



The Mangroves of Mtwapa

The winter season on the coast of Kenya comes at the same time as Europe's summer heat. But to call it winter is a misnomer; it's still short-sleeved balmy weather – both day and night - compared to anything that people to the North might consider their darker months.



Mtwapa Creek snakes inland from the Indian Ocean, just North of Mombasa; its tides rising and falling dramatically from moon to moon. I walk there most mornings, to exercise the limbs and enliven the spirit. It's my secret *Winter Wonderland!*

Mangroves abound here along the banks: one of the most valuable plants known to humankind. I love their comradery as they cluster together, a community working valiantly to tackle the woes that man continues to bestow; consuming more carbon dioxide, to tackle the ills of global warming, than most other species only dream about. But they're not aloof - like the spreading tamarind or tall coconut palm nearby – just a down-to-earth, get-on-with-our-job mix of species that hardly anyone seems to value.

I admire my friend the mangrove. She reminds me of a frog: brown, yellow, and green, happy under or above water. Her variety seems limitless - some symmetrical, others less so - all standing proud above the sand, their beauty later to be veiled by the intruding tide: submerged until the next purposeful display.



At low tide the coral rocks show their underwater charms; the multitudinous suckers encircling the mangrove trunks breathe in the air to feed the foliage above; while an almost impenetrable tangle of roots and branches promises a glorious playground for the assembly of tropical fish, once resubmerged in the waters of the creek.

There's a broad church of flora and fauna: crabs scurry from sand burrows back to water; spiderwebs string across my path, intended not for me, but for the six-legged species which abound; butterflies flit from one colour to the next.

Local fishermen are here every day, their traditional boats hollowed from baobab trees along the banks. They fish the river and sometimes out to sea (which comes with its dangers in rough waters). But the river is safe; nets strung out in a long line, or U-shape, to catch the fish riding back with the tide. I often meet these fisherfolk, cleaning and fixing their nets between expeditions. A fisherman's lot the world over reflects the rhythms of life, dependent on the seasons and the tides; and the Kenyan coast is no different, where fisherfolk rely on a healthy environment to maintain fish stocks. The mangrove forest stretching along the riverbank, is an integral part of all that.

Light is the element that makes this area so magical. Light, shade, and colour perhaps a more accurate description. The sun's rays bounce off the rocks and mangrove leaves, then reflect from the spider and its web in front of a verdant camouflage.

I reach the usual endpoint for my morning walk: a place to sit and take in the beauty that surrounds. My dog swims in the water here ... and chases crabs of course. So, each to our own; we are both content to pause for a while. From here I look back to the morning sun glistening on the waters of the river mouth. Exhilarating!



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