

An Adventure for Life

Ida Trygg and Filip Andersson, both 29 years, who have recently become parents, do not only run the hotel Kinondo Kwetu – they are also working hard for the local community

Three years ago Fred and Louise Andersson made a trip. On a spot that was almost not marked on the map, in a land with a very bloody history, there was a small and worn-down hotel. The name of the place was Kinondo Kwetu and it was situated on the border of a holy forest, one hour's trip by car south of Mombasa, on the long coast of Kenya.

Fred and Louise decided to go for it and buy the place, where they could quietly grow old.

But it did not exactly turn out like that.

“We were there when the deal was finalized and when we came back here to celebrate Christmas, the thought started to grow that we could stay here and help to get the business work.” says Ida Trygg-Andersson, who is married to the couple's son Filip Andersson, both 29 years.

“And in the end we said, let's just do it, let us move here for some time and see what happens! At the same time, it was of course completely unreal to take a step like this. We thought, this place is so very far away in the world”, says Ida, who eight months ago had a daughter, Lova, born straight into the new life in Africa.

Today Ida, - with a past as a press assistant to video director Jonas Åkerlund, is hotel director. And Kinondo Kwetu, that has got its name from the nearby village, is a family run “home away from home” with 60 employees and room for 38 guests.

“Christmas 2008 is already fully booked!” smiles Ida.

It is a mouth-to-mouth marketing that is beginning to give result.

Already from the start it was obvious that it would take an expansion to get the business going. The original houses, which from the beginning were owned by Swedish Tina Dyrssen, are thus completed with many new houses, in a magnificent, Swahili architecture that is typical for the area. The largest of them, Villa Mama Taa, Filip's father had “ready and finished in his head”, says Ida, “it was just to draw and give it further to the architect's office in Stockholm”.

From the start the family also decided that everything should be manufactured locally by local craftsmen, “from the topz-bowl in the bathroom to the beds where the guests sleep.

A full-pension day during premium season costs 2 900 Swedish kronor, including all activities. “Except motor-driven sports”, Ida says.

The guests can have locally produced food from Kinondo Kwetu's kitchen in the pleasantly tropical climate, enjoy drinks, snorkel, get a massage in the shade of the acacia trees by the beach, go on a guided tour in Shimba Hills National Park or drift away in a traditional fishing boat.

The hotel's own safari jeep takes care of the transfer to and from the airport.

All this – more or less wealthy people from the Western world that relax in a very poor former British colony – could of course cause provoke. If it were not that Ida and the Andersson family are not only geographically, but also socially anchored and involved in the region.

The average life expectancy in Kenya is 47 years; in Sweden a woman's average life time is 83 years and a man's 79. The differences in income and wealth are gigantic: SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) calls Kenya one of the world's most unequal countries. The democracy process after the brutal civil war that lead to independence in 1963 has been shaky, to say the

least. Until recently much of the foreign aid to the country has been withdrawn because of the extensive corruption.

“You cannot work here without wanting to help and already from the beginning we decided to hire people from here, which is kind of a contribution in itself”, says Ida and then tells us about the different aid projects that the hotel has started and contributes to. There is among others Kinondo Kwetu Foundation, which has renovated the local school, pays some of the teachers and also helps pupils with the tuition fees so that they can go further to high school. An exchange with Viktor Rydberg School in Stockholm, of which Louise Andersson is one of the founders - is already going on.

And there is Kinondo Health Clinic, financed by the hotel and other donors, which will be ready at year-end and will offer basic health care to the villagers, vaccinations and health information.

Also, the sacred forest on the rim of which the hotel is situated, and where there are gigantic trees that have a holy status – is kind of a support project. Kenya’s animal life and flora are enormously rich and the nature is also the object of some of the people’s worship. In order to protect this area on the Kenyan coast from a too strong pressure of exploitation, the authorities have declared it a protected area, where the visitors by respect must follow a certain dress code; no short skirts or shorts during the guided tour!

“You do not have to be religious to feel a magic stillness here”, says Ida. During the nights, when there is moonlight and the tide has made the beach withdraw towards the horizon... then it is as if someone has lit a huge lamp. We usually take a walk to the nearest neighbor 15 minutes away to take a drink in his bar. You really feel the power from the moon and the dogs then run around like mad and just bark.”