



A guide to the:
Mozambican Marine Conservation Project



The Mozambican Marine Conservation Project

Focus: Marine Life

Location: Mozambique

Start Dates: Every Sunday

Arrival & Starting Point: Inhambane

Hidden in Mozambique's southern reaches, exists the idyllic beach town known as Tofo. Historically a small fishing village, this tiny town has morphed into an exceptional marine hotspot and a scuba diver's paradise. Along the stunning stretches of beach that meet the warm Indian ocean, lies bustling coral reefs and an extensive array of awe-inspiring marine life. Beneath and breaching the waves, you'll find the likes of whale sharks, reef sharks, manta rays, dolphins and even seasonal humpback whales.



In today's world, marine life faces increasing pressures as a result of, and sadly not limited to, ocean pollution, climate change, unsustainable fishing practices and poaching. Interpreting the behaviour of different marine species is key to understanding the potential threats they face and how to minimise them. This project was established in 2014 with the aims of protecting the region's underwater ecosystems and the megafauna that live within them. Alongside the scientific research activities, there are also a number of community initiatives undertaken by the project to promote marine conservation and education in Tofo.

As a volunteer, you'll work alongside a group of highly qualified researchers, scientists and ocean-loving coordinators in a number of exciting activities. You'll be diving in the most species-rich locations on earth whilst learning how to record, monitor and analyse the health of different species and ecosystems they live in. Through setting up and collecting data from an underwater camera trap, photographing whale sharks 'fingerprint' markings, undertaking surveys, tagging sharks, and more, you'll gain knowledge and experience in marine biology and conservation, as well as gaining a world recognised PADI diving qualification.

You'll make a difference above and below the waves, as volunteers also partake in beach clean ups, local school visits and join in with community meetings and events such as World Oceans Day. So, for an ocean adventure that is rich in education, experience, culture, and all manner of incredible creatures in deep blue sea, dive in today!

Looking to travel between July - September? Why not join the Humpback Whale Monitoring Programme! More details included below.

Whale Shark Monitoring



The area immediately off Tofo is renowned as a global hotspot for the world's largest fish, with over 850 whale sharks being officially identified within Mozambique's waters. As a volunteer, you may partake in photo identification of these gentle giants, which involves photographing their fingerprint-like markings and any scars, injuries or abrasions they may have. You will also gather information on their sex, behaviour and characteristics, as well as their populations and GPS locations. The data alongside any photographs will be uploaded to a database and later analysed by volunteers with the project researchers. Reaching up to 22m in length, swimming alongside these awe-inspiring, endangered animals is an unforgettable experience and for many, the highlight of their trip!

Manta Ray Monitoring

Alongside whale sharks, Mozambique is well-known for the sheer number of manta rays that visit the reefs to feed, clean and rest, with their peak visiting season between January to June. With over 1000 manta rays identified in Tofo over the last 10 years, they are regularly spotted on research dives. During your time on the project, you'll assess the health and behaviour of the rays whilst monitoring the manta reef cleaning stations where they gather. You may also help service acoustic listening stations that monitor the presence and movement patterns of reef manta rays. The giant manta ray was recently downgraded from vulnerable to endangered on the IUCN Red List, meaning research on the species and their conservation is more important than ever.



Coral Reef Monitoring

Coral reefs are one of the world's most diverse ecosystems, with a quarter of all ocean species depending on healthy reefs for food and shelter. Tofo's reef systems host and support an abundance of marine life but most notably, 31 endangered species of shark, ray, dolphin and turtle. The team are building knowledge on Mozambique's coral reef ecology in order to protect and conserve the coral and fish species that reside here. As a volunteer, you'll help monitor the reefs by conducting marine surveys, setting up and collecting data from an underwater camera trap and completing dive logs.



Shark Tagging

Very little is known about sharks in Mozambique, so in order to learn more about these misunderstood creatures, the project is currently tracking 22 sharks along the Inhambane coastline and in the Bazaruto Archipelago National Park. This shark tracking project is the first in southern Mozambique and will provide information on bull, hammerhead and oceanic blacktip sharks in the area by using acoustic telemetry. Volunteers may be able to join researchers for the day as they safely capture, tag and release sharks. These tags that will monitor their movements for up to 10 years, allowing the team to build knowledge on their behaviour and develop policies that promote shark conservation. Please note that spaces on the boat are limited therefore we cannot guarantee every volunteer will have this opportunity. We recommend joining for a minimum of 4 weeks to be able to participate.



Estuary Trips

The Inhambane estuary is fed by two rivers which makes it a great place to study the versatile marine life that live within the reef and surrounding mangrove forests. As a volunteer, you'll take weekly trips to estuary on a traditional dhow boat to snorkel and collect data on wealth of species that reside here. The sandy-bottom reef and mangrove forest host starfish, sea urchins, eels, sea horses and more. Through surveys and video transects, the information you collect on a variety of species will give insight into the reef and will support work with the local government to regulate and protect the area. By undertaking this work, the team have been able to establish 9 protected areas in estuary since 2017!



Scientific Talks & Documentaries

Made up of scientists, researchers and dive masters, the project team have a wealth of specialist marine knowledge and hold regular talks about specific wildlife such as sharks and manta rays. These talks will enlighten you to what the project team are studying and why, as well as giving you the opportunity to learn more about the different marine life that you will have seen during the week. There are also regular documentary nights run at the dive centre for you to learn whilst relaxing!





Community Outreach

The project finds regular opportunities to engage and interact with local people and communities. As a volunteer, you may have the opportunity to take part in beach clean ups, visits to local schools to educate the children on ocean conservation or attend community meetings and events. Events held for World Oceans Day are huge celebration and learning opportunity for people of Tofo. The project also works to develop sustainable fisheries and fishing practices, and aim to meet regularly with the fishing communities to establish good working relationships.

Free Time







With weekends at your leisure, you'll have the chance to experience all that Tofo has to offer! If you're looking for some zen, why not head to a morning yoga class? The town also has a great surf school, if you're looking to learn the art of catching waves, or are already an avid surfer, you can grab a board and jump right in. Water sports, kayaking, snorkelling, documentary nights under the stars and a braai (BBQ) could all be on the cards for no additional cost. Finally, you could always make use and have a soak in your accommodation's hot tub!



Humpback Whale Monitoring Programme

If you're looking to join the Mozambican Marine Conservation Project in July – September, you can choose between the general volunteer project or the Humpback Whale Monitoring Programme!

Every year hundreds of humpback whales migrate from Antarctica to Southern Africa to mate and give birth. They lactate the calves and wait for them to build their strength before migrating back to Antarctic waters to feed during the summer. The aim of this programme is to collect data specifically on humpback whales to further research on their biology and conservation. By choosing this programme, you'll focus your time on the giants of the sea, assisting the researchers in truly fascinating and unforgettable activities including:

-  Collecting data on behaviour, movement patterns, habitat use and pod structure
-  Assisting the researchers in taking tissue samples
-  Recording whale songs using hydrophones
-  Learning how to photographically identify individuals, adding or matching them to 150 whales on the project's database
-  Analyse the data and samples collected and contribute to ongoing conservation efforts
-  Experience swimming alongside humpback whales!

Other Activities

As well as completing 4 boat-based research expeditions a week, you'll also conduct land-based research and receive scientific seminars on the whales, as well as the other iconic marine megafauna in the region. Alongside the research activities, you'll also take snorkel-based excursions in the protected areas of the Inhambane estuary and participate in community outreach work, helping to promote ocean conservation.

A PADI dive qualification is not needed to participate in this programme and therefore isn't included in the price but discounted PADI courses are available if you'd like to learn to dive as well.

This programme offers volunteers the unique opportunity of close encounters with some of the biggest marine life in the world. You'll become an integral part of the research team, helping to better understand these distinctive whales and how to protect them to ensure they are here for years to come. Contact our travel team for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to work with these giants of the deep!



Itinerary

For those without a PADI Open Water Diving Qualification, you will spend up to 4 days of your itinerary learning to dive, completing 6 dives in total to gain certification. We recommend booking a minimum duration of 20 nights so that you'll have plenty of opportunity to contribute to the research dives and experience all of the activities on offer.

Day 1

Upon arrival into Inhambane Airport, you will be met by a project representative and transferred to the project site (approximately a 45-minute drive). You spend some time settling into your accommodation and getting to know the other volunteers and project staff. Relax and grab an early night before the diving adventure begins!

Day 2 - 13

For non-divers, you'll spend your first 4 days learning to dive before joining in on project activities. Volunteers who are already qualified will assist on research activities immediately. All project activities run from Monday – Friday with 4 scuba dives per week and the weekends are at your leisure. See what a typical project day looks like below!

Day 14

Today is your final day, so take a final dip in the ocean before saying your goodbyes to your fellow volunteers and the project staff. You will be transferred back to Inhambane Airport for your return flight home, or to commence your independent travel plans.

Example Daily Breakdown

7:00am	Grab some breakfast prepared by the private chef to set you up for the day ahead!
7:30am	Head out on a dive with the researchers. This morning you may find yourself setting up a camera trap or conducting a survey to monitor the health of the reef. Along the way, you may encounter an inquisitive whale shark so jump in to photograph its markings!
12:00pm	Back at the accommodation, the chef will prepare lunch after a busy morning diving.
1:00pm	Time to analyse the data collected on your morning dive. Enter your dive log entries before possibly identifying different species caught on video by the camera trap, or perhaps you'll be processing the photos you've taken of megafauna.
3:00pm	Receive a specialist talk from one of the project scientists. You may learn about specific species you've seen in today's dive or learn about the conservation goals the project team are working towards.
4:00pm	You're finished for the day, so head down to the beach or relax in the volunteer's hot tub before getting ready for dinner.
6:00pm	Around this time, the private chef will cook up a storm for you and your fellow volunteers so you can relax and eat together.
7:00pm	Then the night is yours! Maybe you'll head to the dive centre to catch a documentary or wander into town to enjoy some live music. Or simply, relax on the beach and prepare for another day of diving.

Accommodation

On this project, you will be accommodated in your home away from home, the Volunteer House. Located right on the beach with a pool just a stone's throw away from the ocean, you'll be able to kick back after a busy day of diving and lead that beach-bum lifestyle most can only dream about. You will be allocated a room on a twin-share, same-sex basis (double rooms are available for couples), and all rooms have bedding, fans and mosquito nets. Elsewhere, there are shared bathrooms, kitchen facilities and relaxation areas - many with sea views!



Food & Drink

The price includes a private chef that will prepare and cook three meals a day for you in the volunteer house kitchen. You can expect a mixture of local cuisine and some western-style dishes; vegetarians and vegans can be catered for with prior notice. There's a few local shops to buy drinks or extra snacks, and if you fancy a change of scenery, there are some great spots nearby for restaurants, cafés, bars and local markets (though please note, these are not covered by the project).



What's Included

- Accommodation
- Three meals per day
- Airport transfers
- All project activities and dive equipment
- English-speaking project leader
- A donation to the project
- Open Water PADI qualification (if inexperienced)

Not Included

- All flights
- Any vaccinations
- Visas
- Travel insurance
- Additional dive courses (Advanced Open Water or Rescue Diver courses can be undertaken for an additional fee)
- PADI Dive Courses if joining the Humpback Whale Monitoring Programme.

Volunteer Reviews

Magnus

"We met 5 whale sharks, 5 manta rays and even a humpback whale which swam right over our heads! We had an extreme, awesome experience!"



Ashley

"Being a part of this programme was a privilege and an honour. I could not have asked for a more friendly and hospitable environment."



James

"I loved learning to dive and seeing my first manta ray! This is a fantastic project, in a beautiful location, with wonderful facilitators."





What Next?

Becoming a volunteer on the Mozambican Marine Conservation Project is simple, and you can help make a difference to marine 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.

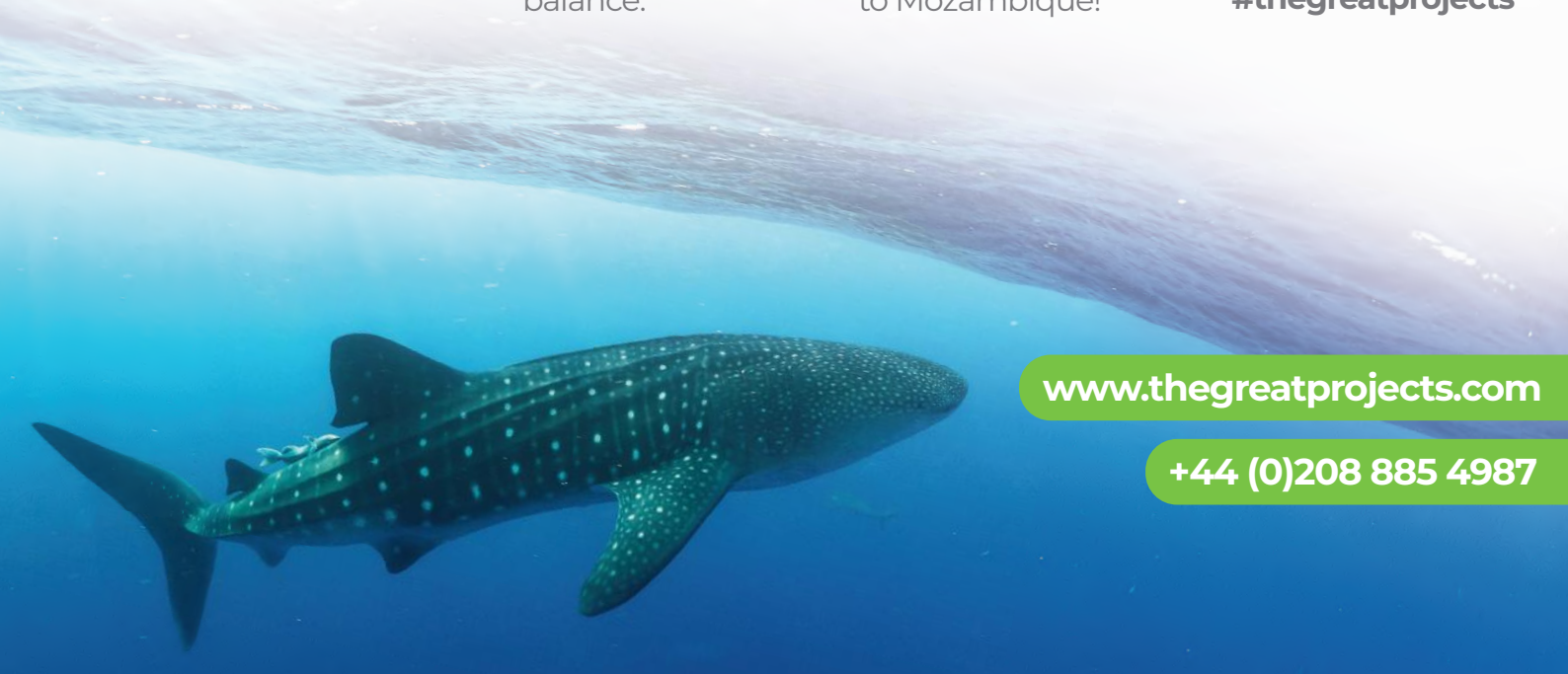


Prepare for your trip and ask your dedicated travel expert any questions before packing your bags and heading off to Mozambique!



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

#thegreatprojects



www.thegreatprojects.com

+44 (0)208 885 4987