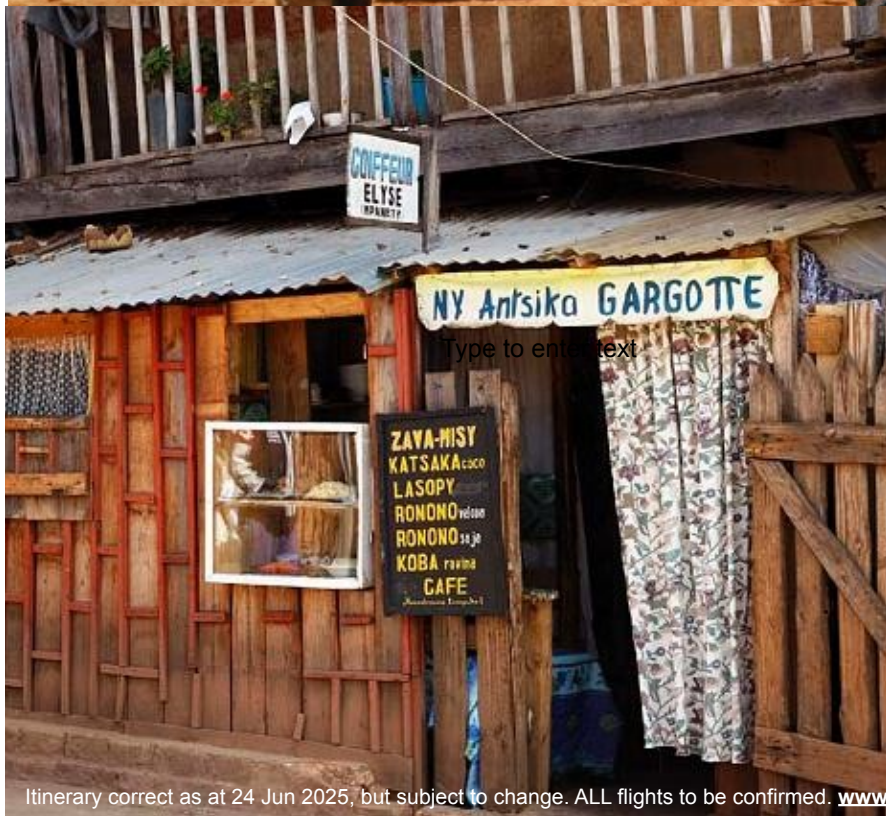




Blue Dot Travel







## MADAGASCAR

Madagascar, 400 km off the East coast of Africa, is the world's fourth largest island (excluding Australia), a fragment of Gondwanaland left behind when the ancient landmass split to form the continents of Africa, India and Australia; it stretches 1600 km from north to south and is 650 km across at its widest point.

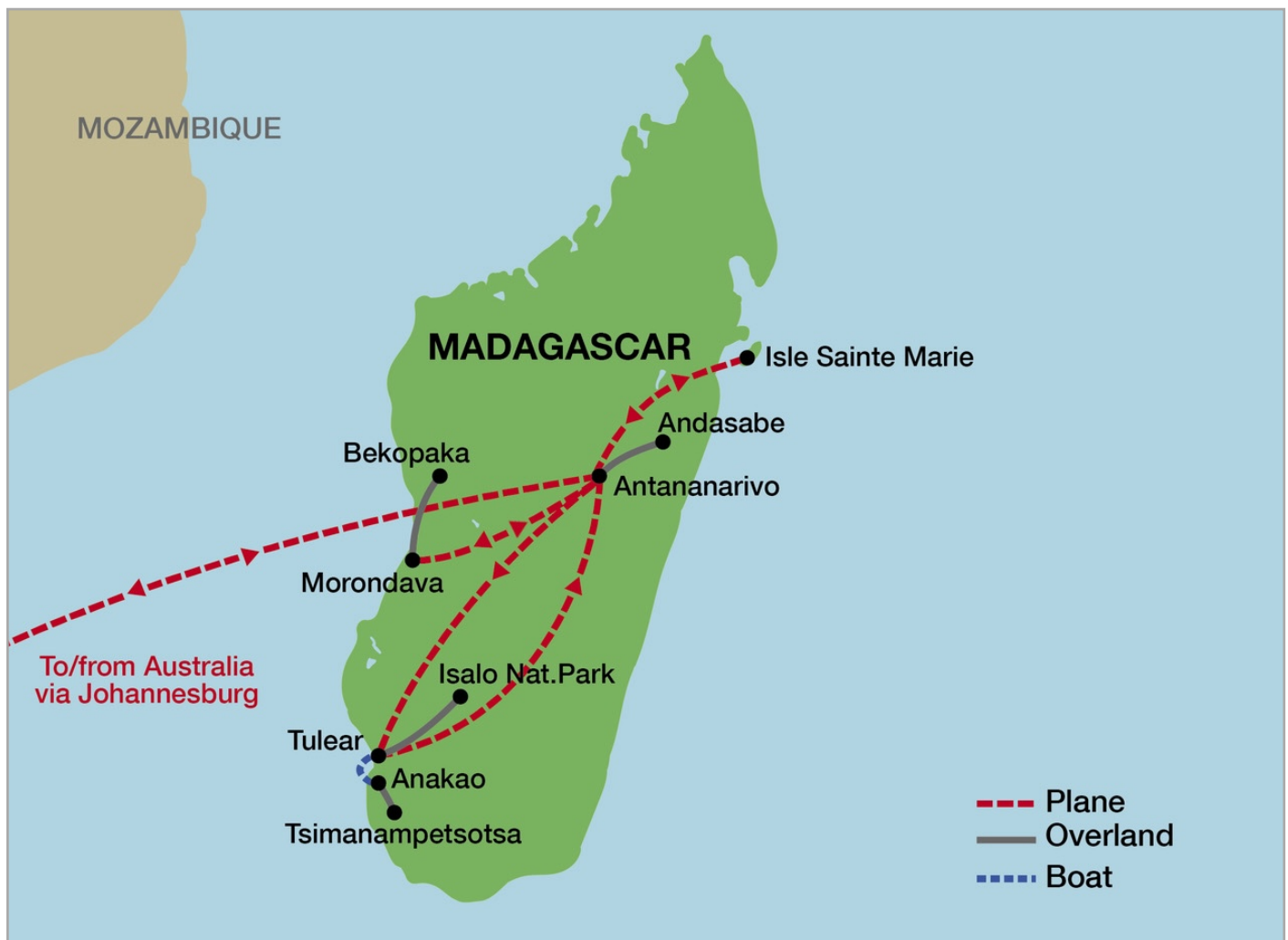
The most astonishing thing about the island is its flora and fauna, found nowhere else in the world. The island has been referred to as "nature's design laboratory", because of the many unique creatures and vegetation, some of quite a primitive nature. The terrain varies from tropical rainforest to desert, from high stony plateaus to lush green islands with many unique geological and geographical formations.

Madagascar has a range of unique animals and plants which have evolved here separated from the rest of the world. The most notable are the Lemurs of which nearly 30 are described. For the bird watcher there are over 250 species of which 106 are endemic, whilst for lovers of reptiles most of the world's chameleons are found here, in fact, the country is nearly as well known for its chameleon population as for its lemurs.

The flora has its own peculiarities, the vegetation varying wildly by climatic region - thorny scrub in the southwest, tropical rainforest along the east coast, heath-land and moss forests on the central plateau and savannahs in the western lowlands. The two best-known examples of these unusual plants are the fan shaped Ravinala, known as the Traveller's Palm, and the Baobab of which there are 10 different species. We will see many examples of these throughout while in the tropical forests we will see trees lush with ferns, fungi, mosses and orchids. Most of this unique flora and fauna, together with some now extinct species, were here when the first humans arrived some 1500 to 2000 years ago. The first inhabitants were Malay Polynesians who crossed the Indian Ocean in large canoes from Indonesia and South East Asia. These early settlers mixed with later arrivals, African, Arab, Indian and Portuguese traders and French colonials have formed the current 18 official tribes, collectively termed the Malagasy. French is the official language and is spoken in all but the remotest areas.

The country is in great need of foreign currency as part of this income can be used to help preserve what remains of the Island's natural wonders.

For those looking for something different, this is it!



#### Thursday 10th July DEPARTURE

Depart Australia for our flight to Johannesburg, where the group will overnight at, or near the airport. Flights are most likely to be with Qantas (ex Syd QF063).



#### Day 1, Friday 11th July JOHANNESBURG – ANTANANARIVO

After breakfast, the group will fly from Johannesburg to Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar known as “Tana”. On arrival late in the afternoon, we’ll obtain our short-stay visa (about €30) and meet our guide. Our guide will also assist with the money exchange to arrange some local currency. The drive through town to the hotel is an experience in itself. Watch with fascination as you drive for one hour, observing the locals going about their busy day. There is an official welcome dinner at the lovely Hotel Pallisandre (or similar) where we stay two nights. *B/D*



#### Day 2, Saturday 12th July ANTANANARIVO

Today, we’ll see some sites of the capital city, affectionately known as Tana. We begin with a visit to the Ambohimanja Royal Palace. Learn about this fascinating part of the region’s history before taking a short walk to get a panoramic view of Tana. We will then drive back towards town for lunch and head to the city lookout for views of Antananarivo from above. We’ll also

schedule a visit to the photo museum. Overnight at the Royal Palissandre Hotel. *B/L/D*



#### Day 3, Sunday 13th July ANTANANARIVO – MORONDAVA

After breakfast, we’ll drive to the airport and fly to Morondava, on the western side of Madagascar (departs 09 :50 hrs – arrives 11:00 hrs). The group will be provided with a lunchbox to eat along the way. In the afternoon, take advantage of the hotel’s grounds, pool, and beach. Later, visit the local marketplace and mix with the locals. It’s about a 30-minute enjoyable walk, or order a *pousse pousse*, the local name for a rickshaw, for a few ariary (local currency). Return to the hotel for a drink at the bar and dinner. Overnight at the Palissandre Côte Ouest (or similar). *B/L/D*



#### Day 4, Monday 14th July MORONDAVA – BEKOPAKA

Today begins with a long day’s drive over dirt and sand roads, heading towards the village of Bekopaka. The first stop is the famous Avenue of the Baobabs, where you can take photos of these giant trees in the morning light. Lunch is at Belo at the halfway mark. We’ll take a 45-minute transfer via the local barge (with cars on board) and then continue to the second river crossing before arriving at the small village of Bekopaka. Arrival will be late in the afternoon. This is a long and bumpy drive in 4-wheel-drive vehicles, but it’s worth the visit. The river barge trip with the locals is a great experience.



Overnight at the beautiful Soleil Du Tsingy for two nights (or similar). **B/L/D**



**Day 5, Tuesday 15th July**  
**BEKOPAKA**

**Activity rating: Challenging**

Today's expedition to the Big Tsingy is considered challenging in some sections. This spectacular nature reserve is UNESCO-listed and offers some of the best landscapes of the trip. We'll trek inside the limestone forest, passing over a swing bridge to go from one side to another and arrive for a panoramic view of the surrounding limestone pinnacles. There are three options for today: a certain fitness level and flexibility is required. You'll also need to be comfortable with heights and able to climb a series of steep ladders (a harness is supplied at some sections). If climbing is too challenging, consider taking a walk through another section of the forest or staying back and enjoying the hotel's facilities. Overnight at the Soleil Du Tsingy. **B/L/D**



**Day 6, Wednesday 16th July**  
**BEOPAKA – MORONDAVA**

After breakfast, we'll begin the long drive back to Morondava in the 4WD vehicles via the same road we came on, stopping for lunch at Belo. Today's main sight is the Avenue of the Baobabs, this time in the afternoon light, where we'll enjoy watching the sun slowly set behind the giant trees. Have your cameras ready, as this is one of the great sights of Madagascar. We arrive back at Morondava in the evening for dinner. Overnight at the Palissandre Cote Ouest (or similar). **B/L/D**



**Day 7, Thursday 17th July**  
**MORONDAVA – ANTANANARIVO**

This morning, transfer to the airport for our flight back to Antananarivo (departs 09:15 hrs – arrives 10:20 hrs). Enjoy lunch at the Combava Restaurant on the way to the city centre. En route to our hotel, we'll stop at the artisan market for a colourful taste of local Malagasy life and then at the supermarket to stock up on any essentials. Overnight at Royal Palissandre Hotel (or similar). **B/L/D**



**Day 8, Friday 18th July**  
**ANTANANARIVO – ANDASABE**

After breakfast, we'll leave Tana by coach for Andasabe (also known as Perinet). This is a roughly 4-hour drive east

through a winding, picturesque landscape. The area is in a rainforest, so expect some precipitation. After checking into our lodge, lunch will be served. We'll then visit the Vakona private reserve for an afternoon walk through the beautiful forest. After dinner at the lodge, those interested can take an evening walk with the guide (take your torch) to spot the active wildlife. We stay at Vakona Lodge (or similar) for three nights. **B/L/D**

**Day 9, Saturday 19th July**  
**ANDASABE & MANTADIA NATIONAL PARK**



Today, we'll enjoy a morning expedition to Mantadia National Park for wildlife spotting and a nature walk. This 155 sq km park is the premier rainforest in the region and provides the chance to hear and see the Indri and Sifaka lemurs. If we are lucky, we'll find other species of lemurs, reptiles, and birds. The flora is very interesting in the lower elevation, which is dominated by fern trees. At higher elevations, moss and lichen grow superbly. Mantadia is a superb example of lowland and mid-altitude rainforest (a certain fitness level is needed for this 3 to 4-hour slow-paced walk). We will enjoy a picnic lunch inside the park and continue to a natural pool in the afternoon before returning to Andasibe for a stroll through the town with your guide. Overnight at Vakona Lodge. **B/L/D**



**Day 10, Sunday 20th July**  
**ANDASABE**

Today we transfer, to Analamazaotra for more wildlife spotting on foot and enjoy the beautiful surroundings. Lunch is back at the lodge before stopping at Lemur Island (right next to the hotel) to interact with wild, but friendly lemurs. Then, those interested can take a short walk through the town of Andasabe with your guide (highly recommended). After dinner, take another night walk to spot wildlife. Overnight at Vakona Lodge. **B/L/D**

**Day 11, Monday 21st July**  
**ANDASABE - ANTANANARIVO**

This morning the group will head back to Tana where we will check in to the Royal Palissandre Hotel. There's an afternoon tour planned to see the Queen's Palace. Dinner is back at the hotel. **B/L/D**



**Day 12, Tuesday 22nd July**  
**ISLE SAINTE MARIE – WHALE WATCHING**

Today, transfer to the airport to fly to the eastern part of the country and the island of Isle Sainte Marie (departs 14:00 hrs – arrives 15:05 hrs). This gorgeous island is just 45km long, with many small villages. This strategic position attracted pirates around the year 1700. Isle Sainte Marie offers a rich cultural history, lush vegetation, and sandy beaches shaded by coconut palms, bays, and coves protected by coral reefs. We'll visit the main town centre and then later, meet at the hotel for a briefing on tomorrow's whale watching. The island is known for the humpback whales, which migrate close to the coastline from July to September. This is one of the main reasons we visit. Overnight at Soanambo Hotel (or similar) for three nights (or similar). **B/L/D**





### Day 13, Wednesday 23rd July ISLE SAINTE MARIE

Today, we'll enjoy a whale safari excursion. Every year, hundreds of giant mammals come to the warm waters of the Sainte-Marie lagoon to give birth. We'll have the opportunity to discover their graceful ballets and jumps outside the water, truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The excursion will be about 3 hours on a smallish boat (if you are not good on boats, you may need to reconsider this excursion). We will then take a boat ride south of the island, where you will have lunch on a small islet. After a stroll around the local village, we'll drive back to the lodge, arriving late in the afternoon – just in time for drinks at the bar overlooking the deep blue sea.

**B/L/D**



### Day 14, Thursday 24th July ISLE SAINTE MARIE – ANTANANARIVO

This morning, we'll visit the island museum and the pirates' cemetery to learn of the fascinating pirate history. Lunch will be served at a local hotel before we visit Ambodifotatra and then return to our hotel for an afternoon of leisure. **B/L/D**

### Day 15, Friday 25th July ISLE SAINTE MARIE – ANTANANARIVO

After an early lunch, we'll transfer to the airport for our flight back to Tana (departs 10:45 hrs – arrives 11:45 hrs) where we'll check in to the Palissandre Hotel (which will now start to feel like home). **B/L/D**

### Day 16, Saturday 26th July ANTANANARIVO – TULEAR

This morning, after breakfast, we'll transfer to the airport for our flight to Tulear (departs 13:25 hrs – arrives 15:10 hrs). Check in at Le Paradisier for one night. **B/L/D**

### Day 17, Sunday 27th July TULEAR – ISALO

Today, the group will be transferred to Isalo by coach. Check into the lovely Jardin du Roy for two nights. Enjoy the hotel's pool and grounds before dinner. **B/L/D**



### Day 18, Monday 28th July ISALO NATIONAL PARK

Walking shoes on... today is physical, with an expedition inside Isalo National Park. Our walk begins at the canyon of Maki, where the impressive

gorge gives way to the surrounding forest. We'll pass waterfalls and visit the blue and black waterholes. If lucky, we'll see different lemurs, birds and reptiles. We'll have a picnic lunch inside the park, and return to the hotel in the afternoon. The trek may not be for everyone, as it could be considered strenuous. Your guide and tour leader will explain the physicality and the time required.

**B/L/D**

### Day 19, Tuesday 29th July ISALO – TULEAR

Enjoy the grounds of the hotel this morning and perhaps a spa. Then, after lunch, you'll drive back to Tulear. On

arrival, the group will take a short walking tour of the township before checking into our hotel. **B/L/D**



### Day 20, Wednesday 30th July TULEAR – ANAKAO

This morning, we leave Tulear by taking the speedboat to Anakao. (If lucky, we'll see whales on their journey through the Mozambique Channel). The 40-minute speedboat ride can be bumpy, but the alternative is a full-day, slow, and road trip. Our afternoon is at leisure. Enjoy the locals in the village right next door.



The beach hotel is basic but offers the necessary comforts. All bungalows are right on the beach. The food served here is mainly seafood. You'll have a comfortable bed, with hot water powered by solar. The rawness and simplicity is part of the experience! Overnight at Safari Vezo (or similar) for three nights. **B/L/D**



### Day 21, Thursday 31st July TSIMANAMPETSOTSA

After breakfast, we'll drive to the Tsimanampetsotsa reserve, a 1.5-hour journey on dirt and sandy roads in 4x4 vehicles. Tsimanampetsotsa is one of the most interesting parks on the island. We'll trek for about 1.5 hours on a slightly steep trail until we reach the plateau. The viewpoint of the salt lake, where you can see the flamingos that have migrated from Africa, is special. We'll have a picnic lunch inside the park. On the walk, we'll see the unique blind fish "Grandmother" in one of the caves, the island's oldest Baobab tree, and the huge Banyan tree with its mega root system. In the afternoon, we'll drive back to Anakao. Overnight at Safari Vezo Beach Hotel. **B/L/D**



### Day 22, Friday 1st August ANAKAO – TULEAR – ANTANANARIVO

This morning we'll take a boat to Nosy Ve, an uninhabited coral island three kilometres off Anakao, to spot birdlife and see the protected wetlands. Head back after lunch for a relaxing time on the beach or mix it with the locals. **B/L/D**



### Day 23, Saturday 2nd August ANTANANARIVO

In the morning, we'll take the speedboat back to Tulear from Anakao. We'll have lunch in Tulear before we board the flight back to Tana (departs 14:30 hrs – arrives 16:15 hrs). Check into the Royal Palissandre Hotel (or similar) for your last night in Madagascar and your farewell dinner in the hotel. **B/L/D**

### Day 24, Sunday 3rd August ANTANANARIVO – JOHANNESBURG

Your morning is free before we depart Antananarivo for the flight back to Johannesburg to overnight. Check into the hotel for dinner at your leisure. **B**

### Day 25, Monday 4th August DEPART JOHANNESBURG

Today, free time before departing Johannesburg for Australia, arriving home on Tuesday, 5th August. (All flights are subject to change). **B**



Icon indicates a day where there is **moderate physical exertion**. A basic level of fitness is required: eg. A trek over 'mostly flat' terrain or climbing several flights of steps without the support of handrails or elevators.



Icon indicates a day where there is a **particularly active section**. A good level of fitness is required: eg. A longer trek over non-groomed, uneven terrain, or ascending to reach a panorama. May also include exposure to higher altitude. **An alternate activity may be offered if you choose to sit out an active section.** Please call - we are happy to discuss each tour in more detail.