

THE MAFIA ARCHIPELAGO

The Mafia Archipelago is a number of sleepy tropical islands, clustered together in the Indian Ocean. Though only a 35-minute flight from Dar, these islands are little known, rarely visited and blissfully lacking in development.

On arriving at Mafia's tiny airport (one runway, one windsock and a simple building) it is clear that the pace of life is slow here. Trundling along sandy roads to your lodge you pass the little capital of Kilindoni, then friendly farming and fishing villages. At the coast you'll find mangrove forests, a few short stretches of golden beach and a brilliant turquoise sea. Sleepy dhows float between the islands.



Marine life flourishes on Mafia

The five main islands of the archipelago Mafia, Jibondo, Juani, Chole and Bwejuu – have lush vegetation and wildlife, with coconut palms, baobabs, cashew, mango and papaya trees in the interior. These are home to bushbabies, wild pigs, blue duikers, genets, vervet monkeys and Pteropus fruit bats (flying foxes). On the coast, the mangrove forests and tidal flats attract endless sea birds.

It is the ocean here that is the greater attraction though. In 1996, Mafia Island Marine Park was formed to protect the archipelago's coral reefs. Within the bay, the shallow reefs are perfect for snorkelling or learning to dive. Outside, the bay's entrance is guarded by a long coral wall, attracting more experienced divers. There are more than 50 genera of coral here, including giant table corals, huge stands of bluetipped staghorn corals, and over 400 species of fish.

This is one of Tanzania's best areas for diving and you'll always see something exciting, from rainbow-coloured clownfish to octopus, rays and the odd gigantic grouper or large potato cod. Sharks and dolphins are found in the deeper waters, and at night turtles crawl onto remote beaches to nest. Between the months of October and March the chances of being able to swim with whale sharks are quite high – this can be arranged from the lodges.

There are three totally different lodges here: two on Mafia Island and one on adjacent Chole Island. None of these have miles of sandy beaches, but Kinasi and Pole Pole each have small sections of beach in front of them, with protecting mangroves around.



MAFIA ISLAND

Pole Pole, meaning ‘slowly, slowly’ in Swahili, is a sleepy little lodge overlooking Chole Bay. The old Zanzibari clock above the bar stopped long ago; time really isn’t important here. It’s a place to relax, eat, snorkel, dive and lie back and enjoy a massage.

The lodge stands beside a small sandy beach with shaded hammocks; all seven wooden bungalows enjoy sea views. Covered in palm fronds, the rooms have polished floors, mahogany furniture, ceiling fans, and large decks with comfy chairs where you can always catch the breeze. The beds have mosquito nets and Italian linen, whilst the bathrooms have double basins, a shower and a flush toilet. The food is a mixture of local flavours with Mediterranean and Italian influences. Expect pancakes with honey and juicy mangoes for breakfast, fresh fish and salad for lunch and an excellent four-course meal for dinner.

Pole Pole offers a variety of activities that are relaxed, yet well organised, including the complimentary, daily snorkelling trips

and picnic excursions to gorgeous sandbars. The dive centre offers a full range of PADI courses, whilst two big dhows make spacious, well-shaded dive boats. These motor out to distant reefs and far-flung beaches before hoisting their sails and running with the breeze back to the lodge. Plenty of cool drinks, as well as coffee and coconut biscuits, are provided for such trips. And later, a snooze on the warm wooden deck is always a pleasure. Pole Pole plans to have completed its new pool for the start of 2011.

Also beside Chole Bay, **Kinasi Lodge** has 14 bungalows landscaped into a hillside studded with palm trees. Originally a private home, Kinasi’s main lounge is furnished with antiques and chairs made specifically for the lodge. There are board games to play, a library, an antique billiards table, satellite TV and internet. Adjacent is the dining area, where seafood is often served accompanied by wines from the cellar.

The stone-and-thatch bungalows are light and airy, with white walls, and rugs over their cool floors. Each is different, using colourful fabrics with Moroccan, Arabic and Indian influences. All have shady verandas

(complete with hammock), large beds, mosquito nets and ceiling fans. The en-suite bathrooms are spacious, using stone, colourful tiles, and brass sinks; all have good solar-heated showers and flush toilets.

At the centre of the lodge’s sloping grounds are a sizeable sundeck and pool. Adjacent, an alfresco bar, grill and pizza oven are landscaped into the hillside. The lodge’s well-equipped PADI dive centre stands beside the sandy beach below, flanked by mangrove trees. For the energetic, Kinasi has many well-organised activities including a range of diving trips, game-fishing, snorkelling, kayaking, windsurfing, boat trips to remote beaches, guided walks, visits to local villages and mountain biking for further island exploration. For those wishing to relax, indulge in Mafia’s only spa, staffed by two professional Thai therapists.

New for last year, Kinasi opened a sister property called **Lua Cheia** in the far north of the island. This is a much simpler tented camp with just six rooms and an eco-friendly focus. It does not aim to be luxurious, but rather to offer a simple and comfortable place on a lovely stretch of beach.

There is plenty of lounging space on Pole Pole’s quiet beach



A fisherman’s catch of the day



One of the tree-houses at Chole Mjini

CHOLE ISLAND

A 20-minute sail from Mafia is the tiny fertile island of Chole. Here, the remarkable **Chole Mjini Lodge** was set up as a partnership between Jean and Anne de Villiers and the people of Chole village. It aims to promote tourism and directly benefit the local community – and it is succeeding. US\$10 per guest per night goes towards community development projects. So far this sustains a primary school, a kindergarden, an adult learning centre with English classes and computers, a market and a small hospital. There are more projects in progress.

The village is a short walk away, as is a remarkable roost for thousands of flying foxes (huge fruit-eating bats), which spread out across the skies as the sun sets. The lodge is built in the midst of the atmospheric ruins of an important gold, ivory and slave trading town dating to 1820.

There are currently six tree-houses standing on stilts, high up in baobab trees, and another large suite on the ground. All of the tree-houses look over the mangroves to the sea beyond. Each has its own toilet and shower at the base of the tree, along a path reached by steep steps. The dry-composting, long-drop toilet is spotless, and there's a wonderful, open-air (hot)

shower. The one house on the ground has an en-suite bathroom, with the only flushing toilet on the island.

In the main lounge area you will find large comfy cushions, reference books, novels and a selection of games. As well as a central table, there are individual tables for breakfast, although dinner is often set up elsewhere in the grounds. Cold drinks are served in the elevated Hanshi bar and the waterfront Red Herring bar which has beautiful views out over the sea.

Activities at Chole include sailing trips, forest walks, exploring various ruins, snorkelling and scuba diving and all are an



All Mafia's lodges have dhows to take you to remote sandbars

Tanzania: the facts

Currency: The Tanzanian currency is the Tanzanian shilling. At time of writing £1 = Tsh2,368. Most camps and lodges charge in US\$; very few now accept travellers' cheques though most accept credit cards.

Visas: At time of writing, travellers with British/American passports require visas for Tanzania (or Zanzibar). These are best obtained in advance from the Tanzanian High Commission.

Health: Tanzania is a tropical country and vaccines are sensible (typhoid, polio, tetanus and yellow fever). Malaria is common: we advise you to take anti-malarial measures. Always check the latest recommendations with your doctor.

Language: Kiswahili and English are the official languages and are spoken by most people. Try to learn some basic Kiswahili before you go, to help you enjoy your trip.

Food: The food at safari camps and beach lodges is generally varied and delicious. The local beer is good; imported beers and wine are excellent.

Climate: See pages 23–25 for comments on climate and when to visit Tanzania.

Children: A few of Tanzania's safari camps and beach hotels are suitable for children, others aren't. For detailed advice, call our team.

Laundry: Virtually all camps and lodges have a laundry service although sometimes, because of religious taboos, women's underwear cannot be included.

additional cost. Turtles nest on the adjacent island, and there are seasonal trips to view whale sharks. Chole Mjini's close connection with the village makes it an excellent lodge from which to experience village life; you can explore either by yourself or with a guide, who will give you a fascinating insight to this magical island.