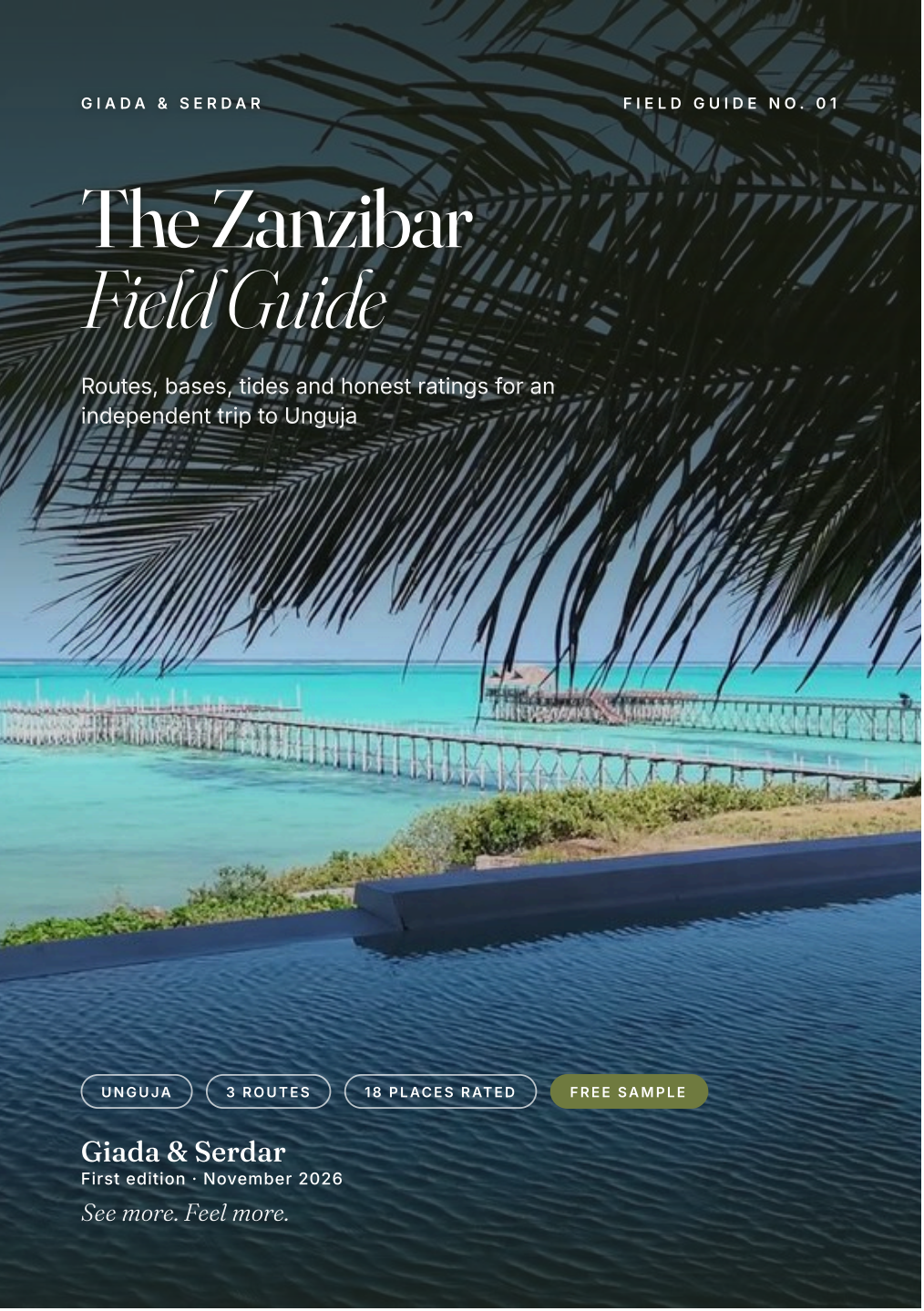


GIADA & SERDAR

FIELD GUIDE NO. 01

The Zanzibar *Field Guide*

Routes, bases, tides and honest ratings for an independent trip to Unguja

UNGUJA · 3 ROUTES · 18 PLACES RATED · FREE SAMPLE

Giada & Serdar
First edition · November 2026

See more. Feel more.

IN THIS SAMPLE

The Zanzibar Field Guide

See more. Feel more.

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This free sample contains complete, unedited pages from The Zanzibar Field Guide. The full guide has 15 chapters.

CHAPTER 01

Start here



We are Giada and Serdar, a couple from Switzerland who film our trips for YouTube. In September and October 2026 we spent 15 days on Zanzibar, mostly in the quiet north-west and for a few days on the south-east coast. We ate, drank and swam our way through beach clubs, cafés and restaurants, and we rated every one of them for our film.

This guide is what we wish we had been handed before we flew: where to base yourself, how the tides really work, three routes that do not waste your days in a car, and an honest list of places with what we paid and what we thought.

What this guide covers

Unguja only. "Zanzibar" is an archipelago and a semi-autonomous part of Tanzania. Nearly every visitor means its main island, Unguja, and so do we. Pemba, Mafia and mainland Tanzania (safaris, Dar es Salaam) are outside this guide. We mention them only where a rule, such as entry insurance, depends on where you land first.

How to read it

Every place in this guide carries one of two labels.

VISITED — we were there ourselves in September–October 2026. The rating and the spend are ours.

RESEARCHED — we did not go. The entry is based on the venue's own information and other public sources, checked in November 2026. No rating from us.

Our rating scale. We rate out of 10, half points allowed. A rating is our overall experience for what we paid on that day: food or drinks, setting, service and effort to get there. It is two people's opinion on one visit, not a verdict. Where we rated only the food, we say so.

Our spend. Figures marked "our spend" are the amounts we noted for our film on the day of our visit, rounded, in US dollars. Treat them as a dated snapshot (September–October 2026), not a price list.

Researched prices are quoted only where the venue or an official source published them, with the date we checked.

Map links. Every place has a "Map" link that opens it in Google Maps. Save the places you want while you still have Wi-Fi; see Offline preparation.

Things change. Fees, opening times and entry rules on Zanzibar change often and without much notice. The edition date is on the cover and the last fact check is logged at the back. For anything that could ruin a day or an arrival, the official source is linked. Please check it.

CHAPTER 02

Zanzibar in ten decisions

If you read only two pages, read these.

1. **Pick your coast by the tide, not by the photo.** The east and south-east coast empty out at low tide. The north-west tip around Kendwa stays swimmable all day. The tide chapter explains the trade.
2. **Two bases beat four.** The island is small on the map and slow on the road. North to south-east is around two hours. Every hotel change costs half a day.
3. **Give Stone Town a night, or two.** It is a different trip from the beach: history, rooftops, alleys, the night food market. A day visit works, but the evenings are the best part.
4. **Come in the dry months if you can.** June to October is the long dry season; mid-December to February is hot and mostly dry. March to May is the long rains.
5. **Sort entry paperwork before you fly.** Passport validity, e-visa and the mandatory inbound insurance are all done online. See Before you fly.
6. **Carry two kinds of money.** Shillings for small things, clean recent US dollar notes as backup, a card for hotels and beach clubs. ATMs exist but are not everywhere.
7. **Use beach clubs as your pool.** A day pass, often redeemable against food and drinks, gets you sunbeds, a pool and showers. It makes a simple guesthouse feel like a resort.
8. **Expect to be approached.** Sellers on the beach are part of the island. A friendly “hapana, asante” (no, thank you) and walking on works. It was the thing we liked least, and it is manageable.
9. **Plan for power cuts and island time.** Download maps and tickets, carry a power bank, and order dinner before you are starving.
10. **Dress for a Muslim island away from the sand.** Swimwear is for the beach and the pool. In towns and villages, cover shoulders and knees.

CHAPTER 03

Know before you choose



Seasons at a glance

MONTHS	WHAT TO EXPECT	GOOD FOR
June – October	Long dry season. Sunny, lower humidity, steady south-easterly wind (the *kusi*), cooler evenings. Busiest and priciest in July–August.	Beach, kitesurfing in Paje, everything
November – early December	Short rains. Showers, often brief; many sunny hours in between. Fewer visitors.	Lower prices, flexible travellers
Mid-December – February	Hot and mostly dry, north-easterly wind (the *kaskazi*). Very busy over Christmas and New Year.	Beach, snorkelling, second kite season
March – May	Long rains, heaviest in April. Some hotels and restaurants close.	Only if you accept real rain

We travelled from late September into October and had warm, sunny weather throughout. At several beach clubs and hotels we had the place almost to ourselves.

Ramadan and public holidays. During Ramadan many local restaurants in Stone Town and the villages close during the day, and eating or drinking in public in daylight is disrespectful. Hotels and beach restaurants serve as usual. Dates move each year, so check before you book.

Tides: the one thing that changes your beach

Zanzibar has two high and two low tides a day, and the difference between them can be several metres. On a flat, shallow coast that means the sea does not just get lower. It leaves.

- **East and south-east coast** (Paje, Jambiani, Bwejuu, Michamvi, Kiwengwa, Matemwe): at low tide the lagoon drains for hundreds of metres, sometimes more than a kilometre. You get sandbanks, tide pools, seaweed farms and long walks, and no swimming in front of your hotel for a few hours. At high tide the water is back, shallow, warm and turquoise.
- **North-west tip** (Kendwa, and most of Nungwi's western beach): the seabed drops faster, so you can swim at any time of day. This is why Kendwa is the easy answer for people who mainly want to swim.
- **West coast** near Stone Town and the quiet north-west (Fukuchani, where we stayed): tidal, with sunsets over the water.

How to work with it

- Look up a tide table for "Zanzibar" for your dates before you book a base, and again each morning. Tide times shift by roughly 50 minutes a day.
- On the east coast, swim in the two hours either side of high tide. Use low tide for a reef walk in water shoes, a seaweed farm visit, or lunch.
- Around full and new moon the tides are at their most extreme; around half moon they are gentlest.
- Low tide can come with a strong seaweed smell on some days. It passes with the water.

FROM OUR TRIP.

The beaches where the sea had pulled far out were our least favourite beach moments, and on some days the low-tide smell was noticeable. We did not hold it against the east coast — the best day of our trip was there — but we would not book a week on that side again without checking the tide table first.

Getting around, realistically

Unguja is about 85 km long. Roads between the main places are paved, but village speed bumps, police checks and animals keep averages low. Plan with these door-to-door times and add a margin after dark.

FROM → TO	TYPICAL DRIVE
Airport → Stone Town	15–25 minutes
Stone Town → Kendwa / Nungwi	1 h 15 – 1 h 30
Stone Town → Paje / Jambiani	1 h – 1 h 15
Stone Town → Kiwengwa	about 1 hour
Nungwi / Kendwa → Paje / Jambiani	about 2 hours
Paje → Michamvi (The Rock)	20–30 minutes
Paje → Jozani Forest	20–25 minutes

Your options

- **Private transfer or taxi.** The default for visitors. Taxis have no meters, so agree the price before you get in, or let your hotel book the car. See fares in the arrival chapter.
- **Driver for the day.** Good value for a day with several stops, for example Jozani plus The Rock plus a beach club. Ask your hotel.
- **Daladala.** The local minibuses and open trucks. Very cheap, slow, crowded and an experience. Fine for short daytime hops if you travel light.
- **Self-drive.** Possible, on the left, with a temporary Zanzibar driving permit arranged through the rental company. Roads are poorly lit, and police checks are frequent. We felt uneasy about traffic stops and night driving and would hire a driver instead.

FROM OUR TRIP.

We stayed two weeks in one hotel in the far north-west and visited the rest of the island on day trips. For the south-east we eventually booked a few nights there, simply to stop driving back for hours every evening. That lesson is built into every route in this guide.

CHAPTER 05

Three routes



Seven days · six nights

Stone Town and the south-east. A city start, then one long stay on the liveliest coast with the best food.

Bases	Stone Town — 2 nights · Paje or Jambiani — 4 nights
Hotel changes	One
Longest drive	Stone Town → south-east, 1 h – 1 h 15 (with a stop at Jozani)

> **Day 1 — Arrive in Stone Town.** Short transfer, check in inside the old town. Sunset at the seafront, then the Forodhani Gardens night food market for a first wander.

> **Day 2 — Stone Town on foot.** Morning: our walking route while it is cooler. Midday break in a courtyard café. Afternoon: boat to Prison Island for the giant tortoises (about 30 minutes each way), or a half-day spice farm visit inland. Rooftop dinner — reserve it today for tonight. *Rain:* museums, cafés and covered market first; boat when it clears.

Day 3 — Transfer via Jozani. Check out, drive towards the south-east and stop at Jozani Forest for the red colobus monkeys and the mangrove boardwalk (allow 1 h 30). Arrive in Paje or Jambiani for lunch. First lagoon swim at high tide.

Day 4 — Lagoon day. Check the tide. At low water walk out across the flats in water shoes or visit a seaweed farm; at high water swim. Coffee and lunch in Paje. Sunset drink at a beach bar.

Day 5 — Beach club day. Spend the day at a beach club with a pool — it takes the tide out of the equation. Our favourite day of the whole trip was this one, in Jambiani. Dinner at Al Casbah in Paje.

Day 6 — Michamvi and The Rock. Late-morning drive up the peninsula. Lunch or a drink at The Rock (reserve ahead; walk out at low tide, short boat at high tide), then cross to Michamvi Kae on the west-facing side for the best sunset on this coast. *Wind:* this side is sheltered when Paje is blowing.

Day 7 — Slow morning, fly. One last swim if the tide agrees. Paje to the airport is about 1 h 15; leave a generous margin.

CHAPTER 08

Eat and drink



Our top three

Al Casbah · Paje MAP ↗

VISITED **Our rating 10/10** · Restaurant, dinner · Our spend ≈ US$30

The best meal of our trip and the place we recommend most warmly. The restaurant is owner-run, and the bread is baked in-house every day. We could not decide, so the chef suggested a mixed platter and built it exactly the way we wanted. Then came a homemade chocolate cake we still talk about — if you go, order it. We had a power cut in the middle of dinner; candles came out and nobody minded.

- **Good for** a relaxed dinner for two, vegetarians included.
- **Reserve?** Worth a message in high season; we walked in.

Bamboo Zanzibar · Jambiani MAP ↗

VISITED **Our rating 10/10** · Design hotel with beach club · Day pass US$50 per person, of which US$40 is credit for food and drinks (Oct 2026)

One of the absolute highlights of our trip. An infinity pool that runs into the lagoon, open-sided lounges, and an amazing view. The day pass includes sunbeds, pool, showers and beach towels. For lunch we had miso-roasted beef with smashed potato, bread with dips and watermelon juices; we stayed for dinner — tagliatelle with prawns and a lava cake — and shared it with two people we had just met.

- **Good for** a full pool day that does not depend on the tide; a special-occasion lunch.
- **Reserve?** Message ahead for day passes; numbers can be limited.

Tazari Caves

Not food, but it belongs in our top three. See Things to do. **10/10.**

THE FULL GUIDE

15 chapters, three routes, every place we rated.

- Five bases compared, with who each one suits
- 5, 7 and 10-day routes, day by day, with weather alternatives
- Stone Town history and a practical walking route
- 18 places we visited, with our ratings out of 10 and what we paid
- A worked budget for two, entry rules, arrival and offline preparation
- Packing lists, trip planner and budget worksheet

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