

Madagascar's Endemic Birds

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1/2	Depart London / Arrive Tana
Day 3	Toliara
Day 4/5	Ifaty
Day 6	Anakao
Day 7/8	Isalo National Park
Day 9/11	Ranomafana National Park
Day 12	Antsirabe
Day 13/15	Ankarafantsika
Day 16/17	Fly Tana and onto London

Masoala National Park pre-tour extension:

Day 1	Fly Tana
Day 2	Fly Maroantsetra
Day 3/5	Masoala National Park
Day 6	Fly Tana and join group

Andasibe-Mantadia post-tour extension:

Day 16	Drive Andasibe
Day 17/18	Andasibe-Mantadia National Park
Day 19/20	Drive Tana, depart, arrive London

Departs

October

Focus

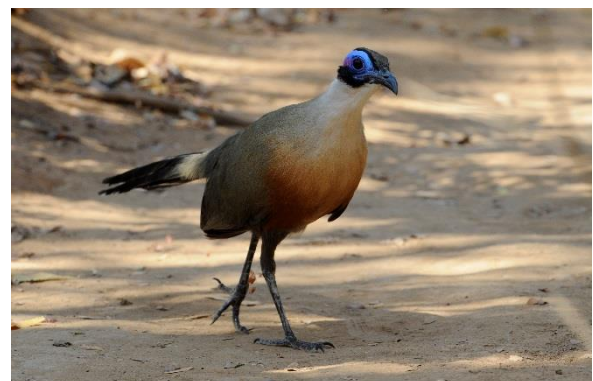
Primarily birds, plus mammals and general natural history.

Grading

Grade B. Easy to moderate day and night walks

Dates and Prices

See www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code MDG07)



Images from top: Long-tailed Ground-roller (by Tony Williams), Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher (by Andy Harding), Giant Coua (by Stephen Woodham)



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Introduction

The island of Madagascar is blessed with some of the world's most unique and exciting wildlife. Over 80% of all life here is endemic, the legacy of 90 million years of isolation following the break-up of the continents 75 million years before. Its birdlife is particularly special. Those few pioneer species that made it to the island in the distant past have, over many generations, evolved and diversified into the wonderful spectacle of Malagasy birdlife that we see today; each family and species has been moulded over the millennia by natural selection to fit its own unique niche and habitat. Today, Madagascar is home to four endemic families of birds (the mesites, ground-rollers, asities and the Malagasy warblers), plus two additional families (the vangas and cuckoo-rollers) that occur only on Madagascar and the nearby Comoros. In all, this ancient fragment of Gondwanaland can boast 36 endemic bird genera and around 120 endemic species!

Itinerary

Please note that this itinerary is based on Air Madagascar's current internal flight schedule. Should they change their flight timings, or days of travel, over the next few months 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 or Nairobi (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

Toliara

This morning we will return to Tana Airport to catch a flight to the town of Toliara on Madagascar's south-western coastline. Depending on the timings of our Air Madagascar flight we should then have time to head south to Sainte Augustine Bay. This bay was the site of one of Madagascar's first European settlements when a group of shipwrecked sailors established a short-lived colony there in the 17th Century. Nowadays, the area still holds patches of spiny forest and is a good place to search for the highly elusive Red-shouldered Vanga, plus Sakalava Weaver, Running Coua, Verreaux's Couas, and Madagascar Sandgrouse. Today we can also take the opportunity to visit a nearby arboretum which has an extensive collection of Madagascar spiny forest plants of which 92% are endemic! We spend the night at a comfortable hotel in Toliara.

Days 4 – 5

Ifaty

This morning, depending on the previous day's success, we may choose to take a second excursion to look for Red-shouldered Vanga and Verreaux's Coua, before we drive north for 28 kilometres to the small community of Ifaty. Here, we will be based for the next 2 nights in a comfortable beachfront hotel whilst we explore the bizarre spiny forest, Madagascar's most unique habitat. 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. During our first evening here we will take an afternoon walk along the coast to look for the endemic Madagascar Plover, and enjoy our first visit to the nearby Reniala Reserve. Walking through spiny forest here is a fascinating experience and an undoubted highlight for many. The forest 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 Bottle Baobab, aloes, kalanchoe and *Pachypodium lanerii*.

The following morning we will take a dawn bird-watching walk in an effort to find birds such as Banded Kestrel, Archibold's Newtonia, Thamnornis Warbler, Lafresnaye's Vanga, Hook-billed Vanga, Chabert's Vanga, Sickie-Billed Vanga and Running Coua. Returning to our hotel for lunch, there will be an opportunity to relax on the beach 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 hopefully the rare and endemic Madagascar Plover. The hotel can also arrange snorkelling or diving excursions to the nearby reef (not included in the tour cost). We will head out birding again later in the afternoon once the heat of the day has abated.



Sub-desert Mesite (by Paul Stanbury)

Day 6

Anakao

This morning we return to Toliara and continue the next leg of our journey by sea. We pack a small overnight bag and set off firstly on a zebu cart, and then board a small motor boat for the 1 hour journey south to the small 'Vezo' fishing village of Anakao, on the southern side of the River Onilahy Estuary. Anakao is a centre of 'Vezo' (the nomadic West Coast fishing tribe) culture, and we will see lines of their brightly painted dugout canoes hauled out onto the sandy beach. Here we can enjoy the peaceful atmosphere of the beach setting, swim in the calm sea and explore the dunes behind the hotel bungalows where we can expect to see the Littoral Rock-thrush and wading birds such as Whimbrel, Sanderling and White-fronted Plover. The main reason for spending the night here, however, is to visit the nearby uninhabited island of Nosy Ve to view a nesting colony of Red-tailed

Tropicbirds, their only breeding site in Madagascar. The beach here is a good place to look for Crab Plover and it is also possible to snorkel over the adjacent coral reef, although the coral is somewhat degraded. We will spend tonight at the Safari Vezo beach chalets.

Day 7

Zombitse-Vohibasia National Park

Our ultimate destination today is the Isalo National Park, but we begin by travelling by boat back to Toliara, where we are reunited with the rest of our luggage. We then continue by road in a north easterly direction, passing the magnificent tombs at Andranovory en route. These splendid and accessible tombs were built by the Mahafaly, Antandroy and Masikoro tribes and are very ornate. After a journey of around about two hours, we will take a break to visit the Zombitse-Vohibasia National Park where western and southern habitat types merge. Here the spiny forest meets the western tropical deciduous woodland. This is the larger of two remaining remnants of dry western deciduous forest on the island, and an ideal place to see this 'transitional' forest habitat.

After years of uncontrolled deforestation the forest is now a national park and is closely monitored by the Worldwide Fund for Nature. The park protects a variety of interesting bird life including the very localised Appert's Tetraka, which is only found in this region, plus Red-tailed Vanga, Chabert's Vanga, Coquerel's Coua, Madagascar Cuckoo Roller, Spectacled and Long-billed Tetrakas and Lesser Vasa Parrot. Several lemur species are also possible including Verreaux's Sifaka, Ring-tailed Lemur and Hubbard's Sportive Lemur. From Zombitse-Vohibasia National Park it is just over an hour to Isalo National Park where we will be based for the next two nights.

NB – The birding at Zombitse-Vohibasia National Park is at its best first thing the morning before the heat of the day kicks in. We are unlikely to reach the park, however, until late morning or lunchtime when it will be hot making some of the more sought after species difficult to locate. We may, therefore, opt to return to Zombitse-Vohibasia early in the morning of Day 7 should we be unable to find some of the key species such as Appert's Tetraka on Day 6.

Day 8

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



Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher (by Stephen Woodham)

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 (subject to the note concerning Zombitse-Vohibasia National Park above). 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 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 return to the lodge for a drink and siesta in the heat of the early afternoon.



Benson's (Forest) Rock Thrush (by Cathy Harlow)

Day 9

Ranomafana National Park

We have a long journey today. From Isalo National Park we continue north along the Route Nationale 7 crossing out of the rain-shadow and into the lush rainforests of Ranomafana National Park. Our journey first takes us up 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 continue on 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 cast grass savannah of the western region or the green rice fields of the Haut's Plateau highlands. En 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 confident Ring-tailed Lemurs although there are also plenty of birds and reptiles to look for.

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"). Finally, shortly after the village of Ambohimahasoia 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 three nights at a basic, but comfortable, ecolodge.

Days 10 – 11

Ranomafana National Park

We have two full days to explore Ranomafana National Park and discover the bewildering diversity of endemic bird and animal life it protects. During our stay we will take morning and afternoon walks into the rainforest where we hope to see a wide variety of bird species such as Pollen's Vanga, Crossley's Babbler (Vanga), Pitta-like Ground Roller, Velvet Asity, White-throated Oxylabes, Red-

Fronted Coua, Grey-Crowned Tetraka, Madagascar Wood-Rail, the skulking Brown Mesite and many others.



Parson's Chameleon (by Cathy Harlow)

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 Emu-tail, Rufous-headed Ground Roller and Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity.

During our walks we will also be on the lookout for lemurs and a wealth of other spectacular and bizarre wildlife to be found in these lush forests. This should include the attractive Milne-Edwards Sifaka, the largest lemur in the park, plus Red Bellied Lemur, Red-fronted Brown Lemur, Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur, and for the fortunate, perhaps the rare Golden Bamboo Lemur (discovered in 1986 and only known from Ranomafana and one other site!) and its even rarer cousin the Greater bamboo Lemur. Other wildlife to look out for includes the beautiful Comet Moth, one of the largest in the world, bright green *Phelsuma* Day Geckos and the bizarre Giraffe-necked Weevil.

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 12

Antsirabe

Following breakfast we will leave Ranomafana and continue our holiday with a drive north to the town of Antsirabe, a stepping stone on our journey back to Tana. It is a long drive of around 6 to 7 hours along Route Nationale 7 through the Central Highlands of the Hauts Plateaux. 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.

Days 13 – 15

Ankarafantsika National Park

This morning we will complete the journey back 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, and we will also enjoy river trips during our explorations of this National Park. 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 Dam's Vanga, Schlegel's Asity and White-breasted Mesite. Other species include Madagascar Crested Ibis, Coquerel's, Red-capped and Crested Couas, Sickie-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



Coquerel's Sifaka (by Jonas Christiansen)

endangered Madagascar Fish Eagle. Ampijoroa is also famous for the Jersey Trust conservation project for 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.

We aim to stay for the next 3 nights 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. Depending on the final timings for the flights between Tana and Mahajanga, we may find we need to spend one of the three nights in this area in Mahajanga itself. If this is the case, we will still have plenty of time to thoroughly enjoy the birdlife of this national park. Please also note that it will be very hot during the day at Ankarafantsika National Park. This will be the hottest location we will visit on the tour and so dawn starts will be the norm.

Days 16 – 17

In Flight

Depending on the time of our flights from Mahajanga to Tana and our onward departure to London there may be a little time for some last minute birding (or souvenir shopping) either on the coast or near the capital. Today we fly back to Tana, and then connect onto our flight back to London via Addis Ababa or Nairobi. Should we have time between flights, we'll book day rooms at a

comfortable hotel where we can repack, relax and enjoy a meal before setting off for London. After flying overnight we arrive back into London on Day 17.

Masoala National Park Pre-Tour Extension (typical itinerary)

Days 1 – 2

Antananarivo

We depart Heathrow on an overnight flight to Tana, arriving lunchtime the following day. On arrival we will transfer to a comfortable hotel for our first night in Tana.

Day 3

Maroantsetra

This morning we return to the airport for our private flight north to Maroantsetra on the north-east coast of the island. Maroantsetra is a small attractive town tucked at the far end of the Bay of Antongil, and is the gateway to some of Madagascar's leading national parks and wildlife preserves. On arrival we will transfer by boat to the beautiful Masoala Forest Lodge, which is nestled in a sheltered cove, surrounded by Masoala National Park and opening onto the warm, coral-rich waters of the Tampolo Marine Reserve. From here, you can choose whether to take guided forest walks each day, enjoy some snorkelling and swimming or even try guided sea kayaking!

Days 4 – 6

Masoala National Park

We now have the 3 full days to explore the Masoala National Park. Masoala is home to the most significant area of remaining tropical rainforest in Madagascar. In excess of 400,000 hectares of virgin rainforest cloth the peninsula, 220,200 hectares of which are protected within the Masoala National Park. This is a landscape of great natural beauty. Steep-sided mountains rise out of the clear blue waters of the Bay of Antongil. Fast flowing mountain streams tumble down their sides and forests of towering buttress-rooted trees,



Helmet Vanga (by Stephen Woodham)

draped with climbers and epiphytes, create a home for a huge diversity of animal and plantlife. Indeed Masoala is thought to be the richest area in the whole country for wildlife and, with much of this enormous biodiversity still largely unknown to science, who knows what we may find!

Ten species of lemur are known to occur here including Red-ruffed Lemur, White-fronted Brown Lemur, Eastern Woolly Lemur and Brown Mouse Lemur. These live alongside Fosa, Fanaloka and Aye-aye, although the latter three are elusive and difficult to find. Birdlife is abundant and includes such species as Brown Mesite, Madagascar Wood Rail, Madagascar Cuckoo Hawk, Pitta-like Ground Roller, Short-legged Ground Roller, Red-breasted Coua, White-throated Oxylabes, Forest Fody,

Nuthatch Vanga, Rufous Vanga and the striking Helmet Vanga, the largest of this endemic family and relatively easy to find here. The rare and elusive Madagascar Serpent Eagle, Madagascar Red Owl and Bernier's Vanga also occur in Masoala, but are much more difficult to find and only seen by the fortunate few.

For the botanist, Masoala contains an exceptional palm flora, including some of the rarest and most unusual palms on the island. The forest coconut, *Voanioala gerardii*, occurs as scattered individuals on the Peninsula and is known from only a handful of mature trees making it one of the most endangered palms in the world. This is also a wonderful place for reptiles and amphibians including frogs such as the Tomato Frog and Green-backed Mantella, Panther Chameleon and two species of intricately camouflaged *Uroplatus* leaf-tailed Geckos.

Day 7

Fly Tana

This morning we will return by boat to Maroantsetra and take the private flight back to Tana.

Price:

5 night extension: £3,995 (minimum 6 participants). This includes one night in Tana on arrival, 4 nights at Masoala Forest Lodge, all activities and excursions, park entry fees, return private flights, full board accommodation, a local naturalist guide accompanying the group to and from Tana, plus local park guides.

NB: In the past we have arranged extensions to Masoala using the scheduled Air Madagascar flights, but these have proved very unreliable in recent years and have caused problems for those on the extension meeting up with the main tour. For this reason, we have chosen instead to offer this pre-tour extension to the exclusive Masoala Forest Lodge using the lodge's own, much more reliable, private flights. Prices are available on request for a post-tour extension to Masoala's more basic Tampolo Lodge, using the scheduled Air Madagascar flights. Please contact the Naturetrek office for further information.

Andasibe-Mantadia National Park Post-Tour Extension

Day 16

Andasibe

Leaving the main group in Tana we will continue our journey 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. For our 3 nights at Andasibe we will stay a comfortable forest lodge.



Indri (by Cathy Harlow)

Day 17

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'.

After watching the Indri we will have time to take the reserve trails at a relaxed pace. 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 18

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. 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 a wide variety of 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.

Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemurs are frequently seen and with a little patience we hope to find the Diademed Sifaka. The rare Black and White Ruffed Lemur also occurs at Mantadia, 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. During our time at Andasibe-Mantadia National Park will also undertake night walks 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*).

Day 19 – 20

In Flight

After breakfast this morning, we must return to Tana for the final time. 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 19 arriving back into London later that same day.

Price:

Depending on flight schedules we offer either 3 or 4 night extensions to Andasibe.

3 night extension: £765 per person (minimum 4 clients)

4 night extension: £895 per person (minimum 4 clients)

These prices includes full board accommodation, day and night time wildlife excursions into the national parks and private reserves, all transport, a local naturalist guide accompanying the group to and from Tana, park entry fees and local park guides.

Prices for smaller groups or individuals are also available on request.

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 at a cost of around EUR 25)
- 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

Tour Grading

This tour has been graded B. We will be covering considerable distances on this holiday, although the overland travel has been cut significantly by the addition of several internal flights. 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 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.

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. 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 least average general fitness. It should be noted that there are several long vehicle journeys included in this tour. Madagascar's top wildlife sites are well spread out and so a few long drives cannot be avoided if you wish to see a good cross-section of the island's habitats and animal life.

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! 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.

International Flights

Our preferred routes to Madagascar are with Ethiopian Airlines or Kenya Airways, flying via Addis Ababa or Nairobi respectively (there are no direct flights from the UK to Madagascar). 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/Kenya Airways 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 / Kenya Airways 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 Nairobi on the way out when flying with Kenya Airways or in Addis Ababa on the way home when flying with Ethiopian Airlines. Both airlines offer upgrades to business class; please contact the Naturetrek office for a quote.

Regional Departures

Ethiopian Airlines is due to introduce a Manchester/Addis flight from autumn 2018, which we will be very happy to book if it coordinates with our tour schedule. Connecting flights to and from Heathrow with British Airways (currently from Manchester, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Belfast, Dublin and Jersey) are also available from around £185 return. Please contact the Naturetrek office for further information.

Accommodation

Most of the hotels and lodges have private facilities although at Anakao and Ankarafantsika facilities may be shared.

NB - 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 the Naturetrek office.

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/madagascar> regularly up to the point of 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 plus 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.

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