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# Tour Notes

**Wild Madagascar**

**Tour Duration – 23 Days**



## Tour Rating

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

## Tour Pace

Busy

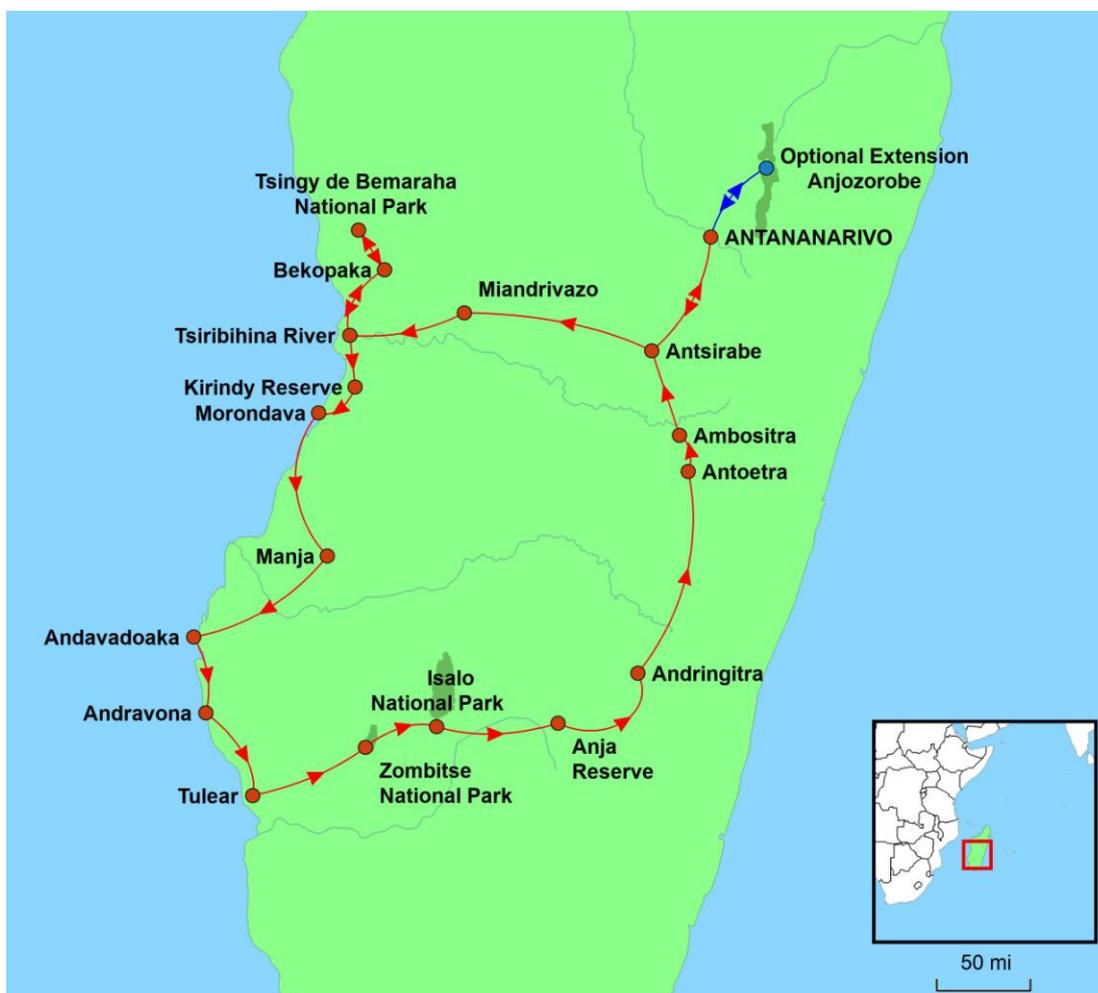
## Tour Highlights

- ✓ See incredible endemic flora and fauna with many chances of seeing many lemur species
- ✓ Travel off the beaten track down the little visited Western flank of Madagascar
- ✓ Diverse landscapes from rainforest to semi desert in a rich array of National Parks and reserves
- ✓ Spend time relaxing by or nature-watching on the beautiful Mozambique Channel
- ✓ Hike in the spectacular landscapes of Andringitra National Park
- ✓ View the fantastical tsingy features of the national parks from one of the 'via ferrata' challenges
- ✓ Encounter the ways and customs of different tribes of Madagascar



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## Tour Map - Wild Madagascar



### Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Mixture of comfortable hotels and lodges with some basic guesthouses and some camping
- Included Meals:** Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary
- Group Size:** Maximum group size 12
- Start Point:** Antananarivo
- End Point:** Antananarivo
- Transport:** 4WD and minibuses, river boat, local ferries
- Country Visited:** Madagascar
- Optional Extension:** Pre or post tour to Anjozorobe Forest



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### Wild Madagascar

On this off the beaten track adventure we explore this enigmatic and alluring land. Our journey takes us West on an exciting navigation along the Tsiribihina River followed by a visit to Kirindy Reserve with its semi-dry western tropical forest, home to the “fossa”. We then travel the coastal track from Morondava to Tulear with its stunning scenery of baobabs, thorny bushes, and magically pristine white sandy beaches, home to the Mikea, a primitive bee-hunting tribe that have very little contact with Westerners – without a doubt one of the cultural highlights of the tour. Heading inland again, another truly memorable high spot greets us: the little frequented Andringitra National Park where we hike along the spectacular Tsaranoro Valley. We then enter the culturally rich and diverse Central Highlands before the tour ends in the capital Antananarivo. The tour can then be extended with a visit to the Anjozorobe Forest corridor where we explore its delicate and stunning tropical rainforest, rich in unique wildlife: sundry species of lemur, including the beautiful Indri, chameleons, and a multitude of reptiles.

### 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.

### Tour Guide

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 merely 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: we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible, you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be advantageous to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

## Itinerary

### Day 1: Antananarivo

On arrival in ‘Tana’ meet our English-speaking guide and transfer to hotel accommodation. If time allows there may be an opportunity to explore the city. For those arriving late evening we use a hotel close to the airport. Overnight Gassy Country House hotel or similar.

### Antananarivo

Antananarivo, locally known affectionately as ‘Tana’, is the capital and largest city in Madagascar. The name Antananarivo literally translates as ‘the City of the Thousands’, named after the thousand warriors of King Andrianjaka, who established Tana as the capital city of the Merina tribe at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The sacred city was largely chosen for its privileged location – being on high ground (1,370m) and surrounded by marsh made it easily defensible. By 1808, it had become the island’s effective capital city, as the Merina established overlordship of the whole island. Tana has idiosyncratic French and Asian inspired architecture with winding cobblestone streets and staircases that lend it a medieval air. The city is built on three essential levels, making it hilly, but very compact to explore. The main street of Arabeny Fahaleovantena (Avenue de l’Independence) is a good orientation point with sundry shops and excellent restaurants. Other attractions include the colourful daily flower market beside tranquil Lake Anosy and the botanical and zoological gardens, where you can view the egg and 3m-tall skeleton of the extinct aepyornis, or elephant bird. The Rova (Queen’s Palace) burned to the ground in 1996; currently being restored, its gardens and partially renovated King’s House, baths and tombs are impressive and lend you a spectacular 360° vista of the capital.



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Antananarivo may 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 fascinating – vibrant markets, decadent colonial buildings, deliciously stocked cafés (a must!) and many craft shops make it a great destination to delve into.

### **Day 2: Antananarivo - Antsirabe** (Approximate driving time: three to four hours)

After breakfast an early city tour includes Tana's higher reaches, affording great views over the capital. After lunch we drive to Antsirabe, noticing that along the way the features of the local people change as Asian heritage becomes more prominent. Antsirabe has an unusual history, and owes its origins to Norwegian missionaries, to this day maintaining links with Stavanger. Due to the quality of its water the city is now home to Madagascar's brewing industry. Overnight Couleur Café Hotel or similar. (BD)

### **Antsirabe**

The unusual city of Antsirabe ("Place of Much Salt"), an elegant European-styled city, residing at 1500m above sea level and boasts the reputation as the centre of Madagascar's beer production. Founded by a Norwegian in 1856, it is the only Malagasy place which really feels and looks like a European municipality. Its 100,000 inhabitants enjoy a temperate climate and consequently fruits and vegetables which favour cooler condition are grown here. 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. Known also as a city of handcrafts, it is characterised by its scatterings of artisan shops and mini-industries.

### **Day 3: Antsirabe to Miandrivazo** (Approximate driving time: five hours)

This morning we explore Antsirabe and its surrounding villages. Local crafts shops specialise in carving the horn of zebu cattle, producing detailed and accomplished work. After lunch we head west, leaving the cooler highlands behind. Descending, the road passes through savannah land to Miandrivazo, a fertile region where corn, manioc, beans and rice are cultivated, along with cotton and tobacco. Overnight Princesse Tsiribihina Hotel or similar. (BD)

### **Day 4: Miandrivazo – Cruising the Tsiribihina River**

This morning we drive to the riverside village of Masiakampy where a private boat will be waiting to navigate down the Tsiribihina River. Spend the day relaxing on-board, taking in the stunning scenery and calling in at Sahambano village on the way. Arrive at camp in time to enjoy a candlelit dinner by the river's shore. Overnight wild camp. (BLD)

### **Cruising the Tsiribihina River**

At 120km, the Tsiribihina River passes through a rich variety of flora and fauna: its arid shores give way sporadically to lush forests, whilst threading through gorges, bordered by dramatic sandbanks and dripping with birdlife. Indeed the fauna of the journey will keep you enthralled: watch out for lemurs such as Coquerel's sifaka and chameleons in the trees, water turtles and Nile crocodiles alongside the bows of your vessel and Red-billed teal, White herons, and whistling ducks amidst the reeds at the side. Amidst the occasional bustle of local barges and pirogues, Madagascar fish eagles sometimes power down the waters and the dazzling iridescence of Madagascar kingfisher bring moments of exquisite excitement. The transport is a transformed barge with ample comfortable seating and relaxing areas for guests, a kitchen and an eating area. Your meals (at full board) are cooked in situ and the staff will also set up and break camp and lay out bedding and pillows for you each day. All you will be expected to do is relax and soak up the amazing landscape.

### **Day 5: Gorge of Bemaraha**

Following the river downstream through banks lined by primary forest, there are excellent opportunities to observe wildlife, including lemurs, bats, colourful birdlife, and crocodiles. At a suitable spot, camp is made on the riverbank. Overnight wild camp. (BLD)



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### Day 6: Coastal plain of Menabe – Tsimafana – Bekopaka

Breaking camp early, the crew aim to be on the water in time to reach the Gorge of Tsiribihina in time for lunch. Continuing through the plains of Menabe, the villages of Sakalava people punctuate the riverbanks, their carefully cultivated rice fields characterising the landscape. Then it's time to leave the water, taking a rough dirt track journey to Bekopaka that culminates in a crossing of the Manambolo River. Bungalow-style accommodation replete with a swimming pool is perched high above Behamara National Park, providing incomparable views. Overnight Hotel Olympe du Bemaraha or similar. (BD)

### Day 7: Tsingy de Bemaraha National Park

We spend today exploring the remarkable UNESCO World Heritage Site of Tsingy de Bemaraha National Park, a bizarre landscape of eroded limestone pinnacles known as tower karst, and one of Madagascar's most scenic areas. We take the half-day Grand Tsingy Circuit, a walk connected by boardwalks and ladders between the pinnacles that allows exploration of an otherwise inaccessible terrain. Throughout, we lookout for wildlife as the park's deep canyons and gorges are home to several species of lemur and varied birdlife. Overnight at Hotel Olympe de Bemaraha or similar. (BD)

**PLEASE NOTE:** *Although the Grand Tsingy circuit is a highlight for most people, some people may find it challenging. There are two paths that can be taken – the Grand Tsingy and the Petit Tsingy. The Grand Tsingy path involves going through caves and some narrow canyons, and harnesses may be used for safety reasons. You also will ascend ladders attached to rocks to reach different levels. It is not rock climbing and people of a reasonable fitness should have no problem, but it is not advisable for those not comfortable with going up ladders or those who suffer from vertigo or feel uncomfortable with exposure to drops. Your guide will explain the difference between the paths so that you can choose the more suitable option.*

### Tsingy de Bemaraha National Park

The Tsingy de Bemaraha National Park is an unmissable site for those traveling the west side of Madagascar. Designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1990, it comprises of 1575 km<sup>2</sup> dominated by the limestone which rises 400m above the valley floor at its highest point. The remoteness of the area meant that it wasn't until 1998 that the southern half was designated a National Park. Visitors come for a variety of reasons: first and foremost, it is a sight whose beauty is almost unfathomably varied, from a multitude of intricately eroded pinnacles (tsingy literally means "walking on tiptoes") and labyrinth of deep, impenetrable humid gorges to placid mangrove swamps and unsullied swathes of deciduous forest canopy – a veritable photographer's dream. Many people come for the exhilarating via ferrata tsingy treks, characterised by extraordinary feats of engineering to suspend walkways and, ladders and cables which thread their way through the karst spires, high above the forest floor. The two main routes – Petits and Grand Tsingy require patience and a decent head for heights but offer astounding visual rewards. Of equal draw is the wildlife: endemism here is reckoned to be at 80%! The dry western deciduous forest houses plants typical of these dry limestone areas, such as species of Aloe and Baobab Andasonia, as well as the red-flowered flamboyant tree, Delonix regia, which is so widely seen in the tropics. Nature lovers seek out the critically endangered stump-tailed chameleon, the 11 species of lemur on view, including Decken's sifaka, Fat-tailed dwarf lemur, Cleese's woolly lemur and the Sambirano lesser bamboo lemur. The bird list stands at over 100 species, including many ornithologists' most-prized Madagascan bird, the Madagascar fish eagle. Amazingly, the 45 reptile and amphibian species which are found here are all endemic.

### Day 8: Tsingy De Bemaraha National Park

Today is again spent in the park allowing time to further explore the Grand Tsingy or shorter Petit Tsingy Circuits and their incredible vistas. Birdwatching, wildlife or photography walks are also on offer, or alternatively just relax by the pool. Overnight at Hotel Olympe de Bemaraha or similar. (BD)



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### **Day 9: Bekopaka – Kirindy Reserve** (Approximate driving time: seven hours)

Driving back through the wilderness, next stop is Kirindy Reserve and bungalow accommodation in the forest. On arrival a short guided hike of about one hour provides a good orientation. However, after dinner there's a fascinating opportunity to join the guide again for a night walk in search of rarely seen nocturnal wildlife. Highlights may include Brown lemur, Fossa, the giant jumping rat, and an array of frogs and insects. Overnight Relais du Kirindy or similar. (BD)

### **Kirindy Reserve**

This privately managed reserve preserve 100 km<sup>2</sup> of some of the most threatened and exquisite habitat on the island: famous for the iconic baobab tree, the dry deciduous forest that remains is a mere 3% of its original extent. This makes the landscape especially rich in flora and fauna which seek a refuge here. The reserve is home to 8 species of lemurs, most evident of which are the diurnal Common brown lemurs and the Verreaux's sifakas which abound in the high canopy. Kirindy also prides itself on being the island's best site for seeing the Fossa, the only predator for lemurs and the world's smallest primate, the Giant jumping rat, as well as dozens of amphibian and reptile species and 70 species of bird, including Madagascar crested ibis and several species of the endemic Vanga family (and no poisonous snakes!). The site has its present origins since the 1970s in sustainable logging which, evidenced by the abundance in wildlife, may well be the saving act for the remainder of the dry forest. Its success is best evidenced at night-time when nocturnal lemurs such as Grey mouse lemur, fat-tailed dwarf lemur and fork-marked lemur are relatively easily spotted and the rare White-breasted mesite emerge – a night's stay here is definitely the best way to experience the park's idiosyncrasies.

### **Lemurs**

Lemurs are a unique group of primates found only on Madagascar and the Comoros Islands. There are fifty species of lemurs, seventeen of which are on the endangered species list. Lemurs are prosimians, or primitive primates. They are social animals with long limbs, flexible toes and fingers, and long noses. Habitat loss is the main threat to lemurs today, as native forests are cleared for farmland. How and when lemurs became separated from the monkey family is unclear. Although it was once thought that lemurs were on Madagascar when the island separated from Africa, recent advances have shown that Madagascar was separated from Africa by hundreds of kilometres before lemurs evolved. Accordingly, the ancestors of Madagascar's lemurs must have crossed over from Africa on floating vegetation early in primate evolution and become isolated from Africa. Once on Madagascar, the lemurs evolved into the different species. Then, about 2,000 years ago, the first human settlers arrived on Madagascar from the Malaysian-Indonesian area. By the time the Europeans who wrote about the natural history of the island reached Madagascar in the mid-1600s, 17 species of lemurs had become extinct.

### **Day 10: Kirindy Reserve – Morondava** (Approximate driving time: three hours)

For early risers there's an opportunity to explore the reserve at the best time to see the elusive, cat-like Fossa – Madagascar's top predator. After breakfast there's free time before heading south to Morondava. A notable stop en route is the Avenue des Baobabs, a vestige of larger forests and now a protected natural monument that sees the road flanked by magnificent baobab trees, some over 800 years old. Photographers should be able to capture shots of the trees against the setting sun, an iconic image of Madagascar. Overnight Baobab Café Hotel or similar. (BD)

### **Day 11: Morondava – Manja** (Approximate driving time: six to eight hours)

A short visit to a nearby Vezo fishing village precedes the first leg of today's journey, four hours on a dirt track to Antsira. After lunch we continue south, joining a private road owned by Kanto Hotel, our evening destination. The road snakes through a wild landscape that varies from arid thorn bush to lush savannah and includes typical west Madagascan villages of tiny wooden huts. Crossing salt flats and fording rivers, the Kabatomena in particular, makes this a memorable journey. All along the way local people greet visitors with





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warmth and genuine interest, children running alongside vehicles as mothers stride on, carrying unfeasibly heavy loads balanced on their heads. Arriving in Manja late afternoon, the town's colonial past is evident in the faded grandeur of its more substantial buildings. These days Manja is a busy market town, the region's rich soil utilised for growing corn, rice and beans. Accommodation is provided at the best hotel in town, in fact the only hotel. However, though simple, Hotel Kanto is a clean, comfortable place to shower and relax amid beautiful gardens. The hotel's breakfast is excellent. Overnight Hotel Kanto or similar. (BD)

**PLEASE NOTE:** Days 11 – 13 in particular are extremely off the beaten track and road conditions can be poor even by Madagascar standards; hence the stated driving times are very approximate since the road state continually changes. The going will be tough but do take pleasure in travelling through one of the very remotest parts of the back country of Madagascar.

**Day 12: Manja – Andavadoaka** (Approximate driving time: six to eight hours)

Today's drive is long but rewarding, as the landscape features striking scenery throughout. Baobabs, from short and squat to immense towering pillars, punctuate distinctive spiny forest. An incredible 95% of plant species here are endemic. Among wildlife, lemur, mongoose, sifaka and even the Madagascar radiated tortoise are all present. Bird species include several varieties of the mainly terrestrial coua and shrike-like vanga, along with Madagascar buzzards and Madagascar kestrels. The journey entails a ferry crossing of the Mangoky River to reach the town of Bevoa, and crossings of two further rivers. The route then sweeps west before traversing a line of large dunes to reveal views of the Mozambique Channel and Andavadoaka's stunning coastal location. Accommodation comprises a series of beautiful bungalows overlooking the sea where fishermen in outrigger fishing canoes ply waters rich in marine life. Overnight Laguna Blu Resort or similar. (BD)

**Day 13: Andavadoaka – Andravona** (Approximate driving time: two hours)

In the morning there's time to appreciate the tranquil beauty of the village before taking a short four-kilometre drive to a highly photogenic stand of baobabs surrounding a freshwater pond. The combination of water and cover is a magnet for an ever-changing cast of wildlife – binoculars out! Continuing, heading once more through the coastal dunes and continuous spiny forest, the 30km of sandy tracks to Befandefa are challenging. Finally we reach the lagoon of Andravona, surely one of the most beautiful sights in Madagascar. Arriving late afternoon allows time to unwind and enjoy the panorama of sea, sand, lagoon and languid fishing village. Overnight Mikea Lodge or similar. (BD)

**Day 14: Kirindy Mitea National Park or Andravona**

Andravona's location on pristine sands, where the spiny forest and baobabs stretch as far as the shore, makes it a photographer's dream. It may be enough to simply take in the sights and relax. However, the lodge offers an opportunity to head into Mikea Forest and spend time with the last remaining members of the Mikea tribe, experiencing a little of their way of life, traditions and arts. Another option is a walk to the nearby Vezo fishing village, to witness the return of fishermen and the explosion of joyous activity as waiting women and children greet the daily catch. Overnight Mikea Lodge or similar. (BD)

**Day 15: Andravona at leisure**

Another day in paradise. Choose to relax or, if visiting from June to September, perhaps take an excursion to see migrating Humpback whales as they head north from Antarctica to mate in the warmer waters of the Mozambique Channel. Overnight Mikea Lodge or similar. (BD)

**Day 16: Andravona – Zombitse National Park – Isalo National Park**

(Approximate driving time: eight hours)

After breakfast, we head south to Ifaty, keeping dazzling ocean to the right and dry dunes, baobab and scrub on the left. At Tuléar, Madagascar's premium highway, the RN7, unfurls a welcome novelty of silky-smooth tarmac all the way to Isalo. En route, in places the road is flanked by characteristically elaborate tombs of the



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Mahafaly, Masikoro and Antandroy peoples. Later, near Andranomaintso the road skirts a plateau of Andansonnia za baobabs, a species unique to Madagascar. Beyond these ages-old sentinels a brutally deforested lunar landscape emerges, a sorry sight finally broken by the contrasting protected forest-island of Zombitse National Park. The park is a last redoubt for Appert's Greenbul, a terrestrial species and one of Madagascar's rarest endemic birds. From Zombitse the road leads to Ilakaka where there's time to stop and explore a town at the centre of the burgeoning sapphire industry. Arriving in Isalo National Park late afternoon, bungalow accommodation occupies rocky slopes offering great evening views over the parkland. The lodge has a swimming pool and an excellent restaurant. Overnight Satrana Lodge or similar. (BD)

**PLEASE NOTE:** *You will be walking for much of the day at Isalo so you should be prepared for this. 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 two 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.*

### Isalo National Park

The Isalo National Park's 815 km square area was created in the 1960s and is comprised of the entire stretch of the Isalo Massif. A spectacular landscape, with its eroded sandstone dome, cut by deep canyons, it makes for the most breathtaking scenery and hence is the most visited national park in the country. Reminiscent of The Grand Canyon in the USA, its geological layers lend it the appearance of a relief map. The sandstone has been eroded into exotic shapes, pillars, towers, and is cut through by impressive gorges and canyons. Vegetation is concentrated in the sheltered canyon bottoms where streams still flow. These wooded areas dominated by the fire-resistant Tapia-tree, on which a Malagasy endemic silkworm feeds. On the cliffs and rocks are several endemic succulents including the elephant's foot and the localised endemic Isalo Aloe. The balance of nature here is intriguingly harmonious: plants have adapted perfectly to the harsh and dry climate of Isalo. Pachypodium, which grow in the rocks, have some of the succulent qualities of cacti, having specialist water-storing roots and trunks which ensures survival without water for many months. For animal lovers you may encounter ring-tailed and brown lemurs, many types lizard, and the exceptional jewelled chameleon: in all, Isalo proudly boasts 82 species of birds, 33 species of reptiles, 15 species of frogs and 14 species of mammals. The massif is also the place where the Bara tribe buries its dead, first in temporary graves, pausing to raise enough silver, then into definitive tombs. The tribe were essentially the last to lose their independence, resisting the national amalgamation under the Merina, and only falling into submission during the French colonisation. Traditionally there were a warlike group, whose young men only attained manhood by rustling cattle from neighbours!

### Day 17: Isalo National Park

After breakfast, there's the option of either a full or half-day guided excursion in the park. One trail leads to a lookout from where there's a fantastic panoramic view of the eroded sandstone landscape and its kaleidoscope of shades, from ochre to russet and blue-grey. Late in the afternoon visit Fenetre de l'Isalo, a natural rock formation that each evening frames a beautiful sunset over Isalo's rocky canyons. Overnight Satrana Lodge or similar. (BD)

### Day 18: Isalo – Anja Reserve – Andringitra (Approximate driving time: four hours)

Today's journey combines diverse landscapes, initially traversing the vivid red soil and expansive savannah of Plateaux de Horombe. Arriving in Ihosy, we're at the capital of Bara people, herders of Madagascar's characteristic Zebu cattle. Bara tribal culture is closely connected to the Zebu. To marry a man must steal several zebus as a badge of his strength and virility. The death of a Bara hunter is similarly marked by the sacrifice of cattle. Beyond Ihosy the landscape changes dramatically as huge granite domes rise from the flower-carpeted grassy plains. Two notable summits are Varavarana ('The Gateway to the South') and the sacred peak, where few local people venture, of Bonnet de l'Evêque ('Bishop's Mitre'). At Anja a community-



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run reserve for some 300 Ring-tailed lemurs makes for an engaging break in the journey. Among other wildlife, there's a chance to see Barbour's day gecko and Dangalia lizard, while birders can look out for Grey-headed lovebird and Souimanga sunbird. There's also a short hike to a precipitous cliff tomb. Income from the project supports the salaries of teachers at the local school. Anja is also the point where the going gets tough. The final 35km of dirt road is 4WD territory and though bumpy it's definitely exhilarating. We arrive late afternoon at the heart of the Tsaranoro Valley, close to the gates of the National Park. Overnight Tsara Camp or similar. (BD)

### **Andringitra National Park**

The valley below Andringitra National Park, dotted with mango trees and abundant in zebu pasture, gives way to the majestic granite outcrops of the National Park itself. Since the 1920s, the 311 km<sup>2</sup> of inaccessible wilderness has been protected and it still manages to preserve a blend of rainforest, montane forest and high-altitude vegetation for the few visitors to tread so far off the usual RN7 tourist routes. Historically, it is held as a sacred place by the Bara tribe, being a place of ritualised burial and it was here that acts of mass suicide took place when the Merina tribe were seeking to force dominion over the whole island. The climate here can be varied, so warm-weather gear may sometimes need supplementing with waterproofs and, at nights, thermals and fleeces! The fauna here draws keen naturalists, offering 108 species of recorded birds, including Pollen's vanga and the Madagascar blue pigeon, 34 types of reptile, an astonishing 55 frog species, 55 different types of mammal and an impressive 13 lemur species. The Ring-tailed lemurs of Andringitra which populate the valley are distinct from those you might have spotted elsewhere, having adapted their colour, size and fur to the empty rocky environment in which they live. The few visitors who do make it as far as Andringitra are drawn by the mountain and so the Park offers a great range of treks, even as far as the summit of Pic Boby, the highest accessible peak in Madagascar.

### **Day 19: Andringitra National Park - Tsaranoro Valley**

Exploring the Tsaranoro Valley involves a combination of 4WD tracks and walking trails. On foot, there are trails to suit all abilities, from flat low-level circular hikes to ambitious mountainous routes. Discuss with guides what best suits. The valley's generally dry habitat supports a varied flora and fauna. Exotic aloes and cacti join colourful avian species, mammals, amphibians and of course, lemurs – Ring-tailed lemurs are particularly abundant here. Walking also provides an opportunity to meet both cattle herding Bara people, and Betsileo, who mainly live by rice cultivation. Overnight Tsara Camp or similar. (BD)

### **Day 20: Andringitra – Antoetra** (*Approximate driving time: six to seven hours*)

Returning to the RN7, it's a steep climb to the town of Ambalavao. Each Wednesday there's a big zebu market - a really authentic and memorable experience. There's also time to visit the town's Anteimoro paper factory where ancient techniques of production dating from the time of Arab settlers are still employed. Perhaps surprisingly, the area also known for its vineyards, and a visit to one of the local wineries is almost obligatory. Production is limited but quality is remarkably good. From Ambalavao we head to Fianarantsoa, capital for the Betsileo people and locally known as 'The Gateway to the South'. A very Catholic city, Fianarantsoa is the seat of the Jesuits and boasts arguably Madagascar's best university. The upper Old City and market are well worth investigation, the latter a good place to buy locally produced tea and celebrated Lazan'i Betsileo wine whose grapes are grown on surrounding slopes. Continuing, the route emerges from the rainshadow of the south-west and enters the fringes of the lush rainforest belt. At Ivato a 15km track leads to Ambalandingana and a sympathetic scattering of eco-lodges set among the upland pastures of the Zafimaniry people. Overnight Sous le Soleil de Mada Hotel or similar. (BD)

### **Day 21: Antoetra**

Antoetra is the capital for the Zafimaniry people, and the only vehicle-accessible village among 17 protected tribal villages. It is also the starting point for an intriguing hiking opportunity exploring the Zafimaniry world. The Zafimaniry are a subdivision of the much larger Betsileo, living by sustainable forest exploitation. They are masters of wood carving and their huts comprise exquisitely carved windows frames and doors - indeed



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virtually every wooden surface displays elaborate ornamentation. The Zafimaniry are unique in maintaining Madagascar's unique woodcraft, given World Heritage Culture status by UNESCO, and once widespread across the whole island. Spend a day among these welcoming and fascinating people, exploring their remote highland homeland. Overnight Sous le Soleil de Mada Hotel or similar. (BD)

**Day 22: Antoetra – Ambositra – Antananarivo** (*Approximate driving time: five to six hours*)

An early start sees a return to the RN7, plunging through the highlands and across the 'hauts plateaux' and their spectacular eroded hillside lavaka features, a journey that once took three days but now enjoys the best road surface on the island. The landscape is reminiscent of the far-east with paddy fields and patchworks of vegetable and fruit plantations. After a brief stop in Ambositra, it's on to Antsirabe in time for lunch. Then, in the afternoon, the road to Tana beckons, the final destination on this epic tour. Overnight Gassy Country House hotel or similar (BD)

**Day 23: Departure from Madagascar**

There's time to relax before transfers to the airport and flight, though optional excursions are possible for those with late departures. Day use of rooms at Gassy Country House until 6pm is available for those booked on Air France's late flight. (B)

**Optional post-tour extension – Anjozorobe Forest Corridor 3 days 2 nights**

**Pre-tour Day 23 – Antananarivo – Anjozorobe**

This is Day 23 (last day) of the main tour. Depart after breakfast and our first stop is the Royal Hill of Ambohimanga (UNESCO), a significant symbol to the culture and people of Madagascar. We then journey to Anjozorobe Forest Corridor where you can relax or take walks in the surrounds of the beautiful forest. Overnight Saha Forest Camp (BLD)

**Pre-tour Day 24 – Anjozorobe**

A full day to relax in the surrounds of the beautiful forest of Anjozorobe. There will also be the opportunity to take walks in the forest with a local guide to get your first taste of some of the magnificent flora and fauna of Madagascar. The forest has an abundance of plant and animal life. It may be possible for you to spot the beautiful Indri Lemur as well as other flora and fauna. Overnight Saha Forest Camp (BLD)

**Pre-tour Day 25 – Anjozorobe – Antananarivo – Departure from Madagascar**

After an optional early morning walk in the forest the rest of the morning is at leisure before returning to Antananarivo and transfer in due time for your onward flight. Day use available at Gassy Country House until 6pm for clients travelling on late night Air France flight. (B)

## Tour inclusions/exclusions

**Inclusions:**

Arrival and departure airport transfers  
All accommodation  
Services of English-speaking guides and special local park guides  
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)  
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

**Excluded:**

International flights  
Travel Insurance





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Visa

Drinks

Optional local tipping kitty collected on arrival between 55-75 euro (or the equivalent in GBP)

Tip for main tour guide (discretionary)

Items of a personal nature

## Important Information

### Foreign Government Travel 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

#### Accommodation Rating

This tour is a mixture of comfortable mid-range hotels/lodges, some more basic hotels and some nights spent camping. Details of the camping can be found in the itinerary.

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.

#### 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. Please note that Satrana Lodge in Isalo is more expensive than the other hotels.

Lunch £5- £10 excluding drinks



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Dinner £5- £13 excluding drinks

### 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.

Bottle of Beer £1

Bottle of mineral water £0.50 – £0.75

### Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Accordingly, a tipping kitty is organised on arrival which covers day to day tips incurred whilst on tour. This includes tips at restaurants and hotels. It also includes tips for drivers and local guides in the national parks. Please budget Eur 75 to 100 depending on the size of the group. This will be collected in euros or pounds cash by your guide at the start of the tour who will then be responsible for tipping throughout your trip.

The kitty does not cover tips for your Tour Guide. At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour 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

**Local Currency:** Ariary

**Recommended Currency for Exchange:** Euros, US Dollars

**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.

#### 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



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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 the UK. 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](http://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.

#### 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.

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.

## Preparing for your tour

### Climate

Madagascar, being a large country, has many different climatic variations but it is generally felt that the best time to visit is between April and November, which are the winter months. The temperature on the island is usually pleasant, ranging from the low twenties to the low thirties (Celsius). Please note that during the winter





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months of June to August 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.

### **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.

### **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.

### **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.

### **Road Conditions**

Road conditions on much of the Wild Madagascar tour, especially after rainfall are challenging. Our drivers are highly skilled but please be patient if the vehicle gets stuck or experiences a puncture. Where conditions dictate we will be using the appropriate vehicles but you should be prepared for challenging road conditions. Approximate daily driving times are given in the best of faith but in Madagascar it is very difficult to predict with any accuracy so please be prepared at times for journey times to differ and perhaps be longer.

### **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 31 October 2019