

The Observer

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MAGAZINE

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PARADISE ISLANDS

Sipping cocktails by the seashore, diving on a perfect reef or basking in midnight sun above the Arctic Circle — whatever your dream, somewhere out there is the right island for you. **Jill Crawshaw** reveals the world's most fabulous castaway experiences



1 MNEMBA ISLAND, ZANZIBAR

Barefoot luxury is the theme at Mnemba, the heart-shaped coral atoll which has been voted one of the most romantic islands in the world. You'll kick off your sandals when you wade ashore from the boat bringing you from Zanzibar.

Your HQ will be a *banda*, or cottage, made from handwoven palm, thatch and driftwood, with a verandah and your own patch of shell-strewn sand. There are only 10 of them hidden among the casuarina trees, so you are more likely to meet a turtle or flock of waders than your nearest neighbour as you stroll around the island.

Don't expect sophistication. Dress code for the day is a straw hat and Swahili wrap, entertainment is watching the outrigger canoes deliver lobsters for your supper, and action is snorkelling and diving. Take your flippers – who needs shoes?

Journeys by Design (01273 623790; www.journeysbydesign.co.uk) offers a seven-night holiday including all meals, drinks, transfers and two dives a day, but not flights, for £2,730.

STEVE DE WETZ/ARRATIVES, MARCUS WILSON/SMITH/VEIBL/OUTDOUS AND G.C. AFRICA



Main picture: watch the day's catch come in from your thatch and driftwood banda, left; above and top, don't expect much company apart from the odd turtle or wader.