

# Tanzania Whale Sharks & Turtles

*Assist in work contributing to the conservation of the majestic whale shark and beautiful turtle in these crystal clear waters around Mafia island.*

Your Tanzania adventure begins with a thrilling journey high above the turquoise Indian Ocean as you fly to Mafia Island - the most beautiful of Tanzania's Spice Islands where tranquil white sand beaches, friendly villagers and world class snorkelling and scuba diving sites combine to make this a true tropical paradise. Tanzania's coast is home to some of the most spectacular wildlife in the world. The crystal clear waters host a wealth of marine habitats, including the bewitching whale shark and beautiful turtle, making this a perfect location to explore this pristine and magical underwater world.

The vivid, multi-hued coral reefs support a dazzling array of tropical reef fish and provide rich feeding grounds for turtles, rays and other marine creatures whilst the deep blue offshore waters support vast shoals of cruising pelagics, whale sharks and dolphins.

One of the most appealing and intriguing aquatic species to be found here though is the wondrous whale shark. Vast in size and blue grey in colour, they glide silently through the deep waters of the Indian Ocean filtering algae and fish into their wide mouths. Despite their impressive physicality (they can grow up to 12.65 metres in length and often weigh the same as a small elephant), whale sharks have been described as gentle and even playful, and make ideal swimming companions. Sadly these elegant aquatic inhabitants are threatened as a result of a variety of natural and human induced reasons.

The work you carry out will be rewarding and exciting and hugely beneficial to Mafia Island Marine Park's conservation efforts, as well as being amazing fun! At the end of the day you will gain immense satisfaction from knowing that you have helped to save this precious marine wilderness and protect it for future generations.

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- Help to monitor & conserve coastal sea shore environments and rare Indian Ocean marine wildlife
- Play an active role in the conservation of sea turtles in the Indian Ocean
- help to protect the whale shark and promote the welfare of these creatures
- The opportunity to earn additional PADI diving qualifications
- Swim and snorkel from your perfect beach camp and explore the crystal clear Indian Ocean
- Make lifelong friends as you enjoy life on this exotic tropical island and discover this spectacular marine wilderness.

## FAST FACTS

<b>Location</b>	Mafia Island, Tanzania
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<b>Activities</b>	Explore the beaches whilst helping to preserve turtle hatchlings Contribute towards an educational/awareness programme with local fisherman and tourists on whale sharks Discover & record living organisms Record observations of the feeding habits & behaviour patterns of a range of marine life Study the impact of fishing on the coral reefs and local whale shark populations Report the effects of global warming on marine communities Observe the impact of a marine park on the health of the ecosystem and associated organisms
<b>Transport</b>	Airport pick-up from Dar es Salaam and first night hostel accommodation in Dar es Salaam can be arranged at extra cost (£40/\$60) (optional) Airport pick up available from Mafia Island Airport Transfer to camp from Mafia Island Airport
<b>Accommodation</b>	Communal camp

## WHAT DOES THE PROJECT DO?

### Mafia Island Marine Park

Mafia Island is about as close as you can get to the quintessential Indian Ocean tropical paradise. The tiny island of about 40,000 people is a friendly, laid-back place that has long been praised as a diver and sea angler's paradise.

Mafia's luxuriant mangroves, luminous seagrass beds and dazzling coral reefs play host to a multitude of tropical reef fish, seahorses and five species of graceful and gentle sea turtles. Offshore, the deeper waters are a regular stop off point for dolphins, migrating humpback whales and giant whale sharks. You can experience this magical seashore environment when you join the Frontier beach camp on Mafia Island and swim and snorkel from the beach out to the crystal clear waters of Tanzania's exclusive Marine Park.

### Conserving the coral reefs and whale sharks

Tanzania's extensive coral reefs are damaged and in danger of being lost forever. Climate change and subsequent rising sea temperatures damage the coral by affecting the zooxanthellae that form the foundation of the reef, a process known as bleaching. Consequently other species that live symbiotically with the reef also begin to die out. Coral reefs are not only extremely beautiful – they sustain vast volumes of biodiversity and are essential for life on earth. Whale sharks are threatened by the same threats that affect coral reefs as well as by the additional threats posed by their accidental death in fishing nets, sound pollution, water pollution and habitat destruction. The key aim of this project is to assist in raising the awareness of local stakeholders of whale sharks along with turtle nesting activity, with the long term aim of developing a strategy for future coastal zone management.

If you are joining this project between November and January then you may have the opportunity to conduct surveys on the transient whale shark population. You may be recording details of sightings

and monitoring returning whale sharks. Volunteers may also have the opportunity to conduct awareness raising activities with tourists visiting Mafia Island.

## **Monitor Turtle Habitat**

The project undertakes underwater exploration involving mapping the incredible biodiversity of the coastal area and marine habitats. Research involves surveying, mapping, and recording important marine habitats such as seagrass meadows and mangrove forests.

## **Discover Swahili Culture**

Through participating in environmental awareness raising in local schools and community activities, you will experience the cultures and lifestyles of the local people.

The time of year that you visit the project will greatly affect the type of work you are involved in as much of our research is heavily dependent on the season.

## **WHAT WILL I BE DOING?**

The marine research and conservation programme is run in association with the Mafia Island Marine Park. The project provides the local communities and government bodies with the information they need sustainably to manage this priceless marine ecosystem and preserve it for future generations. To gather the data needed you will snorkel through seagrass and mangrove habitats and study the various communities existing on them.

Living and working in an internationally recognised marine protected area will give you access to a fantastic array of wildlife and ecosystems. You may have the opportunity to snorkel over habitats untouched by destructive fishing practices and help monitor the success of a variety of conservation methods. The data collected on our commercial fish surveys aids the marine park in maintaining the most up to date and dynamic management plans for the future of the region so that we can be confident that Mafia Island will remain a stunning destination for the ensuing generations.

Sea turtles generally nest on the island from April to July with eggs hatching between June and August. If you are taking part in the project at this time, you may have the opportunity to monitor and protect these incredible creatures of the ocean, witnessing the nesting process and watching young turtles hatching and scurrying their way to the Indian Ocean.

Between November and January you may also have the opportunity to conduct surveys on the transient whale shark population, recording details of sightings and monitoring annual returners. This could involve snorkelling in the same waters as whale sharks as they feed. There is also the opportunity to conduct awareness raising activities with the tourists visiting Mafia Island.

Whilst snorkelling, you'll see an extraordinary array of animals from abundant fish life to nudibranchs, sea cucumbers to feathery starfish and spiny urchins to octopus. By the end of your project you will be expert at identifying hundreds of coloured and patterned reef fish. Those joining the project for a short period of time may not be able to participate in a full range of project activities. Some project activities are seasonal.

You'll find your team to be a fun, dynamic mix of ages and experiences, with members who all share a passion about travelling in developing countries and saving endangered marine life. Your staff will be young, friendly individuals who are highly experienced in their field many of whom may have volunteered on a Frontier project earlier in their career.

You'll get immense satisfaction from having made a valuable contribution to the conservation of this

untarnished marine wilderness and will return home with the new friends you've made and a wealth of incredible photos, videos, stories and memories.

For further information about Frontier marine conservation work see the publications section of this website.

## **DIVING OPPORTUNITIES**

Check out our video on [Frontier Gap Year TV](#) from Frontier-Tanzania, showing you our volunteers diving.

### **Sample Itinerary\***

**7:15** - Breakfast of bread and spread

**8:15** - Marine duty – filling water buckets for rinsing kit later

**9:15** - Journey to snorkel site

**10:15** - Snorkel to see condition of coral

**11:15** - Surface interval on the boat

**12:15** - Snorkel to identify invertebrates

**13:15** - Journey back to camp on the boat

**14:15** - Wash kit and hang up to dry

**14:30** - Lunch

**15:30** - Creating turtle fact sheet

**16:30** - Invertebrate identification quiz

**18:00** - Dinner time

**19:00** - Chill out time

**21:00** - Bed time

*\*This itinerary should only be considered as an example of the kind of activities and timescales to expect. Actual itineraries may vary depending on the season and the requirements of the project.*

## **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I ARRIVE?**

We can arrange an airport pick up for you at Dar es Salaam Airport and a local private driver will escort you to a local hostel where you can spend your first night relaxing and recovering from your journey. These costs are extra and you can pay our representative US\$68/\$60 directly. The following day he will return you to the airport in time for your internal flight on the eight seater light aircraft to Mafia Island. Please ensure you book your flight well in advance. Once on Mafia Island you will be met by Frontier staff at the airport on Mafia and transferred by vehicle to the marine conservation project camp site at Utende. We can provide you with detailed instructions on how to reach the Mafia

Island camp if travelling independently.

It is possible to reach Mafia Island by ferry but sailing times can be very unpredictable. If you choose not to fly you will need to travel via the port town of Nyamasati, 90 km south of Dar, from where you will travel by ferry, approximately a 6-hour trip, to the small harbour town of Kilindoni on the western side of Mafia Island. Once on the island you will be met by the Frontier marine field staff at Kilindoni.

## **WHERE WILL I BE STAYING?**

During the project you'll live on our marine camp at Utende on the east coast of Mafia Island, where you will have an authentic and memorable living experience. The Frontier marine camp was constructed by local craftsmen using traditional building techniques and local materials.

Camp life is very simple, unsophisticated and fun. You will be staying in communal bandas, being huts made from makuti (woven palm leaves), poles and mud, and sleeping on beds constructed from wooden poles, your "shower" will be a jug or a bucket of water and you cook over a charcoal stove so prepare for the basic, unencumbered lifestyle!

As well as the diving and marine conservation work you may help with the community outreach and environmental awareness work in the local villages, scientific data entry and daily camp maintenance, taking turns to cook, tidy and clean the camp, rinse dive kit, prime hurricane lamps, collect water and help with a wide variety of other essential camp duties.

## **WHAT WILL I BE EATING?**

Camp food is simple and nutritious and consists largely of rice, vegetables and beans all of which are purchased locally in order to help support the local economy. Luxuries such as chocolate, biscuits, peanut butter and drinking chocolate can be purchased in Kilindoni but tend to be very expensive, so make sure you stock up before heading to the field! Part of your role on camp will be to help with the cooking, so get your cookbooks out now and start practising! Also, with luck you'll be invited to local parties and festivals – a great way to integrate with the local communities in the nearby villages and absorb the local culture.

## **COSTS**

1 week	US\$ 1,345
2 weeks	US\$ 1,695
3 weeks	US\$ 1,945
4 weeks	US\$ 2,295
5 weeks	US\$ 2,795
6 weeks	US\$ 3,145
7 weeks	US\$ 3,345
8 weeks	US\$ 3,595
9 weeks	US\$ 3,795
10 weeks	US\$ 3,995
20 weeks	US\$ 6,495

Extra week	US\$ 345
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## DEPARTURE DATES

First and Third Monday of the Month

## DURATION

From 1 week

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

### Before you go

- Pre-departure support
- Travel & medical advice & documentation
- Equipment advice
- Discounted medical kit
- Free Frontier t-shirt
- UK residential briefing weekend including food, accommodation and training (extra cost applies)

### In-country

- Airport pickup in Dar es Salaam (extra cost US\$22/\$20)
- First night hostel accommodation in Dar es Salaam (extra cost US\$22/\$20)
- Transfer to airport for connecting flight to the island (extra cost US\$22/\$20)
- Airport pickup from Mafia Island airport and transfer to the camp (US\$7/\$6)
- Accommodation upgrades available in local lodge (extra cost applies)
- Food
- Local orientation
- Project training
- Dive training courses available PADI Open Water US\$782, PADI Advanced Open Water US\$620
- FREE use of Frontier project dive equipment, including tanks, BCDs, regs and weights
- 24-hour international HQ back-up
- In-country emergency support
- Free park & reserve entrance fees (usually \$20 per person per day) & research permits if applicable
- Discounted advanced dive courses: PADI Emergency First Response (US\$221), PADI Rescue Diver (US\$595), & PADI Divemaster qualifications (US\$1,275)
- CoPE qualification available depending on length of stay Dive training courses available to PADI Dive Master
- 24-hour in-country & international HQ emergency support & back-up

## AIRPORT INFORMATION

Nearest airport(s): Mafia Island (MFA)

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Call us on 020 7613 2422 (UK) / 1 949 336 8178 (US)

Mail us on [info@frontier.ac.uk](mailto:info@frontier.ac.uk)

Check out our social media here:

*Project details were correct at the time this document was generated. Price, dates and other details are subject to change. Please see our website for current details for this project.*