

Information about Zanzibar

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Zanzibar is an island partner within the United Republic of Tanzania, located in the Indian Ocean about 35 km off the coast of mainland Tanzania at six degrees south of the Equator. Zanzibar is made up of many islands, the main two being Unguja (sometimes called Zanzibar) and Pemba. The land is divided into three main areas, the plantation area, the coral rag area and the indigenous forests. The highest point is 390 feet above sea level. The population is estimated at around 1 Million, including Pemba and Mafia islands.

HISTORY:

Zanzibar has lured traders, adventurers, plunderers and explorers to its shores for centuries. The Assyrians, Sumerians, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Indians, Chinese, Persians, Portuguese, Omani Arabs, Dutch and English have all been here at one time or another. Some, particularly the Shirazi Persians and Omani Arabs, stayed to settle and rule. With this influence, Zanzibar has become predominantly Islamic (97%) - the remaining 3% is made up of Christians, Hindus and Sikhs. The earliest visitors to Zanzibar were Arab traders who are said to have arrived in the 8th century and settled in Unguja Ukuu. The earliest building that remains on Zanzibar is the mosque at Kizimkazi, which dates from 1107 AD, and is a present-day tourist attraction. For centuries the Arabs sailed with the monsoon winds from Oman to trade primarily in ivory, slaves and spices. The two main islands, Unguja (normally known as Zanzibar Island) and Pemba, provided an ideal base for the Omani Arabs, being relatively small, and therefore fairly easy to defend. Indeed, in 1832, Sultan Seyyid Said, of the Busaid dynasty that had emerged in Oman, moved his Sultanate from Muscat to Zanzibar, perhaps making it easier to protect, where he and his descendants ruled for over 130 years. Most of the wealth lay in the hands of the Arab community, who were the main landowners at that time. They kept themselves to themselves, and generally did not intermarry with the Africans. This was not true of the Shirazi Persians who came from the Middle East to settle on the East African coast. The story goes that in AD 975, Abi Ben Sultan Hasan of Shiraz in Persia (now Iran) had a terrible nightmare in which a rat devoured the foundations of his house. He took this as an omen that his community was to be devastated. Others in the Shirazi court ridiculed the notion, but Sultan Hasan, his family and some followers obviously took it very seriously and they decided to migrate. They set out in seven dhows into the Indian Ocean but were caught in a huge storm and separated. Thus, landfalls were made at seven different places along the East African coast, one of which was Zanzibar, and settlements began. No longer very prosperous in the fiscal sense, the island has a wealth of historical monuments to visit which commemorate the African, British and particularly Arab influences- sultan palaces, cathedrals, mosques, fortresses and old colonial houses. "Spice Tours" are the ideal way to see the island's historic sites and spice plantations. There is also a sanctuary for the rare Zanzibar duiker and the red colobus monkey in the protected Jozani Forest, just twenty-five kilometers from the town.

LANGUAGE:

The main language is Kiswahili. Even if you only use a few words whilst you are in Zanzibar you will make many friends. English is widely spoken and many people also speak Arabic. Other European languages such as Spanish and Italian are known by some local people, especially around the tourist areas.

RELIGION:

About 97% of the local population is Muslim. The remainder are Hindu or Christian and some with traditional beliefs. As well as many mosques, Stone Town hosts an Anglican and a Catholic Cathedral and a Hindu Temple.

CULTURE:

Zanzibar, home to Taarab, is just the place to loosen those hips and get the toe tapping. Taarab is a style of music that snatches inspiration from African, Arabic and Indian influences, and is so irresistible that it is sometimes credited with fostering a degree of harmony among the volatile islands. Traditional dance, is an energetic and mesmerizing way of expressing thanks and praise, marking rites of passage and a means of communicating with ancestors. Tanzanian figurative art was traditionally an important creative outlet, but most of the art you'll see these days may as well be carved in the shape of a tourist.

EVENTS:

Ramadhan: Is an Islamic Holy month in which drinking, smoking, and eating is prohibited during daylight hours (many restaurants close down during these times). The dates change every year about 11 days and depend upon the sighting of the moon.

Eid-el-Fitr: The 4 last days of the Ramadhan.

ZIFF Festival of the Dhow Countries: Celebrates the arts and cultures of the African continent, the Gulf States, Iran, India, Pakistan and the Islands of the Indian Ocean. The first two weeks of July.

Mwaka Kogwa: A four-day celebration. It's the New Year Zoroastrian (Persian religion). Makunduchi (at 5 minutes drive from our Resort) is where the festival biggest events take place. At the end of July.

Sauti za Busara: Music Festival is a six-day cultural extravaganza held in the middle of February. The festival offer a mix of styles including traditional ngoma, taarab, kidumbak, mchiriku, rumba, Swahili hip-hop "bongo flava", mystic & religious music, theatre, film, comedy and dance.

CLIMATE:

Zanzibar enjoys a tropical climate: sunny warm weather and pleasant sea breeze gently carrying cool air off the Indian Ocean chasing away mosquitoes.

TIDES:

Two per day, with an unevenness of more than 4 meters. The reef in Kizimkazi isn't far away, so you may aswell swim during low tide.

DONATIONS:

Most of the travelers coming to Africa are used of bringing things that in the 1st world are not useful anymore but here, are very helpful. We have a donation organization that helps to distribute the donations to arrive to the right persons and avoid corruption. If you're willing to bring scholastic materials, medicines, glasses, clothes, etc, please let us know at the arrival so we may advise you.

REQUIREMENTS:

Passport: valid for 6 months.

Entry Visa: from 50\$ to 100\$ (depending on the nationality)

Airport Tax : 5\$ for national flights, 30\$ for international flights.

Language: English, Kiswahili.

Money: Tanzanian Shilling, Euro, US dollar (new issued notes). Credit cards and travelers cheques are accepted in few places and with a high commission charged.

To put in your suitcase: Sun block, hut, sunglasses, mosquito repellent, coral shoes, light outfits.

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