

## Chumbe Island

We'll always have Chumbe Island! Over spring break we had a fabulous visit from our friends Helen, Steve, Mickey and Marlene. They spent a couple of days in Dar with us, went on safari and then flew to Zanzibar to spend six days with us there.

As they were our first visitors, I was extra nervous about wanting things to go right. While I normally read the guidebooks and my numerous travel magazines thoroughly, I really pored over them to find the right place to take them on Zanzibar. When I read in National Geographic Traveler Magazine that Chumbe Island National Park had scored Number Two in Eco-Tourist Resorts in the World, I thought that I had finally hit the nail on the head. The guidebooks all backed up this notion. So I called and made reservations for four bungalows on fabulous Chumbe Island. It was really expensive - let's call it a "huge investment" - but I was thinking, "once of a lifetime experience!" I had hit the nail on the head again, in many respects!

After three nights at the Embassy house where we had some great meals and toured Stonetown and other parts of the island, we went to the beach to be picked up for our trip to Chumbe. It was a dark and stormy day . . . .when the boat pulled up. We were issued shoes made from radial tires for wading out to the boat through the muck and sand and water and reeds and then finally clambered onto it. The sea was choppy and the wind was high as we all huddled under the awning and tried to look cheerful. We set out with several Tanzanians and lots of food supplies (that at least was a relief!). Slowly we made our way there, no one wanting to ask THE question: "Are there any life vests on this decrepit boat?" An hour later we saw off in the distance the island and its famous landmark, the main gathering place, which is loftily described by all as a mini-replica of the Sydney Opera House. And it is, only covered with thatch and not a window or door in sight.

Upon our arrival we were sat down to be instructed about the strict rules regulating behavior in a National Park as we sipped ice cold avocado juice. We were given the schedule for the day to include lunch and an afternoon snorkel then cocktails and dinner. I was beginning to feel more hopeful. Then they showed us to our cabanas as the rain came pouring down. Imagine Gilligan's Island. Throw in a bit of Swiss Family Robinson. Pepper with the latest eco-tourism technology including composting toilet, low voltage lighting and hot running water. Honestly, if I'd been on a camping trip I would have thought that this was really cool. But all I could think was, "I'm paying three hundred dollars and my mattress is on the floor and there is no fan!?!?" Naturally we had to get the very attractive and almost naked park ranger who had wrestled our 150 pounds worth of bags to get us two cold beers on the double. Upon his return, we curled up in hammock and couch on our open verandah, found our books and considered our situation carefully. Hey, this isn't so bad after all!

Charm? Yes, the place oozed charm. Each bungalow named for a different endangered animal with a picture of the animal drawn into the cement floors with tile. Would Ginger have been happy here? Ginger would have been most happy with the delicious food served, of course, in the mini Sydney Opera House. How about Mr. and Mrs. Huddleston? Aaaah, yes, they would have been quite at home come cocktail hour sipping any one of a wide variety of sinful concoctions WITH ice! Something for the

Professor? But of course and that was probably the most fun was to see how this place was put together. You would untie a rope and pull and suddenly the entire side of the bedroom opened up to the ocean. Each bungalow has its own filtration system of charcoal and sand and shells to clean and store the water for its occupants. And Gilligan and the Skipper could have spent hours up in the top of the lighthouse looking for ships passing by to come rescue them. But I suspect it would have been the ever so Earth Mother Mary Ann who would have been the happiest. The snorkeling was absolutely wonderful.

We had four great snorkels while we were there and also a wonderful hike around the island where we saw some very active and colorful wildlife. The view from the lighthouse really was grand. The kids played endless games of bridge and the adults had lots of downtime. On the sunny return to the main island things really seemed much brighter but oh how we were looking forward to a night with air conditioning. Note to self&mdash;never try eco-tourism in hot season!

Our day in Stonetown was terrific. Several of us managed some serious shopping. Ironically, much of the stuff that is sold on Zanzibar is made in India or Indonesian. They pull off those labels and sell it for lots more with the new Zanzibar labels in the back. However, those clothes just look like they should be from Zanzibar in my Vogue fashion magazine mind. How is that all these gauzy see-through blouses and colorful pareos look so well-placed and comfortable in a city where 90% of the women are dressed from head to toe in black? Beats me but now you have an idea of what you might see under the Christmas tree! Celebrated my 45th birthday dinner by dividing into age groups&mdash;the kids dining on pizza al fresco and el cheapo and the adults going to the Serena Inn for one of the nicest meals I&rsquo;ve had in a long time. It was really delicious and a great way to end a super vacation with our friends. We&rsquo;ll look back and we&rsquo;ll always have Chumbe Island!