

Still waters

Sit back and relax on a Zanzibar stay

@Katie_McGonagle

It's best known as the second half of the safari-plus-beach combo, and there's no question over Zanzibar's credentials on that front, with some of the most idyllic coastlines in the Indian Ocean.

But that's not all this little archipelago off mainland Tanzania has going for it. Between sightseeing and shopping in Stone Town, or exploring the islands' ancient slave market and aromatic spice farms, the beaches are just the beginning.

▶ **SEE: STONY GROUND**

Stone Town, the old side of capital Zanzibar City, is the first port of call for sightseers. With its 19th century architecture and blend of Arab, Indian, Persian and European influences, a day meandering through its winding streets is well spent. In

fact, Rainbow Tours encourages clients to stay a night or two to get a feel for the city and access the excursions which depart here.

The House of Wonders is Stone Town's largest building, constructed in 1883 as a sultan's palace but now a museum devoted to Zanzibar's history and culture, and worth visiting along with the Omani-built Old Fort next door.

The Anglican Cathedral is another must-see, all the more poignant since it is built on the site of the former slave market – the altar bears a memorial to the 'whipping post' – where slaves were shipped from the mainland in horrific conditions until 1873.

After some sobering moments, lighten the mood with a stop at the elegant Old Dispensary – its curved balconies and stained-glass windows make it one of

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Zanzibar boasts one of the most idyllic coastlines in the Indian Ocean, but offers so much more

Stone Town's most impressive buildings – and a spot of haggling at the local market.

There are plenty of guided tours to choose from – most operators arrange these from around £60 – as a local guide will unlock the stories behind the monuments, but if clients are happy to go it alone in the city, there are plenty of other excursions to consider.

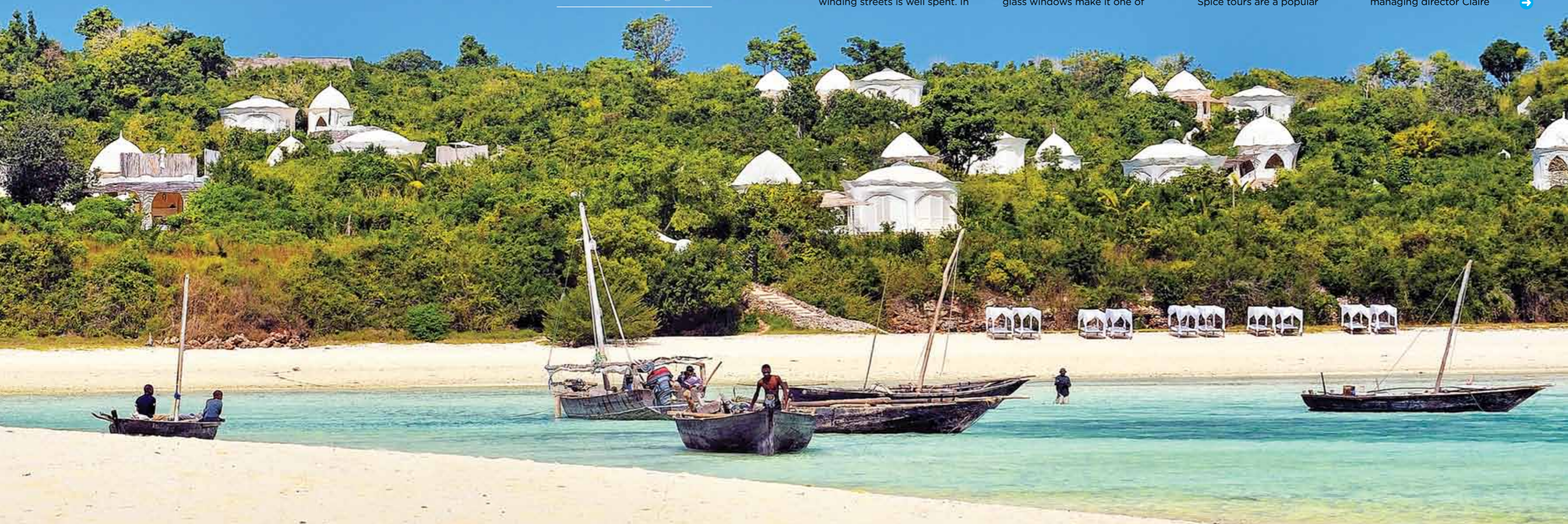
Spice tours are a popular

choice, visiting the farms that grow cloves, nutmeg, cardamom, vanilla and pepper, earning Zanzibar its 'spice island' moniker. But if clients have done similar spice tours elsewhere, suggest seeing the colony of huge land tortoises which have taken up residence on the rather ominously-named Prison Island, or spotting red colobus monkeys in Jozani Forest. Visions of Africa offers half-day trips to the former from £82 and the latter from £63.

Perennially popular with honeymooners, a dhow dinner cruise is another common addition to any Stone Town stay, munching on fresh seafood and champagne while watching the sunset.

▶ **STAY: CHOOSE WISELY**

"The first decision is which island to stay on," says 2by2 Holidays' managing director Claire



➔ Farley. “The main island, Unguja, is where the mass-market all-inclusive hotels are, strung along the eastern side of the island. However, the beach here is tidal, so at certain times of the day, there is no sand visible.

“The north is best for diving and snorkelling, has beaches less affected by the tide, several local restaurants and accommodation ranging from simple guesthouses to five-star uber-luxury.

“Pemba is the second island and much less developed, the ‘Zanzibar of 50 years ago’, so is a lovely option for those who don’t want lots of other people around. Then there are smaller islands like Chapwani and Mafia for those who want a castaway feel.”

BEST FOR... VALUE: Zanzibar isn’t cheap, but if clients have blown the budget on a luxury safari camp and need to rein in spending, there are good-value options.

The four-star Breezes Beach Club combines a spot on southeast Bwejuu Beach – voted one of the best island beaches by *Conde Nast Traveller* – with a chilled-out vibe, and is featured by Travel 2, Kuoni and Cox & Kings. It’s the traditional Zanzibari decor of east-coast Bluebay Resort & Spa that make it stand out for Visions of Africa sales manager Lucy Cook, not to mention great-value rates and free-night offers. Likewise, Royal Zanzibar Beach Resort has early booking



Pemba is much less developed and a lovely option for those who don’t want lots of other people around

discounts for reservations made before March 31. “Set in almost 20 acres of beautifully tended tropical gardens, this is a great all-inclusive option for clients on a budget,” says Cook.

BEST FOR... LUXURY: There is plenty of choice at the other end of the scale. Breezes sister Baraza Resort & Spa, also on Bwejuu Beach, has just 30 villas and endless individual touches, from Swahili motifs to furniture carved by local craftsmen.

Andrew Fulker from Kuoni’s trade sales team, who has just returned from a Zanzibar fam, also highlights the ‘perfect and peaceful retreats’ of The Residence – all private pool villas, Carita spa products and fine fusion cuisine – alongside Zanzibar White Sand and Diamonds Star of the East. If money is no object, Cox & Kings suggests the exclusive Mnemba Island Lodge, a private island three miles off the northeast shore. With just 10



LEFT: Stone Town

RIGHT: Private dining, Bluebay Resort & Spa



bandas woven from palm tree fronds, each with a personal butler, private veranda and access to pristine waters where tropical fish flit between coral reefs, this is the most exclusive address on the islands.

BEST FOR... ROMANCE: Zanzibar is a honeymoon favourite, so it’s crucial to have a few romantic retreats up your sleeve. For most, that means going for a small, exclusive resort such as the 15 white-domed pavilion-style rooms of Elewana Collection hotel Kilindi, on the northwest Nyungwi Beach, where plunge pools, rain showers and intimate dining spots are the order of the day.

Even smaller, the uber-exclusive Matemwe Retreat has just four villas and an in-room dining option, and as an adult-only resort, it’s perfect for newlyweds to get some privacy.

Rainbow Tours has also begun featuring Chapwani Private Island, another secluded resort – the sort of place where you won’t find televisions or phones but a herb garden is par for the course – although this does have a family villa so could suit couples seeking a romantic island retreat with kids in tow.

▶ **SELL: SAND AND SAFARI**

Zanzibar is most-often sold as a beach add-on to safaris in Kenya or Tanzania, easily combined with southern Tanzania’s Selous Game Reserve or the Masai Mara using Kenya Airways connections from Nairobi. On The Go Tours has released a two-for-one deal on overland safaris including Zanzibar, available January-August, with prices from £599 per couple for an 11-day Zebras & Zanzibar tour.

However, there is increasing demand for combinations with up-and-coming wildlife destinations such as Rwanda, Zambia and Uganda, or with cultural breaks to Oman and the Middle East.

Much of that drive comes from the honeymoon market; newlyweds looking for palm-fringed beaches and a castaway vibe will find it here. But there’s no reason that couldn’t extend to special occasions such as wedding anniversaries, attracting older travellers who might have roughed it on an African adventure in years gone by, but now want a softer landing. TW



2by2 Holidays offers a safari-beach holiday combining three nights’ full-board at Selous Serena Camp, two nights’ B&B at Zanzibar Serena Inn in Stone Town, and five nights’ all-inclusive at Diamonds Mapeenzi Beach, with flights, from £2,795. 2by2holidays.co.uk

Hayes & Jarvis can arrange a 10-night twin-centre split evenly between Zanzibar Serena Inn in Stone Town (B&B) and Bluebay Beach Resort & Spa (half-board), with Qatar Airways flights and transfers, departing May 15. hayesandjarvis.com

LEFT: Baraza Resort & Spa
BELOW: Royal Zanzibar Beach Resort



PICTURES: KUONI; COX & KINGS; KILINDI ZANZIBAR



ASK THE EXPERT

Nick Wilson, destination manager, Hayes & Jarvis

“While Zanzibar is an ideal addition to a safari in Kenya or Tanzania, we are seeing it become more popular as a standalone destination, and increased air access means it’s even easier to get there. Most of our customers spend at least two nights in Stone Town before heading to their beach resort of choice – it’s always worth it as you gain an insight into the island’s history with the slave trade and importance with the spice routes.”



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