

VARD AFRICA |

DESTINATION GUIDE

Watamu & Malindi, Kenya

Where the Ancient and the Oceanic Meet on Kenya's Most Pristine North Coast

"Watamu arrived in my life the way the most important things always do quietly, without announcement, and with a beauty so complete it took a full day to understand what had happened. By the time I did, I was already planning when I would return. Malindi gave it context: the Portuguese pillars, the ancient market streets, the Italian-African world that has been building here for 600 years. Together, they are Kenya's most layered and most surprising coast." — **Vard Africa, Destination Curators**

DESTINATION INTRODUCTION

Watamu & Malindi, Kenya

Two Extraordinary Destinations, One Incomparable Coastline

There is a stretch of Kenya's North Coast that has been drawing travellers, adventurers, traders, explorers and lovers of the extraordinary for six centuries and that has managed, despite everything that time and tourism have done to it, to remain among the most genuinely beautiful, most ecologically remarkable and most deeply characterful coastal destinations in East Africa. This is the coast between **Watamu** and **Malindi** a 25-kilometre arc of Indian Ocean shoreline that contains, within its relatively modest geographical compass, some of the finest white-sand beaches in Africa, the oldest and most biologically significant marine protected area in Kenya, one of the continent's most extraordinary tidal creek ecosystems, ancient Swahili ruins of genuine archaeological importance, a dramatic sandstone canyon of otherworldly beauty, and a collection of accommodation and hospitality experiences that range from Kenya's most iconic luxury boutique hotel to intimate private villas of exceptional quality.

Watamu

Whose name translates from Kiswahili as *"home of the sweet people"* is a small, unhurried coastal village approximately **120 kilometres north of Mombasa** and **20 kilometres south of Malindi**, situated between the Indian Ocean and the extraordinary tidal ecosystem of **Mida Creek**. What makes Watamu genuinely exceptional what separates it from every other beach destination on the Kenyan coast is the combination of its marine environment, its creek environment, and the quality of the light and air between them.

The **Watamu Marine National Park and Reserve**, established in **1968** as one of Kenya's first marine protected areas and designated a **UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve** in **1979**, is the ecological heart of the destination. Covering 229 square kilometres of ocean, the park encompasses **Turtle Bay**, **Blue Lagoon Bay** and **Watamu Bay** three bays of extraordinary clarity and beauty, protected by an offshore reef system of considerable complexity that hosts over **1,000 species of marine life** including more than **600 species of fish**, **110 species of stony coral**, **three species of sea turtle** (green, hawksbill and olive ridley, all nesting on Watamu's beaches), **whale sharks** from November to March, **humpback whales** from July to October, **manta rays**, **dolphins** and **dugongs**. The park's coral gardens accessible by snorkel from the beach, just 300 metres offshore are described by marine biologists as among the finest remaining examples of East African coral reef health, a judgement confirmed by the extraordinary diversity and abundance of fish life that greets even casual snorkelers within minutes of entering the water.

Landward of the beaches, **Mida Creek** provides a completely different and equally extraordinary world. A **tidal inlet** of almost four miles in length, lined with dense mangrove forests, Mida Creek is one of the finest birdwatching and kayaking environments in East Africa its tidal flats hosting internationally significant concentrations of **crab plovers**, **flamingos**, **lesser sand plovers** and a huge range of migratory waders alongside resident kingfishers, herons, fish eagles and mangrove-specific species. At low tide the creek exposes vast mudflats alive with crabs, mudskippers and the extraordinary life of the tidal margins; at high tide the water rises to fill the mangrove forest itself, creating a world of green-filtered light and salt-scented air that a sunset dhow cruise through translates into one of the most beautiful experiences available anywhere on the Kenyan coast.

The creek's most celebrated moment comes at sunset, when guests gather at the extraordinary **Lichthaus** floating bar suspended on nets above the creek waters to watch the sun descend behind the mangroves and ignite the water with a golden and crimson light that photographers travel from around the world to capture. It is, by any measure, one of the finest sunset settings in Africa.

Inland from Watamu, the landscape is dominated by the **Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Reserve** East Africa's largest single block of indigenous coastal forest, covering 4,300 hectares and ranked by Bird Life International as the second most important forest for bird conservation in mainland Africa, home to six globally threatened bird species including the **Clarke's Weaver** (found nowhere else on earth), the **Sokoke Scops Owl**, the **Golden-rumped Elephant Shrew** and populations of elephant and buffalo that move through the forest's ancient pathways. The forest is just 15 minutes from Watamu's finest hotels and provides extraordinary wildlife encounters of an entirely different character from the ocean experiences for which the destination is better known.

Watamu's beach geography is distinctive and beautiful. The shoreline is divided into a series of **distinct bays** Garoda Beach, Turtle Bay, Blue Lagoon Bay, Watamu Bay each with its own character, and each protected by the offshore reef that creates the calm, warm, extraordinarily clear swimming conditions that have made Watamu's beaches consistently among the most highly rated on the entire Kenyan coast. The sand is fine and white. The water is turquoise, warm throughout the year, and of a clarity that renders the reef visible from the surface.

Malindi

Lies 20 kilometres north of Watamu a historic town of considerable age, character and complexity that provides the cultural and culinary complement to Watamu's marine and ecological focus. Malindi has been a significant settlement since at least the **13th century**, when it was one of the most important city-states of the Swahili Coast a cosmopolitan port trading ivory, gold, slaves and spices with India, Arabia, China and Persia through the great dhow routes of the Indian Ocean. In **1498**, the Portuguese explorer **Vasco da Gama** arrived here during his historic voyage to India and was received by the Sultan of Malindi, who provided him with a pilot to navigate the final passage to the Indian subcontinent — a transaction that changed the history of the world and is commemorated by the **Vasco da Gama Cross** that still stands on Malindi's seafront, one of the oldest Portuguese monuments in Africa.

The **Malindi Marine National Park**, established alongside Watamu in 1968, protects some of the finest coral reef environments in Kenya's northern waters. The town's **Gede Ruins** a 13th-century Swahili town abandoned in the 17th century for reasons still debated by archaeologists, now preserved in extraordinary completeness within the surrounding coastal forest are one of East Africa's most atmospheric and important archaeological sites. And **Malindi's contemporary character** shaped by a long Italian expatriate community that has brought a distinctive Mediterranean influence to the cuisine, architecture and social life of the town gives it a unique and genuinely appealing complexity that makes it one of the most interesting towns on the Kenyan coast.

Inland from Malindi, the extraordinary **Marafa Depression** known locally as *Nyari* ("the place that broke itself") and by tourists as **Hell's Kitchen** offers one of Kenya's most unexpected and most visually spectacular natural wonders: a dramatic sandstone canyon of jagged gorges, towers and multicolored formations in whites, pinks, oranges and deep crimsons that at sunset produces a landscape so otherworldly that Kenya's coast's best writers have struggled to adequately describe it. The **Mambrui sand dunes**, north of Malindi town, offer a similarly unusual natural experience: vast sand dune formations of rare beauty on the Indian Ocean coast, rising behind a beach of exceptional pristine quality.

The climate of both Watamu and Malindi is warm and tropical throughout the year. **December to March** brings the finest weather warm, sunny and calm, ideal for diving, snorkelling and beach relaxation. **July to October** is the cooler Kusi season excellent for humpback whale sightings and pleasantly cool for beach activities. **October to March** is the whale shark season. **April to June** are the long rains typically the one period to avoid for beach holidays, though the forest and creek environments are extraordinarily beautiful in this season.

THE VARD AFRICA PERSPECTIVE

Why We Love Watamu & Malindi and Their Sandy Beaches

We love Watamu with a particular intensity of feeling, because it is the kind of destination that reveals itself slowly arriving with all the surface charms of a beautiful beach, and then gradually disclosing, over hours and days, the extraordinary depth of its natural world. The marine park. The creek. The forest. The turtles nesting on the beach at night. The whale sharks drifting offshore from October. The humpbacks surfacing in July. The kingfishers in the mangroves. The sunset at Lichthaus. Each revelation compounds the one before it, until by the end of the first week guests find themselves wondering how they had not known about this place, and what else Kenya has been keeping from them.

We love it for **Garoda Beach and Turtle Bay** among the finest stretches of white sand on the entire North Coast, protected by the marine park reef and characterised by a quality of natural purity that very few beach destinations anywhere in the world can still claim.

We love it for **Hemingways** which has been the benchmark for coastal hospitality on the North Coast since the 1980s and which, following its transformative \$11 million refurbishment in 2018, has claimed its position as one of the finest boutique hotel experiences in Kenya. The famous Hemingways Bar, the game fishing heritage, the botanical pool, the Deluxe Rooms with their four-poster beds above the bay these are the standards of the coast.

We love **Malindi** for its extraordinary layering of time the Portuguese cross, the Gede ruins, the Arab influence in the market streets, the Italian restaurants, the Swahili architecture, the mangrove forest at the edge of town. It is a place where history feels present rather than preserved, and where the complexity of Africa's Indian Ocean engagement over 600 years is encoded in the architecture, the food and the daily social life of the town.

And we love the combination. Watamu and Malindi together the marine world and the ancient town, the tidal creek and the sandstone canyon, the whale sharks and the Gede ruins, the Lichthaus sunset and the Hell's Kitchen sunset constitute one of the most complete and most surprising coastal experiences that Kenya offers.

Why Our Guests Will Love Watamu & Malindi

Marine and nature enthusiasts will find in Watamu a marine environment of extraordinary quality the whale sharks, the humpback whales, the nesting turtles, the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, the reef snorkelling, the Mida Creek ecosystem that provides the full spectrum of tropical coastal natural history in a single, compact destination.

Honeymooners will discover that the combination of Watamu's extraordinary marine encounters, private villa settings of considerable romantic quality (Azura Villa's Mida Creek views, Lonno Lodge's ocean terrace, the private rooms of Kobe Suite Resort) and the cultural depth of Malindi creates an itinerary of genuine breadth and beauty.

Families will find that Hemingways Watamu and Medina Palms with their children's clubs, multiple pools, family rooms and comprehensive activity programmes provide infrastructure of the highest standard, while the marine park snorkelling, the turtle nesting watches, the Arabuko-Sokoke forest walks and the creek kayaking offer family experiences of genuine quality and educational value.

Culturally curious travellers will find in the Watamu-Malindi corridor a greater concentration of historical and archaeological depth than any other section of the North Coast the Gede Ruins, the Vasco da Gama Cross, the Portuguese Chapel, the Malindi Museum, the Marafa Depression all within an hour's drive of the finest beach properties.

Why They Are Vard Africa Essential Add-Ons

Watamu and Malindi occupy a perfect geographical and experiential position in any extended Kenyan coast journey. Located 30 minutes from Malindi Airport (served by daily flights from Wilson Airport in Nairobi), they are ideally accessible from any of Kenya's major safari circuits. Combined with Kilifi to the south or Lamu to the north, they complete a coastal chapter of extraordinary range and variety.

For guests with a particular interest in marine biology, conservation and ecological tourism, Watamu is arguably the finest destination on the Kenyan coast its UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status, its whale shark and humpback whale seasons, its turtle conservation programmes and its extraordinary Arabuko-Sokoke forest provide a natural history depth that no other coastal destination in Kenya can match. Vard Africa recommends a minimum of **four nights** at Watamu and **two to three nights** at Malindi, ideally combined into a six-to-eight-night North Coast chapter that includes at least one of the two extraordinary geological excursions (Hell's Kitchen and Mambrui) alongside the core marine, creek and cultural experiences.

WATAMU

Our Accommodation & Trade Partners in Watamu

Every property in this guide has been personally vetted and curated by the Vard Africa team. Our recommendations are based on quality, character, setting, service and the capacity of each property to deliver the transformative experience that defines a Vard journey.

HEMINGWAYS WATAMU

Garoda Beach, Turtle Bay, Watamu Marine National Park | The Coastal Icon

Location: Hemingways Watamu sits directly on the white sands of **Garoda Beach**, within the protected boundaries of the **Watamu Marine National Park** one of the most privileged positions available to any hotel on the Kenyan coast. The property is backed by the extraordinary **Mida Creek Mangrove Forest**, placing it at the precise point where the marine world and the creek ecosystem converge. Malindi Airport is approximately **30 minutes** by road, making Hemingways one of the most easily accessible luxury properties on the entire North Coast.

Introduction & History

There are very few addresses on the Kenyan coast that carry the weight of genuine history places where the name alone conveys a standard and a heritage that generations of coastal travellers have trusted. Hemingways Watamu is one of them. For close to **three decades**, this property has represented the benchmark for coastal hospitality on the North Coast first as the much-loved original hotel that defined Turtle Bay luxury, and since **January 2018** in its entirely reimagined form following a transformative **USD 11 million refurbishment** that has propelled it unambiguously to the top of the Kenya coastal hotel hierarchy.

The property's history reaches back further than its own founding. The name honours the Hemingway tradition of the East African coast the world of big game fishing, of serious angling, of coming to these extraordinary waters with intention and expertise. Hemingways Watamu was the **pioneer of the tag-and-release practice** for billfish on the Kenyan coast, establishing a conservation ethic in its fishing operations that has since become the standard across the region. The **famous Hemingways Bar** which has been serving guests and the wider Watamu community since the 1980s has been sensitively updated in the 2018 refurbishment to retain its history and atmosphere while offering entirely contemporary standards of quality and comfort. It is one of the few bars on the Kenyan coast that genuinely merits the description of iconic.

Today, Hemingways is part of the **Hemingways Collection** a portfolio of six exceptional properties across Kenya and Rwanda that includes **Hemingways Nairobi**, **Hemingways Ol Seki Mara Camp** in the Naboisho Conservancy, **Hemingways River Camp** in the Mara North Conservancy, **Eden Residence** in Karen Nairobi, and the recently opened **Hemingways Retreat Kigali** in Rwanda. This places Hemingways Watamu within one of East Africa's most respected and coherent hospitality groups one whose commitment to the highest standards of guest experience, conservation and community engagement is expressed consistently across every property.

Hemingways is a **proud founding member of the Watamu Marine Association (WMA)** the body that coordinates marine conservation, beach clean-ups and sustainable tourism practices across the Watamu Marine National Park. The property runs solar power systems and bio-digesters that treat wastewater, and organizes regular beach clean-ups in which guests are invited to participate. Annual fundraising events support local community projects including a maternity clinic.

Ownership & Management

Hemingways Watamu is **owned and managed by the Hemingways Collection** a family of properties whose shared commitment to excellence, conservation and the highest standards of guest experience is embedded in every operational decision. The management team is deeply experienced, and many of the original Kenyan staff who shaped the character of the pre-refurbishment Hemingways have continued into the new era, providing the warmth, continuity and personal investment that distinguishes a great hotel from a merely very good one.

Awards & Recognition

Small Luxury Hotels of the World (SLH) — Hemingways Watamu is a proud member of this prestigious global collection, which represents the finest independently owned luxury hotels in the world.

TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Award — Sustained recognition for exceptional guest experience.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

The 2018 refurbishment created a beautifully conceived range of accommodation across **39 hotel rooms** and **21 luxury seafront residences**, all with spectacular views of the Indian Ocean and the endless white sandy beach of the Watamu Marine Park.

Ocean View Rooms (26 rooms) — Located on the ground and first floors of the North Wing, these spacious rooms offer easy access to the beach and the botanical swimming pool. All exceed 40 square metres, with en-suite bathrooms and private balconies providing exceptional ocean views. Bright, airy and beautifully furnished with contemporary coastal detail.

Deluxe Ocean View Rooms (13 rooms) — Positioned on the top floor of the North Wing — the most sought-after rooms in the property — these rooms feature stunning panoramic views over Turtle Bay, four-poster beds, walk-in wardrobes and the private balcony experiences that honeymooners and romantic couples most prize. Guests staying in Deluxe Rooms and Residences receive a personalised butler service.

Residences — 1, 2 and 4-Bedroom Configurations (21 units) — Located in the South Wing of the hotel, Hemingways' seafront residences represent the pinnacle of the property's accommodation offering. Designed and finished to the highest degree of modern coastal luxury, they feature majestic open terraces with ocean views, fully equipped kitchens, dining areas, spacious lounges and the full privacy and independence of a private residence combined with access to all hotel facilities and services. The **4-bedroom residence** offers a split-level sanctuary with panoramic views and the ultimate in private beachfront luxury — ideal for families or small groups.

All rooms feature private balconies with ocean views, premium linen, air conditioning, WiFi and the full range of Hemingways Collection room amenities. Interconnecting rooms are available for families; babysitting service is on offer.

Amenities & Facilities

The refurbished Hemingways provides a comprehensive suite of facilities that positions it as one of the most completely equipped boutique hotels on the North Coast.

Swimming Pools — Three large pools, including the celebrated **botanical pool** whose lush garden surrounds provide one of the most beautiful pool settings on the Kenyan coast. The Rock Bar operates poolside during high season.

Wellness Centre — Housed in its own dedicated wing with **four treatment rooms**, a salon and a gym. Treatments are provided by **Terres d'Afrique** — an exceptional African skincare brand grounded in the traditional uses of African plants, whose products and treatment protocols are among the finest available in Kenya.

Hemingways Game Fishing Centre — The property's legendary fishing operation maintains **four dedicated game fishing boats** for full-day and half-day expeditions. The waters off Watamu offer one of the world's most diverse combinations of game fish black, blue and striped marlin, sailfish, broadbill swordfish, short-bill spearfish and wahoo are all regularly caught and Hemingways' pioneer tag-and-release programme ensures that the great billfish are returned to the sea rather than brought to the dock. This is serious fishing in a serious setting.

Water Sports & Activities — Snorkelling within the Watamu Marine Park (the reef is 300 metres offshore and one of the finest accessible snorkelling environments in Kenya), paddleboarding, kitesurfing, windsurfing, PADI open water dive courses and humpback whale watching excursions (June to September). Electric tuk-tuk transfers to Watamu village and surrounds.

Humpback Whale Watching — Hemingways has pioneered humpback whale watching excursions during the migration months of June to September, when these extraordinary cetaceans pass offshore in significant numbers. The opportunity to watch a 40-tonne humpback surface from a comfortable and well-positioned boat, with the Watamu coast visible in the background, is one of the most powerful natural encounters available from any North Coast property.

Tennis court. Gift shop. Cultural visits to the Gede ruins. Golf at Vipingo Ridge. Day trips to Tsavo National Park and the Maasai Mara arranged on request.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

Hemingways' culinary programme reflects the property's dual personality the serious, refined elegance of a small luxury hotel combined with the relaxed coastal character of Watamu.

The Main Restaurant (alfresco brasserie style) — The signature dining experience: open to the Indian Ocean on one side and the botanical gardens on the other, the main restaurant focuses on local produce and boat-fresh seafood. Signature dishes include **crispy Lamu crab claws**, **bahari calamari** and **Hemingways' famous prawn masala** — dishes that have been on the menu in various incarnations since the hotel's earliest days and that regular guests return for specifically.

Gede Restaurant — A smaller, more intimate dining space serving **Swahili and Lebanese street food** — a creative fusion that reflects the deep Arab and East African culinary heritage of this coast.

Gede Café — A relaxed spot for pastries, paninis, pizzas and what is widely described as the finest gelato ice cream available outside of Italy on the Kenyan coast.

Hemingways Bar — The icon. Located right on the beachfront, the bar offers abundant natural light, panoramic views of the bay and the historical weight of nearly 40 years of coastal hospitality. The cocktail list reflects the property's heritage; the atmosphere is one of civilised, unhurried pleasure.

The Sushi and ceviche menu at the Rock Bar (seasonal) completes a culinary offer of considerable range and quality.

Health & Safety

Hemingways maintains all safety certifications appropriate to its status as a Small Luxury Hotels of the World member and a Watamu Marine Association founding partner. Full first aid capabilities. Generator backup for continuous power.

The property's location within the marine national park is subject to strict environmental protection protocols. All water activities are conducted by qualified guides and instructors with appropriate certification.

Why We Love Hemingways

- ✓ We love Hemingways for its **continuity of excellence** for the way in which the 2018 refurbishment honoured rather than erased the property's history while delivering a contemporary quality that sets an entirely new standard.
- ✓ The famous bar is still there.
- ✓ The fishing boats are still there.
- ✓ Many of the original staff are still there.
- ✓ And surrounding all of it is a physical environment the botanical pool, the Deluxe Rooms above the bay, the beach, the marine park of extraordinary beauty and quality.

Why Our Guests Will Love Hemingways

Guests who want the **most comprehensive and most historically grounded luxury hotel experience on the North Coast** with the fishing heritage, the spa, the culinary range, the marine park access, the humpback whale excursions and the extraordinary Hemingways Bar all under one beautiful roof will find in Hemingways Watamu a property that fulfils every expectation and then quietly exceeds it.

The Vard Africa Insider Note

Book a Deluxe Ocean View Room on the top floor for the four-poster bed experience above Turtle Bay it is the most romantic room configuration at the property. Arrange a half-day game fishing charter on one of the four Hemingways boats the waters off Watamu are extraordinary and ask the kitchen to prepare any catch as sashimi. And have at least one long sundowner at the Hemingways Bar: it is one of those rare places that genuinely earns its history.

Families & Children

Hemingways Watamu is excellent for families. Interconnecting rooms, the babysitting service, the three pools, the family residence configurations, the marine park snorkelling and the turtle conservation programme (turtles' nest on the beach adjacent to the property) create a comprehensive and genuine family experience. Children with an interest in marine life will find Watamu one of the most enriching natural environments on the Kenyan coast.

MEDINA PALMS

Turtle Bay Road, Watamu | The Five-Star Swahili Sanctuary

Location: Medina Palms is positioned directly on the **pristine white sands of Watamu Beach**, off **Turtle Bay Road** the heart of Watamu's finest beachfront strip, overlooking the **Watamu Marine National Park** and Reserve with the Indian Ocean in front and lush tropical gardens within. Malindi Airport is approximately 20 kilometres away under 30 minutes by road.

Introduction & History

Medina Palms is one of the most architecturally distinctive and comprehensively acclaimed luxury properties on the entire Kenyan coast a **groundbreaking hotel** that, from its very inception, was designed with ecological principle, cultural authenticity and genuine design ambition as its three founding commitments. The result is a property of extraordinary visual beauty and operational excellence that has maintained its position at the very top of the Watamu luxury market since it opened.

The resort's design draws on the **rich Swahili heritage** of the North Coast the carved wooden doors, the makuti thatch, the coral stone, the arched doorways and fuses it with **contemporary Arab-Mediterranean influences** to produce a distinctive aesthetic that places Medina Palms in a category of its own. The word *medina* means "*city*" in Arabic and the property lives up to its name: a self-contained world of extraordinary beauty, in which every detail of the garden, the pool, the restaurant, the spa and the accommodation contributes to an overall effect of considerable grandeur and sophistication.

From its construction phase, the property engaged environmental consultants GIBB AFRICA to conduct Environmental Impact Assessments and implement sustainable building and operational practices a commitment that has been consistently honoured through the property's life. The eco-tourism principles embedded in the design have earned Medina Palms recognition that few properties on the Kenyan coast have achieved.

The property has been deeply invested in the Watamu community since opening supporting the **Watamu Community Hospital** through the construction of a new ward and the provision of medical equipment, maintaining the community ambulance service, supporting local school programmes, contributing to HIV/AIDS awareness initiatives and participating in marine conservation through the Local Ocean Trust. Approximately **60% of its permanent staff** are recruited from the local community a figure that reflects a genuine commitment to local economic development rather than a marketing position.

Ownership & Management

Medina Palms is **privately owned and managed** by its founders, whose personal investment in the property's ecological credentials, community engagement and operational excellence is reflected in every aspect of the guest experience. The management team maintains the highest

international hospitality standards while ensuring that the property's character warm, locally rooted, genuinely beautiful is never diluted by the conventions of corporate hotel management.

Awards & Recognition

Medina Palms has accumulated an extraordinary portfolio of recognition over its life:

- ✓ **TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Best of the Best Luxury** — the elite top 1% of all hotels globally, reserved for properties of exceptional and sustained quality. Medina Palms has achieved this recognition for four consecutive years, including the distinction of being voted
- ✓ **Number One Hotel on the Kenyan Coast** in 2018.
- ✓ **Number One Hotel in Kenya** by TripAdvisor users in 2015, ranking **19th in Africa**
- ✓ **Eco Tourism Kenya Gold Rating**-received in 2015 and 2017, recognizing the property's application of eco-tourism principles, environmental best practices and socio-cultural engagement.
- ✓ **SAFE HOTELS Certification** — an internationally recognised audit for health, safety and operational standards Consistent top-ranking by multiple international booking platforms and luxury travel operators.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Medina Palms provides **50 luxuriously appointed rooms and suites** across a range of configurations that set a new benchmark for "*chic luxury ocean residences*" providing more space than conventional hotel rooms while delivering a quality of finish and amenity that exceeds the expectations of the world's most demanding travellers.

- ✓ **Luxury Garden Suites** — Extended views across the lush tropical gardens with private verandas, open-plan living areas, fully equipped kitchens and ensuite bathrooms of considerable generosity. Each suite provides the feel of a private residence rather than a hotel room, with ample space for extended family stays.
- ✓ **Tree-Top Level Penthouses** — One of Medina Palms' most distinctive accommodation categories: penthouses set at tree-top level, with inner courtyards and high-vaulted ceilings that create an extraordinary atmosphere of grandeur and privacy. The elevated position provides exceptional views across the gardens and toward the ocean.
- ✓ **Magnificent Beachfront Villas** — The property's most exclusive accommodation option: individually designed beachfront villas that provide the ultimate combination of private garden, private pool and direct beach access, all within the full-service infrastructure of a five-star resort. Each villa features multiple ensuite bedrooms, an expansive living area and a kitchen the ideal configuration for families or small groups who want the luxury of a private home with the security and service of a world-class hotel.
- ✓ **3-Bedroom Ocean Lodge (Tree-Top)** — Set high at tree-top level with three large ensuite bedrooms, open-plan kitchen and dining area and a rooftop relaxation terrace with private plunge pool.
- ✓ **4-Bedroom Beachfront Villa** — The largest configuration: overlooking the Indian Ocean with four ensuite bedrooms, a well-appointed kitchen, and an expansive rooftop terrace with a deluxe plunge pool.

All rooms feature air conditioning, ensuite bathrooms, digital satellite television, WiFi and the full range of amenities consistent with the property's five-star positioning.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ **Three outdoor swimming pools** in beautifully landscaped settings.
- ✓ The **Sakina Ocean Spa** — a rooftop spa haven where guests can relax with signature organic body treatments from **Africology**, one of Africa's finest spa product ranges, in a setting that catches the ocean breeze from an elevated position above the resort. The spa features five treatment rooms and a full menu of massages, facials and wellness treatments.
- ✓ **Tribe Watersports Centre** — Located at the resort's beach, offering tuition and equipment for windsurfing, body boarding, kayaking, paddleboarding and snorkelling within the marine park.
- ✓ **Fitness Studio** — Fully equipped with modern cardiovascular and strength equipment.
- ✓ **Nemo's Cave Children's Club** — A specifically designed, age-appropriate programme of activities for younger guests including arts and crafts, music, Storytimes and a dedicated padded play area one of the finest children's club offerings at any North Coast property.

Conference facilities for corporate retreats and events. A curio boutique stocking locally made crafts, jewellery and clothing. Daily manager's reception one of the hotel's most sociable and genuinely hospitable traditions, providing guests an opportunity to connect with the management team and fellow guests each afternoon.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ **Amandina Restaurant** — The property's signature à la carte dining venue, serving a refined and creative menu of international and coastal Swahili cuisine prepared from the finest locally sourced produce and the freshest daily seafood. The dining room is elegant and intimate; the ocean-adjacent terrace transforms dinner into a theatrical experience.
- ✓ **Long Bar and Star Lounge** — The property's social heart: a sophisticated bar with an exceptional cocktail list and the kind of atmosphere that encourages lingering well beyond the official end of the sundowner hour.
- ✓ **Tropical Coffee Garden** — A more relaxed daytime café setting for pastries, light lunches and the finest Kenyan coffee, served in the shade of the resort's extraordinary tropical gardens.

Breakfasts at Medina Palms are consistently cited by guests as among the most impressive in Watamu a comprehensive spread of local specialities, fresh fruits, eggs prepared to order and Kenyan coffee that sets the standard for the day ahead.

Health & Safety

Medina Palms maintains comprehensive health and safety systems at the highest international standards, consistent with its SAFE HOTELS certification. The property's eco-operational infrastructure includes water filtration, sustainable waste management and responsible seafood sourcing. Medical assistance is accessible via Watamu's community hospital (whose ward was funded in part by the property). 24-hour security.

Why We Love Medina Palms

We love Medina Palms for its **extraordinary consistency** for the way in which a property that has been at the top of Kenya's coastal hotel hierarchy for years remains genuinely committed to the standards and values that got it there. Four consecutive TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Best of the Best recognitions are not luck; they are the result of unwavering commitment.

Why Our Guests Will Love Medina Palms

Guests who want the **full resort experience at the highest level** the spa, the children's club, the three pools, the finest seafood restaurant on Turtle Bay, the water sports centre and the beachfront villa configurations will find at Medina Palms a property of sustained excellence that delivers every aspect of its promise with warmth and competence.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Book a beachfront villa for the full Medina Palms experiences the private pool and garden in combination with the resort's full-service infrastructure is the best of all possible worlds. Take the rooftop Sakina Ocean Spa treatment at sunset the elevation and the light combine to create a sensory experience that is entirely unique to this property. And ask the Amandina kitchen for the fresh grilled lobster it is caught locally and prepared simply, and it is one of the finest things to eat anywhere in Watamu.

Families & Children

Medina Palms is among the very finest family-oriented luxury properties on the North Coast. The children's club, the three pools, the children's menus, the family villa configurations and the team's warmth and competence with all ages make it the natural choice for family groups who want five-star quality with genuine family infrastructure.

AZURA VILLA

Mida Creek and Turtle Bay, Watamu | The Creek-Side Sanctuary

Location: Azura Villa occupies a quietly extraordinary position on the Watamu coastline situated **between Mida Creek and Turtle Bay**, within the lush greenery of the Mida Forest, with **uninterrupted views over the creek** on one side and a four-minute walk to Turtle Bay Beach on the other. The villa sits within one acre of tropical private garden, completely surrounded by the Mida Forest with no other houses in sight.

Introduction & History

Azura is a Kiswahili word meaning "**blue**" and the name precisely captures the quality of light and water that defines this villa's extraordinary setting. Built at the end of **2023** by **Olivia** a Nairobi-based marketing professional who has worked across the Kenyan luxury travel sector for more than a decade and who applied that deep knowledge to every aspect of the villa's design, staffing and guest experience Azura Villa represents the most recent and in many ways the most thoughtfully conceived addition to the Watamu private villa landscape.

The villa's genius lies in its positioning between two completely different worlds: the marine environment of Turtle Bay and the tidal ecosystem of Mida Creek. From the **elevated sundowner terrace**, guests watch the sun descend over the creek and the mangroves, the light turning the water from gold to copper as the tide retreats. From the beach four minutes on foot across the Mida Forest path guests can snorkel the Watamu Marine Park reef or swim in the warm, clear waters of Turtle Bay. This duality the creek's intimate, ecological, bird-rich world and the ocean's open, blue, marine world give Azura Villa a range of experience that no single-environment property can match.

The architecture and interior design reflect Olivia's specific sensibility: stylish without being ostentatious, locally informed without being folkloric, comfortable without sacrificing the clean-lined aesthetic that characterizes genuinely sophisticated design. The **pizza oven and barbecue pergola** beside the 16-metre pool, the **king-size beds in each ensuite suite**, the **private sundowner terrace** above the creek these are the choices of someone who has stayed in enough properties to know exactly what guests actually want.

Ownership & Management

Azura Villa is **owned by Olivia**, who manages the property remotely from Nairobi while maintaining close involvement in every aspect of the guest experience. A dedicated on-site team led by the celebrated **chef Tuva** (whose beautifully presented meals have generated their own following among returning guests) alongside **Catherine, Eva** and **Robert** ensures that every stay is attended to with the warmth and competence of a fully staffed private house.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

- ✓ Azura Villa accommodates **up to 8 guests** across **4 beautifully appointed ensuite bedrooms**, each opening onto private verandas overlooking the tropical gardens offering a peaceful retreat within the broader natural beauty of the Mida Creek and Arabuko-Sokoke Forest environment.
- ✓ Each bedroom features a **king-size bed**, ample built-in wardrobe space, air conditioning for night-time comfort, high-quality linen and the specific aesthetic of the villa throughout clean-lined, locally inspired, genuinely beautiful.

Amenities & Facilities

The **16-metre swimming pool** — the centerpiece of Azura Villa's outdoor living is one of the largest private pools in Watamu and provides hours of genuine pleasure both in the morning sun and in the extraordinary evening light when the sky turns golden above the Mida Forest.

- ✓ The shaded **pergola with pizza oven and barbecue** beside the pool creates a perfect alfresco cooking and dining setting for groups who want to participate in their own culinary experience.
- ✓ The **elevated sundowner terrace** provides Mida Creek views of exceptional beauty at any hour of the day, and particularly at the moment of sunset.
- ✓ Total privacy within a one-acre tropical garden with no shared spaces or other guests.
- ✓ WiFi throughout.
- ✓ All local transfers and activity arrangements via Vard Africa's Watamu concierge network.
- ✓ Optional yoga and fitness sessions can be arranged at the villa. Car hire can be arranged for independent exploration.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

Chef Tuva prepares all meals in consultation with the guest group the freshest local seafood, produce from the Watamu market and the full range of coastal and international cuisine, served wherever the mood and the day dictate: poolside, on the sundowner terrace, in the garden or at the formal dining table. Breakfasts are particularly praised: generous, beautifully presented and entirely responsive to each guest's preferences.

Health & Safety

- ✓ The villa's unfenced pool requires supervision for young children at all times.
- ✓ The Mida Creek tributary that runs near the property offers the option of floating out into the creek through the mangroves, but children should be supervised around tidal water. Olivia is available throughout office hours for any guest need; full emergency protocol coverage provided through Vard Africa's network.

Why We Love Azura Villa

We love Azura Villa for its **positioning between two worlds** the creek and the ocean, the mangroves and the reef and for the extraordinary quality of light and silence it provides. Waking here to the sound of Mida Creek birdsong, watching the mangrove herons from the sundowner terrace, walking through the forest to Turtle Bay at low tide and snorkelling the reef before returning for Chef Tuva's lunch by the pool this is a day in Watamu of very particular and very deep pleasure.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Time the sundowner terrace visit to the precise moment of sunset over the creek the light at that moment, with the mangroves in silhouette and the water reflecting the sky, is one of Watamu's finest natural spectacles. And arrange a guided walk to Turtle Bay for an early morning low-tide reef walk the beach at that hour, with the forest behind you and the reef ahead, is Watamu at its most purely beautiful.

Families & Children

- ✓ Azura Villa is excellent for families and has accommodated groups of adults with multiple young children with great success.
- ✓ The pool is the principal attraction for children; the forest path to the beach and the creek environment are extraordinary for curious, nature-interested children.
- ✓ Pool supervision is essential.

THE CHARMING LONNO LODGE

Oceanfront, Watamu | The Intimate Pinnacle

Location: The Charming Lonno Lodge occupies a **privileged oceanfront position** at Watamu Marine National Park directly on the coast, serenely removed from the village's main activity while maintaining proximity to Watamu's finest beaches, restaurants and marine experiences. The property's own **private helipad** allows direct arrival by helicopter from Malindi Airport or any other airstrip in the region.

Introduction & History

The Charming Lonno Lodge is, by its own characteristically understated description, *"likely the best hotel in Watamu"* and the qualification is the least false modesty in hospitality marketing. This is a boutique retreat of exceptional quality small by absolute design (just **4 rooms and 5 suites** across the entire property), focused entirely on the delivery of a very particular kind of luxury: true privacy, Swahili-inspired design refined by Italian warmth, and an oceanfront setting that invites silence and genuine wonder.

The lodge is owned and presided over by **Silvia and Aldo** an Italian couple who have created in Lonno Lodge a property that perfectly expresses their values: meticulous attention to every detail, genuine personal warmth toward guests, a culinary sensibility shaped by serious Italian training and a deep love for the Kenyan coast and its culture.

Every aspect of the lodge the rooms, the restaurant (reserved exclusively for staying guests), the massage retreat, the electric tuk-tuk for village explorations, the private helipad reflects the considered choices of owners who have thought carefully about what the finest possible small hotel experience looks like and then built it.

The name *lonno* refers to the lodge's elevated position above the water a perch from which the Indian Ocean is visible in both directions and in which the quality of the light, the air and the silence creates the particular atmosphere that repeat guests describe as the most restorative they have experienced anywhere.

Ownership & Management

Lonno Lodge is **owned and personally managed by Silvia and Aldo**, who are present at the property and deeply involved in every guest's experience. This is emphatically not an absentee-owner operation it is a carefully crafted personal expression of what two people who love Watamu and love hospitality can create when they apply both passions without compromise.

Awards & Recognition

- ✓ **TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Best of the Best Luxury Hotels** one of the most selective global hospitality recognitions, awarded annually to the top hotels worldwide based on sustained guest satisfaction scores.
- ✓ Lonno Lodge has achieved this distinction year after year, confirming its position as among the finest boutique luxury properties in Watamu.
- ✓ Consistent top ranking as the **finest boutique hotel in Watamu** across all major international travel platforms and luxury travel operator lists.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Lonno Lodge accommodates a maximum of approximately **18 guests** across its **4 rooms** (located in the elegant, ancient-style **Observation Tower** one of the most original architectural choices at any Watamu property) and **5 suites** (each spanning two floors with independent access, providing a level of privacy and self-contained comfort that smaller boutique hotels rarely achieve).

The rooms and suites are individually and lovingly designed each a specific expression of the Swahili-Italian aesthetic that defines Lonno Lodge's character, with locally crafted furniture, carefully chosen textiles, natural materials and the quality of finish that comes from owners who are personally invested in every detail. Air conditioning provides comfort throughout; the ocean is audible from every room; the light from the water creates an atmosphere of particular warmth.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ **Saltwater swimming pool** lined with thatched parasols one of the most beautiful small pools in Watamu, its salt-filtered water providing a healthier and more ocean-like swimming experience.
- ✓ **Private beach area** directly adjacent to the lodge.
- ✓ **Massage retreat** providing skilled, individual treatments that blend technique with the particular serenity of the lodge's ocean setting.
- ✓ **Electric tuk-tuk** for zero-emission transfers through Watamu village and surroundings with experienced staff a charming and genuinely sustainable alternative to the diesel tuk-tuks that dominate the local transport scene.
- ✓ **Private helipad** directly on-site for helicopter transfers, allowing guests to arrive with maximum convenience and drama. Watamu's finest marine activities, creek excursions and cultural tours all arranged through the lodge's concierge.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ Lonno Lodge's restaurant is **exclusively for staying guests** a deliberate choice that ensures the quiet, attentive service and intimate atmosphere that the property's character demands.
- ✓ Each day, the kitchen crafts a different menu using the freshest local ingredients fish from trusted Watamu fishermen, vegetables and herbs from local farms, the finest seasonal produce with influences from Swahili, Italian and international cuisine that reflect the owners' dual cultural heritage.
- ✓ The dining experience at Lonno Lodge is one of the most personal and most genuinely delicious on the North Coast.

Health & Safety

- ✓ All health and safety protocols appropriate to a TripAdvisor Best of the Best property.
- ✓ 24-hour security. Medical assistance accessible via Watamu's healthcare facilities.
- ✓ All marine and activity operations conducted through certified, experienced local operators.

Why We Love Lonno Lodge

- ✓ We love Lonno Lodge for being **exactly what it says it is** a small, extraordinary boutique retreat where the quality of the human experience (the warmth of Silvia and Aldo, the personal attention of the team, the intimate restaurant, the electric tuk-tuk) is as significant as the quality of the physical environment.
- ✓ The helipad, the observation tower rooms, the saltwater pool, the exclusive restaurant each of these choices speaks of a property that has thought deeply about what hospitality should be and has executed that thinking with unwavering commitment.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Arrive by helicopter from Malindi Airport the Lonno Lodge helipad is there precisely for this purpose, and the approach to the lodge from the air, with Watamu's extraordinary coastline spread beneath you, is one of those arrival experiences that sets the tone for the entire stay. Ask Silvia or Aldo for their personal Watamu recommendations their knowledge of the destination is intimate and invaluable.

Families & Children

Lonno Lodge's intimate scale and adults-oriented atmosphere make it most suitable for **couples, solo travellers and small groups of friends** who value genuine privacy and the focused attention that a very small boutique lodge can provide. Families with older children who appreciate the setting's specific character are warmly welcomed.

KOBE SUITE RESORT

Garoda Beach, Watamu Marine National Park | The Italian-Swahili Idyll

- ✓ **Location:** Kobe Suite Resort occupies a **direct beachfront position** on **Garoda Beach** one of Watamu's most celebrated stretches of white sand, within the protected Watamu Marine National Park.
- ✓ The resort's beach faces directly onto the turquoise lagoon, with the reef visible in the middle distance and the Indian Ocean beyond. Gede Ruins are just 10 minutes' drive.

Introduction & History

Kobe Suite Resort has established itself as one of Watamu's most loved and most consistently praised luxury properties an achievement built on the Italian ownership's commitment to meticulous design, genuine hospitality and the specific pleasures of Garoda Beach living.

The resort is described by its returning guests with remarkable consistency: *"the lobster pasta is incredible"*, *"the most luxurious villa I have stayed in in Watamu"*, *"idyllic the room was beautiful and the hotel's presentation was immaculate"*.

The property is **Italian owned and operated** — a character that is visible in every aspect of the resort's aesthetic, culinary offering and guest experience: the architectural precision, the quality of the Mediterranean-influenced food, the care given to the design of each of the 23 individually appointed suites, and the warmth and professionalism of a team that genuinely cares about the guest experience.

The private villa **Casa Blanca by Kobe** — available as a standalone private hire within the resort extends the property's offering for guests who want the full-service resort infrastructure combined with the privacy and independence of a private home.

Ownership & Management

Kobe Suite Resort is **Italian owned and operated** with a dedicated professional management team. The owners' personal investment in the quality and character of the property is reflected in every operational decision from the selection of the kitchen team to the design of the poolside furniture to the specific Garoda Beach focus of the daily activities programme.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Kobe Suite Resort offers **23 individually designed suites** in two categories, each reflecting the Italian-Swahili fusion aesthetic of the property:

- ✓ **First-Floor Ocean View Suites** — Elevated above the beach and gardens, these suites provide outstanding views across Garoda Beach and the Indian Ocean from private balconies or terraces. The interiors combine contemporary Italian design sensibility with Swahili coastal materials: natural stone, carved wood, quality Italian linens, the full complement of modern amenities.
- ✓ **Ground-Floor Ocean View Suites** — Direct access to the resort's sinuous pool and garden areas, with the beach immediately accessible. Each suite features a private outdoor relaxation swing bed — one of the most sought-after details at the property and one of those touches that guests invariably mention in reviews.
- ✓ **Casa Blanca by Kobe** — A private luxury villa within the resort grounds: the ideal configuration for couples or small families who want the intimacy and independence of a private home with full access to all resort facilities and services.

All suites are air-conditioned, with minibar, ceiling fan, mosquito net and safe. The outdoor swing beds, the in-suite design details and the quality of linen are consistently praised.

Amenities & Facilities

Two beautifully designed pools with **sinuous forms** that reflect the Italian architectural sensibility set amid white terracing and bleached wood furniture for a look that is distinctly Mediterranean in flavour without being inappropriate to the Kenyan coastal setting. Cocktail bar overlooking Garoda Beach. Direct beach access with guaranteed quiet Garoda is one of Watamu's finest beaches.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

Kobe Beach Restaurant — The primary dining venue: positioned above the beach with views across the lagoon, serving the Italian-Mediterranean-Swahili fusion that defines the property's culinary identity. The fresh seafood menu is the centerpiece daily catch from Watamu fishermen, the finest Mediterranean preparations applied to East African ingredients. The **lobster pasta** has acquired its own reputation as one of Watamu's finest dishes.

La Terrazza Restaurant — A second dining venue offering a more formal and elevated dining experience, with Italian dishes of considerable sophistication and a wine list to match.

Why We Love Kobe Suite Resort

We love Kobe Suite Resort for its **clarity of character** — Italian design, Italian food, Italian warmth, on one of Watamu's finest beaches. This is a property that knows exactly what it is and delivers it with complete commitment.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Ask for a first-floor ocean view suite for the elevated beach perspective watching the tide come in across Garoda Beach from a private balcony is one of Watamu's most quietly beautiful experiences. And book the lobster pasta at the Beach Restaurant at least once it is worth the journey to Watamu.

Families & Children

Kobe Suite Resort is suitable for couples, small families and groups of friends. The private Casa Blanca villa is the ideal family configuration within the resort.

PALM GARDEN BOUTIQUE HOTEL

950 Metres from Garoda Beach, Watamu | The Eco-Boutique Garden Oasis

Location: Palm Garden is set within lush palm gardens at **950 metres from Garoda Beach** positioned deep in the Watamu palm forest environment, away from the immediate beachfront but within easy walking distance (or a quick tuk-tuk ride) of Watamu's finest beach.

Introduction & History

Palm Garden opened in **October 2019** and immediately established itself as one of Watamu's most distinctive and most genuinely eco-committed boutique properties. The hotel's founder the owner known as **Manni**, whose constant presence at the property is one of its most-praised characteristics built Palm Garden from local materials, with Kenyan craftsmen, and powered it from the outset with **120 solar panels generating 200KW** of clean energy, making it one of a very small number of truly solar-powered hotels in Watamu and one of the most environmentally committed boutique properties on the North Coast.

The name is entirely honest: the hotel sits within a genuine palm garden a forest of towering palms that shade the buildings, cool the air and create the specific quality of filtered tropical light that is Palm Garden's most immediate and most enduring atmospheric quality. At night, when the poolside is lit by lanterns and candlelight and the diners gather around the central pool in the warm garden air, Palm Garden achieves a quality of beauty and intimacy that considerably more expensive properties can rarely match.

Ownership & Management

Palm Garden is **owned and personally managed by Manni** — who is described by virtually every guest review as the defining presence of the property: constantly visible, attentive to every detail, ensuring that food and service meet his personal standards at every meal. This is owner-managed hospitality at its most genuine.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Palm Garden offers **9 rooms** across three configurations:

- ✓ **6 Deluxe Two-Bedroom Suites** — Spacious open-air living and dining areas with kitchenette and veranda overlooking the garden. Hand-carved furniture, cream drapes, flat-screen television, charging stations, ample cupboard space, refrigerator, air conditioning, fan and safe. The most comprehensive suite configuration at the property — ideal for couples wanting space or small families.
- ✓ **2 Standard One-Bedroom Suites** — Living and dining area with kitchenette and veranda. The same quality of design and finish as the deluxe suites in a more compact configuration — perfect for couples.
- ✓ **1 Honeymoon Suite** — More spacious than the standard suites, with a longer veranda and a particularly generous open-air living and dining area. Designed specifically for romantic occasions.

All rooms feature hand-carved furniture, cream drapes, television, charging stations, refrigerator, air conditioning and fan.

The property is **adults only** (children over 12 only) a policy that maintains the calm and serene atmosphere that distinguishes Palm Garden from the family-oriented properties in Watamu.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ The **saltwater swimming pool** — set at the centre of the garden, surrounded by the palm canopy is Palm Garden's architectural centerpiece and the heart of the property's daily social life.
- ✓ The **yoga space** (which doubles as a TV lounge) provides the infrastructure for the wellness programming that many guests book specifically. **Massage and beauty treatments** available in-house.
- ✓ A boutique selling clothes, books and necessities.
- ✓ The bar is consistently praised as exceptional one guest described it as offering *"Kenya's best bar, featuring an amazing assortment of whiskeys, gins, tequilas, and other incredible drinks, crafted into unique cocktails by expert staff"*.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ **Manni's Italian Restaurant** — The culinary highlight of Palm Garden and, by many accounts, one of the finest restaurants in Watamu.
- ✓ The menu combines authentic Italian technique with the finest Kenyan coastal ingredients: fresh seafood from trusted local fishermen, the best local vegetables, imported Italian staples and a specific commitment to vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options that makes it uniquely accessible to guests with dietary requirements.
- ✓ The **linguine lobster** is particularly celebrated. Dinners beside the pool, with lanterns and candlelight, create an atmosphere of remarkable charm and intimacy.

Why We Love Palm Garden

- ✓ We love Palm Garden for its **absolute eco-integrity** for the 120 solar panels that power every room and every kitchen, for the local materials and local craftsmen who built it, for the garden that was grown rather than designed.
- ✓ And for Manni's presence a reminder that the finest hospitality is always, ultimately, personal.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Palm Garden is the ideal choice for couples who prioritize environmental integrity, intimate atmosphere and exceptional Italian cuisine in a genuinely beautiful garden setting. The rooftop bar area provides one of Watamu's finest small-scale cocktail experiences — ask Manni to design a signature cocktail for your group.

Families & Children

Palm Garden accommodates **guests over 12 years only** — making it a couples and adult-group property rather than a family destination.

MALINDI

Our Accommodation & Trade Partners in Malindi

THE BILLIONAIRES RESORT

Marine Park Road, Malindi | The Dual-Property Coastal Collection

Location: The Billionaires Resort occupies a beachfront position on **Marine Park Road** in Malindi directly on the Indian Ocean coast, within a 15-minute drive of Malindi Marine National Park. The dual-property concept **Billionaire Beachfront Apartments** and **Lion in the Sun** are set just **300 metres apart**, connected by a complimentary shuttle and accessible to guests of either property.

Introduction & History

The Billionaires Resort represents one of the most creative and most genuinely comprehensive hospitality concepts on the Kenyan North Coast a **dual-property experience** that offers two completely contrasting environments within a single booking, allowing guests to move between the vibrant energy of a beachfront luxury resort and the serene, garden-enclosed tranquility of an intimate retreat as their mood dictates.

Billionaire Beachfront Apartments is the larger, more energetic of the two: a **24-condo luxury complex** with private beach access, a beachfront infinity pool, the celebrated **Billionaire Grill & Bar**, a beach bar, a fully equipped gym and sports courts. The apartments are **spacious**, with large balconies, fully equipped kitchens, ample outdoor seating and the specific luxury of a private gazebo on the private beach the atmosphere combines the energy of a world-class resort with the privacy and independence of a high-end serviced apartment.

Lion in the Sun is an entirely different proposition a **sanctuary of peace** that, as its own description perfectly captures, feels *"a million miles away"* from the more vibrant Billionaire despite the 300-metre physical separation. Entered like a fairy tale land, the Lion in the Sun envelops guests in a world of four **saltwater swimming pools**, lush tropical gardens, open-air lounge areas and individually furnished rooms in the single **Maua House Villa** each decorated by **local Kenyan artists** to give a feel of character and a unique ambience. The **Thalaspia Henri Chenot** a luxury wellness spa with access to hot springs, mineral springs and a mud bath provides one of the most unusual and most indulgent spa experiences on the North Coast.

Ownership & Management

The Billionaires Resort group is **privately owned** and managed by a professional team whose commitment to delivering an exceptional and distinctive guest experience is reflected in the consistent quality of both properties.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

- ✓ **Billionaire Beachfront Apartments** — **24 luxury condos** in studio, one, two and three-bedroom configurations. All apartments feature spacious balconies with ocean or garden views, fully equipped kitchens, large living areas, modern décor and the full complement of modern amenities. Private gazebo on the private beach is included.
- ✓ **Lion in the Sun (Maua House)** — **16 individually furnished rooms and suites** within the Maua House villa, each decorated by local Kenyan artists — making each room a unique artistic statement as well as a genuinely comfortable space. **4 saltwater swimming pools** serve the Lion in the Sun guests. The Maua House can also be booked as **exclusive hire** for larger groups or families.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ Billionaire Beachfront: Private beach with own gazebo per apartment. Beachfront infinity pool. Billionaire Grill & Bar. Beach bar. Gym. Sports courts. Room service.
- ✓ Lion in the Sun: 4 saltwater pools. Lush tropical gardens. **Thalaspia Henri Chenot** with hot springs, mineral springs and mud bath one of the most distinctive spa experiences on the North Coast. Multiple outdoor lounge areas. Complimentary shuttle to Billionaire Beachfront.
- ✓ The two properties combined provide a **complementary shuttle service** and full access to all facilities at both locations one of the most generous cross-property access arrangements in Kenyan coastal hospitality.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

Billionaire Grill & Bar — A beachside restaurant of considerable energy and quality, serving international cuisine with the finest local seafood, grilled meats and the cocktail range that the Billionaire name demands.

Beach Bar for lighter refreshments. Lion in the Sun's in-house dining provides a quieter, more intimate alternative within the garden setting.

Why We Love the Billionaires Resort

We love the Billionaires Resort for the **brilliance of its concept** the idea that guests can have two entirely different experiences within a single stay, moving between beachfront energy and garden sanctuary as mood dictates, is one of the most genuinely innovative hospitality ideas on the North Coast.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Begin your Malindi stay at Lion in the Sun the garden sanctuary is the perfect post-safari decompression environment before transitioning to Billionaire Beachfront Apartments for the final nights, when the beach energy and the Grill & Bar provide the perfect finale. Book the Thalaspia Henri Chenot mud bath treatment it is one of the most unusual and most deeply restorative experiences available in Malindi.

Families & Children

The Billionaire Beachfront Apartments are ideal for families, with the apartment format providing kitchen facilities, multiple bedrooms and the independence that families appreciate. Lion in the Sun's garden atmosphere is better suited to adults.

KILILI BAHARINI RESORT & SPA

Casuarina/Silversands Beach, Malindi | The Botanical Garden Paradise

Location: Kilili Baharini Resort & Spa sits on the beautiful **Casuarina Beach** (also known as Silversands Beach) in Malindi a pristine stretch of white sand that is considered among the finest beaches in the Malindi area, just **5 minutes' drive from Malindi Airport**.

Introduction & History

Kilili Baharini — a Swahili phrase that translates as "*tiny fish by the sea*" is a property of considerable distinction: an **Italian-owned boutique resort** that combines the architectural precision and culinary excellence of its founders with one of the most extraordinary botanical garden environments at any coastal resort in Kenya. The property is set within grounds that contain over **250 species of tropical plants** a botanical collection of genuine quality and diversity that transforms the resort's gardens from a decorative backdrop into a living landscape of scientific interest and extraordinary beauty.

The resort has been operating on the Malindi coast for many years, building a deeply loyal following among guests primarily Italian, but increasingly international who return year after year for the combination of the beautiful beach, the exceptional Italian cuisine, the intimate scale (just 35 rooms and suites) and the specific quality of warmth and service that the Italian-owned, personally managed character of the property provides. The **Kilili Spa Medical Life** a wellness centre of sophisticated design and programme depth has become one of the most respected spa facilities in Malindi, attracting guests who combine their beach stay with a serious wellness programme.

Ownership & Management

Kilili Baharini is **Italian owned and managed** the Italian character of the property visible in the design, the cuisine and the specific warmth of the welcome that guests receive on arrival. The management team has maintained the property's standards with consistency over many years.

Awards & Recognition

- ✓ **TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Award** — sustained recognition for exceptional and consistent quality.
- ✓ Multiple international hospitality recognitions for the Kilili Spa Medical Life wellness programme.
- ✓ Consistently listed by international booking platforms as one of the finest boutique luxury resorts in Malindi.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Kilili Baharini offers **29 comfortable air-conditioned rooms with large private verandas, 3 prestigious suites and 3 junior suites** all overlooking one of the property's five pools and all providing the private morning breakfast service that is one of the resort's most beloved hospitality traditions.

Each room is furnished with care **African wooden furniture**, mosquito nets, tea/coffee facilities, bathrobes and slippers, flat-screen television and WiFi. Every private veranda provides a space for morning breakfast and evening relaxation that transforms the room from a sleeping space into a genuine living environment.

The prestigious suites provide expanded living areas, enhanced pool views and upgraded amenities the ideal choice for honeymooners or guests celebrating a significant occasion.

Amenities & Facilities

5 swimming pools — set within the botanical gardens in a variety of configurations that accommodate different moods and different groups. **2 bars** including the beach bar, which is one of the finest casual social environments on Silversands Beach. The **Kilili Spa Medical Life** offering massages, beauty treatments, a sauna and a hot tub in a dedicated wellness facility whose design and programme reflect a serious commitment to holistic wellbeing. Free return airport shuttle to Malindi Airport. 24-hour reception. Car rental and babysitting services available.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

Kilili Baharini's kitchen is consistently described by guests as one of the finest restaurant experiences in Malindi a judgement that reflects the Italian chef team's mastery of both Mediterranean technique and the extraordinary local ingredients of the North Coast. **Italian cuisine** and

traditional Kenyan coastal dishes prepared with the finest fresh fish and locally grown produce. Breakfast can be taken in the buffet restaurant overlooking the Indian Ocean or on the private veranda of each room the veranda breakfast, served by attentive staff in the dappled light of the botanical garden, is one of Kilili Baharini's most characteristically pleasurable experiences.

Why We Love Kilili Baharini

We love Kilili Baharini for the **extraordinary botanical garden** for the 250+ species of tropical plants that make a walk through the resort grounds a genuinely enriching experience and for the kitchen. Few beach resorts in Kenya produce food of this consistent quality and genuine culinary ambition.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Book a room that overlooks one of the pools through the botanical garden the morning view, with the light filtering through 250 species of tropical plants onto the water's surface, is one of Malindi's most beautiful private moments. And allow time for the Kilili Spa Medical Life the hot tub in the botanical garden setting is one of the finest restorative experiences on the North Coast.

Families & Children

- ✓ Kilili Baharini is excellent for families.
- ✓ The babysitting service, the five pools, the children's menus and the team's warmth with all ages make it a comfortable and well-organized family environment.
- ✓ Children aged 13 and above are charged as adults.

THE KASA MALINDI

Malindi Coastal Reserve | The Four-Villa Private Retreat

Location: The Kasa Malindi (formerly Leopard Point Beach Resort & Spa) occupies a **private, secluded coastal position** on the shores of the Indian Ocean in Malindi set within a landscape of mangrove woods and coral forest overlooking the ocean, near the Malindi Marine National Park. The resort is approximately **14 kilometres from Malindi Airport** 15 to 20 minutes by road.

Introduction & History

The Kasa Malindi is a property of considerable ambition a **luxury boutique resort of unique format** built around four entirely private villas, each with its own infinity pool, private garden, extensive outdoor lounge area and dedicated staff.

The name carries both cultural and environmental resonance: *Kasa* is Swahili for **turtle**, and the property's location adjacent to a stretch of Indian Ocean coast frequented by sea turtles both as feeding habitat and as nesting ground gives the naming a dimension beyond mere aesthetics.

The resort has undergone a significant evolution formerly known as Leopard Point Beach Resort & Spa, a property of established reputation on the Malindi coast, it has been reimaged and rebranded as The Kasa with a clearer vision of the exclusive, private villa experience it wants to provide. The results are impressive: four villas of considerable design quality, each with private amenities that rival the finest private houses on the Kenyan coast, combined within a resort infrastructure of spa, restaurant and marine activity programming that most private villas cannot offer.

The resort's philosophy explicitly honours its marine environment the protection of sea turtles and their breeding grounds, the abundant tropical fish and the marine life of the nearby National Park is described as *"core to the resort's mission"*.

The use of **solar energy**, **glass water bottles** (plastic absent from the property) and traditional Swahili construction techniques that respect the coastal landscape reflect a genuine eco-commitment.

Ownership & Management

The Kasa Malindi is **privately owned and managed** by its current operators, whose vision of a small-scale, privacy-focused luxury resort experience is reflected in the four-villa format and the emphasis on individual attention and bespoke service.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

The Kasa offers **15 rooms across 4 private villas** — each villa a self-contained world of luxury and privacy:

- ✓ **Sea View Suites (5)** — Panoramic Ocean views from private terraces. Spacious living areas, air conditioning, writing desk, minibar, ensuite bathroom with shower or bath. The finest room category at the hotel for views and atmosphere.
- ✓ **Twin Suite (1)** — Twin bedroom configuration for guests preferring separate beds, with the same quality of finish and amenity as the sea view suites.
- ✓ **Garden and Sea View Suites (4)** — Set within the villa gardens with partial sea views, these suites provide a beautiful and private alternative for guests who prefer a garden connection alongside their ocean proximity.
- ✓ **Deluxe Rooms (5)** — The most accessible price point within the resort's exclusive structure, offering the full Kasa quality of finish and amenity in a more compact configuration.

Every villa features its **own infinity pool**, private garden, open living space and a staff room with dedicated villa team.

The construction uses traditional Swahili techniques coral stone, makuti thatch, carved wooden details that ensure the buildings belong to their coastal landscape rather than imposing upon it.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ The **Bien Être Spa** — offering a full range of treatments and massages in a setting designed for tranquility and regeneration.
- ✓ **Mawimbi Seafood Restaurant** — beachside seafood dining of considerable quality.
- ✓ **Jiko Restaurant** — the main international restaurant serving the full range of cuisine.
- ✓ **Café Amka** — locally roasted coffee and light refreshments.
- ✓ **Sea turtle conservation programme** — guests are invited to participate in monitoring and protection activities during nesting season.

Mountain bikes for independent exploration of Malindi town and surroundings. Boat trips to the marine park, snorkelling, scuba diving, deep-sea fishing and windsurfing arranged through the concierge.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ The Kasa's three dining venues provide distinct culinary experiences across the full arc of a day's eating.
- ✓ Mawimbi Seafood Restaurant's beach position and seafood focus caught fresh from the Indian Ocean by trusted local fishermen makes it the most popular choice for evening dining; the coral reef proximity means the catch is extraordinarily fresh.
- ✓ Jiko's international menu provides variety; Café Amka's locally roasted coffee is described as extraordinary by guests who take it seriously.

Why We Love the Kasa Malindi

We love The Kasa for the **privacy architecture** of its four-villa format the way in which each villa becomes a private world with its own pool and garden, while the resort's broader infrastructure provides dining, spa and marine programming that private houses cannot. It is, in concept and in execution, one of the most complete boutique resort experiences in Malindi.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Request Villa Breeze (which has four bedrooms and its own pool) for a family or group the private outdoor living space and pool create an entirely self-contained luxury world within the resort. Participate in the sea turtle conservation programme if your stay coincides with the nesting season the experience of watching a green turtle prepare her nest by moonlight on a deserted Malindi beach is one of East Africa's most profound natural encounters.

Families & Children

The Kasa Malindi is excellent for families the private villa format provides the space and independence that family groups appreciate, and the dedicated villa team ensures that specific family needs (children's menus, early morning breakfasts, beach toy provision) are accommodated with warmth and efficiency.

THE BEACH PALACE VILLA

Malindi Coast | The Private Coastal Retreat

Location: The Beach Palace Villa is positioned on the **Malindi coastline** a private villa retreat offering direct beachfront access on the beautiful Indian Ocean coast of the North Coast.

Introduction & History

The Beach Palace Villa represents the private villa experience in its most intimate and personal form on the Malindi coast a beautifully appointed private property that provides guests with the complete privacy, independence and barefoot luxury of a fully staffed coastal home, while offering Malindi's extraordinary range of marine, cultural and ecological experiences on the doorstep.

The villa's architecture reflects the Swahili coastal tradition in its most refined contemporary expression the high-ceilinged rooms, the wide verandas, the natural ventilation that captures the Indian Ocean breeze, the garden spaces that connect the interior to the landscape creating a home that feels entirely natural to its location and deeply hospitable to its guests.

Ownership & Management

The Beach Palace Villa is **privately owned and managed** through a dedicated villa management team that ensures the highest standards of housekeeping, culinary service and guest welfare throughout each stay.

Barefoot Luxury — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

The Beach Palace Villa accommodates guests across beautifully appointed ensuite bedrooms, each designed for maximum comfort and maximum connection with the ocean environment. Private swimming pool. Direct beach access. The full complement of private villa amenities.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

A private chef prepares all meals in consultation with the guest group the finest local seafood, Malindi market produce and the full range of international and Swahili coastal cuisine, served at any of the villa's indoor or outdoor dining settings.

Vard Africa Insider Note

The Beach Palace Villa is the ideal choice for guests who want the complete Malindi private villa experience — the beach literally at the door, total privacy, and the full range of North Coast experiences arranged through Vard Africa's Malindi concierge network.

OUR SIGNATURE BAREFOOT LUXURY EXPERIENCES

What To Do in Watamu & Malindi

The North Coast's experiential landscape is one of the most diverse on the entire Kenyan coast from the world's most extraordinary marine encounters to ancient Swahili ruins, from tidal creek kayaking to Martian sandstone canyons. The following curated experiences represent the finest and most distinctive encounters available, personally vetted by the Vard Africa team.

1. DEEP-SEA FISHING

Cast a Line in Kenya's Most Celebrated Game-Fishing Waters

The waters off Watamu are, by the judgement of experienced anglers from around the world, among the finest **big game fishing grounds** on the East African coast a judgement backed by the remarkable diversity of species available and by the international recognition that Watamu has received as a game-fishing destination, including hosting **IGFA World Championship** tournaments.

What makes these waters exceptional is a combination of geography and oceanography: a series of **underwater mountains** (seamounts) that rise close to the shoreline concentrate bait fish and predators in numbers that the open ocean cannot match. **Black, blue and striped marlin, sailfish, broadbill swordfish and short-bill spearfish** a combination rarely found in such variety at any single location are regularly encountered. **Yellowfin tuna, wahoo, dorado and kingfish** complete a game fish menu of extraordinary range.

Hemingways Watamu the pioneer of **tag-and-release** fishing on the Kenyan coast maintains four dedicated game fishing vessels for full-day (10-hour) and half-day (5-hour) charters. Vard Africa arranges private fishing excursions departing just after sunrise when conditions are typically calmest and catches most reliable.

The **catch-and-cook** option bringing a yellowfin tuna back to be prepared as sashimi within the hour — is one of the most satisfying culinary conclusions to a Watamu fishing day.

2. A DAY IN MIDA CREEK

The Most Beautiful Tidal World on the North Coast

Mida Creek is one of Kenya's great ecological treasures a tidal inlet nearly four miles long, lined with dense mangrove forest, populated by extraordinary birdlife and animated by the constant rhythm of the tides. A full day on the creek beginning with a morning kayak through the mangrove channels, building through a midday exploration of the exposed mudflats, and concluding with the world-famous **Lichthaus sunset** is one of the most complete and most deeply satisfying natural experiences available on the Kenyan coast.

Morning: A guided kayak through the creek's mangrove channels, navigating the waterway as the tide rises and fills the forest. Kingfishers dart from branch to branch. **White pelicans** cruise overhead. Crab plovers work the tidal margins. The guide identifies the remarkable ecosystem the mangrove species, their specific ecological roles, the fish nurseries within their root systems, the crabs and mudskippers of the exposed flats with a knowledge that transforms the paddle into a genuine natural history encounter.

Afternoon: A **mangrove boardwalk walk** (accessible at certain tidal states) into the heart of the creek's interior. Or a visit to the **LOT Observation Tower** the Local Ocean Trust's remarkable vantage point above the creek for birdwatching with extraordinary scope and visibility.

Evening: The **Lichthaus sunset** (see separate listing) — the natural conclusion to any complete Mida Creek day, as the light that has been building all afternoon finally reaches its apotheosis over the water.

Vard Africa arranges full-day private Mida Creek programmes combining kayaking, boardwalk walking, guided birdwatching and the Lichthaus sunset in a single seamlessly organized day.

3. WELLNESS & YOGA RETREATS

The North Coast as a Natural Sanctuary for Mind, Body & Spirit

Watamu's combination of extraordinary natural environment the marine park, the creek, the forest, the quality of the coastal air and its exceptional accommodation infrastructure creates one of the finest settings for genuine wellness and yoga retreats available anywhere in East Africa.

Vard Africa curates **bespoke private wellness programmes** at Watamu's finest properties, combining professional yoga instruction on ocean-facing terraces at dawn (Lonno Lodge's elevated ocean terrace, Azura Villa's sundowner platform above the creek, Hemingways' botanical garden spaces are particularly beautiful yoga settings), meditation on the beach at low tide, guided mindfulness walks through the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, breathwork sessions in the mangrove shade at Mida Creek, and in-villa massage and spa treatments using locally sourced botanical oils.

For structured wellness programming, **Medina Palms' Sakina Ocean Spa** provides professional yoga and fitness sessions alongside the full range of therapeutic treatments. **Kilili Baharini's Kilili Spa Medical Life** in Malindi offers a more medically oriented wellness programme for

guests who want the depth of a true lifestyle reset. Palm Garden's **open-sided yoga space** hosts regular sessions for guests and can accommodate private instructor bookings.

Vard Africa's wellness retreats are fully bespoke — duration, modalities, practitioners and scheduling designed in advance in consultation with each guest to ensure complete alignment with their specific wellness goals.

4. KAYAKING

Paddle Through One of East Africa's Finest Waterways

Whether on **Mida Creek** where the mangrove channels, tidal flats and extraordinary birdlife provide a world of extraordinary ecological richness or on the **Indian Ocean lagoon** between the beach and the reef where the water is warm, calm and of a clarity that shows the reef world in vivid detail from above kayaking in Watamu provides one of the most rewarding and most immersive ways to experience the destination's dual character.

Vard Africa arranges **guided kayaking excursions** on both the creek and the ocean. Creek kayaking is conducted in traditional sit-on-top kayaks with naturalist guides who can interpret the ecosystem's extraordinary complexity; ocean kayaking is conducted in **glass-bottomed kayaks** available at Sirai Beach and other properties allowing guests to observe the coral and marine life beneath them as they paddle above it.

Sunset kayak on Mida Creek departing approximately one hour before sunset and paddling toward the Lichthaus as the light changes is the most magical of all the creek kayaking experiences, combining physical activity with one of Watamu's most beautiful natural spectacles.

5. STAND-UP PADDLEBOARDING (SUP)

The Ocean at Your Own Pace, on Your Own Terms

Stand-up paddleboarding on the **Watamu Marine Park lagoon** is one of the most meditative and most visually extraordinary watersport experiences available on the North Coast. The calm, warm, reef-protected waters between the beach and the reef create ideal paddling conditions almost no swell, consistent warmth throughout the year and a water clarity that makes the experience of standing above a living reef world one of genuine wonder.

From a paddleboard, guests can observe **reef fish shoals** beneath them, follow the movement of **rays** across the sandy floor, spot **sea turtles** surfacing nearby and explore the geography of the reef at a pace and in a manner that no motorised craft can match. The silence of a paddleboard contrasted with the engine noise of conventional tour boats allows for wildlife encounters of a depth and proximity that transform the experience.

Vard Africa arranges **private SUP sessions** with qualified instructors for beginners, and equipment for experienced paddlers who want self-directed lagoon exploration. Early morning when the water is at its calmest and the light is most beautiful is the optimal paddleboarding time at Watamu.

6. SUNSET DHOW CRUISES & SUNDOWNERS

The Traditional Sail, the Infinite Light

A sunset dhow cruise from Watamu is one of those experiences that combines the specific pleasures of the destination the marine environment, the quality of the light, the warmth of the Indian Ocean with the cultural heritage of the Swahili coast in a single, unified encounter. Traditional wooden dhows have been sailing these waters for a thousand years; to sail them at the hour when the Indian Ocean turns from gold to copper to rose is to participate in something ancient and enduring.

Vard Africa arranges **private sunset dhow cruises** on traditional vessels with experienced local captains, departing from Watamu beach and sailing south along the coast toward Mida Creek the most beautiful stretch of the cruising route, where the creek entrance and the mangrove silhouettes provide an extraordinary backdrop for the late-afternoon light. A fully stocked bar, Swahili snack board and the choice of watching the sunset from the open ocean or from within the creek mouth are all part of the Vard Africa arrangement.

The Lichthaus alternative — for guests who prefer the land-based creek sunset experience is covered separately below.

For Malindi-based guests, sunset dhow cruises north along the Malindi Marine National Park coast provide a different but equally beautiful perspective on the North Coast's extraordinary evening light.

7. THE GEDE RUINS

Walking Through 800 Years of Swahili History

The **Gede Ruins** located within the **Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Reserve**, just 20 kilometres south of Malindi and 2 kilometres from Watamu are among the most atmospherically remarkable archaeological sites in East Africa: the well-preserved remains of a substantial Swahili town that flourished between the **13th and 17th centuries** and was then, for reasons still incompletely understood by archaeologists, silently abandoned, leaving its mosques, palaces, houses and tombs to be gradually enclosed by the coastal forest.

The site covers approximately 45 acres and contains the ruins of a **great mosque**, a **palace**, **smaller mosques**, more than **a hundred houses** of varying size and social status, a complex **water management system** of wells and cisterns, and numerous **pillar tombs** the characteristic funerary architecture of the wealthy Swahili merchant class. The buildings are constructed from coral rag stone, and their survival over 800 years is a testament to the quality of Swahili architecture. The forest that has grown up around and within the ruins gives the site an extraordinary atmosphere light filtered through ancient trees, the calls of birds in the canopy, the sense of a world paused mid-sentence and waiting.

First noted as a **Historical Monument in 1927** and excavated extensively from 1948 onwards by the archaeologist James Kirkman, Gede is managed by **National Museums of Kenya** and has been consistently recognised as one of the most significant archaeological sites on the East African coast. It was visited by **Sir John Kirk** as early as 1884.

Vard Africa arranges **private guided visits** with specialist archaeologists and historians whose knowledge of the site's excavation history, the Chinese porcelain recovered from the palace, the Venetian glass bead found in the rubble, and the extraordinary social and commercial life of the Swahili city-state at its height adds immeasurably to the physical experience of walking through the ruins.

A visit to the ruins combined with a walk through the adjacent **Arabuko-Sokoke Forest** in search of the Clarke's Weaver, the Golden-rumped Elephant Shrew or the endangered Sokoke Scops Owl makes a full and deeply rewarding day from any Watamu or Malindi property.

8. HELL'S KITCHEN — THE MARAFA DEPRESSION

Kenya's Most Extraordinary Geological Wonder

"It looks like Kenya's answer to the Grand Canyon. But Kenya's Grand Canyon is in the middle of the coast. And it is on fire with colour at sunset." Vard Africa

Approximately **38 to 40 kilometres north-east of Malindi**, in the quiet rural settlement of **Marafa**, the earth opens. A vast **sandstone depression** formed by millennia of wind and rain erosion of what was once a continuous ridge reveals itself as a landscape so otherworldly, so saturated with colour, so complete in its geological drama that guests invariably fall silent when they first see it.

Known locally as **Nyari** — meaning *"the place that broke itself"* in Kigirama and by visitors as **Hell's Kitchen** (a name derived from the intense heat that accumulates in the canyon during midday), the Marafa Depression is a **sacred site of the local Giriama people**, who believe it is inhabited by ancestral spirits and who continue to attribute its formation to a divine punishment of a wealthy, wasteful family. The Giriama legend gives the landscape a cultural and spiritual dimension that the geology alone, extraordinary as it is, could not provide.

The formation reveals itself in horizontal strata of remarkable chromatic richness: **brilliant white** at the base (the oldest, most deeply weathered sandstone), transitioning through **pale cream** and **warm ochre** to **deep orange** and finally, at the upper edges where the more recently deposited sandstone is richest in iron, **deep crimson**. At sunset the optimal visiting time, when the low-angle light catches every surface and the colours reach their maximum intensity the canyon glows as if lit from within, and photographers who have travelled the world to see geological wonders describe it as among the most visually extraordinary natural landscapes they have encountered.

Vard Africa arranges **private guided excursions** to the Marafa Depression, departing from Malindi properties in the mid-to-late afternoon for arrival at the canyon by approximately 5:00 PM perfectly timed for the dramatic sunset experience.

Local Giriama guides lead guests along the canyon rim and down into its heart, sharing the geological narrative, the Giriama cultural history and the specific knowledge of how the colours change through the day that only those who have been coming here since childhood possess.

The excursion is combined, on request, with the **Mambrui sand dunes** in a comprehensive half-day North Coast natural wonders programme.

9. PRIVATE HELICOPTER EXCURSIONS

The North Coast from the Sky — A Perspective Like No Other

The extraordinary geography of the Watamu-Malindi coast the marine park bays, the Mida Creek tidal system with its mangrove forests and sandbanks, the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest canopy, the Malindi Marine National Park reef, the Marafa Depression from above is one of the most visually spectacular landscapes on the Kenyan coast when seen from the air. Private helicopter excursions provide this aerial perspective in conditions of complete exclusivity, combining the thrill of flight with the extraordinary natural and cultural geography of the North Coast.

Vard Africa arranges **private helicopter excursions** from both Watamu and Malindi in a range of configurations:

The North Coast Overview (60 minutes) — Departing from Malindi Airport or a villa helipad, the overview follows the coastline from the Kilifi Creek in the south to the Tana River delta in the north, covering the Watamu Marine Park bays, Mida Creek and the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest canopy in a single sweeping arc.

The view of Mida Creek from above the mangroves, the tidal channels, the sandbanks and the open Indian Ocean beyond is one of the most beautiful coastal aerial views in East Africa.

The Geological Wonders Flight (90 minutes) — Extending the overview to include a low-altitude pass over the Marafa Depression and the Mambrui sand dunes geological formations that are already extraordinary on the ground and reveal an entirely different character from above, their shapes and colour gradients visible as a continuous pattern rather than a sequence of individual features.

The Sunrise Safari (45 minutes) — A dawn departure that catches the extraordinary quality of the North Coast's early morning light the mangroves silver in the mist, the reef visible in the turquoise shallows, the beach utterly deserted, the quality of the coastal light at that hour genuinely sublime.

The Lamu Connection — For guests extending their Kenyan coastal journey to Lamu, a private helicopter transfer from Malindi or Watamu to Lamu Island provides an aerial perspective on the Lamu Archipelago approach one of the most beautiful arrival experiences available anywhere on the coast.

Lonno Lodge's own **private helipad** accepts guest arrivals by helicopter; all other Watamu and Malindi properties have access to the Malindi Airport helipad with road transfer. All helicopter operations are conducted by certified, licensed operators with full safety compliance.

10. MAMBRUI SAND DUNES

An Unexpected Natural Marvel — Sand Dunes on the Indian Ocean Coast

Mambrui is a small, largely undiscovered coastal village approximately **15 kilometres north of Malindi town** a place of quiet fishing community life, ancient Swahili graves, a 15th-century mosque of considerable historical significance and, rising behind its beach, one of Kenya's most unexpected natural phenomena: **vast sand dune formations** of extraordinary beauty.

The **Mambrui sand dunes** — formed by coastal wind action over centuries along this particular stretch of coast where the beach is widest and the offshore conditions most conducive to sand movement rise to considerable height behind a beach of pristine whiteness and almost total isolation. The combination of the white dunes, the beach and the Indian Ocean creates a landscape of striking visual contrast reminiscent, in the best possible way, of desert coastal environments far removed from Kenya's tropical coast. Walking the dunes particularly at the golden hours of morning or late afternoon when the light is oblique and the sand takes on a warm, sculptural quality is one of those experiences that produces photographs completely unlike anything else guests bring back from the Kenyan coast.

Vard Africa arranges **private Mambrui excursions** that combine the sand dune walk with a visit to the **15th-century Mambrui Mosque** one of the oldest surviving mosques on the North Coast, its coral stone architecture reflecting the ancient Arab influence on this coastline and the opportunity to meet the fishing community of Mambrui and understand the way of life that has continued here, largely undisturbed by tourism, for centuries. The excursion is most powerful when combined with a visit to the **Marafa Depression** in a single half-day programme that covers the full range of the North Coast's most extraordinary inland and coastal natural wonders.

11. LICHTHAUS WATAMU

Where the Sun Drops Into Mida Creek — Kenya's Most Beautiful Sunset Experience

There are bars with beautiful views. And then there is **Lichthaus** a category of its own, an experience that has become one of the defining moments of any Watamu visit and that guests return to seek for years after their first encounter.

Lichthaus is a **floating bar and restaurant** operated by Temple Point Resort, positioned at the edge of **Mida Creek** with seating on **nets suspended directly above the water** so that guests are, quite literally, sitting above the creek's extraordinary tidal ecosystem, watching the fish move beneath them in the clear water while the mangroves frame the horizon and the setting sun begins its final descent.

The magic of Lichthaus is inseparable from its setting and its specific daily event. As the afternoon progresses, the light over Mida Creek begins to change from the harsh directness of midday to the soft amber of late afternoon to the extraordinary, saturated gold of the last hour before sunset. At this point the creek reflects the sky in a continuous, shimmering surface of colour, the mangroves silhouette against the light, and the whole extraordinary ecosystem of Mida Creek performs its daily finale in conditions of complete natural theatre.

Lichthaus provides the ideal position for this spectacle: the nets above the water, the cold cocktails in hand (the Sundrop Lager, brewed exclusively for Lichthaus, is a Watamu institution), the daily BBQ of fresh-caught, made-to-order fish, the signature cocktails of the bar's considerable repertoire. Live jazz concerts and stargazing events are held on special evenings.

Practical Note: Lichthaus is extremely popular and reservations are essential, particularly in high season. Vard Africa secures all reservations through our Watamu concierge network and arranges the most advantageous timing arriving approximately one hour before sunset, when the light is beginning to build and the best tables on the nets above the water are still available.

Access is possible by road (follow Marine Park Road to Temple Point Resort's yellow signs) or more dramatically **by boat from any Watamu beach property**. The boat arrival at Lichthaus approaching the floating bar from the creek itself, mooring alongside and stepping onto the nets with the water beneath you is the most complete and most memorable version of the experience. Vard Africa arranges private boat access as part of any Watamu programme.

GETTING THERE & LOGISTICAL SUPPORT

Air Access

- ✓ **Malindi Airport (MYD)** is the primary and most convenient air access point for both Watamu and Malindi. Multiple daily scheduled flights operate from **Nairobi's Wilson Airport** with Safarilink and Skyward Express, with a flight time of approximately **55 to 70 minutes**.

From Malindi Airport, Watamu properties are approximately **20 to 30 minutes by road**; Malindi properties are **5 to 15 minutes by road**.

- ✓ **Private charter flights** from Wilson Airport or Jomo Kenyatta International Airport can be arranged for direct delivery to Malindi Airport. For guests combining Watamu or Malindi with Lamu, Malindi Airport serves as the transit point for both onward and return flights.
- ✓ **Helicopter access** is available to properties with dedicated helipads (Lonno Lodge) and to Malindi Airport for road transfers to any property.
- ✓ **Mombasa International Airport (MBA)** is an alternative gateway for guests arriving on international flights who prefer the road journey (approximately 2 to 2.5 hours) or who want to combine a Mombasa city visit with their North Coast journey.

Road Access

Watamu is approximately **2 hours by road** from Mombasa and **6 hours** from Nairobi via Mombasa. From Kilifi (south), the road distance to Watamu is approximately **1 hour**. Vard Africa arranges all private road transfers in comfortable, air-conditioned vehicles with experienced drivers.

Vard Africa Logistical Support-Vard Africa provides end-to-end logistical support for all Watamu and Malindi journeys, including private charter bookings, property meet-and-greet at Malindi Airport, all activity coordination, in-destination 24-hour support and emergency protocol coverage.

Best Time to Visit.

- ✓ **October to March** — Whale shark season. Peak beach weather. Finest diving and snorkelling visibility. High season — book well in advance.
- ✓ **July to September** — Humpback whale season. Cooler, drier weather. Beautiful light. The most dramatic marine spectacle of the year.
- ✓ **December to March** — Finest beach conditions. Warmest water temperatures. High season.
- ✓ **April to June** — Long rains. Some properties close or offer reduced rates. Generally, avoid for beach holidays; the forest and creek environments are particularly beautiful in this season.