



Fresh fish is delivered daily to many beach lodges by local Zanzibari fishermen



Kirk's red colobus are endemic to Zanzibar

## EAST COAST ZANZIBAR

The east coast of Zanzibar is lined with powder-white beaches looking out towards a long barrier reef, about a kilometre offshore. Inland, small fishing villages and a variety of places to stay are dotted along a coastal strip of coconut palms. The beaches here slope very little, so when the tide is out, the water retreats a long way and swimming is difficult – although paddling out to the top of the exposed reef with the right local guide is fascinating!

The old favourite, Matemwe Bungalows, has been renamed as **Matemwe**, and still occupies an isolated spot above a long sandy beach. Its 12 impressively large suites are raised up on a low coral cliff overlooking the ocean. All have private, curved verandas, double hammocks, a cushioned lounge area and a king-size bed. Six of the bungalows have an additional spare single bed on a mezzanine floor, perfect for a child.

Wander through Matemwe's lush gardens to find two swimming pools, one atop the coral cliff and another below it, with an adjacent thatched bar. Matemwe has a very relaxed, open-sided dining area which serves a choice of great food – including a variety of

seafood. Escorted reef walks are interesting and snorkelling from Matemwe's dhow can be arranged. PADI diving trips can be organised locally, too – mostly visiting the superb coral reefs around nearby Mnemba Island. Massages, pedicures and manicures are also offered here.

The exclusive **Matemwe Retreat** is a short walk from Matemwe, and guests can use the facilities of the main lodge. Each of the three suites here are very large and private, with a bedroom (with vast en-suite bathroom), a dining area and a deck downstairs. On the roof are a day bed and a private plunge pool. A butler can help you to plan your day, and the chef will plan a menu. You never really need to leave your self-contained suite!

Standing high on a coral cliff above the stunning Kiwengwa Beach, **Shooting Star** is a firm favourite. Built and run by an engaging Tanzanian, Elly, and his English wife, Lesley, it attracts a youthful crowd. The bar/lounge area has a lovely social air and a small spa has recently opened.

We love the sea-view cottages, all of which have air con, fans, mosquito nets and en-suite bathroom with a large shower and a private terrace; several have been designed

for families. All have cool white walls, colourful tinga-tinga pictures and makuti mats. Each of Shooting Star's two luxurious, two-storey suites has its own swimming pool and stands in private gardens behind the lodge. Diving and snorkelling trips are organised by a nearby PADI centre.

In February 2008 we saw a new lodge being built on the compact plot of an old one. When we returned in June to **Mchanga Beach Lodge**, we were its first guests. Mchanga has eight rooms, split into two categories, but priced equally. Seaview Lodge rooms have a view across the pool towards the beach, whilst Garden Suites are larger, set back, and don't really have a view. All are simple but have been designed well, with polished stone floors, handmade Zanzibari furniture, bright fabrics and an en-suite toilet and efficient shower. The restaurant, lounge and bar have sandy floors, thatched roofs and sides open to the breeze.

The owners, Gloria and Thomas, have put a lot of thought and love into Mchanga, making it a very hospitable lodge. It's a small place, perfect to get away from it all, and currently one of the best mid-range options on Zanzibar's east coast.

**Pongwe Beach Hotel** stands in its own quiet cove which, at high tide, is cut off from the surrounding coastline. Inside the little bay is a beautiful beach and a sandy, palm-shaded area complete with inviting hammocks and loungers.

Its 16 whitewashed, thatched bungalows are simply furnished with Zanzibari beds, mosquito nets, and an en-suite flush toilet and hot shower (using filtered but slightly brackish water). Electricity isn't on all the time, but there is emergency lighting. Dinner is a varied set menu offering high-quality food. Pongwe has its own dhow for sailing and snorkelling trips, and an admirable library of books. This is a simple, great-value spot.

Opened in December 2005, the **Zamani Zanzibar Kempinski** has 110 rooms with private balconies and six private villas. Set in immaculately landscaped gardens, this also boasts a spa and wellness centre with professional Thai therapists.



On the Jambiani Village Tour: learning about seaweed farming, which provides an income to many women



Many of the beaches on the east coast of Zanzibar stretch for miles

## ZANZIBAR'S MICHAMVI PENINSULA

In the southeast corner of Zanzibar, the Michamvi Peninsula is very similar to the area described as 'East Coast', with the same stunning, powder-white beaches, barrier reef, palm trees and significant tidal change.

Six miles south of the tip of Michamvi Peninsula, you'll find the ever-popular Breezes and its neighbouring sibling, Palms.

**Breezes Beach Club** is an international-style resort that's long been a favourite with honeymooners and families. It has 70 rooms with all the amenities of a good hotel, spread out in extensive gardens. Inside are several restaurants, a large swimming pool, a floodlit tennis court, oodles of activities and a very good, independent dive centre, Rising Sun.

There's also a purpose-built spa where experienced Thai therapists offer a range of Eastern treatments. It's comfortable and professionally run, and if you're travelling with children, Breezes might be ideal.

Immediately adjacent, but about twice the price, **Palms** has just six large, luxurious villas. Each has a huge bedroom, en-suite bathroom, and a lounge with all mod-cons, plus a private outdoor plunge pool. The villas share a larger pool, a sumptuous lounge and dining area, and even a tiny spa. Palms' large villas are balanced by its small public spaces and it appeals to a young, moneyed crowd.

On a beautiful stretch of beach a short walk south of Breezes, **Echo Beach** opened in October 2007. This is a very small lodge, with 11 spacious and airy rooms, each with good-quality fittings and furniture, including antique Zanzibari furniture. Outside is an open-sided lounge and dining area. We thought that Echo Beach might become one of the top boutique lodges on Zanzibar, but it received mixed reviews from our travellers in 2008. With high build quality and very reasonable prices, it remains good value, provided your expectations for food and service are moderate.

With only five rooms, **Robinson's Place** is a tiny beach retreat that's more of a family

### Jambiani Village Tour

For an insight into real Zanzibar life, and a chance to meet the villagers, probably the island's best trip is the walking tour of Jambiani organised by Eco+Culture. You can visit here whilst staying anywhere on the island, although it's most convenient if you're staying in Jambiani. Exactly what you see will depend on your interests, as will the trip's length (although 3–5 hours is typical), but it might include visits to the women farming seaweed, to a traditional healer, to a pre-school run by volunteers, and to a particularly good restaurant run by villagers serving traditional foods. This tour costs about £10 per person from Jambiani, or more if a vehicle is needed to get here.

home than a lodge. Set in shady gardens beside a superb beach, it's a gentle and relaxed place. Stay here in the master bedroom, which is huge, with a double and a three-quarter bed, bright fabrics and a spotless en-suite bathroom.

Expect a friendly welcome, but understand that Ann and Ahmed, the interesting European-Zanzibari couple who own it, don't want it to become big or commercial. Instead, they enjoy self-sufficiency, cooking on open fires, serving simple meals, and not having any electricity.

In southeast Zanzibar, Jambiani is a clean, tidy and relaxed village which is quite widely spread out along the coast. Several

environmental and social NGOs, all run by Jambiani residents, are based here, and perhaps these have helped to make it particularly open and friendly towards visitors.

At one end of this, **Kikadini Villas** is an unusual but interesting property, set on a long stretch of beachfront. It consists of four large, separate villas, each with a stunning sea view. Families or groups might occupy one of the larger villas, whilst a couple would have a smaller villa, or stay in one of the rooms. Many of the rooms are large and all are built and furnished with quality. Each is very individual, but all share elements of Arab design and many have original art on the walls.

Currently meals are cooked by your villa's chef, and served in the villa's open courtyard or roof-top terrace. However, by mid-2009 Kikadini plans to have one new central dining area and swimming pool, for the use of all guests.

Kikadini's beach is a working beach: a great spot for seeing something of local Zanzibari life, but not for sunbathing (which is best done on your villas' terraces). Kikadini is quite an exclusive experience, a place to put your feet up and relax, and perhaps to take a village tour (see below).



Pongwe's shaded hammocks are a great place to relax when the tide is out



### Bradt Guide to Zanzibar

Chris McIntyre, who runs *Expert Africa*, is co-author of **Zanzibar, Pemba & Mafia: The Bradt Travel Guide**. The seventh edition of this is published in February 2009 by Bradt Travel Guides, and is the most comprehensive and up-to-date guidebook available for the Zanzibar and Mafia archipelagos. You'll find it on sale at most good bookshops, price £14.99; alternatively copies are available direct from us costing £12 (including p&p) – refundable if you subsequently book a trip to Zanzibar with us.



The beaches around Fumba may not have pure whitesand, but they are stunning



Green turtles nest on Mnemba Island

## SOUTHWESTERN ZANZIBAR

The southwest side of Zanzibar is a very relaxed and friendly quarter of the island. Until recently it had very few visitors – as, although the beaches here are lovely, they don't quite rival the picture-postcard scenes of powder-white sand found on Zanzibar's east coast.

However, in the last few years two smart, new lodges have opened up here. They are the best of a sprinkling of small, new lodges which are dotted around the quiet and undisturbed beaches in this region. Both have quiet beaches, the island's most exclusive diving and snorkelling, and a real sense of style.

**Fumba Beach Lodge** opened its doors in 2005; it's just 30 minutes from Stone Town airport, and currently the only lodge in the Menai Bay Conservation Area. It was designed and built (and is still run) by Edwin and Annemarie, with an eye on safari lodge design. They've done a superb job: carefully crafting clean, crisp lines and bright colours.

Fumba has 20 deluxe rooms with canopied beds, mains electricity, en-suite showers, fans and a sea view, plus six very swish suites. Four of these are luxury suites with

huge double beds, an outside shower, a private deck and a magnificent double bath with a view; two are baobab suites, cleverly built around a tree. Beside the large, infinity swimming pool is an open-air restaurant and a bar built in an old dhow. Activities organised by the lodge include kayaking, fishing, snorkelling, PADI diving trips and a good range of massage therapies.

**Unguja Lodge** opened at the end of 2006 in the far south of Zanzibar, on a small coral shelf near the fishing village of Kizimkazi. The lodge's design is unique: a refreshing mix of modern minimalism and Zanzibari influences. Curved white walls, high thatched roofs and modern art lend a crisp and almost artistic feel to this lodge – yet it doesn't feel detached from its location and environment.

Unguja has 12 vast villas, a large pool and a PADI dive centre from where you can organise snorkelling and dolphin watching as well as excellent diving. Unguja has strong links with the local community; almost all of its furniture and pieces of art were sourced from Zanzibar. Guided walks through the local village are heart-warming, and all the proceeds go directly to the community.

## MNEMBA ISLAND

The term 'barefoot luxury' might have been coined for Mnemba: a private, previously uninhabited island about 5km from the east coast of Zanzibar. At its centre is a tropical forest, home to nothing more dangerous than cute, spaniel-sized suni antelope and butterflies.

The island's circular perimeter is about a kilometre of soft, powder-white coral sand – perfect for an hour's romantic stroll. Turtles nest on the beach, subtle markers noting when guests can expect to discover the young hatchlings. Beyond the pristine beaches lie turquoise seas and some of Tanzania's best coral reefs – some within easy snorkelling distance of the water's edge.

**Mnemba Island Lodge** is the height of exclusivity. Ten private bandas made of hand-woven coconut palm and local timber overlook the beach from the forest's edge. These are large, airy and open plan, so expect to find a few friendly crabs scuttling across the immaculate mkeka-mat floors. Furnished simply but tastefully, each banda has a huge bed, wooden furniture, and lots of comfortable sofas. A palm-covered walkway leads to a stylish timber-and-glass en-suite bathroom; showers are used to moderate the island's fresh-water consumption.

Mnemba's cuisine is predictably excellent, with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, and the flexibility to cater for individual preferences exceedingly well. Candlelit dinners on the beach are the norm and the flexible menu majors on fresh seafood.

There's a first-class dive centre on the island and (for qualified divers) up to two dives per day are included in the cost of your stay. Other activities include snorkelling, kayaking, fly-fishing, dhow cruises and windsurfing.

Mnemba is not cheap (prices start at around £780 per person per night; see the Saffron beach add-on, page 135), but with lots of space and first-rate service in one of the best beach locations in Africa, it is exceedingly good.



The seaview villas at Unguja Lodge have a private terrace

### Spice Tours

Spices are integral to Zanzibari life, providing food, remedies, dyes and income. One of the popular local tours is a 'spice tour', which takes a few hours and costs from US\$20-75 each, depending on the place from which you start your trip. On such a trip you'll be guided around a plantation to pick leaves, pods and twigs, and discover how many of our common spices, including cinnamon, pepper, vanilla, nutmeg, ginger and turmeric, grow on the island.