

DAR ES SALAAM

NO LONGER THE UGLY DUCKLING TO TANZANIA'S HOT TOURIST SPOTS, DES ES SALAAM PULLING ITS OWN

WEIGHT. IT'S ALL GROWN UP AND HAS ITS OWN TANTALISING SECRETS. BY LINDA MARKOVINA (@MORNING_SUSHI)



Type the words “quintessential Tanzania” into any Google search and your browser will be flooded with images of beaches with shades of increasingly blue tropical waters. This is the Tanzania we imagine: the one we pay money to spend time in. But when you arrive there, make sure that before disappearing onto the nearest safari vehicle, you take time to experience Dar es Salaam – the pulsating economic heart of the country where dancing, dining and sunset rooftop cocktails expose you to a city you shouldn’t dismiss as a mere stopover point.

“Pale sora (So sorry) your flight was bumpy, hey?” says Wilbert the taxi-driver as he introduces himself. Somehow, nothing said in Kiswahili can ever make you angry – even if you’re protesting an image of a sweaty, pale, train-crash of a human being shuffling out of Julius Nyerere International Airport and into a wall of tropical heat. In a notoriously bad fever and have timed my arrival at the tail-end of Tanzania’s long rains, from March to May. They’re called that because of the high humidity and tropical downpours that assault the city with intermittent ferocity, soaking the streets and offering only brief respite from the heat. Along with causing turbulence for flights, the long rains also mark the beginning of the high tourist season for the world-famous wildebeest migration. Animals in their millions and tourists in their thousands flock to the great plains of the northern Serengeti to witness one of the most famous wildlife shows on earth.

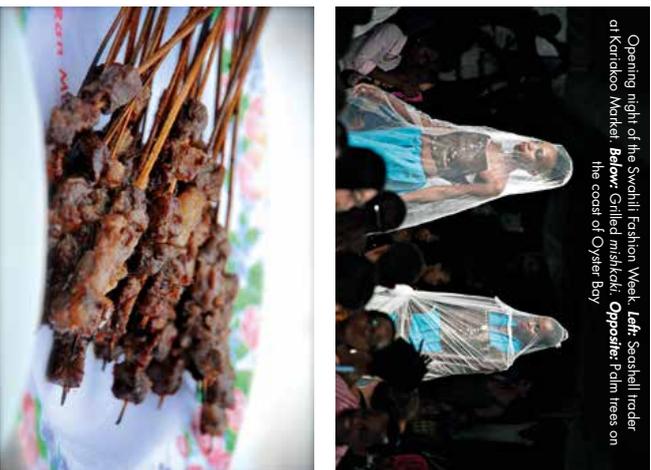
“Karibu Tanzania,” laughs Wilbert over his shoulder as he loads my bags into the taxi. “Rafiki (friend), are you going on safari?” I settle into the seat with a smile as we move into the river of congested traffic creeping along the few main thoroughfares that lead to the city centre. I’ve become used to this question, as it seems to be an integral opener of



the conversations you have with pretty much everyone you encounter as you arrive. It shouldn’t come as a surprise, though, with tourism overtaking agriculture to become the leader in the economic sector, bringing in nearly \$950 million in the past few years, according to the Bank of Tanzania. Of all the travellers and holiday-makers who visit the country, very few will spend more than a day exploring Dar es Salaam – yet the city offers much more than just a place to rest your head before and after your safari *jezo* (fun!).

Granted, at first glance, it doesn’t have the most pleasant façade. As the third-fastest-growing city in Africa, according to an African Development Bank report, its population has expanded faster than its infrastructure can handle, leaving buildings and facilities in varying degrees of modernisation and dilapidation. And don’t get me started on the infamous traffic jams, which make commuting around the city during peak hours an ordeal that can last as long as three hours. If you can avoid travelling at these times, do so. It’s far more pleasant to sit and sip rich rift valley coffee or a refreshing cup of Chat tea before diving into the swarm heading into or out of the centre of town.

Eventually Wilbert and I make our way through the heaving streets past Karakoo Market, one of the largest local shopping districts where you can buy anything from bootlegged CDs of the Tanzania Heritage Project to rare Tanzanite jewellery, beautiful hand-crafted souvenirs, astounding beaded masterpieces made by Jacqueline Kibacha of Heart65 Emporium and gorgeous clothing and fabrics. You need your wits about you when you navigate these noisy, congested streets, but as Wilbert drives, I sit back and relax – *halema matata* (“no worries”). However, if you’re looking for something a little more laid-back, there’s the tourist-friendly shopping centre at the converted bazaar simply called The Slipway. It’s an accessible place for visitors to book chartered



Opening night of the Swahili Fashion Week. **Left:** Seeshell trader at Karakoo Market. **Below:** Grilled mishikaki. **Opposite:** Palm trees on the coast of Oyster Bay

flights, take sailing lessons, arrange boat and diving trips or take in a sunset or five while sipping something refreshingly cold, admiring the sun as it dips into the natural harbour.

Dominating the skyline above the street vendors and markets are the glittering lights of the popular hotels, resting places where the well-connected and beautiful like to spend their evenings lounging around the lush gardens, dining on beautiful seafood platters or sipping whiskies while listening to live jazz in the bars.

Winding through the high-rise city lights and over the final congestion hurdle of Solander Bridge lies the Masarati Peninsula, which harbours all the affluent hotels and homes in the suburb of Oyster Bay. Wilbert pulls up to my home away from home, a little guesthouse tucked behind shady trees off the main road, with the speed of a Nascar driver, but – steady – not the braking or agility. I think all the time he’s spent sitting stuck in traffic has released his

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inner speed demon. A fresh plume of street dust lurches towards the defenceless gate guard and he offers a shaky smile as he calls out: “Karibu tena!” (“Welcome back!”). This kind of taxi-driving is similar to the country’s staple, dough-like *ugali* – something you adjust to in time.

After dumping my bags, I have a quick shower, followed by sauntering on layers of mosquito-repellent – for they’re plentiful and nerveless in the high-humidity months – and prime myself for a night on the town. I’m hoping that this evening there’ll be a poetry slam, a quiz night or perhaps a musician or two on the stage, warming up the locals and expats in the garden restaurant and bar with the delectable smell of spicy, grilled *mishikaki* (beef, chicken or fish kebabs) and fried chips filling every available space.

Going out after dark in Dar es Salaam isn’t an occasion for khaki pullovers and hiking sneakers. It’s at night that the city really



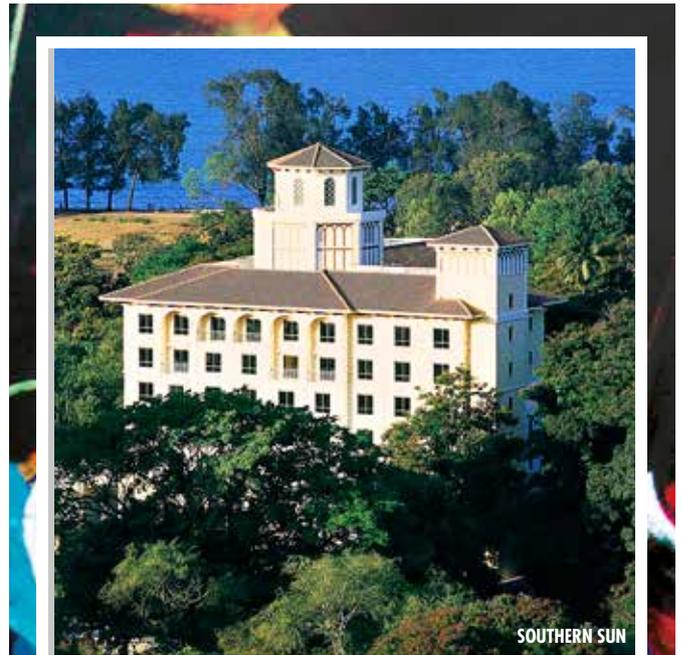
comes alive and dressing to impress isn't optional. If you favour a more subdued environment than a nightclub, there are bountiful dining options that will see you late into the night. Choose from fresh seafood, bustling street vendors, Thai, Italian, traditional, divine Indian, good-old fashioned burgers, pizza or even snacks and a *sheesha* on a rooftop, taking in the cityscape as day fades to dusk.

Dancing and music are two of the most popular activities in town once the sun begins to set – and you can enjoy both in varying degrees of hip-swinging and decibels, if you know where to look. There are open-air venues where you can take in East African music greats, plush clubs with talented DJs spinning the decks until dawn with lounge, house, electronic and hip-hop and dive street parties where young men titter “Wowowo!” as bevy of beautiful ladies sashay past. Fancy a dance party on an island? Certain bars and clubs offer monthly events where a short boat ride takes you to a small island for dancing through the night. During the week of Sauti za Busara every February, keep your eyes open for famous local and international jazz, traditional, fusion and hip-hop artists, who often give performances at venues across the city centre.

Nothing eases the stress of the traffic better than a refreshing Serengeti beer and a short *bajaji* ride to Samaki Samaki, named twice because the food there is so good. A day wouldn't be complete without collapsing into a shweshwe-decorated couch in an open-air lounge until the heat or fatigue forces you back into the safety of an air-conditioned room. Dine or dance with friends, take it easy or hit the town – but don't spend your time hiding inside your hotel waiting for your connecting flight, as it's such a waste.

Tanzania may still be developing, but it's no longer a window into a bygone world – and Dar es Salaam shows off a modern country beyond dhow safaris and fireside bush conversations. There's a Tanzanian proverb: “Little by little, a little becomes a lot.” And little by little, Dar es Salaam will grow on you. 🌈

Local and international artists often perform at city venues.



USEFUL CONTACTS

DINING

AL DAR: Holiday Inn, 11th Floor, Azikiwe St. +255 2221 39250; www.holidayinn.co.tz/dining/restaurant-38

ADDIS IN DAR: Ursino St. +255 (0)713 266 299; www.addisindar.com

KARAMBEZI CAFÉ: Seacliff Hotel, Toure Drive. +255 2226 00380/7; <http://karambezicafe.com>

JAHAZI: Serena Hotel, Kivukoni. +254 732 123 333;

www.serenahotels.com/serenadaressalaam/loliveto-en.html

SAMAKI SAMAKI: Bagamoyo Rd.

+255 7588 12224;

<http://samakisamaki.co.tz>

THE WATERFRONT: The Slipway. +255 2226 00893; www.hotelslipway.com/restaurantsandbars.asp

ZUANE: Mzingaway Rd, Oyster Bay. +255 0222 600118; www.zuanetrattoriapizzeria.com

GEORGE & DRAGON: Haile Selassie Rd. +255 7178 00002.

THAI KANI: 86 Tha Compound, off Kahama Rd. +255 7571 65514.

DANCING AND MUSIC

RUNWAY LOUNGE: Below Shoppers Plaza, Mwai Kibaki Rd. +255 7548 12567.

BREAK POINT: Kijitonyama, opposite Millennium Towers.

HUGO'S BAR: Kinondoni Rd. +255 657 493 257

HOTEL TRAVERTINE: Mpiji St (on Sundays). +255 767 259 711

SELANDER BRIDGE CLUB: It's an outdoor beach space off Ali Hassan Mwinyi Road. (On Saturdays – arrive late).

SAUTI ZA BUSARA: www.busaramusic.org

SHOPPING

KARIAKOO MARKET: In the heart of the Ilala District.

THE SLIPWAY: www.slipway.net

MAMMA MASAI: Handmade crafts and beaded jewellery. 22 Kaunda Drive. <http://mamamasai.com>

HANDMADE TANZANIA & CAN WEAR DESIGNS: 195 Uganda Road, Oyster Bay. www.handmadefromtanzania.com

MWENGE CRAFT MARKET: Open air market, opposite the Village Museum off New Bagamoyo Rd.

SWAHILI FASHION WEEK: www.swahilifashionweek.com

ACCOMMODATION

HIGH-END

THE OYSTER BAY HOTEL: +44 193 226 0618; www.theoysterbayhotel.com

SEA CLIFF HOTEL: +255 22552 9900; www.hotelseacliff.com

SERENA HOTEL: +255 22211 2416; www.serenahotels.com/serenadaressalaam/default-en.html

MID-RANGE

PROTEA HOTEL COURTYARD:

+255 2221 30130; www.proteahotels.com/hotels/pages/protea-hotel-courtyard-dar-es-salaam.aspx

HYATT REGENCY: +255 7647 01234; <http://daressalaam.kilimanjaro.hyatt.com>

SOUTHERN SUN: +255 2221 37575; www.tsogosunhotels.com/hotels/dar-es-salaam

BUDGET

THE SOUK: +255 2226 00893; www.hotelslipway.com

BEST WESTERN PLUS PENINSULA HOTEL: +255 2226 64591; <http://book.bestwestern.com/bestwestern/TZ/dar-es-salaam-hotels>

TRINITY GUEST HOUSE: +255 7559 63686; <http://trinity.co.tz>