

10 Mozambique Nature in the raw

BY LISA GRAINGER

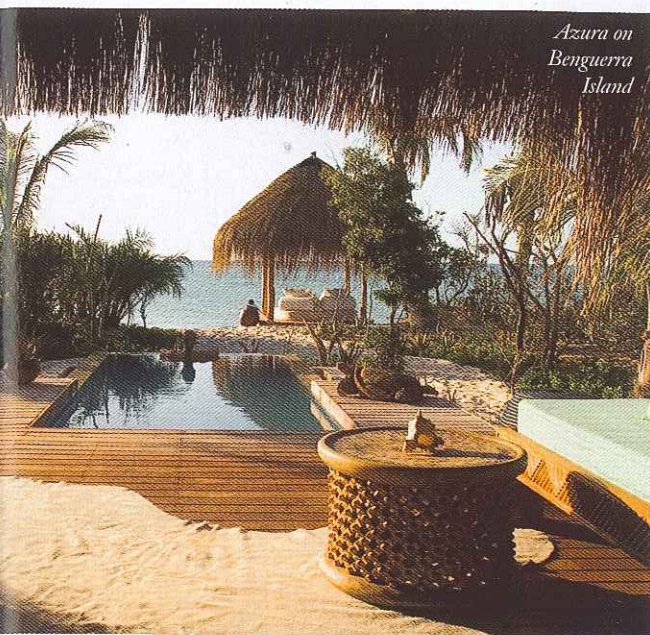
Mozambique is geographically stunning: game reserves the size of Wales, enormous rivers, and archipelagos strung across gem-blue seas. But the fact that it's sprung back after 20 years of war, Biblical floods and deadly hurricanes makes its beauty even more poignant, its riches more keenly treasured. Those riches are plentiful: huge king prawns eaten beneath absurdly starry skies; a 1,600-mile coast strewn with millions of shells; tropical reefs rich with Technicolor fish and coral. And thousands of miles of game reserves where elephants roam, the mythical baobab-tree is silhouetted against blood-red sunsets and one can canoe all day and not see another person.

The Mozambique coast is where the chic build their holiday homes, where the Oppenheims retreat and Prince Harry has played. Fashionable adventurers jet in to relax in boutique bolt-holes, the most recent being White Pearl (www.whitepearlresorts.com), just north of the South African border. Similar in style to the pretty, contemporary Azura hotel (www.azura-retreats.com) on Benguerra Island, the 22-suite White Pearl is as elegantly restrained inside as it is wild outside, against a backdrop of Indian Ocean breakers. But then, most hotels here are eco-friendly and built to show off the stunning scenery: Coral Lodge 1541 (www.coralodge1541.com) is on a nature reserve not far from Ilha de Moçambique (Mozambique Island), the former capital and now a Unesco World Heritage Site. At the Nuarro eco-lodge (www.nuarro.com), thatched suites sit right on the beach; at Pambele (www.pambele.co.mz), even the baths have views of the pale aquamarine water; and in the new private villas of Vamizi Island (www.vamizi.com), reed walls can be rolled up so guests can lie and revel in the scenery.

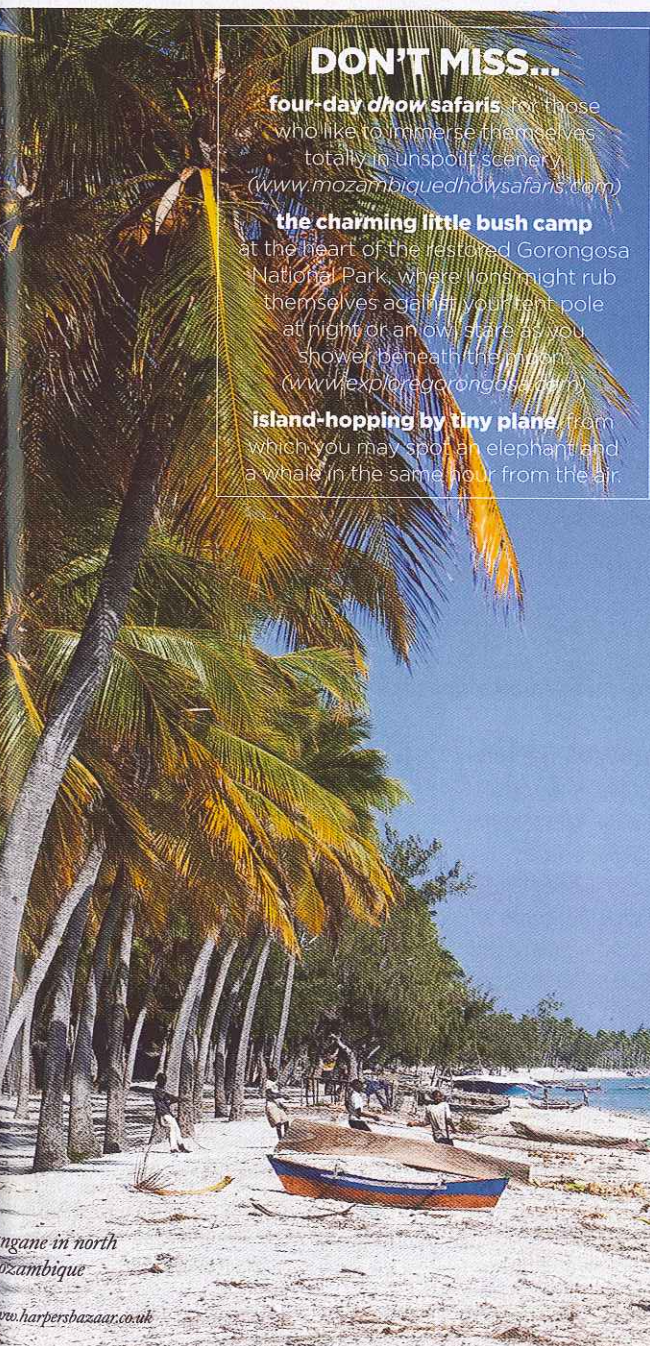
Food at the award-winning Londo Lodge (www.londolodge.com) is served at the edge of a cliff, with soaring views over Pemba's bays. Look out for the new Azura at Quilalea, a private island with nine beachside villas (www.azura-retreats.com). In the Seventies, Bob Dylan wrote: 'I like to spend some time in Mozambique/The sunny sky is aqua blue.' You go there to appreciate the Earth at its most raw, and to support a tourist industry that is genuinely helping to rebuild a country.

Seven nights at Azura on Benguerra Island, from £4,300 a person all-inclusive, including flights and transfers; seven nights at Vamizi, from £3,800 a person all-inclusive, including flights and transfers, both with Elegant Resorts (01244 897517; www.elegantresorts.co.uk). □

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Azura on Benguerra Island



DON'T MISS...

four-day dhow safaris for those who like to immerse themselves totally in unspoilt scenery (www.mozambiquedhowsafaris.com)

the charming little bush camp at the heart of the restored Gorongosa National Park, where lions might rub themselves against your tent pole at night or an owl stare as you shower beneath the moon (www.exploregorongosa.com)

island-hopping by tiny planes, from which you may spot an elephant and a whale in the same hour from the air.