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Below left, from top: a Seychellois sunrise; Pemba's Fundu Lagoon; Réunion island boasts 848 species of native flowers



10 OF THE BEST African Isles

You've seen lions up close and watched the sun sink over the savannah. Now, explore the isles scattered across the continent: think gin-clear water, white sand and bountiful larders. Fleur Rollet-Manus goes off-grid



Praslin SEYCHELLES

Once a hideaway for Arab merchants and pirates, Praslin is the second largest island in the Seychelles and its secret treasure chest. Just nine per cent of the population live here as opposed to 90 per cent on nearby Mahé. At a mere 38.5 sq km, everything is easily accessible, including Valée de Mai, whose flora and fauna has earned it the title of 'Garden of Eden'. The Seychelles isn't short of blemish-free beaches, but the velvety sands of Anse Lazio make this one of the best. From here, Angel Tours angeltours.sc run a half-day, deep-sea fishing trip in search of blue marlin and milkfish, for those who want to catch more than just rays. Indian Ocean Lodge's indianoceanlodge.com 32 rooms lie at the Grand Anse beachfront. It's so vast, you won't have to share this perfect slice of paradise with anyone. **BEST FOR** Those looking to shake off the crowds **GETTING THERE** Fly to Mahé (10h 15m); from here it's a 20-minute flight to Praslin.

Réunion INDIAN OCEAN

French flair and Creole charm crisscross the cuisine, chic streets and exotic markets of this tiny gem, which lies east of Madagascar and south-west of Mauritius. It's home to lush jungles, black-sand beaches and lunar landscapes aplenty, plus Piton de la Fournaise, one of the world's most iconic volcanoes. Pack your hiking shoes and conquer the five-hour Dolomieu trail to the huge caldera. Guided tours can be arranged through Diana Dea Lodge diana-dea-lodge.re, a lush 30-room hilltop retreat. Refuel on fragrant swordfish *carri* and coconut flan at restaurant Ferme Auberge Eva Annibal 00 262 26 25 53 76 – there's nowhere better to sample island staples. And don't miss the local caramel- and honey-flavoured cheese at Saint Paul's Market (Fridays and Saturdays) – back home, it will provide the perfect dinner-party fodder as guests attempt to guess its origin. **BEST FOR** Active travellers **GETTING THERE** Fly via Paris to Réunion (11h).

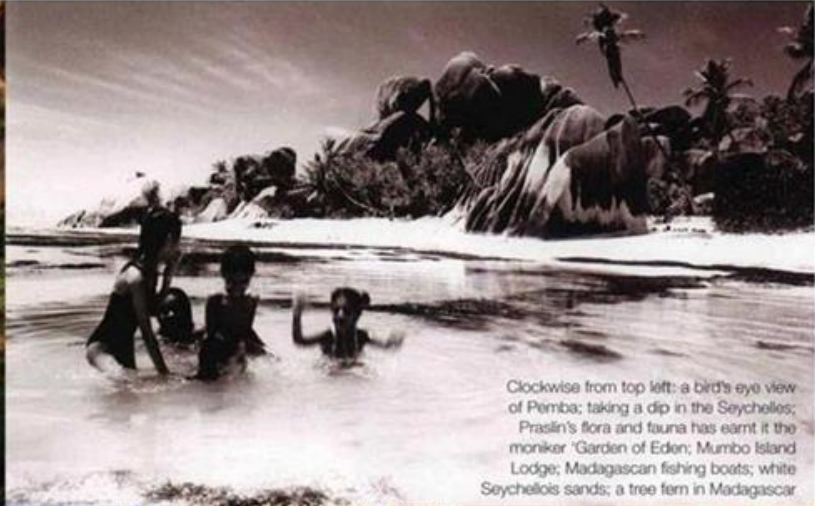
Pemba TANZANIA

Separated from Zanzibar by just 50km of the Somali Sea, Pemba richly rewards the few who make the voyage over from the Spice Islands. Smaller and prettier than its Zanzibar Archipelago sisters, Pemba's Arabic name (Jazirat al-Khudrah), the 'Green Island', is an ode to its foliage-filled hills, mangrove-backed lagoons and banana, coconut and sugar cane plantations. Follow in the footsteps of British fashion designer Ellis Flyte, who created Fundu Lagoon fundulagoon.com as a retreat. Check-in bells are African drums and air-con is forsaken for private plunge pools carved into terraces. Fundu Lagoon attracts well-heeled trailblazers seeking lesser-known pockets of paradise while keeping modernity within arm's reach – the Balinese massage at the poolside is truly a gift from God. **BEST FOR** Luxury-seekers **GETTING THERE** Fly to Zanzibar via Dubai (12h 55m); from here it's 30-minute flight to Pemba.

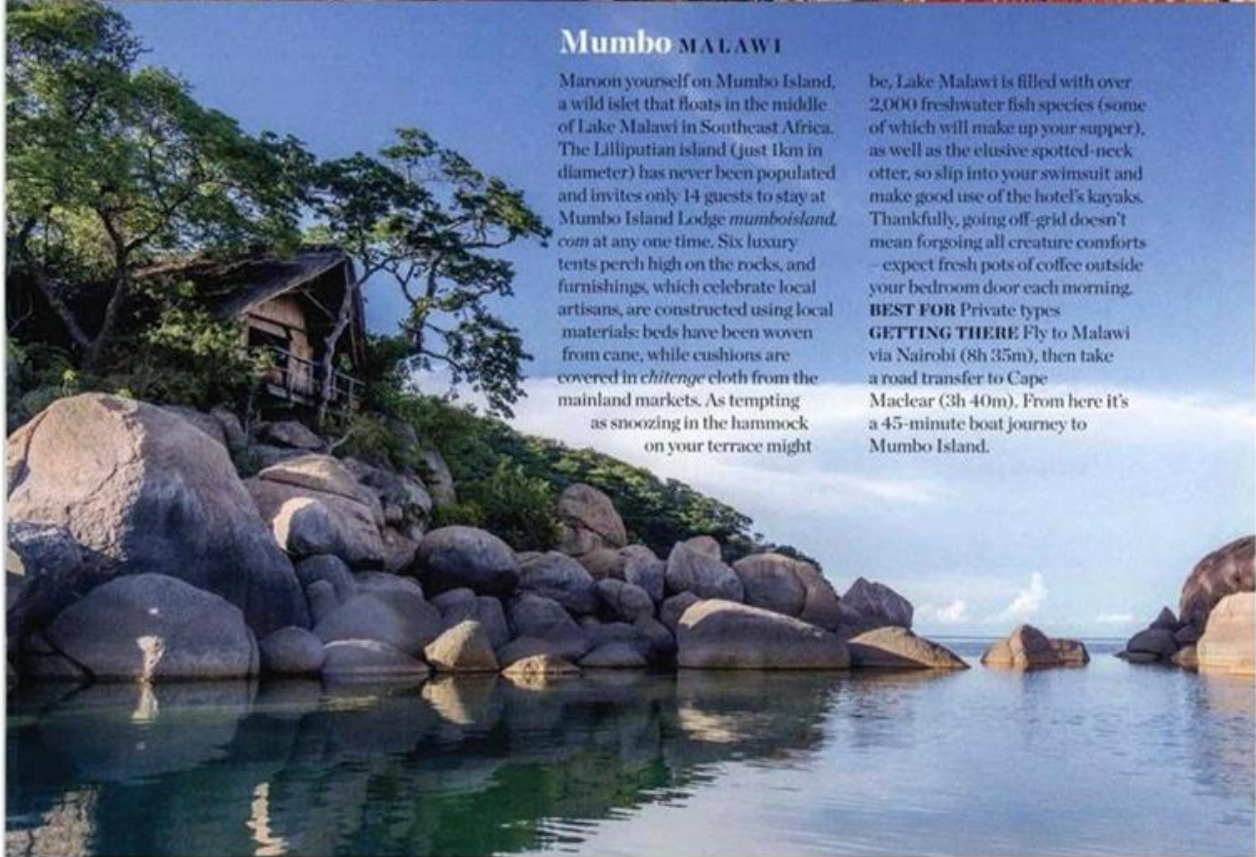
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Clockwise from top left: a bird's eye view of Pemba; taking a dip in the Seychelles; Praslin's flora and fauna has earned it the moniker 'Garden of Eden'; Mumbo Island Lodge; Madagascar fishing boats; white Seychellois sands; a tree fern in Madagascar



Mumbo MALAWI

Maroon yourself on Mumbo Island, a wild islet that floats in the middle of Lake Malawi in Southeast Africa. The Lilliputian island (just 1km in diameter) has never been populated and invites only 14 guests to stay at Mumbo Island Lodge mumboisland.com at any one time. Six luxury tents perch high on the rocks, and furnishings, which celebrate local artisans, are constructed using local materials: beds have been woven from cane, while cushions are covered in *chitenge* cloth from the mainland markets. As tempting as snoozing in the hammock on your terrace might

be, Lake Malawi is filled with over 2,000 freshwater fish species (some of which will make up your supper), as well as the elusive spotted-neck otter, so slip into your swimsuit and make good use of the hotel's kayaks. Thankfully, going off-grid doesn't mean forgoing all creature comforts – expect fresh pots of coffee outside your bedroom door each morning. **BEST FOR** Private types **GETTING THERE** Fly to Malawi via Nairobi (8h 35m), then take a road transfer to Cape Maclear (3h 40m). From here it's a 45-minute boat journey to Mumbo Island.



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Clockwise, from top left Praslin island; fishing in the Seychelles; sailing a pirogue off Nosy Be; carrying bananas on Mohéli; Réunion island. Opposite, clockwise from top left: Mohéli's Laka Lodge; fresh pineapple; Réunion islanders; Senegalese fish; traditional Kenyan boats

Nosy Be MADAGASCAR

While it may be one of Madagascar's most-visited beach destinations, Nosy Be remains relatively undisturbed, drawing just 60,000 visitors a year (compare this with the 725,000 who visit the Channel Islands). Everything here operates at the pace of *mora mora* - 'slowly, slowly'. Kick back and bask in the island's 340 days of sunshine or, if the mood takes you, seek out Madagascar's most famous resident, the lemur. Trekking through the Lokobe Reserve gives you the best chance of spotting the endangered primate - if you're lucky, you'll also see geckos and one of the smallest frog species in the world, the 1cm-long *Stumpffia pygmaea*. Nosy Komba, Nosy Sakatia and Nosy Iranja are all just a boat ride away. Vanila Hôtel vanila-hotel.com can organise visits to the isles, which put even the most jaw-dropping of screensavers to shame. **BEST FOR** Post-safari, island-hopping sun-worshippers **GETTING THERE** Fly to Réunion via Johannesburg (11h); from here it's a 3h 30m flight to Nosy Be.

Mohéli COMOROS

Each year thousands of humpback whales migrate from the Antarctic to the waters around Mohéli, to the east of Mozambique, giving trailblazers the chance to swim with these gentle giants. Despite this extraordinary natural encounter, the smallest of the four Comoro islands sees only around 400 visitors a year, so infrastructure is limited and accommodation sparse. Laka Lodge lakalodge.com is the exception. The 15 beachfront rooms are run on solar power, so the only footprint you'll leave will be imprints in the white sand. Come sunset, huddle around a beach bonfire to devour lobster, mangrove crab and prawns caught from the bountiful surrounding seas. In between snorkelling stints, pay a visit to the village of Chindini. You won't want to miss purchasing precious ylang-ylang oil, which forms the heart of Chanel No5. **BEST FOR** Divers in search of something different **GETTING THERE** Fly to Grande Comore via Nairobi (8h 35m); then it's 2 hours by boat to Mohéli (expect to pay £130).

Gorée SENEGAL

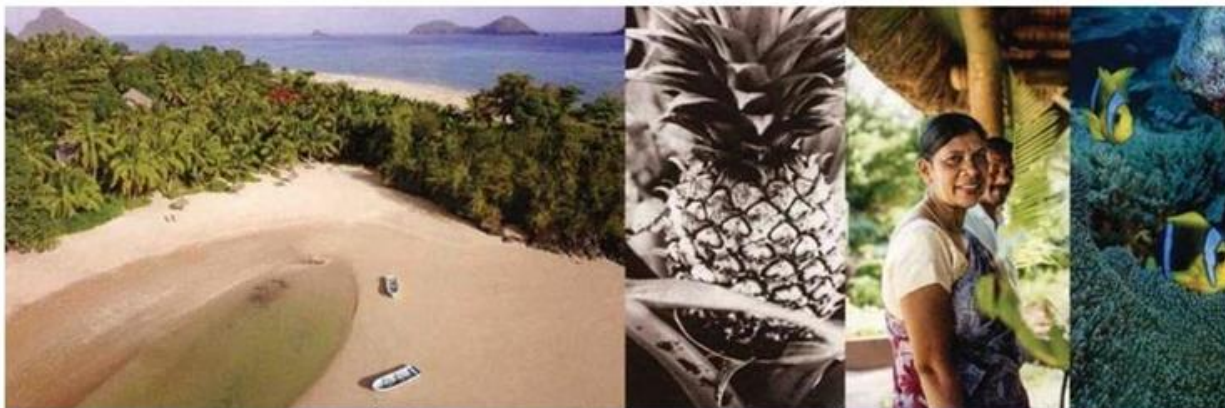
It's difficult to reconcile houses in pastel colours smothered in bougainvillea and quaint cobbled streets with this island's tragic past, but a visit to Gorée manages to be both humbling and heavenly. From the 15th to the 19th century, the island was the largest slave-trading centre on the African coast - it's the nearest point of the continent to the Americas. Maison des Esclaves, the 'House of Slaves', is a crucial site of African history and pays homage to the millions of people who passed through the 'Door of No Return' never to see their homeland again. Located just 1.2 miles from the main harbour of cosmopolitan capital Dakar, the Senegalese have turned Gorée into a haven, transforming it from slave centre to sanctuary. As there are only a handful of hotels on the island (with rates almost double those found on the mainland), many make the pilgrimage in a day by ferry (services 7am to midnight). **BEST FOR** History buffs **GETTING THERE** Fly to Dakar via Casablanca (7h 45m); then it's a 30-minute ferry to Gorée (around £7).

The Bijagós GUINEA-BISSAU

Culturally rich, sparsely populated and absent of European influence, having never fallen to colonial rule, the Bijagós are a cluster of 88 islands off the coast of Guinea-Bissau - a tropical country on West Africa's lesser-visited Atlantic coast. Here, women control the economy, law and household with religious functions being performed by *baloberas* (priestesses). Expect to be welcomed with gusto by locals and eagerly invited into homes to hear tales of tribal traditions. Tourism is still in its infancy here and it can be tricky to reach the islands without an expert guide. We advise booking a tour through Responsible Travel responsibletourtravel.com whose eight-day tour (from £2,595pp) takes you across the West African landscape. You'll sleep both under the stars and in eco hotels en route. **BEST FOR** Bold travellers keen to explore new cultures **GETTING THERE** Fly to Guinea-Bissau via Casablanca (9h 5m); from here it's a 4-hour ferry (one crossing weekly) to the Bijagós.



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Lamu KENYA

Home to 6000 donkeys, hundreds of bobbing dhow boats and not a car in sight, Lamu attracts a heady mix of royals, rock stars and A-listers. The Lamu Archipelago, close to the northern coast of Kenya, was once a key trade stop and today, those deals between Africa, the Middle East and Europe are evident in the coconut-laced cuisine that's milder than the rest of Africa's spicy staples. To sample it, head to Kijani *kijani-lamu.com* to try their crab coconut curry. Adopt the island's *pole-pole* ethos, a harmonious Kiswahili phrase for 'take it slowly', as you wander Lamu Town, one of the best-preserved Swahili settlements in East Africa.

Start at the Lamu Museum for a history lesson, then stroll across to Lamu Fort. A prison during Britain's colonial rule from 1890, it is now more happily a library. Shimmy across the shoreline to Shela, where labyrinthine lanes house galleries, craft boutiques and silversmiths' workshops. After a day spent exploring artists' enclaves, head to the terrace of the Peponi *peponihotel.com* for sundowners. The 28-bedroom bolthole has seduced the likes of Mick Jagger and Kate Moss with its Old Pal cocktail, whose recipe is kept under lock and key. **BEST FOR** Barefoot bohemians **GETTING THERE** Fly to Nairobi (8h 40m); from here it's a 1h 45m flight to Lamu.

São Tomé and Príncipe GUINEA

Naturalists and those in the know refer to this island nation as the 'African Galápagos' because of the advancing jungle that's home to more endemic species per square kilometre than anywhere else on the planet. Floating in the Gulf of Guinea, just off the equator in West Africa, the islands have a combined population of 204,000. Of the two, Príncipe is the least developed but most attractive, appealing to those wanting to immerse themselves in the verdant jungle surrounds. South African tech billionaire Mark Shuttleworth can be credited with bringing these far-flung isles to the forefront, while maintaining them as the last unspoilt wilderness on

earth. He began working closely with the local community in 2013 to introduce Bom Bom Lodge *bombomprincipe.com* - two other hotels followed, including Sundry Praia *sundryprincipe.com* - Príncipe's only five-star hotel. But it's not all laid-back luxe and lush landscapes here: the islands have been importing cocoa from Brazil since 1822 and at Claudio Corallo's chocolate laboratory you can try some of the famous export, such as the intense 100 per cent cacao bars. **BEST FOR** Eco explorers. **GETTING THERE** Fly to Kotoka via Lisbon (8h 20m); then take a 1h 40m flight to São Tomé, from here it's a 35-minute flight to Príncipe.

Photos by Alex Falck, Gary Lambert, Elaine Dorn, Shuaa Bood, Mike Pignat Toyo

