

Ibo Festival

This festival centres around one thing - family. It is called Kueto Siritwala (cue-to sea-ree-wala). It means; “to not forget your roots, regardless of how far away from home you are.” It is celebrated on an almost forgotten island, on the edge of the world, Ibo Island.

Tradition and culture is the heart of Ibo Island. It is a common bond, so strong; the grip has remained unloosened for centuries. These values direct all that occurs on the island. The shape of this lifestyle is unique to Ibo Island. It is an overlap of cultures, the result of turbulent history, which is now a culture uniquely Ibo. Life on Ibo stands out, and is, concomitantly, lost in rich traditions.

History - Once upon a time

Conquered and crossed by many. Ibo Island history reads like a kind of turbulent fairytale. A dramatic series of events that, when recounted, seems to have a presence of magic. Pirates and stone fortresses, with paths and tunnels, fill the history pages. Historically, the island see-sawed between Portuguese and Omani Arab rule. As if not an island, but some marked treasure trove. Architectural heirlooms from this era, canals cut by slaves, and other crumbles of evidence, gather on the outskirts of Ibo, reflecting this rich legacy.

Ibo hosts one of the most ancient settlements in Mozambique, after Ilha de Mozambique. The main trading centre was on Quirimba Island, to the south of Ibo.

Trading in the Quirimbas Islands was in amber, jet, ivory, turtle shell and..... people. As early as AD600 Arab Traders established trading post along the coastline. Then the Portuguese arrived. The Portuguese and the Muslims traders traded blows and battles over the islands for much of the 1500's, but the Portuguese held sway.

In 1522 the Portuguese set alight and destroyed the Quirimbas, because the trading Muslims of Quirimba refused to trade with them.

Slave trade was a big business, reaching as far as the French, who needed them for their plantations in Mauritius and Reunion. The Portuguese on Ibo were very active in the trade, sending slaves all over the world. It subsequently brought huge prosperity to the islands. Streets of houses were laid out and fine public buildings were erected around the plaza.

By the end of the 18th century, Ibo was regarded to have been the second most important Portuguese trading centre in Mozambique.

Throughout the 18th and 19th century the population of Ibo Island and the adjacent regions were consistently under attack from Dutch and Madagascar force. Fort of São João Batista was completed in 1791 as a result.

João Batista, born on Ibo Island, 80 years of age this year, is a saintly man of grace and hospitality. He is named after the fort. He worked for the Portuguese colonial administration, almost unheard of during these times, before siding with the independence movement. As a result he spent time as a prisoner in the fort on his own island. Most believed he lived to tell this story, and so he does, in his home, on Ibo. Spending time with João, your imagination exhausts itself with wonder.

Today Ibo Island is still the marked location on a treasure map. Only this time for the pristine, powder white beaches outlining the island. The warm crystal blue waters ideal for diving, snorkelling, even fishing. And, the rugged, bushy interior of the island with a romance of its own. A kind of off-beat safari with a civilized form.