

THE TRAVELLER

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TRAVEL GUIDE TO
OUR NEW DESTINATION

BUSINESS HOTLIST

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DIGITAL DECADE

10 INNOVATIONS THAT
CHANGED OUR LIVES

KENYA GOLD

THE COUNTRY, THE PEOPLE

SECTION FRANÇAISE

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ALICIA KEYS

AT WORK IN AFRICA

THE NEW TRIBE IN TOWN

The Tribe Hotel sits strategically on the edge of a valley at Gigiri, near Nairobi's giant United Nations complex – one of the biggest in Africa – and many of the city's embassies. One special feature of this handy hideaway is that it is packed with the finest arts and crafts, cleverly sourced from all over the continent.

The Tribe has the distinction of being Kenya's first boutique hotel, helpfully defined for me by general manager Mark Somen as, "a smaller hotel, with fewer than 150 rooms, which is design- and style-orientated".

He might have added that its compact size enables the hotel to offer a ratio of three staff to each guest, placing the focus on an exceptional level of comfort and hospitality. It enables Somen to know and greet all his guests by name.

A third generation Kenyan, Somen, 42, joined the Tribe from New York, where he had spent 20 years honing his skills as a hotelier. He is determined to make the Tribe a hub for the arts, first in Nairobi and then East Africa, with regular concerts, exhibitions, drama and poetry readings. Future events are to include a visit by the US musician, poet and MC Mos Def (real name Dante Terrell Smith-Bey) whom many regard as one of hip-hop's most exciting artistes.

There are some 42 tribes in Kenya, or so the textbooks tell us. But now they'll have to add one more, for joining the list is Tribe, beating the drum for style, art and luxury at Kenya's first boutique hotel. **Shamira Mohamed** reports

Highly conscious of their role in the community, Somen and his team have also held events to raise money for local charities, including a fashion show that brought in a desperately needed US\$4,000 for an HIV+ women's group in Kibera.

Already the Tribe's guest list reflects its interest in the arts. Although the hotel has been open only since September 2008, its 134 rooms and three luxurious suites have become a home-from-home to international rappers like Akon and Wyclef Jean, while closer to home the Kenyan superstars Nameless and Wahu have been welcome guests. Royalty, too, has put the Tribe on its schedule. A Thai princess stayed there last year, while more recently the Crown Prince of the Netherlands enjoyed its exceptional service. And as for American royalty... one recent guest was the niece of former President George W Bush.

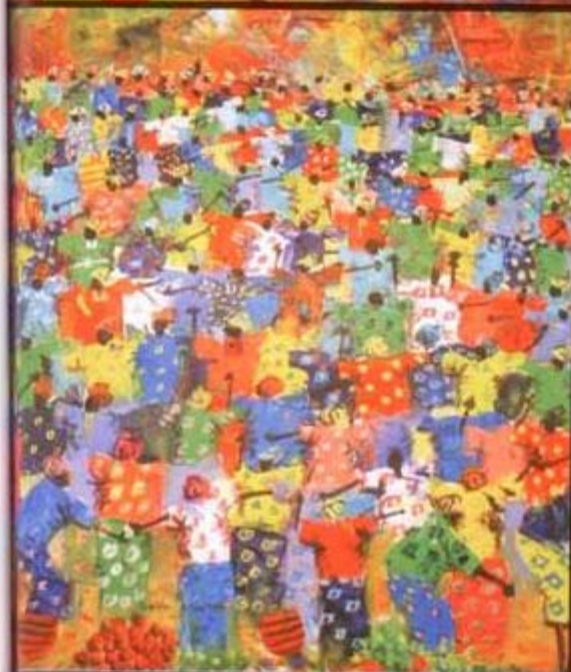
SHOWCASE FOR AFRICA

But what makes the Tribe so different is the hard – and hugely enjoyable work – of Faranak Ehsani, the wife of one of the owners.

"Call me Fara," she said with a disarming smile before taking me on a brief tour of the exciting collection she has amassed to delight hotel guests. It took her three years of what she called "shopping heaven", and in the process she spent around →



THE **ATRIUM**,
WITH ITS TIERS
OF GALLERIES,
SERVES AS A
PERFECT SETTING
FOR ARTS EVENTS



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT:
Fine paintings by Kenyan
artists adorn the walls of the
Tribe: two market scenes by
Robert Aswani; an untitled
abstract by Zacharia Mbuthia;
and Wash Day by Aswani

US\$150,000 on stunning interpretations of some of the finest tribal art to be found anywhere in the world. In the lobbies, rooms, restaurants and lounges there is always something bewitching to catch the eye – everything beautifully lit and presented in series after series of imaginative displays.

Of course Fara had a head start. She owns Kalabash, a smart design and interiors shop in the Village Market adjoining the hotel, one of Nairobi's most popular shopping centres. By inspiring her network of suppliers with the opportunity to have works in the city's newest hotel, she ensured she had the pick of the best artwork Africa could offer.

With artifacts from Cameroon and the Ivory Coast in the West, through Kenya and Rwanda in the East and down to South Africa, Fara has turned the Tribe into a veritable treasure trove. Her keen eye coupled with meticulous attention to detail has seen many guests asking to buy some of the choice pieces of art that grace their rooms. If it can, the Tribe obliges, and guests take away a timeless memory of their stay.

The Tribe's architect – Mehrnaz Ehsani, another member of this talented Iranian family – designed the 100,000-square-foot hotel around the axis of a central atrium almost 50ft high. The atrium, with its tiers of galleries, serves as a perfect setting for arts events, which recently included a concert by the violinist Eugenia Choi of the New York Philharmonic, and a spectacular fashion show on a catwalk built especially for the occasion. It includes several superb works, including a jaw-dropping throne from South Africa, and a beautifully displayed collection of 15 calabashes decorated with leather and beadwork, each shown in its own niche in the natural stonewall that runs the height of the lobby. Also displayed are several bronzes from Cameroon and Benin and two magnificent Kota figures from the DRC.

THOSE EXTRA TOUCHES

Each standard room in this designer hotel boasts beds with 300-thread count linen and the latest glassed-in showers. The washbasin area is open to the room – a neat and stylish touch. Behind the beds, three Sudanese figures of alloy and ebony stand sentinel, while a variety of artworks decorate the desks and shelves. They include Namji fertility dolls from Cameroon and lovely little beaded figures from that country's grasslands, cleverly grouped together for effect. Superbly detailed bronzes from Cameroon and Benin, made by the *cire perdue*, or lost wax, process are another popular placement.

In the three stylish suites, art takes centre stage with magnificent Guru antelope masks, again from the Ivory Coast, and a selection of richly decorated traditional textiles. Nor has East Africa been forgotten, with a



TOP: Tastefully done - Art buyer Fara Ehsani
ABOVE: Skillfully done - General manager Mark Somen
RIGHT: Beautifully done - A metalwork panel by noted Kenyan sculptor Irene Wanjiku, beneath a bench by Jutta Wilhelm that greets visitors to the Tribe



number of Kenyan painters and sculptors represented. Notable is a richly decorated panel in metal repoussé by Irene Wanjiku, one of the country's best-known artists.

In the 80-seater Epic restaurant are archers' wrist guards from Rwanda, more bronzes and a delightful selection of handmade vessels by Kenyan potters – a feast for the eyes as well as the body. Throughout the hotel – and particularly around reception and the atrium – are stools, chairs and benches by Jutta Wilhelm, who works in the capital creating bold statements in blocks of wood and steel.

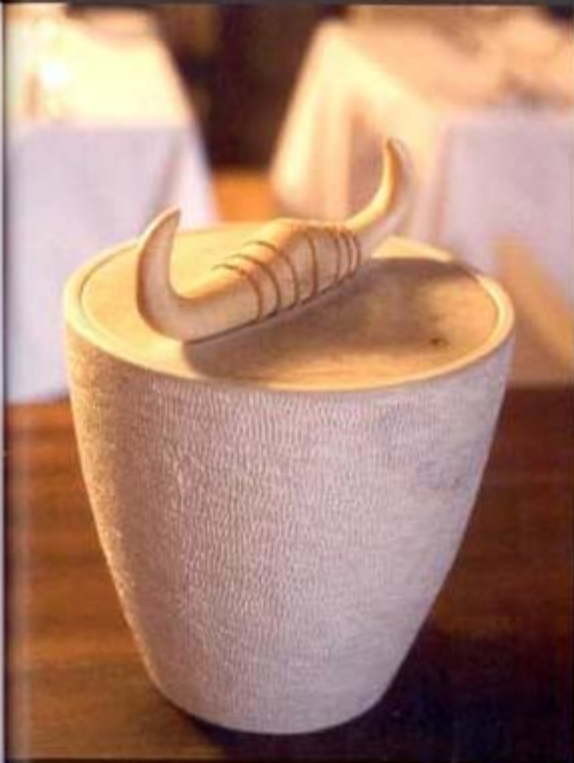
JOINING THE TRIBE

The owners are now taking their showcase hotel even higher up the scale by developing their concept into a new and exciting chain of hospitality outlets throughout Kenya. Next on the list are more hotels, possibly next to the white sandy beaches and the sparkling Indian Ocean, at Diani on the South Coast, plus perhaps a hotel near Jomo Kenyatta International Airport; a convenient stopping off point for guests on the move. Plans are also being prepared for a Tribe lodge in the Masai Mara, Kenya's premier game reserve. Meanwhile Mark Somen and his team are working 24/7 on special projects, including a new gym, a spa and a three-floor conference centre. And you can be sure that each will contain more world-class pieces of African art.

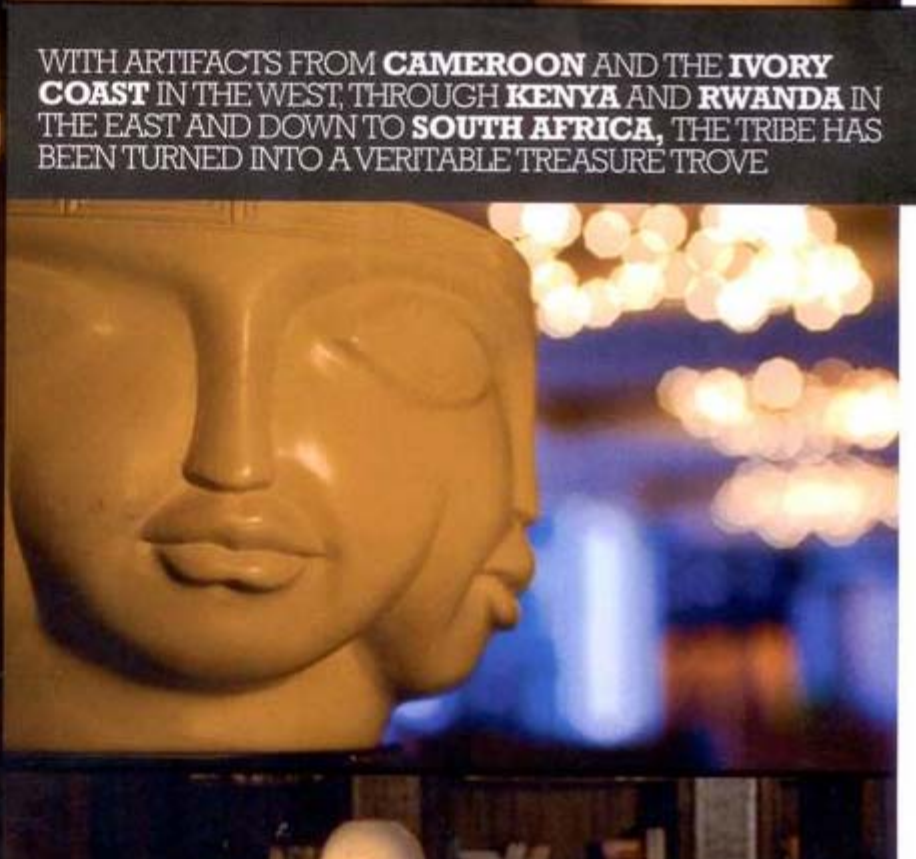
The Tribe team is determined not only to make their hotel the favourite destination of discerning travellers to Kenya, but also to ensure it becomes an interactive and exciting centre for the arts. And driving them always is that passion for service and standards that has already got the whole Tribe dancing. ☺

FURTHER INFORMATION:

- * **Tribe**, The Village Market 9/418, Limuru Rd, Gigiri, Nairobi.
- * **Tel:** +254 20 720 0000
- * **Email:** stay@tribe hotel-kenya.com
- * **www.tribe-hotel.com**



WITH ARTIFACTS FROM **CAMEROON** AND THE **IVORY COAST** IN THE WEST, THROUGH **KENYA** AND **RWANDA** IN THE EAST AND DOWN TO **SOUTH AFRICA**, THE TRIBE HAS BEEN TURNED INTO A VERITABLE TREASURE TROVE



THIS PAGE:

An exciting collection of Kisii soapstone sculptures and vessels by Peter Kenyanya Owendo on display in the Tribe's keynote Epic restaurant

