Culture Through Cuisine

Text: Charlotte Rogers
Images © Anantara Bazaruto Island Resort

Picture this: you are speeding along the coast of Mozambique … The water is every shade of blue you can imagine, the sun is shining, and playful dolphins are popping out of the water, surfing your wake, as you cruise the coastline. Welcome to the world of Anantara Bazaruto Island Resort.

Located on Bazaruto Island, the resort is part of the legendary Anantara Collection and comes with the quality assurance of luxury and utter relaxation that the Anantara name is renowned for. Nestled on the hillside of the Western side of the island, the resort is made up of 44 luxurious villas, sprinkled along the coastline.

Under the shade of indigenous trees, you can find guests lazing on the navy blue and white canvas covered loungers, cocktails in hand, catching the sun and smiling from ear to ear. This is the lasting image that I have of Anantara Bazaruto Island Resort.

One of their signature experiences is Spice Spoons – an interactive cooking class that takes guests through the cuisine of Mozambique with a healthy dash of international influence. This true fusion experience is a must for any foodie or chef in the making.

The traditional cuisine of Mozambique is widely considered as one of the best in Africa. Similar to the history of Mozambique, their national dishes are complex, rich in flavour, and can often contain a healthy dose of spice. As Mozambique is a coastal country, it is no surprise that many of their favourite dishes feature the best that the sea and shoreline can offer. From fresh prawns to mango, succulent crayfish to chicken, the cuisine of Mozambique features some of the most loved ingredients on the continent, with a decidedly *Mozambican* twist.

The history of Mozambique is expressed beautifully through their national cuisine. The Portuguese influences are apparent in their love of piri-piri, and really anything that has a bit of a kick. Spices from across Asia are also commonplace, and these can be traced back to Arab spice traders of the 8th century and the expanded spice trade of the 15th century. Arabic traders brought a myriad of new things to Mozambique, including salt-cured meats, spices, and even dough-based treats like doughnuts.

Our Spice Spoons class took place outside, under the shade of the trees surrounding the veggie garden. Ordinarily, the day starts with a veggie garden tour and a walk through the private orchard. The chef will chat to guests about the local ingredients that make up most of the dishes served at the resort, and then it is off to the show kitchen to get cooking!

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Being located on an island, Anantara Bazaruto used to depend on deliveries from the mainland for everything. Soon, however, the idea for a veggie garden came about, and suddenly the dependence of Anantara on getting their supplies for the mainland decreased. They grow chilies, cassava, lettuce, and various herbs, all of which can be used in the variety of dishes that the guests prepare during the class. It does not get fresher than that!

A particular favourite of the majority of guests, the Mozambican Prawns Nacional, was the first dish that we prepared. Made with jumbo prawns, freshly caught off the island, the dish combines spice and beer into a creamy sauce. The dish was originally made with Nacional beer, which explains the name, and trust me when I say you can really taste the complexity of that particular brew. When making it at home, Chef was sure to emphasise that you can use whichever type of beer you prefer. Maybe you are a fan of stronger lagers, or maybe you prefer a lighter IPA - whichever your choice, add it in and be delighted as your favourite beer takes the dish to a whole new level.

Next we tried our hands at preparing a traditional piri-piri sauce, which is a lot simpler than I first suspected. You simply combine chillies, garlic, paprika, oregano, almonds, lemon juice, and salt. Then add olive oil and hey presto! You have got yourself the best piri-piri sauce known to man. Think you can handle it hot? This recipe uses bird's eye chilli, but feel free to add in an extra hot chilli for even more flavour. Cannot handle the heat? Then get out of the piri-piri!

Bookings to experience Spice Spoons can be made before check-in by emailing bazaruto@anatara.com, or can be made after check-in at the reception desk where an assistant will happily find a slot for you to experience one of the most popular activities of the resort.

Happy cooking! ■