ave in the evening and you're bound to be approached by touts for this would-be upmarket eatery. The food is reputedly very good, with plenty of seafood (KSh1000 to KSh2000, two-person platter KSh4000), but if you've just been dragged in off the street the prices are distinctly off-putting. Cheaper meals are available at the café next door.

CAFÉS

Cozy Inn (Map p155; ☎ 0733-925707; Kibokoni Rd; mains KSh80-195; ☎) A new addition to the Old Town, classical music soothes the senses in this friendly café. Lunch and dinner are planned weekly, with just four Italian-themed main dishes available each day.

Pistachio Café (Map p158; ☎ 221989; cnr Meru Rd & Mwindani Rd; buffet lunch KSh450; ☎ Mon-Sat) A Swiss-run place with excellent ice cream and popular lunchtime buffets, usually consisting of a mixture of Indian and Western dishes. À-la-carte staples such as spaghetti are also served.

Mombasa Coffee House (Map p158; Moi Ave; meals from KSh100; ☎) Take the opportunity to escape above Moi Ave for fresh coffee and snacks, or local meals away from the daily grind.

QUICK EATS

There are dozens of inexpensive local cafés and restaurants serving quick meals and snacks. Street food is an even faster option: stalls around town sell snacks such as cassava, samosas, *bhajis* and kebabs, while a few set up trestle tables to dish out stew and *ugali* (maize meal). For dessert, vendors can ply you with *haluwa* (an Omani version of Turkish delight), fried taro roots, sweet baobab seeds and sugared donuts.

Blue Room Restaurant (Map p158; ☎ 224021; www.blueroomonline.com; Haile Selassie Rd; snacks KSh20-50, mains KSh110-325; ☎) The Blue Room is hugely popular for its fast food – anything from cakes and sandwiches to curries, steaks and pizzas. Drinks are made with filtered water and there are no fewer than two back-up generators in case of power cuts. There's also a highly recommended ice-cream parlour.

Fayaz Baker & Confectioners (Map p158; ☎ 220382; Jomo Kenyatta Ave) Mombasa's 'Master Baker' cooks up excellent cakes and muffins in several locations around town – great for breakfast on the run or a leisurely mid-morning snack.

Anglo-Swiss Bakery (Map p158; Meru Rd) Perhaps not the obvious entente cordiale, but another good place for cakes.

SELF-CATERING

Nakumatt supermarket (Map p155; ☎ 228945; Nyerere Ave) Close to the Likoni ferry, with an astounding selection of provisions, drinks, consumer goods and hardware items – just in case you need a TV, bicycle or lawnmower to go with your groceries.

Main market (Map p158; Digo Rd) Mombasa's dilapidated 'covered' market building, formerly the Mackinnon Market, is packed with stalls selling fresh fruit and vegetables. Roaming produce carts also congregate in

the streets around it, and dozens of *miraa* (leafy twigs and shoots chewed as a stimulant) sellers join the fray when the regular deliveries come in.

A-1 supermarket (Map p158; ☎ 313478; Digo Rd) Reasonable central supermarket.

City Grocers (Map p158; ☎ 223200; Haile Selassie Rd) A well-stocked shop.

Barrels Wines & Spirits (Map p158; ☎ 316187; Moi Ave) Convenient central off-licence.

Drinking

There are plenty of good drinking holes in Mombasa, and many restaurants cater primarily to drinkers in the evening. Keep an eye out for flyers advertising reggae concerts and other events.

New Florida Nightclub (☎ 313127; Mama Ngina Dr; admission men/women KSh150/70; 🕒 24hr; 🍷) This vast seafront complex houses Mombasa's liveliest nightclub, which boasts its own casino, restaurants and even an open-air swimming pool. It's owned by the same people as the infamous Florida clubs in Nairobi and offers much the same atmosphere, clientele and Las Vegas-style floorshows, with the added bonus of outdoor bars, table football and real German *Currywurst* (curry sausage)! Friday, Saturday and Sunday are the big party nights. A taxi fare here is around KSh400.

The Office (Map p155; ☎ 451700; Shelly Beach Rd, Likoni) Perched above the Likoni ferry jetty and matatu stand, the entirely unaptnly named Office is a real locals' hangout with regular massive reggae and dub nights shaking the thatched rafter. Any business that goes on here is definitely not the executive kind.

Casablanca Restaurant & Club (Map p158; Mnazi Moja Rd; admission KSh50-100) Amid the *makuti* and cartoon animals, this loud split-level bar-club pulls in plenty of Westerners, but also a lot of prostitutes – all-male groups will be mobbed mercilessly, especially on the dance floor. Still, the music is good, there's tables downstairs and the beers are wonderfully cold.

Toyz Disco (Map p158; ☎ 313931; Baluchi St; admission KSh100) A loud and lively Kenyan night-spot just off Nkrumah Rd. The 'Be Casual' sign outside announces in graphic form that drugs, nudity, fighting and weapons are banned, which seems to work as it's perfectly friendly inside. Entry is free for women. Expect plenty of gangsta rap and jangly Congolese music.

Salambo Club (Map p158; ☎ 220180; Moi Ave) Head down the steps to investigate this popular Kenyan basement bar, rinsing your eardrums with loud lingala music and your throat with cold beers.

Sky Bar & Restaurant (Map p158; ☎ 315165; Moi Ave) Not far from the tusks statue, this is a pretty seedy drinking hole with plastic chairs and lots of prostitutes. Most travellers only come here to play pool.

Entertainment

Nyali Cinemax (Map p155; ☎ 470000; info@nyalicinemax.com; Nyali Centre, Nyali Rd, Nyali; tickets KSh250-350) A plush, modern cinema complex close to Tamarind, also incorporating a casino, sports bar, cybercafé, Indian deli and restaurant, plus the Hollywood Bowl (see below).

Kenya Cinema (Map p158; ☎ 312355; Nkrumah Ave; tickets stalls/balcony KSh120/150) An appealing old movie house that screens Hindi movies regularly (usually with English subtitles) and Western blockbusters occasionally.

Hollywood Bowl (Map p155; ☎ 476056; Nyali Centre, Nyali Rd, Nyali; games KSh199-350) A typical American-style bowling alley with a range of special offers, including KSh999 family deals at weekends.

Shopping

Biashara St (see Map p158), a busy street west of the Digo Rd intersection, is Kenya's main centre for *kikoi*, brightly coloured woven sarongs for men, and *kangas*, printed wraps worn by women. *Kangas* come as a pair, one for the top half of the body and one for the bottom, and are marked with Swahili proverbs. You may need to bargain, but what you get is generally what you pay for; bank on about KSh350 for a pair of *kangas* or a *kikoi*.

Mombasa has an incredible number of skilled tailors and you can have a safari suit or shirt custom-made in a day or two for an incredible price. There are numerous choices on Nehru Rd, behind the market.

Moi Ave has loads of souvenir shops, but prices are high and every shop seems to stock exactly the same stuff. Almost every building on Ndia Kuu Rd in the Old Town is now a curio emporium! There are stalls selling sisal baskets and spices in and around the main market, but you'll rarely pay fair prices as touts loiter here and 'accompany' tourists for a commission.

Bombolulu Workshops & Cultural Centre (Map p183; ☎ 471704; www.apdkbombolulu.com; admission nonresident adult/child KSh360/180; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) This nonprofit organisation produces crafts of a very high standard and gives vocational training to of physically disabled people. Visit the workshops and showroom for free to buy jewellery, clothes, carvings and other crafts, or enter the cultural centre to tour mock-ups of traditional homesteads in the grounds, where various activities take place. The turn-off for the centre is on the left about 3km north of Nyali bridge. Bombolulu matatus run here from Msanifu Kombo St, and Bamburi services also pass the centre (KSh20).

Akamba Handicraft Industry Cooperative Society (☎ 432241; akamba@wananchi.com; Port Reitz Rd; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sun) This cooperative employs an incredible 10,000 people from the local area. It's also a nonprofit organisation and produces very fine animal woodcarving. Kwa Hola/Magongo matatus run right past the gates from the Kobil petrol station on Jomo Kenyatta Ave. Many coach tours from Mombasa also stop here.

Mombasa Tailoring Mart (Map p158; ☎ 226859; Digo Rd) This is recommended for tailored African-style shirts from around KSh1200 and full safari suits from KSh2800.

Umed Mode (Map p158; ☎ 228037; Haile Selassie Rd) Even cheaper but still reliable, if you catch the right special offer you can get a safari suit here for as little as KSh1000.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Kenya Airways (Map p158; ☎ 221251; www.kenya-airways.com; TSS Towers, Nkrumah Rd) flies between Nairobi and Mombasa at least six times daily (KSh6835, one hour). It's much cheaper if you book more than 14 days in advance. Remember to reconfirm your return seat 72 hours before travelling.

Mombasa Air Safari (☎ 433061; www.mombasaair-safari.com; Moi International Airport) flies to Malindi (US\$21, 25 minutes), Lamu (US\$90, 1¼ hours) and Amboseli (US\$220, one hour), Tsavo (US\$220, on request) and the Masai Mara (US\$229) national parks; they can also arrange complete safari packages.

BOAT

In theory it's possible to get a ride on a dhow to Pemba, Zanzibar or Dar es Salaam in

Tanzania, but it's generally more trouble than it's worth. You might have a better chance down the coast at Shimoni. There were no ferry services at the time of writing.

BUS & MATATU

Most bus offices are either on Jomo Kenyatta Ave or Abdel Nasser Rd. Services to Malindi and Lamu leave from Abdel Nasser Rd, while buses to Tanzania leave from the junction of Jomo Kenyatta Ave and Mwembe Tayari Rd. With all Kenya Bus Service (KBS) buses suspended, Metro Mombasa has largely taken over the cheap multi-stop coastal routes.

For buses and matatus to the beaches south of Mombasa, you first need to get off the island via the Likoni ferry (p168). Frequent matatus run from Nyerere Ave to the transport stand by the ferry terminal.

Nairobi

There are dozens of daily departures in either direction (mostly in the early morning and late evening). Companies include the following:

Akamba (Map p158; ☎ 490269; Jomo Kenyatta Ave)

Busscar (Map p158; ☎ 222854; Abdel Nasser Rd)

Busstar (Map p158; Nairobi ☎ 02-219525; Abdel Nasser Rd)

Coastline Safaris (Map p158; ☎ 312083; Mwembe Tayari St)

Falcon (Map p158; Nairobi ☎ 02-229662; Abdel Nasser Rd)

Mash Express (Map p158; ☎ 491955; Jomo Kenyatta Ave)

Mombasa Raha (Map p158; ☎ 225716) Offices in Abdel Nasser Rd and Jomo Kenyatta Ave.

Msafiri (Map p155; ☎ 314691; Aga Khan Rd)

Daytime services take at least six hours, and overnight trips take eight to 10 hours and include a meal break about halfway. Fares vary from KSh500 to KSh1000; Coastline is the most expensive but its luxury buses are very comfortable. Mash and Mombasa Raha also offer different classes of bus, some with snacks and DVD movies. Most companies have at least four departures daily.

All buses travel via Voi (KSh300), which is also served by frequent matatus from the Kobil petrol station on Jomo Kenyatta Ave (KSh200). Several companies have buses across the country to Kisumu and towns near Lake Victoria, but all go via Nairobi.

Heading North

Red Metro Mombasa city buses run north from the Likoni ferry, which lands roughly every 45 minutes, passing through town on Digo Rd and heading to MtWapa (KSh30, 40 minutes) or Malindi (KSh120, two hours).

There are numerous daily matatus and small lorry-buses up the coast to Malindi, leaving from in front of the Noor Mosque on Abdel Nasser Rd. Buses take up to 2½ hours (KSh100), matatus about two hours (KSh120). You can also catch an 'express' matatu to Malindi (KSh150), which takes longer to fill up but is then supposedly non-stop all the way.

Tawakal, Falcon, Mombasa Raha and TSS Express have buses to Lamu, most leaving at around 7am (report 30 minutes early) from their offices on Abdel Nasser Rd. Buses take around seven hours to reach the Lamu ferry at Mokohe (KSh400 to KSh500), stopping in Malindi (KSh150).

Heading South

Regular buses and matatus leave from the Likoni ferry terminal and travel along the southern coast.

For Tanzania, Falcon and a handful of other companies have daily departures to Tanga (KSh500, two hours) and Dar es Salaam (KSh1000, eight hours) from their offices on Jomo Kenyatta Ave, near the junction with Mwembe Tayari Rd. Dubious-looking local buses to Moshi and Arusha leave from in front of the Mwembe Tayari Health Centre in the morning or evening.

TRAIN

The popular overnight train to/from Nairobi is a great place to meet other travellers and hook up for safaris or travel on the coast. Trains leave from Mombasa at 7pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday, arriving the next day somewhere between 8.30am and 11am. The fares are KSh3160/2275 in 1st/2nd class including dinner, breakfast and bedding – reserve as far in advance as possible. The **booking office** (Map p155; ☎ 312220; ☒ 8am–5pm) is at the station in Mombasa.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

There is currently no public transport to or from the airport, so you're best taking a taxi – the fare to central Mombasa is around

KSh650. Coming from town, the usual fare is KSh800, but you'll have to bargain down from KSh1000.

If you don't have much luggage, you can take a Kwa Hola/Magongo matatu from the Kobil petrol station on Jomo Kenyatta Ave to just beyond the Akamba Handicrafts Co-operative on Airport Rd for KSh20 and walk the last few kilometres.

BOAT

The two Likoni ferries connect Mombasa Island with the southern mainland, running at frequent intervals throughout the day and night. There's a crossing roughly every 20 minutes between 5am and 12.30am, less frequently outside these times. It's free for pedestrians and KSh35 per car. To get to the jetty from the centre of town, take a Likoni matatu from Digo Rd (KSh10).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

There's not much to choose between the car-hire companies in town apart from the possible insurance excesses (see p379). Rates are the same as in Nairobi – about KSh7000 per day for a small jeep and KSh6000 per day for a saloon car. Companies with offices in central Mombasa include the following:

Avenue Motors (Map p155; ☎ 225126; Moi Ave)

Avis (Map p155; ☎ 314950; Southern House, Moi Ave)

Budget (☎ 221281; budgetmba@budget-kenya.com; Moi International Airport)

Glory Car Hire (Map p155; ☎ 313561; Moi Ave) Insurance excess KSh150,000.

Hertz (☎ 4332405; mombasa@hertz.co.ke; Moi International Airport)

MATATU

Matatus charge between KSh10 and KSh20 for short trips. For the Likoni ferry and Nakumatt supermarket, loads of matatus run south along Nyerere Ave (the main post office on Digo Rd is a good place to board them).

TAXI

Mombasa taxis are just as expensive as those in Nairobi, only harder to find. A good place to start looking is in front of Express Travel on Nkrumah Rd. Assume it'll cost KSh200 to KSh300 from the train station to the city centre. One reliable company with ranks all over town is **Kenatco** (Map p158; ☎ 227503; www.kenatco.co.ke; Ambalal House, Nkrumah Rd).

SOUTH OF MOMBASA

The main attraction south of Mombasa is the string of gorgeous beaches stretching most of the way to the Tanzanian border. However, the immaculate white sand can vanish under mounds of seaweed between March and December. Attempts at removing it have met with mixed results as the weed beds play an important role in protecting the sand. Some resorts have been left sitting high and dry as the sand has been eroded from the beaches.

Offshore are the Kisite and Mpunguti marine parks, which protect some impressive coral reefs. Scuba diving, snorkelling and glass-bottomed boat trips are all popular activities. The reef protects the beaches from sharks, so there is no danger to swimmers at the beach resorts along the coast.

Diani Beach is where you'll find most of the big resorts and hotels, but the beach is better and more tranquil at low-key Tiwi Beach, just to the north, which has several budget places to stay. Dhow trips to the mangrove islands of Funzi and Wasini near the Tanzanian border offer a chance to experience what the coast was like before the big hotels arrived.

SHELLY BEACH

Right across the water from Mombasa island, Shelly Beach isn't a bad place to swim if you just want a day trip from Mombasa, though there's lots of seaweed and it's a poor substitute for the northern and southern beaches if you actually want to spend any time here. The Shelly Beach Hotel has the best reputation for accommodation and food, but at the time of writing it was closed. To get here take a matatu from the turn-off (KSh30), just south of the Likoni ferry jetty.

SHIMBA HILLS NATIONAL RESERVE

This 320-sq-km **reserve** (adult/child US\$23/10; ☒ 6am–6pm) lies directly inland from Diani Beach. It covers a wonderful landscape of steep-sided valleys, rolling hills and lush pockets of tropical rainforest, and is rated one of the country's best surviving biodiversity zones. The hills are home to a healthy population of leopards and a vast abundance of birdlife, and you may also spot the reserve's most famous resident, the rare sable antelope. This tall, regal antelope has

a striking black-and-white coat and long, curved horns, and is now protected after the population plummeted to less than 120 animals in the 1970s.

The other main attraction here is the large community of elephants. In 2005 numbers reached an amazing 600, far too many for this tiny space. Instead of culling the herds, Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) organised an unprecedented US\$3.2 million translocation operation to reduce the pressure on the habitat, capturing no fewer than 400 elephants and moving them to Tsavo East National Park.

Most people enter the park through the main gate, about 5km beyond Kwale, but you can also enter via Shimba Gate, about 1km further on, or the Kidongo Gate at the southern end of the park (turn off the coast highway at Mwabungu, about 7km south of Ukunda). Numerous 4WD tracks connect the various observation points in the reserve; Marere Dam and the forest of Mwele Mdogo Hill are good spots for birdlife.

Highly recommended guided forest walks are run by the **Kenya Wildlife Service** (KWS; ☎ 040-4159; PO Box 30, Kwale) from the Sheldrick Falls ranger post at the southern end of the park down to scenic Sheldrick Falls on the Machenmwanwa River. Walks are free but a tip would be appropriate.

SAFETY ON THE COAST

Security along the coast has improved in recent years, but you still need to be careful around the popular resorts. Muggings are a risk on the minor roads that run between the main highway and the various beach hotels. Take a taxi or matatu, particularly at night.

All the resorts and cottages on the coast employ *askaris* (guards) to keep out undesirable, but once you're on the beach, it's easy to become a target for 'snatch and run' crimes. Leave watches, wallets, jewellery and other items of value in your room.

Beach boys – young Kenyan men who walk along the beaches selling everything from woodcarvings to marijuana as well as sexual favours – are a fact of life at the big resorts and their dogged persistence can be wearing. All you can do is refuse politely; they should move on quickly enough.

One more initiative that should be fully operational by the time you read this is the **Shimba Hills Triangular Forest** project, a community project run by the forest guides on the northeastern boundary of the reserve. This biologically rich area is being developed as an ecotourism attraction, with 90-minute tours taking in a replica *kaya* shrine, troupes of resident Sykes monkeys and over 40 species of butterfly.

Sleeping

Shimba Rainforest Lodge (☎ 040-4077; Kinango Rd; full board with shared bathroom per person US\$120) A good Treetops-style affair built from indigenous woods, with a walkway through the rainforest, a viewing platform and a bar. Children under seven years are not permitted. The floodlit waterhole here attracts quite a lot of wildlife, including leopards.

Mukurumuji Tented Camp (☎ 040-2412; www.dianihouse.com; full board per person US\$94) Set on a forested hill, this place is perched above the Mukurumuji River on the southern boundary of the park. Guests can take advantage of walking trips along the river and over to Sheldrick Falls. Transfers from Diani cost US\$10 each way, or you can take an excursion package from Diani House (☎ 040-320 3487; info@dianihouse.com) at Diani Beach for around US\$200 per person.

The **public campsite** (per person US\$8) and excellent round **bandas** (per person US\$20) are superbly located on the edge of an escarpment close to the main gate, with stunning views down to Diani Beach. Monkeys sit in the trees around the camp, and very tame zebras occasionally warm themselves by your fire. It's also possible to camp at Hunter's Camp, close to Sheldrick Falls.

Getting There & Away

You'll need a 4WD to enter the Shimba Hills National Reserve, but hitching may be possible at the main gate. From Likoni, small lorry-buses (No 34) to Kwale pass the main gate (KSh40). Most visitors come on overnight safari packages, but the Mukurumuji Tented Camp can organise transfers from Diani if you're staying there.

MWALUGANJE ELEPHANT SANCTUARY

This **sanctuary** (☎ 040-41121; nonresident adult/child US\$15/2, vehicles KSh150-500; ☎ 6am-6pm) is a good example of community-based conservation

and most local people are stakeholders in the project. It was opened in October 1995 to create a corridor along an ancient elephant migration route between the Shimba Hills National Reserve and the Mwaluganje Forest Reserve, and comprises 2400 hectares of rugged, beautiful country along the valley of the Cha Shimba River.

More than 150 elephants live in the sanctuary and you're also likely to see a large variety of other fauna and flora, including rare cycad forest. (This primitive, palm-like plant species is over 300 million years old.) There's a good information centre close to the main gate and a second ticket office on the outskirts of Kwale. Don't miss the chance to buy the unique postcards and paper goods as souvenirs for the folks back home – they're all made from recycled elephant dung!

Mwaluganje Elephant Camp (Mombasa ☎ 041-5485121; www.travellersbeach.com; per person US\$110) is a rather fine place to stay. There's a waterhole and accommodation is in permanent tents. Most travellers come here on day or overnight packages (US\$115/213 per person), which include transfers from the south coast and wildlife drives.

There's a **campsite** (per person KSh300) near the main gate and another at the southern end of the park, surrounded by an electric fence to keep curious pachyderms out.

The main entrance to the sanctuary is about 13km northeast of Shimba Hills National Reserve, on the road to Kinango. A shorter route runs from Kwale to the Golini gate, passing the Mwaluganje ticket office. It's only 5km but the track is 4WD only.

TIWI BEACH

☎ 040

This wonderfully undeveloped beach is reached by two dirt roads that wind their way through the coastal scrub about 20km south of Likoni. It's a world away from the bustle of Diani Beach, and while the seclusion does mean you have to be a bit careful walking around, it's worth it for the real sense of peace and quiet on this beautiful stretch of white sand. With the Diani reef very close to shore at this point, Tiwi is also an excellent and very safe spot for swimming.

Tiwi is a tranquil haven but it's still very popular with those in the know, so you should book well ahead if you intend to visit during the high season (Easter, August to

TIWI & DIANI BEACHES

Scale: 0 to 3 km / 0 to 2 miles

Directions: To Mombasa (11km), Kwale (26km), Shimba Hills National Reserve (31km), To Shelley Beach (8.5km), To Neptune Paradise Village (1km), Pineswood Village Resort (3km), Aqualand (3km), Kaya Kinondo (12km), To Msambweni (15km), Shimoni (40km), Lunga Lunga (60km), Tanzania

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September and Christmas and New Year). Beach boys and souvenir sellers are fairly prevalent at the southern end of Tiwi, but are almost unheard of at the northern end of the strip.

Sleeping & Eating

Unlike the all-inclusive resorts down the road at Diani, self-catering is the name of the game here, and accommodation consists mainly of individual guest cottages, some with their own restaurants and bars in case you can't be bothered cooking. The options are divided into two groups, linked by a bumpy track just inland from the beach (walking is not recommended). The northern enclave has the nicest beach, a

secluded sandy private stretch cut off from the south by the tide. It's reached by a dirt track off the main road, about 18km south of Mombasa.

Sand Island Beach Cottages (☎ 3300043; www.sandislandtiwi.com; cottages low season KSh2750-5500, high season KSh3000-6050) A lively posse of dogs enhances the warm welcome you'll get at these lovely colonial-style cottages, set in a tidy garden. Cottages sleep up to seven people; linen, mosquito nets and fans are all provided, there's an in-house cook who can prepare meals for you, and fresh fruit is available from the orchard. Nearby Sand Island is a lovely place to relax and catch some sun.

Maweni Beach Cottages (☎ 3300012; www.maweni-beach.com; cottages low season KSh2000-4700, high season

KSh2500-5200) Owned by the Tiwi Beach Resort, this place consists of attractive *makuti*-roofed cottages overlooking a peaceful cove, with a choice of garden or sea views. There's no direct beach frontage but facilities are good and you definitely feel like you're getting your money's worth. High-flyers can opt for a posh 'executive' cottage (low/high season KSh12,000/10,000).

Moonlight Bay Cottages (☎ 3300040; cottages low season KSh3000-5400, high season KSh3400-6200) Just next door to Sand Island, this is a decent plot with well-equipped one- to three-bedroom cottages and a shady open-air bar-restaurant area. The larger houses have nice big dining rooms for more private socialising.

Capricho Beach Cottages (☎ 3300011; capricho.tiwiibeach.com; cottages low season €22.50-39, high season €25.50-49; 📍) A peaceful and well-run operation that caters well for families, maintaining a very pleasant garden around the airy thatched cottages. Watch out for hidden costs, though – almost everything, from linen to use of the pool, is chargeable.

The other group of places is about 2km further south, near the village of Tiwi.

Coral Cove Cottages (☎ 3205195; coralcove.tiwiibeach.com; cottages KSh3500-5200) A fantastically friendly place, with tame monkeys, cats, dogs, geese and ducks and a wide variety of comfy, nicely decorated cottages sleeping one to five people. The larger cottages have kitchens and cooks/cleaners can be hired for KSh500 per day. It's a fine place to stay and the owners go out of their way to help their guests.

Twiga Lodge (☎ 3205126; campsites KSh200, s/d KSh800/1500, cottages KSh1500) The only really backpacker-oriented place in Tiwi, Twiga is a good place to meet younger independent travellers. Almost everyone ends up in the bar-restaurant in the evenings, including guests from Coral Cove and Cliff Beach Villas. Accommodation runs the gamut from the beachfront campsite and basic four-bed cottages to the superior 'show rooms' (bed and breakfast KSh3000 to KSh4500). There's also a lot of building and renovation work going on. Local taxi drivers tout quite heavily for this place, and there always seems to be a crowd of hangers-on; you'd be sensible not to leave valuables lying around.

Tiwi Beach Resort (☎ 3202801; www.tiwiibeachresort.com; s/d half board low season US\$46/79, high season US\$54/96; 📍 📍 📍) This package-holiday complex is the diametric opposite of the

little family-run concerns here, with long whitewashed accommodation blocks, three restaurants, a nightclub, a branch of Somak Travel, palm trees galore and a rather snazzy pool design using linking canals and channels. Full-board and all-inclusive rates are also available.

Cliff Beach Villas (☎ 0721-409068; cottages per person KSh700; 📍) Good-value but unspectacular accommodation perched on a small coral cliff above the beach. The tiny pool's a plus, but there's no direct beach access and the cottages don't have cooking facilities.

Self-caterers can pick up supplies from the **Nagina supermarket** (A14 Hwy) and the *duka* (small shop) near the turn-off to the Tiwi Beach Hotel. Men on bicycles also tour the cottage complexes during the day selling fruit, vegetables and fresh fish.

Getting There & Away

Buses and matatus on the Likoni-Ukunda road can drop you at the start of either track down to Tiwi (KSh30) – keep an eye out for the signs to Capricho Beach Cottages or Tiwi Beach Resort. The southern turn-off by the supermarket, known locally as Tiwi 'spot', is much easier to find.

Although it's only 3.5km to the beach, both access roads are notorious for muggings so take a taxi (KSh300) or hang around for a lift. If you're heading back to the highway, any of the places listed can call ahead for a cab.

DIANI BEACH

☎ 040

As the principal package resort on the southern coast, Diani Beach tends to inspire mixed feelings among visitors. There's certainly not much that's Kenyan about the massive hotel complexes that line the long beach, but the setting as a whole is definitely more exotic than your average Mediterranean holiday strip, the inland national parks and southern islands are within easy reach and the number of activities on offer should be enough to keep even the most cynical tourist from grumbling. Besides, if you're just out for a drink, a laugh and a bit of time out between 'serious' travel, the atmosphere here is as good as you'll find anywhere on the coast, particularly if you get involved in socialising with the sizeable expat population as well as the transitory

holiday crowds. One thing Diani won't apologise for is being good, straightforward fun, and you really can't knock it for that.

As at Tiwi Beach, make advance bookings for any of the cheaper places at Diani during the high season. If you intend to stay for some time and are part of a big group, scan the ads beside the road and in the shopping centres to secure a cheap private lease at one of the beach houses along the strip. Good package deals are often available at travel agencies.

Orientation

The town of Ukunda, which is on the main Mombasa-Tanzania road, is the turn-off point for Diani Beach. In the town you will find a post office, a bank and several shops, as well as a number of basic lodging houses and restaurants. From there, a tarmac road runs about 2.5km to a T-junction with the beach road, where you'll find everything Diani has to offer.

Information

EMERGENCY

Diani Beach Hospital (☎ 3202435; www.dianibeachhospital.com; 🕒 24hr)

Police (☎ 3202121, 3202229; Ukunda)

INTERNET ACCESS

CMS Cybercafé (Palm Ave, Ukunda; per min KSh1.50;

🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-7pm Sun)

Hot Gossip (☎ 3203307; wellconnectednet@hotmailgossip.co.ke; Legend Casino Complex; per min KSh5; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Also offers international phone and fax services.

TechnoSoft (☎ 3203386; diani@technosoftkenya.com; Barclays Centre, Diani Beach Rd; per min KSh5)

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.dianibeach.com Includes information on Tiwi Beach and Funzi Island.

MONEY

Barclays Bank (☎ 3202448; Barclays Centre) ATM accepts Visa, MasterCard and Cirrus.

Diani Forex Bureau (☎ 3203595)

Kenya Commercial Bank (☎ 3202197; Ukunda) ATM accepts Visa.

Postbank (Diani shopping centre)

POST

Diani Beach post office (Diani Beach Rd)

Ukunda post office (Ukunda)

TOURIST INFORMATION

i-Point (☎ 3202234; Barclays Centre; 🕒 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) Private information office with plenty of brochures. Also sells the slightly dated *Diani Beach Tourist-Guide* (KSh50).

Marine iCenter (Diani Beach shopping centre; 🕒 9am-1pm Mon-Sat, 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Information on diving and water sports in the area.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Intra Safaris (☎ 3202630; Diani Beach Rd)

Dangers & Annoyances

Crime is an occasional problem at Diani; see p169 for more information. Souvenir sellers around the shopping centres are an everyday nuisance, engaging you in 'friendly' conversation to try and persuade you to visit their stalls; if that fails they may ask for money, food, a newspaper or even your socks!

Sights

As a beach resort Diani isn't exactly geared towards cultural tourism, but there are a few interesting spots worth seeking out.

The **Colobus Trust** (☎ 3203519; www.colobustrust.org; tours KSh500; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Sat), a conservation project aimed at protecting Diani's population of endangered colobus monkeys (see boxed text on p174), offers informative guided walks from its research station off the southern part of Diani Beach Rd. They provide an excellent introduction to the coral rainforest habitat and a good chance of seeing other indigenous wildlife alongside the resident monkeys.

Inaugurated in 2001, **Kaya Kinondo** (☎ 0722-344426; kayakinondo@hotmailgossip.co.ke) is a superb grass-roots ecotourism project south of Diani. Guided walks take you through the *kaya* itself, sacred to the Digo people, and include visits to a traditional village, a tribal medicine man and the area's main primary school. The local community is involved at every level, managing the conservation process, training guides and producing crafts and other goods for sale to visitors. Projects like this are springing up all over Kenya, and should definitely be supported.

At the far northern end of the beach road strip, the 16th-century **Kongo Mosque** is the last surviving relic of the ancient Swahili civilisations that once controlled the coast here, and is one of a tiny handful of traditional coral mosques still in use in Kenya.

The land, which also encompasses its own *kaya*, was sold for development some years ago, but the resulting furore saw the sale overturned and the mosque is now a listed monument. It's an interesting squat building with a unique barrel-vaulted design.

If you're short of things to do in Ukunda, you could visit the **Diani Falconry** (☎ 0733-755791; Ukunda; adult/child KSh300/150; 🕒 8am-6pm), behind the Kenya Commercial Bank.

Activities

There's a championship-level **golf course** at the Leisure Lodge Beach Resort (see p176). It's open to nonguests for KSh3250 per day, and caddies and clubs can be hired for around KSh2000 for 18 holes. Minimum handicaps and dress code apply. The club also hosts the annual Diani Beach Masters tournament.

Camel rides are available along the beach for around KSh500 per hour (negotiable).

DIVING

All the big resorts either have their own dive schools or work with a local operator. Rates are fairly standard – Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) open-water courses cost €490, and reef trips with two dives cost €90. Most dive sites here are under 29m and there's even a purposely sunk shipwreck, the 15m former fishing boat MFV *Alpha Fungu*, at 28m.

The following are the main operators:

Diani Marine (☎ 3203450; www.dianimarine.com; Diani Marine Village) Very professional German-run centre with its own accommodation (see opposite).

Diving The Crab (☎ 3202003; www.divingthecrab.com; Nomads Beach Hotel) The most commonly used outfit for the big hotels. Offers the cheapest open-water course (€350).

SX Scuba (☎ 3202719; www.southerncrossscuba.com; Aqualand) An offshoot of Southern Cross Safaris.

WATER SPORTS

With such a long stretch of beach, water sports are unsurprisingly popular, and everything from banana boats to jet skis are on offer. Kitesurfing seems to be the latest craze; full-day courses start around €180. As with diving, all the big hotels either have their own equipment (for common activities such as snorkelling and windsurfing) or arrange bookings with local firms.

Main operators:

H20 Extreme (☎ 0721-495876; www.h20-extreme.com; Nomads Beach Hotel)

Wet & Wild (☎ 0722-705350; www.wetandwilddiani.com; Aqualand)

Tours

Several companies offer dhow trips further down the coast to Funzi (p179) and Wasini Islands (p179). Day safaris to Shimba Hills National Reserve or Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary typically cost around US\$100 including lunch and park entry fees; **Ketty Tours**

(☎ 3203582; Diani shopping centre) is a reliable operator. Cheaper trips may be available with smaller safari companies at Diani.

Festivals & Events

Diani Rules (www.dianirules.com) is an entertaining charity sports tournament in aid of the Kwale District Eye Centre, held at the Pine-wood Village resort on the first weekend of June. It's more of an expat event than a tourist attraction, but if you're staying locally there's every chance you'll be invited along or even asked to join a team. Games include football (played with a rugby ball), blindfold target throwing and 'tenfoot' plank walking; the real endurance event, though, is the three days of partying that accompanies proceedings...

Sleeping BUDGET

Unless you're travelling in a group, Diani offers very few budget options. Beach access can be a problem as few of the big hotels will let nonguests walk through their compounds – your best bet is the path by Diani Beach Campsite.

Corner Guest House (☎ 3203355; Ukunda; s/d with shared bathroom KSh400/500) If you really need to sleep cheap, Ukunda's your only option, and this is the best of a number of basic lodgings near the Diani junction. Rooms are simple but clean, with fans and piped music until midnight. Add KSh50 from November to March. Breakfast is available for KSh200.

Diani Beach Campsite & Cottages (☎ 3203192; dianicampsite@yahoo.com; campsites low/high season KSh300/400, cottages low season KSh1500-2500, high season KSh3000-6000) The only budget choice anywhere near the beach, although unless you're camping, even the low-season prices are steep. The tent space is a small, simple lawn site with toilets and an eating area; tent hire costs an extra KSh200 (KSh100 in low season). The compact cottages sleep up to four people.

Glory Palace Hotel (☎ 3203392; Palm Ave; low season s KSh800, d KSh1200-2000, tr 2000, high season s KSh1000, d KSh2000-3000, tr KSh2500; 🍷 🍷) Not exactly a bargain but the cheapest hotel option for solo travellers, and at least you get breakfast, security and use of the swimming pool for your money. With constant matatus passing by, it's easy to get to the beach strip or the Ukunda transport stage.

Eden Drops B&B (☎ 0720-987174; edendrops@yahoo.com; Palm Ave; s/d KSh1200/1500) Just opposite Glory Palace, this is another mid-quality place pushed into the budget category by a lack of alternatives. The atmosphere's nicer and the garden restaurant's lovely, but you don't get a pool.

MIDRANGE

All of Diani's other accommodation is spread out along the beach road. South of the T-junction from Ukunda most places front directly onto the beach; the further north you go, the steeper the slope down to the sand.

Unless otherwise indicated, all places in this category are self-catering.

North of Ukunda Junction

Kijiji Cottages (☎ 3300035; forbes@wananchi.com; cottages KSh5000-7000; 🍷) These characterful cottages, which sleep up to five people, are set along paths in their own garden complex, giving them an exclusive feel. The tiled floors, rock-effect showers and sea-facing balconies are nice touches; even better, the secluded beach is often cut off from the beach boys by the tide. Rates drop by KSh1000 in May and June but almost double over Christmas and New Year. Apparently the British owners may be selling up, so management could change in the future.

Warandale Cottages (☎ 3202187; cottages low season KSh2500-7000, high season KSh3500-10,000; 🍷) Just next door to Kijiji, this is a similarly nice selection of one- to three-bedroom bungalows.

Coral Beach Cottages (☎ 3202205; cottages low season KSh4000-5000, high season KSh7000-10,000) Just north of the junction, this has large, well-appointed cottages set in a garden. The atmosphere is pleasant and relaxed. The original branch of the African Pot restaurant (see p177) is at the entrance gate.

South of Ukunda Junction

Diani Marine Village (☎ 3202367; www.dianimarine.com; s/d low season €25/30, high season €30/35) Although it's primarily a dive resort, the huge guest rooms here are very appealing, with fans, stone floors and four-poster mosquito nets. Unlike most places in this class it's not self-catering – rates include breakfast, and other meals are also available.

Vindigo Cottages (☎ 3202192; vindigocottages@kenyaweb.com; cottages low season KSh1500-3500, high

COLOBUS CLIMBING FRAMES

As your matatu barrels along Diani Beach Rd, you might be surprised to notice monkeys using rope ladders overhead, crossing the road with practised ease several feet above the traffic. This initiative was the founding project of the Colobus Trust, established in 1997 to try to combat the high monkey mortality rate.

The main victim of roadkill was the Angolan black-and-white colobus monkey (*Colobus angolensis palliatus*), a once-common species now restricted to a few isolated pockets of forest south of Mombasa. As well as being quite clumsy beasts on the ground, colobus monkeys will only eat the leaves of certain coastal trees and so are particularly vulnerable to habitat destruction, another big problem in this area.

Staffed by international volunteers, the Colobus Trust has set up 23 'colobridges' between the trees lining Diani Beach Rd, allowing the monkeys to safely cross from one side to the other. With 150,000 recorded crossings per year, the scheme seems to be working, and there are now believed to be around 450 colobus here.

Of course, in such a developed area traffic is just one hazard, and the biggest threat now facing the local primates comes from uninsulated power lines, which kill or maim dozens of monkeys every year. The Trust is working with the power company to cut back vegetation around these lines, and also runs wildlife education and awareness programs for local people and resort staff. Progress is good, but the colobus are by no means out of the woods just yet.

season KSh2000-4000) A rather sweet collection of little orange cottages sloping down to the sea, each sleeping between two and eight people. There are no fans but the sea breeze keeps you cool, and all the cottages have nets. The quirky cottage names add to the charm, though we'd rather sleep in a Dhow than a Lobster Pot.

Sands at Nomads (☎ 3203312; www.thesandsatnomad.com; s/d from US\$100/150, bandas/cottages per person from €24/35) This is a relaxed, informal place right on the beach, catering mainly for divers and water-sports fans and made up of comfortable concrete cottages (up to four people) and thatched twin-bed bandas on the edge of the beach. The attractive grounds are shaded by palms, and the beach bar-restaurant is a local favourite. There are no kitchen facilities for guests here; rates include breakfast.

Diani Beachalets (☎ 3202180; dianibeachalets@wananchi.com; bandas per person KSh550, cottages low season KSh900-2500, high season KSh1300-3400) Towards the southern end of the strip, this place is a little old but there's plenty of space. The accommodation options vary hugely, from two-person bandas with shared facilities to four-bedroom seafront cottages with kitchen. As well as marauding monkeys, a resident army of lethargic cats occupies the front lawn for most of the day.

Kennaway (☎ 3202070; exclusive hire KSh15,000) One of a number of private houses in this area offering rental accommodation for visitors, with space for up to 10 people in attractive rooms. The owners are well clued-up about the local scene.

Wayside Apartments (☎ 3203119; www.kenyaurlaub.de in German; apt per person per week €176; 📞) A neat, well-run complex of smart modern apartments for longer stays, opposite the derelict Tradewinds Hotel. Prices include transfers from Mombasa; bed and breakfast, half-board and all-inclusive rates are also available.

TOP END

If you do have money to spend, Diani is amply stocked with fine properties: there are at least 13 flashy resort complexes spread out along the beach strip. The hotels here cater mostly to European package tourists, offering restaurants, bars, discos, pools, water sports and 'animations' – song-and-dance extravaganzas loosely based on African dances. Most hotels have desks for

tours and activities in the area (see p174). Unless otherwise stated, prices listed are all-inclusive rates for standard rooms. Note that many of these places close for renovation between May and June.

North of Ukunda Junction

Diani Reef Beach Resort (☎ 3202723; www.dianireef.com; half board s/d low season from US\$100/160, high season from US\$190/250; 📞 📺 📶 🛏) One of the sharpest resorts on the south coast, Diani Reef is well executed in every respect and boasts excellent facilities, including an Asian restaurant (complete with teppanyaki tables), health club, casino, water slide, six bars, three presidential suites, an open-air disco and even a 'wedding island' in the pool. The rooms themselves are nicely laid out, with spotless bathrooms and ethernet connections, and there's good disabled access. If you're in reception, look down to see possibly the coolest floor on the coast!

Indian Ocean Beach Club (☎ 3203730; www.jacarandahotels.com; full board s/d low season from US\$96/150, high season from US\$130/200; 📞 📺 📶 🛏) A tasteful, low-key hotel in a Moorish style, near the mouth of the Mwachema River and the Kongo mosque. This is one of the more sensitively designed places, consisting of 100 well-spaced cottage-style rooms with some nice wicker features and other Swahili touches. Rooms have minibars and baths, and some are specially equipped for disabled guests.

Leopard Beach Resort (☎ 3202721; www.leopardbeachhotel.com; half board s/d low season from US\$60/110, high season from US\$105/150; 📞 📺 📶 🛏) Perched on some small cliffs above the ocean, Leopard Beach's compound of low *makuti*-thatched buildings, divided by ponds and pools, is tipped by locals as one of the area's top choices. 'We welcome you with both hands where lobsters meet leopards' must score points as one of the strangest slogans on the strip.

Leisure Lodge Beach Resort (☎ 3203624; www.leisurelodgebeachresort.com; s/d low season from €64/100, high season from €110/144; 📞 📺 📶 🛏) Bring your sense of direction if you want to stay here: the complex is so vast it's practically a small town in its own right, and even the staff sometimes have to consult the handy path-side maps to check where they're going! The sports facilities are particularly good and include an 18-hole golf course across the road (see p174). There is some disabled access.

South of Ukunda Junction

Shaanti Holistic Health Retreat (☎ 3202064; shaantihr@yahoo.co.uk; low season s KSh7000-7900, d KSh12,200-13,700, high season s KSh11,500-13,300, d KSh19,400-22,300; 📞 📺 📶 🛏) If you don't have any hippy in you, get some fast – this brand-new Ayurvedic sanctuary is the antithesis of the usual resort blocks, appealing to New Agers and pleasure seekers alike. There are just eight rooms, designed and decorated in an Indian-influenced sandstone style, plus a tower restaurant offering excellent vegetarian food, a relaxation room with enticing divans, a yoga platform, a Jacuzzi with sea view and several massage bandas right on the beach. Rates include the full day's yoga spa program; other packages are available, and nonguests can also visit for the various classes and treatments. It's enough to make even the most hardened sceptic melt in the hand.

Forest Dream Cottages (☎ 3203224; www.forestdreamcottages.com; cottages €124-290; 📞 📺 📶 🛏) If you're not bothered about the beach, Forest Dream is a fantastic luxury choice, set in an actual forest reserve. The six thatched houses are set up to an excellent standard, sleeping between four and 12 people, and there's even an amazing Sultan's Palace building for a taste of the regal life. Koi ponds, Jacuzzis and fully fitted kitchens are just some of the other treats on offer.

Pinewood Village Resort (☎ 3203720; www.pinewood-village.com; half board s/d US\$79/112, ste US\$164; 📞 📺 📶 🛏) On Galu Beach, down past the far end of the Diani strip, this tasteful, comprehensively equipped villa resort is run by Southern Cross Safaris. The fancy suites come with personal chefs, so you can dictate your own meal times! The Aqualand water-sports centre (☎ 3202719) is one of the best in the area.

Neptune Paradise Village (☎ 3203061; www.neptunehotels.com; s/d low season KSh5000/7600, high season KSh6000/9000; 📞 📺 📶 🛏) At the Galu Beach end of Diani Beach Rd, Neptune has rooms in two-storey *makuti*-thatched huts spread over two adjoining sites. There are several large pools, restaurants and bars down by the beach. Superior rooms are more spacious and generally nicer.

African Sea Lodge (☎ 3202021; ahl@africaonline.co.ke; s/d low season €100/174, high season €120/210; 📞 📺 📶 🛏) Arguably the best of the three hotels owned by the Alliance group here, though none of them are exactly sloppy.

Diani Sea Resort (☎ 3203081; dianisea@africaonline.co.ke; s/d low season €54/84, high season €75/114; 📞 📺 📶 🛏) This is an attractive red-tiled place tucked away behind a shopping arcade. There are nice stepped gardens and the atmosphere is peaceful and unhurried, although the rooms don't quite live up to the layout.

The other two Alliance properties, operating on a half-board basis, are **Jadini Beach Hotel** (☎ 3203081; s/d low season €77/134, high season €92/162) and **Safari Beach Hotel** (☎ 3202726; s/d low season €83/144, high season €99/174).

Eating

African Pot Restaurant (☎ 3203890; Coral Beach Cottages; mains KSh200-220) Meals here work to a simple formula: you order your meat (chicken, beef or goat), then choose from one of five or six ways to have it prepared and add any accompaniments you like. The house speciality, *karanga*, a tomato-based sauce with garlic, coriander and onions cooked in a real earthenware pot, is highly recommended.

African Pot II (☎ 3202882; Palm Ave; 📞) African Pot's open-air sister restaurant, half-way down the Ukunda road, has an identical menu but also offers a pool hall (the kind with balls) and an actual pool (the kind with water).

Ali Barbour's Cave Restaurant (☎ 3202033; www.georgebarbour.com; mains KSh550-900; 📞 from 7pm) This is a very sophisticated semi-open restaurant, built into a cave near the Diani Sea Resort. Seafood is the main attraction, with lobster available for KSh1800. Dining under the stars amid the jagged coral and fairy lights is quite an experience, but you should use the courtesy bus or take a taxi to/from the door as people have been mugged walking down the track.

Forty Thieves Beach Bar (☎ 3203419; mains KSh280-500) Part of the Ali Barbour empire, this has a good standard menu of grills and international dishes, plus regular specials like pub grub on Friday and a curry buffet on Sunday (KSh350). You can hire plastic 'topper' boats here, and the bar is a local institution (see p178).

Galaxy Chinese Restaurant (☎ 3202529; Diani Complex; mains KSh305-615; 📞 noon-6.30pm) A smart Chinese restaurant with an outdoor 'island' pavilion bar and seating area. Duck will set you back KSh1350, while lobster costs KSh200 per 100g; at the other end of the

scale there's a good-value buffet (adult/child KSh500/200). A courtesy bus is available.

Shan-e-Punjab Restaurant (☎ 3202116; Diani Complex; mains KSh300-600) A very popular Indian restaurant opposite the Diani Reef Beach Resort. A wide range of curries are on offer, including some vegetarian options. The owners also run the supermarket of the same name in the Diani Complex.

Globe International Restaurant (☎ 0733-740938; Diani Beach shopping centre; mains KSh380-850) As the name suggests, the Globe spans quite a number of far-flung cuisines, though much of the emphasis is on good old British cooking. Try the lamb with mint sauce (KSh480).

Rongai Fast Food (Palm Ave, Ukunda) Head for the painted flames to sample this local butchery restaurant, highly recommended for *nyama choma*. You can also buy fresh meat for beach barbecues here.

Self-caterers can stock up at the supermarkets in Diani's shopping centres, or at any of the shops, *dukas* and market stalls in Ukunda.

Drinking & Entertainment

Forty Thieves Beach Bar (☎ 3203419) Of all the phrases you might hear in Diani, 'Meet you at Forty's?' is probably the most common, and the most welcome – this is easily the best bar on the strip, frequented on a daily basis by a crowd of expats and regulars known affectionately as the Reprobates. Wednesday, Friday and Saturday are disco nights, Tuesday and Thursday are movie nights, there are live bands on Sunday afternoons and pub quizzes are held once a month. It's open until the last guest leaves, ie pretty damn late.

Shakatak (☎ 3203124) Essentially the only full-on nightclub in Diani not attached to a hotel, Shakatak is quite hilariously seedy, but can be fun once you know what to expect. Like most big Kenyan clubs, food is served at all hours.

Kim4Love (www.kim4love.com) Not a venue but a person, this local DJ and musician puts on regular summer concerts and events to promote tourism. They're usually held at Kim's own beach bar, by the former Two Fishes hotel – look out for the sign along Diani Beach Rd.

Ukunda has a handful of real locals' bars on the main road where you can find African

music and (unfortunately) lots of prostitutes. Options include the **New Dido Pub** (A14 Hwy) and **Germany Sports Pub** (A14 Hwy).

Getting There & Around

AIR

Mombasa Air Safari's routes to Lamu and the southern national parks originate in Diani, passing through Mombasa (see p167). **Aeronav** (☎ 3202655; Diani shopping centre) offers scheduled flights to Lamu and the Masai Mara, also via Mombasa.

BUS & MATATU

Numerous matatus run south from the Likoni ferry directly to Ukunda (KSh50, 30 minutes) and onwards to Msambweni and Lunga Lunga. From the Diani junction in Ukunda, matatus run down to the beach all day for KSh20; check before boarding to see if it's a Reef service (heading north along the strip, then south) or a Neptune one (south beach only).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Fun Sports Centre (☎ 0734-769457) rents out motorbikes for KSh2500 per day, and quad bikes for KSh1000 per hour or KSh6000 per day. A valid passport, drivers licence and a KSh2000 deposit are required to be able to rent a vehicle; note that you can't take them onto the beach.

Motorcycles can be hired from **Fredlink Tours** (☎ 3202647; www.motorbike-safari.com; Diani Plaza). With the first 100km included, 350cc trail bikes cost KSh2700 per day and Yamaha scooters cost KSh1500. You can have unlimited mileage for an extra KSh1200. A full motorcycle licence, passport and credit card or cash deposit are required for rental. The company also arranges motorcycle safaris (see p70).

Car rental firms:

Glory Car Hire (☎ 3203076; Diani Beach shopping centre)

Leisure Car Hire (☎ 3203225; Diani Sea Resort)

TAXI

Taxis hang around Ukunda junction and all the main shopping centres; most hotels and restaurants will also have a couple waiting at night. Fares should be between KSh150 and 650, depending on distance. You can also take a smiley yellow tuk-tuk from **Mobby Safaris** (☎ 0734-700700).

BETWEEN DIANI BEACH & FUNZI ISLAND

About 20km south of Ukunda, at the tip of a mangrove peninsula, is gorgeous **Chale Island**, a tropical getaway with a fine beach, sulphur springs and supposedly therapeutic mud. Most visitors come here on health retreats at the upmarket resort of **Chale Paradise Island** (☎ 040-3203235; www.chaleislandparadise.com; office Diani Bazaar, Diani Beach; per person low/high season US\$70/100). A full course of beauty treatments using the famous 'Fangomud' is available for US\$60 per day, including massage and a vitamin cocktail. Transfers from Diani cost KSh720.

A few kilometres further south, down another dirt track branching off the main road, is Gazi Beach, where you'll find **Seahorse Safaris** (☎ 0733-319116; seahorse@swiftkenya.com; office Diani Beach shopping centre, Diani Beach). This company offers dhow trips to nearby Bird Island, including a seafood lunch, snorkelling and a guided walk (US\$65 from Gazi, US\$70 with transfers from south-coast hotels). There are also powerboat trips to Kisite Marine National Park (p180) with lunch and snorkelling for US\$70 (US\$80 from south-coast hotels).

FUNZI ISLAND

Funzi is a small mangrove island about 35km south of Diani, and has only really appeared on the tourist map over the last few years. Like Wasini to the south, it's mainly popular with groups and day-trippers, so if you arrive under your own steam you'll find a tranquil idyll far removed from the usual resort atmosphere.

Boat tours here are becoming increasingly popular, and crocodiles and dolphins can be spotted in the inlets. Arranging your own boat trip is a breeze if you're in a group: boatmen in the mainland village of **Bodo**, west of Funzi, ask around KSh5000 per day per boat (up to eight people), or you can negotiate individual dolphin-spotting trips and crocodile-spotting expeditions up the Ramisi River. The tidal sandbar in the main bay is a common stopping point, especially around sunset, and you may even be able to have dinner on it!

Funzi Sea Adventures (☎ 0722-762656; funzicamp@africaonline.co.ke; office Diani Villas, Diani Beach) runs more luxurious dhow trips to Funzi Island and up the Ramisi River. Trips cost US\$70 including food, drink and transfers, or US\$80

if you're staying north of Mombasa. Children are half-price. Staying overnight at their island camp with full board costs US\$140 per person.

If you arrive independently, you can generally count on the permanent presence of an accompanying guide from the moment you land, which is actually no bad thing, as they'll show you round the island and can arrange accommodation in the village for around KSh500 to KSh700, with meals available for a further KSh500 (all negotiable).

To get here, take a matatu from Ukunda towards Lunga Lunga and ask for the Bodo turn-off (KSh100). The village is another 2.5km along a sandy track – you can take a *boda-boda* (bicycle taxi), though they'll try and charge you KSh100, or get someone to show you the way. Try to arrive before 9am if you're planning a boat trip. On the way out, northbound matatus are often full when they pass the turn, but there are plenty of them so you shouldn't be stuck for long.

SHIMONI & WASINI ISLAND

☎ 040

The village of Shimoni sits at the tip of a peninsula about 76km south of Likoni. Dhow trips to Wasini Island and Kisite Marine National Park have become a big industry here, and every morning in high season a convoy of coaches arrives carrying tourists from the resorts at Diani Beach. The trips are well run, but you can easily organise your own trip directly with the boatmen.

It's worth waiting until the day-trippers have gone home to explore Shimoni, as the dusty streets have their own unique atmosphere outside tourist times. Villagers have opened up the old **slave caves** (adult/child KSh100/25; ☎ 8.30-10.30am & 1.30-6pm) as a tourist attraction, with a custodian who'll take you around the dank caverns to illustrate this little-discussed part of East African history. Actual evidence that slaves were kept here is a little thin, but as the pile of empty votive rosewater bottles indicates, even today the site definitely has significance for more superstitious locals.

Wasini Island, too, becomes even more appealing in the peace of the evening. There are no roads or running water and the only electricity comes from generators. There are several worthwhile things to see, including some ancient **Swahili ruins** and the **coral gardens** (adult/child KSh100/20), a bizarre landscape

of exposed coral reefs with a boardwalk for viewing. Most people come here on organised dhow trips from Diani.

Kisite Marine National Park

Just off the south coast of Wasini Island, this **marine park** (adult/child US\$5/2) is one of the best in Kenya, also incorporating the **Mpunguti Marine National Reserve**. The park covers 28 sq km of pristine coral reefs and offers excellent diving and snorkelling. You have a reasonable chance of seeing dolphins in the Shimoni Channel, and humpback whales are sometimes spotted between August and October.

There are various organised trips to the marine park (see p174) but these tend to be outside ventures and don't always contribute a great deal to the local community. It's easy to organise your own boat trip with a local captain – the going rate is KSh1500 per person or KSh6000 per boat, including lunch and a walk in the coral gardens on Wasini Island. Masks and snorkels can be hired for KSh200 (fins are discouraged as they may damage the reef).

A good place to start looking for a boatman is at the office of **KWS** (☎ 52027; 🕒 6am–6pm), which is about 200m south of the main pier, where you'll also have to come to pay the entry fee.

The best time to dive and snorkel is between October and March. Avoid diving in June, July and August because of rough seas, silt and poor visibility.

Activities

SNORKELLING & DIVING

Masks and snorkels are available for rent on the beach for KSh100. You'll need a boat to get out to the reef. Most trips to the park provide their own snorkelling gear. Certified divers can take dives with local tour companies (see right), or more expensively at Coral Reef Lodge or Pemba Channel Fishing Club (opposite). Dive courses and longer scuba safaris are also possible in the Pemba Channel.

DEEP-SEA FISHING

The Pemba Channel is famous for deep-sea fishing, and Pemba Channel Fishing Club (opposite) holds over 50% of Kenya's marlin-fishing records. Boats cost from US\$500 for nine hours (valid for up to four fishers).

This company promotes tag and release, which we strongly encourage (see p200).

Tours

Various companies offer organised dhow tours for snorkelling, all leaving Shimoni by 9am. Transfers from north- and south-coast hotels are available (US\$10 to US\$20), and longer trips with overnight stays can also be arranged. Children pay half the adult price. Certified divers can take one/two scuba dives for an extra US\$30/50 with any of these companies.

The Friends of Kenyan Dolphins have set up the **Dolphin Dhow** (☎ 52255, office 3202144; www.dolphindhow.com; office Barclays Centre, Diani Beach), a dolphin-spotting and snorkelling trip around Wasini Island. The dhow leaves from Shimoni jetty at 8.45am daily and costs US\$75. The price includes snorkelling equipment, drinks, a Swahili seafood lunch and the marine park fees.

Kisite Dhow Tours (☎ 3202331; www.wasini-island.com; office Jadini Beach Hotel, Diani Beach) runs popular ecotourist snorkelling trips to the marine park, including a nature walk on Wasini and a very good seafood lunch at Charlie Claw's Original Wasini Island Restaurant. Trips cost US\$55 from Shimoni jetty, or US\$75 with breakfast, drinks and visits to the coral gardens and slave caves.

Pilli-Pipa (☎ 3202401; www.pillipipa.com; office Colliers Centre, Diani Beach) is another expat-owned company offering full-day trips. The price is US\$80 from Shimoni, including lunch, park fees, snorkelling and drinks. Diving trips are available at US\$130/145 for one/two dives.

Paradise Divers (☎ 3202740; www.paradisedivers.net; office Barclays Centre, Diani Beach), also based in Diani, offers similar trips for US\$80.

Sleeping & Eating

Mpunguti Lodge (☎ 52288; Wasini Island; campsites KSh300, half board r with shared bathroom per person KSh1200) This is the only accommodation in Wasini village, run by local character Masood Abdullah and his many nephews. The rooms are uncomplicated, with mosquito nets and small verandas; there is running water but it's collected in rain barrels and doesn't always look too pleasant! The food here is excellent, and it's a common lunch stop for boat trips. You'll need to bring your own towel, soap and any alcoholic drinks from the mainland.

Camp Eden (KWS ☎ 52027; Shimoni; campsites adult/child US\$8/5, bandas per person US\$10) Behind KWS headquarters, this camping ground offers accommodation with 'birdsong and insect noise' in the tropical forest south of the main jetty. The airy bandas are well maintained and have mosquito nets. There's a campsite, a covered cooking area, pit toilets and showers. It's easiest to bring supplies from Mombasa or Ukunda.

Pemba Channel Fishing Club (☎ 0722-205020; www.pembachannel.com; Shimoni; full board per person low season US\$85, high season US\$150; 🍷) A proper slice of elegant colonial style, with a handful of airy cottages set around a swimming pool and three big daf dogs to make you feel welcome. Deep-sea fishing is almost mandatory (see opposite) and the trophy-studded restaurant and bar is excellent. Nonguests are welcome but the cooks need prior warning.

Coral Reef Lodge (☎ 52015; www.oneearthsafaris.com; Shimoni; per person low season US\$52-64, high season US\$80-104; 🍷) A pleasant resort-type place on a bluff overlooking the Shimoni Channel. Facilities include a pool table, a small TV room and a roof terrace with great bay views. The Arabic-style cottages are open-plan and surround a pool, and there's a restaurant overlooking the ocean, but it can seem a little lonely out of season.

Betty's Camp (☎ 0720-900771; www.bettys-camp.com; Shimoni; bungalows US\$75, r/ste US\$95/120; 🍷) Not really what you'd call a campsite, this Swiss-owned luxury complex right on the waterfront offers a choice of tented bungalows and fancier hotel rooms. Rates include breakfast.

Smugglers Bar & Restaurant, close to the KWS compound in Shimoni, is a big *makuti* bar serving beers, *nyama choma* and snack food.

Getting There & Around

There are matatus every hour or so between Likoni and Shimoni (KSh100, one hour) until about 6pm. It's best to be at Likoni by 6.30am if you want to get to Shimoni in time to catch one of the dhow sailings.

The price of getting across the channel to Wasini Island depends to a degree on who you meet on arrival, how many are in your group and how affluent you look. Crossings should cost between KSh300 and KSh500 each way, less if you negotiate return journeys.

There are occasional dhows between Shimoni and Pemba in Tanzania (KSh2500, three hours), but finding a boat, organising passage and haggling over the price generally makes the process one huge, long hassle unless you can find someone trustworthy to do it for you. Ask at the customs office in Shimoni to see if there are any sailings. There is a small immigration office at Shimoni, but you may have to get your exit stamp back in Mombasa if it's closed.

LUNGA LUNGA

There isn't much at Lunga Lunga apart from the Tanzanian border crossing, which is open 24 hours. It's 6.5km from the Kenyan border post to the Tanzanian border post at Horohoro – matatus run between the two border posts throughout the day (KSh20). From Horohoro, there are numerous matatus to Tanga (TSh200). Frequent matatus run to Lunga Lunga from Likoni, but most people take through buses from Mombasa to Tanga or Dar es Salaam.

NORTH OF MOMBASA

Like the south coast, the coastline north of Mombasa has been extensively developed, although this trails off once you get north of Shanzu Beach. It's mostly set up for European package tourists on all-inclusive holidays, but there are some decent choices for independent travellers.

The northern beaches are also dogged by seaweed at certain times of the year. They are usually clear between December and April, but at other times the sand can vanish under piles of black seaweed. The expensive resort hotels employ people to burn or bury the troublesome weed on the beach.

If you're on a budget chances are you'll be staying away from the beach, as the big hotels have grabbed most of the sand. The resorts are luxurious by Kenyan standards but not always in European terms, and most of them are so self-contained that guests don't see anything of the real Africa except the airport, the taxi driver and a few Kenyan waiters.

Going north from Mombasa, the beaches are Nyali, Bamburi, Shanzu, Kikambala and Vipingo.

NYALI BEACH

☎ 041

Out past the suburb of Nyali, this is the first beach encountered as you head north from Mombasa. Like all the northern beaches, it's a long, straight stretch mainly taken up by hotels, with an extensive and expensive residential area to the south.

The **Nova shopping centre** (Malindi Rd; ☎ 8.30am-10pm Sun-Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat), which also caters for nearby Bamburi Beach, has a big Nakumatt supermarket and the excellent Books First bookshop, with an upstairs **Internet café** (per minute KSh2).

Also in Nyali is the very posh **Nyali Golf Club** (☎ 471589; green fees US\$33; ☎ 8am-6pm), set in ornamental gardens on Links Rd. Club hire is KSh1200.

The various hotels are clearly signposted from the relevant roundabouts on Links Rd.

Mamba Village Crocodile Farm

A bizarre combination of commercial crocodile farm, animal park, sports bar and nightclub (see p184). **Mamba Village** (☎ 475184; mambavillage2001@hotmail.com; Links Rd; nonresident adult/child KSh450/250; ☎ 8am-6pm), is located opposite Nyali Golf Club. Around 10,000 scaly inmates bare their teeth for the public at the complex. There's a feeding show at 5pm, which rouses the lethargic beasts quite dramatically. While it's interesting to see the crocodiles in various stages of their development, the knowledge of their impending reincarnation as belts and handbags is a little off-putting, and the fact that you can eat the exhibits in the house restaurant is downright creepy.

You can also visit the small botanical garden, aquarium and snake park (adult/child KSh200/100) or pop next door for some horse and camel riding (KSh50 per round or KSh950 for an hour-long beach tour).

Sleeping

Unless otherwise stated, all rates here are for half board.

Voyager Beach Resort (☎ 475114; www.heritage-eastafrika.com; Barracks Rd; s/d low season US\$185/260, high season US\$230/310; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) The nautical theme is possibly stretched a bit far, but Voyager can happily cruise through life on its deserved reputation as Nyali's best luxury resort. Facilities are comprehensive, prices are all-inclusive, staff are well drilled,

the grounds are huge and the beach is right there – if you actually have any time for it in between everything else.

Nyali Beach Hotel (☎ 471541; www.blockhotelske.com; Beach Rd; s/tw low season US\$118/147, high season US\$184/234; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) At the southern end of the beach, this is Voyager's main competition, managing to take up even more space and offer even more facilities – you'd practically have to stay for a week just to try all the different restaurants and bars. The Sunday poolside barbecues are surprisingly good value at KSh650.

Nyali Beach Holiday Resorts (☎ 472325; nbhr@wananchi.com; Beach Rd; s/d low season KSh3500/5800, high season KSh4500/6800, cottages from KSh5500; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) A good option if you want the Kenyan beach experience without the European price tag. It's less luxurious than the other resorts around here, but you still get a restaurant, bar and games room, and the self-catering cottages (one to three bedrooms) work well for groups. Reception helpfully shows the time in Helsinki for any disoriented Finns who happen by.

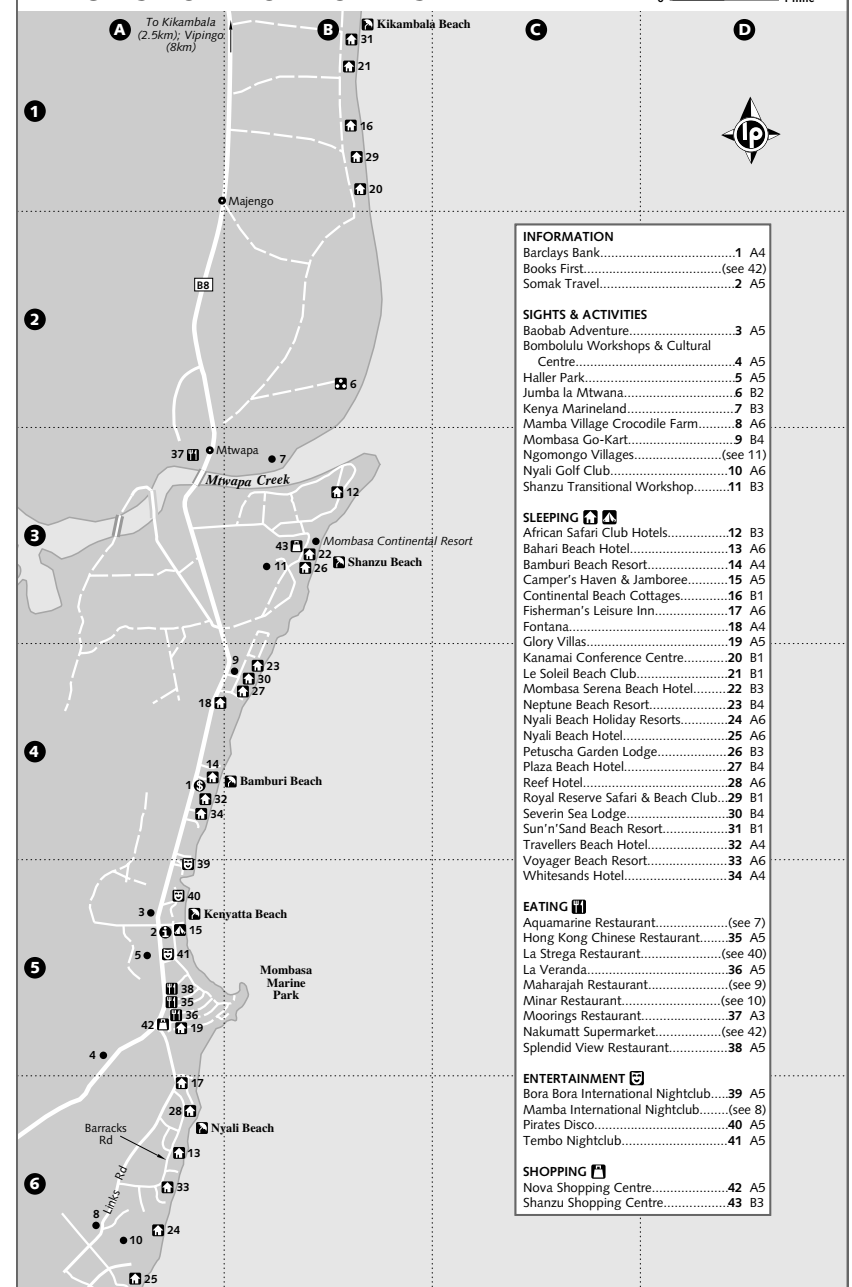
Bahari Beach Hotel (☎ 472822; bahariho@africaonline.co.ke; Barracks Rd; s/d low season KSh4700/7100, high season KSh5500/8100; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Germans on all-inclusive packages form the core clientele at this low-slung *makuti* complex, which makes good design use of the coral rocks that separate it from the beach. The cave-like Italian restaurant is a particularly nice feature.

Fisherman's Leisure Inn (☎ 220721; lexicarhire@hotmail.com; Mwamba Dr; B&B s/d low season KSh2000/2800, high season KSh3500/4200; ☎ ☎) Reached via a turn-off just before the Nova shopping centre, this is a quiet, friendly Indian-run guesthouse with an attractive Moorish foyer and well-appointed tiled rooms. The Lobster Pot restaurant provides meals on site. Walk through the Reef Hotel to get to the beach.

Reef Hotel (☎ 471771; www.oneearthsafaris.com; Barracks Rd; s/d low season US\$59/88, high season US\$68/115; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This rather faded hotel seems to be going for a Club Med vibe, though some of the facilities look a little aged. Luckily the interior is much better kept, and the relatively down-to-earth rates make it popular with Kenyans as well as foreign tourists.

Glory Villas (☎ 474758; sKSh800, dKSh1200-2000, cottages KSh3000; ☎ ☎) The only vaguely budget option for miles, this entry in the Glory empire is a complex of odd conical towers

BEACHES NORTH OF MOMBASA



behind the Nova shopping centre. There's a prayer room for the devout and 'VIPs' in No 34 can dine out on some hilarious 1970s furniture. If the long list of things not to do is anything to go by, the management don't have much faith in their staff – you're even advised not to leave valuables at reception! Nyali Beach is a 15-minute walk away.

Eating

La Veranda (☎ 5485482; mains KSh350-650) This is a reliable Italian restaurant behind the Nova shopping centre, with a big pizza oven, al-fresco veranda dining and reasonable prices. It's closed between 3pm and 6pm on weekdays.

Hong Kong Chinese Restaurant (☎ 5485422; Malindi Rd; mains KSh280-595) On the main road next to the shopping centre, the Chinese food dished up in this round pavilion-style building is a good example of its breed and will definitely fill a hole. Choose from small and large portions or set menus for up to six people (KSh1900 to KSh6850).

Minar Restaurant (☎ 471220; Nyali Golf Club, Links Rd; mains KSh280-800) An Indian restaurant might seem an unusually ethnic choice for such a classic colonial golf club, but you can't argue with a good curry after 18 holes.

Entertainment

Mamba International Nightclub (☎ 475180; Mamba Crocodile Village, Links Rd; admission KSh100-200) Who knows what twisted genius thought it was a good idea to have a disco in a crocodile farm, but the result is this totally over-the-top place, now Nyali's main dance floor. It's one of the most popular independent night-spots around Mombasa – it's a wonder the poor crocs get any sleep!

Getting There & Away

From Mombasa, Nyali Beach is reached via Nyali Rd, which branches off the main road north just after Nyali Bridge. There are regular matatus to/from Mombasa (KSh30).

BAMBURI BEACH

☎ 041

The next beach heading north is Bamburi, which has huge hotels, boisterous nightclubs and some good restaurants. Offshore is the **Mombasa Marine Park** (☎ 312744; adult/child US\$5/2), which has impressive marine life, although it cops some pollution from industry in the

area. On land, Bamburi is dominated by the Bamburi Cement Company.

The beach hotels begin just north of the junction between Links Rd and the main highway north from Mombasa. There's a branch of **Bardays Bank** (Malindi Rd; ☎ 485434) next to Whitesands Hotel.

The most popular public beach is Kenyatta Beach, beside the infamous Pirates Disco. Loads of Kenyans come here, and while you won't escape the attentions of the beach boys and hawkers it's usually a fun atmosphere when it's busy. Glass-bottomed boats to the marine park cost around KSh3000 per boat (negotiable) for a 2½-hour trip, not including park fees.

Sights & Activities

BAOBAB ADVENTURE

Founded in the 1950s to process coral limestone, the cement workings at the Bamburi Cement Company were a derelict eyesore until the creation of this ingenious complex of nature trails and wildlife sanctuaries at **Baobab Adventure** (☎ 5485901; Malindi Rd). It was a huge undertaking, involving bringing in tons of topsoil before anything could even be planted.

The main attraction is **Haller Park** (non-resident adult/child KSh450/225; ☎ 8am-5pm), which includes a wildlife sanctuary, crocodile farm, fish farm, reptile park and drive-through giraffe compound. Giraffes are fed at 11am and 3pm; hippos at 4pm. You can also meet local celebrity, Owen, a baby hippo orphaned by the 2004 tsunami who was brought here to recover and hit the headlines thanks to his unusual friendship with the park's 100-year-old giant tortoise.

Also here are the **Bamburi Forest Trails** (nonresident adult/child KSh200/100; ☎ 6am-5.30pm), a network of walking and cycling trails through reforested cement workings, with a butterfly pavilion displaying many coastal species and a terrace to catch the sunset. North of the main cement plant is **Nguuni Wildlife Sanctuary**, where herds of ostriches, elands and oryxes are farmed. Tours here must be booked in advance.

The various parts of the Baobab Adventure are well signposted from the highway north from Mombasa and have well-marked bus stops.

(Continued on page 193)

(Continued from page 184)

MOMBASA GO-KART

If you haven't had your fill of excitement on the Kenyan roads, this 1500ft **go-kart track** (☎ 0721-485247; www.mombasa-gokart.com; adult/child KSh1000/500; ☎ 4-10pm Tue-Sun) should satisfy any need for speed.

Sleeping

BUDGET & MIDRANGE

There are no budget choices here at all, but groups in particular can find some reasonable accommodation for a moderate price.

Bamburi Beach Resort (☎ 0733-474482; www.bamburiresort.com; r US\$20-90; ☎ ☎) This tidy little complex has direct access to the beach, and a choice of appealing bamboo-finished hotel rooms and self-catering rooms (with outdoor kitchens). There's a nice beachfront bar with a big shaggy *makuti* thatch.

Fontana (☎ 5487554; Malindi Rd; d low/high season KSh2500/3000; ☎ ☎) While the rooms are thoroughly liveable, the highlight of this small German-owned establishment is the big thatched lobby restaurant (mains KSh420-700), which resembles a musty safari lodge stuffed with a huge job lot of Africana. The beach is 100m beyond the compound.

Camper's Haven & Jamboree (☎ 5486954; campers_haven@yahoo.com; campsites per tent KSh500, r low/high season KSh2500/5500) A large, slightly bumpy camping ground on the beach. The four-person tents are KSh1500; room prices include breakfast in low season and half board in high season. If you're wondering where 'jamboree' comes into it, wait until the evening – with disco nights Wednesday to Sunday and local stars the Utamaduni Band playing every Sunday afternoon, peace and quiet isn't high on the agenda!

TOP END

Unless otherwise stated, all prices here are for half board.

Whitesands Hotel (☎ 485926; www.sarovahotels.com; s/d low season from US\$90/140, high season from US\$140/180; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) It's multi-award-winning and invariably busy, and could be justified in dubbing itself the best resort hotel on the coast, offering consistently good service, thoughtful design, full luxury facilities and high standards throughout. Fancy wood reliefs, hand-painted panels and marble add to the airy sophistication.

There are an amazing five pools and the grounds front directly onto the sand.

Severin Sea Lodge (☎ 5485001; www.severin-kenya.com; s/d low season US\$54/108, high season US\$165/206; ☎ ☎ ☎) This place is so classy it has a Swiss consulate in it – surely high praise. Appealing round cottages running down to the beach and there are some nice bars and restaurants, including a funky restaurant in a converted dhow. The comfort-class doubles are the nicest rooms, with more elaborate decor and more expensive rates.

Travellers Beach Hotel (☎ 5485121; www.travellersbeach.com; s/d low season KSh5500/7300, high-season KSh7300/9700; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) A modern, quite stylish place fronted by a huge triangular *makuti* building. Attractive channels link the pools. Not all rooms have sea views.

Plaza Beach Hotel (☎ 5485321; www.plazabeach.co.ke; s/d low season US\$60/110, high season US\$85/140; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Looking a little cramped on the plot next to Severin and Neptune, the Plaza's grounds are a little dry but the Moorish design and decent rooms work just fine. With ships' wheels as headboards, it's certainly not a problem drifting off.

Neptune Beach Resort (☎ 5485701; www.neptunehotels.com; s/d/tr low season KSh2700/4400/6600, high season KSh4300/7000/10,500; ☎ ☎ ☎) An endearing eyesore, the haphazard colour scheme and panda-shaped pool do at least help Neptune stand out from the competition. High-season rates are all-inclusive.

Eating

Splendid View Restaurant (☎ 5487270; Malindi Rd; mains KSh100-500; ☎ noon-2pm & 7-10pm Tue-Sun) Sister to the original branch in Mombasa, this is the more attractive sibling and has a wider menu, serving the customary Indian cuisine and a handful of Western dishes. It's right at the start of the strip, next to the Nova complex; ironically, the views here aren't that much better than in town.

La Strega (☎ 5487431; stephanie@africaonline.co.ke; Pirates complex; mains KSh350-1000) You wouldn't think so to look at it, but the thatched restaurant next to the Pirates nightclub is a great Italian eatery, with a small but well-tempura'd Japanese menu to boot.

Maharajah Restaurant (☎ 5485895; mains from KSh350; ☎ dinner Wed-Mon, lunch Sat & Sun) A stylish Indian restaurant at the entrance to the Indiana Beach Hotel with good veggie and nonveggie food.

Entertainment

Bamburi is a town that's known for its infamous nightclubs, which pull in a slightly wild crowd of locals, tourists, prostitutes and hustlers.

Pirates (☎ 5486020; Kenyatta Beach; admission Fri & Sat KSh200) A huge complex of water slides and bars that transforms into the strip's rowdiest nightclub from Wednesday to Saturday in high season, blazing into the small hours. During the day it's surprisingly wholesome, with family 'fun shows' every Saturday.

Bora Bora International Nightclub (☎ 5486421; admission men/women KSh180/100; 🕒 from 9pm, closed Tue) This is another big late-night party place, and it's known for its over-the-top cabaret shows.

Tembo Nightclub (☎ 5485078; men/women KSh150/100; 🕒 to 5am Sun-Thu, to 6am Fri & Sat) This open *makuti* complex is not just a club, it's an 'entertainment plaza', with pool tables, a playground, barbecue area, beauty salon and 24-hour bar.

Getting There & Around

Buses and matatus to Malindi or Mtwapa stop at Bamburi (KSh30). For the Baobab Adventure, there are bus stops in front of both the Haller Park and the main Bamburi Cement Company gate.

SHANZU BEACH

☎ 041

This busy beach resort is dominated by the private African Safari Club, which operates no less than six luxury hotels in the area. The beach itself is lovely, but away from the all-inclusive places Shanzu is actually depressingly seedy, with a thriving trade catering for European sex tourists and con-

stant hassle from souvenir sellers, touts and *boda-boda* boys.

If you're just down at Shanzu Beach for the day you can get to the beach through the grounds of the defunct Mombasa Continental Resort. Looking around the abandoned grounds of the hotel itself is actually quite fascinating (though watch out for the 'massage' girls who set up shop there), and the security guards are only too happy to have a chat.

Ngomongo Villages (☎ 5486480; www.ngomongo.com; adult/child KSh500/250; 🕒 9am-5pm) is a curious enterprise that attempts to give visitors a glimpse of nine of Kenya's different tribal groups in one place. Although it's touristy stuff, the tours are good fun and you can try your hand at various tribal activities such as Maasai dancing, archery and pounding maize.

Nearby, the **Shanzu Transitional Workshop** (🕒 8am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm), run by the Girl Guides Association, provides training for handicapped women and sells their crafts for them. Among the items on offer are attractive clothes made using traditional Swahili fabrics.

Sleeping & Eating

Mombasa Serena Beach Hotel (☎ 485721; www.serenahotels.com; half board s/d low season US\$95/190, high season US\$200/260; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) Serena's only Kenyan beach resort is so extensive that it's styled on a traditional Swahili village – the pathways around the tree-filled complex even have street names. The split-level rooms are equally impressive, and the design lends an incongruous intimacy.

Petuscha Garden Lodge (☎ 0722-734755; petuscha.hotel@yahoo.com; s/d KSh2000/3000, apts €40; 🍷) A small private complex marketed mainly at Germans. There's a range of different rooms, and rates are pretty negotiable out of season.

The upmarket Coral Beach, Shanzu Beach, Palm Beach, Paradise Beach, Dolphin and Flamingo Beach hotels are all owned by the African Safari Club (p346).

Most visitors eat at the hotel where they are staying, but there are several restaurants in the Shanzu shopping centre offering almost identical menus of pizzas and other European favourites for between KSh350 and KSh500.

Getting There & Away

Public transport plying the route between Mombasa and Malindi or Mtwapa pass the turn-off to Shanzu (KSh30), where a crowd of *boda-bodas* tout for rides to the hotels (KSh10). Hourly matatus from Mtwapa stop at the resort stage before heading to Mombasa (KSh30). The No 31 Metro Mombasa bus to Mtwapa also comes through here – look out for the yellow 'Via Serena' sign in the windscreen.

Mtwapa

☎ 041

At first glance Mtwapa just looks like a busy roadside service town, but the small fishing village at its heart has a lovely setting with fine views of **Mtwapa Creek**, and makes a great stop for a scenic supper.

Most travellers come for the gourmet meals and dhow tours offered by **Kenya Marineland** (☎ 5485248; www.kenyamarineland.com), tucked away on a private estate towards the mouth of Mtwapa Creek. These trips include a visit to the Marineland **aquarium** (admission KSh300), morning and afternoon cruises along the coast with various entertainment and lunch at the waterside Aquamarine restaurant. It's not a bad trip and the food at the restaurant is excellent – the price is US\$85/42.50 per adult/child, including transfers.

Moorings Restaurant (☎ 5485260; mains KSh380-720) is a popular expat hang-out on a floating pontoon on the north shore of Mtwapa Creek, offering prime views of the lofty road bridge. It's a fine place for a beer and serves great seafood. It's a base for various water sports and fishing trips, and sailors have a small chance of finding crewing work or a lift along the coast here. The turn-off is just after the Mtwapa bridge – follow the signs down to the water's edge.

Several companies based in Mtwapa offer deep-sea fishing for marlin and other large billfish. Try **Hallmark Charters** (☎ 5485680), **James Adcock** (☎ 5485527) or **Howard Lawrence-Brown** (☎ 5486394). As always, we recommend that fish are tagged and released (see p200).

Jumba la Mtwana

This **national monument** (nonresident adult/child KSh200/100; 🕒 8am-6pm) is just north of Mtwapa Creek. The ruins are from a 15th-century Swahili settlement, and some interesting structures remain, of which the **Mosque by the**

Sea stands out. There are three other mosques on the site, and evidence of extensive sanitation facilities in all the main buildings. A handy guidebook may be available from the ticket office for KSh20, or the custodian will happily give you the tour for a small gratuity. A cafeteria is being built and should be completed by the time you read this – construction was delayed by the discovery of an ancient mass grave under the site!

The nearby beach is delightful. The site is a 3km walk down a dirt track, signposted from the highway about 1km north of Mtwapa bridge; a taxi there and back should cost around KSh200.

Getting There & Away

Very regular matatus and buses run from Mtwapa to Mombasa (KSh30) and Malindi (KSh70).

KIKAMBALA & VIPINGO

☎ 041

These two remote beaches are reached by long, winding dirt roads and both have a peaceful, unspoiled atmosphere. The coast at Vipingo is particularly beautiful and the reef comes right up to the beach. The tranquillity was disrupted when the Paradise Hotel in Kikambala was the target of a car bomb attack in 2002 (see p31), but life seems to have returned to normal remarkably rapidly.

Sleeping & Eating

All these hotels are at Kikambala, on a long track off the main highway.

Royal Reserve Safari & Beach Club (☎ 32022; www.royalreserve.com; apts US\$66-100; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) Possibly the best-value self-catering on the coast – the smart modern apartments here have all-new fittings, including microwave and utensils, complemented by a full range of facilities and activities. If you need provisions, there's a small shop on site and a weekly shuttle bus to the supermarket. It's heavily marketed for timeshares, so book early in high season.

Sun'n'Sand Beach Resort (☎ 32621; www.sunnsand.co.ke; half board s/d low season US\$45/90, high season US\$70/100; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) Despite its 900-head capacity there's a really nice feel to the pastel-orange Sun'n'Sand, and it's known as one of the best hotels on the north coast for kids. The mock-mud Moorish buildings are intelligently laid out so it doesn't feel crowded. Children are charged 50% of the adult rate.

COAST PHONE NUMBERS

There have been huge problems with the fixed telephone lines on the coast in recent years, and while Telkom Kenya has now upgraded its equipment there's still a chance that phone numbers between Nyalı and Malindi may be out of order. We've given mobile numbers wherever they're still used as a primary contact, though, as these are often just the staff's personal numbers, the ensuing conversations may be a little confusing!

The company also contributes a lot to the local community, providing drinking water, a health centre and a school.

Kanamai Conference Centre (☎ 32046; kanamai@iconnect.co.ke; dm KSh700, s/d KSh1800/3000, cottages KSh1800-2700) This is a quiet Christian conference centre with a tranquil, laid-back atmosphere. Alcohol is prohibited, but there's a cafeteria serving breakfast meals, or you can join in with prayer and fasting (KSh200!). All the rooms are simple but comfortable, and the self-catering cottages are particularly immaculate. It's at the southern end of the track, signposted just before Majengo township.

Continental Beach Cottages (☎ 32190; manasseh@wananchi.com; B&B/full board per person KSh950/1450, cottages KSh1700-3850; 🍴 🚿 🚿) Next door to the very faded Whispering Palms Hotel, Continental is a quiet little place with a beach bar. The cottages are neat and well looked after, with kitchens and palm gardens facing onto the beach.

Le Soleil Beach Club (☎ 32604; www.lesoleilkenya.com; s/d/tr low season US\$72/120/168, high season US\$84/140/196; 🍴 🚿 🚿 🚿) A big beach resort with modernist white blocks and the usual array of facilities. Sadly these prices make it the most expensive hotel on the strip, which is hardly justified.

Getting There and Away

It is possible to come here by public transport (Mombasa–Malindi matatus and buses pass along the highway) but all of the places to stay are a long way from the highway and walking isn't recommended on the smaller tracks. Probably the best option is to get off at the clearly marked turn-off to Sun'n'Sand and pick up a taxi in front of the resort.

If you have your own transport, Kanamai is reached by a signposted track near Majengo. Continental Beach Cottages and Royal Reserve are reached via another turn-off 3km further north. Sun'n'Sand and Le Soleil are down a third road, signposted about 1km further along the highway. Smaller tracks link all these places directly.

KILIFI

☎ 041

Like Mtwapa to its south, Kilifi is a gorgeous river estuary with effortlessly picture-perfect views from its massive road bridge. Many white Kenyans have yachts moored in the

creek and there are numerous beach houses belonging to artists, writers and adventurers from around the globe.

The main reasons that most travellers come here are to stay at one of the pleasant beach resorts at the mouth of the creek or to visit the ruins of Mnarani, high on a bluff on the south bank of the creek.

Information

Kilifi consists of the small village of Mnarani (or Manarani) on the southern bank of the creek, and Kilifi village on the northern bank, where you'll find the post office, bus station, markets and the budget hotels.

Kilifi Creek is a popular anchorage spot for yachties sailing along the coast, and if you're looking for a ride you *may* find one at the **Kilifi Boatyard** (☎ 522552), southwest of Kilifi town.

Barclays Bank (Ronald Ngala St) ATM only; accepts Visa, MasterCard and Cirrus.

Kenya Commercial Bank (☎ 522034; Ronald Ngala St) ATM accepts Visa cards.

Kilifi Books & Stationery Store (☎ 525408; kilifibks@africaonline.co.ke; Biashara St; Internet access per min KSh5) Internet café.

Tourist police (Kilifi Shopping Arcade)

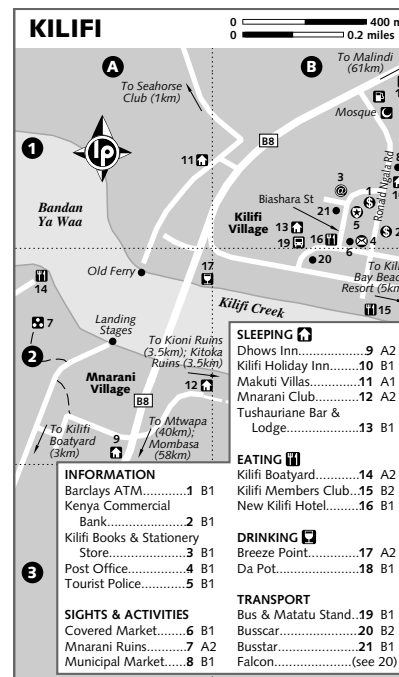
Sights

MNARANI

The **ruins** (nonresident adult/child KSh100/50; ☎ 7am-6pm) are high on a bluff just west of the old ferry landing stage on the southern bank of Kilifi Creek. Only partly excavated, the site was occupied from the end of the 14th century to around the first half of the 17th century, when it was abandoned following sieges by Galla tribespeople from Somalia and the failure of the water supply.

The best preserved ruin is the **Great Mosque** with its finely carved inscription above the *mihrab* (the niche showing the direction of Mecca). Also here are a group of **carved tombs** (including a restored pillar tomb), a small mosque dating back to the 16th century and parts of the town wall.

Tucked away in the woods are all manner of other ruins and unexcavated structures, including a small mosque, plus a huge baobab tree, one of several rumoured to be the oldest or largest on the coast. There's a human-made hole in the side of the tree where local people leave offerings to the local spirits. The path up to the ruins (about



300m long) is clearly signposted off the tarmac road behind Mnarani village.

Mnarani was associated with the smaller settlements of **Kioni**, past Mnarani Club, and **Kitoka**, about 3km southeast of Mnarani Club on the northern bank of Takaungu Creek. All these settlements were ruled over by Mombasa and are now ruined. If you want to visit, it's best to find a guide to show you the way.

KILIFI CREEK

The **beach** on either side of the creek is very pleasant and doesn't suffer the same seaweed problems as the beaches further south, but most of the frontage is private property. Hotels and local boatmen can arrange **sailing trips** around the creek for about KSh500 per person.

MARKETS

Kilifi has two main markets: the **covered market** on Biashara St, a bustling hall crammed with produce stalls, and the **municipal market** on Ronald Ngala St, an open compound of shops, stalls and kiosks selling everything

from meat and clothes to mobile phone cards. They're both atmospheric and unaffectedly African places to peruse.

Sleeping

BUDGET & MIDRANGE

Dhows Inn (☎ 522028; dhowinn_kilifi@yahoo.com; Malindi Rd; s/d KSh650/900) This place is on the main road south of Kilifi Creek. It's a small, well-maintained hostelry with simple but decent thatched blocks set around a garden. The Mnarani ruins are within easy walking distance, and there's a popular bar and restaurant on site.

Makuti Villas (☎ 522415; s/d KSh800/1000; 🍴) Also known as Mkwajuni Motel or Dhows Inn Annex, this bungalow complex isn't nearly as grand as it sounds, but you're certainly not short on space in the big thatched buildings. Prices include breakfast at the complex's bar-restaurant.

Kilifi Holiday Inn (☎ 525490; s KSh400) According to the signs this is 'the celebrated' Holiday Inn, although it's quite patently nothing to do with the US chain. Rooms have fans, nets and squat toilets, and rates include breakfast; other meals must be ordered in advance.

Tushauriane Bar & Lodge (☎ 522521; s/d with shared bathroom KSh150/300) This is a bright yellow building behind the bus station. Unsurprisingly at this price, rooms are basic as you like, with just beds, nets and plenty of market noise.

TOP END

Mnarani Club (☎ 522318; mnarani@africaonline.com; s/d low season US\$62/99, high season US\$79/115; 🍴 🚿 🚿) Atop the cliff on the southern side of Kilifi Creek, this very stylish resort complex has a choice of garden and creek views and an amazing *trompe l'oeil* pool which seems to blend into the ocean. There's a beach below and loads of water sports are possible. The hotel has an adults-only policy.

Kilifi Bay Beach Resort (☎ 522264; www.madahotels.com; full board s/d low season US\$82.50/110, high season US\$120/160; 🍴 🚿 🚿) About 5km north of Kilifi on the coast road, this is a pleasant, small resort with a nice beach and plenty of facilities. Prices are a bit high for what you get.

Seahorse Club, on the northern side of the creek, is a particularly good hotel in the African Safari Club group (p346).

Eating & Drinking

Kilifi Members Club (☎ 525258; mains KSh100-260) A fantastic spot for sunset, perched on the northern cliff edge with a clear sightline to the creek bridge. There's a good menu with lots of *nyama choma* (up to KSh460 per kg) and the Tusker's very reasonable for these parts (KSh70). Despite the name you don't have to be a member.

Kilifi Boatyard (☎ 522552; mains KSh350) A very nice sand-floored café serving excellent seafood and cold beers to expat boating types. It's a long walk from town down a dirt road off the highway just south of Kilifi. A taxi will cost around KSh600 return.

New Kilifi Hotel (☎ 0733-793700; Biashara St; mains KSh80-140) Just past the bus station is this very popular local canteen with good pilau and biryanis (rice and curried meat), plus the usual stew and *ugali* options.

For a beer and bop, Kilifi's main night-spots are **Breeze Point** (Malindi Rd), a *makuti* bar overlooking the creek with regular Giriama dancing, and **Da Pot** (Malindi Rd), a louder, rowdier club in the usual hip-hop vein.

Getting There & Away

All buses and matatus travelling between Mombasa (up to 1½ hours) and Malindi (1¼ hours) stop here at Kilifi; the fare to either destination is KSh70. Falcon, Busstar and Busscar all have offices here for their Nairobi–Malindi route; buses to Mombasa and on to Nairobi leave at around 7.45am and 7.45pm (KSh600).

WATAMU

☎ 042

About 24km south of Malindi, Watamu is another popular beach village with sandy beaches and plenty of hotels, though the atmosphere is a lot more resort-like than in Kilifi. Offshore is the southern part of Malindi Marine Reserve, and the unspoiled forests of Arabuko Sokoke Forest Reserve and the Swahili ruins of Gede are both a short distance away.

The coast here is broken up into three separate coves divided by eroded rocky headlands. Each bay becomes a broad white strand at low tide, and many people walk across to the offshore islands. Like the southern resorts, Watamu is inundated with seaweed at certain times, but the sand is usually clear from December to April.

Although Watamu is primarily a package resort, Swahili fishers still moor their dhows just metres from the sunbathing tourists and a village of mud-walled houses sits immediately behind the resorts. You're equally likely to see a herd of goats or an expat sports car on the main road.

Orientation

Most resorts are south of Watamu, on the road that runs down to KWS headquarters, but the Watamu Beach Hotel and the cheap guesthouses are reached by Beach Way Rd, which leads down to the old village and is lined with souvenir stalls. The old village itself is something of a maze, with unofficial street names in graffiti (look out for Cash Money Rd and New Bla Bla Bla Rd 2000), but the main track is easy enough to follow.

Information

There are now no banks in Watamu, so your only options are the forex bureaus at the big hotels and Tunda Tours. If you need to use an ATM, your nearest choices are in Kilifi or Malindi. The post office is on the Gede road. Online information can be found at www.watamu.net.

Corner Connections (Map p199; Watamu Supermarket; Internet access per min KSh5) Access the Internet here.

Telkom Kenya office (Map p199; Beach Way Rd)

Tunda Tours (Map p199; ☎ 32079; Beach Way Rd; Internet access per min KSh5)

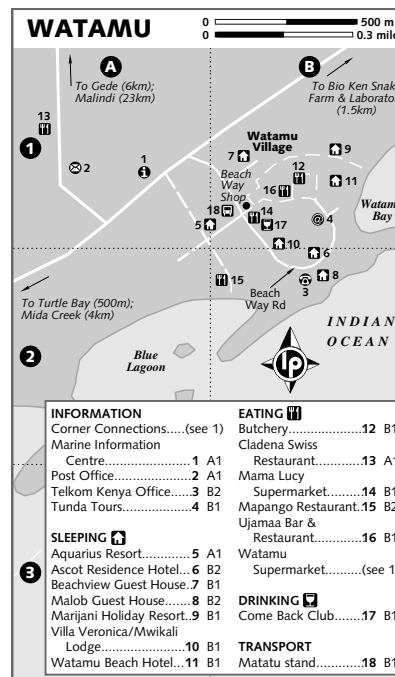
Sights

BIO KEN SNAKE FARM & LABORATORY

This excellent **snake farm** (Map p202; ☎ 32303; snakes@africaonline.co.ke; adult/child KSh500/free; ☎ 10am–noon & 2–5pm) is by far the best of all the snake parks situated along the coast. The farm was established by the late James Ashe, who was a reptile expert and former curator from the National Museums of Kenya. Ashe achieved such level of recognition in his field that he even has a bush viper named after him.

The farm is a nonprofit organisation, providing free antivenin wherever it is needed in Kenya. As well as touring the facilities, staff can take you on a day safari to look for snakes in their natural habitat (KSh4500).

The centre is just north of Watamu village on the main beach road.



WATAMU MARINE NATIONAL PARK

The southern part of Malindi Marine Reserve, this **marine park** (Map p202; adult/child US\$5/2) includes some magnificent coral reefs and abundant fish-life. It lies around 2km offshore from Watamu. To get to the park you'll need to hire a glass-bottomed boat, which is easy enough at the **KWS office** (Map p202; ☎ 32393), at the end of the coast road, where you pay the park fees. For marine park trips, boat operators ask anything from KSh1800 to KSh3500 per person, excluding park fees; it's all negotiable.

All the big hotels offer 'goggling' (snorkelling) trips to nonusers for around KSh1500. The best are the snorkel safaris run by zoologist Richard Bennett from the **Turtle Bay Discovery Centre** (Map p202; ☎ 32003; adult/child KSh1700/850; ☎ 8am–noon & 4–8pm) at Turtle Bay Beach Club.

MIDA CREEK

The extensive mangrove forests around Mida Creek, just south of Watamu, support a huge number of bird species, including the spectacular malachite kingfisher, yellow-billed

stork and African fish eagle. It's paradise for bird-watchers and there is also some good snorkelling and scuba diving at the mouth of the creek.

The head of the creek, the best area for viewing waterbirds, is reached by a dirt road opposite the Mida entrance to the Arabuko Sokoke Forest Reserve. The guides who work out of the reserve can organise guided walks in the mangroves (see p201).

Many people also come here on boat tours (arranged through Watamu hotels), which visit a boardwalk and picnic ground on Sudi Island. Turtle Bay Beach Club's Discovery Centre runs tours for KSh2750 per person.

TURTLES

Several species of marine turtle lay their eggs on the beaches around Watamu and **Watamu Turtle Watch** (Map p202; www.watamuturtles.com), part of the Local Ocean Trust, has set up initiatives with local people to protect these threatened animals. Female turtles lay thousands of eggs here between January and April. Contact the trust's **Marine Information Centre** (Map p199; ☎ 32118; paradise@swiftmalindi.com; ☎ 9.30am–12.30pm & 2–5pm Mon–Sat) if you're interested in seeing this incredible spectacle or volunteering with local projects.

Activities

DIVING

With the marine park just offshore, diving is popular. **Aqua Ventures** (Map p202; ☎ 32420; www.divekenya.com), at Ocean Sports Hotel, offers guided dives in the marine park for UK£18 and an open-water PADI dive course for UK£275. The best time to dive and snorkel is between October and March. Avoid diving from June to August because of rough seas and poor visibility. Dive trips to the **Tewa Caves** (Map p202) at the mouth of Mida Creek are popular, where a group of giant rock cod loiter menacingly at the bottom.

DEEP-SEA FISHING

If you want to ape the fish-wrestling antics of Ernest Hemingway, deep-sea fishing is possible at Ocean Sports Hotel and Hemingway's for around UK£540 per boat (high season, up to four anglers). People are a little more environmentally sensitive now than in old Ernie's day – tag and release is standard procedure (see p200).

TAG & BRAG

While the idea of wrestling a huge marlin on the open sea has a powerful macho allure, catches of billfish in the Indian Ocean are getting smaller all the time. The biggest threat to game fish is relentless overfishing by commercial tuna companies, who routinely hook other pelagic fish as so-called 'bycatch'. Pollution and falling stocks of prey species are also having a serious knock-on effect. Some large species are believed to have declined by as much as 80% since the 1970s; sharks are particularly vulnerable.

Instead of bashing some unfortunate fish over the head with a boathook, you can do your bit to help sustain shark and billfish populations by tagging your catch and releasing it back into the ocean. Most deep-sea fishing companies provide anglers with a souvenir photo and official recognition of their catch, then release the fish to fight another day, carrying tags that will allow scientists to discover more about these magnificent predators.

Sleeping**BUDGET & MIDRANGE**

Marijani Holiday Resort (Map p199; ☎ 32448; marijani@swiftmalindi.com; s/d €18.50/20.50, cottages €38.50-52) The best place to stay in the village, distinctive coral facing, traditional furnishings, balcony sofas and local art set this very personal guesthouse above any competition. If you read German, you can buy the book describing the owners' adventures setting up home in Kenya. To get here, take the path beside the Mama Lucy supermarket and turn left at the Beach Way Shop.

Ascot Residence Hotel (Map p199; ☎ 32326; info@ascotresidence.com; Beach Way Rd; s/d KSh1600/2800, apt KSh3500-7000; 🏠) A very comfortable complex of tidy rooms and apartments set in a garden with a dolphin-shaped pool. Security is good and there's a fine pizza restaurant.

Malob Guest House (Map p199; ☎ 32260; Beach Way Rd; s KSh600) Opposite Ascot, Malob is a good small budget choice. Rooms are clean and well looked after, and are set around a peaceful courtyard.

Villa Veronika/Mwikali Lodge (Map p199; ☎ 0735-499836; Beach Way Rd; d KSh600) A friendly and secure family-run lodging. Rooms come with fans, nets and fridges; they're a bit scrappy and don't always have power, but you could do worse. In high season breakfast is available for KSh100. Some rooms get noise from the nearby Come Back Club.

Scuba Diving Watamu (Map p202; ☎ 32099; www.scuba-diving-kenya.com; cottages €29-52; 🏠) No prizes for figuring out what the main line of business is here – luckily for keen self-caterers the German owners also offer accommodation in five charming one- and two-bedroom cottages. Prices include daily cleaning, and cooks are available. There's

also a good café and a separate villa for up to 22 people (€150).

Beachview Guest House (Map p199; ☎ 32383; watamubeachview@yahoo.com; d KSh1500; 🏠) This big block off Beach Way Rd offers spacious stone-floored rooms at pretty reasonable prices.

TOP END

Top-end hotels take up much of the beach frontage along the three coves. Watamu is very seasonal and many of these places are closed from at least May to mid-July.

Turtle Bay Beach Club (Map p202; ☎ 32003; www.turtlebay.co.ke; r per person low season €58-85, high season €93-122; 🏠 🍷 🍻 🍹) At the far end of the cove, Turtle Bay is one of the best resorts of its kind in the area, with palm-planted gardens to disguise the size of the site. There are various classes of rooms here, facilities are excellent and it's particularly strong on kids' entertainment. Loads of excursions are on offer at the community-oriented Discovery Centre, most of which are open to non-guests. Prices quoted are all-inclusive.

Ocean Sports Hotel (Map p202; ☎ 32008; oceansps@africaonline.co.ke; half board s/d low season US\$82/111, high season US\$100/160; 🏠 🍷 🍻 🍹) A small, informal family-run resort with a deep-sea fishing slant. It's very modest considering the prices, but the atmosphere's very relaxed and the clientele consists mainly of British expats, including local residents who often drop in for a drink. Good cheap snorkelling trips are available here (KSh800).

Hemingways Resort (Map p202; ☎ 32624; www.hemingways.co.ke; half board s/d low season UK£57/82, high season UK£143/203; 🏠 🍷 🍻 🍹) Next door to Ocean Sports, this very stately luxury lodge has a strong deep-sea fishing theme (well,

duh), snappy service and an exclusive ambience. Loads of activities are possible – prices include free transfers from Malindi airport, snorkelling in the marine park and trips to Malindi and Gede.

Aquarius Resort (Map p199; ☎ 32069; www.aquarius.watamu.com; full board s/d low season €64.50/86, high season €78/104; 🏠 🍷 🍻 🍹) A brand-new place set back from the water. The *makuti*-roofed buildings are set in a lovely garden and there are peaceful communal balconies overlooking the pool. The Mapango Restaurant (Map p199), in a separate compound nearer the beach, is highly recommended.

Watamu Beach Hotel (Map p199) is a posh African Safari Club hotel that takes up most of the northern peninsula (p346). Watamu's small but persistent poses of touts and taxi drivers hang around opposite the complex entrance.

Eating

As the better hotels cater more than amply for their clients, there's not much of an independent restaurant scene in Watamu, and most places close relatively early.

For local cuisine, several tiny stalls along Beach Way Rd sell ultra-cheap meals of kebabs, chicken, chips, samosas, chapati and the like. KSh150 to KSh200 should be more than enough to fill you up, possibly with a drink thrown in.

Ujamaa Bar & Restaurant (Map p199; mains KSh150-600; 🍷 noon-2pm & 5-9pm) A central village eatery with some tourist standards such as steak and spaghetti thrown in to complement the local favourites (and up the prices).

Cladena Swiss Restaurant (Map p199; ☎ 32500; dadena@africaonline.co.ke; mains KSh200-600) It's not often you get a taste of the Alps in coastal Kenya, so if you have a hankering for fondue and sausage this is the place to come. It's also the site restaurant for the self-catering cottages run by the same owners.

For a splurge, try the Sunday lunch buffets at the Ocean Sports Hotel or Hemingway's – the going rate is around KSh1000.

Mama Lucy (Map p199; ☎ 32584; Beach Way Rd) and Watamu (Map p199) supermarkets are handy for self-caterers. There's a good *halal* butchery (Map p199) near the village mosque.

Getting There & Around

There are matatus between Malindi and Watamu throughout the day (KSh50, one

hour). All matatus pass the turn-off to the Gede ruins (KSh10).

For Mombasa, the easiest option is to take a matatu to the highway (KSh10) and flag down a bus or matatu from there.

Taxis charge KSh800 to the Gede ruins and KSh1800 to Malindi. There are also a handful of motorised rickshaws, which are cheaper and can be handy for the long beach road; a ride to the KWS office should cost around KSh250.

Bicycles can be hired at various hotels and shops for around KSh60 per hour.

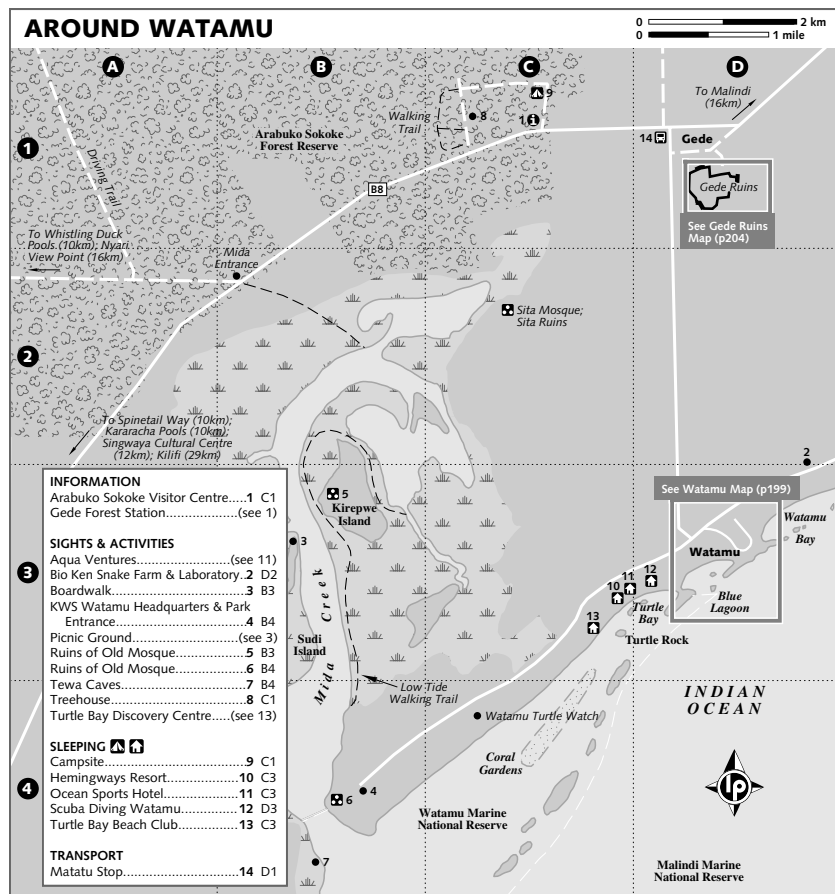
ARABUKO SOKOKE FOREST RESERVE

Close to the marine park at Watamu, **Arabuko Sokoke Forest Reserve** (Map p202; adult/child US\$10/5) is the largest tract of indigenous coastal forest remaining in East Africa, with four distinct vegetation zones. Gazetted in 2002 as an International Heritage Site, it's administered jointly by the Forestry Department and KWS, and contains an unusually high concentration of rare species, especially birds (240 species) and butterflies (260 species). A good deal of work has gone into involving the local community in the protection of the forest.

The most high-profile birds here are Clarke's weaver (found nowhere else in the world), the beautiful miniature Sokoke scops owl (only 15cm tall), the east coast akalat, the Sokoke pipit, the Amani sunbird and the spotted ground thrush. The reserve's signature animal is the charming golden-rumped elephant-shrew – amazingly, it's related to the full-sized elephant. You may see its much larger cousin trundling around the forest, as there's a herd of 80 here.

The **Arabuko Sokoke Visitor Centre** (Map p202; Malindi Rd; ☎ 042-32462; 🕒 8am-4pm) is very helpful; it's at Gede Forest Station, with displays on the various species found here. The shop sells the excellent KWS/Forestry Department guide *Arabuko Sokoke Forest & Mida Creek* (KSh300) and Tansy Bliss' *Arabuko-Sokoke Forest – A Visitor's Guide* (KSh120). The noticeboard in the centre shows the sites of recent wildlife sightings.

From the visitor centre, a series of nature trails, running tracks and 4WD paths cut through the forest. There are more bird trails at **Whistling Duck Pools**, reached via the Mida Creek entrance to the reserve, and at **Kararacha Pools** and **Spinetail Way**, located



16km further south. Near Karacha is the **Singwaya Cultural Centre**, where traditional dances can be arranged.

Trained bird and wildlife guides (☎ 0734-994931) can be hired at KSh600 for up to three hours, KSh1200 for a full day and KSh800 for a half day or a highly recommended night walk (leaving the visitor centre at 6pm). They're very knowledgeable about the forest, and also offer walks in Mida Creek on the opposite side of the highway.

There are basic **campsites** (per person US\$8) close to the visitor centre and further south near Spintail Way. With permission, camping is also allowed deeper within the forest or at the **treehouse** by Sand Quarry. (Acro-

batic nymphomaniacs take note: a painted warning prohibits sex here!)

The forest is just off the main Malindi–Mombasa road. The main gate to the forest and visitor centre is about 1.5km west of the turn-off to Gede and Watamu, while the Mida entrance is about 3km further south. All buses and matatus between Mombasa and Malindi can drop you at either entrance. From Watamu, matatus to Malindi can drop you at the main junction.

GEDE RUINS

Some 4km from Watamu, just off the main Malindi–Mombasa road, are the famous **Gede ruins** (adult/child KSh200/100; ☎ 7am–6pm), one of the principal historical monuments

on the coast. Hidden away in the forest is a vast complex of derelict houses, palaces and mosques, made all the more mysterious by the fact that there seem to be no records of Gede's existence in any historical texts.

Gede (or Gedi) was established and actively trading by at least the 13th century. Excavations have uncovered Ming Chinese porcelain and glass and glazed earthenware from Persia, indicating not only trade links, but a taste for luxury among Gede's Swahili elite. Within the compound are ruins of ornate tombs and mosques and the regal ruins of a Swahili palace, further evidence of Gede's prosperity.

The city was inexplicably abandoned in the 17th or 18th century. The current wisdom is that a series of events weakened the city-state, including disease, guerrilla attacks by the Galla tribe from Somalia and the cannibalistic Zimba people from near Malawi, punitive expeditions from rival city Mombasa and the removal of the sheikh of Malindi by the Portuguese in 1593. Then again, the reason could simply be that Gede ran out of water – at some stage the water table here dropped rapidly and none of the wells at Gede today contain water.

Whatever the reason for Gede's abandonment, the forest took over and the site was lost to the world until the 1920s. Since then, there have been extensive excavations, revealing the remains of substantial Swahili houses and complex sanitation facilities, including toilets and cisterns for ritual washing. The toilets are particularly impressive, consisting of paired cubicles containing a squat toilet and a stand for a washbasin. All the buildings here were constructed of coral rag, coral lime and earth, and some have pictures incised into the plaster finish of their walls.

Two walls surround the site, the inner one of which may have divided the wealthier, ruling-class section of town from the rest of the populace. Another theory is that it was built to enclose a smaller area after the city was temporarily abandoned in the 15th or 16th century. Most of the excavated buildings are concentrated in a dense cluster near the entrance gate, but there are dozens of other ruins scattered through the forest.

Walking Tour

The tree-shrouded ruins are very atmospheric and you will often have the site to

yourself if you visit early in the morning. Guides are available at the gate for KSh300; they definitely help bring the site to life, pointing out the various trees and plants as well as interesting features of the buildings, but will generally stick to a standard circuit of the most important ruins. If you want to see the whole 45-acre site you'll either have to be insistent or go round by yourself. Be a little careful if you choose the latter, as there are dozens of deep wells here.

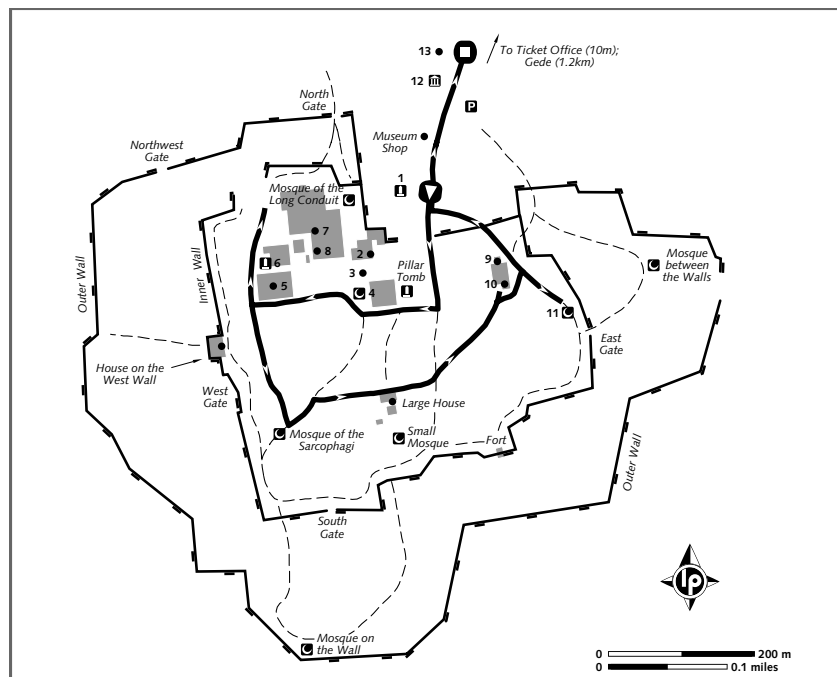
Gedi – Historical Monument (KSh50), a guidebook to the ruins with a map and descriptions of many of the buildings, should be available at the ticket office or the museum shop.

On your right as you enter the compound is the **Dated Tomb (1)**, so called because of the inscription on the wall, featuring the Muslim date corresponding to 1399. This tomb has provided a reference point for dating other buildings within the complex. Near it, inside the wall, is the **Tomb of the Fluted Pillar (2)**, which is characteristic of such pillar designs found along the East African coast. The tomb is largely intact and was once decorated with ceramic dishes and coral bosses.

Past the tomb, next to the **House of the Long Court (3)**, the **Great Mosque (4)** is one of Gede's most significant buildings. It originally dates from the mid-15th century but was rebuilt a century later, possibly after damage sustained at the time of Gede's first abandonment. The mosque is of typical East African design with a *mihrab* or echo-chamber facing Mecca. You can see where porcelain bowls were once mounted in the walls flanking the *mihrab*. On the edge of

TOILET DIPLOMACY?

One intriguing feature of the palace at Gede is the antechamber where distinguished guests are believed to have waited for a personal audience with the town's ruler. Not only is it small and narrow, but the vent in the inside wall leads directly to the ruler's personal toilet, which has no other ventilation! You can just visualise the poor visiting dignitaries shifting uncomfortably on the stone benches as the noises and smells of a higher power wafted over them – surely a political master stroke...



the mosque is a ritual washing area, served by a conduit from a nearby well.

Beyond the mosque are the ruins of an extensive **palace (5)** spread out over a quarter of an acre and thought to have been owned by the former ruler of Gede. This regal structure is entered through a complete arched doorway and many of its interesting features have been preserved, including the great audience hall and a strongroom with no doors or windows, used to store valuables (the only entry would have been a small hatch high up in the wall). Beside the palace is an annexe believed to be the Women's Quarters, consisting of four apartments with private courtyards built later than the main structure.

Some of the walls contain square niches used for oil lamps, and there's also a well-preserved Swahili toilet. One of the most interesting things found within the ruins was an earthenware jar containing a *finjo* or charm, thought to attract *djinn*s (guardian spirits) who would drive trespassers insane. The palace also has a particularly fine **pillar tomb (6)**; its hexagonal shape is unique in East Africa.

Following the path past the tomb, around 11 old **Swahili houses (7)** have been excavated here, in a compact group beside the Great Mosque and the palace. They're each named after particular features of their design, or after objects found in them by archaeologists. The **House of the Cistern (8)** is particularly interesting, with ancient illustrations incised into the plaster walls. Like most houses at Gede, these dwellings follow a traditional Swahili pattern, with a reception court at the front and separate living quarters for the master of the house and his wives.

The other excavations on the site are more spread out, with numerous paths running through the woods from the main complex. Some of the most interesting structures are east of the Great Mosque, including the **House of the Dhow (9)**, the **House of the Double Court (10)** and the nearby **Mosque of the Three Aisles (11)**, which has the largest well at Gede. There are a handful of other structures in the forest if you wish to explore further.

As you head back out past the car park, there's a small **museum (12)** and 'interpretation centre' with displays of artefacts found

on the site, although the best stuff was taken to the Fort Jesus museum in Mombasa.

Other Attractions

Right by the entrance to the Gede complex is the **Kipepeo butterfly farm (13)**; ☎ 32380; non-resident adult/child KSh100/50; ☎ 8am-5pm), named for the Swahili word for butterfly. It was set up by a zoologist from the University of Nairobi. Locals are paid to collect live pupae from the Arabuko Sokoke Forest Reserve, which are hatched into butterflies and sold to foreign collectors and live exhibits in the UK and USA. The money is then ploughed back into conservation of the forests.

Getting There & Away

The ruins lie just off the main highway near the village of Gede, on the access road to Watamu. The easiest way to get here is to take a Watamu-bound matatu to Gede Village and follow the well-signposted dirt road from there – it's a 10-minute walk.

It's also possible to get a taxi to take you on a round trip from Malindi for about KSh1000, with an hour or more to look around the site. This could be worthwhile if your time is limited.

MALINDI & AROUND

☎ 042

Malindi is one of those holiday towns that inspire wildly opposite reactions in people. For many, especially Italians, this is their Kenyan beach paradise and even their adopted home, defended with the unswerving loyalty of a shrine; for others it's a cynical tourist trap with few redeeming features, at best a transport hub for Lamu. If you're new to Africa the high-season hassle may well incline you towards the latter angle, but it would be a shame to dismiss Malindi out of hand, and once you get under its skin you may well find there's more to the town than pizzas and sunloungers.

The Swahili city-state of Malindi had its heyday in the 14th century, when it often rivalled Mombasa and Paté for control of this part of the East African coast. An important trading post, it attracted shipping from as far afield as China, and was one of the few places on the coast to offer a friendly welcome to the early Portuguese mariners.

From a tourist perspective, modern Malindi is all about the beaches, with little in the

way of cultural attractions. Offshore are the coral reefs of the Malindi Marine National Park, one of Kenya's best marine parks, with plenty of opportunities for snorkelling and diving.

The town is best visited during the high season, from August to January, and it can often seem pretty dead if you visit outside these times.

Orientation

The actual centre of Malindi is the area around the old market on Uhuru Rd; the tourist accommodation, restaurants and malls are spread out north and south along the coast. Mama Ngina Rd (which is also known as Government Rd, Vasco da Gama Rd, Sea Front Rd or Ocean View Rd on certain sections) provides access to the resorts south of the town, while the KWS headquarters is at the south end of parallel Casuarina Rd. The big shopping arcades and restaurant complexes are north of the centre on Lamu Rd.

Information

EMERGENCY

Ambulance (☎ 30575)

Fire (☎ 31001, 0733-550990)

Police (☎ 31555; Kenyatta Rd)

INTERNET ACCESS

Bling Net (☎ 30041; Lamu Rd; per min KSh2) Also does food.

Dragonbyte (☎ 30778; dragonbyte@swiftmalindi.com; Malindi Complex, Lamu Rd; per min KSh2)

Inter-Communications (☎ 31310; Lamu Rd; per min KSh1; ☎ 8am-11pm)

Telephone Solutions (☎ 30782; Sabaki Centre, Lamu Rd; per min KSh2)

Y-Net (☎ 30171; y-netinternational@yahoo.com; Stancharnt Arcade, Lamu Rd; per min KSh2)

MONEY

Barclays Bank (☎ 20656; Lamu Rd)

Dollar Forex Bureau (☎ 30602; Lamu Rd) Rates may be slightly better here than at the banks.

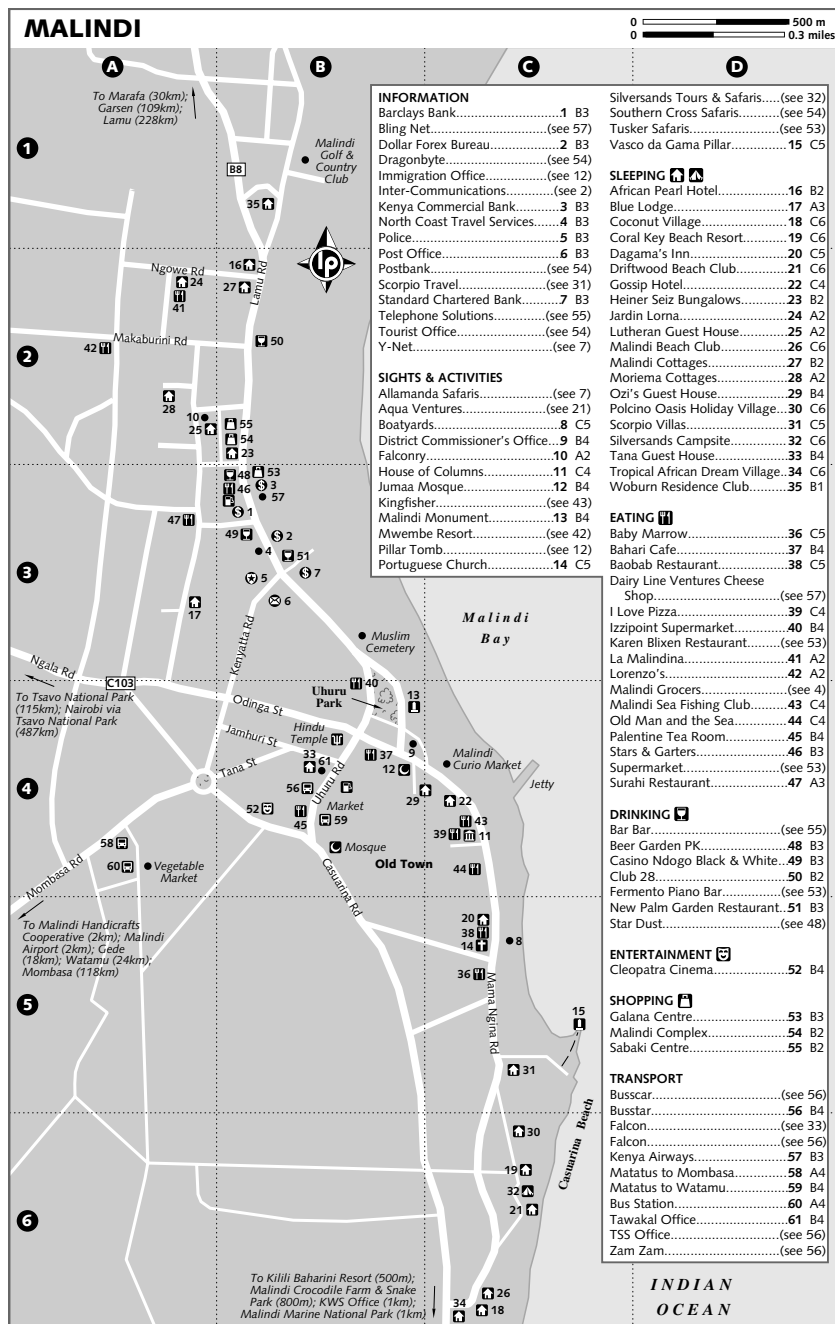
Kenya Commercial Bank (☎ 20148; Lamu Rd) With ATM (accepts Visa cards).

Postbank (Malindi Complex, Lamu Rd)

Standard Chartered Bank (Stancharnt Arcade, Lamu Rd) With ATM (accepts Visa cards).

POST

Post office (Kenyatta Rd)



go out at low tide, so it's a good idea to call in advance to check times. The going rate is around KSh3500 per boat (five to ten people) for a two-hour trip, and masks and snorkels are provided. Alternatively, you can take a tour with any of the agencies in town.

The use of fins (flippers) is discouraged as there has been lots of damage caused by inexperienced snorkellers. Walking atop the reef at low tide also does irreparable damage and should be avoided.

The KWS compound sits on a lovely stretch of beach and there's a KWS campsite and bandas (opposite). You can also charge national park smartcards here for trips to Tsavo East and West.

MALINDI CROCODILE FARM & SNAKE PARK

This commercial **crocodile farm** (☎ 20121; non-resident adult/child US\$5/2; 🕒 9am-5.30pm) is just off the main road leading to the marine park, and the crocs obligingly engage in a feeding frenzy at 4pm every Wednesday and Friday. Kids are more likely than adults to enjoy the spectacle without making the link between the smiling reptiles in the pens and the belts and wallets on sale in the foyer...

FALCONRY

Malindi's **falconry** (☎ 0722-346491; adult/child KSh300/150; 🕒 9am-5.30pm), near the town centre, has a number of caged birds of prey and a late-opening bar-restaurant. The displays can be dramatic, but the drab atmosphere's a bit depressing.

DIVING

With the marine park just offshore, scuba diving is a popular activity, although, as mentioned, the visibility is greatly reduced by silt between March and June. All the big hotels have dive centres, usually run in conjunction with local companies. Single dives cost €40 plus the park entry fee, while a PADI open-water diver course will cost around €330.

Main operators:

Aqua Ventures (☎ 32420; www.diveinkenya.com; Driftwood Beach Club)

Blue Fin (☎ 0722-261242; www.bluefindiving.com) Operates out of several resorts in Malindi.

DEEP-SEA FISHING

As you might expect with all the Hemingway allusions, deep-sea fishing is popular.

Kingfisher (☎ 31275; Mama Ngina Rd), below the Malindi Sea Fishing Club, is one of the best places on the coast to find a cheap, private deep-sea fishing charter. It has a large fleet of boats and charges US\$350 for a 'short day' of around six hours (up to four anglers). You can also ask around the boatyard for cheaper local crews. Tag and release is recommended in all cases (see p200).

Tours

Numerous safari companies operate from Malindi to Tsavo East National Park, entering the park via the Sala Gate. The going rate for a day trip is US\$120 per person. Trips to the Malindi Marine National Park are also a standard option (US\$20).

Reliable companies include the following:

Allamanda Safaris (☎ 31272; allamanda@swiftmalindi.com; Stanchart Arcade, Lamu Rd)

Silversands Tours & Safaris (☎ 30014; Mama Ngina Rd)

Southern Cross Safaris (☎ 30547; sxsmld@swiftmalindi.com; Malindi Complex, Lamu Rd)

Tusker Safaris (☎ 30525; tuskersaf@swiftmalindi.com; AG Complex, Lamu Rd) Can organise transport to the Marafa Depression (US\$25 per vehicle).

Sleeping BUDGET

Tana Guest House (☎ 30940; Jamhuri St; s/d/tr KSh550/550/650, s/d with shared bathroom KSh350/450) Just round the corner from the market area, this is a severely convenient location for buses and cheap food. Rooms are decent for the price, with fans, nets, squat toilets and what appear to be changing rooms. You can buy day-old chicks at reception, if you so wish.

Lutheran Guest House (☎ 30098; tw KSh1000, tw/tr/q with shared bathroom KSh800/1200/1500, bungalows KSh1500) The Lutheran religious centre, set in a quiet garden near the falconry, provides accommodation to travellers of all persuasions. The simple rooms have fans, nets and little else; the bungalows have living rooms and kitchens. Alcohol is prohibited here.

Dagama's Inn (☎ 31942; Mama Ngina Rd; s/d KSh600/800) Big, bare doubles and smaller singles in a modern block, now under new management, with a decent Indian restaurant downstairs (mains KSh190 to KSh495). Only one room has a fan, but there's plenty of breeze through the slatted walls.

Blue Lodge (☎ 30246; s/d KSh350/400, s with shared bathroom KSh300) On the dirt streets behind

Lamu Rd, this is a basic but acceptable budget option away from the bustle of the town centre.

KWS compound (☎ 31554; Casuarina Beach; campsites adult/child US\$8/5, bandas per person KSh600) KWS provides a shady campsite, with lights and a cooking area, and eight popular bandas. Water and bedding are provided and there's a kitchen and mess hall you can use for KSh300. Mountain bikes can be hired for KSh200 per day.

Silversands Campsite (☎ 20412; campsites adult/child KSh200/100, bandas KSh500-600) On the southern beach strip, this is a much-loved site for travellers. There are good facilities but limited shade. The simple tented bandas have recently been fully refurbished. Bicycles can be rented for KSh200 per day.

MIDRANGE

There are relatively few places in this price range. All rates are for high season and include breakfast.

African Pearl Hotel (☎ 0733-966167; www.africanpearl.com; Lamu Rd; s/d from KSh1800/2200, cottages KSh2000-4500; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Blessed with a personal touch, this is the kind of pearl that's worth shuckin' a few shellfish for. Rooms are spacious, all with their own balconies, and foregoing air-con to get an atmospheric wood-panelled fan room is no hardship. Self-catering facilities are available for longer stays.

Ozi's Guest House (☎ 20218; ozi@swiftmalindi.com; Mama Ngina Rd; s/d/tr with shared bathroom KSh600/1200/1800) Barely out of the budget category, this friendly hostelry is a travellers' favourite, though with the mosque right next door light sleepers may want to start praying.

Jardin Lorna (☎ 30658; harry@swiftmalindi.com; Mtangani Rd; r KSh2500-3500; 🍷 🍷) Don't be fooled by the French *nom de plume* - Lorna is very unpretentious, providing accommodation mainly for students of the Hospitality Training and Management Institute. Rooms are endearingly quirky, zebra rugs and local art punctuate the interior, and the large family room even has a panic button! The restaurant (p210) is also very good.

Heiner Seiz Bungalows (☎ 20978; Lamu Rd; s/d KSh1400/1600; 🍷 🍷) These quiet German-run cottages are subdivided into unfancy but well-kept rooms with fridges. Some kitchens are also available to guests.

Moriema Cottages (☎ 31326; s/d KSh1400/2500) These large cottage-style rooms are a pretty

good deal, but whoever thought of putting in carpets and dull green furnishings was way off the mark aesthetically. They're tucked away in a quaint garden behind the Sabaki shopping centre.

Palcino Oasis Holiday Village (☎ 31995; oasis@africaonline.co.ke; Mama Ngina Rd; apts €28-39; 🍷 🍷) A vast but crumbling four-storey *makuti*-roofed apartment block on the southern beach strip, surrounding a truly enormous pool. The shopping arcade has a pizzeria and a good ice-cream parlour.

Gossip Hotel (☎ 0723-516602; Mama Ngina Rd; s/d KSh700/1200) Just down from Ozi's, the Gossip aims for much the same backpacker clientele. Rooms have four-poster nets, dark wood and plastic chairs, and the downstairs restaurant boasts an intriguing TV lounge/junk corner. A couple of rooms share bathrooms, but prices are the same.

Malindi Cottages (☎ 21071; malindicottages@yahoo.com; Lamu Rd; r KSh1500, cottages KSh3000; 🍷) Looking at the terrible 1970s curtains, the seatless toilets, the dodgy kitchenettes and the dank (or empty) pool, you'd have to say this place was a touch overpriced. Still, the rooms themselves are liveable, and at least there's a couple of swings for the kiddies.

TOP END

Malindi experienced a phenomenal tourist boom in the 1980s and has received regular cash injections from Italian tour operators. As a result, there are fancy resorts all along the beachfront both north and south of the town centre, stretching all the way to the marine park. The hotels south of town open right onto a wonderful stretch of beach, but those north of the centre are separated from the ocean by a wide swathe of dunes.

Unless otherwise stated, the following rates include breakfast. Note that most of these places close or scale down operations between April and June or July.

Tropical African Dream Village (☎ 31673; www.planhotel.ch; Casuarina Rd; s/d/tr low season from €94/130/175, high season from €116/160/216; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) This place consists of three resorts around the intersection of Mama Ngina and Casuarina Rds. The Tropical African Dream Village section is a rather grand complex of *makuti*-roofed plantation-style houses, with a soaring multi-level bar and restaurant. Around the corner, the fancy Malindi Beach Club section has a glorious Swahili doorway

and accommodation in stylish Moorish cottages, while the cheaper Coconut Village is a more predictable collection of *makuti*-roofed villas.

Kilili Baharini Resort (☎ 20169; www.kililibaharini.com; Casuarina Rd; half board s/d from US\$153/182; 🍷 🍷) This is a splendid Italian resort, with flamboyant decor and Swahili beds set all over the complex so you can read and catch the sea breeze. It fronts directly onto the sand, and the light, spacious rooms are clustered in small groups around attractive pools.

Coral Key Beach Resort (☎ 30717; www.coralkeymalindi.com; Mama Ngina Rd; s/d low season from €23/31, high season from €44/58; 🍷 🍷 🍷) A huge mass-tourism resort catering particularly for young Italians. It's very lively, with activities such as water-volleyball and a climbing wall. Rooms are divided into groups within five themed areas, each block with its own separate pool, which adds up to a *lot* of water. The Sporting Club has the best design.

Driftwood Beach Club (☎ 20155; www.driftwoodclub.com; Mama Ngina Rd; s/d/tr KSh5300/7600/9120, cottages KSh16,500; 🍷 🍷 🍷) One of the best-known resorts in Malindi, Driftwood prides itself on an informal atmosphere and attracts a more independent clientele than many of its peers. The restaurant, bar and other facilities are all open to nonguests for a temporary membership fee of KSh200 per day.

Woburn Residence Club (☎ 31085; www.woburnresidencemalindi.com; s/d from €79.20/104, apt low season €152-232, high season €190-290; 🍷 🍷) If you're not bothered about direct beach access, this swish complex offers pristine modern rooms and apartments with giant marble bathrooms and the smart Two Dolphins restaurant (mains KSh450 to KSh850).

Scorpio Villas (☎ 20194; s/d low season €26.40/48, high season €41.80/76; 🍷 🍷) Villa-type accommodation set in dense, well-tended tropical gardens with three pools, a restaurant and a travel agent. The beds are huge and lovely Silversands Beach is just 50m from the gate. Staff aren't always as service-oriented as they could be, though.

Eating

KENYAN & SWAHILI

For those on a budget (or just bored of pasta), there are some good Swahili places in the old part of town. Many of these places close during the month of Ramadan.

Palentine Tea Room (☎ 31412; Uhuru Rd; mains KSh60-140; 🍷) A recommended all-hours Muslim canteen opposite the old market, serving stews, curries, pilau and soups in tiled surroundings. It's friendly and almost always busy.

Baobab Restaurant (☎ 31699; Mama Ngina Rd; mains KSh250-600) On the seafront near the boatyards, Baobab is reasonably popular and offers decent Western and African food and beers.

Bahari Cafe (Mama Ngina Rd; meals KSh70-220) Close to the souvenir shops at Uhuru Park, Bahari is a bright little fast-food café serving biryanis.

Stars & Garters (☎ 31336; Lamu Rd; mains KSh190-300; 🍷 24hr) A large *makuti*-roofed bar with pool tables, cable TV, beers and a quite reasonable menu offering all the usual grills and spills.

WESTERN/ITALIAN

Old Man and the Sea (☎ 31106; Mama Ngina Rd; mains KSh300-590, seafood KSh550-1100) Definitely the daddy of Malindi's restaurants, this old Moorish house on the seafront has no competition in its class. The food's superb, service is attentive, you can get decent wine by the glass (KSh110) and the guestbook is entertaining reading – apparently Tupac Shakur returned from the grave to eat here. A 16% VAT charge is added to the bill.

Jardin Lorna Restaurant (☎ 30658; Mtangani Rd; mains KSh150-550) Amid the trees and obsolete beer pumps, this peaceful garden restaurant serves up a limited but unusual selection of French, Italian and African dishes, from standard grills to 'Chinese fondue' (beef with a range of sauces). Lobster starts at KSh600, which is pretty good value.

Malindi Sea Fishing Club (☎ 30550; Mama Ngina Rd; mains KSh240-400; 🍷 noon-8pm) A popular hang-out for the deep-sea fishing crowd. The walls feature some huge stuffed sharks and billfish in dramatic poses. The seafood is excellent. It's a great place for a sundown beer, but it closes early and you have to pay a KSh100 temporary membership fee.

I Love Pizza (☎ 20672; Mama Ngina Rd; nwright@africaonline.co.ke; pizzas KSh300-550, mains from KSh600) A very popular Italian restaurant on the seafront, full of diners pointedly ignoring the cringeworthy name. Luckily the pizzas are excellent.

Baby Marrow (☎ 0733-542584; Mama Ngina Rd; mains KSh350-800) Everything about this place is

quirkily stylish, from the thatched veranda and the plant-horse to the Italian-based menu and the tasty seafood (KSh1400 to KSh1800). We're hoping the 'tiramisu' is a misprint though.

Karen Blixen Restaurant (☎ 0733-974756; cely3@yahoo.it; Galana Centre, Lamu Rd; mains KSh600-950) A fine (wait for it...) Italian terrace restaurant hinting at Art Deco style. The menu has all the usual and an added dose of Chinese, seafood and grill dishes, plus crocodile and warthog (!) for KSh1000. It's also good for a morning cappuccino.

Surahi Restaurant (☎ 30452; mains KSh270-370) What, no spaghetti? Break the habit with an Indian meal at this big restaurant, which has a variable menu and a particularly good range of naan and *paratha* (Indian flatbread). It's down a long, bumpy dirt track off Lamu Rd, and sadly seems to go to pieces slightly outside high season.

In the network of streets behind Lamu Rd are two very upmarket Italian restaurants, **La Malindina** (☎ 20045; www.malindina.com in Italian) and **Lorenzo's** (☎ 31758; Mwembe Resort, Makaburini Rd). Both are open from 9pm in high season only, and serve set meals for around KSh2000. Lorenzo's is part of the private Mwembe Resort, off Lamu Rd, while La Malindina is just around the corner from Jardin Lorna.

SELF-CATERING

The following are useful outlets:

Dairy Line Ventures Cheese Shop (☎ 31264; Lamu Rd)

Izzipoint supermarket (☎ 30652; Uhuru Rd)

Malindi Grocers (☎ 20886; Lamu Rd)

Supermarket (Galana Centre, Lamu Rd)

Drinking & Entertainment

BARS & CLUBS

Bar Bar (Sabaki Centre, Lamu Rd) A perennially popular high-season courtyard bar, restaurant and ice-cream parlour with nonstop Italian cable TV in the background. For a snack lunch, the panini and foccacia are recommended.

Fermento Piano Bar (☎ 31780; Galana Centre, Lamu Rd; admission KSh200; 🍷 from 10pm Wed, Fri & Sat; 🍷) 'For those of the night' – Fermento has the town's hippest dance floor, apparently once frequented by Naomi Campbell. It's young, trendy and Italian, so wear your showiest outfit. Morgan's Bar, part of Fermento, is a ritzy cocktail joint with

a very well-tended bar (cocktails KSh300 to KSh800).

Casino Ndogo Black & White (☎ 0724-236476; Lamu Rd; admission KSh100; 🍷 24hr) A typical semi-open *makuti* bar-club with regular live Congolese lingala bands.

Many tourist bars on Lamu Rd can seem like they're just glorified pick-up joints for prostitutes; **Beer Garden PK** (Lamu Rd) and **New Palm Garden Restaurant** (Lamu Rd) could be put in this category, though things may lighten up a little out of season.

The main nightclubs outside the resorts are **Star Dust** (Lamu Rd) and **Club 28** (Lamu Rd), which open erratically out of season but are generally rammed when they do. As with the bars above, you can expect plenty of unwanted attention.

CINEMAS

Cleopatra Cinema (Casuarina Rd; admission KSh20) This small cinema screens Indian blockbusters and English, Italian and Spanish premier-league football (soccer).

Shopping

There are numerous posh souvenir shops and a curio market along Uhuru Rd and Mama Ngina Rd near the old town. Avoid the shell vendors around Uhuru Park – the shells on sale here are mostly plundered from the national park.

Malindi Handicrafts Cooperative (☎ 30248) Another good place to buy handicrafts is this community project found on the outskirts of Malindi. The cooperative employs numerous local artisans, and the woodcarvings are of a high quality. To get there, turn off the main road to Mombasa near the BP petrol station; you'll find the centre 2km along a dirt road, just opposite the community clinic.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Airkenya (☎ 30646; Malindi Airport) has daily afternoon/evening flights to Nairobi (US\$85, 1¼ hours). **Kenya Airways** (☎ 20237; Lamu Rd) flies the same route at least once a day (from KSh4010).

Mombasa Air Safari (☎ 041-433061) has daily flights to Mombasa (US\$21, 25 minutes) and Lamu (US\$62, 30 minutes) in high season; booking in Malindi is through **Southern Cross Safaris** (☎ 30547; Malindi Complex, Lamu Rd).

BUS & MATATU

The new bus station on Mombasa Rd is currently only used by Mombasa Raha (Mombasa Liners), which has numerous daily buses to Mombasa (KSh150, two hours). Metro Mombasa buses and Mombasa matatus (KSh100 to KSh150) stop at the road stage near here.

Companies such as Busstar, Busscar, TSS and Falcon have offices opposite the old market in the centre of Malindi. All have daily departures to Nairobi at around 7am and/or 7pm (KSh800, 10 to 12 hours), going via Mombasa.

Matatus to Watamu (KSh50, one hour) leave from the old market in town and also stop at the Mombasa stage.

Thanks to improvements on the Malindi-Garissa road, taking a bus to Lamu is an easier and safer proposition than a few years ago, though buses are still accompanied by armed guards for some of the way. Among the various companies offering services, Tawakal buses leave at 8.30am, Falcon at 8.45am and Zam Zam at 10.30am; the fare is KSh300 to KSh400. The journey takes at least four hours between Malindi and the jetty at Mokowe. The ferry to Lamu from the mainland costs KSh50 and takes about 20 minutes.

Getting Around

You can rent bicycles from the Silversands Campsite, the KWS and most of the bigger hotels for KSh200 to KSh500 per day. This is probably the best way to get around town unless you prefer to walk. Cycling at night is not permitted.

Taxis are mainly concentrated along Lamu Rd and in front of any of the big hotels south of town (the best place to start is Coral Key Beach Resort). From the southern resorts, it costs KSh200 to Malindi town, KSh300 to Lamu Rd and KSh500 to the airport.

Malindi also has Kenya's biggest fleet of Indonesian-style tuk-tuks, which are cheaper than taxis – a trip from town to the KWS office should cost around KSh100.

MARAFI DEPRESSION

This beautiful geological anomaly, also called Hell's Kitchen, Devil's Kitchen or Nyari (the Place Broken by Itself), lies about 30km directly northeast of Malindi near Marafa. Over the millennia wind and rain have eroded a

ridge of sandstone into an amazing set of gorges. Most people visit on organised tours, with a self-drive car or by taxi (KSh6000).

Alternatively, there are one or two morning matatus from Mombasa Rd in Malindi to Marafa village (KSh100, three hours), and from there it's a 30-minute walk to Hell's Kitchen. Guides are available in the village, but you may have to spend the night in one of the basic lodges, as all matatus travel in the morning.

TANA RIVER

From Garsen, a nondescript town (with very basic hotels) on the road to Lamu, a rough road leads inland to hot and humid Garissa and on to Thika. About 40km north of Garsen on this road is the **Tana River National Primate Reserve** (☎ 046-2035), established in 1976 to protect the remaining populations of the endangered crested mangabey and Tana River red colobus. Funded by the World Bank, the **Mucheledo Research Camp** was set up here in 1992 to study these rare primates, but plans to create a full-blown national park have faced considerable opposition from locals (see opposite).

While the reserve itself is not yet a viable option for tourists, Bush Homes of East Africa has taken advantage of the area's isolation to create the **Tana Delta Camp** (Nairobi ☎ 020-600457; www.bush-homes.co.ke; s/d low season US\$285/480, high season US\$380/640), a remote and exclusive lodge right at the scenic mouth of the Tana River. Prices include all meals and activities; it's at least three hours from Malindi by road, or air transfers are available for US\$40.

All roads into the area are prone to attacks by bandits and cannot currently be considered safe for independent travel; however, the security situation has improved up as far as Lamu, so things may be looking up. Contact the **KWS** (☎ 020-600800) in Nairobi to find out the latest situation.

LAMU ARCHIPELAGO

There's something magical in the air on Lamu, and it's not just the seductive sea breeze. Consisting of six main islands and countless smaller ones, the archipelago is the unrivalled jewel of the Kenyan coast, offering both tourist facilities and unspoiled tropical havens for those who know where

TANA RIVER PROTESTS

The Tana River National Primate Reserve has been earmarked for development into a national park, backed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), but the plans would require thousands of local tribespeople to be relocated from their ancestral lands. There have been extensive protests against the plan by local people, who are already suffering from a vicious ongoing tribal war between the Orma and Pokomo people over land rights.

Things came to a head in February 2001, when 300 naked women from surrounding villages stormed the research centre and attacked the scientists, a traditional gesture designed to shame enemies. Faced by such protests, the World Bank has suspended its funding and the KWS has put its plans on indefinite hold.

to find them. For many people a stay here is the highlight not just of the coast, but of their entire time in Kenya, and a large proportion of visitors are regulars entranced by the whole feel of the place.

Among the archipelago's many charms are Lamu's Swahili old town, Shela's exclusive beach community and the remote shores of Kiwayu Island. All are supported and enlivened by a cast of bizarre characters including a man called Satan, a cat called Smacker and a blind man who can 'see' women. At its best, Lamu has the ability to make you feel like you've always belonged here, and it's small wonder so many people keep coming back.

LAMU

☎ 042

Lamu town is the core of everything the archipelago stands for in the hearts and minds of inhabitants and visitors alike, a living throwback to the Swahili culture that once dominated the entire Indian Ocean coast. The winding streets, carved woods and traditional houses are simply captivating. Few experiences can compare with wandering the narrow lanes immersed in the sights and sounds of everyday life, from the mysterious rustle of *bui-bui*-clad women to the echoing of some unseen donkey's hooves, all set against the crackle of wind-blown palm trees, the slow bobbing of dhows at sunset, the smell of seafood and the changing textures of a hundred coral and plaster walls. It's simply a different world, and one you'll be in no hurry to leave.

Traditionally, Lamu houses had flat roofs that created a private space where women were free to talk and socialise; many have been replaced by shady *makuti*-covered terraces, which serve the same purpose for

the many travellers who cross paths here. Although there have been concerns about the increasing use of imported materials in building and maintenance work, conservation efforts have largely paid off and surviving examples of the town's famous carved doors and painted wooden beams are probably safe from plunder.

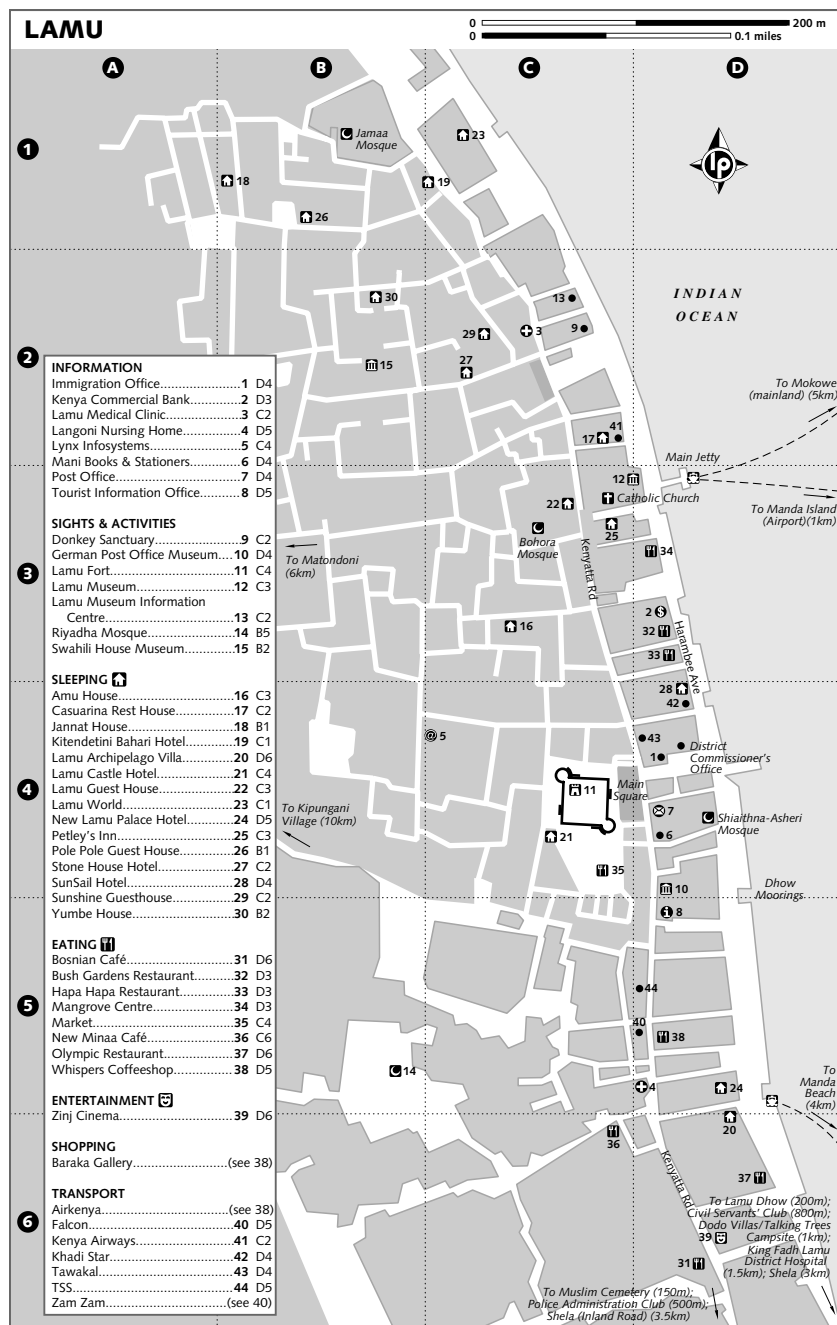
History

Lamu itself was a bit of a late starter; originally, the major power-centres in the archipelago were the Swahili settlements of Takwa, Paté, Faza and Siyu (on Paté Island), which date back to the 7th and 8th centuries. In pre-Arab times, the islands were home to Bajun tribespeople, but that culture vanished almost entirely with the ascendancy of Arabic ideas.

Arab settlers established a busy trading post on Lamu island at the start of the 16th century, exporting ivory, mangrove poles, tortoiseshell and thousands of African slaves, who were whisked away by dhow to Iraq, Oman and the burgeoning Arabic colonies elsewhere on the East African coast.

Initially, Lamu was a minor player in the East African power game, dominated by the nearby sultanate of Paté, but it rose to prominence in the 19th century after defeating the forces of Paté in a battle at Shela beach. At this time the twin cash-cows of ivory and slavery made Lamu a splendidly wealthy place, and most of the fine Swahili houses that survive today were built during this period.

It all came to an end in 1873, when the British forced Sultan Barghash of Zanzibar to close down the slave markets. With the abolition of slavery, the economy of the island went into rapid decline. The city-state was incorporated into the British Protectorate



from 1890, and became part of Kenya with independence in 1963.

Until it was 'rediscovered' by travellers in the 1970s, Lamu existed in a state of humble obscurity, escaping the runaway development that happened elsewhere on the coast. Today, only Zanzibar can offer such a feast of Swahili culture and uncorrupted traditional architecture. In 2001 Lamu town was added to Unesco's list of World Heritage Sites.

Orientation

Although there are several restaurants and places to stay along the waterfront (Harambee Ave), most of the guesthouses are tucked away in the confusing maze of alleys behind. Lamu's main thoroughfare is Kenyatta Rd, a long winding alley known popularly as 'Main St', which runs from the northern end of town, past the fort, and then south to the Muslim cemetery and the inland track to Shela.

MAPS

The leaflet-map *Lamu: Map & Guide to the Archipelago, the Island & the Town* (KSh500), available from the tourist office, is worth buying if you want to explore properly.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Lamu Museum shop (Harambee Ave) Specialises in Lamu and Swahili culture.

Mani Books & Stationers (☎ 632238; Kenyatta Rd) Good for newspapers.

INTERNET ACCESS

Lynx Infosystems (☎ 833134; per min KSh2; ☎ 8am-10pm) Temperamental connections over a Safaricom line – worth a look when the post office is closed. To find it, head west down the street next to the Khadi Star office and turn left at the end.

MEDICAL SERVICES

King Fadh Lamu District Hospital (☎ 633012) One of the most modern and well-equipped hospitals on the coast.

Lamu Medical Clinic (☎ 633438; Kenyatta Rd; ☎ 8am-9pm)

Langoni Nursing Home (☎ 633349; Kenyatta Rd; ☎ 24hr) Offers clinic services.

MONEY

If you're stuck outside bank times, ask around; local shopkeepers may be able to

help you out with changing money, sometimes at surprisingly reasonable rates.

Kenya Commercial Bank (☎ 633327; Harambee Ave) The only bank on Lamu. No ATM, Visa advances only. Beware of large commissions on cards and travellers cheques.

POST

Post office (Harambee Ave) Postal services, cardphones and the best Internet connections in town.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist information office (☎ 633449; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-4pm) A commercial tour and accommodation agency that also provides tourist information.

VISA EXTENSIONS

Immigration office (☎ 633032; off Kenyatta Rd) There's an office near the fort where you should be able to get visa extensions, although travellers are sometimes referred to Mombasa.

Dangers & Annoyances

Beach boys are the primary nuisance in Lamu. Most loiter around the waterfront offering dhow trips, marijuana and other 'services'. Men can generally get away with a bit of friendly chat, but single women and even groups of female travellers are likely to have constant company, which can get very wearing. Unfortunately there's not a lot you can do except be firm, stay polite and always keep on walking.

Lamu has long been popular for its relaxed and tolerant atmosphere, but it's still a Muslim island, with all the associated views of acceptable behaviour. In an extreme case in 1999, a gay couple who planned a public wedding here had to be evacuated under police custody. Whatever your sexuality, it's best to keep public displays of affection to a minimum and respect local attitudes to modesty – ignoring local sensibilities makes you just as much of an annoyance as those pesky beach boys.

Sights

All of Lamu's museums are open from 8am to 6pm daily. Admission to each is KSh200/100 for a nonresident adult/child.

LAMU MUSEUM

Housed in a very grand Swahili warehouse on the waterfront, the Lamu Museum is an excellent introduction to the culture and history of Lamu Island. It's one of the most

interesting small museums in Kenya, with displays on Swahili culture, the famous coastal carved doors, the Maulid Festival, Lamu's nautical history and the tribes who used to occupy this part of the coast in pre-Muslim days, including the Boni, who were legendary elephant-hunters.

The pride of the collection are the remarkable and ornate *siwa* (ceremonial horns) of Lamu and Paté, dating back to the 17th century. Lamu's *siwa* is made of engraved brass, but it pales beside the glorious ivory *siwa* of Paté, carved from a single massive elephant tusk. Swahili relics from Takwa and other sites in the archipelago are displayed the gallery downstairs.

The upstairs rooms, recreating the wedding quarters of a traditional Swahili house, are particularly worthwhile – not least for factoids like the custom of showing the nuptial sheet to the women of the bride's family to prove consummation had occurred.

The museum also has its own library and **Information Centre** (Harambee Ave; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat; ☑) just down the waterfront, supported by the American Embassy.

SWAHILI HOUSE MUSEUM

If the Lamu Museum stokes your interest in Swahili culture, this beautifully restored traditional house tucked away off to the side of Yumbe House hotel will put you firmly back in the past. Inside you'll find a recreation of a working Swahili home, with cookware, beds and other furniture. The attendant will give you a whistle-stop but informative tour in between small talk, including some fascinating descriptions of the regimented lives of Swahilis in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Traditional Swahili homes were built along rigid social lines, with separate quarters for men and women and audience halls allowing men to receive guests without infringing on their womenfolk's privacy. Other unusual details are the ceremonial death bed, where the deceased lay in state before burial, and the echo chamber, used by women to receive visitors without being seen when their menfolk were away. The museum is signposted from Kenyatta Rd.

LAMU FORT

The bulky, atmospheric Lamu Fort squats on Lamu's main square like a weary intruder

among the airy Swahili roofs. The building of this massive structure was begun by the Sultan of Paté in 1810 and completed in 1823. From 1910 right up to 1984 it was used as a prison, and it now houses the island's library and some lacklustre displays on natural history and the environment, which a guide will show you around. The highlight is scaling the ramparts for some sweeping town views.

GERMAN POST OFFICE MUSEUM

In the late 1800s, before the British decided to nip German expansion into Tanganyika in the bud, the Germans regarded Lamu as an ideal base from where they could successfully and safely exploit the interior. As part of their efforts the German East Africa Company set up a post office on Kenyatta Rd, and the old building is now a museum exhibiting photographs and memorabilia from that fleeting period of colonial history.

DONKEY SANCTUARY

A man without a donkey, is a donkey.
Swahili proverb

With around 3000 donkeys active on Lamu, *Equus asinus* is still the main form of transport here, and this **sanctuary** (☎ 633303; Harambee Ave; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri) was established by the International Donkey Protection Trust of Sidmouth, UK, to improve the lot of the island's hard-working beasts of burden. The project provides free veterinary services to donkey owners and tends to injured, sick or worn-out animals; there's even a small ambulance for donkey-emergencies.

Activities

DHOW TRIPS

Taking a dhow trip is almost obligatory and drifting through the mangroves is a wonderful way to experience the islands. You'll be approached by touts and would-be captains almost as soon as you arrive, but it's worth shopping around to find a captain you like and a price you're happy with. Prices vary depending on where you want to go and how long you go for; with a bit of bargaining you should pay around KSh500 per person in a group of four or five people. Groups of more than five aren't recommended as the boats aren't very big.

Solo travellers joining an existing group to make up numbers will often be offered a great price, on the condition that they don't tell their fellow passengers how much they paid. As this generally means the others paid the extortionate asking price of KSh1000 each, it probably shouldn't be encouraged!

Whatever you arrange, make sure you know exactly how much you'll be paying and what that will include, to avoid misunderstandings and overcharging. Don't hand over any money until the day of departure, except perhaps a small advance for food. On long trips, it's best to organise your own drinks. Make sure you take a hat and some sunscreen, as there is rarely any shade on the dhows.

Most day trips meander around the channel between Lamu and Manda Islands, and the price includes fishing and snorkelling, although both can be disappointing as the fish tend to hide amongst the coral during the day. Lunch is usually served up on a beach on Manda Island. Longer trips head for Manda Toto Island, which has better snorkelling.

For something a bit more flashy, Peponi Hotel, at Shela, offers full-moon dhow cruises for KSh4500 (minimum eight people) including drinks, wine and a lobster dinner.

Multi-day trips head out to Paté or the still more remote island of Kiwayu (see p228). When it is properly up and running, **Lamu Dhow** (☎ 0734-583780; rocksure@hotmail.com; Harambee Ave) will offer luxury trips with accommodation actually on board a massive vessel.

Dhows without an outboard motor are entirely dependent on wind to get them anywhere, although poling the boat is fairly common along narrow creeks and channels. It's common to get becalmed or stuck on sand banks, so you'll just have to patient and wait until the wind picks up or the tide rises to move on. With this in mind, it's probably unwise to go on a long trip if you have a flight or other appointment to meet.

Likewise, dhows are dependent on the tides. You can't sail up creeks if the tide is out and there's not enough water to float the boat. This will be the main factor determining departure and return times (see right for more information about these crafts).

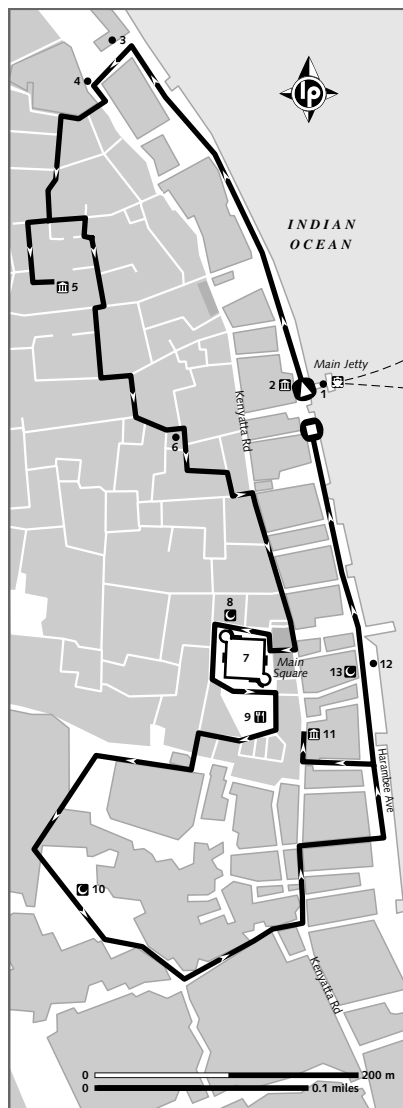
PLAIN SAILING

Arabic dhows have been negotiating the coast of East Africa for centuries, and numerous dhow ferries still operate between the mangrove islands that line the Kenyan coast. These ancient vessels are distinguished by their triangular sails (lateens), although today many rely on a mixture of wind and motor power to get around. Dhows range considerably in size, from huge ocean-going *jahazi*, with broad hulls designed to withstand constant bumping along rocky shores and coral reefs, to small *kijahazi*, used as ferries and fishing boats up and down the coast. Kenyan *jahazi* can be recognised by their perpendicular bows, distinct from the sloping bows of their Zanzibari counterparts, but you're only likely to see these larger boats on dhow tours around Mombasa. *Kijahazi* are much more common and are widely used around the Lamu archipelago. There are excellent models of the various types of the dhow in the Lamu Museum (p215).

Walking Tour

The best, indeed only, way to see Lamu town is on foot. Few experiences compare with exploring the far back streets, where you can wander unnoticed amid wafts of cardamom and carbollic and watch the town's agile cats scaling the vertical coral walls. This tour will take you past some of the more noteworthy buildings in under an hour, but don't feel bound to follow it too rigidly. In fact, getting slightly lost is a vital part of the process, and we downright insist that you take as many detours and digressions as possible!

Most of Lamu's buildings date back to the 18th century and are constructed out of local materials, with cut coral-rag blocks for the walls, wooden floors supported by mangrove poles and intricately carved shutters for windows. Lavish decorations were created using carved plaster, and carpenters were employed to produce ornately carved window and door frames as a sign of the financial status of the owners. There are so many wonderful Swahili houses that it's pointless for us to recommend specific examples – keep your eyes open wherever you go, and don't forget to look up.



Starting at the **main jetty (1)**, head north past the **Lamu Museum (2)** and along the waterfront until you reach the **door carving workshops (3)**. In recent years, there has been a real revival in woodcarving and you can once again see traditional carved lintels and doors being made in workshops like these all over Lamu.

From here head onto Kenyatta Rd, passing an original Swahili **well (4)**, and into the alleys towards the **Swahili House Museum (5)**. Once you've had your fill of domestic insights, take any route back towards the main street – if you can hit the road leading towards Matondoni you'll pass a particularly elaborate original carved **door (6)** in the Arabic style.

Once you've hit the main square and the **fort (7)**, take a right to see the crumbled remains of the 14th-century **Pwani Mosque (8)**, one of Lamu's oldest buildings; an Arabic inscription is still visible on the wall. From here you can head round and browse the covered **market (9)**, then negotiate your way towards the bright Saudi-funded **Riyadha Mosque (10)**, the centre of Lamu's religious scene, founded by the great scholar Habib Swaleh in 1891.

From here you can take as long or as short a route as you like back to the waterfront; this end of town is a little shabbier, but it has just as much life as the northern part. Then stroll back up along the promenade, diverting for the **German Post Office Museum (11)** if you haven't already seen it – the door is another amazing example of Swahili carving. If you're feeling the pace, take a rest and shoot the breeze on the **baraza ya wazee (12)**; 'Old Men's Bench' outside the appealing stucco minarets of the **Shiaithna-Asheri Mosque (13)**. Benches of this kind were a crucial feature of any Swahili home, providing an informal social setting for men to discuss the issues of the day, and this newly inaugurated seat is already well used by Lamu's loquacious elders.

Carrying on up Harambee Ave will bring you back to the main jetty and the end of our tour. We suggest you celebrate a hard day's walk with a large juice at one of the seafront restaurants!

Festivals & Events

The Maulid Festival celebrates the birth of the Prophet Mohammed. Its date shifts according to the Muslim calendar and it will fall on 12 April 2006, and 20 March in 2007 and 2008. The festival has been celebrated on the island for over 100 years and much singing, dancing and general jollity takes place around this time. Among the interesting traditional dances are the *goma* or cane-fighting dance and the quivering-sword

dance, where sword-wielding dancers set up a chorus of vibrating steel.

Organised events include swimming galas, poetry reading, calligraphy competitions, donkey races for young boys and dhow races for all the dhow captains. Most of the celebrations are centred around the Riyadhha Mosque, although there is much loud rejoicing at all of Lamu's mosques. On the final day a procession heads down to the tomb of the man who started it all, Habib Swaleh.

The Lamu Cultural Festival is another colourful cultural event, held in the last week of August. It's actually a recent initiative, established in 2000 and aimed more at tourists than local people. Attractions include traditional dancing, displays of crafts such as *kofia* embroidery (a *kofia* is a cap worn by Muslim men) and dhow races.

The Donkey Awards in March/April are an unusual spectacle, organised by the Lamu Donkey Sanctuary (p216) in conjunction with the KSPCA to promote animal welfare. Prizes are given for the best-cared-for donkey, and a surprising number of locals turn out to parade their well-tended beasts.

Sleeping BUDGET

Lamu has been catering for budget travellers for several decades and still has loads of inexpensive guesthouses. Prices are remarkably consistent because of the competition for clientele, although you obviously get what you pay for. All the places have fans (where necessary) and mosquito nets, though remarkably few have the towels and soap you'd usually expect as standard.

Rates rise by up to 50% from August to September and around Christmas and New Year. At other times, there's plenty of scope for negotiation, especially if you plan to stay for more than a day or two. Touts will invariably try and accompany you from the jetty to get commission; the best way to avoid this is to book at least one night in advance, so you know ahead of time what you'll be paying.

If you plan on staying in Lamu for a while it's worth making inquiries about renting a house, so long as there's a group of you to share the cost. The price per person will usually be similar to staying at a lodge, but you'll have the advantage of a place to yourself and the luxury of a kitchen. Houses

are available in both Lamu and Shela – ask around and see what's available.

Casuarina Rest House (☎ 633123; s/d KSh400/800, s/d/tr with shared bathroom KSh300/500/700) What can we say – we just love this place, less for the accommodation than for the atmosphere, which is exactly the kind of friendly personal vibe that gets people backpacking in the first place. The roof terrace acts as a social lounge, the staff are great fun and the breezy top-floor balcony double is romantic as all hell, even if the shower is virtually outdoors. Unfortunately (and unsurprisingly), it's often full, both in and out of season; ongoing expansion should create a few more berths.

Pole Pole Guest House (☎ 0722-652477; s/d KSh500/1000) Pole Pole is north of the centre of town and back from the waterfront. One of the tallest buildings in Lamu, it has bright doubles with fans and nets. There's a spacious *makuti*-roofed terrace area with great views and its own mini 'tower'. It's a good place to stay, but relies heavily on touts.

Lamu Guest House (☎ 633338; Kenyatta Rd; s/d KSh500/1000, s/d/tr with shared bathroom KSh400/800/900) Behind Petley's Inn, the basic rooms here are very plain, but the upper-floor ones are better and catch the sea breeze. The 'official' rates posted in reception are a good KSh500 more than quoted here and definitely not worth paying.

Lamu Castle Hotel (☎ 0722-355240; s/d with shared bathroom KSh300/400) A lick of fresh pink paint has left the Castle looking rather spruce, but inside it's just the basics, and even some of the walls seem to be left a little short. You'll find it off the main square, behind the market.

Sunshine Guesthouse (d/tr KSh500/700) Around the corner from Stone House Hotel, Sunshine is a bit old-looking, but it is cheap and there's a kitchen with a fridge for guests. Entry is via the steps up over the alleyway, which doubles as a neat vantage point to peer at the street below.

MIDRANGE

Yumbe House (☎ 633101; lamuoldtown@africaonline.co.ke; s/d/tr low season KSh1100/2100/2900, high season KSh1290/2700/3860) Close to the Swahili House Museum, Yumbe is a tall, traditional house set around a leafy courtyard. The pleasant rooms have fridges and are spotlessly clean, decked out with kangas, woven rugs and

Lamu furniture. If you can, go for the big, chic 'tower' room right under the thatch. If the house is full, staff can refer you to its sister hotel a few blocks away.

Jannat House (☎ 633414; www.jannatouse.com; s/d KSh2625/4500, with shared bathroom KSh2175/3675; 🏠) The architects clearly had a field day designing the Jannat House; it's essentially two houses spliced together around a courtyard, with several levels and multiple terraces. The lower rooms are disappointing, but the upper levels are as nice as you'd hope for. Follow the signs from Kenyatta Rd – you'll need to keep looking up.

Stone House Hotel (☎ 633544; half board s/d US\$45/66) Another wonderful old Swahili place, with Escher-like stairways and a fine leafy courtyard. The hotel has its own superb rooftop restaurant (no alcohol) with excellent views over the town and waterfront. Rooms can be booked with Kisiwani Ltd (☎ 020-4446384) in Nairobi.

Amu House (☎ 633420; amuhouse@aol.com; s/d/tr KSh1700/2300/2700) Of all the refurbished Swahili hotels, this beautifully restored 16th-century house has had perhaps the greatest attention to detail paid to it. The original woodwork and plaster have been lovingly brought out, with local antiques completing the look. Rates include breakfast, transfers from Manda airstrip and a free water-skiing lesson at Shela Beach. Knock KSh500 or so off in low season.

Kitendetini Bahari Hotel (☎ 633172; s/d KSh700/1200) A borderline budget option set around a neat rectangular courtyard. All rooms have fans, nets and fridges, though the toilets lack seats. Prices include breakfast and are usually negotiable.

SunSail Hotel (☎ 632065; sunsailhotel2004@hotmail.com; Harambee Ave; s/d downstairs KSh1800/2500, upstairs KSh2000/3000) The effort put into the SunSail sadly doesn't do justice to the waterfront location – there are some great views from upstairs rooms, but the downstairs rooms are pretty cramped. Still, the rooftop terrace is huge (if a little bare) and it's generally quiet.

Lamu Archipelago Villa (☎ 633247; Harambee Ave; s/d KSh900/1500) Just along the waterfront, this friendly hotel has trouble entirely justifying even this modest price tag, and there's certainly nothing villa-like about it. Useful as a fall-back or cheaper alternative to the popular Swahili places.

TOP END

Lamu World (☎ 633491; www.lamuworld.com; Harambee Ave; s/d low season US\$90/100, high season US\$150/200, ste low/high season US\$150/250; 🏠 🏠) Oh my gosh. It almost rankles to recommend something so new in such a traditional town, but the pale stone design of this luxury establishment is such a perfect modern interpretation of Swahili style that it frankly outshines even some of the authentic places. There are just 10 rooms shared between two houses, all with immaculate fittings, super-thick mattresses and huge shower heads; exclusive hire of each house costs US\$1000, or US\$1200 with a dhow thrown in.

Petley's Inn (☎ 633107; www.chaleislandparadise.com; Harambee Ave; s/d US\$70/90; 🏠) Originally set up in the late 19th century by Percy Petley, a somewhat eccentric English colonist, Petley's has plenty of traditional touches but is looking a bit worn these days, despite extensive renovation after a fire in 2003. It's a fine place though, especially the 'penthouse' room and rooftop bar. Rates include transfers to and from Manda Island airstrip. Petley's is also a drinking venue.

New Lamu Palace Hotel (☎ 633164; Harambee Ave; s/d US\$70/90) Owned by the same people as Petley's Inn. This modern hotel is not as sensitively designed as its peers, but rooms are smart and comfortable and there's a good restaurant (mains KSh650 to KSh1200) and a bar serving alcohol. The problem, as with all the top-end options here, is that you could rent a whole Swahili house for these prices.

Eating

It's important to know that *all* the cheap places to eat, and many of the more expensive restaurants, are closed all day until after sunset during the month of Ramadan. If your hotel doesn't provide breakfast and lunch, you'll have to head to Whispers Coffeeshop, Petley's Inn or New Lamu Palace Hotel, or Peponi Hotel in Shela.

Bush Gardens Restaurant (☎ 633285; Harambee Ave; mains KSh180-800) The Bush Gardens is the template for a whole set of restaurants along the waterfront, offering breakfasts, seafood – excellent fish, top-value 'monster crab' (KSh400) and the inevitable lobster in Swahili sauce (KSh750) – and superb juices and shakes mixed up in panelled British pint mugs. Somehow just about every traveller

on Lamu ends up here at some point, and it remains a great meeting point and a firm favourite with repeat visitors. We hear the samosas are quite good, with a squeeze of lime of course.

Hapa Hapa Restaurant (Harambee Ave; mains KSh150-750) Very much in the same vein as Bush Gardens, and advocated just as vehemently by its regulars, this waterfront eatery is a bit more informal and African under its low thatch.

New Minaa Café (meals under KSh120; ☎ 6.30am-midnight) On the road towards the Riyadhha Mosque, this busy, clean rooftop café serves Swahili favourites such as beef kebabs, *maharagwe* (beans in coconut milk), chicken tikka and *samaki* (fried fish). It's cheap and popular with both locals and travellers.

Mangrove Centre (Harambee Ave; mains KSh250-380) Facing the main jetty, you'll find a video store and an informal cinema behind the eating area here, though sadly you can't watch the films as you eat. The restaurant does a lively trade at lunchtime, and it's handy for a juice while you wait for a boat, or while you find your feet on arrival.

Olympic Restaurant (Harambee Ave; mains KSh250-700) Further south near the waterfront woodyards, the Olympic serves the usual favourites. It's less popular than its more central rivals, but no worse off for that. The owners are very friendly and it's a favourite with a slightly older crowd.

Whispers Coffeeshop (Kenyatta Rd; mains KSh240-550; ☎ 9am-9pm) In the same building as the posh Baraka Gallery, this is a great place for an upmarket meal, a freshly baked cake or a real cappuccino. There's a lovely palm-shaded courtyard and simple meals such as pasta, fish and chips and pizza are available even during Ramadan, though it closes in low season.

Stone House Hotel (☎ 633544; mains KSh250-750; ☎ noon-2pm & 7-9pm) A fine rooftop restaurant that really catches the breeze. The wonderful panorama of the town and seaford is matched by the quality of the food. There are usually several choices for lunch or dinner, and menus often feature crab and grilled barracuda. Only soft drinks are available.

Bosnian Café (Kenyatta Rd) One of several dirt-cheap local canteens at the far end of the main street that set up takeaway stalls in the evening, selling samosas, chapatis,

mishkaki (kebabs), chips and the like from 10 bob apiece.

At some point most travellers will come across Ali Hippy, who offers meals at his house for around KSh500 and will almost certainly point out his presence in this book. The whole family entertains you while you eat and some people come away quite satisfied, but plenty are put off instantly by the sales pitch!

Self-caterers should head to the main market next to the fort. The fruit and vegetables are cheap and fresh, and there's a slightly gory section where you can get meat and fish.

Drinking & Entertainment

As a Muslim town, Lamu caters very poorly for drinkers.

Petley's Inn (☎ 633107; Harambee Ave) and **New Lamu Palace Hotel** (☎ 633164; Harambee Ave) both have nice bars where you can sink a cold beer. Petley's has the edge as its terrace catches the breeze and the pool table is well used. Beers cost a steep KSh120.

Even bureaucrats need to let their hair down – the **Civil Servants' Club** (admission KSh100), along the waterfront towards Shela village, is virtually the only reliable spot for a drink and a dance at weekends, and occasionally plays host to big names like the Ogofa DJs. It's small, loud, rowdy and great fun, though lone women should run for cover and the harbour wall outside is a potential death trap after a few Tuskers.

The informal disco at the **Police Administration Club** (admission KSh50; ☎ Fri & Sat) is the only other option, though for some reason it's only open during school terms.

Lamu has several small cinemas, all screening Bollywood blockbusters and big football matches for KSh20 a seat. The **Zinj Cinema** (Kenyatta Rd), at the southern end of town, is easy to find.

Shopping

Along the seaford and in the suburbs surrounding Lamu town, you can see craftsmen carving traditional Lamu doors, furniture and window frames. Many now do a healthy sideline in picture frames, *bao* board games, Quran stands, and traditional *ito* – round painted 'eyes' from Swahili dhows, originally used as talismans to avoid underwater obstacles and protect against the evil eye.

For upmarket souvenirs from all over Africa, **Baraka Gallery** (☎ 633264; Kenyatta Rd) has a fine selection, but stratospheric prices.

Lamu is also a good place to buy *kikois*, the patterned wraps traditionally worn by Swahili men. The standard price is around KSh350, more for the heavier Somali style.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Airkenya (☎ 633445; Baraka House, Kenyatta Rd) offers daily afternoon flights between Lamu and Wilson Airport in Nairobi (US\$143, 1½ hours). The inbound flights also continue on to Kiwayu Island (US\$65, 15 minutes). **Safarilink** (Nairobi ☎ 020-600777) runs virtually identical services (US\$140).

Kenya Airways (☎ 633155; Casuarina House, Harambee Ave) has daily afternoon flights between Lamu and the domestic terminal at Nairobi's Kenyatta International Airport (KSh10,860, 2¼ hours). Fares come down dramatically if you can book in advance. Remember to reconfirm your flights at least 72 hours before flying.

Mombasa Air Safari (Mombasa ☎ 041-433061) flies to Mombasa (US\$90, 1¼ hours) via Malindi (US\$21, 30 minutes). Book through **Ndaou Safaris** (☎ 633576).

The airport at Lamu is on Manda Island and the ferry across the channel to Lamu costs KSh100. You will be met by 'guides' at the airport who will offer to carry your bags to the hotel of your choice for a small consideration (about KSh200). Many double as accommodation touts, so be cautious about accepting the first price you are quoted when you get to your hotel.

BUS

The main bus companies operating between Mombasa, Malindi and Lamu are TSS, Falcon, Zam Zam, Khadi Star and Tawakal.

There are booking offices for all these bus companies on Kenyatta Rd, apart from Khadi Star, which has its office on the waterfront. The going rate for a bus trip to Mombasa is KSh400 to KSh500; most buses leave between 7am and 8am, so you'll need to be at the jetty at 6.30am to catch the boat to the mainland. Tawakal also has 10am and 1pm bus services. It takes at least four hours to get from Lamu to Malindi, plus another two hours to Mombasa. Book early as demand is heavy.

Getting Around

There are ferries (KSh40) between Lamu and the bus station on the mainland (near Mokowe). Boats leave when the buses arrive at Mokowe; in the reverse direction, they leave at around 6.30am to meet the departing buses. Ferries between the airstrip on Manda Island and Lamu cost KSh100 and leave about half an hour before the flights leave. Expect to pay KSh200 for a custom trip if you miss either of these boats.

Between Lamu village and Shela there are plenty of motorised dhows in either direction throughout the day until around sunset; these cost about KSh100 per person and leave when full. Alternatively, you can hire a whole boat for KSh250 to KSh300, or KSh400 after dark.

There are also regular ferries between Lamu and Paté Island (see p226).

AROUND LAMU

Shela

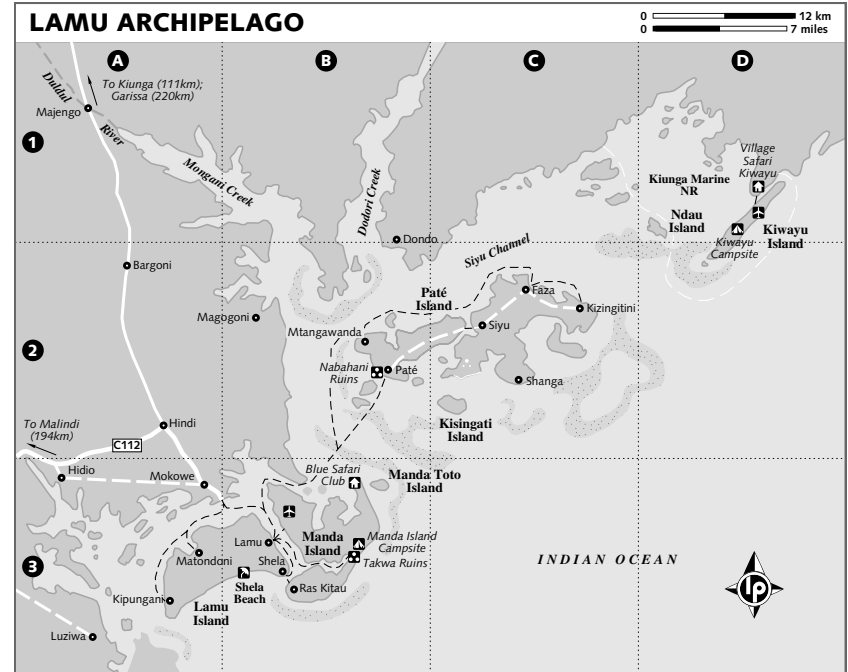
This ancient Swahili village, often spelled Shella, sits at the start of glorious Shela Beach. In some places it seems even more medieval than Lamu, with few signs of modernity along its maze-like alleyways. Ironically, the pleasing authenticity is mostly due to the large and affluent expat population, who have restored many of the old houses – left to its own devices Shela would probably be far more dilapidated.

Shela's first residents were migrants from the abandoned settlement of Takwa on Manda Island. The local people speak a distinct dialect of Swahili and you can see strong evidence of Omani ancestry in many people's faces. Although it's something of a European enclave, with almost unseemly amounts of building going on to cater for foreign demand, it's still an atmospheric place to visit and wander around, and the mood is just as languorous and laid-back as it's always been.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

There are no cultural attractions in Shela, but wandering around the village is a very amenable way to pass the time. Look out for the pillar-style **Mnarani Mosque** behind Peponi Hotel.

Most people are here for the **beach** – this spectacular dune-backed strip runs for 12km around the headland, so you're guar-



anteed a private stretch of sand, and it's a good place to comb the beach for shells. The Indian Ocean tsunami washed away a lot of sand here, revealing some sharp rocks, but it's expected to return to normal within a few seasons.

At the start of the beach is a ridiculous mock **fort**, which was built by an Italian entrepreneur who had lots of money but dubious taste.

There's no surf at Shela village because it lies in the channel between Lamu and Manda Islands, which makes it a prime spot for **windsurfing**. For traditional surfing, there are real breakers at the mouth of the channel, although this is also the realm of some substantial sharks.

Peponi Hotel's **water-sports centre** runs water-skiing (KSh8000 per hour), windsurfing (KSh650 to KSh800 per hour), snorkelling (equipment KSh200 per day), deep-sea fishing (from US\$200 per boat) and scuba diving for certified divers between December and March (US\$50/90 for one/two dives, including lunch). Cheaper windsurfing gear is available at Talking Trees Village.

SLEEPING

Guesthouses

Stopover Guest House (☎ 633459; mtendeni@ikenya.com; d KSh3000) This is the first place you come to on the waterfront, above the popular restaurant of the same name. The rooms are nice and light with big beds; like all the places in this category, prices include breakfast and should be thoroughly negotiable when it's not busy.

Shella Bahari Guest House (☎ 632046; bahari.guest@swiftlamu.com; d low season KSh2000-3000, high season KSh2500-4000) Another waterfront place with a very similar setup to the Stopover. Rooms open onto a wide balcony above the bay and have sea views, nets, fans and Swahili furniture. Again, you can often bargain down – aim for around KSh500 per person.

Shella Pwani Guest House (☎ 633540; d low/high season KSh2000/2500) Behind the shop selling *kikois*, immediately behind Peponi Hotel, is this lovely Swahili house with carved plasterwork. Some rooms have fine sea views, as does the airy roof terrace, and all have fans and nets.

Dodo Villas/Talking Trees Campsite (☎ 633500; campsites per tent KSh400, r KSh600-1200, apt per person KSh200) This is Lamu's only budget beach option, 50m back from the seafloor on the Shela-Lamu track, with an extra lounge area on the sand. Its nominal identity crisis reflects the varied nature of the accommodation: the main building has large, unfussy rooms and several concrete blocks hold apartments for up to ten people, with more being built. There's plenty of room for camping but no shade.

Hotels

Peponi Hotel (☎ 633421; www.peponi-lamu.com; s/d high season US\$220/300; ☒ closed May & Jun; 🚻) At the east end of Shela is *the* top resort hotel on the island, right on the waterfront facing the Lamu Channel. It blends neatly into the surrounding Swahili buildings and offers just 24 individually styled rooms, in white-washed cottages with their own verandas. The stylish rooms are bright and airy, and decked out with Swahili furniture. The hotel has excellent facilities (see p223) plus a bar and an upmarket restaurant, all open to both guests and nonguests.

Kijani House Hotel (☎ 633235; www.kijani-lamu.com; d US\$160-180; ☒ closed May & Jun; 🚻) Set in splendid gardens, Kijani was painstakingly rebuilt over 10 years from the remains of three separate Swahili houses, and it looks a treat. Rooms are beautifully appointed, with fine traditional furniture. Like Peponi, all manner of activities and trips can be arranged, and rates include boat transfers to and from Manda Island airstrip.

Fatuma's Tower Yoga & Retreat House (☎ 632044; r per person from US\$50) Seekers of the esoteric or just something that little bit different should bend and stretch their way to this unique complex, a collection of coral cottages seemingly cobbled together as a single fortress-like entity. Rooms are very variable, but the ones on upper floors are well worth a sprain or two. Yoga classes cost KSh500 per person. The retreat is towards the back of the village; ask for directions.

Island Hotel (☎ 633290; half board s/d US\$37/52) In the centre of Shela is a superb Lamu-style house with a romantic rooftop restaurant (opposite). It's only five minutes' walk from the waterfront, along the alley beside Kijani House, but you'll probably have to ask for directions. The room rates include boat

transfers to and from Manda airstrip. The hotel can also be booked through Kisiwani Ltd in Nairobi (☎ 020-4446384).

Houses

As so many houses in Shela are owned by expats who only live here for part of the year, there's a huge amount of accommodation available, very little of which is widely advertised outside the island. This makes Shela one place where the beach boys can actually be useful – it's often easier to turn up and let someone show you a few places rather than trying to do it all yourself.

Shella Royal House (☎ 0722-698059; www.shella.royalhouse.com; d KSh1000-5000) This is a grand building behind Kijani House, with balcony dining areas on every floor. The owners, Shella Guest Houses (☎ 633091; shella@africaonline.co.ke), also run two other properties, the White House Guest House (rooms KSh1000 to KSh4000) and Shella Rest House (rooms KSh1500 to KSh5000). All the houses have kitchens for guests. Rates vary according to the season and include breakfast and staff, who can cook for you if required.

Banana House (☎ 0723-471814; s/d US\$70/100) Seven stunning rooms in a Swahili-style coral house in the so-called New Town area. The garden's particularly lovely, and, as with most private houses, exclusive hire is available. Rates include breakfast.

Kisiwani Ltd (Nairobi ☎ 020-4446384; www.lamu.homes.com) Rents out whole houses in Shela from US\$180 to US\$280 per day. Cooks and cleaners are provided and the houses sleep six to 10 people. Properties include Mnarani House, behind the Mnarani Mosque, and Mtakuja House and Jasmine House, behind the Kijani House Hotel. You should book all these houses well in advance.

EATING & DRINKING

Stopover Restaurant (☎ 633459; mains KSh250-800) This is where Shela's extended posse of beach boys meet for afternoon *chai* (tea), which can actually be quite fun if you're on sociable rather than business terms. Even if you're ignoring them completely it's a good place to eat, with the usual complement of seafood and plenty of curries.

Bahari Guest House & Restaurant (☎ 632046; mains KSh250-600) Again, Bahari's house restaurant is pretty much identical to Stopover,

and sadly has adjusted its prices upwards to match. Still, you can't sniff at lobster for KSh700.

Barracuda Restaurant (☎ 633290; mains KSh350-850) Just in case Lamu itself isn't romantic enough for you, this rooftop restaurant at the Island Hotel provides the perfect setting for an intimate night out. The terrace looks out over the old village, and the seafood is excellent. Nonguests are welcome and prices are reasonable.

Rangaleni Café (meals KSh60) Hidden away in the alleys behind the shorefront mosque is this tiny blue café, which does the usual stews and *ugali*.

Ali Samosa (☎ 632236; set dinners KSh1000) Shela's answer to Ali Hippy is Ali Samosa, a former samosa-seller whose whole family has done rather well out of the tourist boom. Shela's Ali is a lot smoother than his Lamu counterpart, and the extremely good Swahili meals are served in a rooftop dining room in a house near the Shela Primary School. He can often be found at Peponi Hotel, or you can ask at any of the Shella Guest Houses properties.

Peponi's Bar (☎ 633421) Naturally the bar at a Swiss-owned Kenyan hotel with an Italian name has to resemble an English pub. The terrace overlooking the water is a splendid place to watch the sunset, but at KSh140 for a Tusker it's not solar glare that'll bring tears to the eyes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

To get to Shela, you can take a motorised dhow from the moorings in Lamu for KSh100 per person (or KSh250 to KSh300 for a solo ride). Alternatively, you can walk it in about 40 minutes. The easiest way is to take Harambee Ave and then follow the shoreline, though this may be partly flooded at high tide. When the tide is in, you can either wade through the sunken bits or cut across to the inland path. If you want to follow the inland path all the way, it starts near the Muslim cemetery in Lamu.

Matondoni

You'll see many dhows anchored along the waterfront at Lamu and at Shela, in the harbour at the southern end of town, but if you want to see them being built or repaired the best place is at the village of Matondoni, in the northwest of the island.

To get there from Lamu town you have a choice of walking (about two hours), hiring a donkey (KSh400) or hiring a dhow (KSh2000 per boat, up to five people). Dhow captains often provide lunch.

Walking there is a little more problematic, as there are lots of confusing trails in the sandy terrain behind town. First you have to find the track at the back of town, then head for the football pitch and follow the telephone wires that go to Matondoni. Ask directions from locals until you're sure you're on the right track.

Set off early if you are walking. There's a small café in Matondoni village, but no guesthouses. An impromptu group of travellers generally collects later in the afternoon, so you can usually share a dhow ride back to Lamu.

Kipungani

At the southwest tip of Lamu Island is this small village where local people make straw mats, baskets, hats and *kifumbu*, used to squeeze milk from mashed coconut. It's a friendly place, and tea and snacks can be arranged, plus there's a beautiful empty beach nearby. It's a long, hot walk and the path is very hard to find. A better option is to visit on a dhow tour for about KSh5000 per boat (good for around five people). Prices include lunch.

The only accommodation here is at the very exclusive **Kipungani Explorer** (Nairobi ☎ 020-4446651; www.heritage-eastafrika.com; full board s/d US\$335/470; ☒ closed Apr-Jun). It's predictably luxurious, and rates include transfers and 'non-motorised marine activities'. There's a booking office next to Lamu Archipelago Villa in Lamu town.

MANDA ISLAND

This is the easiest island to get to, since it's just across the channel from Lamu. Almost everyone takes a half-day trip to the Takwa ruins at the head of Manda Creek. A dhow trip to Manda Island costs an average of around KSh1500, shared by however many people you can gather. Sometimes (but not always) this includes a barbecued lunch, so settle this issue before you leave. You can also get there by motor launch, which isn't as romantic but will give you a little more time at the site before the tide gets too low for boats to negotiate the creek.

Sights & Activities

The extensive **Takwa ruins** (adult/child KSh200/100) are the remains of an old Swahili city that flourished between the 15th and 17th centuries. At its peak, there were at least 2500 people here, but the town was inexplicably abandoned in the 17th century and the people moved to Shela. The site is maintained by the National Museums of Kenya and the ruins include the remains of about 100 limestone and coral houses, all aligned towards Mecca.

The largest structure is the **Jamaa mosque** (*Jamaa* means 'Friday'), which is well preserved and includes a pillar tomb unusually situated atop the *mihrab*. Also here is a tomb dating back to 1683 (1094 by the Islamic calendar). The settlement is surrounded by the remains of a wall and huge baobab trees dot the site.

Just off the northeast coast of Manda is **Manda Toto Island**, which offers some of the best snorkelling possibilities in the archipelago. The only way to get here is by dhow, and you need a full day to get there and back from Lamu. Boat owners typically charge around KSh700 per person if there's a group of four or more, and masks and snorkels are provided.

Across the channel from Shela is **Manda Beach**, which has fine sand and is home to the Manda Beach Club, where you can get a chilly Tusker or something fancy with a little umbrella in it. Shuttle boats leave from New Lamu Palace Hotel at 10am (KSh600 one way), returning at 6pm. You can also hire a boat in front of Peponi Hotel.

Sleeping

The only standard place to stay is the campsite adjacent to Takwa, but few people stay here because facilities are minimal. Contact the Lamu Museum for bookings, information and transport.

Blue Safari Club (Nairobi ☎ 020-890184; www.blue-safariclub.com; r per person US\$300-400) On the northern end of the island is this intimidatingly exclusive resort, only accessible by boat. Rates include activities and transfers, and you can also arrange luxury sailing cruises from US\$325 per person.

Getting There & Away

The trip across to Manda from Lamu takes about 1½ hours by boat and can only be

done at high tide because the inlet is too shallow at low tide. You may well have to wade up the final stretch, so wear shorts. Since you have to catch the outgoing tide, your time at Takwa will probably not be more than an hour.

It's possible to walk to the Takwa ruins from the airstrip, but it's around 5km and the path isn't properly cleared. A boat transfer to the airport jetty costs KSh100.

Peponi Hotel and Kijani House in Shela offer tours to Takwa for around KSh1200 per person.

PATÉ ISLAND

Paté, an engaging mangrove island northeast of Lamu and Manda, is one of those rare places where the cultural isolation equals the geographical seclusion, preserving an uncomplicated traditional lifestyle as much by necessity as by choice. The only foreigners who come to this island are dhow-trippers and the occasional archaeologist, so you can expect to be a novelty and to be treated with friendly curiosity, especially by the local children. The local mosquitoes also appreciate the fresh meat, so bring insect repellent.

There is a number of historical sites on Paté Island, including Paté town, Siyu, Mtangawanda and Faza. All are still inhabited, mainly by fishers and mangrove-pole cutters, but very little effort has been put into preserving or clearing the remains of these once-powerful Swahili city-states.

Accommodation and food on the island are easy to arrange with local families, and there are one or two simple restaurants offering basic meals and tea. Paté town is little more than a crumbling old settlement, but the **Nabahani ruins**, just outside town, are interesting, although they've never been seriously excavated or cleared.

Getting There & Away

A motor launch leaves Lamu more or less daily for Mtangawanda (KSh50, about two hours), from which it's about an hour's walk to Paté town along a narrow footpath through thick bush and across tidal flats.

Boats continue to Faza (about another two hours) and Kizingitini (KSh150, another one hour), also stopping at the mouth of the channel to Siyu, where small boats transfer passengers to shore. Boats leave from the

main jetty in Lamu town; times depend on the tides, but it can be quite tricky finding out when they go, as Swahili time is commonly used and everyone you ask will tell you something different!

Coming back from Paté, ask locally to make sure the boat will be calling at Mtangawanda on the return trip. If not, you may have to wait an extra day.

Siyu

Founded in the 15th century, Siyu was once famous as a centre of Islamic scholarship and crafts. In its heyday (between the 17th and 19th centuries) it boasted some 30,000 inhabitants and was the largest settlement on the island. Today, however, less than 4000 people live here and there are few signs of its previous cultural and religious influence.

The modern village displays little of Siyu's former glory, consisting of simple mud-walled and *makuti*-roofed houses. What does remain is the ruin of a huge crenellated **fort**, which sits dramatically on the waterfront. Even this grand structure couldn't halt Siyu's demise in 1847, when it was occupied by the sultan of Zanzibar's troops. The fort has been well restored and there are some Swahili relics inside.

South of Siyu is the intriguing village of **Shanga**, apparently originally settled by stranded Chinese traders (the name itself is a corruption of China). You'll need local help to find it.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The boat from Mtangawanda to Faza stops at the mouth of the mangrove-lined channel leading up to Siyu, where small canoes transfer passengers to the village. From Lamu the fare is KSh100. This service isn't always available, so you may have to walk from Paté or Faza.

From Paté it's about 8km to Siyu along a dirt track through the bush. The first part is tricky since certain turn-offs are easy to miss, so it's a good idea to take a guide with you as far as the tidal inlet (the boat captain can help to arrange this). From there on it's easy, as the path bears left and then continues straight through to Siyu.

Faza

The biggest settlement on Paté Island, Faza has a chequered history, being almost totally

destroyed by Paté in the 13th century and then again by the Portuguese in 1586. It was subsequently re-established and switched its allegiances to the Portuguese during their attempts to subdue Paté in the 17th century. With the demise of slavery, Faza faded away, but its new status as an administrative centre is breathing some life back into the place.

The modern town is quite extensive and includes a post office, telephone exchange, a simple restaurant, several general stores and two guesthouses. The only historical relic is the ruined **Kunjanja Mosque** on the creek next to the district headquarters. Among the rubble is a beautifully carved *mihrab* and some fine Arabic inscriptions. Outside town is the **tomb of Amir Hamad**, commander of the sultan of Zanzibar's forces, who was killed here in 1844 while campaigning against Siyu and Paté.

SLEEPING & EATING

The two guesthouses, Lamu House and Shela House, are essentially family residences, but they can provide meals and a bedroom if you need somewhere to stay. The price is negotiable (expect to pay around KSh200 per person) and the families are very friendly.

A simple restaurant in the centre of town offers bean stews, tea and *mandazi* (a semi-sweet flat donut) for just a fistful of shillings, and is a popular meeting place for the local menfolk.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The inlet leading up to Faza from the main channel is deep enough to allow the passage of dhows and motor launches at high tide, but at low tide it is impassable, so you'll have to walk in to Faza over the mud and sandbanks.

The Paté motor launch continues to Faza after Mtangawanda and Siyu, charging KSh150 from Lamu (four hours). Boats usually leave mid-morning from Lamu and from Faza in either direction, but the exact ferry times depend on the tides, so you should ask around the day before you leave.

Getting to Siyu from Faza involves a two-hour walk through *shambas* (small farms) and thick bush along a dirt track. The path is confusing so it may be best to come with a guide from Faza – volunteers are sure to approach you.

KIWAYU ISLAND

At the far northeast of the Lamu archipelago, Kiwayu Island has a population of just a few hundred people and is part of the Kiunga Marine National Reserve. Gloriously remote, it's a long, narrow ridge of sand and trees surrounded by reefs, with a long beach stretching all down the eastern side of the island. Standing at the tallest point and surveying your surroundings at sunset will probably be one of the defining experiences of your time on the coast.

The main reason to come here is for the three-day dhow trip itself, and to explore the coral reefs off the eastern side of the island, rated as some of the best along the Kenyan coast. For our money, the reefs at Manda Toto Island and further south at Watamu are better, but a visit here is still highly recommended.

The village on the western side of the island where the dhows drop anchor is very small, but it does have a general store with a few basics.

Sleeping & Eating

Kiwayu Campsite (campsites KSh150, bandas from KSh500) Unless you can stretch to US\$600 per night, the only place to stay is this rudimentary tourist site on the bay where the dhows land. The thatched bandas are a bit run down, but clean sheets are provided as well as kerosene lanterns, and the treehouse is fabulous. There are basic toilet and bucket-shower facilities, and a covered dining area where you or your dhow crew can cook up the catch

of the day. The same owner also operates a second set of more solid bandas (high season only) by the long beach on the other side of the island, a 10-minute walk away.

Kiwayu Safari Village (Nairobi ☎ 020-600107; www.kiwayu.com; s/d US\$408/632) If money is no object, you could do worse than stay at this exclusive collection of open luxury bandas, known as a hideaway for rock stars and other glitterati. It's a splendid getaway, although you pay a premium for the privacy and isolation.

Getting There & Away

The most interesting way to get to Kiwayu is by dhow. The island forms part of a three- or five-day dhow trip from Lamu, usually with stops along the way. If there's sufficient wind, the return trip to Kiwayu from Lamu takes three days and two nights; it's a lot quicker on the way there, as the return journey is against the wind and involves a lot of tacking down the Manda Channel, which can take up to 14 hours to navigate. Bank on around KSh1000 per person per day, based on a group of five or more.

If you'd rather spend more time on the island and less on the boat, you can take the motor ferry to Kizingitini on Paté (p226) and catch a dhow from there (KSh500 to KSh600, one hour).

High fliers tend to arrive by air. Airkenya flies from Manda airstrip to Kiwayu (US\$65, 15 minutes), usually as an add-on to flights originating from Nairobi. Safarilink also offers flights here from Nairobi (US\$170, 4¼ hours).