

Mafia Island



Pole Pole, a luxury eco-lodge on Mafia Island's Chole Bay.

Pole Pole

Taking its name from the Arabic word "morfiyah," which means "group of islands," Mafia is the third biggest of the isles that dot the Tanzanian coast.

Although many assume it's part of the Zanzibar archipelago, Mafia is governed from the mainland and forms part of another small cluster of islands and atolls in the region.

It lies to the south of Zanzibar and was once an important stop over for the trading vessels -- from Egypt, Rome, Portugal and Greece -- that plied these waters centuries ago.

Like Pemba, Mafia is far less busy than Zanzibar and has some of the best diving in the world.

The waters around the island are -- on account of mainland rivers that tip into the sea here -- extraordinarily fertile, meaning they host an astonishing population of whale sharks and are a popular breeding ground for humpbacks which return every year to breed.



There are several places to stay, amongst the nicest is eco lodge Pole Pole (which in KSwahili translates as "slowly, slowly," an invitation to kick back and take it easy) on the southern end of the island with easy access to the marine conservation areas.