

PLACES ON THE COAST

DAR ES SALAAM

Although Dodoma, in the middle of the country, is Tanzania's designated capital city, Dar es Salaam remains Tanzania's social and commercial heart. As the country's largest city and main port, most travellers fly into and out of 'Dar', as it's always called, and most connect straight through to their first safari or beach lodge. Occasionally an overnight stop here is needed, and then you may be surprised how much you enjoy the place.

Dar isn't one of Africa's most beautiful cities; many parts of it are dusty and poor. Yet it's a vibrant and interesting corner of modern Africa. Colourfully clad people jostle with vehicles and bicycles in the streets, whilst street stalls sell anything from wooden carvings to matching sets of luggage.

The city has a handful of good, international-style hotels. In the centre of town, the **Royal Palm Hotel** has recently been taken over by the Serena chain and remains an excellent

choice, although it's been slightly eclipsed in the style stakes by the relatively new **Kilimanjaro Hotel Kempinski**. Both are professional and make good overnight stops. Also in town, the **Southern Sun** (formerly the Holiday Inn) is more modest, but still pleasant, whilst the **New Africa Hotel** is more basic. For something smaller, near restaurants and a good craft market, ask us about rooms at the **Slipway**.

A much smaller and more 'boutique' option, the exclusive **Oyster Bay Hotel**, has been designed as a pre- or post-safari stop and exudes a warm house-party feel. Its eight large, very high-quality rooms all overlook the ocean and are furnished in a contemporary, minimalist style with an African twist. Excellent food is served at any time it's needed, often beside the swimming pool and lush lawns. The Oyster Bay is a city hotel in a class of its own: it's an oasis of calm; certainly the best hotel in Dar, and probably one of the best in Africa.

For longer than one night, consider one of Ras Kutani's beach retreats.



The Oyster Bay is a high-quality haven of tranquillity in Dar Es Salaam

RAS KUTANI

Tanzania's coastal vegetation is lush, and dotted amongst it are many small farming villages, where clusters of thatched huts stand under palm and papaya trees. Being driven south of Dar, you'll leave the city surprisingly quickly; tar will give way to gravel, and pavements to swaying palm trees. The pace of life slows as you pass stalls piled high with fruit and vegetables. After a little over an hour, you'll reach a headland where there are two lovely places to stay: Ras Kutani and Amani Beach.

Both lodges have idyllic beachfront locations only five minutes' walk apart, yet there's not another lodge for miles. Neither offers sophisticated activities: there are no jet skis, speedboats or scuba diving here, so the beach remains quiet and tranquil. They are relaxed places, perfect for a few days at the beginning or end of your trip.

The smart and luxurious **Amani Beach** has 10 spacious thatched cottages, decorated in an Afro-Arabian style with studded wooden chests and sumptuous fabrics. Dotted throughout lovely landscaped gardens, each is air-conditioned and has an en-suite bathroom with shower, flush toilet and twin basins. There are pool-side cottages or quieter rooms set in the garden and overlooking the sea. The food is beautifully presented and of a high standard, with an Italian twist and lots of fresh seafood. There's a bar on the beach and a large pool and tennis court in the grounds, and mountain biking and snorkelling excursions are possible.

Ras Kutani is a relaxed lodge that blends into the vegetation beside the beach. Sandy paths wind through the native trees to nine spacious, reed-and-thatch chalets, four larger suites and one 'Hill House', which is perfect for families. Each is light and airy, with its sides open to the breeze and views of the lagoon or the sea. All have en-suite hot showers, basins and flush toilets. The suites also have their own plunge pools. They are furnished in a simple, natural style, with locally woven cottons, mkeka mats on the floor and two generously cushioned hammocks on the veranda for afternoon siestas. The wholesome food is delicious, with plenty of salads and fresh fish. Activities from Ras Kutani vary from soothing massages to canoeing in the lagoon, or a walk through the local village.



Baby turtle