Madagascar's Mammals

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1/2	Depart London / Arrive Tana
Day 3	Fly Toamasina and overnight
Days 4/5	Palmarium
Days 6/7	Andasibe
Day 8	Tana
Days 9/11	Fly Morondava, Kirindy Reserve
Day 12	Fly Tana and overnight
Days 13/14	Fly Tolagnaro, Berenty Reserve
Day 15	Tolagnaro (Fort Dauphin)
Day 16	Fly Tana and overnight
Day 17/18	Depart Tana / Arrive London

Departs
October / November

Focus
Lemurs, other mammals, birds & other Malagasy wildlife

Grading
B. Easy to moderate day and night walks

Highlights:

- Visit Kirindy Reserve in search of Fosa, plus chance of Narrow-striped Mongoose & Giant Jumping Rat
- Coquerel's Giant & Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemurs plus Madame-Berthe's Mouse Lemur in Kirindy
- Watch wildlife from your bungalow & walking along trails at Berenty Reserve
- Look for wild Aye-ayes at the Palmarium Reserve
- Listen to the eerie cries of Indri in Andasibe







Images from top: Aye-aye (Paul Winser), Fosa (Jonas Christiansen), Avenue des Baobabs (Stephen Woodham)

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Introduction

Madagascar's isolation from mainland Africa for 165 million years has allowed evolution to run a unique course. Today, over 80% of all Malagasy wildlife is endemic, occurring nowhere else on Earth. New species continue to be discovered here and it is this unknown 'other-worldliness' that makes Madagascar such a rewarding and exciting wildlife destination. There is an astonishing variety of birds, with species from the six endemic or near-endemic families – the mesites, ground-rollers, cuckoo-rollers, asities, vangas and the Bernieridae 'warblers'– amongst the most sought-after. A large number of colourful chameleons, wonderfully camouflaged geckos, and an untold number of insects and plants all contribute as well to make this a wildlife destination like no other.

For many though, Madagascar's mammals are the crowning glory of this Indian Ocean island's unique menagerie. This eclectic set of prosimians, insectivores, carnivores, rodents and bats is thought to be descendent from individual pioneers that inadvertently arrived on the island from eastern Africa over the last 100 million years, and we will search for them from the dry deciduous forests of the northwest down to the lush mist-covered rainforests in the east.


Indri

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, in advance of the tour departing, we may need to amend our itinerary accordingly. Adverse weather and other local considerations can also 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 London Heathrow this evening on an overnight flight to Tana via Addis Ababa, where 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, or, for those that wish, to simply to catch up on some sleep!

Day 3 Tana, fly to Toamasina

Today's activities will depend on the flight time from Tana to Toamasina, but if there is a significant amount of time in Tana today, we will head to the Lemur Park which is outside of the city. Here,

lemurs of various species which have been rescued from the pet trade, have the freedom to roam around the park, which also houses over 70 endemic botanical species as well. Here we will have our first sightings of species such as Common Brown Lemur, Mongoose Lemur, Coquerel's Sifaka and Ring-tailed Lemur. The park is also home to various reptiles, including Radiated Tortoise.

We will then make our way to Tana airport for the flight to Toamasina on the east coast, the entry point for Palmarium. Depending on Air Madagascar's flight schedule we will either spend one night in Toamasina before 2 nights at Palmarium, or all three nights there.

Days 4 – 5 Palmarium


Aye-aye (Chris Hutchinson)

We travel south to the Pangalenes canals on the coast, and from there we complete the journey by boat to the Palmarium, and our lodge for the next two nights. Here we will no doubt be greeted by a strange horde of introduced lemurs and their hybrids, but our main reason for coming here is in fact to visit an area of coastal forest nearby, which is owned by the Palmarium and only accessible by boat. Six wild Aye-ayes live here, and over time have been habituated. In the early evening we will take the boat over to the forest to visit the coconut feeding stations, where we are all-but-guaranteed an encounter with these most incredible creatures.

We will take the following day at a more relaxed pace, enjoying a guided tour of the Palmarium's gardens, and exploring some of the surrounding forests. As well as the introduced lemurs we should see plenty of common forest birds, and some wild lemurs which may include Eastern Woolly Lemurs and perhaps another family of Indri. This evening we will be sure to return to the coconut feeding stations for a further encounter with the Aye-ayes.

Days 6 – 7 Andasibe

We depart this morning, back on the boat and then south on the highway, before heading west inland where we will start to see patches of rainforest on the steep slopes. Our destination is the rainforest reserves of Andasibe (Périnet) where we will spend two nights in a comfortable forest lodge. We should arrive in the afternoon with time for our first visit into the special reserve of Périnet.

We will rise early the following morning to visit Périnet once again in order to see the 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! Walking the trails through the reserve, we will also be on the lookout for troops of beautiful Diademed Sifakas, 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, Pollen's Vanga, Ward's Flycatcher-Vanga, Velvet Asity, Madagascar Starling, and 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.


Diademed Sifaka

One evening, after dinner, we will arrange a night walk in the nearby Mitsjino Reserve, giving us the opportunity to search for both Crossley's (Furry-eared) Dwarf Lemur and Hairy-eared Dwarf Lemur, the latter being a real target here, along Eastern Woolly Lemur, Goodman's Mouse Lemur, Madagascar Long-eared Owl and perhaps an endearing Lowland Streaked Tenrec.

Day 8 Andasibe, drive to Tana

After a final walk this morning at Andasibe, we must undertake the 5 – 6 hour drive back to Tana for the final time. Our route heads west, through a variety of small colourful villages, all thronging with life and many with wonderful names such as Ambohimanagekely, Ambohimahandry and Manjakandriana. We will wind our way up to a relatively productive agricultural region with highland scenery of terraced slopes and flooded rice paddies in the valley bottoms. Eventually, we arrive in Tana for an overnight stay.

Days 9 – 11 Fly Morondava / Kirindy

After breakfast this morning we will transfer back to the airport for the Air Madagascar flight to Morondava, from which it is about a two hour drive to Kirindy. En route we will stop to admire the spectacular 'Avenue des Baobabs' just north of Morondava, and aim to arrive at Kirindy in time for our first afternoon and evening excursions into the reserve. We spend the next two nights at a basic, but comfortable lodge.

Kirindy has long been the only place in Madagascar where the otherwise elusive Fosa may reliably be seen. Fosa are the top land predator in Madagascar, and can frequently be found both in the reserve and around the camp. It's also one of the few places where we may find the beautiful Narrow-striped Mongoose (or Boky boky) and is indeed the only place that offers us a chance of seeing one of the most endangered mammals in Madagascar, the Giant Jumping Rat. This


Giant Jumping Rat (John Young)

strange animal, which looks somewhat like a rabbit and somewhat like a bandicoot, which both walks and hops, has a very restricted range, most of which falls into Kirindy reserve.

During our stay here we'll take day and night walks in the beautiful deciduous forests of Kirindy Reserve. During the day, Verreaux's Sifaka and Red-fronted Brown Lemurs are both commonly seen, whilst at night, nocturnal lemurs to look out for include Pale Fork-marked Lemurs, Red-tailed Sportive Lemurs, the beautiful caramel-coloured Coquerel's Giant Dwarf Lemur, Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur and Grey Mouse Lemur. There is also the chance of finding Madagascar's smallest primate, Madame-Berthe's Mouse Lemur, largely believed to be the world's smallest primate at less than 100mm long and weighing only 30g.


Madame-Berthe's Mouse Lemur (Stephen Woodham)

Madagascar Hog-nosed Snakes are common here, and Commerson's Leaf-nosed Bats can be seen flying around the camp. Birds will be abundant in the dry forest, and we'll be on the look-out for Crested Coua, Giant Coua, Rufous Vanga, Sakalava Weaver and Madagascar Hoopoe, as well as the localised White-breasted Mesite.

Depending on flight schedules we may head back to Morondava on the afternoon of Day 11 for an overnight before a flight back to Tana the following morning, or we might stay in Kirindy for a third night and have a charter flight the following day.

Day 12 Fly Tana

We take our return flight to Tana today, either a scheduled flight from Morondava or a charter flight from near Kirindy. Depending on our arrival time in Tana, we should have time to arrange an excursion to Lake Alarobia in Tana's Parc de Tsarasaotra. This is an excellent location for common African waterbirds and common Madagascar woodland/scrub birds, plus Madagascar Grebe, Hottentot Teal, Knob-billed Duck, Madagascar Pond Heron, Madagascar Harrier and Meller's Duck. It is also an excellent location to look for the stunning Jewel Chameleon.

Days 13 – 15 Fly Tolagnaro (Fort Dauphin) / Berenty Reserve

Today we take a flight south to the town of Tolagnaro (Fort Dauphin), located on Madagascar's south-eastern tip. Depending on the Air Madagascar schedule 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 4 to 5 hours, and although the road is bad, 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 still be carrying young on their backs – though they will be starting to gain confidence and learning to spring through the trees themselves – 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.


Ring-tailed Lemurs (Sarah Richards)

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 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.

N.B. We plan to spend 3 nights on the southern tip of Madagascar, two at Berenty and one at Tolagnaro. Which of these nights we spend at Tolagnaro will depend on Air Madagascar's internal flight schedule.

Day 16 Fly Tana

We will take our flight today from Tolagnaro to Tana, and transfer to our comfortable hotel nearby. Again, depending on the times we will organise an excursion either in Tolagnaro in the morning before the flight or in Tana in the afternoon.

Days 17 – 18 Tana / Fly London

We usually depart the following afternoon for the overnight flight back to London.

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

We have graded this tour B, involving easy to moderate walks. 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 birds. All walks are optional and taken at a leisurely pace, occasionally over hilly, rocky or forested terrain, and often in hot, humid conditions. Please note that 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 early starts will be essential. In the eastern rainforest reserves (Andasibe in particular), trails can be steep and narrow at times, covered in roots and slippery after rain. Walking here is in single file and on occasion can be tough and tiring, though we tend to avoid the tougher parts of the reserve on this particular tour. Walking boots are a must and some people may find a trekking pole useful. Wildlife viewing at both Berenty and the Palmarium is easy, where wildlife is easy to see close to the accommodation.

It should also be noted that there are a couple of long vehicle journeys included in this tour, especially to and from Berenty and the Palmarium. Madagascar's top wildlife sites are well spread out and so a few long drives and internal flights cannot be avoided if you wish to see a good cross-section of the islands habitats and wildlife. When travelling in Madagascar it is necessary to accept that the roads may be poor on occasion, the journeys long and uncomfortable, and the internal airlines may not always leave exactly on time!

Accommodation

As outlined above, Madagascar has yet to develop the same standard of tourist infrastructure as some other mainland Africa countries. All of the hotels and lodges we use are comfortable and have private facilities, 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 confirmed a little closer to the departure date but if you require any additional information on accommodation please do not hesitate to call. 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 Indian Ocean island.

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.

Domestic flights across Madagascar are provided by the national airline, Air Madagascar, which only flies some routes on certain days of the week, and can be prone to delays or even cancellations, so buffers have been built into the itinerary to allow for this (and a flexible mindset is necessary). On one occasion we might travel by chartered plane between Tana and Kirindy to avoid the long return road journey. The plane has a maximum payload, and the luggage weight allowance on charter flights will depend on the weight and number of people on board.

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

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