

VISIT KILWA KISIWANI: ONCE FAMOUS CITY RUNNING OUT OF TIME



Kilwa Kisiwani is not very well known among the world tourist community; nevertheless, its relevance has not escaped the attention of the UNESCO. It is a city of a glamorous past which is now, sadly, in great danger.

For many centuries, Kilwa Kisiwani, located in today's Tanzania, used to function as a major East African trading centre. Tradesmen from Zimbabwe brought in their gold and iron, Tanzanians sold ivory and slaves and many Asian tradesmen offered their jewelry, porcelain as well as spices.

Its popularity massively increased in the 4th century, when a trader called Ali bin Al-Hasan purchased the place. **By the 12th century, Kilwa developed into the most powerful city of the East African coast.** Due to its flourishing trade and power, Kilwa was in the centre of attention of many countries that were fighting to gain control over the area; the Portuguese, the French, and the Germans took turns in controlling Kilwa. However, centuries of divided control resulted in the city being basically deserted by the 1840s.

Its precious treasures remained hidden until massive excavation works started in 1950s. The Great Mosque, the Mkutini Palace, and many stone houses and tombs were the major archeological finds of the excavation works. In 2002, a joint project of the French and Tanzanians was started to secure the conservation of the Great Mosque. Even though the effort to preserve Kilwa is intense, **it has been seriously threatened by the changing climate.** Some of the masonry structures are already falling apart. For that reason, **the UNESCO decided to include Kilwa on the top list of World Heritage in Danger in 2004.**

Kilwa is a unique place. There are not many cities in the East African region whose history we are able to trace back so far. Especially thanks to two 16th century chronicles found here: the History of Kilwa, written in Arabic, and the *Chrónica dos Reyes de Quiloa*. Even though the links are not perfect, a lot of information may still be gained from these two sources of immense importance.

Tourists are still welcome here, though it is necessary for anyone to obtain an official permit to visit the site. It is quite a spectacle not to be missed - especially when in a few decades, Kilwa may not be the same place as it is today.

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