

## An Indian Ocean jewel right on our doorstep



You know those island paradises you see in the travel brochures? The ones that look like they are thousands of kilometres away? Well, there is one just a stone's throw away from South Africa which offers magnificent diving that won't require the winning of the Durban July to experience.

Inhaca Island is approximately 37km from the port of Maputo and is situated at the entrance to Delagoa Bay. It is an attractive holiday destination for anyone who wants to savour the laid-back rhythms of a small, semi-tropical Indian Ocean island. Situated on the fringe of the tropics, Inhaca has a wealth of breathtaking beaches, coral reefs and exotic marine life. Large areas of the island and shores have been protected as a natural reserve since 1976 and provide a unique and pristine environment which is ideal for the egg laying and reproduction of sea turtles. The mangroves along the coastline are the northernmost forest of its kind found in eastern Africa. The climate is warm all year round, though April to November is a more pleasant visiting period than December to March which can be very hot and humid as this is the rainy season in Mozambique.

The island has a rich history that is full of legends and myths. The island's inhabitants found their sacred symbols in the trees and bushes – they believed that the Marula tree enables communication between people and their ancestors. Inhaca has the southernmost of Mozambique's major lighthouses and the light station is one of the countries oldest. It was established in 1894 at the northern end of the island which shelters the Bay of Maputo. Its purpose was to guide ships to the colony's most important seaport, Maputo (then called Laurengo Marques).

Just to the northwest of Inhaca is a smaller island named Portuguese Island. You can amble across the narrow strait when the tide is low, snorkel in the enclosed lagoon or be even more adventurous and venture out further towards the reef with fins, snorkel and a mask. It is, however, only advisable to do so when the water is clear since there are sharks in the deeper waters of both islands. While in the waters, you may even be lucky enough to spot the legendary Dugong, a threatened sea mammal in danger of extinction.

Inhaca has top class dive sites, including wrecks and pristine coral reefs which are home to various pelagic fish species. The average water temperature is between 22 and 27°C and water visibility ranges from 10 to 30m. Inhaca has about 100km of coastline with much of it playing host to some of the best coral reefs in the Mozambique Channel.

The launch sites are usually close to the accommodation and are done with ease as there are no waves between the islands. Most of the diving is done in calm waters, except for the wrecks which are further out to sea. Dive gear can be rented here, but as always, it is best to come prepared if you are not the average Joe.

This area has great photographic possibilities because the dive sites all range between 10 to 25m with often no surge or current present. Snorkelling conditions in the inshore bay areas are

excellent for beginners and for doing training dives, and while visibility may not be as good as on the offshore reefs, the marine life is still varied and plentiful. The fish life is virtually untouched and the reefs are unspoilt because of the low dive volumes. The diving is tide dependent and the best time to hit the waters is when tides are at their highest (you can then catch the tide on its ebb and drift a kilometre or more along one of the reefs). A fascinating experience for scuba divers is exploring the many shipwrecks in the waters.

**Activities in and around the area:**

- Snorkelling
- Walks and hiking trails
- Lighthouse trips
- Visits to the Marine Biological Centre
- Boat trips to Portuguese Island and Santa Maria
- Water sports
- Deep sea fishing

Information by [www.divestyle.co.za](http://www.divestyle.co.za)