TOUR CODE

MG1

ADVENTURESABROAD

MADAGASCAR

'The Lost Continent'

14 days

Updated 14/06/2013

Day 1 ***Arrive in Antananarivo***

Today we arrive in Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar.

Unlike most capital cities in southern Africa, Antananarivo was already a major city before the colonial era. The city was founded circa 1625 by King Andrianjaka and takes its name (the City of the Thousand) from the number of soldiers assigned to guard it.

Overnight in Antananarivo. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 ***Antananarivo - Antsirabe***

In the morning we will have a panoramic sightseeing tour of Antananarivo. Tana has the quality of a child's picture book, with brightly coloured houses stacked upon the hillsides, mauve jacarandas and purple bougainvillea against a deep blue, and rice paddies that are tended right up to the edge of the city. Tana does not have much in the way of "tourist attractions" per se, but we will pause at the Rova, the shell of the Royal Palace built in 1864 for Queen Ranavalona II by the Scotsman, James Cameron. Everything that was wooden burned in 1996, but the imposing stone fortress of a shell still stands.

We then leave the capital and travel towards Antsirabe, founded in 1872 by Norwegian missionaries attracted by the cool climate (1500m / 4,700 ft) and the healing properties of the thermal springs. Along the crest of the island lie the central highlands, a plateau region of red soil giving the country the nickname, "the Red Island."

Antsirabe means "place of much salt," and is the agricultural and industrial centre of Madagascar. This is the centre of a rich agricultural area lying on the slopes of the island's second highest peak.

Overnight in Antsirabe. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 ***Antsirabe - Ambositra - Ranomafana***

Leaving Antsirabe we continue through typical highland scenery of rice paddies and low hills. We stop in Ambositra, the centre of Madagascar's wood carving industry where even the houses have ornately carved wooden balconies and shutters. There is an abundant choice of good quality carved figures and marquetry in several shops.

From Ambositra the scenery becomes increasingly spectacular. We now pass remnants of the western limit of the rainforest. The road runs up and down steep hills, past neat rice paddies interspersed with eucalyptus and pine groves. Our stunning descent into Ranomafana takes us from dry highland vegetation to lush greenery and flowers. We have beautiful views of the tumbling waters of the Namorana River and the lovely unbroken green of virgin forest.

The village of Ranomafana is situated by a river in the lush greenness of the eastern rainforest. The name Ranomafana

means "hot water" and it was the waters, not the lemurs, which drew visitors in the colonial days to this place. Today the draw here is the Ranomafana National Park, a fragment of high altitude rainforest that first came to world attention with the discovery of the golden bamboo lemur in 1986.

NOTE: There are some moderate to strenuous walks on this tour that, though optional, are an integral part of experiencing the highlights of the country. Reasonable level of physical fitness and steadiness on one's feet is important for the participant to fully and comfortably enjoy such tour activities.

Overnight in Ranomafana. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Ranomafana National Park*

Today we enjoy morning and evening walks/hikes in the park. Hidden in these trees are at least 12 species of lemur: diademed (Milne-Edwards) sifaka, red-bellied lemur, red-fronted lemur, ruffed lemur and three species of bamboo lemur. At night you can add mouse lemur, avahi, lepilemur, fat-tailed dwarf lemur, and even aye-aye. Then there are more than 110 species of birds with 36 endemic; reptiles, butterflies and other insects. There is also much variety in the vegetation and scenery, all of which can be observed from well-constructed trails.

During our walks through the park we are most likely to see red-fronted brown lemurs and perhaps the rarer red-bellied lemur. The golden bamboo lemur is less easily seen. The most memorable of the easily found lemurs is a subspecies of the diademed sifaka, Milne-Edward's sifaka. Unlike the more familiar Verreaux's sifaka which is largely white, this is dark brown with cream-coloured sides.

Overnight in Ranomafana. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Ranomafana - Fianarantsoa*

This morning we depart from Ranomafana and journey onwards to Fianarantsoa. On our way we pass forest, open country, rice paddies modest country homes as we begin the approach to Fianarantsoa.

Fianarantsoa means 'Place of good learning'. It was founded in 1830 as the administrative capital of Betsileo and is one of the more attractive Malagasy towns. The Upper Town, with its narrow winding streets and plethora of churches, is one of our stops today. Fianarantsoa also has a wonderful market, which features a great variety of herbal medicines and dried fish brought up by train from Manakara.

Overnight in Fianarantsoa. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Fianarantsoa - Ambalavao - Ranohira*

This morning we drive through fields of rice, corn, potatoes, coffee and even grapes to arrive in Ambalavao where the famous Malagasy 'Antaimoro' paper is made. Antaimoro paper is traditionally made from the bark of the araho tree from the eastern forests, but sisal paste is now sometimes used. After the bark is pounded and softened in water it is smoothed on to linen trays to dry in the sun. While still tacky, dried flowers are pressed into it and brushed over with a thin solution of the liquid bark to hold the flowers in place. The tradition began with Muslim immigrants who wrote Koranic verses on the paper, the only form of writing known in Madagascar before a written Malagasy language was developed nearly five hundred years later using the Roman alphabet.

Ambalavao is also the place where the highly agricultural highland Betsileo tribe (who the most skilled rice cultivators

in Madagascar), meet the nomadic, non-agricultural Bara tribal peoples who count their wealth in cattle, not unlike the Masaai in East Africa.

This afternoon we drive to Ranohira through a truly awesome landscape at the foot of the Isalo Mountains.

Overnight in Ranohira. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Isalo National Park*

Today we spend exploring the Isalo National Park on foot.*

Established in 1962, the Isalo National Park protects 815 sq km of sandstone massif wildly eroded by wind and rain into bizarre ridges (known as "runiformes") featuring wild forms, impressive gorges and canyons, and tiny stalagmite pinnacles. The climate is dry tropical with warm temperatures all year around.

One of our options today is a walk to the Piscine Naturelle where a natural stone cave overlooks a crystal-clear waterfall flowing into a deep green pool surrounded by leafy pandanus trees. This tranquil pool is a virtual oasis in the heat, and offers a welcome relief after the long hike to get there.

* NOTE: Due to the nature of the terrain and the heat in this area, the walks here are more difficult on average than others on our program. By now your Tour Leader should have a good sense of overall group abilities and individual limitations and can provide advice on your suitability for today's excursions.

Overnight in Ranohira. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Ranohira - Toliara*

This morning as we drive from Ranohira to Toliara (Tulear), the rugged mountains give way to grasslands. There are some charming villages along the our way, and closer to Toliara we'll see baobab trees and pass through a cotton-growing region.

The name of the town is thought to derive from an encounter with an early sailor who asked a local inhabitant where he might moor his boat. The Malagasy replied: "toly eroa," or "mooring down there." Toliara is relatively modern (1895), designed by a seemingly uninspired French architect. His tree-planting was more successful aesthetically, and the shady tamarind trees provide welcome respite from the sun.

Overnight in Toliara. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Toliara - Andasibe-Mantadia*

This morning we fly back to the capital from where we travel my road to Andasibe-Mantadia (Perinet).

We have an early start for our road journey to the popular rainforest reserve of Andasibe-Mantadia (formerly known as Perinet). The drive over the highlands and escarpment is pleasant and the scenery is stunning. Since this is in the eastern escarpment, the climate is cooler and the rain falls mostly at night. The mist-enshrouded rainforest creates an awesome spectacle in the early morning.

This evening we will go for a walk through the Analamzaotra Special Reserve. There are at least nine species of lemur

here, (including the recent discovery of the aye-aye). Our most likely encounter will be with a troop of grey bamboo lemurs which are diurnal and sometimes feed on the bamboo near the warden's house. On a nocturnal lemur hunt one should also look for mouse lemurs and the greater dwarf lemur, which hibernates during the cold season.

Overnight in Andasibe-Mantadia. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Andasibe-Mantadia / Analamazaotra*

Today we visit Analamazaotra Special Reserve (walks/hikes in the reserve). This reserve protects the largest of the lemur family, the indri. It stands about three feet high, with a barely visible tail, and black and white markings. You will be an observer: most people see indris in Analamazaotra Special Reserve, and if they don't see them they hear them. It is their voice that makes this lemur extra special: while other lemurs grunt, the indri "sings." It is an eerie, wailing sound somewhere between the song of a whale and a police-siren, and it carries for up to two miles as they call to each other across the forest.

In Malagasy the indri is called Babakoto. There are various legends connected with the indri, which reveals the esteem in which the local people hold them. A popular legend tells of a man who climbed a forest tree to gather wild honey and was severely stung by the bees. Losing his hold, he fell, but was caught by a huge indri which carried him on its back to safety.

This is also a good place for bird watching. There are flowering trees of a species much favoured by the Madagascar green sunbird, which has an iridescent green head and throat. There are also plenty of the cuckoo-like blue couas, blue pigeons, paradise flycatchers, two species of falcon (Newton falcon and Madagascar falcon), two species of black vasa parrot, and many others.

Overnight in Andasibe-Mantadia. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Andasibe-Mantadia - Antananarivo - Berenty*

Today we travel back to Tana from where we fly to Fort Dauphin (Taolagnaro). On arrival we drive to Berenty through beautiful landscape (mountains, endemic plants, baobab, cactus, sisal). The reserve lies some 80 km to the west of Tolagnaro, amid a vast sisal plantation, and the drive there is part of the experience. For the first half of the journey the skyline is composed of rugged green mountains, and "Travellers' trees" (ravenala) dot the landscape. Near Ranopiso is a grove of the very rare three-cornered palm, Neodypsis decary.

We will first stop to visit some pitcher plants whose nearest relatives are in Asia. The yellow 'flowers' (actually modified leaves) lure insects into their sticky depths where they are digested, probably for their nitrogen content.

Before reaching the spiny forest we will stop at an Antanosy 'tomb' (actually the dead are buried elsewhere) known as the tomb of Ranonda. It was carved by the renowned sculptor Fiasia. The artistry of this unpainted wooden memorial is of a very high standard although the carvings are deteriorating in the frequently wet weather.

Berenty is famous for its population of ring-tailed lemurs and sifakas. Henri de Heaulme, and now his son Jean, have made this one of the best-studied 260 hectares of forest in Madagascar. Although in the arid south, its location along the river Mandrare ensures a well-watered habitat for the large variety of animals that live there. In previous years the forest itself was threatened by the rampant spread of the cactus-like 'rubber vine', Cissus quadrangularis, but this is being vigorously tackled.

The following species of lemur are often seen: brown lemur, ring-tailed lemur and sifaka. The lemurs here are well-used

to people. There are approximately 350 ring-tailed lemurs in Berenty, and the population has stayed remarkably stable considering that only about a quarter of the babies survive to adulthood. The young are born in September and at first cling to their mother's belly, later climbing on to her back and riding jockey-style.

Overnight at Berenty Private Reserve. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Berenty Private Reserve*

We have a full day to experience Berenty.

Berenty is famous for its population of ring-tailed lemurs and sifakas. Henri de Heaulme, and now his son Jean, have made this one of the best-studied 260 hectares of forest in Madagascar. Although in the arid south, its location along the river Mandrare ensures a well-watered habitat for the large variety of animals that live there. In previous years the forest itself was threatened by the rampant spread of the cactus-like 'rubber vine', Cissus quadrangularis, but this is being vigorously tackled.

The following species of lemur are often seen: brown lemur, ring-tailed lemur and sifaka. The lemurs here are well-used to people. There are approximately 350 ring-tailed lemurs in Berenty, and the population has stayed remarkably stable considering that only about a quarter of the babies survive to adulthood. The young are born in September and at first cling to their mother's belly, later climbing on to her back and riding jockey-style.

Overnight at Berenty Private Reserve. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Berenty - Fort Dauphin - Antananarivo*

Today we drive back to Fort Dauphin from where we fly to Antananarivo in the mid-afternoon.

Overnight in Antananarivo. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Departure*

Departure from Antananarivo.

NOTE: Ever-changing air schedules from Antananarivo may necessitate an extra overnight at the end of the tour which has NOT been included in tour pricing. Land only passengers please confirm dates with Adventures Abroad BEFORE booking your flights.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.