



A taste of paradise

Zanzibar, off the east coast of Africa, has one golf course. But that was sufficient for Sarah Forrest to visit the archipelago and discover that even here there is more than enough to satisfy the holiday golfer



Jambo! That's the cheerful cry from the locals as you come out of the airport, hot and sticky from your flight into Zanzibar. Then you're met with the hustle from taxi drivers vying for your business to wherever you want to go.

Learning very quickly that bartering was the norm, we negotiated a decent price to our final destination, **Sea Cliff Golf Resort & Spa** on Zanzibar's West side, 40 minutes away.

Zanzibar is in fact two islands, Pemba being the lesser known, less populated and apparently

less touristy than Unguja, the larger, more populated, island.

Sea Cliff on Unguja, Zanzibar is an all-inclusive resort, and when I say all inclusive it really did have everything from great food to all sort of sports and activities offering so much to do to satisfy even the fussiest of family members.

Keen to get out onto the onsite golf course, the next morning there was a buffet breakfast; a smorgasbord of treats to set you up for the day. In 30 degrees of heat we walked the five

minutes to the golf course, slowing coming down the hill to overlook the private beach with the golf course beyond, dhows at sail on the clear blue ocean, adding depth to this spectacular view.

There are just nine holes and greens to this golf course, but with two tee positions you can play 18 holes. The reality is that golf is one of many things on offer at Sea Cliff. We used their golf clubs which were all branded, and were certainly good enough to satisfy the holiday golfer in this tropical paradise.

With a tropical rainstorm the day before, we simply teed up the golf ball to save any mud splashes and any further damage to the course. The blades of grass were each thick and crept along the ground to matt together, forming a green covering, easy enough to play from whilst on the fairway, but the rough was a challenge of its own, in fact if the ball went into the deep rough, even if you saw its exact entry point, finding it was another story. Tropical golf does throw up alternative challenges; greens are often baked and difficult to hit without it rolling for miles, so having that rain made them much more receptive. The greens are also relatively flat, with the odd one being tiered to mix it up a bit. This Peter Matkovich design of par threes, fours and fives with water in play, where bougainvillea dotted its splash of colour amongst the varying shades of

green with the clear blue sky and puff ball white clouds, was a sight to behold.

Our second game bought the added challenge of a warm wind channeling itself down the fairway towards the tee box. For me, a challenging hole was hole two, not for its length, more for the ability to manage your shot down the split fairway. Split by a small island of long grass; going for either side only gave a narrow target off the tee. Day one I took a driver, missed the island but hit it too far right and ended 'up the hill' on the other side in thick grass. We found the ball and I chipped high onto the green in regulation. Subsequent games I played with a more sensible hybrid. Hole nine / 18 is the signature hole, a par three of 130 to 145 metres, with rubbish at the front – tropical rubbish admittedly! – and multiple bunkers guarding the green. One has to be able to fly over all of this and land it softly on the green, which sloped back to front.

We managed to play three rounds of nine holes during our time at Sea Cliff, each time being hotter than the previous, we conquered this by playing at 4pm, then watching the sunset over the signature hole with the ocean as the backdrop, as we relished a Kilimanjaro beer in the stylish, friendly clubhouse.

All evening meals with the pool as the backdrop were themed buffets. We

dined Italian continental, Swahili and barbecue. A good selection of meat, fish and vegetables were available after a tasty salad bar. The food was mostly locally sourced and cooked to perfection. During Swahili night we got to try 'Zanzibar Pizza', best described as a lighter tasty calzone filled with minced cooked chicken, cheese and peppers.

We took a few excursions from Sea Cliff to beak up our golf, beach and poolside enjoyment. Historically known as



golf in Africa

spice islands, visiting a spice farm was a must for me. Cloves are the main spice commodity that Zanzibar still excels in, with locals being encouraged to farm themselves to sell to local government for on-selling.

With a white fronted beach and picture-postcard trees, Prison Island rises out of the bright blue Indian Ocean. Take a water taxi to this unique island that was never a prison! The British clearly had second thoughts as imprisonment may be seen as a treat – to be banished to such a beautiful place! A gift from the Seychelles, large tortoise are kept in a sanctuary as a protected animal with a keeper on site. The oldest tortoise being nearly 200 years old and showing no signs of slowing down, no pun intended!

Our trip to Jozani Forest was a must to see the red and blue monkeys which reside in that one location on the



island. The Zanzibar red colobus is a species of red colobus monkey endemic to Unguja. A walk around the 5,000 hectares revealed the red monkey, easily identifiable as the four fingered monkey, and the blue monkey, similar in size and not too dissimilar in colour but has four fingers and a thumb, and is therefore much more dexterous when climbing the trees.

The last night we stayed at Jafferji House & Spa in the centre of Stone Town. This traditional Zanzibar hotel had the look and feel of a Moroccan hotel, it was incredibly comfortable and a great place to base yourself as you take in this busy, vibrant city. Try out their Cinnamon Spa, what better way to say good bye than with a relaxing back massage.

With 'Hakuna Matata' ringing in our ears, we left this tropical paradise promising to return one day. TGB

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