

Jewels of **Tanzania**
African Safari & Pemba Island Diving

Text and photos
by Scott Bennett

Kilimanjaro, Ngorongoro Crater, the Serengeti... boasting a wealth of natural beauty that reads like a lexicon of African icons, Tanzania is a wildlife enthusiast's dream destination. However, this rich bounty isn't limited to just the land, as the warm waters fringing its coast are home to some of the most spectacular reefs in all of East Africa.

Having dived exclusively in the Asia-Pacific region, I was eager to experience an entirely new destination. While perusing the exhibitor list at last year's DEMA show, the exotic name of "Swahili Divers" virtually leapt up to grab my attention. Sauntering over for a look, I met owners Farhat and Francisca Jah. Known to friends as Raf and Cisca, both are long-time Africa enthusiasts with their base of operations on the island of Pemba situated in the Indian Ocean off the Tanzanian coast. Separated from the mainland by the deep, cold waters of the Pemba Channel, the island is regarded as one of the supreme jewels in Tanzania's diving crown. The thought of a dive trip combined with a safari proved irresistible, and I was sold on the spot!

Despite its somewhat far-flung location, Pemba proved surprisingly easy to get to. From my home base in Toronto, Canada, the trip took less than 17 hours plus a stopover in

Zebras and flamingos,
Ngorongoro Crater





Amsterdam. The international gateway is Dar es Saalam, the country's largest city and home to over three million inhabitants. My late night arrival necessitated an overnight stop in the city. The thrill of finally being in Africa made for a very sleepless night.

The next morning, it was back to the airport for my domestic flight to Pemba. The island, along with neighbouring Unguja (the main island, informally referred to as Zanzibar) and a host of smaller islands comprises Zanzibar, a separate state within the United Republic of Tanzania.

After boarding my ZanAir island-hopper, it was only a 20-minute flight to Zanzibar, where we had had a brief stopover before resuming the journey to Pemba. My visit also coincided with the advent of the rainy season. Enroute, we skirted an immense

thunderstorm before finally landing at Pemba's diminutive terminal.

Compared to the bustle of neighbouring Zanzibar, the atmosphere on Pemba was decidedly sedate. Pemba's fertile countryside is blessed with undulating hills of verdant green interspersed with fertile valleys and forests. Coconut palms dominated the landscape along with a myriad of mango, breadfruit, and banana and clove trees. The dominant crop on the island, cloves, were introduced by the Omani Arabs from Mauritius. Over three million clove trees are found throughout the island and is now a bigger producer than Zanzibar itself. Clove smuggling is considered a very serious offence on the island—a fact reinforced by the numerous police checkpoints passed on the way.

Driving north from the regional

capitol of Chake Chake, the roads became progressively rougher with oxcarts providing the primary form of vehicular transport. Nearing our destination, the road entered the verdant confines of the Ngezi forest. Home to the island's last expanse of protected forest, the reserve hosts prolific wildlife, including five endemic bird species. Dense stands of red mahogany towered above, while vervet monkeys peered down from the lofty branches. After a scenic 90-minute drive, we finally reached the turnoff to the resort.

Established in 1999, Swahili Divers had its original base of operations in the town of Chake Chake. Then, in October 2006, Raf and Cisca opened their newly built Kervan Seray Beach

Reef scene at Manta Point (right)
Close-up of nudibranch (above)





Tanzania

Resort on the northwest coast of the island. Accommodation is in simple but comfortable bungalows featuring spacious four-poster beds draped with mosquito netting. The outdoor bathrooms are equipped with showers providing solar-heated water. Electricity is available in the evenings between 6:00 and 11:00pm, and for those that absolutely cannot live without it, internet access is available via satellite. The 30-40 staff members come from Chake Chake and the nearby village of Makangale.

Upon checking into my room, I soon came across some of the local wildlife, albeit of the creepy-crawly variety. Moving languidly across my outdoor bathroom floor was a decidedly hefty millipede that was big enough to put on a dinner roll.

As the burgeoning humidity was starting to take its toll, Cisca asked if I'd like to sample a local cold drink. Always eager to partake in the local cuisine (providing it isn't endangered), I readily agreed. Moments later, I was presented with a brown bottle emblazoned with the lyrical name of Stony Tangawizi. Sounding like the name of a Flintstones character, I was pleasantly surprised to discover a crisp flavour reminiscent of ginger beer. I ended up having a lot of them over the ensuing week.

Diving

Separated from the African continental shelf by sheer walls that drop down to



ZANZIBAR HISTORY
Lured by the promise of trade and conquest, ships from Arabia, Persia, India and as far away as China have plied Pemba's waters for nearly 2000 years. Known as 'Al Jazeera Al Khadra' (the green island, in Arabic), Pemba, along with neighbouring Zanzibar, has long been at the centre of the most affluent trade empire in East Africa. Carried by the

monsoon winds, Arab and Persian trading dhows carried beads, cloth and Chinese porcelain to the African coast returning heavily laden with gold, ivory, spices and slaves. The dhows have been a mainstay throughout Pemba's history, and to this day, remain an enduring attribute of the East African coast.

Pemba's first settlements were established by the Shirazi Persians who arrived before the 10th century. Intermarriage between Shirazis and indigenous Africans gave birth to the

Swahili culture. The name Swahili is derived from the Arab word sawahil, which means 'coast'. Derived in part from Arabic, Swahili soon became the dominant language in the region and eventually went on to become the national language of Tanzania.

The Portuguese occupied the island in the 16th century before being displaced by Omani Arabs in 1698. In 1832, Sultan Seyyid Said was so captivated by the Spice Islands that he shifted his capitol from Muscat to Zanzibar, where he and his descendants ruled for over 130 years.

The 19th century saw the dawn of European colonialism in East Africa, with various countries eager to gain a foothold to exploit the region's riches. The British arrived on the scene, forcing the Sultanates of Muscat and Zanzibar to separate and then administering the islands in the name of the Sultan.

Zanzibar was also the starting point for the great European expeditions, with legendary explorers such as Burton, Speke and Livingston passing through as they set out to map the continent's unexplored interior. Due in part to the efforts of Livingston and many others, the slave trade was finally abolished in 1873. Today, Islam is still the dominant religion and the island remains fairly conservative. ■

LEFT TO RIGHT: Skunk Anemonefish; Two Band Clownfish (inset); Monocled Hawksfish



Blood Spot Squirrelfish (left inset); Reef scene at Maziwe Reserve (above); Anemonefish and scuba diver (right)

over 300 metres, Pemba's northwest coast is dominated by a series of barrier islands separated by three passages: Ngao, Fundo and Uvingi. At high tide, large volumes of water flush through the passages, bringing in the big fish and providing nutrients for abundant coral species. Wall and drift dives are the order

of the day, with a wide variety of easily accessible dive sites. After a day of rest, I was eager to get in the water. Well, not TOO quickly. At high tide, the exposed shoreline consisted of a large swathe of jagged exposed limestone. The still wet surface necessitated careful negotiation, but my camera and I made it to the boat without incident. Transport was courtesy of the resort's Tornado Rigid inflatable boat. As polyurethane and the hot African sun proved incompatible, the tubes had been replaced with specially designed buoyant fiberglass pontoons. As there wasn't a ladder, getting on board proved to be somewhat interesting as I'm not, shall we say, petite. Hopping in from the shallows wasn't a problem, but hauling myself

aboard in deep water proved to be a challenge, to say the least!

Our first destination was a mere ten minutes away. Situated adjacent to a historic old lighthouse dating from 1901, Swiss Reef turned out to be one of those proverbial high-voltage drift dives you always hear about! Within moments of descending, the powerful current propelled us over a series of undulating ridges rising from the seabed. A kaleidoscope of colourful reef fish swam effortlessly amongst abundant tubastrea corals, but I soon realized photographing anything would be a near impossibility! I forgot about the camera and just enjoyed the dive for the sheer joy of it. At one point, a large bommie offered just enough protection from the raging current that I could stop and photograph a large school of yellow sweepers.

That evening, dinner was held in a large open thatched-roof bure overlooking the waters of the Pemba Channel. I arrived just in time for a spectacular sunset, the sky ablaze with intense hues of red, orange and yellow

silhouetting the distant peaks of the Usambara Mountains on the mainland. Everyone sat at the same table, creating a friendly communal atmosphere. After a sumptuous meal of freshly caught red snapper, my Zanzibar spiced coffee



LEFT TO RIGHT:
Reef scene at
Bunker dive site;
Powder Blue
Surgeonfish; Fire
Dartfish; Map of
Pemba Island



was interrupted by a maniacal cackling resembling the laughter of a demented clown. Seeing my perturbed expression, Cisca laughed and told me it was merely a greater galago, more commonly known as a bushbaby. Members of the primate family, these cat-sized creatures resemble the lemurs found on neighbouring Madagascar.

At that moment, Raf brought out a bottle of Turkish ouzo, also known as raki. The word Ouzo is a derivative of uzum, which is Turkish for grapes. The raki, in combination with my malaria medication, infused my sleep with dreams of Dali-esque proportions that even a wailing bushbaby couldn't penetrate!

The remainder of the week was spent exploring the area's superlative dive sites. The nearest passage to the resort is NgaoGap, a ten-minute boat ride away. End of the World and D F Malan boasted hard coral gardens of unparalleled diversity, with table and staghorn corals growing everywhere with reckless abandon. Cabbage corals were all over the place, stacked atop one another like tiers of a marine wedding cake, while rocky outcrops played host to numerous sponges, anemones and bubble corals.

A bit more challenging was Rudy's Wall, situated right at the gap's

entrance. According to Raf, this site is not dived very often due to the strong currents that converge here. One day we lucked out, arriving right at the verge of the slack tide. Entering the water, the surface chop was fierce and it took some effort to descend down the mooring line. The effort was well worth it as the walls were adorned with luxuriant fan corals garbed in pastel hues of pink, orange and red. Nearby was Emilio's Back Passage, which featured a gigantic fissure hewn into the sheer vertical wall.

Many divers could easily fit into it at once with room to spare.

A bit further afield lay Fundo Gap. If anything, the sites here proved to be even more spectacular! Manta Point featured a wall descending to 28m, with the reef top at 6-8m depending on the tide. Alas, the congregations of mantas that used to frequent the area are long gone, the unfortunate victims of over fishing. Nevertheless, this was a stunning site boasting a tremendous variety of hard corals and abundant fish life. A few weeks before my arrival, a great hammerhead was sighted just off the wall, as was a juvenile manta.

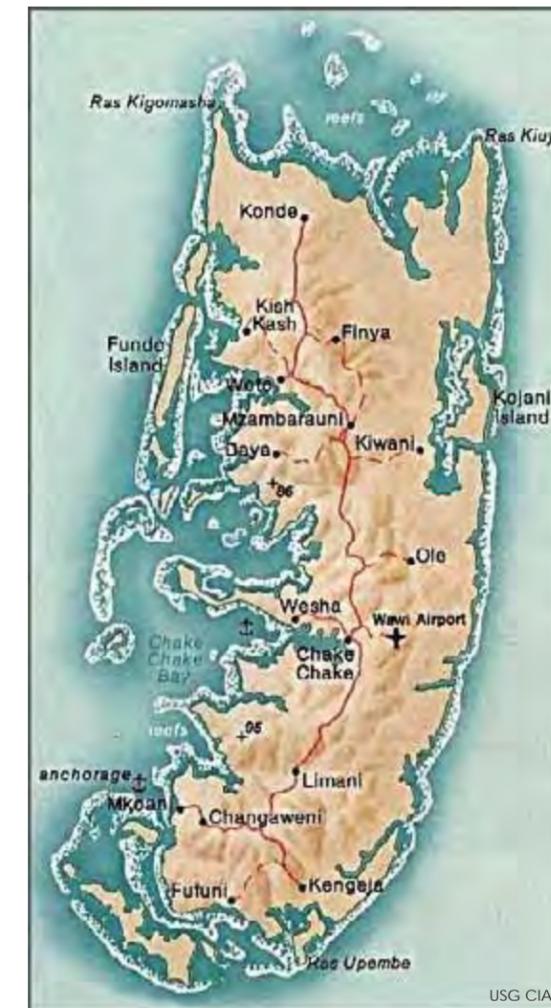
Deep Freeze gets its name from the cold upwellings surging up from the depths. Here, my borrowed 5mm suit proved to be most useful indeed! Yellow fan corals adorned the precipitous drops offs, while schools of yellowtail fusiliers congregated in the blue just off the wall. At the current-swept point, large schools of jacks and barracudas are routinely encountered. Although I missed them, I did spot a couple of big Napoleon wrasse. Maddeningly, they proved to be just as camera-shy as their Pacific cousins.

The deep waters of the Pemba

Tanzania

Channel attract a large number of game fish species. On one occasion, as Mohamed maneuvered the boat into anchoring position, we saw the unmistakable silhouette of a sailfish erupt from the surface. Alas, it didn't make a repeat appearance underwater.

One of the real pleasures of Pemba was observing a lot of new fish species. While many Pacific notables were present, such as Moorish idols, coral trout, oriental sweetlips, regal and emperor angelfish, there was also myriad of Indian Ocean specialties. After one dive, I asked what the powder blue surgeonfish was. I was bemused to discover it actually WAS a powder-blue surgeonfish!



USG CIA



Reef garden at Manta Point (left)
Yellow sweepers (below)

MAZIWE ISLAND MARINE RESERVE

There is also some good diving to be had off the mainland. Situated just off coast about 15 nautical miles east of Pangani town, Maziwe Island was established as a marine reserve in 1975. Communities living in the vicinity of the island are actively involved in conservation activities. At one time, the island had extensive forest cover of coconut palms and large casuarina trees. Used by local residents as a place for rituals, the island was eventually overrun with goats and chickens. That, coupled with the clearance of the island's vegetation, resulted in irreversible erosion before finally submerging between 1978-79.

The reserve is biologically diverse with more than 200 species of fish and 35 species of hard and soft corals. Maziwe's undersea environment is markedly different than Pemba, with large sandy areas punctuated by coral bommies draped in a thick mantle of sponges, anemones and hard corals. Schools of juvenile barracudas, yellow sweepers, anthias, damselfish and sweetlips congregate in abundance while nooks and crannies provide shelter for nudibranchs, flatworms, shrimps and dragonets.

A number of resorts and guesthouses allow easy access to the reserve. I stayed at The Tides Resort, a luxurious resort right on the beach featuring stylishly appointed bungalows framed by swaying coconut palms. Diving is arranged by Kasa Divers, located at the Emayani Beach Lodge. Owners Kerstin and Wim are extremely knowledgeable about Maziwe's dive sites and can arrange trips to the reserve. ■



Other colourful denizens included Alland's anemonefish, ring-eyed hawkfish, lyretail hogfish and an exquisite Indian sand wrasse, its vivid red body accented with white spots encircled with black. Pemba is also home to some absolutely monstrous titan triggerfish. I'm eternally grateful that none of them exhibited aggressive behaviour!

Topside attractions

Although it would have been easy to spend all day in the water, I also wanted to experience some of Pemba's terrestrial attractions. One afternoon, Laura from reception drove me up the coast to visit the lighthouse I'd seen on the first day. Despite only being in the country a short time, she handled the land rover like a true pro, effortlessly negotiating the copious ruts and

potholes during the bumpy 20-min trip. Upon arrival, we were immediately thronged by a gaggle of curious children who stayed with us for the remainder of our visit.

The lighthouse certainly boasted a unique design—it's towering central column surrounded by an intricate network of rusted metal struts and beams. Nearby, an ancient looking corrugated metal structure housed several families, including that of Ali, the youthful-looking lighthouse keeper. He immediately asked if I wanted to go up to the top. As heights aren't my favourite thing, I wasn't particularly enamored by the idea but threw caution to the wind and decided to go for it.

Once inside, the heat was downright oppressive as I started the precipitous climb up the constricting 30m spiral

staircase. Once at the top, my discomfort was forgotten in seconds. Complimented by a refreshing cool breeze, I was rewarded with a spectacular panorama encompassing the entire northern end of the island. Ali then gave a charming, well-rehearsed speech on the lighthouse's history before we headed back down again.

On the way back, we made a detour to Vumawimbi Beach on the other side of the peninsula. Azure waters lapped a powdery white-sand beach fringed with coconut palms, while offshore, a small flotilla of Arabian-style dhows bobbed in the gentle surf. The only thing missing from the idyllic scene was hordes of tourists. Welcome to Pemba!

As well as being actively involved in the local community, the resort even has its own fire engine. The "Green Goddess" is a circa 1950's army vehicle



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Flatworm, Maziwe Reserve;
Indian Sand Wrasse; Rose
Phyllidelia nudibranch

that Raf shipped from the UK. Fire drills for the staff members are held on a regular basis. One afternoon, while watching the proceedings, I learned a valuable lesson: NEVER leave a camera bag unattended in the immediate vicinity of a fire hose. At one point, a staff member accidentally let go, and the wildly flailing hose scored a direct hit on my hapless camera bag. The blast flipped it upside down, spilling several lenses on to the soggy ground. Miraculously, nothing was damaged (but definitely a bit cleaner).

Misali & Kashani Islands

For my last full day of diving, Raf had something special planned: a full day excursion to Misali Island. All week long, I'd practically been salivating at the string of superlatives used to describe Misali's undersea treasures, so I couldn't wait! It was also a full boat. The previous evening, the number of guests virtually

doubled in one fell swoop and a number of them were divers. Along with Raf, dive guide Mohamed and the boatman, there were nine divers on board for the 45-minute trip.

As it turned out, our destination was not Misali itself, but a special site known only to Raf. Situated past the Uvingi Gap, the small island of Kashani was alluring enough above water, its shoreline encircled by waters of the most exquisite hue of turquoise. It also takes the prize for the most unlikely name for a dive site I've ever heard: Slobodan's Bunker. It turns out Raf discovered the site the day Slobodan Milosovic was apprehended.

As we arrived just at the tail end of the slack tide, everyone had to gear up quickly in order to maximize our dive time before the currents became too strong.

Although the name "bunker" conjures up visions of drabness, Slobodan's

proved to be anything but. Entering the water, I was instantly spellbound by a site of staggering diversity. Resembling the knuckle of a gigantic hand with the fingers outstretched, the coral-

shrouded walls were the epitome of exuberance.. Tubastrea, whip, table and soft corals jostled each other for space along with tube and barrel sponges. A school of blackspotted sweetlips hovered

above one large tubastrea, joined by bronze soldierfish and blood-spot squirrelfish. Nearby, a large map puffer waited patiently as a cleaner wrasse performed its duties while vast swarms of basslets observed the proceedings. Startled by the unexpected appearance of our group, a large potato cod bolted for the safety of the depths. Upon hearing some frantic tank banging, I spun around to see a large Napoleon wrasse. Moments later, a school of five swam by further below with one of the divers in hot pursuit. Boasting a gigantic, humped forehead, the male fish



leading the entourage was the largest specimen I've ever seen. I started to follow until I checked my computer; I was already at 26m. The other diver was already well beneath me, the fish beneath her and the bottom plainly visible beneath all of the above. It was at that moment I realized the visibility was easily 40m! I thought it would be a good idea to ascend to shallower water. Unfortunately, the dive ended way to soon. I could have easily spent the rest of the day here.

After a shore interval on a blindingly white beach, we headed for our final dive at a site called Atta Turk just off Uvingi Island. This time, I was set up for macro, and there was plenty to keep my camera occupied. Two-band clownfish, porcelain crabs, pipefish, fire dartfish, flatworms and a host of other critters kept my shutter clicking for the

duration of the dive. The highlight was an exquisite nudibranch with a semi-transparent white body etched with a patchwork of yellow lines. Wow!

Ngezi Forest stroll

On my last afternoon, I arranged a walking tour through the nearby Ngezi Forest. At one time, swathes of forest once dominated much of the island, but starting in the mid 19th century, much was cleared for clove cultivation. Encompassing 1440 hectares, the reserve was established in the 1950's to protect last remaining stands of the island's indigenous forest.

It is home to abundant wildlife including vervet monkeys, blue duiker (a small forest antelope), hyrax, marsh mongoose and several species of bats including the endemic Pemba flying fox. The Portuguese introduced pigs

several centuries ago, but as the local population abstains from eating pork, their numbers increased exponentially. The reserve is also home to a myriad of birds, five of which are endemic.

After checking in at the park office with ranger Ali, I went on a walk with my guide Ali (I was beginning to wonder if that was the only first name on the entire island). Within moments, we came across what seemed to be the reserve's most numerous resident. The damp pathway was strewn with a plethora of giant millipedes.

Upon entering the confines of the forest, the humidity packed an immediate wallop. Clusters of epiphytic ferns shrouded the trees, while an extraordinary array of writhing vines cascaded down to the expansive buttress roots below. Ali could name every tree, many of which were used

Lighthouse view (above); Pemba at sunset (top left)

for medicinal purposes by the local people.

After a sensational week, it was time to bid Pemba adieu. Raf and Cisca were gracious hosts and the relaxing atmosphere and good company made my departure difficult to say the least. The island made for a unique introduction to Africa but a highly memorable one.



African safari

No trip to Tanzania would be complete without experiencing some of the country's spectacular national parks and reserves. Protecting a remarkable 25 percent of the country, they are home to an extraordinary diversity of wildlife. The hard part was deciding where to start!

Before leaving home, Cisca put me in touch with Bush2Beach, an Arusha



-based safari company run by Chris Piller and his partner Ingrid Vaes.

Gateway to the northern safari circuit, the city of Arusha is the country's safari headquarters with over 200 government-recognized safari companies (and half as many again that aren't). They arranged an incredible personalized itinerary that not only included icons like Ngorongoro and the Serengeti, but also some lesser-known destinations such as the Usambara Mountains and Mkomazi National Park, the country's newest. Joining me was John, my Tanzanian driver. With 15 years game-spotting experience under his belt, I knew I was in good hands.

Usambara Mountains. Our first stop was the Usambara Mountains, situated inland from the Swahili coast near the Kenyan border. One doesn't usually think of rainforest in savannah-dominated east Africa, but the Usambaras rise from the surrounding plains like an archipelago of forest-clad islands. They are part of the Eastern Arc Mountains,

a string of 13 ancient ranges that are the oldest in East Africa. Often dubbed "Africa's Galapagos", these mountains contain the highest number of endemic species in all of Africa. While large animals are conspicuously absent, the area is a treasure trove of endemic species, particularly, birds, reptiles and amphibians.

Amani Nature Reserve. Tucked away at the eastern end of the ranges, the Amani Nature Reserve is a botanical wonderland. Opened in 1997, the reserve protects 10,000ha of the most extensive montane rainforest to be found in Tanzania. A series of excellent walking trails offers sublime forest scenery and outstanding birdwatching. At the last count, 340 species have been recorded here including 19 endemics. Noteworthy residents include silvery-cheeked hornbills, Fischer's touraco, Usambara eagle owl and a host of sunbirds, starlings and flycatchers. Chameleons are especially prolific and the area is the original home of a flower known the world over: the African violet.

LEFT TO RIGHT: Smiling boy; Masai woman; Swahili Divers base

Tanzania

Several hours to the west, the Western Usambaras provide a totally different experience. Much higher in elevation, they also boast a very different look with extensive stands of eucalyptus trees carpeting the slopes.

The steep-sided valleys are home to a diverse patchwork of cultivated farmland, plantations and patches of indigenous forest. Situated at 1400m, the town of Lushoto is the gateway to the region. A number of German colonial buildings dating from the early 20th century can be found rubbing shoulders with colourful local markets.

A number of nature reserves offer a plethora of scenic walking trails through lush native forest brimming with birdlife and cascading waterfalls. Lying at the edge of the Usambara massif, the Irete Viewpoint offers stupendous views across

the arid Masai Steppes 1000m below. Numerous resorts cater to frequent tourists, particularly expats, who come here to escape the sweltering heat of the nearby coast.

Mkomazi National Park. Despite being in the country for nearly two weeks, I had yet to experience the quintessential African bush. That introduction was made in a rather unique and special place. Mkomazi National Park is Tanzania's newest, having been established in 2007. With its northern boundary adjoining Tsavo National park in neighbouring Kenya, the park was initially established as a Game Reserve in 1951. Mkomazi takes its name from Pare tribe's word for "scoop of water", in reference to the dry conditions.

Lying in the shadow of the Usambara





Elephants at Arusha (left)
View of Ngorongoro (below)

continent's fifth highest peak, rising to an elevation of 4,566 metres. The luxuriant montage forest is inhabited by prolific birdlife, blue monkeys and red duiker. It is also one of the best places in the country to see the striking black and white colubus monkey. We were even fortunate to observe one on the ground, looking the entire world like a misplaced skunk as it scampered across a grassy clearing enroute to a nearby tree.

On the way back down, we rounded a corner to discover four elephants grazing in a clearing at the forest's edge. "You are VERY

lucky," intoned John with a smile as most visitors to rarely encounter elephants.

Further north, rolling grassy hills encircle the serene beauty of the Momela Lakes, whose shallows are often awash with the pink hues of thousands of greater and lesser flamingos. Other birdlife includes crowned cranes, Egyptian geese and a myriad of herons and egrets. Due to the absence of lions, it is one of the few parks in Tanzania that allow walking safaris, albeit with an armed guard. Exploring the park on a 90-minute walk was a definite highlight of my entire trip.

I could have easily spent a few

days here. Due to my incessant picture taking, we didn't get to visit all the stops on our itinerary. Ngurdoto Crater, whose steep, rocky cliffs enclose a broad marshy floor dotted with herds of buffalo, will have to wait until next time. However, the park had one final surprise in store. Just as we reached the park gate at sunset, I turned to see that the veil of cloud had dispersed, revealing Kilimanjaro's imposing snow-capped summit.

Ngorongoro Crater. Undoubtedly, one of Tanzania's crown jewels is the Ngorongoro Crater. Not actually a national park, the crater is



and Pare Mountains, the park encompasses 3700 square kilometers of semi-arid savannah dotted with acacia scrub and baobab trees. It is home to a number of dry country species rarely encountered elsewhere in Tanzania, including fringe-eared oryx, lesser kudu and the gerenuk—a gazelle distinguished by its habit of standing tall on its hind legs to reach for acacia leaves utilizing its elongated neck. Other residents include giraffe, hartebeest, Grant's gazelle, elephant, zebra and dik-dik (a diminutive antelope). An unexpected bonus was a close encounter with a female cheetah and her two cubs; I was told that cheetahs weren't even known to live in the park. White-bellied go-away birds, martial eagles, red-billed hornbills, black bellied bustards, ostrich, secretary birds and lilac-breasted rollers are just a few of the 450 species of birds.

The animals here tend to be skittish, as they have long associated people and vehicles with guns. While viewing wildlife may not be as easy as in some of the big parks, it provides an opportunity to

experience an unspoiled landscape with virtually no tourists. Mkomazi doesn't share her secrets easily, but when she does, it is truly special.

Arusha National Park. Another overlooked gem lies virtually on the doorstep of the city of Arusha. Only 40 minutes from the bustle of the city, Arusha National Park offers an enthralling assortment of habitats ranging from savannah and acacia woodlands to rolling hills, lakes and mountain slopes shrouded with lush rainforest, allowing visitors a chance to experience a broad range of environments in a relatively compact area. The diverse animal population includes, giraffes, zebras, buffalos, baboons, elephants, hippos, leopards, hyenas, waterbucks, warthogs and a wide range of antelope species.

The dominating feature is the imposing silhouette of Mt. Meru, its summit and eastern slopes protected within the confines of the national park. While not attaining the lofty heights of its more illustrious neighbour, Kilimanjaro, it is the

LEFT TO RIGHT: Leopard in tree on the Serengeti; African Buffalo at Ngorongoro Crater; Giraffe portrait at Arusha; Male lion on the Serengeti; Wildebeest on the Serengeti (bottom)



a part of the Ngorongoro Crater Conservation area, which encompasses an area of 8300 square kilometres. Ngorongoro is a place of superlatives. Standing at the viewpoint at 2300m is nothing short of awe-inspiring. Stretching 23 kilometres across, this vast natural amphitheatre is

the world's largest intact volcanic caldera. A proverbial Garden of Eden, the crater floor is home to

an estimated 25,000 large mammals. All the mainstays are here including elephant, lion, hippo, warthog, ostrich, buffalo, spotted



hyena and some impressive bull elephants sporting some of the biggest tusks to be seen in East Africa. One of the most notable (and endangered) residents is the black rhino. Poached to virtual extinction throughout East Africa, Ngorongoro is one of their last strongholds in Tanzania. Rigorously protected, there are estimated to be 19-25 individuals inhabiting the crater. There is one prominent absentee, however: giraffes. This is due to the relative lack of acacia trees, whose leaves are their favourite food.

I was initially disappointed to discover we only

had one full morning at the crater. Then, I discovered why; entry fees to the park are a whopping US\$200.00 per vehicle—and that's not necessarily for the whole day. If you leave the crater and come back later in the day, the fee is charged again. Apparently, this increase was initiated to help reduce tourist traffic, which, can look like a traffic jam at rush hour. During my visit in the wet season, tourists were few, and the crater floor was a vibrant carpet of lush green grass. While some cynics may liken the experience to a gigantic safari park, this is no zoo! The predators mix freely with the





prey, creating an unparalleled wildlife experience that is not to be missed.

Serengeti. Bordering Ngorongoro is Tanzania's most famous national park, the world-renowned Serengeti. A World Heritage Site, its name is derived from the Masai word "siringet", meaning empty place. The sense of space is overwhelming, with endless skies presiding over a vast plain teeming with wildlife. It also plays host to one of the greatest wildlife spectacles on the planet. Commencing at the end of April, up to one million wildebeest congregate in the park's southern section before commencing their migration to Kenya to follow the rains. Joining them are several hundred thousand zebra and numerous species of gazelle .

A characteristic feature of the park's southern areas the distinctive outcrops of granite boulders called kopjes. They are especially popular with lions, which perch imperiously atop the large granite boulders. Those who bemoan lions' lack of activity in zoos will be surprised to discover they are just as active in the wild, as they

usually sleep 20 hours a day. Lying on their backs with legs splayed, they resemble giant housecats, although their inoffensive appearance would change dramatically if a person decided to exit the vehicle.

Other large cats make their home in the park. A keen eye may reveal the telltale tail of a leopard lounging high in an acacia tree, while cheetahs are often observed sitting on rocky outcrops scanning the horizon for prey.

The junction of the Seronera and Orange rivers boasts a deep pool that is a favourite haunt of hippos. Lazing about in the water, their generally placid demeanor belies the fact that they kill more people in Africa each year than every other large animal combined. Crocodiles are also frequently encountered here, although they give the hippos a wide berth. Bird life is especially prolific with over 500 species present. After three days of non-stop photography, both my camera and I were exhausted.

With its seemingly infinite bounty of attractions both over and under the water, Tanzania was unlike any destination I have visited before. Three weeks flew by

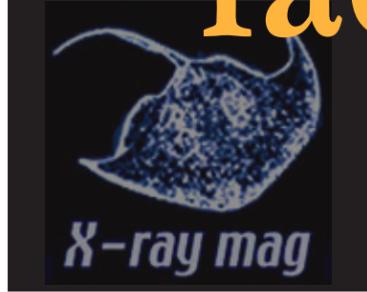
in a heartbeat, but the experience will last a lifetime. It's definitely a journey I will undertake again. ■

NOTES

*Visas can be obtained on arrival, but are best applied for in advance. However, not all foreign visitors require visas, so it's best to check with the Tanzania government website for any additional information. A number of domestic carriers service Pemba daily via Zanzibar. I flew with ZanAir. The vast majority of these flights employ small aircraft such as Dash 8's, so baggage weight is limited to around 15kg. This may prove to be a problem if you are travelling with heavy gear, so it is recommended that you contact the airline well in advance for any special requirements. The combined flight time is around 50 minutes. Swahili Divers can arrange transfers to the resort. Visit: www.tanzania.go.tz/visa
Swahili Divers Swahilidivers.com
Bush 2Beach Safaris Bush2beach.com
Tides Resort Thetideslodge.com
Kasa Divers Emayanilodge.com
ZanAir Zanair.com*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Flamingos at Arusha; Crowned Crane at Arusha; Lilac-Breasted Roller at Mkomazi

fact file



Tanzania



SOURCES: US CIA WORLD FACT BOOK, SCUBADOC.COM

History Tanganyika and Zanzibar came together to form the nation of Tanzania in 1964 shortly after attaining independence from Britain in the early 1960s. In 1995, one-party rule came to an end with the first democratic elections held in the country since the 1970s. However, two contentious elections since 1995 were spurred by Zanzibar's semi-autonomous status and popular opposition. Despite international observers' claims of voting irregularities, the ruling party won. Government: republic. Capital: Dar es Salaam

Geography Tanzania is located in Eastern Africa and borders the Indian Ocean, between Kenya and Mozambique. Terrain includes vast plains along the coast, a central plateau, and highlands in the north and south. Coastline: 1,424 km. Lowest point: Indian

Ocean 0m. Highest point: Kilimanjaro 5,895m. Note: Kilimanjaro marks the highest point in Africa. The mountain is bordered by three of the largest lakes on the continent: Lake Victoria (the second-largest fresh-water lake on the planet) in the north, Lake Tanganyika (the second-deepest lake in the world) in the west, and Lake Nyasa in the southwest.

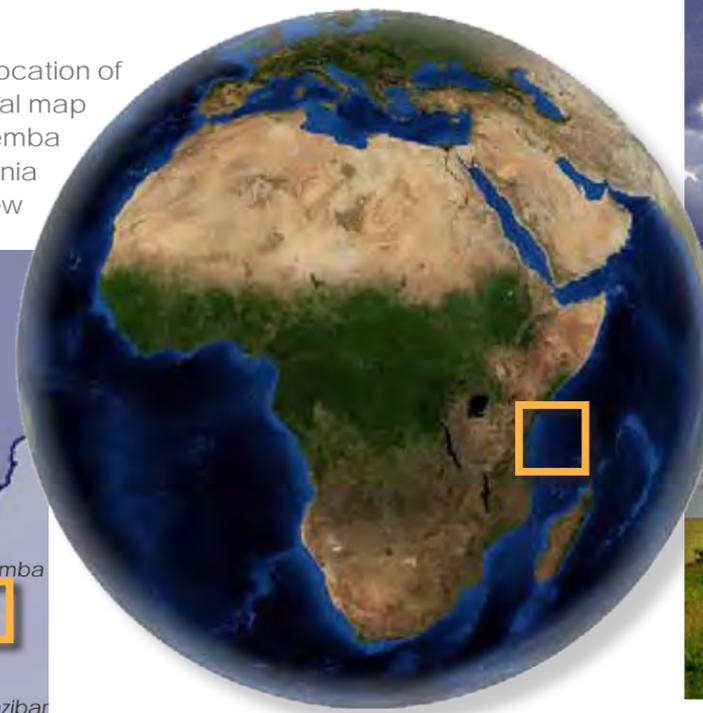
Economy In terms of per capita income, Tanzania is in the bottom ten percent of the world's economies. The economy depends mostly on agriculture, which makes up more than 40% of GDP, contributes 85% of exports, and gives jobs to 80% of the work force. However, topography and climatic conditions limit cultivated crops to just 4% of the land mass. Industry in the country traditionally featured light consumer goods and the processing of agricultural products. Funds from the World Bank, the IMF, and bilateral donors were provided to rehabilitate Tanzania's out-of-date economic infrastructure and to reduce poverty. Long-term growth through 2005 saw an increase in industrial production and a substantial rise in output of

Kervan Seray Resort
www.kervansaraybeach.com

minerals, with gold at the head. Banking reforms in recent years have helped increase investment and private-sector growth. Natural resources: hydropower, tin, phosphates, iron ore, coal, diamonds, gemstones, gold, natural gas, nickel. Agriculture: coffee, sisal, tea, cotton, pyrethrum (insecticide made from chrysanthemums), cashew nuts, tobacco, cloves, corn, wheat, cassava (tapioca), bananas, fruits, vegetables; cattle, sheep, goats. Industry: agricultural processing (sugar, beer, cigarettes, sisal twine); mining of diamond, gold, and iron, salt, soda ash; cement, oil refining, shoes, apparel, wood products, fertilizer

Climate Tropical along the coast; temperate in the highlands. Natural hazards: drought and flooding during the rainy season on the central plateau

RIGHT: Location of Tanzania on global map
BELOW: Location of Pemba Island on map of Tanzania
FAR RIGHT: Serengeti view



Environmental issues Marine habitats are threatened by destruction of coral reefs. Other issues include soil degradation, deforestation, desertification, marginal agriculture suffer regional droughts, wildlife is threatened by illegal hunting and trade, especially ivory. Tanzania is party to: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Ozone Layer Protection, Wetlands

Currency Tanzanian shillings (TZS)
Exchange rates: 1EUR=1,893.23TZS;
1USD=1,315.00TZS; 1GBP=2,234.24TZS;
1AUD=1,105.57TZS; 1SGD=917.059TZS

Population 41,048,532 (July 2009 est.)
In poverty: 36% (2002 est.) Living with AIDS: 1.4 million (2007 est.) Ethnic groups: mainland - African 99% (of which 95% are Bantu consisting of more than 130 tribes), other 1% (consisting of Asian, European, and Arab); Zanzibar - Arab, African, mixed Arab and African. Religion: mainland - Christian 30%, Muslim 35%, indigenous beliefs 35%; Zanzibar - more than 99% Muslim. Internet users: 400,000 (2007)

Time UTC+3

Language Kiswahili or Swahili (official),

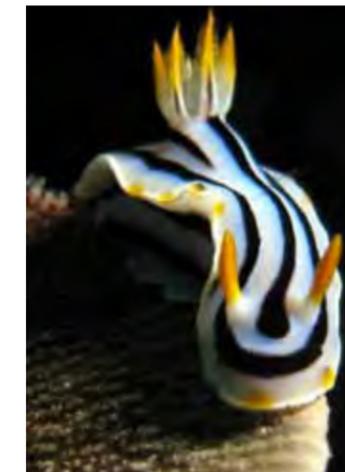
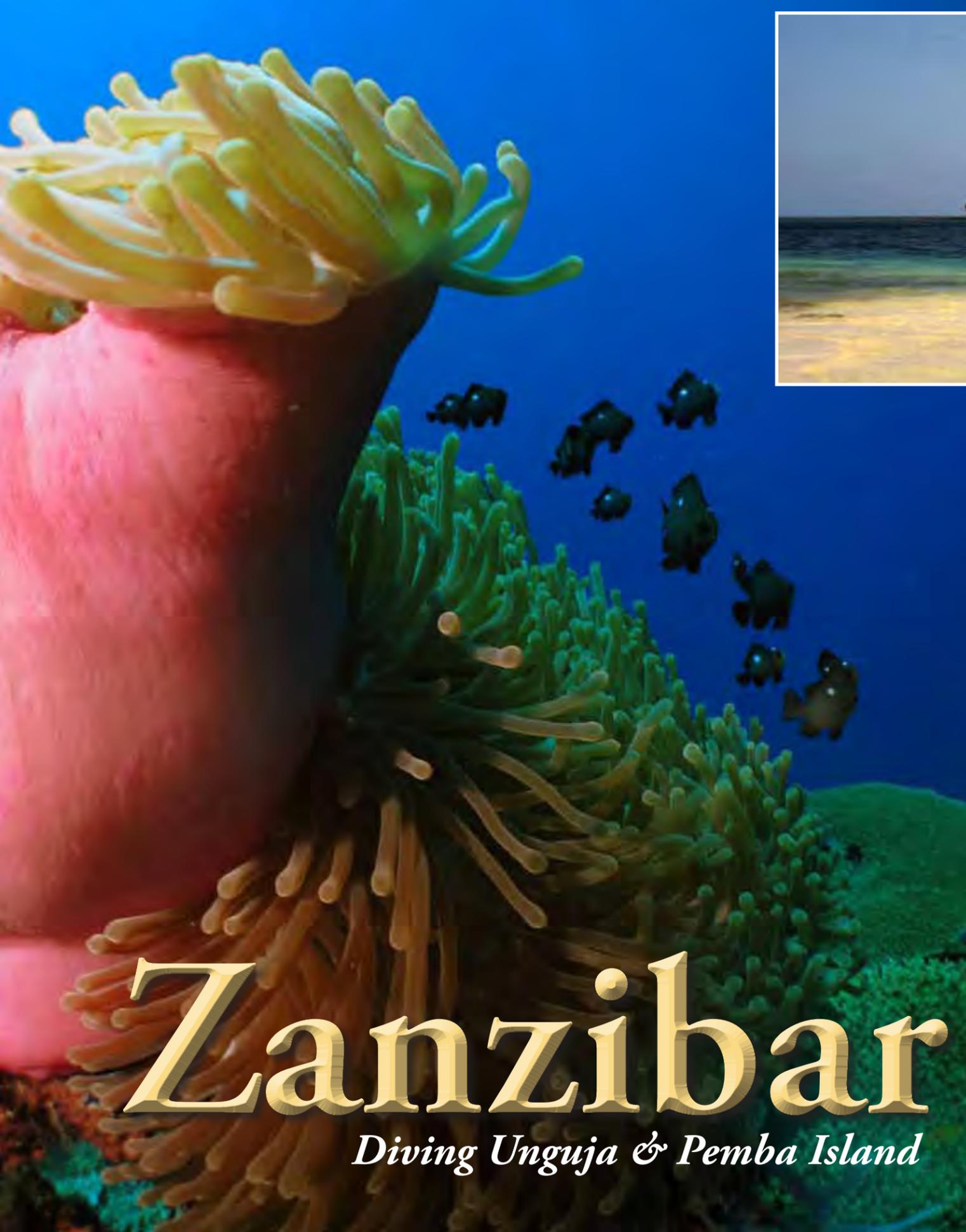
Kiunguja (name for Swahili in Zanzibar), English (official and primary language of commerce, administration, and higher education), Arabic (widely spoken in Zanzibar), several local languages. Note: Kiswahili (Swahili) is the native tongue of the Bantu people living in Zanzibar and adjacent coastal Tanzania. The language's vocabulary draws on a variety of sources including English and Arabic, even though Kiswahili is Bantu in structure and origin. Kiswahili is now the lingua franca of central and eastern Africa. However, local languages are usually the first language of most people.

Health There is a very high degree of risk for: food or waterborne diseases such as bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever; vectorborne diseases such as malaria and plague; water contact diseases such as schistosomiasis; and animal contact diseases such as rabies (2009)

Recompression Chamber
EAST AFRICA HYPERBARIC CENTRE
Zanzibar, Tanzania
Tel: +9255 (0)77 330 0865

Links
Pemba information
www.pemba.net
Tanzania Tourism Board
Tanzaniatouristboard.com ■





CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Magnificent anemone; Fishing dhow in channel; Chomodoris lochi on lattice coral; Marbled cleaner shrimp; Flatworm; Chromodoris africana nudibranch on sponge

Zanzibar

Diving Unguja & Pemba Island

The spacious, purpose-built dhow slid through the calm Indian Ocean. We were briefed sitting under the shade area of the deck, then kitted up and went through our buddy checks before a giant stride took us into the 30°C sea. Looking down, I could just make out the dive site, an old British lighter, 27 metres below me. It was 9:30 a.m. and the day was going fantastically.

Text and photos
by Christopher Bartlett

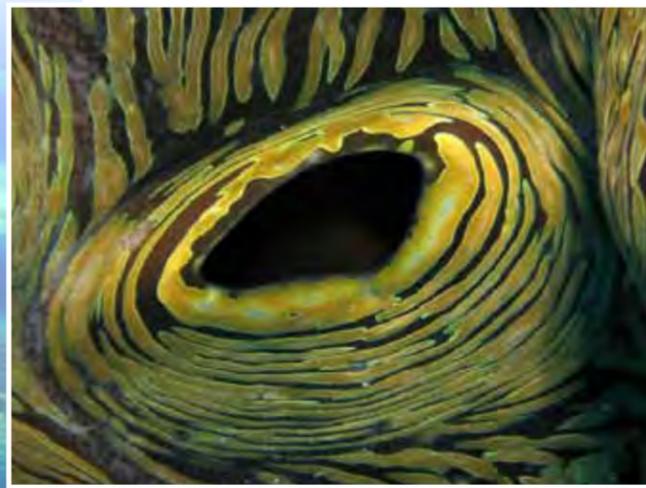
I'd started the morning in Dar-es-Salaam and caught a Coastal Airways Cessna 182 for the 20-minute 07:30 flight to Stone Town on the west coast of Unguja, more commonly known as Zanzibar, for some low-level sunrise shots of the outlying reefs. Ten minutes in a taxi, and I was kitting up at One Ocean Divers, a mug of coffee steaming next to me.

One Ocean started 16 years ago, and in 1999, it was taken over by Aussie Gary Greig and his South African wife, Gail. From one dive shop in Stone Town, they now operate from four other resorts around the island. Kit was dished out whilst more coffee was brewed and then consumed, before we were walked

past the palm trees, down the small beach, and onto the waiting dhow. On the leisurely cruise out to a reef near Bawe Island, acquaintances were made and the loudmouth been-there-done-it-all-in-25-dives Harvard post-grad Italian diver was quickly identified and avoided as a buddy.

The wreck itself was a tad disappointing. Although the briefing by Amani had covered all the essentials and had been thorough in terms of safety procedures, no indication of the size of the wreck had been given. Hence, my initial thoughts of "With a lifeboat that size, it must be a huge wreck" soon turned to disappointment when Amani went straight for it. It was host to a large school of





CLOCKWISE: Zanzibar's west coast; Detail of giant clam; Featherstar; Scorpionfish; Bifurcated flatworm; Healthy table corals; Diver with large gorgonian fancoral; Starfish

our best to convince our Italian expert that a Stonefish sting really would spoil his day, it was time to pull on our shorties again.

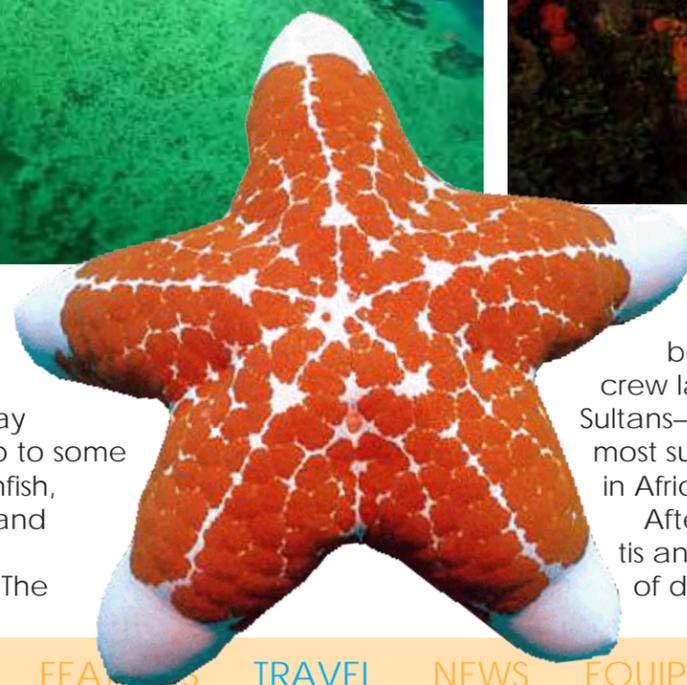
The visibility was around 15 metres, and the site deserved its moniker. Table and plate corals adorned the reef, and we spotted common lionfish, lots of nudis, an undulated moray eel, a hermit crab, huge gorgonian fans, a giant clam, and two blue spotted rays. However, the highlight of the dive was the large remora that took a fancy to Captain Fantastic's bare leg, his squeals being



striped eel catfish and long strands of whip coral (that numbered one less after some unusual buoyancy "skills" from the Adriatic).

Following the dive plan, we then finned away following the contours of the sandy bottom up to some outcrops of reef, home to a bearded scorpionfish, and an assortment of triggerfish, butterflyfish, and coachmen.

By the time we'd started puttering along to The



Aquarium at Murogo Reef (how many Aquariums are there around the world?), our bellies were grumbling, and the crew laid out a spread fit for Omani Sultans—once rulers of Zanzibar and the most successful slave and spice traders in Africa.

After samoosas, spring rolls, chapattis and fresh fruits and a leisurely spot of digestion during which we tried



Zanzibar

Stone Town

Back on shore in Stone Town, there is a bit of sightseeing to do. Central Stone Town is a labyrinth of narrow streets and alleyways, flanked by crumbling mansions and mosques. The main attractions are the massive Zanzibari wooden doors, Mercury's restaurant and bar (Freddy of Queen fame is Unguja's most famous son) by Big Tree, the House of Wonders, the Omani Fort, Tippu Tip's house, the Hamamni Persian Baths, and the fish market (conservationists beware: you will find sharks here). The night food market in Forodhani Gardens is alleged, by the same guidebook that I used in Dar es Salaam, to host the best food market in East Africa. If the guidebook was written for flies, this is undoubtedly true.



vaguely reminiscent of dolphin chatter as he trashed around trying to avoid its attempted love bites. Back on the dhow, he was informed that remora like to live on sharks, and that one is never very far from the other. "I could've been killed then", he shrieked. "If only," thought I.

The reefs around Stone Town are fairly plentiful and other, larger wrecks exist, too. And whilst any aficionado of Bass Lake would gawk in amazement at the coral formations and the fish life, the reefs have suffered greatly from plagues of crown of thorns, draining the coral of any colour.

Matemwe & Mnemba

Situated close to Mnemba Atoll, a shallow expanse of coral reef with a tiny heart-shaped island on its western fringe surrounded by some step drop-offs, Matemwe is

the "must-dive" of Unguja. With average viz 20 metres or better, there are a multitude of sites to dive, and its calm conditions make it suitable for novices and experienced divers alike.

One Ocean's centre here was on the premises of the Beach Village where standard rooms are comfortable and clean. The Shamba suites are huge and charm-



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Omani Fort; Mosque minaret and Anglican cathedral towers dominate the skyline of Stone Town. The cathedral was built over the old slave market; Typical Stone Town alleyway; Tinga tinga artist displays his work; Breakfast view of Stone Town from Hotel Kiponda; Forodhani Gardens, deserted in daylight, becomes a hive of activity in evenings with the food market; Detail and full view of Stone Town's famous doors





Zanzibar



a relaxing atmosphere that even the open water students were looking like seasoned veterans.

If it was a haven of peace and tranquility on the boat, the ocean was buzzing. With great viz, our first site was West Bank. Starting at six metres and then rolling down into a 50m drop-off, it was covered

After another dhow-diving lunch taken anchored over a snorkelling site that had several divisions of sergeant majors flitting over it, it was time to visit Turtle Reef. The site was not one unbroken reef, but rather coral mounds interspersed with sand, where unusual sightings included two left-eyed flounder, a huge octopus in some rocks, and a grand total of zero turtles between eight divers. However, lionfish fans were delighted; there was an abundance of these delicate-looking but venom-carrying members of the scorpionfish family.

Having returned along the same road due to extra-low tides, instead of in the dhow, beers were cracked around the poolside bar and new arrivals greeted like distant cousins, before dinner and a relatively early night under the sleep-inducing whirl of the strategically positioned fans. If you want to treat yourself, the Shamba suites are well worth the extra 50 dollars, and for a special romantic night for two, the honeymoon suite is even more secluded and

ingly decorated. Located next to the beautiful infinity pool a few paces from the beach, it also had excellent equipment, friendly and efficient service.

After a bumpy 45-minute drive to the launch site in a daladala and transfer to another purpose-built diving dhow, the *MV Jessica*, the divers carried on the banter from the night before. More flat sea and baking sunshine make for such

in reef fish and eels, hard and soft corals, and large schools of fusiliers. There were the intriguing juvenile black snapper, damselfish in the staghorn coral, royal and emperor angelfish, chocolate dips, blue spotted rays, two-bar clown fish. Thumbing through the fish book back on the dhow, it was a case of "Saw that, saw that, saw that, loads of them, two of them, few of those, etc..."



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Green turtle with Remora fish; Spotfin lionfish; Matemwe Beach Village; Rock lobster

Striped eel catfish (above); Color-changing octopus attempts to attract a mate

Zanzibar



garden eels stick their heads out of the sand and start swaying to the tune of an invisible snake-charmer.

Kendwa

I caught a ride across the top of the island where there are two resorts to choose from. Nungwi was a dusty village that has rapidly grown into the most frequented and fashionable (read promoted) resort on the island. It has the liveliest nightclubs and the greatest selection of restaurants, but is also overrun by tourists and has poor swimming beaches. For divers, there are a few local sites, but the best dives involve a long dhow trip to Mnemba.

The less-publicised resort of Kendwa has a huge beach that is ideal for bathing even at low tide, offers a choice of eight places to stay,

ranging from thatched bandas at 15 dollars a night, to air-con en-suites, has six restaurants, is the location of the only dive centre using zodiacs (rubber ducks), and has some great local reefs. By operating with the faster craft, Scuba-Do can get their divers past Nungwi, round the tip of the island, and onto Mnemba dive sites in just under 30 minutes—quicker even than from Matemwe, which overlooks the atoll.

The dive center is situated next to the excellent Bikini Beach Bar and very reasonable Sunset Bungalows (50 USD for a spacious en-suite double with a traditional Zanzibari bed that could sleep four). The BCDs weren't as new as those at One Ocean, as they were coming up for replacement,



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Kendwa Beach is the longest in the north, good for a long walk; Weedy Scorpionfish; Bommie at End of the World dive site; White mouthed moray eel near Kichafi



Porcupinefish swimming slowly above the table corals, false stonefish hid on the rocks whilst peppered and white-mouthed morays skulked in crevices; paperfish swayed gently in rocky recesses, rock cod went about their business and, looking off into the beautiful blue, a napoleon wrasse cruised by unperturbed by a school of kingfish.

The last dive was at Mnemba's take on The Aquarium. With a more open seascape, it was like being in the aquarium rather than looking in to it. We drifted on the gentle current from one outcrop of coral to another, marvelling at the size of the schools of fusiliers and the number of green turtles. In total, twelve individuals were observed, including three resting on one outcrop, with remoras being cleaned by accompanying wrasse attached

to their carapaces.

has its own plunge pool, beach access, and chef. Fully refreshed and as relaxed as a rasta in a ganja pile, it was time to blow bubbles at Mnemba again. Small Wall was home to

As we eventually moved off the site, the dive master led us to a vast sandy patch. Not the ideal spot for a safety stop you think, until hundreds of





Zanzibar



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Yellow Margin Moray eel in lattice coral; Coral crab; Durban dancing shrimp; Diver on one of Pemba's signature walls

cent of a fantasy world.

Hunga was the home to even bigger schools of snapper, and the impressive crocodile flathead that can be found in significant numbers resting on the sandy bottom in gullies and between bommies. Rare finds included sea-horses, a Mauritius scorpionfish, and a Weedy scorpionfish. Visibility was between 15 and 25 metres, and the water was still a balmy 29C.

Post-diving, one of the bars would generally have something going on, and they could all be reached by walking down the beach; the only hazard at night being either nausea or hysteria brought on by the insincere declarations of local playboys to female tourists. With reduced travelling time and morning and afternoon dives with a long shore-break in between, Kendwa is also more suitable for mixed parties made up of divers and non-divers, children and adults.

Pemba Island

The 35-minute half-empty flight yielded some more picture-postcard aerial shots of uninhab-

ited islands and the reefs, before touching down in Chake Chake—Pemba's biggest town, half-way up the west coast at the end of a long mangrove-lined creek.

The airport was a small ramshackle affair, and despite a plethora of attractions including atmospheric ruins, primeval forest, unique bird species, deserted beaches, and some of the best diving in the Indian Ocean, Pemba probably hosts less than 100 tourists at any given time.

Swahili Divers and the Kervan Saray eco-resort on the northwest coast are run by Farhat Jah, a seemingly eccentric mixture of Turkish and Indian heritage with a resolutely British upbringing, and his Dutch wife, Cisca. Known by locals as Mr. Raf—and just Raf to anyone else—there is something of a young Basil Fawlty in him that, whilst a little surprising initially, is ultimately endearing.

The accommodation was built in 2008 from local materials, and quarry where the bricks were cut is, well, a stone's throw away. Any



Leaf fish (above); Royal Angelfish (inset)

but safety was far from overlooked here; each BCD came with a surface marker bouy in the pocket and a briefing on how and when to deploy it.

Local sites included Kichafi and Haji reefs and their extensive lattice coral formations, peacock mantis shrimp, paperfish and bearded scorpionfish, Nankivell with its giant plate corals in fascinating formations, rays, napoleon wrasse, groupers, and the stunning Hunga Reef with its interconnected bommies and a huge variety of hard and soft corals, reminis-



Zanzibar

als twenty metres down were clearly visible. Backwards roll, hot tub, OK, going down. Equalize, all together? look around. W-O-W. With a capital W. On one side was a wall, like the top of a submerged mountain, covered in hard and soft corals of all descriptions, positively teeming with fish. On the other, the bluest blue, near perfect viz, dropping down, and down, and down. Lucky there's no point talking underwater, because I was speechless. There was not one moment when there was not something to watch.

The surface interval snack of still-



imported goods come by dhow whose carbon footprint is limited to the fire that the crew use to warm their food at night when at sea. It is the best priced on the island with dorm beds and doubles, and good value packages. Food is wholesome and filling, and is locally-sourced and cooked with love by Chef Mzee Ali on charcoal (chocolate biscuit cake a speciality), unlike the other two resorts that ship most supplies in, and is the most affordable Pemba diving option.

Raf pioneered much of the diving from Pemba, and has discovered many of the sites himself, hence the odd names. You'll find no Aquarium here. Deep Freeze, Slobodan's Bunker (after the ex-Serbian warmonger), Le Reef Caché (hidden reef in French) and Emilio's Back Passage to name a few. With a wealth of knowledge of the reefs and conditions, years of experience, and a passion for underwater photography and videography, and you can pick up a host of tips from Raf, provided you can keep up.

The RIB zipped across the top of the flat sea, taking us to Deep Freeze. The ride had been soothing, re-enforcing the remoteness of this small island 50 kilometres off the coast of one of the poorest countries in the world. We passed local in sailing dhows or dugouts, fishing teams of up to ten men swam nets into a circle, slapping the water as they went to scare fish into the net. A lone spearfisherman here and there in Jacques Cousteau mask and an elbow-grease powered spear hunted for dinner. Now it was time to see if it Pemba lived up to its growing reputation. Had I saved the best for last?

Looking down as we kitted up, the table cor-



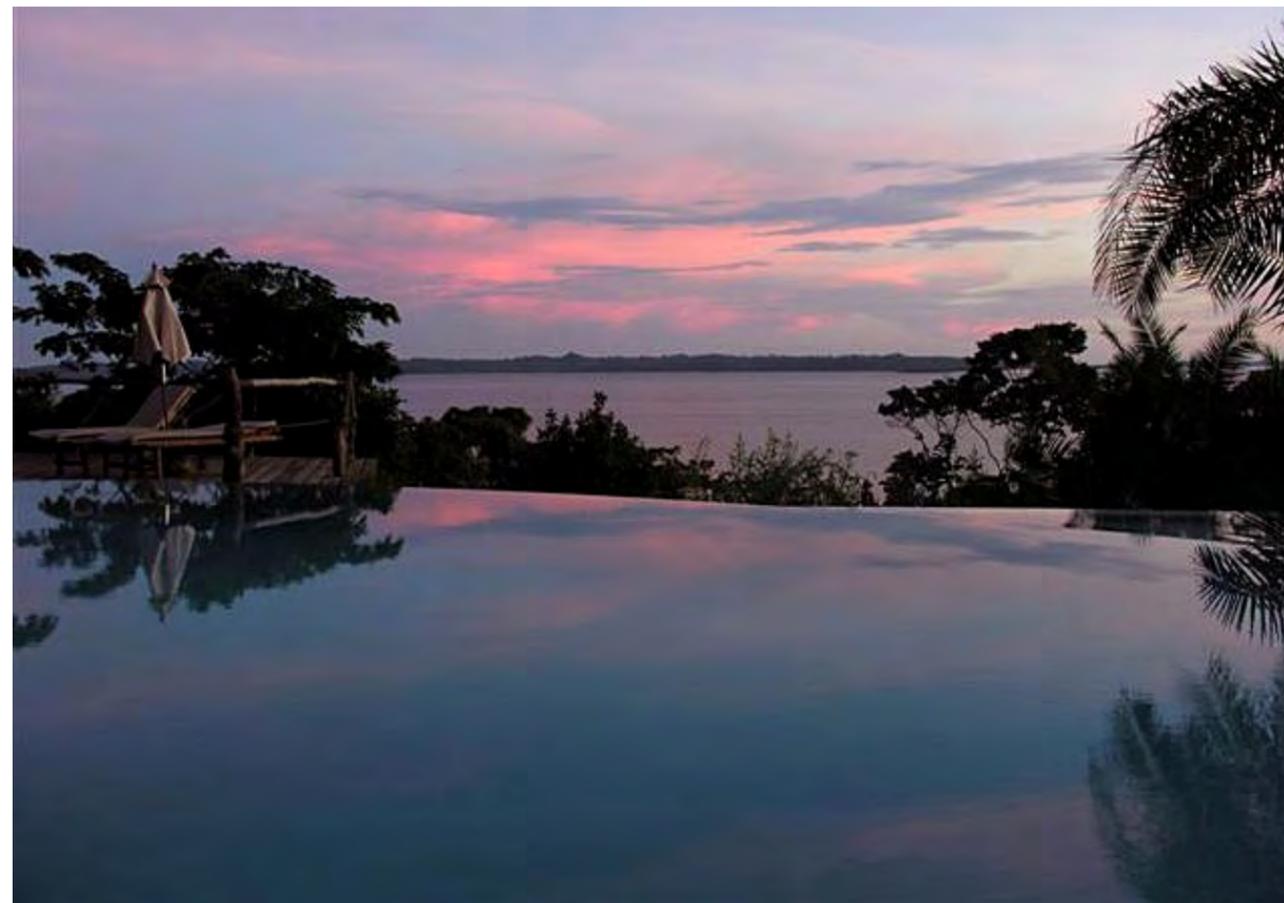
LEFT TO RIGHT: Chake Chake mosque; Lush coral bommie at Egger's Ascent; Walls are everywhere; Linda's flatworm; Mauritius scorpionfish

warm crepes was taken on a deserted island of fossilized coral and white sand before heading off to Slobodan's Bunker, best described by looking down on your hand with digits splayed, each gap a ravine in the reef full of marine life.

The following day, at Le Trek, we watched four Napoleon Wrasse pass below us and a school of Barracuda cruise by as we kept the wall left shoulder. Then one of the five other clients started babbling and bubbling loudly, pointing back to the right. And along came a six-metre wingspan Manta, accompanied by the largest and ugliest old cobia I have ever laid my eyes upon. She glided by on the outside to the edge of visibility, then turned, slowly soaring back, under me and up over the group.



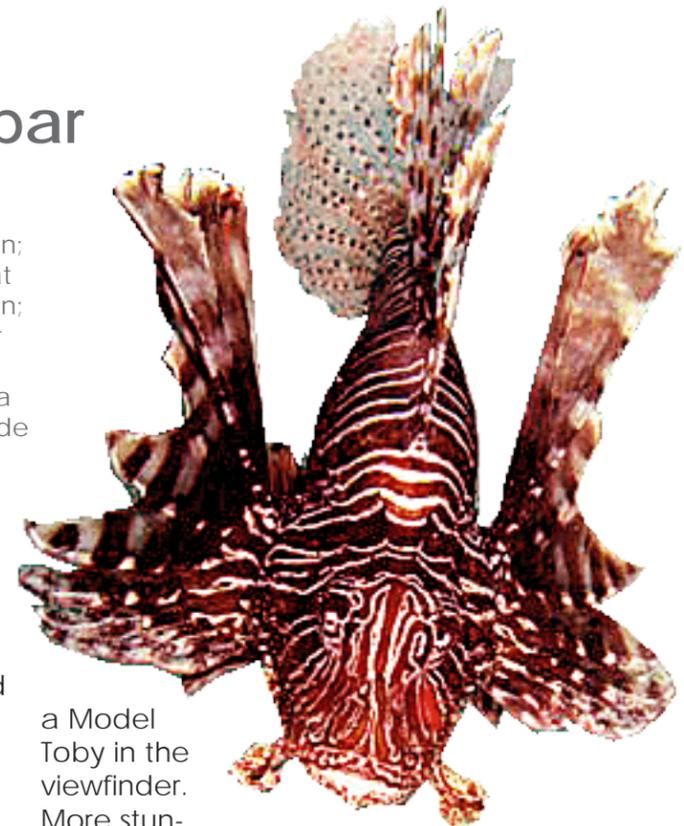
Maybe it's a mix of the remoteness of the island, the remoteness of Raf's sites, and a touch of melancholy from sitting at a keyboard, but the diving here felt like real adventure, as if all I needed was a red woolly hat and I was the re-incarnation of Commandant Cousteau.



Zanzibar

CLOCKWISE: Sunset over Fundu Lagoon; Infinity pool at Fundu Lagoon; Lionfish; Diver with Giant Manta; Cobia catching a ride on manta

The next morning a cocktail of all four gels and shampoos revived me enough to make it down to the dive centre. The water was like a mirror, as we sped across



a Model Toby in the viewfinder. More stunning coral.

Unguja had been great, but Pemba was awesome. It's not a place for "big" encounters everydive, but the variety and volume of small to medium-sized species is outstanding, with coral crabs, magnificent partner shrimps, nudibranchs, anthias, morays galore. I wondered how I would re-adjust to diving back home? ■

the barracudas and assorted morays at Njao Gap; the multitude of marine life at Swiss Reef; and the ghost pipefish of Victoria's Secret almost to myself by

day. And when they turned their torches off momentarily on Shimba Wall at night and just followed my beam, the reef really was mine.

Dives were broken up by gourmet picnics on tidal sand islands in cyan waters under cloudless skies. It was blissful; more dream diving. Then it was time to move on for the last stop of the trip at luxurious Fundu Lagoon down south.

Fundu Lagoon luxury

I couldn't hope to top the past week's diving, but the place itself looked impressive on the web, and the room rates certainly were at 600 USD a night per standard double, all inclusive (excluding champagne). After a 70-dollar taxi ride back to the airport, I met the Fundu transfer minibus and three well-heeled

guests. Forty-five minutes later, the driver dropped us at Pemba's main port of Mkoani where a speedboat was waiting to whisk us to the lodge, a ten-minute ride away.

The long wooden jetty was impressive, as was the discreet but warm welcome. The rooms are large safari tents inside a wooden cabin, with a magnificent ensuite shower room, complete with Fundu Lagoon's own range of four shower gels and shampoos (one of each for the morning and the evening, obviously), and a secluded bit of beach for each of the 16 rooms, the more expensive suites having their own pool, too.

The sunset views over the infinity pool and across the bay were breathtaking, and the sun setting directly behind the jetty bar and into the ocean surreal. It being a Saturday, dinner was being served on the beach, an eat-till-you-burst gourmet braai of slipper lobster, tiger prawns, and calamari washed down with excellent French wines and a few forgotten cocktails for desert.

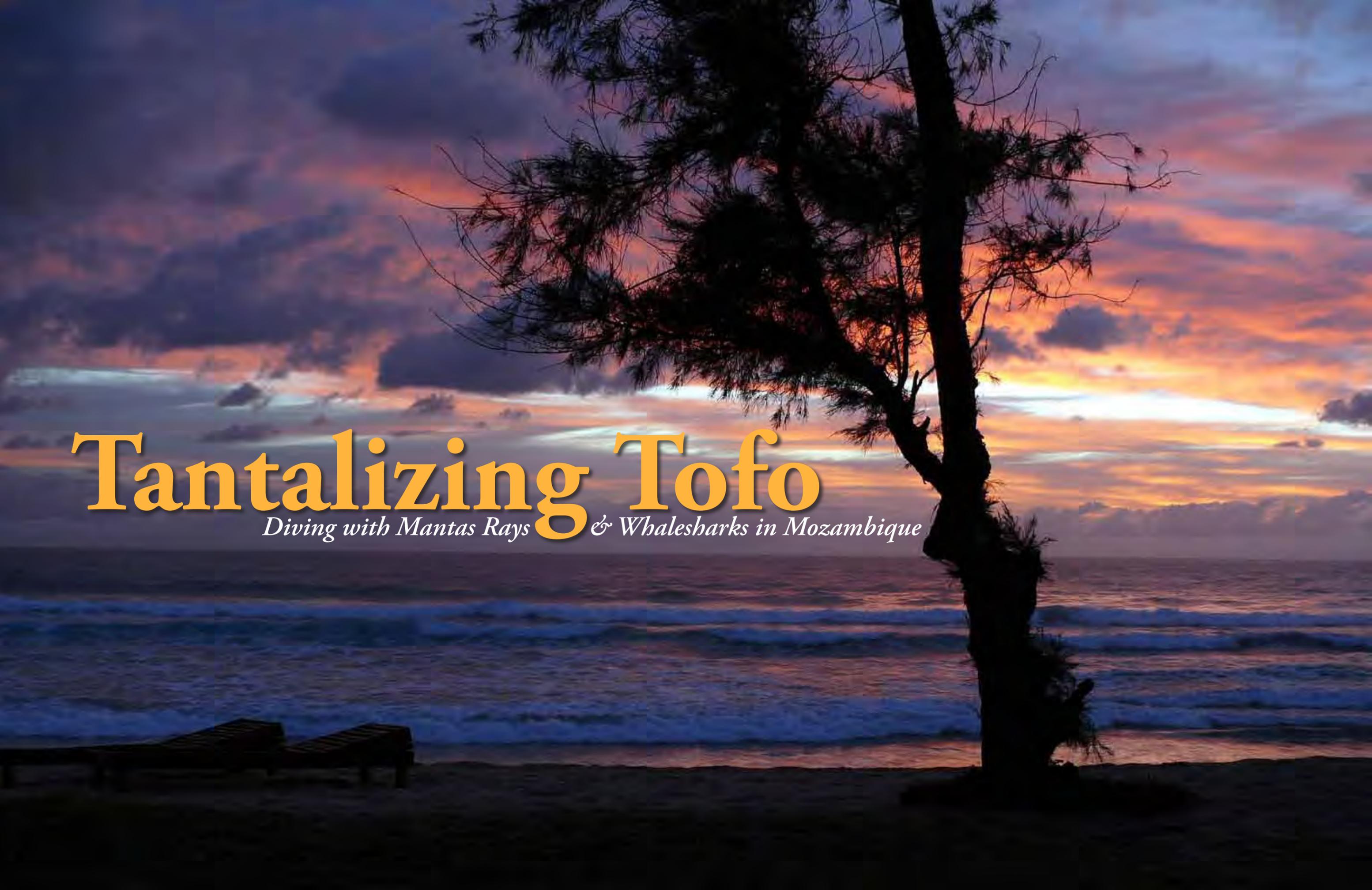
to Misali Island and its surrounding reefs for my two last dives on Funga Pacha and Coral Mountain. Six of us baled over the side and dropped down to 18 metres (the four other guests were only Open Water certified). More clear blue water, more prolific fish life, and on the last dive, the magnificent marbled cleaner shrimp, and a last sighting of a crocodile flathead with a lionfish and



Middle-class lodging

The next port of call was Manta Reef Lodge on the northeast tip of the island. Built on a hill just up from the beach, Manta Reef Lodge's well-appointed wooden chalets have superb views of the lagoon, and are good value for money, if you can afford 130 USD per person full board (excluding dives), given the weekly shipping in of supplies from Kenya, the excellent food, and the quality of the environment.

Over the next two days, accompanied by Van and dive master, Ali, I had the depths and the huge schools of big-eye trevally and skunk anemonefish of Fundo Gap South Wall; the unidentified but beautiful cleaner shrimps and metallic looking bubble algae of Manta Point (but no luck with the legendary mantas);

A scenic sunset over the ocean with a silhouette of a tree in the foreground. The sky is filled with vibrant orange, yellow, and blue clouds. The ocean is dark with white-capped waves. In the foreground, a sandy beach is visible with a wooden structure on the left and a large tree on the right.

Tantalizing Tofo

Diving with Mantas Rays & Whalesharks in Mozambique



Four hundred and fifty kilometres north of Maputo, Mozambique's capital, and half an hour from the historic Portuguese trading town of Inhambane and its airport, Tofo is a laid-back village popular for its endless pristine beaches and, of course, scuba diving. The warm waters of the Indian Ocean provide sustenance for an abundance of marine life here, but the mantas and the whale sharks are the stars of the show.

Text and photos
by Christopher Bartlett

PREVIOUS PAGE:
Sunrise at Tofo

THIS PAGE: Encounters with giant mantas at Tofo, Mozambique

"Three, two, one go!"

Rolling backwards off the pontoon of the RIB, I delighted in the slow-motion freefall from a negative entry, going straight down with Carlos, our Dive Master. "At last," I thought, "this is the life." Yet, I had little time to contemplate the hue of the blue and the visibility, as the instant I looked down I saw a giant manta moving slowly over the cleaning station 20 metres below. It slid graciously and effortlessly through the water, butterflyfish, goldies, and wrasses nibbling it clean of the parasites it had picked up on its oceanic wanderings. We unobtrusively dropped behind a wall next to the cleaning station and watched as a second and then a third manta glided in, whilst a large green turtle settled into a hollow. What a start!

As we drifted gently along the dive site, the oddly-named Hogwarts, 100 kilos of potato grouper gave us the eye, kingfish cruised past, and a school of barracuda zipped along. My grin was so wide I nearly lost my regulator when a

unique small-eyed stingray, the largest of all stingrays and only ever seen alive here, 5000 kilometres from the edge of its previously considered range, flapped its two-metre wide wings and slid past nonchalantly. It was undoubtedly the best first dive of a trip ever, and there were some big smiles on the surface, dive leader Carlos beaming even more than normal.

On the boat after the first dive, the crew changed our cylinders and we moved close to the coast and started cruising slowly, looking for the biggest fish in the ocean, the beautiful and docile whale shark. Within an hour skipper Ernesto's eagle eye picked out the outline of one of these giant planktivores. Donning fins and masks we slid over the side and snorkelled alongside a six-metre specimen, the sun's rays highlighting the white spotted patterns that cover its body from the tip of its tail to its super-wide terminal mouth.

Attracted by the plankton blooms



Fish catch a free ride in the mouth of a giant whale shark; Respect the whale shark's space and lengthen your experience; Six-metre whale shark; Schooling Bannerfish on Giant's Castle



scientist and Whale Shark specialist Dr Simon Pierce, Tofo has the world's largest population of the species, present year round, making it an ideal place for a sighting or two. Non-divers can also enjoy an amazing encounter with this behemoth on a two-hour ocean safari run by Tofo Scuba. I swam with them on four occasions in two weeks.

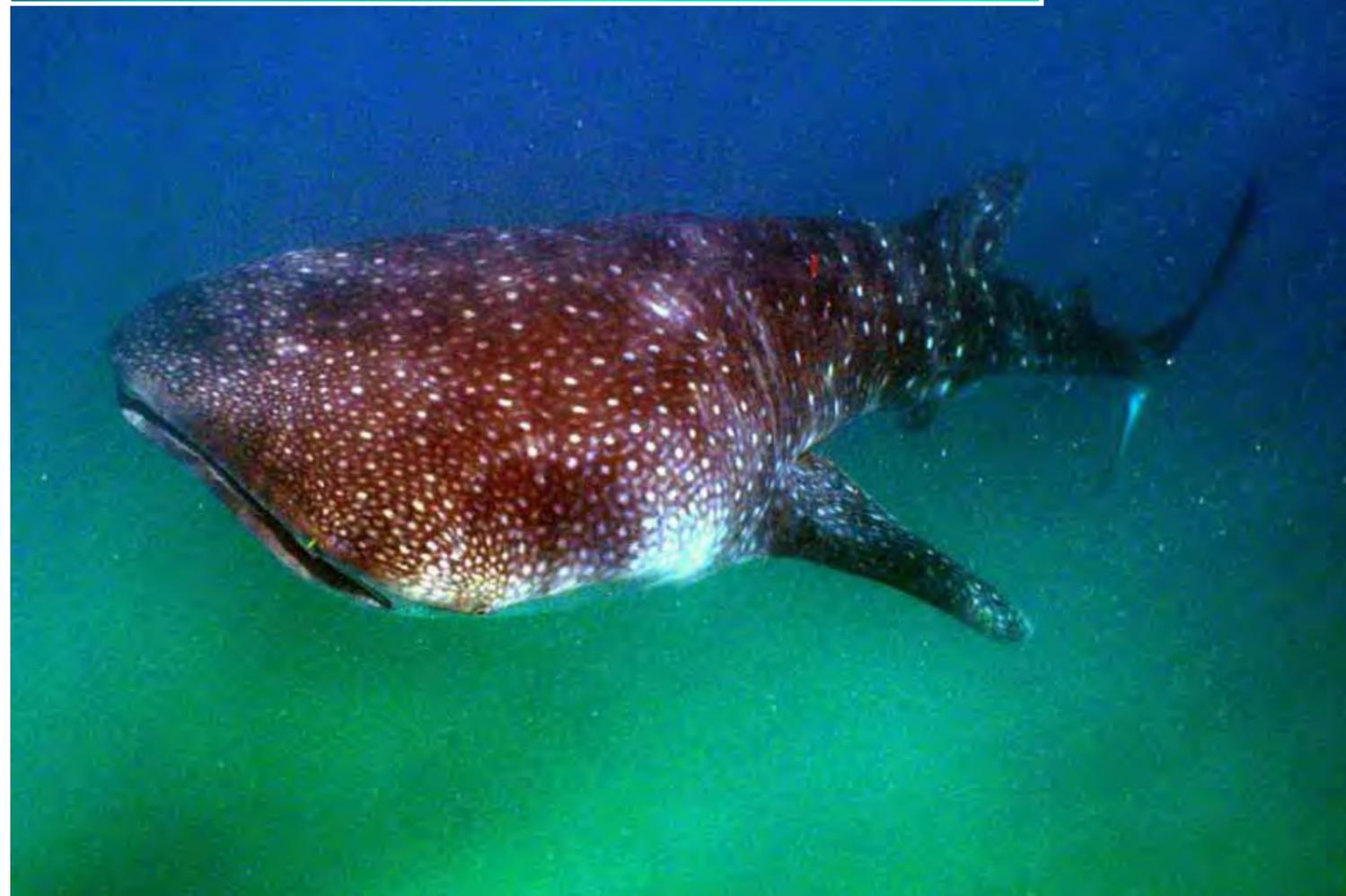
Diving

There are three dive centres in Tofo, with similar prices, but Tofo Scuba (www.tofoscuba.co.za) has an attractive, purpose-built dive centre on the beach, a training pool, an on-site restaurant, and very professional and friendly staff. They are an eclectic mix of nationalities who make you feel at home straight away, and with smiles everywhere it is impossible to not have a good time. The rates are the best in town, too: On a ten-dive package with your own equipment, a dive comes to a very reasonable 22 pounds. Some of the further reefs are subject to a small surcharge, but are well worth it.

To the north, Amazon with its strong currents has

that occur in the vicinity, Junior opened wide to filter out the nutrients with the spongy tissue near its gill arches. As we did our best to keep up, he progressed effortlessly seemingly not moving his tail at all, staying just below the surface for ten minutes, before he disappeared from view.

And Junior is not alone; according to research





Anemone crab; Potato Bass; Snappers and diver on Manta Reef; Honeycomb moray eel; Frogfish and its aura; Eye-stripe surgeonfish

a good mix of macrolife, lionfish, honeycomb morays, and groupers, and never has it such a pleasure to be informed that it is time to go to The Office. David Brent was happily absent but his chair is often filled by a leopard shark, some whitetips, and the wierdly beautiful bowmouth guitarfish. Colosseum has only ever been dived a handful of times but should be renamed The Hospital for its schools of eye-stripe surgeonfish.

Straight out of the bay lies Giant's Castle. Dropping next to a Manta cleaning station, we drifted along the battlements as spectre-like silhouettes appeared from the blue, before dropping down to find the crawling sea moth or short dragonfish, morays, and ribbon

eels. Often the second dive of the day, it has a relatively short bottom time despite a 90-minute surface interval, but it's an action packed half-an-hour. As the bottom slopes downwards peppered with green coral trees, a big school of pelagic big-eye kingfish cruised into view circling us for a minute, and as we rose to our safety stop a school of devil rays ambled past. Giants also seems to be a favourite haunt of the small-eye stingray, and I was fortunate enough to see it there on two occasions.

To the south though, next to the impressive Hogwarts, lies the jewel in Tofo's crown. The aptly-named Manta Reef is as vibrant a piece of underwater eye candy that I would



Whip coral goby





Leopard blenny at Amazon (top); Ribbon eel (bottom)



Tofo



happily dive over and over. From the surface, swathes of yellow and striped snapper, red soldierfish, and blue red-fang triggerfish covering the pinnacles can be seen.

Dropping into an amphitheatre that starts at 18 metres and bottoms out at 28, it is impossible to know where to look. Whilst taking

in the stunning colours of the schooling fish, my eye is caught by a coral whip goby, and then I spy African and Potato Grouper under different overhangs.

Back over the edge of the wide bowl, countless mantas (the resident and world-leading manta researcher Dr Andrea Marshall, identified 22 different individuals there the previous day), both giant and "normal", glided gracefully over the numerous cleaning stations, as a myriad of

goldies, damsels, and butterflyfish picked them clean. They danced over us, around us, and even between us, as if courting each other. I was certainly smitten.

And that was before meeting the monster.

I have seen many a fair-sized giant moray, as thick as a large

man's head, but, standing proudly on one-third of its three metres at the back of a cave like a dragon in its lair, was a beast with a head the size of a horse. Unsurprisingly, I could not convince my buddy to go in with a torch to help me focus my camera and give a sense of scale, but the image of this goliath of morays will stay with me until I return, as return I will. Manta Reef is definitely up there with the best.

Accommodation & transportation

Tofo has a range of accommodation options from camping to lodges, but right next to the dive centre, the independently owned and run Aquaticos Beachside Casitas provide conveniently located, good value for the money self-catering, with friendly staff who take care of dishwashing and free laundry to boot.

A short walk along the beach or sand roads to the market and several restaurants and bars, and an even shorter walk to Tofo Online



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP CENTER: View of Tofo Scuba dive centre; Starfish posing; Market scene; Sea cucumber feeding at The Office



Tofo

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: Manta gets close; Stunning spiky starfish; Soldierfish on Manta Reef; Another stunning starfish; Shortfin dragonfish rests on the seabed



for email junkies, or to Dino's Bar for pizza or prawns—everything is close by. Meals at Tofo Scuba, Dino's or Fatima's go for around four pounds; a pizza will set you back a fiver.

The market has fresh fruit and veggies, cashews, fish and basic groceries—and, hidden in the centre behind the colourful batiks, some local lunch eateries serve rice with fish, chicken, or beef cooked on coals for a pound. If your Portuguese or Bitongo isn't up to much, pointing at a pot and saying "que es, por favor?" Will get you a look inside. In the evening, ask for Mr Bamboo's for grilled chicken or fish with a mountain of rice and fresh tomato salsa. Wash it down with a 500ml Manica, a Dois M, or Mozambique's stout, Laurentina Preta, and you'll get change from three pounds.

It's perfectly safe to walk around day or night, and the curiously squeaky sand is a delight to stroll along. Just remember to pack the sunscreen, as even in early May, the air temperature is in the low 30s, and the sea at 25-27°C, although it can drop to the low 20s in July.

LAM-Mozambique Airlines flies

between Inhambane and Johannesburg on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays, or it's an eight-hour ride on a shuttle bus from departing from outside Fatima's in Maputo at 5 a.m everyday. The cost is 11 euros, and there is more information at www.mozambiquebackpackers.com. The LAM ticket office is difficult to deal with, and it's best to go through an agent like Tofo Scuba Safaris (www.tofo-scubasafaris.com). Ask for Lucie, and she'll be delighted to interrupt her endless coffee consumption to answer your queries. A Joburg-Inhambane return is around 300 to 350 pounds. Both Lucy and Sharon at Acquaticos (info@aquaticolodge.com) can organise airport transfers.

As I write this in the bus heading south,



Maputo then London-bound, taking in the palm trees, acacias, and the villages with cassava crops and roadside vendors, I wonder when I'll be back. Tofo and its megafauna have enchanted me. ■

fact file

Mozambique



SOURCES: US CIA WORLD FACT BOOK, SCUBADOC.COM

History In 1975, Mozambique established its independence after nearly 500 years as a Portuguese colony. However, the country's development was hindered by large-scale emigration, economic dependence on South Africa, a severe drought, and a prolonged civil war until the mid 1990's. In 1989, the ruling Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) party formally abandoned Marxism. The following year, a new constitution authorized a free market economy and multiparty elections. In 1992, fighting ended between FRELIMO and rebel Mozambique National Resistance

(RENAMO) with a UN-negotiated peace agreement. After 18 years in office, Joaquim Chissano stepped down in December 2004, leading Mozambique into a delicate transition. The elected successor, Armando Emilio Guebuza, pledged to continue the sound economic policies that have nurtured foreign investment. Largely due to post-conflict reconstruction, Mozambique has seen very strong economic growth since the end of the civil war. Government: republic. Capital: Maputo. Legal system: based on Portuguese civil law system and customary law.

Geography Mozambique is located in Southeastern Africa. It borders the Mozambique Channel, between South Africa and Tanzania. Terrain is mostly coastal lowlands, uplands in central Mozambique, high plateaus in the northwest and mountains in the west. Coastline: 2,470 km. Lowest point: Indian Ocean 0m. Highest point: Monte Binga 2,436m. Note: the Zambezi River flows through the most fertile north-central part of the country.

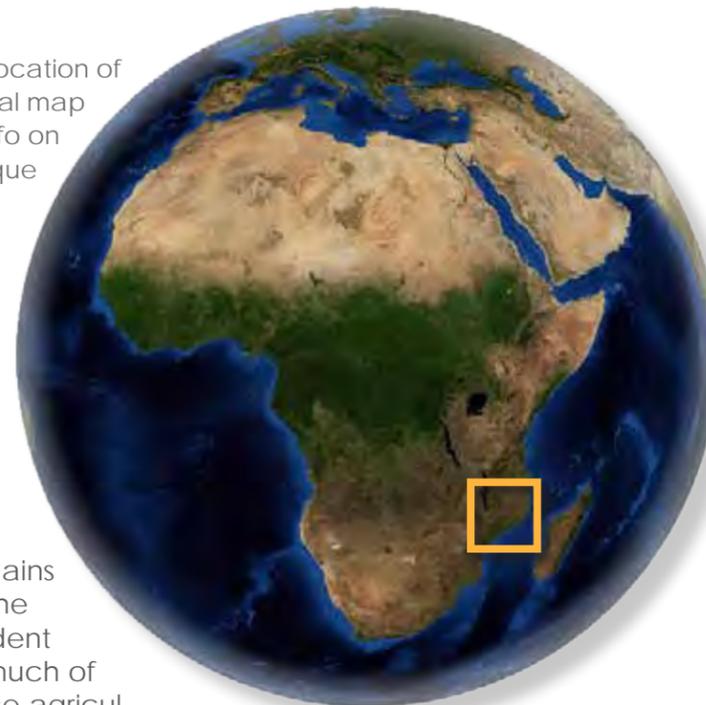
Economy Mozambique was one of the world's poorest countries at its independence in 1975. Exacerbating the situation were socialist mismanagement and a brutal civil war from 1977-92. In 1987, the government initiated a series of macroeconomic reforms made to stabilize the economy. These led to vast improvements in the country's growth rate. Despite these gains, the majority of

the country's population remains below the poverty line and the government remains dependent upon foreign assistance for much of its annual budget. Subsistence agriculture employs the majority of the work force. However, through forgiveness and rescheduling under the IMF's Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) and Enhanced HIPC initiatives, Mozambique's once substantial foreign debt has been lowered, and is now at a manageable level. July 2007 saw the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) sign a five-year Compact with Mozambique, which went into force in September 2008 and focuses on improving infrastructure, sanitation, agriculture, and the business regulation environment in the northern provinces. Natural resources: coal, titanium, natural gas, hydropower, tantalum, graphite. Agriculture: cotton, cashew nuts, sugarcane, tea, cassava (tapioca), corn, coconuts, sisal, citrus and tropical fruits, potatoes, sunflowers; beef, poultry. Industry: food, beverages, chemicals (fertilizer, soap, paints), aluminum, petroleum products, textiles, cement, glass, asbestos, tobacco

Climate tropical to subtropical. Natural hazards: severe droughts; devastating cyclones and floods in the central and southern provinces

Environmental issues adverse environmental consequences have resulted from increased migration of the country's population to urban and coastal areas spurred by civil war and recurrent

RIGHT: Location of Mozambique on global map
FAR RIGHT: Location of Tofo on map of Mozambique



drought in the backcountry. Other issues include desertification; pollution of surface and coastal waters; elephant poaching for ivory. Mozambique is party to: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands

Currency Meticals (MZM)
Exchange rates: 1EUR=37.41MZM; 1USD=25.55MZM; 1GBP=43.70MZM; 1AUD=21.78MZM; 1SGD=18.27MZM

Population 21,669,278. In poverty: 70% (2001 est.). Living with AIDS: 1.5 million (2007 est.) Ethnic groups: African 99.66% (Makhuwa, Tsonga, Lomwe, Sena, and others), Europeans 0.06%, Euro-Africans 0.2%, Indians 0.08%. Religion: Catholic 23.8%, Muslim 17.8%, Zionist Christian 17.5%, other religions 17.8%, no religion 23.1% (1997 census). Internet users: 200,000 (2007)

Time CAT (UTC+2)

Language Emakhuwa 26.1%, Xichangana 11.3%, Portuguese 8.8% (official language spoken by 27% of population as a second language),

Elomwe 7.6%, Cisena 6.8%, Echuwabo 5.8%, other Mozambican languages 32%, other foreign languages 0.3%, unspecified 1.3% (1997 census)

Health There is a very high degree of risk for food or waterborne diseases such as bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever; the vectorborne diseases malaria and plague; the water contact disease schistosomiasis; and the animal contact disease rabies (2009)

Recompression Chamber
St. Augustine's Hospital
Durban, South Africa
www.sahmc.co.za

Links
Mozambique Tourism
www.mozambique tourism.co.za ■



Diver with large lionfish



silver



www.seacam.com

Water lillies display their blooms on the Okavango River

Text and photos by Toni White

Carrying all we would need for the next five days, our expedition team travelled some 65 kilometres through shallow, meandering channels in small power boats. We eventually reached Jugu Juga, the small island which was to be our home for the next two days. As we unloaded our equipment and started to pitch camp, a bull elephant with tell tale 'tears' staining his face repeatedly charged us, only veering off when our guide beat two metal plates together. The strong smelling discharge, rich in testosterone, running down his cheeks announced that he was in 'musth'. This was my introduction to the "Really Wild"— the Okavango Delta in Botswana.

The Okavango Delta in Northern Botswana is described as the "Jewel of the Kalahari Desert". Covering some 15,000 square kilometers, it is a labyrinth of lagoons, lakes and hidden channels. It is the biggest inland fresh water delta in the world. It acts like a magnet to the wildlife of Botswana and beyond, with its crystalline waters attracting huge herds of elephant, hippo and Nile crocodiles. With 400 different species of bird, it has by far the greatest concentration and diversity of wildlife in the whole of Africa.

Spurred by huge subtropical storms in central Angola, some 12 billion cubic metres of water travel down



Diving the Delta

Botswana's Okavango River





The expedition team in action; Hippo yawns; Stealthy croc in the reeds; Team member Pete works his underwater rig

the Cubango River, through Namibia as the Kuvango River, and finally enter Botswana as the Okavango River. The water diverts through a maze of lagoons, channels and islands before draining away in the southern wastes of the Kalahari Desert.

I had been talking for some years about going on an expedition to the Okavango Delta to photograph the wild-

life and assess the possibilities of diving it. However, I really didn't know what we were letting ourselves in for.

I had done many big animal expeditions before with world renowned expert Mark Addison of Blue Wilderness Diving (www.bluwilderness.co.za), mainly in South Africa. And so it was that in the dry season of October 2007, Mark and I gathered with six intrepid underwater

photographers, in Maun, the gateway to the Moremi Game Reserve, Botswana.

The expedition

As we loaded up our two flat-bottomed boats with everything from tents to compressors, we all wondered what the next five days would bring. We were soon speeding along the Boro River, leaving the low rise buildings of Maun. The river

when the boats became tangled up in the reeds in the shallow waters, we arrived at our first camp on Jugu Juga Island.

It was late afternoon by the time we started preparing the camp while our cook started to dig holes to prepare our evening meal. This was the point when we all decided that the Okavango was very definitely a different kind of wild

banks were alive with birds of every description, and we soon found ourselves gazing at the rafts of reeds that are the life blood of the delta. The further we travelled, the narrower and shallower the delta channels became.

After 30 to 40 kilometres, we started to see our first signs of big game. Elephants and crocodiles became more frequent sightings, and in the distance, we saw herds of impala and buffalo. After a couple of heart-stopping moments

from the average game reserve.

We were just carrying our sleeping bags up from the boats when the bull elephant repeatedly charged us. It was more than a little disconcerting, especially when we wondered whether we were pitching camp in his territory. Mark managed to discourage him, and he pulled back to a safer distance, but continued to show his annoyance with us by stamping and trumpeting for the rest of the night.

We investigated our chosen patch further and found a small lagoon at the rear of the camp with a resident hippo in it. The next morning we found that five rather large crocodiles had spent the night on the sand of the river, no more than 20 feet from our tents. It was definitely getting wilder! To add to all of this, during that first night we had one of the most dramatic storms that I have ever seen. The cracks of thunder would have shattered glass if there been any around and the night sky was illuminated by huge displays of lightning.



The Okavango River

The next morning, we were quickly on the river with our dive gear and cameras in tow. Travelling deeper into the delta, we came across a huge disturbance in the river. It soon became obvious that we had come across a hitherto unknown migration of barbell. The banks were covered in every bird imaginable; fish eagles, storks, pelicans and the beautiful malachite Kingfisher. Crocodiles were lined up in the sand. Every size from half a metre to a couple of four metre monsters were waiting for their turn to feed on the barbell.

Andy donned his wetsuit, fins and mask and immediately jumped over the side, camera in hand, to try and get a half and half picture of a small croc sitting on the bank. The croc was up and gone before you could say snap! So instead he turned his attention to the more static lilies that were growing profusely from the river beds.

Following Andy's lead we all jumped into the water, ignoring the fact that bigger crocs were within a few metres of us. The

barbell (some as long as a metre) were swimming past us in such numbers that they were crashing into our submerged legs. Before long we were all jumping up and down in the water, and the air was blue with expletives! It didn't take long for us to decide that this was just a bit too hairy, and we exited the water rather faster than we had entered.

We thought that that was quite enough excitement for one day but on the way back to camp, we were confronted by a herd of elephants crossing the channel in front of us. Two huge females were guarding the progress of the young elephants. They decided that they would walk up the channel towards us, sparring as they came. Luckily for us they must have seen the agitation on our boats as they got nearer and decided that we had taken their severe warning.

Apart from the troop of baboons that walked through the camp at 1am, the pride of lions calling to each other all night and our friend the elephant throwing

things around in disgust because we hadn't moved on, the night passed relatively quietly.

Hippo haven

The dawn brought a new challenge; we knew that there was a lagoon nearby with a resident herd of hippos. On arrival, we saw five heads in the water all staring at our boat. Apparently, boats take first place on the hippo hate list, closely followed by humans!

We had already decided that going into the water with the single biggest killer of humans on this continent was not an option. We had built a couple of small ROV's with Mark that we planned to attach our cameras to and drive them into the herd to try to capture the images we wanted. Let's just say we got close.

We had a bit of a hiatus while deciding which of us would volunteer their camera first (due to the significant risk that it might not come back!!!) Once decided, the ROV's set off but instead of the attack we expected, the male hippo moved behind the females, and the whole herd started to back off into shallower water, completely intimidated by the small black box travelling towards them. After three frustrating hours trying to get nearer, we decided that we had enough information to plan a different approach for our next trip in July 2008.

Proud eagle perches on a limb; family of elephants commune by the waters; Portrait of a larg bull elephant

Large croc waits in the grass; Stork in flight; Trees dot the Delta landscape



large monitor lizard has been debated many times since. Whatever it was, it was certainly a warning.

And as for our last night... what a night it was! Just after midnight Mark and Gail woke up to find that they had an elephant's trunk in their tent with them. They had

ing, there was a huge rush for the one portable toilet!

Joking apart, we all agreed that this had been an exceptional expedition for all of us. Experiencing these magnificent animals up close and wild, had been the experience of a lifetime for all of us. From a practical point of view, it has also given us confidence to return armed with what we learned. We are sure that given time, we will capture the underwater images that we now know are possible. We plan to return to the Delta twice a year over the next three years, once during the dry and once during the wet season. We know that we will capture the stunning images that we have been privileged to see. ■

Tony White is a professional underwater photographer. Now based in South Africa, he runs underwater photographic tours to some of the most exciting underwater events and places on our planet. More information can be obtained from his website www.seaofdreams.co.uk

of getting nearer to a bigger herd of hippo. We wanted some deeper water, so we could attempt a scuba dive to assess the possibilities of future dives with crocs.

By lunch-time we had established

camp on Nxaraga Island and were looking out of our tent at the lagoon with its eight resident hippos. We spent the afternoon fruitlessly trying to photograph this herd and learned valuable lessons for our next visit.

The evening and night brought nothing more exciting than a large spider running around the inside of my tent. Little did I realize that all the trouble was being stored up for our last night.

Diving the river

Bright and early we were back on the water heading for deeper channels with the clear water that we had identified

for our dive. Kitting up, we soon became aware that the waters here are never still, and this would be a drift dive.

Entering the water, we dropped two metres to the bottom. The visibility was restricted to about four metres because of the high concentrations of peat in the ground but this was good enough for photography. The sand on the bottom was white—we were definitely in the Kalahari Desert.

We knew from this first dive that photography would be possible, but we got another reminder that this was truly a wild, wild place and one to be respected. As the dive ended, we stood up in shallow water and within seconds, Pete had let out an ear splitting scream as something large swam between his legs knocking him off his feet. Whether it was a croc or a

tent under a Marula tree—the fruit is an elephant's favourite food.

I opened my tent flap during the night to find three hippos happily munching away at the grass just outside. Nobody left their tents that night, and in the morn-



We spent the rest of the afternoon gently travelling the river banks enjoying the profusion of wildlife. We were on our way back to base camp when we saw a group of hippos on the bank. It was the group that we had been trying to photograph that morning. In an instant, we could see a look in their eyes that said, "So, it was you harassing us in the lagoon this morning". At that point, they all charged down the bank towards us. Our driver slammed the engines forward and sped past them as they all jumped into the channel obviously intent on upsetting our evening.

The next day we broke camp to travel back nearer to Maun with the intention

fact file



Botswana



SOURCES: US CIA WORLD FACT BOOK

History Botswana, formerly the British protectorate of Bechuanaland, adopted its new name when it attained independence in 1966. Forty years of uninterrupted civilian leadership, progressive social policies, and significant capital investment have boosted the country's economy making it one of the most dynamic in Africa. Although tourism is a growing sector due to the country's conservation practices and extensive nature preserves, mineral extraction, mainly diamond mining, leads economic activity. The country has one of the world's highest known rates of HIV/AIDS infection, however, it also has one of Africa's most progressive and comprehensive programs for dealing with the disease. Government: parliamentary republic. Capital: Gaborone

Geography

Botswana is located in Southern Africa, north of South Africa. Note: No coastline, landlocked; population is concentrated in the east. Terrain is predominantly flat to gently rolling plateaus with the Kalahari Desert in the southwest. Lowest point: junction of the Limpopo and Shashe Rivers 513 m. Highest point: Tsodilo Hills 1,489 m.

Economy

Since independence in 1966, Botswana has had one of the world's highest economic growth rates, though, in 2007-08, growth fell below 5%. Botswana has transformed itself, through fiscal discipline and sound management, from one of the poorest countries on Earth to a middle-income country with a per capita GDP in 2008 of US\$13,300. Indeed, Botswana is ranked as the best credit risk in Africa by two major investment services. Much of the expansion is fueled by diamond mining, which currently makes up more than one-third of GDP and 70-80% of export earnings. Other key sectors include tourism, financial services, subsistence farming, and cattle raising. However, the government faces challenges such as high rates of

unemployment and poverty. Botswana's considerable economic gains are also threatened by high HIV/AIDS infection rates, the second highest in the world. Long-term prospects are dimmed by an expected leveling off in diamond mining production. Natural resources: diamonds, copper, nickel, salt, soda ash, potash, coal, iron ore, silver. Agriculture: livestock, sorghum, maize, millet, beans, sunflowers, groundnuts. Industry: diamonds, copper, nickel, salt, soda ash, potash; livestock processing; textiles

Climate Botswana's climate is semi-arid with warm winters and hot summers. Natural hazards: periodic droughts; visibility can be obscured with seasonal August winds that blow from the west, carrying sand and dust cross-country.

RIGHT: Location of Botswana on global map
BELOW: Location of Okavango Delta on map of Botswana
FAR RIGHT: View from space of Okavango Delta. NASA



Environmental issues over-grazing; desertification; limited fresh water resources. Botswana is party to: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Ozone Layer Protection, Wetlands.

Currency Botswana Pulas (BWP)
Exchange rates: 1EUR= 9.95BWP;
1USD= 7.00BWP; 1GBP= 11.58BWP;
1AUD= 5.82BWP; 1SGD= 4.84BWP

Population 1,990,876. In poverty: 30.3% (2003) Living with AIDS: 300,000 (2007 est.) Ethnic groups: Tswana (or Setswana) 79%, Kalanga 11%, Basarwa 3%, other, including Kgalagadi and white groups 7%. Religion: Christian 71.6%, Badimo 6%, other religion 1.4%, no religion 20.6% (2001 census). Internet users: 80,000 (2007)

Time CAT (UTC+2)

Language Setswana 78.2%, Kalanga 7.9%, Sekgalagadi 2.8%, English 2.1% (official), other language 8.6%, (2001 census)

Health There is a very high degree of risk for the food and waterborne diseases

bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever; and the vectorborne disease malaria (2009)

Recompression Chamber
PRETORIA, South Africa
Eugene Marais Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy Centre
24hr phone: +27(0)12 334-2567

DURBAN, South Africa
St. Augustine's Hospital
Hyperbaric Medicine Centre
www.sahmc.co.za

Links
Botswana Tourism
www.botswanaturism.co.bw ■



Split view of lily pad on Okavango River in Botswana