

Island Outpost of Old Araby in the Indian Ocean

ZANZIBAR

Tanzania

The very name Zanzibar conjures up images of romantic spice islands, and—like legendary Timbuktu or Kathmandu—the name alone is almost reason enough to make the trip. The historic center of its capital city is

known as Stone Town, a maze of narrow streets, crooked passages, and crumbling houses once owned by Arab traders, with enclosed balconies and carved, brass-studded doors. The merchants built homes here after amassing their wealth by trafficking in gold, ivory, cloves, and—most lucratively—slaves destined for Arabia and Persia.

Zanzibar was once the largest slave market on Africa's east coast. Today an Anglican church, erected to celebrate the end of the slave trade in 1873, stands on the grounds of the old slave market, the main altar built where the whipping post once stood. More

clues to the island's history can be found everywhere, from the Arab mosques and forts to the British and Portuguese Colonial architecture to the pulsing Swahili market, with its colorful fruits and spices (in particular, nutmeg, cardamom, cinnamon, and cloves), grains, and fish from the surrounding waters. At the center of it all is the Zanzibar



Traditional carvings frame a wooden door in Stone Town.

Palace Hotel boutique in a renovated Arabic town house with nine rooms (three on each floor) wrapped around a bright atrium. Persian rugs, hanging lamps, tile work, beaded pillows, wood carvings, and silk drapes transport guests to the early days of the spice trade.

The two main islands of Zanzibar—Zanzibar Island (or Unguja), where Stone Town is located, and Pemba—have become popular beach getaways to tack onto the end of mainland safaris. While their coasts are thick with hotels, the finest retreats are on smaller satellite islands, like Chumbe where a stone lighthouse and thatched eco-bungalows are the only landmarks you'll see. With its pristine coral garden, it is the place to drop off the map and enjoy snorkeling.

Tiny Mnemba, not even 1 mile in circumference, peeks out from a perfect coral atoll and beckons honeymooners, divers, and all lovers of barefoot indulgence. Ten romantic and understated *bandas* line the white sandy coast lapped by clear waters. Dinner on the beach follows lazy days of kayaking, sailing, and scuba diving.

WHERE: 22 miles/35 km off eastern coast of Tanzania. **ZANZIBAR PALACE HOTEL:** Tel 255/24-223-2230; www.zanzibarpalacehotel.com. *Cost:* from \$170. **CHUMBE ISLAND:** Tel 255/24-223-1040; www.chumbeisland.com. *Cost:* from \$260 per person, all-inclusive. *When:* closed mid-Apr–mid-Jun. **MNEMBA ISLAND:** Contact & Beyond in South Africa, tel 27/11-809-4314; in the U.S., 888-882-3742; www.mnemba-island.com. *Cost:* from \$1,150 per person, all-inclusive (off-peak), from \$1,500 (peak). *When:* closed Apr–May. **BEST TIMES:** Dec–Feb and Jun–Oct for dry season; early Feb for Sauti Za Busara African music celebration; Jul for Stone Town's Festival of the Dhow Countries, with film, art, and cultural events.