Tour Code
MG1

ADVENTURESABROAD

MADAGASCAR

'The Lost Continent'

15 days

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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' -- supposedly because a thousand warriors protected it. Until the French conquest in 1895 Madagascar's history centred around the royal palace or rova, and the rock cliffs near the 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.

Overnight in Antananarivo.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Antananarivo - Fly to Taolagnaro - Berenty

Today we fly to Fort Dauphin (Taolagnaro).* On arrival we drive (on a very poor road, approx 4 hours) 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.

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.

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.

* Due to frequent changes to air schedules, lodge availability, and seasonal variations, the final order of our overnight points often change from one departure to another. Overall content will remain the same, but there may be some adjustments prior to your chosen date.

Overnight at Berenty Private Reserve.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 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.

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 at Berenty Private Reserve.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Berenty - Taolagnaro - Fly to Antananarivo

Today we drive back to Taolagnaro (Fort Dauphin), on the same bad road, to connect with our flight back to Antananarivo where we spend the night prior to our onward road journey to Andasibe tomorrow.

Overnight in Antananarivo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Antananarivo - Andasibe: Mantadia/Analamzaotra

Today we travel by road to Andasibe and the popular rainforest reserve of Andasibe-Mantadia. 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. Please note that this is a full day of travel.

This area is home to at least nine species of lemur (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. After dinner we'll have a night walk in order to experience the sights and sounds of the forest after dark.

Overnight in Andasibe.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Andasibe: Mantadia/Analamzaotra

Today we have a full-day visiting 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. Most visitors see Indris in Analamazaotra Special Reserve, and if they don't see them they definitely 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. There are various legends connected with the Indri, which reveals the esteem in which the local people hold them. A popular tale 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.

This afternoon we have a leisurely nature walk in the area.

Overnight in Andasibe.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Andasibe - Antsirabe

We depart by road for 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. During our time in Antsirabe, we should be able to take a ponsee ponsee (rickshaw) ride.

Overnight in Antsirabe.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Antsirabe - Ranomafana

This morning we depart for Ranomafana.

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 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.

Overnight in Ranomafana.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Ranomafana National Park

Today we enjoy morning and evening walks/hikes.

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 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.

This evening we experience the park after dark with a night walk.

Overnight in Ranomafana.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Ranomafana - Fianarantsoa

This morning we journey by road onward to Fianarantsoa. On our way we pass forest, open country, rice paddies modest country homes.

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.

On arrival we'll have an informal panoramic tour of the town including a walk up to a viewpoint overlooking the city. We'll have a walk though the old town and hope that the colourful market is on.

Overniht in Fianarantsoa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Fianarantsoa - Ranohira & Isalo National Park

Today we travel by road to the vicinity of Isalo National Park. En route we stop at Ambalavao to visit the traditional weaving atelier, Antemoro. We also visit Anjaha Park hoping to spot the ring-tailed lemur.

In Isalo, we encounter the the warm weather of the south amidst a different kind of scenery -- the savanna of the vast plateau of Ihorombe, near the Massif of Isalo. The Isalo National Park was created in 1962 to preserve the ancestral beauty of the site. Archaeological relics and funeral sanctuaries create a magical atmosphere made of strong contrasts. Lemur calls and bird chirps are heard in this green oasis along rivers filled with lush plants. While the sandy cliffs with rare riparian vegetation complete the picture.

Overnight Ranohira.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 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 ridge 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 will 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Ranohira - Tulear

Today we travel by road to Tulear (Toliara) to better place us for tomorrow's flight back to 'Tana.

Overnight in Tulear.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Tulear - Fly to Antananarivo

Today we fly back to the capital. Ever-changing flight times-permitting, we may be able to accomplish some sightseeing upon arrival.

Tana will surprise you with its rice paddies, pollution, Asian influences, lots of stairs up steep hills, palaces, cobbled streets, and churches. This is not Africa or Asia, Madagascar is totally unique. This is a bustling place with lots of churches, a mosque, a zoo and plenty of markets. The

capital is basically built on 12 hills and steep steps lead to the main Independence Square in the town center. The architecture is a mixture of old wooden houses, modern offices and French colonial style buildings.

Tana does not have much in the way of "tourist attractions" per se, but we hope to take in the highlights, including 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.

Overnight in Antananarivo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Departure

Departure from Antananarivo.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast