



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Take a boat to Prison Island for a great view of Stone Town; Dar House is located on a powder-white beach; high tide and high romance at The Rock Restaurant

VILLA HOPPING *IN ZANZIBAR*

ONE WRITER TRAVELS TO THE SPICE ISLAND WITH HER HUSBAND AND TWO SONS IN SEARCH OF THE BEST PRIVATE VILLAS FOR FAMILIES.

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“*Jambo!*” call the women, wading in the shallows in their wind-twisted colourful kangas, resembling bright sweets in a turquoise bowl. This is Zanzibar, where the colours and contrasts are as startling as the island’s famous textures and tastes. Silk, sand and warm breezes mingle with lime, coconut, passion fruit and cloves. Zanzibar Island is safe, friendly and easy to get around, with good roads and taxis that are never far away. Travelling with our two young boys, we didn’t want to be confined to one resort and a packaged experience. Instead, we went in search of the island’s best villas.

Having your own villa on a beach, away from the hustle often found at resorts, is the ultimate way to spend lazy time with the people you love. If, like us, you’d rather accompany your private chef to the local fish market to choose dinner, dine in your bathing costume and eat platters of fresh fruit in bed than tuck into resort buffets, then villas are for you. You can expect all your meals as well as a staff of housekeepers, a butler and a chef. Excursions and day tours are easy to organise from the villa, and tour guides are always a phone call away. Ask for a bicycle, a dhow, squid for lunch or a cold beer, and someone will ask someone – and make it happen. Always with a wide smile and a shout of “*pole pole*” (slowly, slowly).

BEYOND THE RESORTS

We decided to explore four parts of the island: Stone Town, the scenic peninsula of Michamwi Pingwe, north-east to Matemwe and further north to Nungwi.

A night in Stone Town is an unmissable treat. Once the flourishing centre of the spice and slave trades, its maze of narrow alleys is shaped by ancient palaces, bazaars and mosques with intricately carved doors. Cars negotiate vendors and artists, markets and muezzins, and everything tumbles out onto a breezy, busy port. At night, the Forodhani Food Market offers skewers of every type of seafood, which we washed down with delicious, freshly squeezed sugar-cane juice laced with ginger. We loved our trip in a blue dhow, called Facebook, to Prison (or Changuu) Island, where we walked among the giant Aldabra tortoises that are descendants of four individuals gifted to the island by the governor of Seychelles in 1919.

Our first villa of the trip was Dar House, situated opposite the much-photographed The Rock Restaurant, possibly the world's smallest eatery. Here the beach is powder-white and fringed with palms and coral rag, and feels secluded. Once you're through the bougainvillea-framed doors, the house is airy and spacious, and its four bedrooms can accommodate two families comfortably. Our eyes were always drawn to the blue-green water, and we spent hours unwinding in the serpentine pool. The Maasai *askaris*, or sentries, who guard the property, are highly competitive at playing *boules*, so take them on for a sunset game if you dare!

The chef will buy and cook the freshest kingfish for dinner, and his passion-fruit mousse is not to be missed. Also, hire bicycles and ride up the beach, catch a local fishing boat, collect cowrie shells and search for eels in the shallows.

From Dar House, you can take a half-an-hour drive to swim with dolphins at Kizimkazi and walk through Jozani Forest to see red colobus monkeys. Don't miss the Safari Blue full-day dhow trip across the island-studded Menai Bay Conservation Area, with a great seafood barbecue followed by snorkelling. The crew may drop you on a spit of sand in the middle of the sea with some ice-cold drinks and shade cloth for a midday siesta.

CLOCKWISE FROM

RIGHT Explore the narrow streets of Stone Town; the Forodhani Food Market is a bustling, vibrant display of seafood vendors; Matemwe Beach at sunrise



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LEFT The sparkling sea views from Nungwi Beach.
BELOW LEFT Dar House is ideal for families, with its own staff and fantastic swimming pool.
BELOW RIGHT These Aldabra tortoises are found on Prison Island.



1919

THE YEAR
 THE ORIGINAL
 ALDABRA
 TORTOISES
 WERE GIFTED TO
 PRISON ISLAND.

ON SOCCER AND TURTLES

Matemwe was a highlight for us and we discovered two superb villas there: Matemwe Beach House and Che Che Vule. On the same stretch of beach, they're both perfect for families. They are a hop from the sand and feel part of the vibrant village. We watched the fishermen bringing in their catch and our boys played endless soccer games with the kids on the beach.

But what makes this area so astonishing is the Mnemba Atoll two kilometres offshore and a quick dhow ride away. Part of a marine reserve, Mnemba offers incredible diving and snorkelling, and we were lucky enough to have dolphins join us on each dive. The world beneath the water is a tapestry of coral, sea urchins and tropical fish species that defy description. Matemwe Beach House has two bedrooms, with a bunk bedroom upstairs for kids, so it is best for one family. Che Che Vule

accommodates 10 people. Matemwe is also a convenient base from which to take the Spice Tour.

Nungwi lies in a scenic, if not the busiest, part of the island, with a string of hotels tussling for space between the villages. On the beach, dhow builders practise their ancient craft, unfazed by the resorts and well-heeled tourists. Another highlight was visiting the turtle sanctuary – the boys won't forget swimming with them and hand-feeding them seaweed. We stayed in the villas at the new Essque Zalu Zanzibar Hotel. They are private, although you have full use of the hotel's facilities during your stay – including the island's biggest swimming pool, best spa and tallest makuti roof, and excellent cuisine.

So pack up the kids, your parents and some friends, and consider hiring your own villa on your next visit to Zanzibar. Coupled with Mango's direct flights from Joburg, the cost per person will make your visit an affordable break. You'll leave feeling part of the island. ☀️