

Northern Madagascar

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London
Day 2/3	Arrive Tana. Day in the capital
Day 4/5	Montagne d'Ambre National Park
Day 6/7	Analamerana (Andrafiarana Protected Area)
Day 8/10	Ankarana Special Reserve.
Day 11/13	Nosy Sakatia (Nosy Be)
Day 14/15	Depart Nosy Be/Arrive London



Departs

October/November

Focus

Lemurs, birds and other Malagasy wildlife

Grading

Grade A/B

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code MDG05) or current brochure

Highlights:

- Unique and endemic wildlife found nowhere else on Earth
- Limestone tsingy of Ankarana Special Reserve
- Beautiful Perrier's Sifakas at Analamerana Reserve
- Leaf-tailed Geckos and tiny Brookesia Chameleons
- Whale Sharks and Humpback Whales in Nosy Be
- Snorkel with Green Turtle

Images from top: Crowned Lemur, Ankarana Special Reserve.
Panther Chameleon



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Introduction

One hundred and sixty-five million years ago, the island of Madagascar was cast adrift. As the huge continent of Gondwanaland split apart this large chunk of Africa began its slow, inexorable drift out into the Indian Ocean. And so began a unique experiment in evolution. Isolated from the rest of the natural world, the Malagasy fauna and flora took their own distinctive path and today over 80% of all life here is endemic, occurring nowhere else on Earth. Last refuge of the prosimians, better known as the lemurs, this huge island is also home to endemic bird families such as the vangas, ground-rollers and sunbird-asitys, a wonderful diversity of striking reptiles and unique habitats such as the strange spiny forest. Madagascar is truly a land of the weird and the wonderful.

Here in the far north of the country our journey will take us to the northern reserves of Montagne d'Ambre National Park, Analamerana Reserve (Andrafiarana Protected Area) and Ankarana Protected Area, looking for a wealth of exciting wildlife including mammals such as Crowned Lemur and Perrier's Sifaka, birds such as Sickle-billed and Blue Vanga, Pitta-like Ground-roller and White-breasted Mesite and a host of fascinating chameleons and geckos.

The trip will finish on the island of Nosy Sakatia, a small island off the west coast of the larger and more well known Nosy Be. From here we will search for both Whale Shark and Humpback Whales which are in the surrounding waters at this time of year. There will be the opportunity to snorkel in these pristine waters, or simply relax on the tranquil white sands. All of the lodges chosen for this tour are of a high standard for Madagascar.



Pitta-like Ground-roller

N.B. Night walks are not permitted within national parks in Madagascar. This means that we are not always able to carry out night walks in some key areas of forest where Aye-ayes are found, though we always search for the Aye-aye along with other nocturnal wildlife wherever and whenever possible, usually outside the national park boundaries and within private reserves.

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations, such as Air Madagascar's scheduling, 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 the comfortable Relais des Plateaux Hotel, our base for the first two nights of the tour.

Day 3

Tana

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.

After the relative calm of the morning, we will head into the historic centre of Tana, experiencing the hustle and bustle (and traffic!) of the capital as we go. We will pass the main market, the old central railway station, and the main central avenue before winding our way up to the summit of the largest hill in the city. Here presides the Queen's Palace, as it is locally known, named after Queen Ranaivalona I, who reigned in the 19th century and embarked on a bloody and relatively successful quest to eradicate foreign influence in the country, which included throwing enemies from the sides of the palace down the steep hillside. We will have a tour of the palace and take in the impressive views over Tana before heading back to our hotel.

Days 4 – 5

Montagne d'Ambre National Park



Madagascar Crested Ibis

Following breakfast, we will return to the airport to catch a morning flight to Antsiranana (Diego Suarez) on Madagascar's northernmost tip. On arrival, we will drive south for a couple of hours to Montagne d'Ambre National Park.

Montagne d'Ambre (or Amber Mountain) is an isolated volcano massif clothed in montane tropical moist forest and covering approximately 18,200 hectares. The park's name is derived from the resin that oozes from some of the trees; it is not a reference to the colour of the mountain

itself. Many of the trees tower to 40 metres in height and are festooned with a myriad of lianas, birds-nest ferns, orchids and other epiphytes. These lush, sun-dappled forests are cut by several

beautiful waterfalls and home to another wonderful array of mammals, birds and other wildlife, many of which is found only in this area.

Seven species of lemur live in the park, the most notable being the localised Crowned Lemur and Sanford's Brown Lemur, and the Amber Mountain Fork-marked Lemur, a species found nowhere else in the world! Amber Mountain Mouse Lemur, Brown Mouse Lemur, Northern Sportive Lemur and Fossa also occur here, along with the Ring-tailed Mongoose. Birdlife is equally diverse and includes Madagascar Crested Ibis, the endemic Amber Mountain Rock Thrush, Cuckoo-roller, Madagascar Cuckoo-roller, Pitta-like Ground-roller, Broad-billed Roller, Souimanga Sunbird, Forest Fody, Hook-billed Vanga and Dark Newtonia. Reptiles are also common, with numerous species of Leaf-tailed Gecko, and Stump-tailed Chameleon, Amber Mountain Chameleon and Blue-nosed Chameleon being three of the commoner chameleon species to look out for.



Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko, Stephen Woodham

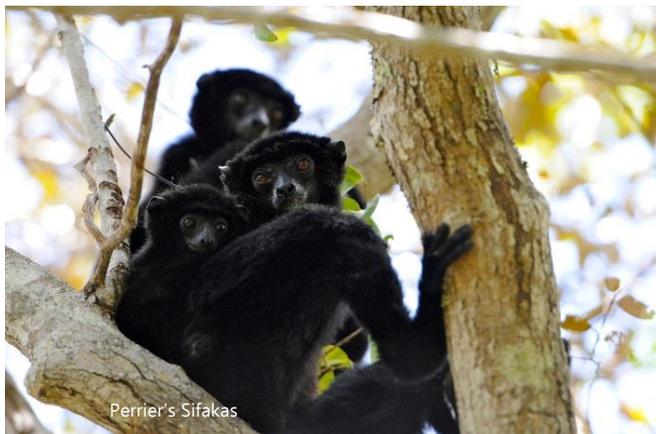
We will spend our two nights at Montagne d'Ambre at Nature Lodge, an ecolodge just outside of Joffreville, a delightful little village surrounded by wonderful views.

Day 6 – 7

Analamerana (Andrafiamena Protected Area)

After breakfast today we leave Joffreville and Montagne d'Ambre behind, and begin our journey south. Descending out of the hills, we drive through a varied agricultural landscape dotted with small villages, passing through busy and colourful street markets along the way. We are also likely to see plenty of birdlife en route, such as Madagascar Bush Lark, Madagascar Bee-eater and Madagascar Cisticola amongst others. After a couple of hours, we turn off the road onto dirt tracks which lead to the village of Anjahakely and the local reserve of Analamerana, part of the wider Andrafiamena Protected Area.

Here, a large patch of dry forest has been set up as a local nature reserve to protect a small



Perrier's Sifakas

population of the localised and rare Perrier's Sifaka. We will spend one and a half days here to maximise our chances of finding these beautiful animals. Birdlife is again abundant, and we will be keeping our eyes peeled for Madagascar Harrier-hawk, Long-billed Green Sunbird, Blue Vanga, Grey-headed Lovebirds and Madagascar Buttonquail. Our two nights here are at the remote yet impressive Akiba Lodge in Anjahakely.

Days 8 – 10

Ankarana Special Reserve

Today we continue our journey south, leaving behind the moist tropical forests for the dry forests and limestone 'tsingy' of Ankarana Special Reserve. The journey should take us no more than a couple of hours and on arrival we will stay at the rustic Iharana Bush Camp for three nights, which sits on the shore of a lake, where birds such as Purple and Striated Herons, Reed Cormorant, Allen's Gallinule and Madagascar Mannikin can be seen.

The Ankarana massif is a limestone plateau which rises abruptly from the surrounding grassy plains. It has been eroded over the aeons into a dramatic landscape of limestone pinnacles known as 'tsingy', numerous caves and other karst landforms, all edged by dry deciduous forest. Lemurs to look out for include Crowned Lemur, Sandford's Brown Lemur, Ankarana Sportive Lemur, Northern Sportive Lemur, Avahis (Woolly Lemur), Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur and Grey Mouse Lemur, whilst other mammals include the inquisitive Ring-tailed Mongoose.



Left: Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher (by David Tattersfield). Right: Ankarana Sportive Lemurs (by Stephen Woodham)

Birdlife is rich and varied with around 85 species recorded, such as White-breasted Mesite, Banded Kestrel, Madagascar Crested Ibis, Crested Coua, Hook-billed Vanga, Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascar Scops Owl, and Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher. Numerous reptiles and interesting plants, such as the *Pachypodium* (or Elephants Foot), also add to the region's varied wildlife attractions. Ankarana is hot and the paths are steep and tiring. It is, however, a wonderful park and your effort is sure to be rewarded!

Day 11

Travel to Nosy Sakatia

A large proportion of today will be spent travelling to our next destination. In the morning, we will be travelling south overland towards Ankify Harbour. From here we will take a boat across to Nosy Be, travel up the west coast, and take another short boat trip across to the idyllic Sakatia Lodge, our accommodation for the last three nights of the tour, on the island of Nosy Sakatia. Known as 'Orchid Island', this is arguably one of Madagascar's most beautiful islands, blessed with several excellent white sandy beaches, pristine waters which are feeding ground for Green Turtle, and away from the busier beach resorts of Nosy Be.

Sakatia Lodge is a small resort on the south coast, with simple lodges set in the densely vegetated grounds and on the beach, next to a small peninsula called Sacred Mountain. We should arrive this afternoon with enough time to relax and unwind on the beach or snorkel in the inviting surrounding waters.



Sakatia Lodge

Days 12 – 13

Nosy Sakatia

One day we will do a boat trip looking for Whale Sharks and Humpback Whales in the surrounding seas. The former come to these tropical waters from September to December to surface feed on plankton and krill, and we have a wonderful opportunity to get up close to these gentle giants, which, although primarily juveniles, can still be between 5 and 10 metres in length. We will also be on the lookout for Humpback Whales which have been here since July and will soon be leaving. They are attracted to the tropical, shallow waters to breed and give birth, as these waters are the perfect nursery. Mothers and their calves will tend to be near the surface in the shallower waters close to land, whilst males will be further out in deeper waters where, if we are lucky, we might see a breach. We will stop for lunch on an island beach and return back to Sakatia in mid-late afternoon.

The following morning, we will board another boat and this time head over to Nosy Be and visit Lokobe Nature Special Reserve on the south coast of the island. Nosy Be boasts immense biodiversity, including a host of endemic species, much of which is concentrated in Lokobe. These include *Stumpffia pygmaea*, one of the world's smallest frogs, and the endangered Dwarf Chameleon, which was regarded as the smallest species of chameleon in the world until the discovery of the Nano Chameleon on the mainland in 2021. Lokobe is particularly well known for its resident Black Lemurs and the stunning Nosy Be Panther Chameleon, both of which we will try to seek out. Hawk's Sportive Lemur and Bemanasy Mouse Lemur are the other two lemur species



Dwarf Chameleon

found here, as well as Madagascar Tree Boa and several other species of chameleons, geckos and frogs. We will return to Sakatia in the early afternoon and there will be the opportunity to relax or snorkel. The Ambohibe Turtle Reserve is located just off the beach, where there is a vast area of sea grass, which attract Green Turtles to feed, in addition to a plethora of other marine life.

Days 14 – 15

Depart Nosy Be/Arrive London

We have one last morning on this paradise island before we regrettably have to say goodbye, making our way over to Nosy Be, and drive to the airport. Our flight departs this afternoon for Addis Ababa, where we change planes for an overnight flight back to London, arriving in the early morning.

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

The following are not included and should be budgeted for:

- Visa (currently 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)
- Discretionary tipping
- Any other personal spending e.g. souvenirs

Extensions

It would be possible to extend your holiday on Nosy Sakatia or at a different hotel on Nosy Be if you wanted more time to enjoy the white sands and tropical seas of this beautiful coastal region (subject to availability).

Additionally, a pre-tour extension to Masoala National Park is an option. This is in a remote area of north-east Madagascar, which involves flights there and back from Tana, a boat trip and simple accommodation, but the reward is a large tract of virgin rainforest with a huge diversity of animals and plants not found elsewhere.

Please enquire at the time of booking about either or both of these.

Tour Grading

This tour has been graded A/B. There is no major trekking on tour, but 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 (where permitted) 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. Some of the trails are steep, narrow, covered in roots and slippery after rain. Walking is often in single file and can be very tiring!

Walking boots or shoes are a must and some people may find a trekking pole useful. 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.

The month of November immediately precedes 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. 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. In the case of marine-life, this is the month when both Whale Sharks and Humpbacks overlap in the seas of the north-west. When travelling in Madagascar, it is necessary to accept that the roads may be poor on occasion and the internal airlines may not always leave exactly on time!

It must be stressed that Madagascar is a very poor country and has yet to establish the same standard of tourist facilities found in many other African destinations. Travelling in northern Madagascar is never straightforward and 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

As outlined above, Madagascar has yet to develop the same standard of tourist infrastructure as some other mainland African countries. However, in the north there are a handful of very good hotels and lodges and we have deliberately chosen these. They are comfortable, have private facilities, and welcoming staff, though the rooms can be a little spartan in nature and the food quite simple.

It is also worth noting 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 reconfirmed a little closer to the departure date but if you require any additional information on accommodation please do not hesitate to call.

International Flights

On this tour we will be flying with Ethiopian Airlines via Addis Ababa (there are no direct flights from the UK to Madagascar), arriving into Tana on the outbound journey, and flying back from Nosy Be at the end. 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/Nosy Be. Flights between Nosy Be and Tana are either three or four times a week and so extending your holiday by a few days is entirely possible. Ethiopian do not offer premium economy but do offer upgrades to business class. Please ask the office if you would like a quote for any of these options.

Flights are usually overnight in both directions, and timings will be confirmed on your invoice once these have been booked.

Your Safety & Security

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/madagascar> regularly prior to travel.

How to Book Your Place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost and any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website.