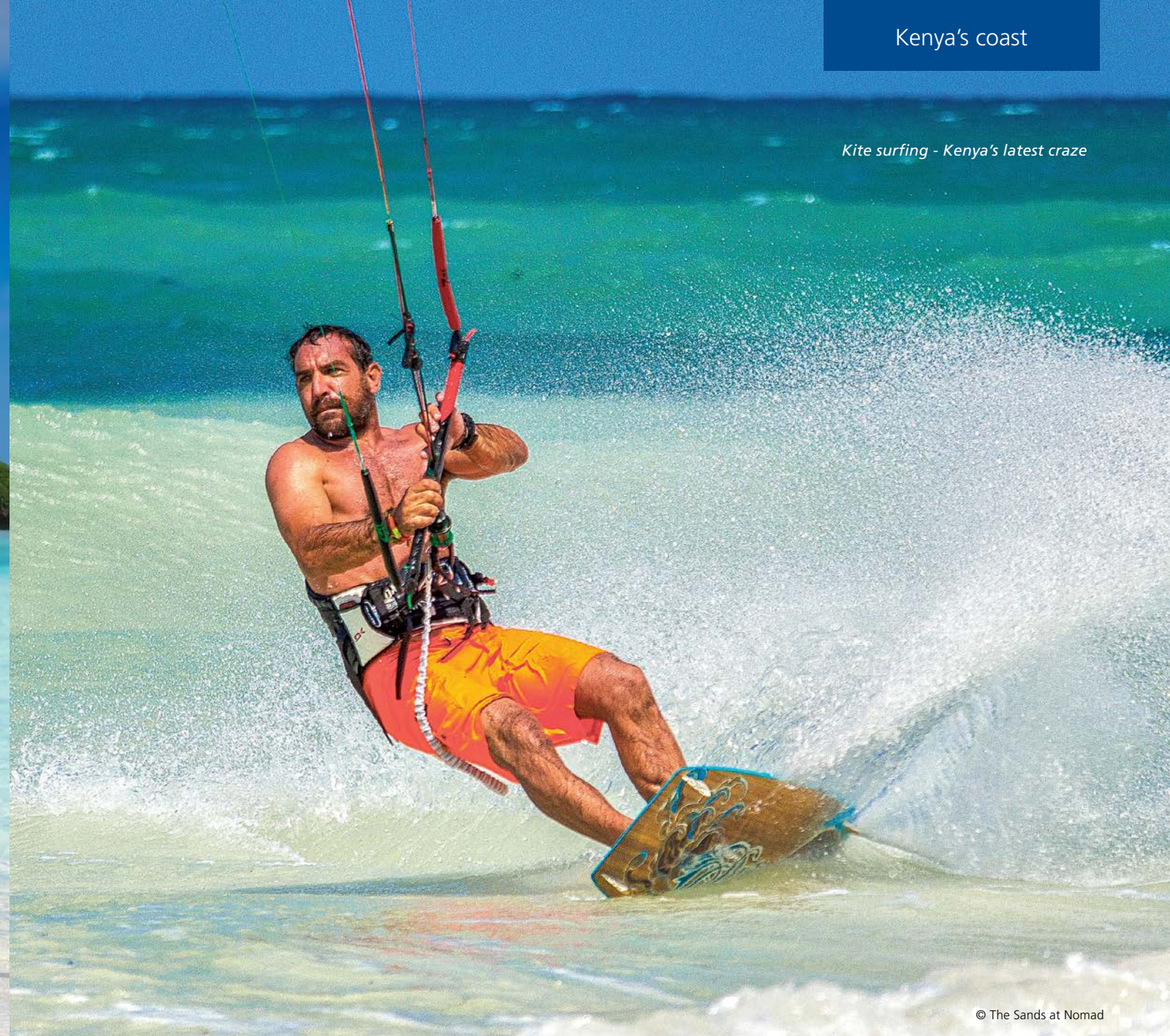


Swahili Coast

Kenya's Indian Ocean coastline dances to a different tune; it's swayed by Swahili rhythms, governed by the rise and fall of the tides and ruffled by the breath of the Trade Winds. The warm blue ocean holds treasures; coral gardens, turtles, dolphins, dugongs and a shifting mirage of multi-coloured tropical fish; there are ancient mosques, ruined Swahili cities and mile upon mile of palm trees. And, thanks to a subtle melding of African, Indian and Arabian influences there's a culture you'll find nowhere else.



Kite surfing - Kenya's latest craze



© The Sands at Nomad

When it comes to beach-life Kenya is hard to beat, offering 700 kms of Indian Ocean coastline renowned for its white sandy beaches, clear waters, remote islands, and mysterious Swahili ruins. Protected for its entire length by a coral barrier reef lying just a kilometre offshore, Kenya's beaches offer calm lagoons that are ideal for swimming and watersports, nine national marine parks promising sightings of whale sharks, dolphins, turtles and thousands of other tropical species; and some of the finest dive sites on the planet.

Add to this the fact that the coastal climate is as near perfect as it gets with an average daily temperature of 28 degrees centigrade, and a daily average of eight hours of sunshine, and you'll rapidly conclude that Kenya's coastline is one of the most alluring in the world.

And then there's the culture

An exotic fusion of Arab, African and Portuguese influences, the Swahili culture is found nowhere else on earth. Typified by its serene pace of life, its sublime cuisine, its profound heritage and its welcoming people, the sheer delight of the Swahili lifestyle prompts thousands of tourists to return year after year to immerse themselves in its lilting languor; and to step out of their everyday worlds and into the enchanted Swahili world of winding alleys, peeping faces, bustling markets, white-walled mosques and black-veiled women.

Roughly divided into 'North' and 'South' of the island city of Mombasa, Kenya's beaches offer a surprising diversity. South of Mombasa are; Shelly, Diani and Msambweni beaches. North are Nyali, Kenyatta, Bamburi, Shanzu, Kilifi, Watamu, Malindi and, ultimately, the beaches of the island resort of Lamu. Which to choose? Diani Beach is regularly voted one of the 'finest beaches in the world' by the global tourism press, but coastal charm is not entirely dictated by beaches. And each stretch of coast has its own subtle allure. Malindi, for instance, is famous for its aura of Italian chic, its stylish shops and restaurants and its vibrant nightlife. Watamu is adored for its sleepy rusticity, its magical mangrove creeks and its big game fishing. Mombasa is the place to go if you want bustle and bazaars, and arriving in Lamu is a little like entering the enchanted world of the *Tales of One Thousand and One Nights*. Finally, if all you want is beach, sky and sea, with perhaps the occasional harpoon fisherman emerging from the waves every now and then – head for Msambweni.

The glory of INDULGENCE

From the five-star luxury of a Sultan-esque palace to the warm friendly service of an affordable private guest house, we've got the indulgence factor covered. If you're an escapist you can bespeak your own beach-house (private chef included). If retail's your addiction then browse the beach buys of word-renowned Diani Beach where you can pick up everything from an authentic carving to a pure cotton wrap. Alternatively, spoil yourself in a spa, de-tox in a yoga retreat or sail away to a private island in a traditional dhow.



© Medina Palms



© Ali Barbours Cave Restaurant

Eating SWAHILI

Swahili cuisine is like no other. A mesmeric mix of African, Indian and Arabian with a touch of traditional British thrown in for good measure, it's all about freshly culled spices, just-squeezed limes, coconuts-off-the-tree and seafood straight from the waves. We also boast our own very distinctive East African Indian style while our indigenous Kenyan cuisine majors on BBQed meat and such Kenyan traditions as *Sukuma na wiki* (spinach, tomatoes and onions) and *Kuchumbari* (a fiery tomato, onion and chilli relish). As for eating venues, choose from natural coral caves, ocean-going dhows, ancient fortresses or moonlit beach bars. Meanwhile, in our sparkling new shopping malls you can get everything from home-made Italian ice cream to all-American hamburgers.



WATER worlds

Kenya boasts some of the finest silver sand beaches in the world, while the Indian Ocean coastline makes the ideal water-sporting venue, offering: windsurfing, kite surfing, snorkelling, stand up paddleboarding, glass-bottom boats, catamarans and dinghies, boogie boards, jet-skis, surfing, pedalos and water-skiing. Kenya also offers some world-class dive sites including wall and pinnacle dives with dramatic drop-offs together with wreck, drift and night drives. As for the wildlife, Kenya offers giant manta rays; reef, hammerhead and whale sharks; turtles and multi-coloured reef fish in coral gardens. A Mecca for deep-sea fishermen, Kenya holds many of the world and all-Africa game fishing records. Billfish catches include: striped, blue and black marlin; sailfish, swordfish, shark, wahoo, yellowfin tuna and dorado.



Mida Creek © Greg Armfield



© Stuart Price / Make it Kenya

Go GREEN

For all those who'd like to 'give back', the Kenyan coast offers a myriad of different pursuits choose from turtle nest-watching, whale-shark watching, working with coastal butterflies or mangrove swamps or joining one of the many community projects working to turn the plastic that threatens our wildlife into everything from fashion accessories to house-building materials.



The other BIG FIVE

Come to the coast and tick off the other Big Five. There's the marine Big Five (whale shark, dolphin, dugong, dolphin and turtle) or the coast's very own speciality Big Five: the golden-rumped elephant shrew – star of the Arabuko Sokoke Forest Reserve; the colobus monkeys of the Diani Colobus Trust; the elephants of the Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary; the Sable Antelope of the Shimba Hills; and the tropical snakes of the Diani Snake Farm.



Sable Antelope, Shimba Hills National Reserve

Immediate GRATIFICATION

Kenya's fabulous new single gauge railway not only whisks you from Nairobi to Mombasa in a matter of hours, it also delivers its own safari as you glide through Nairobi National Park and the magnificence of Tsavo East National Park. There's also a wide choice of local flights that will deliver you to the coastal venue of your choice from destinations as diverse as the wilds of the Masai Mara to the misty moorlands of the Aberdares.

And even when you're on the coast – it's so easy to explore such world-renowned wilderness areas as The Shimba Hills, The Taita Hills, Tsavo East and West, the Lumo Conservancy or that ornithologist's Mecca – the magical Arabuko Sokoke Forest Reserve. Day trips and short excursions are offered by all the best beach hotels - by road, by plane or by train.



© Satao Camp, Tsavo East



CULTURE Hounds

The coast bristles with cultural treasures that range from ruined mosques to the sacred glades of the coastal peoples – known as *kayas*. The twin jewels in the crown, however, are Fort Jesus and Gedi Ruins. Fort Jesus epitomizes the bloody history of the Swahili coast. Built in 1593, it is one of the oldest European buildings in Africa. Designed by Joao Batisto Cairato to protect Portuguese interests in East Africa, it is considered one of the world's finest examples of 16-century Portuguese military architecture. And then there's the wonder of Gedi. Just north of Watamu are the ruins of a 13th century town, allegedly deserted by its occupants at the approach of cannibals. Now it is a picturesque ruin with streets and market places, palaces and mosques, all set amongst dense coastal forest.



Gedi Ruins, Kilifi County



Sable Antelope in Shimba Hills National Reserve



Lamu Old Town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site © Erik Hersman



Elephant shrew in Arabuko Sokoke Forest

Coastal ROMANCE

You might be getting married on the beach, you might be taking your honeymoon on the coast; you might just be seeking a little sun-drenched romance, but no matter where you go on the Kenyan coast you'll be guaranteed moonlit walks along silver beaches, exclusive suppers under the stars, intimate dhow trips and the shared magic of swimming hand-in-hand through coral gardens dancing with tropical fish.



© Hemingways Collection

Coastal Highlights

If your idea of bliss is lounging on a sunbed, snorkeling over the reef, eating fresh fish simmered in lime and coconut and drinking cold beer on a silver beach you may have no interest in wilderness and cultural exploration. But if you'd like to ring the changes here are some venues worth leaving the beach for:

> The Shimba Hills National Reserve

Easily reached from Diani Beach, the Shimba Hills are cloaked in forest and wandered by elephant. They are also the only Kenyan habitat of the rare and magnificent sable antelope.

> The Arabuko Sokoke Forest Reserve

Within easy reach of Malindi and Watamu, this cool and shaded retreat shelters the last remnants of Kenya's coastal forests and hosts some of Africa's most rare and unusual creatures. It also promises a network of nature trails and some unrivalled bird watching.

> Kenya's Machu Picchu, the lost city of Gedi

Once buried in jungle, this ancient Swahili town was not discovered until the 1940s. Built in the 13th century and abandoned in the 17th century – some say due to the arrival of cannibals – it features ruined sultan's palaces, sunken gardens and a network of medieval streets. It is also reputedly haunted by a dark creature that always seems to have just disappeared around a bend in the walls: yet always seems to be watching you. Next door is the Kipepeo Butterfly farm featuring 260 species of butterfly. Gedi is being considered for UNESCO World Heritage Site status.