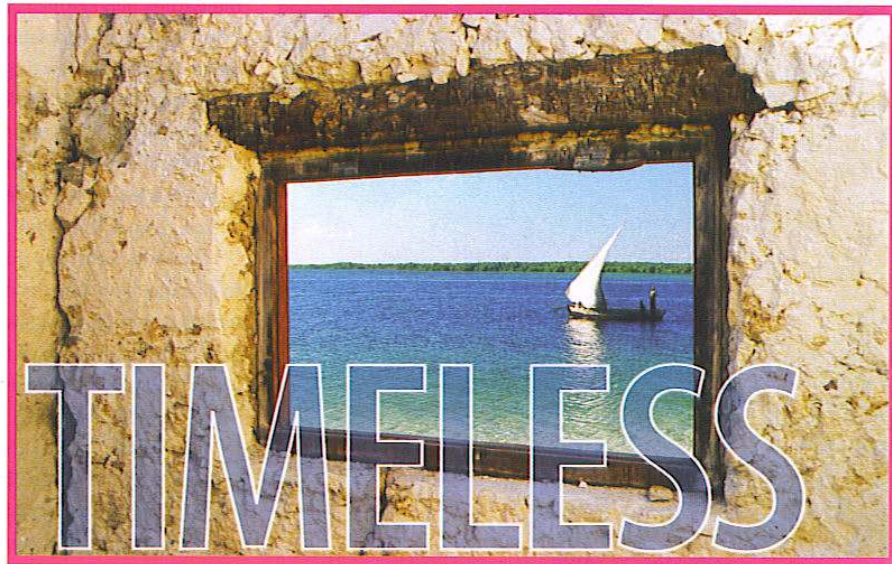


Ibo Island is a world apart, a hidden gem in the far north of Mozambique. It's a place of faded colonial splendour and romance, with a nostalgic air of being lost in time.



© Courtesy Ibo Island Lodge

WONDER

IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

"Tik, tik, tik." There's a gentle rhythmic tapping as we enter São João Fort on Ibo Island. Then the tapping speeds up and different tones and rhythms can be clearly distinguished. This bright, white, star-shaped fort that welcomes visitors to Ibo is also home to an ancient tradition.

Ibo is renowned for its unique silversmiths, who melt down old colonial coins and fashion intricate lacy jewellery from the white metal.

There are about 40 silversmiths who craft their fine pieces in the fort, melting the coins over well-worn burners and then tapping out silvery sheets to be cut and crafted into delicate designs.

It sounds like an unconduted orchestra, but each silversmith is completely focused on his task and dreaming up new designs that reflect Ibo's rich heritage. Their craft is handed down from father to son through hundreds of years, having been first learnt from ancient Indian silversmiths who settled on the island.

Arabic, Chinese and Portuguese influences can also be seen in the fine silver pieces. When the jewellery is completed, lemon juice is used to polish it to a fetching shine. Ibo's silverware is more than enough reason to visit the island, but if you look a little further the place has countless tales to tell, spoken through crumbling colonial ■■■



Cannons at the fort on Ibo island.

mansions and locals who remember its intrepid past.

João Baptiste is one of these people, and at 80 is Ibo's self-proclaimed historian. He was born and bred on the island, as were his 10 children, and he clearly remembers the battles and skirmishes that pepper Ibo's history; the time when the Indian population had their own bank to keep their money separate from the rest, and when he was the first black child to attend the local school.

João is the favourite name on Ibo, with the fort, the Catholic church and arguably most of the men carrying the name. It's the Portuguese equivalent of John, who is also the patron saint of the island.

However, Fort São João is just one of three ancient fortifications on Ibo, clearly illustrating the island's tumultuous history. The wide streets, derelict mansions and general infrastructure of the town also point to the splendid past enjoyed by all who lived on Ibo.

But, while children fill the streets, playing freely and laughing loudly, Ibo also has a dark side and was an important centre for the East African slave trade.

For the past thousand years, the island has been a strategic trading post along the coast of East Africa. Not only was it a melting pot for diverse cultures interested in trading ivory and more, but it was a favourite spot for pirates too. Many ruins on the island date back to the 1700s, and if their walls could talk it would be of intrigue and long-kept secrets.

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Ibo Island Lodge

The illustrious João Baptiste knows many of the island's old tales, but says little has happened on Ibo since the Portuguese left in 1975. "I am so happy Ibo is growing again," he says in rasping Portuguese, "because it was forgotten for so long. For decades we have lived in isolation from the rest of the world, just trading and living off fish."

Today the island is an alluring mix of ruin and renewal, with old colonial mansions being slowly restored to original glory. Ibo has been nominated as a World Heritage Site for its cultural and historical importance to Mozambique and East Africa, but in the meantime children and chickens still play on the wide, pillared verandahs of deserted homes, in the shade of giant gnarled fig trees that grow straight through the roofs of these houses.

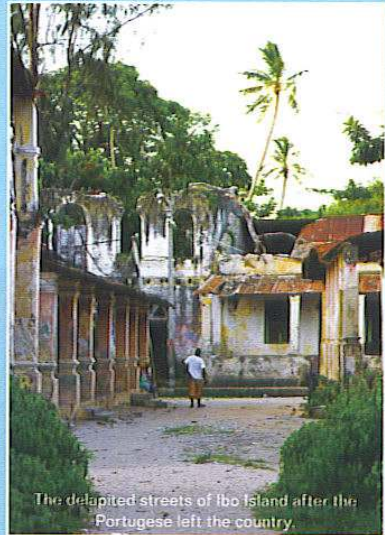
Ibo is also right in the middle of the Quirimbas National Park, founded to protect the unique ecosystems of this tropical ocean. So this means that diving and snorkelling in the area are quite extraordinary, with clouds of colourful

fish and elaborate corals to see. Even the shells that wash up on the long beaches are huge and somewhat other-worldly. Perfectly whole cowries are often found, though best left alone since they reside in the national park.

Quite quirky is that there are only two vehicles on Ibo and most people walk or ride bicycles. It's the ancient way of living that they are used to, and the reason they love and live on Ibo. There are after all over 30 islands to choose from in the Quirimbas Archipelago, but Ibo has a special, timeless appeal.

It's a place where history was made and changed, where silver and slaves were traded and battles of dominance were lost and won between many nations who recognised the importance of Ibo.

Today, it couldn't be more peaceful, more nostalgic or serene. It's where you can hear your heart beat and your soul speak. It's where you will quickly forget the chaos and crime of modern life and slip into a world of timelessness and pure romance. ▀



The dilapidated streets of Ibo Island after the Portuguese left the country.

IBO ISLAND

Ibo Island is home to one of the oldest towns in Mozambique, surpassed only by Mozambique Island. Arab traders were already in the area from 600 AD and ancient Chinese gravestones from the 1800s can still also be seen, as can Portuguese graves from the 1700s. See: www.iboisland.com for more information



Dinner time at Ibo Island Lodge.