

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Kipungani invests in its future by ensuring nature's balance

"Five-star Robinson Crusoe" – BBC

"The most laid-back lodge in Africa" - Daily Telegraph (London)

"Some of the most glamorous beach huts in the world" – The Guardian

The stunning resort at Kipungani on Kenya's Lamu Island today announced its commitment to the future of Kenya's tourism industry by committing to a long-term plan that will ensure that only local staff and materials are used in the development and maintenance of its property. Already considered the finest property on Lamu, this five-star property has proven that it doesn't require giant generators, imported foods, or state-of-the-art gadgets to keep guests happy.

The stunning bandas, cushion-piled driftwood furniture, attentive staff, and spectacularly good seafood have ensured that guests return again and again. "Talking to people in the village next door, you get the impression that this lodge is the best thing that ever happened to them," said a recent guest.

In a country that is enjoying a major tourism renaissance, with international visitor numbers nearly doubling since 2001, much of Kenya's coastal tourism continues to be concentrated on the large beach resorts around Mombasa and Malindi, which famously line the pockets of a few wealthy directors with minimal benefits to the poor fishing communities. At Kipungani, however, these benefits are never in doubt. The lodge buys all of its seafood from Kipungani's fishermen, repairs its seven boats in their boatyards, and hires local craftsmen to weave the *makuti* thatch and *makeka* palm from which its Crusoesque bandas are constructed.

Kipungani's close relations with the community also offer unique opportunities to join local fishermen in their acrobatic attempts to catch giant crabs in the Lamu channel, as well as trips north into the sprawling Dadori reserve, where Kipungani's fishermen net and sun-dry prawns for sale in the markets of Mombasa.

Mohamed Islam, a Kipungani employee and former chairman of the village's education committee, says the lodge has also given local residents a new reason to stay: "Before, a lot of people were leaving for Mombasa and Malindi. But now that people can get jobs here, or do other work like weaving (for the lodge's bandas), more and more people are staying."

Kipungani's new manager, Sebastian Chambers, is at pains to point out that the lodge is not so much an ecotourism champion as an up-and-coming challenger. "We're just starting to get the balance right," he says. "My predecessors, Louis and Mary Jo van Aardt and Eric Munyasia, were responsible for putting up the school and the clinic. Now, we're working to consolidate on these projects by creating a more comprehensive long-term partnership with the community – expanding our local staff, giving them more training opportunities, looking for donors to fund agricultural and environmental projects that genuinely benefit the community."

Sebastian's own background as a mechanical engineer will stand him in good stead for some of Heritage's longer-term goals, such as running Kipungani entirely on solar and wind power. The lodge already has several innovative ways of minimising its environmental impact, such as using black reinforced-plastic bags for heating its shower water and planting indigenous trees to provide poles for future construction.

For more information on Kipungani, please contact Heritage Hotels on 254-20-4446651, mail info@heritagehotels.co.ke, or visit our website at www.heritage-eastafrika.com.