

MAFIA ISLAND

A TRUE AFRICAN CHARM



Mafia Island is a true remnant of the old Swahili coast, a timeless place that is preserved and unaffected by commercialism. Local people go about their traditional activities seemingly detached from the outside world. The main activity is fishing which is combined with the cultivation of staple foods and weaving of mats and baskets.

Moderate Islamic religion dominates the Island. Mafia is the largest of a small archipelago of islands with a population of about 40,000.

It is approximately 20 miles off the Tanzanian coast, about 35 minutes by air from Dar es Salaam. Across from island lies the Great Rufiji River delta and the world famous Selous Game Reserve.

The name Mafia is probably derived from the Arabic “morfiyeh”, meaning “group” or “archipelago”, or from the Swahili “mahali pa afya” meaning “a healthy dwelling place”. Its history goes back to the 8th century where it played a key role in the East African trading routes between Kilwa and Zanzibar.

According to a legend, in the early 19th century, the Shirazi town of Kua and Juani Island were ransacked by a group of cannibals from Madagascar who ate many of the local people and abducted the rest for slavery. In more modern times it was the base used by British forces in the First World War, crucial for locating the German battleship Königsberg. Today it's known for its spectacular and peaceful natural environment.

Mafia has mostly escaped the invasion of mass tourism, with only a handful lodges on the island.

The lodges are like “bush resorts” in that everything is quiet, thus offering the perfect alternative safari experience. Major tourist activities are scuba diving, snorkelling, beach and offshore island excursions.

The places to visit are: Chole Bay, Kinasi Pass Islets, Mange reef, Kitutia, and Jibondo Pass. Diving safaris around Chole Bay, within Mafia Island's Marine Park are outstanding. This is one of the highest bio-diversity marine sites in East Africa!

There are over 400 species of fish, 48 genera of soft and hard coral, the endangered marine turtle, dolphins and the rare dugong.

Chole Bay, the core of the Marine Park, also provides a rare alternative destination when the monsoon produces particularly windy days and the ocean is raging beyond the reef at other Tanzanian diving destinations. There are a handful of genuinely world class dive sites and you can be assured of never diving in a crowd.

Ideal for nature lovers, this is a real paradise with the rich variety of vegetation, which combines a mixture of bush with baobabs, mangroves and dream sandbanks. There are wild pigs, duikers, monkeys, small antelopes, hippos and nocturnal creatures such as bush babies and the fruit bat (flying fox). Fish eagles and countless other wading and wetland birds frequent the shoreline.

It's a wonderful destination to round off a wilderness safari or simply put your feet up and unwind!