

# Sustainable tourism

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Inhambane sand dunes located in southern Mozambique

Mozambique is the rising star of African tourism, its tropical beaches, cosmopolitan cities and wildlife luring growing numbers of visitors. Since the return to peace in 1992 following a protracted civil war the tourism sector is enjoying sustained growth.

Demand for beach based leisure tourism has prompted the development of accommodation mostly along the southern coast, while more recently visitors have begun to show an interest in still relatively untouched northern Mozambique.

Mozambique's tourism potential speaks for itself. With 2,500 km of Indian Ocean coastline, abundant coral reefs and marine life, along with more than 15 per cent of its land made up of conservation areas, mountains, wetlands, and a rich and varied cultural heritage, Mozambique has all the ingredients to develop into an major league tourism destination.

## THE HIGHLIGHTS

### Pemba and the Quirimbas Islands

Close to the border with Tanzania, the picturesque town of Pemba in the north of Mozambique sits on the third largest bay in the world: Pemba Bay. Despite

the rural and underdeveloped surroundings, Pemba is a relatively modern town with breathtaking beaches on either side of it.

It's not often the world gets a new corner to explore, but the relatively unknown Quirimbas Archipelago is rapidly becoming Mozambique's hottest destination. Seclusion, a laidback rhythm of life, a rich marine world and crystal clear water – these are a few of the draw cards of a Quirimbas island holiday.

The archipelago is made up of 27 coral islands strung along Mozambique's northern coast, from Pemba to the Tanzanian border. Many are uninhabited, and Quirimbas accommodation is limited to a handful of luxurious lodges and romantic beach bungalows, so it's easy to find an empty stretch of beach or virgin reef.

Coconut palms and powder-white beaches line small private islands like Matemo and Medjumbe. Add to this bucketfuls of luxury and a fantastic range of activities – from thrilling scuba diving to peaceful dhow cruises – and this is the perfect off-the-beaten track escape.

Ibo Island is probably the most visited of the islands due to its unique blend of culture and architecture, fascinating history and landscapes.

Eleven of the southernmost islands are included in the Quirimba National Park, established to help protect the wide range of marine life that includes whale sharks, humpback whales, dolphins and dugongs.

Whether in search of solitude, an avid diver, or part of a group of friends or family; a Quirimbas island holiday offers the chance to get away from it all, and find a secluded little piece of paradise to live out a Robinson Crusoe fantasy - in luxury.

The best time to visit the Quirimbas is during the cooler, drier winter months.

### Mozambique Island

Located near Nacala on the north coast, Mozambique Island is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In the sixteenth century, this was Mozambique's capital, where the Portuguese built an intricate, fortified stone-built city that functioned as a trading post for Portuguese ships sailing to and from India and later as a slave-trade centre. The remains of this ancient city



are now protected by their World Heritage Site status. Among the highlights are the 17th century Palace of Sao Paulo and the Fortress of St Sebastian, along with the Chapel of Nossa Senhora de Baluarte - the oldest example of European architecture still standing in the southern hemisphere.

The incredible architectural unity of the island derives from the uninterrupted use of the same building techniques with the same materials and the same decorative principles. The island has been classed on the national level and for about 10 years has benefited from restoration work and studies by international specialists. However, while the present state of conservation is not fully satisfactory, a restoration and management programme is in progress.

#### **The Bazaruto Archipelago.**

Made up of six coral islands near the city of Vilankulo, Bazaruto, Benguerra, Magaruque, Banque, Santa Carolina (also known as Paradise Island) and Shell - boast unspoilt, pristine (sometimes pink) beaches and coral reefs with fishing, surfing, snorkelling and diving opportunities in clear turquoise water. The entire archipelago has been a National Park in 1971, with the result that no development has ever taken place on the islands.

The islands are covered by large sand dunes and freshwater lakes, which are nesting grounds for beautiful black-winged flamingos. The islands of the Bazaruto Archipelago are not for those whose idea of a holiday is shopping – as there are no shops – just crystal white beaches and wildlife habitats.

To keep environmental damage to a minimum, visitors must stay at one of several private lodges, which offer excellent scuba diving, deep-sea fishing and sailing. Just offshore, in warm waist deep waters, one floats amidst coral gardens of infinite beauty and colour, examining and being examined by shoals of fish that move amongst the corals like clouds of living jewels.

Declared a National Park in 1971, the Archipelago boasts among its wildlife, 180 species of birds, endemic butterflies, suni antelope and freshwater crocodiles.

The protected reefs and beaches support dolphin, dugong, gamefish, giant

lobster and several species of marine turtle.

All of the islands support populations of traditional fisherman and their families, many of whom are not permanent residents and may migrate between the Archipelago and the mainland in their pursuit of good fishing waters.

To avoid the occasional high winds and powerful currents, tourist facilities are all located on the landward (lee) side of the islands. Luxury Lodges with superior facilities and services to enable guests to realise the full potential of their visit to this idyllic, romantic island.

#### **Maputo and Inhaca Island**

The country's capital - although severely impacted by years of decline during the civil war - is still a beautiful city with architectural highlights, thanks to the extravagance of the Portuguese colonialists and their taste for European design. The Iron House (Casa de Ferro) – designed by Gustave Eiffel (of Eiffel Tower fame) – as well as the Cathedral of Maputo, the Natural Historic Museum, and the City Hall are fine examples of colonial architecture.

Before independence, Maputo was known as Lourenço Marques, and was a very fashionable and extravagant destination for Europeans and South Africans. Thanks to new investment and a government renovation programme, Maputo is once again one of Africa's most vibrant and attractive cities.

Maputo, population roughly a million, still feels like a small town. Unlike many other African cities, which empty at night, Mozambicans crawl their vibrant city at all hours - snacking at sidewalk stands

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Mozambique is a diver's paradise



offering enormous yellow mangoes and papayas and popping into hundreds of bars for some of the Portuguese-language Afro-Brazilian funk that wafts out into the streets.

All this activity makes Maputo one of the safer capitals in Africa - certainly safer than the wealthier, but more crime-ridden, cities of South Africa. Even heavy afternoon rains during monsoon season dissipate by early evening, hardly crimping any activity.

Because Mozambique was influenced not only by Portugal and its own African roots but also by Arab traders and migrants from Portugal's Asian and Latin American colonies, Mozambique's cosmopolitan cuisine mixes Brazilian spices, Asian styles including Indian, and Portuguese and African produce - Portuguese cod steak and potatoes, local seafood and tropical fruits. A distinctive culinary offering.

Restaurants in Maputo showcase this fusion with flair; at each place recommended by locals, the food seemed to get more sumptuous.

Inhaca Island, In Maputo's Bay, boasts a range of habitats from pristine coral reefs and extensive mudflats to dune forests and mangroves - all contained in 52 square kilometres of unspoilt landscape.

Barra This is the place where Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama first landed in Mozambique, in the late 15th century, and proclaimed it "Land of the Gentle People." Barra's attractions are obvious. Mozambique offers some of the finest diving of any country that borders the Indian Ocean, in part because the long war limited the fishing industry, preventing commerce from destroying fish and coral and fouling the water's visibility. And in comparison to many Asian beaches, where divers must sail miles from shore, in Barra the marine life is easily accessible and dives are cheap.

A 10-minute boat ride takes the diver out to coral shaped like brains and razors that have retained their natural bright blues and reds, not yet worn into a dull brown. Two-yard-wide manta rays, giant eels, barracuda and schools of tiny, fluorescent blue pepperfish swim in its turquoise waters. Enormous clams the size of a man blend into the coral, slowly opening and closing their mammoth mouths.

## Inland

It's worth taking the time to visit the interior of Mozambique, where there are four stunning national parks: Banhine (south central Mozambique), Gorongosa (in central Mozambique, south of the Zambezi River), Limpopo (on the border between Mozambique and South Africa) and Zinave (southern central Mozambique). In addition to these, Mozambique also boasts six national reserves and several other conservation areas.


## A bright future

Mozambique offers something for the beach tourist, the adventure-seeking tourist, the cultural tourist and the eco-tourist, which broadens the potential for tourism overall and widens the market.

Mozambique has experienced one of the fastest tourism industry growth rates in the world, with a tenfold increase in numbers since 2000. This is largely due to the influx of South African tourists, who still make up around a third of all visitors in the country.

In 2010, this sector generated about US\$700 million, putting it firmly at the top of the country's priority list for further investment and development. The government has chosen to ensure that all future tourism development projects have a strong social responsibility component.

In 2009, the government announced plans for a number of tourism development projects that would stimulate growth in key areas such as the National Reserves at Gilé and Maputo; the islands of Epidendron and Casuarina (central coast), Crusse and Jamali (north coast); and the fishing village of Inhassoro, as it is the closest settlement to the Bazaruto Archipelago. Between US\$8 million and US\$20 million will be invested at each site, to build resorts, hotels, basic tourism infrastructure and commercial outlets for local traders.

In total, Mozambique's tourism sector has tremendous potential to generate foreign revenue through tourism, raising living standards and putting it on the map once again as one of the world's top tourism destinations. 



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Mozambique offers all the attractions of a safari destination