

ZANZIBAR ARCHIPELAGO

The Zanzibar archipelago consists of over 50 islands, strung out in the Indian Ocean, and varying from tiny outcrops like Chumbe Island and Mnemba Island, to the larger, more populated islands of Zanzibar (Unguja) and Pemba.

The larger islands are lush and fertile. They're covered with coconut palms and clove plantations, the produce of which you'll often see and smell. Small farming communities are everywhere. Bicycles laden with green bananas, spiky jack fruit and enormous fish abound; fishing villages nestle beside the beaches; and everywhere the air is suffused with the aroma of fruit and spices. It's an intoxicating, exotic atmosphere.

The beaches on these islands are often stunning: powdery white sand, shaded by palm trees. The sea is shallow, but venture further into the sparkling, turquoise water and you'll find coral reefs for great snorkelling and diving.

In recent years we've looked very closely at Zanzibar, regularly revisiting its beach lodges and hotels with a critical eye, so that we can recommend the right ones for you.

This has been more arduous than it sounds: the 'long version' of our research is three editions of Bradt's Zanzibar guidebook, which have been written by Expert Africa's team members (see page 217), who have visited virtually every lodge on these islands: all 300+ of them! However, the 'short version' – a précis of the cream of Zanzibar's crop – is noted here, in the following few pages.

You'll find a couple of the best larger hotels, typically used by families who travel with us, and many smaller, more individual lodges on quiet beaches and remote islands. Some are simply excellent, others are excellent value; one or two are both! The best options here change fast, so call our experts for up-to-date, first-hand advice.

Day Trips on Zanzibar Island

Aside from the spice tours (see page 222), there are many possible day trips on Zanzibar. Our team on the ground can help you to organise these, including visits to the giant tortoises of Prison Island and to Jozani Forest.



STONE TOWN

The historic heart of Zanzibar Town, known as Stone Town, was constructed during the 19th century and remains largely unchanged. Labyrinths of narrow alleys lead to palaces, mosques and old Arab houses; tiny shops sell colourful tingatinga paintings, Zanzibari clocks and heavily adorned chests. The early-morning market on Creek Road, where determined Zanzibaris shop for fragrant spices, exotic fruit and fresh fish, is fabulous.

Stone Town is best explored on foot and we find that a two-night stay here is perfect. If this is your last stop in Africa, then an early morning flight from Zanzibar to Dar will connect with early flights back to the UK.

Note that Stone Town can be noisy; we cannot guarantee silence anywhere! Frequent calls to prayer from the mosques, along with the hustle and bustle of town, are part of everyday life here. It's a lively, vibrant atmosphere, but don't expect peace and quiet.

Town Hotels

Regarded as the best hotel in Stone Town, the **Zanzibar Serena Inn** is a swish establishment with excellent facilities, a lovely pool and views over the Indian Ocean. Its 51 modern rooms have large beds, mosquito nets, air conditioning and sparkling, en-suite bathrooms; most also



Testing the spices at the friendly market in Stone Town

have balconies. It has no real beach, but day trips by courtesy shuttle bus can be made to the hotel's Beach Club at Mangapwani, north of Stone Town.

Also beside the sea, **Tembo Hotel** is furnished with ornate Zanzibari mirrors, wooden chests and a number of elephant ornaments. There's a central courtyard with a swimming pool and bar area overlooking the busy beach, where numerous boats, including traditional dhows, are moored. The 36 air-conditioned rooms and four apartments are simple with canopy beds and en-suite bathrooms.

Tucked away in a narrow street, the **Dhow Palace Hotel** is another old, converted Arabic house. It is relaxed and peaceful with 30 rooms arranged around a central courtyard fountain and swimming pool. Steep stairs lead to wide corridors, and rooms with traditional beds, air conditioning and en-suite bathrooms. The Dhow Palace has a lovely rooftop restaurant for lunch and dinner, while breakfast is served by the pool. The Tembo Hotel and Dhow Palace Hotel are sister hotels; both offer reasonable standards and value for money. However, unusually for Zanzibar's hotels, neither serves alcohol.

Boutique Hotels

Beyt al Chai ('house of tea') stands beside a grassy square, directly opposite the Serena. Originally built by an Arab merchant, this was originally a private home and still offers very informal hospitality. It has just five en-suite rooms spread over three floors and furnished with authentic Zanzibari furniture, and its sumptuous lounge is a lovely place to relax. Breakfast is served downstairs in the restaurant, which is also one of the best spots in town for lunch and dinner.

For a good little hotel with a mid-range price tag tucked into a pedestrian-only part of Stone Town's maze of streets, consider the **Zanzibar Coffee House**. It's a friendly place – part of an authentic coffee shop that is frequented by locals and ex-pats alike (the coffee is roasted and ground here – a gorgeous aroma!). Up steep stairs all eight rooms are different, though each is furnished

Zanzibar Different Tours

Zanzibar Different Tours are a small tour company, operating in conjunction with the Mtoni Palace Conservation Project, whose main aim is to preserve Zanzibar's oldest palace. Their offbeat itineraries include the Princess Salme Tour costing US\$80 per person, which combines a visit to various historical palaces with a traditional ceremony, an informative spice tour and a Swahili lunch. Or you can try your hand at taarab music lessons, ngoma dancing or tingatinga painting. These unusual tours offer a thoroughly original way of experiencing Zanzibar's sites and culture, whilst also supporting important conservation projects. Ask us for more details.



Stone Town's Forodhani Gardens look out over the sea



Ornate Zanzibari door in Stone Town



The rooftops of Stone Town

in a simple Zanzibari style with handmade furniture and bright fabrics. Tasty fresh breakfasts are served on their sunny roof terrace each day.

The **Zanzibar Palace Hotel** is a high-quality *piéd-à-terre* which offers excellent service and unique style. Its nine rooms are all completely different and the suites are like nothing else in Stone Town: spacious, with lots of original furniture. The friendly owners, Cootje and Frans, are usually around and go out of their way to be helpful.

The newly-opened **Emerson Spice** has a generous helping of owner Emerson's flair for design, with each of the six open rooms having a different take on the exotic Swahili feel. With further rooms to follow, the hotel is quickly becoming a popular choice for an atmospheric stay in Stone Town and follows on from the success of Emerson's previous project, the *Emerson and Green*. Enter the hotel through the impressive wooden doors and head up to the rooftop terrace for the delicious tasting menu, five high quality and imaginative courses that make full use of local spices.

Kholle House opened its doors in February 2011 after three years of extensive restoration work. Built in 1860 for Princess Kholle, the house has been thoughtfully and

beautifully restored and retains many original features. With warm bright linens, colourful stained glass, antique furniture and carved Zanzibari beds, there's a wonderfully welcoming and historic feel to the place. Plus, there's a sparkling blue pool, a rarity in Stone Town and most welcome on any hot afternoon.

Swahili House is an elegant hotel built in a traditional style. Once an Indian merchant house, its antiques and locally made furniture lend it a lovely authentic feel. Even if you don't stay here, do dine in its stunning rooftop restaurant. They have 20 rooms, which are spread over four floors, all traditionally decorated, yet with mod-cons such as air conditioning and fans. Many also feature impressive open bathrooms within the rooms.

The historic **Mashariki Palace Hotel** was once the home of the Sultan's religious councillor and has now been fully renovated and restored. While some original features remain, the hotel favours a more modern take on Zanzibari design, with bare white walls, wide open spaces and the occasional hand carved ceiling. Just around the corner, **The Seyyida** offers 18 tastefully decorated and spacious rooms, all with flat-screen TVs and air conditioning. Upstairs is a relaxing

rooftop lounge and bar with sweeping views of the harbour and the sea beyond.

Once well known as the *Emerson and Green*, **236 Hurumzi Hotel** was historically Stone Town's flagship boutique hotel. However recent feedback on the quality of service has been mixed and there are some more reliable boutique hotels in Stone Town now.

Out-of-town Hotels

It is possible to explore Stone Town whilst staying just outside the humdrum of the centre. **Mbweni Ruins Hotel**, 15 minutes south of the city, is an old, established hotel in lush gardens. It's a calm spot with a restaurant, a pool and a bar overlooking the beach and jetty (the embarkation point for trips to Chumbe Island). Mbweni's 13 en-suite rooms are well appointed with air conditioning, tasteful furniture and balconies.

Also set in impressive tropical gardens, **Mtoni Marine**, 10 minutes to the north of town, is recommended for its friendly service, choice of spacious rooms and restaurants, and its proximity to neighbouring Mtoni Palace, offering culture and concerts literally on the doorstep. Families are warmly welcomed with a cool pool and even a playground on site.

NORTHERN ZANZIBAR

Two or three hours' drive from Stone Town, a bustling backpacker centre has grown up beside white beaches near the village of Nungwi. There's a small turtle sanctuary here, and many lively places to stay, eat and drink.

Flame Tree Cottages spreads over well-tended gardens. It's a low-key place with 16 fairly simple whitewashed cottages which have recently been refurbished. All have electricity, air con, fans and en-suite bathrooms; some have small kitchenettes. Flame Tree is an inexpensive option in a secluded location close to Nungwi's centre.

In the heart of Nungwi, the British-owned **Z Hotel** is a 35-room hotel built in modern style with high-spec (and often high-tech) finishings. Offering contemporary, Western design with Zanzibari influences and a popular cocktail bar, it appeals to a young and lively crowd with money.

A few miles from the village, the popular **Ras Nungwi Beach Hotel** has 32 rooms standing in compact, well-kept gardens

with a swimming pool. The rooms vary but each has an en-suite bathroom, a veranda, and a lovely large bed draped with a mosquito net, as well as air conditioning, a minibar, room safe and hairdryer. There's an excellent PADI dive centre, offering a wide range of watersports and deep-sea fishing, as well as a spa, a flood-lit tennis court and an indoor games area – helping to make it popular with active, younger visitors.

On the same stretch of beach is the imposing **Essque Zalu**, with its giant makuti thatch entrance, the tallest on the island and somewhat reminiscent of the Sydney Opera House. The resort has 40 suites and nine vast villas set in lush landscaped gardens, as well as three restaurants serving a range of international cuisines. Further back into the gardens is the relaxing spa with eight treatment rooms and there's also a colourfully-lit infinity pool, complete with water jets and a whirlpool.

Right next door is **Mnarani Beach Cottages**, a friendly and welcoming place named after the nearby lighthouse. With four different room types on offer, from

simple standard cottages to self-contained family flats, as well as a sparkling new pool looking out over a gorgeous sweep of beach, this relaxed place should appeal to families and young couples. Zanzibari owner Nassor is very active in the local community and is involved with various projects aimed at supporting Nungwi village and reducing the environmental impact of the hotel. Further around the headland, **Doubletree by Hilton** is a new addition that has been refreshed and refurbished into 96 rooms, a gym and spa and various bars and restaurants.

Just south of Kendwa is the relatively new **Kilindi**, which opened in early 2009 and is promoted as one of Zanzibar's most exclusive getaways. When we visited it, we found a stunning lodge built to a very high specification. Each of its 15 vast private pavilions has a stylish bedroom, an open-plan bathroom and a private plunge pool. Kilindi's public areas have traditional touches blended with chic, minimalist design. The food is exceptional and despite its luxury it still manages to feel unpretentious.



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 was published in February 2009 by Bradt Travel Guides – and the eighth is now being written. It's probably the most comprehensive 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 at £12 (including p&p) – refundable if you subsequently book a trip to Zanzibar with us.



There's always a lot happening on Nungwi's South Beach, which is one of Zanzibar's busiest beaches