



## **Marine research & whale shark conservation**



### **Programs descriptions :**

As a volunteer, on the Marine Research & Whale Shark Conservation Project, you will help carry out the Marine Research and monitoring activities for the project under the guidance of our coordinating project scientists. You will join other volunteers on the project to collect the data via scuba dives, ocean safaris and beach walks off the coastline of Tofo in Mozambique. You can expect an excellent diving, snorkeling and beach experience whilst gaining first hand Marine Research skills and contributing to a worthwhile project.

### **Accommodation & meals**

During your stay, you will be accommodated in Tilak Lodge, in Tofo. Three meals a day will also be provided, some on a self-serve basis and others cooked for you.

### **Project start dates**

The start date for this project is the **first Monday of the month** throughout the year, with the exception of November & December when the project is closed.

## Your Role as volunteer

The project involves conducting multiple types of research with different species. The following is a summary of the type of research and Conservation activities you may be involved with. Some of the activities are conducted at specific times of the year whilst others are conducted all year round. Our co-ordinating project scientists will teach you how to assist with data collection throughout your project duration.

In order to carry out many of these activities, you will need to be able or willing to learn to scuba dive. An open or advanced internationally recognized diving course is provided in the cost of the program to facilitate this (not included in the 2-week option).

You will also need to be a capable swimmer (able to swim 100m unassisted) and snorkeler. Being able to hold your breath to dive down would be an advantage but is not required.

### Some of the activities you will get involved in may include:

**Whale Shark (Annually)** The Whale Shark component of the Project involves joining ocean safaris to snorkel with Whale Sharks in the open ocean. It involves taking underwater photographs for identifying the Whale Sharks as well as recording other ecological information.

As a summary, you will collect the following information on the Whale Sharks:

- Date, GPS location, surface and underwater conditions
- Size, sex, scars/distinctive features, the behavior of the Whale Shark
- You will take an ID photograph and identify each Whale Shark & record re-sightings

**Dolphin (Annually)** You will be collecting data which enables dolphin numbers and the behaviours to be recorded and uploaded onto databases to share with our Marine Partners. Of particular interest in this study is dolphin behavior in relation to tourism.

**Coral Reef and Fish (Annually)** This involves carrying out underwater data collection on indicator species of coral fish and the condition and cover of coral and echinoderms on the reefs.

**Seahorses (Annually)** This project will involve travelling to the nearby Inhambane Estuary and snorkel in relatively shallow waters to evaluate and monitor the seahorse population. The seahorses are counted, and photos are taken to identify the size of the seahorses and data then entered into a database to allow for analysis.

**Humpback Whales (June – October)** Monitor the numbers of Humpbacked Whales on their seasonal migration up and down the coast. This involves sand dune based observations using binoculars and boat-based observations recording the numbers of

Whales, the makeup of the pods and the behaviours witnessed.

**General environment (Annually)** A number of more general environmental awareness and clean-up activities will be also carried out during the project.

## **Day in the life of a volunteer**

**7:00** Wake up to see the sunshine and get yourself started for the day with breakfast!

**7:30** Get prepared for your research dive – get your equipment together and head to one of the dive sites or you may go on an ocean safari and go searching for Whale Sharks and dolphins to take photo ID shots and record behavioral data

**12:30** Time to return to your accommodation for lunch after an action-packed morning!

**14:00** Go to the office and enter data into our databases of the research work

**15:00** Depending on the time of year – you may be collecting data on Humpback Whales from the top of the sand dunes, uploading photo IDs into the database, conducting turtle nest surveys or improving the beach environment with a clean-up collection.

**16:30** Return back to your accommodation and share your day's adventures with other volunteers!

**18:00** Enjoy a delicious evening meal and relax...

## **Itinerary for your experience**

**Day 1** Fly into **Inhambane Airport**, usually connections are available from OR Tambo Airport Johannesburg or Maputo Mozambique where you will be met by our staff member who will transfer with you to your accommodation.

**Day 2 Your orientation** will start with a presentation by the coordinating project scientists to prepare you for your project. You will then be shown around Tofo and have a tour of the nearby city of Inhambane.

**Day 3-5 Begin your scuba diving course** which usually lasts between 4 & 7 days depending on weather conditions. This is an internationally accredited course and upon completion you will get a certificate permitting you to scuba dive to 18m anywhere in the world. Those who already hold an open water course will complete an advanced dive course (qualifies you to dive to 30m).

**If you are a 2-week volunteer** on the program or already have both open and advanced dive qualifications you will begin the activities described under day 8-13 on the itinerary instead.

After scuba class you will be treated with a series of interesting educational talks on some of the amazing megafauna you will be swimming with over the next few weeks including how to ID several different kinds of fish species.

**Day 6-7** At weekends there is time to explore the stunning palm-fringed beaches of Tofo: relax, surf, swim and enjoy your beautiful surroundings. During the first weekend you may also be completing your open or advanced water certificate.

**Day 8-12** Once your dive course is completed you will officially be an assistant scientist! Your dives in the morning/afternoon will be for the purpose of collecting data and the second part of the day you will be responsible for communicating that data into the proper vehicle for safekeeping and analysis at a later date.

On days when you are not in the water, our social projects guide may take you on activities around Tofo such as Portuguese lessons, historical walking tours and/or local handicraft creation.

It is important to note that daily activities may change due to weather conditions or other circumstances beyond our control at any given time. Attention to the daily posted schedule will be vital.

## **Climate and weather**

In southern Africa, no matter your destination, weather can play a role in daily activities. At times infrastructure and amenities are harder to navigate in poor weather situations; for this reason, please be flexible if plans change. In Mozambique, many of our activities will be on the water. Safety is always our top priority and we will cancel any water activities if we consider the conditions to be unsafe. Examples include rain, lightning, high winds, rough waves, or strong currents. We will do everything to make sure any missed activities are made up before the end of your experience.

## **Packing list**

Please pack as lightly as possible as space and weight are limited. Ideally, you should not have more than 22kg of luggage and a day pack.

- Sunglasses/sun hat/sun cream
- Insect repellent
- Daypack/rucksack for everyday

- Small torch (head torch preferable)
- Toiletries Personal basic first aid kit
- Flip Flops/Sandals Swimwear
- Fun, casual wear for the weekends, temperatures vary depending on time of year, winter can be cool, especially in the evening
- Light waterproof jacket
- Project clothes (for ladies, trousers/pants or skirt/dress at least knee-length is recommended & nothing too revealing; for gents, trousers/pants in case meeting a chief or elder).
- Towel (NOT PROVIDED AT THE ACCOMMODATION)

## **Phone and internet**

It is recommended that you bring a phone with you that is “unlocked” so that you can purchase a local SIM card or consider purchasing an eSIM which will function in your destination country/countries before departure.

Remember you will be volunteering in a developing country and therefore WIFI speed might be slower than you are accustomed to.

## **ATM's**

Mozambique's currency is the Metical (meticais). Market stalls and some small restaurants and shops will require cash, though card payments are increasingly accepted. Visa is more commonly accepted than Mastercard.

Mozambique projects are based in Tofo where there isn't an ATM (the nearest ATM is a short taxi ride away) We recommend that you bring a little cash with you.