

# Lamu Island



## Further Links

- Tropical, sandy beaches.
- No cars!
- Lamu town is a World Heritage Site.
- Lots of water-based activities, such as sailing and fishing.

## Situation

Lamu is an archipelago in the Indian Ocean on Kenya's northern coast.

## Activities

Relaxing beach holidays; watersports such as sailing, diving, snorkelling, fishing, boat trips; village visits.

Lamu Island has a relaxed and sleepy atmosphere, making it a wonderful place to relax and make the most of the stunning scenery, sweeping beaches, rolling sand dunes and warm Indian Ocean. The ocean continues to play a vital role in the life and livelihood of Lamu, and traditional sailing dhows abound. A trip on one of these wooden boats offers a highly relaxing way to explore the area, travelling to neighbouring islands and fishing villages.

Snorkelling is excellent in the waters off Lamu and the surrounding archipelago, which teem with vibrant marine life. Diving is becoming increasingly popular here, and many superb sites remain relatively unexplored.

Over a thousand years of East African, Omani, Yemeni, Indian, Portuguese and Victorian British influences have all left their mark on Lamu Island, in the architecture, the language and the very essence of the place. In bustling Lamu, winding alleys lead past the intricate carved doorways of white stone houses -some of which are truly majestic and still home to the very wealthy. And, because the alleys are too narrow to be negotiated by cars, the modern world has had little visible impact on this historic town.

Life appears little changed since Lamu was a busy port town in the 14th century, donkeys remain the preferred local mode of transport, and the streets are lit by lanterns after nightfall. Spices and the smell of grilled food scent the air around the markets, mosques, museums, fort and ancient houses, and exploring Lamu on foot - or donkey - is a treat for all the senses. Sitting at an open-air restaurant by the water and watching the world go by is an irresistible past-time. Fishermen haul their catches ashore, locals walk or

ride by, donkeys carry their cargo. Shopping for local woodcarvings and curios is another enjoyable experience.

The other main town on Lamu Island, **Shela**, is a 10-minute boat ride from Lamu. It lacks the vibrancy of Lamu town, but is beautiful; smaller, quieter and more elegant than Lamu - and distinctly more upmarket.

### **Manda Island**

The airstrip for Lamu Island is on Manda Island, and visitors reach Lamu by boat. Manda itself is also fascinating. Huge baobab trees dominate the skyline, and the ruins of Takwa, a 16th-century Swahili settlement can be found after negotiating a thick mangrove swamp. This unspoilt island, which has been visited by Arab traders in their dhows for centuries, lies in calm inshore waters on a long protected beach of white sand. There are creeks and other tiny islands to explore, and big game fishing can be arranged.

### **Kiwayu**

Furthest north in the Lamu archipelago is the lovely island of Kiwayu. This remote paradise is also dominated by giant baobab trees, and its beaches are believed to be amongst the best in Kenya.

