MADAGASCAR

“Musts” & “Discovery”
Madagascar “Musts” & “Discovery” Tours

Sunday – Day 1
Paris / Antananarivo – Upon arrival into Antananarivo, the capital city of Madagascar, affectionately known as "Tana", clear passport and customs formalities, then meet our Cortez representative to transfer to the Hotel La Varangue for overnight stay. No meals today.

Monday – Day 2
Antananarivo – Breakfast at the hotel, with the remainder of the morning free to recover from the flight into Madagascar. After lunch at the hotel, meet your Cortez guide and embark on an afternoon excursion to the Tsimbazaza Zoo and the adjacent Natural History Museum on the ground of the Malagasy Academy of Sciences, for an introduction to early Madagascar life as well as to the special birds, lemurs and botanical wonders endemic to the island. Meals and overnight La Varangue. (Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner)

Tuesday – Day 3
Antananarivo / Maroantsetra – Transfer to the airport for a morning flight to Maroantsetra, gateway to the great coastal rainforest of Masoala Peninsula, mecca of naturalists and wildlife enthusiasts. After checking-in and lunch at the hotel Hippocampe, depart by boat on the Antainambalana river to the forest of Farakaraina to the east, a lush Eden located between the bay and the lazy river. Return to the Hippocampe for dinner and overnight. BLD
Wednesday – Day 4

**Maroantsetra** - Full day excursion by boat to the island reserve of Nosy Mangabe, just off the shore of Maroantsetra in the Bay of Antongil. One is sure to see the curious brown lemur and the unique leaf-tailed gecko on a pleasant walk along the shore; a more challenging uphill climb reveals an ancient burial site and the black and white ruffed lemur high in the trees. Return to the Hotel for dinner and night walk for best chance to see the elusive Aye aye. Overnight Hippocampe. (BLD)

Thursday – Day 5

**Maroantsetra / Antananarivo / Andasibe** – You have time this morning to visit the pleasant marketplace in town, known for intricate raffia hats and bags, before your return flight to the capital. Upon arrival at Ivato (the airport in Antananarivo), you bravely drive off toward Andasibe in the eastern rainforest. Dinner and overnight at Vakona Forest Lodge or Eulophiella Lodge in Andasibe. (BLD)

Friday – Day 6

**Andasibe** – Rise early to hike into the forest in Analamazaotra Reserve known in colonial times as "Perinet"), arriving in time to see the Indri indri and hear their haunting "singing" call. Mild hiking provides a
good opportunity to experience the abundant flora and fauna of the eastern rain forest. Dinner and overnight at the Vakona or Eulophiella. (BLD)

Saturday – Day 7
Andasibe / Antananarivo – Morning visit with the friendly lemurs at the small reserve of the Vakona before lunch and return drive to the capital. Stop at “Madagascar Exotic”, a nature farm at La Mandraka, where renowned naturalist André Peyriéras raises endemic chameleons, geckoes, frogs and other species of the local fauna. Overnight Hotel La Varangue. Dinner on your own tonight. (BL)

Sunday – Day 8
Antananarivo / Ft Daupin / Berenty Reserve – Transfer to the airport this morning for your flight to Ft. Dauphin, at the southeastern tip of the island. Upon arrival, meet your Berenty driver and depart for Berenty Reserve, a 3+ hour drive from coastal rainforest to the “spiny thicket” forest characteristic of the South of Madagascar. Stops along the way to view the unique baobab trees, rare three-cornered palms and funerary art of the Antandroy ethnic group. Afternoon and evening visits in the reserve; meals and overnight at Gite de Berenty. (BLD)

Monday – Day 9
Berenty – Full day to spend in the reserve with walks along the wide, well swept paths. The “maki” (Lemur catta), better known as the ring-tailed lemur, are very friendly and seem pleased to pose for photographs. Be ready for surprise encounters with the beautiful sifaka lemur and other species including flying foxes, lizards, chameleons, the endangered radiated tortoise and dozens of species of rare birds. Meals and overnight at Gite de Berenty at the edge of the forest. (BLD)

Tuesday – Day 10
Berenty / Ft Dauphin – You have time this morning to enjoy more of the reserve and the small but comprehensive cultural museum at Berenty before the return drive this afternoon to Ft. Dauphin. Meals and overnight Croix du Sud. (BLD)

Wednesday – Day 11
Ft Dauphin / Antananarivo – Breakfast and transfer to the airport for morning flight back to the capital. Lunch at the hotel and afternoon free; dinner at the delightful Villa Vanille with local entertainment. Later tonight, transfer to the airport for your flight back home. (BLD)
Day 10 – Day 11 same as “Musts”

Thursday – Day 12
Antananarivo / Diego-Suarez / Montagne d'Ambre – Today you fly to Diego-Suarez, unique port on the northern tip of the island. Diego features an eclectic mix of architectural styles reflecting the myriad of influences throughout the centuries. Upon arrival, drive up to the lush national park of Montagne d'Ambre, and enjoy a late afternoon and evening walk. Overnight at Nature Lodge or Le Grand Hotel in Diego. (BLD)

Friday – Day 13
Diego-Suarez / Ankarana / Ankify – Rise early to drive off for the Ankarana, noted for stunning limestone pinnacles known as the “Tsingy”. Visit to the bat cave or climb the tsingy for a view of this vast area. Possible close encounters with the crown lemurs during your picnic lunch, before continuing on to the port town of Ankify in the afternoon. Dinner overlooking the ocean and overnight Hotel Baobab. (BLD)

Saturday – Day 14
Ankify / Nosy Be – Early morning boat crossing to Nosy Be, with stops along the way on the islands of Nosy Komba, where the black lemur reigns, and Nosy Tanikely for snorkeling and a barbeque lunch. Dinner and overnight at the Nosy Be Hotel. (BLD)
Sunday – Day 15
Nosy Be – Day excursion to the peninsula of Lokobe by pirogue, the native paddle boat. Learn firsthand from Jean-Robert and his guides about his village’s prolific plants and wildlife. Meals and overnight Nosy Be Hotel. (BLD)

Monday – Day 16
Nosy Be / Antananarivo – Day free before the afternoon flight to Antananarivo, where you can relax in your dayroom at the La Varangue before returning to the airport later tonight for the flight home. BL Those passengers traveling via Johannesburg overnight at La Varangue, with Dinner on own. (BL)

A few words about the different habitats

Located in Madagascar’s most biodiverse region, Masoala is the largest National Park of the island. Mammal species encountered include the red-ruffed lemur, the red-fronted brown lemur, the aye-aye, the greater hedgehog tenrec, the fosa, the fanaloka, the falanouc, and whales which visit Antongil Bay around the breeding season in the austral winter and spring. The park is also home to various species of brightly colored Mantella frogs, and all manner of extraordinary chameleons of all sizes. Masoala is also the refuge of the endangered Madagascar red owl and Madagascar serpent eagle, along with many, many endemic bird species. The flora includes the Masoala pitcher plant and the rare Masoala palm. Coral reefs teeming with life are protected in three adjacent marine parks. The peninsula also features some beautiful deserted sandy beaches.

Mangabe island was set aside as a reserve in the early 60’s, in part to protect the fascinating nocturnal aye-aye which had been introduced there. This is the best place in which to see the black and white ruffed lemur, as well as the white-fronted brown lemur. The rainforest which covers Nosy Mangabe also shelters, among others, the cryptic fringed Uroplatus gecko, the largest of the 10 species in this endemic genus. Some look like dead leaves, some mimic bark, and this remarkable ability to literally fade into the woodwork makes them a particular delight to spot.

Andasibe’s Analamazaotra Special Reserve is famous as the home of the babakoto “indri” lemur (“indr(o)” means roughly “there it is” in Malagasy – a well-meaning guide for some early explorer must
have spotted a babakoto, pointed and shouted … and the rest is history). These largest of all living lemurs are monogamous, and do not live in captivity anywhere in the world. They greet the morning with a unique display of elaborate calls that echo throughout the forest. Several groups in the reserve have become highly habituated and are therefore relatively easy to see. The forest also shelters the beautiful diademed sifaka, grey bamboo lemurs and brown lemurs, as well as Parson’s chameleons which can exceed half a meter in length, the Madagascar tree boa, and numerous birds including the Madagascar blue pigeon, the blue coua, the Nellicourvi weaver, The Madagascar paradise flycatcher, the blue vanga and the Madagascar buzzard. Nearby Mantadia National Park is quite similar if somewhat more forbidding, hence less often visited.

The region of Fort Dauphin and Berenty Reserve is home to three different ecosystems: the southern spiny succulent forest, the wet rainforest, and between them a transitional forest, each harboring different populations of lemurs (maki, sifaka, Microcebus and even aye-aye). Most notable among the flora is the endemic trihedral palm (Neodypsis decarii). Birds include the Madagascar hoopoe, the crested drongo, the crested coua, Verreaux’s coua, the Madagascar coucal, and the white-faced whistling duck.

The upland rainforest at Montagne d’Ambre hosts Sanford’s Brown lemur, the northern sportive lemur, the fork-marked sportive lemur, the northern ring-tailed mongoose, the Madagascar crested ibis, the pitta-like ground roller, the Madagascar magpie robin, the white-throated rail, the Montagne-d’Ambre rockthrush and the white-throated oxylabe.

Ankarana Special Reserve is home to one of Madagascar’s extraordinary “tsingy” eroded limestone formations. It is also a sacred site for the Antankarana ancestors, and hosts the royal mast coronation ceremony of the quinquennial “Tsangantsaïna” relic-washing festival. The reserve also boasts ten species of lemurs including Eulemur coronatus, as well as the aptly named Galidia elegans mongoose, and over ninety species of birds including the Vasa parrots.

Besides its splendid beaches, Nosy Be hosts a bona fide low-altitude rainforest sheltering two kinds of lemurs, the mongoose lemur and the dimorphic black lemur (the male is black) - though the latter is much more easily seen on the nearby idyllic island of Nosy Komba. The forest also contains many reptiles and amphibians including the panther cameleon and the tiny Brookesia minima, the Madagascar ground boa, and the orange-backed Mantella betsileo frog. Birds include the hook-billed vanga, the cuckoo roller, the Madagascar blue pigeon, the malachite kingfisher, the Malagasy kingfisher, and the Madagascar paradise flycatcher. The underwater sanctuary of tiny Nosy Tanikely nearby is a natural aquarium where colorful fish and turtles are protected by a coral reef featuring the black coral Antipathes dichotoma.
Included in this guided expedition:
* all lodging in Madagascar as in the itinerary
* meals as in the itinerary
* all domestic flights within Madagascar, including airport taxes and fees
* private vehicle and driver as required along the itinerary
* excursions, entrance fees and local guides in the parks and reserves
* English-speaking guide throughout the itinerary in Madagascar

Not included:
* any international airfare
* any gratuities (a small tip at time of service is customary)
* any beverages, alcoholic and non-alcoholic, including bottled water
* personal items such as phone, fax, laundry

Please note that the order of the itinerary may have to be rearranged due to unforeseen schedule changes, and some hotels may have to be substituted with similar hotels due to overbooking practices beyond our control.
Why Madagascar?

Although Madagascar has over 1,800 miles of beautiful beaches and exceptionally good food, its greatest attractions are its UNIQUE flora and fauna. Among the discoveries that await the traveler:

**LEMURS** These prosimian primates are found wild only in Madagascar. Some of the best known are:
* the nocturnal “dwarf” and “mouse” lemurs, no bigger than a mouse, found all over the island
* the ring-tailed lemurs, seen in the South and Southwest
* the agile sifaka, capable of repeatedly leaping 30 feet or more from branch to branch to branch …
* the babakoto, “indri”, the largest living lemur, most easily seen in Analamazaotra Reserve
* the aye-aye, most unique of all living lemurs, with a genus all to itself.

**EXOTIC BIRDS** Five families of birds are endemic to Madagascar. Notable are:
* the marvelous vangas, found all over the island
* the couas, including the beautiful crested coua, and the peewit, easily identified by its unique call
* the Coracidae, sedentary insect feeders with brightly colored plumage
* an abundance of aquatic birds in rice paddies and marshes, including herons and flamingoes
* endemic birds of prey, such as eagles, falcons, and owls found only in Madagascar
* more than 70 species of singing birds, including the two species of vasa parrots.

**RARE PLANTS** Madagascar boasts one of the richest floras in the world with more than 10,000 species of vascular plants, over 80% of which are endemic to the island, including:
* more than 1,000 different species of orchids, including the Comet Orchid (Angraecum sesquipedale), the hawkmoth-pollinated species with an extraordinarily long nectar spur
* Ravinala madagascariensis, or “traveler’s tree”, a striking “tree” with a water-storing “trunk”, in the bird-of-paradise family
* Raphia farinifera, raffia palm, found throughout the East
* 6 different species of baobabs, all of which are found only in Madagascar
* two species of the carnivorous genus Nepenthes, or “pitcher plant”
* the spiny thicket of the South, with its Didiereaceae, Euphorbiaceae and other xerophytes.

**OTHER ATTRACTIONS:**
* reptiles, including chameleons, geckoes, turtles and tortoises, most of them endemic
* amphibians (including brightly colored frogs), beautiful butterflies, moths and stick insects
* unique mammals such as the fossa and other Madagascar Euplerids,
* whales during the breeding season (July and August), fantastic coral reefs, and so much more…

Are you ready for Madagascar?

Changes, delays and occasional chaos are to this day part of traveling in Madagascar, so potential visitors should be mentally ready for such mishaps to avoid unhappy experiences. Visitors should also be aware of the health hazards, the lack of safety equipment, the scarcity of medical facilities outside of Antananarivo, and the fact that the medical facilities available in the country are not up to international standards. Traveling to Madagascar remains an adventure.

If one requires more than basic comfort (food and shelter), expects one’s trip to happen exactly as outlined in the brochure, is shaken by unexpected and sometimes drastic changes, or is not in good health or physical condition, then Madagascar – at this time – is not the right destination.

If, on the other hand, one has a spirit of adventure akin to that of the early explorers, is willing to trade some aggravation and discomfort for incredible flora and unique wildlife in a pristine land, and welcomes the unexpected as the very essence of adventure travel, then Madagascar will prove to be the destination of a lifetime.