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Tour Notes

Essence of Madagascar

Tour Duration – 12 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●○ | Culture ●●●○ | History ●●●○ | Wildlife ●●●●○

Tour Pace

Medium / Busy

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Incredible endemic flora and fauna and an opportunity to see different lemur species
- ✓ See the famous ring-tailed lemurs at Anja Reserve
- ✓ Diverse landscapes from the rainforest of Ranomafana to the semi desert of Isalo
- ✓ Spend time on the beautiful Mozambique Channel at Ifaty
- ✓ Experience the interesting cultural diversity of the Central Highlands





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Tour Map - Essence of Madagascar



Tour Essentials

Accommodation:	Simple but comfortable small hotels with private bathrooms – suitable for those on a budget
Included Meals:	Daily breakfast (B)
Group Size:	Maximum group size of 4 travellers
Start Point:	Antananarivo
End Point:	Antananarivo
Transport:	4WD - Hyundai H1 or similar
Country Visited:	Madagascar



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Essence of Madagascar

The island of Madagascar occupies a unique place, both culturally and geographically, within Africa. Separated from the mainland millions of years ago, its fauna has developed very differently from the rest of the continent's wildlife, and it is home to countless species found nowhere else on earth. Its people are an intriguing mix of Malay and African ancestry, with complex patterns of beliefs and an unusual history. On this trip we take in some of the best of this enigmatic and alluring land. We visit superb national parks, including the bizarre moonscape of Isalo and the lush rainforests of Ranomafana, home to countless species of lemurs including the rare golden bamboo lemur, only discovered by scientists in 1986. Also spend time at Ifaty on the beautiful Mozambique Channel. If you have longer to spare than just 12 days then contact us for many different extension options. Madagascar is unlike anywhere else on earth – join us to experience its diverse charms on a trip that will challenge what you thought you knew about Africa.

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used. Although we try to be as accurate as possible, distances and timings indicated in the itinerary are meant as guidelines only and can substantially vary from one departure to another one depending on local safety initiatives, road conditions, road traffic and other unforeseen events.

Driver and Local Guide/s

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. On this tour you will not have an accompanying tour leader. On this tour you will have a professional English-speaking driver and then enjoy the services of local guides at each of the parks/reserves.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Antananarivo

Arrive in Antananarivo and transfer to your hotel conveniently situated in the vicinity of the airport. You may wish to relax or start exploring the city if time permits. Overnight Gassy Country House Hotel or similar. No meals are included today.

Antananarivo

Antananarivo, commonly known as Tana, is the capital and largest city in Madagascar. The name Antananarivo means 'the City of the Thousands', a reference to the thousand warriors of King Andrianjaka, who established Tana as the capital city of the Merina tribe and accorded it a sacred status. The city was largely chosen for its privileged location – being on high ground (1,370m) and surrounded by marsh made it easy to defend and thus a natural choice for the capital. Tana has unusual French and Asian inspired architecture with winding cobblestone streets and staircases that create a medieval impression.

The large open-air Zoma market has been disbanded, which means there is now plenty of room to walk around Araben ny Fahaleovantena (Avenue de l'Independence), the capital's main street. Other attractions include the colourful daily flower market on the edge of Lake Anosy and the botanical and zoological gardens, where you can see the egg and 3m-tall skeleton of the extinct aepyornis, or elephant bird. Sadly, the Rova





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(Queen's Palace) burned to the ground in 1996. Though virtually nothing remains at the site, there are nice views of the city from the hill where the palace once stood. Antananarivo does not have too much in the way of conventional sightseeing, but if you enjoy walking around, watching local scenes and experiencing the laid-back atmosphere that is prevalent here, the city is a very pleasant place – interesting markets, colonial buildings and many craft shops make it a great place to explore.

Day 2: Antananarivo – Ambositra (Approximate driving time today is 8 hours)

After breakfast drive southward across the landscape of the highlands, mainly composed of rice fields and lavaka, or 'big holes' caused by erosion. Stop in Ambatolampy, the 'city built on the flat rock'. Traditionally agricultural, the town is also famous for age-old foundries, a technique transmitted from father to son. Continue to the important town of Antsirabe where we stop for lunch and then drive to Ambositra for our overnight stay. Overnight Motel Violette or similar (B)

Ambositra

Ambositra, meaning 'the place of the eunuchs' (supposedly because the Merina tribe castrated all defeated warriors of the local tribe), is an excellent place to see examples of Malagasy wood carvings, and is the capital of the Zafimaniry tribe. The local houses boast intricately carved balconies, panels and shutters.

Day 3: Ambositra – Ambalavao (Approximate driving time today is 7 hours)

This morning explore Ambositra, the centre of Madagascar's wood carving industry. The architecture is beautiful; houses are made with ornately carved wooden balconies and shutters with vivid colours. Continue through the highlands to the large city of Fianarantsoa, where the landscape is still dominated by rice fields on stage, pine forest and eucalyptus. On arrival, take a city tour of Fianarantsoa before continuing to Ambalavao, where we visit the Paper Anteimoro workshop, a sign of the Arabian influence in Madagascar. Also, if time permit, we visit the colourful and popular zebu market in Ambalavao (only on Wednesdays and Thursdays). Overnight Zongo Hotel or similar (B)

Day 4: Ambalavao – Anja Reserve – Isalo (Ranohira) (Approximate driving time today is 6 hours)

This morning continue to Anja Reserve where we start our wildlife experiences. Anja is a reserve run by the local village, and income raised serves to pay the local school teachers' salary. During the 2 hour hike, we will get the chance to see the famous ring-tailed lemurs. Continue south passing the "3 hillocks" and the huge dome called "archbishop's cape" a sacred place for the local people, as it is a place where their ancestors made a collective suicide rather than to surrender to Merina's domination. Stop in Ihosy, the capital of the Bara tribes, nomadic cattle raisers and then drive through the spectacular "plateaux de Horombe" to finally arrive in Ranohira, the gate to the Isalo National Park. Overnight Motel de l'Isalo or similar. (B)

Day 5: Isalo National Park

After breakfast, enjoy a walk in the National Park of Isalo. This park is very famous for its strange sandstone geological formations eroded over the passage of time by the wind and rain, this park offers some of the most spectacular scenery of the country. This is also a place where the Bara tribes bury their dead. If we are lucky, we will see the lemur Catta during our excursion in the park.

With permission, visit a local school project. Later in the afternoon, we head to "La Fenêtre de l'Isalo", a stunning rock arch to watch the sunset over this dramatic landscape. Overnight Motel de l'Isalo or similar (B)

Isalo National Park

Isalo National Park, in the south of the country, is largely made up of interestingly-shaped sandstone rocks, and is a world away from the lushness of some of Madagascar's other parks. The park is renowned for the colours of the surrounding terrain and impressive panoramic views, as well as a sense of utter tranquillity. It is also a sacred area to the local Bara tribe, who use caves in the cliffs as burial chambers. We will be walking for much of the day at Isalo so you should be prepared for this.



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The walk to the natural swimming pool is 3km both ways and the trail is climbing steps and heading upwards for about 1km, then flat for 1km and finally descending to the natural pool. Whilst walking along the flat part of the route you can climb the rocks to the view point. There are 2 areas you can climb to depending on how comfortable you are with heights. Your guide will explain these to you so you can decide the best viewing platform.

Day 6: Isalo - Zombitse National Park – Tuléar - Ifaty (*Approximate driving time today is 8 hours*)

After breakfast, continue southwest to Tuléar, the terminal of Route National 7. Stop at Ilalaka, a tiny village transformed into a busy town since the discovery of sapphire 15 years ago. From here, a new landscape presents, composed with semi-dry forest of the west and, baobab tamarin trees. Visit Zombitse National Park where we will have 1-hour hike with a special guide in a semi-dry tropical forest, home to endemic birds and up to 6 species of lemurs. As we approach Tulear, we start to see the spiny forest and the colourful tombs of the Mahafaly and Antandroy tribes. At Tulear we take the Route National 9, and head north to Ifaty along the coast passing mangroves, spiny forest and dunes. Overnight Belle Vue Hotel or similar (B)

Day 7: Ifaty at leisure

Today is at leisure. This afternoon there will be an optional walk to the village of Mangily and get a feel for the life of the Vezo fisherman. During the winter months (June – August it is possible to take a whale watching excursion at extra cost). Overnight Belle Vue Hotel or similar (B)

Ifaty

On the south-west coast of Madagascar, looking out over the Mozambique Channel lays Ifaty, an idyllic sun-soaked part of Madagascar. Home to the local Vezo people, Ifaty is an excellent place for snorkelling, diving, or just relaxing and watching the waves lap the shore.

Pirogues manned by local fishermen move up and down the coastline, bringing their catches back to land to sell in the local markets, and you'll soon find yourself slipping into an easy pace of life. There are also plenty of other options for the more energetic, including trips to local nature reserves, boat trips to spot whales and other marine life, and walks to local villages.

Day 8: Ifaty – Tuléar - Isalo (Ranohira) (*Driving time approximately is 7 hours*)

After breakfast, we head back to Tuléar and have a short city tour and visit the excellent Arboretum showcasing the best flora of Madagascar. From there, we take the Route National 7 and head northwards back to Isalo National Park. Overnight Motel de l'Isalo or similar (B)

Tuléar

Located in the Deep South, crossed by the Tropic of Capricorn and bathed by the Canal de Mozambique, Tulear used to be one of the main harbours of Madagascar during colonial time. Different tribes -Vezo, Sakalava, Masikoro and Antandroy- managed to intermingle in Tuléar, making it a cosmopolitan city with different cultures and traditions which are all based on the cult of ancestors.

Day 9: Isalo – Fianarantsoa - Ranomafana (*Approximate driving time today is 7 hours*)

After breakfast, we head north to Ihosy the capital of the Bara tribes and renowned Zebu herders. Pass back through the dramatic scenery of "plateaux de Horombe", with its wide-open savannah. Around Ihosy we look out for the Bara with their droves of zebu. Continue through to the catholic city of Fianarantsoa and on to Ranomafana National Park. Overnight Ihary Hotel or similar (B)

Day 10: Ranomafana National Park

Today we enjoy a morning excursion, walking for around 4 hours with stops with a local guide where we hope to see different lemur species. Later you will have some leisure time before a night walk on the edge of the forest looking for nocturnal species. Overnight Ihary Hotel or similar (B)



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Walk in Ranomafana National Park

The walk in Ranomafana National Park can take approx. 4-5 hours. The walk is along marked trails which include many steps, and it may be necessary to leave the trails to search for the lemurs.

Ranomafana National Park

Ranomafana is considered to be one of Madagascar's most beautiful National Parks, and was established in the early 1990s to protect the newly discovered golden bamboo lemur, as well as the very rare greater bamboo lemur. The park is covered with forest, and in higher areas moss and lichens cover the trees, giving it a prehistoric feel. Exotic plants such as orchids, as well as mountains, waterfalls and natural hot springs, make this endangered forest a charming and unusual place to discover.

Day 11: Ranomafana - Antsirabe (Approximate driving time today is 6 hours)

Depart early today and we re-enter the highlands once again enjoying the scenery of rice terraces beautifully arranged on the hills, and the valleys decorated with wide vegetable plantations. Stop at Ambositra for lunch and visit a local wood carvers' shop. Continue to Antsirabe arriving by the middle of the afternoon. We take a tour of this important highland town which is also home to the main beer brewery of Madagascar. Overnight Royal Palace Hotel or similar (B)

Antsirabe

The city of Antsirabe has about 100,000 inhabitants, and was founded by Norwegian missionaries in the late 18th century, who were attracted by the pleasant climate. It lies on the slopes of the nation's second highest peak, Tsiafajavona, in the Ankaratra Mountains, and has nearby thermal springs, locally renowned for their healing properties. The city is also known as the centre of Madagascar's brewing industry, and indeed you will smell the brewery on the way into town.

Day 12: Antsirabe - Antananarivo – Departure from Madagascar

(Approximate driving time today is 4 hours)

After breakfast we drive back to Tana. Upon arrival, transfer to the airport on due time for your onward flight back home. Day use available at Gassy Country House until late afternoon for clients travelling on the night Air France / Kenya Airways flights. (B)

Tour inclusions/exclusions

Inclusions:

Arrival and departure airport transfers
All accommodation as per mentioned in the itinerary, or similar
Transport throughout the tour with an English-speaking driver
Services of local guides in parks/reserves
Drinking water (1L per day per person)
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast)
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

Excluded:

International flights
Travel Insurance
Visa (available on arrival – currently 35 euros per person)
Drinks
Tips (at your discretion)
Items of a personal nature



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Important Information

Foreign Travel Advice Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At present there are no warnings against travel to Madagascar to areas that we travel to. Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or would like to know in detail what measures are being taken to ensure visits remain trouble free and without incident. It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore, please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.

Accommodation Rating

Accommodation on this tour is relatively simple, suitable for budget conscious travellers but still comfortable with private bathrooms.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

Food & Drink

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.



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Food

In general, the costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more. The costs below are indicative to eating at the hotel restaurants and range depending on number of courses.

- A lunch is £5-10
- A two-course dinner is £5-13

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general, you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

- A bottle of water is £0.50 - £0.75
- A bottle of local beer (THB) is £1 - £2
- A fresh fruit juice is £1 - £1.50

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Although not compulsory, tipping is customary in Madagascar. You can refer to the following amounts given as a general indication in local currency (MGA):

- Staff at the hotel: 10,000 to 15,000 MGA in total, per stay– usually there is a tipping box at the reception
- At a local restaurant: 5,000 to 10,000 MGA in total, per service
- Local guides in the parks and reserve: 10,000 to 20,000 MGA per visit
- Porters: 3,000 MGA per person, per service
- Additionally, if you are happy with your driver/guide, a reasonable amount to leave would be 15,000 to 25,000 MGA per day in total.

In addition, at your discretion you might also consider tipping your tour driver/guide in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: Madagascar's larger cities are equipped with ATMs but they can be unreliable. We recommend you get your Ariary in Tana or at the airport.

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Cards are not widely accepted as Madagascar is generally a cash economy, but those places that do accept them generally only take Visa cards.

Local Currency: Ariary (MGA)

Recommended Currency for Exchange: Euros (preferred), US Dollars, Pound Sterling

Where to Exchange: Tana Airport or Gassy Country House. Your guide will advise you. Please note that the exchange counters at the airport will be available to change money for all arriving flights.

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.



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Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a free airport transfer, both on arrival and departure. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance, the cost of which is not included in the price of the tour. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country.

Visa Information

Visitors from most countries, including UK, EU and US visitors require a visa for entering Madagascar. This is currently available on arrival for EUR 35 for most nationalities. However, visa regulations can frequently change and therefore we recommend that you check with your nearest embassy for the most up to date details.

When you arrive at Tana, do not join the queue for immigration, instead pass through the barrier and head to the visa counter located at the right-hand side of the arrivals hall where you can obtain your visa. You then continue to the police desk and then to baggage reclaim area.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to your country. We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition, certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively, UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

As with travel to most parts of Africa, we strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic around 6-8 weeks before departure for up-to-date information, advice and the necessary vaccinations. For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Typhoid. We also recommend that you seek advice about malaria prophylactics.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on [best practice when travelling with medicines](#). For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.



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Yellow Fever

Yellow Fever vaccination is required for travellers arriving from countries with risk of yellow fever transmission. If you can't produce a certificate, you will have to visit the Institut Pasteur in Antananarivo for vaccination.

Preparing for your tour

Climate

Madagascar, being a large country, has many different climatic variations. The route of this tour enables us to operate the trip year-round but please be aware that the optimum time to visit Madagascar is April – November. From December – March more rain showers can be experienced and very rarely Madagascar can be affected by Indian Ocean cyclones during this time. The positive side is that during this time tourists are few and you will experience parks/reserves when they are quiet. The temperature on the island is usually pleasant, ranging from the low twenties to the low thirties during the day but can get higher (Celsius).

Please note that during the winter months of May – November it can be cool/cold at night with temperatures dropping into single figures Celsius. In general, it is hotter in the west and south-west of the country whilst Antananarivo and the Central Highlands tend to be cooler.

General Travel in Madagascar

Madagascar is not like safari destinations in Southern or Eastern Africa. It is one of the poorest countries in the world. Whilst tourists have been visiting the country for many years in small numbers the infrastructure is still not as well developed as tourist destinations in the western world or even some destinations in Africa. Things sometimes do not run according to plan. Travelling can be slow and tough going. Although we try to be as accurate as possible, distances and timings indicated in the itinerary are meant as guidelines only and can substantially vary from one departure to another one depending on local safety initiatives, road conditions, road traffic and other unforeseen events. Service at hotels and restaurants is not comparable to western standards. Please kindly travel with an open mind and if you experience any problems contact our local team on the telephone number on your tour voucher who will do their best to assist.

Access to the Internet

Kindly note that access to the Internet via Wi-Fi should be available in every location on the main tour. Wi-Fi is usually only available at the restaurant or main lobby of the accommodation and we cannot guarantee that Wi-Fi connection will be working when you stay at the properties.

Driving times

The driving times stated in the itinerary are given in the best of faith. Driving times may on occasion be longer due to unforeseen circumstances such as poor weather, road construction activity, mechanical problems etc. Most of the roads in Madagascar are poorly maintained and asphalt is rare.

Clothing

Madagascar is quite warm and so light clothes are generally a good idea. You should ensure that you bring warmer clothes for any cool evenings. When walking in the forest it is advisable to wear long trousers and sleeves. Madagascar has reasonably relaxed attitudes towards dress and shorts are acceptable throughout much of the country. You should bring a raincoat as although our tours run in the dry season, it can still rain in the forests, particularly Ranomafana, as well as a hat to protect yourself from the strong sun.



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Equipment

Suncream/sunblock is a must. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have. Please bring a torch/head-torch as electricity outage can occur from time to time and also to assist with walking around hotel/lodges at night. If you use walking poles you may wish to bring them for walks in the national parks.

To limit unnecessary plastic waste, we do ask you to bring your own water bottle or flask that you can fill in with drinkable water for the whole length of stay.

Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable walking shoes/boots with closed toes and ankle support are recommended, as well as a pair of sandals for general travelling. In general, when walking you will be sticking to trails/paths but there may be times when you will leave the main footpaths in the National Parks to see the wildlife which is when good grip is particularly necessary.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large suitcase/rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electrical supply is 220V/50 Hz and plugs have two round pins like most European countries.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated 27th December 2019.

