

# VAMIZI ISLAND

M O Z A M B I Q U E



## TURTLES

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'ECOLOGY COLOURS EVERY THOUGHT AT VAMIZI'

AGNES SIMPSON, TATLER



## THE TURTLES

Vamizi Island has the largest recorded population of green turtles in Mozambique managed by one of the longest standing turtle monitoring programmes in Eastern Africa.

With a dedicated WWF conservation team, the beaches are patrolled daily to monitor and record new turtle activity. The nesting season is between December and July, peaking in March and June.

Between December and March the turtles migrate to the beaches on the east side of the island to shelter from the northerly Kaskazi winds, returning to the northern and western beaches for the remainder of the season.

The female turtle will approach the beach, often on the high tide to avoid having to crawl too far, and lay her eggs in the sand dunes above the high tide mark to ensure the eggs are kept dry. She may return to the same beach several times during each season to lay up to 150 eggs.

Turtles are easily disturbed and will abort their crawl up the beach if there are lights, obstacles or human presence. For this reason we make every effort to minimize any disturbance.

When a nesting turtle is sighted, a small team of Conservation Monitors will visit to record data and tag the turtle with a unique number that will allow her movements to be recorded. Once the eggs have been laid she will leave the nest and not return.

After an incubation period of between 50 and 60 days (depending on the temperature) the hatchlings will emerge, often at night, and make their way to the sea.

This is a critical period for them as they need to rapidly orientate themselves so they can find their way back when they reach maturity. Turtles habitually return to the same beach and often within about 100 metres of where they first emerged.

When the Conservation monitors find a recently evacuated nest they will remove any remaining hatchlings which are then released into the ocean on their onward journey.