

Sampling a taste of the Spice Islands

AFRICA is swaggering with a new-found confidence in its food culture. From street food to fine dining, it's fast becoming a global destination for its spicy, fresh produce.

South Africa is currently leading the charge thanks to Le Quartier Français and Test Kitchen, both of which made it into the World's 100 Best Restaurant awards this year.

I came to Zanzibar on a hunt for luxe, ethical accommodation but it was the archipelago's food culture that really stood out.

Zanzibar is one of east Africa's most culturally diverse and tropical destinations, thanks to its position in the Indian Ocean. Centuries of trade winds have blown Arab, Persian, Shirazi, Omani, African and European explorers through Zanzibar. All have left their mark on its cuisine, helping it gain its Spice Islands name.

Street food is as alive here as it is anywhere else in Africa and an evening visit to Forodhani Gardens, a small park in Unguja's Stone Town, is one of the best ways to see what the Indian Ocean has to offer.

Fishermen steer us to stalls filled with kingfish, marlin, octopus, lobster, tuna, snapper and barracuda, which sizzle alongside barbecued breadfruit, green banana and naan. There are also stalls selling Zanzibar pizza, a local delicacy.

'It is almost like pizza but is cooked on top of the stove, not in an oven, and instead of regular cheese, Zanzibar pizzas are made from

Places such as Zanzibar are no longer just honeymoon destinations, they're now becoming foodie pilgrimages too, says *Helen Jennings*

cream cheese,' says food blogger Miriam Rose Kinunda. We add eggs and spices to ours.

'There are always new food stalls cropping up, so it's hard to keep up,' says Kinunda. 'But there are regular bites that many Tanzanians and tourists love, such as fish katlesi, samosa, bhajia, kachori and chapatis.'

OUR bellies full, we visit Kizimbani Spice Farm, about 30 miles north-east of Stone Town, to feed our brains. Our guide, Benjamin, shows us clove bushes, encourages us to crush curry and basil leaves between our fingers, digs up cassava root and teaches us about the medicinal properties of ginger, cinnamon and nutmeg.

Finally, we escape the heat of the capital city and take a plane, bus and boat to Pemba island, where we're delivered to the remote shores of Fundu Lagoon.

This luxury resort is made up of thatched suites overlooking a sandy beach. Fundu's farmer shows us flying foxes – bats that were once hunted for food but are now a pro-



Mouthwatering fare: Vendors in Forodhani Gardens sell fresh seafood



EATING OUT

Archipelago

For super-fresh seafood such as marlin, swordfish and juicy king prawns at affordable prices, head to this Stone Town institution run by Zanzibari Masoud and his Australian wife, Judi. For dessert, try the sticky date pudding or passion fruit crème brûlée. www.archipelago-restaurant.co.uk



Emerson Spice

This tea house is perched on top of the charming and chic Emerson Spice hotel and offers a panoramic view across Stone Town. Matt Dillon and Juliette Binoche have stayed here but, more importantly, try the light, six-course dinner, which features the freshest seafood cooked with Zanzibari spices at around \$25 (£16) a head. www.emersonspice.com

The Rock

If you want to escape town and get straight to the Indian Ocean, head to Michamvi, where you'll find this fish restaurant (pictured above right). It is perched on a rock in the sea and, depending on the tide, you will have to walk or wade to it. Try the gnocchi with vanilla and prawns. www.therockrestaurantzanzibar.com

tested species – as well as his pepper, aubergine, banana and watermelon crops. He gives us handfuls of lemongrass and mint for us to make into tea and, that evening, we dine on corn fritters, samosas, bean stew and coconut cake.

Zanzibar is yet to make its mark on the world's fine dining scene but for fresh, spicy food steeped in history, it's definitely winning.

Helen flew to Tanzania with British Airways, Tel: 0844 493 0787, www.britishairways.com. Return flights from London start from £684. She flew on to Zanzibar with Zan Air, www.zanair.com. Accommodation and transfers booked with Sally And Alice Travel Co. Tel: 07780 870 085, www.sallyandalice.com. For an online guide to Zanzibar's food and culture, visit www.mambomagazine.com



ROAM
the **GLOBE**
with Lisa Scott

This week, Lisa takes us on a tour of Mexico's Mayan celebrations. Where do you think we should go next? Tweet your suggestions to @LisaScott



DAY ZERO FESTIVAL

With less than one month until the Mayan-predicted apocalypse, it's time to start thinking about your final hours on Earth. We suggest you head to the Caribbean coast of Mexico and dance for 24 hours. Day Zero Festival, presented by Crosstown Rebels, takes place in a pyramid site set between two lakes in Playa del Carmen, and was conceived by label head Damian Lazarus, who is flying out Jamie

Jones, Infinity Ink and Art Department, among others. The party starts at 6pm on December 20 and will finish with a set from Lazaurus (pictured below left), who says it's not the end of the world – just the beginning of a new chapter. Tickets, £32. www.dayzerofestival.com

END OF THE WORLD CRUISE

The (Not The) End Of The World Cruise will appeal to those of you who aren't convinced the world will fall into the sun before Christmas. On board the Norwegian Pearl will be an army of scientists, astronomy professors, science-fiction writers and an astronaut, who will educate guests as they sail around the Caribbean, stopping at Ochos Rios in Jamaica, George Town in the Cayman Islands and, finally, Mayan ruins in Cozumel. Scientists may not believe



the prediction but they do appreciate the ingenuity of the civilisation that, in 800AD, lived in a city five times larger than London. Cabins from £377. www.end-of-the-world-cruise.com

ME HOTEL OOZES STYLE

There aren't plenty of cool, credible hotels in Cancun but ME by Melia, a South Beach-style 448-room property, stands out from the generic hotel

crowd. Recently awarded Trip Advisor's Travellers' Choice award, ME is shaped like a huge pyramid, reminiscent of Mayan ruins. It's also home to a bar owned by Rande Gerber, Cindy Crawford's husband. To see in this new era, the hotel is throwing a party in its Beachhouse to the sounds of DJ Antu Coimbra and a fire and percussion show. From £200 per night. www.me-cancun.com

