

TRAVEL UPDATE: NORTHERN MOZAMBIQUE

NEED TO GET AWAY ATOLL?

Vicky explores the enticing beaches and intriguing culture of Northern Mozambique



I first visited Mozambique in 1996, just after the civil war had finished and the country had basically been decimated, burnt out tanks and lorries littered the broken roads, blown up bridges cut off whole areas, families were torn apart by war and poverty was rife. Over the years I have ventured back seeing the country stabilise and the growth of tourism in the southern part of the country. But in the past few years there have been exciting developments 2000 kilometres further north near to the Tanzania border.

The Quirimbas archipelago is a stunning string of islands north of Pemba in the Cabo Delgado province. Untouched since the colonial days, it has a rich trading history from the Omani sultans to the first Portuguese colonial settlers in the 16th century. The town of Pemba is the gateway to the region and on the far side of its huge natural harbour is Londo Lodge built in a natural cove with a beautiful beach and clear turquoise waters. Arriving for lunch of a huge plate of Thai flavoured split prawns was the start of a 10 day gastronomic seafood extravaganza at four different lodges, and I couldn't fault the food anywhere - except maybe that the lobsters and crabs were too big!

Another outstanding lodge on the mainland, and probably my favourite for its simplicity and eco friendliness, is Guludo, which was set up by a dynamic young English couple who at the same time as building the lodge set up the Nema Charitable Foundation which supports numerous projects in the area which you are encouraged to visit.

We flew next to the islands. First stop was Ibo Island, where we bumped slowly through the faded grandeur of the Ibo town square, to the beautifully restored Ibo Lodge. Ibo is a place where time has stood still and you can watch the world go by from the shady lodge veranda: the boat builders repairing dhows, the children on their way to school, fishermen returning home with their catch. The beauty of Ibo is the laidback friendliness of the people and you can wander around at ease exploring the back streets and crumbling buildings.

Flying north over turquoise seas and uninhabited islands and atolls, the luxurious Vamizi Island was our next stop. It certainly is 5* luxury, made all the better without air-conditioning and plunge pools. It must be one of the best beaches I have seen anywhere - beautiful white sand and clear, clear seas I had a lovely dive here but due to lack of time and onward flights, I didn't have time to dive the most-talked-about site in the area - Neptune's Arm - but it will be still be there for my next visit.

Having not thought of myself as much of beach person, northern Mozambique with its history, sublime diving, fishing, snorkelling, clear waters, an abundance of seafood, beautiful lodges and friendly people might just have changed the way I think about beach holidays for good.

