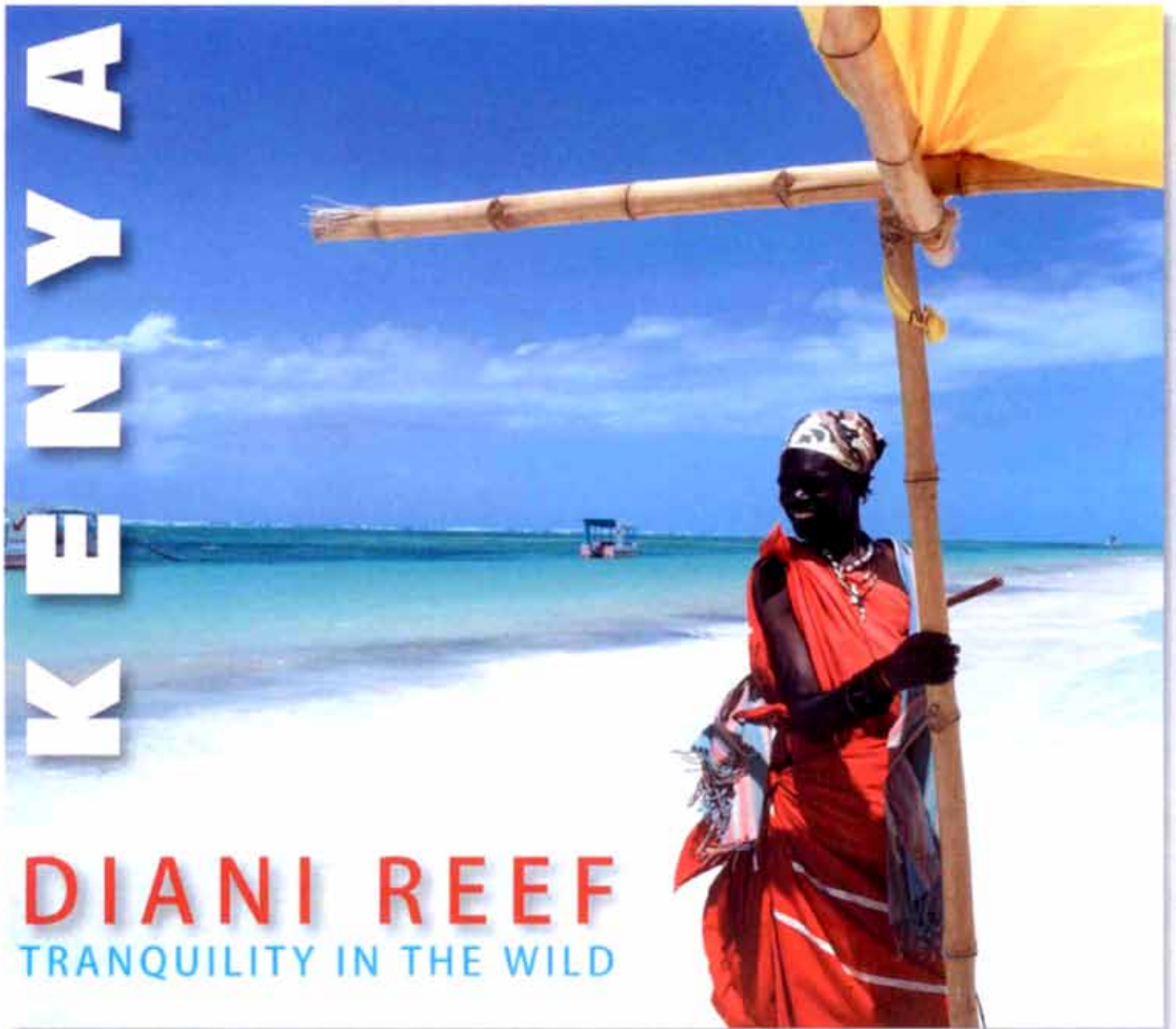


# KENYA DIANI REEF TRANQUILITY IN THE WILD

SINDHIAN – AUGUST 2011

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL



## DIANI REEF

TRANQUILITY IN THE WILD



DIANI REEF BEACH RESORT AND SPA, AN AWARD WINNING PROPERTY, BY ZURI HOTELS TUCKED AWAY IN UKUNDA, EAST AFRICA, PROVES TO BE QUITE THE HIDEAWAY, HONEYMOON OR OTHERWISE - THE PERFECT TROPICAL HOLIDAY DESTINATION





A view of the property from one of the rooms

A journey across continents, an invitation to a time of leisure, pristine white sands, and five star luxury awaited us. I was eager to know more. Africa had always silently cloyingly, beckoned me; the stories, the movies, friends having lived there, and so much more. But a call of the wild, along a coral reef was something to think about. I somehow knew it was going to be anything less than memorable.

The Kenya Airways flight was packed, the time was past midnight, our nerves were still not frayed. Quite unable to live down the excitement, we sipped on our wine, making friends, hearing about how Kenya was the primary focus of all adventure travel in Africa. It is one of the finest, and undoubtedly the most famous safari destination in the world.

The aircraft tipped into the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (Nairobi), giving us a glimpse of life thereon. *Jambo* - Welcome in Swahili, greeted us on all the faces, visas on arrival, the rule of the thumb in those parts, and certificates of yellow fever all intact, we were quickly seen through the formalities, and hurried to a smaller airstrip. There awaited our chartered flight to Ukunda. Of course, we were lucky to be put on flight 540,

the only other way being the ferry. With the most amusing, friendly purser, we discovered flying in a 20 seater aircraft, sighting at a distance the famous Kilimanjaro peaks, a moment to cherish!

Arrival at the Ukunda airstrip, greeted by the staff of the Diani Reef Beach Resort & Spa, our excitement was now almost palpable. The property sits on the legendary Diani Beach, overlooking the Indian Ocean, 25 miles south of Mombasa (Kenya's largest port). This Zuri Hotel's property, has already won the award for "Service Excellence" in Kenya at Amarula Best Retreats in Africa Awards 2009. Newly renovated, it is the flagship property of

the Zuri Hotels chain, owned by two brothers Bobby and Abishek Kamani. Driving into the hotel we sight the sign Karibu, and we know it's going to be wonderfully heartfelt as we step off the coach to meet the very hospitable GM Aditya Mata. We are greeted with garlands of frangipani and champagne. A modern boutique hotel, by the looks of it, but marked generously with African overtones.

The Masai, the actual semi nomadic ethnic group perform and welcome us with an air of propriety. Traditional clothing, ornamental jewelry, all dazzle us. This land and ethos surely belong to them. They are known to be one of the very few tribes who have retained most



The main lobby at Diani Reef

of their traditions and lifestyle.

Settling in, we find ourselves in the amazing Maya Spa, Zuri Hotel's famous Holistic & Wellness Centre, where we experience the jet lag reviver, which helps us de-stress after our long journey, followed by a wonderful tour of the property. Diani Reef overlooks a remarkable turquoise Indian Ocean, and consists of 30 acres of prime property, bang on the Kenyan coastline. 143 rooms panning Presidential, Penthouse, Deluxe, Double, Twin; you name it and they offer it.

Activities, we are surprised to find, include everything from tennis, wind and kite surfing, jet skiing, kayaking, pool, snorkeling, safaris, scuba diving, fishing, sailing, etc. An 18-



hole golf course awaits those that play the game, and not far behind is the resort's full-fledged Casino. A mini theatre and Cocoa Jumbo Kids Club are also on the list. All these amenities are included, making our stay comfortable, as the African sun sets to a regular beat.

The Kenyan climate on the coastline is humid and warm in this season. We retire for dinner at the Coral Rock Café, the twinkling skies a carpet above us, the deck below a caravan, the food sizzling, the drinks flowing. The Dawa, means 'magic potion' in Swahili, is an African cocktail that is said to be so potent that it would cure whatever ailed a person. The night turned magical. The Dunes Night Spot Bar livened up

the end of the day with African beats.

An early start catapults us into the day that we visit the Wasini Island, located off the shores of Mombasa. But before that, on the way we are taken to visit the old Slave Caves nestled in the little seaside village of Shimoni, being taken around by a custodian explaining East African history. Later, sailing happily in a dhow, we hope to spot some dolphins. But having no such luck, the locals helped us snorkel and swim in the turquoise waters, as we discovered other marine life. Then, as our dhow gently bobbed into the island, we were taken to a little open-air restaurant serving the most delicious Swahili cuisine. Masala seaweed, delicious whole crabs, chapattis with grilled fish, and mango drinks formed our heady lunch menu. Back on the high seas singing along with the locals - *Hakuna Matata* invigorates our very souls. Exhausted, we retire to our rooms; only to resurface at the Sake Oriental Restaurant, ready to take on some more of the hotel's delicious offerings.

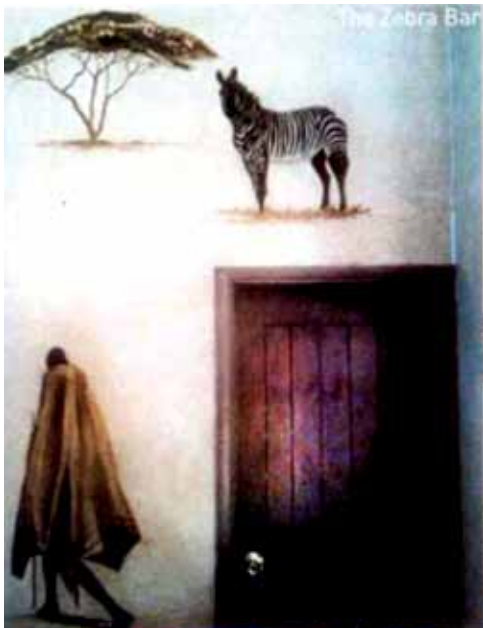
The Shimba Hills National Reserve, just 45 minutes away from



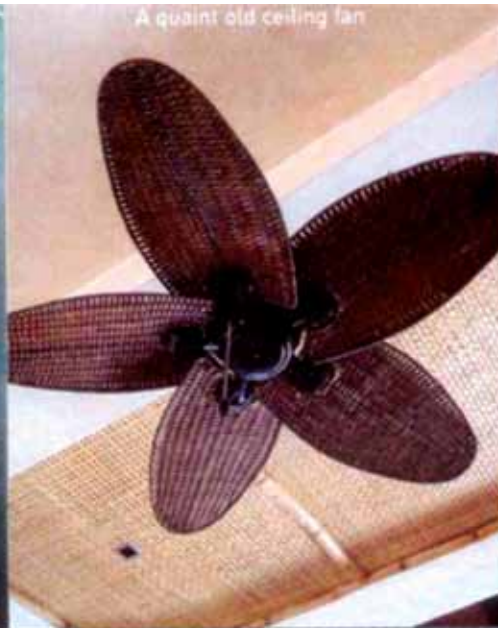
Diani, is 192 km wide, consisting of rainforests and is home to sable, roan antelopes, elephants, deer, giraffe, monkeys, buffaloes and the like. Not wanting to miss the whole Africa experience, we jumped on to Safari Cruisers, along with a naturalist, hoping to sight as many animals as we possibly could. The fauna astounded us and flora that we came across, being the nationally important site for rare birds and butterflies, the track afforded us some sightings as well. A fitting end to a busy day, as we witnessed Masai tribal dancers, along with local acrobats, and magicians, all gathered at the beachside dinner party, the hotel put up for us.

The trip would be quite incomplete if one did not go to Mombasa City to visit Fort Jesus, a major landmark of East Africa, built by the Portuguese 400 years ago. A museum and a gift shop catered to the avid tourist. Shopping was a delight as we browsed through the old streets for figurines, straw bags, beaded footwear and jewellery. Almost as if to complete a story, the Zuri hotel hosted a Kenyan night at the Royal Palm Garden, with local music, African food, the arts and Amarula liqueur to cap all the experiences.

The Zebra Bar



A quaint old ceiling fan



Kenyan artifacts

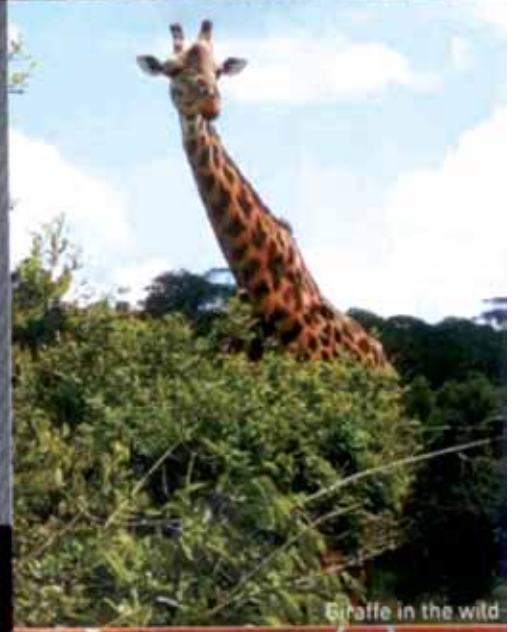
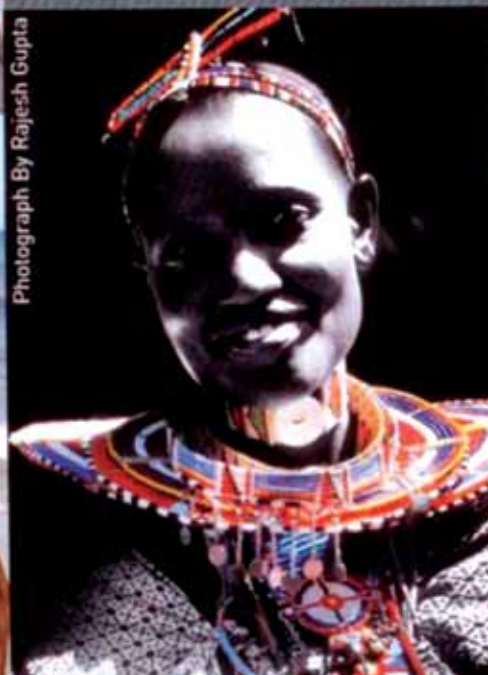


Fresh crab

Heavy hearts, tearful goodbyes, bags in place, we crossed the big Baobab tree in the lobby, reluctant to leave in the very coaches that had brought us here. Promises of friendship on the world wide web, we leave, hoping to come back for the magic potion, and as we board flight- 540 on the Ukunda airstrip, we know that the African people mean every word when they say *Karibu Tena...* Welcome back!



Photograph By Rajesh Gupta



Giraffe in the wild

