

# The Fumba Times

FROM ZANZIBAR TO THE WORLD – THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL

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**TOURISM**  
**NEW MARKETS,  
MORE GUESTS**



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**ENVIRONMENT**  
**SORT OUT YOUR  
TAKA-TAKA!**

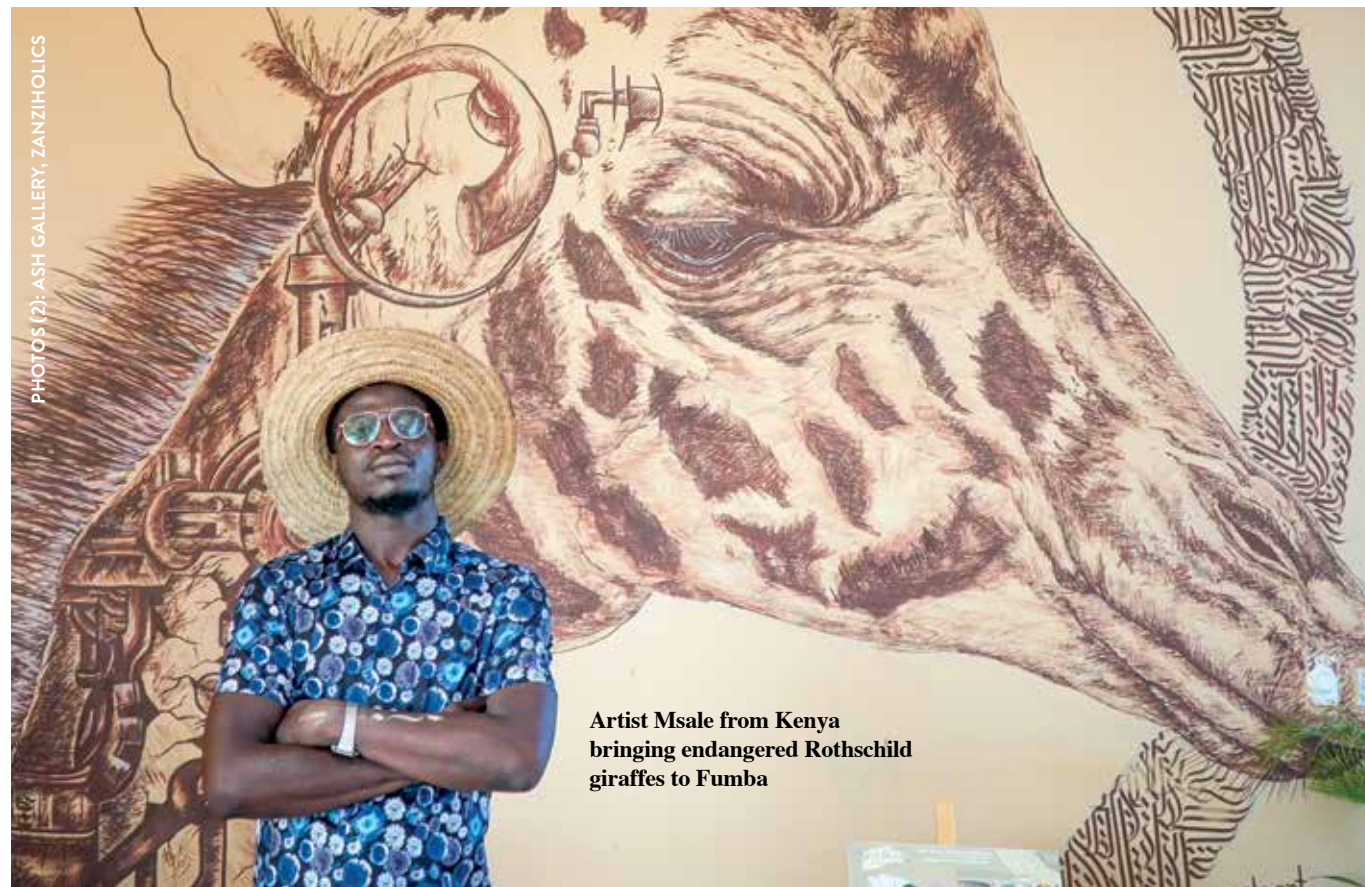


PAGE 07 | MY LIFE

**INDULGE!**  
**TESTING LUXURY  
ISLAND BAWE**



PAGE 08 | MY WORLD



Artist Msale from Kenya bringing endangered Rothschild giraffes to Fumba

## WONDERWALLS

The island's first "Wild Murals" festival turned walls into wonders, captivating crowds as artists inspired school kids with lasting lessons in creativity. And the best: the art is here to stay. [Read more on page 7](#)



## Ramadhan Mubarak

The highlight of the Muslim calendar, the month of Ramadhan (also: Ramadhan) falls into the publishing timespan of this issue of THE FUMBA TIMES. If you are visiting Zanzibar around this time you will feel the island in a very special mood. We'd like to wish all our Muslim readers a blessed Ramadan Kareem!

## ZANZIBAR'S LAST SULTAN



The late Jamshid bin Abdullah

The last Sultan of Zanzibar is dead. Sayyid Jamshid bin Abdullah died in Oman on 30 December 2024 at the age of 95. He ruled Zanzibar for only six months when the island was about to gain independence from the British protectorate in 1963. He was overthrown in 1964 as Tanganyika and Zanzibar merged, and went into exile in England. Jamschid continued to claim the crown of Zanzibar from Portsmouth. He was only allowed to return to Oman in 2020.

## GOLDEN MNEMBA

Mnemba Island Lodge gained entry into Condé Nast Traveler's much coveted Gold List 2025 - the only place in Zanzibar to do so.

The tiny island of Mnemba is one of the world's most treasured holiday places - at least according to the powerful travel trendsetters of Condé Nast publishers in US and UK. After a total make-over the Mnemba Island Lodge, run by AndBeyond and built in 1997, reopened last year. Ten Robinson Crusoe type beachfront bandas were enlarged and refurbished but the barefoot-luxury feel was carefully preserved, a stunning bar and spa added. Bill Gates is said to have stayed here but contrary to gossip he does not own the place!



Inside and outside merge on beautiful Mnemba island

# NEW CHANCE FOR STONE TOWN

EXCLUSIVE

Two men on a joint mission to beautify Zanzibar's historic heart

By Andrea Tapper

Never before has there been a concerted action like this: The whole of Stone Town and several of its historical icons are being dusted-off, renovated, modernised, repaired and repainted. Two men have vowed to tackle the mammoth task.

From repaving historical alleyways to moving electric cables underground, from whitewashing the ancient mouldy walls of the Old Fort to turning the Saracenic High Court into a judicial museum – the UNESCO-protected old town of Zanzibar is set to shine in new splendour. Current renovations are being carried out with a sense of urgency rarely exuded before. With it comes a shift in policy - and certainly in drive and motivation. Major results of the overhaul are expected to be seen during 2025. Some improvements are already visible. "We are starting from the seaside, swiftly making our way inward", explained Ali Said Bakar, Director-General of the Stone Town Conservation &

Development Authority (STCDA), the conservation body responsible for the iconic old town.

Stone Town is an ancient Swahili settlement unique to Zanzibar with a fascinating mix of Arab palaces, Indian merchant houses, narrow streets, mosques and churches. Since Zanzibar became a part of Tanzania in 1964, the historic quarter has suffered from decay. "Stone Town was dying, our mission is to bring it back to life", said Ali S. Bakar, explaining major new regulations and developments to reverse the creeping demise:

- Private sales of houses – for the last decade or so seen as a remedy to save the crumbling historical quarter - have been stopped.

- The government of Zanzibar has released \$5.5 million to finance part of the unprecedented – and long overdue – conservation move, Bakar said.

- The entire make-over is taking place under the control and auspices of the Stone Town conservation authority who has been given a new and wider mandate, de facto replacing the municipality.

The STCDA office now issues business licenses, building permits, manages sewage and waste, and regulates traffic as well as parking in Stone Town. Every three months, control inspections of the world heritage site by UNESCO are carried out: "We do nothing without their approval", Bakar

assured. The 47-year-old engineer with a diploma in law has overseen the building of ten new hospitals in Zanzibar. Moving from health to heritage, he was placed at the helm of the Stone Town conservation authority two and a half years ago.

### Working in tandem

Equally important as the government action seems the newly-won support of a private sponsor from Dubai who has entered the transformative initiative. In regards to his motives, Samuel Saba, 29, a real

estate developer from Dubai and chairman of the family business Infinity Developments, simply said: "We like Zanzibar and we said, let's have some impact." Infinity has been licensed to build a 255-villa-and-apartment Anantara resort on the north-east coast. "The hotel project is our money-making enterprise", said the heir of a Dubai billionaire family and aviation company: "The Stone Town overhaul is our voluntary effort to make Zanzibar's unique heritage more accessible and enjoyable for tourists."

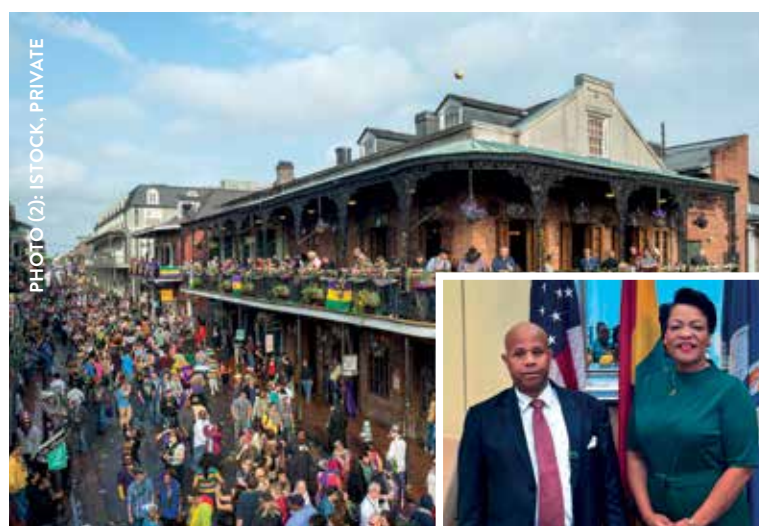
THE FUMBA TIMES was granted an exclusive interview with director Bakar and investor Saba. Infinity projects include the restoration and modernisation of the Old Fort, the transformation of the High Court into a museum, restoration of a hamam, the already finalised new Mnazi Moja hospital garden and the repainting of entire Stone Town, for which 120 people have been hired. Since most houses require repairs before repainting, this facelift, however, is expected to take at least 36 months.

CONTINUE on page 3



Suddenly more beautiful: chief conservator Ali Said Bakar (left) and Dubai businessmen Samuel Saba in front of cleaned walls of the historic Old Fort. The face-lift began externally. Inside, major repairs are still ongoing

# NEW DADA NEW ORLEANS



Culture connects: Mardi Grass in New Orleans (above). Zanzibar mayor Ali Haji and his New Orleans counterpart La Toya Cantrell (right)

New Orleans has become a sister-city of Zanzibar – mayors, chefs and universities are excited.

An American lady chef in Stone Town, Ashley Maybe of The Box in the old post office, was instrumental in getting the sisterhood between New Orleans (360,000 inhabitants) and Zanzibar City (216,000 inhabitants) off the ground. Culinary, university and other cultural exchanges are planned. When New Orleans mayor La Toya Cantrell received Zanzibar mayor Ali Haji in the US in September 2024, the partnership of-

officially started. "Zanzibar is one of the spice capitals of the world and New Orleans is a mecca for everything culinary", Ashley Maybe noted. Also on board: Prof. Byron Bradley, a well-known New Orleans chef who has already visited Zanzibar.

Partner or twin cities are a global initiative fostering cultural and economic exchange. Started in 1947 after World War II to promote peace and unity, around 2,000 such partnerships exist worldwide. Famous examples include: Paris and Rome, San Francisco and Osaka (bridging East and West). Zanzibar's partner city in Germany is Potsdam since 2017. Dar es Salaam partners with Hamburg, also in Germany - many joint workshops have been keeping that active partnership alive.

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By staff writer

Buonissimo! Tourism has grown by 15.4 percent in Zanzibar; in December 2024 even by a staggering 30 percent (compared to the year before!) Italians love Zanzibar most, followed by Germans. Zanzibar is aiming at one million tourists per year.



Honeymooners on the beach: Dream weddings, events and cultural tourism are in high demand

Zanzibar has "a healthy mix of tourists", said the Chairman of the Commission for Tourism, Rahim Bhaloo, in an interview with THE FUMBA TIMES. An international balance of tourists from West and East, from developed and developing countries, is reflected in the 2024 statistics, released by the Chief Government Statistician and the Commission for Tourism recently. All in all, 736,755 international visitors came to Zanzibar in 2024. "We are on a very good path", said Bhaloo who has been tourism commissioner for three years. "We are very happy with European arrivals and are now focussing on Indian and Chinese markets, as well as East and South African travellers." From India alone, 300-400 million people travel abroad annually. "If we could get only one per cent of these people, it would have a big

impact", Bhaloo said. The 52-year-old executive visited India recently promoting Zanzibar.

Europe first

The four biggest groups of international tourists to Zanzibar all hail from Europe (Italian, German, French and Polish – in that order, see chart below). And contrary to what sometimes appears like an over-proportional influx from Eastern markets recently, this particular group of visitors increased "only" by 12.5%. Polish are clearly leading the "emerging" pack with 51,000 annual visitors. 8,400 visi-

tors came from Russia in 2024 despite international travel sanctions. Chinese tourist numbers doubled from 6,000 to 12,000 tourists. The low season in Zanzibar is April and May – the rainy period. But Zanzibar is almost an all-year-round destination, with an average of about 50,000-60,000 arrivals per month.

In December tourist numbers went through the roof with around 82,000 tourists recorded last year. In April/May the number hovers only around 20,000 tourists per month. Does he believe that Zanzibar has already reached its lim-

its in terms of tourism numbers? "Absolutely not", replied the commissioner adding that he favours "sustainable growth" over sky-high expectations. "Our first goal is to reach one million tourists per year", he said. The all-year-round bonus is attracting large hotel chains. Spanish company RIU now entertains two hotels in Zanzibar and is planning a third one. Luxury brands like Four Seasons and Anantara are preparing to open here. Between 2019 and 2024, the archipelago added 22 new 4 and 5-star properties, with 2,000 high-quality rooms. On average, tourists stay seven to eight nights, often in combination with a safari.

Corona what?

The "Corona dent" in tourism's upward curve has been totally overcome. Zanzibar was one of the very few destinations open during most of the pandemic. Almost a quarter of a million guests, mostly Russians, visited here at the height of Corona in 2020. Before Covid, 538,264 tourists came to Zanzibar in 2019.



"Healthy tourism mix": Tourism commissioner Rahim Bhaloo

AIR TRAFFIC TRIPLES IN FOUR YEARS



En route to Zanzibar, a Turkish Airlines carrier crossing the Red Sea. The airline flies to Zanzibar nine times per week - on weekends twice per day

More than two million passengers frequented the international airports in Zanzibar and Pemba in 2024.

Nothing illustrates the tourism boom in Zanzibar better than the traffic numbers at Abeid Amani Karume International Airport (AAKIA) and the much smaller Karume Airport in Pemba. Between 2020 and 2024 the number of passengers more than tripled from 660,000 to 2.1 million, according to statistics released by the Zanzibar Airport Authority (ZAA). There are 42 international airlines and 24 domestic airlines serving the isles. Among the most frequent and direct international flights are those of Turkish Airlines, Ethiopian Airways, Fly Dubai and Kenya Airways.

The new Terminal 3 of the Zanzibar airport was opened in 2022. Construction of an additional Terminal 4 in Zanzibar and an international airport in Pemba is planned to start this year, while Paje will get an airport in 2026. A new domestic Terminal 2 in Zanzibar is already under construction.

**More Turkish, less KLM** Turkish Airways now flies to Zanzibar and back 9x per week from Istanbul. Passengers can get a free stopover in Istanbul in a 4-star-hotel. Air France temporarily suspends its Paris-Zanzibar route from March 22 - May 25 due to the "green season". KLM will pause its Zanzibar service from March to October 2025, and resume in the IATA winter season (October to March). Both airlines clarified that the suspensions are routine adjustments.

SAFARI TRENDS

Go on a different safari this year, recommends Gabriele Brown of urthsafari.com who has organised distinctive trips for American and European travellers for 10 years.

- 1. **Multi-generational adventures** It's no longer just parents and kids – it's grandparents and cousins joining the fun. Picture your family sharing a private villa in Zanzibar or family-friendly game drives in the Serengeti. "Shared experiences create memories to be cherished for generations", Brown knows.
- 2. **Off-the-beaten-path** Travellers are increasingly drawn to uncharted destinations. Lake Natron is such a natural phenomenon very few tourists visit. With flamingo filled lakes, ancient hominoid footprints and active volcanoes, it is thrilling to explore. The lake sits close to the Tanzania/Kenya border, in the Arusha region. Maasai people benefit from local tourism there.
- 3. **Extended stays** The slow travel movement offers an immersive way to explore. With remote work more common, extended stays are increasingly popular. Imagine spending weeks in Zanzibar, balancing productive workdays with beachside fun. Slow travel allows you to embrace the rhythm of local life.

GLOBAL TRENDS

TikTok for travel? One of the world's largest travel operators, TUI, identified new holiday trends in a representative survey with 2000 customers.

- 1. **TikTok travel** 69% of travelers get inspiration for their next journey from social media. Preferred sources: IG and TikTok
- 2. **Solo travel** Why wait for others? Set your own tempo, and make new friends travelling alone
- 3. **Granny travel** Grandparents taking their grandchildren on a trip giving parents a much-needed break.
- 4. **Backyard tourism** Exploring your own region; discovering beaches, forests or culture around you while enjoying best service in a pleasant hotel.



Why am I here? I saw it on Tik Tok!

EXCLUSIVE

# THE BIG MAKE-OVER

Who and what is behind the ongoing facelift of Stone Town



Three crucial developments in Stone Town (clockwise from top right): the overhaul of the Old Fort, the High Court being turned into a museum and the new seafront garden of the Africa House. Managing the renaissance: Zanzibar's chief conservator Ali Said Bakar (upper photo, right) and Samuel Saba from Dubai (left)

By Andrea Tapper

The historic quarter of Zanzibar is undergoing a massive overhaul and facelift. Exclusively for THE FUMBA TIMES, state conservator Ali Said Bakar and private investor Samuel Saba revealed their plans for the evocative makeover during a discovery walk.

If you are living in Zanzibar or are a regular visitor, you may have noticed some changes already. All of a sudden, the fountain at Forodhani, laid out in 1936 for the silver jubilee of Sultan Khalifa, is bubbling again. *Boda-boda* bikes no longer (or much more rarely) get in the way of pedestrians in the labyrinth of Stone Town. The seafront promenade, beautified by the World Bank some years ago, has been kept surprisingly clean, with locals and tourists resting under palm trees on traditional *barazas*. Nobody could be happier about the progress than engineer Ali Said Bakar, who took over a lacklustre Conservation and Development Authority (STCDA) in 2022 and has initiated much of the renaissance himself. "Stone Town has about 2,700 buildings, 1,000 need urgent repair", he tells me. Bakar has found an unusual ally in Samuel Saba, a young investor from Dubai claiming to handle real estate projects worth \$450 million with his family company Infinity Developments, including the new Anantara residential resort on

the north east coast of Zanzibar worth \$170 million.

Paying fines for littering

The public-private and the private changemakers agree, the time to act is now. "Heritage tourism is growing", Bakar points out and is determined to clean-up Stone Town: "We have started punishing littering with a fine of TZS 50,000", the agile civil servant says while walking along the promenade. "We want to enhance the customer journey experience", investor Saba describes the wider cultural and touristic intentions of the two men's public-private initiative as we cross over to the freshly painted Sultan Cemetery behind the Palace Museum, where nine of the 12 former Zanzibar rulers are buried. "White walls, green grass patches, comfortably paved walkways: the renovated graveyard and an adjacent modern exhibition have become an instagrammable heritage experience. The graveyard museum was financed by Oman, which is also trying to heal Zanzibar's biggest wound in the heart of history, the collapsed Sultan's palace. The painstaking reconstruction costs \$22 million and might be finished in 2027, Bakar estimates.

Repairs with cement? Not allowed!

With the help of investor Samuel Saba several major historical icons are presently under repair. Infinity billboards with ambitious renders have popped up everywhere. The ongoing beautification – for Zanzibar nothing short of a new approach towards its own history – is not uncontroversial.

Modern shops and restaurants in the Old Fort? A padel court instead of sundowners at the Africa House?

Some critics question the methods ("building with concrete"), others the intentions ("who will benefit?") and aesthetic qualities ("will it look like Disneyland?"). Most concede however: the miserable looking old town can only gain from the effort.

With the help of the Dubai investor, Zanzibar is claiming its 1,000-year-old history back. The government and the real estate mogul plan innovative tourist packages such as a "Stone Town Heritage pass", sharing potential earnings for the next 25 years, Saba disclosed. But what is the guarantee that this time things will work out – against the backdrop of ever more dilapidated houses barely kept up by wooden poles? "85% of Stone Town's houses are deteriorated", well-known historian Prof. Abdul Sheriff has said. "We are moving fast", counters Bakar, "the impact will encourage others."

Facelift for the Old Fort

Standing in front of the Old Fort, built 1698-1701 by Omani Arabs to fend off Portuguese invaders, big changes are

visible. With high-pressure cleaning ("water and chlorine", says Bakar) the impressive building has regained its natural clayish-brown colour instead of the former weathered mouldy black. "Heritage does not mean deterioration", insists the chief engineer. He has learnt to be careful: "We have documented on video that we used lime and not cement to restore the walls" – just as the world heritage status demands. Another

challenge remains: The popular Sauti za Busara festival held at the Old Fort for 22 years and the Infinity modernisations must yet find ways to coexist. Bakar's Stone Town reversion mission rests on three pillars: state-financed renovation of particular historical buildings, improvements of utilities such

What's the future of Africa House?

In front of Africa House, the former British club and long-time popular restaurant presently looking for a new owner, we watch heavy machinery fortifying the seafront wall, erecting a pier and resting spaces for visitors. For years, the garden had deteriorated and had a huge hole in the seawall. The rehabilitation of the seafront alone, once the yacht harbour of the colonial

entrepreneur got involved in Stone Town's overhaul in the first place? More or less by chance, it turns out. Wanting to acquire property in Stone Town himself, the conservation authority safeguarded him from a fraudulent offer - that kickstarted the co-operation of the two men.

From High Court to museum

We have reached the former High Court, already beautifully renovated by Infinity. Climbing up an elegant staircase still covered with construction dust, we imagine the many cases argued here since the times of the British protectorate. The almost completed transformation has turned out airy and authentic. "In all projects we follow exactly what the conservation authority tells us", says Samuel Saba. In this case, modern partitions were removed and valuable wooden interiors like judges' panels, witness stands and even a cell for suspects carefully restored. Built around 1900 by British architect John Sinclair, the Saracenic-style court combines colonial and Arabic features. The museum will showcase Zanzibar's history from anti-slavery legislation to later-day treason cases.

HISTORIC GEM STONE TOWN

Stone Town is Zanzibar's unique historical heart, a 1,000-year-old cosmopolitan relic of Arabian palaces, Indian trader shops, royal residences, mosques and narrow winding lanes. Most of its more than 2000 houses were built at the end of the 19th century, when Zanzibar became rich by slave and spice trade in a coup in 1964. Lacking funds and care, the historic gem deteriorated. Tourists, however, love discovering the ancient labyrinth. In 2000, Stone Town was declared a world heritage site by UNESCO.

## ITALIANS LOVE US MOST

736,755 TOURISTS IN 2024

+15.4% TOURISM GROWTH

513 HOTELS

7-8 NIGHTS AVERAGE STAY

\$158 AVERAGE NIGHTLY RATE

### TOP TEN VISITORS '24

1. ITALIANS 87,000
2. GERMANS 71,000
3. FRENCH 69,000
4. POLISH 51,000
5. BRITISH 42,000
6. AMERICANS 36,000
7. SOUTH AFRICANS 31,000
8. SCANDINAVIANS 27,000
9. KENYANS 23,000
10. DUTCH 23,000

Sources: Gov Statistician, Commission for Tourism, Tanzania Tourism UK

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## MIND MY BUSINESS

LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS MAKING A DIFFERENCE - THIS TIME: CHAKO ZANZIBAR

# THE GLASS MIRACLE

Chako upcycling creates 50 jobs

There are bottles everywhere. Of course, this is Chako's raw material! Chako (Swahili for yours) is the oldest glass collection company in Zanzibar creating handcrafted art products from waste. When we visit the factory near Bububu, more than 50 women and men are busy cutting used bottles into new shapes; some are crafting exquisite little wooden covers for jam glasses, spaghetti containers and water bottles. Cafes, vases, bulbs and lamps are also made of old bottles. The upcycled products of Chako are known to be not only practical but beautiful. Many hotels and restaurants use them; tourists buy them as souvenirs in Chako's new shop in Stone Town and take them home. Reduce, reuse, recycle is the idea. 750 students have been taught by Chako about the importance of environmental protection. Chako became the first member of the World Fair Trade Organisation in Zanzibar and is supported by the TUI Care Foundation, a travel-related charity from Germany. "Tourism brings money but also a lot of waste", say the Chako's owners and founders, Anneloes and Suleiman Mohamed, longtime partners in life and business. Suleiman Mohamed was recently elected as the new director of ZATI, the powerful 500-member-strong Association of Tourism Investors on the isles. Chako collects between one and two million bottles per year in Zanzibar. Started in 2019, their success story is presently widening. They experiment with upcycling plastic into modern chandeliers, and have started making terrazzo of crushed glass and cement. "It was unusual to see women working with glass here", Dutch-born Anneloes explains. But Nasma and Aziza at Chako look very comfortable heating up delicate glass bottles marked with a diamond laser, until they crack. After cleaning and polishing, a new glass is ready to sell. (AT)

Artistic: Chako employees create beautiful products from waste

More information: chakozanzibar.com

WELCOME NOTE

UNITED NATIONS OF HAPPINESS



Andrea Tapper Editor-in-chief THE FUMBA TIMES

The other day we celebrated our librarian's birthday in the Fumba Town library with a jolly round of about 14 women from seven nations. We nibbled Dutch cheese and South African wine, Ukrainian cake and mango juice, gossiping in Swahili and English, Spanish and Dutch. We truly felt like the United Nations of Happiness – as a new branding slogan of Fumba Town has so beautifully captured it. A few weeks before I had returned from Germany to Zanzibar, once more on board my favourite airline flying here more than any other (which one? See page 2). Upon arrival I noticed something noteworthy. Amidst many excited tourists, two well-dressed middle-age couples stood out, purposefully wheeling their luggage trolley into the warm tropical night, where two Zanzibari men warmly welcomed them. "Habari", said the one of the women, "is everything okay, do we still need to do some shopping?" The case was clear, my ever-curious journalist gene clicked into gear: These two couples were not anxious-



NOW & THEN

Elegance connects these photos, taken 70 years apart. In 1955, a young man cycling through Stone Town on Saleh Madawa Street in Kiponda was immortalised in black and white. At the same location today, beautiful Shaba boutique hotel bridges past and present. Keeping its flair, Stone Town seems timeless. Replicas of the iconic b&w photo, shot by the late Ramesh R.T. Oza's father, and other historic photos are available at Capital Art Studio, Kenyatta Rd.



MOVING TO TANZANIA

How to relocate easily with a family



Departure to an unknown world: moving abroad with a family can be quite challenging

family. Parents can foster growth by viewing the move as a shared journey. Encourage your child to approach change with curiosity – exploring the new environment with its vibrant culture and languages, strengthens adaptability and resilience.



By Christine Schuppener

Not only has she relocated her family of five several times from Southeast Asia to America, from Germany to Tanzania. Christine Schuppener has made "transition coaching" her profession. For our series "With kids in Zanzibar", she has some surprising practical and psychological tips for the big move.

Since 1993 I have worked in international cooperation. Together with my family, I have lived in Southeast Asia, England and in North and Middle America. Relocating to Tanzania offers not only an adventure, but also a chance for deep personal development for the whole

Curious parents – curious kids! As parents, your role is vital. Model openness to new experiences, whether by learning Swahili phrases together, getting to know the new neighbourhood or by tasting different kinds of fruit and vegetables. A growth mindset from you will inspire the same in your child.

Weekly family check-ins Use the transition to build family bonds. Weekly family check-ins can help everyone share their feelings and celebrate milestones – big or small. Acknowledge your own emotions, too. It's okay to feel overwhelmed at times. Seeking support from local expat communities or Tanzanian friends can ease the adjustment. This journey, while challenging, equips your family with invaluable life skills: adaptability, empathy, and a global perspective. Finding creative ways is a life motto for me. Even small changes can have a big impact. Here are some practical ideas for the family to share:

Take a large jar of glass and put it in a place that is easily accessible for

Christine Schuppener is an international consultant based in Germany and Zanzibar. Together with her husband she offers life coaching based on the theory of Viktor Frankl. Since 2007, the couple specialises in training for expats. www.schuppener-global-transitions.com/

GUEST COMMENT

WHY WE LOVE (AND NEED) BUSARA



Sine Heitmann, 44, has lived on the south east coast for 15 years. The educator is married and has 3 kids. She shares her love for Zanzibar on Instagram @mama\_in\_zanzibar

"Who taught wazungu to dance?"

After the festival is before the festival. The 22nd edition of Zanzibar's music festival Sauti za Busara has ended and it was a big success. As usual, I feel a little exhausted yet exhilarated, and a bit nostalgic. What started over two decades as an idea by DJ Yussuf has turned into an internationally recognised top event, year after year attracting star performers like Tiken Jah Foleys from Ivory Coast and Thandiswa from South Africa, while also showcasing Tanzanian voices like Tryphon Everist and many, many others. The Swahili Encounters, too, represent the spirit of the festival perfectly, when international artists come together for a one-off performance. The consistent message: connecting cultures, fostering unity. And, in my opinion, there is also an unofficial motto: female power! I cannot remember even one edition without a fantastic female performer. The festival has withstood a lot of challenges – finding sponsors, organising shows during the Covid pandemic, evolving with wider tourism developments on the island. If you attended the first editions, you might remember the free entry before 5pm. I often joined with my family early and we were happily

sitting on the lawn with many others until things happened. The festival now attracts a much wider international audience and offers almost non-stop performances on four different stages, an opening parade, a range of workshops across Stone Town and a cashless payment system. I heard Singeli artist Baba Kash from Dar being interviewed after his performance: "Here you'll find Tanzanians dancing with guests from Europe. Who taught the wazungu to dance ndauna?", referring to Tanzania's very own music and dancing style. Artists from Sudan & DRC Congo reiterated this year's theme "Voices for Peace", helping the event to stay politically relevant. Sauti za Busara 2026 has already been announced – and the organisers face new challenges: Within the next few years, the festival will take place during Ramadan, and the venue of the Old Fort is set for a facelift. But what better venue to have for Busara than the 300-year-old fort, representing the cultural melting pot that is Zanzibar? It would be heart-breaking if the upcoming modernisation would place a question mark on next year's festival. I do hope the authorities find a good compromise. Busara attracts many extra visitors to the island and we would not want to miss it!

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READER'S LETTERS

"Useful interview"

Your interview with the director of the International School, Mark McCarthy, has been very useful indeed. Short and crisp, it managed to capture our most pressing questions. Remarkable that the transition from a national school anywhere to Zanzibar, is usually easier than the other way around!

A good read...

Enjoying THE FUMBA TIMES at the Kweku Kweni Play cafe are Fumba residents Shadya and her husband Nadir from Oman who were among the very first homeowners here.

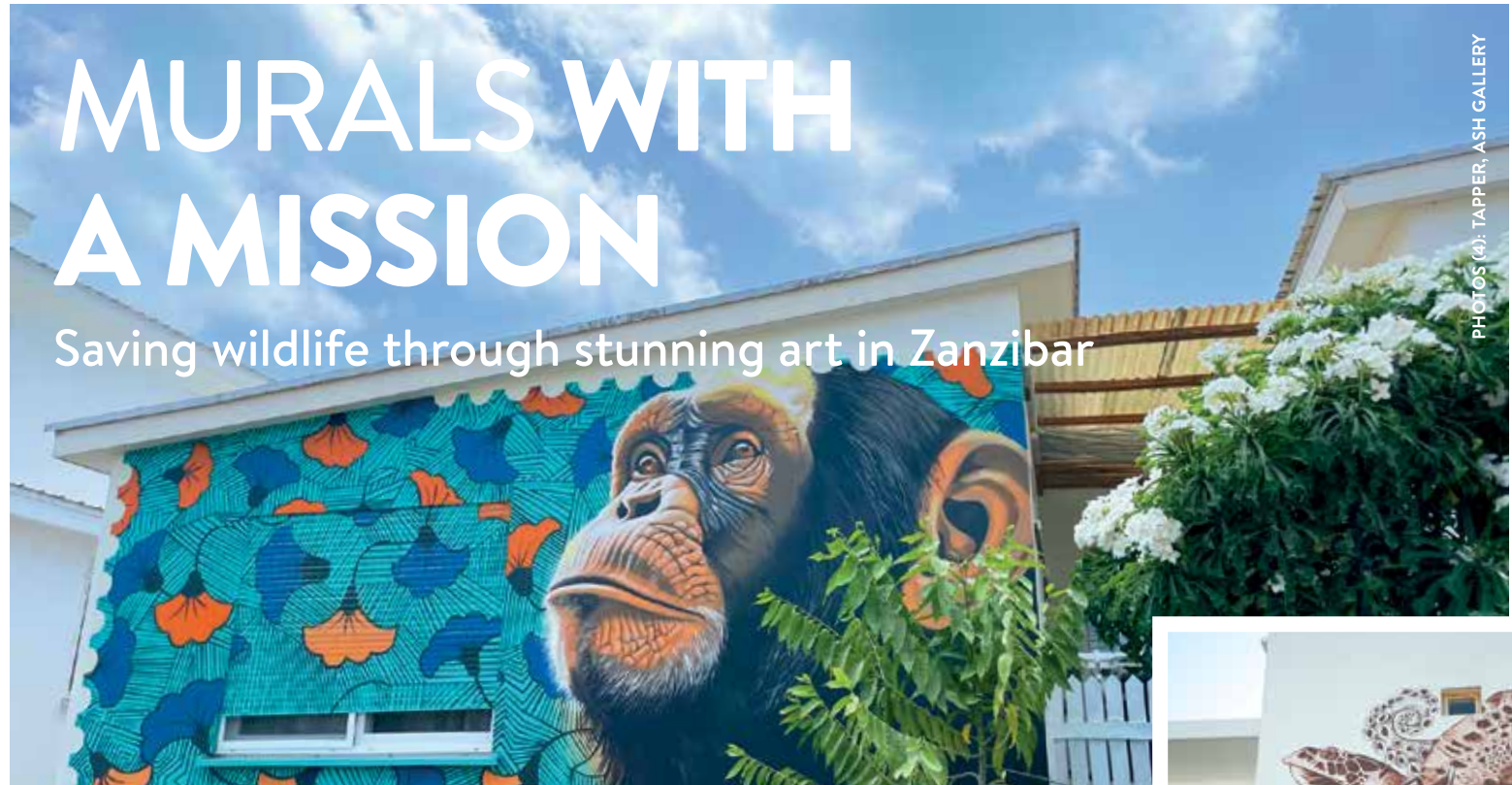
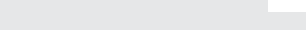
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New neighbours: Sardinian house owner Viviana Farris loves the chimps by artist Wamala on her house in Fumba

By Andrea Tapper

Ten artists, ten masterpieces, one wild cause. In Fumba Town recently, young mural masters from East Africa revealed the secret of just how to get a painting on a wall. Their art is here to stay.

Chimps on a house facade, a Rothschild giraffe in a much-frequented food court, a rare pangolin creature on a staircase. For the first time ever, Zanzibar invited ten graffiti artists to paint the town red. The "Wild Murals Festival", facilitated by developer CPS, took place in Fumba Town, combining art and activism in stunning style. "Our town is no longer just white", fascinated residents remarked, happy about the artistic vibes in town. All murals – ten of them - are here to stay.

An atmosphere of creativity, fun, even intellectualism got the seaside community hooked, as the artists were at work for a fortnight. It started with huge scaffolding being erected; of course, how else would the artists reach the high walls, staircases and housing facades? But the next steps of the art-in-progress show actually needed some more explaining. Smart and pretty little easels were placed in front of every artwork in progress enabling the audience to get some basic information without distracting the artist.

"Pangolin-man" Mjeuri from Dar es Salaam painted one of the most trafficked mammals in the world on the walls of a staircase in support of a conservation program in his country. In the future, shoppers making their way up at the Pavilion centre will always be reminded of the pangolins' plight.

How long do murals last? "We use quality paint, so they can last up to 20 years", said French-born artist Laura "La Zipolita", one of the organisers of the festival. Together with Victoria Firth, an educator and experienced mural artist from England, she created the concept of the festival. The two women supported all artists to meet conservation organisations in their respective countries Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda to understand the causes of threats to wildlife – before picking up their brushes.

"Most of them were not conservationists before." Vicky Firth explained. "Everything was new to me", said Ninah Tanya, 26, from Nairobi, busy with a 'wall of women' – Samburu tribe ladies engaged in the Grevy Zebra Trust in Kenya. "There are only 3,000 grevy zebras left in the world", the artist learnt,

"Luckily, we can make a living off our art"



Flower power for kids: Laura "La Zipolita" beautifying a playground in Fumba

Elijah from Uganda (top) with his mural; impressive group work (L)

his giraffe. With his specific style, the 30-year-old father regularly gets commissioned by Kenyan companies including the National Railway museum. "Luckily, we all can live off our art today", Msale, short for Brian Musasia Wanyande, said. Zanzibar kids were eager to learn from the muralists during several workshops in Fumba. At the end of a special festival exhibition, CPS director Tobias Dietzold invited the artists: "Don't go anywhere else, come back here." Residents might just be lucky to get another round of street art in their community.

All artists' info and bookings: Thewildmuralprojects.com

ENJOYING ZANZIBAR DURING RAMADAN What visitors should know about the Holy Month. Includes sections on 'DO'S AND DON'TS FOR VISITORS DURING RAMADAN IN ZANZIBAR', 'SPECIAL TREATS FOR IFTAR', and 'Your private iftar'.

A KING'S VISIT TO ZANZIBAR



Royal in Fumba: Christian Manahl, his wife Joy and THE FUMBA TIMES editor Andrea Tapper with King Letsie III of Lesotho (from left)

Off protocol and perfectly at ease, the reigning King of Lesotho recently touched down in Zanzibar to reconnect with an old friend—and enjoy a real royal meal.

It was meant to be a relaxed afternoon and it was. Taking a brief respite from a packed itinerary, King Letsie III of Lesotho visited Zanzibar recently following his participation in the Africa Energy summit in Dar es Salaam. "It's my first time here," remarked the youthful-looking monarch, "but I like it and will come back. He had come on an unofficial mission to see an old-time friend, Christian Manahl, a former UN conflict mediator and now the proprietor of a unique seafood restaurant at the southern tip of Zanzibar's Fumba peninsula. As the golden sun dipped behind the horizon and birds chirped in the surrounding mangroves, the King and the former diplomat sat on a terrace overlooking the Indian Ocean, reminiscing about the past and presence. Manahl, 64, served as the European Union ambassador to Lesotho - often referred to as the "Kingdom in the Sky", from 2017 to 2021, during which time the two men forged a friendship. Although constitutionally a monarch without much political power, King Letsie III played an important

role in reforming his landlocked nation, which is surrounded entirely by South Africa. "The European Union supported him." Manahl noted. Since ascending to the throne at the age of 33, the King—born David Mlotsho Bereng Seiso—has become a respected moral authority and a beloved figure in Lesotho. Now 61 and father of three children, he navigates his role in a country still grappling with the economic and political aftershocks of apartheid. Yet, this afternoon in Fumba was a light-hearted reunion. The highlight? A specially curated meal featuring Zanzibar's finest: octopus, lobster, and kachumbari, prepared by Christian Manahl's Membe Kayak Restaurant, an emerging culinary treasure still considered an insider's secret on the island. All smiles in Fumba: King Letsie III from Lesotho on a private mission



# IN A DIFFERENT TIME ZONE

New private luxury island Bawe open for business



PHOTOS (4): ASH GALLERY, TAPPER

Maldives style: spectacular overwater villas overlooking the lagoon of Bawe. The 30-hectare private island (small photo) lies only 15 minutes by speed boat from Stone Town

By Andrea Tapper

The first of 19 private islands recently given away by the government, luxurious Bawe, has opened to guests. From Italian country style cooking to your own water villa on stilts – nothing is amiss in paradise. As long as you are prepared to part with at least 2,000 dollars. Per night.

Tanzania's president "Mama Samia" has no heart for luxury wasted. She made it pretty clear recently: Whoever is not developing his or her choice of the 19 or so private islands spectacularly auctioned off three years ago, will be fined or even lose the deal. She gave investors three months to start. Only three island owners did not need reminding: the Italian family owning Bawe Island and Prison Island, well known for tortoise excursions. And the Czech hoteliers actively developing the Pamunda twin islands of six hectares south-west of Fumba (THE FUMBA TIMES reported).

But nobody moved as fast as Bawe. The moment we arrive in the lush green lobby boasting two enticing de-luxe boutiques we feel like in another world. Definitely we are in another time zone: "Put your watch-

es one hour ahead", a very attentive employee alerts us and explains: "We do that to enjoy a later equatorial sunset. Ladies don't wish to leave the pool so early and need time to get dressed-up for dinner." How thoughtful!

The boat trip from Stone Town to the private island took us only about 15 minutes, still too much for his esteemed guests, pledges general manager Mehdi Serrou, 66, who has come to greet us personally: "We have applied for a helicopter license. Guests in our price range request that comfort." Serrou knows the real luxuries in life. Simplicity is one. Simply fantastic is Bawe's beach trattoria "Sinfonia", seemingly coming straight out of an Italian picture book. A blue counter, fresh veggies, gelato. Chef Giacomo Bongiovani serves ever-so light ravioli, almost transparent slices of pizza and a perfectly cooled prosciutto. The silhouette of Stone Town is simmering in a heat haze.

Bawe, flat like a pancake and 30 hectares big, was developed in less than two years. It takes 45 minutes to walk once around the island. But who would do that in the heat? Every guest gets a bicycle to explore. "We had more than 1,000 construction workers on the ground", Serrou says. 70 exclusive villas, all with pri-



ate pools and butler service, stretch out to different sides of the island.

Most exceptional are surely the eight lagoon suites on eight-metre stilts, each 170sqm big, with thatched roofs – creating a perfect Maldives feeling. The only disadvantage: Guests cannot climb down and immediately access the sea, "too dangerous", says the manager. Solar panels, a desalination plant, three restaurants, bars, great diving and water sport possibilities, a padel court, a gym, babysitting on request – Bawe has it all, but most importantly, says the manager "it's beach-boy-free".

Privacy is another luxury of the affluent. But privacy can sometimes border boredom: a beach-club and a large common infinity pool work against that here. "Common", of course, is the wrong word: fluffy macramé sun chairs and umbrellas are reserved for guests only. Surprising: the open sea around the island has a strong current, but apparently

no tides. Sunrise villas of 200 sqm face east, sunset suits (240sqm) west, but the real space wonder is the Sultan Palace, an ultra-modern, two-storey villa on 500sqm accommodating up to nine guests. Sofas by Etro, a bathroom as big as a dance hall: holidaying like the sultans starts at \$8,000 per night. "Our Christmas guests here spent \$80,000 in five days", Serrou dryly recounts.

Bawe is the most expensive holiday place in Zanzibar today. First guests hailed from Dubai and France, Germany and Poland; the upper-luxury segment never fails to come, the manager says. The Cocoon Collection invested \$50 million into Bawe. It is a new brand of the well-known Azzola family in the Indian Ocean. Their first resort was created in 1980 by Enzo and Maria Rosaria in Sri Lanka, six hotels in Zanzibar and Maldives by Attilio, Alessandro and Andrea followed. Maria Rosaria also owns the travel agency Azamar and is considered one of the main female entrepreneurs in the Italian tourism industry. Successfully running the Gold Hotel in Zanzibar and three resorts in the Maldives, the family must be doing something right!

The gardens and greenery in Bawe still need development, and an organic farm is planned. What is Bawe's promise? "Ultimate privacy only 15 minutes in front of Stone Town and no more than an hour's flight away from safari elephants", says manager Serrou. Blend that with top contemporary design, informal hospitality and gourmet cuisine – and you never want to leave.

INFORMATION AND BOOKING: [www.baweisland.com](http://www.baweisland.com)

## The biggest luxury on Bawe? Privacy!



Ultimate comfort: sun-chairs with fluffy macramé covers. Romantic double beds with nets are equally comfy



# AFRICA RALLY RETURNS

Biggest Sub-Saharan road trip - from South Africa to Kenya



PHOTO: AFRICARALLY

The 2024 winner: a 1964 Volvo Amazon

Attention, car lovers! This is a rally where everyone with any type of vehicle can participate. It takes place in July. The 5,000km, three-week drive starts in Hartbeespoort, South Africa on 5th July before travelling through Botswana and Chobe National Park to the Victoria Falls in Zambia. It then heads east to Malawi for the Half Way Party at Wheelhouse Marina, Senga Bay. Teams from around the world will recuperate for 24 hours on the Lake, while enjoying outstanding Malawian cuisine, and sampling the famous Malawi-made Linga Wine.

Vehicles as old as 1935 and as new as 2022 are booked in for The Africa Rally 2025. The car that won the charity rally in 2024 was a Malawi-registered

1964 Volvo Amazon. The rally has been running for 10 years. In the second half of the race, the rally divides, one section comes to Tanzania, across the Serengeti, and into Kenya finishing at Victoria Sands Lodge in Mbita. The Discovery Route instead heads south, into Mozambique, past some of the best diving and fishing spots in the world, before crossing into eSwatini and finishing at the home of Bushfire Festival in Mandelelas. The Finish Line events are jointly held on 26th July 2025 and are open to the public. Thinking of entering a team? Places are still available; simply go to [www.africarally.com](http://www.africarally.com). To follow the action as it happens, follow on Instagram @africarally, and on Facebook – <https://facebook.com/theafricarally>. Or reach out on [info@africarally.com](mailto:info@africarally.com)

# # My ZANZIBAR

For this new column, THE FUMBA TIMES asks residents and fans of the island to show us Zanzibar through their eyes - from personal happy places to must-try restaurants and standout attractions



## LISENKA BEETSTRA IN STONE TOWN

Lisenka Beetstra has been living and working in Stone Town since 2008, mainly at the famous Emerson on Hurumzi hotel. The Dutch national loves art and culture in Zanzibar

## # GO HERITAGE!



Dive into history in this tiny but beautiful museum dedicated to Zanzibar's most famous female - run-away princess Salme. The sultan's daughter escaped with a German trader in 1866, and was buried as Emily Ruete in Hamburg in 1924. Carefully curated by scholar Said el-Gheithy, you may touch her clothes and artefacts in the museum and learn a lot. **Princess Salme Museum**, daily 11am-5pm; book an appointment +255 779 093 066 for a full tour

## # SKY-HIGH DINING

Wandering through Stone Town's alleyways, I always enjoy cooling down with a gentle breeze while having a meal on a rooftop. Located in a restored heritage building, Emerson on Hurumzi's Tea House is open daily from 12-4pm for lunch, and at 6pm for dinner with traditional taarab music, by reservation only. [www.emersonzanzibar.com](http://www.emersonzanzibar.com)



## # KEEPING FIT IN TOWN



Staying in town must not stop anybody from exercising. Every Wednesday at 5pm at Hifadhi building (behind the palace) we run and exercise as a group. Everyone is welcome to join. Some of us get fit for the yearly Kimbia bila Shaka (Run without Fear), this year taking place on 28 June. **Weekly Town Run** @zanzihalf\_kimbibilahasha

## # AFRICA UNPLUGGED

Live music can be found in different venues in town, like in the romantic Secret Garden. Regular unplugged street concerts (photo) are also a lot of fun. Most musicians in Zanzibar developed their skills at our local music school presently located at Jaws Corner and absolutely worth a visit for a concert or workshop. **Dhow Countries Music Academy** @dcmazanzibar



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FUMBA TOWN ZANZIBAR

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