



# MOMBASA OLD TOWN

## Introduction

The two most important sites of historic interest on Mombasa island are Fort Jesus and the Old Town. While Fort Jesus, now a national museum, is well catered for with guides and maps, the Old Town with its many small streets and winding alleys is not so well documented. This guide map hopes to encourage visitors and tourists to walk within the Old Town and see for themselves the special architectural features and historical reminders that make Mombasa a town worth visiting.

## Historical Note

The town of Mombasa dates back to medieval times, when it was an important Islamic trading port and one of the main centres of the Swahili civilization that flourished along this coastline between 13th-15th centuries. Throughout its chequered history, under a variety of rulers, Portuguese, Arab and British, Mombasa retained its special character and managed to survive as a thriving community.

## Special Features of the town

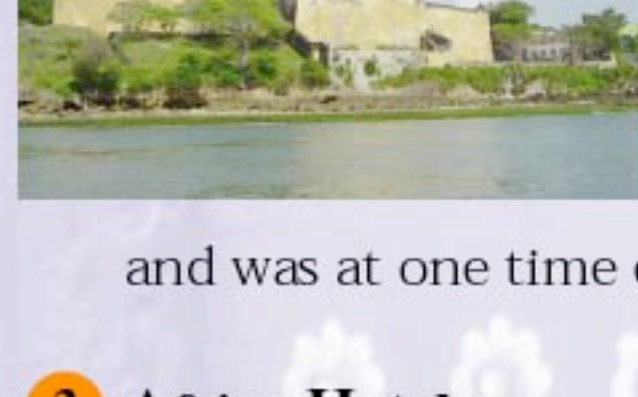
Of particular note are the carved doors, many of these are over 100 years old and show Arabic and Indian influence in their designs. The fine wooden balconies, some of which are intricately carved or screened for privacy are also worth looking out for.

The Old Town is predominantly Muslim and so there are several fine old mosques within the historic quarter and you will see that many of the inhabitants wear Muslim dress.

## Listed Buildings and Areas of Interest



- 1 Fort Jesus:**  
Portuguese 16th century fort, now a national museum. Open daily.



- 2 Mombasa Club:**  
Built in 1897, it is the oldest club in Kenya and was at one time exclusively European.



- 3 Africa Hotel:**  
One of the first hotels in Mombasa. There was originally a fine sea view from the balcony. In 1904 it was owned by Goans, Junior and Diaz, who ran a grocery and tailoring business on the ground floor and acted as Portuguese Consul.

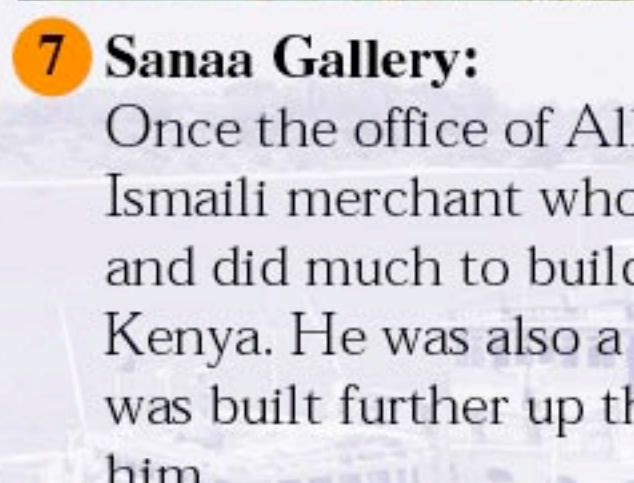
**4 Mandhry Mosque:**  
One of the oldest mosques in use in Mombasa, founded in 1570/1. The present building probably dates c 1830. The apse-like qibla in the north wall indicates the direction of Mecca. The well for the Mandhry mosque is just across the road and the elaborate frontage to the well is dated 1901.



- 5 The Old Post Office:**  
This used to be the main post office, which was opened in 1899, initially to enable the Indians who built the railway to send money home to their families.



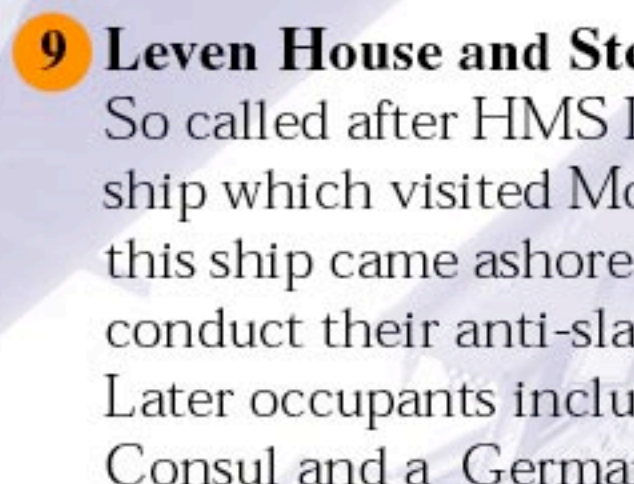
- 6 Old Port/Government Square:**  
For over a thousand years one of the major ports of the triangular dhow trade of the Indian ocean and Arabian Gulf, Mombasa nowadays is lucky to see a dozen of these craft during the season.



- 7 Sanaa Gallery:**  
Once the office of Allidina Visram, a successful Ismaili merchant who came to Mombasa in 1898 and did much to build up the commercial life of Kenya. He was also a generous philanthropist and the Allidina Visram school was built further up the harbour by his son Abdul Rasul as a monument to him.



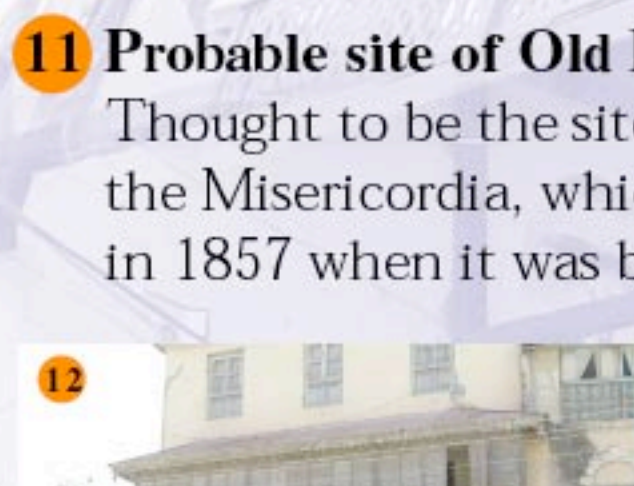
- 8 Bohra Mosque:**  
The Bohras are another prominent Muslim community in Old Town Mombasa, originating from the Indian subcontinent. The present mosque was built in 1982 replacing the original mosque, which was built by A.M.Jeevanjee, in 1901. Occupying a beautiful and scenic position, visitors on request are allowed to enter the mosque grounds and enjoy the view.



- 9 Leven House and Steps:**  
So called after HMS Leven a British naval survey ship which visited Mombasa in 1824. Officers from this ship came ashore and were given permission to conduct their anti-slaving operations from here. Later occupants included Dr.Krapf, the missionary, the first British Vice-Consul and a German shipping Company, O'swald & Co.



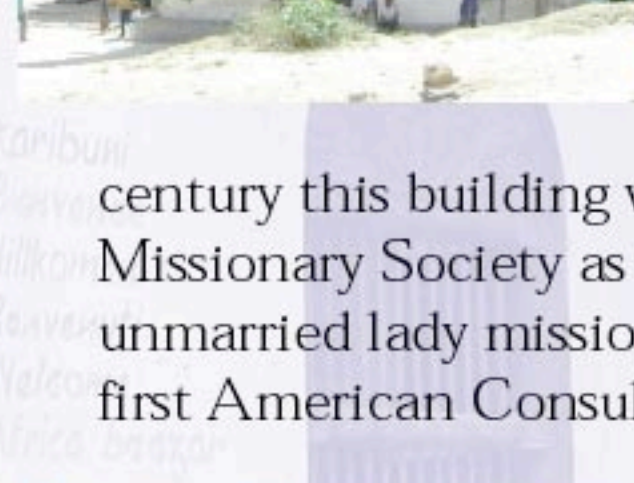
- 10 "Reitz House":**  
formerly the site of a Portuguese warehouse. Lieutenant Reitz, one of the British naval officers engaged in the prevention of slavery (see above entry), stayed here until his death in 1824. The house is said to be haunted by its former Portuguese and British inhabitants.



- 11 Probable site of Old Portuguese Church:**  
Thought to be the site of the Portuguese Church of the Misericordia, which was seen by Richard Burton in 1857 when it was being used as a cattle shed.



- 12 Mombasa House:**  
Built by a former customs master to the Sultan of Zanzibar c1880, this is a good example of an old town house.



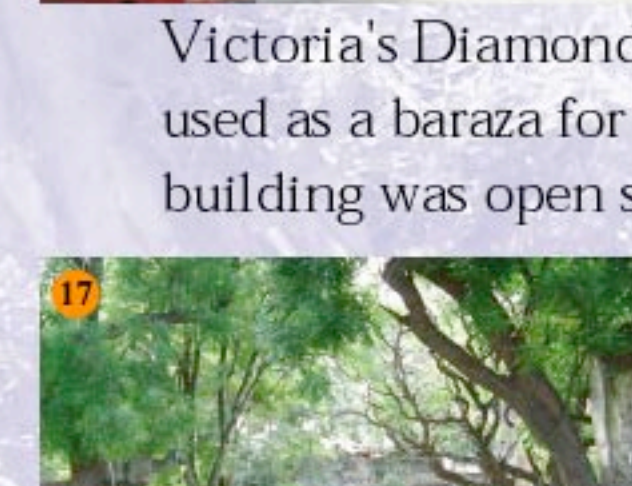
- 13 "The White House":**  
Built in the late 19th century this building was rented to the Church Missionary Society as a "Ladies House" for unmarried lady missionaries. Later it became the first American Consulate in Mombasa.



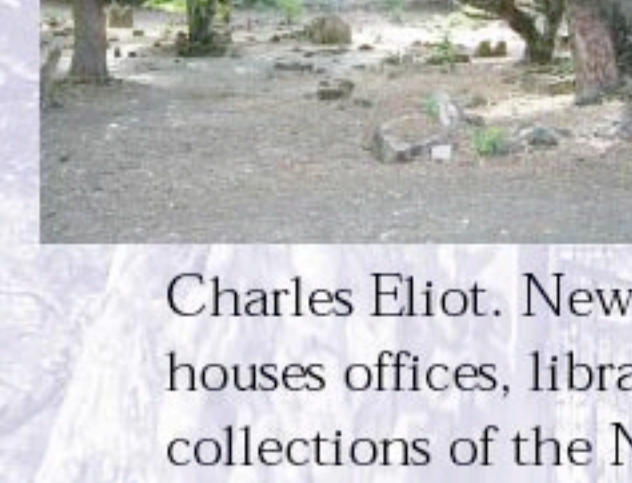
- 14 Lookmanji Curio Shop:**  
This house has a particularly fine balcony and door. The balcony brackets are carved with birds and the balcony is screened for privacy following the strict Muslim custom of shielding women from the looks of strangers.



- 15 Ali's Curio Market:**  
This was built in 1898 as the first police station in Mombasa.



- 16 Jubilee Hall:**  
Built in 1897 for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Until the 1950's it was used as a baraza for town meetings. The original building was open sided.



- 17 Mazrui Graveyard:**  
This graveyard belongs to the Mazrui family which ruled Mombasa in the 18th century.



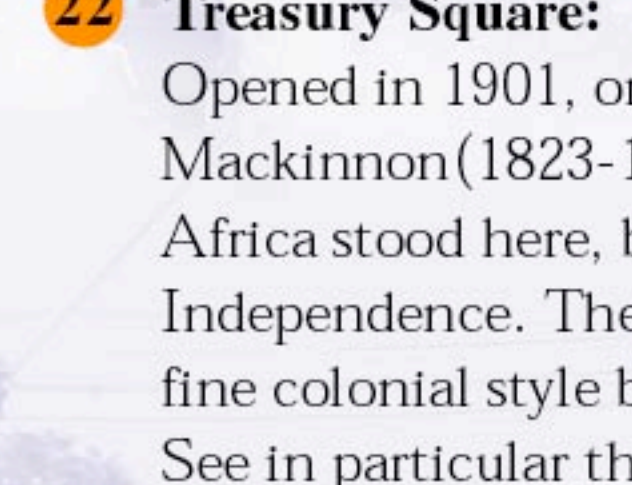
- 18 Old Law Courts:**  
Opened in 1902 by the British Governor, Sir Charles Eliot. New law courts were built in 1983 and this building now houses offices, library and archaeological collections of the National Museums of Kenya.



- 19 Datoo's Sale Rooms:**  
Built in 1920, furniture and household equipment is still auctioned here every week.



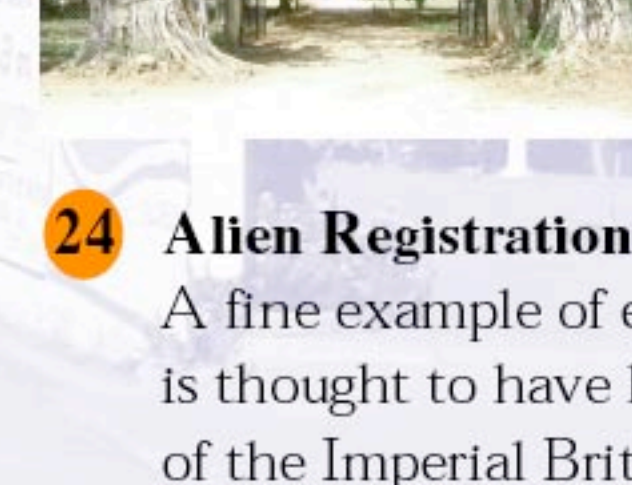
- 20 Pigott Place:**  
Formerly a busy market place, named after an acting administrator of the Imperial British East Africa Company.



- 21 Basheikh Mosque:**  
Swahili Friday mosque. There is little decoration on the building apart from the carved doors and the interesting minaret, which is typical of Swahili mosque architecture.



- 22 Treasury Square:**  
Opened in 1901, originally a statue of Sir William Mackinnon (1823-1893) founder of British East Africa stood here, but it was removed at Independence. The square is surrounded by several fine colonial style buildings all dating to c.1900. See in particular the Kenya Commercial Bank and the Municipal offices opposite.



- 23 Swahili Cultural Centre:**  
Housed in two restored colonial buildings, this is a craft training centre, which specializes in reviving Swahili traditional handicrafts. Visitors are welcome.



- 24 Alien Registration Building:**  
A fine example of early colonial architecture, this is thought to have housed the chief administrators of the Imperial British East Africa Company, who ruled Mombasa 1888- 95.