

# What to do and where to stay in Zanzibar

 By [Ruth Cooper](#)

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The heat slams your entire body in a suffocating, damp caress as soon as you step out of the plane's air-conditioned coolness; immediately curling hair into little frizzy ringlets and dew-ifying the face. It's overwhelming for a Capetonian used to fresh sea breezes and dry heats - Jambo Zanzibar, there is no mistaking we have arrived upon your welcoming shores!



The airport is a confusing flurry and squash of people, scents and sounds. Once through immigration (and while trying to acclimatise to the all-enveloping humidity), we eventually scout out our luggage which is plied haphazardly in a corner of the airport. Zanzibar is in the process of building a much bigger and fancier airport however this is already a few years behind completion deadline and still stands unused a few metres away. But there is an unorganised rhythm, a chaotic order to proceedings at Abeid Amani Karume International Airport, and we muddle through without much distress. This is Africa after all, TIA my dears, Hakuna matata!



We are welcomed by the charming gentleman from [Sun Tours](#), who are our personal guides and chauffeurs for the trip. Their bus, with ice-cold water and (praise be to deity) efficient air con is most welcome – it even has free Wi-Fi! Fellow journalists, travel agents and myself gratefully scramble aboard. I'm here courtesy of [AfricaStay](#) and [Mango](#) for the next few days and as we pull out of the airport and into the streets of Zanzibar, I'm overwhelmingly excited.



The weather is uncustomarily rainy during our stay, shockingly hot sunny patches are punctuated by dark clouds and torrential down pours on the regular. The rain does little to appease the heat, just adding an extra level of smothering damp and sauna-like conditions to proceedings.

Zanzibar is a contrast of rural and developed, impoverished and luxurious, chaotic and serene. It's this dichotomy that make it so intriguing and appealing to travellers the world over. Offering the exciting exploration of streets, markets and spice gardens yet all served with the option of a comfortable base of pure relaxation and luxury at the many five-star resorts along the edges of the island.

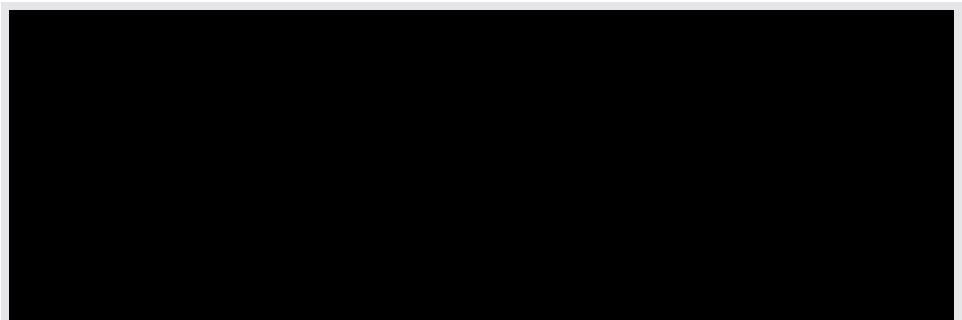


**Recommended tours:**

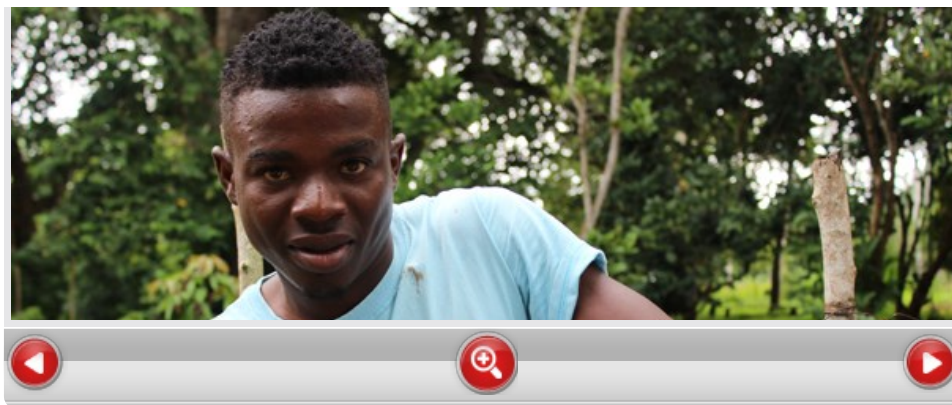
For those with an adventurous spirit that want to experience all of the complex sides of Zanzibar and not just keen to laze upon a sun lounger, I would recommend the following tours:

***Be enchanted and informed on a Spice Tour***

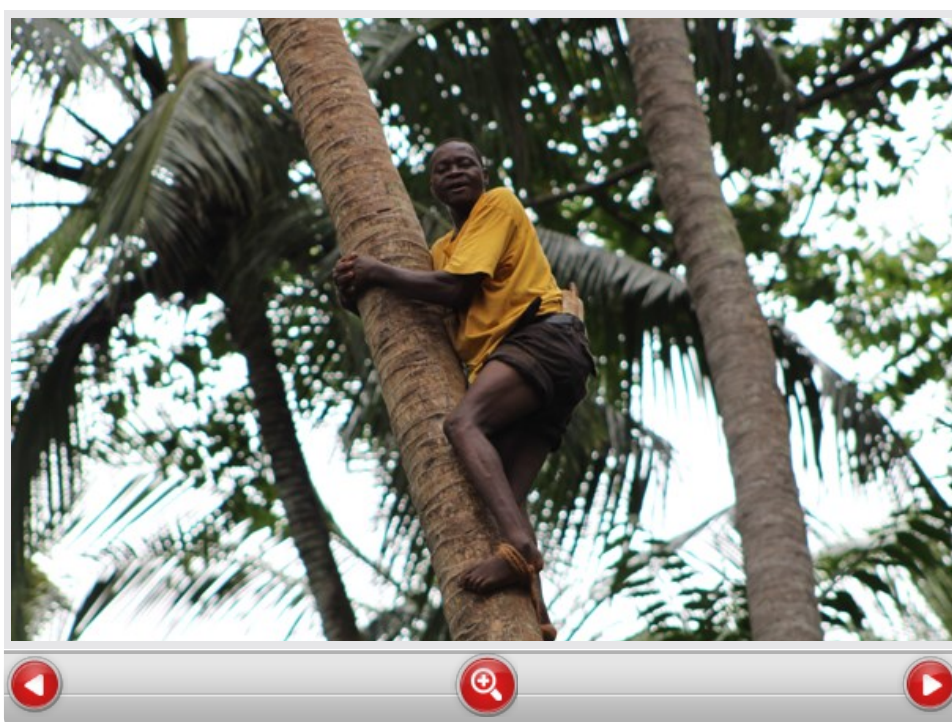
By far, this was my most favourite tour. Amongst the lush jungle like vegetation at Kizimbani in central Zanzibar we touched, sniffed and tasted our way through a traditional Spice Garden. Sun Tours shuttled us there and our excellent guide, Jay introduced us to one of the local Spice gurus who enthusiastically plucked, picked, crushed and explained the different spices.







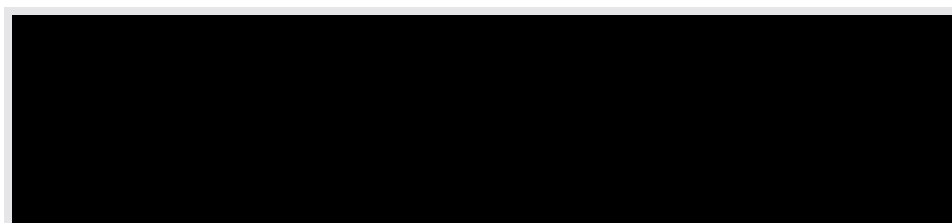
The tour also includes a sighting of the amazing Butterfly, a man who machetes coconuts like a boss and scales up tall palm trees like a monkey all the while belting out personalized songs to his audience. A sight not to be missed! Our guide also fashioned baskets, headdresses, bangles and necklaces out of palm fronds and hibiscus for us as keepsakes. One can also support the local community by purchasing soaps, fragrances and spices while on the tour.



**Cost:** Rates range from 25 USD to 40 USD per person. For more info go to [www.zanzibarquest.com](http://www.zanzibarquest.com)**Did you know:** In Zanzibar ginger is thought of as an aphrodisiac for men and nutmeg for women.

### ***Enjoy the hustle and bustle of a Stone Town Tour***

After the serene lush jungles in the centre of the Island, we made our way to the South-East side for the vibrancy of Stone Town, a world heritage site and the birth town of *Farrokh Bulsara* aka Freddie Mercury. The tour takes you past his modest house, as well as through the bustling markets and narrow streets lined with curios and spewing scooters and bicycles from every angle. I would 100% recommend getting a local guide to navigate you through the streets, as Stone Town is a maze of similar looking alleyways and corners and is incredibly easy to get hopelessly lost in.





The tour includes stops at the Palace Museum, the Old Fort of Zanzibar and a walk by the House of Wonders and visit to the Old Slave Market.

**Cost:** Rates range from 25 USD to 40 USD per person. For more info go to [www.zanzibarquest.com](http://www.zanzibarquest.com)



## Where to stay:

### *Park Hyatt*

If looking for luxury accommodation close to Stone Town, look no further than the [Park Hyatt](http://www.parkhyatt.com), which combines traditional Swahili, Persian and Arab architecture and décor with modern aesthetics and comfort. The food is amazing, and is renowned as the place to go if looking for fine dining in the area. The hotel doesn't offer a swimmable beach on its doorstep like a lot of the other hotels and resorts, however, it does include a beautiful pool and views of the dhow-dotted harbour.





### ***La Gemma***

We spent our first night at [Diamonds La Gemma](#), and it really was the best way to start the trip. Cute cottages surrounded by fragrant frangipani, welcoming dining area, vibey jetty bar and a pool area right on the edges of the picture-perfect beach are sprawled throughout the resort. We grabbed a couple of the all-inclusive Kilimanjaro beers and watched the sun dip into the Indian Ocean from the pool.



### ***Mapenzi***

Unlike the five-star Park Hyatt and La Gemma, [Mapenzi](#) is a four-star resort, however, you wouldn't think it. A light and airy with Bali meets rustic beach decor is seen throughout the resort. The beach villas are pure Tropical paradise perfection and the resort is boarded by the beautiful Kiwenga beach.





## ***Melia***

If Park Hyatt offers sophistication, La Gemma a youthful vibe, Mapenzi a rustic serenity then the last hotel we stayed at, [Melia](#), on the North-East Coast, offers pure modern elegance. A resort that you would not be surprised to see celebrities hanging out at. We stayed in one of the Garden Rooms, which includes the biggest bathroom I have seen, like ever! In fact, the bedroom to bathroom ratio most definitely leans in favour of the bathroom. Two showers, one indoor, one outdoor a deep tub, massive mirrors, two basins and a generous changing area really emphasizes the lux vibe.



On Monday's, the resort hosts a seafood braai buffet on the neighbouring Gabi beach, with a local live band and plenty of cocktails.

**How to get there:** We flew direct with [Mango](#) from Joburg, the flight is only four hours – so quick, painless and

perfect for Saffas.

### How to book:

Our trip was hosted by Africa Stay in partnership with Sun Tours.

AfricaStay is currently running a new *Book now and Pay Later* campaign which offers clients the opportunity to secure a Zanzibar holiday with only an R1,000 per person (nonrefundable) deposit with the balance due eight weeks prior to travel. As well as a *Black Friday* deal running for bookings made from 20-24 November 2017.

For more info visit [www.africastay.com](http://www.africastay.com)



### Good to note:

Climate: Hot September to April (26°-32°C.). Fresher May to August (25°-28°C.)

Time zone: GMT +3 hours.

Currency: Tanzanian Shilling but USD and Euro are widely accepted.

There's no better time to start planning your Zanzibar adventure!

## ABOUT RUTH COOPER

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