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Tour Notes

Wild Madagascar

Tour Duration – 23 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●●○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●●○ | Culture ●●●●○ | History ●●●●○ | Wildlife ●●●●○

Tour Pace

Busy

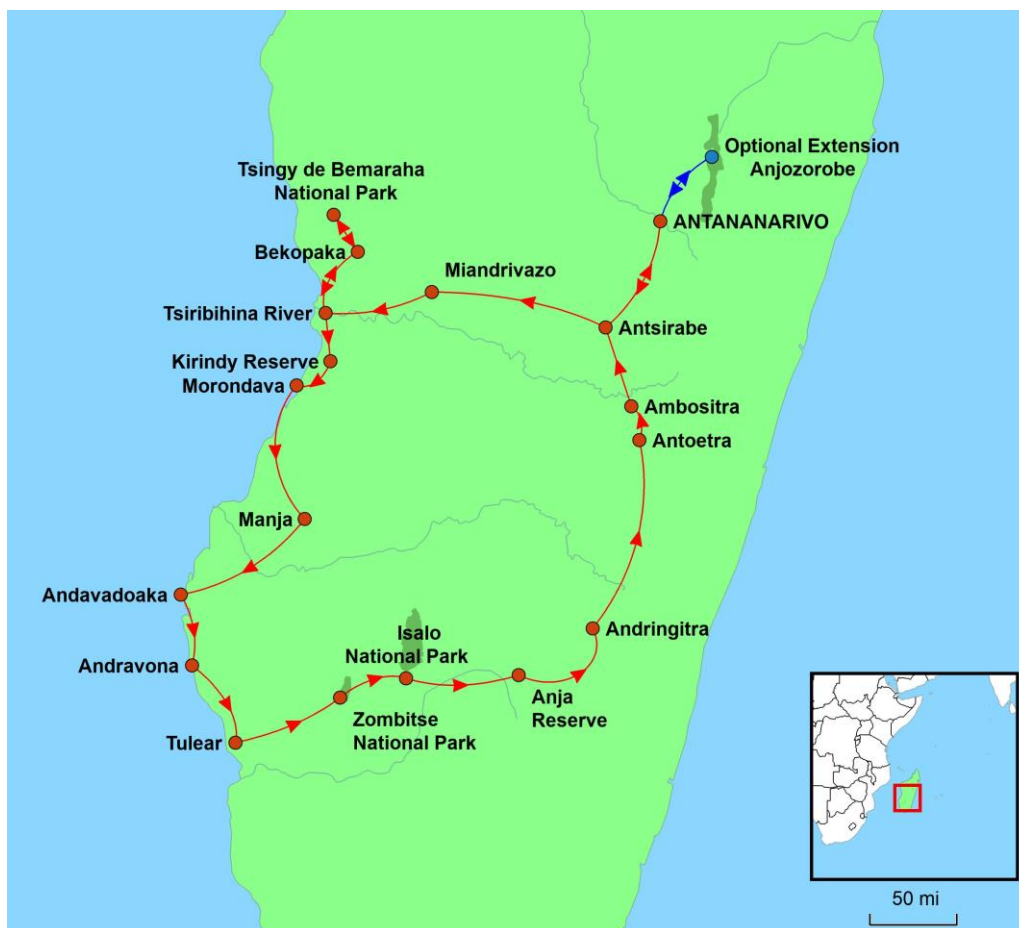
Tour Highlights

- ✓ See incredible endemic flora and fauna with many chances of seeing many lemur species
- ✓ Travel off the beaten track down the little visited Western flank of Madagascar
- ✓ Diverse landscapes from rainforest to semi desert in a rich array of National Parks and reserves
- ✓ Spend time relaxing by or nature-watching on the beautiful Mozambique Channel
- ✓ Hike in the spectacular landscapes of Andringitra National Park
- ✓ View the fantastical tsingy features of the national parks from one of the 'via ferrata' challenges
- ✓ Encounter the ways and customs of different tribes of Madagascar



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Tour Map



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Mixture of comfortable hotels and lodges with some basic guesthouses and some camping
- Included Meals:** Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary
- Group Size:** Maximum group size 12
- Start Point:** Antananarivo – you can arrive any time on day 1
- End Point:** Antananarivo
- Transport:** 4WD and minibuses, river boat, local ferries
- Country Visited:** Madagascar
- Optional Extension:** Pre or post tour to Anjozorobe Forest



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Wild Madagascar

The island of Madagascar occupies a unique place, both culturally and geographically, within Africa. Separated from the mainland millions of years ago, its fauna has developed very differently from the rest of the continent's wildlife, and it is home to countless species found nowhere else on earth. Its people are an intriguing mix of Malay and African ancestry, with complex patterns of beliefs and an unusual history. On this off the beaten track adventure we explore this enigmatic and alluring land. Our journey takes us West on an exciting navigation along the Tsiribihina River followed by a visit to Kirindy Reserve with its semi-dry western tropical forest, home to the "fossa". We then travel the coastal track from Morondava to Tulear with its stunning scenery of baobabs, thorny bushes, and magically pristine white sandy beaches, home to the Mikea, a primitive bee-hunting tribe that have very little contact with Westerners – without a doubt one of the cultural highlights of the tour. Heading inland again, another truly memorable high spot greets us: the little frequented Andringitra National Park where we hike along the spectacular Tsaranoro Valley. We then enter the culturally rich and diverse Central Highlands before the tour ends in the capital Antananarivo. The tour can then be extended with a visit to the Anjozorobe Forest corridor where we explore its delicate and stunning tropical rainforest, rich in unique wildlife: sundry species of lemur, including the beautiful Indri, chameleons, and a multitude of reptiles. Madagascar is unlike anywhere else on earth – join us to experience its diverse charms on a trip that will challenge what you thought you knew about Africa.

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not merely passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies, it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK: we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible, you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be advantageous to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

On the pre or post tour extension to Anjozorobe you will not have an accompanying guide. You will have the services of a local park/reserve guide.

Itinerary

Day 1: Antananarivo

Arrive in 'Tana'. On arrival, you will be met and our English-speaking guide who will provide your transfer to the hotel. Depending on your time of arrival, you may have time to explore the city. For those arriving late evening we use a hotel very close to the airport. Overnight Gassy Country House or similar.

Antananarivo

Antananarivo, locally known affectionately as 'Tana', is the capital and largest city in Madagascar. The name Antananarivo literally translates as 'the City of the Thousands', named after the thousand warriors of King Andrianjaka, who established Tana as the capital city of the Merina tribe at the end of the 16th century. The sacred city was largely chosen for its privileged location – being on high ground (1,370m) and surrounded by marsh made it easily defensible. By 1808, it had become the island's effective capital city, as the Merina established overlordship of the whole island. Tana has idiosyncratic French and Asian inspired architecture



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with winding cobblestone streets and staircases that lend it a medieval air. The city is built on three essential levels, making it hilly, but very compact to explore. The main street of Araben ny Fahaleovantena (Avenue de l'Independence) is a good orientation point with sundry shops and excellent restaurants. Other attractions include the colourful daily flower market beside tranquil Lake Anosy and the botanical and zoological gardens, where you can view the egg and 3m-tall skeleton of the extinct aepyornis, or elephant bird. The Rova (Queen's Palace) burned to the ground in 1996; currently being restored, its gardens and partially renovated King's House, baths and tombs are impressive and lend you a spectacular 360° vista of the capital. Antananarivo may not have too much in the way of conventional sightseeing, but if you enjoy walking around, watching local scenes and experiencing the laid-back atmosphere that is prevalent here, the city is fascinating – vibrant markets, decadent colonial buildings, deliciously stocked cafés (a must!) and many craft shops make it a great destination to delve into.

Day 2: Antananarivo - Antsirabe (Overall driving time – approx. 3-4 hours)

After an early breakfast, take a city tour of the capital, including a visit to the higher reaches of town affording great views all over Tana. After lunch drive to Antsirabe. You will notice changes on the features of the local people as Asian heritage becomes more prominent. We finish the day in Antsirabe, with its unusual Norwegian origins and home to Madagascar's brewing industry. Overnight Royal Palace or similar (BD)

Antsirabe

The unusual city of Antsirabe ("Place of Much Salt"), an elegant European-styled city, residing at 1500m above sea level and boasts the reputation as the centre of Madagascar's beer production. Founded by a Norwegian in 1856, it is the only Malagasy place which really feels and looks like a European municipality. Its 100,000 inhabitants enjoy a temperate climate and consequently fruits and vegetables which favour cooler condition are grown here. It lies on the slopes of the nation's second highest peak, Tsiafajavona, in the Ankaratra Mountains, and has nearby thermal springs, locally renowned for their healing properties. Known also as a city of handcrafts, it is characterised by its scatterings of artisan shops and mini-industries.

Day 3: Antsirabe to Miandrivazo (Overall driving time – approx. 5 hours)

This morning explore points of interest in Antsirabe and the surrounding villages. You may choose to visit some nearby craft shops, such as one of the Zebu horn workshops where you will marvel at the transformation of Zebu horn into decoration. After lunch, head west to Miandrivazo leaving the highlands behind. Descend through a landscape in which you leave the highlands behind. Continue through savannah to Miandrivazo, a fertile region for cotton, corn, manioc, beans, tobacco and rice. Overnight Princesse Tsiribihina or similar (BD)

Day 4: Miandrivazo – Cruising the Tsiribihina River – Overnight Camping

This morning transfer to Masiakampy where your boat will be waiting to navigate you down the Tsiribihina River. Spend the day relaxing on-board and taking in the stunning scenery, stopping at Sahambano village on the way. Arrive at camp in time for dinner by the river. Overnight camp. (BLD)

Cruising the Tsiribihina River

At 120km, the Tsiribihina River passes through a rich variety of flora and fauna: its arid shores give way sporadically to lush forests, whilst threading through gorges, bordered by dramatic sandbanks and dripping with birdlife. Indeed the fauna of the journey will keep you enthralled: watch out for lemur such as Coquerel's sifaka and chameleons in the trees, water turtles and Nile crocodiles alongside the bows of your vessel and Red-billed teal, White herons, and whistling ducks amidst the reeds at the side. Amidst the occasional bustle of local barges and pirogues, Madagascar fish eagles sometimes power down the waters and the dazzling iridescence of Madagascar kingfisher bring moments of exquisite excitement. The transport is a transformed barge with ample comfortable seating and relaxing areas for guests, a kitchen and an eating area. Your meals (at full board) are cooked in situ and the staff will also set up and break camp and lay out bedding and pillows for you each day. All you will be expected to do is relax and soak up the amazing landscape.



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Day 5: Gorge of Bemaraha – Overnight Camping

Continue the journey downstream today, with a good chance of seeing lemurs, crocodiles, bats and some amazing birdlife in the primary semi-dry forests that line the riverbanks. Once again this evening you camp and have dinner by the river. Overnight camp. (BLD)

Day 6: Coastal plain of Menabe – Tsimafana – Bekopaka

Depart early this morning and at the end of the Gorge of Tsiribihina cross the plain of Menabe characterised by rice fields on the banks of the river. Observe the Sakalava tribe who live close to the river. You then disembark from your boat and take an adventurous dirt track journey to Bekopaka, culminating in a crossing of the Manambolo River. Check into your bungalow-style hotel, perched above the Behamara National Park, with its swimming pool that boasts incomparable views of the immediate region. Overnight Hotel Olympe du Bemaraha or similar (BD)

Day 7: Tsingy de Bemaraha National Park

We spend today exploring the remarkable World Heritage Site of Tsingy de Bemaraha National Park, a bizarre landscape of eroded limestone pinnacles and one of the most scenic areas in all of Madagascar. We take the Grand Tsingy circuit where boardwalks and ladders between the pinnacles allow us to explore the area, replete with deep canyons and gorges and home to several species of lemur and birds. Overnight at Hotel Olympe de Bemaraha or similar (BD)

PLEASE NOTE: *Although the Grand Tsingy circuit is a highlight for most people, some people may find it challenging. There are two paths that can be taken – the Grand Tsingy and the Petit Tsingy. The Grand Tsingy path involves going through caves and some narrow canyons, and harnesses may be used for safety reasons. You also will ascend ladders attached to rocks to reach different levels. It is not rock climbing and people of a reasonable fitness should have no problem, but it is not advisable for those not comfortable with going up ladders or those who suffer from vertigo or feel uncomfortable with exposure to drops. Your guide will explain the difference between the paths so that you can choose the more suitable option.*

Tsingy de Bemaraha National Park

The Tsingy de Bemaraha National Park is an unmissable site for those traveling the west side of Madagascar. Designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1990, it comprises of 1575 km² dominated by the limestone which rises 400m above the valley floor at its highest point. The remoteness of the area meant that it wasn't until 1998 that the southern half was designated a National Park. Visitors come for a variety of reasons: first and foremost, it is a sight whose beauty is almost unfathomably varied, from a multitude of intricately eroded pinnacles (tsingy literally means "walking on tiptoes") and labyrinth of deep, impenetrable humid gorges to placid mangrove swamps and unsullied swathes of deciduous forest canopy – a veritable photographer's dream. Many people come for the exhilarating via ferrata tsingy treks, characterised by extraordinary feats of engineering to suspend walkways and, ladders and cables which thread their way through the karst spires, high above the forest floor. The two main routes – Petits and Grand Tsingy require patience and a decent head for heights but offer astounding visual rewards. Of equal draw is the wildlife: endemism here is reckoned to be at 80%! The dry western deciduous forest houses plants typical of these dry limestone areas, such as species of Aloe and Baobab Andasonia, as well as the red-flowered flamboyant tree, Delonix regia, which is so widely seen in the tropics. Nature lovers seek out the critically endangered stump-tailed chameleon, the 11 species of lemur on view, including Decken's sifaka, Fat-tailed dwarf lemur, Cleese's woolly lemur and the Sambirano lesser bamboo lemur. The bird list stands at over 100 species, including many ornithologists' most-prized Madagascan bird, the Madagascar fish eagle. Amazingly, the 45 reptile and amphibian species which are found here are all endemic.



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Day 8: Tsingy De Bemaraha National Park

A further day to explore this wonderful national park. You may wish to traverse whichever of the Grand Tsingy or Petit Tsingy circuits you did not experience yesterday and enjoy both routes' incredible vistas. Other walks – for photography, nature or bird-watching purposes are also possible; alternatively, you can relax by the pool at the hotel. Overnight at Hotel Olympe de Bemaraha or similar (BD)

Day 9: Bekopaka – Kirindy Reserve (Overall driving time – approx. 7 hours)

This morning we drive back through the wilderness to Kirindy Reserve. After arrival and check-in at Kirindy's bungalow accommodation in the forest, you will be guided on an hour's hike in Kirindy Reserve. At around 6pm, for those who wish, you will meet your guide again for a night walk to see the array of unusual night active animals, some of which are rarely seen elsewhere, such as Brown lemur, fossa, the giant jumping rat, frogs and insects. Overnight Relais du Kirindy (BD)

Kirindy Reserve

This privately managed reserve preserve 100 km² of some of the most threatened and exquisite habitat on the island: famous for the iconic baobab tree, the dry deciduous forest that remains is a mere 3% of its original extent. This makes the landscape especially rich in flora and fauna which seek a refuge here.

The reserve is home to 8 species of lemurs, most evident of which are the diurnal Common brown lemurs and the Verreaux's sifakas which abound in the high canopy. Kirindy also prides itself on being the island's best site for seeing the Fossa, the only predator for lemurs and the world's smallest primate, the Giant jumping rat, as well as dozens of amphibian and reptile species and 70 species of bird, including Madagascar crested ibis and several species of the endemic Vanga family (and no poisonous snakes!). The site has its present origins since the 1970s in sustainable logging which, evidenced by the abundance in wildlife, may well be the saving act for the remainder of the dry forest. Its success is best evidenced at night-time when nocturnal lemurs such as Grey mouse lemur, fat-tailed dwarf lemur and fork-marked lemur are relatively easily spotted and the rare White-breasted mesite emerge – a night's stay here is definitely the best way to experience the park's idiosyncrasies.

Lemurs

Lemurs are a unique group of primates found only on Madagascar and the Comoros Islands. There are fifty species of lemurs, seventeen of which are on the endangered species list. Lemurs are prosimians, or primitive primates. They are social animals with long limbs, flexible toes and fingers, and long noses. Habitat loss is the main threat to lemurs today, as native forests are cleared for farmland. How and when lemurs became separated from the monkey family is unclear. Although it was once thought that lemurs were on Madagascar when the island separated from Africa, recent advances have shown that Madagascar was separated from Africa by hundreds of kilometres before lemurs evolved. Accordingly, the ancestors of Madagascar's lemurs must have crossed over from Africa on floating vegetation early in primate evolution and become isolated from Africa. Once on Madagascar, the lemurs evolved into the different species. Then, about 2,000 years ago, the first human settlers arrived on Madagascar from the Malaysian-Indonesian area. By the time the Europeans who wrote about the natural history of the island reached Madagascar in the mid-1600s, 17 species of lemurs had become extinct.

Day 10: Kirindy Reserve – Morondava (Overall driving time – approx. 3 hours)

For early risers an opportunity to explore the reserve and the early morning represents the best time to try and see the elusive and shy Fossa, a predator for the lemurs in the forest. After breakfast and some time at leisure to relax you continue south to Morondava: your route will lead you through the incomparable "Allée or Avenue des Baobabs", a protected natural monument where the road is flanked by magnificent baobab trees, some of them calculated to be over 1000 years old, which tower above you on either side. You will hopefully be able to observe these majestic and ancient trees against a perfect sunset. Overnight Laguna Beach or similar (BD)



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Day 11: Morondava – Manja (160 km) (Overall driving time – approx. 6-8 hours)

After breakfast, enjoy a short visit to a fishing village close to Morondava and then drive for around 4 hours on a dirt track to reach Antsira for lunch. From here, your vehicle drives southwards towards Manja, ultimately via a private road owned by Kanto Hotel, our evening destination. This really feels like frontier-land, as the road snakes through arid landscapes of thorn, lush savannah and passes typical west Madagascar villages consisting of tiny wooden huts. The locals will greet you with warmth and genuine interest, and children love to run alongside the vehicles, as their mothers stride on, carrying unfeasibly heavy loads to and from local markets, atop their heads. Some of today's most memorable features are the water crossings as you ford your way across saline flats and through rivers, the most substantial of which is the Kabatomena. Along the way, watch out for chameleons and some of the many non-poisonous snakes of the island. Expect to arrive in Manja late afternoon. A former colonial hub, as evidenced by the exquisite, but faded grandeur of its more substantial buildings, nowadays, the locality is characterised by its fertility – corn, rice and beans all fill the region's fields, making Manja a small, but bustling market town. You stay in the simple Hotel Kanto, the only real option amidst such isolation, but a clean, comfortable place to shower and relax amidst lovely gardens where you will also partake of a lovely breakfast. Overnight Hotel Kanto. (BD)

PLEASE NOTE: Days 11 – 13 in particular are extremely off the beaten track and road conditions can be poor even by Madagascar standards; hence the stated driving times are very approximate since the road state continually changes. The going will be tough but do take pleasure in travelling through one of the very remotest parts of the back country of Madagascar.

Day 12: Manja – Andavadoaka (Overall driving time – approx. 6-8 hours)

Today's drive is immensely rewarding, and its length is easily forgotten as the landscape gives way to stunning scenery all round: you will be enthralled by the wonderful range and variety of the baobabs, from towering columns to squat, immensely-trunked pill boxes. The spiny forest with its distinctive bush is home to a host of natural wonders: 95 percent of plant species here are endemic and lemur, mongoose, sifaka and even the Madagascar radiated tortoise are all to be seen in the landscape, so it is well worth keeping an eye on the surroundings. For those keen on birding, several coua and vanga species are to be seen and Madagascar buzzards and Madagascar kestrels are regular companions in the skies above. The drive includes a ferry across the Mangoky River to reach the town of Bevoa and the crossing of two further rivers. The road then sweeps west towards the coast and you will stop on several occasions too before your arrival by the end of the afternoon at Andavadoaka's stunning coastal location. Drive across the coastal line through large dunes with great views of the Mozambique Channel as well baobab trees and spiny forest. Here you feel as if you've truly escaped time itself: centuries old traditional fishing outrigger-canoes ply their trade amongst the azure turtle and manta filled waters. Your hotel is comprised of a series of beautiful sea-front private bungalows where you can unwind in a veritable paradise. Overnight Olobe Lodge or similar (BD)

Day 13: Andavadoaka – Andravona (Overall Driving time – approx. 2 hours)

In the morning there will be ample time to imbibe the beauty of this unique landscape, a synthesis of natural wonders from the sapphire sea's surge and its obscure, hidden creeks to the magnificence of the spiny forest. After breakfast, visit the small picturesque fishing village of Andavadoaka. The much briefer next stage of your adventure initially takes us a mere 4km to the utterly photogenic baobab pond, where the stately arboreal guardians oversee waters which are a real draw to wildlife. Continuing your drive, you plunge through the coastal dunes, flanked by the dizzyingly bright ocean and the continuous spiny forest. The final 30km of sandy roads are a challenging pathway to Befandefa before we reach the idyllic charm of Andravona, one of the most beautiful lagoons in the country, and your home for the night, nestling in the alabaster dunes. Arrival here early afternoon again allows you some time to settle, unwind and simply enjoy the panorama of delightful sea, sands, lagoon and languid fishing village. Overnight Mikea Lodge or similar (BD)



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Day 14: Kirindy Mitea National Park or Andravona at leisure

Andravona's location on pristine sands, where the spiny forest and baobabs stretch as far as the shore makes it a photographer's dream and begs time for an artist's canvas to capture its carnival of colours. Whilst its visually stunning enchantments may be enough, the hotel also offers the opportunity to head into Mikea Forest to experience its cornucopia of natural wonders and also to spend valuable time with the last remaining members of the Mikea tribe, experiencing a little of their way of life, traditions and arts.

Another equally attractive opportunity in the afternoon is to enjoy the walk along to the Vezo fisherman's village, watch the enthralling spectacle of the return of the fishermen from the sea and see the explosion of joyous activity as the waiting women and children greet the daily catch. Alternatively, you may wish to simply relax on the shores or enjoy some watersports. Overnight Mikea Lodge or similar (BD)

Day 15: Andravona at leisure

Spend the day at leisure in this idyllic paradise. You may choose to simply relax before we embark on the next leg of our epic journey, or perhaps take an optional excursion such as a trip out to see magnificent migrating whales which migrate through the Mozambique Channel from June until September. Overnight Mikea Lodge or similar (BD)

Day 16: Andravona – Zombitse National Park – Isalo National Park (Overall driving time – approx. 8 hours)

After breakfast, we head south to Ifaty. The road follows the same synthesis of dazzling ocean to the right and dry dunes, baobab and scrub on the left. At Tuléar, you will move onto the luxury of Madagascar's premium highway, National Road 7! This stretches as far as the capital, but today your goal is Isalo. From there you take the National 7 which links Tuléar to the capital; you are aiming for Isalo, 4 hours' drive away. En route, the road is flanked by a multitude of magnificent colourful tombs of the Mahafaly, Masikoro and Antandroy tribes. A few kilometres ahead, in Andranomaintso, you pass through the plateaux of baobab Andansonina za, a species unique to Madagascar. The deforested lunar landscape which then emerges leads to the protected forest-island of Zombitse National Park, which hosts many birding wonders, perhaps the highlight of which is the terrestrial Appert's Greenbul, one of Madagascar's rarest endemics. Afterwards, the road leads through Ilakaka, the town at the centre of the burgeoning sapphire industry where you will have a stop. You will arrive in Isalo National Park late afternoon, where you check into the bungalows at Satrana Lodge which nestle against the rocky slopes and look across the beautiful Park. The Lodge has an excellent restaurant and fabulous swimming pool from which you may wish to enjoy one of nature's stunning sunsets. Overnight Satrana Lodge or similar (BD)

Isalo National Park

The Isalo National Park's 815 km square area was created in the 1960s and is comprised of the entire stretch of the Isalo Massif. A spectacular landscape, with its eroded sandstone dome, cut by deep canyons, it makes for the most breathtaking scenery and hence is the most visited national park in the country. Reminiscent of The Grand Canyon in the USA, its geological layers lend it the appearance of a relief map. The sandstone has been eroded into exotic shapes, pillars, towers, and is cut through by impressive gorges and canyons. Vegetation is concentrated in the sheltered canyon bottoms where streams still flow. These wooded areas dominated by the fire-resistant Tapia-tree, on which a Malagasy endemic silkworm feeds. On the cliffs and rocks are several endemic succulents including the elephant's foot and the localised endemic Isalo Aloe. The balance of nature here is intriguingly harmonious: plants have adapted perfectly to the harsh and dry climate of Isalo. Pachypodium, which grow in the rocks, have some of the succulent qualities of cacti, having specialist water-storing roots and trunks which ensures survival without water for many months. For animal lovers you may encounter ring-tailed and brown lemurs, many types lizard, and the exceptional jewelled chameleon: in all, Isalo proudly boasts 82 species of birds, 33 species of reptiles, 15 species of frogs and 14 species of mammals. The massif is also the place where the Bara tribe buries its dead, first in temporary graves, pausing to raise enough silver, then into definitive tombs. The tribe were essentially the last to lose



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their independence, resisting the national amalgamation under the Merina, and only falling into submission during the French colonisation. Traditionally there were a warlike group, whose young men only attained manhood by rustling cattle from neighbours!

PLEASE NOTE: *You will be walking for much of the day at Isalo so you should be prepared for this. The walk to the natural swimming pool is 3km both ways and the trail is climbing steps and heading upwards for about 1km, then flat for 1km and finally descending to the natural pool. Whilst walking along the flat part of the route you can climb the rocks to the view point. There are two areas you can climb to depending on how comfortable you are with heights. Your guide will explain these to you so you can decide the best viewing platform.*

Day 17: Isalo National Park

After breakfast, you will take a guided half day or full day excursion in the National Park of Isalo: one option is the trail to the top of the mountain, where a fantastic panoramic view of the eroded mountain is attained, with its kaleidoscope of rock shades, shifting from ochre to russet to blue-grey. At the end of the afternoon, you visit Fenetre de l'Isalo, a natural rock formation in the shape of an exquisitely airy window, where you experience the beautiful sunset framed magnificently between the rocks. Overnight Satrana Lodge or similar (BD)

Day 18: Isalo – Anja Reserve – Andringitra (Overall driving time – approx. 4 hours)

In the morning, you head on to the dizzying beauties of Andringitra National Park, experiencing a rich diversity of settings, landscapes, with great options for stops and activities on the way. The drive is through the huge savannah region of Plateaux de Horombe, with its vivid red soil, until arrival in Ihosy the capital of Bara tribes, the proudly independent shepherd tribe who herd the idiosyncratic Zebu cattle. The tribal culture is wound closely around the Zebu: to be allowed to marry a wife, a man has to steal several zebras as a badge of his strength and virility. The death of a Bara hunter is similarly marked by the sacrifice of the cattle. The next phase of the trip heads towards the spectacular mountain chain of Andringitra National Park: the landscape changes dramatically, with huge domes of granite searing out of the flower-carpeted grassy plains, with Varavarana ("The gateway to the South") and the imposing and locally sacred Bonnet de l'Evêque ("Bishop's Mitre") being especially dramatic examples. The latter is held locally to be a sacred spot, where few traditionally ventured. You pause for a visit to the thriving community-run park at Anja: this is a place for excellent, close-up encounters with many of the extremely tame 300 ring-tailed lemurs; beyond this, a local trek or hike up to the seemingly unassailable cliff tomb. Beyond the lemur, reptiles and insects here include the idiosyncratic trio of Barbour's day gecko, Dangalia lizard and planthoppers, as well as beautiful species of bird such as Grey-headed lovebird and Souimanga sunbird. The income from your visit will go towards the salaries of teachers in the local school. From here, transfer to 4WD: your route heads down an exhilarating dirt track for around 35 km through some of the most spectacular views that Madagascar has to offer, until you reach your destination in the heart of the Tsaranoro Valley, close to the gates of the National Park. Overnight Camp Catta (BD)

Andringitra National Park

The valley below Andringitra National Park, dotted with mango trees and abundant in zebu pasture, gives way to the majestic granite outcrops of the National Park itself. Since the 1920s, the 311 km² of inaccessible wilderness has been protected and it still manages to preserve a blend of rainforest, montane forest and high-altitude vegetation for the few visitors to tread so far off the usual RN7 tourist routes. Historically, it is held as a sacred place by the Bara tribe, being a place of ritualised burial and it was here that acts of mass suicide took place when the Merina tribe were seeking to force dominion over the whole island. The climate here can be varied, so warm-weather gear may sometimes need supplementing with waterproofs and, at nights, thermals and fleeces!



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The fauna here draws keen naturalists, offering 108 species of recorded birds, including Pollen's vanga and the Madagascar blue pigeon, 34 types of reptile, an astonishing 55 frog species, 55 different types of mammal and an impressive 13 lemur species. The Ring-tailed lemurs of Andringitra which populate the valley are distinct from those you might have spotted elsewhere, having adapted their colour, size and fur to the empty rocky environment in which they live. The few visitors who do make it as far as Andringitra are drawn by the mountain and so the Park offers a great range of treks, even as far as the summit of Pic Boby, the highest accessible peak in Madagascar.

Day 19: Andringitra National Park - Tsaranoro Valley

Access to Andringitra and the Tsaranoro Valley will involve heading down the tracks in a 4x4 and before taking in some of the abundant highlights of these exceptional environs on foot. The Tsaranoro Valley boasts a hotter, drier climate and is accessible all year round. Trekking opportunities abound, from low-level to ambitious mountainous routes. At every turn, photography and indeed painting opportunities offer themselves in the guise of glorious vistas. Flora and fauna beg your attention too, from exotic aloes and cacti to splendid birds, mammals, amphibians and of course, lemurs – the Ring-tailed species is particularly abundant here. The walk is also an opportunity to meet the cattle herding Bara tribe and the Betsileo, who mainly live on rice cultivation. Return to the camp after the walk. Overnight Camp Catta (BD)

Day 20: Andringitra – Ambositra

Antoetra (Overall driving time – approx. 6-7 hours)

This morning you return to the route National 7, and then continue the rugged climb up to Ambalavao; Wednesday is a big zebu market in Ambalavao so it is a good opportunity to experience the local atmosphere. There is also time to visit the Antemoro paper factory in the town. Since this area is known for grape plantations, a visit to one of the local wine factories is a must. From here, you head on to Fianarantsoa the capital of Betsileo tribes. Locally known as “the Gate to the South”, Fianarantsoa is the capital of the Betsileo tribes. A very catholic city, this is the seat of the Jesuits and boasts arguably Madagascar's finest university. The upper old city and market are well worth investigation: the latter is a good opportunity to pick up locally produced tea and bottles of the celebrated Lazan'i Betsileo wine, grown on the surrounding slopes. Taking the road on from here, your route gradually bids farewell to the rainshadow of the south-west and fringes the outliers of the lush rainforest belt. You continue to Ambositra. Overnight Artisan Hotel or similar (BD)

Day 21: Antoetra

15 km of rough track from Ivato, your route today delves deep into the heart of a very different landscape: Antoetra, capital of the Zafimaniry tribe, is the starting point an intriguing hiking opportunity to discover the Zafimaniry world. Antoetra is the only vehicle-accessible village amongst the set of 17 protected Zafimaniry tribal villages, a sub division of the much larger Betsileo tribe. The Zafimaniry are essentially a forest-based culture and make their living from a model of sustainable forest exploitation. They are masters of wood carving and their wooden huts comprise of exquisitely carved windows frames and doors, indeed virtually every wooden surface displays elaborate ornamentation. The tribe is the sole remaining people to sustain Madagascar's unique woodcraft culture, previously widespread over the whole island. Their art is classified as a world heritage culture by UNESCO. You will spend the day with these welcoming and fascinating people, as well as exploring the inaccessible highland region they inhabit. Overnight Artisan Hotel or similar (BD)

Day 22: Ambositra – Antananarivo (Overall driving time – approx. 5-6 hours)

Today's drive begins early and emerges from the rural escape of your stay in Ambalandingana, onto the Ambositra road, National Route 7. Your drive plunges through the highlands, where the N7 route takes you across the 'hauts plateaux', with its spectacular eroded hole-features called lavaka, a journey that once took 3 days on foot, but now enjoys the best road surfaces on the island. The landscape is reminiscent of the far-



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east with its paddy fields and green landscapes covered with patchworks of vegetable and fruit plantations. After a brief stop in Ambositra, next on the route is the brewing-capital city of Antsirabe. In the afternoon, you head on to Tana, the final destination of this sensational tour. Overnight Gassy Country House, or similar (BD)

Day 23: Departure from Madagascar

Time at leisure until your transfer to the airport and your onward flight. Please note optional excursions are possible for those with late flights. Day use available at Gassy Country House until 6pm for clients travelling on late night Air France flight. (B)

Optional post-tour extension – Anjozorobe Forest Corridor 3 days 2 nights

Pre-tour Day 23 – Antananarivo – Anjozorobe

This is Day 23 (last day) of the main tour. Depart after breakfast and our first stop is the Royal Hill of Ambohimanga (UNESCO), a significant symbol to the culture and people of Madagascar. We then journey to Anjozorobe Forest Corridor where you can relax or take walks in the surrounds of the beautiful forest. Overnight Saha Forest Camp (BLD)

Ambohimanga (UNESCO)

The Royal Hill of Ambohimanga consists of a royal city and burial site, and an ensemble of sacred places. It is associated with strong feelings of national identity, and has maintained its spiritual and sacred character both in ritual practice and the popular imagination for the past 500 years. It remains a place of worship to which pilgrims come from Madagascar and elsewhere.

Anjozorobe Forest Corridor and Saha Forest Camp

Anjozorobe is home to one of the last large and unfragmented remnants of the central highland's natural ecosystems. Two types of forest are present: high altitude humid forest (over 1500 m) and mountain humid forest (800 - 1500 m). The corridor is still of sufficient size and integrity to guard safe populations of plant and animal life. Anjozorobe is the richest known forest highland sites for biodiversity of flora and fauna. Anjozorobe is somewhat of a hidden gem and despite its beautiful forest and biodiversity receives relatively few visitors compared to more famous parks in Madagascar. We stay at the beautiful Saha Forest Camp which offers a fabulous nature experience. Run by the NGO Fanamby and nestled in the heart of a humid and tropical forest, the structure is composed of 10 elegant bungalows. Equipped with private bathroom with hot water and mobile heating in winter, each bungalow has a large balcony opening to a lush green landscape. The restaurant and its raised balcony is an excellent place to enjoy the surroundings with a book or a pair of binoculars to observe the abundant birdlife. This is a great way to start your trip to Madagascar.

Pre-tour Day 24 – Anjozorobe

A full day to relax in the surrounds of the beautiful forest of Anjozorobe. There will also be the opportunity to take walks in the forest with a local guide to get your first taste of some of the magnificent flora and fauna of Madagascar. The forest has an abundance of plant and animal life. It may be possible for you to spot the beautiful Indri Lemur as well as other flora and fauna. Overnight Saha Forest Camp (BLD)

Pre-tour Day 25 – Anjozorobe – Antananarivo – Departure from Madagascar

After an optional early morning walk in the forest the rest of the morning is at leisure before returning to Antananarivo and transfer in due time for your onward flight. Day use available at Gassy Country House until 6pm for clients travelling on late night Air France flight. (B)



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Tour inclusions/exclusions

Inclusions:

Arrival and departure airport transfers
All accommodation
Services of English-speaking guides and special local park guides
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

Excluded:

International flights
Travel Insurance
Visa
Drinks
Optional local tipping kitty collected on arrival between 55-75 euro (or the equivalent in GBP)
Tip for main tour guide (discretionary)
Items of a personal nature

Important Information

Foreign Government Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At present there are no warnings against travel to Madagascar to areas that we travel to. Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or would like to know in detail what measures are being taken to ensure visits remain trouble free and without incident.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Accommodation and Meals

Accommodation Rating

This tour is a mixture of comfortable mid-range hotels/lodges, some more basic hotels and some nights spent camping. Details of the camping can be found in the itinerary.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

Food & Drink

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.



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Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

In general the costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more. The costs below are indicative to eating at the hotel restaurants and range depending on number of courses. Please note that Satrana Lodge in Isalo is more expensive than the other hotels.

Lunch £5- £10 excluding drinks

Dinner £5- £13 excluding drinks

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Bottle of Beer £1

Bottle of mineral water £0.50 – £0.75

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Accordingly, a tipping kitty is organised on arrival which covers day to day tips incurred whilst on tour. This includes tips at restaurants and hotels. It also includes tips for drivers and local guides in the national parks. Please budget Eur 75 to 100 depending on the size of the group. This will be collected in euros or pounds cash by your guide at the start of the tour who will then be responsible for tipping throughout your trip.

The kitty does not cover tips for your Tour Guide. At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Guide in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: Madagascar's larger cities are equipped with ATMs but they can be unreliable. We recommend you get your Ariary in Tana or at the airport.

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Cards are not widely accepted as Madagascar is generally a cash economy, but those places that do accept them generally only take Visa

Local Currency: Ariary

Recommended Currency for Exchange: Euros, US Dollars

Where to Exchange: Tana Airport or Gassy Country House. Your guide will advise you. Please note that the exchange counters at the airport will be available to change money for all arriving flights.



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Joining your Tour

Flight Information

Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a free airport transfer, both on arrival and departure. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance, the cost of which is not included in the price of the tour. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country.

Visa Information

At the time of writing British, US and Australian nationals require a visa for a tourist visit to Madagascar. For further details please visit the applicable website shown below;

British Nationals - www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

US Nationals - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>

Australian Nationals - www.smartraveller.gov.au/

Other nationals should check the latest requirements with the authorities in their home country, or with the destination's nearest embassy or consulate.

Should you require any documentation to support a visa application, such as a letter of invitation, upon request this will be provided by Undiscovered Destinations after receipt of your balance payment.

As it is the travellers' responsibility to ensure that they meet all entry requirements it is essential that you check the rules and any other conditions at the time of booking and again when making your balance payment. In addition, we would strongly advise that you make a final check around two weeks before your arrival. This is important as requirements can change at short notice. Undiscovered Destinations, when possible, will provide guidance about entry rules, but in the first instance please contact the relevant authorities, including the applicable embassy or consulate for assistance.

When you arrive at Tana, do not join the queue for immigration, instead pass through the barrier and head to the visa counter located at the right-hand side of the arrivals hall where you can obtain your visa. You then continue to the police desk and then to baggage reclaim area.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to the UK. We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities.



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In addition, certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

As with travel to most parts of Africa, we strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic around 6-8 weeks before departure for up-to-date information, advice and the necessary vaccinations. For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Typhoid. We also recommend that you seek advice about malaria prophylactics.

Yellow Fever

Yellow Fever vaccination is required for travellers arriving from countries with risk of yellow fever transmission. If you can't produce a certificate, you will have to visit the Institut Pasteur in Antananarivo for vaccination.

Preparing for your tour

Climate

Madagascar, being a large country, has many different climatic variations but it is generally felt that the best time to visit is between April and November, which are the winter months. The temperature on the island is usually pleasant, ranging from the low twenties to the low thirties (Celsius). Please note that during the winter months of June to August it can be cool/cold at night with temperatures dropping into single figures Celsius. In general it is hotter in the west and south-west of the country whilst Antananarivo and the Central Highlands tend to be cooler.

Clothing

Madagascar is quite warm and so light clothes are generally a good idea. You should ensure that you bring warmer clothes for any cool evenings. When walking in the forest it is advisable to wear long trousers and sleeves. Madagascar has reasonably relaxed attitudes towards dress and shorts are acceptable throughout much of the country. You should bring a raincoat as although our tours run in the dry season, it can still rain in the forests, particularly Ranomafana, as well as a hat to protect yourself from the strong sun.

Equipment

Suncream/sunblock is a must. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have. Please bring a torch/head-torch as electricity outage can occur from time to time and also to assist with walking around hotel/lodges at night. If you use walking poles you may wish to bring them for walks in the national parks.

Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable walking shoes/boots with closed toes and ankle support are recommended, as well as a pair of sandals for general travelling. In general when walking you will be sticking to trails/paths but there may be times when you will leave the main footpaths in the National Parks to see the wildlife which is when good grip is particularly necessary.



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Road Conditions

Road conditions on much of the Wild Madagascar tour, especially after rainfall are challenging. Our drivers are highly skilled but please be patient if the vehicle gets stuck or experiences a puncture. Where conditions dictate we will be using the appropriate vehicles but you should be prepared for challenging road conditions. Approximate daily driving times are given in the best of faith but in Madagascar it is very difficult to predict with any accuracy so please be prepared at times for journey times to differ and perhaps be longer.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large suitcase/rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electrical supply is 220V/50 Hz and plugs have two round pins like most European countries.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated 25 November 2022.

