



The seven award-winning chalets on Chumbe Island are all very close to the beach

MNEMBA ISLAND

The term 'barefoot luxury' might have been coined for Mnemba Island: 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 beach.

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 (woven-palm) 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 freshwater 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 £770 per person per night; see the *Saffron Beach Add-on*, page 232), but with lots of space and outstanding service, it is exceedingly good.



The rare coconut crab can be seen on Chumbe Island

CHUMBE ISLAND

Chumbe is a tiny coral island six miles by boat from Zanzibar Town. Many years ago the army restricted access to it and thus the surrounding coral remained untouched; now it is a protected marine park. At the heart of this stands the remarkable **Chumbe Island Eco-Lodge** – a trail-blazing, award-winning example of a lodge that is genuinely ecologically sensitive.

There's no groundwater on the island, so all of the lodge's buildings have been ingeniously designed to catch, filter and store their own rainwater. The main dining and lounge area, which also functions as an education centre, is particularly spectacular in scale and design; like the rest of the lodge it uses mainly local materials. Chumbe has just six double-storey chalets, all lit by solar power. Each has a bedroom on the upper floor, one wall of which opens to the stars. Downstairs is a bathroom with composting toilet, a lounge/living room area and a hammock. There's also one single-storey bungalow, and all are within 30 seconds' walk of the beach. The food is simple but fresh and very good, with an emphasis on vegetables, fruit and seafood and a menu inspired by traditional Zanzibari recipes.

Activities focus on learning about the island's ecology. Guided forest walks look at the island's geology, flora and fauna – including endangered giant coconut crabs. On the beach, walks explore the rich intertidal zone, while knowledgeable guides lead snorkelling trips (scuba diving is prohibited) through a particularly impressive coral garden: the pristine reef around the island harbours over 400 species of fish and 200 species of coral.

Chumbe is a non-profit organisation that ploughs its proceeds back into local conservation and education; we're pleased to support it. It's also a delightful and fascinating place, ideal for a quiet stay of two, or perhaps three nights.

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. Ask us in advance if you'd like to organise one of these.



PEMBA ISLAND

Pemba is a 30-minute flight northeast of Zanzibar Island and, though comparable in size, it is less developed. Pot-holed roads lead through villages where women in bright kangas sit and chat, ox-drawn carts are stacked high with fruit, and the air is filled with the smell of spices.

Drive for 40 minutes from the airport and hop in a boat to Wambaa Beach, where you'll find the resort lodge of **Fundu Lagoon**. This has 18 tented rooms, six of them spacious suites, spread along the beach and densely vegetated hillside above. All have sea views from their private verandas, quiet ceiling fans, a wicker sofa and a double bed draped with mosquito nets. The en-suite bathrooms have flush toilets, hot showers, washbasins and a range of the lodge's own aromatherapy soaps and shampoos.

Fundu has three bars: one in the main lodge, another mid-way along the jetty, and a third beside the swimming pool; some drinks are included in your stay, like the six 'house cocktails' and house wine. There is a separate games room (with a satellite

television), and a spa offering massages amongst other treatments. A friendly team serves a choice of dishes from the imaginative menu in the dining area, and the pool bar serves snacks all day.

Fundu has a PADI dive centre that offers waterskiing, sea kayaking in the surrounding mangroves, and day trips to nearby Misali Island for snorkelling and diving. Due to strong currents off Pemba, we recommend some of the dives here only for the experienced, who will enjoy the adrenalin of drift-diving along the walls of the Pemba Channel and the large pelagic fish which come to feed there. Fundu is one of Tanzania's most costly beach lodges and is popular with young honeymooners and those seeking a rustic beach experience.

Newly opened in 2010, **Pemba Lodge** claims to be the first truly eco-lodge in this area. Located on Shamiani Island, off the southern tip of Pemba, there are just five large bungalows here. These are raised on stilts about a metre off the ground, furnished with items built from reclaimed dhow wood and equipped with solar-powered lights. The en-suite bathrooms

have composting toilets and showers which use collected rainwater. At time of press, we hadn't seen this new lodge for ourselves, but we have heard good things about it – and are planning a detailed research trip to Pemba in the first few months of 2012. Call us for the latest details.



The rooms at Fundu are tucked into the greenery, some on the beach and others higher on the hill

The sunset bar at Fundu Lagoon hangs out over the sea

Quirimbas Archipelago in Mozambique

Although situated in northern Mozambique, the Quirimbas Archipelago offers private islands with stunning beaches and pristine marine life, and it's also accessible from Dar es Salaam. If you're looking for a really exclusive tropical getaway, you should consider these islands (see page 242).