

ISLAND PARADISE FOUND

Azura Benguerra Island Retreat

Boasting crystal-clear waters and views to thrill, Mozambique is undoubtedly one of the most sought-after travel destinations in the world. Travelling to Mozambique for the first time can be an exciting prospect for even the most seasoned travellers, and then, to find the perfect retreat from where one can while away the time in this beautiful country, should lead you no further than the Azura Benguerra Island Retreat.

As its name suggests, Azura Benguerra Island Retreat takes pride of place on the northern shore of the breathtaking Benguerra Island, 14 kilometres northeast of Vilanculos, the closest town, and site of one of several Mozambican international airports. While travelling to Vilanculos necessitates a transfer via South Africa, from the moment one arrives on the island – via private helicopter if you prefer. I was overcome with happiness in its purest form. I had travelled to Mozambique with somewhat high expectations; when I left, however, I found it difficult to put into words just how much my expectations had been exceeded. Aside from the pristine beauty of the island,

it was the hospitality of the staff at Azura Benguerra that stole my heart.

STEPPING INTO PARADISE

Upon arrival, the island greeted me with its white sands, crystal-clear water, and an overall sense of calm. Introduced to the retreat by my host Pedro – a native Mozambican man with a big smile and an even bigger heart – I was shown the variety of comfortably luxurious dining rooms, lounge and bar areas, the water sports centre. Finally, also, the 20 villas positioned directly opposite the beach. The Azura villas take having the ocean at your doorstep to a new level. Azura Benguerra was the first eco-friendly retreat in the country, having been hand-built by the local community and operated in partnership with it.







The fact that the hosts at Azura are all local inhabitants adds to the personalised experience at the retreat, as they know the island inside out. On my last night at Azura, Pedro explained to me how he is part of one of the island's local soccer teams, proceeding to tell how they have matches every Sunday afternoon. This conversation helped me to realise that the staff at Azura view their work as a part of their day-to-day lives, rather than merely a job. Throughout my stay, I did not hear Pedro complain once. This man loves his job through and through - Azura is part of who he is. The Azura hosts take enormous pride in their innovative dining layout, with small but discernible touches that make the experience all the more special. For my last dinner on the island, Pedro set up a candle-lit affair for one, on the beach, where I was welcomed to a fully laden table surrounded by palm leaves and tiki torch candles that dotted the shoreline.

ALL THE LUXURY YOU NEED

When it comes to retreat amenities, Azura Benguerra leaves no box unchecked. All villas on the property - which were all hand-built by local artisans - offer guests everything they could want on an island getaway. The villas are spacious, overflowing with natural light and filled with that typical island charm that cannot be replicated. All villas come equipped with full tea and coffee stations (replete with the most incredible homemade chocolate chip cookies), a minibar, Wi-Fi, air-conditioning, outside showers, and luxurious bathroom amenities. The pièce de résistance, however, is the private patio and pool at each villa; perfect for a morning americano as you watch the island awake, or a glass of champagne as you bid it goodnight. Nestled among the retreat's indigenous palm tree gardens, the villas offer luxurious seclusion as their outstanding feature. Although guests can look out onto the beach with its spectacular ocean view, the villas are completely private- a tranquil oasis where the outside world seems to fade away.

The public areas of the retreat, which include the restaurant, bar and lounges, are

located on the beach, and perfectly serve as an enduring reminder that, no matter what activity you are enjoying, you find yourself in paradise. There is a boutique in the reception area which sells locally-made treasures as well as anything you may have forgotten to bring with you such as sunscreen, hats and sarongs. There is also an indoor lounge where guests may browse the retreat's painstakingly curated book collection. As an avid reader, this room was a paradise for me, and I found myself curled up on the couch getting stuck into my book on most evenings, winding down after days spent exploring in the sun.



EXPLORING THE ISLAND

Regarding excursions, Azura offers many activities to its guests, including island tours, whale watching, scuba diving and snorkelling. I joined a snorkelling and island-hopping excursion on one of the



retreat boats, and it was an experience I will truly never forget. Lunch orders are taken the day before so that when you reach your lunch destination (another secluded island no less), your meal has been prepared and is waiting for you. The guides set up a simulated restaurant environment so that you can enjoy this bespoke culinary experience on the beachfront, interrupted only by the soft crashing of the waves. Personalised and meticulously curated, this experience will exceed even the wildest imaginings.

Azura Benguerra Island Retreat stole my heart as it will yours. Paradise in its purest form, the complete luxury

and genuine warmth of the staff, and the impeccable attention to detail left me feeling invigorated, fully rested, and sincerely humbled, as it will for any who make their way to Mozambican shores.

For more information on Azura Benguerra Island Retreat, please visit www.azura-retreats.com. Tourism Corporation Africa offers an iconic collection of camps and lodges across the African Continent. Visit www.tourismcorp.co.za.

*by **maxine volker** /
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