The Shimoní slave caves

Only five minutes from Shimoní Pier, and well worthy a visit, are the ancient coral caves of Shimoní. Known cavernous bat-filled, they are reputed to extend 5 km inland and served for centuries as ‘Kayas’ or sacred sites of worship and sanctuary for the local community. Lately, in the 18th and 19th century, the caves are also believed to have served as the holding areas for the thousands of slaves who, captured in the African interior, were in transit to the infamous Arabian slave markets of Zanzibar. The caves, which are run as a community project, are open from 8.30am to 6pm (a small entrance fee is payable).

WHEN TO GO

The Park is open all year round. Snorkelling is good throughout the year.

WHAT TO TAKE WITH YOU

Footwear (to protect your feet from reef), T-shirt (to protect your body from sunburn), snorkel, mask, fins, camera, hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, insect repellent, guidebooks and plenty of water.

PLEASE RESPECT THE MARINE WILDLIFE CODE

• Check local weather and sea conditions before entering the Marine Park or Reserve.
• Some marine life is dangerous; do not touch anything under water.
• Do not damage or remove the coral; it is a living organism which takes many years to form, and is host to many rare and endangered species.
• Do not remove shells, starfish or any other marine life, especially those deriving from turtles and whales.
• Do not stand on the coral, or damage it with your diving or snorkelling fins.
• Never dispose of the litter on the beach or on the sea.
• Avoid restaurants that serve undersized crabs and lobsters as this contributes to their rapid demise.
• Support the local communities and do not give money to children on the beach, as this can encourage them to stay away from school.
• Respect the cultural heritage of Kenya, never take pictures of the local people or their habitat without asking their permission, respect the cultural traditions of Kenya and always dress with decorum.

HOW TO GET THERE

The Park can only be reached by boat. Contact the KWS warden (the area KWS HQ is 200 meters south of the main Shimoni Pier) or your hotel or local travel agent.

Sporting facilities:
Swimming, sailing, snorkeling and diving.

Open:
Daily 8.30am-6pm including public holidays.

Current entry charges:
Obtainable via KWS HQ. Tel: +254(0)20 6000800, 6002345.
Email: kws@kws.org - Website: www.kws.org

‘SmartCard’ required?
At present this Park does not operate the SmartCard system. Entry is by cash only (Ksh or US$). The warden’s office, Information center and KWS self-catering accommodation facilities are located 200m south of Shimoní Pier. The warden can be contacted at: P.O. Box 55, Ukunda, Kwale District, Coast Province.
Tel (Shimoní) +254 (0)40 52027. Email: kisite@africaonline.co.ke
The park, which was established to protect the scenic islands and special habitats of a wide range of endemic marine animals and breeding migratory birds, lies in the coral gardens beginning about 1 km south of Wasini Island. This trapezoid section of the Indian Ocean encompasses four small, and coral islands, each with considerable areas of fringing reef. Kisite Island features an exposed sand bar and the surrounding pelagic waters offer perhaps the most rewarding of the snorkeling sites.

Kisite Island
Essentially unspoiled (there are no roads or cars) and entirely different in terms of culture and landscape from the mainland, this peaceful invites exploration. It features a picturesque sculptured rocky coastline, low rug coral forest cover, numerous venerated baobab trees and the two small Muslim villages, the most frequently visited Wasini Village whose friendly and welcoming villagers inhabit a settlement believed to have been found by Chinese and the Arab traders some four hundred years ago; and which still features the ruins of those civilizations.

Wasini Island
Also boasts a number of sea food restaurants, the best-known being Charlie Claw’s who also run dhow and snorkeling safaris around the Marine Park and an internationally certified dive school (fan dives available). Contact Charlie Claw's: Tel; +254 (0) 403202331, 3203055. Email:sand@wasini-island.com

Reefs, the rainforests of the sea
Coral reefs are one of the most fascinating ecosystems on earth, sheltering nearly one million types of marine life. Forming only in warm seas, reefs are built by battalions of tiny polyps (minuscule sea anemone-like creatures living together in colonies), some of which create a hard skeleton outside their bodies, which eventually forms into stony coral. Coral comes in many shapes, colours and sizes including the open-branched stag’s horn coral, the pincushion-like acropora coral, the wavy-branched and plate-like poroia coral, the massively solid favia coral and the convoluted brain coral.

Boat safaris
A selection of dhow and boat safaris depart from Shimoni pier daily. Taking around half an hour to reach the park, most tours encompass the islands of M ponto, Ya Chini and M ponto Ya Juu (lower and upper islands) and Kisite Island, a coral-encircled rock about 100m long which features an elongated sand bar and a rocky bird-nesting site. Boat safaris usually depart at 9am (and no later than 11am) and leave the Park no later than 2.30pm (depending on weather conditions).

EXCELLENT DIVING
Due to its warm shallow waters, exceptional clarity, pristine coral and extraordinary breadth of marine life, the Park and the Reserve offer an excellent dive venue for beginners and professionals alike. Some eleven prime dive sites exist in and around the area, ranging from 5-30m in depth. Mako koke Reef (4 km to the west) is also an interesting dive site being a fine example of a rejuvenating reef.

Snorkeler’s paradise
The warm clear waters, spectacular soft corals and kaleidoscopic marine life make this Park one of the finest snorkeling venues in Kenya, the most popular areas lying in the main coral garden towards the outer edge of the Kisite anchorage area.

Excellent diving
An enchanted realm of living coral gardens, sculptured islands, wheeling seabirds and sparklingly clear seas, this world famous Marine Park promises an underwater world of unbelievable color, discovery and vibrancy.

Visitortip: The best time to snorkel is two hours either side of low tide, when the greatest amount of marine life is revealed. Please avoid standing on or otherwise damaging the coral.

WHAT TO SEE
The reef provides food and shelter for an entire community. A shifting rainbow of small fish, octopus and clams hide in the gaps between the rainbow coral; celestial-blue parrotfish use their hard beaks to chew off lumps of coral while a kaleidoscope of soap plate sized snappers, rubber fish, zebra fish, butterfly fish, angelfish and scorpion fish shimmer in the clear waters. Hunting sharks, rays, turtles and starfish also prowl the reef in search of prey while moray eels hide in holes alongside small crabs and wrasses

WAVES, TIDES, WATER TEMPERATURES and LIGHTING

Marine life: Forming only in warm seas, reefs are built by battalions of tiny polyps (minuscule sea anemone-like creatures living together in colonies), some of which create a hard skeleton outside their bodies, which eventually forms into stony coral. Some eleven prime dive sites exist in and around the area, ranging from 5-30m in depth. Mako koke Reef (4 km to the west) is also an interesting dive site being a fine example of a rejuvenating reef.

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Turtle territory
The Park is famous for its population of turtles: green, hawksbill, Loggerhead, Ridley and leatherback.

Dolphin and whale spotting
The reef offers sanctuary to over 200 dolphins (spinner, humpback and bottle-nosed), which can be encountered singly or in schools, above and below the waves. You may even be fortunate enough to see a humpback whale (October-December). Whale sharks meanwhile are often seen around the M ponto islands.

Kisite Island, realm of the seabirds
Kisite Island, a small waterless coral island 8km south of Wasini Island, is flat, treeless and often only visible as a sandbar. At its tip is a rocky outcrop, which makes an ideal seabird habitat supporting an abundance of pelagic feeding birds including a breeding colony of roseate terns and nesting sooty terns.

WHERE TO STAY
There is no accommodation within the park or, but there are various accommodation options in nearby Shimoni including a selection of 7 economically priced KWS self-catering 'bandas' or chalets (offered inclusive of bedding, towels, cooking equipments, bathrooms, showers and communal eating area).

Pillipipa Safaris: Tel; +254 (0) 403205185 or 52286 Email: info@ pillipipa.com or pillipipa@ikenya.com

Dhow Tours: Tel; +254 (0) 403202144. Email: bookings@dolphin dhow.com

What file
Altitude: Sea level to about 8 meters.
Area: 10-20 km
Location: Kwale District, Coast Province. The Marine Park lies 6 km off the Kenyan Coast (at Shimoni) and 8 km north of the Tanzanian boarder.
Climate: the coast is humid with mean annual temperatures ranging from 22-34 degrees centigrade. Rainfall is around 500mm pa.
Vegetation: sea grasses and marine algae.

Kenyan barrier reef
The most outstanding feature of the Kenyan coast, the pristine and well-developed coral barrier reef extends all the way from Shimoni in the south to Malindi in the north, without significant break, except at the mouths of the rivers.

Dolphin luncheons and dhow trips
Wasini Island also boasts a number of sea food restaurants, the best-known being Charlie Claw’s who also run dhow, dolphin and snorkeling safaris around the Marine Park and an internationally certified dive school (fan dives available). Contact Charlie Claw’s: Tel; +254 (0) 403205185. Email:sand@wasini-island.com

Petrided coral gardens
Once below the waves, but now merely washed by the incoming tide, these rather surreal grey-white coral gardens lie directly behind Wasini Village. Run by the friendly ‘Wasini Women, Cooperative Boardwork’ (offering guided walks, cool drinks and a handicraft shop), the two and a half acres of petrified coral gardens and mangrove swamps can be explored by means of a meandering timbered boardwalk leading in a circuit around the site.

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