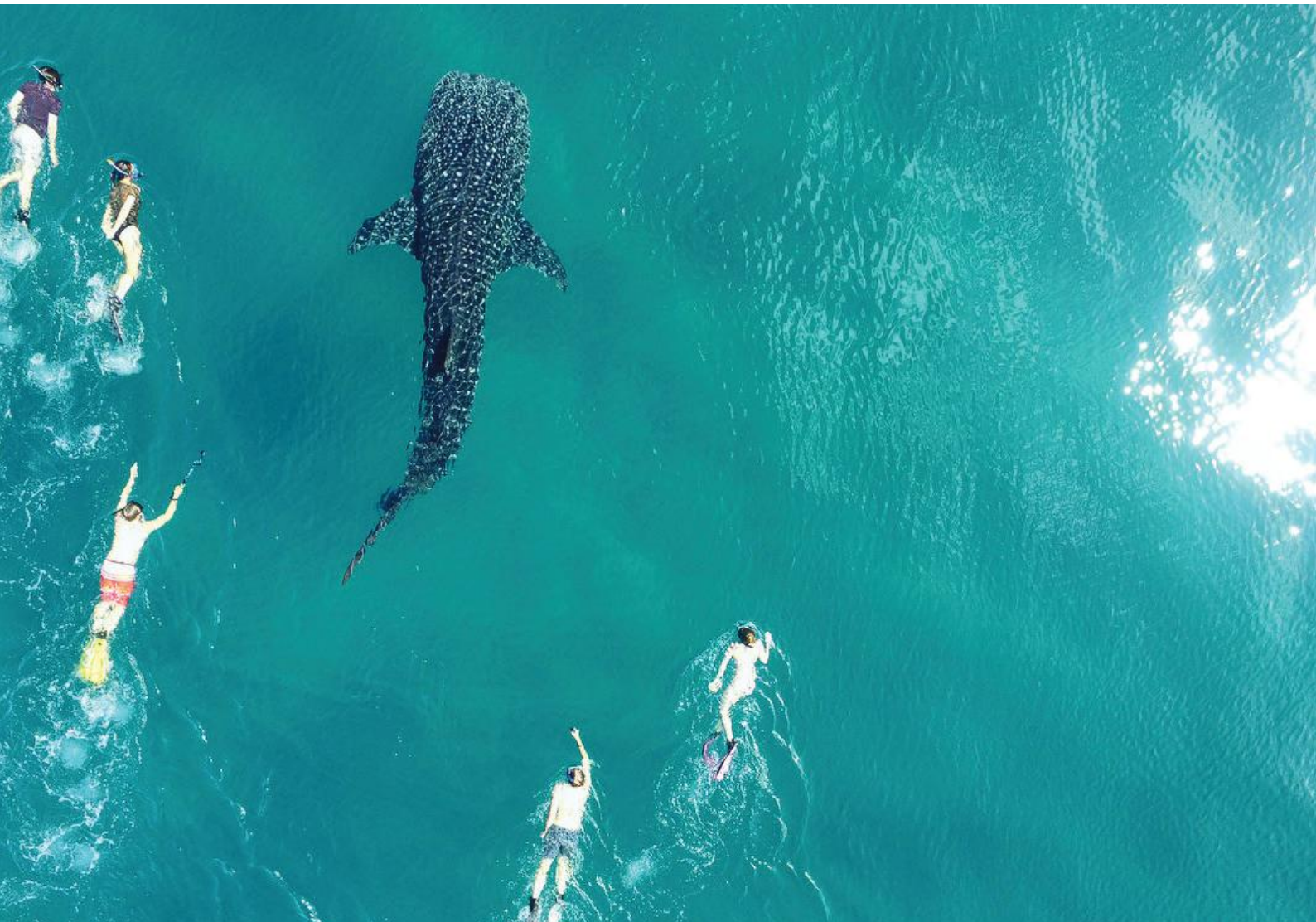




A guide to:

Mafia Island Whale Shark Conservation





Mafia Island Whale Shark Conservation

Focus: Whale Sharks

Location: Tanzania

Start Date: Any Day (October to March)

Arrival and starting point: Mafia Island



Situated in the stunning Mafia Island, this unique whale shark conservation experience is completely one of a kind. Renowned for its kaleidoscopic coral reefs, excellent diving, and fascinating culture – Mafia Island really is a unique destination in which to volunteer.

Whilst on the project, you will get the chance to experience Mafia Island's white sandy beaches and dazzling aquamarine waters - beneath which you will regularly encounter and swim with the curious whale shark as you take part in up to 4 tourist expeditions a week. Upon seeing your first shark, it will become clear why this conservation project is so enjoyable and eye-opening!

Mainly due to human activity, whale sharks are under huge threat in the area and around the world. They are often involved in fatal boat collisions with tourist boats and hunted for their fins, meat and oil. You will therefore assist with the integral conservation of these gentle giants by helping tourists to witness up close the largest fish in the world in the most responsible way.

You will be taught all that you need to know about these magnificent creatures so you can impart your knowledge to tourists, as well as collect vital data to contribute to the Global Spot Pattern ID Project, ensuring you make a lasting contribution to the conservation efforts of the awe-inspiring whale shark.

Assist With Whale Shark Tourism Excursions

Up to 4 days a week you will be responsible for taking out tourists on the boats to go and see the whale sharks. You will meet the tourists in the morning and give them an orientation and briefing on how to safely and responsibly dive with whale sharks, along with preparing all the snorkel equipment that you will be taking with you. Once this is completed you will head out to sea on the boats as you go in search of the whale sharks! There will be two interns per boat, and you will take it in turns between being in the water and collecting data as you swim with the whale sharks, and taking observations from the boat as you look after the tourists.



Skills & Theory Classes

So you are able to take part in the tourism excursions you will spend time in your first few days taking part in a variety of courses. These include: marine first aid, where you will learn how to handle various stings and marine envenomations, the theory and practise of skin diving, where you will learn how to snorkel efficiently, and also an introduction into whale shark biology. Once you have completed these, you will be able to head out to sea to join the tourism excursions with the other volunteers and project staff.



Photo & Video Identification

Much like human fingerprints, whale sharks can be individually identified by their spot patterns, and you will learn how to take photos and videos of the fish so that they can be identified before uploading them to the database for the Global Spot Pattern Identification Project. This project helps to map the migration patterns of whale sharks (by identifying returning individuals in peak seasons and any new to the area), as well as make more accurate population estimates. You will also photograph any significant markings, injuries or abrasions on the sharks, which will help identify where these animals are most at risk, and what from.



Beach Clean

To ensure this beautiful island paradise is preserved, once per fortnight you will take part in a beach clean. As well as with the rest of your volunteer group and the staff, you will be encouraged to involve members of the local community too. Any plastic waste that may be harmful to marine life as well as the environment will be removed and recycled where possible.



Free Time

During your time on the project you will get at least 2 full days off per week (usually Saturday & Sunday) and some afternoons as well. You can spend this time taking part in a variety of different activities, such as beach runs, yoga lessons and volleyball games which the staff organise, or simply relax on the beach and go for a swim.



If you fancy going a bit further afield, there is also a whole host of additional activities you can take part in (though they will come at an additional cost, even if it is just for the transport). These include, scuba diving (or learning how to dive if you have not dived before), visiting the hippo pools in the north or the wild beaches in the south! Additionally, you can visit the Mafia Island Marine Park where you can have a picnic on a deserted sand bar, paddle board through the mangrove forests, explore ancient ruins and villages or go snorkelling to see the wealth of corals and fish that the park is so famous for.

This time offers a fantastic opportunity to get out and explore and experience all that Mafia Island has to offer!



Itinerary

This project runs on a 4-week duration, providing ample opportunity to see whale sharks and time to explore the island! Below is an example itinerary and day schedule, but please note that itineraries are subject to change.

Day 1

After taking a flight from either Dar Es Salaam or Zanzibar, you will arrive into Mafia Island Airport. Here, you will be met by a member of the project team who will transfer you to your accommodation. You will then have some time to relax and meet the other volunteers and project staff before joining an orientation in the evening where you will discover what lies ahead in the coming weeks.

Days 2 - 27

During this time, you will go out to sea up to 4 times per week to take part in tourism excursions and research dives. You will also take part in beach cleans with the rest of your group and join theory classes as you learn all about whale shark ecology and the practice of skin diving. At least 2 days per week will also be free for you to see more of what this incredible island has to offer!

Day 28

This is your final day, and after some fond farewells, you will be transferred back to Mafia Island Airport in time for your return flight home or to commence your onward travel plans!

What Does A Typical Day Look Like?

6:00am	You will wake up and get ready to meet the tourists at the pick-up point in time for 6:20am to escort them down to the project site.
6:30am	During breakfast, you will conduct a health & safety briefing, before getting all the kit ready that will be needed for the trip out to sea.
7:30am	Time to go out on the boats!
12:00pm	The trip will end around midday, after which you will help to debrief the tourists and check out all the amazing pictures everyone managed to take during the trip.
1:00pm	After a morning of working hard, you now get to sit down for a tasty lunch.
2:00pm	This time may be spent entering data into the Global Spot Pattern ID Project database or taking part in a beach clean. However, this time can also be spent resting and relaxing before dinner.
4:00pm	You will now have some free time to relax before dinner or perhaps join an exercise class organised by the staff such as a beach run or some yoga!
7:30pm	You will enjoy a delicious dinner at this time!
8:30pm	You are now free to spend the evening taking part in social activities such as playing cards with your fellow interns or watching a movie!

Accommodation

Whilst on the project, you will be staying in the Magemani Camp on Mafia Island's western shore. This stunning beach front location is situated amongst the trees of an old coconut, mango, and cashew nut plantation. Traditional thatched houses of different sizes make up the camp which are shared, same-sex dorms that house two people per room. All dorms are equipped with beds, pillows, linen, and mosquito nets, and in true Bush style, the camp features composting toilets and outside showers. Free Wi-Fi is also available for volunteers to use. If you would prefer your own room in the dorm, you can pay the single supplement fee of £25 per night.

Standard accommodation



It is also possible to upgrade your accommodation to stay in one of the private stilt houses which are pictured below. The cost for this is £45 per night for solo travellers and £25 per person per night for couples. These prices are valid for the whole season except between December 20th and January 6th (peak season) when the cost to upgrade to a stilt house is £90 per night for a solo traveller and £50 per person per night for a couple.

Accommodation Upgrade



Food & Drink

Three meals of fresh local food are prepared by chefs daily here, including a lot of fruit and seafood such as fish, octopus and squid. Chicken and beef are also often served, and for vegetarians, there is plenty on offer. You will also be provided with tea, coffee and according to your preference, bottled or filtered water. Any extra snacks or drinks are not provided but can be purchased at an additional cost from either the local shop or the on-site bar.

What's Included

- Accommodation
- Three meals per day and filtered or bottled water
- English speaking facilitator
- All project activities
- Conservation donation
- Laundry service
- Skills and theory classes

Not Included

- All flights
- Any vaccinations
- Visas
- Scuba diving or certification
- Snorkelling equipment

Volunteer Reviews

Alexandra

"The whole trip was amazing but if I had to choose my favourite part, it would be when I saw my first whale shark and of course when I swam with one! The itinerary was full and fascinating!"



Katrina

"I was drawn to the project for the whale shark experience, but found myself immersed into their community project teaching local girls to swim. I got much more than I ever imagined."



Madalena

"This is a great organisation and I was impressed with how responsibly they conduct whale shark encounters. I got to swim with a whale shark with a double rainbow in the background!"





What Next?

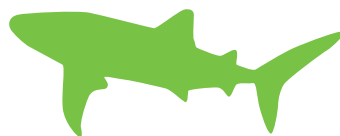
Becoming a volunteer on the Mafia Island Whale Shark Conservation Project is simple, and you can help make a difference to whale shark conservation efforts in just a few simple steps...



Visit the website to select your start date and how long you would like to volunteer for.



Secure your place online by paying a deposit of £195. You'll have up to 60 days before your start date to pay your remaining balance.



Prepare for your trip and ask your dedicated travel expert any questions before packing your bags and heading off to Tanzania!



Finally, have an incredible time and don't forget to send in or tag us in your photos!

#thegreatprojects



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