

Madagascar – A World Apart

Madagascar is the fourth biggest island in the world and due to its isolation is considered to be the “Galapagos of the African Continent”. The country offers a mixture of 18 cultures, a variety of landscapes and a unique natural environment with many secrets still to unveil... these are just a few of the highlights. Over the millennia, the lineage that includes apes, monkeys and humans evolved on the African mainland, while lemur-like ancestors evolved in Madagascar. These lemurs lived in a gentle world with few predators. Madagascar is a unique destination, it does not offer a safari experience as on the mainland, however this island offers visitors real contrasts and culture with many endemic animals and plants.

Day by Day Itinerary

Day 1 – Arrive at Antannarivo Airport

Arrival in the capital where you will be met and transferred to the IC Hotel for one night in a suite (B). (Flight options include Air Madagascar via Paris or South African Airlines via Johannesburg).

Day 2 – Tana - Andasibe 135 km: 3 hours

After breakfast you will be met by the local representative who will brief you about your tour. After you will enjoy a city tour, Tana is the capital of Madagascar and built in three stages, the high city which was the first area to be occupied during the royal period and is where the old queen's palace is situated. You will see the 'Rova', the queen's palace and the house of the first minister which is now a museum. You then drive down to the mid-city ending at the Rainiharo tombs where all the chic boutiques of the capital are found. Finally you drive to the low city which is the commercial area of the town with its magnificent 'avenue de l'indépendance' and its imposing colonial buildings and old railway station. In the afternoon you will begin your drive to Andasibe through the green landscape of the east. This will bring you to the humid part of the country with its primary forest and lakes. Arriving at Andasibe late in the afternoon. Two nights at Vakona Hotel (B).



Day 3 – Andasibe

An early morning departure to the National Park of Andasibe where we hope to see Indri Indri, the largest lemur on the island. This reserve is very unique with endemic fauna and flora,



it contains a wide variety of orchids, endemic species of chameleons and birds and after you will visit the Orchid Park. In the afternoon there is a visit to an Andasibe village of a typical Betsimisaraka (The-Many-inseparable) tribe, they are the second largest tribe on the island. This visit will allow you close contact with local people, to see how they live.

You will then visit the private park of Vakona where you can find three species of lemurs, Sifaka, Brown Lemurs and *Variecia Variegata*. Return to the hotel.

Day 4 – Andasibe – Tana - Antsirabe

After breakfast we will drive back to Tana through the green landscape and vegetation of the east. Along the way you will see Merina villages on the hills and you will stop in Mandraka to visit the private reserve of Domaine Pyereras where you can see different varieties of chameleons, snakes, lemurs and butterflies. You will then drive south across the highland landscape with its beautiful rice-fields and its spectacular eroded hills called lavaka. Arriving in Antsirabe in the afternoon, the name of this town means ‘the place of salt’ and it is an elegant city. Antsirabe feels like a European city with a cool climate and a thermal spring, it is one of the most attractive places in Madagascar. The town is also known for gems and semi-precious stones and during the city tour you will visit a lapidary of semi-precious gems and a workshop. After you will drive to Andraikiba Lake and then return to Antsirabe. Overnight at Couleur Café (B).



Day 5 – Antsirabe – Ambositra – Ranomafana, 250 km/5 hours

After breakfast you will continue your journey to Ambositra which is the centre of Madagascar’s wood carving industry. You are still in the highlands where the green landscapes are dominated by rice fields and forests of pine and eucalyptus. You will also notice that the houses in this area are made with ornately carved wooden balconies and shutters. Ambositra has several small handicraft workshops which you will have the opportunity to visit and see the craftsmen at work. Continue to Ranomafana, en-route you will see the ‘le col de tapia’, a type of tree which resists bush fires. Arrive in Ambohimahasoa where you can visit a tropical forest with lemurs. Continue eastwards to Ranomafana with the landscape becoming greener and with tropical forests on both sides. The National Park of Ranomafana was created in 1991 and has a series of steep hills from which numerous small streams run into the River Namorona, creating a series of waterfalls and rapids.



Overnight at Setam Lodge (HB).

Day 6 - Ranomafana

This morning you will have a chance to explore the forest with a guide and an opportunity to see as many as 12 species of lemur. Ranomafana is an important site for lemurs; it is the only confirmed site for two of the rarest species - the greater bamboo lemur and the golden bamboo lemur. Other lemur species can also be seen here as well as more than 100 birds, reptiles and butterflies which have been recorded in this park.

The area is covered with forest, giant bamboo and various orchids and the steep mountains, dramatic waterfalls and natural hot springs make this forest charming and unusual. The name Ranomafana means 'hot water' so visitors can relax in the hot spring water in this thermal city.

Day 7 – Ranomafana – Isalo, 339 kms/6 hours

After breakfast, you will continue to Fianarantsoa. This is the centre of the catholic religion so some of the best schools are found here. Called 'the gateway to the South', Fianarantsoa is the capital of the Betsileo tribes and the name means 'Place of good learning'. In Fianarantsoa you will enjoy a tour; the city has been built in a similar way to Antananarivo with three stages. In the upper town or old city, you can find the cathedral and a fantastic view of the city. Following the tour you head south towards to Ranohira with a stop in Ambalavao for a wine tasting, as Ambalavao is the centre of wine industry. The climate is not ideal for growing grapes but it is a tradition which was left by the priests and monks who lived in this area. After you will visit Ambalavao and the 'Anteimoro Paper factory', which is a remnant of the Arabian civilisation on the island. You will then visit 'Anja Park' where you can see many lemurs in their natural habitat. Continue your journey to Ihosy which is the capital of the Bara tribes who breed the distinctive Zebu cattle. The drive will take you through the Andringitra mountain chain which serves as a transition between the dry south and green highland. Finally you pass through the huge 'plateaux de Horombe' with its red soil, arriving in Isalo, Two nights in Satrana Lodge (B).



Day 8 - Isalo

Visit Isalo National Park. The park covers an area of 81,540 ha which is the entire stretch of the Isalo massif! You will first walk for about 1½ hours observing the local vegetation such as elephant's foot which is a native species of aloe and an endemic species for Isalo. Then you will walk through the eroded mountains which is also the place where the Bara tribe places



their dead before they take them to their real tombs. After 20 minutes you reach the massif where there is a spectacular view of the sandstone mountains and the many strange and eroded forms. Along the way you may also see lemurs such as sifakas, brown lemurs and ringtails, fifty five species of birds, lizards and snakes. Eventually you will reach the swimming pool where you can take a dip in the crystal clear water which is a great reward after the walk.

Day 9 – Isalo – Ifaty, 234km/4 hours

After breakfast you continue to Tuléar which is where National road N° 7 ends. En-route you can see tribal tombs like the 'Mahafaly tombs' and a few 'Antandroy tombs'. After a short tour of Tuléar you will drive to Ifaty, unfortunately the roads in this area are not in a good condition. This drive will bring you to the driest part of the country, situated in the deep south the landscape will be dominated by spiny forest. The local Vezo villagers earn their living by fishing and you will see many small pirogues as the men go fishing twice a day while the women take the fish to Tuléar to sell.

Two nights at Hotel Les Dunes (B).

Day 10 - Ifaty

A day at leisure. This is an ideal place for diving and snorkeling, situated in the largest lagoon in the country, Ifaty is protected by a large coral reef which makes this an ideal place for diving and snorkeling. This area is a popular place for birdwatchers or many excursions can be arranged like a visit to the Reniala Reserve where you can see two kinds of baobabs and spiny bush as well as reptiles and chameleons or take a boat to see whales. From July to mid



September, whales come to the cool sea of Madagascar to give birth. This is a fantastic experience as sometimes the whales come very close to the boat. In the afternoon you can walk to the village of Mangily where you can visit a local school or experience the Vezo Fishermen's life.

Day 11 – Ifaty – Tulear – Tana

Transfer to the Tulear airport and check-in for the flight to Tana (1450/1720). On arrival transfer to Ihotel for day use. Transfer to the airport for your international flight.

The cost of this itinerary is £1495 per person based on twin share and subject to availability.

Included

Accommodation in twin/double room based as per itinerary
Breakfast daily
Transports by private 4X4, Toyota Land Cruiser or similar, driver and fuel
Entrance fees with special guide in all national parks or reserves as mentioned in the program
All transfers airport / hotel / airport
Domestic flight Tulear - Tana

Excluded

International flights
All optional excursions
Lunch/dinner
All items of a personal nature
Travel Insurance – ask us for a quote
Tips, drinks, laundry

USEFUL INFORMATION

Local currency: Ariary which has replaced the Malagasy franc. 1 EURO is about 2400 Ariary. Malagasy Ariary can be changed back to foreign currency at any bank and money changer.

Credit card: Visa Card is the most generally accepted credit card. Others, such as Master Card, Diner's and American Express, are not impossible to use but difficult. Euros Cash is recommended especially away from the larger towns. ATM machine are available in big cities, only with VISA.

Opening hours: Local bank and all offices open from 08.00 to 15.30. Closed on week-ends and public holidays.

Payment: Cash - Ariary, Euros, US\$
Traveller's cheque - Euros, US\$
Credit card - VISA only

Time zone: GMT + 3 hours.

Official languages: Malagasy and French.

Visa : A visa is mandatory and the passport must be valid for a minimum of 6 months, visas can be obtained at the airport upon arrival in Madagascar. There is no charge for the visa and no photo is required, only a return ticket and a valid passport.

Health: no vaccination is compulsory, however an anti-malarial treatment is recommended.

Country code: + 261

Electricity: 220 V. Some places have no electricity.

Recommendations

Travel with light luggage, if possible. Soft bags are very handy
Pack light trousers, long sleeved shirts or T-shirts, sandals, hikers must have good walking shoes and don't forget a swimsuit
Mosquito repellent sprays and/or creams and sun block cream

Seasons and weather

There are 5 climatic zones, which follow the varied physical geography of the island. The mild Highlands, the hot and dry western regions, the rainy and the eastern coastal regions under the influence of trade winds, the hot and wet North, and the semi-arid South.

Rainfalls decreases progressively from the North-East (over 300 m) to the South-West (less than 400 m) with several variants between these two extremes. The dry season or the southern winter is from April to October, and summer is from November to March.

Temperatures range from 27°C and 32°C in summer and 22°C in winter, on the Highlands, they may go down to 4°C or even less on winter nights.

