

Travel

The Dallas Morning News

Section K

Sunday, March 30, 2014

dallasnews.com



INSIDE

FAMILY TRAVEL FIVE: Find your happy place 2K

TEXAS: The state's best biking 4K

OREGON: Going with the wind 6K

AFRICA

An island of timeless mystique



Traditional wooden dhows, which have been plying the waters off eastern Africa for centuries, transport visitors around Mozambique Island.

Unlock the secrets of historic Mozambique Island

Story and photos by MARK SISSONS
Special Contributor

MOZAMBIQUE ISLAND, Mozambique — Squinting through the cross-shaped slit carved into the cavernous church's thick stone wall, I see the dazzling azure of the Indian Ocean. Nearly 500 years ago, a Portuguese priest stood in this spot watching for the arrival of a long-awaited caravel from home — and dreading the sight of an enemy Dutch warship or Arab pirate dhow.



The island is just off Mozambique's northern coast, opposite Madagascar.

Here, in the Chapel of Nossa Senhora de Baluarte, perched like a holy relic on the eastern spur of Mozambique Island, the centuries melt away. Built in 1522, this masterpiece of Manueline vaulted architecture is Africa's oldest still-intact European struc-

ture. Behind it looms massive Fortaleza de São Sebastião, the largest fortress ever built in sub-Saharan Africa and that once housed thousands of colonial troops.

Together, they tell part of the fascinating story of this tiny crescent-shaped speck of

coral barely 2 miles long by 500 yards wide off Mozambique's northern coast, opposite Madagascar. Founded shortly after Vasco da Gama first came ashore here in 1498, the island that gave this country its name was once the capital of Portugal's African empire and the most important Indian Ocean port south of Mombasa. But after the colonial government moved to Maputo in 1898, Mozambique Island gradually slid into obscurity and became a forgotten, albeit amazingly well-preserved, backwater.

Today, this Indian Ocean outpost where African Muslims live amid the remnants of a long-gone European empire is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, one that few North Americans have likely ever heard of, let alone explored. What draws adventurous travelers to cross the narrow single-lane causeway connecting Mozambique Island with the mainland is the romantic allure of exploring what feels like an abandoned, surreal movie set.

Here, vivid reminders of Portugal's centuries-long marauding African adventure coexist alongside the Arabic seafaring heritage that also produced frangipani- and sandalwood-scented Swahili ports like Lamu and Zanzibar.

See **DISCOVER** Page 3K



The Chapel of Nossa Senhora de Baluarte is perched like a holy relic on the eastern spur of Mozambique Island.

Photos by Mark Sissons/Special Contributor

Discover Mozambique Island's historic charm

Continued from Page 1K

An African ghost town

Mozambique Island's original settlement, Stone Town, has the exotic allure of Zanzibar without the crowds of tourists. Occupying the northern half of the island, it is eerily silent, part sleepy fishing village, part living museum. Twisting, slave-built cobblestone alleys lined with crumbling colonial-era mansions — their yellow, blue, terra cotta and pink facades blistered by the merciless midday sun — converge on town squares ringed by coconut palms swaying in the salty sea breeze.

In 1992, UNESCO bestowed World Heritage Site status on Mozambique Island, largely for its remarkable architectural harmony, the result of centuries of uninterrupted use of the same building techniques, materials and decorative styles. Look for handcrafted wooden doorways and archways carved with Indian, Arab and even Chinese flourishes.

Along Stone Town's waterfront, old Portuguese trading houses still stand. Fishermen loiter beneath them in small groups, waiting for the tides to take them back out to sea



Stone Town, the island's original settlement, is part sleepy fishing village and part living museum. It often feels more like a ghost town.

in the same traditional wooden dhows that have plied Africa's eastern coast for centuries.

In the bay near the wharf, Muslim women hand-wash laundry in the sea, draped in brilliantly colored capulanas, the traditional cloth that women wear as wraparound skirts. Some have painted their faces with musiro, a

wood-based lotion and natural sunscreen.

A place of refuge

The people are descendants of Mozambique's original African Muslim population, which was driven off the island by the invading Portuguese. Muslims only began to return after the Portuguese departed from the island after Mozambique's independence in 1975. With the outbreak of the brutal civil war in 1977, thousands more

reed huts. With their departure, Stone Town again became a ghost town.

Ghosts of doomed mariners still inhabit the Marine Museum, which houses the remains of 16th-century shipwrecks, including remarkably intact Ming porcelain cargo and navigation tools. Maxim guns, cannons and other rusted artifacts of war still litter the courtyard of the Palace and Chapel of São Paulo, built in 1610 as a Jesuit college. It later served as the governor's residence, 5,000 miles from

TRIP.IT
travel. stay. discover.

To Advertise, Call 214.977.7931

Luxury Cruise Presentation
THURSDAY, APRIL 3 • 7-9PM

Regent at Martin Lawrence Galleries
SEVEN SEAS CRUISES (Inside Galleria, 1st Level • Next to Macy's)

Meet Regent's Sales Director
Exclusive Offers • Wine & Hors d'oeuvre

Cruise & Tour Center RSVP Required
www.cruiseturcenter.com **214-206-4488**

VACATION STARTS NOW!

Where Vacation Becomes Adventure



Many women wear brilliantly colored capulanas.

flooded in, desperate to flee the fighting. Most took refuge in the same mansions their former colonial masters had recently abandoned.

"When I was a child this was a very broken place," says James, a man in his mid-30s who offers to show me around Stone Town. "The local Makua people still call this place omuhipiti, or 'refuge,' because so many of them hid here."

After the civil war ended in 1992, many refugees returned to their ancestral mainland homes. Others migrated to the former slave slum on the south end of the island called Macuti Town, an overcrowded traditional settlement of thatched

mother Portugal.

Bidding farewell to Stone Town, I boarded a dhow and set sail across the bay to where I'm staying. A string of luxurious bungalows called Coral Lodge 15.41 is perched on a peninsular headland overlooking a long, sweeping beach. Receding in the setting sun and framed by the white fins of dhows is the Chapel of Nossa Senhora de Baluarte, where so many prayers were uttered, and so many went unanswered, on this resurrected island at the end of the world.

Mark Sissons is a freelance writer based in Vancouver, Canada.

When you go

Getting there

Airlink (flyairlink.com), a subsidiary of South African Airways, offers daily direct flights from Johannesburg to Nampula. From there, road transport can easily be arranged for the three-hour ride to Mozambique Island.

Where to stay

Dutch-owned and -operated Coral Lodge 15.41 is a secluded luxury beach resort and a great base for exploring nearby Mozambique Island. Guests can also go snorkeling, shipwreck diving or fishing, as well as visit the nearby fishing village of Cabaceira Pequena.

Outfitters

Extraordinary Journeys (1-800-403-6012, ejafrica.com) and Absolute Travel (212-627-1950, absolutetravel.com) can arrange customized Mozambique itineraries, including visits to the island.

UNIVERSAL Orlando
VACATION LIKE YOU MEAN IT

Experience the thrills of two amazing theme parks, spectacular on-site hotels, unique dining and entertainment, plus much more at Universal Orlando® Resort. It's an entire universe of fun and excitement for every member of the family.

2-Park Getaway
WITH A 3RD Day FREE

Stay three nights on-site at the new Universal's Cabana Bay Beach Resort (opens March 31) and enjoy three days of Park-to-Park admission.

FROM \$415*
PER ADULT (TAX INCLUDES)

Visit UniversalOrlando.com or contact your preferred travel professional.

All prices, package inclusions & options are subject to change without notice. Additional restrictions may apply. *The 2-Day Park-to-Park with 3rd Day Free Ticket entitles one (1) guest admission to BOTH Universal Studios® and Universal's Islands of Adventure® theme parks on the same day for the duration of the ticket. Ticket is valid for any three (3) calendar days during a fourteen (14) consecutive calendar day period. First use of this ticket must be on or before 5/31/14 and all ticket usage must be completed on or before 5/27/14 when the ticket will expire on full. **Rate is per adult, tax inclusive and based on double adult occupancy for a 3-night stay at Universal's Cabana Bay Beach Resort. Courtesy Family Suite Introductory Rate. Rate valid for bookings NOW - 5/31/14 and travel Sunday - Thursday 4/25 - 5/22/14. Universal Parks & Resorts locations is registered with the State of Florida as a seller of travel. Registration number: 22-12155. TRANSFORMERS and its logo and all related characters are trademarks of Hasbro and are used with permission. © 2014 Hasbro. All Rights Reserved. © 2014 Universal Parks & Resorts. Universal elements and all related indicia TM & © 2014 Universal Studios. © 2014 Universal Orlando. All rights reserved. 1012/2014