

Travel

Nampula, Mozambique, is not a typical package holiday destination and on the flight there from Maputo, my friend and I are the only tourists. Other passengers include an Australian missionary, a dozen or so middle-aged Chinese businessmen and a cluster of hip Thai twentysomethings (technicians on their way to install a new internet network, it turns out).

"These flights used to be empty," murmurs the Australian missionary. "Now look, they're completely full and there's not a Mozambican on them."

While southern Mozambique has had an influx of South African money, people, business and tourism, northern Mozambique is so far away, it's almost another country.

Here, the boom times are just beginning, largely fuelled by the fact that the port town of Nacala has the deepest natural harbour on Africa's east coast. It's a vital exit point for the raw materials the rest of the world – but particularly China – is desperate for. There's more than a whiff of the wild west in the air: it seems a place of prospectors, bounty hunters, and get-rich-quickers.

But then, this isn't entirely new. The first written record of Mozambique was in a 10th-century Arab text entitled "the meadows of gold and mines of gems". That title more or less sums up how the country has been seen since by successive waves of colonisers – Arabian, Indian and Swahili traders and, later, the Portuguese. It is a history that has left its mark, not least upon our destination, the Ilha de Moçambique, a tiny coral island that for 400 years was Mozambique's capital. It's now a Unesco world heritage site, and, as I tell my mother excitedly before I go, "the new Zanzibar".

"Have you been to the old Zanzibar?" she asks. Well, no, I haven't. But, still, who wouldn't want to see the new one?

Our first stop, however, is Nuarro, just further north. It is, we've been warned, in the middle of nowhere, the only trouble with nowhere being the roads it takes to get there. "They're bad," our driver, Miguel, warns us. We zoom along a freshly resurfaced highway, then turn off on to a rutted dirt road and can see what he means. "Oh no," he says. "This isn't the bad road. This", he says half an hour later, "is the bad road." In fact, "road" is something of a generous description. Dried-up mud channel might be more accurate.

Nuarro turns out to be a handful of rustic bungalows set on a glorious sweep of sand. It is billed as an eco-

It's a scene that doesn't seem to have changed in 1,000 years, until one of the fishermen pulls out a cellphone

lodge, but then where isn't these days? Here, though, it is clearly more than a name: there are composting toilets, the electricity is generated by wind turbines, our room is designed to catch the sea breezes, and the whole thing was built by the villagers who live at the other end of the bay.

The village receives \$5 a night per tourist staying at the lodge and \$3 per activity booked. Eighty people work at the lodge, in turn supporting an estimated 1,000. This gives it a genuine community feel. The service is amazing, friendly and professional, the bar staff make flawless cocktails, and the chef, from nearby Nacala, turns out exquisitely griddled squid, freshly made pasta and, on one night, excitingly, baobab ice cream.

The rooms are shutterless, so we wake at dawn and walk along the beach to see the fishermen returning with the night's catch in their dhows and dug-out canoes. I'm just thinking that it is a scene that doesn't seem to have changed in the past 1,000 years when one of the fishermen looks up from mending his net, pulls out a cellphone and does a passable imitation of Michael Douglas in *Wall Street*.

Later, we borrow mountain bikes and cycle to a nearby lighthouse where small, shoeless, shrieking children run out to wave and smile and say hello and fall over, laughing hysterically when we take their photos.



Magic of Mozambique

On a tiny island off Africa's east coast tourism is in its infancy – which makes Ilha de Moçambique all the more enticing, says *Carole Cadwalladr*



From top: the Fort of São Sebastião at the tip of Ilha de Moçambique; the restored hotel Terraço das Quitandas; the upper town on the Ilha

Alamy

Back at the lodge, there's a certain Graham Greene quality to the clientele. I chat to a lone Portuguese woman at breakfast and ask how long she's staying. "A long time," she says. "Weeks. Maybe months." And then after a pause, "Working." Oh, I say, and what kind of work do you do? "I'm taking... soil samples," she says and it's only later that one of the managers translates this for me: "She's looking for diamonds."

Later, in a blur of noise and South African accents, two helicopters land, their passengers – a survey team working on a new Chinese-funded 600-mile railway – checking in for some weekend rest and relaxation.

Then there are the old Africa hands, such as Jacques Berard, a Belgian who was brought up in Congo on his father's tea estate and lived for 40 years in Nigeria with his wife Martine. Here, Jacques says, is the old east Africa, where the spirit of the old Swahili coast lives on.

"We used to go to Malindi on the Kenyan coast when I was a child," he says. "There was a single hotel and it was a wonderful place. Now, that whole coast is completely commercial-

ised and built up but here it really is like it was in the old days."

The Berards tried Mauritius and Lamu in recent years but "everywhere we went we were staying in these hotels which are more like compounds," says Martine. "Like prisons with high walls to keep the local people out. Whereas here, you really feel like you are part of the village."

It also feels as if we're off the grid, which has pluses and minuses. There's a reef offshore, and the Berards go on a diving trip. They're pretty experienced but, during the dive, they drift and the boat fails to spot them. By the time anyone has realised they're missing, it's already getting dark.

There's a certain amount of panic in the air, particularly when no one can work out how to start the rescue boat. And then... it's the villagers who save the day. The fishermen find them and rescue them in their dug-out canoes.

On our walk along the beach the next day, one of the fisherman runs up to us and does a dramatic rendition of how he paddled out and paddled back. It's a vivid illustration of how community tourism works: the villagers feel as if we're their tourists too.

It's a wrench leaving. Particularly since we have to face "the road" again. We bump over the ruts to the sound of *tujó*: soulful songs that our driver, a former musician, tells us are from Ilha de Moçambique, or as he calls it simply, "the Ilha". He's a classic Mozambican hybrid, of Portuguese-Indian descent, a cross-cultural remnant of Mozambique's past.

It is a past that comes stunningly to life when we cross the causeway to the island. It is only two miles long and feels like a forgotten kingdom that was abandoned centuries ago and has only recently been rediscovered. In a sense it has. When Maputo took over as capital in 1898, the Ilha de Moçambique became a provincial backwater, its colonial churches and merchants' mansions left to rot and gradually fall into the sea.

Its fortunes have only just begun to turn again. Unesco status and an influx of foreign money have seen a few buildings restored to their former glory, including our hotel, the Terraço das Quitandas. Originally three merchants' houses, it has intricately carved wooden doors, interesting antiques, a rooftop terrace overlooking the sea, and a vast, formal drawing room, where breakfast is served.

There are supposedly 16,000 people living on the island but it's hard to



know where. When we wander the streets, admiring peeling stucco walls and artfully crumbling porticoes, there's barely a soul about. We drink coffee in a café so effortlessly cool – huge windows, ceiling fans, black and white checkerboard floor – it could have been art-directed by someone from *Wallpaper** magazine. At the tip of the island, we visit Our Lady of the Ramparts, a beautifully simple vaulted church dating from 1522 and believed to be the oldest European structure in the southern hemisphere.

It's a wonderfully peaceful spot, with just the waves crashing on the rocks outside. According to a map in the museum, it is the dangerous side of the island, where dozens of ships have been wrecked. The museum houses a large collection of shipwrecked 16th-century Ming porcelain but every hawker in town has his own collection of scraps and shards, fashioned into pendants and necklaces.

There is no hard sell, though, but then there's hardly anyone to sell to. Tourism is still in its infancy and is delightfully low-key: we hire a fisherman and his dhow to sail us to a beach with white sand and turquoise water, catching the same trade winds that brought Vasco da Gama here.

Back on the island, we finally discover where all the people are: down the other end, in the so-called "reed town", as opposed to the "stone town" where the Europeans lived – the old distinctions holding true even to this day. It's where the life is, and there's lots of it, especially after dark when the streets teem: everyone ambling, shouting, cooking and playing football. And it is where we're thrilled to discover Mama's, a shipping container bar-shack where there's home-cooked food and cold beer.

I'm still not sure whether or not it's the new Zanzibar, but at Nairobi airport, I chat to a couple just back from the old one. How was it, I ask, curious to know, how our experiences compared, then spend the next half hour listening to a litany of gripes. The rep never visited the hotel, they were bothered on the beach by hawkers, the fruit salad only had two types of fruit, and the Sunset Dhow Trip involved "wading out to the boat".

How else would you get out to a boat, I ask? "Well, they could have warned us," said the woman. "We'd dressed up." We, on the other hand, went on a dhow trip at sunset rather than a Sunset Dhow Trip, a small but crucial difference between the old and new Zanzibars, I can't help thinking.

Details

● Carole Cadwalladr travelled as a guest of Journeys by Design (www.journeysbydesign.com), which offers three nights at Terraço das Quitandas on Ilha de Moçambique and four nights at Nuarro beach camp from £2,180, full board, including internal flights and transfers.

● Many travellers choose to have a week's safari in Tanzania before a week on the coast; the two-week trip would cost from £3,950. Return flights from London to Maputo with Kenya Airways (www.kenya-airways.com) cost from £831 per person

Postcard from... Portugal Surf, sand and hotdogs

Earlier this year a group of expert adjudicators met to pore over video footage and photographs of a man surfing a wave. After much deliberation, the team, employed by Guinness World Records, announced its conclusion: this was the biggest wave any human had ever surfed. The rider was a Hawaiian professional called Garrett McNamara, but the 78ft-wave was not on the famed North Shore of O'ahu, nor the famous exotic surf spots of Australia or California. It was at Nazaré, Portugal.

McNamara's feat has announced the country's surf credentials to the world, and his plans to return to go even bigger this autumn will draw yet more attention. And as well as the potential for

vast waves, Portugal has another selling point – the accessibility of its beaches. Nazaré, for example, is just 75 miles north of the capital, Lisbon, making it perfect for weekend trips.

My destination, Cascais, is more convenient still, just 30 minutes' drive from Lisbon airport. And while previous explorations of Portugal's beaches have involved roughing it in camper vans on windy headlands, this time I have opted for a kind of surf trip that would have been unthinkable just a decade ago: a deluxe one.

The Oitavos, which opened in 2010, is a five-star hotel, but rather than frown on guests who arrive in the grand lobby in baggy board shorts, it positively encourages surfers,

offering surfing packages complete with lessons and post-surf massages.

This may have something to do with the fact that the general manager, Miguel Champalimaud, is a former national under-21 surfing champion. He has picked the right hotel to work at – Oitavos is five minutes' drive from the popular surfing

beach of Guincho, while Ericeira, whose waves are so good that the fishing-village-turned-resort was last October designated a World Surfing Reserve, is just half an hour away. En route, there is Praia Grande, another well-known surf spot. Even the stretch of coastline between Cascais and Lisbon is blessed with good surf.



Miguel Champalimaud surfing at Nazaré, Portugal Ricardo Bravo

Champalimaud has agreed to be my guide but first wants to show me some of the local surf culture. First stop is Santini's, a 1950s-style ice-cream parlour in the centre of Cascais, an upmarket yet unpretentious coastal town. Champalimaud explains that eating ice-cream outside on the sun-drenched steps rather than within Santini's retro interior is a Portuguese tradition. Next stop is for hotdogs at Pastelaria Garrett, a patisserie and tea house in Estoril, followed by more ice-cream. The hotdogs are an improvement on their British counterparts, the *gelados* delicious. Estoril itself, with the Hotel Palácio as its centrepiece, isn't bad either. We make our way from

Cascais along the coast to Guincho. Within minutes of paddling out into clean, uncrowded waves, it's clear Champalimaud has lost none of his ability. As a surfer of a certain age, I keep up about as well as I would have fared in the monster wave of Nazaré but, then again, one of the joys of being an older surfer is that competitiveness fades, to be replaced by appreciation of the simple joy of being in the sea.

Alex Wade

Alex Wade was a guest of the Oitavos (www.theoitavos.com), British Airways (www.ba.com), and Nova Car Hire (www.novacarhire.com). The Oitavos offers two-night surf trips from €660 for two