

Madagascar Culture, Wildlife, Beauty

September 28-October 15, 2023

Experience a comprehensive exploration of ecologically pristine Madagascar on this fantastic journey to the semi-arid savannah and the canyons of the south and the idyllic quiet beach of Ifaty through the mountainous central Highlands with its red lateritic soil and terraced rice fields to the rainforest of the Eastern slope.



The circuit allows us to experience three different threatened ecosystems, the eastern rainforest vegetation, the spiny desert and the dry deciduous forest of Madagascar.

We visit several national parks and reserves to admire the unique fauna and flora of Madagascar and enjoy wildlife viewing up-close. There will be many opportunities to observe several species of lemurs quite easily.

During this tour, we will meet several ethnic groups and get to know their cultures: the Merina, the Betsileo, the Antandroy, the Bara's and the Mahafaly as well as the Vezo fisher tribe alongside beautiful beach of the Mozambique Channel.

October is the perfect month to visit Madagascar and enjoy the wildlife. It is spring; trees are blooming, temperatures are at their best and the baby lemurs are born.

Getting There: We can assist you via our consolidator if you like. Best option is to fly into Johannesburg. Many flights arrive in the early morning and you will remain at the airport for the connecting flight to Antananarivo. If you arrive Johannesburg at night, there are hotels close to the airport and make the connection to Antananarivo next morning.

Sep 28: Arrival Antananarivo (D)

Depart Johannesburg South African Airways 8252 at 10 am, arrival time in Antananarivo at 2:10 pm (Flight schedule subject to change).

You will be met on arrival and transfer to the hotel. Rest of afternoon is free to rest. Some snacks will be provided to tide you over until dinner.

Early dinner tonight at La Varangue Restaurant.

Sep 29: Antananarivo (B,L)

This morning, we'll embark on a city tour to see the arcades (an ordered series of arched windows as a decorative work on a wall), train station, Analakely Market, flower markets and Lake Anosy.

Lunch at a local restaurant.

This afternoon tour with an historian guide, 30 min drive to visit the Queen's Palace (under reconstruction), and the old palace of the Prime Minister Rainilaiarivony who married the three Queens. (2 hr visit)

Transfer to hotel (approx 30 min drive).

Dinner on your own.

Sep 30: Antananarivo - Fort Dauphin - Berenty Reserve (B, L, D)

Transfer to airport for flight to Fort Dauphin in the southeastern tip of Madagascar. TZ714 depart 07:00, arrive 09:00. The hotel will prepare box breakfasts to take with you.

Meet our guide on arrival at Fort Dauphin airport and drive directly to Berenty Private Reserve.

The 90 km / 4 hour drive by 4WD from coastal rainforest to the spiny desert. The road is paved but in terrible shape; last 4 km on red dusty track—better than the paved road!

Stops along the way to view the unique baobab trees, rare triangular palm trees and funerary art of the Antanosy burial grounds. Berenty is the headquarters of the Antandroy people.

Transfer to hotel on arrival and lunch. A nocturnal visit to the reserve.

Dinner and Overnight at BERENTY LODGE at the edge of the forest.

Oct 1: Visit of Berenty Reserve - Fort Dauphin (B, L, D)

This morning visit Berenty Reserve and its small museum.

Located about 100 km from Fort Dauphin, near the town of South Amboasary and inside a huge sisal plantation, the Berenty Private Nature Reserve covers an area of 240 ha along the river Mandrare. Its wildlife belongs to the gallery forest classified as spiny bush characteristic of southern of Madagascar.

The fauna is mainly composed of lemur, four species are particularly very common in the south: Verreaux Sifaka (*Propithecus verreauxi verreauxi*), Ring-tailed lemur (*lemur catta*), Grey mouse lemur (*microcebus murinus*) and White footed lemur (*Lepilemur leucopus*). The Brown lemur (*Eulemur fulvus rufus*) was introduced from Morondava area but been adapted to the environment.

Turtles, chameleons, snakes and butterflies are also found there. It is a good spot for bird watching as well. The flora is composed of Tamarind trees, Didieracea (*Didiera trollei*, *Alluaudia procera*), Euphorbiacea (*Euphorbia stenoclada*, *Euphorbia onoclada*), Apocynacea (different *Pachypodium*, *Catharantus roseus*) and Liliacea (different species of *Aloe*).

A museum is built into the reserve devoted to Antandroy tradition and arts, exposing parts of everyday life, musical instruments, amulets and other talismans intended to the art of divination.

Lunch in Berenty and then we head to Fort Dauphin.

Dinner and overnight at CROIX DU SUD

Oct 2: Fort Dauphin – Antananarivo- Antsirabe (B,L,D)

After the breakfast, transfer to the airport for flight to Antananarivo TZ715 dep 09:35 – arr 11:35.

Meet our guide on arrival and we have lunch at Rendez-vous des pêcheurs restaurant before heading south.

Drive 4 hours to Antsirabe, meaning “the place of much salt” and the capital of pousse-pousse “rickshaws.” This colonial town is located in a volcanic area and the land is very fertile. Antsirabe is known for its precious stones and minerals that you will have the opportunity to discover during the visit of workshops.

Overnight at ROYAL PALACE. (Or Similar)

Oct 3: Antsirabe (B, L, D)

Today is a possibility to witness the Famadihana, a funerary tradition of the Malagasy people—no guarantee, as it is private/not a scheduled event. During this ceremony, known as the turning of the bones, people bring forth the bodies of their ancestors from the family crypts, rewrap the corpses in fresh cloth, and rewrite their names on the cloth so they will always be remembered. This important celebration is a time for Malagasy people to spend time with their loved ones, both living and deceased. The Malagasy celebrate this event so that new family members can meet their ancestors and memories can be shared and never forgotten. This practice of secondary burial emerged in the 1820s after the repatriation of soldiers’ remains from far away. The festival also regained popularity during tomb transfers when tombs started to be rebuilt in stone with the introduction of the kiln.

We will walk from one village to another to learn the ways of the local people. Visit a school, meet farmers, artisans and blacksmiths and visit the homes of the inhabitants. We will enjoy a picnic lunch or perhaps lunch with a family. If lucky, we will see the Famadihana.

The walk is organized by a local association, a partnership with young Malagasy from Antsirabe. They donate part of their income to the villagers to purchase products and equipment to improve para-agricultural activities. Thus, our participation contributes to the development of the region.

Overnight at ROYAL PALACE. (Or Similar)

Oct 4: Antsirabe- Ambositra-Ranomafana (B, L, D)

Depart at 8 am, driving approx. 2 hrs to Ambositra on a good paved road. On the way, we shall visit Zafimaniry artisans and admire their carved wood and finely done square box marquetry. In addition: local markets and other typical villages of the Betsileo tribe.

Have lunch in local restaurant where you can taste local food specialties. Here we may also have the opportunity to enjoy traditional music.

We continue to Ranomafana (160 km/4 hr), to the Betsileo tribe region. It is a tar road with pot-hole patches and winding road as we are at the highest plateau of Madagascar highlands.

On arrival in Ranofana, check-in and dinner. In the evening, we will take a short walk to observe nocturnal animals around the park such as the grey mouse lemurs, the narrow-stripped mongoose.

Dinner and Overnight at THERMAL HOTEL (or Similar)

Oct 5: Ranomafana National Park (B, L, D)

Drive 5 km on good paved road to Ranomafana National Park to experience more rainforest, home for rare primates amongst other animals and plants.

The morning will be spent inside the park. Walking duration: 2 to 4h

In Ranomafana National Park, the terrain is steep; the forest is dense, with up and down trails and often slippery particularly during the wet season. Therefore, I suspect you will not want to have a full day hike on the trails here. Instead, we can enter the park for an easy walk and you do not need to go too far to see birds, reptiles and even one or two lemurs.

In the afternoon, we visit the village of Ranomafana where you can observe the Tanala people's daily lifestyle. Also go to the village water springs centre – where you can have a massage with essential oils extracted from local plants if you wish (pay direct).

Oct 6: Fianarantsoa – Ambalavao - Isalo National Park (Ranohira) (B, L, D)

Today we leave the Highlands. Departing at 7:30 am we drive southwards to Ambalavao (3 hr drive) and stop to visit Antaimoro paper factory, a silk weavers' workshop that belongs to a local association of women and the small community-run reserve of Anja - where one can get very close to the ring-tailed lemurs.

Lunch in a local restaurant. The drive continues through the rocky and savannah scenery. This huge plateau and valley is the area of the Bara, - a conservative farming tribe whose livelihood and rituals are centered on the zebu.

We cross the largest plateau of Madagascar constituted by a beautiful herbaceous steppe, topped with huge termite nests: it is Horombe. Continue 4 hrs to Ranohira, which is close to Isalo Massif and the National Park Gate.

Distance today is 360 km/approx. 7 hrs total. Dinner and Overnight HOTEL RELAIS DE LA REINE.

Oct 7: Isalo National Park (Ranohira) (B, L, D)

We will have a leisurely hike in this eroded uniform sandstone formations from the Jurassic era. Isalo is a semi-desert area characterized by its huge canyons, oases and lunar landscape - home for lemurs and many other endemic species.

Begin the picturesque hike up to the Cascade des Nymphs from the entrance to Canyon Namaza, a spectacular hidden waterfall with emerald green pool, an opportunity to meet the sifaka and the red-fronted brown lemurs at the beginning of the trail. This breathtaking spot gives a sensation of an outer-world journey. On the return hike, enjoy a picnic lunch and extended photo session with ringtails at the campsite.

The hike in Isalo generally covers a circuit of perhaps 4 miles (6 km) over mostly unshaded, somewhat rough terrain. There is an initial up climb to the "Piscine naturelle." To get an idea of how this region was formed, the expedition starts with an easy walk up 200 low-rise sloping steps on a level plateau. Your guide will find alternate paths for you that are easier and will assist you.

In Ranohira, we will encounter a mixture of two different ethnic groups: the Bara and the Betsileo.

As the temperature rises in the afternoon, you will be able spend leisurely time by the natural swimming pool or at the black pool inside the canyon.

The sunset at Isalo is a memorable moment.

Dinner and Overnight at hotel RELAIS DE LA REINE. (Or similar)

Walking duration: 2 to 4h depending on group preference and abilities.

Oct 8 Ranohira-Tulear - Ifaty (B, L, D)

We progress to the southwest towards the Mozambique Channel. It is a beautiful drive from Ranohira to Tulear through different botanical settings in the morning.

After 100 km/1.5 hr on paved road, stop at the Zombitse National Park to observe other species of lemurs like the Hapalemurs. The hike here is very easy with broad paths, all flat.

Then, we go northwards to Tulear (250 km) towards the savannah and the baobab areas, through the Ilakak village known for its sapphire mining. Several species of spiny vegetation of this area are endemic and exist nowhere else.

We will pass through villages and the famous decorated tombs of Mahafaly and Antandroy tribes. Here, the Aloalos (funeral-sculpted decoration) are considered as messengers between the living and their ancestors. (2.5-3 hrs including stops; some portions of the road are in bad shape).

In afternoon arrival in Tulear. Tulear, a bustling town of 350 000 inhabitants, is the last town of the southwest part of the country and home to the Antandroy tribe, meaning "the people living in the spiny area" who erect majestic burial tombs decorated with wooden figures and sculptures known as "Aloalo" carvings in a totem-like style. In the Southwest, wealth and social status of the Bara, Antandroy and Mahafaly people are measured in their cattle.

We continue, driving 20 km/approx 45 minutes, south to the beach settlement of Ifaty set on a lagoon with barely penetrable spiny thicket behind the coast to the east. (Road is not paved).

Distance today is 280 km/approx. 7 hrs total. Dinner & Overnight at DUNES D'IFATY (or similar)

Oct 9 Ifaty (B, L, D)

This morning we visit Reniala Private Reserve, a small protected area of only 60 ha that shelters an amazing, bizarre and unique eco-system which only occurs in the south-eastern part of Madagascar: "the spiny forest." The towering spiny bushes are home to more than 2000 plants species (many of them local endemic) some spectacular and very old baobab of 12,5 diameter) and complete endemic plants family, the Didieraceae, the Euphorbiaceae.

Return to the hotel for lunch. Independent afternoon. Enjoy the beach and relax at the comfy hotel.

Dinner and Overnight at DUNES D'IFATY (or similar)

Oct 10: Ifaty – Tulear - Antananarivo (B,L)

Early morning visit the Honko Conservation Association managed jointly with the local population "Vezo people" – to observe the mangroves ecosystem located in Belalanda village area. In Ifaty you will encounter Vezo fisher tribe alongside beautiful beach of the Mozambique Channel.

Afterwards, drive back to Tulear (45 min). We will have a very short browse of the bazaar de market place as well the local seashell and handicraft market. Then we board the flight to Antananarivo TZ719 dep 14:35, arr 16:25.

Transfer to hotel. Dinner on your own.

Overnight at HOTEL DU LOUVRE (Or similar)

Oct 11: Antananarivo – Tamatave (B,L,D)

Departing at 8 am we drive 15 mi / (approx. 45 min-can be up to 1.5 hr with traffic jams) NE of Antananarivo to visit Ambohimanga (a hill and fortified royal settlement and UNESCO World Heritage Site). Ambohimanga is considered to be the most significant symbol of the cultural identity of the Merina People and most important and best preserved monument of the pre-colonial Kingdom of Madagascar and its precursor, the Kingdom of Imerina.

The walled historic village includes residences and burial sites of several key monarchs. The site, one of the 12 sacred hills of Imerina, is associated with strong feelings of national identity and has maintained its spiritual and sacred character both in ritual practice and the popular imagination for at least four hundred years. It remains a place of worship to which pilgrims come from Madagascar and elsewhere.

Visit Ambohimanga Palace, UNESCO World Heritage site, two wooden pavilions of Queens Ranavalona I and Ranavalona II, the sacred basins where the queens bathed and an ox park. Duration of the visit is 2 hours plus lunch.

We must depart at 2 pm to transfer to the airport for flight to Tamatave (aka Toamasina), the chief seaport of the country. TZ505 dep 17:30, arr 18:25. On arrival transfer to hotel.

Dinner and night at CALYPSO HOTEL (or Similar).

Oct 12: Ankanin'ny nofy (B, L, D)

Departing at 8 am, we sail in the Pangalanes Channel to Ankanin'ny Nofy (3.5 hrs). Check-in at the hotel and lunch.

This afternoon, visit of Palmarium Reserve. We devote the morning to observe the various species of lemurs and other endemic animals and discover Malagasy fauna.

This evening we go for a nocturnal visit for aye aye observation.

Boat Duration: 3.5 hrs. Dinner and Overnight at PALMARIUM. (Or Similar)

Oct 13: Ankanin'ny nofy -Andasibe National Park (B, L, D)

Departing at 8:30 am, we visit Andranokoditra village for short walk. The ethnic group here are the Betsimisaraka. They are the 2nd largest group, after the Merina; approx. 15% of the Malagasy people. Tromba (spirit possession) ceremonies feature strongly in the Betsimisaraka culture.

Ar 10:30 am we sail 1.5 hrs in the Pangalanes Channel to Manambato. Lunch in Manambato and then drive 4 hrs to Andasibe.

Arrival in Andasibe in the afternoon and have nocturnal visit of the Mitsinjo Community reserve.

Overnight at VAKONA LODGE (Or Similar)

Distance: 140 km Tarmac Road + 7 km track – Duration: 1.15 h by boat + 4h drive

Oct 14: Andasibe National Park - Antananarivo (B, L, D)

In the morning, we walk with a local guide to discover this protected area. It is mainly covered with primary forest peculiar to the east side of Madagascar. Many rare and endemic species can be found in this rain forest. The biodiversity is so amazing; we can meet Indri indri the largest of lemurs here. Their behavior is fascinating and your guide will explain all about them. Many other species are living there such as Grey Bamboo lemur (Hapalemur griseus), Woolly lemur (Avahi Laninger) and others.

Flora is also very interesting; there are several species of medicinal plants.

Lunch and then drive 5 hrs back to Antananarivo.

Dinner at CITIZEN Restaurant. Overnight at HOTEL DU LOUVRE (or Similar)

Oct 15: Antananarivo – Depart (B)

Time permitting—depends on your flight schedule-- This morning a visit to handcraft market, where you might be surprised of the high quality of local products, as embroidered tablecloths and shirts, leathers, semi-precious stones, chessboards and solitary games, as well as wooden or metal instruments and toys.

Transfer to airport for the flight

Price: \$4550 per person based on min 4 people. Single room supplement: \$1195

Plus domestic airfares (subject to change): Antananarivo-Fort Dauphin \$220, Fort Dauphin- Antananarivo \$180, Tulear -Antananarivo \$210, Antananarivo- Tamatave \$225.

Extra night in Tana (estimate/subject to change): \$120 per person twin share, \$240 single room. **Transfer if not on tour days:** \$60 per car (1-2 people); \$20 per person (3-4 people sharing car).

Includes:

Accommodations with daily breakfast

16 Lunches, 15 Dinners

Bottled water in the vehicle during drives (2 litre bottles per person per day)

Airport transfers

Transport throughout in ac 4WD, 8 seats group size 4, Mercedes Sprinter 12 seats group size 5-9, Toyota, Nissan or Hyundai bus 18 seats for group size 10-12

Driver /guide for group size 2-4; separate driver and guide for group size 5 -12

Accompanying guide Ifaty to Andasibe; Local guides in Fort Dauphin and Berenty

National Park and site fees

Guided safari and excursions including pirogue trip to Sahambavy

Private boat for the excursion on Matsiatra River

Private boat Manambato – Ankanin'ny Nofy – Tamatave
Gov taxes

Accommodations with breakfast, based on availability:

Antananarivo: *Hotel Le Louvre* <http://www.hotel-du-louvre.com/>

Settled in a Eiffel building dating from 1930 and renewed in 2009, Le Louvre and Spa is ideally situated at the heart of the city of Antananarivo and its exceptional view on the capital makes it an ideal location. The rooms are air-conditioned and spacious. Facilities include: spa, fitness center & pool. The establishment also offers a restaurant combining European cooking and flavors of islands.

Berenty Reserve: *Berenty Lodge* <http://www.madagascar-resorts.com/en/the-berenty-lodge/>

Fort Dauphin: *Hotel Croix du Sud* <http://www.madagascar-resorts.com/en/la-croix-du-sud-hotel/>

Ifaty: *Hotel Les Dunes D'Ifaty* http://www.lesdunesdifaty.com/index_en.php

OR *Le Paradisier* <http://www.paradisier.net/>

Ranohira: *Hotel Relais de la Reine* <http://www.lerelaisdelareine.com/en/hotel-spa-madagascar-isalo/>

Fianarantsoa: *Hotel Zomatel* <http://zomatel-madagascar.com/>

Ranomafana: *Thermal Hotel* <http://www.thermal-ranomafana.mg/>

Antsirabe: *Royal Palace* <http://www.leroyalpalace.mg/>

Andasibe National Park: *Vakona Forest Lodge* <http://www.hotelvakona.com/>

Ankanin'ny Nofy: *Palmarium Lodge* <https://www.palmarium.biz/>

Our Guide: Mr. Fano Rambolamanana (pending confirmation)

Fano is a Malagasy guide from Tana. In the profession for several years, he loves to roam the national parks to observe the wildlife, hike in the mountains, travel to the four corners of Madagascar to introduce his visitors to the culture and nature of his country. Fano is a mainly English-speaking guide who regularly accompanies small groups of English, Americans and Australians. He knows and appreciates each region of Madagascar with a predilection for the Canal des Pangalanes, Highlands and Tsingy de Bemaraha. He will be our guide in Tana and again when you return to Tana and from Ifaty to Andasibe.

Does Not Include: International flight (request if you want our assistance), domestic flights within Madagascar (priced separately), Visa fee (35 eur/at the moment), trip cancellation/travel insurance, tips to driver/guide, camera fees if any, beverages during meals.

NOTES:

Flight schedules are subject to change which will require us to change the sequence of the itinerary. Antsirabe is the coolest region in the country and most of the hotels are not equipped with a/c.

Most walks are fairly easy. During walks in the parks we will have one or sometimes two local guides in addition to our accompanying guide. These guides are available to assist people who walk slowly or need to rest. We can also split the group into two for those who do want more challenging walks and those who prefer the easier paths.

It gets dark at about 6:00 pm. Whenever we have a nocturnal walk, we will depart hotel at about 6. These will be short walks with about an hour of observation. Dinner will be about 8 pm. On these days, be sure to stock up on snacks. You can take fruit, bread, cheese etc from breakfast buffet. It is also suggested to bring your own favorite snacks from home.

There are no leeches to be encountered at any of the parks except for Ranomafana. Wear long pants, long sleeve shirts and high socks with closed shoes.

Guides and Drivers: There will be one accompanying guide and driver up to the point where there is a flight and then a new driver will accompany the tour.