

SPICE ISLAND

Even the word 'Zanzibar' sounds exotic, romantic and mysterious. The small island off the coast of Tanzania has fragrant spice plantations, beautiful beaches and a very colourful history, as Carolyn Lockhart discovers.

An avenue of huge mango trees, planted by a beautiful sultan's daughter long ago, forms a canopy above the busy road. Legend has it that each tree marks the grave of a murdered lover, beheaded when the princess grew tired of them.

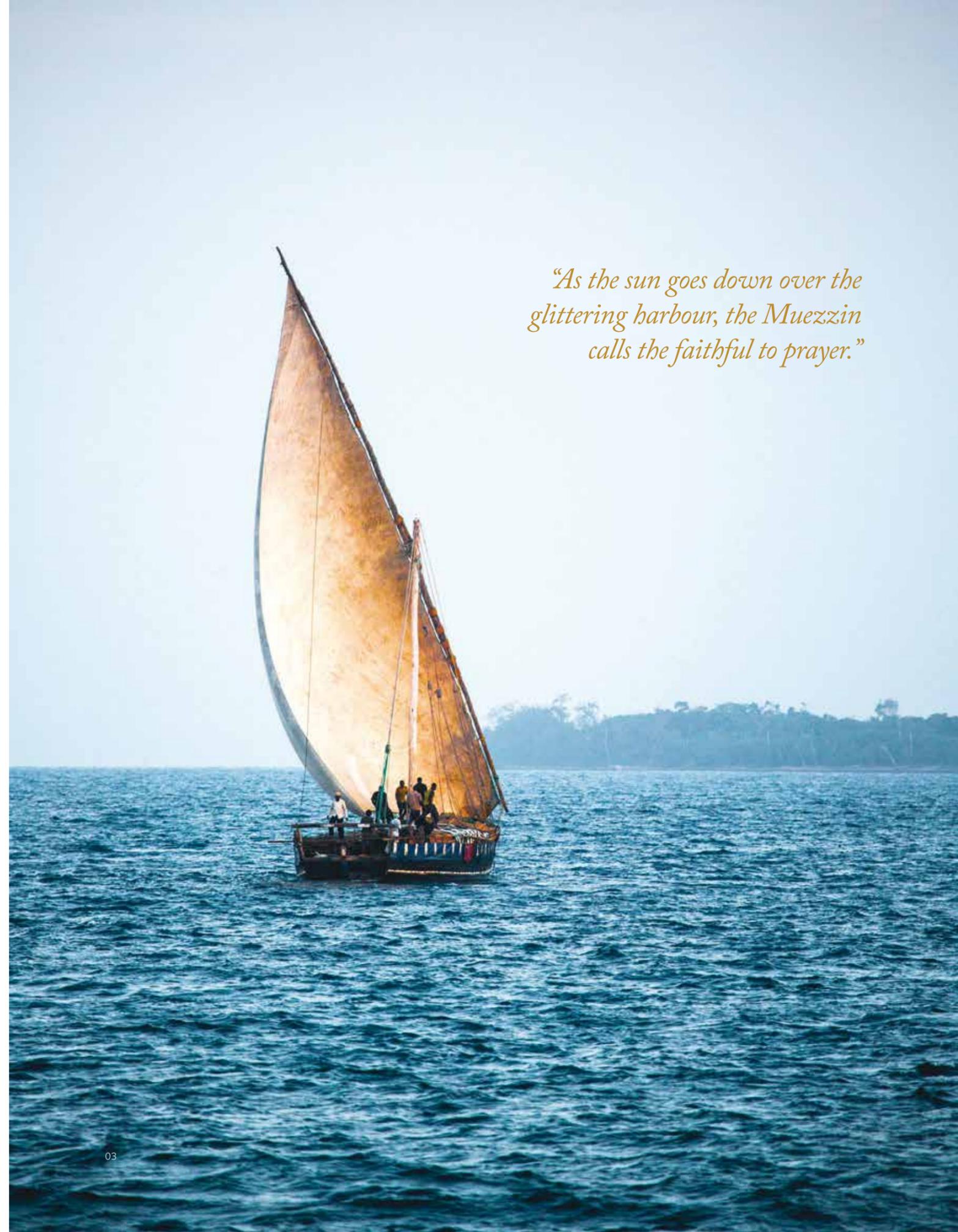
Rickety market tables are set up along the roadside as women and girls inspect the meagre produce. Printed cotton of gloriously clashing colours cover their heads and fall over long black robes. Parrot green, pomegranate red and deep purple frame dark faces. A woman wearing a saffron turban sells neatly tied piles of sticks.

Thanks to Abercrombie & Kent, we are on our way in a comfortable car from the hot, chaotic Zanzibar

International Airport to the cool luxury of The Residence Zanzibar. This modern resort on the southwest coast promises "a dream fit for a sultan" set on 32 hectares trimmed with white sand and coconut palms.

Although it's a fascinating destination in itself, Zanzibar is an ideal place to relax either before or after an African safari; the game parks and camps of mainland Tanzania are a short flight away.

The Residence Zanzibar is about an hour's drive from the airport and the historic capital of Stone Town. The roadside market soon gives way to vegetation and plantations, but the road is bumpy and we're glad to reach the airy porticos of The Residence where a warm welcome awaits us.



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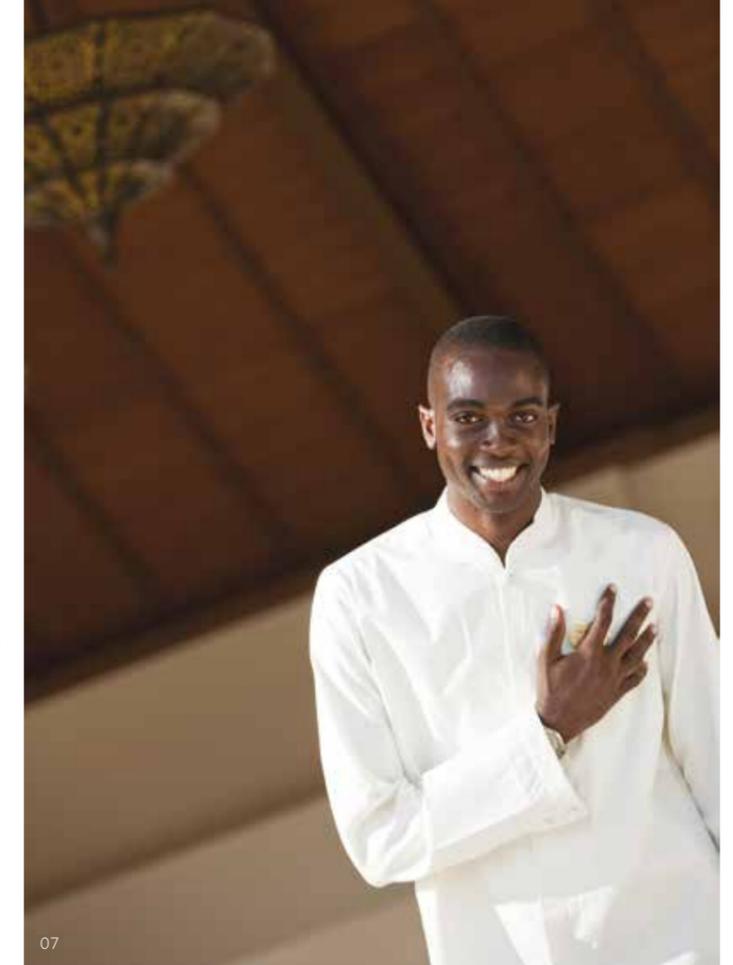
Our spacious villa is one of 66 strung along the white-sand beach. We have a private pool set in our own little garden and it's just steps to the beach. Pale blue bicycles are propped near our door, but there is also an efficient golf buggy service: "Just call and he will come."

At the main resort area you can sip a cool drink by the pool, gazing at the beach and Indian Ocean beyond. There's a splendid spa and a list of water sports and local excursions to choose from, but many guests are content to just sit on the beach under a thatched umbrella as waiters pass with chilled watermelon and cool drinks.

In the evenings hundreds of blue-painted lanterns are lit and little tables are set up on the white sands for romantic dinners.

Reminders of the past

World Heritage-listed Stone Town is the historic heart of Zanzibar. Its fascinating, often cruel and violent history goes back thousands of years. Zanzibar was



01 The Residence Zanzibar is friendly and welcoming 02 Serena Hotel relaxation
03 Sailing with the Park Hyatt 04 The white sands of The Residence Zanzibar
05 The bathroom of The Residence's Presidential Villa 06 Lobster at The
Residence 07 Butler service with a smile

a trade centre for slaves, ivory and spices, attracting Arab, Indian, African, Portuguese and English merchants, who built palaces and houses.

There are still grim reminders of the ruthless trade that lasted into the 20th century, although much of the old slave market has been covered by an Anglican cathedral and memorial museum.

We wander the labyrinthine streets and laneways too narrow for cars, but full of vivid life. Stalls sell beadwork, cheap harem trousers and the marvellous Swahili cotton cloth called *kanga* with its riotous patterns. The lengths are big enough for a tablecloth and cost about US\$10 after a spot of bargaining.

We discover a wonderful shop owned by local designer Doreen Mashika, who trained in Europe. She stocks a small range of couture clothing and the most fabulous handbags made of local fabrics.

Stone Town has some sophisticated places to stay, such as Park Hyatt Zanzibar and the elegant Zanzibar Serena Hotel, which is renowned for its seafood buffet served on the waterfront terrace.

For a truly romantic experience, book ahead for a magical dinner at Emerson Spice's Rooftop Tea House Restaurant.

As the sun goes down over the glittering harbour, the Muezzin calls the faithful to prayer. We sip our drinks sitting on huge kanga-covered floor cushions. As we feast on spice-salted squid, pumpkin with saffron tagine and slow-cooked goat with plum and hibiscus, we are entertained by haunting music played on antique instruments. ♦

Travel file

Information
abercrombiekent.com.au

Accommodation
cenizaro.com/theresidencezanzibar.park.hyatt.com
serenahotels.com

Shopping
doreenmashika.com

Dining
emersonspice.com