

My name is Agustín Moreira Saporiti, I am a student from the ISATEC master (International Studies in Aquatic Tropical Ecology). Thanks to this master, I had the opportunity of spending the fieldwork for my master thesis in Unguja Island (Zanzibar Archipelago, Tanzania). During this period, I spent my time collecting data from two different projects which will be included in my thesis: seaweed farming and its effects on seagrass meadows and the herbivory of sea urchins on seagrass meadows as well.

As asked from the PROMOS scholarship, I therefore write an experience letter with all the information I am able to provide about my time abroad.

My decision of heading to Zanzibar in order to write my master thesis came from my interest in marine botanics. The Algae and Seagrass ecology department had members that already worked in Zanzibar, so the decision came naturally as I got quite a lot of information from former PhD and master students that went there for their own fieldworks.

The contact was made by the chief of the department and the workers from the Institute of Marine Sciences (IMS, University of Dar es Salaam), with whom they have already worked before. From there, an official application letter to the IMS was sent in order to establish a collaboration agreement for my stay in there. Once this official letter was made, I was able to start contacting with my supervisor in Zanzibar and get more information about the study areas and the feasibility of the project.

Useful internet address:

- Institute of Marine Science: <http://www.ims.udsm.ac.tz/>
- Secretary for international affairs: Dr. M.S. Shalli , shalli@ims.udsm.ac.tz

I was sent under the SUTAS project, which is a collaboration project between the IMS and the Centre of Tropical Ecology (ZMT), to which my department belongs.

It is important to make sure you have all the necessary documents before you go there, as once in Zanzibar everything gets more complicated. First of all, make sure that your passport is valid until the end of your stay, and scan all the official documents that you need both for Zanzibar as for the university (Immatrikulationbescheinigung, passport, health care card, any other important paper). Another useful thing is to get US dollars before going to Zanzibar.

Even though in your daily life you will use shillings (the Tanzanian official coin), for paying rent and official documents (the visa) you will need dollars. Once arrived in the airport, the first thing you will have to do is to pay 50 dollars for the tourist visa.

Talk with your travel agency and your insurance company for obtaining a international health insurance. You never know what problems you will have once there, and the medical bills can be extremely expensive.

Last but not least, make sure to bring a bankcard that will work on the ATMs in Zanzibar. Visa cards should work everywhere, but not Master Card and Maestro cards. It is a quite important point because some people (including me) had problems to take money from the ATMs once in there. If you can, bring at least two different bank cards from different banks. If one does not work, the other one would.

Those are all the formalities you will have to go through before going to Zanzibar. Once in there and with your tourist visa in hand, you will have to get a new visa depending on the regime you are in. In my case, as I was doing my master thesis, all the bureaucracy was handled by the IMS. For them I had to submit my passport, ID photos, some official forms you will be provided with and the money for the visa.

Visas in Zanzibar are very expensive. You will have to pay different amounts of money depending on what you are doing there. In my case I had to pay for the residence permit, the research permit and the bench fee for the institute. At the end of the stay I paid in total around 1000 euros. Make sure you find out how much money you have to spend per month in the visa before going there.

In my case, the amounts were:

- Research permit 150 dollars
- Residence permit 200 dollars
- CTA permit 200 dollars
- Tourist visa 50 dollars
- Departure fee 50 dollars
- Bench fee 100 dollars x 5 = 500 dollars
- Total: 1150 dollars

As you see, the visa cost is something to seriously take into account before going to Zanzibar. Anyway, you can always ask the host institution for more information.

Regarding my time in there, the motivation was to pursue an original research about seagrass. Even though seaweed farms and herbivory of sea urchins are already researched topics, in this case I was focusing my attention in what was not yet looked at when investigating them and its interaction with seagrass meadows.

The goal for the seaweed farm project was to look at the long term impact of seaweed farms over seagrass meadows (if any), and in the case of the herbivory of sea urchins over seagrass meadows, the goal is to relate the feeding behavior of sea urchins with an overgrazing event in seagrass meadows near Stone Town (capital of Unguja Island).





The IMS provided me with some equipment and a “base” in which to work and use the facilities (laboratories, storing areas). Nevertheless, it was necessary to pay for any extra reactive. In addition, I was provided with the contacts of the seaweed farmers thanks to my supervisor Flower Msuya, who is head of the Seaweed Cluster. The Seaweed Cluster deals with the problems of the seaweed farmers and tries to solve them with scientific support.

The IMS, as a research institution, has ongoing projects with other foreign parties. Nevertheless, the involvement in the institution was not too deep. Everybody works in their own projects without minding much about the foreign visitors. Collaboration with different professors apart from my supervisor turned difficult because contact with them was not always possible (by e-mail or personally). My advice is to contact them long time before your stay, so they are aware of your arrival and prepared for collaborating with you.

Regarding the accommodation, I was provided by people who already went there with the internet address of one tourist agency in Zanzibar which rents rooms for a long time period. The internet address is: <http://amozanzibartours.hpage.com/>.

The rooms are cheap (between 160-300 dollars), clean and furnished. They lay in the middle of Stone Town with places for eating nearby. The manager of the place is a German girl, who is always extremely nice and helpful. If you ask for it, they can pick you up in the airport when you arrive, which is nice as taxi drivers are quite aggressive in the airport and the prices could be too high.

The first impression I had in Zanzibar was of a really chaotic place. Everything seems to be placed randomly around, and the traffic is very dense and crazy. After a while you start to see that there is an order in this chaos, and things work quite well once you understand them. Transport around the island is held by the local buses called “dalla-dalla”. They can be quite slow, but they will take you wherever you want, and they are very cheap. On the other hand, you can always ask for transportation to any taxi driver for moving from one city to another town. Inside the town, you can ask people with motorbikes to move you around for a very small dime.

Zanzibar is a very safe place in general. I never had the impression of being in danger or trying to be robbed, both in the daylight and at night. The only safety instruction I have is to make sure your house

has good locks and always to close with keys your room door. Robberies in houses are very common, especially if you are a tourist. Keep your laptop, cameras and electronic devices safe at home.

Internet is available in every tourist hotel, restaurant or bar. In case you want to have internet all the time, USB internet modems are very cheap and give a signal good enough to surf the internet (maybe not for streaming and so, but enough for the basics). Getting a SIM card for your phone is as easy as walking to one of the street phone shops and asking for one. You have just to provide your name and pay a little amount for the card.

Two very important recommendations: learn the basics of Swahili (the official language there) and always, always negotiate the prices. As you are a foreigner, they will always try to charge you double or triple for anything you buy. Always negotiate the prices; it doesn't matter if you are in a street shop or a normal shop. The only places with fixed prices are the tourist restaurants and hotels, and some "high price" shops.

Regarding the food, you can buy it in local restaurants and street shops. The only recommendation is to make sure that the food is recently cooked and that the vegetables and fruits look fresh. In my experience I never had any problem with street food. Lastly, always drink bottled water. Never drink water from the bill. Locals do, but your body is probably not prepared for it.

As a summary, use your common sense. Don't be afraid of asking, try to learn the language and be careful with your possessions at home. Even though, I repeat, it is a very safe place, make sure you keep your passport and bank cards with you. Last recommendation: you are in a Muslim land: covering yourself is important. Unfortunately, the standards for men and women are different. As a foreign woman, you will be suggested to cover your shoulders, and not to use very short shorts.

I found the experience of living in Zanzibar very enriching for several reasons. The opportunity of living with locals, and learning how they lives are so similar and so different at the same time. The struggles of their lives, their own personal goals...and also learning from people raised in a very different religion.

On the other side, from the academic perspective it was a learning experience. Every step in the field shows you how difficult is to carry out a research by your own, but also how accomplished you feel afterwards. It is definitely an experience that will help me in the future to plan new research and know about the feasibility of a new project.

All the time spent in the field in Zanzibar will be translated in a whole thesis, which hopefully will be the basis for a scientific paper. Because of that, the time spent in Zanzibar was both enriching for a personal and academic point of view.

