



The narrow, bumpy streets of Zanzibar City are an assault on the senses after a five-and-a-half-hour flight. But then, kaleidoscopic markets, speeding mopeds and unruly riders on rickety bikes slowly make way for lofty coconut palms, swaying calmly as if to welcome us to their exotic home.

For those looking to escape the UAE's summer heat, Zanzibar is a tonic. Proximity to the equator means both main islands forming the Zanzibar archipelago - Unguja and Pemba - have temperatures ranging from the mid-20°C to the low-30°C year-round and, as you're never far from the coast, humidity is tempered by a refreshing sea breeze.

A reliable rainy season from March to May nurtures lush, green vegetation and abundant wildlife.

We hadn't allowed ourselves to get too excited about our Zanzibar trip until we had two negative PCR results in hand, the new norm for overseas travel. Dubai International Airport was eerily quiet and any queues moved fast. Before we landed in Abeid Amani Karume International Airport, five kilometres south of Zanzibar City, we had to fill out a travel visa document and a Covid-19 health form. Zanzibar visas cost \$50 (Dh180) per head.

It's a 90-minute drive from the airport to The Residence Zanzibar, near Kizimkazi on the south-west coast. Steeped

in spice-scented sea air, our European-style villa comes with indoor and outdoor rain showers and a private pool. Bicycles are parked outside. I strap in my son, 2, and ride through tropical gardens that are home to wild red colobus monkeys, a Zanzibar native. They dance through the palms overhead, delighting our children. One scampers over to snatch a banana from an outstretched hand.

Both boys happily ensconced in the children's club, we explore the mile-long beach. It's too shallow for swimming so instead, we paddle in a glass-walled infinity pool. There's also an on-site spa, gym and open-air yoga studio.

Boasting coconuts, cloves and cardamom, mangoes and mangroves, lobster, lemon-grass and limes, these Spice Islands may seem worlds from the UAE, but their intertwined trading histories explain the startling similarities. As well as Swahili and English, Arabic is spoken here and 95 per cent of the island's 1.5 million residents are Muslim.

A 40-minute drive takes us east to Zanzibar White Sand Luxury Villas & Spa, the only Relais & Chateaux property in Tanzania, on the kitesurfing haven of Paje beach. This boutique hotel offers 11 luxury villas; ours is beachfront with its own dining lounge, sun deck and pool. We're invited to WhatsApp our private butler Joseph with any requests and so, when our youngest has a

SEA AIR WITH A SCENT OF SPICE

► Moderate temperatures, tropical vistas and child-friendly retreats make Zanzibar a firm family favourite, discovers **Yvonne Kerr**

fever, we ask for a doctor, who arrives in 20 minutes. Harvey is fine after a good sleep and a dose of Panadol.

No expense has been spared in the rooms, which are fitted with Bosch speakers, a Smeg kettle and designer fittings. The hotel sits on four hectares of lush gardens - 100,000 tropical plants planted only six years earlier are thriving. There's a spa and gym, a games room, a shaded outdoor playground and a zoo where my boys lose themselves, plus babysitting for \$15 an hour that gifts us a modicum of peace. European-trained chefs serve a bounty of local seafood.

It's almost possible to forget about Covid-19. Masks are compulsory only for staff, temperatures are generally not recorded.

"It's difficult to put a finger on why Zanzibar has escaped the brunt of Covid," says White Sand Villas' general manager, Adriaan Erasmus. "We closed for four months in 2020 but not due to Covid; instead because of a lack of tourism. Tanzania never went into lockdown. The hospitals show no strain. Vaccinations are rolling out now with front-line workers."

The all-inclusive Baraza Resort & Spa is one of four private resorts that make up

The Zanzibar Collection along the eastern coastline. Staff are preparing to host Tanzania's president in the royal villa as we depart.

Here, white stone arches and billowing curtains contrast with majestic carved hardwood doors, brass lanterns and antique coffee pots that hark back to an Omani sultan's palace.

The five-star resort is opulent but also welcoming. Our sweeping two-bedroom villa is one of 30 set among seven hectares of gardens, rich with jasmine, frangipani and bougainvillea. We have a garden and plunge pool, a day bed and two bathrooms.



Clockwise from top: a villa at Zanzibar White Sand Luxury Villas & Spa, the only Relais & Chateaux property in Tanzania; the infinity pool at the Residence Zanzibar; cactus-like sea urchins in the reefs with many marine creatures

Christiaan David Studio; The Residence Zanzibar

It's a two-minute walk to the beach where kayaks and stand-up paddle-boards can be borrowed, and kite and windsurfing lessons are an option. A shallow reef stretches 1 kilometre from the shore, so it's safe for my toddler in the gently lapping waves.

Hesitantly, we all venture out on a catamaran. This small, wide-open boat is a little confronting with children in the face of a strong sea wind, but our confident Swahili captain, Moussa, ensures a smooth 45-minute trip. So smooth, in fact, that my 2-year-old falls asleep.

I sample an early-morning reef walk at low tide. Donning reef shoes to protect my feet from cactus-like sea urchins, I become transfixed by a coral display that's normally camouflaged by deeper

waters: cucumber snakes, giant clams; blue starfish; spider fish and purple urchins. Zanzibaris are bent over the same waters as they attempt to catch octopi nearby.

We take our boys to the well-equipped children's club after breakfast. There's a splash pool and mini football, as well as pool and air hockey tables. A babysitting service and daily itinerary are on hold owing to Covid-19. We're invited to cooking and craft workshops. I try both, weaving my own bag from coconut palm fronds, and preparing a local fish curry.

Before departing, we must again present two negative PCR tests and register them on a government app 72 hours prior. Our resort handles all this; a doctor visits and our results are printed out for us. The test costs \$120 per person. My sons aged 4 and 2 are exempt, as are all children under 10.

I am keen to visit a turtle sanctuary on the north coast, but we decide against a four-hour return drive with little ones. We also miss exploring the labyrinthine alleyways, forts, museums and Portuguese churches of Stone Town, a Unesco World Heritage Site on the west coast, established by Sultan Said as the capital of Oman in 1840.

We vow to return to this spice-scented idyll for more adventuring when our children are older.



Outdoor workouts in the summer are best done early morning or late in the evening Pixabay

How to continue exercising safely through the hot summer months

While many people associate summer with vacations or daycations, fitness enthusiasts see the hot months as just another chance to up their training and endurance.

According to a Dubai Chamber report in March 2020, sport is one of the UAE's fastest-growing sectors, so it's no surprise that residents regularly participate in various races and fitness events, extreme weather notwithstanding.

In June, Kapsi Faheem ran a 90-kilometre race in the sweltering heat of Dubai for the Comrades Centenary Hope Challenge. Faheem began at midnight and finished in 11 hours and 4 minutes.

"The first 45km were challenging, and I kept a moderate pace because it was extremely humid. After 45km, I put ice cubes in a towel and tied them around my back, which was beneficial to [counter] the heat," he says.

Elsewhere, mum-of-three Chloe Davies completed 2,147km (the distance from Dubai to Gaza) by bike and foot, also in June. She took up this challenge to raise funds to help children and families in Palestine. "Before embarking on this long challenge, I knew the weather wouldn't be in my favour. However, I underestimated how difficult it would be to get the required kilometres each day while avoiding the heat."

"Running during the day became unbearable; I only had a small window after finishing the morning school run and then collecting my children in the afternoon. If I started running after 10am, the temperature was already 40°C-plus."

Not one to be deterred, Davies switched to the treadmill on some days, and then cycled to make up the rest of the distance.

"I would train for hours in the evenings at Al Qudra. It was a lot cooler and more achievable, albeit still extremely humid and sweaty."

In addition to taking a cue from these extreme athletes, fitness buffs who want to maintain their physical and

mental health via daily exercise can follow a few tips to stay both active and safe in the hot and humid UAE summer.

Olivia McCubbin, co-founder and head coach of Best Body Co, recommends focusing on indoor training at climate-controlled venues with proper air conditioning and cooling systems.

"This will ensure that the intensity and volume of your training don't have to drop or be compromised, and you'll be able to improve your strength and performance in a more comfortable environment."

"If you only train outdoors in the heat and sun, the change in training to an indoor gym will be beneficial. There will be less stress on your cardiovascular system, allowing you to get stronger and lift heavier weights with less risk of fatigue and dehydration."

If you have no option or would still like to exercise or perform sporting activities outdoors, McCubbin says taking

which can be practised before sunrise or at sundown.

Nutrition is also key when it comes to keeping fit in the summer, not least in the midst of a global pandemic. Nutritionist Remy Shanker says: "It is advisable to eat closer to nature, and opt for nourishing foods that are in season. Colourful seasonal vegetables and fruits have a higher nutritional profile. Locally grown produce could very well be a safe bet for nutritional value, too, as our gut bacteria adapt to the region's soil and water terrain."

To counter dehydration, says Shanker, eat water-rich fruits and vegetables such as cucumbers, celery, melons, citrus fruits, berries, guavas, dark green leafy vegetables and beetroot.

"These seasonal beauties are not just a powerhouse of nutrients, fibre, antioxidants and functional compounds, but also help us 'eat our water' through their liquid-based composition."

"We often construe hydration in terms of just water content, but we must consider the value of replenishing essential electrolytes that are lost so easily through sweat, but have a vital role in supporting the process of cellular hydration. These fruits and veggies lend that additional boost of electrolytes naturally," she says.

Shanker also suggests a base of about 25 per cent to 30 per cent whole grains and adequate protein in every meal. She recommends lacing these with modest amounts of fats, such as pure butter, ghee, unprocessed sesame oil, mustard oil and coconut oil to improve energy and hydration dynamics.

Hot weather not only makes us feel slower and more sluggish, but also influences our rate of recovery. Yet, Asylum gym coach Frank Golya believes summer is the best season to increase endurance. "Exercising in the heat adds to the stress load of your fitness regimen. You become more efficient at working out in various temperatures and circumstances when your body responds by boosting circulation and sweating. You are more likely to do better in your next race or challenge when the weather is cooler. Training in the heat also improves cardiac fitness since it conditions your lungs to function with less oxygen," says Golya.

Just don't forget the sunscreen.



It is advisable to eat closer to nature... fruits and veggies lend that additional boost of electrolytes naturally

REMY SHANKER
Nutritionist

certain precautions are a must. "Aim to do it at the cooler times of the day, so early morning or late evening. Ensure you are well-hydrated before going outside and always carry a surplus of cool liquids. Also, reduce the intensity and duration of your workouts compared to what you would do in the cooler months."

There are various other refreshing and enjoyable ways to torch calories and stay cool this summer. Replace running or workouts with activities such as swimming, paddleboarding, kayaking, rock climbing or basketball, all of

Water-based fitness activities such as canoeing are a good way to lower risk of overheating

