



The boat to Mnemba Island

EAST COAST ZANZIBAR

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

The old favourite, Matemwe Bungalows, has been renamed as **Matemwe Lodge**, and still occupies an isolated spot above a long sandy beach. Its 12 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 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 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.

Its sister property, the exclusive **Matemwe**

Retreat, is a short walk away, and guests here can use the facilities of the main lodge. Each of the four suites are very large and private, with a bedroom (and vast en-suite bathroom), a dining area and a huge wrap-around 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 prepare a dedicated menu. You never really need to leave your self-contained suite! A new addition in 2011, **Matemwe Beach House** is a three-bedroom house, offering the same facilities and service as Matemwe Retreat, but designed more with families and small groups in mind.

Standing high on a coral cliff above Kiwengwa Beach, **Shooting Star** is a good-value option. Built and run by an engaging Tanzanian, Elly, and his English wife, Lesley, it attracts a friendly, mixed crowd of all ages. The bar/lounge area has a lovely social air, there's a delightful infinity pool, and a small spa. A beachfront restaurant is planned for early 2012.

The sea-view cottages, all have air con, fans, mosquito nets, an en-suite bathroom with a large shower, and a private terrace; several have been designed for families. Each of Shooting Star's two luxurious, two-storey suites also has its own swimming pool. Diving and snorkelling trips are organised by a nearby PADI centre.

We were the first guests at **Mchanga Beach Lodge** in 2008, and it has since become popular amongst our travellers. The owners, Gloria and Thomas, have put a

lot of thought and love into Mchanga, making it a very hospitable lodge. Mchanga has 10 rooms, split into two categories. Seaview Lodge rooms have a view across the pool towards the beach, whilst Garden Suites are larger and set back in the tropical gardens. 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 and thatched roofs, and are open to the breeze – and there's a new beachfront spa. Mchanga is perfect for quiet relaxation; it's currently one of the best and best value mid-range options on Zanzibar's east coast.

Pongwe Beach Hotel stands in a quiet cove which, at high tide, is cut off from the surrounding beaches. It has a beautiful beach, shaded by palms and dotted with inviting hammocks and loungers, while above that, a swimming pool stands on a coral outcrop.

Pongwe's 16 bungalows are simply furnished with Zanzibari beds, mosquito nets, and an en-suite flush toilet and hot shower (using filtered but slightly brackish water). Dinner is a varied set menu, and the food is generally very good. Pongwe has its own dhow for snorkelling and fishing trips, complimentary kayaks, and an admirable library of books. This is a simple, great-value spot.

Brand new in 2011, **Green & Blue** is a collection of 13 bungalows and one beachfront villa set in leafy gardens which are also home to a secluded open spa area and three pools. There's a great attention to detail here, from the fine finish of the split-level rooms to the position of the windows in the lounge that perfectly frame Mnemba Island; Green & Blue is an exciting new addition to Zanzibar's east coast.

Also new for 2011 is the peaceful yet efficient **Sunshine Hotel**, which has a lovely setting in flowering gardens on picture-postcard stretch of beach. The 16 rooms are located in two-storey bungalows, and use bright shades to add even more colour to this vibrant hotel, whose relaxed atmosphere is popular with young couples.

Towards the northern end of the east coast, in Matemwe, is **Kasha Boutique Hotel**, another recent addition that offers 11 villas in two rows along the coastline. The spacious rooms come with large plasma screen TVs and DVD players, while outside each has its own plunge pool.

Diving from Zanzibar

From the north or east coast, you're likely to dive on the large Mnemba Island reef – even though it's a distance to sail there. From the Michamvi Peninsula, you're more likely to dive on the coast barrier reef, which isn't as spectacular, but will still result in some great dives. In the south-west, you'll usually dive in the excellent Menai Bay Conservation Area. Ask to speak to one of *Expert Africa's* divers for our views; we've dived at many sites, and with many operations throughout Mozambique and Tanzania, so will always do our best to give you an impartial comparison.

ZANZIBAR'S MICHAMVI PENINSULA

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

The elegant **Sultan Palace** is an old favourite of ours which reopened in August 2011. Re-visiting it shortly after, we found it even better than before, with a stunning location atop a coral cliff and sweeping views out to sea. The 15 suites are spacious, while the circular main area is filled with stained glass, carved Zanzibari furniture, sumptuous fabrics and appliqué cushions. To top this off there's a beautiful pool overlooking the deserted beach below, a romantic sundowner spot. This is one of our top tips for great value on Zanzibar in 2012.

Six miles south of the tip of Michamvi Peninsula, you'll find the ever-popular Breezes and its neighbouring siblings, Palms & Baraza. **Breezes Beach Club & Spa** is an international-style resort that's long been a favourite with honeymooners and families. Spread through extensive gardens, its 70 rooms have all the amenities of a good hotel. It has several restaurants, a large swimming pool, floodlit tennis court and a good dive centre, The Rising Sun. There's also a large spa where experienced Thai therapists offer a range of treatments. It's comfortable and very professionally run, and great if you're travelling with children.

Immediately adjacent, but much more exclusive, **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

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. 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). It might include a visit to the women farming seaweed, a traditional healer and a volunteer-run pre-school, and will usually end in a particularly good, if ramshackle, traditional restaurant run by local villagers. This tour costs about £15 per person from Jambiani, or more if a vehicle is needed to get here. We highly recommend it.



balanced by its small public spaces and it appeals to a young, moneyed crowd.

Baraza Resort & Spa is a new addition completed in 2010 – a luxurious beach resort with 29 private villas. Sumptuous fabrics, curved archways and authentic furniture combine with modern fittings such as flat-screen TVs. The larger two-bedroom villas and kids' club make this a great spot for families who enjoy a bit of luxury, alongside private accommodation and good food.

On a beautiful stretch of beach, a short walk south of Breezes, is **Echo Beach**. This is a small lodge, with 11 spacious rooms, each with good-quality fittings and furniture. With high build specification and 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. 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 couple who own it, don't want to become big or commercial. Instead, they enjoy cooking on open fires, simple meals, and no electricity.

With a warm colonial atmosphere, **Anna of Zanzibar** is a peaceful and unfussy beachside lodge. The 5 villas have a homely feel, with patterned wallpaper, soft

armchairs and cushions - a stay here is like being welcomed back into an old friend's home.

SOUTH-EAST ZANZIBAR

In south-east 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.

Kikadini Villas is an unusual but interesting property in Jambiani, set on a long stretch of beachfront. It consists of four large, separate villas, each built to a very high standard and with a stunning sea view. Families or groups might occupy one of the larger villas (although they don't accept children under 12), whilst a couple would have a smaller villa, or stay in one of the large rooms. Each is very individual, but all share elements of Arab design and have original art on the walls. Meals are usually served in the main building's restaurant, where you will also find a shisha lounge and swimming pool, but they can be served privately in your own villa as well.

Kikadini's beach is a working beach: a great spot for seeing local Zanzibari life, but not for sunbathing (which is best done by the pool or on your villa's terrace). Kikadini offers quite an exclusive experience, a place to put your feet up and relax and perhaps to take a village tour (see left).

Sultan Palace's new pool has beautiful views over the beach



The beaches around Fumba may not have pure white sand but they are stunning

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 six years, two excellent 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 is just 30 minutes from Stone Town airport, and currently the only lodge in the Menai Bay Conservation Area. It was designed and built by Edwin, who still manages the lodge, with an eye on contemporary safari lodge design. He has 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



The gardens and pool at Unguja Lodge

suites. Four of these are Luxury Suites with huge double beds, an outside shower, private deck and a magnificent double bath with a view; two are Baobab Suites, cleverly built around their namesake tree. Beside the large, infinity swimming pool is an open-air restaurant and a friendly bar built in an old dhow. Activities organised by the lodge include kayaking, fishing, snorkelling, picnics on nearby deserted islands, PADI diving trips and a good range of massage therapies in its spa.

Fumba has also recently purchased a large dhow with a double bedroom, which comes complete with its own staff. This can be used for a one- or two-night romantic stay on the ocean.

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, thatched villas, a large pool, spa and a PADI dive centre, from where you can organise snorkelling, surfing, kayaking 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.



Local women fishing