

Mafia Island



Further Links

- Indian Ocean island surrounded by sandbanks and coral reefs.
- Excellent diving and snorkelling.
- Whales sharks are often abundant at certain times of the year.
- Good birdwatching.
- Interesting fishing villages and boat building sites
- Cultural trips including ancient ruins

Situation

Mafia Island is off the Tanzanian coast, about 160kms south of Zanzibar.

Activities

Relaxing; swimming; snorkelling; diving; boat trips; village visits; birdwatching.

Mafia Island is a small island 160km south of Zanzibar, Tanzania. If you want a peaceful retreat, come and stay at one of the great lodges here. Mafia is a perfect island for anyone wanting to escape and stay away from crowds.

Although the beaches at the lodges are small and surrounded by mangroves, if you want pure sandy beaches to laze on and swim from, all the lodges will take you out to sand banks at low tide, where you can while away a few hours with shade cloth and cool drinks.

Mafia Island Marine Park is a protected environment for coral reef and other ecosystems. The park is 822km sq and one of the largest protected areas in the Indian Ocean. Local communities still live inside the marine park zone and their livelihoods depend on fish catches and mangroves and coral limestone for building their houses - so the people live side by side with conservation and have a happy balance between conservation and their traditional live styles.

Birdwatching is excellent around Mafia and very different to the mainland parks. The tidal flats and mangroves are alive with coastal and sea birds and there are many colourful woodland and forest species. There is fantastic **snorkelling and diving** to be found from Mafia - some of the finest in East Africa. There are lots of reefs and coral rocks that offer great sites to explore and if you don't want to be in the water, many excursions, boat trips and walks can be enjoyed. Ask your lodge to arrange these for you.

Chole Island (see separate link) is the oldest still inhabited settlement in this archipelago with ruins of old Arab buildings, lush vegetation and a huge bat colony. Chole Bay is a great diving and snorkelling site and even not so confident swimmers can snorkel at the coral rocks emerging from **Maweni Bay**. **Kitutia Reef** is one of the most beautiful reefs flanked by two long white strips of sand at low tide where you can enjoy a picnic or walk along along the reef, sun bath or swim as well as snorkel. **Marimbani Sand Bank** is a strip of pure white sand which appears at low tide where you can swim in clear waters.

There are several old ruins around Mafia, one of the largest are those of the ancient city of **Kua** on **Juani Island**, and surrounded by many legends. Animals found on Juani include wild pigs, monkeys and blue duikers. South of Juani Island is the '**Blue Lagoon**' where the island is divided in two by a long channel which links the inland bay and the open ocean. Depending on tides you can swim in the huge natural pool that forms here.

A trip to **Jibondo Island** gives you the chance to meet the fishermen in this remote village, about an hour by boat from Utende village (where the lodges are located). Their drying nets and traditional shipyard are very interesting and one of the most well known in Tanzania.

One of the most beautiful islands is **Bweju** which is less than 2km long and no more than 200 metres wide at the most. Located between the main Mafia Island and the Rufiji River Delta it is a good base for diving and snorkelling with a small traditional fishing community living on the island.

At the northern point of Mafia's main island is **Ras Mkumbi Lighthouse** which can be reached by car. This journey takes you right across Mafia island with it's stretches of savannah dotted with Baobab trees, small villages and bushlands. It is usually possible to climb to the top of the lighthouse for great views around the island. Another car trip of interest takes you through virgin forest to **Chuwia Beach** which has no human settlement and one of the more remote beaches of Mafia. At some times in the season it may be possible here to visit places which are inhabited by a **pod of hippos** which are so small the locals call them 'dwarf hippo'. It seems that their strange presence on Mafia could be that in ancient times the Rufiji River Delta tidal flow made it possible for the animals to cross the strip of sea between Mafia and the mainland.

