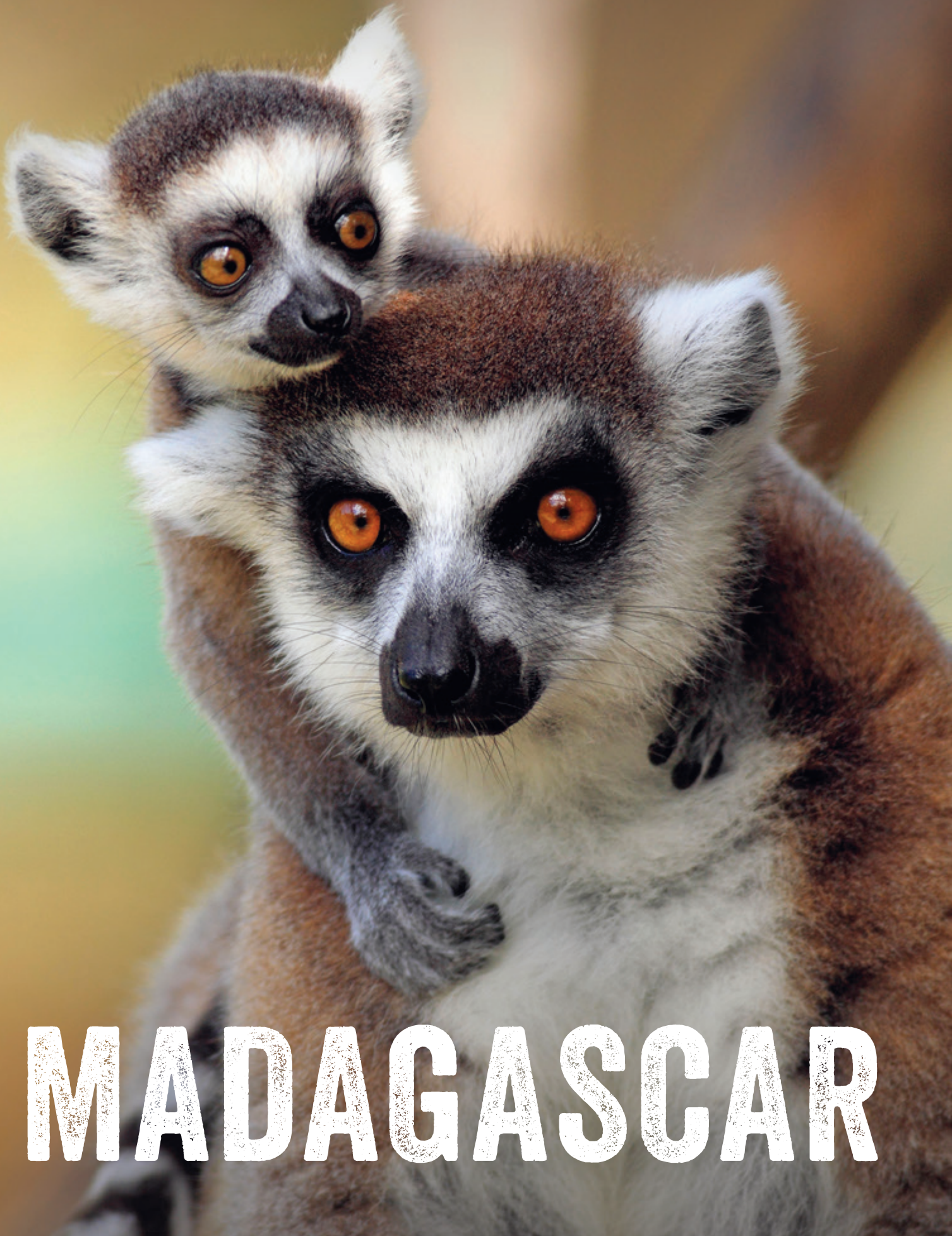


**RAINBOW
TOURS**



MADAGASCAR



RAINBOW
TOURS



THE RAINBOW STORY

Born from one man's deep love of Africa and dedication to responsible travel, Rainbow Tours began with a handful of people and an adventure to South Africa. It's a love and dedication that remains and drives us to pioneer trips to new destinations and find new ways to explore well-trodden routes. Rainbow Tours now offer high quality, tailor-made individual holidays and group travel throughout Africa and Latin America and are proud to be the UK's leading tour operator to Madagascar.

When Roger Diski established Rainbow Tours in 1997, he wanted to show that Africa was a place to fall in love with - not pity. It was a belief that grew from his own experiences in Africa. Encounters with majestic wildlife and grand landscapes, but also exotic cultures. He spent time meeting and working with local communities and forged long-lasting relationships.

It's these relationships that are still at the heart of our tours. Our link with local communities allows us to craft unique journeys using their insider knowledge; journeys that benefit the community without compromising on fun. We also continue to develop responsible travel. Each of our tours is carefully constructed to support the conservation of wildlife, protect surrounding natural landscapes and encourage further development in our host communities.

Today, we work closely with a select group of respected charities and NGOs to remain deeply involved in each of our specialist countries. In Madagascar, extreme poverty and limited healthcare access for disadvantaged Malagasy people are tackled head-on by Money for Madagascar.

Our passionate travel experts are handpicked for their extensive first-hand knowledge. They have travelled intimately through their specialist countries on countless occasions and will turn your needs and interests into individual suggestions and tailored tours.



Share your travel stories with us
#ResponsibleRainbow

Travel Specialists

MEET THE TEAM

At Rainbow Tours, personal experience means personal service. Our Travel Specialists are picked for their intimate first-hand knowledge of our destinations, their passion for the natural world and a commitment to exceptional customer service.



Derek Schuurman

Product Manager for Madagascar & Alternative Africa

Few people know Madagascar as well as Derek. With a decorated career spanning the publication of several travel and wildlife guidebooks, the forging of strong relationships with local partners and in-country charitable organisations and more than 20 visits to the country, he's helped make our Madagascar programme the strong holiday collection that it is today. Born in South Africa, Derek is a keen naturalist and, although his interest in wildlife (birds in particular) has taken him all across Africa, Madagascar will always be his favourite destination.

✉ dschuurman@itc-uk.com



Helen Kennedy

Madagascar & Africa Travel Specialist

Both Helen's personal life and professional career have a few things in common: a love of wildlife and the strong desire to travel! After trading life in rural Lincolnshire to live in Australia, she's hopped on a plane to explore what seems like pretty much everywhere. Madagascar ranks at the top of her list though, with its incredible array of endemic wildlife, and she's even spent time working with a charity in the south of the island – researching lemur behaviour and helping to educate the community about conservation.

✉ hkennedy@itc-uk.com



Craig Kaufman

Madagascar & Africa Travel Specialist

Craig's love affair with Africa began while at university, where he spent time aiding technology and schooling projects in Uganda, before later returning to organise charity building works and manage a riverside lodge. Craig recently spent a month exploring the range of habitats that Madagascar has to offer visitors, circumnavigating the country to kayak across lakes in Ankarana, seek out the sandstone massifs at Isalo, meet the lemurs of Andisibe and stand at the foot of towering baobab trees in Reniala Forest.

✉ ckaufman@itc-uk.com

Trust us to **tailor-make** your perfect Madagascar holiday

Our experts have been fortunate enough to travel extensively throughout their specialist countries, staying at the properties that we recommend, searching for wildlife that we love to talk about and seeing the NGO projects that we support in action. It's this knowledge and experience that allows us to craft personalised itineraries that perfectly suit you and your interests.

Don't just take our word for it.

Visit [trustpilot.com](https://www.trustpilot.com) to read some of our five-star independent reviews.



WE HAD THE MOST FANTASTIC, MEMORABLE TRIP TO MADAGASCAR

I organised a trip to Madagascar for my family of 6 with Rainbow Tours and they organised the perfect trip. All ran according to their itinerary and we had a great time. All the guides and drivers we had were first class. The places we stayed were exceptional and by the end of our trip we felt that we had really seen and understood the culture and wildlife of this beautiful island. Thank you Rainbow!

Katherine Minch



FANTASTIC COMPANY, FANTASTIC HOLIDAY!

My wife and I recently spent an amazing honeymoon in Madagascar, and we can't thank Rainbow Tours enough. The holiday was more than we could have imagined - much more. It was superbly organised, the locations laid out in our itinerary were incredible to see, and the opportunities to see the wildlife were second to none! Our time was split between the rainforests and Ile Sainte-Marie (a paradise island off the north-east coast). Everything from the hospitality, the transport, the guides (both national and local) and the food surpassed our expectations. Well done Rainbow Tours! Superb job!!

Philip Kerr



WONDERFUL TRIP TO MADAGASCAR

Returned last week after a wonderful trip to Madagascar. Can't praise Rainbow Tours enough; their organisation was faultless. Our guides and drivers from the local agency were brilliant, they really took care of us. Princesse Bora was a delightful experience. Everywhere we went we were made very welcome.

Carole Coles



EXCELLENT PERSONALISED MADAGASCAR TOUR

We used Rainbow to organise a 5-day trip to Madagascar followed by a 10-day break in a Mauritius resort. We had a personal guide and driver throughout the Madagascar trip, plus a specialist guide who joined us for the trips into the forest. Whilst the specialist guide went to seek out the lemurs our general guide was able to point out and identify birds and plants. This made for a really memorable trip.

Liz King



AMAZING MADAGASCAR TRIP

We've just returned from an 18-day tour of Madagascar, arranged by Rainbow Tours. Our trip was fantastic! We were very pleased with all arrangements made by Rainbow Tours - all guides in Madagascar, drivers, accommodations and activities were great! It was the trip of a lifetime - one that we won't forget! I definitely recommend Rainbow Tours and plan to book future trips with them.

Janet Stooke



MADAGASCAR

Madagascar is a strong contender for offering the most distinctive wildlife holidays on the planet. The island separated from the African mainland some 165 million years ago and much of its fauna and flora has evolved in a unique way – an astonishing 80% is endemic.

For most visitors the number one attraction are lemurs, of which there are more than 100 species and subspecies. Innumerable highlights include the world's smallest and largest chameleons, an abundance of exquisite geckos and more than 100 species of bird found nowhere else.

If you're travelling west, don't miss the opportunity to drive through the imposing Avenue of the Baobabs. Showcasing Madagascar's endemic giants, this iconic tree-lined dirt road has been granted protected status to become the island's first natural monument.





TRAVEL KNOW-HOW

Flight Time from the UK: 12 hours via Paris

Time Zone: GMT+3

Capital: Antananarivo

Language: Malagasy is the official language, French is Madagascar's second language

Currency: Malagasy ariary

When to go: Madagascar can be a year-round destination but different places are at their best at different times of the year. The rainy season is usually from mid-December to March with heavy downpours interrupting blazing sunshine. However, the south-west is usually dry year-round

Getting around: Internal travel can be challenging, and it is often necessary to fly. Overland trips can be taken with 4-wheel drive vehicles and a professional driver and guide

Accommodation: Madagascar has – and Rainbow Tours can book – some exceptional lodges near nature reserves, along with a wide range of appealing places to stay by the beach. We also offer a selection of comfy hotels in Antananarivo and can arrange fully equipped camping

MADAGASCAR IN NUMBERS

165

million years ago since the island separated from the African mainland

100+

species and subspecies of lemur

25

times Rainbow Tours specialists have visited the country

HIGHLIGHTS

Madagascar was once Africa's gateway to the Silk Road. The commercial port town, Toamasina, saw gold dust, rubber products and live animals exported for international trade. Nowadays, it is home to palm tree-lined beaches and colourful street markets, where locals peddle exotic spices and handmade crafts.

Antananarivo

Although the capital is used as a gateway for the rest of the island, Antananarivo's red clay houses, French inspired boulevards and markets make it worth a couple of days of your time.

Montagne d'Ambre National Park

Find crater lakes carved into the landscape by volcanoes and crashing waterfalls that split the forest in two in a park that's celebrated for its variety of wildlife, from chameleons to falanoucs.

Nosy Be Archipelago

Widely recognised as the best place in Madagascar to slip on a snorkel, slide into the warm water and marvel at the lionfish, parrotfish and other colourful characters along the reef.

Ile Sainte-Marie

Watch migrating Humpback whales from July to September on this island encased by miles of stunning beach and dotted with traditional fishing villages, once inhabited by pirates.

Andasibe-Mantadia National Park

Delve into the relic forest of Andasibe-Mantadia National Park to find 50 species of reptile and 100 species of bird and hear the haunting siren-like call of the Indri, Madagascar's largest lemur.

Ankarana National Park

The rumblings of the earth have crafted this land into a forest of spiky limestone towers known as tsingy. Explore the hidden deciduous forests to find rare wildlife cut off from the world and thriving.

Ifaty

Blessed by good weather, even by Madagascar's high standards, use the 300 days of sunshine on Ifaty to snorkel or to explore the country's incredible patches of spiny bush.

Kirindy Forest

This dry deciduous forest holds a higher primate density than any other comparably-sized dry forest on earth. It's the island's best place for night walks and home to fossa, giant jumping rats and Madame Berthe's mouse lemur.

Ranomafana National Park

One of Madagascar's most popular parks pulls in the visitors thanks to the many lemurs that call this stretch of rainforest home. Find 12 different species, including the Golden bamboo lemur.

Berenty Private Reserve

Everybody wants to see the Ring-tailed lemur made famous in the films and there are few better places to find them than here and Ifotaka community forest, which is also the ancestral home of the Antandroy Tribe.

Tsingy de Bemaraha National Park

As if this fortress-like geological phenomenon of limestone needles and tsingy peaks wasn't attractive enough, you'll also find acrobatic lemurs leaping over deep chasms and from one pinnacle to the next.

Isalo

A landscape crafted by wind, rain and sand; the jagged canyons, stratified sandstone and vast grassy plateaus that taper into the horizon at Isalo are some of the most memorable landscapes in Madagascar.

Masoala National Park

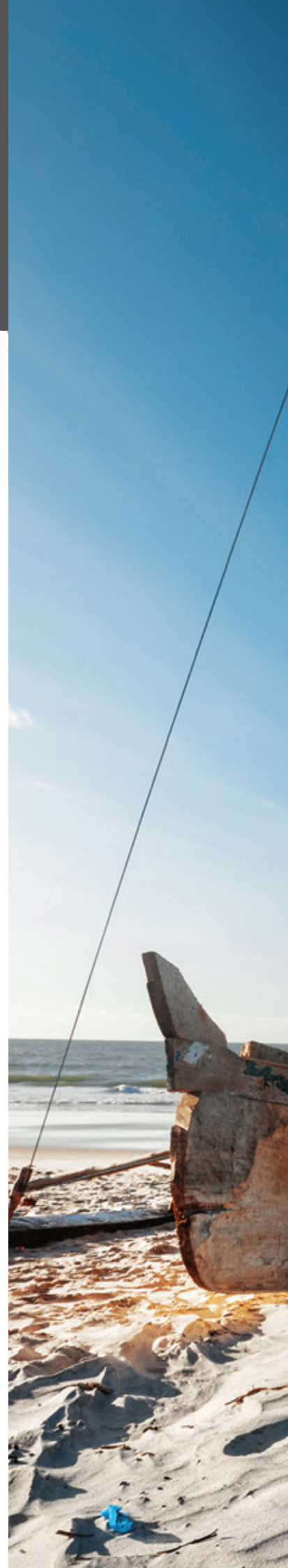
Few visitors make it as far as Masoala National Park, but that means that you can enjoy the pristine rainforest and coral reef-filled coastline of this UNESCO World Heritage Site without the crowds.

Anjajavy Private Nature Reserve

Cut off from the rest of the country, the Anjajavy Private Nature Reserve combines an extensive forest filled with 1,800 floral species and a coast with small coves, beautiful beaches and turquoise waters.

Ankarafantsika National Park

Endangered Coquerel's sifaka and Mongoose lemur find sanctuary in this dry forest, which is also home to the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust's largest project, protecting the Ploughshare tortoise.





BEST FOR?



Wildlife enthusiasts

With over 100 different species and subspecies of lemur, more than 400 species of reptile and over 100 species of endemic bird, few places on the planet can compete with Madagascar's wildlife. From Sickie-billed vangas fluttering beneath the canopy in Kirindy Forest to Diademed sifakas in Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, most Malagasy animals can't be found anywhere else in the world.

✈️ Take me there

Rainbow Tours' Wildlife of Madagascar 14-day itinerary costs from **£4985pp**



The whole family

Teens and kids with an adventurous streak will find Madagascar a natural playground. Take them for a trek through the rainforest to listen for the cry of the Indri lemur and visit the giant baobab trees. Pack a snorkel and head to the coast where they can explore coral reefs filled with colourful fish and meet Green turtles off the beaches of Nosy Be Archipelago.

✈️ Take me there

Rainbow Tours' Madagascar Family Holiday - Wildlife & Beach 14-day itinerary costs from **£12150 for a family of four** (two children under 12)



Solo travellers

Many Rainbow travellers return to us each season; not just to find new adventures but to make new friends as well. For solo travellers, our small group tours are a fantastic way to share your experiences of Madagascar's impossible landscapes and swap stories about close encounters with wildlife. Our Madagascar Wildlife Discovery small group tour is led by experienced, highly-praised professional guides.

✈️ Take me there

Rainbow Tours' Madagascar Wildlife Discovery 16-day itinerary costs from **£4520pp**



Honeymooners

For a honeymoon holiday with a twist, combine wonderful wildlife-watching in remote and spectacular wilderness areas around Mandrare River Camp, Masoala Forest Lodge, Anjajavy Le Lodge or in the mist-dipped foothills of Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, while playing castaway in Mauritius, famous for its sapphire-blue waters and white-sand beaches. On Mauritius, luxuriate in style or go exploring the island in search of rare birdlife and reptiles.

✈️ Take me there

Rainbow Tours' Madagascar & Mauritius Made Easy Honeymoon 17-day itinerary costs from **£3195pp**

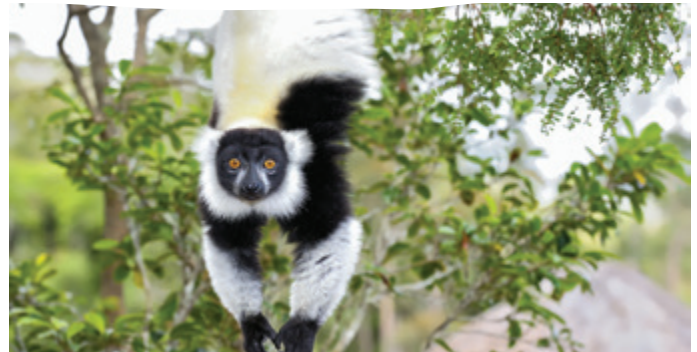
WHEN TO VISIT?



Migrating whales

July - September

Watching a huge Humpback whale burst up through the waves and crash back into the ocean is nothing short of spectacular. But whale spotting is a seasonal luxury; these iconic creatures make their lengthy migration from the Antarctic to breed and raise calves, only staying in the warm Malagasy coastal waters between July and mid-September. Manafiafy on the island's southern tip offers magnificent viewings and, while Nosy Be is not on the migration route, whales can still be sighted. For an exciting hands-on approach, research teams at Ile Sainte-Marie in the north-east offer the opportunity to join scientists in collecting data as the whales migrate.



Lemurs

Year-round

Despite the striking variety of natural life that calls Madagascar home, one creature continually steals the headlines. Over 100 species of lemur, including the musical Indri, Ring-tailed and Golden bamboo lemurs, reside in Madagascar's lush rainforest. Several species of these endemic lemurs are critically endangered, and Rainbow Tours works with local conservationists to ensure that you see the lemurs in their natural habitat while contributing to efforts to help their survival. These charismatic prosimians can be seen year-round, but for the best memories visit between September and November when baby lemurs are born and can be found clinging to their mothers' backs among the trees.



Flora

December - March

Madagascar is well known for its enviably rich biodiversity but even those wildlife lovers with high expectations will find the abundance and diversity of plants here astounding. You'll see everything from Baobab trees and rainforests filled with bright-eyed lemurs to a parade of marine life and blossoming coral reefs. Delicate endemic orchids add an especially attractive burst of colour to the island, and with more than 1,000 different varieties the guidebooks bulge with options. Each plant only opens one of its gentle flowers a day, but for a glimpse of them in bloom your timing is key; the best flowering takes place between December and March.



Birds

September - December

More than 41% of the bird species in Madagascar are endemic. Find weird and wonderful birds like the Velvet asity sporting fluorescent wattles, while the female Greater vasa parrot goes bald during the mating season. Ranomafana and Mantadia National Parks are hotspots for all things winged; keep your eyes open for the long trailing tail feathers of the Paradise flycatcher or the stunning Blue vanga darting through the forest canopy. While bird parties can be seen all year round, to experience an enchanting mating birdsong, visit during the breeding season from early September to December.

Regions of MADAGASCAR

Most Madagascar trips begin and end in Antananarivo but, with ever-improving roads connecting the country, you're not limited to just the central regions. A 14-day itinerary could combine several of Madagascar's most fascinating places, the tricky part can be choosing which you'd most like to explore.



The North

Highlights: Tsingy & caves in Ankarana, rainforest in Montagne d'Ambre, Fontenay Park, Nosy Be Archipelago beaches

Perfect for: Geologists, biologists, photographers

When to go: April - November

The north has its fair share of lemurs. You'll find plenty clambering through the trees in the sweeping Montagne d'Ambre National Park rainforest, but this is also a land that is uniquely distinct. The road from the atmospheric capital of Diego Suarez leads visitors past ylang ylang plantations and piles of cocoa beans drying in the sun to some of the most dramatic landscapes in the country. Find fields of otherworldly tsingy (razor sharp limestone) in Ankarana National Park, where you can also slip beneath the savannah to explore vast cave systems and underground rivers. While off the northern coast coral reef still blooms around the islands of Nosy Be Archipelago – home to the best beaches in Madagascar.

 **Take me there**

Rainbow Tours' Madagascar Rainforests, Wildlife, Tsingy & Beach 14-day itinerary costs from **£4985pp**



The South

Highlights: Spiny bush (Ifaty, Ifotaka), sandstone mountains in Isalo, baobab trees, lemurs (Isalo, Berenty, Ifotaka)

Perfect for: Wildlife enthusiasts, botanists, hikers, birders

When to go: Year-round

Less popular, but no less impressive, southern Madagascar hides some of the country's most exotic landscapes. The dusty roads here will steer you through a sand-swept countryside of octopus trees, three-sided palms and iconic baobab trees. Hop off the main road and you'll find farmers pulling oxen to market, tribal dancers strutting their stuff in small villages and, because so few visitors adventure out this far, local people who are keen to show you around. As dust gives way to sand dunes on the southern coastline, you can snorkel in secluded bays or watch Humpback whales breaching the waves of the Indian Ocean.

 **Take me there**

Rainbow Tours' Spiny Desert, Rainforest & Beach 14-day itinerary costs from **£5990pp**



The East

Highlights: Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, Ranomafana National Park, whale watching off Ile Sainte-Marie Island

When to go: April - December

Perfect for: Wildlife enthusiasts, botanists, birders, hikers, honeymooners

If it's your first time in Madagascar or you just have your heart set on as many close encounters of the lemur-kind as possible, head east. Here, in the humid rainforests of Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, you'll find 11 species of lemur lounging around on trees and can enjoy a jungle soundtrack provided by the gentle singing of the indri. Partner this with a trip off the eastern coast to Ile Sainte-Marie. This tropical retreat offers coconut-lined beaches, coral reef protected waters and plenty of opportunities to sample Malagasy cooking and culture in local fishing villages.

 **Take me there**

Rainbow Tours' Reef & Rainforest 14-day itinerary costs from **£3650pp**



The West

Highlights: Anjajavy, Tsingy de Bemaraha National Park, baobab trees, lemurs, birds, Kirindy Forest, Ankarafantsika National Park

When to go: May - November

Perfect for: Wildlife enthusiasts, birders, families

Where even cars fear to tread, the far corners of western Madagascar are so remote you'll sometimes need to board a light aircraft to reach them. The reward is splendid isolation amongst incredible flora and fauna. Make your base Anjajavy peninsula and you'll be completely cut off by a carpet of mangrove swamps and thousands of acres of tropical deciduous dry forest that offer endless hiking trails. The west also holds some of Madagascar's most secretive wildlife. If you've ticked off the country's more common lemurs then you can seek fascinating animal oddities such as fossa, giant jumping rat and the Madagascar fish eagle.

 **Take me there**

Rainbow Tours' Madagascar Made Easy Deluxe 12-day itinerary costs from **£4950pp**



The RN7

Highlights: Highland scenery, Ambalavao, lemur-watching at Anja Parc, Merina and Betsileo culture

When to go: Year-round

Perfect for: Culture enthusiasts, hiking, wildlife enthusiasts

Starting amidst the clay houses and pink-hued palaces of Antananarivo and finishing on the sands of Ifaty beach, the RN7 is Madagascar's most iconic route. As an introduction to Madagascar's catalogue of stunning landscapes it's unrivalled, with the chance to step on sandstone massifs, ramble around a volcanic lake and of course meet lemurs in Isalo and Ranomafana National Parks. And when you've finally finished with the car, jump into a local pirogue (dugout canoe) at Ifaty on the Indian Ocean, where you'll be joined by parrotfish, angelfish and pipefish.

 **Take me there**

Rainbow Tours' Classic Madagascar Overland; the RN7 Route 15-day itinerary costs from **£4295pp**

LEMURS

Lemurs evolved on Madagascar long after it had drifted from the African mainland and become an island, so scientists are baffled about how their ancestors came to call the country home. It has been suggested that, in the wake of tropical storms, rafts of vegetation were blown across the seas carrying some unwitting passengers.



Aye-aye

With saucer-shaped eyes, slender fingers and large ears, the aye-aye is the epitome of 'weird and wonderful' wildlife. This alien-like appearance has seen them associated with superstition and some Malagasy believe them to be evil. Usually found lurking in the rainforest after dark, your first encounter with these creatures can certainly be startling in the dead of night. In truth, they are amongst the friendliest lemurs in the jungle.



Perrier's Black Sifaka

The only all-black sifaka, this charismatic lemur is restricted to a narrow range in northern Madagascar. Sadly, it is critically endangered, with an estimated population of no more than 250 mature individuals, making it one of the world's 25 rarest primates. You can still lock eyes with these sifakas in the forest at Andrafiarana Andavakoera Park where they can be found in tropical lowland deciduous forest.



Ring-tailed Lemur

With its iconic black and white circled tail, the Ring-tailed lemur is the lemur loved by Disney and the model for hundreds of magazine front covers about Madagascar – including this brochure! Living in groups of up to 30 with a mix of males, females and youngsters glued to the backs of their mums, they are gregariously social and impossibly cute. Find them lounging about in the trees or foraging for food in the south of the country.



Indri

Measuring nearly 4ft and with long limbs and an upright body, the Indri are known locally as 'babakoto', meaning 'man of the forest'. And their similarity to humans isn't just superficial – they also mate for life, live in groups of two to six and form families that can last for generations. The Indri are best known for the haunting calls they use to communicate. You can hear this distinctive whale-like song at the break of dawn as the mist lifts over the forest canopy.



Golden Bamboo Lemur

Discovered in 1985 by primatologist Patricia Wright, this adorable, critically endangered lemur and its close relatives occupy the niche which pandas do in Asia. The Golden bamboo lemur consumes enough cyanide in its daily intake of Giant bamboo to kill several people. Along with the equally endangered Greater bamboo lemur, the Golden bamboo lemur can be seen in the exquisite upland rainforest of Ranomafana National Park.



Verreaux's Sifaka

While they might live in the trees, the Verreaux sifaka save their best moves for when they are on the ground. The two-legged hop they use when sashaying across open ground wouldn't look out of place on *Dancing with the Stars*. They also enjoy clowning around with each other in the branches above your head. As happy in the humidity of the rainforest as they are in the dry forests further west, this is Madagascar's most entertaining lemur.

Other **WILDLIFE**



Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko

Where else could you find what looks like a baby dragon than in the rainforests of Madagascar? Bearing an uncanny resemblance to our most fearsome mythical creature thanks to its bulging eyes, wide mouth and flashing red tongue, the Satanic leaf-tailed gecko is actually harmless. You'll find these masters of camouflage hanging around the rainforest pretending to be bits of bark or hanging lifeless from branches imitating a leaf – a brilliant disguise from predators.



Panther Chameleon

Bright and beautiful, the Panther chameleon has an extensive wardrobe of colours to help it blend in with its vibrant natural surroundings. Although they are found all across northern Madagascar, those near the water and wide skies of Nosy Be and Anfiky have splashes of deep blue across their skin, while those inland prefer flashes of red and yellow. If you're lucky you can catch them flicking their tongue into the air – a tongue as long as their body.

Madagascar's bizarre array of wildlife echoes the 88 million years the island has spent in isolation. Evolution worked its magic to produce a spectacular array of endemic species and the island is now one of the most biodiverse regions in the world. It's so unique that the country is sometimes called the 'Eighth Continent'.



Giant Jumping Rat

With a pink button nose and conical shaped ears, the Giant jumping rat is more rabbit-like than rodent. If that isn't enough to endear them to you, then how about the fact they hop like kangaroos, using their powerful back legs to leap up to three metres across the ground? Wholly nocturnal, the Giant jumping rat burrows like a rabbit during the day and your best chance of an encounter is on a night walk around the Kirindy Forest.



Fossa

Madagascar's largest carnivore may be no match for the lions across the water in Mozambique but measuring up to 6ft long this cat-like creature is the most powerful mammalian carnivore on Earth and also the stuff of nightmares for local lemurs. Solitary and swift, the Fossa bears little resemblance to its mongoose cousins and hunts by day and night in the forest using its long tail to balance as it chases down prey in the treetops.



Madagascar Flying Fox

With wings that spread almost 1.5 metres, the Flying fox is Madagascar's largest endemic fruit bat. Living in colonies that number in the thousands, few sights in Madagascar are more powerful than a dusk sky blotted black by a colony of Flying foxes swooping overhead. By day these fruit bats can be found hanging from trees rather than hiding in caves, and you'll find roosts of up to 5,000 Flying foxes nested near Berenty and Nosy Mangabe.



Lowland Streaked Tenrec

The 30-odd species of tenrec are primitive insectivores which look like hedgehogs or shrews. Most often seen in the lowland rainforests, the black and yellow Lowland streaked tenrec communicates by rattling a specialised row of spines on the back of its neck. If threatened, these mouse-sized tenrecs won't hesitate to headbutt an adversary with a view to lodging some spines in its mouth.

BIRDLIFE



Giant Coua

There are 114 species of bird that can only be found in Madagascar, but none are more memorable than the Giant coua. This endemic bird can be found in the dry forests of western and southern Madagascar. Like the other members of its family, it has a long, broad tail and a striking, blue facial mask. When the Coua is not calling during the breeding season, it can often be found on the ground, foraging for the large insects it eats.



Image courtesy of
Greg & Yvonne Dean
WorldWildlifeImages.com

Sickle Billed Vanga

Another Madagascar exclusive. Groups of these dove-sized birds can be heard cackling and babbling in the dry forests of western Madagascar as they probe tree bark with their uniquely curved beak for earthworms and insect prey. Much to the delight of keen visiting birders, they're easily seen too, with the stark contrast between their vivid white bodies and tar black wings helping them stand out amongst the brown trees and bush vegetation.



Image courtesy of
Greg & Yvonne Dean
WorldWildlifeImages.com

Long-tailed Ground Roller

Among the most sought-after sightings on birdwatchers' lists, the Long-tailed ground roller is one of Madagascar's most beautiful birds. They're characterised by their dressy wardrobe; displaying a bright white breast, vibrant blue wing coverts, and a striped tail, often far longer than the body of the bird. As the name suggests, the roller is exclusively ground dwelling and can be spotted in its last few pockets of habitat in the spiny bush north of Toliara and on the south-west coast.



Image courtesy of
Greg & Yvonne Dean
WorldWildlifeImages.com

Cuckoo Roller

The big-headed, short-legged Cuckoo roller is more often heard than seen, with its loud, whistling calls being one of Madagascar's 'hallmark' sounds. Cast your eyes to the skies during the spring and summer months to catch a glimpse of their spectacular aerial displays above the forest canopy. To the untrained eye, the sexes appear to be completely different species; the males display a brilliant green plumage, while the females blend into the forestry with their darkened wings and dappled brown breast.

CULTURE

It's not just the wildlife that's unique, the culture in Madagascar has a flavour of its own as well. Here is just a taste of the local customs you can explore on a trip to Madagascar.



The Famadihana ceremony

In Madagascar, part of paying respect to your ancestors is throwing them a party once in a while. Although it may seem ghoulish to us, every few years each family takes part in a funerary tradition called Famadihana or the 'turning of the bones' ceremony. The day consists of entering the family tombs and re-wrapping each of the ancestral remains in silk, before inviting friends and relatives for a grand feast and evening of music. The celebration is intended to reaffirm the link between the living and the ancestors, gathering all members of the family from across the country. It is presided over by the local wise person, or astrologer.

Respect for their ancestors

Utmost respect for the ancestors features heavily in Malagasy culture. It is believed that, once deceased, the dead become 'gods on earth' and are connected to a supreme being. Culture dictates that they not be neglected, as their role is to watch over daily life to influence the luck and fortune of the living. Impressive traditional stone tombs, some decorated with intricate wooden totem carvings or paintings, stand tall across the country, designed to house the bodies of the whole family and provide a tangible link to the dead. These are built with great care and are often more expensive and substantial than the homes of the living.

The Malagasy fady

A blend of superstitions and taboos, 'fady' act as the rules of the road for any trip to the remote parts of Madagascar. Some fady span the country, for example remembering not to point at a grave with an outstretched finger, or the widespread cultural ban on hunting the large, orange-eyed, black and white Propithecus lemurs – many believe that they are the reincarnation of ancestors who died in the forest. But many fady vary between villages and regions and can be as small as not passing the salt directly to someone at the table or as big as not working the land on a Tuesday. Many of these local fady have colourful stories behind them.

Popular COMBINATIONS



Madagascar & Mauritius

If anywhere can rival Madagascar's claim to the best beaches in the world, it's Mauritius. Pristine stretches of sand wrap almost the whole island and it's easy to find your own spot in the sun away from the crowds. This petite Mascarene island is brimming with castaway adventures from charming fishing villages and intriguing historic sites to breath-taking landscapes and an Indian Ocean full of marine treasures. After introducing yourself to the Indri lemurs in Madagascar's Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, grab your bucket and spade for time out on this tropical islet.

[✈️ Take me there](#)

Rainbow Tours' Madagascar & Mauritius Indian Ocean Island Escape 14-day itinerary costs from **£3195pp**



Madagascar & Reunion

While Madagascar dwarfs Reunion in terms of size, this volcanic French island can easily hold its own in terms of astonishing scenery and striking landscapes. Explore the 100 thundering waterfalls of Cirque de Salazie, dramatically plummeting down gorges and cliffs, before you discover the geological wonders of active volcano Piton de la Fournaise during an unforgettable helicopter flight. Combine this with endangered wildlife in Madagascar: visit the remarkable Ankarana for its tsingy and caves and see wildlife including Crowed lemurs and panther chameleons.

[✈️ Take me there](#)

Rainbow Tours' Volcanoes & Tsingy 19-day itinerary costs from **£5195pp**

Tailor-made travel Here at Rainbow Tours, our knowledgeable Africa & Madagascar Travel Specialists are on hand with their suggestions for other destinations which you can combine with your trip. Or, as we like to call it, your 'perfect pairing'. So, whether you're interested in spending time searching for mountain gorillas in Uganda, setting out on safari in the national parks of South Africa or Kenya, or relaxing on the golden beaches of the Seychelles, we're on hand to build your Madagascar holiday to suit your every need. Speak to a specialist today to tailor-make your perfect holiday.



Madagascar & Ethiopia

Ethiopian Airlines now enables combining exploring land-locked Ethiopia with island Madagascar. Be awestruck by Lalibela's rock-cut churches and Gondar's enchanting castles: Ethiopia tantalises with its scope for historic and religious explorations, out-done only by its spectacular scenery, including the Simien Mountains which you'll visit. After having seen the eccentric Geladas in the Simien Mountains, trade Addis Ababa for Antananarivo; explore wildlife-rich rainforest at Andasibe-Mantadia and luxuriate on a glorious beach on the Sambirano Coast at Eden Lodge.

[✈️ Take me there](#)

Rainbow Tours' Ethiopia & Madagascar Culture & Wildlife 16-day itinerary costs from **£5495pp**



Madagascar & Kenya

Whether it's seeing the Big Five or peering through the dust kicked up by thousands of migrating wildebeest in the Great Migration, Kenya is a fantastic destination for a thrilling safari. After watching herds of wildebeest, antelope and zebra galloping across the African savannah, travel to Madagascar to see its weird and wonderful rainforest wildlife. End the trip relaxing on Ile Sainte-Marie, well known for its palm-lined coves and world class whale-watching.

[Take me there](#)

[✈️](#) Rainbow Tours' Lions, Lemurs & Whales 15-day itinerary costs from **£4990pp**

ACCOMMODATION *Options*



Lodges

Most of the protected areas and popular wildlife-watching regions which our holidays visit are neatly serviced by a selection of sturdy lodges which offer comfortable accommodation and often a 'no frills', authentic experience. Some of our lodges of choice include the new Mantadia Lodge at Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, Anjajavy Le Lodge on the north-west coast and Le Paradisier Ecolodge at Ifaty on the south-west coast.



Island retreats

Madagascar does have a couple of boutique or romantic properties, which are the perfect choice for visitors looking to add something a little bit special to their trip. Luxury beach-side eco-lodge, Tsara Komba, is an intimate property on the beautiful island of Nosy Be which, with just eight lodges, lends itself to honeymooners. Princesse Bora, a relaxed property on Ile Sainte-Marie, is the ideal beach retreat for families, where the array of activities on offer includes superb whale watching opportunities in season.



Camps

Although tented camps aren't abundant in Madagascar, we do offer accommodation in the finest of those available. All of our chosen properties are hand-picked for their truly special locations and have been praised for their attentive, personal service. Our collection of properties which feature tented, en-suite rooms include Mandrare River Camp in the south, Masoala Forest Lodge in the far north-east, Eden Lodge on the north-west coast and Mikea Lodge on the remote south-west coast.



Unique hideaways

Here at Rainbow Tours, we work hard to ensure that our trips are far more than just a run-of-the-mill Madagascar holiday. If you are looking for a truly exceptional place to stay, we've partnered with several what we like to call 'unique hideaways'. Take the beautiful Iharana Bush Camp at Ankarana Ouest, for example. Here, the design, furnishings and art of the natural cottages and cabanas have been curated with exceptional attention to detail and, set on the edge of a lake overlooked by the Tsingy massif, it couldn't boast a better location.



Always **GIVING BACK**

While rich in natural biodiversity, Madagascar and the Malagasy people struggle with extreme poverty, lack of access to medical support and healthcare, limited education and rapid biodiversity loss as population growth puts ever-increasing pressure on the remaining patches of rainforest, dry forest, scrublands and wetlands.

With us, you can travel safe in the knowledge that your trip to Madagascar is making a genuine contribution to the country: for every guest travelling with us to the country, a donation is made to our favourite charity, Money for Madagascar (MFM), patrons of which include Hilary Bradt and Dr Lee Durrell.

Since 1986, the team of trustees and volunteers of MFM has worked tirelessly to tackle some of the social and economic difficulties that face the island. MFM work within the country, aiming to identify and fund local solutions that enable the Malagasy people to take control of their situations, and engineer their own brighter future. Their actions tackle extreme poverty and limited healthcare access for disadvantaged Malagasy people head-on.

Food, education and medical care are available to over 1,000 street children a year thanks to drop-in centres funded by MFM in Antananarivo and 95 functioning classrooms have been set up across the country. Volunteers work with local communities to source vocational training for vulnerable women, girls and single mothers, helping them to support themselves and generate their own sustainable income.

MFM also supports the reforestation programme of the NGO Association Mitsinjo at Andasibe-Mantadia National Park. If you're interested in taking a hands-on approach to having a positive impact on the country, we encourage our clients to visit the tree nursery there as well as at other habitat restoration programmes, such as the small initiative by NGO FANAMBY, near the Alley of Giant Baobabs in the Menabe region.





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