

Visiting Watamu Beach: Everything You Need to Know

Are you actively thinking about Watamu as your next tourist destination? Whether this is the right decision for you depends on many things, most of which are dependent on your preferences and interests. As you read through, you'll learn the kinds of wonders Watamu has to offer and make an informed decision.

Watamu Town and Beach

Watamu is a coastal town in Kenya, located north of Mombasa. The approximate distance is 108 kilometers from Mombasa town, on your way to Malindi. Traveling from Mombasa to Watamu by road is a captivating experience as you go past the breathtaking view of tall palm trees along Mtwapa and Kilifi towns.

Upon arrival, you are greeted by the sight of locals going about their daily activities and tuk-tuks navigating through the streets. Another common sight is Makuti restaurants and hotels that add a touch of authentic coastal life to the growing town. Not forgetting the warm tropical climate that might deceive you into thinking that the sun on the coast is not too hot.

As you move further from the town towards the ocean, your attention drifts to the beautiful hotels along the beach. You only catch a glimpse of each because most seamlessly blend with their natural surroundings.

Most are located on grounds with lush, well-maintained greenery. The architecture also complements the surrounding trees and landscape. The design may also incorporate eco-friendly elements, such as treehouse-style accommodations, wooden structures, or large windows to bring the outside in.

On the opposite side sits the ocean and its expansive beaches. Characterizing the Watamu beaches are powdery white sands, crystal-clear turquoise waters, and a tranquil atmosphere that offers a perfect escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Along the shoreline, you may encounter local fishermen going about their daily activities, nesting sea turtles, and a beehive of activity by tiny white crabs as they get in and out of the sands.

But Watamu is not just about these handful experiences. It is a haven to multiple wonders some of which aren't available elsewhere on the Kenyan coastal beaches. Some of these include the Watamu Marine National Park, Turtle Watch, Mida Creek, Love Island, water sports and activities, turquoise waters, coral reefs, dolphins' watch, and cultural attractions.

Watamu Marine National Park

The Watamu Marine National Park is a mesmerizing aquatic haven that envelops a captivating blend of turquoise waters, coral reefs, and a colorful assortment of flamboyant fishes. The fishes feature scales adorned in shades of blue, yellow, green, orange, and white and black patterns. They create a spectacle as they nibble on coral with their beak-like mouths, or dart through the crystalline waters leaving behind a trail of vibrant energy.

The coral reef system of the Watamu Marine Park is extensive and spectacular. The corals appear in various shapes and sizes to form beautiful patterns and create a vital ecosystem. Watamu's crystal-clear waters form a cover for the delicate gardens that are home to a dazzling array of marine life. Schools of fish, from tiny gobies to majestic parrotfish, navigate through the corals, creating a lively and harmonious dance. Turtles gracefully glide through the water, and inquisitive seahorses peek out from their hiding spots, adding a touch of enchantment to this underwater paradise.

Mida Creek

Mida Creek emerges as a hidden gem as you navigate deeper into the ocean from its neighbouring beaches. The destination is a true sanctuary of natural beauty that beckons both nature enthusiasts and serenity seekers alike. As mangrove forests meet the shimmering waters of the Indian Ocean, you notice a shift appearance of the waters and the climate. The waters are darker, and the climate is cooler.

The mangrove forests, with their labyrinthine roots, serve as a nursery for countless marine species, providing a vital refuge for juvenile fish and crustaceans. Beneath the surface, a bustling underwater community thrives, with seahorses, crabs, and a plethora of fish species navigating through the intricate web of mangrove roots.

Mida Creek is not merely a scenic landscape; it is a pulsating ecosystem that breathes life into the coastal environment. The mangroves play a pivotal role in stabilizing the shoreline, preventing erosion, and acting as a natural buffer against storm surges. The salt-tolerant vegetation of the mangroves, including the iconic *Rhizophora* species, stands tall against the changing tides, creating a resilient ecosystem that withstands the test of time.

Watamu Water Sports and Activities

Dolphin Safaris/Dolphin Watch: Watamu's waters are frequented by playful dolphins, and specialized safaris offer the chance to witness these intelligent creatures frolicking in their natural habitat. The experience which blends excitement and awe allows you to get a glimpse of the magic of the high seas.

The dolphin's watch safari begins early in the morning. The length of the safari depends on the beach where the trip commences. Sometimes the trip may incorporate other activities such as a stopover at the tortoise bay, a marine park trip, and lunch at Mida Creek.

The first step of the safari is a briefing on safety protocols and an introduction to the dolphins and other marine species that inhabit the area. The guides, who are knowledgeable about the local ecosystem, share insights into dolphin behavior, biology, and conservation efforts.

Once aboard the safari boat, you embark on a journey into the inner waters of the Indian Ocean. As the boat moves further into the sea, you notice the climate and temperatures of the waters changing. Experienced guides navigate the waters with skill and expertise. They ensure that the boat glides across the waters with stability. This assures a smooth and enjoyable ride for passengers of all ages.

Guests are encouraged to keep a keen eye out for signs of dolphin activity. However, it is always easier for guides to locate them because they utilize their expertise and local knowledge. The pods of dolphins are often identified by their distinctive dorsal fins breaking the surface of the water.

They make rhythmic movements that create an unforgettable experience for you as a visitor. Watamu Dolphin Safaris prioritizes responsible wildlife viewing practices, maintaining a respectful distance from the dolphins to minimize disturbance to their natural behaviour.

Snorkelling: Snorkelling in Watamu can be a trip on its own or part of a boat safari to capture multiple experiences. Watamu boasts several snorkelling sites, each with its unique allure. Sites like the Watamu Marine National Park and the Blue Lagoon offer accessible reefs bursting with life. On the other hand, deeper spots like the Coral Gardens beckon with their unexploited beauty.

The best snorkelling tours are led by knowledgeable locals or marine biologists. The experts not only ensure safety but also enhance the experience by providing insights into the marine ecosystem, pointing out hidden gems, and facilitating encounters with elusive species.

Snorkelling experiences are heavily influenced by tidal dynamics. Depending on the tide, the visibility and accessibility of certain snorkelling sites may vary. Snorkelers may encounter stronger currents during certain times, requiring careful navigation and adherence to safety guidelines.

Generally, visibility and marine activity peak during certain months. The calmer and dryer months (December to March) offer the best season. During the best times, you can see the intricate details of the sites' coral formations and the countless marine organisms that they support.

Boat Safaris: Watamu boat safaris often incorporate visits to nearby attractions such as secluded beaches, mangrove forests, and traditional fishing villages. These opportunities provide insights into the local culture and way of life.

One notable beach is Love Island. This is a small temporary island that you can only visit from early morning to midday. It only appears after water recedes leaving bare land that is covered by very clean white sands.

Onboard a boat safari, you find ample opportunities to capture breath-taking scenes of the coastal landscape and its inhabitants. Overall, the experience provides a blend of adventure, relaxation, and environmental appreciation.

Watamu Cultural Attractions

Watamu's cultural attractions range from community engagements to local markets and local food. Out of everything culture has to offer, Local markets and Swahili cuisine leave the best impression.

Local Markets: Watamu's bustling markets offer a glimpse into the daily lives and traditions of the coastal communities. Here, you can browse through stalls selling colorful textiles, handmade crafts, and fresh produce. Engaging with local vendors provides an opportunity to learn about traditional crafts such as wood carving, beadwork, and weaving, while also supporting local artisans.

Swahili Cuisine: Food is an essential aspect of the Kenyan coastal culture. Watamu's culinary scene reflects a fusion of Swahili, Arabic, and Indian flavours. Visitors can savour traditional dishes such as pilau (spiced rice), samosas, and grilled seafood infused with aromatic spices. Hotels such as Swahili Dishes, and Crab Shark provide a variety of wholesome dishes at affordable prices. Some guides allow you to participate in cooking during trips to places such as Mida Creek. Participating in cooking classes or dining with local families offers insight into the ingredients, techniques, and cultural significance of Swahili cuisine.