

UNDER AFRICAN SKIES

As Mozambique attracts more travellers to its now tranquil shores, **Philip Watson** discovers the lesser-known Quirimbas archipelago

LOOK through recent travel "It Lists", "Hot Spots" and "Must Visit Destinations" and one unlikely country emerges triumphant: Mozambique.

Lauded as the most original, fascinating and increasingly fashionable place to holiday in.

While Mozambique was at one time more readily associated with trouble than travel – the former Portuguese colony has suffered from a particularly brutal 15-year civil war and a series of devastating floods – it's easy to see why the stunningly beautiful and unspoilt south-east African country has captured the imaginations of travel leaders and insiders.

Stable and peaceful for almost 20 years, Mozambique has more than 1,500 miles of undeveloped coastline; numerous pristine islands; an intriguing cultural mix of African, Arabic and European influences; some of the best diving and deep-sea fishing in the world; the winningly ramshackle party capital of Maputo – hosting the 2011 All Africa Games in September; and a northern interior that has just one safari camp and some "very wild animals".

The beguiling and slowly regenerating country makes other more established Indian Ocean destinations such as the Maldives, Seychelles, Zanzibar and Mombasa seem tired and overdeveloped in comparison. While Mozambique boasts many remarkable attractions, it's the Quirimbas Islands in the isolated far north of the country, near the border with Tanzania, that offer the most luxurious and spectacularly laid-back holiday options.

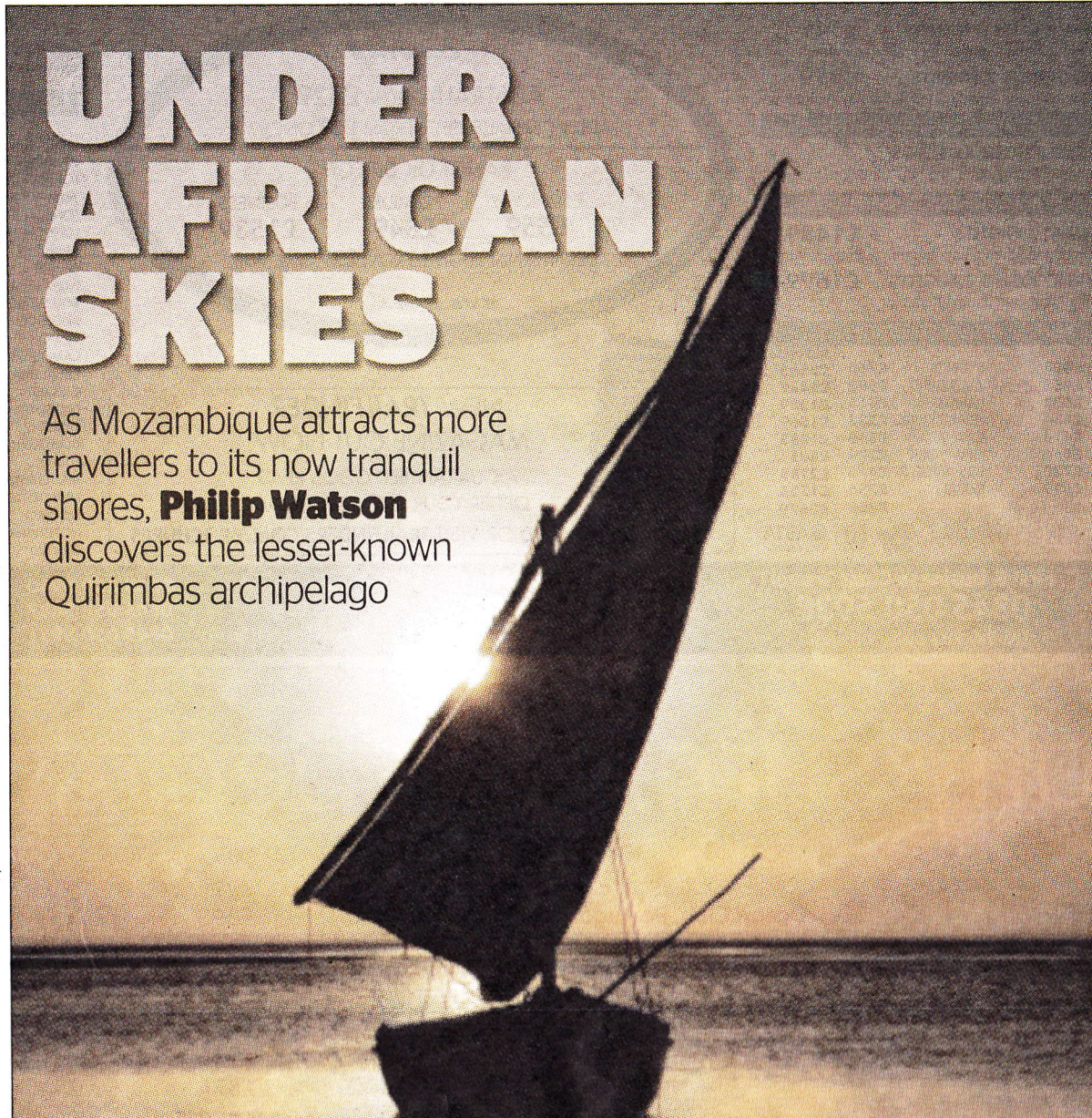
contributing significantly to the island's economy and 3,500 population. Cynicism aside, Ibo Island Lodge really is commerce with a conscience.

A similarly sustainable approach operates at Guludo Beach Lodge, which lies in the centre of a spectacular and untouched 12km crescent of white sand on the mainland just across from Ibo. The creation of innovative British couple Amy and Neal Carter-James, who are both in their early thirties, Guludo brilliantly achieves their ambition to establish a lodge that provides both a unique tourism experience in a remarkable setting and a direct community benefit in an area of acute poverty.

Guludo is certainly more eco than other lodges in the region, and the food, accommodation and facilities more simple and affordable. Guests are housed in nine large thatched, beachside bush tents or "bandas" that are carefully integrated into the forest.

As well as the construction and running of Guludo providing employment in the nearby village of 1,300 people, five per cent of the lodge's profits go to Guludo's charity, Nema. The charity is actively involved in many aspects of local village and environmental welfare, from building a primary school, community centre and water pumps, to providing school meals and monitoring humpback whale migration.

In little more than five years of operation, Guludo's work has been internationally recognised: Amy Carter-James was voted Young Social Entrepreneur of the Year at an event hosted by the New Statesman, and the lodge won a Responsible Tourism Award for "Best Resorts Reduction", Originality and



larly laid-back holiday options.

Described by Africa aficionados as the continent's "last undiscovered jewels", and (more predictably) "the new Maldives", the 32 tiny Quirimbas islands have a number of exclusive lodges that, together with new inter-

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national flights, have gradually opened up the region to more curious and adventurous travellers. A sprinkling of celebrity visitors – from Leonardo DiCaprio to Sven-Goran Eriksson, Sting and Trudie to Prince Harry and Chelsy Davy – has naturally followed.

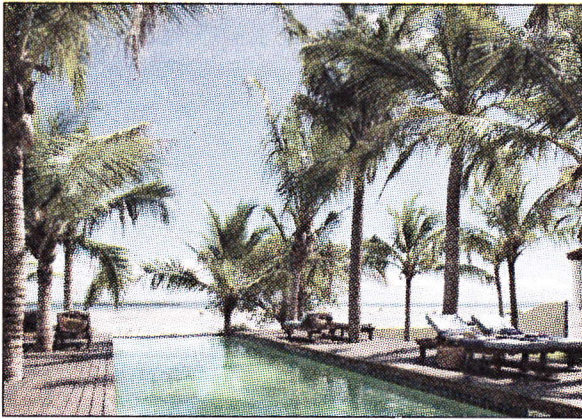
There are currently just nine lodges scattered along the Quirimbas coast and islands, yet they offer a surprising variety of accommodation, cost, comfort, authenticity, service, eco-sustainability and proximity to the bush. I recently visited three of the best and most responsibly managed, although five more are to open this year.

If ever an island encapsulates Mozambique's nascent appeal, it is Ibo. Walk around the tropical island's old town and you'll see elegant colonial mansions built from the plentiful local coral stone, a splendidly weathered 18th-century Portuguese fort that guarded this once prosperous trading port, and fleets of wooden dhows heading out from the mangrove-fringed harbour, their sails flapping rhythmically to the singing of the fishermen on board.

Ibo has a highly evocative and magnificently dilapidated atmosphere that appears to owe more to fable or fiction.



Sunset sail: a dhow sails into Ibo Island in the Quirimbas archipelago of northern Mozambique; (below left) the sea-facing pool at Ibo Island Lodge; (below right) the 19th-century lodge has coral and lime walls a metre thick and teak beams inside



There is a kind of magic realism and mysterious beauty to the place, a dirty romanticism that recalls parts of Havana or Cartagena, or Zanzibar 40 years ago.

Ibo Island Lodge, a group of three stately, 19th-century waterfront mansions on the edge of the old town, is the first upmarket retreat on the island. The lodge's main buildings have thick lime-washed walls, lofty ceilings,

smooth concrete floors, wide verandas, and smart colonial-style furniture. There are now 12 simple yet stylish bedrooms; some face out to sea, others onto tropical gardens.

Yet this is only part of the picture. As well as employing more than 150 local people in the renovation, furnishing and running of the lodge, Ibo's owners have initiated a variety of ambitious education and community projects that are



DETAILS: MOZAMBIQUE

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Cazenove + Loyd has seven nights from £2,800 pp full-board, staying at Ibo Island, Guludo and Londo lodges, plus one night in Dar es Salaam, inclusive of all flights and transfers, cazloyd.com

■ Best visited April to December

■ mozambique tourism.co.za

Responsible Tourism Award for "Best Poverty Reduction". Originality and authenticity are also to the fore at Londo Lodge, a small and stylish boutique hotel on a cliff-top on the northern edge of stunning Pemba Bay, the third largest natural bay in the world.

'People come to Londo Lodge to relax, to enjoy a unique and authentic African holiday'

Londo has a main building that skilfully blends traditional African and modern Moorish design, a large infinity pool, and six sleek and spacious octagonal stone villas with thatched roofs. Built beside ancient baobab trees, the villas have indoor bathrooms and outdoor showers, louvred doors that provide cooling breezes, and teak sun decks that face the bay. This is an African bush-and-beach resort with a decidedly cosmopolitan sensibility.

For all this, Londo, like the lodges at Ibo and Guludo, was created with more than laid-back luxury in mind. As well as providing employment in the nearby subsistence-level fishing village of Londo, the lodge funds several social projects, including building classrooms and supplying teaching equipment at the local school.

"People come to Londo Lodge to relax, to enjoy a unique and authentic African holiday, but we also find that they enjoy walking with us to the local village," one of the lodge's Dutch owners, PJ Hulsebosch, told me. "They get to see what life is really like for people in this part of the world. In a huge global tourist industry, that puts everything a little more into perspective."