



MADAGASCAR

Pre-Departure Information



*Although your journey with us may end
Africa will forever be inscribed in your heart*

The **Republic of Madagascar** is the fourth largest island in the world, (226,597sq. miles or 587,041sq km) and is located off the east coast of Africa, amongst a cluster of much smaller islands, all of them ex-French colonies. Namely Seychelles, Reunion, the Comores and Mayotte.

The island was originally part of India, and split away 88 million years ago, taking with it populations of mammals, reptiles and birds of course, together with assorted flora. Over millennia these evolved into a unique group of creatures and plants, making Madagascar one of the worlds 'Biodiversity Hotspots'.

The earliest humans arrived from Borneo by outrigger canoes over the ocean, between 350BC and AD550, and so the gradual demise of the island's creatures began. Different ethnic groups arrived from Africa, India, Arabia and eventually Europe. Today, 18 different tribal groups exist. The groups organized themselves into ruling classes and even a form of monarchy, with the Merina nobles ruling most of the island. Conflict arose when the French colonized the island, the original monarchy was forced to give way.

Although independence was attained in 1960, an uneasy political climate has prevailed with several changes in leadership, up until 2013! A new government is now in power. ANTANANARIVO is the capital, in fact the original Merino capital too, and the IVATO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT is located 16km NE of the city.

The biggest attraction on the island are the unique lemurs, birds and reptiles. The beaches, wonderful snorkeling and shallow coral reefs and beautiful coastal camps are another powerful incentive for visitors. Gem stones in the form of sapphires and garnets amongst others have become a major industry in the last decade. Semi-precious stones are widely marketed to tourists who want something special to take home.

NATURAL HISTORY

People come to Madagascar to see the unique wildlife and flora and to lie on the beaches. Like many islands the creatures that have developed and evolved over time are unique. 88 million years of isolation have created a natural history base that is 90% endemic! By 2012, there were 103 lemur species discovered and named, 260 reptiles including the world's largest and tiniest chameleons, more than 300 birds (60% of which endemic), but most astonishing of all, 651 species of land snails! The unique fringed geckos, lizards, amphibians and insects are a naturalist's delight and the object of many books and films on natural history.

Many of the plants of the island are endemic too, and some have won fame for their shapes and beauty like the Travelers Palm (*Ravinala* spp.) or because they brought unique medicinal properties to science. The Madagascar Periwinkle is one. This lovely small forest edge shrub contains *vinblastine* and *vincristine* which are used to treat Hodgkins disease and leukemia, and other cancers!

Environmental Issues

The human effect on the fauna and flora of the island started when *Homo sapiens* first set foot on the shores, in about 350BC. The Giant lemurs were hunted out, then other large lemurs, a Pigmy Hippo, crocodiles and then the Giant Moa. Only egg shells remain of this huge flightless bird, three times the size of the ostrich.

Environmental degradation has silted the rivers, caused by the stripping of the forests for cultivation of food and construction of homes and ships by the French. Cattle were introduced about 1000 years ago, and grasslands are needed for these beasts.



The island has a mix of habitats now, the Highlands are extensively terraced for rice growing, whilst the eastern coastal mountains are narrowly forested still. Deciduous woodlands exist in the NW, and unique dry spiny forests occur in the southern tip.

The lemurs have found niches within these remaining habitats to occupy, however the increasing human numbers and primitive farming methods are taking their toll. Recent surveys have shown a crisis level in the populations of 90% of lemur species, this is exacerbated by the present government policy allowing the harvesting of certain tree species in forests for the Chinese market.

The current government's lack of understanding of the damage of logging to the remaining forests is of major concern! Particularly as Chinese business interests are taking priority over conservation of habitats and species! Nearly 90% of the forests are gone forever. Human populations have reached levels never before seen, and political instabilities compromised conservation areas and the protection agencies as recently as 2012.

If this unique island is to retain its fauna and flora for posterity, there has to be a massive change in awareness by the policy makers, otherwise the Dodo will only be the first in a long line of extinctions from this otherwise lovely island paradise. The people of Madagascar will be far poorer for this as well. Tourism has an important role to play that is far more beneficial than any commercial Chinese presence. Tourism is only sustainable if there is wildlife to see! Visitors are welcomed as a way of encouraging locals to see wildlife as a way forward and a cash-cow as well. Tourism is very important to the country, however it is what should precede Tourism that is not being recognized.

CLIMATE

The island is subject to annual cyclones in February which the local inhabitants have coped with by adapting their homes and habits to minimize the damage! In the far south, many rural homes are made of wooden sheeting, and so the local folk collapse the houses and bury them under sand. This is amazingly successful and once the storms are passed, the houses are re-erected.

- The SE trade winds, and NW monsoon winds bring much needed rain to the eastern sea board for the rainforest along the eastern coastlines of the island.
- In winter the central highland areas reach temperatures of about 5C/34F, especially Antsirabe.
- **Cool, dry season:** May to October.
- **Hot, rainy season (CYCLONES):** Nov to April.

POPULATION

22 million people live on the island, the majority are rural, putting huge pressure on the land.

LANGUAGE

Malagasy and French are the two main languages, more people are however learning to speak English.

TIME & INTERNATIONAL DIALING CODES

GMT +2 in summer. +3 in winter.

Phone code: +261



SAFETY

Visitors landing in Antananarivo are met and transferred by Africa Inscribed representatives to the hotel. The city is essentially 'safe', visitors are advised to exercise all the normal care and 'street savvy' that would be normal in any Third World city. Walking around at night on your own, without a local guide is NOT advised.

CURRENCY-AR

- Malagasy AIRY. This has replaced the old Franc Malagasy (FMG)
- It is advisable to change money on arrival in the airport at the bank or bureau.
- PLEASE NOTE THAT ONLY EUR, USD & GBP can be changed for local currency.

CREDIT CARDS

- VISA credit cards will only be accepted in the major centers and towns, it is wiser to carry cash.
- Automated Teller Machines are present in all the bigger towns and cities.
- ATM's YIELD ONLY local currency and ONLY VISA CARDS WORK IN THE ATM'S.
- Traveler's cheques are difficult to change, so avoid carrying them.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

It is up to the guest to ensure that passports and visas are valid for six months beyond the intended length of stay. There should be SIX blank VISA pages for any visa as well as for entry stamps on arrival. Please note these are visa pages NOT endorsement pages. This is important as IMMIGRATION OFFICIALS WILL BE STRICT about this, especially if you are travelling between several countries during your trip.

All passport holders should verify with their travel agent or relevant consulate concerning visa entry requirements. If you are extending your journey to other countries, please establish entry requirements for those countries as well.

ALL persons entering the republic require a visa, and they are obtainable at the port of entry.

EMERGENCY "Paper work"

Please photograph your passport Face page, credit cards and any vital travel documents with your cell phone, so that you have a copy with you.

1. **Lost Passport:** Photograph/scan a copy of your passport face page for quick reference.
2. **Lost Credit cards:** Photograph/Scan all credit cards and keep copies same as above.
(Don't scan back of Credit Cards)
3. Scan air tickets as above.
4. Leave a copy of these documents at home as well, with a contactable friend.



INSURANCE

It is a condition of booking, that the sole responsibility lies with the guests to ensure that they carry the correct comprehensive travel and medical insurance to cover themselves, as well as any dependents/travelling companions for the duration of their trip to Southern Africa.

FLIGHT CHECK-IN TIMES

Please check in early at all airports (at least one and a half hours prior for domestic flights, two hours prior for regional flights and three hours prior for all international flights) due to additional security which now affects international travel around the world.

Please be aware that during peak season, delays are often encountered on scheduled flights. Remember that you are on holiday... relax and enjoy the ambience, which sometimes has no sense of urgency at all!

RECONFIRMING FLIGHTS

Please ensure that your onward flights are reconfirmed, when applicable, at least 72 hours prior to flying. The camp managers will be responsible for reconfirming your local onward flights between camps, but INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS should be your responsibility.

COMMUNICATION IN THE CAMPS/LODGES

Telecommunications in the urban areas is possible, and even some cell phone access is found. BUT in the less accessible areas do not expect any cell phone coverage. If this is important, enquiries should be made beforehand. Some lodges offer WiFi but it is unreliable.

DIETARY REQUIREMENTS

We do ask that on making your booking you inform us of any special dietary requirements. The camps can cater for special diets *when given prior notice*. Due to the camps remote locations, prior notification is important.

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Please advise us if you will be celebrating any special occasions, such as a birthday or anniversary during your trip.

MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS

When making your booking with us we need to know if there are any medical conditions or allergies that may affect your safari or that we need to be aware of to facilitate transfers and movements between camps. Many of the camps and lodges are located in remote areas, so prior notice is required for particular medical needs.

HEALTH

There are a few basic health matters that require care and attention. The following points are recommended guidelines only. Please consult your doctor and also check with your health department prior to departure for any changes in health regulations.



1) Malaria

Malaria is common within Africa. Although not widespread, it is encountered anywhere where wet conditions prevail and settlements exist. It is also strongly affected by seasonal conditions; it is therefore best to be prepared any time one travels to Africa.

Malaria prophylactic recommendations for travelers:

- Expert opinion differs regarding the best approach to malaria prophylaxis. It is important to bear in mind that malaria may be contracted despite chemoprophylaxis, especially in areas where chloroquine resistance has been reported. Both chloroquine-resistant and normal strains of malaria are prevalent in Africa.
- Please remember that the best precaution is the preventative kind:
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and trousers/slacks in the evenings.
- Apply insect repellent to the backs of hands, ankles and neck and throat area.
- Please use the mosquito net over your bed where supplied/available.
- If staying in a bungalow or tent, staff will spray with a suitable insecticide to kill any mosquitoes that may have flown into your room.
Mosquito coils are also effective.

2) Tick Bite Fever

Ticks can be found in the wilderness of Africa, tick bites can possibly lead to tick bite fever. Symptoms of tick bite fever include, headache and painful, enlarged lymph glands in the area of the bite. If you experience any of these symptoms after returning home from your travel, please visit your doctor and advise them of the possibility of tick bite fever. Precautions can be taken to avoid being bitten when going on bush walks; these precautions include wearing long trousers tucked into socks and boots.

LYME'S DISEASE IS NOT YET A THREAT IN AFRICA.

3) Water

It is very important that you drink plenty of water especially during the warmer months. It is generally recommended that guests drink at least 4 to 6 pints (2 to 3 liters) of water per day to limit the effects of dehydration. This excludes tea, coffee and alcoholic beverages, which act as diuretics and therefore can actually contribute to dehydration. It is recommended that you drink bottled water throughout Africa.

4) Medical Conditions

Please make us aware of any medical conditions you have prior to your arrival. This includes any allergies e.g. bee stings, nuts, shellfish etc.

5) Inoculations

Please consult your doctor or local travel clinic with regards to any other suggested inoculations for your travels.



IMPORTANT

There is a significant difference between the luggage allowance:

- On International flights and internal flights in some regional countries (Zimbabwe), the allowance is 44lbs/20kg excluding hand luggage.
- In East Africa, only 33lbs/15kg is allowed, including hand luggage.

LUGGAGE ON SCHEDULED FLIGHTS - 44lbs EXCLUDING HAND LUGGAGE

Scheduled airlines generally carry a weight restriction of 44lbs (20kg's) on checked luggage per economy class traveller, and a carry-on, which may include your photographic equipment. Please ensure that you comply with the applicable restrictions (further details regarding number of luggage pieces and exact dimensions, for the particular carrier can be obtained from your ticketing agent).

Please note when combining scheduled airline flights and air transfers (as specified below), then restriction will apply unless alternative arrangements have been made for the storage or separate transfer of excess luggage, which will be at an additional cost.

Sufficient locks or baggage ties for baggage safety, is advised. Sometimes a colored ribbon will identify YOUR luggage more easily if it is just a black bag!

LUGGAGE ON INTERNAL AIR TRANSFERS - 44lbs, INCLUDING HAND LUGGAGE

There are strict weight restrictions in place on any itinerary, which includes light aircraft transfers for the following reasons:

- The aircrafts are designed with a maximum bodyweight and luggage weight allowance.
- Most of our airfields are over 3000ft./1000 meters above sea level and are located in the tropics, and therefore the permissible aircraft carrying capacity is reduced.
- The aircrafts also have physical space restrictions.

Some important issues must please be noted for air transfers:

Luggage, including hand luggage, is restricted to 44lbs per person. Only soft bags will be accepted, no hard suitcases can be transported, as they physically cannot fit into the aircraft. The maximum dimensions of the soft bags that can be accommodated are as follows: 10 inches wide x 12 inches high and 24 inches long. Please keep in mind that the baggage compartments on the light aircrafts are only 10 inches high, so the pilots must have the ability to manipulate the bag into the compartment.



Passengers weighing 220lbs or more, or two guests travelling together whose combined weight is 440lbs, must please advise us in advance as an extra seat for the additional weight will have to be costed into the package for safety purposes. If we are not advised of this information prior to arrival, this can cause a problem on the ground and could result in a private charter, which will be billed directly to the guest.



PLEASE NOTE: IF YOUR CAMERA EQUIPMENT IS EXCESSIVE, THEY WILL NOTICE AND ASK TO WEIGH IT, AND LIMIT YOU ACCORDINGLY.

LOST LUGGAGE

Luggage that goes missing on scheduled flights is beyond our control or the airline concerned. The airport Baggage Handling company controls what happens to passengers' luggage from when it is checked in or out until it is put on or taken off the aircraft.

We suggest that you pack a small bag with your essentials including **any life sustaining medication, which can be carried with you as hand luggage**. If your luggage goes missing, you will still have your essential items on hand to see you through the first couple of days while we try and recover your lost baggage.

LOSS OF ARTICLES

Please note that we cannot accept any responsibility for the misplacement of any articles whilst on your travels. Naturally, we will endeavor to reunite you with your misplaced items.

CLOTHING AND ACCESSORIES

CAMOUFLAGE CLOTHING IS FORBIDDEN IN MANY AFRICAN COUNTRIES

We suggest that when in Safari Camps/lodges you wear 'bush' colors such as olive green, khaki, gray and brown. Bright and light colors should be avoided, except at night. Some hotel properties do require men to wear long trousers to dinner. It is advisable to wear light colored clothes at night, as insects tend to avoid light clothing. Avoid wearing black and dark blue during the day as these absorb heat & attract insects.

Clothes

- 3 long sleeved shirts
- 3 pairs of long trousers. (Zip off legs idea)
- 2 long sleeved shirts for casual wear at some destinations.
- (In winter: 3 lightweight, close fitting sports T shirts to wear under normal shirt and to sleep in)
- 4 pairs of cotton underwear. Nylon sweats and can cause discomfort.
- 3 pairs of socks.
- 1 neck buffs or a scarf. Very useful.
- (In winter: pashmina or heavy scarf/kikoi is necessary).
- (In winter: Beanie/woolen cap, scarf and gloves too)
- 1 pair comfortable closed walking shoes for daily wear. (No need for heavy boots)
- 1 pair soft/lightweight/sandals for around camp.
- Wide brimmed hat, with under the chin tie)
- Swimming costume.
- NB: 1 lightweight, water proof/wind proof jacket.
- Suggestions for women travelers
- 3 sports bras
- 4 pairs cotton underwear
- Flannel PJ's
- Wet wipes
- Extra feminine hygiene items



Other kit

- Binoculars and Camera (see separate paragraph).
- iPad, book, alarm clock, camera & video, games, a computer to Skype and store photos.
- Flashlight, choose a battery charged one, NOT a rechargeable. LED type.
- Ziplock bags. Large for extra dirty or wet items of clothing or shoes.
- Dark glasses.
- Sun block - generally Africa has a very dry climate.

Suggestions for a small MEDICAL kit

- Headache tablets. (Everyone has their preferred brands and strengths)
- CIPRO or similar for upset stomachs.
- Immodium, antiseptic cream, hand sanitizer.
- Band Aid plasters for blisters. Especially if doing long walks.
- Spare Tampons/Pads
- Sun block and lip balm lotion (Recommended to bring minimum factor 30 SPF)
- Anti-malarial prophylactics are essential all year round.
- (Coastal areas are warmer)

LAUNDRY

Most camps do laundry on a daily basis, which is hand washed and sun dried.

ELECTRICITY

220 Volt. European 2-pin type plugs.



TIPPING / GRATUITIES

Tipping is customary, but not compulsory. If, however, you want to tip because you have received good service, we have enclosed a brief guideline to assist you:

- **The General Safari Camp / Lodge Staff**

We recommend US\$10- per guest per day for camps. This should be placed in the communal tipping box to be distributed equally amongst all the staff.

- **Transfer Driver for long transfers: \$5 per person**

- **Park guides**

These are the guides at the park entrances. \$2 to \$10- per person depending on performance and duration of walk.



- **Private Guides**

Normally these individuals make all the difference to a safari, and their roles are more involved than just guiding. Guests generally use their own judgment in this regard.

- **Porterage**

We recommend about US\$1 per bag per movement.

- **Restaurants / Hotels**

15% is customary on meal accounts if you are satisfied with the service.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Please note that photography of government buildings, many airport buildings, State House and officials in uniform is normally strictly prohibited. Be courteous, polite and always ask permission.

Please be advised that the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (Drones) is not allowed in many of the conservation areas, due to their use in poaching operations and the disturbance caused to the wildlife and other guests.

POACHING

PLEASE BE AWARE: POACHERS ARE USING SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLETS TO TRACK AND POACH ENDANGERED WILDLIFE (RHINOS & LARGED-TUSKED ELEPHANTS). SO PLEASE DO NOT POST PHOTOS OF THESE ANIMALS ON YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS. POACHERS WILL USE EVERY MEANS POSSIBLE TO FIND THESE ANIAMALS, INCLUDING USING THE GEO TRACKER AND LOOKING THROUGH EVERY PHOTO TO DETERMINE THE LOCATION.

Example: If a photo of a rhino or a larged-tusked elephant is posted on social media, the poachers will look at every photo in that particular photo album to determine what reserve that the animal is located on. Therefore, even if the geo tracker is turned off, a photo of the lodge or any mention of the lodge in the post will give away the location of the photographed animal.

CAMERAS & BINOCULARS

WHAT CAMERA SHOULD I HAVE ON SAFARI?

Cameras are a way of ensuring that we can record a moment in time. Sights and scenes of persons, places and in our case, wildlife and safari camps! We take a photo as a form of a non-violent benevolent trophy. A reward and proof of a successful chase. Photographs tell it in colour! 100% of our safari guests bring a camera on safari.

Choosing a camera is fraught, as the camera industry has thrown itself into this arena wholeheartedly and made it difficult. ***This short brief is to try and help you make the right choice.***

Any safari to Africa is a significant investment of thousands of dollars. It seems worthwhile to invest a few hundred in a camera that will record the event for life! Although camera choice is a *personal one*, I have included some pointers to assist with this choice.



There are frankly FOUR main types of camera.

1. The small '**POINT & SHOOT**' variety. They are small, palm size and convenient to carry in a pocket or purse with essentially an automatic function that guarantees a good picture - in a room, a car, or when taking fairly close-up pictures of friends and family.
2. The second variety are the typical **DSLR** (Digital Single Lens Reflex) cameras that can take interchangeable lenses and photographic enthusiasts will use these. They come now with a full gamut of electronic settings to facilitate taking photos in a variety of light conditions and generally have a video setting as well. There are a number of really good brands and models on sale, BUT the lenses come at a price.
3. The third variety is '**COMPACT**' cameras. These have been built to bridge the gap between the Point & Shoot, and the DSLR's! These incredible cameras weigh about 30% of the DSLR's, and yet have built-in lenses that easily rival the 'big' lenses used typically for sports and wildlife photography. They are truly amazing!
These cameras have *the same range* of adjustments seen on the heavier, semi- and professional cameras, AND, the lens 'reach' of the heavy glass lenses too! There is a built in flash, movie facility, screen view, viewfinder, 'Intelligent' options, Automatic, S, M, P, and A parameter functions as well. The lenses range from X20 to X60 in magnification, giving the user equivalent 300mm to sometimes 500mm! A small number of manufacturers are producing an innovative camera without all the moving parts of a typical camera.
4. '**MIRROR LESS**' cameras. These cameras will in time compete with the traditional DSLR cameras. There is no viewfinder. One sees the image through the rear screen. There is no internal mirror and complex moving parts...hence the term 'mirror less', and significant weight reduction. These cameras are lighter, have lighter lenses, without any loss of image quality. Interchangeable lenses are available in some brands, up to 250mm, but rarely larger.

The LENS is another important factor in selecting a camera. Again, the small 'Point & Shoot' cameras will have small, retractable lenses that work well in a room or close setting and so will collect very poor wildlife images, taken at a distance because they lack the necessary 'zoom' ability, which magnifies the object onto the sensor plate.

The DSLR gives one the option to fit a zoom lens of different sizes to magnify the image in the camera. Essentially the greater the zoom numbers the bigger the image. For example, a 18 – 150 zoom, is going to be a poor lens for wildlife photography, but great for photographing houses or portraits! A 70 – 300 zoom is far better suited for wildlife, as is any lens from 300mm onwards.

The better Compact cameras now have lenses that have a x10 up to x60 ability! These are significant 'zoom' numbers and will certainly give the user a wonderful result. We recommend a camera lens with an equivalent zoom of at least 300mm.

PLEASE BEAR IN MIND ONE CAN HIRE LENSES NOW FOR A FRACTION OF THE RETAIL COST.



Other Factors to consider:

1. Weight
2. Quality of camera
3. Who is going to use the camera?
4. What do you want to spend on this camera?
5. What are you going to do with the pictures?

Please ensure that you have enough memory cards, film and batteries for the duration of the trip, as these are not always available locally. Recharging facilities for video and camera equipment is generally available at most camps and lodges. It is advisable to bring your own adaptor and re-charging equipment. Ensure your equipment is in a padded, dust and heatproof case, as dust will get 'in' everywhere!

WHAT BINOCULARS SHOULD I TAKE ON SAFARI?

Binoculars are a vital part of every safari, and should be considered as important as a camera or decent hat. Most game viewing is carried out from a vehicle and so the game will commonly be within 150 feet of the vehicle. Larger animals, birds (even for non-birders) and small animals form a main part of the wildlife seen on a safari.

Many people regard binoculars as an unnecessary piece of equipment, used once and forgotten. *Bino's* as they become known, may be used on safari, again on the second safari, your children's safari, at the local 'ball game', on hunting & fishing trips, and for birding from the comfort of your verandah.

Choosing which to have needs professional help... let me try!

FOR SAFARIS, we recommend 7x40, 7x50; 8x40; 8.5x42

10 x 42 is recommended for serious birders, those with a 'steady hand' and more sedentary use from a vehicle, a hide or on a tripod.

The small 10 x 25 binoculars, often touted as 'convenient' by sales people are of little functional use on safari as they are too small to use in a vehicle quickly and for extended periods, and limit the amount of light coming into the binocular.

Brands

There are a number of very good value brands, but the better reviews mention CELESTRON GRANITE, MINOX, NIKON, BUSHNELL, PENTAX and at the top of the pile are LEICA, LEITZ and SWAROVSKY, but these are expensive. Naturally your personal considerations such as budget and availability will play a big part in the selection process. Any safari to Africa is a serious investment of resources and it seems rather shortsighted to limit ones' enjoyment of the trip by not purchasing or borrowing decent equipment to facilitate getting the most out of the safari!

RECOMMENDED READING

1. Madagascar – The 10th Bradt Guide. Hiliary Bradt.
2. Madagascar Wildlife (Bradt Travel Guide). Nick Garbutt.
3. The Eighth Continent: Life, Death & Discovery in the Lost World of Madagascar. Peter Tyson; Russell Mittermeier
4. The Aye Aye and I. Gerald Durrell.



Birds

1. Guide to the Birds of Madagascar. O. Langrand
2. Birds of Madagascar. A Photographic Guide. Peter Morris.

Mammals

1. Guide to the Mammals of Madagascar. Nick Garbutt.
2. Lemurs of Madagascar. R.A. Mittermeier
3. The Natural History of Madagascar. Steven M Goodman.

Frogs

1. Frogs of Madagascar. Olga Jovanovic

QUALITY & FEEDBACK

We pride ourselves in running quality itineraries and offering the best experience.

If you have a problem, please bring it to our attention at the time, thereby giving us a chance to try and rectify it immediately on site, as it will be more difficult to resolve later on.

YOU have chosen a fabulous way to have a holiday, and you will never forget it.

Have a wonderful safari!

