

VARD AFRICA | DESTINATION GUIDE

The Lamu Archipelago, Kenya

Where Time Stands Still & the Indian Ocean Whispers Ancient Stories

"There are places in this world that do not simply exist they breathe, they feel, they seduce. Lamu is one of those rare and sacred places. It does not rush to reveal itself. It waits, in the quiet way of the ancient, until you are still enough to receive it." — Vard Africa, Destination Curators

DESTINATION INTRODUCTION

The Lamu Archipelago, Kenya

An Island World Where the Desert Meets the Ocean

There are very few places left on earth where the modern world has not yet arrived where donkeys still carry the loads, where the narrow streets were designed before the automobile was even imagined, where the call to prayer drifts across coral-stone rooftops at dusk and mixes with the warm salt air of the Indian Ocean. The Lamu Archipelago is one of those places. And it is extraordinary.

Situated off the northern coast of Kenya, approximately 150 kilometres north of Mombasa and just south of the Somali border, the Lamu Archipelago is a chain of seven islands, islets and sandbanks that float in the turquoise waters of the Indian Ocean like a forgotten dream. The four principal islands **Lamu, Manda, Pate and Kiwayu** each offer their own distinct character and landscape, yet together they form one of the most singular, culturally intact and naturally beautiful destinations in all of Africa.

The archipelago stretches across a geography of breathtaking contrast: pristine white sand beaches that stretch for uninterrupted miles; ancient mangrove forests that fringe sheltered creeks of emerald water; towering sand dunes that roll inland like a golden sea; coral reefs of startling colour; and, at the heart of it all, Lamu Old Town a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the oldest continuously inhabited Swahili settlements in East Africa, with origins dating as far back as the **12th and 14th centuries**.

Lamu's Old Town is unlike any other settlement on the continent. Its streets some barely wide enough for two people to pass were carved from coral limestone and designed according to Arab traditions of urban development, their labyrinthine patterns still intact today as they were centuries ago. The buildings are constructed from mangrove poles, coral stone and limestone, their whitewashed facades adorned with some of the most intricately carved wooden doors in the world. Each door tells a story: of rank, of wealth, of artisanship, of the remarkable cultural crossroads that Lamu has always represented.

For Lamu was never simply an African settlement. From as early as the **8th century**, it was a vital node in the Indian Ocean trade network — a meeting place of Swahili, Arab, Persian, Indian, and Chinese civilization's whose dhow captains navigated the monsoon winds across thousands of miles of open ocean. The **Kaskazi** (north-east monsoon, November to April) and the **Kusi** (south-east monsoon, May to October) dictated the rhythm of trade, of travel, and of life itself. This oceanic heritage is still visible everywhere in the graceful wooden dhows that glide across the channels at sunset, in the biryani and pilau that fill the air with cardamom and cinnamon, in the Arabic calligraphy above ancient mosque doorways, and in the faces of Lamu's people, who carry within them the genetics of a thousand years of cross-cultural encounter.

Today, Lamu is home to approximately 25,000 people, the vast majority of whom are Muslim. It is one of the most important centres of Swahili culture and Islamic scholarship in East Africa, and its people maintain their traditions with a quiet, dignified pride. There are no privately owned cars on Lamu Island only four exist on the entire island, belonging to officials and emergency services. Everyone else walks, takes a boat, or travels by donkey. The result is a silence, a pace, and a quality of air that you will find nowhere else.

Shela Village, two miles south of Lamu Old Town at the start of the island's magnificent 12-kilometre beach, is the heartbeat of Lamu's luxury scene. Languid and sophisticated in equal measure, Shela is where the world's most discerning travellers come to slow down where white linen catches the sea breeze, where lunches drift gently into the late afternoon, and where the only agenda is the tide. Its seafront and the extraordinary empty beach beyond are ringed by some of the most beautiful private villas and boutique hotels on the African continent.

Beyond the islands themselves, the archipelago is a natural wonder. The surrounding marine ecosystem supports a remarkable diversity of life **humpback whales** between September and November, **dolphins** from December through March, sea turtles that nest on the beaches, and coral reefs of exceptional clarity teeming with tropical fish. The mangrove forests some of the most extensive on the East African coast provide critical habitat and nursery grounds for marine species, as well as extraordinary kayaking and creek-exploration experiences for guests.

The climate is warm and tropical year-round, governed by the dual monsoons. **January to March** offers hot, sunny days with calm seas ideal for beach time and watersports. **June to October**, the Kusi season, brings cooling trade winds and excellent conditions for kitesurfing and sailing. The short rains in November and the long rains from April to May bring the island's lush vegetation to life. **December through March** is high season; accommodation must be booked well in advance.

In summary: the Lamu Archipelago is not simply a beach destination. It is a living, breathing civilization a place of extraordinary historical depth, natural magnificence, cultural richness and barefoot elegance that exists, remarkably, almost entirely on its own terms. It does not compete with anywhere else. It simply is itself. And for those privileged enough to experience it, it leaves an impression that does not fade.

THE VARD AFRICA PERSPECTIVE

Why We Love the Lamu Archipelago

At Vard Africa, we have travelled widely, curated deeply, and remain endlessly searching for destinations that transcend the ordinary. Lamu is among a very small handful of places in Africa or indeed in the world that consistently exceeds expectation.

Here is why we love it:

- ✓ We love Lamu because it is **genuinely irreplaceable**. There is no facsimile of this place. Zanzibar has been modernized; Mombasa has grown; the world has, in so many places, smoothed over its rougher, more beautiful edges. Lamu has refused. It remains coral stone and carved doors and the smell of the sea on ancient walls.
- ✓ We love it because of the **silence**. No car engines, no diesel fumes, no honking horns. Just the wind through palm fronds, the creak of a dhow at anchor, children's laughter in the alleys, the rhythmic braying of donkeys. This quiet is not passive — it is actively restorative.
- ✓ We love the **layered cultural world** that Lamu represents. Every meal is a history lesson: the biryani brought by Arab traders, the fish curries of the Indian merchants, the coconut and cassava of the Swahili coast. Every carved door is a family's signature. Every festival — from the Maulid celebrations to the Lamu Cultural Festival is an act of collective memory.
- ✓ We love the **quality and character** of the accommodation. Lamu's finest houses and lodges are among the most aesthetically masterful in Africa — genuinely architectural achievements that honour their setting. Staying here does not feel like checking into a hotel. It feels like being invited into someone's extraordinary life.
- ✓ We love Lamu because it makes you **present**. Without the distractions of the modern world no traffic, limited connectivity, the constant rhythm of the tide guests reconnects with themselves, with their companions, and with the simple, profound pleasures of being alive in a beautiful place.
- ✓ And we love it because it is **kind**. The people of Lamu are warm, generous, and proud of their home. The relationship between host and guest here carries a grace that is increasingly rare.

Why Our Guests Will Love Lamu Island

Our guests will love Lamu for the same reasons we do and for reasons that are entirely their own. But from our years of curating extraordinary travel experiences, we have observed certain consistent truths:

- ✓ **The honeymooners** will discover that Lamu is one of the most romantic destinations on earth not in a manufactured, rose-petal-on-the-bed way, but in the deeper, more enduring way of a place that actually rewards slowing down, being present, and being together.
- ✓ **The families** will find that Lamu gives children back their imagination. There are no screens powerful enough to compete with learning to water-ski in a turquoise bay, feeding bush babies at dusk, exploring a 700-year-old town on foot, or watching sea turtles emerge from the moonlit sand.
- ✓ **The seasoned travellers** — those who have seen much of the world and found it increasingly similar will find in Lamu something they perhaps feared no longer existed: a destination that has not been processed, packaged and smoothed into a product. Lamu is still the real thing.
- ✓ **The wellness-seekers** will find that the archipelago offers the deepest kind of reset mornings of yoga on rooftop terraces above the ocean, silent kayaking through mangrove creeks, early swims in water so clear and clean it feels medicinal, and evenings of extraordinary simplicity under a sky full of stars.
- ✓ **The adventure travellers** will discover that the Lamu Archipelago rewards those who explore beyond the beach the multi-day dhow safaris along the coast, the deep-sea fishing expeditions for marlin and sailfish, the snorkelling on pristine reef systems, the kitesurfing in the trade winds.

For all of our guests, Lamu offers something increasingly precious: **time**. Not the rushed, itinerary-driven time of a conventional holiday, but deep, generous, unhurried time. Time to read. Time to talk. Time to sit and watch a dhow sail silently across the channel. Time to simply be.

Why It Is a Vard Africa Essential Add-On

- ✓ Lamu is the perfect complement to a Kenyan safari and we consider it an essential component of any truly complete East Africa journey.
- ✓ The rhythm of a safari is extraordinary but also demanding: early mornings, long game drives, the emotional intensity of wildlife encounters. By the time guests complete five to ten days of safari whether in the Masai Mara, Amboseli, Samburu, Laikipia or along the Rift Valley their souls are full but their bodies are ready for rest. Lamu is the perfect answer.
- ✓ The contrast is as important as it is beautiful. From the red dust of the Mara to the white sand of Shela; from the thundering herds of the great migration to the silent glide of a dhow at sunset; from the vast open skies of the savannah to the intimate, candlelit terrace of a Swahili villa above the sea this is the complete Kenya experience, and Lamu is its most elegant conclusion.
- ✓ Logistically, the connection is seamless. Guests fly directly from any major safari camp airstrip to Manda Island via a private charter or scheduled flight, arriving at Lamu typically within the same day.
- ✓ Vard Africa handles all transfers, welcomes and logistics so that the transition from bush to beach is as effortless as everything else on a Vard journey.

We recommend a minimum of **five nights** in Lamu enough time to settle into the island's pace, explore the archipelago meaningfully, and depart feeling genuinely restored. Seven nights is ideal. And our most devoted guests stay for ten days or more, returning year after year.

OUR ACCOMMODATION & TRADE PARTNERS IN LAMU

Best Places to Stay in the Lamu Archipelago

Vard Africa has personally experienced, vetted and curated each of the following properties. Our recommendations are based on quality, character, service, and the ability of a property to deliver the kind of transformative experience that defines a Vard Africa Experience.

PEPONI HOTEL

Shela Village, Lamu Island / The Icon

Location: Peponi Hotel sits on the seafront of Shela Village at the very eastern tip of Lamu Island, directly at the point where the dhow harbour meets the beginning of the island's glorious 12-kilometre beach. The Old Mosque of Shela a 14th-century landmark stands just behind the property.

Introduction & History

There are hotels, and then there are institutions. Peponi is an institution. More than that, it is a legend one of the most beloved and enduring addresses on the entire East African coast, and one that has somehow, across more than five decades, managed to remain utterly itself.

The story begins in 1966, when **Aage "Lemmy" Korschen**, a Danish farmer whose land had been acquired during Kenyan independence, took a short flight up the coast with his wife **Wera** for a day trip to Lamu. They ended up in Shela Village, and there perched on the edge of the harbour like the prow of a ship they found an abandoned Arab house. Within ten days, they had the keys. In **1967**, they opened Peponi as a four-room guesthouse.

Over the decades, Peponi grew not in the expansive, corporate sense, but organically, carefully, always shaped by the family that owned and loved it. Their son **Lars** designed all the new rooms, shaped the pool among the ancient baobabs, and gave Peponi the architectural character it still carries today. Lars also started the legendary New Year's dhow race, a tradition that continues to this day. His wife **Carol** brought warmth, culinary passion, and a deep conservation commitment she founded the **Lamu Marine Conservation Trust (LAMCOT)** in 1992 to protect endangered sea turtles. Today, Carol's daughter **Elke** continues the family stewardship, carrying forward what three generations of the Korschen family have built.

Ownership & Management

Peponi remains entirely **family-owned and operated** by the Korschen family. This is not a managed property or a branded hotel it is someone's home that grew into something extraordinary. The warmth and personal investment that comes from genuine family ownership is felt in every interaction.

Awards & Recognition

Peponi has been recognised by **Condé Nast Traveller**, **Travel + Leisure** and the **World Travel Awards** as one of the finest boutique hotels on the East African coast. It consistently ranks among the highest-rated hotels in Kenya across all major platforms and maintains an exceptional reputation among the world's leading safari and luxury travel operators.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Peponi offers **29 beautifully appointed rooms** across several categories, each sea-facing and designed in classic Swahili coastal style with elegant simplicity:

- ✓ **Standard Rooms** — Comfortable, immaculately appointed rooms with ocean views, private terraces or balconies, high four-poster Lamu beds, overhead fans, mosquito nets, ensuite bathrooms with hot showers, personal safes, hairdryers and beach towels. Egyptian cotton sheets and premium bedding throughout.
- ✓ **Superior Rooms** — More spacious than the Standard category, with prime positions across the property, additional private outdoor areas featuring the iconic Peponi swing beds, mini-fridges, and enhanced views of the channel and ocean. These rooms are particularly sought after by honeymooners and repeat guests.
- ✓ **Family Rooms** — Available in both Superior and Standard configurations. These rooms can accommodate up to four guests, ranging from a single shared room to two separate rooms with a shared bathroom — ideal for families travelling with children.
- ✓ **Apartments** — Three apartments are available, including one studio apartment and two two-bedroom apartments, each comprising superior bedrooms alongside a spacious open-plan living, dining and kitchen area. These are particularly popular with families seeking a degree of self-contained living or longer-stay guests.

Amenities & Facilities

The heart of Peponi's common spaces reflects the same understated elegance as the rooms.

- ✓ The **legendary bar** possibly the most famous watering hole on the Kenyan coast overlooks the dhow harbour and serves fresh rock oysters, cold coconuts and an eclectic menu of cocktails. It is frequented as much by Shela villagers as by hotel guests, giving it an authenticity and life that cannot be manufactured. The **rooftop Jahazi Bar** offers elevated views across the channel.
- ✓ The **swimming pool**, designed by Lars and set among ancient baobab trees, is one of the most photographed in Kenya. Swing hammocks in the shade of coconut palms complete the picture. The poolside menu, served under the dappled light of the baobabs, is quite simply one of the pleasures of a Kenyan life.
- ✓ Further facilities include room service, a library, spa treatments (Swedish massage and hot stone massage), a daily manager's reception, and laundry services. Free roundtrip airport boat transfers are included. WiFi is available throughout.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

Food at Peponi is an event a deeply pleasurable, meticulously sourced event. The kitchen is guided by a philosophy of sustainability: fish is sourced directly from trusted local fishermen who share the hotel's commitment to responsible fishing practices, and the menu evolves with the seasons, reflecting the natural bounty of the archipelago.

Guests dine across three distinct settings the classic **Main Dining Room** with its whitewashed walls, Arabic tea urns and antique plates; the **seafront terrace** overlooking the channel (the finest spot for a dinner under the stars); the pool area among the baobabs; and the rooftop. A table d'hôte menu is served alongside an à la carte selection, both centered-on seafood notably the celebrated crab, fresh lobster, grilled catch-of-the-day, and the hotel's signature Japanese-Swahili fusion preparations. Italian, Thai and Southeast Asian influences weave through the menu with notable skill.

Breakfast is included and served continental-style with fresh tropical fruits and eggs prepared to order.

Health & Safety

- ✓ Peponi maintains rigorous hygiene standards throughout all food preparation, using filtered and purified water in all cooking and drinking.
- ✓ The property operates 24-hour security, maintains comprehensive first aid protocols, and can assist in arranging medical evacuation in the event of a serious emergency.
- ✓ A county hospital and several private clinics are accessible on the island.
- ✓ All staff are trained in food safety and guest wellbeing.
- ✓ Mosquito nets are provided in all rooms; the poolside area operates according to child safety guidelines please note that Peponi does not accommodate children under the age of six, as the unfenced pool is situated at the ocean's edge.

Why We Love Peponi

- ✓ We love Peponi because it is one of those increasingly rare properties that cannot be replicated.
- ✓ It has **soul** the kind that comes only from decades of genuine love, family ownership, and an uncompromising refusal to be anything other than itself.
- ✓ The bar at Peponi on a warm evening, with rock oysters and a cold Tusker and the whole of the Lamu Channel spread before you, is one of the great pleasures of African travel.

Why Our Guests Will Love Peponi

Our guests will love Peponi for its extraordinary warmth, its food, its position, and the sense rare in travel that they have been welcomed into something real. Repeat guests return year after year, some for decades. Many consider it their home in Africa. The Korschen family's genuine investment in every guest's experience is felt from the moment of arrival.

The Vard Africa Insider Note

- ✓ *Book the Superior Rooms for the swing beds they are as romantic as they sound, particularly with the night breeze and dhows gliding past. Spend at least one evening at the bar before dinner rather than going straight to the table the social life at Peponi's bar is half the experience.*
- ✓ *And do not miss the Jahazi Bar at sunset for a Dawa (the classic Kenyan cocktail of vodka, honey and lime). Always book months ahead for December through March Peponi fills early and this is not the sort of place where last-minute availability exists.*

Families & Children

Peponi warmly welcomes families with children **over the age of six**. The property does not accommodate children younger than six due to the unfenced pool's proximity to the ocean. For older children and teenagers, the dhow trips, water sports, beach walks and daily Lamu Town excursion are genuinely memorable experiences.

MANDA BAY LODGE

Northwestern Tip of Manda Island / The Remote Paradise

Location: Manda Bay occupies the northernmost peninsula of Manda Island, set on the quiet side facing across the deep-water Mkanda Channel toward the Kenyan mainland. It is approximately 8 miles (30 minutes by speedboat) from Lamu Town, and accessible directly by private charter to its own airstrip.

Introduction & History

If Peponi is Lamu's heart, Manda Bay is its soul the place where barefoot luxury meets true wilderness, where the land behind the lodge is dry bush country patrolled by buffalo, bushbuck and civet cat, and where the beach in front stretches in both directions to an empty, shimmering horizon. Manda Bay is one of those exceptional lodges that manages to feel simultaneously completely removed from the world and completely at ease within it.

The lodge sits in a grove of coastal trees on a sheltered private bay, built in the Swahili tradition using primarily local materials wood, palm-woven matting, thatch and stone. High roofs and open sides throughout ensure a constant sea breeze; the boundary between lodge and beach is deliberately blurred, so that sand is underfoot, ocean is visible from every angle, and the transition between indoors and outdoors is seamless.

The lodge is celebrated as much for its **atmosphere** as for its setting. Guests describe arriving at Manda Bay as arriving home met by a team who already know their names, welcomed onto a beach of extraordinary beauty, and immediately liberated from shoes and schedules.

Ownership & Management

Manda Bay is **privately owned and managed** by the **Dyer and Roberts families** a hands-on, deeply committed family operation. The Dyer and Roberts families have strong ties to the Lamu coast and to conservation across northern Kenya. Fuzz Dyer serves as Coastal Director of the **Northern Rangelands Trust**, and the lodge works actively with the **Lamu Marine Conservation Trust (LAMCOT)** on marine conservation initiatives. This is a property whose owners are genuinely invested in the long-term wellbeing of the archipelago.

Awards & Recognition

Manda Bay has been awarded the **Luxury Safari Company Award for Best Beach Lodge in Lamu** and is consistently ranked among the finest beach lodges in Kenya by the world's leading luxury travel operators.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Manda Bay offers **22 accommodation options** across three categories, all constructed from local materials with palm thatch roofs and woven matting floors. Each room features open-air windows (no shutters or glass, to maximise the sea breeze), an oversized walk-in mosquito net, overhead fans, and a verandah with chairs and a signature swing bed overlooking the ocean.

- ✓ **11 Beachfront Rooms** — Positioned directly on the seawall, with immediate and uninterrupted access to the beach. These rooms are equipped with either king-size beds or twin beds, with room to add one, two or three extra beds for families. Ensuite bathrooms with twin basins, W/C, shower and hot water.
- ✓ **5 Palm (Seaview) Rooms** — Set slightly back from the water's edge and a little higher, these rooms enjoy elevated perspectives over the bay. Still ensuite and beautifully appointed; their slightly more sheltered position makes them popular in windier conditions.
- ✓ **6 Garden Rooms** — More closely spaced and situated in the heart of the property, these smaller rooms were originally designed with guides and teenagers in mind, and are the most affordable accommodation at the lodge. Still ensuite with standard-sized twin or double beds, they are ideal for fishermen who spend full days at sea or families who want a separate room for older children at a more accessible price point.

All rooms can accommodate extra beds for families with young children.

Amenities & Facilities

Manda Bay's public areas are an extension of its philosophy: relaxed, beautiful and entirely unpretentious.

- ✓ The **beachfront bar** where the barman is poised to mix the legendary Kenyan Dawa is the social heart of the lodge. Adjacent, the **games room** houses a pool table, darts, and table tennis.
- ✓ A **library** offers refuge during the midday heat.
- ✓ The **yoga room** is available each morning.
- ✓ A **freshwater swimming pool** provides an alternative to the sea (though the sea, here, is hard to resist).
- ✓ The **gym** offers a full workout facility for those who cannot entirely let go.

Wi-Fi is available. Phone coverage is decent. But Manda Bay operates on what its team lovingly describes as a "**no shoes, no news**" philosophy and most guests find, within hours of arriving, that they are very happy to abide by it.

Full-board rates include all meals, desalinated drinking water, airstrip transfers from Lamu Airport, pool and games room use, the yoga room, kayaking, sailing, windsurfing, SUP boarding and laundry.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

The kitchen at Manda Bay is one of its great strengths. Cuisine is gourmet, using the freshest possible ingredients a large proportion of the seafood arrives daily from local fishermen, including tuna, dorado, wahoo, lobster, crab and prawns. Meals are flexible and responsive to guests' preferences and dietary requirements. Breakfast is a leisurely celebration of fresh tropical fruit, pancakes, eggs cooked to order and freshly baked bread. Lunch at the beachfront, dinner under the stars. The team will also create private beach dinners, dhow dining experiences and sundowner setups at remote sandbanks on request.

The deep-sea fishing boat **Cheza** is central to the culinary identity of the lodge: guests who catch their own fish (yellow fin tuna, sailfish, marlin) are invited to have it prepared on the spot the freshest possible sashimi with soy and wasabi, or grilled whole on the beach at dusk. It is one of those experiences that cannot be matched by any restaurant on earth.

Health & Safety

Manda Bay operates a **comprehensive 24-hour security operation**, professionally designed and independently assessed.

- ✓ The lodge uses purified, desalinated water throughout.
- ✓ Food hygiene standards are rigorous.
- ✓ Medical evacuation can be arranged via the lodge's own private airstrip.
- ✓ First aid is available on site.
- ✓ The owners are deeply experienced in the area and provide guests with comprehensive safety briefings and local knowledge.

Why We Love Manda Bay

We love Manda Bay for its extraordinary **hosting** the owners and their team create an atmosphere that genuinely feels like a house party rather than a hotel. We love it for the wild land behind the lodge, where buffalo roam and civet cats emerge at dusk.

We love the **sunset dhow cruises** on the 60-foot traditional dhow Utamaduni to remote sandbanks, with a fully stocked bar and a bonfire built on the sand as the sun goes down. And we love that Manda Bay understands what hospitality actually is the art of making people feel that they are home.

Why Our Guests Will Love Manda Bay

Our guests love the **completeness** of the experience the fact that from the moment they step off the plane, everything is taken care of and nothing is expected of them except to enjoy themselves. Families in particular thrive here: the children have the freedom and the space and the activities to be genuinely happy, while parents have the peace and beauty to be genuinely rested.

The Vard Africa Insider Note

Book a private charter directly into Manda Bay's airstrip if budget allows it saves the boat transfer from Lamu and allows for a dramatic low-level arrival over the coast. Arrange the sunset sundowner dhow cruise to the sandbank on your first or second evening it is the defining Manda Bay experience. And ask for fresh crab on the beach at least once during your stay. You will not forget it.

Families & Children

- ✓ Manda Bay is outstanding for families.
- ✓ All rooms can accommodate extra beds; the ocean and the range of activities will absorb children of all ages.
- ✓ The lodge's bush also offers a wildlife element game drives in convertible Range Rovers that bridges the gap between beach holiday and safari, making Manda Bay particularly appealing for families transitioning directly from a game reserve.

FORODHANI HOUSE

Shela Beach, Shela Village, Lamu Island / The Architectural Masterpiece

Location: Forodhani House stands on the very spot where, centuries ago, a watchtower controlled the passage of ships entering and exiting the Lamu Archipelago. Today, it commands 270-degree views of the Indian Ocean, the channel between Lamu and Manda Islands, and the village of Shela.

The house is positioned at the exact point where Shela Beach begins just metres from Peponi Hotel and a short boat ride to Lamu Old Town.

Introduction & History

Forodhani House is, by any measure, one of the most beautiful private villas in Kenya. Built in authentic Swahili style by Lamu's finest craftsmen led by the legendary **Ali Skanda** and the *niru* artists' team and inspired by the deep love of its French-European owners for East Africa and Swahili culture, it represents perhaps the finest example of modern Swahili architecture on the island.

The house takes its name from the Swahili word *forodhani*, referring to a harbour or customs point. Its location is extraordinary: built directly on the beach of Shela with two sides directly on the sea, it offers views that sweep from the open ocean to the channel to Manda Island. Sitting on its terrace as dhows slide silently through the arched frame of its windows, or watching sardines scatter before barracuda in the channel below at breakfast, is to understand exactly why its owners fell irrevocably in love with this place.

The architecture is a joyful celebration of Swahili craftsmanship: *zidaka* plasterwork and niches; carved and painted beams; *daka* porches; Arabic arches of sweeping elegance; carved teak doors of museum quality; hand-woven carpets; antique chests sourced from dealers in Mombasa, Nairobi and Lamu; white stucco with motifs of extraordinary delicacy. The quality of finishes makes this one of the finest modern architectural achievements on Lamu Island.

Ownership & Management

Forodhani House is privately owned and personally managed by its French-European owners, who oversee bookings directly through a dedicated concierge service to ensure a bespoke, one-to-one experience for every guest. The house is run by a team of six dedicated staff, including an accomplished cook who sources the finest local seafood and produce daily.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Forodhani House is available for **exclusive private hire** and can comfortably accommodate **10 to 13 guests** in its five ensuite bedrooms making it ideal for extended families, a group of close friends, or a combination thereof.

- ✓ **4 Double Bedrooms** — Each with a shaded private terrace, magnificent uninterrupted sea views, ensuite bathroom, and access to the many different living and lounging areas throughout the house.
- ✓ **1 Triple Bedroom** — Accommodating three guests, with the same quality of finish and views as the double rooms.

All bedrooms are connected to the house's multiple terraces, sunny and shady lounging areas, day beds and welcoming corners — ensuring that even a large group has space and privacy as desired.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ A **10-metre freshwater swimming pool** overlooks the ocean from the garden level the ultimate setting for morning laps or a post-beach afternoon float. Multiple terraces at different levels provide choice of sun or shade at any hour of the day.
- ✓ A large main lounge, dining terrace, full kitchen, garden with ylang-ylang, frangipani, palm and bougainvillea, and a roof terrace for starlit dinners complete the picture.
- ✓ Free WiFi is available. Air conditioning is provided. A fully equipped kitchen includes a coffee machine, dishwasher and barbecue.
- ✓ The property provides complimentary airport boat transfers. Massage can be arranged on request.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ Forodhani's cook is celebrated by guests across multiple seasons of return visits.
- ✓ Menus are developed in consultation with the guests, drawing on the finest daily seafood lobster, crab, prawns and fresh fish caught that morning as well as the full spectrum of Swahili-influenced cuisine with European touches.
- ✓ Dinners by the pool, under the arcades, in the garden or on the roof terrace beneath the African night sky are among the memories guests carry longest from Lamu.
- ✓ The house operates as self-catering in structure but fully serviced in practice guests have complete flexibility of mealtimes, menus and style, supported by a team that anticipates every need.

Health & Safety

- ✓ The property provides filtered and purified drinking water.
- ✓ A security team and a responsible host relationship ensure guests are well briefed on island safety protocols.
- ✓ Medical support is available via the island's health facilities and Vard Africa's emergency network.

Why We Love Forodhani House

- ✓ We love Forodhani for its **audacious beauty** the architecture, the views, the quality of the craftsmanship.
- ✓ It is the kind of house that stops you in your tracks the moment you walk through the carved teak door.
- ✓ The 270-degree sea views are not simply spectacular they are transformative.

Why Our Guests Will Love Forodhani House

Guests who love design, architecture and the finest possible aesthetic experience will find Forodhani House deeply satisfying. It also works superbly for larger family or group gatherings where the exclusive-hire format provides both space and total privacy.

The Vard Africa Insider Note

Ask for a dinner on the roof terrace on a clear night the stars above the Indian Ocean from this elevation are extraordinary. Take a sunset drink on the upper terrace and watch the dhows moving through the channel below. And allow the cook at least one evening to prepare a full Swahili feast it will be one of the finest meals of your journey.

Families & Children

- ✓ Forodhani is particularly well-suited to families and multi-generational groups.
- ✓ The exclusive-hire format ensures complete privacy, and the pool, beach access and village proximity mean there is always something to engage children of all ages.

JANNAH HOUSE

Shela Village, Lamu Island / The Constellation Hotel

Location: Jannah occupies its own distinctive position in Shela Village, rising as the tallest tower on the skyline with sweeping views across the entire archipelago. It is centred around the old village square at the very social and historical heart of Shela.

Introduction & History

Jannah meaning *paradise* in Arabic is the most recent and perhaps the most artistically significant addition to Lamu's luxury scene. It is the hospitality vision of **Anna Trzebinski**, a Kenyan-raised designer and entrepreneur of international renown, whose art-filled Nairobi residence is now part of the Hemingways portfolio. Trzebinski first came to Lamu as a child, in the days before electricity, fuel or cars arrived on the island. Her love for the place spans decades; Jannah is its most eloquent expression.

Described as a "**constellation hotel**" a series of four interconnected residences, each distinct in character yet coherent in philosophy Jannah is built across the tallest tower in Shela, offering altitude, architecture and atmosphere that no other property on the island can match. Traditional Islamic artisanal detail informs every surface: lime-plaster polished floors; *zidaka* niches; carved wooden doorways; ornate lattice screens. Contemporary Swahili interiors carry an intellectual sophistication that reflects Anna Trzebinski's background as a designer and artist.

Ownership & Management

Jannah is personally designed, curated and managed by **Anna Trzebinski**, ensuring that every detail of the guest experience reflects her exacting aesthetic vision and deep personal connection to Lamu.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Jannah comprises **four residences** across the tower, including a rooftop **Honeymoon Suite** of exceptional beauty and romance its billowy net-draped bed, cocktail shakers, beaded palm-tree candle holders, and far-reaching views over the archipelago making it the most sought-after room in Shela for couples and honeymooners.

The remaining three suites each offer distinct character within the consistent aesthetic of the property carved doorways, lattice screens, monsoon-cooled interiors (Jannah is almost unique in Shela for offering air conditioning throughout), polished lime floors and an atmosphere of refined peace.

The property also owns a **canopied and cushioned barge** perfect for languid day trips to distant dunes, morning swims through mangrove inlets, or shopping trips to Lamu Town.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ A rooftop bar with arguably the finest views in Lamu. Concierge services for all activities and excursions.
- ✓ Rooftop alfresco yoga.
- ✓ The private barge for island exploration. Sharp, attentive service that is intimate in scale and individually responsive.
- ✓ Air conditioning throughout.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ Dining at Jannah is a curated experience reflecting Anna Trzebinski's aesthetic intimate, beautifully considered and deeply pleasurable.
- ✓ Fresh local seafood, Swahili-inspired cuisine and personal service define the culinary offer.

Why We Love Jannah

We love Jannah for its **originality and artistic vision**. There is nowhere else like it in Lamu or indeed in East Africa. Anna Trzebinski has created something that is simultaneously a work of art and a supremely comfortable place to stay.

Why Our Guests Will Love Jannah

Guests with a deep appreciation for design, art, craft and authentic cultural experience will feel immediately at home at Jannah. The Honeymoon Suite is among the most romantic rooms in Africa.

The Vard Africa Insider Note

- ✓ *The rooftop bar at sunset is a must the best view of the entire archipelago from any property in Shela. Reserve the Honeymoon Suite well in advance.*
- ✓ *And ask Anna, if she is in residence, about her Lamu her stories of the island are as beautiful as the place itself.*

Families & Children

Jannah is best suited to **couples, solo travellers and small groups** seeking intimacy, design and a sophisticated retreat. Its tower architecture makes it less suited to families with very young children.

THE HONEYMOON HOUSE

Shela Village, Lamu Island / The Eco-Fortress

Location: Perched on the hilltop of Shela Village, immediately adjacent to the historic Mosque of Shela and neighbouring Peponi Hotel, The Honeymoon House commands the highest position of any private residence on Lamu Island, with its gardens extending from the summit all the way to the water's edge. It offers 80 feet of **private beach access**.

Introduction & History

The Honeymoon House is one of Lamu's most dramatic and unusual properties a castle-like eco-fortress of considerable scale and grandeur, set within three acres of lush tropical gardens on the hills above Shela. It is simultaneously grand in ambition and deeply sustainable in operation: two deep wells equipped with reverse osmosis and ultraviolet filtration systems provide the entire property's water supply; solar power drives its energy systems; the gardens provide fresh herbs and produce for the kitchen.

The property features a **100-foot swimming pool** one of the longest private pools in Kenya which hugs the front of the house and is accessible from the ground-floor bedrooms and the tower. The views from the highest terraces take in the entire Shela channel, the open ocean beyond, and the minarets of the surrounding villages.

Ownership & Management

The Honeymoon House is a privately owned villa managed by a dedicated full-time team of ten, including a house manager, four *Askari* (security), two skilled cooks, a sailing captain and mate, a speedboat captain and a travel coordinator.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

The property offers **five luxurious ensuite bedrooms**, each spacious and beautifully appointed, with excellent natural ventilation and sea breezes. The house can accommodate larger groups in comfort and is also popular for intimate weddings and private celebrations.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ The Honeymoon House offers three boats for exclusive guest use: an **18-foot Quicksilver Mariner speedboat** for day trips to Manda Toto and Kipungani; a **Kiwayu Speedboat** for water-skiing and ocean excursions; and a **27-foot traditional Mozambique dhow** for midnight moon sailing and romantic ocean passages.
- ✓ Gardens of 2.5 to 3 acres, the extraordinary 100-foot pool, yoga and massage on request, 24-hour security, full Wi-Fi and comprehensive sustainability infrastructure.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

The house employs a **world-class chef** who specializes in health-oriented, locally inspired cuisine across multiple styles Swahili coastal, California-style summer fare, Italian, and vegetarian. Fresh ingredients drawn from the gardens and daily fish markets ensure a quality of produce that is exceptional.

Why We Love the Honeymoon House

We love it for its extraordinary scale, its position above the island, its remarkable pool, and the sense that guests here are genuinely living in a private castle above the sea.

The Vard Africa Insider Note

- ✓ *The moonlit dhow sailing experience is unlike anything else Lamu offers if conditions allow, arrange it for at least one evening.*
- ✓ *And walk to the highest point of the gardens at sunrise before anyone else is awake the light over the archipelago from this height is unforgettable.*

Families & Children

The Honeymoon House is wonderfully suited to **families and larger groups** due to its scale, the privacy of its grounds and beach, and the range of boats available for excursions. Children will love the speedboat, the 100-foot pool and the freedom of the gardens.

CHUCHUNGI HOUSE

Kizingoni Beach, Southwest Lamu Island / The Wild Edge Retreat

Location: Chuchungi House is located on **Kizingoni Beach** on the southwestern, creek-facing side of Lamu Island the quiet side, away from town and village, accessible via a **30-minute speedboat ride** through the mangrove-lined channels from Lamu Airport. It is one of the few properties on the Kenyan coast that offers views of both ocean and creek simultaneously.

Introduction & History

Chuchungi is the wildly beautiful, barefoot-brilliant outlier of the Lamu accommodation scene a three-bedroom private beach house on a stretch of coast so pristine and so quiet that it is genuinely hard to imagine life anywhere else. Its four-floor design captures both sunrise and sunset, looking east over the Indian Ocean and west across Lamu Creek. The house was designed to echo the essence of Lamu's Old Town and Shela whitewashed stucco, excellent fans, mosquito nets, hot showers, panoramic rooftop terraces and a long pool perfectly suited for morning laps.

Behind the house, the local community of **Kipungani** provides an authentic and enriching cultural connection guests are encouraged to visit, to learn, and to engage with the traditional coastal life that persists on this quieter side of the island.

Ownership & Management

Chuchungi House is managed by **The Safari Series**, a boutique Kenya operator with exceptional knowledge of Lamu and the coast. The house is staffed entirely by local people from the Lamu community, including its celebrated boat captain and watersports champion **Rama**, who has become something of a legend among Chuchungi's returning guests.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

- ✓ **3 Bedrooms** across four floors of traditional Swahili architecture.
- ✓ The house accommodates **up to 6 guests** in beautifully appointed rooms with high ceilings, intricate decor, mosquito nets and sea-facing windows. All rooms are ensuite.
- ✓ The multi-level design ensures that different members of the group can find their own private corner while still sharing the common areas.
- ✓ A **long swimming pool** runs adjacent to the house ideal for laps; a **children's splash pool** ensures younger guests have their own dedicated space.

Amenities & Facilities

Yoga sessions on the rooftop terrace, motorised boat for all activities and excursions, speedboat for water-skiing and ocean exploration, kayaks, paddleboards, snorkelling equipment, sundowner setups on the beach, BBQ facilities, outdoor pool, complete airport speedboat transfers. All-inclusive rates cover accommodation, all meals, all drinks (excluding luxury spirits and champagne, which must be pre-ordered), all in-house activities, and all transfers.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

The team at Chuchungi is celebrated for its food fresh, generous, beautifully prepared. Oysters, crab, fish caught that same day and the freshest local produce feature daily. The team is responsive to dietary preferences and family-friendly requirements, and meals are a genuine highlight of the experience.

Why We Love Chuchungi

We love Chuchungi for its position on the quiet, creek-facing side of Lamu, it offers a perspective and an atmosphere that no other property can quite match. The sunrise from the rooftop terrace and the sunset over the creek are extraordinary moments that stay with guests long after departure.

Why Our Guests Will Love Chuchungi

- ✓ Families and groups of friends seeking a completely private, immersive and genuinely adventurous beach experience will find Chuchungi ideal.
- ✓ The all-inclusive format removes all decision-making; the team creates the experience and guests simply enjoy it.

The Vard Africa Insider Note

Book Chuchungi in conjunction with Manda Bay or Peponi for a beautifully balanced Lamu experience the creek-side perspective of Chuchungi contrasts beautifully with the ocean-facing character of the other properties. Rama's sunrise water-ski session before breakfast is non-negotiable.

Families & Children

Chuchungi is among the most family-friendly properties in the archipelago the staff are extraordinarily warm with children, the activities are genuinely appropriate for all ages, and the property has been praised repeatedly by guests as a perfect setting for families.

THE CABANAS LAMU

Kizingoni Beach, Southwest Lamu Island / The Eco-Bohemian Sanctuary

Location: The Cabanas are located on **Kizingoni Beach** on the southwestern coast of Lamu Island the wild, quiet, trade-wind-facing side of the island, a 20-minute private speedboat journey from Manda Airport through the mangrove-fringed channels.

Introduction & History

The Cabanas are a deeply personal, family legacy-driven property born from the vision of **Leslie** the brave and visionary creator of Kizingoni Beach who first lived on this very sand dune in a humble palm-leaf hut she called *HQ* (headquarters). From those beginnings, she planted hundreds of trees across acres of hot desert sand and designed eight beautiful Swahili villas, each nestled into the tropical foliage she had cultivated.

Each Cabana carries its own name and story. **Ohana Cabana** the first dwelling built, named after the Hawaiian word for *family* by Leslie's daughter Anna, who grew up here. **Moana Cabana** elevated above the ocean, inspired by unique blue doors that travelled from a previous home in Bali. The other villas follow in the same vein of intimate, named characters each with its own personality and view.

The property champions a clear and genuine philosophy of **eco-conscious, off-grid living**: solar panels and a windmill provide reliable power; well water filtered for drinking; sustainable watersports; and a deep respect for the marine environment around the island's own **Treasure Island** a private snorkelling and dolphin-watching spot accessible only to Cabanas guests.

Ownership & Management

The Cabanas are owned and managed by Anna, Leslie's daughter, who continues her mother's legacy with the same passion and respect for the land, the sea and the Lamu community.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

8 individual Cabanas (villas), each named and distinct, ranging from one to two bedrooms. Available for exclusive private hire individually or in combination making the Cabanas ideal for couples, solo travellers, small families and intimate groups seeking complete seclusion with the option to scale. **Pepo Villa** is a larger, fully private retreat option for groups requiring additional space and exclusivity.

All Cabanas feature Swahili-style architecture, ocean views, private terraces, mosquito nets, fans, ensuite facilities and the trademark swing beds.

Amenities & Facilities

Island Escapes, operating out of The Cabanas, offers what is arguably the **largest selection of watersports on Lamu Island** — kitesurfing, kayaking, paddleboarding, snorkelling, sailing, fishing and more. The wellness programme includes yoga, meditation and bespoke retreats. Community connections with the local village are facilitated. Sustainable food sourcing is central to the operation. Solar-powered and wind-powered throughout.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

Freshly caught seafood, organic produce and thoughtful, health-conscious menus define the culinary offer at The Cabanas. The team works with guests to understand their preferences and dietary requirements, providing an experience that is simultaneously nourishing and delicious.

Why We Love the Cabanas

We love The Cabanas for their **authenticity** this is a place born from genuine love, personal history and a deep ethical commitment. The family story behind the property gives it a warmth and meaning that is palpable from the first moment.

The Vard Africa Insider Note

Visit Treasure Island for snorkelling it is a private marine world that most Lamu visitors never encounter. And arrange the dolphin experience in season the Cabanas' marine connections make it one of the most consistent dolphin-encounter locations in the archipelago.

Families & Children

Excellent for families, particularly those with an interest in marine conservation, nature, and gentle adventure. Children thrive in the freedom of the beach environment and the range of safe, supervised watersports.

SYNGUÉ SABOUR COTTAGE

Manda Island / The Intimate Design Gem

Location: Syngué Sabour sits directly on the beachfront of Manda Island, opposite Peponi Hotel across the Shela channel. It occupies what is widely considered the most beautiful stretch of Manda Island's beach a position of extraordinary serenity and privacy.

Introduction & History

Syngué Sabour named after the Afghan concept of *the patience stone*, a stone that absorbs all sorrows is one of the most original and carefully conceived boutique properties in the archipelago. Designed, developed and decorated by the acclaimed **design duo Claudio Modola and Andrea Mathison**, it is a plantation-style cottage of genuine architectural beauty a place that feels both deeply personal and immediately welcoming.

The property consists of a charming main **plantation-style cottage** and a separate **guest suite**, together sleeping four guests in comfort and privacy. It was designed specifically as an intimate getaway for one or two couples who want a completely private, beautifully appointed hideaway with access to all the pleasures of the archipelago without the social atmosphere of a larger property.

The saline plunge pool, designed for use both in afternoon sun and candlelit evenings; the surrounding mature gardens of hammocks and *acacia* shade; the 180-degree uninterrupted beach views; and the dedicated team of four who attend exclusively to the cottage's guests all of these combine to create an experience of rare quality.

Ownership & Management

Privately owned and designed by **Claudio Modola and Andrea Mathison**. The cottage is managed by a permanent team of four, including the head cook **Edison** described by guests as a culinary genius whose passion for sourcing the finest local seafood is matched only by his skill in preparing it and **Harrith**, the captain of the beloved hardwood canoe *HMS Intolerance*, which serves as the cottage's private vessel for all island exploration.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

The property comfortably accommodates **up to 4 guests** across the main cottage and the separate guest suite. Plantation-style architecture with elegant, airy interiors; multiple private verandas and terraces; a saline plunge pool surrounded by mature tropical gardens; hammocks under acacia shade.

All rooms are ensuite with air conditioning, fully equipped kitchen facilities and outdoor dining areas.

Amenities & Facilities

The private canoe HMS Intolerance for all island exploration beach picnics on sandbars, mangrove creek swimming, dinner at Peponi, shopping in Shela, excursions across the archipelago. A professional massage bed for in-cottage treatments (Shela masseuse Maureen is available by appointment). Sunset boat tours, beachcombing, yoga and meditation on the terraces, outdoor cinema experiences and in-house spa treatments. Four dedicated staff for four guests a ratio that ensures service of the most attentive and personalised kind.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ Edison's cooking is a genuine highlight of any stay at Syngué Sabour a deeply personal culinary experience built around the daily arrivals from the sea and the weekly produce sourced from upcountry farms.
- ✓ Guests specify their preferences; Edison creates.
- ✓ Dining takes place on the beachfront, by the pool, on the terrace, or under the acacia trees wherever the moment dictates.

Why We Love Syngué Sabour

- ✓ We love it for its **intimacy and design excellence** it is an exceptional piece of creative work, and the experience of staying here is proportionately exceptional.
- ✓ Four guests, four staff, and one of the most beautiful beaches in East Africa entirely to yourselves.

The Vard Africa Insider Note

Syngué Sabour is the perfect Lamu property for couples seeking true seclusion and a deeply romantic experience. Book the full property for maximum privacy. Ask for the evening canoe trip to Shela for dinner at Peponi arriving by traditional wooden canoe is one of the great Lamu moments.

Families & Children

- ✓ Best suited to couples and adult groups.
- ✓ The property's intimate scale and design make it less appropriate for families with young children.

THE MOON HOUSES

Shela Village, Lamu Island / The Constellation of Private Retreats

Location: The Moon Houses are a collection of individually owned and managed properties located across Shela Village, each with its own distinct character, position and offering.

Introduction & History

The Moon Houses represent one of Lamu's most charming hospitality concepts a **constellation of privately owned guesthouses** scattered through the village of Shela, each named after a different moon or celestial reference and each offering a distinct experience of Shela village life. Properties include **Full Moon House, Kiwandani House, Betty's Suite** and others within the same family of interconnected and complementary properties.

Together they form a flexible network of accommodation that can be rented individually for smaller groups or combined for larger parties the Full Moon House and Kiwandani House together, for example, can comfortably accommodate 12+ guests, making them ideal for a multi-family or large group hire that wants the village experience without the hotel dynamic.

Each Moon House is **historic and charming**, built in traditional Swahili style and furnished with local antiques and carefully curated artefacts. All enjoy Shela seafront positions or are within a short walk of the beach.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Properties range from **1 to 3 bedrooms**, each ensuite and decorated in authentic Swahili style. Configuration options are flexible and designed for couples, small families or intimate friend groups.

- ✓ **Betty's Suite** — The most romantic of the collection; a perfect one-bedroom retreat with its own private roof terrace and elevated infinity pool overlooking the Lamu channel.
- ✓ **Full Moon House** — A spacious 3-bedroom house steps from the seafront, often rented with Kiwandani next door.
- ✓ **Kiwandani House** — Three double ensuite bedrooms, exotically decorated, with a courtyard garden and pool.

Why We Love the Moon Houses

We love the Moon Houses for the **village life they provide** these are not resort hotels but genuine Shela homes, and staying in them puts guests inside the fabric of one of the most atmospheric villages in Africa.

The Vard Africa Insider Note

Combine Betty's Suite for a honeymoon couple with the larger Moon Houses for the wider family it is the perfect configuration for a multi-generational family gathering with everyone together but with their own private corners.

DHOW HOUSE

Shela Village, Lamu Island / The Chicest House in Africa

Location: Dhow House sits less than 50 metres from the seafront in Shela Village, adjacent to a traditional dhow-building workshop a poetic proximity that speaks to the property's character. Peponi Hotel and the beginning of the 12-kilometre beach are just minutes away.

Introduction & History

Dhow House has been called, in print, "*perhaps the chicest beach house in Africa*" and it is a title this seven-bedroom property carries without effort. Glamorous, expansive and stylishly secluded, it is tucked within lush tropical gardens on the fringes of sophisticated Shela, offering the privacy of a sanctuary with the pleasures of village and beach just moments away.

The whitewashed exterior is distinguished by a charmingly quirky **turret** that gives the house its instantly recognisable silhouette on the Shela skyline. Inside, stone floors, ornately carved furniture, sunken seating areas, shuttered openings and carefully chosen pieces of art capture Lamu's extraordinary quality of light and the eclectic personal style of its owners. The gardens are extraordinary stuffed with palm trees, hibiscus and flat-topped acacias, with a tamarind tree providing fresh juice each morning.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

- ✓ **7 ensuite bedrooms** accommodating **up to 14 guests** airy, generously proportioned and flooded with natural light.
- ✓ The house works equally well for families and groups of friends, offering the space for everyone to spread out while the common areas draw the group together.
- ✓ A **beautifully designed pool** sits at the front of the house, overlooking the seafront and the channel beyond.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ The Dhow House kitchen team led by the celebrated **Philomena** and managed with warmth and professionalism creates exceptional cuisine rooted in the local seafood tradition with international inflections.
- ✓ Past guests have organized birthday celebrations and private events here to outstanding effect.

Why We Love the Dhow House

We love Dhow House for its unapologetic **glamour** it is one of the most beautiful houses in Lamu and among the most impressively run. It is the kind of house that makes you feel like the luckiest person in the world from the moment you walk through the gate.

The Vard Africa Insider Note

The sunken conversation pit in the main living area is one of the great design moments of Lamu's private villa world. Dhow House is particularly suited to landmark celebrations birthdays, anniversaries, family reunions where the scale and quality of the property match the occasion.

THE AMANI HOUSE

Shela Village, Lamu Island / The Serene Sanctuary

Location: The Amani House is situated in and around Shela Village, offering guests the tranquil village setting of Lamu at its most intimate.

Introduction & History

Amani is the Swahili word for **peace** and it is the defining characteristic of this beautifully designed and serene Lamu retreat. Whether as a private villa hire or individual room, Amani offers the quintessential Shela experience: complete quiet, beautiful interiors, the scent of the sea on warm evenings, and the unhurried pace that makes Lamu so deeply restorative.

The property's design honours the Swahili architectural tradition carved details, white plaster, natural ventilation, private courtyard spaces and the warm hospitality of a well-run private home.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

- ✓ Multiple ensuite bedrooms available across individual room bookings or full property hire.
- ✓ Shared plunge pool.
- ✓ Professional housekeeping and chef available on request. The property is ideal for couples and small families or friend's groups.

Why We Love Amani House

We love Amani for the **simplicity of its pleasures** it is a beautiful, quiet, perfectly positioned retreat that delivers exactly what the name promises.

The Vard Africa Insider Note

Amani is particularly well-suited to guests who want a self-directed, private Lamu experience without the more formal structure of a hotel. The village setting places guests immediately into the rhythm of Shela life the morning market, the evening dhow, the call to prayer at dusk.

HOUSE E SHELA

Old Village Square, Shela Village, Lamu Island / The New Wave Boutique

Location: House E Shela is centred around the **old village square** in the heart of fashionable Shela Village a position that places guests at the social and architectural centre of one of Lamu's most beloved communities.

Introduction & History

House E Shela is Shela's newest and most original boutique hospitality concept a **"constellation hotel"** of seven diverse suites and apartments arranged around the historic village square, offering Swahili-chic accommodation that is stylish, characterful and deeply embedded in the atmosphere of the village.

Described as having *"gorgeous indoor-outdoor spaces and a rooftop bar with the best views in Lamu"*, House E Shela has quickly attracted a devoted following among a new wave of travellers both Kenyan and international who want the intimacy and authenticity of Lamu without sacrificing aesthetic ambition.

The property is the ideal choice for **couples and solo travellers** who want a charismatic, boutique experience at the centre of village life close to the seafront, close to Peponi, close to the beach, and yet in a position that is genuinely their own.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

7 diverse suites and apartments, each distinct in character and layout ranging from intimate one-bedroom retreats to more spacious apartments for two guests travelling together. All are designed in the Swahili-chic aesthetic, with carved details, polished floors, considered art and the quality of finish that reflects serious investment in the guest experience.

Amenities & Facilities

The rooftop bar with panoramic views of the archipelago is one of the defining spaces of the property and, by many accounts, offers the finest elevated view in Lamu. Concierge services for all activities and excursions; beautifully maintained common areas; the village square as an immediate and living extension of the property.

Why We Love House E Shela

We love House E Shela for its **contemporary vision** it represents the next chapter of Lamu's boutique hospitality scene, and it represents it brilliantly. The rooftop bar alone is worth the stay.

A stylish, sprawling, sophisticated and serene new home on Shela's highest spot
Contemporary minimalist aesthetics meet traditional architecture and craftsmanship
Beautifully thought-out design with airy and interconnecting spaces cascading down the hillside
13 metre swimming pool, expansive poolside living and entertaining spaces
100 steps from Shela beach and just 150 metres from Peponi Hotel

The Vard Africa Insider Note

House E Shela is the perfect choice for solo travellers or couples who want to feel genuinely integrated into the life of Shela Village. Book the rooftop bar for a private sundowner for two the views are simply extraordinary.

JHAZI HOUSE

Kizingoni Beach, Southwest Lamu Island | The Ocean's Edge Estate

Location: Jahazi House stands directly on the Indian Ocean on **Kizingoni Beach**, on the southwestern, creek-facing side of Lamu Island two kilometres from Kipungani village and accessible by a 20 to 30-minute private speedboat journey through the mangrove-lined channels from Manda Airport. No roads, no other properties in sight. Just the sea, the sand, and the house.

Introduction & History

The name says everything you need to know. *Jahazi* is the Swahili word for the great trading dhows the deep-hulled, ocean-going vessels that carried the wealth of the Indian Ocean trade routes into Lamu for a thousand years. To name a house after a Jahazi is to claim kinship with that history, with the restless, romantic energy of the sea. And from the moment you approach Jahazi House by boat across the Kizingoni channel and see it rising from its two acres of garden directly on the ocean's edge soft ochre walls, the deep shade of frangipani and lime trees, the first-floor terrace open to the horizon like the prow of a ship the name feels entirely right.

Jahazi House was designed along classical Swahili lines, built in white coral block and finished in the local *neru* plaster, its architecture organized around an inner courtyard that holds a very private swimming pool a cooling heart at the centre of the house, around which all the rooms and social spaces gather. The result is a building that functions simultaneously as a fortress of privacy and a house of extraordinary openness one that gives guests the dual experience of complete seclusion and absolute immersion in the light, sound and movement of the Indian Ocean.

The house is entirely solar-powered, providing both environmental credentials and the practical luxury of uninterrupted power in one of the world's most remote beach settings.

Ownership & Management

Jahazi House is a **privately owned villa**, managed by its owners through a dedicated concierge and booking operation. A full-time, resident staff team of five comprising a celebrated private chef, a room and table steward, a housekeeper, a boat captain and a gardener is included in the house rental rate. The house is available for exclusive private hire only.

Awards & Recognition

Jahazi House holds a consistent **perfect score of 10/10** on Booking.com based on multiple guest reviews, and is recognised by a number of Kenya's leading luxury travel operators as one of the finest private villa experiences on the Lamu coast. Guests repeatedly cite the staff, the chef, the position and the extraordinary quality of the food as among the finest they have experienced on any private villa holiday.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Jahazi House accommodates **up to 10 guests** across five superbly appointed ensuite bedrooms, each individually designed within the unified Swahili aesthetic of the house.

1 Master Suite — Occupying the elevated first floor at the rear of the house, the Master Suite is entered through a private salon with working desk and twin lounge sofa beds. The bedroom itself features a large Lamu wooden four-poster bed with windows on all four walls — morning light from the ocean, evening light from the garden. A dressing room with ample built-in storage and a separate bathroom with twin sinks, W/C and rainfall shower complete this extraordinary room.

4 Ground Floor Ensuite Bedrooms Three double rooms and one twin room, each accessed directly from the inner courtyard and designed with the same quality of craft and attention. Each room has its own private veranda furnished with a writing desk, occasional tables and a traditional Lamu four-poster day bed the ideal spot for afternoon reading or a sundowner as the dhows pass in the channel.

Throughout the house, additional gathering and relaxation spaces proliferate in the best Swahili tradition: three *baraza* areas (cushioned social benches built into the architecture); the first-floor baraza nearest the bar, covered and breezy being the most coveted for pre-dinner drinks and games; two signature swing beds on a covered wooden deck behind the house facing the garden; and two hammocks strung beneath the frangipani trees.

Amenities & Facilities

A **10-metre private pool** sits in the inner courtyard deep, beautifully tiled and wonderfully private. Three dining areas across the ground and first floors allow complete flexibility of atmosphere from the informality of a poolside lunch to the romance of a first-floor dinner above the sea. A fully equipped separate kitchen, a beach shower, beach towels and a laundry service are all included. Solar-powered electricity and solar hot water throughout. Personal safes in all rooms. 4G Telecom network and free WiFi.

The house's **private speedboat with dedicated captain** is available for all water excursions water-skiing, wakeboarding, donuting, windsurfing, deep-sea fishing, snorkelling, dolphin-watching, sunset cruises and trips to Lamu Town and Shela Village. A traditional sailing dhow called **Kilindini** 38 feet of beautiful working history is also available for private charter: for a languid afternoon at anchor, a sunset cruise with sundowners on deck, or a full-day sailing picnic on a deserted beach. A smaller traditional fishing dhow, **Mafida**, is available for those who want to learn to sail. Snorkelling equipment, water-ski equipment and wakeboarding gear are all provided. A massage bed is available for in-house treatments arranged on request.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ The chef at Jahazi House has accumulated a devoted following among the house's returning guests.
- ✓ The kitchen's philosophy is simple: the finest local ingredients, sourced fresh each morning from the Lamu fish market and the island's producers, prepared with genuine skill and warmth.
- ✓ Fresh crab the celebrated **crab beignets** that guests write about long after departure lobster, prawns and the daily catch arrive directly from the sea.
- ✓ Menus are designed in consultation with each group, accommodating dietary preferences across local Swahili cuisine, vegan, seafood-focused and allergy-friendly menus with equal enthusiasm.
- ✓ Breakfast is laid on the first-floor terrace overlooking the beach. Lunch by the pool, dinner wherever the evening dictates on the roof, on the beach, or at the baraza above the channel.

Health & Safety

- ✓ Jahazi House operates full-day and full-night security.
- ✓ Solar-powered systems provide clean, reliable electricity.
- ✓ The house is set on a private stretch of beach with no public access, ensuring complete privacy and security.
- ✓ Filtered drinking water is provided.
- ✓ Medical support is accessible via speedboat to the island's health facilities; Vard Africa's emergency response network covers all contingencies.

Why We Love Jahazi House

We love Jahazi House for the **quality of its quiet**. Kizingoni Beach on the southwestern side of Lamu is one of those rare places where silence is absolute no boat traffic, no adjacent properties, no intrusion of any kind. Just the sound of the Indian Ocean and the occasional creak of the dhow at anchor. Set against the extraordinary warmth of the staff and the excellence of the kitchen, it produces an experience of almost indecent completeness.

Why Our Guests Will Love Jahazi House

Guests who love the **private house format** the complete flexibility, the personal kitchen relationship, the sense of genuine ownership over one's days will find Jahazi House deeply satisfying. The dhow and speedboat give the group total freedom to explore the wider archipelago at will; the beach and pool ensure that days of pure, glorious inertia are equally available.

The Vard Africa Insider Note

Request the crab beignets as a standing order they are the house signature dish and they are as good as advertised. Arrange the Kilindini dhow for at least one evening sundowner cruise there are few finer ways to spend a Lamu evening than drifting across the channel at sunset on a traditional sailing dhow with a cold Dawa in hand. And ask the boat captain about the snorkelling spot off Manda Toto it is exceptional and Jahazi's position on the western side of the island makes it a particularly easy sail.

Families & Children

Jahazi House is outstanding for families. All five rooms can accommodate extra beds; children of all ages are explicitly welcome; the beach and pool are the world's finest babysitters; and the array of watersports water-skiing, wakeboarding, donating, snorkelling will absorb teenagers and adults alike for the entire duration of a stay.

PAMBA HOUSE

Shela Village, Lamu Island | The Village Soul

Location: Pamba House is located in the heart of **Shela Village** one of the most atmospheric and beloved coastal villages on the East African coast — set on Lamu Island's magnificent seafront, steps from the beach and within easy walking distance of Peponi Hotel, the village square and the beginning of the island's celebrated 12-kilometre stretch of white sand.

Introduction & History

There are houses that announce themselves loudly grand gestures of architecture and scale. And then there are houses like Pamba, which reveal themselves slowly, in the way that the finest things in Lamu always do: a carved doorway that opens onto something you didn't expect, a rooftop terrace that appears above the village roofline, a quality of silence that settles over you the moment you step inside and tells you, quietly and without drama, that you have found somewhere rather special.

Pamba means **cotton** in Kiswahili a reference to the soft, generous quality of comfort and rest that the house promises and delivers. Built in authentic Swahili coral-stone construction with the hand-crafted detail and spatial quality that defines Shela's finest architecture, the house has been furnished with an eye for the particular beauty of this place Lamu antiques, hand-woven textiles, carved wooden furniture, objects gathered from decades of life on the Swahili coast so that it feels simultaneously like a personal home and a curated experience of the best that Lamu has to offer.

The position in the thick of Shela's village life, yet separated from it by the house's walls and the extraordinary stillness of its interior is the defining characteristic of Pamba.

Guests here are not removed from Lamu; they are inside it.

The rhythms of village life the call to prayer, the morning fishermen, the evening dhows are the ambient soundtrack to every day.

Ownership & Management

Pamba House is a **privately owned Shela village property**, managed by its owners through a dedicated concierge team. A full-time staff including cook, housekeeping and laundry is provided. The house is available exclusively for private hire, ensuring complete privacy for the guest group.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Pamba House accommodates **up to 8 guests** across its beautifully appointed ensuite bedrooms, each decorated with authentic Swahili craftsmanship four-poster Lamu beds, hand-carved furniture, mosquito nets, overhead fans and the excellent natural ventilation that comes from the coral-stone construction and the careful arrangement of the house around its inner courtyard.

The multi-level layout creates natural privacy between rooms while drawing guests together at the communal spaces the courtyard, the dining terrace, the rooftop. A **private swimming pool** provides the essential Shela afternoon pleasure of cool water and warm sun without having to walk anywhere at all.

The **rooftop terraces** the crowning glory of Pamba House offers sweeping views across the Shela village roofline to the channel, to Manda Island, and to the open ocean beyond.

It is, as with all the best Lamu rooftop terraces, the finest place to be at sunrise and sunset, and under the stars at night.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ Private swimming pool with courtyard garden.

- ✓ Multiple terrace levels for different times of day and different moods.
- ✓ Full concierge service for all island activities and excursions. Laundry service.
- ✓ Boat transfer arrangements to and from Manda Airport.
- ✓ The position in Shela Village puts the beach, Peponi Hotel, the village restaurants and the antique shops within minutes' walk a logistical pleasure that the more remote island properties cannot match.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ The house cook provides beautifully prepared Swahili-coastal cuisine, designed in consultation with each group's preferences and dietary requirements.
- ✓ Fresh seafood sourced daily from the local market; tropical fruits from the island's vendors; the full palette of the Swahili kitchen coconut, cardamom, tamarind, chilli, lime brought to bear on the finest ingredients the Indian Ocean provides.
- ✓ Meals can be taken in the courtyard, on the terrace, at the rooftop dining area, or on the beach the choice is entirely the guests.

Health & Safety

- ✓ Full-time security, purified drinking water and comprehensive housekeeping standards throughout.
- ✓ Lamu's health facilities and Vard Africa's emergency network cover all guest wellbeing requirements.
- ✓ The village position central and well-connected provides additional practical security and accessibility compared to more remote properties.

Why We Love Pamba House

We love Pamba House for the **village immersion** it provides. Staying in Shela genuinely inside the village, surrounded by its architecture and its sounds and its rhythms is a different experience from staying on the waterfront or on a remote beach. It is the experience of actually inhabiting the place. Lamu becomes not a backdrop but a home.

Why Our Guests Will Love Pamba House

Guests who want to be **genuinely embedded in the Shela village experience** who want to walk to Peponi for a rock oyster and a cold drink, to explore the antique shops, to know their way around the lanes by the second day will find Pamba House the perfect base. It is equally well-suited to couples, small friend groups and intimate families who want the private-house experience with the village immediately to hand.

Vard Africa Insider Note

The rooftop of Pamba House at sunrise is one of Lamu's great quiet pleasures the light over the channel at that hour, with the first dhows already moving and the village still almost silent, is the kind of thing that stays with you. Walk to Peponi for a drink before dinner at least once; and ask your concierge to arrange a private snorkelling excursion to Manda Toto the boat can be arranged from the Shela waterfront in minutes. Pamba House is also ideally positioned for the annual Lamu Cultural Festival if your travel dates align, this is not to be missed.

Families & Children

- ✓ Pamba House welcomes families warmly.
- ✓ The private pool, the beach proximity and the village's walkable scale mean that children are easily and happily accommodated.
- ✓ Shela's calm seafront, directly accessible from the house, is an excellent swimming area for older children.

THE MAJLIS RESORT

Ras Kitau, Manda Island | The Grand Resort

Location: The Majlis Resort occupies a commanding beachfront position on **Ras Kitau Bay** on the southern tip of **Manda Island** accessible only by boat, directly across the channel from Shela Village. The resort's private jetty receives guests from Manda Airport in approximately 10 minutes by motorboat, and the Shela waterfront is less than a kilometre across the channel close enough to visit by water at any time of day, yet sufficiently separated to provide the quality of seclusion that a private island resort demands.

Introduction & History

The story of The Majlis begins, as the finest things in Lamu sometimes do, with an accident of love. An Italian family the Moccia family built what was intended as a private second home on Manda Island. The setting proved so extraordinary, the experience of being there so exceptional, that the idea of keeping it entirely private felt almost too greedy. The house grew into a resort. The resort grew into one of the finest addresses on the East African coast. And today, the founder's sons **Federico and Stefano Moccia** preside over an institution that the *Michelin Guide* has described as feeling less like a hotel than "*an impeccably tasteful guest house*" whose every square foot feels thoughtfully, intentionally designed.

Majlis is an Arabic word meaning a gathering place of honour a space where important guests are received and hosted with the highest distinction. The word captures the resort's character precisely. The Majlis does not feel transactional. It feels like a reception the warmth of a private home extended to the full scale of a boutique resort, without losing any of the intimacy that the family origin gave it.

The architecture and interiors are a joyful fusion of **Swahili tradition and Italian sensibility** a combination that, in lesser hands, might produce confusion but here produces something genuinely original and extraordinarily beautiful. White coral-block walls carry hand-carved timber doors and furniture in the Lamu tradition. The lounges and dining spaces reference Italian ease and elegance. Three separate villa buildings spread across the property, each with their own gardens, pools and beach access, so that the resort never feels crowded or institutional. The involvement

of the artist and hotelier **Julian Schnabel** perhaps the world's most accomplished art-hospitality double act in the property's design ensures that the aesthetic ambition is matched by the execution.

Ownership & Management

The Majlis is **privately owned and family-managed by the Moccia family** Federico and Stefano, the sons of the Italian founder. This family stewardship ensures that the resort's character remains consistent, personal and genuinely warm. The Majlis is not a branded hotel or managed by an external operator; it is, in the truest sense, a family home that welcomes guests.

Awards & Recognition

The Majlis Resort holds a **Michelin Guide listing** one of only a handful of properties on the East African coast to have earned this distinction. It has been recognised by the **World Travel Awards** and consistently ranks among the finest luxury beach hotels in Kenya across all major international travel platforms. The resort's TripAdvisor rating is exceptional, and it has been named in multiple publications including *Condé Nast Traveller* and *Travel + Leisure* — as among the most beautiful hotel stays on the African coast. Notably, **Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie** famously chose The Majlis for a New Year's Eve stay the kind of endorsement that speaks both to the resort's discretion and its exceptional quality.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

The Majlis offers **39 superbly appointed rooms and suites** across three separate villa buildings, all ensuite and air-conditioned — a notable distinction in Lamu, where air conditioning is less standard than in many other luxury destinations. Every room is constructed from white coral block, with hand-carved timber doors and furniture, mosquito nets, the highest quality linen bedding, electric fans, a private veranda and an ensuite bathroom of generous proportions.

- ✓ **Deluxe Garden View Rooms** — Located on the ground floor with private terrace access to the garden and views toward the ocean. Spacious and quietly elegant, these are the entry point into the Majlis experience but an entry point of considerable quality.
- ✓ **Deluxe Sea View Rooms** — Positioned on the first floor with private balconies offering direct views across Ras Kitau Bay to Shela Village. These rooms are the most sought-after for couples and honeymooners.
- ✓ **Junior Suites** — Larger and more private than the Deluxe rooms, the Junior Suites offer enhanced space, elevated views and additional furnishing that makes them appropriate for longer stays and guests who want the most of the resort's spatial generosity.
- ✓ **Family Suite** — Two interconnected Deluxe rooms with separate garden-view terraces, two ensuite bathrooms and a first-floor position. Purpose-designed for families, the Family Suite combines space, privacy between adults and children, and the full quality of the Majlis experience in a configuration that works beautifully for multigenerational travel.
- ✓ **Royal Suite** — The most significant accommodation at The Majlis: two junior suites combined into a single extraordinary space, with two ensuite bathrooms, a private living room, a large terrace with ocean views and the most expansive perspective of Ras Kitau Bay available from any room on the property. For landmark celebrations, important honeymoons and guests who simply want the finest room available.

Amenities & Facilities

Two **ocean-fronting swimming pools** one of which is adults-preferred, the other more family-oriented each positioned with panoramic views across the bay, shaded by indigenous trees and served by a dedicated pool bar. The **Mediterranean Bar** on the first floor of the restaurant building offers what many guests consider the finest elevated cocktail experience at the resort, with panoramic views across the bay at sunset. The **beachside bar** barefoot, breezy, perfectly positioned is the alternative for those who want the sand between their toes with their Dawa.

- ✓ A **Kids' Club** with dedicated activities and supervised nanny care makes The Majlis one of the most genuinely family-supportive resorts in the archipelago.
- ✓ The **wellness centre** offers Ayurvedic treatments, massage both in the centre and in a dedicated massage banda directly on the beach yoga and a fully equipped gym.
- ✓ A comprehensive **activity centre** coordinates the full range of island excursions and watersports: deep-sea fishing, creek fishing, kitesurfing, water-skiing, wakeboarding, windsurfing, kayaking, paddleboarding, snorkelling, dhow sailing, cultural excursions to Lamu Old Town and the Takwa Ruins, and Vard Africa's full portfolio of signature experiences.
- ✓ The resort is **accessible exclusively by boat**, which provides both a natural privacy filter and a uniquely romantic arrival.
- ✓ Guests are met at Manda Airport by the resort's boat captain and escorted across the channel in approximately 10 minutes to the private jetty, from which it is a short walk through the gardens to reception.
- ✓ Free WiFi throughout.
- ✓ Full-board and half-board meal plans available.
- ✓ Comprehensive airport and inter-island transfers managed by the resort.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

The Majlis kitchen is one of the most accomplished on the East African coast, and one of the most interesting in its culinary identity. The open-fronted restaurant, built from local materials casuarina and mangrove poles, a makuti thatch ceiling serves menus that reflect the beautiful collision of Italian and Swahili culture that defines the resort's character: wood-fired pizzas alongside fresh grilled octopus with coconut *sambal*; handmade pasta alongside Lamu-style lobster in aromatic spice; an Italian wine list alongside freshly pressed tropical juice at breakfast.

The kitchen's relationship with local fishermen ensures that the seafood is always at peak freshness red snapper, yellow fin tuna, crab, lobster and prawns arriving daily.

Vegetarian and vegan menus are prepared with the same care and skill as the seafood-focused offerings.

The panoramic restaurant rooftop bar provides an alternative to the main dining room for sundowners and casual dinners; private beach dinners can be arranged on request for special occasions; and the pool bar serves a light lunch menu throughout the day.

Health & Safety

The Majlis operates a **24-hour professional security operation** and collaborates closely with local authorities on island safety. The resort's private island location on Manda accessible only by boat provides a natural security environment of considerable quality. The health and safety standards of the resort are reviewed regularly and maintained to international luxury hotel standards. Medical evacuation can be arranged via Manda Airport, which is 10 minutes by boat. The resort's own medical contacts and Vard Africa's emergency network ensure comprehensive coverage for all guest wellbeing needs.

Why We Love the Majlis

We love The Majlis for what it represents in the landscape of Lamu accommodation: a **full-service boutique resort** of the highest quality, with the personal warmth of family ownership, the creative vision of Italian design, the architectural integrity of Swahili tradition, and the operational sophistication of an internationally recognised luxury hotel.

- ✓ It is the only property in the archipelago that combines all of these qualities at resort scale which makes it the natural choice for guests who want the full beach resort experience without sacrificing the intimacy and character that make Lamu special.
- ✓ We love it for the **family offer** exceptional, genuinely considered and practically outstanding.
- ✓ The Kids' Club, the family suite configuration, the pool attendants and the child-friendly dining mean that families here feel truly catered for, not merely tolerated.
- ✓ And we love the **Italian soul** of the food a reminder that Lamu's history of cross-cultural encounter is still unfolding, and that the results continue to be beautiful.

Why Our Guests Will Love the Majlis

Guests who prefer the **assurance and range of a full-service hotel** over the self-directed freedom of a private villa will find The Majlis deeply satisfying. The activity centre, the spa, the pools, the bars and the restaurant give guests genuine choice and genuine quality across every moment of the day. The family configurations make it exceptional for multigenerational groups.

And the beachfront position with 2.5 kilometres of sheltered Manda Island sands largely to themselves provides a quality of beach experience that few properties in the archipelago can match.

The Vard Africa Insider Note

Book a Royal Suite or Sea View Junior Suite for the full impact of the Ras Kitau Bay views. The Mediterranean Bar at sunset with the bay turning from gold to copper to deep rose, and Shela Village visible across the water is a moment of genuine beauty. Ask the activity centre to arrange a private morning snorkelling excursion to Ras Kitau reef with one of the resort's own marine guides the coral there is accessible and in excellent condition. And do not miss the beach massage lying on the sand with the sound of the Indian Ocean and the warmth of the afternoon light is an experience that the indoor treatment room, however excellent, simply cannot replicate.

Families & Children

The Majlis is among the finest family-focused luxury resorts in the Lamu Archipelago.

The dedicated Kids' Club with supervised activities, the nanny service, the family suite configuration, the child-safe pool environment, the family-friendly beach and the breadth of supervised watersports activities make this the natural choice for families with children of any age who want the reassurance of full-service resort hospitality alongside the beauty and cultural richness of Lamu.

PRIVATE HELICOPTER EXCURSIONS

The Lamu Archipelago & Kenyan Coastline from Above

See Everything. Miss Nothing. Arrive Everywhere.

There are very few moments in travel that genuinely reframe your understanding of a place that lift you, literally and figuratively, above the familiar and reveal what has always been there but could not, from the ground, be fully seen or felt. A private helicopter excursion over the Lamu Archipelago is one of those moments.

From the air, the archipelago reveals itself in its full, extraordinary complexity. What from sea level feels like a collection of beautiful islands becomes, from above, something entirely different: a vast, intricate world of waterways and coral reefs, of ancient sand dunes rippling in the trade wind, of mangrove forests threading their way through the tidal channels in patterns of astonishing intricacy, of the open Indian Ocean stretching away to the south and east in every shade of blue that water is capable of producing. And there, in the middle of all of it, the terracotta rooflines and white-plastered walls of Lamu Old Town a 700-year-old settlement that, from this altitude, looks like a model of itself, every lane and mosque and carved doorway visible at once.

This is the Lamu that only the sky can show you. And Vard Africa gives you the sky.

The Experience

Vard Africa arranges **fully bespoke, private helicopter excursions** over the Lamu Archipelago, operated by carefully selected, Kenya Civil Aviation Authority-licensed aviation partners with extensive East African coastal flying experience. Aircraft used are typically the **Eurocopter AS 350 B3** a five-passenger helicopter with sliding doors for unobstructed photography, proven performance in hot and coastal conditions, and a smooth, quiet ride that allows for genuine appreciation of the landscape rather than anxious endurance of it.

Every Vard Africa helicopter excursion is **designed from first principles** for each individual group, based on their interests, the duration they wish to fly, the specific sites they want to see and the landing and picnic options that appeal. No two excursions are the same. The following itinerary suggestions represent the most popular configurations, but they are starting points — not constraints.

The Archipelago Overview (*90 minutes*) — A sweeping circuit of the full Lamu Archipelago: lifting from a private airstrip or landing zone on Manda Island and flying low over Shela Beach, the Lamu channel, Lamu Old Town and its minarets, the Manda mangrove system, north across the Mkanda Channel to Pate Island and the remote settlements at Siyu and Faza, across to the wild outer edges of the archipelago at Kiwayu, and back across the open ocean to the sand dunes south of Shela. The pilot and guide provide commentary throughout; a Vard Africa host provides champagne and snacks on departure and return.

The Heritage Flight (*2 hours*) — A deeper exploration of the archipelago's cultural and historical geography: flying low over Lamu Old Town with a cultural commentary on its mosques, forts and ancient street patterns; across to the Takwa Ruins on Manda Island for an aerial appreciation of this 15th-century lost city; continuing north to Pate Island and the ruins of the ancient settlements at Shanga and Pate Town; and returning via the extraordinary tidal flats of the archipelago's northern edge, where the sea retreats at low tide to reveal a landscape of surreal and extraordinary beauty.

The Sunrise Safari (*60 minutes*) — The most intimate and most magical of all the helicopter experiences: departing before sunrise from a private airstrip, climbing into the pre-dawn sky as the horizon begins to lighten to the east, and watching the Lamu Archipelago wake up from the air the first light catching the minaret of the Friday Mosque, the dhow sails emerging from the darkness on the channel, the vast empty beach south of Shela emerging from shadow as the sun breaches the horizon over the Indian Ocean. This experience is exclusively for early risers, and it is unforgettable.

The Remote Beach Picnic (*Half-day*) — A flight to one of the archipelago's most remote and inaccessible beaches on the northern tip of Pate Island, or on the wild ocean-facing shores of Kiwayu where a Vard Africa team has established a private picnic on the sand: a full table set with linen and crystal, a freshly prepared cold seafood menu, chilled wine and sparkling water, and the entirety of one of the Indian Ocean's most remote and pristine beaches entirely to yourselves. The helicopter waits while you swim, explore and eat; it returns you to your property in the afternoon.

The Coastal Safari Extension (*3 to 4 hours*) — For guests with the appetite for a broader geographical sweep, Vard Africa can extend the Lamu helicopter experience into a coastal excursion that incorporates the **Tana River Delta** one of East Africa's most important and least visited wildlife habitats, where hippo, crocodile, elephant and a staggering diversity of birdlife inhabit the river's vast tidal flats and the ancient Portuguese fort ruins at **Pate Town**, whose crumbling walls speak of a colonial history as layered and complex as Lamu's own.

Why This Experience Belongs on Every Vard Lamu Itinerary

The Lamu Archipelago is, as we have described throughout this guide, a destination of extraordinary geographical, cultural and historical depth. But it is a depth that, from sea level, can only ever be partially perceived. The archipelago's scale seven major islands, dozens of smaller ones, hundreds of square kilometres of reef, mangrove and open ocean simply cannot be comprehended from a boat or a beach.

The helicopter changes this. It gives guests a literal and figurative elevation the experience of understanding where they are, what they are in the middle of, why this place has drawn sailors and traders and explorers and lovers for a thousand years. After a helicopter excursion, Lamu looks different at sea level. The lanes of the Old Town carry new meaning. The mangrove channels have a logic you can now picture. The open ocean has a depth and a scale that the view from a beach chair cannot convey.

This is why we consider the private helicopter excursion not simply an exciting addition to a Lamu itinerary but, for guests who are open to it, a fundamental deepening of the experience. It is the view that makes everything else make sense.

Photography & Moments of a Lifetime

The Lamu Archipelago from the air is one of the most photographically extraordinary environments in East Africa. The quality of the light particularly in the early morning and late afternoon the extraordinary colours of the water, the geometry of the mangrove systems, the silhouettes of dhow sails against the channel at golden hour, the ancient geometry of Lamu Old Town from above all of these produce images of a quality and originality that are entirely beyond what ground-level photography can achieve. Vard Africa recommends bringing the best camera available, and we can arrange a professional photographer to join the excursion on request.

Practical Details

All Vard Africa helicopter excursions are operated exclusively no shared flights, no other passengers, no compromise of privacy or itinerary. Aircraft are maintained to the highest international safety standards; all pilots are fully licensed and carry extensive East African coastal experience. Pre-flight safety briefings are thorough and professionally conducted. Baggage is restricted to 15 kilograms per person in soft bags. Maximum group size is five passengers per aircraft; for larger groups, additional aircraft can be arranged. All excursions operate in daylight hours only. Vard Africa manages all bookings, logistics and on-the-day coordination; our guests are required only to arrive, wonder, and enjoy.

Health & Safety

- ✓ All helicopter operations are conducted in strict accordance with **Kenya Civil Aviation Authority** regulations.
- ✓ Aircraft are equipped with satellite tracking software; pilots are trained in first-person-on-scene first aid; and all pre-flight safety checks are conducted rigorously.
- ✓ Weather conditions are monitored continuously; in the event of weather-related cancellation, full refunds or rescheduling are provided.
- ✓ Vard Africa maintains direct communication with the operating aviation partner throughout every excursion.

Why We Love This Experience

We love the helicopter excursion because it **changes the way our guests see Lamu** and changing the way someone sees a place they already love is one of the most powerful things that travel can do. There is always a moment, somewhere above the mangroves or the Old Town or the open ocean, when a guest goes quiet. Not because they have nothing to say, but because what they are seeing has temporarily exceeded language. Those are the moments that define a Vard Africa journey.

Why Our Guests Will Love It

- ✓ The private helicopter excursion delivers the twin qualities that our guests consistently value above all others in extraordinary travel: **exclusivity and perspective**.
- ✓ The world below is one they have spent their Lamu holiday inhabiting the channel, the beach, the Old Town lanes, the dhow sails at sunset. From the air, that world reveals itself entirely.
- ✓ It is a privilege of sight that very few travellers to Lamu ever receive, and it is one that, once experienced, our guests speak of for years.

Vard Africa Insider Note

The Sunrise Safari is our personal favourite of all the configurations the light is extraordinary and the quiet of the pre-dawn departure from a private airstrip, rising into a sky that is just beginning to colour at the edges, is an experience unlike anything else Lamu offers. Book it for the second or third day of your stay after you have had time to fall in love with the archipelago from sea level. Seeing it from the air when you already know and love it from below produces something quite extraordinary. And bring binoculars as well as a camera — the marine life visible from the helicopter on a calm morning, including whale sharks, dolphins and manta rays in season, can be genuinely spectacular.

Families & Children

- ✓ Private helicopter excursions are suitable for children aged six and above, subject to the pilot's assessment of individual suitability and comfort.
- ✓ The experience is particularly memorable for older children and teenagers, who often show greater appreciation of the historical and geographical context than younger travellers.
- ✓ Vard Africa recommends the Archipelago Overview as the most accessible format for families; the Sunrise Safari for children who are early risers and genuinely curious about the world below.

OUR SIGNATURE BAREFOOT LUXURY EXPERIENCES

What To Do in the Lamu Archipelago

Lamu does not offer experiences in the conventional sense it offers encounters: with the sea, with the culture, with the wild, with yourself. The following are the experiences that we at Vard Africa consider essential to a complete understanding of this remarkable place.

THE MULTI-NIGHT DHOW SAFARI

Sail the Ancient Trade Routes of the Indian Ocean

There is no more romantic or more authentic way to experience the Lamu Archipelago than from the deck of a traditional dhow, sailing between its islands on a voyage that follows the routes of Arab and Swahili traders who first charted these waters a thousand years ago.

A multi-night dhow safari aboard one of Lamu's finest vessels including the magnificent **65-foot Tusitiri**, available for private charter takes guests across the full breadth of the archipelago over two to five days. Each day brings a different island, a different beach, a different light: anchoring off remote sandbars for swimming and picnics cooked aboard by the dhow's crew; sailing to the mangrove-fringed creeks of Pate Island; visiting the ruins of ancient Swahili settlements; snorkelling over pristine coral in waters that have never seen a tourist boat. Nights are spent at anchor under a sky full of stars, or on quiet beaches where no other soul is visible to the horizon.

Tusitiri is equipped with all the latest fishing and water sports gear, comfortable sleeping arrangements for up to 10 guests, and a full culinary operation serving freshly prepared meals using the day's catch and provisions from the local markets.

Vard Africa curates bespoke multi-night dhow safaris ranging from 2 to 7 nights, tailored precisely to each party's interests whether fishing-focused, culture-focused, pure relaxation, or a combination of all three. This is one of the signature experiences of a Vard East Africa journey, and it is available nowhere else on earth in quite this form.

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The Sunrise Safari (*60 minutes*) — The most intimate and most magical of all the helicopter experiences: departing before sunrise from a private airstrip, climbing into the pre-dawn sky as the horizon begins to lighten to the east, and watching the Lamu Archipelago wake up from the air the first light catching the minaret of the Friday Mosque, the dhow sails emerging from the darkness on the channel, the vast empty beach south of Shela emerging from shadow as the sun breaches the horizon over the Indian Ocean. This experience is exclusively for early risers, and it is unforgettable.

The Remote Beach Picnic (*Half-day*) — A flight to one of the archipelago's most remote and inaccessible beaches on the northern tip of Pate Island, or on the wild ocean-facing shores of Kiwayu where a Vard Africa team has established a private picnic on the sand: a full table set with linen and crystal, a freshly prepared cold seafood menu, chilled wine and sparkling water, and the entirety of one of the Indian Ocean's most remote and pristine beaches entirely to yourselves. The helicopter waits while you swim, explore and eat; it returns you to your property in the afternoon.

The Coastal Safari Extension (*3 to 4 hours*) — For guests with the appetite for a broader geographical sweep, Vard Africa can extend the Lamu helicopter experience into a coastal excursion that incorporates the **Tana River Delta** one of East Africa's most important and least visited wildlife habitats, where hippo, crocodile, elephant and a staggering diversity of birdlife inhabit the river's vast tidal flats and the ancient Portuguese fort ruins at **Pate Town**, whose crumbling walls speak of a colonial history as layered and complex as Lamu's own.

Why This Experience Belongs on Every Vard Lamu Itinerary

The Lamu Archipelago is, as we have described throughout this guide, a destination of extraordinary geographical, cultural and historical depth. But it is a depth that, from sea level, can only ever be partially perceived. The archipelago's scale seven major islands, dozens of smaller ones, hundreds of square kilometres of reef, mangrove and open ocean simply cannot be comprehended from a boat or a beach.

The helicopter changes this. It gives guests a literal and figurative elevation the experience of understanding where they are, what they are in the middle of, why this place has drawn sailors and traders and explorers and lovers for a thousand years. After a helicopter excursion, Lamu looks different at sea level. The lanes of the Old Town carry new meaning. The mangrove channels have a logic you can now picture. The open ocean has a depth and a scale that the view from a beach chair cannot convey.

This is why we consider the private helicopter excursion not simply an exciting addition to a Lamu itinerary but, for guests who are open to it, a fundamental deepening of the experience. It is the view that makes everything else make sense.

Photography & Moments of a Lifetime

The Lamu Archipelago from the air is one of the most photographically extraordinary environments in East Africa. The quality of the light particularly in the early morning and late afternoon the extraordinary colours of the water, the geometry of the mangrove systems, the silhouettes of dhow sails against the channel at golden hour, the ancient geometry of Lamu Old Town from above all of these produce images of a quality and originality that are entirely beyond what ground-level photography can achieve. Vard Africa recommends bringing the best camera available, and we can arrange a professional photographer to join the excursion on request.

Practical Details

All Vard Africa helicopter excursions are operated exclusively no shared flights, no other passengers, no compromise of privacy or itinerary. Aircraft are maintained to the highest international safety standards; all pilots are fully licensed and carry extensive East African coastal experience. Pre-flight safety briefings are thorough and professionally conducted. Baggage is restricted to 15 kilograms per person in soft bags. Maximum group size is five passengers per aircraft; for larger groups, additional aircraft can be arranged. All excursions operate in daylight hours only. Vard Africa manages all bookings, logistics and on-the-day coordination; our guests are required only to arrive, wonder, and enjoy.

Health & Safety

- ✓ All helicopter operations are conducted in strict accordance with **Kenya Civil Aviation Authority** regulations.
- ✓ Aircraft are equipped with satellite tracking software; pilots are trained in first-person-on-scene first aid; and all pre-flight safety checks are conducted rigorously.
- ✓ Weather conditions are monitored continuously; in the event of weather-related cancellation, full refunds or rescheduling are provided.
- ✓ Vard Africa maintains direct communication with the operating aviation partner throughout every excursion.

Why We Love This Experience

We love the helicopter excursion because it **changes the way our guests see Lamu** and changing the way someone sees a place they already love is one of the most powerful things that travel can do. There is always a moment, somewhere above the mangroves or the Old Town or the open ocean, when a guest goes quiet. Not because they have nothing to say, but because what they are seeing has temporarily exceeded language. Those are the moments that define a Vard Africa journey.

Why Our Guests Will Love It

- ✓ The private helicopter excursion delivers the twin qualities that our guests consistently value above all others in extraordinary travel: **exclusivity and perspective**.
- ✓ The world below is one they have spent their Lamu holiday inhabiting the channel, the beach, the Old Town lanes, the dhow sails at sunset. From the air, that world reveals itself entirely.
- ✓ It is a privilege of sight that very few travellers to Lamu ever receive, and it is one that, once experienced, our guests speak of for years.

Vard Africa Insider Note

The Sunrise Safari is our personal favourite of all the configurations the light is extraordinary and the quiet of the pre-dawn departure from a private airstrip, rising into a sky that is just beginning to colour at the edges, is an experience unlike anything else Lamu offers. Book it for the second or third day of your stay after you have had time to fall in love with the archipelago from sea level. Seeing it from the air when you already know and love it from below produces something quite extraordinary. And bring binoculars as well as a camera — the marine life visible from the helicopter on a calm morning, including whale sharks, dolphins and manta rays in season, can be genuinely spectacular.

Families & Children

- ✓ Private helicopter excursions are suitable for children aged six and above, subject to the pilot's assessment of individual suitability and comfort.
- ✓ The experience is particularly memorable for older children and teenagers, who often show greater appreciation of the historical and geographical context than younger travellers.
- ✓ Vard Africa recommends the Archipelago Overview as the most accessible format for families; the Sunrise Safari for children who are early risers and genuinely curious about the world below.

DEEP SEA FISHING EXPEDITION & WAKEBOARD ADVENTURE

Cast a Line in the Blue Waters of the Indian Ocean

- ✓ The waters of the Lamu Archipelago are among the finest sport fishing grounds on the East African coast. The deep-water channel between Manda and Pate Islands offers consistent access to **yellow fin tuna, sailfish, marlin, wahoo, dorado and kingfish** trophy catches in extraordinary numbers, particularly from October through March when conditions are at their finest.
- ✓ Vard Africa arranges private deep-sea fishing expeditions aboard the finest dedicated sport-fishing vessels in the archipelago, including **Manda Bay's legendary boat Cheza**, captained by experienced local fishermen who know these waters intimately.
- ✓ Half-day and full-day expeditions are available, fully equipped with professional rods, reels, tackle and bait. Catch-and-release is available for the conservation-minded; catch-and-eat is even more popular nothing compares to freshly caught tuna prepared as sashimi on the boat, within moments of landing.
- ✓ For those who want their ocean adventure with an adrenaline edge, our wakeboarding and water-ski packages operating from the sheltered bays of Manda and Lamu islands deliver an extraordinary ocean experience.
- ✓ The bay waters of Manda Bay are particularly celebrated for kite-surfing during the Kusi season (June to October), when the trade winds are reliable and powerful. Vard Africa arranges instruction for beginners and conditions for experts.

TRANSFORMATIONAL WELLNESS & YOGA RETREAT

Reconnect with the Deepest Version of Yourself

The Lamu Archipelago is, without question, one of the finest natural settings for a transformational wellness experience available anywhere in Africa. The quality of the air, the sound of the ocean, the extraordinary light, the complete absence of the urban world's distractions all of these create conditions for the kind of deep, genuine rest and reconnection that cannot be replicated in a city spa.

Vard Africa curates bespoke **private wellness and yoga programmes** delivered by professional, certified instructors who travel with or meet guests at their Lamu property. Morning yoga on rooftop terraces above the Indian Ocean, meditation in the mangrove forests, pranayama breathing on pristine empty beaches at dawn these are the rituals of a Vard wellness journey in Lamu.

For those seeking a more structured programme, the **Lamu Yoga Festival** in March each year brings an exceptional roster of international teachers to the island. Vard Africa can arrange accommodation and participation in the festival alongside a curated Lamu itinerary.

In-villa massage and wellness treatments Swedish, deep tissue, hot stone and Swahili-inspired treatments using locally sourced oils and botanicals are available at all Vard partner properties, arranged in advance and delivered by Shela's most celebrated therapists.

KAYAKING THROUGH HIDDEN MANGROVE CREEKS & PADDLEBOARDING

Paddle into the Heart of the Archipelago's Most Secret Places

Beyond the open beaches and the sailing channels, the Lamu Archipelago reveals a completely different world to those who venture into its mangrove creeks: a world of extraordinary green silence, of birds that have never seen a road, of water so clear that sea turtles are visible rising from the sandy bottom, of channels so narrow that the mangrove roots form cathedral arches overhead.

Vard Africa arranges private **guided kayaking expeditions** through the most beautiful and least-visited creek systems of the archipelago — exploring the waterways that separate Lamu and Manda Islands, threading through the mangroves toward the open ocean, stopping to swim in hidden pools of fresh and salt water, and learning about the extraordinary ecological role of these forests from guides whose families have worked these creeks for generations.

Stand-up paddleboarding on the calm waters of the sheltered bays particularly the bay at Manda and the lagoon systems on the southwestern coast near Kizingoni offers a different kind of experience: the meditative practice of balance and breath on the surface of a warm, still ocean, with only the sound of water beneath the board.

SNORKELLING AT EXCLUSIVE VARD AFRICA REEF LOCATIONS

Slip into the Blue at the Archipelago's Most Beautiful Reefs

The coral reefs of the Lamu Archipelago are among the most intact and vibrant on the East African coast and the most extraordinary of them are not visible from any beach or accessible from any public boat. Vard Africa maintains exclusive relationships with the dolphin whisperers and experienced marine captains of the archipelago who know exactly where the best coral is, when the visibility is finest, and where the marine life including sea turtles, dolphins, moray eels, lionfish, manta rays and hundreds of species of tropical fish gather in the greatest abundance.

Manda Toto Island Baby Manda is perhaps the finest snorkelling destination in the archipelago: a small, uninhabited island surrounded by coral gardens of exceptional diversity and colour, where turtles regularly surface and dolphins occasionally join swimmers in the shallows. Vard Africa arranges private full-day expeditions to Manda Toto with a freshly prepared beach barbecue served on the sandbar at low tide.

For our guests who dive, we arrange **PADI-certified scuba diving** experiences in the deeper reef systems, including sites that are genuinely off the beaten track for all but the most established local dive operators.

DOLPHIN EXPEDITION & SUSTAINABLE CREEK FISHING

Sail with the Dolphin Whisperers of the Lamu Archipelago

The waters around the Lamu Archipelago are home to **resident populations of Indo-Pacific bottlenose and spinner dolphins**, with peak sightings between December and March. Vard Africa works with a small number of the archipelago's most experienced and respected boat captains known locally as the **dolphin whisperers** whose intimate knowledge of the dolphins' daily patterns and routes ensures encounters that are as extraordinary as they are responsibly managed.

These private dolphin expeditions combine open-water dolphin encounters with traditional creek fishing in the mangrove channels, where local fishermen using methods unchanged for centuries target snapper, grouper and barracuda from hand-made canoes. Guests are invited to fish alongside them, learning techniques that predate the dhow by centuries. The catch is brought back and prepared for lunch.

All Vard Africa marine excursions are conducted with full respect for the marine environment. We do not endorse or arrange excursions that disturb wildlife, damage coral, or operate outside the guidelines of responsible marine tourism.

A VISIT TO THE TAKWA RUINS

Walk Through a 15th-Century Swahili City Reclaimed by the Forest

On Manda Island, hidden within the ancient forest a short boat ride and gentle walk from the Lamu channel, lie the **Takwa Ruins** the remains of a substantial Swahili settlement that flourished between the 15th and 17th centuries before being abandoned, for reasons that historians still debate, sometime around 1700. The ruins cover several acres of dense coastal forest and include the remarkably well-preserved remains of stone houses, a large Friday Mosque, a pillar tomb and a town gate all slowly and beautifully being reclaimed by the forest that has grown up around them.

Takwa was once a prosperous trading town of several thousand inhabitants its residents connected to the broader Indian Ocean trade network of the medieval period. Walking its silent streets today, with the forest pressing in from every side and the sound of the Indian Ocean carrying through the trees, is one of the most atmospheric and genuinely moving experiences the archipelago offers.

Vard Africa arranges **private guided visits to Takwa** with Kenya Museums and Local Heritage-accredited guides who bring the history of the site to life with genuine scholarly depth and storytelling skill. The excursion is typically combined with a dhow crossing from Shela, a walk through Manda Island's coastal forest, and a beach picnic on the island's pristine northern shore.

SUNSET DHOW CRUISE & SUNDOWNER EXPERIENCES

Watch the Sky Turn Gold from the Deck of a Traditional Dhow

The Lamu sunset is, quite simply, one of the most beautiful natural events on the African coast. The quality of the light at this latitude, at this hour, over this particular arrangement of islands, channels, dhow sails and minaret silhouettes is extraordinary. There is no better way to receive it than from the deck of a traditional sailing dhow, with a cold drink in hand and the warm wind of the Indian Ocean in your hair.

Vard Africa arranges **private sunset dhow cruises** of two to three hours, departing from Shela or Lamu waterfront in the late afternoon and sailing through the channels of the archipelago as the light changes from gold to amber to rose to deep violet. A fully stocked bar and a selection of Swahili snacks (*vitumbua*, grilled prawns, fresh coconut) are served on deck. The cruise can be extended to include dinner at anchor off a remote beach or sandbar, with the evening stars replacing the sunset and the silence of the open ocean replacing all other sound.

For those who prefer their sundowner on land, Vard Africa arranges **private beach sundowner setups** on the magnificent dunes south of Shela champagne on ice, a fire built in the sand, the sunset behind the dunes and the full moon rising over the ocean. It is a very specific kind of magic.

SNORKELLING ON CORAL REEFS

Discover the Underwater Kingdom of the Lamu Archipelago

Beyond the Manda Toto experience, the Lamu Archipelago contains numerous reef systems of varying depth, complexity and marine diversity each worth visiting at different times of day and different states of the tide. Vard Africa's marine experts guide guests to the reefs that are best suited to their swimming ability and interest level, ensuring that every snorkelling experience is safe, rewarding and memorable.

The coral gardens of the outer reef at Ras Kitau, the shallow patch reefs off Shela Beach accessible at low tide, the deeper reef systems north of Manda Island all offer different windows into an underwater world of astonishing colour and life. Vard Africa provides full snorkelling equipment of the highest quality, including prescription mask options for guests who require them.

PADDLEBOARD IN QUIET LAGOONS & MANGROVE CREEKS

Find Your Stillness on the Water

Stand-up paddleboarding or simply floating on a board in the extraordinary peace of the Lamu mangrove creeks is one of the most meditative and quietly joyful experiences the archipelago offers. The sheltered inner waterways, where the only sounds are bird calls and the gentle lap of water against the board, provide conditions for paddleboarding that are genuinely unlike anywhere else.

Vard Africa arranges all equipment, instruction for beginners and guided creek paddleboarding experiences for those who want to explore rather than simply float. Early morning sessions, when the light is at its most beautiful and the creeks are still, are particularly recommended.

WATER-SKI & WAKEBOARD EXPERIENCES

Carve the Water in One of Africa's Most Beautiful Settings

The sheltered bays and channels of the Lamu Archipelago provide ideal conditions for water-skiing and wakeboarding, with calm, warm water, consistent visibility and the extraordinary backdrop of dhow sails, mangrove forests and coral-stone buildings. Manda Bay in particular is celebrated for the quality of its watersport's operation and the patience and skill of its instructors.

Whether you are a first-time water-skier learning to stand, a seasoned slalom skier carving a clean wake, or a wakeboarder practicing aerial tricks, the experience of doing it here in turquoise water, under a tropical sun, with this landscape around you elevates the activity far beyond its usual context.

All equipment is of professional quality; instruction is available at all levels; safety is always the first priority.

BEACH WALKS, RELAXATION & PICNICS ON PRISTINE SANDS

Do Nothing, Beautifully

The 12-kilometre beach that stretches south from Shela Village is one of the longest and most pristine stretches of white sand on the East African coast. Beyond the first kilometre, it is almost entirely empty no vendors, no boats, no footprints in either direction as far as the eye can see. Just white sand, the Indian Ocean and the towering dunes that back the beach like a golden amphitheatre.

Walking this beach at dawn when the light is low and golden and the tide has left the sand smooth and unmarked is one of the transcendent experiences of a Lamu stay. Picnicking on the dunes at noon, sheltered from the wind, with a hamper of Swahili food and cold drinks prepared by your villa's cook, is another. And simply lying on the sand with nothing to do and nowhere to be, watching the dhows move across the horizon, is perhaps the finest of all.

Vard Africa arranges private beach picnics, beach dinners and sunset beach gatherings with full concierge support every detail considered, every preference anticipated, the only task left to our guests being the gentle, luxurious one of enjoying it.

EXPLORING LAMU OLD TOWN & SHELA VILLAGE

Walk Through 700 Years of Living Swahili Culture

Lamu Old Town is one of the most extraordinary inhabited heritage sites in Africa and indeed in the world. A **UNESCO World Heritage Site** since 2001, it is the oldest and best-preserved Swahili settlement in East Africa, its current layout established by the 14th century and its character maintained with remarkable integrity to the present day.

Walking its streets some barely 1.5 metres wide is to move through a living museum that refuses to be a museum. Donkeys carry laundry. Children play in doorways carved five centuries ago. The scent of biryani drifts from open kitchens. Fishermen repair nets beside boats that carry the same design as their grandfathers' boats.

Vard Africa arranges **private guided walking tours** of Lamu Old Town with expert guides whose knowledge encompasses the architecture, the history, the politics, the culture and the personalities that have shaped this place over seven centuries. The tour includes the **Lamu Museum** (one of the finest coastal museums in East Africa), the **German Post Office Museum**, the **Fort**, the **Swahili House Museum**, the **Donkey Sanctuary** and a selection of the town's five historic mosques.

The **Old Pal cocktail**, created by Peponi's Lars a blend of Campari, dry vermouth and rye whiskey is traditionally enjoyed on the return. It is, improbably, one of Lamu's great cultural exports.

Shela Village, two miles south, rewards a slower, more wandering exploration its antique shops, art galleries, textile vendors and spice stalls offering treasures that take patience and return visits to fully discover.

GETTING THERE & LOGISTICAL SUPPORT

Air Access

Lamu is best accessed by air, with **Manda Airport** on Manda Island receiving daily scheduled flights from Nairobi (both Wilson Airport and JKIA), Mombasa and Malindi. The flight from Nairobi takes approximately **1 hour 30 minutes to 2 hours** depending on routing and aircraft. Airlines serving Lamu include **Safarilink** and **Jambo jet**.

For the ultimate luxury experience, **private charter flights** can land directly at Manda Airport or at **Manda Bay's private airstrip**, eliminating any shared-aircraft experience and allowing precise departure timing from any airstrip in Kenya, including remote safari camps. Vard Africa manages all private charter bookings with our preferred aviation partners.

From Manda Airport, a short **boat transfer** of 5 to 20 minutes brings guests across the channel to Lamu Town, Shela Village, or directly to their chosen property.

All Vard Africa partner properties provide boat transfer arrangements; we coordinate all logistics in advance to ensure a seamless arrival.

Vard Africa Logistical Support

Vard Africa provides comprehensive end-to-end logistical support for all Lamu journeys, including:

- Pre-arrival consultation and itinerary design
- Private charter bookings from any Kenyan airstrip
- Property meet-and-greet at Manda Airport
- All boat transfers between airport, Lamu Town and Shela
- Daily activity bookings and coordination with all experience partners
- In-destination 24-hour support via our Nairobi operations team
- Emergency evacuation protocol and medical support network
- Customs, visa and documentation support where required

Best Time to Visit

January to March — Hot, sunny and calm; ideal for beach relaxation, snorkelling and watersports. High season; book well in advance.

June to October (Kusi season) — Cooler, with reliable trade winds; exceptional for kitesurfing and sailing; excellent for dhow safaris.

November — Short rains; beautiful green landscape; fewer crowds.

April to May (Long rains) — Some properties close; less suitable for beach holidays but beautiful for those who relish solitude and dramatic weather.

December — High season begins; the archipelago at its most social and vibrant, with the Lamu Dhow Races on New Year's Day.