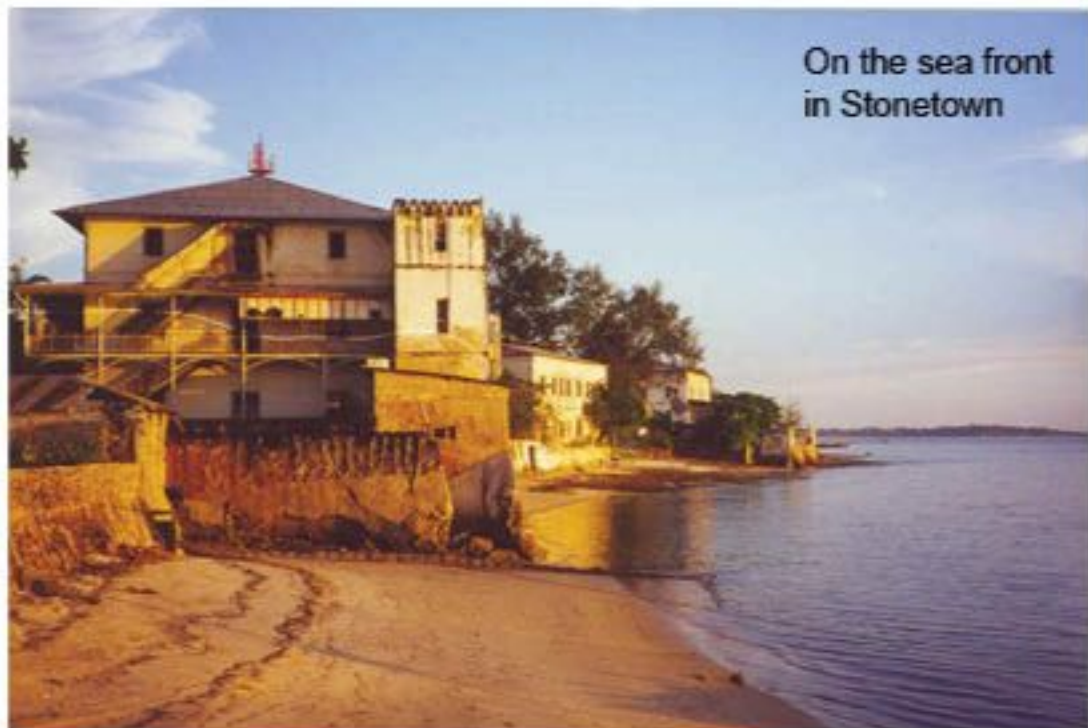


Zanzibar: Culture, Heritage & Sun

ITM correspondent



On the sea front
in Stonetown

Zanzibar is a magical island where Arab, Swahili, Indian and Portuguese cultures exist in a happy symbiosis. The very name conjures up images of ancient markets, fragrant spices and romantic dhows sailing upon the turquoise blue waters of the Indian ocean whose beaches are second to none.

For centuries, Arab traders sailed down the African coast in their dhows searching for ivory, spices and slaves. It was not a one-way trade, as they brought with them their language (eg. the Arab word for coast is "swahil" - hence Swahili) and their religion of Islam. Over 95 per cent of Zanzibaris are Muslims.

The Shirazi Persians, from present-day Iran, arrived in the tenth century. Apparently acting on an omen in a dream, Sultan Hasan set sail in seven dhows which later became separated due to a storm enroute and landed in seven different locations on the coast.

They intermarried with the Africans and integrated well. The Omanis had become increasingly dominant following a series of Portuguese defeats during the 17th Century.

In 1811, the infamous slave market was opened in Stonetown (where the Anglican Cathedral now stands) and in 1832 they moved their Sultanate from Muscat to Zanzibar and grew rich from the profitable slave trade.

Although officially abolished earlier in the British Empire, it was not until 1897 that a halt to the trade in slaves was enforced by the British on a reluctant Sultan. However it continued unabated on the mainland, until the end of WW1 when Britain took control of the former German colony of Tanganyika.

In the post-WW1 era, independence came in 1963. Fueled by African resentment against Arab domination, a bloody revolution rocked the island in early 1964 when thousands of Arabs and Indians were massacred.

Julius Nyerere, the mainland's charismatic reformer, sought to defuse the situation and proposed a union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar. The union eventually came to fruition as the United Republic of Tanzania. To this day, pro and anti-union sentiment informs local politics. Zanzibar has achieved semi-autonomous status with its own president and house of representatives. Tourism continues to grow, providing much-

Forodhani gardens stone town
zanzibar zanzibar tanzania



needed hard currency and employment.

Today Zanzibar is an idyllic beach holiday island with charisma, coconut palms and powder-soft coral sands washed by cobalt clear sea.

Zanzibar beaches are among the best in the world, and have a very special charm; views from the palm-fringed sands reveal the hand-sewn sails of traditional wooden fishing dhows, and ocean explorers discover the glorious depths of thriving coral reefs all around.

Zanzibar Stonetown, a world heritage site, is a unique place. The old city, the cultural heart of Zanzibar, it has changed little during the past 200 years. It has winding alleys, bustling bazaars, mosques and grand Arab houses whose original owners vied with each other over the extravagance of their dwellings. This one-up-manship is particularly reflected in the brass-studded, carved, wooden doors - there are more

than 500 different examples of this handiwork.

The intriguing history of Stonetown tells the story of brave sea traders, explorers, Sultans and the fragrance of exotic spices. The exceptional architecture and construction of the coral stone buildings and narrow streets carries the imprints of the influences of various cultures and traditions brought in by the Stone Town inhabitants.

Prison Island the site of a goal for misbehaving slaves, lies just off Stonetown. It is fringed with a beautiful coral reef, ideal for snorkeling, and has a lovely white beach for sun-bathing.

It is also home to a family of giant tortoises, imported from the Seychelles in the late 19th century. This island is ideal for a day-trip with refreshments available throughout the day. It also has a small restaurant specialising in freshly caught fish.

Apart from Stonetown Zanzibar has many other wonderful



Indian wooden door in Stonetown

attractions. Commonly known as the "Spice Island" it is famous for spices such as cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, vanilla, cardamom, pepper and many others which brought the Sultans of Oman and the beginnings of the infamous slave trade. They can be seen in the plantations just outside Zanzibar town, and a good tour includes opportunities to dazzle the senses with fresh spices. A detailed description is given about a variety of spices, and their uses in cooking

and cosmetics. Visitors will be fascinated by the sheer number of spices produced and their incredible value for many ailments. This is also the cheapest place to purchase spices and spice oils.

The Jozani Natural Forest Reserve is located in the central east region of Zanzibar island and is home to the rare Red Colobus Monkey endemic to Zanzibar. These monkeys are full of character, and roam freely. They



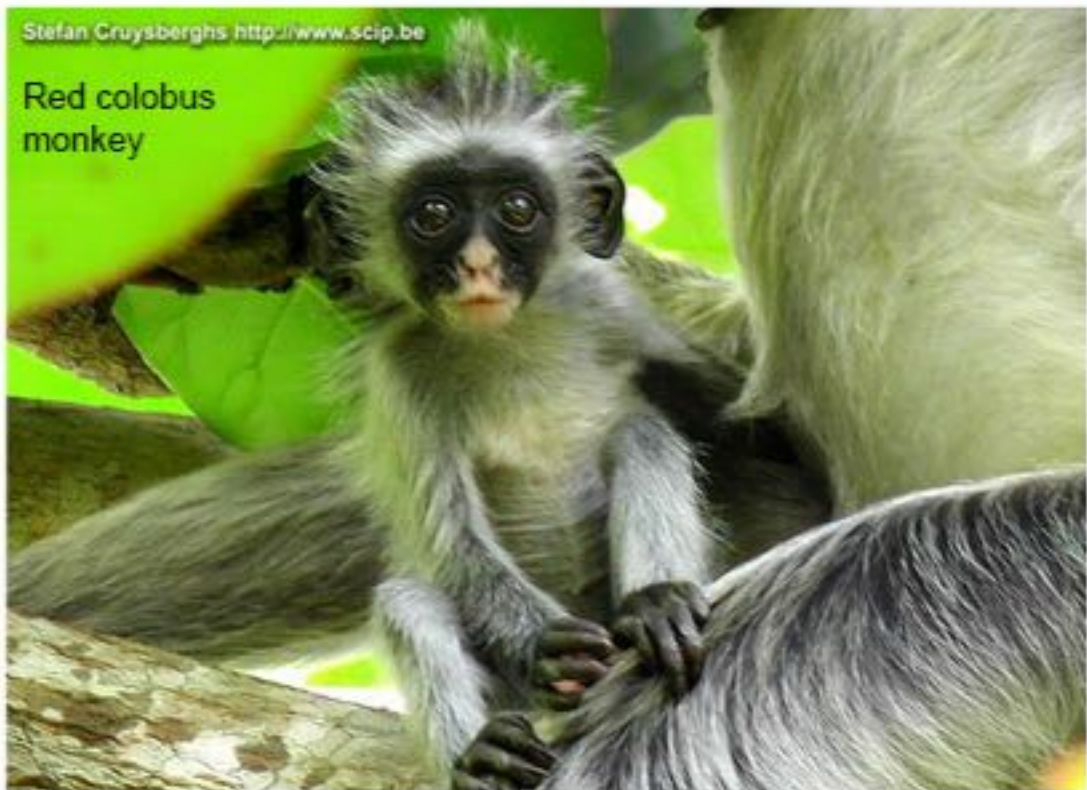
Prison Islande

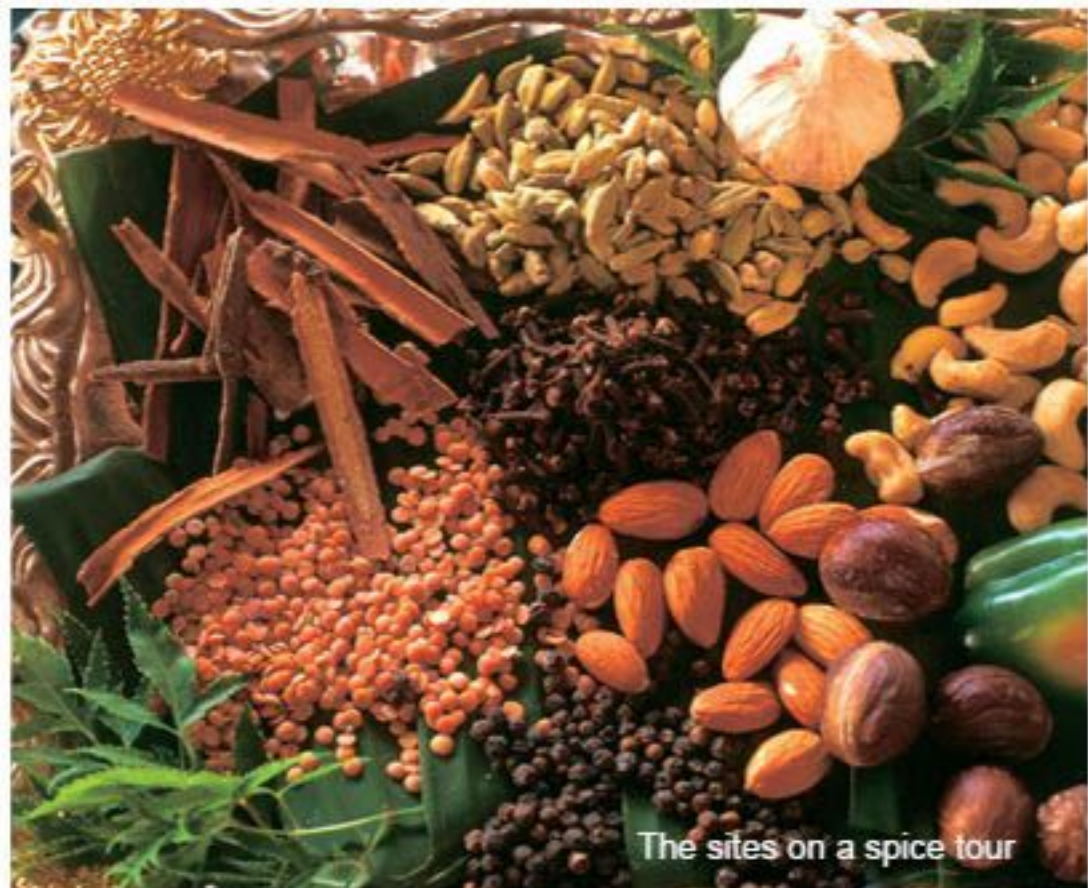
Ras Nungwi



Stefan Cruysberghs <http://www.scip.be>

Red colobus
monkey





The sites on a spice tour

can also be seen at very close quarters just outside the reserve's perimeter and are incredibly photogenic. Jozani is home to other species including Syke's monkey's, small buck and bushpigs. The elusive Zanzibar leopard (last sighted several years ago) is said to feed here at night - perhaps this is why the reserve is only open during the day?! Jozani has an excellent nature trail and

the guides are well trained and informative.

Tours to the unspoilt north coast always end up at Ras Nungwi, a sleepy fishing village on the northern tip of Zanzibar island. It is the dhow building capital of Zanzibar, and visitors can see the traditional methods of dhow construction in action. This area of Zanzibar has some fantastic

beaches and nearby coral reefs which are ideal for diving and snorkeling. The local villagers have built a turtle sanctuary where injured turtles and other marine animals are nursed back to health before being released back into the warm waters of the Indian Ocean.

A trip to Zanzibar can be combined with a holiday to Tanzania, famous Serengeti national park and

Ngorongoro Crater. It is also a fascinating stand alone destination for young and old, families, couples and single independent travellers.

* Zanzibar Festival Tours specialises in small group tours to Zanzibar's famous music and film festivals, custom-made holidays and mainland safaris. Contact Graham Bleadsdale UK free phone 0800 542 1200, www.zanzibarbestivaltours.com



Zanzibar Leopard