

## Exploring the Marine Wonders of Eritrea



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Eritrea, a coastal country on the western shores of the Red Sea, boasts a paradise of breathtaking marine destinations that rival the world's most renowned beaches. Its diverse marine life, including a wide variety of fish species and coral reefs, is just one of the many unique features that make it a haven for marine enthusiasts.

With its warm, friendly people, Eritrea is a rare and rewarding destination for those seeking a truly authentic, immersive travel experience, whether they're food enthusiasts, nature lovers, or simply looking for a unique, off-the-beaten-path adventure. From the pristine waters of the Red Sea to the crystal-clear lakes and hot spring resorts, this charming country has an abundance of natural beauty and recreational opportunities.

Marine tourism supports the livelihoods and cultures of local communities while causing a positive impact on the marine ecosystem and the country's economic growth. The global tourism market is diverse, and the appeal of coastal and beach destinations remains strong, with the majority of visitors drawn to these environments.

Eritrea's marine resources are scattered across the long, winding coast. As you delve into the details of the country's extensive marine environment, you encounter Eritrea's coastline, which features stunning beaches, mangrove forests, coral reefs, and an array of incredible marine species. Eritrea's maritime

climate is well-suited to a thriving avifauna, making it a crucial stopover for migratory and resident birds throughout the year.

The coastal regions and the surrounding islands, including the Dahlak Archipelago, offer a diverse array of habitats. From sandy shores to complex ecosystems, including saltwater lagoons, coral reefs, and mangrove forests, the coastal archipelagic landscape of Eritrea provides a rich tapestry of plant and animal life. This unique environment has created a haven for seabirds, which breed and nest in the area's extensive wetlands.



While providing sheltered bays and inlets for fishing and leisure activities, the country's relatively calm waters and steady winds create a pleasantly moderate climate for sailing, diving, snorkeling, and other water sports and recreation. Eritrea's diverse marine landscape and climate, along with its rich cultural heritage, make it a fascinating and accessible destination for tourists to experience the thrill of ocean exploration, enjoy a variety of water activities, and discover the incredible natural beauty of this remarkable region.

The waters along the coast are shallow and relatively safe for swimming. Beyond those who crave adventure, numerous beaches on Eritrea's mainland coast and islands offer a variety of options for family visits, holidaymakers, and honeymooners alike, providing ample opportunities for relaxation and recreation. Given their facilities and the range of services they offer, Gurgussum beach hotels are the most preferred by most visitors. However, these beach hotels can become crowded on weekends, particularly during the summer holidays from June to September, when thousands of visitors from overseas

flock to enjoy the sea, sun, and sand. Visitors are advised to book in advance during these seasons to save time and make the most of their travel experience.

The most comfortable seasons for diving and snorkeling in Eritrea are spring and autumn, when the waters are clearest, and the temperatures are moderate. For wind sites, the best locations are between 12.5 and 14.5 degrees north latitude along the southeastern coastline. The strong winds in this area during the dry season are driven by channeling and topographic enhancement to the southeasterly flow in the southern Red Sea inversion. Therefore, Eritrea's Assab coastline is the best place for water skiing, surfing, and sailing.

The country's natural attractions are complemented by its rich history, which is a major attraction for historians, explorers, and divers. Several interesting shipwrecks, including several well-preserved World War II Italian vessels such as the *Nazario Sauro*, which is in excellent condition with intact furnishings, are available for exploration.



Visitors can also explore the ancient relics of Adulis, the necropolis on Dahlak Kebir Island, the Crater Lake of Badda, the unique ecosystems of the volcanic islands, and the thermal springs of Irafaile. These inland spots, combined with the country's numerous coastal villages and historical landmarks, provide a diverse and enriching experience for visitors from around the world.

In response to the pressing need for sustainable marine development in our coastal waters, a comprehensive and coordinated approach is essential. To achieve this, Eritrea's Ministry of Marine Resources is implementing policies

and regulations to manage marine resources sustainably and effectively, allocating them fairly and equitably to the public, ensuring the long-term health of Eritrea's marine resources, and generating economic benefits for the communities that depend on them.

unchecked natural resource exploitation, as well as, unregulated tourism and fishing practices are naturally fraught with detrimental consequences to a usually delicate ecosystem.

To ensure the long-term preservation of coastal marine resources and the Dahlak Archipelago's unique aquatic ecosystem, a critical step in the preservation plan could be to have it inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Notably, several African sites, such as Aldabra Atoll (Seychelles), Banc d'Arguin (Mauritania), Simangaliso (South Africa), Sanganeb (South Africa), and Mukkawar (Sudan), are recognized by UNESCO for their outstanding marine ecosystems and biodiversity.

The world heritage sites mentioned above share common features with Eritrea's rich marine environment including: islands — a diverse range of coral atolls and rocky outcrops; coral reefs — vibrant ecosystems supporting an incredible array of marine life; shallow bodies of water — clear and calm waters that provide habitat for a wide variety of marine species; sandy beaches — pristine and unspoiled shorelines perfect for recreation and wildlife observation; coastal dunes — dynamic and ever-changing landscapes shaped by waves and tides; and abundance of migratory birds and marine life — a constant display of beauty with many species visiting the area to feed, breed, and nest.

These iconic features demonstrate Eritrea's remarkable natural beauty and the potential for similar sites to be recognized as a World Heritage destination. By inscribing their marine ecosystems on the World Heritage List, countries gain international recognition and support for conservation efforts.

Eritrea can also capitalize on the growing trend toward eco-friendly tourism by investing in sustainable infrastructure and promoting eco-tourism activities such as snorkeling, diving, and sailing.

One final thought: The growing interest in the Blue Economy concept is also gaining momentum in Africa. As a result, Eritrea can harness this trend to drive economic growth and unlock the sector's tremendous development potential. Eritrea's marine development strategy is rooted in a comprehensive approach to the blue economy, built on the principles of sustainable use of aquatic ecosystems and alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal 6 on water and sanitation and Goal 14 on the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas, and marine resources.



Ultimately, Eritrea's forward-looking approach to eco-tourism and sustainable development offers a compelling opportunity for growth, with the country prioritizing the protection of its marine and coastal ecosystems. By safeguarding these vital habitats, Eritrea can unlock a thriving and environmentally conscious tourism industry, attracting visitors and investors from around the world while protecting the region's natural heritage and ensuring a sustainable future for generations to come.

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Feb 2, 2026