

## Journey to the South of Madagascar

*visiting Antananarivo, Andasibe-Mantadia, Ranomafana, and Isalo*



*The fourth largest island in the world, Madagascar is famed for its warm climate and eccentric wildlife. It is a land of stunning biodiversity, home to a host of unique and rare species (an estimated 80% of which are endemic to the island). The most famous of these are the 90+ species of lemur that have made Madagascar their home – long since extinct on the African mainland, these beautiful creatures thrive on the island of Madagascar, in an environment largely free of predators. Other highlights include the world's largest (and also the smallest!) chameleons, and fabulous plant life, including exquisite orchids.*

*This 13-day tour will see you explore Eastern and Southern Madagascar. Beginning in the capital of Antananarivo, you'll explore the rainforests of eastern Madagascar, before journeying south via Ranomafana and Isalo National Parks to the coastal region of Ifaty.*

### **Day 1: Arrive Antananarivo**

You will be met on arrival into Ivato Airport and transferred to the Tana Plaza Hotel for one night (B&B basis).

#### **Tana Plaza**

*Situated in the heart of Antananarivo, Tana Plaza Hotel offers 75 cosy rooms and studios. It's a simple hotel but a good base from which to explore the city. On your doorstep are the lively trading arcades of the Avenue of Independence, Ambohitsorohitra Palace and the Museum of Art and Archaeology. Tana Plaza also provides easy access to one of the most famous restaurants in town, L'avenue. (We can also recommend Café de la Gare, located in the old railway station across the road from the hotel.)*

## **Day 2: Antananarivo to Andasibe-Mantadia National Park**

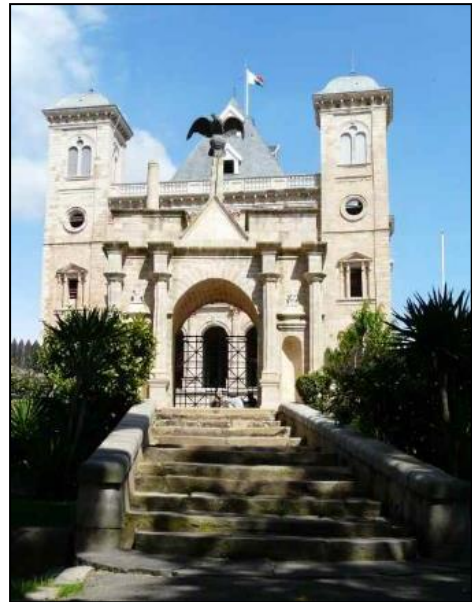
After breakfast, embark on a short tour of Antananarivo - or Tana, as it is fondly known - in the company of a local guide.

Antananarivo was built in three stages. Your tour starts in the high city, the setting for the Rova, the Queen's Palace, and the House of the First Minister (now a museum), all iconic buildings constructed during the colonial era.

From the high city, drive to Tana's mid-city, or the administrative district, where you can tour the elaborate tomb of Rainiharo, one of Madagascar's early prime ministers.

Your tour ends in the low city, the commercial area of town, where you'll have time to explore the magnificent Independence Avenue and the iconic old railway station. The tour ends with lunch in a local restaurant.

After lunch in town, set off for Andasibe, a journey of 2-3 hours through the green landscapes of the east, a region of dense rainforest. Arrive at Vakona Lodge early evening and check-in for three nights (B&B basis).



### **Vakona Lodge**

*Vakona Lodge occupies a wonderful location amid dense rainforest in the heart of Andasibe. Guests are accommodated in spacious hillside bungalows, which overlook the central restaurant & bar area encircled by a small lake.*

*There are pleasant gardens, a viewing deck over the lake and a swimming pool. The standard rooms are spacious and open onto verandas overlooking the gardens.*



## **Day 3: Analamazoatra Reserve (Andasibe-Mantadia National Park)**

After breakfast, venture into Analamazoatra Reserve, part of the greater Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, with your guide on an early morning hike.

Analamazoatra is a huge tropical rainforest where 9 species of lemur can be spotted. Other notable fauna and flora include chameleons, tenrecs, and a wide variety of orchid flowers.



With any luck you'll encounter Madagascar's most famous resident, the Indri Indri, or Babakoto. These are the largest lemur on the island, known especially for their spectacular whooping calls. (The name "Babakoto" is derived from a local legend; it is said that one day a small boy called Koto slipped from a tall tree in the forest while trying to collect bees. He was saved and returned to his village by the forest lemurs, and from that time the Indri Indri was called "Babakoto", or father of Koto).



Adult male and female Indri Indri stay together for life, along with their young. A female Indri gives birth to a single offspring every 2-3 years. No one knows how long an Indri may live, but their lifespan is estimated to be between 25 and 40 years. Adults are 70-90cm tall and weigh 7-10kg.

After the hike, you may like to continue to Andasibe village, a typical Betsimisaraka settlement, for a guided tour. During the tour, you'll have the chance to learn more about the Betsimisaraka, the second largest tribe of Madagascar, whose livelihood revolves around cultivating rice and vanilla.

Late afternoon, return to Vakona Lodge for dinner and overnight.

#### **Day 4: Mantadia Rainforest**

After breakfast at the lodge, depart with your guide for the rainforests of Mantadia.



One of Madagascar's most prominent national parks, Andasibe-Mantadia is best known for its rare orchids, its resident population of Indri Indri that can be observed all year round, and its magnificent waterfalls.

The Mantadia forest accommodates a wide variety of wildlife, including 108 species of bird, 14 species of lemur, 51 species of reptile (of which Boa is the most famous) and 84 species of amphibian.

In the rivers of Mantadia there are several endemic fish species of which two are classified threatened species.

The aye-aye has acquired a reputation as the strangest of Madagascar's lemurs, and if you are lucky you may observe them in the forests of Mantadia.

The Parsonii is the biggest chameleon on Madagascar and can be seen in the dry season (though it can be difficult to distinguish them from the trees that they camouflage in).

After a morning spent exploring Mantadia, return to Vakona Lodge for a late lunch. The rest of the day is at leisure.

#### **Day 5: Andasibe to Antsirabe, via Tana**

Depart Vakona this morning and travel south via Tana, across the Madagascan highlands region with its beautiful rice-fields and spectacular eroded hills (or 'lavaka'), to Antsirabe, capital of the Vakinankaratra region. Expect to arrive early afternoon. After checking into your hotel, the Chambres du Voyageur, embark on a guided tour of the city.



Antsirabe, or 'the place of salt', is an elegant city renowned for its temperate climate, thermal springs, and locally-brewed beer! Founded by the Norwegians in 1856, it is one of the few towns of Madagascar that has retained much of its 19<sup>th</sup>-century architecture and heritage. With a cool climate and laidback atmosphere, it is also one of the most pleasant cities in Madagascar to spend a day or two at leisure.

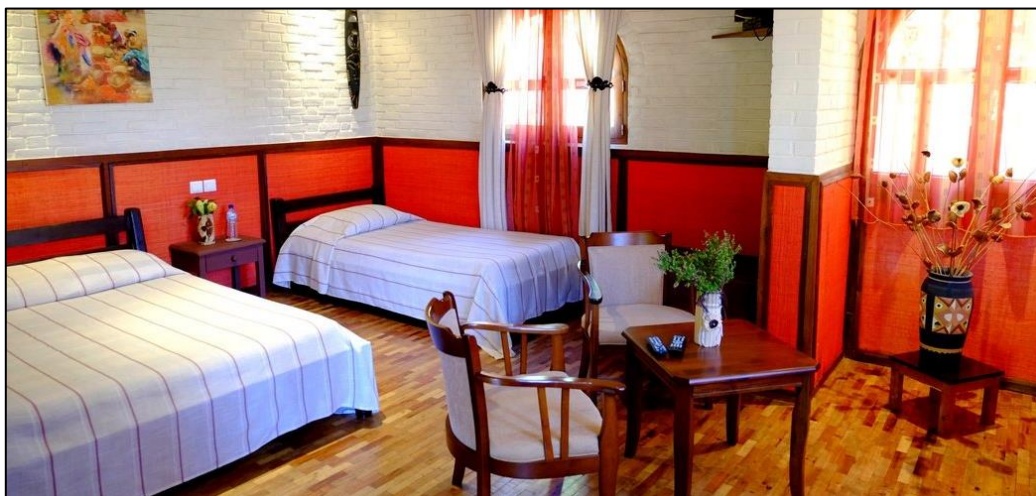
As well as its colonial-era heritage, Antsirabe is also known for its gems and semi-precious stones, and during your city tour this afternoon you'll have the option to visit a lapidary of semi-precious gems, as well as a workshop making pousse pousse (rickshaws) and cars in miniature. In the afternoon, drive to Andraikiba Lake for photo opportunities and a chance to stretch your legs.

Return to Antsirabe late this afternoon for one night in the Chambres du Voyageur (B&B basis).

#### **Chambres du Voyageur**

*This attractive hotel is located on the outskirts of Antsirabe.*

*Built with local materials, the bungalows are decorated with crafts and woodwork typical of the region. Each bungalow has a private bathroom and is equipped with a heater for the cool winter evenings.*





*There is a natural pool for swimming and the gardens are a welcome retreat during the heat of the day. Colourful birds, chameleons and turtles can be seen in the hotel gardens.*

*The hotel restaurant offers breakfast and dinner menus utilising fresh, seasonal produce.*



#### **Day 6: Antsirabe to Ranomafana**

Depart Antsirabe after breakfast and continue your journey south through the highlands region, with its green landscapes dominated by rice fields and forests of pine and eucalyptus, to Ambositra, the centre of Madagascar's wood-carving industry.

Ambositra is a charming town in which almost all of the houses are adorned with ornately carved wooden balconies and shutters. There are several handicraft workshops which you can visit while here to observe the craftsmen at work.



Leaving Ambositra, you continue on to Ranomafana. As you journey further south, the landscape will become greener, with tropical forest soon appearing on both sides of the road, occasionally interrupted by small villages and roadside stalls selling bananas and charcoal.

Expect to arrive in Ranomafana late afternoon. This prominent national park was created in 1991 and encompasses a series of steep hills from which numerous small streams run into the river Namorona.

Check-in at Setam Lodge for two nights (half-board).

#### **Setam Lodge**

*Setam Lodge sits on a high hill just outside Ranomafana town, from where it enjoys fabulous views of the rainforest and park below. Of all the lodges in and around Ranomafana, Setam is the closest to the National Park.*

*Setam is a simple hotel with bungalow rooms spread along the hillside on terraces. The rooms are spacious, clean and comfortable, and the food delicious!*



*The main lodge and dining area has huge picture windows and a large balcony from where you can take in the scenery.*

### **Day 7: Ranomafana National Park**

Meet with your specialist wildlife guide after breakfast and set off for a 3-4 hour rainforest expedition into Ranomafana National Park.

Like Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, Ranomafana is a haven for all manner of wildlife, but especially lemurs, with 12 resident species. It is the only confirmed site on the island for the two rarest lemur species – the greater bamboo lemur and the golden bamboo lemur (both of which were discovered only relatively recently).

More than 100 birds, reptiles, lizards, butterflies and other insects have also been recorded in Ranomafana. The area is covered with thick forest and in the higher regions the trees are adorned with mosses and lichens. You can also see giant bamboo, various orchids, and dramatic scenery of mountains, waterfalls and natural springs. The name Ranomafana translates roughly as 'hot water', and indeed visitors to the park can relax in its hot springs!



Return to Setam Lodge for lunch. The afternoon is free for you to explore Ranomafana village independently, or you may prefer to simply relax at the lodge.

### **Day 8: Ranomafana to Isalo**

After breakfast at the hotel, depart for Isalo and Ihosy, with a number of interesting stops en route. This morning's drive will take you through valleys and hills planted with rice. The labour in this region is done mostly by hand, and everywhere you will see men and women working in the fields, aided by domestic zebus.

Your first stop will be in the town of Fianarantsoa. Its name roughly translating to 'place of good learning', Fianarantsoa was a centre of Catholicism in Madagascar during the 19<sup>th</sup>-century. Today it is a small and unassuming city, built on raised slopes and divided broadly across three levels,



in the same manner as the Madagascan capital Antananarivo. You'll have time to enjoy a short stroll in Fianarantsoa's historic centre, before continuing your journey south.



Leaving Fianarantsoa, a further hour's drive will take you to the town of Ambalavao, centre of Madagascar's wine and traditional paper industries. Here you'll have a chance to stop at a vintners and also at the Antemoro Paper Factory, an interesting relic of the Arabian presence on Madagascar.

Continuing your journey south, you drive through the mountain chain of Andringitra, transitioning between the green highlands and the dry south. From here on, the landscape takes on a more dramatic character, with huge granite blocks marking the spacious plains. Two such blocks comprise the 'gate to the south', separating the highlands from the southern plains. From a distance

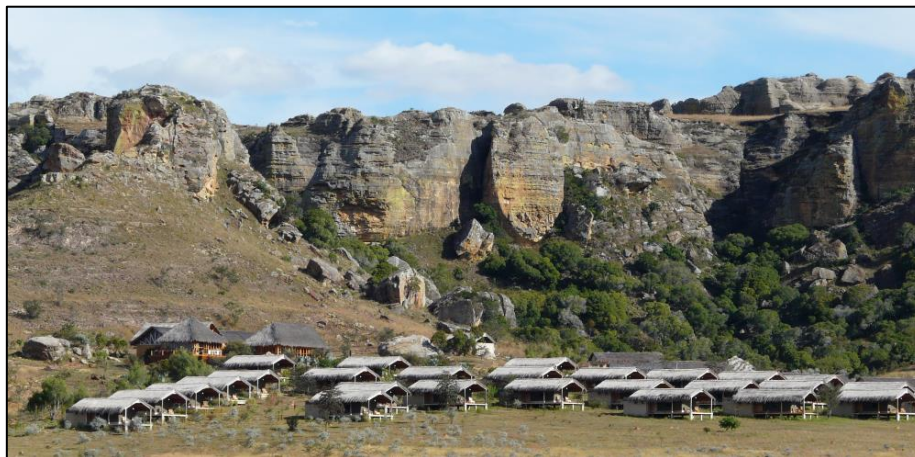
you can see a huge imposing rocky hill called the Bishop's Hat. This is a sacred burial place belonging to the local Betselio tribe.

The afternoon's drive will be broken up with a visit to the Anja Community Reserve, located mid-way between Fianarantsoa and Ihosy. This small but important reserve is believed to be home to the highest concentration of ring-tailed lemur in Madagascar, and was founded in part to disincentivize the capture and trade of the species. You'll explore the reserve in the company of a local guide over the course of two hours, following an established trail.

Leaving the Anja Reserve, you soon arrive in Ihosy, the heartland of the Bara tribe, and continue through the huge plateaux de Horombe, with its red soil and wild grass plains. Expect to arrive at your accommodation in Isalo, Satrana Lodge, late this afternoon.

### **Satrana Lodge**

*Satrana Lodge is situated at the entrance to Isalo National Park, on a rocky hill overlooking the Horombe Plain. It has the character of an East African safari camp, with accommodation in large Meru-style tents (40 in total), each with permanent en-suite bathrooms and inside/outside showers.*



*Raised on wooden platforms, the tents are spacious and comfortable. Each opens onto a private verandah with stunning views down into the valley.*

*The main lodge, which is slightly elevated, houses the dining room and bar. There is also a large outdoor swimming pool. Other guest areas include a small library and bar.*

### **Day 9: Isalo National Park**

After breakfast, meet with your guide and set off for a full day expedition into Isalo National Park.



Isalo National Park encompasses almost all of the Isalo massif, an area of 81,540ha. This huge mountain, notable for its strange geological formations (composed of sandstone eroded by the wind and rain into the most curious shapes), offers some of the most spectacular scenery in all of Madagascar.

You'll be following the Piscine Naturelle trail, named for the natural water pools that form the main attraction of this popular, 12km route. As this is one of the best-known routes in Isalo, you are likely to encounter other

walkers, especially as you approach the water pools via the 3km Canyon de Signes, or "Monkey Canyon". The terrain is predominantly flat, making for an approachable hike, but the route is also very exposed to the sun, with little shade even within the canyon, making good sun protection most important! You can expect to walk for 5-6 hours, with time to stop and rest at various areas of interest along the way, including the natural water pools.

During your hike through the eroded mountains, you will encounter unusual vegetation, such as elephant's foot, as well as native and endemic species of aloe. Wildlife is more limited, but you may encounter sifakas, brown lemurs and ringtails, as well as many species of bird, lizard and, more rarely, snake.

For the local Bara tribespeople, Isalo is an area of great cultural significance, serving as a traditional burial ground.



Early evening, visit the "Isalo Window" – a natural rock window and local landmark – for a view over the plains at sunset.



### Day 10: Isalo to Ifaty

Depart Isalo this morning and continue south to Tuléar (or Toliara).

Today's drive will take you through the driest region of Madagascar, a landscape dominated by spiny forest and many varieties of euphorbia. You will cross the dry and sandy soil, where drinking water is scarce, and continue on to the coast, lined by mangrove trees and Vezo villages, whose people earn their living by fishing. You can often see the men fishing in small pirogues along the coastline, while the women and children take the fish to Tuléar to sell. En-route you'll also have a chance to see the tribal tombs of the Mahafaly and Antandroy.

Tuléar is where the main road ends. Gateway to the Great Reef, it's a quiet town with a certain raffish charm. Stop for lunch here, before continuing on to Ifaty, about 27kms north of Tuléar (the drive can take an hour, due to the poor condition of the roads).

On arrival in Ifaty check-in at Le Paradisier for three nights (half-board).

### Le Paradisier

*Le Paradisier occupies a long stretch of beach just outside of Ifaty. From this coastal position, it enjoys beautiful views of the ocean, including from its restaurant terrace.*

*Le Paradisier has twenty rooms and one suite, all facing the ocean. The rooms have been built from stone and wood. They occupy two floors, with a double bedroom on the ground floor and a mezzanine level with a small balcony on the upper floor. The bathrooms are tucked away at the back. Each room opens onto a small front terrace.*



### Days 11 & 12: Ifaty

The next two days are at leisure to relax at Le Paradisier and enjoy the beach.

Various excursions can be arranged in and around Ifaty, such as Vezo village visits to learn more about the Vezo fishermen's way of life, and visits to Reniala Park, a small reserve home to two species of baobab, spiny bush and many reptiles.

Seasonal activities include whale-watching (July to September, when the whales calve and nurse their young off the Madagascan coast), and bird watching in the spiny forests.

Ifaty is the largest lagoon of the country and is protected by a large coral reef, making it the perfect environment for diving and snorkelling.

### Day 13: Ifaty to Tana

Late morning, transfer to Tulear airport to catch the afternoon flight to Antananarivo.

On arrival you will be met and transferred to the Relais des Plateaux for day use, prior to a late transfer to the airport for your international flight home.

We can arrange for an additional night in Tana at the end of your itinerary if your flight schedule requires it.



### Price Guide

*The cost of this itinerary is from **£2,860 per person**, based on twin/double share and subject to availability at the time of booking. For more information, or if you would like to enquire about a tailor-made holiday combining part or all of the above itinerary, please [contact us](#).*

#### Includes:

- Private transport in a 4WD with English-speaking driver-guide from Tana to Ifaty
- Twin/double accommodation
- Entrance fees and special guides for the visits to parks mentioned in the program
- Airport transfers
- Domestic flights (Tulear – Tana, incl. taxes)

#### Excludes:

- International flights
- All optional excursions
- Items of a personal nature
- Drinks with meals
- Visa fees
- Travel Insurance – please ask us for a quote