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ZANZIBAR GUIDE

wordtravels



Located about 22 miles (35km) off the east coast of Tanzania, Zanzibar is an archipelago consisting of the main island of Unguja (commonly known as Zanzibar), Pemba Island, famous for its deep-sea fishing, and about 50 smaller surrounding islands and coral reefs.

Also known as the 'Spice Islands', Zanzibar evokes images of an exotic paradise with white palm-fringed beaches and turquoise coves, dreamy dhows with billowing white sails, and ancient Islamic ruins. Today's idyllic beach resorts belie the island's haunting history of slavery, and Zanzibar combines Arabic alleyways and historic monuments with coral reefs and excellent diving and snorkelling opportunities.

The island's varied history brought with it seafarers, explorers and traders, and it became a major centre for the slave industry. Its heyday was during the 19th century, when the island became the world's leading producer of cloves; its plantations still produce more than 50 different spices and fruit, and guided spice tours are a Zanzibar speciality.

Stone Town, the historic centre of Zanzibar's capital city, is a captivating place built by Arab and Indian merchants in the 19th century from the island's coral stone. A walk through the disordered twisting alleys, past intricately-carved wooden doors and beneath ornate balconies, with the lingering scent of spices in the air, takes one back in time to the days of a prosperous slave and spice industry. Decaying architecture, numerous mosques, a bathhouse and old fort, cool interior courtyards and lively markets are the remaining influence of the Persians and the Omani Arabs who established themselves as the ruling power here.

For centuries Zanzibar has enticed those in search of business; today it remains an irresistible attraction for those seeking a heavenly beach holiday or an exploration into its exotic heritage - or a bit of both.

THE BASICS

TIME

GMT +3

ELECTRICITY

230 volts, 50Hz. Rectangular or round three-pin plugs are used.

LANGUAGE

Swahili and English are the official languages. Several indigenous languages are also spoken.

TRAVEL HEALTH

Travellers are advised to see a doctor or visit a travel clinic at least three weeks before leaving for Tanzania. Visitors should consider vaccinations for hepatitis A, typhoid, yellow fever and polio. Those arriving from an infected country are required to hold a yellow fever vaccination certificate. There is a risk of malaria all year and outbreaks of Rift Valley Fever occur; travellers should take precautions to avoid mosquito bites and take malaria medication. Food prepared by unlicensed vendors should be avoided, as meat and milk products from animals may not have been cooked thoroughly. Sleeping sickness is a risk in the game parks, including the Serengeti, and visitors should take precautions against bites by tsetse flies. There is a high prevalence of HIV/Aids. Cholera outbreaks are common throughout the country and visitors are advised to drink bottled or sterilised water only. Travellers climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro are at risk for altitude sickness.

Medical services are available in Dar-es-Salaam and other main towns, but facilities and supplies are limited even in cities, and often non-existent in rural areas; visitors with particular requirements should take their own medicines. Comprehensive medical insurance is advised.

TIPPING

Waiters in the better restaurants should be tipped around 10 percent. Guides, porters and cooks in the wildlife parks and on safari trips expect tips. The amount is discretionary according to standard of service and the number in your party.

SAFETY INFORMATION

Most visits to Tanzania are trouble-free. As in other East African countries, the threat from terrorism is quite high in Tanzania and visitors should be cautious in public places, tourist sites and hotels, particularly in Zanzibar's Stone Town. The area bordering Burundi should be avoided. Street crime is a problem in Tanzania, especially in Dar es Salaam, and tourists should be alert and cautious. Lonely beaches and footpaths are often targeted; women are particularly vulnerable to attacks. Visitors should leave valuables in their hotel safe and not carry too much cash on them at any time.

Armed crime is on the increase and there have been serious attacks on foreigners in Arusha and on Pemba Island. There have also been reports of robberies and kidnapping on Zanzibar, and piracy in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden is a serious concern with commercial and tourist vessels being fired upon and several British tourists taken hostage.

Road accidents are common in Tanzania due to poor road and vehicle conditions, violation of traffic regulations and exhaustion among long-distance drivers. There have also been a number of ferry accidents in Tanzania in recent years. Caution should be exercised - if a bus or ferry seems overloaded or in poor condition, don't get on.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Tanzanians are known to be friendly and generally welcoming, but travellers should be sensitive to local cultural mores. Drunkenness is frowned upon and Tanzanians feel strongly about showing respect for their elders.

Visitors to Zanzibar should be aware that it is a predominantly Muslim region and visitors should dress modestly and respectfully. Beachwear is fine on the beach or around a hotel pool, but not acceptable elsewhere. Topless sunbathing is a criminal offence. Some tourists buy a local sarong, called a kanga, which can be used to cover shoulders when needed, or otherwise be used as a scarf or towel.

Smoking in public places is illegal. Tourists should be especially careful during Ramadan when public drinking, smoking and even eating should be avoided.

Homosexuality is illegal in Tanzania.

BUSINESS

Although Tanzanians come across as relaxed and friendly, it is important to observe certain formalities, especially with greetings. It is advisable to learn a few Swahili catch phrases when greeting, followed by a handshake. Women and men rarely shake hands in Swahili culture; however, if the woman extends her hand, the man is obliged to take it. Tanzanians are to be addressed as Mr, Mrs, and Ms, followed by the family name. Business dress is seldom very formal but lightweight suits are recommended for formal occasions. Business hours are similar to Western countries, but a longer lunch break is taken during the hotter months, and business continues later in the evening from Monday to Friday.

COMMUNICATIONS

The international country dialling code for Tanzania, as well as Zanzibar, is +255. There is good mobile phone coverage in main cities and towns, with operators using GSM networks; rural areas may have limited coverage. There are international roaming agreements with most international operators. Avoid making telephone calls from hotels; they can be very expensive. Internet cafés are available in the main towns and resorts.

DUTY FREE

Travellers to Tanzania do not have to pay duty on 250g tobacco or 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars and 500ml of alcoholic beverages. Restrictions apply to firearms, plants, plant products and fruits.

CLIMATE

Zanzibar is warm throughout the year. The heat at the coastal resorts on the north and east coast is tempered by sea breezes. Stonetown and the centre of Zanzibar Island have showers throughout the year. There are heavy showers throughout the island in April and May when most tourists avoid the island and hotels close. Temperatures consistently average between 72°F (22°C) and 92°F (33°C) throughout the year.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR SOUTH AFRICANS

South Africans do not require a visa if intending to stay for a maximum of up to 90 days, provided that the passport is valid for six months from date of entry. Otherwise a visa is required for longer stays. Visitors must hold return/onward tickets and all documents required for their next destination. Business travellers will be required to pay a fee on arrival.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR UK NATIONALS

A visa is issued on arrival, and a passport valid for six months from date of entry is required. Visitors must hold return/onward tickets and all documents required for their next destination. Those with British passports with endorsements other than 'British Citizen' should confirm official requirements.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR AMERICANS

A visa is issued on arrival, and a passport valid for six months from date of entry is required. Visitors must hold return/onward tickets and all documents required for their next destination.

PASSPORT/VISA

Most visitors entering Tanzania require a visa. Passports must contain one unused visa page. Visitors may obtain a visa on arrival at Dar-es-Salaam or Zanzibar airports, costing between US\$ 50 and US\$ 200 depending on nationality, payable in cash. All visitors also require proof of sufficient funds and should hold documentation for their return or onward journey. Passports should be valid for at least six months from date of entry. Those arriving from an infected country must hold a yellow fever vaccination certificate. It is highly recommended that passports have at least six months validity remaining after your intended date of departure from your travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

MONEY

The official currency is the Tanzanian Shilling (TZS), divided into 100 cents. The tourism industry prices everything in US Dollars and this is the preferred unit of currency. Money can be exchanged in larger towns; foreign exchange bureaux may offer a better rate of exchange than banks. ATMs are available in major towns and cities. Major lodges, some hotels and travel agents in urban areas accept credit cards, but these should not be relied on and can incur a surcharge.

TRANSPORT

Public transport on the island of Zanzibar is limited. Daladalas are cheap crowded minibuses that operate extensively on the island. Taxis are quite affordable but travellers are advised to negotiate a price before starting a trip as very few vehicles have a functioning meter. Motorcycle taxis are a cheap and speedy way to get around the island; fares are cheap but passengers are advised to always wear a helmet. A fun way to explore the island is by bicycle. Bicycles can be hired throughout the island at a very low rate. Travellers can also hire cars, motorcycles or 4x4 vehicles and these offer greater independence when it comes to travelling around Zanzibar; 4x4 vehicles are often the best choice for those wanting to travel off the beaten track. Drivers will find that most roads in Zanzibar are fairly well maintained and driving is relatively safe on the island.

ATTRACTIONS

There is so much to see and do in Zanzibar!

Most travellers visit primarily for a beach vacation and Zanzibar's beaches alone more than justify the trip. The northern beaches of Zanzibar are particularly celebrated for their beauty, and excursions to Pemba Island and Mafia Island are a treat for beachgoers. Other tourist favourites include Kendwa Beach and Nungwi Beach, close together on the northwestern tip of the island, with good resort facilities; Uroa Bay, in the middle of the east coast, which still retains a pleasant local flavour; Paje Beach, on the east coast, said to be the best spot on Zanzibar for some kite surfing; Nakupenda Beach, accessible by a short boat trip from Stone Town, which is pristine and usually deserted, a true paradise beach; and the beaches of Changuu Island (Prison Island) where beach lounging can be combined with a visit to the old quarantine centre and the resident giant tortoises. It is possible to arrange many different water sports and boat trips, and the scuba diving and snorkelling is world-class.

Zanzibar is more than just picturesque beaches, however, with the Islamic heritage infusing the island with an exotic, ancient atmosphere, and the legacy of the slave trade ensuring some historical interest. The dilapidated beauty of Stone Town is a big draw card for travellers wanting a taste of culture. For those wanting to explore into the interior of Zanzibar, 4x4 excursions are popular, and the Jozani Chwaka Bay Conservation Area is the best place to experience the surviving mangrove forests.

ANGLICAN CATHEDRAL AND SLAVE MARKET



The colossal Anglican Cathedral in Stone Town is located on the grounds of the island's largest former slave market. The cathedral's altar stands on the exact location of the former whipping post, a tree where slaves were brutalised to show their strength and resilience to potential slave owners. Building began in 1873 to commemorate the end of the slave trade and was conducted by Edward Steere, third bishop of Zanzibar and a fervent abolitionist. The cathedral has a combination of Gothic and Arabic styles and is noted for its Basilica shape and barrel vault roof, which the populace believed would never hold. Taking ten years to build, Edward Steere died of

a heart attack during construction and was buried behind the altar. Look out for the stark memorial outside the cathedral, a sculpture of a slave family bound round the neck by a chain.

Address: Near the junction of New Mkunazini Road and Creek Road, Stone Town;

CENTRAL MARKET



A vibrant array of colours and spicy scents lures visitors to the vibrant Central Market in Stone Town. Opened in 1904, the numerous stalls run over with tropical fruits, exotic spices, brightly coloured *khansas* (worn by local women) and rare provisions such as pomegranates and red bananas. Locals come daily from the surrounding areas to display their subsistence wares, and fishermen display their catch of the day with a pungent array of fresh fish from huge marlins to salty sardines. The market is chaotic and can prove a bit overwhelming for some people, but it is an exciting, colourful cultural experience and worth a quick stroll at least. Foodies will enjoy sampling the rare fruits and local specialities. Speaking of food, the best place for a sampling of traditional street food is the night market by the waterfront of the Forodhani Gardens.

Address: Benjamin Mkapa Road (Creek Road), Stone Town;

HOUSE OF WONDERS (BEIT EL-AJAIB)



The first building in Zanzibar to have electricity and the first building in East Africa to have an elevator, Beit el-Ajaib (which translates into the House of Wonders) was the former ceremonial palace of Sultan Barghash and was built in 1883 on the site of the 16th-century Queen Fatuma's residence. A striking white building, the House of Wonders has housed many influential tenants, used by the British as their local offices and as the headquarters of Tanzania's political party CCM.

While the building is now in disrepair and not open to the public, one can still admire the architecture. The multiple verandas, Arabic arches, heavy wooden door and embossed cannons are all a fascinating sight to see.

Address: Mizingani Road, Stone Town;

JOZANI CHWAKA BAY CONSERVATION AREA



The largest conservation area in Zanzibar and the only remaining natural mangrove forest on the island, the Jozani Chwaka Bay Conservation Area is renowned for its hairy ape residents, the Red Colobus Monkeys. Endemic to Zanzibar, these entertaining creatures attract visitors from far and wide. The species is highly endangered, now numbering only about 1,500. Due to large-scale cultivation, firewood collection, harvesting building materials and charcoal and lime making, Zanzibar's forests have been largely depleted, making the Jozani Chwaka Bay conservation area a significant natural landscape and well worth protecting. Nature lovers can walk through the

100 different towering tree species and marvel at the rich variety of birdlife and other small wildlife that inhabit the cool woodland area. Exploring the mangrove forest is a refreshing break from the sunny beaches.

Address: 23 miles (37km) south of Stone Town;

MAFIA ISLAND

Mafia Island, along with Pemba and Zanzibar, form the famous Spice Islands off the coast of Tanzania. While the name conjures images of shady criminals and glamorous heists, the real riches of Mafia Island lie underwater in its magnificent coral reef system. Mafia Island is



a top diving destination for those in the know. Limited accommodation means it's a great place to hide from the tourist crowds on Zanzibar, and provides additional opportunities for fishing and swimming with whale sharks. There are also land-based activities, including trips to the bustling village on tiny Chole Island and the ruined one on Juani Island.

Website: www.mafiaisland.com;

MTONI PALACE RUINS



If you are looking for a place to escape the bustle of Stone Town for a few hours, head north to the peaceful Maruhubi and Mtoni Palace ruins. Sultan Said bin Sultan first built Mtoni between 1828 and 1834 after he left Muscat and made Zanzibar his throne and it was also the childhood home of Princess Salme. The decadent Maruhubi Palace was built later in the 1880s by Sultan Barghash, as a harem for his 99 concubines and wife. The structure was mainly wooden and one of the most beautiful of its time, but was gutted by a fire in 1889 and left in ruins. The rolling lawns, bathhouses and water lily ponds are reminiscent of the life of affluence enjoyed by the

palace residents over a century ago.

To view a well-preserved Hammam from the 1850s continue north to the Kidichi Persian Baths, constructed by Sultan Seyyid Said for his Persian wife.

Local buses stop near the palace ruins and there is no cover charge to explore, unless there is an event underway - the site is used for concerts and lectures and travellers should find out if anything interesting is happening during their stay in the area.

Website: www.mtoni.com;

NORTHERN BEACHES OF ZANZIBAR



There are many superb white beaches and picturesque villages around Zanzibar ideal for those wanting to get away from the bustling town life, particularly along the northeast coast. Modestly veiled women make bright splashes of colour along white sandy stretches of beach, dhows with curved sails drift along close to shore, and fishermen offer their fresh catches of the day to the simple seaside restaurants. Miles of pristine beaches are dotted with pockets of guesthouses, particularly around Kendwa and the fishing village of Nungwi, renowned for its tradition of boat building, and one of the most popular locations, particularly with the younger crowd. There is

excellent diving and deep-sea fishing off this coast. One of the most beautiful and isolated beaches is at Matemwe, and the small offshore island of Mnemba has a fine coral reef offering some of Zanzibar's best diving.

OLD DISPENSARY



An architectural symbol of the mixed bag of cultures evident in Zanzibar's history, the elaborate Old Dispensary was so named because it long housed a dispensary on the ground floor, with a pharmacy and resident doctor. An affluent Ismaili Indian merchant, Tharia Topan, who financed the building project, laid the first brick 1887 and the building was completed in 1894. One of the most decorative buildings of the time, the Old Dispensary is adorned with ornate carved balconies, stuccowork and stained glass windows. Restored in the early 1990s, the Dispensary housed a small museum which displayed old photographs of Stone Town's waterfront, but the upper floors are

now mostly empty. For a stunning view of the harbour, visit the upper veranda, which is open for visitors. There are also some curio shops on the ground floor.

The Old Dispensary is a beautiful building and worth passing by and photographing at the very least.

Address: Malindi Road, Stone Town;

OLD FORT



Built at the turn of the 17th century on the remains of a Portuguese church and crumbling Arab garrison, the burly Old Fort was constructed to fend off the enterprising Portuguese seafarers and Mazrui Arabs of Mombassa keen to gain power of the lucrative 'Spice Islands'. The Mazrui Arabs launched an attack in 1754 coming off unsuccessfully against the stoic Old Fort. The thick caramel walls and castellated battlements later acted as a place of incarceration, detaining local criminals and slaves. In later years the fort functioned as the depot for the Bububu railway, Zanzibar's first railway, which once wound from Zanzibar Town to Bububu, but no longer exists.

Nowadays the Old Fort houses shops and henna painting stores and the Cultural Centre where visitors can marvel at the fine artistry of local craftsmen at work. In the evening local music and dancing at the open-air theatre brightens up the night and occasional film screenings are shown.

Address: Mizingani Street, Stone Town;

PALACE MUSEUM



Illuminating the lifestyle of the Sultans of Zanzibar, the Palace Museum (originally called the Sultan's Palace), became the official residence of the Al Busid dynasty in 1911. Built in the 1890s, the extensive white building is situated on harbour road with breath-taking sea views. It is the most recent of the Sultans' palaces and was occupied till the revolution in 1964. The Palace Museum houses an impressive collection of the Sultans' elaborate furniture and possessions as well as a room dedicated to the life of Sultan Sayyid Said's daughter, Princess Salme. Renowned for her manuscript, *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess*, this significant autobiography is the only known

written account of what life was like for Arab women of the Royal court in the 1800s. Excerpts from the book, family photographs and samples of Princess Salme's wardrobe are also on display. Outside the museum is the Makusurani graveyard where some of the sultans are buried.

For those interested in the opulent lives of Zanzibar's Sultans this is a fascinating attraction.

Address: Mizingani Road, Stone Town;

PEACE MEMORIAL MUSEUM



Home to a wealth of Zanzibar's memorabilia, the Peace Memorial Museum is a great place to discover the intriguing history and culture of the islands. With exhibits including traditional carvings and local wildlife displays covering reptiles and birds, visitors can also view relics from the age of the Sultans and early explorers such as Chinese porcelain, an old palm oil-powered bicycle lamp and David Livingstone's medical chest. Built as a peace memorial by British architect J.H. Sinclair, the beautiful spherical design of the museum acknowledges Zanzibar's Arab influence and is reminiscent of the eastern architecture of Istanbul and India. Look out for the cumbersome land tortoises that inhabit the Museum's lush garden.

Those looking for a touch of education on their tropical beach holiday should find a visit to this museum informative.

Address: Benjamin Mkapa Rd, Zanzibar Town;

PEMBA ISLAND



The small and unspoilt Tanzanian island of Pemba is becoming a popular alternative for visitors seeking a quieter, less developed alternative to Zanzibar, located approximately 31 miles (50km) to the north. Pemba is known as 'the green island' in Arabic, and is one of several islands that make up the Zanzibar archipelago. The island trio consisting of Pemba, Zanzibar and Mafia is traditionally referred to as the Spice Islands.

This undulating, fertile island hosts a number of small and large scale farming enterprises. The smaller farms producing mainly rice, coconuts, bananas, cassava and *maharagwe* (red beans), while the larger farms produce cash crops such as cloves (there are over 3 million clove trees on the island!) This backdrop of cultivated countryside makes for some interesting - and fragrant - sightseeing.

As a tourist destination, Pemba offers some great dive sites with abundant marine life, untouched corals and dizzying vertical drop-offs. The towns of Chake-Chake (the capital), Mkoani and Wete have some interesting cultural and archaeological attractions influenced by the local Arab and Waswahili peoples; the island is recognised as a national centre for traditional medicine and witchcraft. There are also bullfighting events to watch, a throw-back of the island's 16th century Portuguese colonisation.

Getting to Pemba Island isn't too much of a problem - there are regular domestic flights from Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam to Pemba Airport (also referred to as Wawi or Karume Airport), located 4 miles (7km) from Chake-Chake on the east coast of the island. There are also ferries to Pemba from Zanzibar.

SHOPPING

Shopping in Zanzibar is varied, cheap and culturally exciting. The best shopping is available in Stone Town, where local goods and items imported from other African nations, as well as India, Arabia and the Far East, are good value provided you bargain.

There are a number of shops on Gizenga Street and Kenyatta Road that sell quality local artefacts, clothing, jewellery, massage oils and spices - everything quintessentially Zanzibar! Here visitors can find colourful *kangas* or *kikoys* (sarongs), which make great souvenirs. Wooden chests and tinga tinga paintings are also sought-after Zanzibar souvenirs. Look out for street-side stalls where Masai women sell curios, jewellery and batik fabrics.

The silver shops on Gizenga, as well as in Sokomohogo Square, trade in antique or handcrafted silverware and jewellery, while gold is offered in stores on Tharia Street. On Darajani Street visitors can buy almost anything, including fresh produce from the Central Market.

Most Zanzibar shops are open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 12pm, and then from 2pm to 6pm. Few shops will accept credit cards, so be sure to bring enough cash. US dollars are accepted at resorts and on the beaches, but the exchange rate will not be in your favour and you will most likely get a better deal by using local Tanzanian shillings.

AIRPORTS

ABEID AMANI KARUME INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (ZNZ)

LOCATION

The airport is located three miles (5km) south of Stone Town

GETTING TO THE CITY

Taxis are available at the terminal. Some hotels in Stone Town offer shuttle services from the airport.

TIME

Local time is GMT +3.

CONTACTS

+255 24 2233979

CAR RENTAL

While car rental companies are not located at the airport, most are only a short distance away and easily accessible from Arrivals by a short taxi transfer.

AIRPORT TAXIS

There is a taxi rank at the terminal. Taxis will have a set list of prices, though you can negotiate them down.

FACILITIES

The airport has limited facilities, with small shops selling souvenirs, gifts, snacks and beverages.

DEPARTURE TAX
