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Contents

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Features

- 112 Next Stop, Mozambique**
On tiny, unspoiled islands off Africa's southeastern coast, MARIA SHOLLENBARGER experiences the ultimate castaway fantasy. PHOTOGRAPHED BY WILLIAM ABRANOWICZ. GUIDE AND MAP 119
- 120 Scotland by the Yard**
From drinking straw caps to python kilts, the fashion traditions of Edinburgh and Glasgow are being gloriously (and glamorously!) reborn. BY LYNN YARGER. PHOTOGRAPHED BY JULIAN BROAD. GUIDE AND MAP 130

- 132 Marseilles Makeover**
Paris's scruffy yet stylish rival is shining after a much-needed face-lift. And with a surge of chic hotels and restaurants, SAYS ALEXANDRA MARSHALL, there's never been a better time to go. PHOTOGRAPHED BY MATTHIEU SALVAING. GUIDE AND MAP 138

- 140 Big Sur Utopia**
Set on the cliffs south of Monterey and steeped in the countercultural ethos of the 1960's, Esalen is a retreat whose mission, DANI SHAPIRO discovers, may be more relevant than ever. PHOTOGRAPHED BY BROWN W. CANNON III



A spray-painted mural by Remed covers the new tower at La Friche, an arts complex in Marseilles, France.

MATTHIEU SALVAING

an an island be, in the best possible sense of the word, haunted?

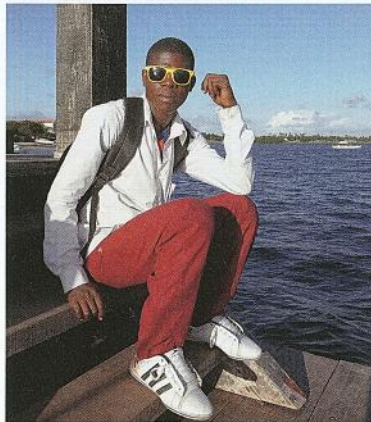
On Ibo, in the Quirimbas Archipelago, off the coast of northern Mozambique—a place that is gorgeously kinetic with the colors and textures of its past—I am compelled to consider the possibility.

Ibo radiates with the memories of the Arab sultans and Portuguese explorers who came and went on the trade winds, enriching the surrounding coast with their cultural patrimony even as they plundered its resources. The echoes of their dominions merge along its tidal shores and in the near-deserted streets of its colonial Stone Town, long since reclaimed by sand. Traces of vanquished prosperity and forsaken grandeur linger in mercantile arcades and crumbling Lusitanian villas in faded shades of yellow and pink. Trees grow up inside some of them, limbs reaching through windows; florid patches of black-green mold spread across their walls like great abstract watercolors.

That Ibo is so redolent of a rich history should come as no surprise: Mozambique is a country whose past has never quite relinquished its hold on the psychic landscape. Bordered by Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Swaziland, its coast stretches more than a thousand miles; in the north, it is a place of tidal flats and mangrove forests, coconut plantations, boundless blue skies.

Today, this coast is confronted with an electrified future. If you've read about northern Mozambique, it was likely in the context of the discovery of vast gas and oil fields in the Rovuma Basin and at various offshore sites, which has invited exploration of the 21st-century sort: planes and helicopters from major U.S., Russian, and Chinese energy conglomerates jostle for position on the runway of the one-hangar airport in Pemba, gateway to the Quirimbas. In certain towns and lodges up here, there is more than a hint of the Wild West in the air.

Simultaneously, though, northern Mozambique's unique, frozen-in-amber heritage—as characterful as Zanzibar or Lamu but, for the time being, far less visited than either—is attracting private investment, conservation organizations, and those simply in search of untrammeled beauty. A handful of the latter have turned their talents to hotel-keeping—here



From top: At Ibo Island Lodge, off Mozambique's northern coast; a local teenager on Ibo Island; wares on display at Missanga, on Ilha de Moçambique. Opposite: Villa Sands, also on Ilha.





From top: Sailing a dhow off Ibo; a sitting room at Terraço das Quitandas, on Ilha de Moçambique; Binte Assane wearing musiro paste on Ibo Island. Opposite: The deck of a villa at Azura at Quilalea.

in the Quirimbas as well as on Ilha de Moçambique, some 200 miles to the south. Though their aesthetic visions vary, all marry respect for history, architecture, and nature with a passion for thoughtful design.

One of the first hotels to open was Ibo Island Lodge, on the edge of Stone Town on the northwestern coast of tiny Ibo (it measures only a couple of miles across). Bush planes ferry visitors back and forth to the island from Pemba on a 20-minute flight, though at low tide one could conceivably walk all the way from the mainland. Villagers, most from the Kimwani tribe, creak along Ibo's sand paths on rusty bicycles, banana bunches slung over the handlebars; young women wrapped in vibrant *capulanas* stroll hand in hand, their faces white with a hydrating paste made from the *musiro* tree. Silversmiths—part of a once-thriving tradition that in the past decade has been resuscitated by the Aga Khan Foundation—work in the shade of porticoes in Stone Town, shaping wire-thin segments of metal into intricate earrings and pendants. I take a walk around the island with Anli Madu, one of the lodge's easygoing guides, who was born and raised here; he translates as the village's healer (disarmingly young and pretty) explains shyly how she treats the patients whom the nurses from Ibo's lone infirmary have deemed beyond their care.

The lodge itself is housed in restored 19th-century Portuguese villas, set side by side at the sea rampart's edge. Earlier this year, a third villa at the south end of the property was added; it brings the number of rooms to 14 and can be booked as a fully staffed private villa. The mostly local waitstaff and housekeepers, young and quick to share a laugh, pad about with iced juices and cold towels.

Ibo Island Lodge's owners, Zimbabwean Fiona Record and her husband, Kevin, have coaxed its interiors back to genteel, but not overly polished, life—good, because excessive polish would, here, be uncomfortably untrue. The décor mixes faded antiques from Goa with contemporary photography and carved teak and mahogany chests and sideboards. There are vintage claw-foot bathtubs in some suites, marble showers in others. Rooms open onto deep verandas running the length of each building; folding carved-wood Swahili screens between them afford privacy, while fans spin above—though in the early morning hours (when one of the staff comes with coffee) the breeze along the bay is still fresh, gently quilting the Indian Ocean.

That ocean, changeable but omnipresent, is a protagonist here. Ibo was key to the spice route plied by Arab sultanates as far back as the eighth century; it was they who purportedly built the fortification that later became the Fortim de São João, Ibo's oldest fort. Dramatic tidal fluctuations create massive flats around Ibo's rough coral coastline, so beach chairs and umbrellas don't factor into the setting. The lodge's solution for sunseekers is a dhow, which collects you from the nearby pier and heads north, toward Matemo Island, where you reach your own private paradise: a sandbar, newly emerged from the ocean. The crew sets up a tent and umbrellas; chairs and towels are laid in its shade; brunch (or lunch) is served. It's pure castaway joy, yours for hours without another soul in sight; until the tide turns, and



Poolside at Villa Sands, on Ilha de Moçambique.

the ocean—faster than you would ever imagine—starts to reclaim it. When you look back as you sail away it's as if it never existed.

If Ibo Island Lodge is the Quirimbas Archipelago at its most atmospheric, Azura at Quilalea, a private island retreat that's a 40-minute powerboat ride to the south, is a Crusoe fantasy executed at the full-on, five-star level—the one that includes sundowners served by butler-hosts and Heidi Klein beachwear in the boutique. A tiny, half-mile-long coralline outcrop covered in marula trees and the odd baobab, Quilalea has been elegantly shaped without losing its essential wildness: the path that meanders from reception to the groovy sunken beach bar to the dive center is paved, but you might share it with the occasional (entirely harmless) monitor lizard, or one of the 180-odd bird species indigenous to the archipelago. The nine thatched-roof villas are spare and cool, with polished concrete floors and floor-length linen curtains. Four are strung along the east coast; five face west, toward the Indian Ocean sunsets; Villa Quilalea blows

out the template with significantly more space, multiple wooden decks, and a bathroom with a view. For all the guests, each of the exquisite meals is served in a different location on the island: one day my breakfast was in a tiny private cove; that night I dined under a sea chestnut, its branches glowing in the light of a dozen lanterns.

Stella Bettany, the Johannesburg-based British owner of Azura Retreats—which reopened Quilalea in late 2011—believes the island “has an immense soul. We wanted to keep that unique castaway quality,” she says. Creature comforts and 2-to-1 staff-to-guest ratio notwithstanding, nothing about Quilalea is exclusive in the undemocratic and un-fun sense of that word. Millions went into the refurbishment, she notes, but most of it underground or back-of-house; so

out front, despite a pronounced chicness (aquamarine and turquoise prevail, with lots of grass matting underfoot), barefoot still feels like a perfectly acceptable dress code. Bettany champions Quirimbas culture as well; guests are encouraged to take the speedboat—or the resort's helicopter—to Ibo to visit the forts, Stone Town, and village (Azura collaborates with Ibo Island Lodge, whose guides are available for cultural tours). South African managers Paul and Kelly Ricklan are consummate hosts, moving fluidly from urbane chat to serious wilderness discourse to divespeak. “I lived in southern Mozambique for eight and a half years, and it's beautiful,” Kelly Ricklan says. “But here the confluence of nature and culture is just unique. And it's far wilder.” Azura guests can fish from the main beach and kayak the perimeter of the island. Or they can lie on their private decks and listen to the hiss of the wind-tossed casuarinas and the thump of waves against coral, appreciating how Azura's very cushy version of the Middle of Nowhere manages to impart an inimitably Mozambican sense of place.

There is no more definitively Mozambican place, however, than Ilha de Moçambique, off the coast of Nampula province—a bumpy but beautiful six-hour drive due south from Pemba through a landscape of lush bush and banana fields occasionally interrupted by towering granite mountains. About two miles long and a couple of thousand feet wide, and reached by a long causeway, Ilha, as locals refer to it, is a 500-year-old fortified island city that is a microcosm of an empire and its demise. Vasco da Gama landed here in 1498 and the Portuguese colonized in 1505, displacing the Arabs who had for centuries made this a principal port (its name is said to derive from that of Moussa Al-Bik, the sultan who controlled its trade). In 1507, it was made the capital of Portuguese East Africa, which it would remain for almost 400 years; in the mid 1600's, its population comprised Africans, Portuguese, Arab and Macanese traders, and Indians from the imperial provinces in Goa. Local children still scour the shallows for beads from Kerala and fragments of Jiaying Ming porcelain, remnants of 350-year-old shipwrecks, to sell.

The dissolution of Portuguese power was Ilha's saving grace: by 1898, when the capital moved to Lourenço Marques (now Maputo), slave trading had been outlawed for 20 years; by the 1950's, Nacala, to the north, had overtaken it as the primary port. Four centuries of commerce deserted Ilha in the space of 50 years, and much of the nonnative population followed (those who didn't made themselves scarce after 1975, with the arrival of independence). This near-desertion protected it from development, and in 1991, UNESCO sealed its status as a World Heritage site.

Ilha's Stone Town is a bigger, denser version of Ibo's—houses more tightly packed; streets more bustling, then and now—but equally magnificent in its half-disintegration. It harbors the oldest European church in the Southern Hemisphere: the Church of Our Lady of the Ramparts, constructed in 1522—white, austere, the searing African sunlight pouring through the cross-shaped embrasures cut into its three-foot-thick walls.

These days, though, for almost every empty villa, or one bearing signs of habitation by locals, there is a lime-renderer façade that has been conspicuously renovated. Ilha's promise isn't going unappreciated in Maputo, Johannesburg, or Cape Town—or farther afield. “French; Italian; French; German; Spanish; American.” Eddie, the guide I've hired for the day, ticks off the proprietors' nationalities as we pass construction sites and restorations in the labyrinthine alleys. Private investment may have been encouraged by the establishment of a dedicated tourism authority last year, and is definitely encouraged by the easy affordability of a 2,000-square-foot villa here compared with, say, Morocco or Sicily (for those willing to abide Mozambique's convoluted property laws, dodgy infrastructure, and malaria hazards). One or two subtly stylish restaurants, serving improbably tasty thin pizzas or spicy prawn curries, dot the streets around the museum, a former seminary; a pretty new boutique, Missanga, sells smocks fashioned from *capulanas* and the odd brass relic pressed from the bottom of the ocean.

Bright, whitewashed walls signal your arrival at Villa Sands, a luxurious 11-room inn in a former shipping warehouse at the water's edge. Its Stockholm-based owners purchased it in 2007, infused its interiors with a blend of contemporary minimalism and 19th-century Gustavian flourishes, and opened for business in 2011. The infinity-edged pool deck merges easily with the terrace restaurant, flush with the sea; the open lounge, with its poured-concrete floor, Mies-inspired sitting areas, and ornate European chandeliers, leaves the Afro-Lusitanian references to the rest. The slick result is unexpected, but totally appealing.

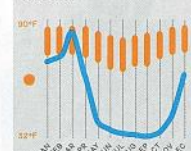
My own hotel's façade is similarly fresh, whitewashed. Three and a half centuries old, Terraço das Quitandas was restored over an eight-year period by Isabel Osório and Sérgio Oliveira, its Maputo-based Mozambican owners. Beyond its doors is a ravishing time warp. *Quitanda* is the word for the local ornate carved-wood beds; one furnishes my two-room suite, which has saffron-yellow walls and a freestanding stone bathtub large enough for two. Makonde ebony carvings are showcased in alcoves; a delicate rocking horse, brought from India by Isabel's grandfather, gazes at me mildly from a corner. The living room is as long as the nave of a church, painted a rich burnt red, and layered in antiques, along with Thai textiles, rugs and lamps from Morocco, and wooden doors from Jaipur. The terrace is crowded with rattan furniture and plants in hand-thrown blue pots; hot-pink and tangerine bougainvillea wreathes an inviting fringed hammock; beyond, you can see dhows tilting and bobbing on water turned to quicksilver by the afternoon sun. Fatima, the housekeeper's assistant, brings tea, with the wide and generous smile she dispenses to compensate for her lack of English. “Besides the natural beauty and the amazing architecture, why here?” Isabel muses. “Because Ilha represents what we are: the mix of cultures, histories, people, food—left over centuries, by who passed and who stayed. It's made Ilha the place of everyone.”

Maria Shollenberger is the travel editor of *How to Spend It* at the Financial Times.



T+L Guide

Weather



STAY

- Azura at Quilalea** [azura-retreats.com](#); all-inclusive. \$\$\$\$\$
- Ibo Island Lodge** [iboislandlodge.com](#); all-inclusive. \$\$\$\$\$
- Terraço das Quitandas** [terraçodasquitandas.com](#). \$
- Villa Sands** [villasands.com](#). \$

EAT

- Café-Bar Ancora d'Ouro**
The sun-soaked dining room, overlooking the Church of the Misericórdia, serves local specialties such as prawn curry, Swedish pancakes, and thin-crust pizza. *Ilha de Moçambique*; 258-26/610-006. \$\$
- Reliquias** Not far from Terraço das Quitandas, this spot has the freshest seafood and a garden that's perfect for sundowners. *Ilha de Moçambique*; 258-82/437-318. \$

When to Go

Northern Mozambique's high season is June to September. December and January can be hot; February and March see almost daily rain.

Getting There

Even with recent tourism initiatives, trip planning can be challenging here. Africa specialists Journeys by Design ([journeysbydesign.com](#)) can organize your entire itinerary to Pemba and beyond, including internal flights and ground transfers.

What to Know

It's common practice to tip guides \$20–\$25 a day, and drivers \$5–\$10. Malaria is present in the region, so a prophylactic (such as Malarone), long sleeves and pants in the evening, and insect repellent are strongly recommended.

SHOP

- Missanga** *Ilha de Moçambique*; 258-82/434-6400.

HOTELS

- \$ Less than \$200
 - \$\$ \$200 to \$350
 - \$\$\$ \$350 to \$500
 - \$\$\$\$ \$500 to \$1,000
 - \$\$\$\$\$ More than \$1,000
- RESTAURANTS**
- \$ Less than \$25
 - \$\$ \$25 to \$75
 - \$\$\$ \$75 to \$150
 - \$\$\$\$ More than \$150

Join us for a Facebook chat on travel in Africa on Wednesday, September 25, at 2 p.m. EDT; go to [facebook.com/travelandleisure](#).

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