



MAFIA

Island Diving

About us



Mafia Island Diving is a 5 star PADI dive and excursions centre situated on Utende Beach, on the East coast of Mafia Island. We strive to offer personalised, land and water based tours to immerse our guests in the natural beauty, fascinating history and culture of Mafia and its surrounding islands.

We are able to communicate in English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Swahili and Dutch.

About Mafia



The Mafia archipelago consists of one large island and several smaller ones, each boasting a unique history and bursting at the seams with nature's personal touch. Its history goes back to the 8th century where it played a key role in the East African trading routes between Kilwa and Zanzibar. The tropical islands are teeming with fantastic colours and lush vegetation, giving a home to a wide amount of animal species from the tiny butterflies to the graceful fruit bat.

Slipping just below the surface of Mafia's ocean, you find yourself in one of the greatest locations to either start or continue your diving adventure. The majority of the time you will find yourselves as the only divers on site, having a whole section of the ocean just for yourself.

The name "Mafia" derives from the Arabic morfiyeh, meaning "group" or "archipelago", or from the Swahili mahali pa afya, meaning "a healthy dwelling-place".



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About Our Excursions



The Mafia archipelago offers a wide variety of adventures to suit all tastes. You can be as adventurous or as laidback as you like whilst exploring all the island's have to offer.

The first rule of Mafia is that everything is governed by the sun and the moon. Their gravitational pull create's differences in the height of the ocean at varying times of the day, known to us, as tides. The tides depict when the women of Chole will go harvest the seaweed, when Mafian children will go hunt in the rock pools and when we will go explore Chole bay.

All snorkelling equipment can be provided at our centre. We stock a wide range of masks and fins to ensure that each individual that joins us finds a comfortable fit. We kindly request those of you who will be joining us for an adventure to meet at the centre 15 minutes before the departure time and to feel free to pop over anytime for a cup of tea and a flip through our fish books.

All of our excursions are run off traditional dhows in an effort to blend in as much as possible with the unaltered, seafarers of Mafia. This signature boat of the archipelago has been uniquely transformed to offer you the highest level of safety and comfort possible while still experiencing a true Swahili island adventure.

All of our excursions are designed to showcase Mafia in its true, natural beauty. We don't believe in staging scenes or interfering with the natural environment. What you see is what we see, an unfiltered, unedited, first hand glance into Mafia; a sleepy set of islands that are bursting with colours, sights and sounds.



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Snorkelling



Snorkelling in Chole bay is a fantastic, colourfully exuberant experience accompanied by hoards of fish, all with different shapes, colours and sizes. The waters surrounding Mafia Island offer an extraordinary variety of marine diversity, with over 400 species of fish, 5 species of marine turtle and 48 species of coral.

All of our snorkel sites are a 30 minute boat journey from the beach, one that offers us fantastic views as we slowly make our way out into the bay. You will always be accompanied by an experienced snorkel guide who leads you on your journey through the aquamarine waters of the marine park.

Our snorkel trips normally last a few hours but we always invite our guests to stay as long as they please. Eventually mother nature will have her way and the current will pick up, gently letting us know that it is time to make our way home as the tide switches. On our journey back to shore we like to hoist the sail so long as the wind allows, pour ourselves a cup of tea and nibble on some coconut as we rock sleepily back and forth towards land.

We encourage everyone to join us for a snorkelling trip to see the magical underwater scenery that Mafia has to offer. If you are wary about your experience level, let us know beforehand and we'll be sure to put all the necessary measures in place to create a memorable experience for you.



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Marimbani Sandbank



Marimbani sandbank is a beautiful half moon shaped sand island which slowly appears as the tide starts to go out. Revealing itself for a few hours before all too soon, the Indian ocean trickles back in and swallows it up.

The excursion starts with us meeting at the Mafia Diving base and jumping aboard one of our dhows to slowly motor out into the heart of the marine park for some snorkelling. As our stomachs start to grumble, we board the dhow once again to then journey West, within minutes, Marimbani comes into view in all its glory.

From the moment the dhow slides up onto the sandy banks of your little private island, it is completely up to you how you spend your time. This is one of the most idyllic spots imaginable to curl up with a book, catch a few sun rays or explore the inter-tidal area and all the creatures it is home to.

While you are getting acquainted with your home for the afternoon, our staff will rustle up a delightful meal to feast upon. Spending the afternoon with your feet in the sand, the ocean breeze on your face and a Swahili style BBQ'd fish on your plate, you will dread the moment it is time to leave.

Although we typically visit the sandbank for lunch we can also organise sundowners here as well as a morning of swimming and relaxing.





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Fisherman Island



Fisherman Island is a beautiful small islet hidden on the North Eastern side of Chole Bay.

Its name comes from the periodic presence of Mafian Fisherman who stop over to dry their catch before returning home. Fisherman Island is home to a beautiful beach, bordered on either side with rich mangroves. Riddled with shells, fisherman Island can only be reached on a high tide, making it an excellent alternative for the sandbank.

Our day will start with a journey out to one of Mafia's stunning snorkel sites. After enjoying the marine park, we will make our way through an in-conspicuous channel that slowly widens into a sheltered area of beautiful aquamarine water, topped off with our own private island for the afternoon.

Your guide will set up a shade and some mats for you to relax under and kick start your Island getaway. On the Island itself it is possible to sunbathe, explore the mangroves, or swim in the crystal clear water just in front of your camp.

Whilst you settle in, our team will start to set up a traditional Swahili, fish BBQ and prepare your lunch.

Unfortunately one can not hide away here all day. As the sun lowers in the sky, the ocean follows with it, prompting us to board our dhow and wind allowing continue our theme of relaxation with a sail back to Mafia.



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Chole Island



Chole island, once at a crossroads of a major trade route is now considered a place where one can take a glance back in time.

Chole Island is one of the smallest of the islands that comprise the Mafia Archipelago and is located just across the channel from us. Chole is around one kilometre long and half a kilometre wide and bursting at the seams with nature. Mangrove forests, baobab and palm trees are a few examples of the vibrant flora that can be found growing on this magical Island.

Once considered the 'capital' of the archipelago, it has since slowed its pace from a bustling port and transformed into an island so unique that it is one of the most memorable adventures one can take whilst visiting. We love this tour as it offers our guests a one-stop-destination to sample a snippet of all that Mafia has to offer; history, culture, nature and the most beautiful sunset imaginable.

This late afternoon adventure starts with a short trip over the channel to land on the busy beach. Our Chole tour begins with an exciting journey through the various ruins left behind from days long past that are so beautifully riddled with vegetation. A short walk down Chole's 'main street', a dirt path that winds through the various tropical trees, will lead you through the first dedicated fruit bat sanctuary in the world, where one can readily spot the sleeping comores bats high up in the trees.

The walk slowly winds down with a visit to the boatyard where all the Swahili dhows are built using traditional methods unchanged over generations, and finally an opportunity to watch the sun set over Mafia from the Red Herring, Chole's beautiful ocean view bar, before returning home.





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Kua Ruins



Nestled amongst amongst the overgrown forests in the South of Juani are a set of ruins, the last remnants of the ancient city of Kua dating back to the arly 12th century.

Kua is an identified archaeological site which still has no firm reasoning as to why all of a sudden the civilisation ceased to exist, although there are various legends. The destruction of Kua is said to have been by the sultan's enemies, the Sakalava tribe from Madagascar during the fifteenth century.

The ruins cover a large area of the South western side of Juani Island and are located close to the shore. As you wander between crumbling walls smothered by the roots of strangler figs, you will pass several mosques, a cemetery, a palace with large storeroom, a dispensary and a school, all which were funded by the then-lucrative trade in cowrie shells. From these one can tell that Kua was once a place of considerable local importance.

The city of Kua was established by settlers from Kilwa, and was heavily involved in trade. All over the ruins you can readily dig up pottery sherds, some dating several hundreds of years to Chinese and Persian origins. Vervet monkeys scamper among the fallen buildings and plenty of haunting cries from surrounding birds will add to the mysterious atmosphere, letting your imagination run wild.

This is a wonderful excursion to plan for the late afternoon, when the afternoon light illuminates the ruins in a beautiful yet spooky ambience.





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Blue Lagoon



The blue lagoon is a long channel linking the huge inland bay with the open sea that bisects the southern point of Juani. At the end of the channel is an enormous natural infinity pool whose level varies according to the tides.

This excursion is the perfect late afternoon adventure suitable for everyone. The journey to the channel itself takes 30 minutes from our beach and boasts stunning views of the southern section of the archipelago.

As you seem to sail endlessly with no channel in sight, all of a sudden a crack in the island comes into view. Bordered on either side with lush mangrove forests, the journey down the amazon-esque channel is filled with hues of green and blue and highlighted by the many bird species huddling on the banks of the water.

After a short journey, winding around azure corners, you end up at the end of the channel, flanked by small islets and the mainland of Juani on either side and a spectacular view of the fierce Indian Ocean in front. The blue lagoon has a welcoming, sandy bottom and shallow water making it the perfect place for a refreshing swim with unimaginable views.

For the more adventurous among us, there is the possibility to take a short trek through Juani and come to just one of many natural pools that can be found. Here one can jump in the water with a mask and admire the dramatic underwater, algae-dominated landscape and quirky upside-down jellyfish.





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Sunset Cruise



A sunset cruise is a beautiful option for couples, families and friends to sit back and relax with a drink in hand and not a care in the world.

For those of us who have been to Africa before, you will understand when we say that there is nothing better than an African sunset, but what if we said that a Mafian sunset is even better?

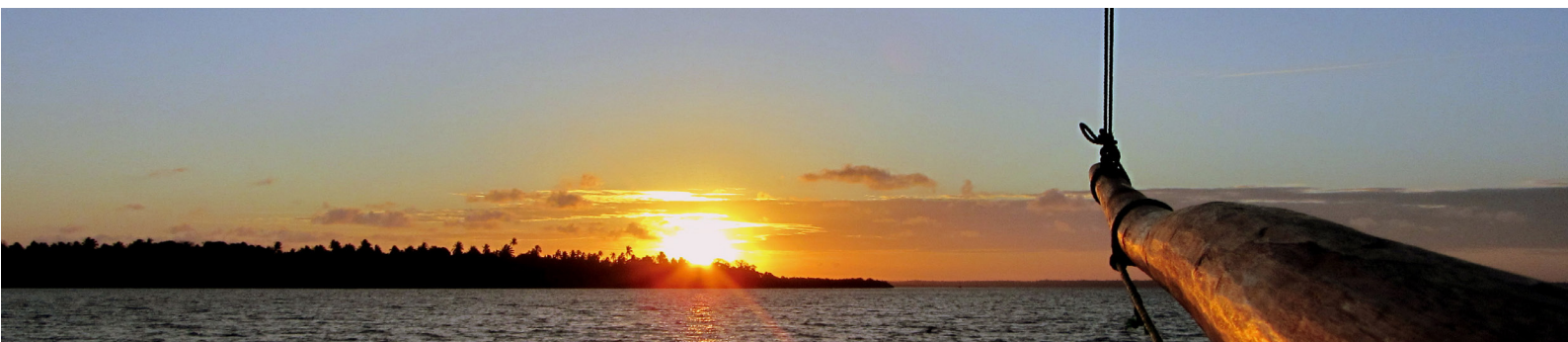
After a busy day of adventuring or a lazy day of snoozing, jump on board your private, traditional dhow for a first class view of a Mafian sunset.

Your traditional Swahili dhow will be waiting on the shore ready to depart at 17:30 with a waiter onboard to serve you cold drinks which can be chosen earlier in the day at the bar.

The Captain will slowly motor out into the channel, orient the dhow and hoist the sail up. As the sail catches the warm, gusts of wind, you will begin your journey, gently rocking as the trade winds lead you through Mafia's aquamarine waters.

Once the Captain has found an idyllic spot to settle, he will lower the sail and drop the anchor. At this point we encourage you too refresh your drink, raise a glass and cheers to another beautiful moment.

The sky will fill with striking hues of red, pink, orange and yellow before all too soon, the sun will gently slip below the horizon, prompting us to return home.





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Mange Sandbank



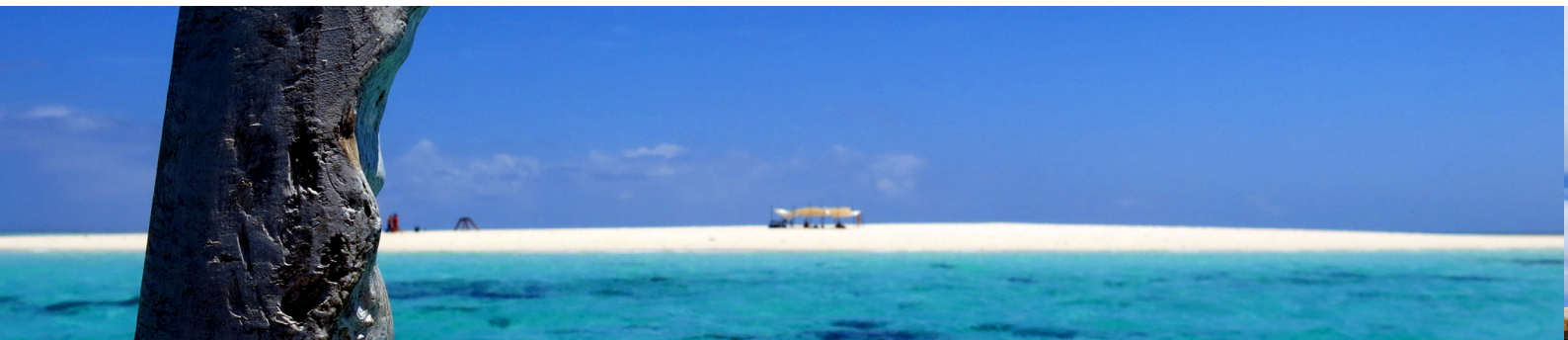
Mange is the most pristine patch of pure, white sand, exposed only on the low tide, surrounded by tropical reefs teeming with colourful corals and fish.

A Mange sandbank excursion is essentially a day lost at sea. A combination of navigating the Southern frontier of Mafia's archipelago, exploring an untouched sand island and its surrounding underwater scenery.

This memorable adventure is planned as a full day at sea, usually departing around 08am and returning in the early evening. The journey to and from the sandbank is around one and a half hours away. The boat trip allows us the opportunity to feast on the beautiful views that the Southern side of Mafia harbors, settle back and read a book and quite often watch dolphins put on a playful display alongside us.

Before we descend onto our private island for the day, we take a moment to explore Mange reef either on scuba or by snorkel. Once we arrive at the sandbank our team will set up a shaded area for you to retreat under and start to BBQ up some fish in true Swahili fashion. The sandbank boasts incredibly clear, aquamarine waters, perfect for a pre and post lunch swim. There are also a nice collection of coral bommies to be explored just metres from the sandy shores.

Eventually, mother nature claims back her prized possession, as the ocean swallows up our home for the afternoon, we lazily retreat to our dhow for a beautiful journey back to Mafia Island. A true robinson crusoe experience with a dash of barefoot luxury.





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Humpback Whales



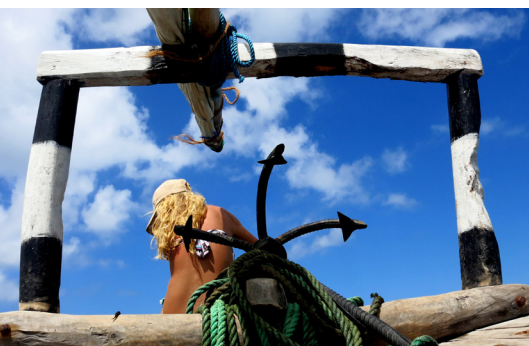
During the months of September and August we experience the Humpback Whale migration in the south of Mafia as they head for warm waters with their calfs.

These magical creatures can grow up to 14 metres long and weigh up to a whopping 40 tonnes. Humpbacks are renowned for their magical songs which travel for great distances or as legends say, across entire oceans. These songs are complex and often continue for hours on end.

The waters to the South of Mafia Island are an excellent area to watch the humpbacks as they make their way up and down the coast as part of their annual migration. The most breath-taking moments are watching them breach, throwing themselves out of the water to land with a tremendous splash.

We like to combine this trip with a BBQ lunch and island getaway on the magnificent Mange sandbank and a dive or snorkel on the surrounding tropical reefs. We normally depart around 08am to ensure we arrive on the migration route before the sun gets too hot and the whales take refuge under the rippling sea. We make our journey, winding through Mafia's surrounding islands and coral reefs on a traditional Swahili dhow, renovated to add a touch of barefoot luxury and maximum comfort for a day at sea. Once the whales are in sight we strategically place our boat, shut of the engine and hold our breaths as the whales slip on beside us.

A fantastic experience rounded off with a beautiful sandbank picnic and exploring Mange's coral reef to the soundtrack of singing whales.





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Turtle Hatching



Sea turtles have been nesting on Tanzanian beaches for over 150 million years.

Between June and September hundreds of baby turtles make their instinctive scramble from the white sandy beaches to the warm Indian Ocean waters. Here in Mafia we are fortunate enough to be able to witness this natural spectacle from the Eastern beach of Juani, an island bursting with nature from the tiniest of butterflies to giant cascading trees.

This experience is made possible for us by an NGO called Sea Sense. Set up in 2001, they have been working in partnership with the local communities to promote the importance and protection of marine turtles and their habitats through various projects.

The adventure starts with a lovely dhow trip across Chole Bay, landing on the shielded Western side of Juani Island. On arrival, a 45 minute walk across the island reveals the islands true beauty in the form of towering trees and acres and acres of green foliage up until the very last minute before our attention is turned to the turtle nest hidden amongst white grains of sand.

The little hatchlings emerge from their sandy burrow, scrambling out of their nest, flapping their fins vivaciously, racing to reach the surf and start the next step of their incredible journey. It is a truly heart wrenching experience to watch these ancient reptiles fight for survival in their first moments among the living.

After experiencing one of nature's most harrowing hurdles, we make our way back to our dhow, settle back with a cup of tea and daydream of what these little turtles will be up against next.



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Whale Sharks



In Mafia, between the months of October and March, Mafia's western shore calls itself home to the mighty whale shark.

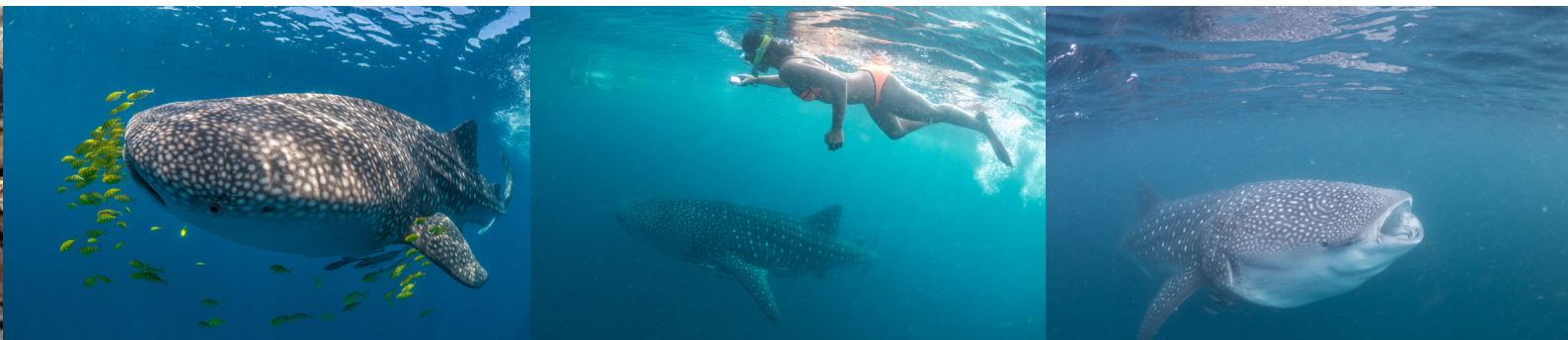
Whale sharks are not whales and are not your typical shark. They are the largest fish in the sea measuring up to 20m. Little is known about these gentle giants by scientists, which is what adds to the overwhelming feeling you have when you swim alongside them.

The whale shark is a filter feeder and therefore has no teeth. They flock to the archipelago to feast among our plankton rich waters in large numbers before drifting back to the depths of the ocean.

We book all our whale shark tours with a company called Kitu Kiblu who offer responsible marine encounters with these gentle giants.

The tour starts with a pick up early in the morning by car which takes you over to the Western side of the Island to their base. Breakfast will be served whilst the guide gives you a briefing and some fascinating information on the enigmatic creature you are only moments away from swimming with face to face. Kitu Kiblu aim to have their guests back at their hotels around midday, in time for a much needed hearty lunch and afternoon snooze.

Kitu Kiblu run their whale shark trips on a traditional Swahili dhow allowing for minimal disturbance to the sharks and creating a unique half day adventure out on the sea. Equipment is provided on site as well as snacks and refreshments.





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Island Tour



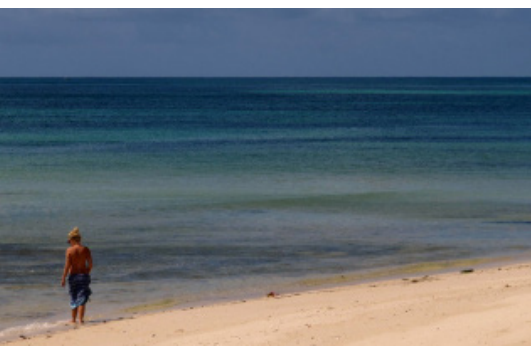
The main hub of the archipelago, Mafia is home to a variety of uncrowded, special spots to be discovered. As one can expect, a relatively untouched, tropical island isn't the easiest to traverse.

Although the South of Mafia relatively developed the Northern stretches of the island are not making them picturesque areas to visit but not the easiest to escape to. We therefore designed a trip which would make the most of all the different individual adventures Mafia has to offer all in one.

After exploring the island ourselves we tailor made this excursion to include our personal favourite landmarks. The day starts by departing from your hotel around 08 am and driving straight to the northern tip where the Germans built a lighthouse during World War 1. Not only is it a little tour of Mafia's history, but it is also home to some amazing views of the Indian Ocean breaking onto the shores and is the perfect way to start the day!

Following on from the lighthouse, a short drive away is the beautiful, Kanga beach. An empty beach hidden amongst fields of coconut trees where we set up a shady retreat, crack open some coconuts and enjoy the early afternoon looking out over the azure waters. Your guide for the day will take the opportunity to BBQ some fresh seafood for lunch depending on what sea creatures are found on your journey. Quite often grilled fish with a side of lobster is the menu for your beachside culinary experience.

We like to round the trip off with a small walk through the weedy ponds where one can spot the small, illusive hippo population and a stroll through the Kilindoni market before settling in for a sundowner at the picturesque whale shark lodge bar.





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Ras Kisimani



Ras Kisimani is in our opinion home to the most beautiful beach you can find on Mafia Island.

It takes a short 45 minute journey from your hotel by car or bajaj if you are feeling adventurous to this sleepy fishing village. The journey itself is a highlight as you weave through palm trees, dusty roads and over a beautiful, wooden bridge.

Besides the white sandy shore and coconut fringed beach, Ras Kisimani is also home to ruins of an ancient civilization that since its demise has slowly, partly been swallowed by the sea. As you walk down the beach you can readily find old coins, beads, pottery and remnants of the town just above the water line.

A short walk inland will reveal several other souvenirs of days long past such as an old well and mosque that remain safe from the oceans grasp for now.

Your guide will set up a shaded area for you to rest under inbetween beach walks and refreshing swims in the sea. Whilst you sip on the drink of your choice, our guide will start to set up a traditional Swahili BBQ and service up a delicious treat for lunch.

An afternoon swim, while looking out at sea is a great way to spend the afternoon. Snorkelling is also possible with a beautiful reef a few 100 metres out as well as an array of star fish to be found just seconds of the shore.

An excellent escape for the day suitable for couples, families and friends.

