The Best of Madagascar

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1/2	Depart London / Arrive Tana
Day 3	Antsirabe.
Day 4/5	Ranomafana National Park.
Day 6/7	Isalo National Park.
Day 8/9	Ifaty.
Day 10	Tana.
Day 11/13	Mahajanga, Ankarafantsika National Park
Day 14	Tana.
Day 15/17	Tolagnaro, Berenty Private Reserve.
Day 18	Tana.
Day 19/21	Andasibe-Mantadia National Park.
Day 22	Tana.
Day 23/24	Depart Tana / Arrive London







From top: Verreaux's Sifaka (Paul Stanbury), Long-tailed Ground-Roller (Stephen Woodham), Ring-tailed lemur (Aniket Sardana)

Departs
October / November

Focus
Birds, mammals and general natural history

Grading
B/C. Moderate to difficult day and night walks

Dates and Prices
See website (tour code MDG01) or current brochure

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Introduction

Madagascar lies off the coast of east Africa, across the Mozambique Channel, and straddles the Tropic of Capricorn. Separated from the African mainland for some 165 million years, the island has developed in its own ecological niche and today possesses a unique and extremely diverse natural history. Over 80% of its plants, 40% of its birds and virtually all of the mammals, reptiles and amphibians occur nowhere else in the world. It harbours 34 known species of chameleon (whereas Africa has only nine!), over 100 lemurs (primates unique to Madagascar) and seven baobabs (Africa has only one). Even now, new species are still being discovered as biological survey work continues.



Lowland Streaked Tenrec (Oliver Smart)

Its exceptional biodiversity and the disturbingly fast pace of environmental destruction make Madagascar a world conservation priority. Fortunately, Madagascar enjoys an extensive network of protected areas, most of which are open to visitors. Park fees go towards maintaining reserves, with some economic benefits to local people ensuring that Madagascar's tourist industry provides a good incentive to conserve its valuable ecology. Madagascar's natural history has been likened to a string of pearls. Much of the central region has been transformed by man into barren grasslands with the loss of much of the original wildlife, which is now mostly confined to outlying sites - the 'pearls'. The aim of the tour is to give as broad an experience as possible of Madagascar's natural history in all the main habitat types, but to achieve this we must cover considerable distances by mixing road travel with internal flights. This will give us the opportunity to view the country itself and to gain access to a variety of different sites and a wide range of Madagascar's varied fauna and flora.

Itinerary

NB. This itinerary is based on Air Madagascar's current internal flight schedule. Should they change their flight timings, or days of travel, prior to departure, we may need to amend our itinerary accordingly. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Days 1 – 2 Antananarivo

We depart Heathrow this evening on an overnight flight to Tana via Addis Ababa (please see section below regarding flight connections). We then connect with a mid-morning flight to Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, arriving in the early afternoon. On arriving at Madagascar's international airport we will purchase our visas, clear immigration and customs and transfer to a comfortable

hotel, our base for the first night of the tour. This afternoon, depending on our flight arrival time, there should be the opportunity to enjoy an excursion to a nearby wildlife spot in Tana.

Day 3 Antsirabe

This morning we will travel the short distance to Parc Tsarasaotra, an oasis for birdlife in the urban sprawl. It is a RAMSAR site, the smallest in the world in fact, but it is often overlooked by tourists and locals alike, meaning we are likely to have the place to ourselves. The lake here is filled with hundreds of Red-billed Teal and White-faced Whistling Duck paddling across the surface, and the vegetation of the island in the middle bends under the large numbers of various heron and egret species that seek refuge here. Butterflies abound and geckos and chameleons can be found in the foliage of the surrounding shrubs and trees.

We will leave then leave Tana and start our journey with a drive south to the town of Antsirabe, our stepping stone for Ranomafana National Park. It is a 5-hour drive along Route Nationale 7 through the Central Highlands of the Hauts Plateaux to Antsirabe (approximately 170 kilometres). Though little endemic vegetation remains, we can enjoy watching the scenery and pace of local life, whilst being on the lookout for waterbirds such as the Hamerkop, Dimorphic Egret, Green-backed Heron and the beautiful Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher. Though the word Antsirabe actually means 'the place of much salt', the town was originally founded here due to the appealing cool climate and the presence of a hot spring. We overnight at a comfortable hotel.

Day 4 Drive to Ranomafana National Park

Today we must complete the long drive to the Ranomafana National Park. Today's drive is longer (around 11-12 hours), but rewarding nevertheless, as we continue our journey through the Hauts Plateau and then start to enter the East Coast region and our first native rainforest. The areas immediately south of Antsirabe are very fertile and the steep slopes are neatly terraced and irrigated, and with rice shoots at different stages of maturation, provide an intricate patchwork of vivid greens.

Further along we will pass through the attractive town of Ambositra (pronounced 'Amb-oost') and then make a short stop at a small fragment of native rainforest and marsh just to the south of the town which, on occasion, holds Madagascar Snipe. Shortly after the village of Ambohimahasoa we turn west along the Route Nationale 25 which leads us to the village of Ranomafana. A spectacular view south over the Namorona waterfalls signals our arrival at the Ranomafana National Park where we have two nights at a basic, but comfortable, ecolodge.

Although night walks are no longer permitted within the national park itself, we can still walk the forest-lined roads after dark in search of some of the nocturnal inhabitants of Ranomafana. Brown (Rufous) Mouse Lemurs, one of the smallest of all the lemurs, are possible along with a variety of chameleons, frogs and perhaps one of the *Uroplatus* leaf-tailed geckos.

Day 5 Ranomafana National Park

Today will be another long but rewarding day at Ranomafana National Park to discover the bewildering diversity of endemic plant and animal life it protects. We will walk into the forest where we hope to see a wide variety of lemur species including the attractive Milne-Edwards Sifaka, plus Red Bellied Lemur, Red-fronted Brown Lemur, Greater Bamboo Lemur, Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur, and the rare Golden Bamboo Lemur (discovered in 1986 and only known from Ranomafana and one other site!)

Ranomafana is also one of Madagascar's birdwatching hotspots and in the forest we will look out for rare and elusive species such as Brown Mesite, Madagascar WoodRail, Pollen's Vanga, Crossley's Babbler (Vanga), Pitta-like Ground Roller, Velvet Asity, White-Throated Oxylabes, Red-Fronted Coua, Grey-Crowned Tetraka and many other endemics. The forests here are dense, the trails are steep and narrow and many of the birds are extremely elusive so a great deal of patience is required when searching out these avian specialties. We will be accompanied by one of the park's top wildlife guides, however, so such effort and patience rarely goes unrewarded! We will also find time to visit the nearby Vohiparara site which is marshier and where we may find Brown and Grey Emutail, Rufous-headed Ground Roller and Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity.



Giraffe-necked Weevil (Oliver Smart)

During our walks we will also be on the lookout for a wealth of other spectacular and bizarre wildlife to be found in these lush forests. With luck these may include the beautiful Comet Moth, one of the largest in the world, *Phelsuma* Day Geckos and the bizarre Giraffe-necked Weevil.

Day 6 Drive to Isalo National Park via Anja

We have another long journey today of approximately 11-12 hours. From Ranomafana we drive back along the bumpy Route Nationale 25 onto the Route Nationale 7 and then head south once more through the highlands. We hope to make a brief stop at the regional capital of Fianarantsoa, Madagascar's second city and centre of education (Fianarantsoa means "place of good learning"). From there our journey takes us through some of Madagascar's most beautiful scenery, although since very little natural vegetation remains the wildlife interest along this stretch is limited. The scenery changes from the green rice fields of the highlands to cast grass savannah of the western region. E n route we will stop a small community reserve known as Anja; set in a magnificent scenery of granitic mountains known as 'inselbergs'. Anja was protected, and is now run, by the local community and is a wonderful example of local people helping to protect their local wildlife. The reserve protects several troops of very confiding Ring-tailed Lemurs and provides an interesting

contrast to the Ring-tails you will see later at Berenty. There are also plenty of birds and reptiles to look for and our first opportunity to look for another bizarre Malagasy inhabitant, the wonderful pink Flatid Leaf-Bug.



Ring-tailed Lemurs at Anja (Ben Chapple)

South of Ambalavao the scenery becomes even more imposing as the road passes through vast grassy plains flanked by more huge domes of granite, the most striking of which has twin towers of rock called the 'Door to the South' (Varavarana Ny Atsimo). Past Ihosy (pronounced "Ee-oosh") we climb onto the Horombe Plateau, a barren treeless area dominated by coarse grasses and dotted with hundreds of red termite hills. The endless grasslands here are home to Madagascar Bush Lark, Pied Crows, Yellow-billed Kites, but little else, although they are the best place to scan the horizons for the localised Reunion Harrier. We aim to arrive at Isalo National Park around dusk where we check into a luxurious lodge, our base for the next 2 nights.

Day 7 Isalo National Park

The Isalo massif is a huge area of Jurassic sandstone that has been calved by the wind and rain into spectacular gorges and gullies. We will start our day with an early morning bird walk around the lodge grounds in search of such species as Benson's Rock Thrush (now considered the same species as Forest Rock Thrush) Madagascar Bee-eater, Broad-billed Roller, Madagascar Hoopoe, Namaqua Dove, Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher and Grey-headed Lovebird. We will then collect our park guide and drive into the park itself. We are likely to undertake two walks today, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. There are a variety of interesting walks to choose from, such as the Piscine Naturelle, which leads to a refreshing dip in a natural freshwater spring, and the Canyon des Makis, at the entrance of which there is often a troop of Verreaux's Sifaka. The grasslands bordering the massif are full of Madagascar Larks and Madagascar Cisticola and we will also look out for be some of the plant life endemic to this special biotype including the strange Elephant's Foot (*Pachypodium roselatum*) and the Isalo Aloe. It is likely to be very hot here so we will be return to the lodge for a drink and siesta in the heat of the early afternoon.



Benson's Rock Thrush (Cathy Harlow)

Day 8 Drive to Ifaty via Zombitse National Park

Today is a very early start as we will complete our drive to the coast. Initially, our journey takes us past more spectacular rock formations at the southern edge of the Isalo massif before emerging into a flat grassy plateau once dominated by fire resistant palms. However, this area has been quite recently deforested with the discovery of sapphires. Almost overnight the small village of Ilakaka swelled from a population of only 200 people to over 20,000 people. Crime is rife and with no provision for fuel, the miners have all but cleared-felled the trees. It is an interesting but disturbing sight!


Zombitse Sportif Lemur (Andy Smith)

Out of the reach of Ilakaka lies an area of dry western transition forest called Zombitse. After years of uncontrolled deforestation the forest has now been declared a National Park and is closely monitored by the Worldwide Fund for Nature. The park protects several lemur species including Verreaux's Sifaka, Ring-tailed Lemur and Hubbard's Sportive Lemur. Groups are occasionally fortunate enough to see a pair of Fosa (Madagascar's largest carnivore) mating in a tree; a very rare and privileged sight indeed. We are also assured of some interesting bird life including the very localised Appert's Tetraka, which is only found in this region, plus Red-tailed Vanga, Chabert's Vanga, Giant Coua, Coquerel's Coua, Madagascar Cuckoo Roller, Spectacled and Long-billed Tetrakas and Lesser Vasa Parrot.

From Zombitse it is another 5 hour drive before we arrive at the regional capital of Toliara. From here, we drive another 28 kilometres north to the beach and spiny forest of Ifaty where we overnight at a comfortable beachfront hotel.

Day 9 Ifaty

The region of spiny forest around the Firenana River is home to two of Madagascar's most attractive and localised birds, the stunning Long-tailed Ground Roller and the Sub-desert Mesite whose defence mechanism is to freeze motionless on a branch. This morning we will take a dawn birdwatching walk in an effort to find these birds along with Banded Kestrel, Archibold's Newtonia, Thamnornis Warbler, Lafresnaye's Vanga, Hook-billed Vanga, Chabert's Vanga, Sickle-Billed Vanga, Crested Coua and Running Coua.

Walking through spiny forest is a fascinating experience and an undoubted highlight for many. The forest here is a botanical treasure house with 92% of spiny forest species endemic to Madagascar. The most striking of these are the strange spiny *Didieraceae* (Octopus Trees) whose trunks can grow to up to 10 metres tall and curve to grow into the prevailing southerly wind. The forest also holds many fine examples of the *Adansonia za* Baobab, Bottle Baobabs, aloes, kalanchoe and *Pachypodium lanerii*.


Sub-desert Mesite (Paul Stanbury)

It will have been a tiring week up to this point, so this afternoon you may choose to relax on the beach, in the hotel or swim in the sea. As the tide retreats the beach in front of the hotel attracts various wading birds including Whimbrel, Sanderling, Curlew Sandpiper, Grey Plover, Turnstone, White-fronted Plover and occasionally the rare and endemic Madagascar Plover. The hotel can also arrange snorkelling excursions to the nearby reef (not included in the tour cost and payable locally).

Day 10 Ifaty, fly Tana

We have another morning to explore the spiny forest habitat, before we return to Toliara to catch our afternoon flight to Tana, where we overnight.

Days 11 – 13 Ankarafantsika NP & Ampijoroa

This morning we will return to Tana Airport to catch a flight to Mahajanga on the islands' north-western coastline. From there we will drive for approximately two and a half hours to the dry western forest reserve of Ampijoroa Forestry Station, part of the larger Ankarafantsika National Park. This reserve protects the Coquerel's Sifaka, a beautiful silky-white and chestnut lemur which frequently uses a tree right beside the car park to sleep. Night walks are particularly rewarding here as the density of nocturnal lemurs is high. Species to look out for include Mongoose Lemur, Western Woolly Lemur, Milne-Edward's Sportive Lemur, Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur, Grey Mouse Lemur and the recently discovered (1998) Golden-brown Mouse Lemur; indeed Ankarafantsika is the only place in the world to see this rare primate.

Our visit will also give us a chance to see a wide variety of birds such as the rare Van Dams Vanga, Schlegels Asity and White-breasted Mesite. Other species include Madagascar Crested Ibis, Coquerel's, Red-capped and Crested Couas, Sickle-billed Vanga, Madagascar Green Pigeon, Greater Vasa Parrot, Sakalava Weaver, Madagascar Jacana, African Open-billed Stork and Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher. A nearby lake has a population of Nile crocodile and often a nesting pair of the critically endangered Madagascar Fish Eagle. Ampijoroa is also famous for the Jersey Trust conservation project for


Mongoose Lemur (Quentin Bloxam)

the Ploughshare Tortoise and, more generally, is one of the best areas on Madagascar for reptiles. Species to look out for include Rhinoceros Chameleon, Stump-tailed Chameleon, Madagascar Tree Boa and Giant Hog-nosed Snake.

For a stay here we aim to stay in the national park accommodation, which consists of a series of basic chalets (with bedding provided). Reservations here are, however, notoriously unreliable, though we do make our bookings a very long way in advance! In the unlikely event that we are unable to secure enough chalets for the entire group, however, it is possible that some of the party may have to camp. If this is the case, we will provide good quality tents with mattresses and bedding, and will alert you in your final joining instructions prior to travel.

Please also note that it will be very hot during the day at Ampijoroa. This will be the hottest location we will visit on the tour and so dawn starts will be the norm.

Please note: We plan to spend 3 nights in this area, two at Ankarafantsika and one in Mahajanga. Which of these nights we spend in Mahajanga will depend on various factors including Air Madagascar's internal flight schedule which is never finalised until a few weeks before the tour.

Day 14 Fly Tana

The plan for today will depend on flight schedules, but we will continue to enjoy the birds, lemurs and other wildlife of Ampijoroa before returning to Mahajanga for an afternoon flight back to Tana, where we stay for 1 night in a comfortable hotel.

Days 15 – 17 Berenty & Tolagnaro



Giant Coua (Alistair Marsh)

On Day 15 we take a flight from Tana to the town of Tolagnaro (formally known as Fort Dauphin), located on Madagascar's south-eastern tip. Depending on the Air Madagascar timetable we may drive directly to Berenty or spend our first night at a comfortable hotel in Tolagnaro. The journey to the private Berenty Reserve takes around 3 hours. The scenery is varied and dramatic from the cultivated paddies and fields around Tolagnaro to the transitional and Spiny Forests of Andohahela National Park. As we near Berenty the landscape flattens out and we will start to pass through the endless tracks of Sisal, a crop which has blighted this area of Madagascar and led to the destruction of so much of the native habitat.

We will spend 2 nights at the comfortable chalets at Berenty, plenty of time to enjoy the lemurs and birds of this small, but well-known reserve. The reserve belongs to Jean D'Heaulme, whose

father established sisal plantations in the region in the 1930's. Some small pockets of spiny desert and gallery forest were saved from plantation, and the gallery forest harbours dense populations of Ring-tailed Lemurs, Verreaux's Sifakas and the (introduced) Red-fronted Brown Lemur. It is also good for birds and we hope to see to see such species as Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher, Sickle-billed and White-headed Vangas, Giant Coua, Crested Coua, Broad-billed Roller, Souimanga Sunbird and many others. But above all the joy of Berenty is observing the troops of Ring-tailed Lemurs either high in the tamarind trees or as they move along the ground. At this time of year the females will be carrying young on their backs and during breakfast we may well get to see the celebrated 'dancing lemurs', the sifakas of Berenty which untypically come down to the ground to cross in crab-wise hops between the trees.

As well as lemurs, Berenty protects a wide range of other animals. We should find Oustalet's Chameleon and Jewel Chameleon and, if fortunate, the large Madagascar Ground Boa. The reserve also has a protected area for Radiated and Spider tortoises confiscated from smugglers and kept before being returned to the wild.

Please note: We plan to spend 3 nights on the southern tip of Madagascar, two at Berenty and one in Tolagnaro. Which of these nights we spend in Tolagnaro will depend on various factors including Air Madagascar's internal flight schedule which is never finalised until a few weeks before the tour.

Day 18 Fly Tana

Depending on the time of our flight, we may have the opportunity this morning to catch up on anything missed so far in the Tolagnaro region. We may, therefore, opt for a trip to the headland in search of Humpback Whales and seabirds or a visit to a nearby area of transitional forest. We will then make our way back to the airport in time to catch our internal flight back to Tana for one night back in the capital.

Day 19 Andasibe

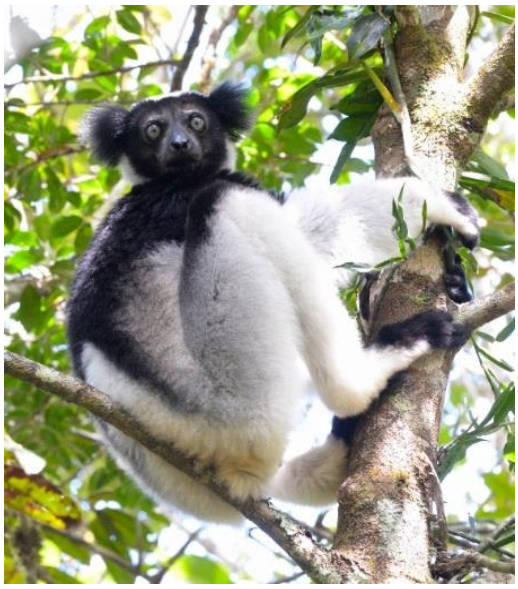

Parson's Chameleon (Quentin Bloxam)

This morning we will set off eastward to the rainforest reserves at Andasibe (Périnet), a journey of around 5 hours. The road takes us firstly through a relatively productive agricultural region before beginning its winding descent to the East Coast, where we will start to see patches of rainforest on the steeper slopes. We will pass through a variety of small colourful villages, all thronging with life and many with wonderful names such as Ambohimanagekely, Ambohimahandry and Manjakandriana. En route, we will stop at the Mangoro river to look for Madagascar Pratincole and arriving at Andasibe mid-afternoon. The Andasibe reserves complex

includes two distinct protected areas; the special reserve of Analamazaotra (Périnet) is the most well know of the two and protects the Indri, whilst the lesser known Mantadia National Park, a much larger area of primary rainforest (10,000 hectares), is also hugely rewarding. On arrival we will make arrangements for a night walk to look for Crossley's (Furry-eared) Dwarf Lemur, Eastern Woolly Lemur, Lowland Streaked Tenrec and a variety of reptiles and amphibians. For our 3 nights at Andasibe we will stay a comfortable forest lodge.

Day 20 Andasibe

This morning we rise early to visit the special reserve of Analamazaotra (Périnet) in order to see the Indri (*Indri indri*), Madagascar's largest and most vocal lemur whose eerie cries, once heard, are never forgotten. They are also one of the world's most attractive primates and are frequently likened to large black and white teddy bears! Each year presents a different aspect of the life of this large primate. Some years we have been treated to spectacular family singing contests, whereas in other years the Indri were silent but came to the ground within a few feet to eat soil. Incidentally, the word Indri is actually Malagasy for "look!" The early French explorer and naturalist, Pierre Sonnerat, heard his local Malagasy guide point at a lemur in a tree and took the word to be the animal's name. The Malagasy name for the Indri is 'Babakoto'.


Indri (Cathy Harlow)

After watching the Indri we will have time to take the reserve trails at a relaxed pace, watching birds and possibly catching a sight of other lemurs such the beautiful Diademed Sifaka, widely regarded as the most beautiful of all lemur species, as well as Common Brown Lemur, Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur, and perhaps a daytime roost of Eastern Woolly Lemurs. Amongst the birdlife we will look out for are Collared Nightjar, Red-fronted Coua, Red-breasted Coua, Malagasy Pygmy Kingfisher, Blue Vanga, Nuthatch Vanga, Velvet Asity, Madagascar Starling, and the Pitta-like Ground Roller. The rainforest here is also a good site for reptiles such as the Madagascar Tree Boa, Parson's Chameleon and Short-horned Chameleon.

Day 21 Andasibe

This morning we drive an hour north to Mantadia, which was declared a national park in 1991 and has some of the most diverse forests in all of Madagascar. Although the wildlife can be difficult to see on occasion and the terrain is tough, visits here are to be treasured. There are few relatively accessible places in Madagascar that offer such a fantastic pristine rainforest experience. Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemurs are frequently seen and with a little patience we hope to find the Diademed Sifaka. We also look for the rare Black and White Ruffed Lemur, though they can be difficult to find and are more frequently heard than seen, given that much of the forest here is still inaccessible to visitors.

Mantadia also holds a wonderful variety of rare and endemic birds. This is the best area in which to look for two of the most elusive ground-rollers, Short-legged Ground Roller and Scaly Ground Roller along with other species such as White-throated Rail, Madagascar Crested Ibis, Pitta-like Ground Roller, Common Sunbird-Asity, Velvet Asity, Madagascar Blue Pigeon, Madagascar Partridge, Red-breasted Coua, Red-fronted Coua, Blue Coua, Nuthatch Vanga, Blue Vanga, Forest Fody and the rare Collared Nightjar whose call is still unknown. We will also try to organise a night walk to look for Crossley's (Furry-eared) Dwarf Lemur, Eastern Woolly Lemur, Goodman's Mouse Lemur, Madagascar Long-eared Owl and perhaps one of the wonderfully named Satanic Leaf-tailed Geckos (Uroplatus phantasticus).



Velvet Asity (Aniket Sardana)

Day 22

We will have one last morning to enjoy the wildlife of Andasibe, before heading back to Tana, where we will spend our last night.

Days 23 – 24 In Flight

Our flight usually departs from Ivato International Airport in the early afternoon, arriving back into London the following morning, though some flights depart in the early hours of Day 24 arriving back into London later that same day.

Holiday Inclusions / Extra Expenses

The following costs are included in the price of the holiday:

- International and domestic flights in economy class
- Full board accommodation throughout (i.e. breakfast, lunch and dinner)
- All transport and guiding
- Park fees and reserve entry fees
- Tips to reserve / national park guides and trackers, drivers, waiters, porters and other locals

The following are not included and should be budgeted for:

- Visa (e-visa or purchased on arrival in Tana)
- Drinks (though your guides will keep a supply of bottled water on the bus for you to help yourself to during the day)
- Tip for Local Guide (who will be with you the whole time)
- Any other personal spending e.g. souvenirs, laundry

Tour grading

This tour has been graded B/C, and a good level of fitness and stamina is required. We will be covering considerable distances on this holiday on poor quality roads, even though some overland travel has been cut significantly by the addition of several internal flights. The first full week in particular driving south west from Tana to the coast will involve 3 days of about 11-12 hours of driving. There is no other way around this, but these are some of the country's best wildlife habitats remaining, so will be well worth the drives, which will also provide an insight into the rural Malagasy way of life.

There will be plenty of daytime walks in a variety of Malagasy habitat types and in some of the major forest reserves of Madagascar we will organise night-walks to see nocturnal lemurs, reptiles and sometimes roosting birds. All walks are optional and taken at a leisurely pace, but they will often be over hilly, rocky or forested terrain, and in hot, humid conditions. Since animal activity dies away quite quickly after the first few hours of daylight, we will need to make full use of the early hours and so dawn starts will be encouraged.

Please note that the trails at Ranomafana and Mantadia are steep, narrow, covered in roots and slippery after rain. Walking here is in single file and can be tough and tiring. Walking boots are a must and some people may find a trekking pole useful. We may also opt to leave the main trails and clamber over rough terrain or through dense vegetation in order to find wildlife that has been spotted deeper into the forest. Some of the trails at Isalo can also be steep and rocky although it is the heat here that tends to be more of a problem.


Ranomafana National Park

The months of October and November immediately precede the wet season so the air is heavy with impending rain and rising temperatures, but they are the best months in which to see wildlife. The locations that we visit on the western side of the island in particular will be hot. Many birds are nesting, reptiles are emerging from their winter rest and mating, and the lemurs and birds are most easily seen at this time as many deciduous forest trees are still without their leaves. As such, the long travelling on some days (with stops as required), and walking in the tropical climate demand at the very least a good level of general fitness.

When travelling in Madagascar it is necessary to accept that the roads will be poor and the internal airlines may not always leave exactly on time! Likewise, whilst we will provide comfortable lodge and hotel accommodation throughout, it must be stressed that Madagascar is a very poor country and has yet to establish the same high standard of tourist facilities found in many other African destinations. Several of the hotels/lodges are basic in nature and lacking in many of the comforts

found in western hotels. What is needed more than anything, therefore, is a good sense of adventure, and if you come equipped with this you are sure to enjoy the fascinating animals, birds, plants, culture and landscapes of this unique African island.

Accommodation

Most of the hotels and lodges have private facilities although at Ampijoroa facilities may be shared. All of the hotels and lodges we use are comfortable, though the rooms can be a little spartan in nature and the food quite simple. Please note that Madagascar is becoming ever more popular as a holiday destination and at present there are too few beds for the number of people who wish to visit. It is getting increasingly difficult for groups to secure an allocation of rooms and, whilst we at Naturetrek always reserve our room allocation up to two years in advance of the holiday, we do occasionally find that we do not get our first choice of hotel or lodge. This uncertainty is compounded by the fact that hotels and lodges in Madagascar are notorious for overbooking their rooms. Although we always strive to keep our groups in the same lodge whilst exploring a park, on rare occasions it may be necessary to split the stay, or group, between two. The names of the hotels and lodges will be confirmed a little closer to the departure date, but if you require any additional information on accommodation please do not hesitate to call.

International Flights

We usually fly to Tana with Ethiopian Airlines via Addis Ababa (there are no direct flights from the UK to Madagascar), and quite often there is an Ethiopian flight from Manchester and a handful of other European cities that links up with the flight from Addis to Tana. Please ask the office for more details about this if of interest. Flight routes and timings will be confirmed on your invoice once these have been booked. You do not need a visa for either route. Flights are usually overnight in both directions.

Air France does provide a viable alternative, flying via Paris, but we have found this route unreliable in recent years, with difficult connection times in Paris and an extremely late arrival into Tana. Should you wish to instead fly with Air France, we would strongly recommend flying to Paris and staying overnight at an airport hotel ahead of your flight to Tana the next morning. This flight arrives in very late the same day as the Ethiopian Airlines arrival, meaning that you would meet up with the rest of the group at breakfast on your first morning in Madagascar.

Flying with Ethiopian Airlines means that we arrive on a much smaller aircraft at a more civilised time of day, making the (somewhat chaotic!) process of purchasing a visa on arrival a little easier. It also allows the afternoon to recover from the long journey. The downside is that there is a fairly long transfer in Addis Ababa on the way home. They do not offer premium economy, but do offer upgrades to business class; please contact the Naturetrek office for a quote.

Your Safety & Security

You have chosen to travel to Madagascar. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice regularly prior to travel.

How to Book Your Place

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