

Madagascar in Style

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1/2	Depart London / Arrive Tana.
Day 3/4	Ifaty.
Day 5	Tana.
Day 6/9	Masoala National Park.
Day 10/11	Tana.
Day 12/15	Anjajavy.
Day 16	Tana.
Day 17/18	Depart Tana / Arrive London.

Departs

September / October / November

Focus

Birds, mammals and general natural history

Grading

A. Easy to moderate day and night walks

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code MDG11)

Highlights:

- Stay at some of the best hotels in Madagascar
- Experience day and night walks in pristine rainforests and bizarre spiny desert
- See rare and iconic lemur species such as Red-ruffed Lemur and Coquerel's Sifaka
- Enjoy endemic birds, chameleons, Leaf-tailed Geckos and other reptiles
- Small group, led by expert naturalist local guide



From top: Red-ruffed Lemur, Moramamba Bay, Helmet Vanga
(Stephen Woodham)



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Introduction

This new 18 day tour is our most exclusive holiday to Madagascar to date, combining both adventure and luxury. Limited to a maximum of just eight people, we stay in some of the best accommodation Madagascar has to offer, without compromising on the quality and variety of the wildlife.

Madagascar lies off the coast of east Africa, across the Mozambique Channel, and straddles the Tropic of Capricorn. Separated from the African mainland for some 165 million years, the island has developed in its own ecological niche and today possesses a unique and extremely diverse natural history. Over 80% of its plants, 40% of its birds and virtually all of the mammals, reptiles and amphibians occur nowhere else in the world. It harbours 34 known species of chameleon (whereas Africa has only nine!), over 100 lemurs (primates unique to Madagascar) and seven baobabs (Africa has only one). Even now, new species are still being discovered as biological survey work continues. Its exceptional biodiversity and the disturbingly fast pace of environmental destruction make Madagascar a world conservation priority. Fortunately, Madagascar enjoys an extensive network of protected areas, most of which are open to visitors. Park fees go towards maintaining reserves, with some economic benefits to local people, ensuring that Madagascar's tourist industry provides a good incentive to conserve its valuable ecology. Madagascar's natural history has been likened to a string of pearls. Much of the central region has been transformed by man into barren grasslands with the loss of much of the original wildlife, which is now mostly confined to outlying sites – the 'pearls'.

The tour begins with a visit to the unique spiny forest habitat on the south-west coast, where the vegetation evolved to protect itself from not long extinct giant lemurs that used to live here. This fascinating habitat is home to many species that are only found here, and our hotel on the beach overlooking the Mozambique Channel is the perfect base to relax.



Coquerel's Sifakas at Anjajavy

After a night in Tana we then head to the north-east of the country and stay four nights at the small Masoala Forest Lodge. With tents akin to east African safaris, on platforms shrouded in forest, looking down onto Antongil Bay, this lodge provides adventure and comfort in equal measure. Most visitors to Madagascar do not make it to Masoala National Park, which is the largest protected area in the country and the most biodiverse! This is one of the best places to see the sought-after Helmet Vanga, but all the wildlife here is an absolute treat. Walking through primary rainforest or kayaking in the crystal blue waters, this is a truly special place to visit.

After another night in Tana, we end the tour at the most renowned hotel in Madagascar. Created more than two decades ago, it is at the forefront of ecotourism, combining a luxurious experience with conservation and benefits to the local community. Anjajavy Le Lodge is a series of villas on a pristine beach in an isolated location on the north-west coast, and has created its own private reserve, which is part of a wider protected area. With multiple habitats in a relatively small area, the wildlife here is varied and bountiful, with much of it not found elsewhere. There are many trails to explore and boat trips on offer, although spending time on the beautiful private beach or in the pool might be just as tempting! This paradise is the perfect location to finish our holiday.

Itinerary

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

Days 1 – 2

Fly Antananarivo

We depart Heathrow this evening on an overnight flight to Tana via Addis Ababa (please see section below regarding flight connections). We then connect with a mid-morning flight to Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, arriving in the early afternoon. On arriving at Madagascar's international airport, we will purchase our visas, clear immigration and customs and transfer to a comfortable hotel, our base for the first night of the tour. This afternoon, depending on our flight arrival time, there should be the opportunity to enjoy an excursion to a nearby wildlife spot in Tana.

Day 3

Fly Toliara, Ifaty



This morning we will do some exploring close to our hotel and have our first sightings of the more common birds and other wildlife in the urban setting of Tana.

We will return to the airport for our flight to Toliara on the south-west coast. Upon arrival we will make the short drive up the coast to the small fishing village of Ifaty and our hotel on the beach, our base for the next two nights. The rooms are spacious, individual chalets, set in lovely gardens, with an inviting pool and friendly service. Facing westwards, we will enjoy dinner and drinks as we watch the magnificent sunset unfold in front of us over the Mozambique Channel.

Day 4

Ifaty

This morning we will explore the bizarre spiny forest, Madagascar's most unique habitat, in the reserve of Reniala. 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 Meseite, whose defence mechanism is to freeze motionless on a branch. We will take 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, Sickie-billed Vanga, Crested Coua and Running Coua.



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

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

Day 5

Fly Tana

This morning we will have another opportunity to visit the spiny forest and hope to catch up with any species that we might have missed the day before.

This afternoon we fly back to Tana and spend the night in our comfortable hotel.

Day 6

Fly Masoala Forest Lodge

This morning we head back to the airport for our less than 2-hour charter flight to the town of Maroantsetra in the north of the country, and the gateway to Masoala National Park. Upon arrival we will be taken to the harbour and board our boat, which will make the 2-hour journey across Antongil Bay to Masoala Forest Lodge, our home for the next four nights.

Nestled in a sheltered cove, surrounded by Masoala National Park and opening onto the warm, coral-rich waters of the Tampolo Marine Reserve, this intimate and comfortable beach lodge is

accessible by boat or on foot, making it a haven of tranquillity where the rainforest meets the ocean and fringing reefs. The beach here is magnificent and there are plenty of activities such as kayaking and snorkelling as well as other excursions. The lodge is comprised of six simple but very comfortable en-suite tents set on raised wooden platforms. The friendly owners are dedicated to involving the local community in the benefits of tourism and this is perhaps most apparent in the sourcing of the delicious food, which is outstanding.

After we have settled into our tents, we should have time for an initial exploration of the beach and coastal forest in the vicinity of the lodge, where we might be fortunate to see the elegant Madagascar Pratincole.



Tent at Masoala Forest Lodge



The seadeck at Masoala Forest Lodge

Days 7 – 9

Masoala National Park

We now have three 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 clothe 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 streams tumble down the mountainsides and forests of towering buttress-rooted trees, draped with climbers and epiphytes, create a home for a huge diversity of animal and plant-life. 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 Fossa, 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, Giant Day Gecko and two species of intricately camouflaged *Uroplatus* leaf-tailed Geckos.

On the three full days that we are here, we will venture into the primary rainforest in the morning, walking the different trails and viewing the wildlife in this special place. The paths are good but can be quite steep in some sections. After returning to the lodge for lunch, there are various other options in the afternoon that include walking the various trails of the private reserve that belong to the lodge, kayaking along the stunning coastline or into the mangroves, or taking a canoe trip on the Tampolo River. It is also possible to visit a nearby village to meet and learn about the locals' way of life or simply relax on the beautiful, private beach or indulge in a massage. Every evening after dinner, there will be the option to partake in a nocturnal walk from the lodge, which are sure to yield even more wildlife sightings.

All activities here are optional, so you can pick and choose what you wish to do. In addition to the above, there are day trips on offer to places further afield, and also the possibility of a boat trip to see Humpback Whales if they are still here (our stay will be at the tail end of the season for them), all of which are at additional cost.



Day 10

Fly Tana

We will have one last breakfast on the restaurant decking with spectacular views over the sea before sadly saying goodbye to the lovely staff and this wildlife paradise. We will make the boat journey back to Maroantsetra Harbour, then overland to the airport for our charter flight back to Tana.

On arrival we will once more head to our hotel in the capital, where we will spend the next two nights.

Day 11

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.

Day 12

Fly Anjajavy Le Lodge

We have an early start this morning, as we head back to Tana airport for an early morning charter flight to Anjajavy. It is a 90-minute flight to the airstrip and then a half-hour drive to Anjajavy Le Lodge, arguably the most luxurious and spectacular resort in the whole of Madagascar, set in over 1,000 hectares of its own private reserve, and our base for the next four nights.



The Anjajavy Peninsula lies on Madagascar's north-west coast and harbours the private Anjajavy Reserve. This reserve is 'Madagascar in microcosm' due to its variety in habitat and terrain: it comprises coastal mangroves, limestone outcrops and seasonally dry deciduous forest. It holds a wealth of wildlife, including such lemur species as Common Brown Lemur and the beautiful Coquerel's Sifaka. These magnificent creatures tend to inhabit the forest near to the lodge and are

likely to be seen on a regular basis. A string of secluded beaches, from which to enjoy a little snorkeling, line the coast and can easily be explored on foot.



This exquisite yet relaxed hotel offers 24 rosewood villas, each with a large sea-facing terrace, living room, en-suite facilities and breakfast area. From the hotel you may walk into the pristine forest behind or explore the beaches, coves and reefs in front of you. It has a reception, dining and bar area, where afternoon tea is served in the late afternoon, overlooking the sea and a large swimming pool. The food is simply superb, using seasonal and locally grown and sourced ingredients. It is generally French-inspired, but always with a local twist. Nearby there is a curated, landscaped garden with native plants and trees, and beyond this the natural habitat of the protected private reserve.

There are many activities and excursions that can be undertaken at Anjajavy. We have devised a set programme to do as a group (although this is not obligatory) and have intentionally given some free half days to allow a choice of how to spend this time, meaning experiences will be curated to personal preferences. These vary from walks with a focus on botany, geology, or general natural history to boat trips, kayaking, snorkelling, and cultural visits to nearby villages in different locations in Anjajavy's private reserve or further afield in the wider protected area (some of these might involve an additional cost).

After settling into our villas and new surroundings, it will be time for lunch and in the afternoon, we will have our first exploration of the area, doing the 'Giant's Walk'. We will make our way through the forest, where the first birds we are likely to see include Common Newtonia, Common Jery, Souimanga Sunbird, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher and Crested Drongo, a bird that is often found in feeding flocks of various species due to its alarm call and fearlessness with all predators. On the ground we could also see Madagascar Hairy-legged Land Crab which reside here, en route to a 400-year-old Grey Baobab tree with a 13-metre circumference.



This evening we will do a night walk in the vicinity of the lodge and we have a good chance of finding mouse lemurs, sportive lemurs and fat-tailed dwarf lemurs, as well as large Oustalet's and exquisite Jewelled Chameleons.

Day 13

Anjajavy Le Lodge

This morning we will have a pre-breakfast birdwatching walk a short distance away from the lodge. We are likely to see several species of the Coua family, including Crested, Coquerel's and Red-capped Coua, and we will keep our eyes and ears peeled for the beautiful call of the Madagascar



Sickle-billed Vanga

Nightjar that resides in this forest. Other specialities include Chabert, White-headed and Sickie-billed Vangas; the latter is much larger than the other two and uses its long-curved bill to probe cracks and crevices, sometimes hanging upside down to do so.

After breakfast we will head out again on foot once more, this time along the 'Sakalava Path', where tsingy rocks are interspersed in the mangroves and secondary forest. We could see all manner of wildlife along the way, including

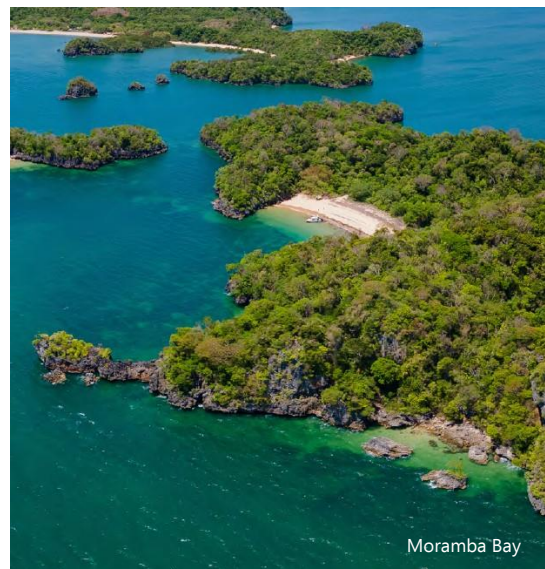
Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher, Madagascar Green-Pigeon, Madagascar Hoopoe, roosting White-browed Owl and possibly the shy and elusive Madagascar Ibis, which can be found in the surrounds of Anjajavy. We will also keep an eye on the reptiles, with masters of disguise, Spearpoint Leaf-tailed Geckos, hiding in the foliage, as well as Rhinoceros Chameleon and, if lucky, a Leaf-nosed Snake which has a spear-like projection on its nose.

We will return to the lodge for lunch, after which the afternoon is free so that you can choose one of the many excursions or activities on offer, or simply laze on the gorgeous beach or by the pool. We will reconvene for dinner.

Day 14

Anjajavy Le Lodge

This morning we will embark on a boat trip to the extraordinary Moramba Bay, where small mushroom-shaped islets seemingly float in the bay, and idyllic and untouched sandy beaches line the islands and mainland of this remote paradise. It is one of the few places in the country where centuries-old baobab trees grow so close to the sea, and even on the small islets themselves, seemingly sprouting out of nothing but rock. We will search for one of the rarest raptors in the world, the critically endangered Madagascar Fish Eagle, as well as keep an eye out for other birdlife in the trees and on the shoreline. If lucky, we might see the endangered Malagasy Sacred Ibis, a large white bird with fluffy black feathers across the rump and a black head. If the water is clear, there



Moramba Bay

will also be an opportunity for snorkelling before returning to the lodge in time for lunch.

This is another free afternoon, but there are plenty of ways to occupy your time should you wish. After dinner we will take a short drive to another part of the protected area and then head out on foot for a 'night safari'. We will have a couple of hours to explore by torchlight and can hope to see more mouse lemurs and sportive lemurs, as well as roosting birds and a remote chance of Fossa!

Day 15

Anjajavy Le Lodge

We will have another pre-breakfast birdwatching walk this morning, on which we could see species such as Madagascar Cuckooshrike, Greater and Lesser Vasa Parrots, Grey-headed Lovebird and the skittish Madagascar Buttonquail with its intricately patterned feathers.

The morning is free, and then we will head out in the afternoon after lunch to the Alley of Baobabs, Anjajavy's own version of the larger and famous avenue to the south. Here we could see family groups of Common Brown Lemurs and possibly the critically endangered Mongoose Lemur, which is often found with the former. Overhead we might see Madagascar Buzzard, Madagascar Harrier-hawk and maybe a Malagasy Harrier. The main attraction, though, will be the congregation of baobabs that occur here. We will return back to the lodge in time for our final dinner here.

Day 16

Fly Tana

It is with a heavy heart that we will leave Anjajavy this morning, driving back to the airstrip and then taking the charter flight back to Tana, where we will spend the night.

Days 17 – 18

In Flight

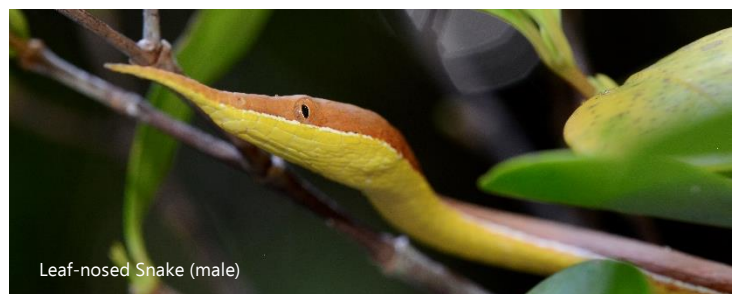
Our flight usually departs from Ivato International Airport in the early afternoon, arriving back into London the following morning.



Baobab in the Spiny Forest



Fossa at Anjajavy Le Lodge



Leaf-nosed Snake (male)

Holiday Inclusions / Extra Expenses

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

- International flights in economy class
- Scheduled internal flights in business class
- Charter flights to / from remote lodges
- Full board accommodation throughout (i.e. breakfast, lunch and dinner)
- Bottled water throughout and local drinks at all hotels
- All ground and water transportation
- English speaking, expert naturalist local guide throughout
- Park fees and reserve entry fees
- Excursions at Masoala Forest Lodge and Anjajavy Le Lodge as described in the itinerary

The following are not included and should be budgeted for:

- Visa (currently purchased on arrival in Tana)
- Imported drinks
- Excursions at Masoala Forest Lodge and Anjajavy Le Lodge that are not described in the itinerary
- Discretionary tipping
- Any other personal spending e.g. souvenirs

Tour Grading

This tour has been graded A, although a good level of fitness is required.

There will be plenty of daytime walks in a variety of Malagasy habitat types, as well as night walks to see nocturnal lemurs, reptiles and sometimes roosting birds. All walks are optional and taken at a leisurely pace, mostly on flat terrain, but in Masoala National Park they will sometimes be over hilly and 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.

When travelling in Madagascar, it is necessary to accept that the roads will be poor and the internal airlines may not always leave exactly on time! Likewise, whilst we will be staying at some of the best and most exclusive hotels in the country, it must be stressed that Madagascar is a very poor country and things do not always go to plan. 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

We stay at Le Paradisier in Ifaty, Masoala Forest Lodge and Anjajavy Le Lodge. All of them are located on beautiful stretches of the coastline, away from other settlements, providing en-suite accommodation and excellent standards of service. Two of them have swimming pools, and all offer opportunities for snorkelling. We stay in a high-quality hotel in Tana on the nights in between.

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 instead to 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 very late the same day as the Ethiopian Airlines arrival, meaning that you would meet up with the rest of the group at breakfast on your first morning in Madagascar.

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

Your Safety & Security

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

How to Book Your Place

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.