

pole pole resort

mafia island

A rarely visited conservation area on a balmy island off the coast of Tanzania
is the setting for one of the world's most exciting eco-lodges.





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Raised on stilts, each luxurious unit has a Zanzibari bed for those essential afternoon siestas



PREVIOUS SPREAD Lamplit evenings on the beach at Pole Pole are popular with honeymooners.

THIS SPREAD The furniture is made of local wood and rattan. Gentle giants – whale sharks are regular visitors to these waters.

The resort is situated in the Mafia Island Marine Park, famous for its coral reefs and mangroves. Each bungalow has its own veranda and en-suite bathroom.

The service is friendly, the food exquisite.

A romantic picnic beside the ocean.



A warm wind rustles the fronds of the coconut palm outside my veranda. Offshore, white-sailed dhows drift across the viridian waters of Chole Bay. It's a tranquil setting here at Pole Pole as the late afternoon light softens. I kick off my shoes and watch the moon rise and cast silvery fingers over the rippled ocean.

Pole Pole Resort (its name means 'slowly, slowly' in the Swahili language) has been hailed by the US *Travel & Leisure* magazine as one of the top 25 eco-lodges in the world. Its seven spacious en-suite bungalows are set in tropical gardens and were built by local craftsmen entirely of local timber. Raised on stilts, each unit has a private veranda with a Zanzibari bed for those essential afternoon siestas. Indoors, the bedlinen has been imported from Italy, the bathrooms have double basins and the showers are king-sized. Gauzy drapes hang at the windows. Beyond, there are endless views to the horizon.

The resort is situated inside Mafia Island Marine Park, one of the largest protected marine areas in the Indian Ocean. Founded in 1995, the reserve has gained international recognition as a centre of biodiversity for its coral reefs, abundant marine life, mangroves and coastal forests. The island is far off the tourist track, but for those who do make it here, it offers an experience they will never forget.

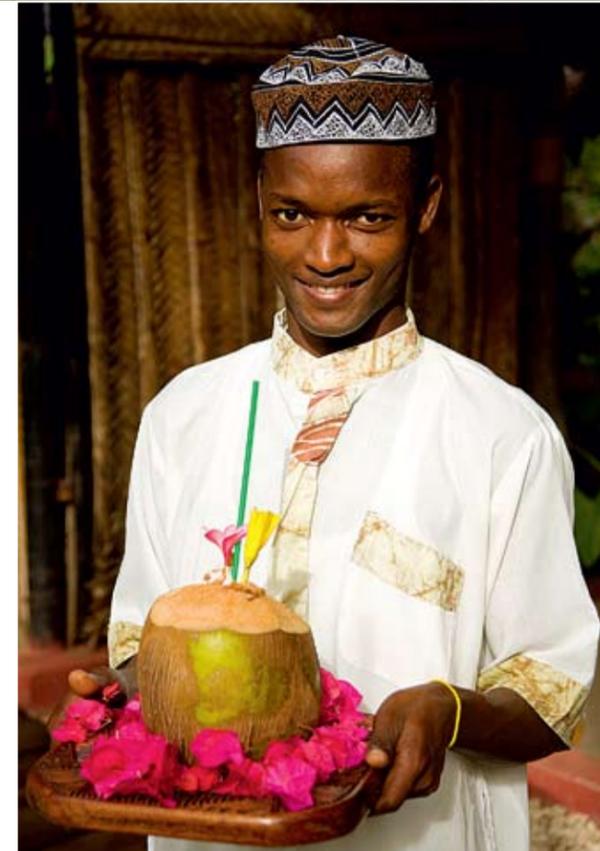
There's lots to do at Pole Pole. The underwater life is vibrant and plentiful – more than 400 species of fish have been identified – and the Mafia Island archipelago is a paradise for snorkellers and scuba divers. Whale sharks and manta rays also visit these waters. On land, the vegetation is just as lush. Large palm groves dominate, but there are also baobabs, mango and cashew trees, and mangroves that help to prevent coastal erosion. Wildlife includes vervet monkeys, small antelope, wild pigs, lemurs and many species of birds.

Apart from diving, Pole Pole offers dhow trips to various destinations around Chole Bay, with a favourite being the excursion to Fungo Marimbani, a strip of dazzling white sand that is revealed at low tide. Another popular outing is to Maweni, a coral reef easily accessed by snorkellers. And, when all those activities have left you with aching muscles, you can have an essential-oil massage in a palm-thatched banda or in a shady spot on the beach.

Dinners are a fusion of local and Italian dishes (attributable to the Italian owners). Tonight, lobster and king prawns are on offer. I opt for grilled barracuda and calamari, which are delicious. The food, my waiter tells me, is organically grown.

In the morning, I set off with a British honeymooning couple on a snorkelling trip. Our dhow first stops at Fungo Marimbani. 'We came here a few days ago for a picnic and had the whole place to ourselves. It was so romantic,' the wife tells me. 'We saw beautiful cowrie shells and so many crabs that we called it Crab City.'

After photographing a spotted jellyfish and two tiny white starfish, we continue to the reef where I waste no time jumping into the water. It's warm, and the clarity and colours are amazing. Hundreds of fish in all shades of the rainbow swim around the coral. I take a deep breath and kick down a few metres, floating free in the aqua paradise.



details

When to go

The resort is closed in April and May, when heavy rain falls. The most popular visiting period is from June to March.

How to get there

Daily flights connect Dar es Salaam and Kilindoni airstrip on Mafia Island. Resort staff will transport visitors to Pole Pole Resort.

Who to contact

E-mail contact@polepole.com or go to www.polepole.com