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Green Spaces: Nkwichi Lodge, Manda Wilderness, Mozambique

One of the judges in our 2008 Green Spaces Travel Awards explains why this lodge is his favourite nomination for April



Toby Sawday

MOZAMBIQUE

With so much hot air in the world of responsible tourism, it is a huge relief to be genuinely impressed by Nkwichi Lodge on the shores of Lake Niassa (Lake Malawi) in Mozambique.

First, the lodge itself: seven stunning thatch, wood and stone chalets hidden beneath the tree line, designed to be removed without leaving a trace; dinner under baobabs that have stood firm through 40 years of civil war and for 2,000 years before that; showers under the African sky; tiny coves of empty white sand along a freshwater lake famed for its snorkelling; and genuine peace in one of the remotest parts of Africa.

There are other places, perhaps, whose brochures could paint such a dreamy picture, but pitifully few that are so closely linked to the development of their local communities. Funding from the lodge has contributed to the neighboring Manda Wilderness Project, which — with the support and help of the local community — is turning 100,000ha of lakeside Mozambique into a community-owned conservation area.

Where decades of war and grinding poverty have destroyed the local ecosystem, tourism is now reason enough to nurture the area back to its prewar status as one of East Africa's most ecologically abundant wilderness areas.

With support and funding from the lodge, a clinic and six primary schools have been built, basic medical training provided, and an agriculture project established to train 60 farmers in more sustainable methods of farming. Those farmers now provide fruit and vegetables for the lodge's

kitchen. The community seems to determine exactly which projects happen, and the support of the lodge — among others — makes much of it possible. An impressive partnership, but one you cannot visit without flying.

Details: www.mandawilderness.org

Nominated by Alexia Woolsey, London