



# A terrific trip to Tanzania

*A successful melting pot of diverse religions and cultures in the heart of Africa*

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**T**anzania is made up of two separate countries, Tanganyika (on the mainland of Africa) and Zanzibar (an archipelago in the Indian Ocean). Tanganyika is almost twice the size of France and has a population of about 42 million. On the east lies the Indian Ocean while eight other countries are on its remaining borders. It contains Africa's largest lake (Victoria), its highest mountain (Kilimanjaro) and many wildlife sanctuaries, including the famous Ngorongoro Crater and Serengeti national parks. The country has eight world heritage sites and one-quarter of its land mass has been set aside for conservation.

Mainland Tanzania is one of the oldest inhabited areas on our planet, and fossil remains of our early human ancestors have been found dating back almost 4 million years. About 3,000 years ago, Bantu-speaking people arrived from western Africa. Somewhat later, another group, the Masai, migrated there from Egypt and Sudan. Monsoon currents and winds from the Indian Ocean brought sailors, traders and travelers to the coast of the mainland as well as Zanzibar as early as the first millennium. They hailed from Persia, Arabia and India and introduced their cultures, including Islam and Hinduism. Persian traders used Zanzibar as a base for voyages between the Middle East, India and Africa and there was active trade with China, Indonesia and Malaysia.

During the Age of Exploration, the Portuguese gained control of the coastal area and Zanzibar and their influence lasted more than 100 years. A new power, Oman, ousted the Portuguese and Zanzibar became the flourishing center of the spice market and ivory trade. It was during this time that the notorious slave market was established. More than 1 million slaves were traded over the course of 60 years, and Zanzibar became so prosperous that in 1841, Sultan Seyyid Said moved the capital of his Omani empire there from Muscat, in the Arabian peninsula.

In the last decades of the 19th century, the mainland came under the rule of Germany. Following World War I, this area was given to the British and the mainland was named Tanganyika. In 1961, there was a relatively peaceful transition to independence in Tanganyika and Julius Nyerere was elected its first president. Zanzibar gained independence from Britain in 1963. In 1964, a bloody revolution broke out on the island and resulted in the removal of the sultan and the establishment of a republic which merged with Tanganyika. The united country was renamed Tanzania.

Nyerere was a real nation builder who succeeded brilliantly in forging national identity in a country with 129 different tribes. This had the effect of blurring ethnic and religious affiliations. Because of Nyerere's efforts, Tanzanians pride themselves on living together and the country is free of trib-

alism which has plagued so many other independent African states with such disastrous consequences. Independent of their religious affiliations, the people regard themselves first and foremost as Tanzanian.

Nyerere also embarked on a program committed to socialism and nationalized banks and many large industries. This disastrous economic policy rapidly bankrupted the country, which sank deeper and deeper into debt, and he eventually resigned. Capitalist reforms were instituted which have improved the situation to some degree. The economy is based mostly on agriculture, but it has many resources including gold and natural gas. Tourism also plays a vital part in the economy.

About 90 percent of the population comprises indigenous African tribes, although there are also other groups including the Masai and a minority of people of Indian, Pakistani, Arab and European origin. The two main spoken languages are English and Swahili. On the mainland, one-third of the population is Sunni and one-third Christian. The remainder follow traditional African beliefs. Despite the mixed religious affiliations, there has only been one terrorist incident. In 1998, al-Qaida carried out truck bomb explosions at the US embassy in Dar es Salaam.

In an attempt to develop the interior of this vast country, a new planned city, Dodoma, was declared the capital in 1973. This followed a pattern established by Peter the Great, who moved the Russian capital west to St Petersburg, and Juscelino Kubitschek, who established Brasilia to develop Brazil's interior.

The country's major seaport and principal commercial center is Dar es Salaam, a name derived from the Arabic "house of peace." One hundred years ago, Dar, as it is affectionately referred to by its inhabitants, was a minor coastal fishing village; today it has a population approaching 4 million. The bustling harbor is teeming with freighters, oil tankers and dhows. Most government offices and diplomatic missions are here. The rapid expansion of the city has produced overcrowding and there is a lack of basic infrastructure. A large percentage of the city's population remains without electricity, running water and sanitation.

The British divided the city into distinct areas based on racial divisions. To a certain extent these quarters still persist. In the former Indian and Swahili zones, streets are crowded with masses of people and a cacophony of sounds. There are Masai medicine men in red garb selling their traditional medicines as well as street sellers and other vendors of all sorts. There are Indian women in their saris, Muslims in white garments with white caps and Swahili women in black. Bazaars, teeming markets and small stores are to be seen everywhere, together with numerous mosques and Hindu temples. Perhaps the most interesting market is the Kivukoni fish market where fish of every shape and size are sold.

The former European zone borders the Indian Ocean and is characterized by tree-lined avenues and stone buildings. We stayed at the Southern Sun, one of Dar's

leading hotels with excellent amenities and a most helpful staff. It is situated near the botanical gardens in the heart of the former European zone and is in walking distance of the major tourist attractions.

The few tourist destinations in Dar can be explored on foot. In the city center is the bronze Askari Monument dedicated to Africans killed during World War I. The red-roofed Lutheran church built by German missionaries is a prominent landmark. There is the Ocean Road Hospital with its Moorish-influenced architecture. Nobel Prize winning German scientist Robert Koch spent some time there. The national museum contains the fossil discoveries from Olduvai Gorge, including footprints believed to be 3.6 million years old.

The name Zanzibar is derived from Persian and means "the sea of the blacks." The archipelago is approximately 25-50 kilometers off the coast. It consists of two large islands, Unjuga and Pemba, and numerous smaller ones. The people are mostly of Bantu origin, but there is also a large presence of Muslims from Arab countries as well as Indians. Unlike the mainland, 97% of the population of Zanzibar is Muslim and the remaining 3% is made up of Christians, Hindus and Sikhs. The economy is based primarily on spices and tourism.

THE CAPITAL city, situated on Unjuga, is known as Stone Town and it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is a unique example of cultural fusion and harmonization. The presence of mosques, churches, Hindu temples and Omani palaces is testament to more than a thousand years of mutual tolerance among communities of different cultural origin. The architecture is an amalgam of Moorish, Arab, Persian, Indian, African and European styles.

The name Stone Town comes from the use of coral as the main construction material. The town is a maze of narrow winding alleys and resembles an Arabian shukh with simple as well as grand dwellings, shops and bazaars. The town exudes atmosphere and new exotic vistas unfold at every corner. Buildings often have large verandas protected by carved wooden balustrades. Many houses have prominent brass-studded, finely decorated wooden doors, with rich carvings and bas-reliefs.

We stayed in the upscale luxury boutique Zanzibar Palace Hotel located in the heart of Stone Town. It is an old structure which has been lovingly restored by the Dutch owners, who ensured that our every need was taken care of. There are nine rooms on three floors. The décor is an amalgam of Indian, Arabian and European styles. Each suite is unique and is furnished with locally made antique pieces and Persian rugs. Plumbing and toilet facilities were modern. The hotel was fully air-conditioned with cable TV. There is also a high-class Sea Grill restaurant run by Gilbert, an experienced Belgian chef.

Several major historical buildings are found on the seafloor and include the former sultan's palaces and the fort. The most popular meeting place is the "Big Tree," an old fig tree located in front of the ferry

boarding pier. The most clearly identifiable landmark is the House of Wonders with its clock tower. Built in 1883, it was the former sultan's residence and the first building in Zanzibar to have electricity and an elevator. Currently it serves as a museum on Swahili and Zanzibar culture. The Old Fort is a heavy stone fortress that was built in the 17th century. The internal courtyard is now a cultural center with shops. Live dance and music shows are frequently held there.

The Anglican cathedral, built in a neo-Gothic style, is situated in the city center in an area which previously hosted the largest slave market on Zanzibar. Indeed the altar is located in the exact spot where slaves were bound and whipped. They were kept under the most appalling conditions. Their dingy windowless cells can still be seen adjacent to the cathedral. Each cell housed 75 slaves with a pit in the center serving as a toilet. Although slavery was officially abolished in England and most of the British Empire in 1833, it remained rampant in Zanzibar and the slave trade became the main revenue for the island. Slavery was reluctantly abolished by the sultan under pressure from Britain in 1873, although it still operated illegally until 1897.

A small park known as the Forodhani Gardens is located in the main sea walk of Stone Town. From here magnificent sunsets can be seen. Young boys dive into the polluted water and play on the beach. Every evening after sunset, this site becomes a popular market selling seafood.

North of Stone Town are the ruins of Mtoni Palace, one of the largest residences of the sultans. At one time, more than a thousand people lived here. Besides the sultan, this included his three wives, numerous children and hundreds of concubines. Around the 1880s it was abandoned and later destroyed by a fire. Despite the ruins, the palace still offers a glimpse into the world of Arabian royalty. There are reception halls, courtyards, gardens and a well preserved bathing complex.

Zanzibar was once the world's leading producer of cloves, and it is possible to visit the famous spice plantations in Kidichi. In addition to cloves, one can see, feel and taste cinnamon, ginger, vanilla, tamarind, menthol, nutmeg and vanilla growing in their natural state. Spices were crucial to the trade routes and were used in traditional dishes, as cures for ailments and even for dyeing ceremonial outfits.

The small Changau Island, about 800 meters long, is just northwest of Stone Town. Originally used as a transit camp for slaves, the British erected buildings which were to be utilized as a prison. However it became a quarantine station for yellow fever. Today the buildings have been converted to a hotel. The island also houses a collection of endangered giant Aldabra tortoises.

About 25 kilometers north of Stone Town, is the Mangapwani Slave Chamber. There are two rectangular cells hewn out of rock sealed by a heavy door to conceal the slaves. Boats from the mainland would unload their human cargo on the nearby beach, and the slaves would be kept here before being taken

to Stone Town for resale. Tragically even after the abolition of slavery in 1873, the cave still continued to operate illegally because of the lucrative black market for slaves.

Zanzibar is most renowned for its beautiful pristine sandy beaches and coral reefs. Some of the finest beaches are situated on the island's east coast. Many are undergoing rapid development with the building of new hotels and upscale resorts. On this coast, the ocean recedes about 1 km. at low tide, so swimming adjacent to the shore is only possible at high tide. The reef barrier lies a short distance from the shore. The adventurous settle for scuba diving, while the less enterprising take a ride on a dhow and snorkel in the reef.

WE STAYED in Jambiani, a picturesque village with colorful bazaars and a beach with miles of white sand. This area has escaped modernization and here it is possible to get a feeling of authentic 19th century Zanzibar. The village is adjacent to the beach, which enables tourists to mingle with the friendly locals who greet everyone with a smile and "jambo," hello in Swahili. Another favorite expression is "hakuna matata," "don't worry be happy." In Jambiani, waves litter the beach with seaweed at low tide. This is collected and dried by locals and subsequently sold to exporters.

Our charming hotel, the Coral Rock, is situated in a magnificent setting on the beach and is managed by expatriate South Africans, Gillian and Neil Cave. It consists of several simple but more than adequate bungalows. The owners ensure that there is a pleasant and lively atmosphere. The restaurant is excellent. They even gave me an impromptu birthday party.

On the beach in Jambiani, local conservative Muslim inhabitants come into contact with bikini-clad tourists. This uncommon mixing is rather unique but here it is tolerated. The government turns a blind eye, realizing that tourism is the lifeline of the country. This idyllic state belies the true situation. Infrastructure is still minimal. Zanzibar is almost totally dependent on the mainland even for its electricity, which is supplied via a submarine cable. The island frequently suffers power failures which can be sporadic or last for as long as a few months. Many upscale hotels and restaurants often have to rely on their own generators.

In the recent presidential election, in spite of accusations of irregularities, the incumbent was reelected. Hopefully the government will make a great effort to curb corruption, improve infrastructure on both the mainland and Zanzibar and boost the living standard of all citizens. Development of natural resources should be a major priority. This will give the country a chance to fulfill its enormous potential.

The writer, emeritus professor of medicine, is an avid traveler and photographer. He writes reviews and lectures on medical topics, music, art, history and travel. Additional pictures of Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam can be seen at <http://www.phbase.com/irspitz/zanzibar>. Other pictures, articles and reviews can be seen at [www.irvingspitz.com](http://www.irvingspitz.com)



**TERRIFIC TANZANIA:** (Clockwise from top left)  
• Women in Jambiani sorting and packaging seaweed for the market  
• Sailing on a dhow off Jambiani Beach  
• Traditional medicine man with his wares in Dar es Salaam  
• Encountering a peacock with a giant Aldabra tortoise on Changuu Island  
• Jambiani women  
• View of harbor and city development from the roof of the Mkapu Pension Towers, the tallest building in Dar es Salaam  
• A view of Stone Town

(Photographs by Irving Spitz)

