

Luxury in emerging economies

As we know, the emerging economies including India and South Africa are jostling for everything that howls and bellows luxury. From the bloated monogram Louis Vuitton bag, to the elephantine Bentley the markets are demanding what they can show off. Understandably so as they emerge into a market that for the first time can shop and indulge in what the first world has bored with. So as the first world moves to find retreat, and perhaps another yoga class, the surfacing (or rather surfaced) patrons are hunting for more, as they feel entitled to explore the unexplored.

So how does a little, just over 1 million strong, capital like Maputo deal with the boom as the city fills up with Portuguese settlers returning, or even coming for the first time, to the east African haven. It embraces it of course. With the world's most unexplored beaches and untouched nature combining with a peace-loving, after the previous regime, nation.

In one segment you have Mozambique Fashion Week, currently in full swing, which brings out the hunger for gloss. With designer labels, hands full of mobile phones, overly posh cars and a whole new anti-western swagger the front row seats are embellished and animate. The biggest attraction, along side fashion week, in this harbor town is no longer the meticulous architecture or beachfront but the two stately malls.

And in complete contrast to this new moneyed hedonism exists the beacon of good taste and aged opulence: the Serena Polana Hotel. The hotel is an institution and landmark of civility in Maputo and has been since 1922. So it fills with guests eager to avoid the unfolding bling but to pamper in the old world with that charm evocative of Portugal hemming them in. With traditional Portuguese cuisine, four-poster beds and a hamam the hotel's refuge in the humid city is the perfect understated refinement.

As Mozambique becomes the next big destination on Africa's growth and boom the flights are packed with businessmen coming to develop railways and more mining and Euro-tourists looking for paradise. But what makes it special is that between the bling and the superior-taste lies a grouping of Maputo residents forming their own voice, their own creed not for what luxury in an emerging economy looks like but what luxury in Mozambique looks like.

By Daniel Scheffler



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