

# Maputo



With its Mediterranean-style architecture, waterside setting and wide avenues lined with jacaranda and flame trees, Maputo is easily one of Africa's most attractive capitals. It's also the most developed place in Mozambique by far, with a wide selection of hotels and restaurants, well-stocked supermarkets, shady sidewalk cafes and a lively cultural scene.

The heart of the city is the bustling, low-lying *baixa*. Here, Portuguese-era buildings with their graceful balconies and wrought-iron balustrades jostle for space with ungainly Marxist-style apartment blocks. *Galabiyya*-garbed men gather in doorways for a chat, Indian traders carry on brisk business in the narrow side streets and women wrapped in colourful *capulanas* (sarongs) sell everything from seafood to spices at the massive Municipal Market.

A few kilometres away, along the seaside Avenida Marginal, life takes a more leisurely pace. Fishermen stand along the roadside with the day's catch, hoping to lure customers from the constant parade of passing vehicles; banana vendors loll on their carts in the shade, with Radio Moçambique piping out eternally upbeat rhythms in the background; and local football teams vie for victory in impromptu matches in the sand.

Maputo is pricier than elsewhere in the country, especially for imported goods brought in on the toll road linking Johannesburg and the South African economy with Maputo's port and the sea. Yet there's enough selection to make it a good destination no matter what your budget. Getting to know the city is a highlight of visiting Mozambique and essential to understanding the country. Don't miss spending time here before heading north.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Catch some culture at one of Maputo's many **museums** (p61)
- Dine out in style, sample a different **restaurant** (p66) every night
- Shop for souvenirs and browse for bargains at the city's colourful **markets and craft shops** (p68)
- Experience the pulsating pace of the capital's thriving **nightlife** (p68)
- Enjoy the laid-back ambience of **Inhaca Island** (p71)

## HISTORY

Long before Europeans discovered Maputo's charms, the local Ronga people were living here, fishing, whale hunting, farming and trading. In 1545 Portuguese navigator Lourenço Marques happened upon Delagoa Bay (now Maputo Bay), in his journey up the southern African coastline. His reports attracted other traders who established temporary settlements offshore on Inhaca and Xefina Grande islands as bases for ivory trading forays to the mainland. Yet the Portuguese attention to the area was only fleeting. They soon turned their sights northwards, all but abandoning their activities in the south.

Lourenço Marques – as the area later became known – took on a new importance in the mid-19th century, with the discovery of diamonds and gold in the nearby Transvaal Republic. Around 1898 it replaced Mozambique Island as the capital of Portuguese East Africa. A new rail link with the Transvaal in 1894 and expansion of the port fuelled the city's growth. In the 1950s and 1960s, 'LM' became a favoured playground for Portuguese holiday makers, and for apartheid South Africans who came over the border in droves seeking prawns, prostitutes and beaches. With Mozambican independence in 1975, the city's original residents reasserted themselves and in 1976 President Samora Machel changed the name to Maputo, honouring an early chief who had resisted Portuguese colonialism.

## ORIENTATION

Maputo sits on a low escarpment overlooking Maputo Bay, with the long avenues of its upper-lying residential sections spilling down into the baixa.

Some budget accommodation and many businesses, the train station, banks, post and telephone offices are in the baixa, on or near Avenida 25 de Setembro, while embassies and most better hotels are in the city's upper section, especially in and around the Sommerschild diplomatic and residential quarter. Maputo's tallest building and a good landmark is known as '*trinta e três andares*' (33 Storey Building), in the baixa at Avenida 25 de Setembro and Rua da Imprensa. At the northernmost end of the Marginal and about 7km from the centre is Bairro Triunfo and the Costa do Sol area, with a small beach and several places to stay and eat.

About 10km west of Maputo is the large suburb of Matola, home to many industries and new developments.

## Maps

The *Planta de Endereçamento do Centro da Cidade de Maputo* (1997), put out by Conselho Municipal in collaboration with Coopération Française, is dated and difficult to find, but still the best city map. There's a larger version of the same map in book form (*Guia das Vias* 1997) which includes the city's outskirts. Other city maps, including the Páginas Amarelas Maputo Guide, are widely

### MAPUTO IN...

#### Two Days

After breakfast at your hotel or a street-side cafe, head to Praça 25 de Junho and get an early start on some of the nearby sights, including the **Municipal Market** (p61), the **Money Museum** (p62) and the **train station** (p61). Once finished, hire a tuk-tuk to take you along Avenida Marginal to **Restaurante Costa do Sol** (p66) for lunch. The **National Art Museum** (p61) is an ideal afternoon stop, before heading to **Rua d'Arte** (p68) or another venue for an evening sampling Maputo's **nightlife** (p68).

Spend day two taking in some more sights, including the **old fort** (p62), the **Chissano Gallery** (p61) and **Praça da Independência** (p61). While you're here, don't miss shopping for crafts at the **Bazar de Arte** (p68). In the late afternoon head down to the **Fish Market** (p61) to take in the ambience and enjoy an informal meal, before heading out for another night on the town (or getting to bed early to catch an early bus north).

#### Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary. On day three, take an excursion to the **Maputo Special Reserve** (p78). Consider spending the night there. Alternatively, spend days three and four on **Inhaca Island** (p71), relaxing and snorkelling.