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TOURS & EXPEDITIONS

Enriching Lives Through Distinctive Journeys

Destination Information Guide

Madagascar



The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions and answers to some frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip.

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Welcome to the World of Big Five!

Big Five Tours & Expeditions is pleased to welcome you on this exciting adventure. We take great care to insure that your travel dreams and expectations are well met. Our distinctive journeys allow you to experience the finest aspects each destination has to offer. We also aim to provide you with a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the places you'll visit and the people you'll meet.



Antananarivo, Madagascar Elevation: 4185 feet Latitude: 18 48S Longitude: 047 29E

Average High Temperature

| YEAR | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | Jun. | Jul. | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. | |
|------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|----|
| °F | 74 | 78 | 77 | 77 | 75 | 72 | 68 | 67 | 68 | 73 | 77 | 78 | 77 |

Average Low Temperature

| YEAR | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | Jun. | Jul. | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. | |
|------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|----|
| °F | 58 | 64 | 64 | 63 | 61 | 57 | 53 | 51 | 52 | 54 | 58 | 61 | 63 |

Average Precipitation

| YEAR | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | Jun. | Jul. | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. | |
|------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| in. | 53.9 | 11.3 | 10.3 | 7.6 | 2.3 | 0.7 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.6 | 2.4 | 6 | 11.4 |

Toamasina, Madagascar Elevation: 16 feet Latitude: 18 07S Longitude: 049 23E

Average High Temperature

| YEAR | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | Jun. | Jul. | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. | |
|------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|----|
| °F | 81 | 86 | 86 | 85 | 83 | 80 | 77 | 75 | 76 | 78 | 81 | 84 | 85 |

Average Low Temperature

| YEAR | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | Jun. | Jul. | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. | |
|------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|----|
| °F | 69 | 74 | 74 | 73 | 72 | 69 | 66 | 65 | 64 | 65 | 67 | 70 | 73 |

Average Precipitation

| YEAR | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | Jun. | Jul. | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. | |
|------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| in. | 128.1 | 14.4 | 14.8 | 17.8 | 15.7 | 10.4 | 11.1 | 11.9 | 8 | 5.2 | 3.9 | 4.6 | 10.3 |

CLIMATE

Madagascar, the fourth-largest island in the world, lies in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Mozambique. It includes several much smaller islands. A central chain of high mountains, the Hauts Plateaux, occupies more than half of the main island. It is a hot and subtropical climate, colder in the mountains. Rainy season: November to March and April. Dry season: April to October. The south and west regions are hot and dry. Monsoons bring storms and cyclones to the east and north from December to March, with February being the most active month. The mountains, including Antananarivo, are warm and stormy from November to April, and dry, cool and windy the rest of the year. Madagascar is a popular year round destination with peaks at Easter, Christmas and July/August. A particularly nice time of year to visit Madagascar is September – November -- before the rainy season – is an especially good time to visit, when there are fewer travelers and it's not too hot.

PASSPORTS / VISAS

Passports: For international travel, a U.S. passport valid for at least six months from date of departure, containing **at least** two blank pages is necessary.

Visas: U.S. and Canadian travelers require visa; except for transit passengers continuing their journey by the same or first connecting aircraft within 24 hours provided holding onward or return documentation and not leaving the airport. Visas can be obtained on arrival, and are issued for stays up to 90 days and are valid for six months from date of issue.

Important: Please look at your passport prior to travel to insure that:

- 1) Your passport is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.

Please note: Pages reserved for amendments and endorsements cannot be used for visas.

TIME ZONE - GMT + 03:00

AIRPORT FORMALITIES

Upon arrival, proceed through immigration and baggage claims and customs. Big Five personnel or their representatives will assist you with your baggage

and escort you to your hotel. They will assist with check-in formalities.

Departure tax: As of this writing, there is no international departure tax. However, please note that this is subject to change. It is virtually impossible for us to keep abreast of these relatively small fees, as we are not automatically advised of them and some lodges absorb them in their rates and others do not. Any significant fees and airport taxes will, of course, be specifically be advised to you. The best rule is to keep a small quantity of US Dollars and the local currency to cover these small charges.

CUSTOMS INTO MADAGASCAR

Duty Free: The following goods can be imported into Madagascar without incurring customs duty by persons 21 years of age and over: 500 cigarettes or 25 cigars or 500g of tobacco; one bottle of alcoholic beverage.

All perfume is subject to duty. Arms and ammunition require an exit permit.

Tourists should be aware that many items on sale may have been manufactured illegally and may not be taken out of the country, with or without a permit.

U.S. CUSTOMS

Returning U.S. residents are allowed to bring back \$800 worth of merchandise duty-free. There are limits on some items. Regulations frequently change. For a list of exempt items and more information contact your nearest Customs office or write the U.S. Customs Service, Box 7407, Washington, DC 20044.

HEALTH

Visitors to Africa should be in generally good health. Talk with your personal physician about any shots or boosters recommended depending on your personal health profile and your itinerary. Tetanus and polio vaccines should be up to date.

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from travelers arriving from, or having passed through, an area considered by the Malagasy authorities to be infected within six days; enquire at Embassy.

A cholera vaccination certificate is recommended for travelers arriving from, or having passed through, an area considered by the Malagasy authorities to be infected; enquire at Embassy.

Malaria risk, predominantly in the malignant falciparum form, exists all year throughout the country and is highest in coastal areas. Resistance to chloroquine has been reported. The recommended prophylaxis is mefloquine.

Other risks: Bilharzia (schistosomiasis) is present. Avoid swimming and paddling in fresh water. Swimming pools which are well chlorinated and maintained are safe. Hepatitis A, B, and E are endemic and precautions are advised. Dysenteries and diarrhoeal diseases are common. Many viral diseases including severe hemorrhagic fevers have been reported. Natural foci of plague occur. Rabies is present. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay.

Private and public healthcare is available, but public facilities can be very limited. It is highly recommended that visitors bring medication for stomach upsets.

Health insurance is strongly advised during any foreign travel. Please check the latest regulations with your local health office or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747); fax: 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299), or their main telephone number in Atlanta, 404-332-4559. Or, visit the CDC Internet home page at <http://www.cdc.gov>.

CLOTHING

*For general clothing information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials. See pre-departure information for general packing check list.*

Lightweights are worn during the summer on high central plateau and throughout the year in the north and south. Warmer clothes are advised for during the evenings and winter in mountainous areas. Rainwear is advisable.

LUGGAGE

*For general baggage information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials.*

Lost baggage

In the unfortunate event that you arrive at your destination and your bag does not, you should report this to the airline baggage handlers before you leave the luggage collection area. You or the baggage handler should complete a property irregularity report and this will have a unique file reference. This

will typically be in the format of five letters followed by five numbers. The letters will be the airport code, then the airline code then five digits e.g. Jnb ba 12345. This is the reference to make sure that you obtain and quote in all conversations which may be necessary before you are reunited with your bag. (you will also need to keep the sticker with the baggage check - this looks similar as it is the two letter airline code followed by six digits - but bags cannot be traced using this number alone). The airline will take responsibility for locating the bag and getting it to you but please advise your local ground handler or our office so that everyone is aware. A copy of this report will also be needed if you want to claim on your travel insurance.

MONEY

The pre-colonial Ariary (MGA) has been reintroduced to replace the Malagasy Franc (MGF). Notes are in denominations of MGA10,000, 5000 and 2000.

Currency Exchange: Malagasy Ariary (MGA) can be bought only at banks and official bureaux de change in hotels and the exchange bureaux at Antananarivo Airport. Hotels have a less favorable exchange rate. A few ATMs have now been installed in Antananarivo. Note that there are limited opportunities to change money so please ensure you carry enough cash. On the other hand, please note that *the Ariary is a non-convertible currency and cannot be exchanged back into tradable currency so exchange only as much as you think you will need.*

**** Important Note **** If you take US dollars, please be advised that US dollar notes that are printed before 2001 will not be accepted. Therefore, please ensure all your US dollar notes are the more recently printed ones from 2002 and later to avoid any embarrassment or misunderstanding when paying with US dollar notes.

Travelers Checks: Travelers checks can be exchanged in banks, major hotels including the Tana Plaza Hotel and at the exchange bureaux in Antananarivo Airport. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travelers are advised to take travelers checks in Euros or US Dollars.

The import of local currency is limited to MGA1000. The export of local currency is prohibited to non-residents. The import and export of foreign currency is unlimited, subject to declaration.

Credit/Debit Card: American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa are accepted at the capital's Colbert and Hilton hotels. These and other cards have limited use elsewhere in the country. Check with your credit or debit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

Currency Restrictions: The import of local currency is limited to MGA1000. The export of local currency is prohibited to non-residents. The import and export of foreign currency is unlimited, subject to declaration.

COMMUNICATION

The official languages are Malagasy (which is related to Indonesian) and French. Local dialects are also spoken. Please note that very little English is spoken.

Mobile telephone: The GSM 900 network is in use. The main network providers are Madacom and Orange Madagascar (website: www.orange.mg). Coverage reaches major cities and main roads.

Internet: Public Internet access exists in large cities; there are a few Internet cafes in Antananarivo.

ELECTRICITY

Mostly 220 volts AC, 50Hz. Plugs are generally two-pin.

FOOD & DRINK

All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated. Water used for drinking, brushing teeth or making ice should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilized. Milk is unpasteurized and should be boiled. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is advised, but make sure that it is reconstituted with pure water. Avoid dairy products that are likely to have been made from unboiled milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably served hot. Pork, salad and mayonnaise may carry increased risk. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled.

In Madagascar, eating well means eating a lot. Malagasy cooking is based on a large serving of rice with a dressing of sauces, meat, vegetables and seasoning. Dishes include ro (a mixture of herbs and leaves with rice); beef and pork marinated in vinegar,

water and oil, then cooked with leaves, onion, pickles and other vegetables and seasoned with pimento; ravitoto (meat and leaves cooked together); ramazava (leaves and pieces of beef and pork browned in oil); vary amid 'anana (rice, leaves or herbs, meat and sometimes shrimps), often eaten with kitoza (long slices of smoked, cured or fried meat). The people of Madagascar enjoy very hot food and often serve dishes with hot peppers. Local restaurants are often referred to as hotely.

The choice of beverages is limited. Malagasy drinks include litchel (an aperitif made from litchis), betsas (fermented alcohol) and toaka gasy (distilled from cane sugar and rice) and 'Three Horses' lager. Non-alcoholic drinks include ranon 'apango or rano vda (made from burnt rice) and local mineral waters.

In most places that international visitors stay, the prevailing cuisine is very French, with white bread and potatoes plus meat.

Note: If you have food allergies or special/restricted dietary requests, please notify your travel agent or our office in advance, so that we may try to comply with your needs. Also, please advise your travel agent or our office if you have any mobility restrictions, so that we may inform our representatives accordingly. They will always strive to accommodate you to the best of their ability.

OVERVIEW

As Madagascar is the world's fourth largest island, 994 miles long and 360 miles wide. The prime wildlife hotspots are far from each other, so getting to each involves domestic flights and scenic road transfers. The island Madagascar split from Gondwanaland some 165 million years ago and moved east. This isolation led to its own evolution of flora and fauna, creating a paradise for nature-lovers with over 20,000 species of flora and fauna – 80% of which are not found anywhere else on this planet. This strangest of islands is an incredibly exciting destination, known for its lemurs, orchids (1000 species), chameleons (over 70% of the world's population) and frogs (a mere 150 species).

To see a reasonable spectrum of Madagascar's endemic mammals, birds, reptiles, invertebrates and flora, you ideally need to visit the three main climatic/floral zones. These are the damp eastern rainforests of Perinet, famed for its large variety of upland rainforest animals and plants; the tropical dry

western woodlands of Kirindy; and the bizarre “spiny desert” in the sub-arid south – Berenty, famous for its ringtail and Sifaka lemurs.

Antananarivo, often abbreviated to Tana, is the capital and is in the highlands. It has a distinctively French atmosphere. French is widely spoken, and road as well as shop signs are mostly in French. The city is built on three levels. Dominating the city is the Queen’s Palace and associated Royal Village or Rova. Now a national monument, it was once the residency of the Merina Dynasty which, in the 19th century, united all Madagascar for the first time.

The birthplace of the Malagasy state, Ambohimanga is 12 miles from the capital. Known variously as ‘the blue city’, ‘the holy city’ and ‘the forbidden city’, it is surrounded by forests. The citadel was an important Merina stronghold and retains several structures associated with their ceremonies. Its main gate is an enormous stone disc; 40 men were needed to roll it into position.

Tsingy de Bemaraha Strict Nature Reserve, on 152,000 hectares, is located in the northern sector of the Anstingy region of the Bemaraha Plateau, north of the Manambolo River Gorge. Undisturbed forests, lakes and mangrove swamps are home to rare and endangered birds and lemurs. Rocky landscapes and limestone uplands are cut into large peaks with a mass of limestone needles. Rivers flow on the plateau and springs arise on each flank of the Tsingy, making this an important water catchment area. Ancient cemeteries can also be found in the Gorge. Visitors are currently restricted to the pinnacle region to the south or to the forests in the north; both of these areas are accessible overnight with guides based at Antsalova and Bekopaka. Ampefy, 60 miles from the capital.

Perinet, 90 miles from the capital, is a nature reserve, home of the indri (a tailless lemur) and many species of orchid.

Antsirabe, 110 miles from the capital, is a thermal spa and Madagascar’s main industrial center. The volcanic hills surrounding the town are dotted with crater lakes. Madagascar’s second-highest mountain, Tsiafajovona, may be seen to the west of the road from Antananarivo.

In the Central Highlands is the Hauts Plateaux, a chain of rugged mountains that run from north to

south down the centre of Madagascar. The lush north is dominated by two great mountains. Tsarantanana, the island’s highest at 9450ft, is covered with the giant ferns and lichens peculiar to high-altitude rainforests. Montagne d’Arbre, 4900ft, is a national park and is famous for its orchids and lemurs.

The monsoon falls in the north between December and March. On the East Coast, the Ivolina Zoological Park and Botanical Gardens contain every kind of vegetable species from the eastern forests and many varieties of animal life.

The main diving centers are Nossi Bé (with its neighboring islands, Nossi Mitsio, Nossi Radama and Tanikely). Nossi Lava, Toliara have excellent bathing beaches and opportunities for skin diving, fishing, sailing and other water sports. Ile Ste-Marie (Nossi Boraha is known for beautiful white-sand beaches and coral reefs. Scuba-diving centers are located on the north and west coasts. Water-skiing and sailing are located at Ambohibao’s Lake Mantasoa, on Andraikiba Lake and Ramona. River-rafting can be done in the Highlands and on the East Coast. Anjohibe, Antseranana (formerly Diégo Suarez), is a cosmopolitan seaport overlooking a beautiful gulf at the northernmost tip of the island. It has excellent beaches, with many lakes, waterfalls and grottoes in the rainforests above the port. Wildlife and flora including lemurs, crocodiles and orchids.

Stroll around one of Madagascar’s lively markets. In the capital of Antananarivo, Zoma Market claims to be the second-largest in the world and is certainly worth a visit - it is held daily. Toamasina is the country’s main port and a provincial capital. It is an eight-hour drive from Antananarivo and it has several busy markets, including the Bazary Be. Other areas where you can stumble across some wonderful arts and crafts are Fianarantsoa, an important center for wine and rice production and good base for exploring the southern highlands. The Zafimaniny village, where intricate marquetry products are made.

You may want to visit the fascinating Amabalavao, said to be the ‘home of the departed’, where antemore paper and lamba aridrano silk are made. Nearby are Ambondrome and Ifandana crags, where the revered bones of exhumed ancestors may be seen (the latter was the site of a mass suicide in 1811).

SUGGESTED READING LIST

Many comprehensive and readily available guides produced by Lonely Planet, Fodor, Insight, The Rough Guide, etc.. Longitude Books at <http://www.longitudebooks.com> has an extensive collection of books, searchable by country.

BIRDS OF MADAGASCAR: A PHOTOGRAPHIC GUIDE

Peter Morris, Frank Hawkins, Pete Morris

Isolated for at least 120 million years, Madagascar has developed a unique flora and fauna. The fourth largest island in the world, Madagascar has 260 species of birds, no fewer than 108 of which are endemic and a further 25 of which are endemic to the Malagasy Region (Madagascar, the Comoros, Mauritius, Reunion, and their outlying islands). This book is a photographic field guide to the avifauna of Madagascar. The text for each species describes all known plumages likely to be encountered in Madagascar, vocalizations (many of which have not been previously described), habitat and behavior, range within Madagascar and worldwide, status (including taxonomic notes where relevant, subspecies, and global conservation status), and where to locate the species in Madagascar. There is also an invaluable section that summarizes distinctions from similar species. The introduction gives an overview of the birds found on Madagascar and the habitat zones where they are most likely to occur. There is also a short gazetteer to the major bird watching locations on the island that, together with the "where to watch" section of the species accounts, should enable prospective visitors to plan their itineraries so that they can see nearly all the Madagascan endemics and regularly occurring species.

LORDS AND LEMURS: MAD SCIENTISTS, KINGS WITH SPEARS, AND THE SURVIVAL OF DIVERSITY IN MADAGASCAR

Alison Jolly

This is a social and natural history of "the island at the end of the Earth." Jolly (now U. of Sussex, England) went to Berenty, in the south of Madagascar, to study lemurs 40 years ago. She intended to stay a year but was seduced by the place. A pioneer in the study of primate behavior, Jolly writes a tale that's part memoir and part travelogue and does not lack for colorful

characters. Eight pages of color photos and 16 of b& w document her journey.

ANCESTORS, POWER AND HISTORY IN MADAGASCAR

Karen P. Middleton, K. Middleton (Editor)

Anthropologists, area specialists, and historians explore the significance of ancestors for changing relations of power, emerging identities, and local historical consciousness in the African island culture where the people are renowned for the prominence they give to the dead. The case studies include the royal bath of 1817, succession in an urbanized Sakalava kingdom, the Antakarana ritual cycle, 19th-century Norwegian missionary culture, sacrifice on the east coast, violence among the Zafimaniry, and circumcision and colonialism in the south. Other studies look at slavery, memory, and cultural politics in the highlands. Annotation c. Book News, Inc., Portland, OR (booknews.com)

DIGGING FOR BIRD DINOSAURS: AN EXPEDITION TO MADAGASCAR

Nic Bishop

The extinction of dinosaurs some sixty-five million years ago is one of the greatest biological catastrophes in the history of our planet. Yet in recent years, paleontologists have turned up increasing evidence that ancestors of one group of dinosaurs still fly among us: birds. Join Cathy Forster, one of the few female paleontologists working today, on an expedition to Madagascar in search of clues to the mystery of bird evolution.

IN SEARCH OF LEMURS: MY DAYS AND NIGHTS IN A MADAGASCAR RAIN FOREST

Joyce Ann Powzyk

This is an unusual account of a woman scientist's field expedition in the Ranomafana National Park of Madagascar. Of the 32 types of lemurs known to live on the island, 11 live in the park. On this trip, with guide Talata, the author encounters eight lemurs. The pair also observe an array of exotic birds, a hedgehog, insect-eating bats, city and

forest rats, an orb-weaver spider, ring-tailed and broad-striped mongooses, a civet, tree frogs, freshwater crabs, a fossa, giant earthworms, leeches, millipedes, and an aye-aye. The key encounters are handsomely and faithfully illustrated, and the first-person descriptions bring the story to life.

**IN SEARCH OF THE RED SLAVE:
SHIPWRECK AND CAPTIVITY IN
MADAGASCAR**

**Mike Parker Pearson, Michael Parker Pearson,
Karen Godden**

"Published in 1729, *Madagascar: or, Robert Drury's Journal, during Fifteen Years Captivity on that Island*, describes the adventures of Robert Drury, an English sailor who was shipwrecked off the coast of Madagascar while still a teenager. After witnessing the massacre of his shipmates, he spent the next fourteen years living as a slave and

fighting alongside the islanders in a world of enemy princes and raging civil wars. Rescued by an English ship at the age of twenty-nine, he returned to London but then made an extraordinary decision. He went back to Madagascar as a slave trader." Nearly 300 years later, Mike Parker Pearson, an archaeologist investigating the unique burial customs of Madagascar's Tandy people, came across Drury's journal, and became hopeful that it would turn out to be a useful historical source, which might assist him with his investigations. Previously believed to be a hoax written by the novelist Daniel Defoe, the journal could have proved useless to Parker Pearson's research. However, he headed for Madagascar, with a team of archaeologists and the journal, in order to understand more about the Tandy people and to attempt to uncover the truth behind Drury's story.