The Kenyan Queen
As Britain and the Commonwealth celebrate their Queen’s Diamond Jubilee, we tell how it all started right here in Kenya in a tree...

Tanzania’s Chumbe Island
The first privately managed marine conservation area in the world
our opening shot

A misty moody Soysambu from the air. Read all about The Sleeping Warrior on page 16.
June 2012 travel news 3

A misty moody Soysambu from the air. Read all about The Sleeping Warrior on page 16. A competition even...
RIDING FOR THE DISABLED FOOD FAIR

Date: Saturday, June 30th 2012
Venue: The Talisman Restaurant, Karen
Time: 10am-5pm

ENTRANCE
200/- per person
Free Under 12 years

CHOCOLATE DESSERT COMPETITION
CHILDREN'S CORNER
WINE TASTING
MICRO BEER TASTING
FOOD SAMPLING
LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTS STALL

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FAREED KHIMANI
Presenter, XFM

BARRY TONKS
Executive Chef of the
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will be one of the judges

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the news 7
the sleeping warrior 16
miscellaneous ramblings 20
wine of the month 22
residents specials 24
in days gone by 26
chumbe 28
the inside edge 48
guest photo gallery 50
olarro 56
coastal currents 64
book reviews 66
speaker’s corner 68

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June 2012 travel news 5
Greetings and welcome to the 21st digital edition of Travel News.

In this edition we tell of three vastly different destinations in Kenya. The new Sleeping Warrior Camp in the Soysambu Conservancy has an appeal all of its own - Jane Barsby weaves a remarkable story. Melissa Wilken visits Olarro near the Masai Mara, a great story with brilliant images. What is not said is that it is for sale at a bargain basement price - if interested please get in touch.

We welcome back Anthea Rowan who visits a place she can now tick off her bucket list - Chumbe Island off Zanzibar. I'm enticed, I'm going - you should to.

In the Commonwealth and in the UK June is of course all about the Queens Diamond Jubilee and we have the story from where it all started. Treetops in Kenya. Juliet Barnes tells the story in ‘Days Gone By..’ The lovely old images bring the story to life.

All of the above plus our Resident Specials, our Guest Photographer, and our columnists all make for an interesting read.

We’ve gone retail by offering our readers a very special deal, not on travel but our new wine-of-the-month feature.

You can only buy it here and nowhere else in Kenya with FREE delivery. So what are you waiting for?

Enjoy

Tony Clegg-Butt
Qatar Airways Adds Flights To Mombasa and Kilimanjaro

Flights to Tanzania’s safari gateway of Kilimanjaro near Arusha have been reconfirmed to take place on 25th July. The daily flights will be an extension of one of the two daily flights between Doha to Nairobi, and is expected to boost not only seat capacity, of crucial importance to the safari sector in Tanzania, but also increase global visibility for the country through added promotions and targeted marketing across the airline’s network.

Again, tourism stakeholders in Mombasa are excited about the prospects of having the airline commencing daily scheduled flights to the coast and several have already expressed their interest to join hands with the airline to promote the destination with special initiatives.

Other destinations announced were Erbil and Baghdad in Iraq, Perth in Australia and Myanmar’s capital Yangon, while in Europe Croatia’s capital Zagreb will be added, to be served via Budapest.

For more information click HERE

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ground floor location - no parking hassles - garden setting - great staff - TCB in residence

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Kempinski Comes To Kenya

The long awaited announcement has been made today that Kempinski has signed a management agreement with the locally incorporated Simba Corporation for a 200 suite and room hotel in the heart of Nairobi, Kenya’s capital, in addition to which a luxurious safari camp will be opened on the Olare Orok Conservancy, adjoining the Masai Mara Game Reserve.

The Nairobi Kempinski will be a fully fledged 5-star luxury hotel, bringing the Kempinski pedigree at last to Kenya, after withdrawing last year from Tanzania. The new hotels, due to be opened later in 2012, will offer state-of-the-art meeting and conferencing facilities, very ‘posh’ restaurants and lounges, and a ballroom without the often disturbing pillars. It has been ascertained that the luxurious tented safari camp will not be a new build but rather a makeover of a present camp to Kempinski’s high standards and is set on the banks of the Ntiakintiak River in the Olare Orok Conservancy adjacent to the Masai Mara national reserve.

Click HERE to visit Kempinski website
NEW!

KLM’s Facebook/LinkedIn Meet & Seat

This interesting development lets you find out about interesting people who will be on board your KLM flight such as other passengers attending the same event as you at your destination.

Simply share your Facebook or LinkedIn profile through the ‘Manage My Booking’ tab on the KLM website. Here you can check other passengers’ shared Facebook and LinkedIn profile details to see where they’ll be sitting. If interested you can then choose your own seat next to them.

KLM will not use your profile details for any other purpose than Meet & Seat, nor will they share your details with third parties. Your details will be removed automatically 48 hours after your flight has departed.

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For more information or promotional offers, please visit qatarairways.com

World’s 5-star airline.
British & Irish Lions Tour
Australia 2013

Ticket for this tour’s three Test matches are long sold out. However all is not lost.

Uniglobe Lets Go Sports have packaged the three Test matches into modules to include two-nights hotel only accommodation in either Brisbane, Melbourne or Sydney; plus Test match tickets which can be upgraded at additional cost. Also included is a 90-minute pre-match party at each Test. Plus on-site staff.

First Test 22nd June - Brisbane. From AU$ 754 per person sharing.

Second Test 29th June - Melbourne. From AU$ 788 per person sharing.

Third Test 6th July - Sydney. From AU$ 765 per person sharing.

Airline tickets from Nairobi to all three venues from US$ 2,456.

For more information click HERE

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Your Invitation 2
Spotlight on Africa Travel Show

Thursday - 7th June
Southern Sun Mayfair Hotel, Westlands
From 4.30 - 7.30 p.m

The Spotlight on Africa & Indian Ocean Islands show promotes business and leisure travel from KENYA to the Rest of Africa and the Indian Ocean Islands….as well as domestic tourism and conferences.

Meet 20 exhibitors promoting South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Mauritius and Zanzibar. Here you can network with hotel groups, tour operators, beach resorts, tourist offices and safari lodges, update your knowledge, learn about new developments and negotiate rates. Spotlight is an excellent opportunity to assist you to plan business trips in Africa or to search for an exotic conference venue or incentive destination.

ENTRANCE is FREE of charge and refreshments will be served. If you cannot attend in the evening there is also a morning session from 8:30 a.m. to noon to include breakfast.

Exhibitors:

South Africa - Durban Tourism; RadissonBlu Sandton; Sandton Convention Centre; South Point Hospitality; Southern Sun Hotels; Syavaya Travel & Tours; InterContinental Hotel Sandton; Rovos Rail

Zambia - Taj Pamodzi

Zimbabwe - African Albid

Mauritius - Sofitel Hotels & Resorts

Zanzibar - Blue Bay Hotels; Karafuu Beach Resort Hotel; Breezes Zanzibar Collection

Mozambique - The Mozambique Roadshow (representing 12 hotels and resorts)

Kenya - Enashipai Resort & Spa; Sarova Hotels; Southern Sun Hotel; Palacina; Heritage Hotels; Kenya Tourist Board

It is very important that you register to attend.

Click HERE to register
Kids Holiday Sports Camps

Big Hill Holiday Camps, a new initiative from Pembroke House School, will run from Monday 13th August to Sunday 19th August 2012 for boys and girls aged 8 to 14. The camp is timed to fall in the middle of the long school holidays, when many parents are looking for something exciting to offer their children.

They have put together an awesome outdoor activity programme that will have children coming back for more. Big Hill gives children a chance to gain confidence through experience, meet and make new friends, develop new skills, challenge themselves through adventure and realise their abilities. Jim Ross, ably assisted by Pembroke House staff, will lead the camp.

The week-long camp will primarily be a boarding camp with non-boarding being an option for those that live nearby. Children will use Pembroke's excellent boarding facilities, a home away from home.

How Much? The full week (6 days, 6 nights), fully inclusive boarding Kshs. 50,000/-, non-boarding (no overnight stays) Kshs. 42,500/-.

A bus is available to collect children from convenient locations in Nairobi and Nanyuki to bring them to the camp. Cost one-way Kshs. 1,500/- from Nairobi and 2,500/- from Nanyuki.

Click HERE for more information.

Where To Now, KQ?

Kenya Airways continues its dizzy expansion with new destinations to include Delhi and Kilimanjaro. Flights to Rome will be re-instated from 17th June with thrice-weekly non-stop flights to the Italian capital.

The airline also revealed a new ambitious major expansion plan that by 2017 will see it flying to both North and South America and Australia.

China will see additional flights to Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Chongqing, Xiamen, Kunming and Urunqi in addition to the present daily flights to Guangzhou.

Additionally six new routes to India will be launched plus three elsewhere in Asia.

Its network will rise from the present 56 destinations to 115 and its passenger fleet will triple to 107 aircraft.

Go KQ Go....

Southern Mombasa By-Pass

Kenya has secured a Kshs. 30 billion loan from Japan to build the Dongo Kundu bypass that will help speed up traffic in the Mombasa area. The Mombasa Port Area Development Project is designed to eliminate congestion on the Makupa Causeway, Nyali Bridge and the Likoni Ferry.
The first phase will be a 17.5 kilometre bypass from Miritini, west of Moi International Airport, through the proposed new port then south to Vumirirani on the A14 Coast Road. The second phase will be the re-carpeting of link roads on the North Coast and Mombasa Island.

“The project will significantly decongest the city of Mombasa by providing alternative options to the Likoni ferry by linking the mainland to the South Coast... and complement the ongoing expansion of the Mombasa port, which will greatly benefit the tourism sector,” said Finance minister Njeru Githae.

**Virgin On The Rocks**

Virgin Atlantic is giving Upper Class passengers the chance to cool their in-flight drinks in the most innovative way possible with the launch of its ‘Little Richard’ ice cubes. The bespoke ice cubes have been crafted in the image of Virgin Atlantic’s president Sir Richard Branson.

With Virgin Atlantic pulling out of the Kenya market at the end of September there is no time to waste if you want to enjoy this silly experience.

![Grin and tonic...](image)

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As we are not an App - you need to tap twice to zoom in...
Sitting atop your volcano, surveying the plains rolling to the far horizons in a wash of jade, bronze and pewter, there’s just the faintest echo of Medieval jousting, the merest whiff of unicorn, and a whisper of deja vu to the scene. As if the bright pennants of Renaissance princes might snap in the breeze just beyond your vision.

Sculpted with lava flows, black-frozen in time, the volcano-studded plains might shelter moated castles, rocky battlements and dark towers atop Arcadian crags. Once bright and brash as the birth of the Great Rift rent the earth’s crust, this is a landscape whose hues have faded to those of an Old Master; an eggshell-cracked mosaic of muted green and tapestry blue.

Far below the timbered deck upon which you stand, buffaloes blunder, waterbucks browse, giraffes slope slant-necked across the cloud shadows, hyenas loll, and shifting herds of gazelles shimmer through the heat haze like shoals of fish in a coral garden. Ahead the Aberdare range glowers. Behind the Mau Escarpment jabs the haze. To the south, great forests of Euphorbia lie shrouded in mist and in the near distance lie the petrol-grey waters of Lake Elmenteita.

The Cinderella of the Rift Valley Lakes, for years Elmenteita has been left behind while her sister lakes Nakuru, Naivasha and Bogoria have danced at the tourism ball. Now, World Heritage Status clad, she’s ready to try out ‘destination’ for size.

Partially locked within the private lands of the Delamere family’s 48,000-acre Soysambu Estate, which has remained pristine since Lord Delamere first founded it in 1906, and only opened as a conservancy in 2008, Lake Elmenteita is Kenyan tourism’s most sheltered debutante. Around its shores, over the past 20 years, but a sprinkling of camps and lodges have sprung up, the most recent being the exclusive Lake Elmenteita Serena Tented Camp, which hugs the lakeshore where once Delamere Tented Camp stood.

Increasingly, the hot springs at the lake’s most southerly tip attract weekend locals, some to splash, some to launder, some to picnic on the *nyama choma* upon which the nearby roadside butchery boomtown of Kekopey has blossomed. Here, just 16km out of Nakuru, a dusty track leads off the Nairobi-Nakuru road and creeps around the ramparts of a vast volcano, whose knife edge profile dominates the landscape and lake alike. Known as ‘Delamere’s Nose’ in memory of Kenya’s most colourful pioneer, it now goes more often by the ancient title of The Sleeping Warrior. A character of Maasai lore, he sleeps with his shield on his chest, perhaps to wake at the end of time, or in answer to the call of his increasingly land-eroded people.

Massively crouched behind the warrior, is a dimpled volcano whose higher slopes shelter a cluster of stone and thatch. Eight cottages hug the hillside below a high-vaulted lounge, dining room and stone terrace, all of which can vaguely be made out from the Nairobi-Nakuru road if you know where to look. Since it opened at the end of 2011, the lodge has attracted growing numbers of Nairobi escapees, all of whom have been swift to wake up to the fact that the warrior’s charms lie just over two hours drive from the capital. They include a majestically thatched dining room views, a warrior-inspired bar, cushion-strewn loft, and an eclectically presented lounge that achieves just the right blend of Africana and elegance. There is also an almost Zanzibar-styled lobby while lapping the lodge is a stone clad terrace with a central fire pit and simply thatched exterior bar. Below, a track snakes through the
Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came

Burningly it came on me all at once,
This was the place! those two hills on the right,
Couch’d like two bulls lock’d horn in horn in fight,
While, to the left, a tall scalp’d mountain…
I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.”

Extract from Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came,
by Robert Browning (1812–89)
Win a Weekend for Two!

If you’d like to experience all that the atmospheric new Sleeping Warrior Lodge has to offer, simply answer the questions below and send us your answers:

1. The lava islands of Lake Elmenteita provide a breeding ground for which bird?
2. Name the two small streams that feed into Lake Elmenteita
3. Which other site was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site at the same time as the Kenya Lake system?
4. Elmenteita derives its name from the Maasai Ol muteita: what does this mean?

Terms
The winner is invited to book two nights at the Sleeping Warrior Lodge (valid for May or June, October or November 2012). The offer is based on two people sharing, full board. All extras (conservancy fees, drinks, activities) are payable at the end of your stay.
acacia to the landscaped terraces where the wide-spaced natural stone cottages look out across an addictive view of Africa as she used to be. Kidney-shaped, and thickly thatched, each features an impeccably presented net-draped bed, a seating area, bathroom and outshot deck. Here, king of your castle, you become strangely feudal. Espying some ant-like vehicle creeping into the far distance of your domain, you lunge for the binoculars, bristle with autocratic affront, and monitor its approach jut-chinned and narrow eyed.

Finally, as you descend the acacia slopes and head back to reality, it’s a strong-willed guest that doesn’t crane back for a last look at the hammerkop nests of the cottages and the haughty peaks of the lodge. By this time, however, they will have all but merged back into the blue-green tapestry of the landscape as, with a wink of a windowpane and a whisk of lawns, the Sleeping Warrior shrugs back into his cloak.

What’s not to like? Nothing. At all.

**Need to Know**

The exceptionally eco-friendly Sleeping Warrior offers double, twin and family rooms on a fully catered basis only. Power is solar, water is rain-captured and the lodge operates a wide range of community projects. Activities include bush sundowners, dinners and breakfasts, guided walks; game drives across the Conservancy and around the lake (the only nesting site in Kenya of the Great White Pelican and typically home to thousands of flamingo) and an imaginative range of child friendly options.

Conceived, constructed, owned and managed by a visionary Frenchman and his American wife, the lodge promises attentive service and a menu that is French in style (the cooks have been trained by a Cordon Bleu chef who earned his stripes at the George V, Paris) and American in quality.

GO!

For more information click [HERE](#)
A well known travel mandarin was wringing his hands the other day over the decision by Virgin Atlantic to cease flying to Kenya from the end of September. ‘It’s massively negative and sends out all the wrong signals to our source markets’ he said.

‘Hang on a minute’ I said. There is an excess of capacity on routes to and from Kenya and for that matter East Africa. Virgin in a good week, they had advertised daily flights but in recent times only operated five a week, offered a paltry 2,460 weekly round-trip seats.

This is a drop in the bucket when you look at all the new airlines serving this marketplace such as Etihad, Gulf, Qatar and Turkish. Added to the mix are additional flight frequencies and larger aircraft from the likes of Brussels Airlines, Swiss and KLM, which cumulatively amount to more than 8,354 round-trip seats per week. If you then factor in Kenya Airways now with eleven non-stop flights a week to London, plus daily flights to Amsterdam and service to both Paris and Rome, British Airways if rumour is to be believed who will upgrade equipment from a 777 to a 747 to cash in on Virgin’s exit both in cargo and passenger traffic. Not forgetting Emirates with double-daily wide-body flights to Dubai and the world.

Plenty of seats, perhaps a premium to be paid for non-stop service, who knows, market forces will dictate what we pay. Although these days the actual fare is usually much less than the total price you pay, taxes, surcharges and fees now make up the bulk of any airfare anywhere.

But for how long is the question? Global economic uncertainties indicate that we might see up to a 40% drop in tourist arrivals for the remainder of 2012. A fact born out by Suresh Sofat the founder of Somak Travel, who in a recent UK travel media interview revealed that after bringing 12,000 tourists to Kenya in 2011, he expected that number to drop to 7,000 for 2012 which equates to the aforementioned 40% drop.

People have asked me why Virgin couldn’t make a ‘go’ of it on their flights to and from Kenya. I’d hazard a guess that the primary reason is that they have no connectivity at either end of the route and rely heavily on what is termed origin and destination traffic. Whereas KLM, BA, Swiss, KQ, Brussels and all the Middle Eastern airlines offer massive connectivity over their hub cities.

On a recent trip on KLM, I was one of about twenty people whose destination was Amsterdam, the rest of the fully loaded 747 were destined elsewhere.

I was there on a business trip (honest) and had to arrive a day early due to flights being full, which gave me a free day to explore the city which I last visited as a
wide-eyed twenty something year old. A canal cruise was obligatory, museums and art galleries received cursory visits, a beer at the Dam Square and lots of wandering aimlessly around taking in the sights and sounds of this vibrant city.

I happened upon the city’s world famous red light district, which seemed less enthralling than the last time I visited. Perhaps it’s an age thing.

What really fascinated me were the many coffee shops that do a roaring trade in cannabis. So trying to be an objective journalist, I went into full investigative mode when I sheepishly visited one such establishment. Aladdin’s den comes to mind, the air pungent with the many different aromas of cannabis, dark with little light, seedy, lots of very happy people and believe it or not a decent cup of coffee. Weed from around the world, but all I’m assured grown under supervised conditions in Holland. From Africa why not try Ethiopian Gold, Malawi Red or Senegal Skunk. There is even a star rating from super mild stuff to numb bombers. Folk sip their coffee and smoke their joints all in the open and no one takes any notice.

The Dutch government is trying to limit the sale of cannabis in these cafes to residents only. However those opposed to this point out that Holland was the first western country to legalise prostitution by bringing it out into the open many years ago. They reason why drive the cannabis culture underground, fair argument you’d have to say. But the real truth is that government collects many many millions of Euros in taxes from both these endeavours. Therefore you can rest assured that change is not expected anytime soon.

Finally, here is a NEW internet word which describes so many things across a broad swath of our world. Soon to be in Websters.

Ineptocracy (in-ep-toe ‘ra-cy) - A system of government where the least capable to lead are elected by the least capable of producing, and where the members of society least likely to sustain themselves or succeed, are rewarded with goods and services paid for by the confiscated wealth of a diminishing number of producers.

A return trip to the Tower, and a single for my wife
intense purple colours
plum, spice and smoky oak with
a soft, warming finish…
to be served with hearty
robust food and good friends

region: Margaret River

composition: 90% shiraz, 10% malbec

vintage conditions: sunny, warm days and low yields – un-crowded vines = happy grapes and richly flavoured, long lived wines

winemaking: wine was fermented in stainless steel vats and aged in french and american oak barriques, prior to final blending and bottling

colour: intense purple with violet and pink fringe.

nose: plum, spice and dark chocolate

palate: warming, lush palate with soft, mouth-filling flavours

wine analysis: alc/vol – 14.0%  pH 3.37  TA 6 g/L

peak drinking: now - 2015

food matching: italian sausages and roasted vegetables

james halliday 2011 australian wine companion
5 star winery rating
James Kinuthia arrived in Australia in 2004 to pursue a BSc at Murdoch University in Perth. Four years later he not only had a double major in Biological and Environmental Sciences, but had also developed a keen interest in Australian wine.

So how did he develop an interest in wine? James explains, “We did odd jobs during the holidays to make some pocket money and one of our first jobs was pruning vines at a remote country town called Boyup Brooke. The famous Margaret River region, well known for its wineries followed.

Back home, he noticed that there were few Australian wines in Kenya so decided to turn his hobby into his business.

Today he is the proprietor of Makkin, a company that exclusively distributes Australian wine.

This is an incredible wine at an incredible price, you can’t buy it in the stores, so buy it here today. Offer valid while stocks last.
Drive-In Safaris

Lion’s Bluff
Lumo Conservancy – Tsavo

Save 10%
Secluded within a 125,000-acre private conservancy, this eco-lodge was conceived and built by the local Taita community. Long views across the plains to Kilimanjaro.

Includes: One-night full board. Conservancy fees not included.

How Much? Kshs. 8,000/- per person sharing. (valid to 30th June)

Click HERE to book

Elephant Bedroom Camp
Samburu

Book 3 nights and get 50% off 3rd night
On the banks of the Ewaso Nyiro River in Samburu National Reserve sits this small and exclusive camp of 12 luxury tents.

Includes: One-night full board. Park fees not included.

How Much? Kshs. 7,500/- per person sharing. (valid to 30th June)

Click HERE to book

Sunbird Lodge
Lake Elementaita

Nestled on a cliff above Lake Elmentaita overlooking the Soysambu Conservancy between Nakuru and Gilgil is this very small and exclusive lodge.

Includes: One-night full board. Conservancy fees not included.

How Much? Kshs. 6,600/- per person sharing. (valid to 30th June)

Click HERE to book

Ol Tukai Lodge
Amboseli

In the heart of Amboseli National Park, surrounded by endless plains and after the rains shallow lake-lands. All cottages face the open plains with Kilimanjaro offering a magnificent backdrop.

Includes: One-night full board. Park fees not included.

How Much? Kshs. 6,750/- per person sharing. (valid to 30th June)

Click HERE to book

Lantana Galu Beach
South Coast

Right on an unspoiled beach, 5 kms south of Diani Beach. A collection of elegantly furnished and serviced self-catering holiday villas, apartments, bungalows and penthouses. The homes on the property are available for holiday lets on a self-catering basis.

Includes: One-bedroom apartment (sleeps two).

How Much? Kshs. 21,000/- per apartment. (valid until 30th June)

Click HERE to book
Fly-in Safaris

Swahili Beach
Diani Beach

A NEW centrally located hotel, which is both innovative and sophisticated, situated right on the beach.

Includes: Two-nights half board, return flights from Nairobi and airport transfers at the coast.

How Much? Kshs. 36,320/- per person sharing. (valid to 30th June)

Click HERE to book

Naibor Camp
Masai Mara

Stay 4 nights for the price of 3

On the banks of the Talek River in the heart of the Masai Mara near the confluence of the Mara River. Each tent is positioned for maximum enjoyment of the surrounding views and complete privacy.

Includes: Two-nights full board, return flights from Nairobi, airport transfers in the Mara, game drives and sundowners. Park fees not included.

How Much? Kshs. 56,500/- per person sharing. (valid to 30th June)

Click HERE to book
THE KINGDies IN HIS SLEEP
PROCLAIM ELIZABETH QUEEN
FLYING HOME FROM KENYA

MONARCH AROUND FARM
SEEMED IN GOOD HEALTH
FEW HOURS ERE DEATH

LONDON, Feb. 6.—WHEN King George VI died peacefully in his sleep at his country home at Broadlands, near Farnham, England, his death was a shock to the entire world. The King had been in good health for several weeks, and there was no indication that he was ill. He was 56 years old.

The news of the King's death was announced to the world by His Excellency, Sir Richard Codrington, the British High Commissioner in Kenya. He said that the King died at 11:45 a.m. at Broadlands, his country residence near Farnham, England.

QUEEN ELIZABETH, PHILIP
FLY BACK HOME TODAY
6 DAYS AFTER FAREWELL

LONDON STUNNED AS IF
ATOM BOMB HAD STRUCK
CRY OPENLY ON STREETS

CABINET TO NAME
DAY OF MOURNING
IN HONOR OF KING

TONIGHT'S NHL GAME
BETWEEN MAPLE LEAFS,
N.Y. RANGERS CANCELLED

TORONTO DAILY STAR
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1952
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26 travel news June 2012
As Britain and the Commonwealth celebrate Elizabeth II’s Diamond Jubilee, we are reminded that it was at Treetops here in Kenya where she famously became Queen on 6th February 1952.

HRH Princess Elizabeth’s visit to Kenya was like a breath of fresh air after her forebears, Edward, Prince of Wales and his brother Henry, Duke of York, who had behaved badly on the last Royal visit in the 20s.

During her visit, HRH attended the morning service at St. Philip’s in Naro Moru on the 2nd of February 1952, according to the plaque on the Brazilian Rosewood tree planted by Major G. Baines to celebrate the occasion. This is a part of the world I cherish: my parents were married in St. Philip’s; I was born in Mt. Kenya Hospital in Nyeri and christened at St. Philip’s. When I visited the church recently, the caretaker showed me the piece of coronation carpet sent by the newly crowned Queen to this attractive stone church.

The legendary hunter Jim Corbett, a resident of Treetops at the time, wrote the now famous lines in the visitors’ log book:

For the first time in the history of the world, a young girl climbed into a tree one day a Princess and after having what she described as her most thrilling experience she climbed down from the tree next day a Queen — God bless her.
The story of Treetops goes further back. Jan Hemsing’s booklet suggests that the idea of a tree lodge came from the creators of the Outspan Hotel, the Sherbrooke Walkers, partly inspired by Lady Bettie’s memories of her childhood tree house. However Joan Davies writes that the idea was Captain Billy Sheldrick’s.

In 1930, he and some other Nyeri settlers had to camp beside an elephant trail on the banks of the Tana River. They hoisted their gear into a thorn tree, where an uncomfortable night was spent. Below the elephants bathed noisily in the moonlight.

“Back in civilization,” Billy Sheldrick reportedly said: “I’ve been thinking about our night in that tree. On the edge of my farm there’s a giant fig tree overlooking a salt lick and pool, where elephant, buffalo and rhino come nearly every night to drink. There’s heaps of room in the tree for quite a decent-sized house and I’m sure people would pay to stay the night and watch game.” (Source: Pioneers’ Scrapbook)

The Sheldrick family built a platform in the Aberdare Forest and the Sherbrooke Walkers were invited for sundowners. Thus Treetops was conceived - a tourist venue offering unique opportunities to photograph wild animals. Sheldrick supervised the building of the initial two-roomed tree house.

**Apparently the builder hiked his prices every time the rhinos charged - which was a daily occurrence.**

Kenya has 34 species of fig tree, traditionally sacred to the Kikuyu. This was the bark cloth fig tree (*ficus natalensis*). Later on Mau Mau General, Dedan Kimathi, would use a similar fig tree as a secret postbox, between Treetops and the Ark.
Jim Nicolson helped create Treetops. Nicol Cameron, whose mother Margaret was Jim’s sister, has letters written early 1985, between Jim and RJ Prickett, the Hunter at Treetops. Prickett, then working on his book about the Queen’s 1952 and 1983 visits, writes: “After the Queen left I had another fig tree planted, well protected, I wrote to her on the first anniversary and received a beautiful letter back.” It had taken him many months, he added, to prove that the old tree was in forest reserve, not on the Sheldrick’s land. Nicolson’s reply confirms this. Although Nicolson doesn’t mention being involved in the construction of Treetops, Nicol believes that while he was living nearby at Frank Page’s farm, Greystones, it’s highly probable that he was involved in building the original platform sometime between 1928, when he came to Kenya, and 1932 - before the Kakamega gold rush. Nicolson mentions that Sheldrick’s manager, Scott, “put the first plank in a tree on the Nyeri side of the present tree whilst I was on the goldfields.” Sherbrooke Walker increased this to a “shack.”

The first guests signed the visitor’s book on 6.11.32. They were Captain Sheldrick and his wife. Guests mounted a 30-foot ladder to reach the fork of the vast tree, having walked a mile and a half through dense forest. The escorting hunter carried a rifle, while along the route many trees had ladders: The hunter’s order “up ladders” was obeyed promptly.

In his book, Prickett mentions that in 1951, Governor Sir Philip Mitchell, instructed Mervyn Cowie to build a game-viewing lodge in the Ngong Hills as a belated wedding present for Princess Elizabeth. He changed his mind and the Royal Lodge on Mt. Kenya, near the Sagana River, materialised. Prickett then describes the old Treetops beside a natural pool in the path of an old elephant migration trail between Mt. Kenya and the Aberdares. Salt was laid to attract animals, along with cabbages and sugarcane. The swampy pool was duly enlarged by visiting animals, into a small lake.

Guests came in box-body Ford 10s, with roll-down canvas sides to repel dust. The hunter briefed them before issuing walking sticks to assist with the slippery ascent.
He led, followed by female guests, male guests, *askaris* with spears, then porters carrying baggage, food and water - for drinking and washing.

All braved a rickety ladder, with a resting platform half way, ascending to Treetops on its high branch. There was an Elsan chemical toilet on another branch, and baggage was winched up. There were folding beds, chairs and tables, while rooms were divided by hanging blankets or papyrus matting. A cuckoo clock heralded passing time.

Sundowners were a must, especially whisky for preventing malaria! Slippers were worn, morning tea was served in bed and the tree’s wilder inhabitants continued their lives: hammerkops and hornbills nested, while bushbabies, genets and squirrels entertained guests. Rates were £10 a night - although Sherbrooke Walker waived this if no game was sighted.

Initially Treetops - the 2-guest version - had a manhole over the first platform to deter leopards. This had to be abolished after a portly guest became stuck and had to be fed stiff drinks until somebody worked out how to dislodge him. An early visitor, RO Pearse, stayed there in 1933 with his wife. The cacophony of night sounds ensured little rest and he described it as an eerie experience.

The rich, famous and distinguished flocked to Treetops, which was enlarged for the 1952 Royal Visit. It now had a dining room with a wood-burning stove, three guest rooms and a small room for the hunter. The long, open balcony had cushioned seats.

Hunter Jim Corbett’s last book, a beautifully illustrated booklet on Treetops, vividly describes it on the 5th February 1952:

*That day he’d had a telegram, an invitation from Princess Elizabeth, to accompany them to Treetops. The Royal party had arrived at the Royal Lodge in Sagana two days earlier - and the previous day the Duke had played polo at Nyeri. Corbett, concerned about security, had missed the polo to ensure their safety. As it happened, the biggest threat turned out to be the elephants, which uprooted four of the biggest trees - plus ladders - two days later.*
Then & now
The Royal visit to Treetops was its 794th guest and this would be the first time floodlights were used. Corbett had shaved twice. While waiting he watched a herd of 47 jittery elephants with small calves approach the salt lick, right below the tree in which Treetops was built.

As the party approached, led by Edward Windley, Princess Elizabeth remained completely calm, although the elephants were ten yards from the foot of the ladder.

Lady Pamela Mountbatten, the Duke and Commodore Parker followed her. Luckily the wind was on the side of the Royals - and the Sherbrooke Walkers and Corbett heaved unanimous sighs of relief when all were up the ladder. Corbett praised the Princess for her courage, adding: “A minute after climbing the ladder the Princess was sitting on the balcony and, with steady hands, was filming the elephants.” HRH was rewarded with excellent game viewing, including a cow elephant suckling her young, the antics of Karra, the disfigured baboon and two waterbuck fighting to the death.

The entranced Princess requested tea on the balcony. As evening drew on, Corbett discussed Shipton’s theory on the abominable snowman with the Duke, also talking to the Princess about her father’s illness, although she was confident he’d seemed much better when waving her off in London. After dinner, during which a lamp almost caused a fire, the Royal party returned to the balcony to watch nine rhinos. Corbett remained at the top of the ladder, honoured to be on guard.

At dawn Princess Elizabeth was out on the balcony to film more, making notes on all the animals and enjoying her morning tea. Corbett marvelled that “though she had spent so few hours in sleep the Princess had started that day with eyes sparkling and a face as fresh as a sunflower.” He noted that it was a “radiantly happy princess” who returned
to the Royal Lodge at Sagana - only to receive the sad news that her father had just died.

Treetops was burned down by Mau Mau on 27th May 1954, as was the Nyeri Polo Club, allegedly in protest of British anti-terrorist operations: “Operation Blitz” had run through the Aberdares in late 1953, resulting in the deaths of 125 Mau Mau, followed by the King’s African Rifles’ “Operation Hammer” with a shoot-on-sight policy. Both places had the Royal visits in common.

Sherbrooke Walker erected the new Treetops on the opposite side of the forest pool, which opened in 1957. He later sold it to Sir Malin Sorsbie, who then sold it to Block Hotels. But many felt, like Corbett, that: “for those of us who knew the grand old tree and the friendly hut, Treetops has gone forever.”

With special thanks to Tom Lawrence, a fount of East African history and collector of old and fascinating books on the same, for many photographs and facts.

This is the tenth in a series of articles on the houses of Happy Valley. The writer Juliet Barnes has submitted a book on all of the famous houses of the Valley to a publisher in the UK. Once published we will let you know where you can obtain a copy...

To view previous articles click Issues top left of menu.
RJ Trickett the Treetops ‘Hunter’ with the Queen and Prince Phillip on their return visit in 1983.

Treetops has just re-opened after major renovations, which according to friends of Travel News who should know and who had visited recently are said to be really impressive.

An article is sure to follow.

If you need any additional information on Treetops click HERE
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Chumbe

Twenty three islands surround Zanzibar.

From the air, they recline atop coral out crops so that they look like aquamarine butterflies floating on the surface of a jade green sea. A flotilla of little bits of land are strung together to form the most exotic of archipelagos.

But why Chumbe?

Because this island embraces the first privately managed marine conservation area in the world. It hosts an award winning eco lodge and is home to enormous – and endangered coconut crabs as well as the elusive and rare Ader’s Duiker.

Anthea Rowan fulfils a long-held dream to visit this very, very special place...
Bawe, ten kilometres from Stone Town, was gifted by the 18th Century Sultan of Zanzibar, Barghash ibn Sa’id, to the Eastern Telegraph Company which used it as a base station for the underwater cable connecting Zanzibar to the Seychelles and Aden. Mnemba, off the northeast coast, is a millionaire’s hangout. Rumour has it that should the island’s security spot undesirables approaching the island from the sea – undesirables means people like you and me that don’t have bank accounts to match regulars such as Bill Gates and Naomi Campbell - they’ll shoo you back into the water.

Tiny Prison – or Changuu – Island is just 800m long by 230m wide at its broadest point and was used to house rebellious slaves in the 1860’s. In 1893 the first British Prime Minister of Zanzibar, Lloyd Mathews, purchased the island and built a prison there which morphed later as a quarantine station for yellow fever cases.

Today it’s a marginally less salubrious tourist hang out than Mnemba and is home to a collection of non-indigenous Aldabra Giant Tortoises, a present from the British Governor of the Seychelles.

But the reason that I, that day, was Zanzibar bound – on Fly 540 from Mombasa so that I rose as sharply as we fell and the stewardess had to gather up coffee before we’d had time to drink it whilst I gracelessly stuffed the rest of my sandwich into my mouth – wasn’t because I was headed to Bawe or Mnemba or Prison, but because I was living out a long held dream to visit Chumbe, the island which is supposed to have inspired Giles Foden’s Zanzibar (not one of his best; he does African dictators, Last King of Scotland, infinitely better than idyllic island retreats).

Why Chumbe over better known Prison Island or millionaires’ Mnemba? Why Chumbe over the – almost – two dozen islands one could visit? Two reasons. No. Three. Actually… four. Chumbe embraces the first privately managed marine conservation area in the world. It hosts an award-winning eco lodge. It is home to enormous and endangered coconut crabs, as well as the elusive and rare Ader’s Duiker.

I went 45 minutes across the sea from Stone Town in a banana boat armed with camera, notebook and – imperative accessory to any travel hack – a cynical companion, namely Husband. Husband thinks eco tourism is hogwash, all greenwashing, not really putting your money where your mouth is; he can’t believe the goggling is as good as previous press articles suggest it is and anyway, why haven’t all those coconut crabs been eaten; are we actually going to see one?.

A cynic is a useful adjunct to a potential paradise island: they encourage you to keep your eyes open without being wide-eyed.

So we arrived, he and I, along with Jeff and Lynn from California who had a big expensive camera and wore khaki and expressions of that wide-eyed wonderment in contrast to the sceptical slit-eyed one my cohort bore.

Chumbe, seven miles west of Zanzibar, looms from the water quickly. It is landmarked by a tall lighthouse, a sort of giant and tangible ‘You’re Here!’ exclamation mark which rises sharply, bone white and sturdy, piercing the blue of the sky as you squint upwards. Built in 1904 by the British, the lighthouse has a place in the annals of maritime history and has witnessed famous sea battles.
The lighthouse - it still works...
Eight eco-bandas, taken from the top of the lighthouse

Flip flop and fly... our verandah
between, for example, the ‘Koenigsberg’ and ‘Pegasus’ during WWI. Fitted with gas in 1926, it still works today and winks encouragingly all night long at the dhows which ply these waters.

At the lighthouse base hunkers a mosque built so that the Lighthouse Master might pray; its diminutive proportions shrunken further against the scale of its neighbour.

We alight on the beach. I’m trying not to look as wide-eyed as Jeff and Lynn from California whose expressions of awe are accentuated by slack jaws and open mouths as they gape at this pretty, pretty spot, all talc white beach and Perrier bottled water beating a rhythm on the sand. Even Husband is in danger of being less cynically slit-eyed than he has been; ‘Jeez, look at the size of those oysters’, he observes of the several hundred dozen clinging fatly to the rocks. ‘This’, I hiss, ‘is a conservation area, you are not to get your pen knife out’. He demurs and takes his hand out of his pocket.

We mince up the beach whilst Chumbe’s staff, who have raced down to assist us labour under the weight of our Californian co-guests matching luggage, to the main mess which looks like a thatched equivalent of the Sydney Opera House, such is the intricate design of its makuti roof, ‘to catch rain water’ explains the camp manager. Husband rolls eyes, which have returned to slits behind his dark glasses. I can’t see. But I can tell from his tone. So can the manager who immediately offers to show us the complicated filtration system which renders the rain water gin clear having been sieved via sand and coral of all the undesirables rain washes from thatch. Husband’s eyes widen momentarily.

The lodge is comprised of eight eco bandas, all sweetly set on stilts and double storey so that your sleeping quarters hang eyrie like atop the whole arrangement. It’s all wide open, the ‘air-conditioning’ a mkeka shutter that you can fling open or draw closed. Open and the breeze pours in as does the light whilst the view of the butterscotch bay spills in.

A proper eco destination doesn’t allow for any faffing about, ‘ten minutes’, we are told on arrival, ‘ten minutes and we will leave for snorkeling’. There is no diving at Chumbe - it’s deemed intrusive. Only observational goggling from the surface. I’m a coldwater wimp and was dreading the mandatory (I was the hack on tour after all) aquatics, until I was supplied wet suit to keep the chill at bay. Chumbe are well equipped for wets like me. And off we set from the beach, in a boat with our dive master and a tractor inner tube, ‘the marker’, he said, so we knew where he was and so we had something to hang onto in case we needed a rest.

The designated conservation area, just off Chumbe’s west coast, is a mile long and 330 yards wide. The other side of the island is not protected; fishermen still cast their nets there. We tip ourselves into the water when we’re told to and there beneath us sprawls a coral garden of such vibrant, such bountiful and beautiful variety the impulse is to surface to see if everybody’s reaction is the same as yours: an instinctive gasp. Husband’s face bobbed inches from mine, a broad grin splitting his face, his eyes as wide as saucers. Not for nothing has JEN Veron, of the Australian Institute of Marine Science called this ‘One of the most spectacular “coral gardens” to be found anywhere in the world’; it is the best preserved shallow reef on the East African coast with over 200 species of coral and 400 species of fish. Colour and movement abound, coral – perfect and
whole and healthy – rises as architectural edifices of such staggering size you feel really, really small as you splash about on the surface. We swam for an hour and a half, dreamlike, making our way slowly down the reef and back to the island as sea life drifted, darted and danced in front of us. Turtles glided along the bottom with a grace that deserts them on the beach, fish flitted, seagrass swayed.

Then on to lunch which was delicious; octopus so tender I could cut it with my fork. (How do they do that? Mine always tastes like something I've peeled off the bottom of my shoe?) I became aware of the gravitas of Chumbe. This is no chichi playing at saving the planet place; it means business, an ethos entrenched by founder and perpetual Chumbe champion, Sibylle Reidmiller.

She is the reason that Chumbe is. Sibylle first came to work in Tanzania – in Tanga in 1982 and developed a passion for the sea and snorkelling. In 1990, in Zanzibar to work on an education program, she discovered that few local people had any understanding of the importance of coral reefs. Discovering that, and discovering the beautiful, but quickly disappearing, reef life around Chumbe, prompted her to do something to save it. An astonishingly brief – though doubtless it didn’t feel that way to her – four years (and hours of tricky negotiations) later and Sibylle had pulled it off: Chumbe Island Coral Park (CHICOP), Tanzania’s first marine protected area, was gazetted by the Zanzibar Government.

Four years after that and the ecolodge, with its marine education centre, was complete. Sibylle is clearly a woman of substance; Husband, who was trying to sell tractors to the Zanzibaris at about that time, is in awe of her achievement. He couldn’t galvanise them to buy a single one.

Our melt-in-your-mouth octopus is served in the education centre, the walls plastered with posters and chairs and desks arranged as if for a mini lecture: it’s not just international marine biologists that visit this place, Chumbe supports visits by local Zanzibari school children too because, as their chief ranger later explains to me, what’s the point in thinking you can protect an area if the local people don’t understand why it’s worth protecting.

The walls of the mess are also adorned with a plethora of impressive awards which pay homage to the place as a serious and committed Eco player as well as an extraordinary escape destination. In 1999 it was British Airway’s Tourism for Tomorrow Global Winner; at the Expo2000 in Hanover a year later, where Chumbe was selected to represent Tanzania, it was the Project-Around-the-World winner; in 2001 it was Conde Naste’s World Winner in Ecotourism; in 2003 Harper’s & Queen Most Romantic Eco-Lodge and most recently, 2012, it was voted Traveller’s Choice in Africa by travelers’ virtual bible, TripAdvisor.

I want to understand how this happens: how can you protect a single reef despite the necessary and relentless onslaught of fishermen who rely on their trade just to get by. Chumbe’s head ranger, Omari Nyange, who at almost 50 is in his 20th year with Chumbe, patiently fields my questions. It was, he says, a battle. A battle to stop fishing in the area, a battle to sustain the arrest of fishing, a battle to help fishermen understand why it was necessary to stop and how that would – ultimately – benefit them.

Saving the world is, essentially, a well-fed aspiration. It’s much, much harder to do it in a place where poverty takes precedence over ideals.
A lounging place...
That evening Juma takes us for a walk around the island with our new Californian friends. We walk through the coral rag forest where we observe the tell-tale signs of a long ago receded reef in the fossil evidence captured millennia ago. He describes the counting exercises to ascertain Ader Duiker’s numbers. He thinks he might have seen one once – in his five years here – so it’s not surprising we don’t stumble upon one. The first of these elusive creatures was translocated to the island from Zanzibar in 1998 in a bid to secure safe haven for what is one of the most threatened antelope species in the world.

Our walk ends beneath the monolith of the lighthouse, ‘Up now’, he instructs. Up means hauling yourself skywards on 131 steeply cut and deep steps inside the funnelled gloom of a lighthouse with metre thick walls. Juma throws open windows as we go so that the light and the air bleed in. He, judging by the lack of any audible effort, has clearly scampered up the innards of this lighthouse often. We haven’t and puff and pant and push on creaky knees to haul ourselves onwards.

And then we’re at the top where the breeze greets us enthusiastically and where the views are stupendous and circulating, a panorama of sea and islands and forests and blue where water meets endless skies. We can see the lodge thrown into toy town relief below and Zanzibar to the west. At least I am told we can by Husband who keeps urging me out from my crouched position at the top of all those stairs; I have been felled by vertigo ‘Just take pictures’, I urge him, ‘I’ll look later’.

Which I do, over dinner served on the beach and under a canopy of stars which makes the sky look as if it’s been fitted with fairy lights by some invisible and celestial electrician who hadn’t broken a single bulb. We drink breath-warm wine and cold water from a jug – plastic bottles, the scourge of beaches all over Africa, are gloriously absent from Chumbe. And with our tummies full, we persuade Juma to give us a nighttime walk to track those coconut crabs.

A hermit species, the coconut crab – sometimes called the robber crab or palm thief – is the largest land living anthropoid in the world; they can weigh up to 5 kg. and live for up to sixty years. Adults dispense with shells for protection as they develop a tough exoskeleton. They cannot swim and would drown if immersed in water since they have branchiostegal lungs not gills. They have a highly developed sense of smell, which is how they source food including coconuts which they pluck from trees and crack open with huge claws. It’s not long before we find one of these huge brutes. ‘Take a picture, take a picture’, whispers Husband urgently. In the absence of anything to lend as useful comparison to demonstrate their size I suggest he puts his hand into the shot. ‘Are you mad?’ he asks, ‘these things can crack coconuts open; what do you think it’ll do to my thumb?’ I take the picture without my yardstick.

I’m impressed with Chumbe, I’m blown away by it, by the location, by the struggle to get there, by the evidence of the hard slog that it takes to be a real eco lodge, by the unmatched coral gardens and the life they host, by those enormous crabs.

But it’s not until several weeks later that I ascertain how impressed Husband was. I hear him describe our trip to a friend,
‘You have to go, best goggling on the East African coast, and they let you goggle where you want for as long as you want, no namby pamby Health & Safety nonsense’.

His audience smiles.

‘And there’s nobody there, nobody. Well, except you, a handful of other guests (four in our case) and the lodge staff’.

His audience smiles more broadly and nods, enthused.

‘And you have to see those crabs, they’re HUGE’.

‘Huge?’

‘Yes, HUGE, 5 Kgs and up’.

And his audience’s eyes widen satisfactorily.

Click HERE for more information