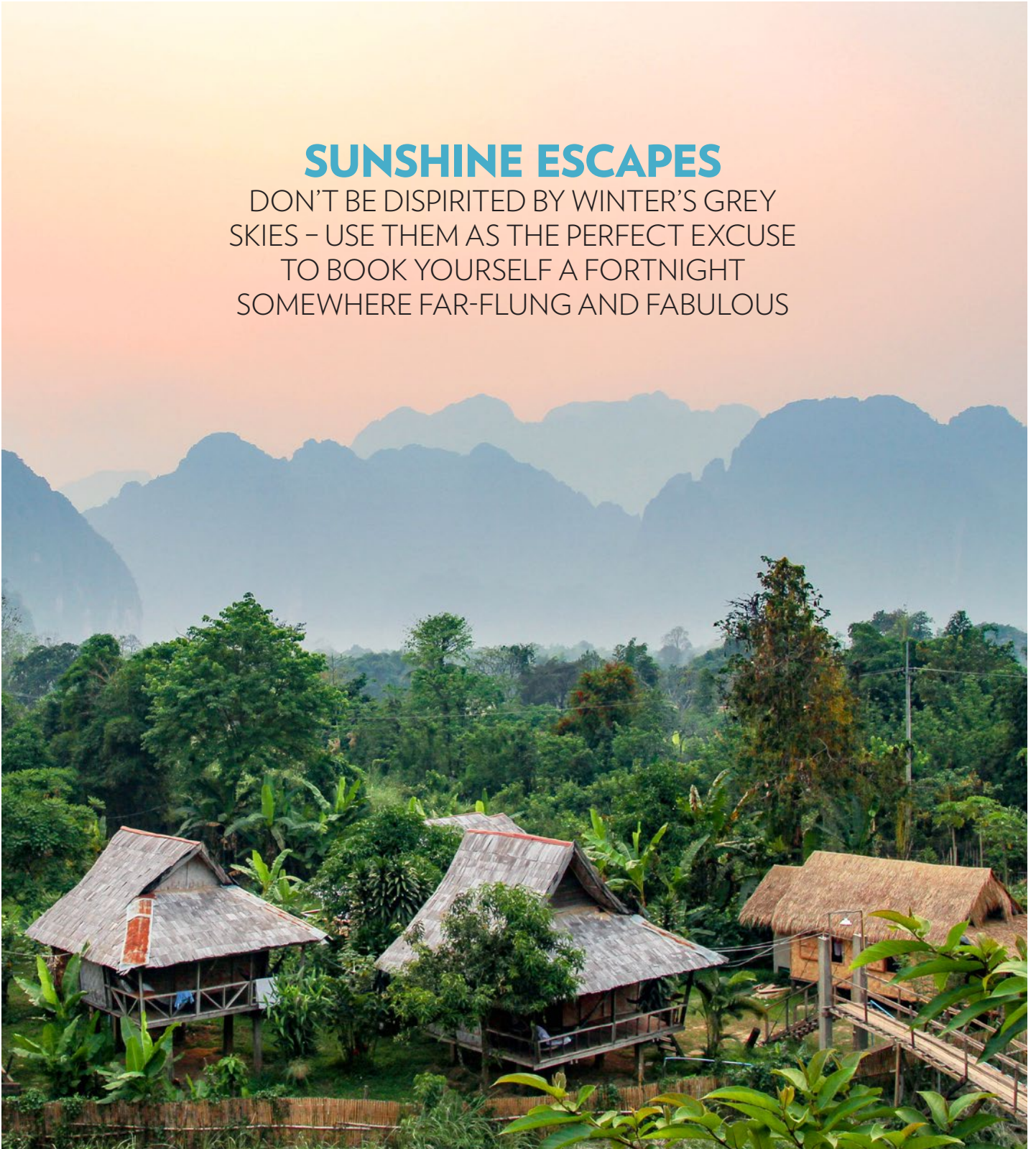


ESCAPES

Edited by
SARAH TOMCZAK

SUNSHINE ESCAPES

DON'T BE DISPIRITED BY WINTER'S GREY
SKIES – USE THEM AS THE PERFECT EXCUSE
TO BOOK YOURSELF A FORTNIGHT
SOMEWHERE FAR-FLUNG AND FABULOUS



Escapes



Romance in MOZAMBIQUE

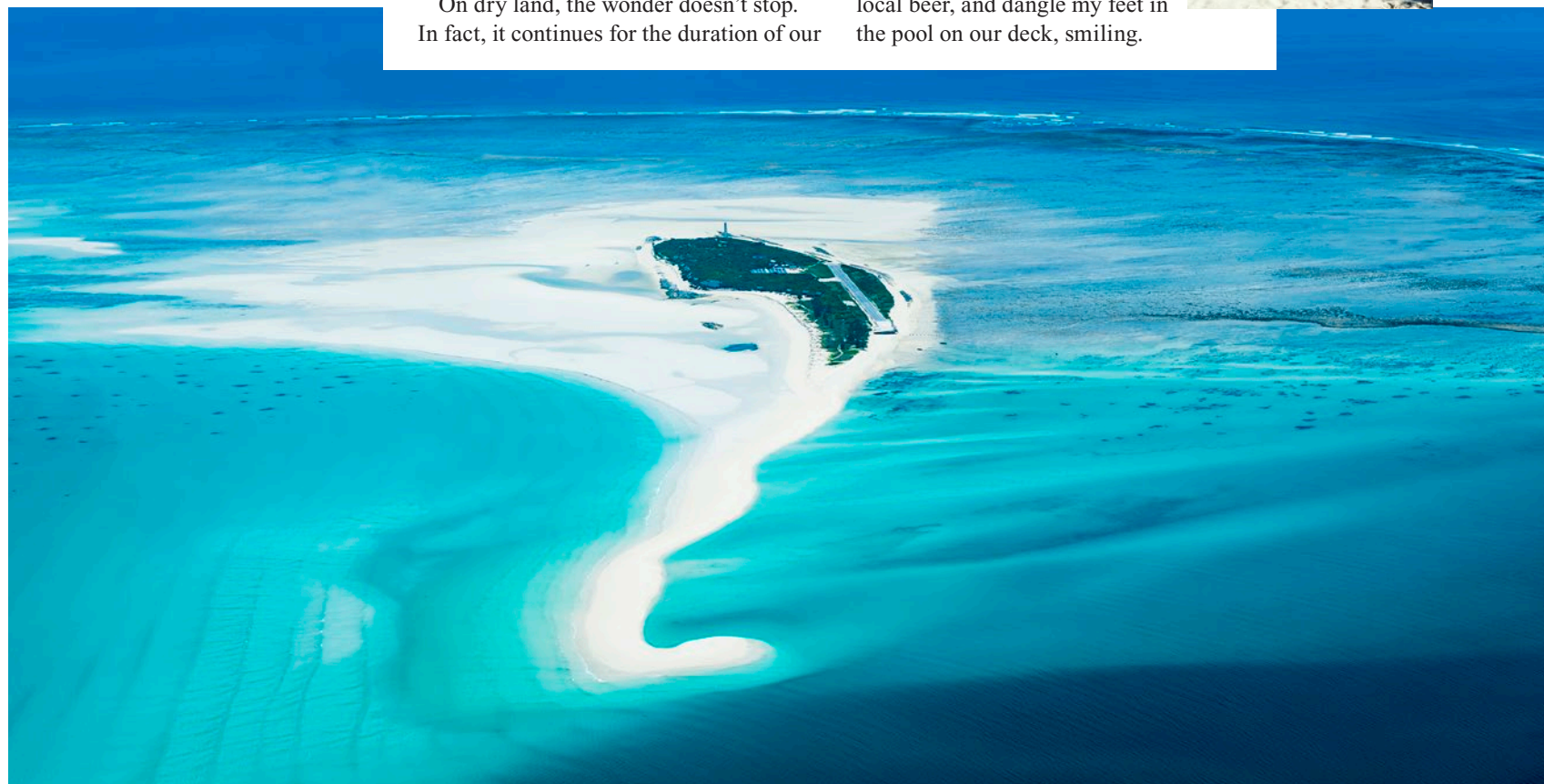
A two-hour flight delay on our way to Pemba airport on Mozambique's mainland means my husband, Rob, and I only just make the helicopter transfer to Anantara Medjumbe, a remote resort in the virtually untouched Quirimbas Archipelago, before nightfall. But as the helicopter shudders off the ground, the sun begins to set, draping the necklace of islands in a buttery yellow glow, and within seconds we're flying parallel to the clouds. Gold sunbeams dance on the water below, and the sky glows from deep amber to pink. Had we been on time, we'd have arrived ahead of the sunset; any later, we'd have spent the night on the mainland. Instead, we're treated to a cinematic natural wonder.

On dry land, the wonder doesn't stop. In fact, it continues for the duration of our

week-long stay. Medjumbe, a sylphlike sliver of emerald at high tide, is framed by a ring of sand at low tide, the ocean sprawling outwards. Our host, Abu, leads us to our sunset-facing villa, where 'Karibuni' – 'Welcome' in Swahili – is etched in the sand. Inside, duck-egg blue wood panelling surrounds a chocolate-box island hideaway. There's a 'pillow menu', indoor and outdoor showers, a gym-in-a-basket (weights and exercise bands), a bath with an ocean view and a platter of calamari, flatbread and fresh watermelon. I crack open a can of 2M, the local beer, and dangle my feet in the pool on our deck, smiling.



Below: Medjumbe Island framed by a ring of sand. Above: a night in the open air on nearby Quissanga Island. Above right: the living is easy on the remote Anantara Medjumbe resort



At breakfast the next morning (mine's an avocado and prawn Benedict, Rob's is a Portuguese prego), we notice the beach is criss-crossed by the diminutive tracks of ghost-white crabs, busily scuttling back and forth from the sea. For us, however, there's blissfully little to do, and we fill our days with paddle-boarding, tandem kayaking (requiring UN-level diplomacy skills!) and walking to the end of a mile-long spit that winds out to sea as the tide descends. I read countless books and receive nearly as many massages from the superlatively skilled therapist, Tania. The wi-fi won't win any prizes, but to let that small matter be of concern is to miss the point of Anantara Medjumbe.

With only 12 beach villas, Anantara Medjumbe's staff can afford to be attentive. By day two, bartender Abdul has our drink orders down (5pm means local Tipó Tinto rum; 7pm is ice-cold rosé hour). There's no menu – the chef meets us daily to ask what we'd like to eat – so I lunch on grilled shellfish salads and

dine on wahoo fish fillets and, on one particularly winning night, a succulent crab curry served in-shell. No meal is eaten in the same place twice, with tables set up outside our villa, on the beach, and even carved into the sand!

Towards the end of our stay, we spend a night in the open air on nearby Quissanga Island, yet another degree of separation from reality. We snorkel, eat tempura calamari, and slurp the rest of our cold beers before falling asleep. The next morning, we wake to the sound of the sea brushing the shore before heading back to the mainland.

After seven days on Medjumbe, we've learnt the shapes of the sand, the way the sea collects into pools as the tide recedes, and how the beach ripples into perfect rivulets. It's a wrench to leave, but it's taught me the value of a far-flung holiday. Upon boarding the helicopter home, we reluctantly reconnect to the 'real' world, but vow to return to our secret slice of paradise. **CYAN TURAN**

Above: it's drinks o'clock in Anantara Medjumbe's main lodge. Below: from the resort's restaurant to dinner à deux on the beach, no meal is eaten in the same place twice



TRIP NOTES

A stay at Anantara Medjumbe Island Resort costs from £1,051 per night, including all meals, local beers and spirits, house wines, non-motorised watersports and transfers from Pemba International Airport.

Visit anantara.com