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MOZAMBIQUE

Mozambique's best-kept secrets

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Mozambique is usually viewed solely as a tropical beach destination with beautiful white-sand beaches and palm trees. Tourism Update rounds up some of the destination's best kept secrets.

The beaches are incredible and the coral reefs pristine, says **Michele Abraham**, describing the destination “[B]ut Mozambique is a fascinating tourist destination with many other beautiful and interesting attractions such as wildlife; vibrant city life in Maputo; and an intriguing history that dates back to AD600.”

Feature

Mozambique

Mozambique's best-kept secrets
A spotlight on Maputo
Seven of the best beach properties
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1. Step back in time at Ilha de Mozambique and Ibo Island



Gary Lotter, MD of Go2Africa, says, without a doubt Mozambique's best-kept secrets are Ilha de Mozambique and Ibo Island in the Quirimbas Archipelago. "Both offer 'step-back-in-time' experiences that combine beaches with the history of the slave and spice trades, as well as Indian, Portuguese and African culture. Photographers will enjoy shooting the evocative ruins, dhows and old churches in a tropical setting while shoppers should be sure to check out the traditional silver jewellery on offer."

A Unesco World Heritage Site, Ilha de Mozambique features a fortified city, which was a former Portuguese trading post on the route to India. The island's fascinating mix of African, Arab and European culture and history is displayed in the churches and mosques, its beautiful colonial buildings with thick walls, and its small traditional houses. There is a colourful and vibrant feel to the island with all the hustle and bustle; yet you can still feel the charm, sophistication and culture.

Ibo Island is virtually unknown and feels like a place where time has stood still. It used to be a prosperous trading post and still features three forts, a beautiful old Catholic church and numerous ancient trading buildings.

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PAULA KAHUMBU

2. Lugenda Wilderness Camp in the Niassa Reserve



For **Marcia Gordon**, owner of Extraordinary Journeys in the US, Lugenda Wilderness Camp in the Niassa Reserve in northern Mozambique is one of the country's best-kept secrets. “We would really encourage people to try Lugenda Wilderness Camp as a last safari stop before heading to the beach in northern Mozambique. Lugenda is accessed via a 90-minute flight from Pemba to a small dirt airstrip with some stunning views along the way. The camp itself features only eight tents, set among the trees along the banks of the Lugenda River.”

Gordon says game viewing might not be as prolific as somewhere like the Masai Mara but with a little patience, travellers will be able to see everything from lions to leopards, elephants and crocs. “Game drives are supplemented with canoe trips down the Lugenda River, walking, and trips to see cave paintings from Batwa tribes that used to inhabit the area. Every sundowner and coffee break spot is breathtaking and gives you the chance to really appreciate being the only safari-goers in this massive area.”

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3. Santa Carolina



“I would definitely include Santa Carolina as a best-kept secret,” says **Blake Gray**, Director of Mozambique Connection.

Santa Carolina, also called Paradise Island, is the smallest island in the Bazaruto Archipelago. Visitors can explore the entire rocky island during a short 40-minute walk. It used to be a prison colony during the Second World War and a small fort can still be seen.

The old Hotel Santa Carolina, which is now in ruins, used to be a hotspot for celebrities. Spokesperson for African Travel Inc., **Arnelle Kendall**, says: “If you got married in the 50s or 60s this was the place to go on honeymoon!” There are also rumours that **Bob Dylan** composed his song ‘Mozambique’ on the piano at this hotel. Kendall warns, however, that the hotel is scheduled for redevelopment so the opportunity to visit the ruins won’t last for long.

Around the island are three coral reefs, rich in marine life, and a few deep channels, great for big game fishing. Common fish that are caught around the islands include: Giant Trevally, Kingfish, Bonito, King and Queen Mackerel, Springer and Kawakawa.



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MIKE PHEIFFER

4. The hidden treasures of Maputo



The capital, Maputo, is situated on the shores of the Indian Ocean. Although the city was badly damaged during the civil war, it is now an up-and-coming tourist hotspot once again. With its many pavement cafés, jazz bars and its vibrant arts scene, the city is undoubtedly one of Mozambique's 'hidden' treasures.

There are numerous tours of the city but, according to **Karin Sieberhagen**, spokesperson for the Polana Serena Hotel, the historical and art deco walking tours of the city organised by **Jane Flood** are an unforgettable experience.

Flood takes travellers on a walking tour with her partner, **Walter Tembe**, showing them the secrets of downtown Maputo, including the city's best architecture, such as the impressive CFM train station and the art deco splendour of Sé Cathedral.

Flood says her tours take travellers to many hidden gems in the city such as the Trichardt Monument, Radio Mozambique and Gerald Pott's house. They include visits to the Baixa heritage area where the Tundurú gardens are expected to open on June 25, as well as to Pekiwa's sculpture garden.

Flood says there are many different tours of the city: a tour celebrating Pancho Guedes' 90th birthday led by an architecture expert; one that celebrates the works of Forjaz;

The long and winding road to Indaba

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A woman's touch in tourism

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DAVE MARSH

colonial tours and art deco tours. She takes travellers to see the Malangatana murals on buildings that are not usually accessible to the public and for families with children, she organises 'I Spy' tours.

5. Gorongosa National Park



Once the haven of the greatest populations of wildlife in Africa, the Gorongosa National Park in central Mozambique was almost completely destroyed during the country's civil war. The numbers of some of the species fell by almost 95% and up until a decade after the civil war, Gorongosa remained in ruins.

However, today the rehabilitation of Gorongosa National Park is well on its way and represents one of the great conservation opportunities in the world. The Carr Foundation, a US not-for-profit organisation, teamed with the Mozambique government to protect and restore the ecosystem of the park and to develop an ecotourism industry to benefit local communities. In January 2008, the Foundation signed a 20-year contract with the government to co-manage the park. This long-term commitment to work together followed a three-and-a-half-year period of restoration activities that were conducted under an initial Memorandum of Understanding.

Gorongosa National Park has become one of Mozambique's special national treasures. It is home to good populations of oribi, reedbuck, waterbuck, warthog and sable. Predators are

It is about keeping out the neighbours

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ANDRÉ DU TOIT

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also recovering slowly and elephant herds and bulls are regularly encountered. Birding is also very good, with special and endemic birds such as the Collared Palm thrush, the Green coucal, Narina trogon and Spotted creeper.

Travellers can experience the rebirth of the Gorongosa National Park through the eyes of Emmy Award-winning wildlife cameraman, **Bob Poole**, later this year. Poole recorded a *National Geographic International* series about the rebirth of the park. In the series, he'll share secrets of filming lions, crocs, elephants, and spectacular scenery, and tell how he cracked the 'Gorongosa code' – learning to read the landscape and find prime locations for filming the park's spectacular wildlife. "Gorongosa is proof that what we've broken we can put back together," he said.

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