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INTO THE BLUE:
A VIEW OF
MNMEMBA ISLAND,
HOME TO THE
FABULOUS MNMEMBA
ISLAND LODGE.

terra incognita

The remote islands of Zanzibar offer an idyllic respite from the modern world.

For those who grew up with Sinbad, Captain Kidd, and other tales of hidden treasure, no place holds more allure than Zanzibar. Surrounded by white sandy beaches and the aquamarine waters of the Indian Ocean, this spectacular collection of islands is the land that time forgot. Stone Town, on the main island, is an almost mythical labyrinth of narrow, maze-like streets and remains much the same as it was more than 100 years ago, when it was a center for the spice and slave trades.

Recently declared a World Heritage Site, Stone Town is a walking city. For just a few dollars, you can hire a local guide to show you the sights. Visit such architectural marvels as the Old Dispensary, a grand four-story building with decorative balconies, recently restored by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture; the House of Wonders; the Palace Museum; the seventeenth-century Arab Fort; and the Anglican Cathedral, built on the site of the former slave market. The best place to stay in Stone Town is at the bohemian-chic Emerson & Green hotel. Each of the ten rooms is individually decorated in traditional Zanzibari style with brightly colored batik fabrics, hand-carved four-poster beds, and antique furniture. At sunset guests gather for gin-and-tonics at the Tower Top Restaurant, which has a panoramic vista of the city's minarets and rooftops. Downstairs, Kidude serves light fare and is popular with the lunchtime crowd (\$150 per room; phone: 011-255-747-423-266; www.zanzibar.org/emegre).

Moored in front of the old Sultan's Palace, the recently opened Dhow Restaurant, a beautifully restored spice-trading ship, offers striking waterside views of the city. While seated on huge *kitenge* pillows, dine on a sumptuous seafood buffet that features such local specialties as rock lobster dressed in lime and watch the dhows sail by (\$25 per person; phone: 011-255-24-225-0117). If you're in the mood for something simpler, stop by the adjacent Forodhani Gardens, where in the evenings vendors gather under the glow of gas lanterns to grill fresh crab claws, prawns, and kingfish shish kebabs. For ten cents, buy a glass of freshly squeezed sugarcane juice spiked with ginger and lime. And if you're feeling adventurous, rent a boat and sail to one of the nearby sandbars for a moonlit picnic.

All over the island women wear the traditional *khanga* (colorful cotton wraps), printed with Swahili proverbs like "Don't set sail using someone else's star." For a good selection, follow the locals to Chavda Street. (Don't miss the nearby fruit and vegetable Darajani Market on Creek Road.) The daily bazaar on Gizenga Street sells handwoven baskets, straw *makuti* mats, traditional wooden Zanzibar chests, jewelry, and beaded sandals. For an excel-



TREASURE ISLAND:
THE SECLUDED
MATEMWE
BUNGALOWS BOAST
LUSH PATHWAYS
(ABOVE) AND
STUNNING VIEWS.



travel

lent selection of books, colorful textiles, and specialty spiced oils and soaps, all made locally, try the Zanzibar Gallery on Kenyatta Street. And the *travel* ▶ 350

People are Talking about

Zanzibar Curio Shop on Hurumzi Street sells good silver, *kikois* (striped cotton wraps worn by men), saris, and an unusual collection of antiques.

For nature lovers, the island has many attractions: Swim with dolphins at Kizimkazi, the oldest village on the island, or head to the Jozani Forest Reserve to see the endangered Red Colobus monkeys. Hand-feed giant tortoises in the protected wildlife reserve on Prison Island. The Kidichi Spice & Fruit Farm offers spice tours; sample and purchase some of the season's best crop. (Be sure to visit the Persian Baths across the road, built by the sultan in 1850.)

Twenty minutes out of town, Pilou and Nigel Brown run Salomé's Garden, a rambling guesthouse in Bububu set amid the overgrown gardens and ruins of Sultan Seyyid Said's sugar plantation. Guests sleep in one of four spacious bedrooms, which are furnished with traditional Zanzibari antiques and overlook the beach, where local fishermen tend to their sails. On the way, stop to tour the old sultan's palaces at Mbweni, Mtoni, and Maruhubi (hotel rates start from \$125 per room;

\$800 per day for the whole house in the high season; \$450 per day in the rainy season, which runs from mid-March to May; www.zanzibar-holiday.com).

Only 45 minutes from Stone Town by boat, Chumbe Island Coral Park is a spectacular eco-lodge and the only privately managed marine park in the world. Up to fourteen guests may stay in the seven open-air eco-bandas that rise out of the sand like mini-thatched versions of the Sydney Opera House. If you want to try living like Robinson Crusoe, this is the place to do it. Walking through the forest at night, guests can observe the endangered tree-climbing coconut crab, while a stroll along the beach at low tide displays a bright-red carpet of starfish. But the main attraction here is the glorious reef, with more than 200 species of coral and fish (\$200

per person, per night; phone: 011-255-24-223-1040; www.chumbeisland.com).

The island's most beautiful and secluded beaches lie on the northeast coast at Nungwi and Matemwe. The Matemwe Bungalows sit on top of a jagged coral cliff, surrounded by lush, tropical gardens filled with fragrant frangipani, hibiscus, and birds of paradise. Sixteen whitewashed bungalows overlook the reef; each room is bright and airy and has its own veranda, complete with hammock and deck

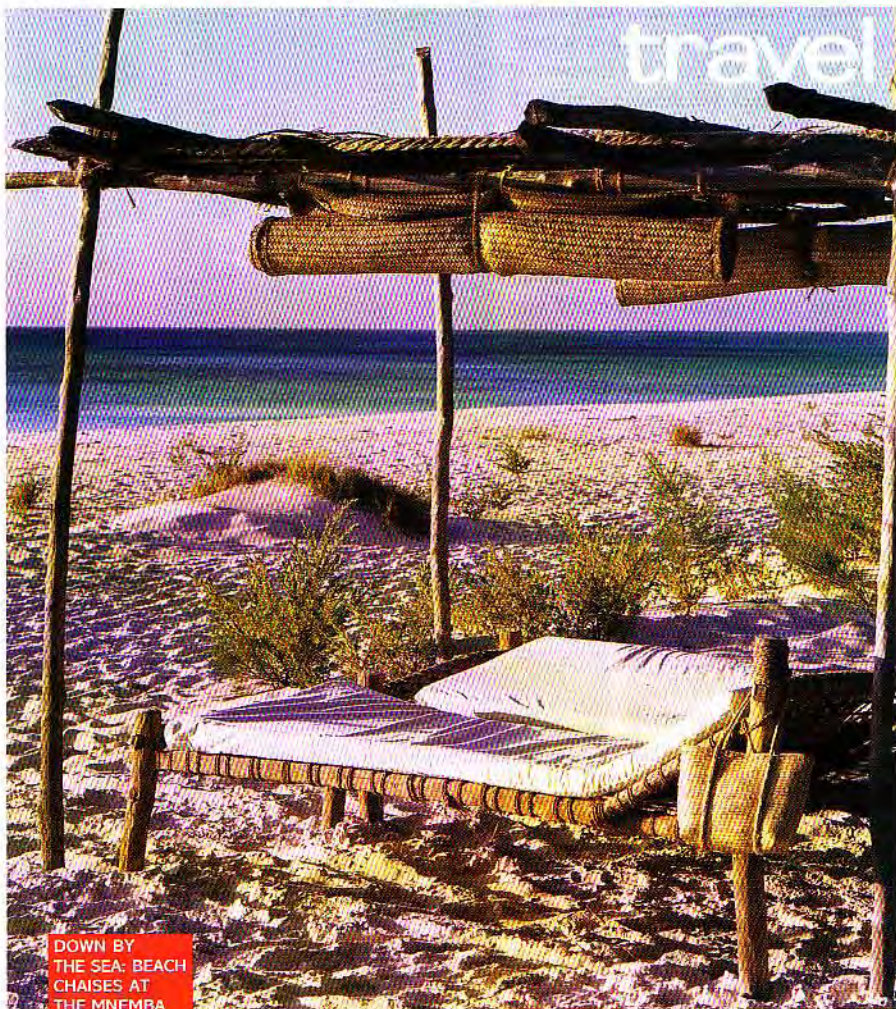
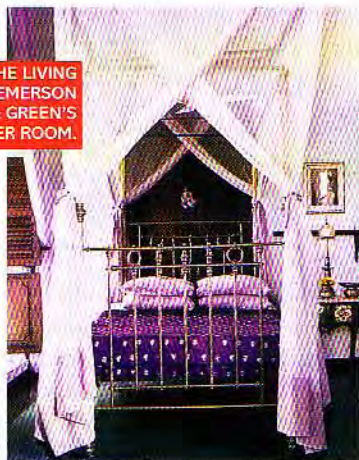
chairs (from \$170 to \$300 per room; phone: 011-255-747-425-788; www.matemwe.com).

Just two miles off the coast of Matemwe, Mnemba Island Lodge is where people like Bill Gates and Naomi Campbell come to get away from it all. Shaped like a heart, it is only a half-mile in circumference and surrounded by a coral reef that offers some of the best diving and snorkeling in the

area. The ten bandas, made from coconut palms and banana leaves, face the ocean and are far enough apart to make you feel as though you had washed up on your own desert island. Guests gather at mealtimes on the beach, where the hotel staff miraculously appears out of nowhere to serve up a feast of fresh seafood and fine spiced Zanzibari cuisine (\$625 per person, per night; phone: 011-2711-809-4300; www.ccafrica.com).

At Fundu Lagoon in Pemba, just 50 miles off the northeast shore of Zanzibar, on the beautiful Wambaa Peninsula, nineteen thatched, tentlike rooms perched on mangrove stilts with private decks overlook a wide tidal beach. This isolated hotel, built out of sheer madness by British fashion designer Ellis Flyte and twin partners, Marcus and Alex Lewis, is a stunning example of eco-friendly architecture. Activities include first-rate diving, game fishing, sailing, kayaking expeditions, and rain-forest walks. (A pool and spa are also in the works.) Run by the ex-manager of the trendy Groucho Club in Soho, London, this is the spot for night owls to stay up late and dance on the open-air jetty bar till dawn (double bungalows are \$285 to \$315 per person, per night, depending on the season; phone: 011-255-24-223-2926; www.fundulagoon.com). —KATE AYRTON *pata* ▶ 352

AND THE LIVING IS EASY: EMERSON & GREEN'S LAVENDER ROOM.



DOWN BY THE SEA: BEACH CHAISES AT THE MNEMBA ISLAND LODGE.