

The Reptiles & Amphibians of Madagascar

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London
Day 2	Arrive Antananarivo
Day 3 – 5	Montagne d'Ambre National Park
Day 6 – 8	Ankarana
Day 9	Antsiranana
Day 10	Antananarivo
Day 11 – 13	Ifaty
Day 14	Antananarivo
Day 15 – 17	Andasibe
Day 18	Antananarivo
Day 19 – 20	Inbound flights

Departs: September – October

Focus: Reptiles & Amphibians

Grading: **Important:** please read the 'Tour Grading and Focus' section at the end of the document before booking.

Dates and Prices: See www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code MDG10) or our current brochure

Highlights

- A huge diversity of chameleons including such special species as Parson's, Panther, Big-nosed, Canopy, Short-horned, and many others
- Search for the island's special snakes
- Endemic amphibians
- Superlative wildlife throughout
- Led by an expert local naturalist and a Naturetrek herpetologist



Antimena Chameleon, Madagascar Tree Boa, Beautiful Pandanus Frog © Laura and Bobby Bok



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Introduction

By any measure, Madagascar ranks amongst the most extraordinary countries on Earth. The fourth largest island in the world, it has been isolated from all other landmasses for some 80 million years. During that time, a dazzling array of endemic birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates and plants have evolved, almost all of which are found nowhere else in the world. Madagascar has all of the world's species of lemurs (of which there are over 100 and still more being discovered!), half of the world's chameleon species and six out of eight baobab species. The entire native terrestrial mammal fauna has evolved from just four colonists (one primate, one rodent, one insectivore and one carnivore) that are thought to have completed the perilous journey to



Parson's Chameleon © Cathy Harlow

Madagascar, by chance, on rafts of vegetation. Then, over tens of millions of years, these early pioneers evolved into over 100 living species, filling all manner of ecological niches across the island, and all are found nowhere else on Earth.

The landscapes of this huge tropical island are similarly unique, ranging from luxuriant tropical rainforest to spiny desert and tsingy (limestone pinnacles). Because it is so completely different from anywhere else on Earth, biologists often refer to Madagascar as "the eighth continent". One 18th-century traveller wrote: *"Of Madagascar I can announce to naturalists that truly this is their promised land. Here nature seems to have created a special sanctuary whither she seems to have withdrawn to experiment with designs different from any she has created elsewhere. At every step, one meets more remarkable and marvellous forms of life."*

During this special tour we will explore several of the most spectacular locations and seek endemic species by both day and night. We will also encounter the charming, hospitable Malagasy people, learning about their unique customs and beliefs.

This tour has been specifically designed to see reptiles and amphibians. It will be led by an expert herpetologist, and our carefully constructed programme will maximise our encounters with the rich diversity of reptiles and amphibians in this incredible country.

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, 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.

Day 1 – 2

Depart London/Arrive Antananarivo

For those using the group flights, today we depart London Heathrow on an overnight flight to Tana via Addis Ababa (please see the 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. 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 who wish, to simply catch up on some sleep!

Day 3 – 5

Montagne d'Ambre National Park

Today we fly to Antsiranana and transfer to Joffreville on the edge of the Montagne d'Ambre National Park for three nights. From here we can enjoy daily visits to the park with optional nocturnal walks. Reptiles are commonly sighted here, including such species as the endemic Montagne d'Ambre Leaf Chameleon (*Brookesia tuberculata*), Amber Mountain Chameleon (*Calumma amber*), Arthur's Chameleon (*Calumma ambreense*) and Giant Day Gecko (*Phelsuma grandis*). Also among the lizards are Madagascar Plated Lizard (*Zonosaurus madagascariensis*) and Elegant Skink (*Trachylepis elegans*). Snake species include Madagascar Tree Boa (*Sanzinia*

madagascariensis), Madagascan Giant Hognose Snake (*Leioheterodon madagascariensis*), Striped Madagascar Garter Snake (*Thamnosophis lateralis*), and Collared Bright Snake (*Liophidium torquatum*). We will also be targeting the scarce, nocturnal Madagascar Tree Snake (*Phisalixella arctifasciata*).



Madagascar Giant Day Gecko (*Phelsuma grandis*) © Bobby Bok, March 2026

Night walks will be outside of the national park and often produce good sightings of the relatively common Northern Blue-nosed Chameleon (*Calumma linotum*), Panther Chameleon (*Furcifer pardalis*) and Oustalet's Chameleon (*Furcifer oustaleti*), as well as Petter's Chameleon. Geckos include Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko (*Uroplatus sikorae*) which is quite common, and the main target species, the Giant Leaf-tailed Gecko (*Uroplatus giganteus*). Spearpoint Leaf-tailed Gecko (*Uroplatus finiavana*) has also been recently described here. There is a great diversity of frogs which include (Northern) Madagascar Bright-eyed Frog (*Boophis roseipalmatus*), Duméril's Bright-

eyed Frog (*Boophis tephraeomystax*), Madagascar Jumping Frog (*Aglyptodactylus madagascariensis*), Free Madagascar Frog (*Guibemantis liber*), Boettger's Grainy Frog (*Gephyromantis horridus*), Massif Bridge Frog (*Gephyromantis pseudoasper*), and Green Mantella (*Mantella viridis*). Seven species of lemur live here, with the most notable being the localised Crowned Lemur, Sanford's Brown Lemur and the Amber Mountain Fork-marked Lemur, a species found nowhere else in the world. The birdlife is equally diverse and includes Madagascar Ibis, the endemic Amber Mountain Rock Thrush, Cuckoo-roller, Pitta-like Ground-roller, Nelicourvi Weaver, Souimanga Sunbird, Hooked-billed Vanga and Madagascar Buzzard. The Malagasy carnivoran, Ring-tailed Vontsira (formerly known as Ring-tailed Mongoose) also occurs here.

Day 6 – 8

Ankarana



Western Madagascar Tree Boa (*Sanzinia voluntary*) © Bobby and Laura Bok, March 2026

After an exciting exploration of Montagne d'Ambre National Park, we next drive from Joffreville to Ankarana with three nights on the eastern side of the reserve, where numerous reptiles add to the region's wildlife diversity. We hope to see Oustalet's Chameleon (*Furcifer oustaleti*) and Panther Chameleon (*Furcifer pardalis*) and, with a bit of luck, Plated Leaf Chameleon (*Brookesia stumpffi*) and the recently described Ankarana Minute Leaf Chameleon (*Brookesia confidens*). We will be looking out

for western populations of Madagascar Tree Boa (*Sanzinia voluntary*), Four-striped Snake (*Dromicodryas quadrilineatus*), Madagascar Cat-eyed Snake (*Madagascarophis colubrinus*), Orange Tree Snake (*Phisalixella variabilis*), and Mahafaly Sand Snake (*Mimophis mahfalensis*). Lizards include Tsingy Plated Lizard (*Zonosaurus tsingy*), Tavaratra Skink (*Trachylepis tavaratra*), Northern Madagascar Velvet Gecko (*Blaesodactylus boivini*), the nocturnal Peters' Spotted (Fish-scaled) Gecko (*Geckolepis maculata*), and Henkel's Leaf-tailed Gecko (*Uroplatus henkeli*), along with a few species of very recently discovered Madagascar Geckos. Frog species here include Duméril's Bright-eyed Frog (*Boophis tephraeomystax*), Kirindy Jumping Frog (*Aglyptodactylus securifer*) and Madagascar Bull Frog (*Laliostoma labrosum*). Lemurs to look out for include Crowned Lemur, Sanford's Brown Lemur, Northern Sportive Lemur and Grey Mouse Lemur, whilst other mammals include the inquisitive Ring-tailed Vontsira. Birdlife is also rich with Crested Coua, Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascar Buttonquail, White-breasted Mesite, Madagascar Crested Ibis and Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher all present.

Day 9

Antsiranana

Today we make a final visit to Ankarana Reserve before transferring back to Antsiranana (Diego Suarez) where we overnight.

Day 10

Antananarivo

After breakfast we transfer to the airport for the flight back to Antananarivo before we overnight, positioning ourselves for our flight to the south-east.

Day 11 – 13

Ifaty



Green Bright-eyed Frog © A Marsh

This morning, we transfer to the airport for the flight south to Toliara and then north to Ifaty, where we are based for three nights. The spiny forest here is unique and our stay includes visits to the Reniala Reserve during both the day and night. We will also explore the surrounding region where Warty (or Spiny-backed) Chameleon (*Furcifer verrucosus*) and Antimena Chameleon live in a small area of spiny forest. The Ifaty region is an excellent place to look for Bernier's Striped Snake (*Dromicodryas bernieri*) and the sexually dimorphic Mahafaly Sand Snake (*Mimophis mahfalensis*), as well as Madagascar Speckled Snake (*Leioheterodon geayi*), Duméril's Ground Boa (*Acrantophis dumerili*) and Ocellated Cat Snake (*Madagascarophis ocellatus*). Lizards are common around Ifaty, with species such as Three-eyed Lizard (*Chalarodon madagascariensis*), Peters' Keeled Plated Lizard (*Tracheloptychus petersi*) which occurs sympatrically with Madagascar Keeled Plated Lizard (*T. madagascariensis*), Gravenhorst's and Gold-spotted Skinks (*Trachylepis gravenhorstii* and *T. aureopunctata*), the iguanid Merrem's Madagascar Swift (*Oplurus cyclurus*), Standing's and Modest Day Gecko (*Phelsuma standingi* and *P. modesta*), Spiny Forest Dwarf Gecko (*Lygodactylus tuberosus*), Mocquard's and Madagascar Ground Geckos (*Paroedura bastardi* and *P. picta*). Frog species here include Western Bright-eyed Frog (*Boophis doulioti*), Madagascar Bullfrog (*Laliostoma labrosum*) and Toliara Rain Frog (*Scaphiophryne menabensis*). 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. You will be taken on a dawn birdwatching walk in an effort to find these birds along with Banded Kestrel, Archbold's Newtonia, Thamnornis Warbler, Lafresnaye's Vanga, Hook-billed Vanga, Chabert's Vanga, Sickle-billed Vanga and Running Coua. The forest here is a botanical treasure trove 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 rubrostipa* Baobab, Bottle Baobabs, aloes, and kalanchoe.

Day 14

Antananarivo

After our days exploring Reniala Reserve, this morning we transfer to the airport for the flight back to Antananarivo.

Day 15 – 17

Andasibe



Parson's Chameleon (*Calumma parsonii*) yellow lip © Bobby and Laura Bok, March 2026

This morning, we take a short drive to Andasibe where we will be based for three nights. This is another spectacularly diverse region of Madagascar and chameleons here include Parson's Chameleon (*Calumma parsonii cristifer*), Short-horned Chameleon (*Calumma brevicorne*), the Yellow-green Chameleon (*Calumma malthe*), Perinet (Band-bellied) Chameleon (*Calumma gastrotaenia*), Canopy Chameleon (*Furcifer willsii*), Big-nosed Chameleon (*Calumma nasutum*), Brown Leaf Chameleon (*Brookesia superciliaris*) and Domergue's Leaf Chameleon (*Brookesia thielii*). There's also the newly discovered species named Two-toned Chameleon (*Calumma roaloko*). The eastern forms of 'Fandrefiala' Snake (*Ithycyphus perineti*) and Madagascar Cat-eyed Snake (*Madagascarophis colubrinus*), Madagascar Tree Boa (*Sanzinia madagascariensis*), Forest Madagascar Garter Snake (*Thamnosophis infrasignatus*), Striped Madagascar Garter Snake (*Thamnosophis lateralis*), Collared Bright Snake (*Liophidium torquatum*) and Gluttonous Bighead Snake (*Compsophis laphystius*) all occur here. Lizards include the Madagascar Plated Lizard (*Zonosaurus madagascariensis*), Ornate Plated Lizard (*Zonosaurus ornatus*), Bronze Plated Lizard

(*Zonosaurus aeneus*), Gravenhorst's Skink (*Trachylepis gravenhorstii*) and Common Madagascar Skink (*Madascincus melanopleura*). Expected geckos include Lined Day Gecko (*Phelsuma lineata*), Madagascar Day Gecko (*Phelsuma madagascariensis*), Small Lined Day Gecko (*Phelsuma pusilla*), Peacock Day Gecko (*Phelsuma quadriocellata*) and various species of the cryptic Dwarf Geckos. We will look out for the nocturnal Graceful Ground Gecko (*Paroedura gracilis*), Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko (*Uroplatus phantasticus*), Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko (*Uroplatus sikorae*), and Madagascar Clawless Gecko (*Ebenavia inunguis*). Night walks are extremely rewarding, with sightings of frog species and roosting chameleons. Frog species are very diverse here and include Free Madagascar Frog (*Guibemantis liber*), Tsarafidy Madagascar Frog (*Guibemantis pulcher*), Horned Grainy Frog (*Gephyromantis cornutus*), Betsileo Reed Frog (*Heterixalus betsileo*), Spotted Bright-eyed Frog (*Boophis albipunctatus*) and Bohm's Bright-eyed Frog (*Boophis boehmei*)

Day 18

Antananarivo

After a leisurely morning in the Andasibe reserves, after lunch today we will make the return journey of about 5 hours back to our hotel in Tana, where we enjoy a final evening meal together.

Day 19 – 20

Inbound flights

We will transfer to Ivato International Airport in the late morning, ahead of our early afternoon flight back to London, via Addis Ababa. Please note that lunch is not included today (though snacks can be purchased at the airport, and a meal will be provided on board the flight home).



Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko (*Uroplatus phantasticus*) © Bobby and Laura Bok, March 2026

Holiday Inclusions / Extra Expenses

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

- International and domestic flights in economy
- Full board accommodation throughout (i.e. breakfast, lunch and dinner) from dinner on arrival in Tana on Day 2, through to breakfast on the final morning on Day 19.
- 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 35)
- 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

Flights and Baggage Allowances

Our preferred route to Madagascar is with Ethiopian Airlines from Heathrow flying via Addis Ababa (there are no direct flights from the UK to Madagascar). Flights are usually overnight in both directions and there is the option to fly from Manchester, along with a handful of other European cities, to Addis Ababa.

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 fly with Air France instead, 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 very late the same day as the Ethiopian 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).

Tour Grading

On a typical day on our herpetology tours, we'll begin searching in the field after breakfast, when the sun has warmed the substrates and landscapes, often getting into the vehicles at 9am and, after stopping for approximately one hour for lunch, we'll continue into early evening when we will stop for a rest and dinner. Most evenings it will be possible to do excursions in search of nocturnal species, which will on average be for three hours after dinner. With an equal percentage of the target reptile and amphibian species likely to be nocturnal, these night searches are an important part of the tour but are optional, with some participants preferring to rest on some of the days. On average, 5-8 miles are walked per day.

We'll focus our time in the field on building an enviable list of reptile and amphibian species seen. Whilst searching, there is no doubt we'll come across a huge variety of amazing fauna and flora, which we'll also take time to enjoy, but reptiles and amphibians will strongly remain our focus. Sensitively checking under stones, logs and other refugia is an effective way of finding many species. Some of the target reptile or amphibian species may require longer field hours to locate, and therefore this tour is suitable and most enjoyable for experienced herpetologists or naturalists who, aside from wishing to see the region's rarely seen reptiles and amphibians, relish being in the field searching for and identifying the vast array of birds, mammals, butterflies, invertebrates, and other wildlife which can be found sharing the wonderful habitats that we'll explore on the tour.

In summary, Naturetrek herpetology holidays offer tremendous value and are suitable for those whose main holiday focus is seeing some of the world's superb reptiles and amphibians, whilst spending the majority of their time in wildlife habitats.

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 en suite 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. 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.

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.

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.



Granddier's Baobab © O. Smart