

Alice and Edward soak up the sunshine at Ibo

Lost paradise

The Quirimbas Archipelago is an unspoilt haven for honeymooners. Newlywed writer Alice Sunderland discovered its hidden charms...

TOP FACTS Quirimbas

☀ Mozambique was granted independence in 1974 and the Portuguese were given 24 hours to leave the country. They threw their possessions into the sea off Ibo, and amongst the shells and coral, you can find rare pieces of pottery.

☀ With the average temperature a balmy 25°C, the Quirimbas is a year-round destination, but January to March is the rainy season.

☀ Quilálea is a malaria-free island due to the fact there is no natural water source on the island.

☀ The time on Quilálea is one hour behind the rest of the Quirimbas, meaning you have an extra hour of sunshine in the afternoon.

☀ Although neither Ibo Island Lodge or Quilálea promote themselves as A-list resorts, Leonardo di Caprio, Elle MacPherson and Gordon Ramsay have recently holidayed on the islands.

Are you dreaming of a tropical paradise miles away from the pressures of modern life? Then consider the Quirimbas Archipelago in Mozambique. My fiancé Ed and I hadn't heard of the Quirimbas when we started researching our honeymoon. In fact, Mozambique barely registered on our holiday radar. We knew we wanted to go somewhere hot and exotic, and somewhere neither of us had been to before — somewhere secluded and unspoilt.

It was only when we sought advice from Rainbow Tours, who specialise in tailor-made holidays to Africa and the Indian Ocean, that we found out about the Quirimbas Archipelago, a group of 32 coral islands off the north coast of Mozambique. Until very recently, the area was virtually unknown as a holiday destination due to 20 years of civil war. But



A bird's-eye view of the Quirimbas, a group of 32 coral islands near Mozambique



now, holidaymakers and honeymooners have begun to discover its magic.

Pristine paradise

As well as being rich in history and culture — Mozambique was once Portugal's most important African colony — the Quirimbas Archipelago has

extreme natural beauty. The powder-white beaches and crystal-clear sea are evident, but it's the pristine coral reefs, providing habitat for an abundant marine life, that have led to the area recently being granted protection status in the form of the 750,000ha Quirimbas National Park. This is now

one of the best places in the world for diving, and it's not uncommon to see turtles and whales feeding here, as well as dolphins and game fish.

There are a handful of lodges and small resorts that offer travellers a bewitching blend of back-to-nature escapism and high-end luxury. It's the individual qualities of each island and the varying interpretation of luxury between the lodges that makes the Quirimbas such a unique destination. One thing that the lodges share is their commitment to preserving the environment while benefiting the

and the décor tasteful. Our courtyard room was large and cool, and champagne was on ice. Wanting to catch the last few hours of sunshine, we headed out to the beach. I was surprised to discover we had it entirely to ourselves. This luxury continued for our whole stay, save some afternoons when local children would cartwheel along the beach. It was bliss to be able to switch off from everything, with just the sound of the lapping waves to break the silence. A full-body massage at the resort's spa helped us relax even further.

“ We dined on delicious lobster and crab pasta, enjoying a view of the sea ”

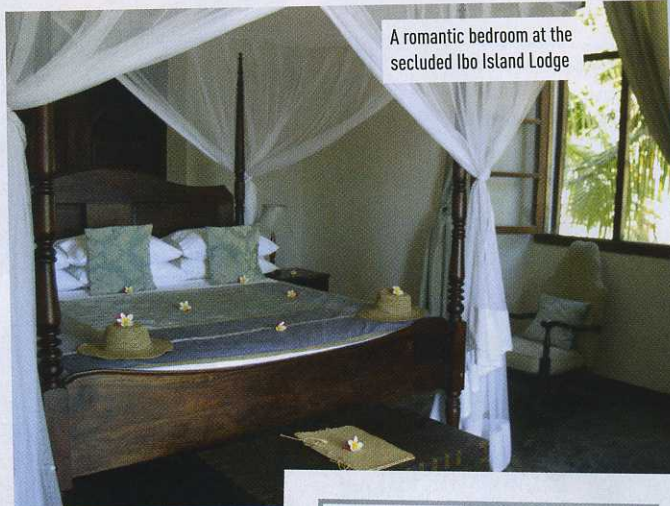
community. This is eco-tourism and barefoot luxury at its best.

First taste of luxury

After our wedding, we flew from London to Pemba, which is the gateway to the Quirimbas. Wearing after a long flight and with memories of the wedding playing over in my mind, I was jolted out of my slumber by a stream of light piercing through the plane window as we circled to land. The view of the white-sand crescent of Pemba Bay and the jade green sea below was breathtaking. Our first stop was The Pemba Beach Hotel and Spa, a 100-room resort. My first impression was that we'd arrived at something of an Arabian palace. Turrets of terracotta, huge arched doors and intricately carved colonnades greeted us. But although imposing in size, the hotel is well designed

The food at the resort was exquisite — it would have been easy to eat every meal at the hotel restaurant, with its menu focusing on fresh fish and Mozambican cuisine. However, one of the best dinners we had in Pemba was at the *Restaurante Aquila Romana*, an Italian restaurant further along the beach. Here we dined on delicious lobster and crab pasta while enjoying a panoramic view of the sea. Pemba Beach was the perfect place to spend three nights unwinding with all the mod cons you'd expect from a mid to high-end hotel, but the town itself didn't have much to offer, and we were ready to set out on our quest for the Quirimbas.

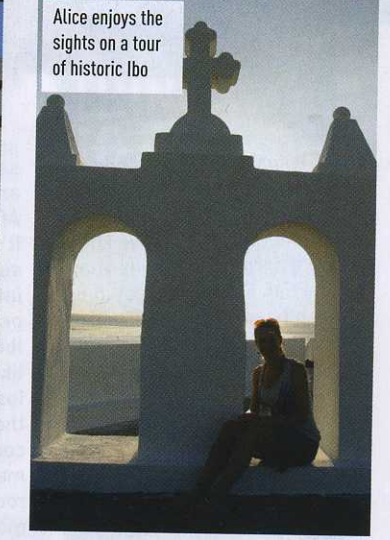
Rates for a courtyard room at Pemba Beach Hotel and Spa (www.pembabeachresort.com) start at \$194 (about £98) per person sharing. ➤



A romantic bedroom at the secluded Ibo Island Lodge



Meeting the locals at the charming, rustic airport



Alice enjoys the sights on a tour of historic Ibo



Bougainvillea adorns the gorgeous lodge at Ibo

