



Out of Africa

From the rocky volcanic promontories of isolated Cape Verde to the lush tropical saltwater habitat of the Bissagos Islands, these two ecologically diverse archipelagos provide havens for some rare and fascinating creatures.

Diversity in isolation

Thanks to both location and geological history the waters around Cape Verde host a globally significant level of biodiversity. Giant coral mountains rise up from the seabed providing valuable oceanic habitats at a range of depths. Hundreds of different types of fish have been catalogued in these waters, along with at least 17 species

of cetacean, and the beaches of the islands provide nesting grounds for the rare loggerhead turtle.

Where the jungle meets the sea

The low-lying coastal archipelago of the Bissagos Islands is a rare meeting of tropical forest and saltwater maritime ecosystem, and in 1996 the islands were declared a UNESCO

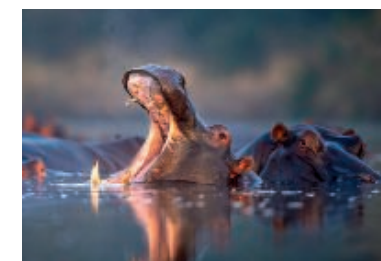
Biosphere Reserve. As you cruise around the islands it will be easy to see why. A relative lack of human development and a wide range of diverse ecosystems including mangrove swamps and coastal savanna, have created a fragile but rich habitat just off the coast of West Africa.



Animal magnetism – The loggerhead turtle may have been using the Earth's magnetic field to navigate far longer than human sailors. After spending most of her adult life alone and at sea, the female loggerhead will only return to land to lay eggs. Although it's still a theory, marine biologists believe they may use magnetite, an iron compound in their brains, to navigate the Earth's magnetic field and return to the exact beach where they hatched many years earlier.



Slap happy – A humpback whale 'breaching' is one of nature's most awe-inspiring sights. Cape Verde is one of only a few known breeding grounds in the North Atlantic for this endangered species. It's not uncommon to witness their incredible acrobatic displays as they launch their huge bodies above the water and slap the surface with their fins or tail flukes. While it's unclear if the purpose of breaching is communication, navigation, parasite control or just fun, that doesn't lessen its impact.



Sink or swim – Although we may think of hippos as aquatic creatures, their huge bulk and dense bones mean they are not skilled deep-water swimmers. This usually confines them to shallow freshwater river systems, however, the Bissagos hippos have overcome this and have made the saltwater lagoons and intertidal swamps of the islands their home. They spend the whole day wading in this marine environment, enjoying the benefits of saltwater without risk of drowning.