

TOUR CODE

**MG2**

ADVENTURESABROAD

## MADAGASCAR & SOUTH AFRICA

with Swaziland

**25 days**

Updated 27/08/2009

### Day 1 *Arrive in Antananarivo*

Arrive in Antananarivo.

Antananarivo means 'City of the Thousand', supposedly because a thousand warriors protected it. By the end of the 18th century, Andrianampoinimerina had taken Antananarivo from his rebellious kinsman and moved his base there from Ambohimanga. From that time until the French conquest in 1895 Madagascar's history centred around the royal palace or rova, the modest houses built for Andrianjaka and Andrianampoinimerina giving way to a splendid palace designed for Queen Ranavalona I by Jean Laborde and James Cameron. The rock cliffs near the now ruined palace became known as Ampamarinana, 'the place of the hurling', as Christian martyrs met their fate at the command of the Queen.

There was no reason for the French to move the capital elsewhere: its pleasant climate made it an agreeable place to live, and plenty of French money and planning went into the city we see today.

NOTE: Ever-changing air schedules to Antananarivo may necessitate an extra overnight at the start of the tour which has NOT be included in tour cost. If we find ourselves with extra time in Tana, we will have an expanded sightseeing programme in the city with time to browse through the local marketplaces.

Land only passengers must confirm dates with Adventures Abroad BEFORE booking their flights.

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

### Day 2 *Antananarivo - Andasibe-Mantadia National Park (Perinet)*

Today will transfer to the popular rainforest reserve of Andasibe-Mantadia (formerly known as Perinet). The drive over highlands into the escarpment is pleasant and the scenery is stunning. Since this is in the eastern escarpment, the climate is not too hot and 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 nine species of lemur altogether here, (including the recent discovery of the aye-aye). Your 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 look for mouse lemurs, and the greater dwarf lemur which hibernates during the cold season. Pack raincoats and a good flashlight for a night walk to see nocturnal animals.

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

### Day 3 *Analamzaotra Special Reserve*

Today we visit Analamzaotra Special Reserve today (walks/hikes in the reserve). This reserve protects the largest of

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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, and explaining the esteem with which the local people hold them (it is unlucky to kill an indri). 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 (*Cinnyris notatus*) which has an iridescent green head and throat, and such nectar like the new World hummingbirds. 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.

<b>Day 4</b> <b><i>Andasibe - Mantadia - Antsirabe</i></b>
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Today we travel towards Antsirabe.

Antsirabe was founded in 1872 by Norwegian missionaries attracted by the cool climate (1500m / 4,700 ft) and the healing properties of the thermal springs. Our journey takes us back via Antananarivo and into the highlands. Along the crest of the island lie the central highlands, a plateau region of red soil giving the country the nickname, "the Red Island."

The name means "place of much salt". Antsirabe 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.

<b>Day 5</b> <b><i>Antsirabe - Ambositra - Ranomafana National Park</i></b>
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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 Betsileo rice paddies interspersed with eucalyptus and pine groves. Before we reach Ranomafana we first have the marvellous drive down, with the dry highland vegetation giving way to greenery and flowers. Then there are the views of the tumbling waters of the Namorana river, and the relief when the hillsides become that lovely unbroken, knobbly 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 people give more attention to the Ranomafana National Park. This unprotected fragment of high altitude rainforest first came to world attention with the discovery of the golden bamboo lemur in 1986 and is particularly rich in wildlife.

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Overnight in Ranomafana. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

**Day 6      *Ranomafana National Park***

Today we enjoy morning and evening walks/hikes in the National 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. Even if your wildlife viewing is limited, there is enough variety in the vegetation and scenery, and enough pleasure in walking the well-constructed trails.

During our walks through the National 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 7      *Ranomafana - Fianarantsoa***

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

The name means 'Place of good learning'. Fianarantsoa (Fianar for short) was founded in 1830 as the administrative capital of Betsileo. It is one of the more attractive Malagasy towns, built on a hill like a small-scale Antananarivo. The Upper Town, with its narrow winding streets and plethora of churches, is one of our stops today. Fianarantsoa 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 8      *Fianarantsoa - Ambalavao - Isalo National Park***

This morning we drive through rice, corn, potatoes, vegetable, coffee and wine fields to arrive in Ambalavao. This is where the famous Malagasy 'Antaimoro' paper is made. This papyrus-type paper impregnated with dried flowers is sold throughout the island as wall-hangings and lampshades. The people in this area are Betsileo, but paper-making in the area copies the coastal Antaimoro tradition which goes back to the Muslim immigrants who wrote verses from the Koran on this paper. This Arabic script was the only form of writing known in Madagascar before a written Malagasy language was invented nearly five hundred years later using the Roman alphabet.

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.

This afternoon we drive to Ranohira through an awesome landscape. Here we may see 'zebu herds' of the Bara tribe. Ranohira is situated on the bottom of the Isalo mountains. The combination of sandstone rocks (cut by deep canyons and eroded into weird shapes), rare endemic plants and dry weather (between June and August rain is almost unknown), makes this Isalo National Park particularly rewarding. Abstract sculpturing and colours of the eroded terrain sweeping

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panoramas and absolute and enveloping silence.

Overnight in Ranohira. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

**Day 9 Isalo National Park**

Today we spend exploring the Isalo National Park on foot.

Beautiful flora and fauna, deep canyons eroded into weird shapes, rare endemic plants. This eroded mountain range is a marvellous and magical place. A flat grassy plain is surrounded by wind sculpted rocks and cliffs, seemingly full of eyeholes, noses and beaks. At ground level, there are strange leaves which grow lying flat on the ground, thousands of termite mounds, tiny stalagmite pinnacles, and mini baobab trees which look like inflated rubber gloves or planted human hearts! Some of these produce beautiful yellow flowers.

Running through the middle is a small stream, which at two points runs into little lake gardens. These oases couldn't have been created more perfectly by a Hollywood set builder working on "Adam & Eve in Paradise". One in particular has a natural stone bridge and cave with a waterfall that tumbles into a cool, clean and deep pool, surrounded by overhanging pandanus trees. This spot, where you can swim, is simply Eden.

Overnight in Ranohira. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

**Day 10 Isalo National Park - Toliara**

This morning as we drive from Ranohira to Toliara (Tulear), the rugged mountains give way to grasslands. It is the human aspect that makes the final stretch so rewarding. There are some charming villages on our way, and as you get closer to Toliara you'll see baobabs and pass through a cotton-growing region.

The name of the town is thought to derive from an encounter with one of those early sailors who asked a local inhabitant where he might moor his boat. The Malagasy replied: Toly eroa, "Mooring down there". Toliara is relatively modern (1895) and designed by an uninspired French architect. His tree-planting was more successfully aesthetic, and the shady tamarind trees, kily, give welcome respite from the blazing sun.

Overnight in Toliara. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

**Day 11 Toliara - Taolagnaro (Fort Dauphin)**

Today we fly to Taolagnaro (Fort Dauphin). The remains of two forts can still be seen in or near this town on the extreme south-east tip of Madagascar: Fort Flacourt built in 1643; and one that dates from 1504, the oldest building in the country, which was erected by shipwrecked Portuguese sailors. This ill-fated group of 80 reluctant colonists stayed about 15 years before falling foul of the local tribes. The survivors of the massacre fled to the surrounding countryside where disease and hostile natives finished them off.

The year 1642 saw a French expedition, organised by the Societe Francaise de l'Orient and led by Sieur Pronis with instructions to 'found colonies and commerce in Madagascar and to take possession of it in the name of His Most Christian Majesty'. An early settlement at the Bay of Sainte Luce was soon abandoned in favour of a healthier peninsula to the south, and a fort was built and named after the Dauphin (later Louis XIV) in 1643. At first the Antanosy were quite keen on the commerce part of the deal but were less enthusiastic about losing their land. The heavily defended fort only survived by use of force and with many casualties from both sides. The French finally abandoned the place in 1674, but their 30-year occupation formed one of the foundations of the later claim to the island as a French colony.

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During this period the first published work on Madagascar was written by Pronis's successor, etienne de Flacourt. His Histoire de la Grande Ile de Madagascar brought the island's amazing flora and fauna to the attention of European naturalists, and is still used as a valuable historical source book.

Overnight in Taolagnaro. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

**Day 12 Berenty Private Reserve**

This morning we drive through beautiful landscape (mountains, endemic plants, baobab, cactus, sisal) to the Berenty Reserve. 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. 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 (gallery or reverine forest) 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. Ring-tails eat flowers, fruit and insects.

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

**Day 13 Fort Dauphin - Antananarivo**

Today we fly from Taolagnaro (Fort Dauphin) to Antananarivo.

Overnight in Antananarivo. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

**Day 14 Antananarivo, Madagascar - Johannesburg, South Africa**

Today we fly from Tana to Johannesburg.

Overnight in Johannesburg (Sandton). Garden Court, Sandton City Hotel or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

**Day 15 Johannesburg - the 'Panoramic Route' - Hazyview**

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From Jo'burg we head off through the vast wilderness of Mpumalanga (formerly The Eastern Transvaal), the "Land of the Rising Mist". Along the way we travel from the vast grasslands of the High Veld, with its huge farms and ranches, down to the drier Low Veld region characterized by rocky hills and acacia scrub forest. This is an expansive landscape of mountains, valleys, rivers, waterfalls, primal forests, and colourful flora. Steeped in a history of pioneers and fortune-seekers, we will pass many Gold Rush towns and farming communities en route. Lydenburg ("town of suffering") established by Voortrekkers in 1849 lies at the bottom of Long Tom pass. This pass, named after the big gun used by the Afrikaners during the Anglo Boer War, is one of the most scenically dramatic in the country. It links Sabie on the escarpment with Lydenburg on the Drakensberg plateau.

A highlight of our sightseeing today is the spectacular Blyde River Canyon. This great escarpment is the kind of place where brochures and guide books run out of original adjectives to describe the fresh mountain scenery and magnificent panoramic views. The Blyde River Canyon is one of the most spectacular in Africa and its cliffs rise between 600-800 m (2,000-2,640 feet) from the river bed. At the "Three Rondavels viewpoint" is an unforgettable view of three huge rock spirals rising out of the far wall of the canyon. Their tops appear to have a hut-like rounded roof.

Following the road and the Treur River south, there are further viewpoints; Wonder View, God's Window and the Pinnacle. Their names help to conjure up the indescribable vastness of the scenery. From here we continue to Hazyview near Kruger National Park.

Overnight in Hazyview. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

**Day 16      *Hazyview - Kruger National Park - Hazyview***

Early this morning we enter South Africa's largest game reserve, Kruger National Park, named after Paul Kruger, the first to initiate the setting aside of this area as a reserve in the 1890s. Here we transfer to open safari vehicles and make a full-day excursion through the southern sector of this fascinating and beautiful park.

The Kruger Park is an enormous area of flat veld, broken by rivers and comprised of mixed vegetation and terrain. The park, officially founded in 1926, supports more species of wildlife than any other African reserve -- over 137 mammal species, 49 fish species, 112 reptile species, and nearly 500 bird species! With some luck we may see and photograph lion, leopard, cheetahs, elephant, zebra and many other wonderful African animals.

We return to Hazyview in the late afternoon.

Overnight in Hazyview. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

**Day 17      *Hazyview, South Africa - Mbabane, Swaziland***

We travel south today and enter the Kingdom of Swaziland, an independent country completely landlocked by South Africa and Mozambique, and smaller than Kruger Park! Naturally fortified by beautiful mountains, Swaziland remains one of the last kingdoms in Africa, a continent once dominated by colonialism. The pace of life here is relaxed and the lifestyle traditional; we will see rural people working their farms and tending their herds as we make our way to the vicinity of Mbabane, the capital city.

Overnight in / near Mbabane. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

**Day 18      *Mbabane, Swaziland - Hluhluwe, South Africa***

This morning we travel into the Swazi Lowveld, an area of tiny villages and endless rolling hills planted in sugarcane.

Later this morning we cross back into the Republic of South Africa and travel into the province of Kwazulu-Natal. This area is a nature-lover's paradise, boasting unforgettable untamed African wilderness. This is the traditional homeland of the Zulu people whose informal economy was historically based upon livestock, subsistence agriculture and hunting. The Zulu have lived in southern Africa for over 300 years and have maintained their traditions and customs perhaps more than any other indigenous southern African ethnic group. In the late 18th century, the Zulu clan was but one of a number of small groups among the northern Nguni. By the 1820s, a powerful Zulu state had emerged under the control of Shaka. Historians continue to debate the reason/s for the rise of a militarised and authoritarian Zulu state.

This afternoon we settle into our comfortable lodge in the African bush, situated in close proximity to the Umfolozi, Mkuze and Hluhluwe National Parks.

Overnight near Hluhluwe. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

**Day 19      *Hhuhluwe Game Reserve - Durban - Port Elizabeth***

This morning we will participate in an early morning game drive through Hluhluwe Game Reserve. The reserve is the oldest conservation area in Africa, established on 30 April 1895, and is famous for saving the White Rhino from extinction. The area currently boasts the largest rhino populations in Africa; both the Black and White Rhino are endemic to the area. Apart from the "Big Five," the area is also refuge to the endangered wild dog and the elusive cheetah.

This afternoon we travel toward the Indian Ocean and continue on to Durban, the 'Garden City' of South Africa. This area was opened up to white settlement by the Voortrekkers in the early 19th century, though the Portuguese were navigating the coast here as early as the late 15th century. Vasco da Gama was the first European to sail along this coast, giving it the name Natal to commemorate his Christmas Day arrival. In 1899 the British and the Boers went to war, but under reconciliation in 1910 formed the Union of South Africa with an agreement signed in what is now Durban's modern-day Main Post Office.

This evening we fly from Durban to Port Elizabeth, the start of the famous "Garden Route."

Overnight in Port Elizabeth. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

**Day 20      *Port Elizabeth - Knysna - Oudtshoorn***

Port Elizabeth is South Africa's fifth largest city and the third largest port. This morning we will have a brief panoramic tour of this city seeing the Market Square and the beaches of Algoa Bay.

From Port Elizabeth we travel along the world-famous Garden Route to Knysna. This route is parallel to the ocean and features lakes, mountains, beaches, and steep cliffs. We pass beautiful Jeffery's Bay, a popular surfing beach. The Tsitsikamma Forest Park contains many huge Yellowwood trees -- the national tree of South Africa.

This part of the garden route reminds one somewhat of the Oregon Coast (USA) or the Cornwall Coast (Britain) with its sand dunes and great surf beaches. Knysna affords tremendous views of a lagoon and the surrounding mountains. The town was founded in 1817 by George Rex, reputed to be an illegitimate son of King George III. Known for its picturesque lagoon, the town was first established as a timber port. Separated from the ocean by the imposing Knysna Heads, Knysna is proud of its riviera atmosphere with sidewalk cafes and shops.

We continue through the towns of Wilderness and George to Oudtshoorn (pronounced "Oats-horn").

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Overnight in Oudtshoorn. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

**Day 21      Oudtshoorn - Cape Town**

This is the ostrich capital of South Africa with thousands of these unusual birds dotting fields throughout the area. At the turn of the century ostrich feathers were in such demand that the fashion conscious paid a premium and feathered the nests of the barons who built magnificent mansions known as "Feather Palaces." This fine architecture can still be seen around the sedate and pleasant town. There are several ostrich show farms that still sell the beautiful downy feathers but now make more money out of the desirable soft, strong, knobby leather. There is also an export demand for the eggs, one of which makes an omelette for 20 people.

The bottom suddenly dropped out of the feather market in 1914, leaving ostrich farmers penniless. There were some 750,000 domesticated ostriches on Little Karoo farms in 1914; today there are about a tenth of that number. Today it is not merely the plume feathers of the males but the whole birds that are utilised. We will have a tour of one of the region's main ostrich show farms before continuing our journey to Cape Town.

From Oudtshoorn we travel through the Huis River Pass with its spectacular rock formations. The little farming town of Ladysmith was named after the beautiful Spanish wife of British Cape Governor Sir Harry Smith. The town of Swellendam, established in 1745, is the third oldest in South Africa. Here we see several historic buildings built in the charming Cape Dutch style. These buildings have whitewashed walls and black, thatched roofs. We pass through a wheat growing and sheep farming area on our way to Cape Town. In the late afternoon we cross the Hottentot's Holland Mountains, the centre of South Africa's apple growing region, to arrive in Cape Town, one of the world's most isolated and beautiful cities.

Overnight in Cape Town. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

**Day 22      City Tour & the Cape Peninsula**

Today we tour Cape Town, one of the world's most spectacularly located cities. Cape Town is the seat of the Parliament which holds a six-month session here each year. We will see the Houses of Parliament, the Malay Quarter with its narrow streets and minarets; the Castle of Good Hope, South Africa's oldest building; and visit the South African Museum.

We continue our tour of the Cape Peninsula, including a visit to the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve and Cape Point. The Nature Reserve is a wildflower, bird, and animal paradise on 77 sq km (30 sq miles) of the Cape Peninsula. The reserve is also home to eland, springbok, bontebok, baboon, and zebra. Within the reserve are Cape Point and the Cape of Good Hope, the most southwesterly point on the African continent.

We head north again up the Indian Ocean side of the peninsula, passing through Simonstown, founded by the Dutch in 1741 as a naval depot and named for Simon van der Stel, governor of Cape Colony from 1679 to 1697. In 1814 the town became the headquarters of the British South Atlantic squadron. Today Simonstown is famous for its distinctly English architecture and atmosphere, and the southernmost train station on the continent.

We complete our loop around the peninsula, past the well-watered eastern slopes of Table Mountain, Constantia, Bishops Court and the campuses of the University of Cape Town.

Overnight in Cape Town. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

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**Day 23     *Table Mountain & Cape Winelands***

We will start our day with a gondola trip to the top of Table Mountain,\* a sandstone plateau rising up above the city. The top is approximately 3km wide and at its highest point, Maclears Beacon, rises to 1085m / 3,580 ft. Over the centuries it has become one of South Africa's most famous landmarks. The steep cliffs and rocky outcrops of the mountain play home to a number of plants and animals. The mountain is home to approximately 1,470 species of plants; more than the entire British Isles!

We continue to Stellenbosch, South Africa's second oldest settlement. We'll spend time in the centre of town and allow some time for some independent, on-foot exploration. You will notice some of the finest examples of traditional Cape Dutch architecture along the town's oak-lined streets.

We continue to one of the area's many wineries for a cellar tour and tasting. The Cape vineyards were originated at Constantia by Jan van Riebeeck in 1685 and were advanced in 1688 by Huguenot refugees who brought their vine seedlings and skills with them from France. The Cape's different soils and climatic variations allow a wide variety of wines to be pressed -- exquisite sweet and dry whites and fruity reds. Along our route today we will see several wine estates with their delightful Cape Dutch houses, thatched roofs and decorative gables.

Overnight in Cape Town. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

**Day 24     *Departure***

Departure from Cape Town.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.

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