

Anniversary | DESTINATION

The reflection of the flood-lit facade of the resort in the pool; a beach bum's paradise (below)



THIS TIME FOR AFRICA





FORGET THE WILDEBEEST MIGRATION
AND OUTDO THE OVERLY DONE.
CHUMKI BHARADWAJ REPLAYS KENYA.

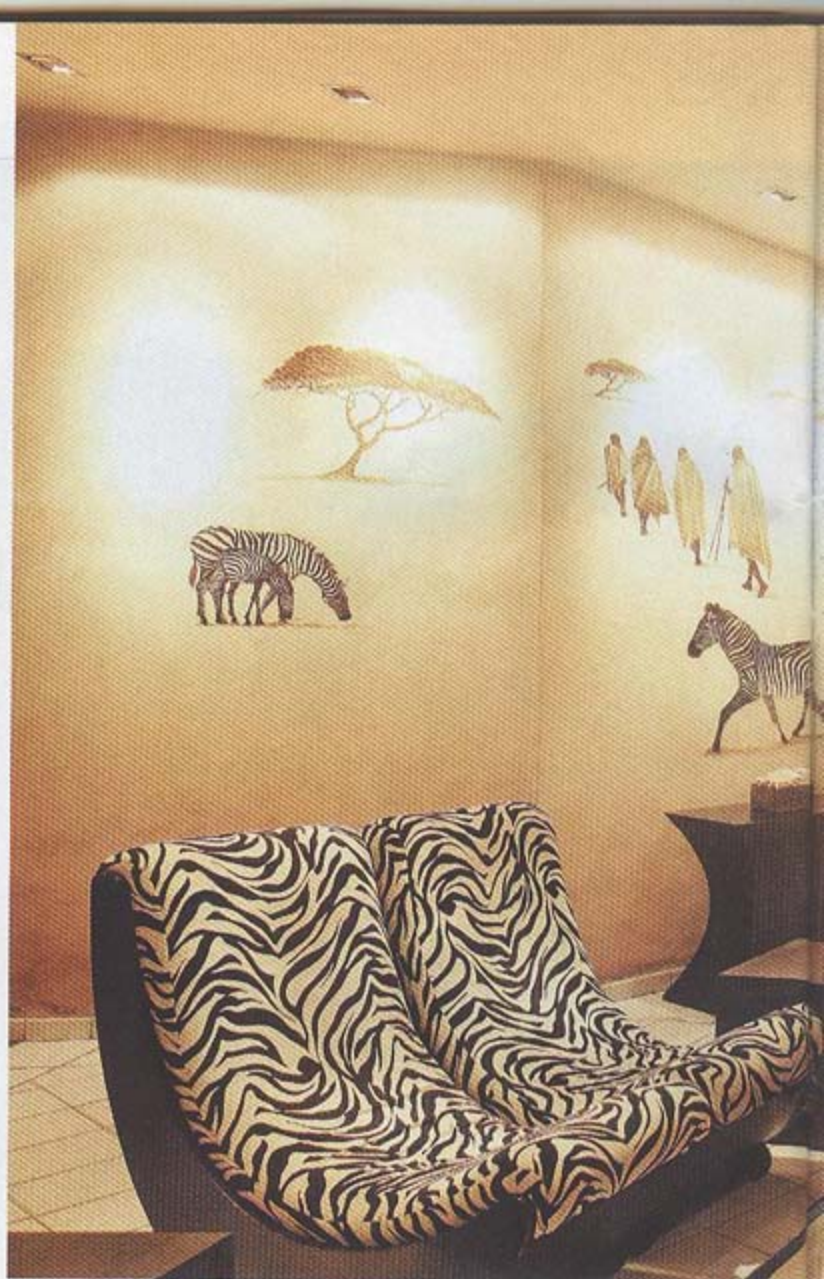
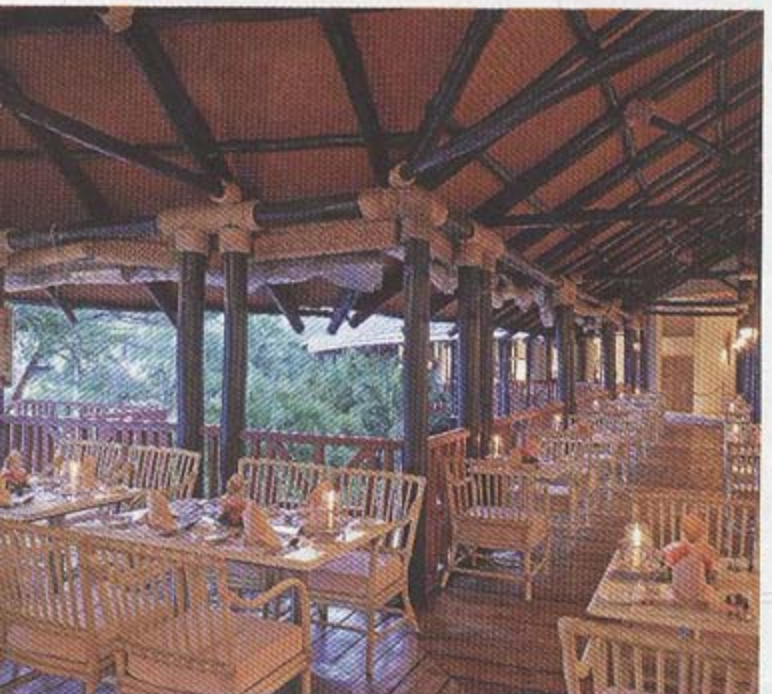
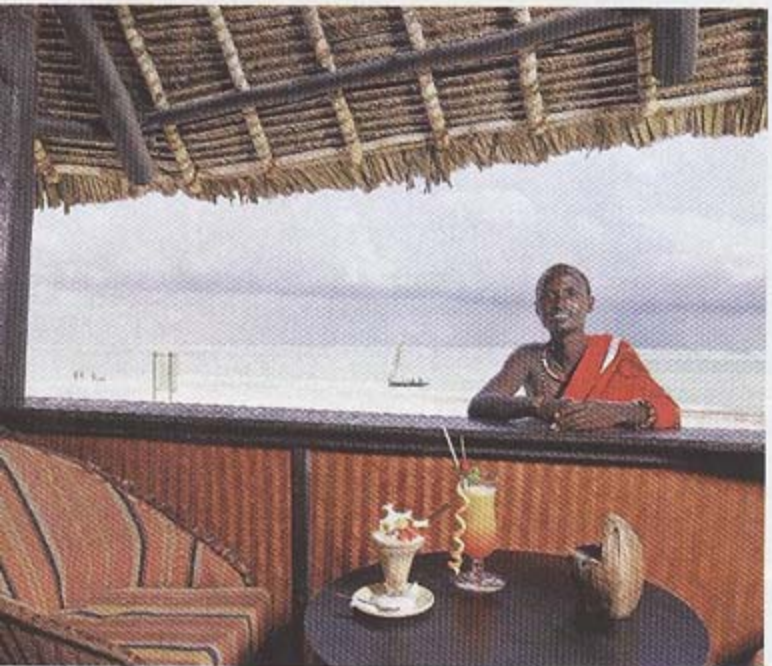
Drunk on the scent of Frangipani; drenched with the rubescent hues of the Masai and overgrown with friendly locals, Kenya is the Dark Continent's favourite bedtime story. More feet-on-the-ground than head-in-the clouds, Kenya unfurls on the edge of the exotic: 700 km of coastline, broken only by white silken beaches, sheltered lagoons, remote islands, and uncharted mangrove swamps. Suitably furtive despite an overt endorsement of the National Geographic brand of tourism, it is this sliver of magical realism that makes its wild seem tame and its exotica almost homely.

Nothing captures this spirit of dichotomy better than the sun-kissed Diani Reef Beach Resort, nestled enviably on Diani beach, 25 miles south of Mombassa (Kenya's largest port). The recently renovated resort (flagship property of the Zuri Hotels chain) is a whimsical blend of modern boutique hotel, African décor and beach languor.

The living areas are airy, spacious and flirt with the elements. From the high rafted ceilings at the entrance to the koi pond visible through the transparent glass floor of the reception to the 300-year-old Baobab tree that frames the courtyard, the outdoors seamlessly conjoins with the inhabited spaces.

While the jewelled setting of the Indian Ocean, the backdrop of a coral reef and 30 acres of lush environs, are bait enough, it's the sheer magnificence of the hospitality and service that is overwhelming. Exemplary service is best compli-

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Clockwise from top: the Zebra and Piano Bar and Lounge; a married couple takes a walk on the beach; the Coral Bar at sunset; the jewelled tone of the ocean, viewed from the Fins SeaFood & Grill restaurant; sunbathing tourist

mented by exceptional food; with three restaurants serving diverse cuisines and five bars, choice is clearly plentiful at Diani.

The Coral Rock Café puts out an extravagant buffet, which includes live cooking for breakfast, lunch and dinner; while the Oriental Restaurant, Sake, specialises in Indian, Chinese and Japanese cuisine with a Tepenyaki table. The Fins Seafood Restaurant & Grill serves up the catch of the day with a tantalising array of sizzling fresh fish and meat as well as Mediterranean dishes.

The Coral Bar, situated on the deck of the Coral Rock Café, is the perfect perch for sundowners and sunset watching since it overlooks the pool as well as the beach. For water babies, the Pool Bar, located in an island at the pool, serves exotic cocktails that set the mood for the evening and the anticipation of heightened pleasures. The Dune's Night Spot Bar, adjacent to the Fins Seafood & Grill, is the twilight zone that breeds party with a live band and a swinging crowd. The Piano Lounge and Zebra Bar centred in the heart of the property has a vantage view of the pool, the beach and most of the public areas; it includes a library facility as well as well as a cigar and liqueur's corner. Better still, it's the only WiFi zone in the hotel and thus plays host to all creatures who can't seem to disconnect.

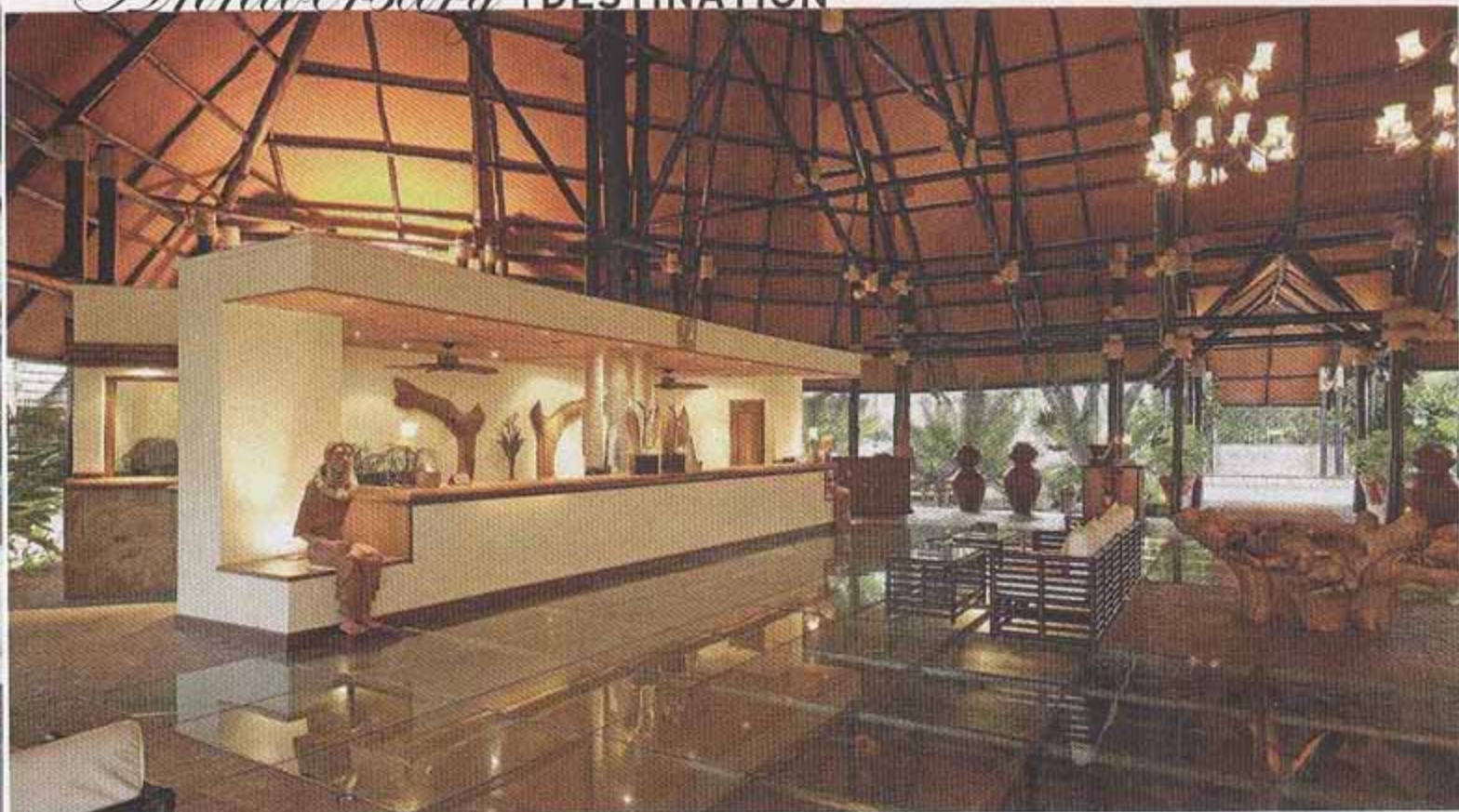


The Sports Bar, equipped with live satellite television, is ideal for those who prefer games to real sport. The hotel also organises exciting theme nights in the garden areas and along the beachfront. Fridays, for instance, is reserved for the Masai flea market on the front lawns. Be prepared to bargain, for survival techniques aren't the only skill the Masai have honed over the years. For those with an eye for beauty and a whimsical taste for handcrafted curios are likely to go bankrupt.

Those who feel compelled to explore beyond the depths of their credit card can fish for excitement in the glistening aquamarine of the Indian Ocean. Once you sign up, remember, relaxation is reserved only for the afterlife. Tempt fate on an elaborate sailing trip on the high seas in an Arab dhow or skim the waves on jetskis. Enjoy the gush of the warm seas and the beautiful coral reefs by snorkelling or scuba diving up close and personal with the deep blue or simply cruise in a glass bottomed boat for the same view with lesser effort.

Prefer your entertainment on terra firma? Try the safari to the Shimba Hills which is a picturesque drive and a great way to encounter the endangered Sable antelope. Culture vultures can visit bordering villages, watch demonstrations of food preparations and savour creekside barbecue lunches. For history enthusiasts of course, there are plenty of old forts and ruins to get gritty with.

If the grime of ancient quarters and lost cities exacts a toll, rejuvenate, refresh and relax at Diani's famed Maya Spa. From basic re-



A junior suite (left); the Khoi pond distracts from beneath the transparent glass floors of the reception (above)

FACT FILE

Rooms & suites: 143

Location: 34 km from Mombasa

Closest airhead: Ukunda

Getting there: Daily charters from Nairobi to Ukunda

Tariff: Kshs 20,000-26,000 (Standard to deluxe room)

Penthouse suite: Kshs 125,000 all rates are calculated on the basis of double occupancy

laxation with sauna, jacuzzi spa baths and floatation pools, its expansive therapies include baths, massages, hydrotherapy and aromatherapy. Go on a soul vacation with their bodywraps, skin-care treatments and extensive range of sea-salt peels and sea-weed wraps; bliss is just two doors away.

With exclusivity and enigma as its mapping address, romance is the most obvious byproduct and Diani's imprimatur. For mooning couples, the hotel has set up a private island that transforms into a wedding Xanadu for those with a penchant for panache. Idyllic and imaginative, marriages aren't the only bonds you forge here. ✨