

A small piece of paradise

By **PETER ENGELS**

PROPRIETOR, NGALA LODGE



PETER ENGELS is a Dutch national who, after a career in industry, started a bed and breakfast business in The Gambia in 1998. Over the years the original B&B expanded into today's Ngala Lodge, one of the most up-market and unique properties in The Gambia.

Ngala Lodge has been lovingly created over many years and has established itself as one of the most exclusive luxury properties in The Gambia. Situated close to the working village of Bakau, and yet enjoying an atmosphere of tranquillity and calm once you pass through its doors, it is a small, intimate and child-free boutique hotel, offering both luxurious accommodation and an excellent a la carte restaurant in a stunning, cliff-top location for the discerning guest.

The 18 individual suites, all sea-facing, offer a choice of comfortable and spacious accommodation and an individual style is very apparent throughout, in both the artwork displayed and finishing touches or decoration. All the rooms are en-suite with air-conditioning, safes and minibars as you would expect, and some with private Jacuzzi and ocean views, or even private garden areas.

The original suites are housed in a 2-storey colonial mansion, along with the penthouse which offers something unique, being split over 2 levels with a skylight above the bed and private roof terrace. As the success and reputation of the Lodge has grown and demand started to outstrip supply for this exclusive property, in cooperation with The Gambia Experience who provides the majority of my clientele, I have created additional upgraded rooms which maximise the space and views available, yet without spoiling the ambiance at Ngala. The four impressive Atlantic Suites all enjoy their own private Jacuzzi on the terrace or balcony, whilst the

neighbouring Ngala Manor now incorporates a further 4 spacious suites enjoying stunning sea views and their own private shared garden with Jacuzzi overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, yet just a stone's throw away from the pool and highly reputed restaurant.

The elevated Ngala Restaurant deserves its reputation and is frequented by local businessmen and expatriates, as well as the hotel's own clientele, many of whom choose never to dine outside the Lodge. It not only serves excellent food with a la carte dining and daily specials inspired by its English chef, Jonathan Groves, but it also has wonderful views of the ocean at sunset. Low key entertainment is regularly provided, along with a weekly African night with dancers, creating an inviting atmosphere – it is not unusual for diners to capture the mood and participate by dancing or singing with the musicians which adds something truly special to an evening without spoiling the intimate ambiance. Breakfasts and lunches can be taken on the terrace or even on the decked area of beach below, or special requests for dining on private terraces are taken on board with ease.

One of the main attractors of Ngala is the sense of space around the grounds and the feeling of privacy and exclusivity that guests can achieve throughout the property; the attractive tropical gardens with towering palm trees facing the ocean offer plenty of room to relax and enjoy the fabulous climate and refreshing breezes during the day, with nothing to interrupt the wonderful views. Alternatively, the enclosed sandy beach below is enhanced by an area of timber decking complete with sun loungers and parasols for those preferring to relax whilst enjoying a closer connection with the ocean. It also offers the opportunity for a romantic stroll or even a spot of fishing for which The Gambia is renowned.

People come to Ngala for several reasons; the quality of accommodation and dining along with its enviable location are important, but just as influential are the warmth of the welcome and exceptional service offered by the friendly staff. The atmosphere is very relaxed and people leave Ngala with a real sense of being part of a large family and wishing to return for more. Some hotels offer formality and elegance; Ngala offers warmth and homeliness without compromising on its high standards. This small piece of paradise remains open throughout the year and offers an oasis of tranquillity and luxury in a romantic and intimate setting. **F**

