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LAGOS BY LAGOSIANS: AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO CULTURE IN AFRICA'S FIRST CITY

‘Lagos for and by Lagosians’ as the ultimate way to experience fashion, art, fine dining and entertainment for the thrill-seeking luxury traveller.

By Jareh Das

Nigerian label Maki Oh reveals its fall/winter 2016 collection.

Image courtesy of Stranger Lagos.

The thick wall of humidity that hits you as soon as you step outside of Lagos's Murtala International Airport is unforgiving. Although it is early spring, Lagos is incredibly hot and sticky as one emerges from the airport into a cacophony of its distinct urban hustle, characterised by individuals who offer you everything from taxis to foreign exchange, mobile top-ups and luggage handling services. This encounter provides an apt introduction to the explosive, lively, incredibly loud, fast and exciting energy of the city – an ever-changing metropolitan destination that's recently put itself on the map for world-class art, design, fine dining and luxury fashion for the adventurous traveller.

I have a very personal relationship with Lagos. I grew up here and have observed how the city, along with the country, has progressed and evolved into Africa's largest economy. It is often described as 'Africa's first city' and it's no wonder why, as aside from the socio-political challenges it faces, the 'Lagosian' (and indeed Nigerian) spirit is one of optimism, determination, resilience and industriousness. Culture and creativity thrive here, with art, fashion and music flourishing both within the local and international scenes. The variety of art on offer has led to the establishment of important auctions, festivals and biennials, with Lagos Fashion and Design Week (LFDW) now firmly established after having attracted international designers, including Matthew Williamson and PPQ, vying for prestige alongside esteemed Nigerian designers Maki Oh, Grey, Lanre Da Silva Ajayi and Orange Culture. It seems as though the world is now finally paying attention to a cultural scene that has been brewing for decades. Lagos might at first glance seem an unlikely tourist destination for the avid Middle Eastern traveller, but they share commonalities due to visitors to both cities loving luxury, fine dining, art and culture, alongside a recent poll naming Dubai as one of the most visited cities in the world by Nigerians. The intrigue is mutual. In light of this burgeoning interest in the city, MOJEH spent a week scouring sights and sites of the Lagos revolutionised by self-starters, who never left and some who have returned, all with the aim of contributing to local industries. A Lagos through the eyes of these creative leaders. For art lovers, the first stop should be the Centre

for Contemporary Art, Lagos (CCA Lagos). Located in Yaba (which is also home to one of the busiest markets in the city, Tejuosho Market), it is an internationally renowned not-for-profit organisation that was set up over a decade ago. Led by the globally respected curator, Bisi Silva, CCA Lagos is a research-driven space for exhibition-making, display and critical conversations that challenge, encourage and promote art production and curation in Nigeria. Aside from its rigorous exhibition programme, which has included presentations by artists Jelili Atiku, IRWIN, Emeka Ogboh, Wura-Natasha Ogunji, Adolphus Opara, Zanele Muholi and the legendary Nigerian photographer, J D 'Okhai Ojeikere', CCA Lagos is an important part of the city's critical art scene, providing a library space for research and public programmes that facilitate a local-global exchange through talks, residencies and workshops. Leaving Yaba via 'Third Mainland Bridge', the longest of the three bridges that connect Lagos Island to the city's mainland, one is immediately captivated by arresting views of the expansive Lagos Lagoon. It is illuminated by the warm glow of the sun and separates the city from the Atlantic Ocean. One of the most distinct sights crossing this lagoon, dotted with small barges and fishing boats, is Makoko – a fishing village established in the 18th century that rests entirely on stilts and, up until recently, was home to the Makoko Floating School. Balogun Market is located here and it is a self-organising sprawl that takes over many of the streets on a daily basis. This is 'THE' destination for an injection



Lagos's Stranger boutique, embracing Nigerian culture through designer clothing, accessories and a swap library.

AN INSIDER’S GUIDE TO LAGOS
Mojeh speaks to three female leaders in Lagos, who give exclusive insider tips on places to go to and where to find solace in the city’s madness.

Zemaye Okediji, Photographer and Director, The Exwhyzee Studio
“I love that Lagos is the African trailblazer when it comes to cities. I find that there is always something or someone new to discover, given the rapid rate of migration and urban development.”
5 places I go to find solace: The Beach; Queens drive pier; Osborne foreshore boat club; Rele Gallery; Lufasi Park

Adia Sowho, Director, Digital Business at Etisalat Nigeria
“I am an addict of big cities and I won’t get out of bed for less than 10 million people to bump into, make money with or gawk at. Lagos, London, Chicago, New York – I loved and left them all, but the rush I get from returning to Lagos is nostalgic and surprising. An awakening, if you will, to the realisation of my addiction.”
Must visits: Casa Lydia, A small bistro in Ikoyi with great food, cocktails, and one of the first places that unapologetically plays house music all day, every day; Ishahayi Beach – sun, sea and sand. Barely a soul in sight. Unlike most beaches in Lagos, this one is super private... bliss!

Osaru Alile, Interior Designer/Social Entrepreneur and Co-Founder of CC Interiors
“Lagos is an extremely dynamic, exciting city. Running a business in Lagos that requires me to move around a lot inevitably means that I get stuck in traffic frequently, dealing with both road rage and LASTMA (traffic police). But, somehow I stay in love with my crazy city. To stay in love – I must take breaks!”
Places to take breaks: Culinary Academy & Tarragon Restaurant, is a premier leisure cooking school/chef training centre in Lagos – it’s right in the middle of the city, which means you don’t need to travel far to get some exceptional food; Lakowè Lakes – an hour away from the hub of the city, but well worth the drive! It’s stunning, breathtaking, serene, quiet and feeds any nature-thirst. The greenery and the countless lakes make my heart sing.

of the real Lagos. The mainland then splits into neighbouring Ikoyi and Victoria Island (VI) and adjoining Lekki, a natural peninsula connecting the two islands to the Atlantic Ocean. Apart from being the main business and financial centres of Lagos, VI and Ikoyi constitute some of the most exclusive and expensive areas to live in Nigeria. Lekki, on the other hand, is also home to the Lekki Conservation Centre, an initiative established to protect wildlife in the southwest coastal environment of Nigeria from sprawling urbanisation. These three areas form the city’s core cultural and entertainment hub for both

young and old, local and international crowd, with art galleries including the expansive five-storey Nike Art Gallery, founded in 2009 by Nike Davies-Okundaye, a philanthropist, artist and textile designer, who single-handedly contributed to preserving and reviving traditional Nigerian indigo reverse (Adire) dyeing techniques in various centres across the country. Art Twenty One, another hot destination, is located within the luxurious five-star Eko Hotel & Suites. It was established in 2013 by Caline Chagoury Moudaber to serve as a platform for showcasing contemporary art with an ethos to foster, contribute



Works shown at Art Twenty One from artist Namsa Leuba. Umfana, from the series The Kingdom of Mountains, 2014.

Fibre print on Aluminium Dibond, image courtesy of the artist and Art Twenty One. Image courtesy of Art Twenty One.



Venture to the unique luxury concept store ALÁRA for contemporary art, fashion, textile and furniture.

and solidify the city’s burgeoning art scene. Their programming includes a mix of group, thematic and solo exhibitions of emerging and established artists, including Olu Amoda, Gérard Quenum, Namsa Leuba and Abraham Oghobase. A highlight of their 2015 programme was the exhibition ‘Another Congo’, bringing together works by acclaimed Magnum photojournalists Alex Majoli and Paolo Pellegrin, a first showing of these artists in West Africa. A short distance from Art Twenty One is the David Adjaye-designed retail concept store ALÁRA, founded by Reni Folawiyo. The building stands out due the use of cast concrete both inside and outside. Spread over a series of suspended platforms, landings and staircases, ALÁRA provides a unique luxury shopping experience and is a place to appreciate art, fashion, textile and furniture. Notable luxury lines stocked here include Stella Jean, Self-Portrait, Maki

Oh, Zashadu, Alexander McQueen, Tiffany Amber, Marni and Peter Pilotto. One of the most exciting brands discovered here is Zashadu by the talented leather accessories designer, Zainab Ashadu. Zashadu is a sustainable label, sourcing locally produced leather handbags and shoes made by artisans in Northern Nigeria. The brand was born out of Zainab’s interest and highly personal ethos of creating ‘an organic growth that turns the challenges of her context into strengths’. It is not driven by trends (think the explosion of popular Dutch wax ‘African’ prints), but rather through exquisite attention to detail, which in turn builds close relationships and creates livelihoods for artisans, who produce unique limited edition pieces from start to finish. Zashadu’s recent collaboration with the equally talented Maki Oh resulted in the ‘Cigarette Box Bag’ for AW16, exploring how ‘boxy constraints and austere sensuality can function as a handbag’, drawing on a colour palette based on the richness of the Nigerian landscape of ‘lush greens, earthly Nok terracotta and pastels’. Temple Muse, another notable concept store, offers a curated selection of renowned products and exciting brands. These are displayed in a building that also stages art exhibitions alongside an in-house champagne bar and pool for use by visitors. Alexander Wang, Missoni Home, Balmain, Carven, Lalique, Lanre Da Silva Ajayi, Mawi London and Loewe all feature here. Discovering the upcycled furniture by Yinka Ilori, the Nigerian-British and London-based product designer, provides an exciting addition to this stellar store’s brands. Ilori’s

Installation of Another Congo exhibition at Art Twenty One, Lagos.



MOJEH RECOMMENDS

- **Restaurants:** Casper and Gambini, Nok by ALÁRA, The Food Lounge at Terra Kulture
- **Hotels:** Eko Suites, Bogobiri, Federal Palace Hotel Lagos and The Wheatbaker
- **Fashion Designers:** Zashadu, Grey, Orange Culture, Maki Oh and Lanre Da Silva Ajayi
- **Boutiques:** Temple Muse, ALÁRA and Stranger Lagos

Works from renowned Nigerian photographer, J D ‘Okhai Ojeikere’s show at CCA Lagos. J.D. ‘Okhai Ojeikere, Untitled 2005.

‘upscale vintage furniture’ is a colourful juxtaposition of textiles and found pieces, brought together in a signatory style that draws on both European and West African culture manifested in these design objects. Ilori is inspired by the way Lagosioans use and wear colour – “The one thing Nigerians are not afraid of is wearing colour, and that is beautiful”. Moving beyond VI and into Lekki, which is also home to the majority of beaches in Lagos, one is momentarily transposed into another vastly populated area of shopping malls, boutiques, and an arts-crafts market, alongside bars and restaurants, all away from the business of VI and Ikoyi islands. Stranger is one of such boutique spaces, offering a much-needed independently run co-working space, a brew bar and swap library. It also sells innovative designer clothing and accessories, alongside publications on fashion, design and culture. Stanger’s ethos is one of ‘building and strengthening’ a community of like-minded individuals to fuel an alternative culture in the city centred on colouration and appreciation of contemporary Nigerian culture. Partnering with organisations including LagosPhoto Festival, emerging artists and designers, it is an exciting space to have tea, work, do some yoga, whilst also exploring an international film programme of independent cinema. As the city is enveloped by beaches and intense sunlight, Dap Mod is the place to pick up unique sunglasses to navigate the sunny sidewalks of Lagos. The store is designed by Kemedeco, founded by interior designer Kelechi Ejikeme. This design house, according to its director Ejikeme, ‘focuses on creating neo-African designs using locally sourced materials’. Dap Mod sunglasses are all hand-made, rustic and distressed to preserve the authenticity of the wood from which they are produced.

The ultimate way to unwind in Lagos is, of course, through culinary enjoyment and live entertainment. Fine dining experiences can be found in venues including Nok by ALÁRA, The Food Lounge at Terra Kulture and Casper and Gambini, all of whom provide delectable and varied local and international cuisines. Bogobiri House, a 16-room boutique hotel, restaurant and in-house art gallery, is a favourite for live music, whilst MILIKI, an upscale private member’s club, is an exclusive lounge bringing together artists, writers and musicians for curated events fostering creativity. To escape further and connect with nature, creative agency Nothing to Do in Lagos (NTDIL) are responsible for changing the ways Lagosians engage with their city, with the motto ‘#FindYourLagos and when you do #ShareYourLagos’. A highlight includes their ‘Kayak Lagos’ – what better way to explore the city than through its expansive waterways. Finally, this week long tour of Lagos ends with the stunning Lakowè Lakes Golf and Country Estate, located about an hour’s drive away from the city – an exclusive, secure and serene resort with a world class 18-hole golf course, complemented by several

man-made lakes, including a spectacular 55-hectare lake. It also includes a golf academy, a driving range and a clubhouse.

A week in Lagos, a city of approximately 20 million inhabitants, seems such an insignificant period of time to explore all that this cosmos has to offer. A megalopolis that has transformed itself into an ever-expanding and burgeoning cultural and travel destination, Lagos has so many cultural offerings for the adventurous traveller. From luxury boutiques to influential art institutions and galleries, innovative fashion, interiors and product designers, Lagos needs time and energy. And, alas, be prepared not to sleep, as the city is is on par with the greats because the adventure just never stops. As writer Binyavanga Wainaina so eloquently put it, “There is no country in the world with the diversity, confidence, talent and black pride of Nigeria.”

Dine at Nok Restaurant by ALÁRA.



E TKO Mini Green Croc Bag from sustainable label Zashadu.

