

# Zanzibar Archipelago

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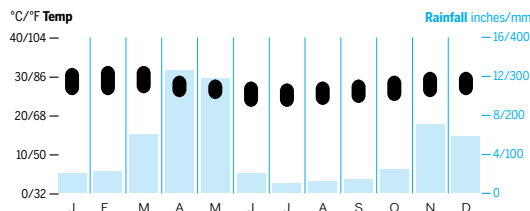
## Why Go?

Step off the boat or plane onto the Zanzibar Archipelago, and you'll be transported through the centuries – to ancient Persia and tales of Shirazi merchants that inspired *Sinbad the Sailor*, to the court of Swahili princes and Omani sultans, to India, with its heavily laden scents.

For over 2000 years the monsoon winds have shaped the landscape and culture of these islands. Stone Town's Indo-Arabian architecture provides an exotic urban backdrop for elderly men playing *bao* (traditional board game) while women in their *bui-bui* (Islamic cover-alls) pause to chat. On Pemba, clove farms creep up the hillsides and farmers load crates of mangoes onto outbound boats. And, along the coast, village life remains steeped in tradition as fishing dhows set sail on high tides and women farm seaweed off powder-white coral sand. With its tropical tableau and unique culture, the archipelago offers the quintessential Indian Ocean experience.

## When to Go

### Zanzibar Town



**Mar-May Masika**, the main rains, fall; some hotels close and Zanzibar is crowd-free.

**Jul A** culture-packed month with the International Film Festival and Mwaka Kogwa.

**Jul-Aug** Kitesurfing season and summer holidays bring higher prices and hordes of visitors.



## Zanzibar Archipelago Highlights

- 1 Meeting ghosts and making friends on cultural tours of **Stone Town** (p77).
- 2 Nabbing African print bags, bespoke leather sandals and oyster-shell jewellery on **Gizenga Street** (p95).
- 3 Diving **Pemba's** underwater mountains, sponge beds and pristine coral gardens (p116).
- 4 Cycling out to **spice plantations** and discovering what turmeric and cinnamon look like in the wild (p82).
- 5 Tracking red colobus monkeys in **Jozani Forest** (p108).
- 6 Meeting dhow-builders and heading out on sunset cruises in **Nungwi** (p101).
- 7 Sampling *pweza* (octopus), *mhogo* (roasted cassava) and rock lobster in **Jambiani** (p111).
- 8 Sailing to **Chumbe Island** (p101) and seeing what conservation can do for coral gardens.
- 9 Chilling-out in **Matemwe's** luxury lodges (p105) and diving **Mnemba's** crystal-clear waters (p100).

## History

The archipelago's history stretches back at least to the start of the first millennium, when Bantu-speaking peoples from the mainland ventured across the Zanzibar and Pemba channels. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (written for sailors by a Greek merchant around AD 60) makes reference to the island of Menouthias, which many historians believe to be Zanzibar. From around the 8th century, Shirazi traders from Persia also began to make their way to East Africa, where they established settlements on Pemba, and at Zanzibar's Unguja Ukuu.

Between the 12th and 15th centuries trade links with Arabia and the Persian Gulf blossomed. Zanzibar became a powerful city-state, supplying slaves, gold, ivory and wood to places as distant as India and Asia, while importing spices, glassware and textiles. With the trade from the East also came Islam and the Arabic architecture that still characterises the archipelago today.

The arrival of the Portuguese in the early 16th century temporarily interrupted this golden age, as Zanzibar and then Pemba fell under Portuguese control. It was challenged first by the British, and then by Omani Arabs in the mid-16th century. By the early 19th century Oman had gained the upper hand on Zanzibar, and trade on the island again flourished, centred on slaves, ivory and cloves. Trade reached such a high point that in the 1840s the Sultan of Oman relocated his court here from the Persian Gulf.

From the mid-19th century, with increasing European interest in East Africa and the end of the slave trade, Omani rule over Zanzibar began to weaken, and in 1862 the sultanate was formally partitioned. Zanzibar became independent of Oman, with Omani sultans ruling under a British protectorate. This arrangement lasted until 10 December 1963, when Zanzibar gained its independence. Just one month later, in January 1964, the sultans were overthrown in a bloody revolution instigated by the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), which then assumed power. On 12 April 1964 Abeid Karume, president of the ASP, signed a declaration of unity with Tanganyika (mainland Tanzania) and the union, fragile from the outset, became known as the United Republic of Tanzania.

Karume was assassinated in 1972 and Aboud Jumbe assumed the presidency of Zanzibar until he resigned in 1984. A succession of leaders followed, culminating in