

KENYAN KALEIDOSCOPE

by Laurel Pardy

Laurel lived in Kenya from 1975-78. Adaptable, resourceful and insatiably curious, she spent most of her time travelling and observing, researching and writing articles for the Kenya Museum Society and prowling the coastal reefs. Her article provides a micro Safari through this diverse country.

Kenya. Ivory and slave traders. Tarzan. Stephanie Powers and William Holden. Lions, elephants and wildbeasts. Safari country. These are media-generated preconceptions. Within a few days one discovers that this only hints at the diversity of history, life, topography and avenues to explore, either intellectually or physically. From paleoanthropology to bird watching, photography to mountain climbing, desert to alpine meadow, Hilton Hotel to canvas tent, for the spectator or the sportsman, for the novice or the expert, Kenya offers a gourmet's palette of things to see and do. When the East African Community had been functioning, one could travel at will throughout Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. However, politics alters reality and now one

must approach each country separately. Visitors to Tanzania must fly in to Dar-es-Salaam from outside Kenya, and visitors to Uganda are nearly always on business.

The single most significant event in the emergence of modern Kenya was the decision of the British government to build a railway from Mombasa on the Indian Ocean to Port Florence, now called Kisumu, on Lake Victoria. This incredible engineering feat through desert and lion-infested, fever-plagued scrub country, across volcanic ridges and quagmire took from 1895 to 1901. The railroad eased colonization and the establishment of a colonial government; turned a highland swamp into the city of Nairobi; cut across traditional migration paths of people and wildlife; encouraged settlement along this corridor which facilitated the spread of education, religious teaching and smallpox; accelerated the competition between agricultural land and wildlife range; introduced a large population of Asians, recruited in India as workers and traders; and provided reliable, rapid transportation of goods and services.

Equipped with handbooks identifying flora and fauna, armed with historical facts from dipping judiciously into *Zamani* by B.A. Ogot, and stimulated by the insights and tales of *The Lunatic Express* by Charles Miller, one can take the train from Mombasa to the Lake Victoria port of Kisumu while reliving centuries of East African history and development. The train provides a leisurely opportunity to view the flowers, trees, bird and animal life; see Kenyans, black, white and Asian living in traditional, transitional and contemporary style; and rest, read, dine and take photographs en route.

The coast with its heat and humidity, its strong Arabic influence in architecture and facial features, its sweet pawpaws, cashew nuts and fresh fish provides an exotic background for a tropical vacation. Although the drive from the coast to Nairobi takes only five hours, the train provides an interesting, if slower, alternative. One can board in Mombasa after tea, settle the children and suitcases, change clothes and repair to the dining car for a leisurely five course dinner impeccably served on fine china with silver service, heavy linen tablecloths, fine wines and the world's best coffee. The gleam of darkly polished wood, burgundy carpeting, white-jacketed waiters and dim lighting create a protective cocoon that is hardly disturbed by the swaying of the two straining locomotives as they begin their 14-hour, 510-km. climb to Nairobi.

By the time darkness makes its dramatic equatorial entrance, the train has left the coastal plain with its lush vegetation, fringing coral reef and clustered villages and entered the Athi Plains — a dry, red dusty desert with sparse clumps of elephant grass, conical termite mounds, fleshy babobab trees and scattered gatherings of acacia trees.

Through here one can still find the vast, though dwindling, herds of elephant and antelope with their omnipresent predators and see the Masai people with their herds of cattle, bead decorations and beer-can earrings. This is a harsh region and cannot support any great density of life. It created a barrier to inland travel with the exception of ivory and slave caravans, and accounts for the readily visible differences between coastal tribes and those further inland. The coastal tribes show the results of centuries of Arabic influence in language, facial features, architecture, decorative design and religion, whereas the inland tribes have adapted influences from the successive waves of migrations from the central and Nilotic regions of Africa.



Having admired her paintings and knowing that she and her family had been posted to Tunis, MARGARET HARMAN was approached and asked if she would create for us, something depicting either Africa or the Middle East. The result — not one, but three such aesthetically appealing compositions that it was difficult to chose from among them. Finally, this street scene of Cairo, Egypt with its rich texture and its unique, pervading mood, was selected. Thank you, Margaret, for adding greatly to our publication.