



# Ethiopian Experiences in Madagascar



## Madagascan Odyssey

Marvellous, Magnificent, Memorable

An amazing tour in an amazing country

Dates for 2024 - \*newly announced\*

Friday 19th July (evening flight) - Saturday 3rd August (daytime return)

What an extraordinary country!

It has so many amazing and wonderful sights, truly fascinating cultures, a plethora of beautiful and desirable local handicrafts, a staggering variety of different landscapes, and a justly famous endemic wildlife that will enthral you.

Come with us and experience this unique land accompanied throughout by our own Ethiopian Experiences guide as well as a member of our local Malagasy team, and enjoy one of the favourite tours in our schedule.

A full fourteen-day tour of alluring and wonderful experiences in comfortable hotels and with such excellent food for just

**£2445**

plus just one domestic connecting flight and visa.

Everything else is included - clean and comfortable accommodation, truly delicious food, amazing scenery, glorious wildlife, all tourist costs, guide fees, and all land transportation.

## The itinerary

**MG Day 0:** The tour begins in the capital, **Antananarivo**, in the evening for an excellent tour group dinner and plenty of relaxed time to get to know each other and to talk through our plans.

**MG Day 1:** Our Sunday sees us immediately driving out of the city to get our first (and up-close) experiences of Madagascan wildlife. **Lemurs Park** is home to six or seven varieties of lemur at freedom in their family groups - you will be enchanted! Then after a relaxed and rather special lunch, we set off in a different direction to visit the area's premier historic site, **Ambohimanga (The Blue Hill)**, the attractive traditional fortified settlement of Madagascar's kings and queens and an excellent place to start our understanding of the history and culture of this extraordinary country

**MG Day 2:** Monday is our day to get to know the characterful capital city, with time spent in the rambling market before walking up into the Haute-Ville with

a knowledgeable local guide to show us some of the notable features - the palace, the historic frieze, the cathedral. A fine French-influenced dinner is welcome.

**MG Day 3:** Our road trip begins, in a comfortable tourist bus with large windows. We are on our way to **Antsirabe**, a town famous for its varied handicrafts. After a lunch in town, we do a short drive to Andraikibah Lake and stroll along the attractive lakeside to survey the numerous tiny shops selling ammonites, fossils, gemstones and other fascinating things. Coffee is taken at a comfortable lakeside hotel before our return.

**MG Day 4:** This is a craft-making (and of course shopping, if you so desire) day. We start off by visiting a traditional sweet-makers and get a full demonstration of the confectioner's art, with plenty of freebies at the end. Then it's on to see how many different things you could possibly make out of zebu horn, how they create amazing miniature vehicles out of drinks cans, and what beautiful local embroidery is in the making. Later we take a short walk through local market stalls before driving back into town to see the imposing main square, a railway station with fine architecture, an unexpected cathedral with fine stained glass. After a coffee in the gardens of a somewhat grand hotel, we might even catch a local boules/pétanque tournament.

**MG Day 5:** A morning drive brings us to the next main town on our tour, **Ambositra**. After a good lunch and the possibility of some Madagascan folk-dancing, we shall take a guided country walk and have an opportunity to learn more about the local culture, seeing country buildings and perhaps watching the mud-brick-making process. There are lots of craft shops here also, particularly specialising in wonderful wood-carving.

**MG Day 6:** We are heading for one of the most famous protected areas in Madagascar, the **Ranomafana** rainforest, and a two-night stay in a relaxed and attractive country village. It's a substantial drive to get there but the ever-changing scenery is easy to appreciate and keeps our interest. After lunch we take some relaxation in preparation for an hour and a half of night walk, with a knowledgeable local guide using torchlight to show us pygmy lemurs, beautiful tree frogs and more than one variety of our first Madagascan chameleons.

**MG Day 7:** This is a day of individual choices. The rainforest itself is a magical and amazing place but the three- or four-hour trek required to make it really worthwhile is a tough one by most standards. The forest paths are steep and the tourist groups leave the main routes completely when multiple guides and spotters call them into the trees to see the next variety of tree-top lemur that they have found. For those who choose this option (not one for the faint-hearted or weary-limbed) a subsequent restful and relaxing afternoon will definitely be the order of the day. But for those wiser ones who decide the challenge is just a bit too great, we offer a substantial but flat walk to a beautifully laid-out and extensive arboretum on the edge of the village where we can appreciatively wander at will, along with an area of hot springs where some pleasant bathing may be had. The village itself is attractive and well-worth a wander between periods of relaxation.

**MG Day 8:** We are now on our way to the town of **Ambalavao**. But first we are going to strike out to the east of the RN7 to get to the main tea-plantation in Madagascar, called **Sahambavy**. There is a first-rate lakeside hotel here where we shall enjoy a special lunch and look round its extensive and beautiful garden that is a combination of garden centre and a small zoo. After that we shall have a short guided tour of the plantation itself and be shown the tea-producing process before we resume our drive to Ambalavao for our overnight stop.

**MG Day 9:** One of the most dramatic of the national parks is our destination today - Isalo. But first we are heading to a smaller, privately-owned park called **Anja Park** where a local guide will show us the maki, the ring-tailed lemur, ubiquitous and easily seen, along with possible further sightings of chameleons and suchlike. We then continue in a south-westerly direction, to the small town of Ranohira for the night.

**MG Day 10:** **Isalo** is the **Grand Canyon of Madagascar** offering impressive trekking opportunities at all levels of fitness. We are proposing an expertly guided, three-hour, leisurely and not too challenging trek that we can all enjoy, a sunny and perhaps tiring experience but one that will provide special memories. Our focus is a surprisingly fertile and deeply shaded oasis called the **Piscine Naturelle** (natural swimming pool) which you will welcome for a much-needed rest and a possible bathe. We are going to employ our own private cooks to be there in advance and prepare us a freshly barbecued lunch.

**MG Day 11:** We are just a few hours from the sea coast in south-west Madagascar now and the end of our day's drive will see us comfortably settled in Chez Alain hotel, quite central in this town of **Toliara** (Tuléar). The rooms themselves are simple and unpretentious bungalows but the hotel is an oasis of peace and birdsong (quite a rarity in Madagascar) with a small, inviting swimming pool and a fine varied menu of food. We can use any time we have to explore the town.

**MG Day 12:** We can't get to this point and not seek to enjoy some of the almost paradise-like coast. Today we drive out to the very pretty seaside retreat of **Ifaty** with excellent restaurants, a palm-fringed sandy beach and plenty of alluring shops selling colourful goods. We're here to eat, drink, walk, swim in the sea - and relax.

**MG Day 13:** It has taken us ten days on the RN7 to reach this southerly point, but we are using our one domestic flight to get back more speedily to the capital, **Antananarivo** (**Tana** for short). But our Madagascan experiences are not over yet. The capital's airport is in a suburb called **Ivato** and we shall visit the very well-laid-out **Crocodile Farm** once we are there. Don't panic! This is really not like a farm at all but more like a very intimate and well-cared-for zoo gardens with, yes, crocodiles but also a wide range of other Madagascan wildlife. We might take some refreshment here before going back into the city for the night, by way of extraordinary souvenir shops.

**MG Day 14:** Our Madagascan Odyssey ends after lunch today, Saturday, back in familiar surroundings and with a full memory bank of experiences to last us for some time.

**Note:**

- *If any guests on this tour wish to be more flexible in their travel arrangements and meet us in the Madagascan capital at the start of the tour rather than travel with the group from the UK, we have no problem with that idea and we shall be happy to advise and help with individual arrangements.*
- *For most of us, the best route at the moment is offered by Ethiopian Airlines, with the journey starting from Heathrow on the Friday evening and connecting with the flight leaving Addis on Saturday morning. We've planned our itinerary with this in mind.*
- *The tour itself has just one domestic flight in the itinerary. The recent cost of this domestic flight has been around £160. And given the the most recent increases in international flight prices, we might estimate the international flights at around £1100.*
- *The cost of the one-month tourist visa at the present time is €35*