

MY GETAWAY

Ardina Strüwer's love of wildlife, photography and solitude sends her in search of deserted paradise... Little did she realise she could have all three!

"Would you like to go on *safari* or would you prefer to go to the beach?" was the question I was asked. My boyfriend and I had some time off and both wanted to get away from Nairobi. We thought long and hard about what we preferred to do. I had read about great getaways on the Kenyan coast; I'd also heard about Tana Delta Camp not far from Malindi which had the perfect empty beach that we were both longing for. What we *didn't* know was that it was going to give us both: *safari and beach*.

Getting to Tana Delta Camp takes some time and effort. Of course, if you have the budget, you could always rent a plane and land on the beach as the camp is just a 10-minute flight from Malindi. We found that driving for an hour on tarmac from Malindi, followed by an hour off road slaloming around palm trees, passing villagers with cattle until you reach the river, was a perfect way to unwind.

We were met by a small motorboat that took us the final 30 minutes down the maze of the Delta passing a family of hippo, lazy crocodiles and several interesting and some rare birds. Having never been particularly interested in birds, I found myself looking out for them; the word bird-watching took on a whole new meaning here.

Tana Delta Camp, with its six thatched cottages, is situated at the mouth of the Tana River which joins the Indian Ocean. On one side of the Camp the river meanders gently past the tents and on the other side lies the open sea with its endless beach. Staying here is about kicking off your shoes and playing Robinson Crusoe. Walking for miles on the seemingly endless beach searching for shells and oddly-shaped driftwood, deep-sea fishing, boat trips to see hippo or take therapeutic mud-baths.

South African-born Renaldo Retief is the man who during the sixties found this extraordinary piece of paradise. This area was famous for its great

population of Elephant. Renaldo's brother-in-law, at the time a professional hunter, brought him to explore it and setting up a tented camp on the sand dunes here gave birth to the idea of creating a lodge.

Today the tents have been replaced with attractive palm-thatched cottages, built with driftwood and a variety of natural materials washed up by the sea. Just above the camp a small fresh water swimming pool provided the ideal respite from the oppressive heat of the afternoon.

I found staying here a privilege: to be in such a remote and unspoiled place. Of course the friendly welcome from Renaldo, barefoot with kikoy around his waist added to the informal ambience of this idyllic Robinson Crusoe hideaway.

Nothing could have prepared me for the view from our cottage overlooking the Delta. We were able to see for miles and miles without a single road, telephone-line or sign of human settlement. The *banda* had practically no walls with open verandah from where we could sit and soak in the wonderful views across the river. All bathrooms had hot water and flushing loos, and even *they* had a view!

At the very top of the sand dune, some 50 metres from our cottage, lunch was served under a castaway-like pagoda. From here, sitting at our table feasting on succulent ginger crab, fresh prawns and mango-salsa, we had a 360-degree panoramic view over the Delta and Indian Ocean.

Tana Delta Camp is the perfect place for walking. We wandered for hours along the 20 miles of deserted beach, bumping into shy bushbuck that quickly disappeared behind the dunes. There is not a lot one can say about the beach. The curve of sand, flanked by majestic sand dunes on one side and the surf of the Indian Ocean on the other, stretches as far as the eye can see and is yours to wander.

The sea is warm and the surf rolls across a gently sloping beach. For those who enjoy beach combing there is an internationally stocked surf line where

PHOTOGRAPHS: ARDINA STRÜWER





ACCOMMODATION

Each cottage has been designed to blend into the environment and has been artfully constructed and furnished from an array of flotsam from the beach. Great care has been taken to ensure that all the cottages have their own private views making you feel that you are the only person in Africa...

Whilst the cottages have a castaway ambience, they also house all the comforts of modern-day living. Beds fashioned from driftwood are covered with large cotton mosquito nets, bathrooms have flush loos and hot showers and cold drinks will be delivered to your verandah when you need them.

Six cottages (four with king-size beds in spacious open room with ensuite bathroom and small lounge area).

Two cottages are larger family units with two rooms, one with king-size bed and the other with two singles and ensuite shower.

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truly exquisite pieces are available and always appreciated and utilised back at the Lodge!

The highlight of our stay here, besides the astonishing views and remoteness, was a boat trip down the Tana to see huge pods of Hippo and several Crocodile basking on the sandy banks. Wading through a half-drowned landscape at high tide into an impressive mangrove forest was magical. As the bush grew thicker we reached a spot where we had to change boats. We crossed a field and continued the boat-ride along another branch of the river. This time in an open landscape with an incredible variety of birds from Pied and Malachite Kingfishers and African Fish Eagles, to Grey Herons and White-Throated Bee-Eaters. Above all though, it was the hippo that caught my attention most.

Imagine 100 or so heads sticking out of the water, grunting noisily. Some very close, some with their huge mouths open. As the light started to fade we headed back to the Camp. The day after we were going to have to leave this amazing camp but next time I know where to go when we can't choose between beach and safari. ☑

Tana Delta Camp was set up as a community conservation project to protect the surrounding wetland area and local Orma and Pokomo peoples. The community benefits from each visit that is made by visitors to the camp.

Visit www.tanadelta.org for more information.

TANA RIVER

The Tana River is Kenya's largest: its source lies far to the east of the Delta in the Aberdare Mountains and the peaks of Mount Kenya. Having travelled over 1,000 kilometres, the river then meanders across a flood plain on the northern edges of the conservation project.

The main river is lined with thick riverine forest boasting huge fig and palm trees. Explorable by boat from the camp, these deep forests team with interesting birdlife and often shelter Buffalo, Elephant, Hippo and Nile Crocodile as well as a host of smaller, shyer antelope and primates.

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