



**Travel Savvy**  
 PO Box 1933  
 Linkhills 3652  
 0317632686  
 carly@travelsavvy.co.za

## MADAGASCAR GUIDE

wordtravels



A land unlike any other, Madagascar is an enticing destination for those who find its lack of modern conveniences, tourist infrastructure and efficient transport system an interesting challenge rather than a problem. Despite its sometimes volatile political situation and comparative remoteness, Madagascar continues to draw adventurers from all over the globe.

The fourth largest island in the world, Madagascar is one of the most bio-diverse countries on earth, home to thousands of species of plant and animal life of which about 80 percent cannot be found anywhere else on the planet. Situated off the east coast of Africa, Madagascar is very different from its African neighbour, and its uniqueness in the world has led some to class it as the Eighth Continent.

Madagascar is world famous for its lemurs, of which there are about 50 different types, ranging from the unusual to the utterly bizarre. Lemurs are endemic to the island and generally resemble a cross between a monkey and a squirrel; but lemurs are not the only curious creatures inhabiting this exotic realm. Dwarf chameleons, tomato frogs, giant jumping rats and hedgehog-like tenrecs are among the host of peculiar indigenous fauna; while the country's isolation has enabled the development of plants with remarkable shapes, such as the swollen Baobab, Madagascar's national tree. Wilderness areas such as Isalo National Park and Tsingy Nature Reserve are wonderful places to discover Madagascar's exotic fauna, flora and striking geological features.

Besides this natural wonderland, Madagascar also has its share of beautiful beaches and coral reefs, such as those found on the cluster of islands off the northeast coast. Best known is Nossi Bé, while Ile Ste-Marie off the east coast, and Toliara in the south, are also major attractions for divers, snorkelers and sunbathers. The bustling capital, and first and last stop for visitors arriving by air, is Antananarivo, or 'Tana', which has a distinctly French flavour and is an excellent place to shop for Malagasy arts and crafts. Go looking for the unexpected in Madagascar and you will find an undeniably fascinating destination that makes for a refreshingly different sort of holiday under the tropical sunshine.

### THE BASICS

#### TIME

Local time is GMT +3.

#### ELECTRICITY

Electrical current is 220 volts, 50Hz. Plugs are generally of the two-pin variety.

#### LANGUAGE

Malagasy is the official language, but French is used in business and government and is widely spoken in the main cities in Madagascar. A few people involved in the tourism industry might be able to speak some English, but it is not widely spoken.

#### TRAVEL HEALTH

Malaria is a risk throughout the year and the risk of infection is highest in coastal areas; visitors should take appropriate measures to avoid contracting the disease. All travellers coming from a country with yellow fever risk are required to prove they have been vaccinated against the disease to enter Madagascar. Vaccinations are also recommended for hepatitis A, hepatitis B, typhoid and influenza, and those at risk of animal bites should also consider a rabies vaccination. Tap water should not be drunk unless it has been boiled or chemically treated.

Medical facilities are severely limited in Madagascar, and outside of the capital medical care may be difficult to find. Limited French medications are available in Tana; however, it is advisable to bring along a medical kit for private use. If you require specific prescription medications it is best to bring them with you, in their original packaging, along with a signed and dated letter from your doctor stating what they are and why you need them. Comprehensive medical insurance is advised.

#### SAFETY INFORMATION

The political situation in Madagascar is unstable, especially in central Antananarivo and the Ambohitovolo, Lac Anosy, Antaninarenina and Analakely areas. Violence is possible at any large gatherings and political or military installations. It is advised to travel with an established agency, and solo travellers should continually monitor the local media. Precautions against opportunistic crime, especially in the urban areas, should be taken. Pickpockets operate at the airport and in crowded areas such as markets. Travellers should carry a photocopy of their passport at all times. At night, avoid walking around city centres and road travel outside urban areas as there have

been occasional hold-ups on the main routes. The height of the cyclone season is from January to March and affects the coastal regions. Piracy is a significant concern in the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean, and there have been several attacks against private vessels and kidnappings.

#### LOCAL CUSTOMS

Do not photograph military or police establishments while in Madagascar. Identification should be carried at all times by visitors. In rural areas, locals may abide by a number of taboos called *fady*, which should be respected by visitors at all times.

#### COMMUNICATIONS

The international dialling code for Madagascar is +261. The outgoing code is 00 followed by the relevant country code (e.g. 0027 for South Africa). To make an international call to Madagascar, the dialling code of 261 must be followed by a two-digit operator code (e.g. 34 for TELMA, the most reliable), then the regional code (e.g. 22 for Antananarivo) and then the five-digit number. A GSM 900 network is in use, covering major cities and main roads, and some operators have also introduced 3G networks. Public internet access exists in large cities and there are a few internet cafes in Antananarivo.

#### DUTY FREE

Visitors may bring 500 cigarettes or 25 cigars or 500g tobacco, as well as one bottle of alcohol into the country without incurring import duty.

#### CLIMATE

Generally the climate of Madagascar is subtropical, with a hot and rainy season between November and April, and a cooler dry season from May to October; however, there is a big variation in climate depending on altitude and geographical position within the country and travellers should be sure to check up on the climate of the particular region they are visiting. For instance, the west coast is drier than the east coast and the central highlands, while the far south and southwest is a semi-desert region that experiences very little rainfall. The east coast receives the most rain and is hot and humid during the wet season, and also prone to cyclones between February and March. Temperatures are much cooler in the highlands. Antananarivo has a pleasant, temperate climate. Along the coast temperatures range from 81°F to 90°F (27°C to 32°C) in the wet season, and 64°F to 72°F (18°C to 22°C) in the dry season. The cooler and drier months between May and October are generally the most pleasant time to travel to Madagascar, but if you are planning specific activities, like whale watching or diving, it is worth finding out the best time to enjoy such pastimes.

#### ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR SOUTH AFRICANS

South African citizens must have a passport that is valid for at least six months beyond the date of their arrival in Madagascar. A 90-day visa can be obtained on arrival.

#### PASSPORT/VISA

Foreign visitors to Madagascar of most nationalities can obtain a tourist visa on arrival, provided they have at least one blank page in their passport reserved for the Immigration Authorities of Madagascar, and return/onward flight tickets. Tourist visas are valid for a maximum of 90 days and cost around MGA 200,000 (or equivalent in USD or EUR). Shorter stays cost less. A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required to enter Madagascar, if arriving within six days of leaving or transiting through an infected area. NOTE: It is highly recommended that your passport has at least six months validity remaining after your intended date of departure from your travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

#### MONEY

The official currency is the Malagasy Ariary (MGA), which has been reintroduced to replace the Malagasy Franc. Coins and notes display both currencies, but newer notes display the Ariary more prominently than the Franc. One Ariary is equal to five Francs. Foreign currencies can be exchanged at banks and official bureaux de change, but the Ariary cannot be changed back into hard currency. Some banks will only accept US Dollars or Euros. ATMs are available in Antananarivo. Most major credit cards are starting to be accepted in top hotels and major travel agencies in the capital and other major towns, but have limited usage elsewhere.

### ANTANANARIVO

Shortened simply to 'Tana', Antananarivo is the bustling capital of Madagascar, set among the vast wilderness that sees an increasing number of travellers visiting this inspiring land. Meaning 'town of a thousand', Tana was named for the revered 17th-century King Andrianjaka who conquered several villages in the area, leaving a garrison of 1,000 men to defend his new territory.

Built on hillsides and ridges Tana is the main entry point for visitors travelling to Madagascar, although not many tourists spend more than a couple of days here, either at the beginning or end of their holiday, as Antananarivo is not an easy place for first time visitors, with surprisingly little in the way of tourist infrastructure despite being the capital. Sights worth seeing include the Royal Hill of Ambohimanga, the Prime Minister's Palace and Rova, the old shell of the Queen's Palace which was severely damaged by arson in the 1990s.

Shopping in Antananarivo is a fun experience with stores, bustling markets, shopping centres and hawkers vying for patronage. The Zoma Market, which is held daily, was once claimed to be the second-largest in the world, and is definitely worth a visit for those wanting to get some souvenir shopping done. Tana Market is also popular and sells exquisite local handicrafts and artefacts made of sea shells and corals. Head to the top and bottom of Avenue of Independence for some fantastic stalls where popular Madagascar souvenirs such as woodcarvings, oil paintings, hand-loomed fabrics, cotton, silk, embroidery and woven straw items like baskets and hats can be found. The bright colours of the fabrics draped across tables make for an unforgettable and very colourful shopping experience. Haggling is expected but, as a tourist, be prepared to pay more for items than locals. Beware of pickpockets in the bustling markets, and brush up on your French as this can come in handy when bartering with the locals.

With a distinctive French flavour, a mish-mash of red-brick houses scattered all over the hillsides, and nineteenth-century churches dotted around the maze of small, winding streets, Tana has its own inimitable charm and is an attraction in itself. Visitors should be on guard against opportunistic crime as poverty levels are high in the city.

## **FIANARANTSOA**

The capital of the Haute Matsiatra Region, Fianarantsoa is among the biggest and oldest cities in the country, and a top tourist destination in Madagascar.

A vibrant city, Fianarantsoa is the intellectual and cultural heart of Madagascar with a large university and many interesting events and festivals, including the traditional Betsileo folk festivals held between May and September. There are some beautiful sights in Fianarantsoa as well, as the city is home to the oldest cathedrals in Madagascar (a mix of Protestant, Lutheran, and Catholic churches). Strolling around the colourful old town of Fiana (as the locals refer to it), is a great way to soak up local culture, however most of the shops and transportation hubs are located in the new town.

Just 178 miles (287km) south of Antananarivo, Fianarantsoa is the wine capital of Madagascar, surrounded by vineyards. Although experienced wine tourists may be disappointed by the lack of polish at the wineries and shops in town, wine tasting in Madagascar is an increasingly popular activity. Maromby, just north of Fianarantsoa, is a quiet village with a monastery that offers a good selection of local wines.

A popular excursion from the city is the attractive town of Ambalavao, in the Central Highlands, which is well-known for paper-making, specialising in the Malagasy Antaimoro paper, made from papyrus and wild flowers. The paper is a popular souvenir from Madagascar, as is the silk produced at a factory in town. Those who travel to Ambalavao find it a thriving town with colourful buildings framed by elaborately-carved wooden balconies and tiled roofs.

## **NOSY BE**

Nosy Be, meaning 'big island' in Malagasy, is located off the northwest coast of Madagascar and is a must for all visitors to the country. It is home to Madagascar's busiest and largest tourist resorts and a good destination for a romantic beach getaway, with much better amenities and accommodation options than most of the country.

Featuring spectacular beaches such as Madirokely, Belle Vue and Andilana, Nosy Be also has some impressive coral reefs, which make it a popular choice for scuba divers and those who want to try some snorkelling. The island is also known for its verdant tropical forest which is teeming with a diversity of wildlife; the Lokobe Natural Reserve is a gem where fantastic bird watching opportunities abound and a great variety of animals, including the beloved lemurs, can be found. Nosy Be also offers volcanic lakes, great hiking and mountain biking trails, rum distilleries, Ylang Ylang plantations and, in May, the four-day Donia Music Festival, which is a treat for music lovers.

Visitors to Madagascar often don't venture far beyond the beautiful island and it isn't hard to see why. Although it can get crowded, Nosy Be still has a sleepy, laid-back atmosphere and hasn't been ruined by its resorts.

## **AIRPORTS**

### **IVATO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (TNR)**

#### **LOCATION**

The airport is situated 10 miles (16km) from Antananarivo.

#### **GETTING TO THE CITY**

Private taxis are available but are known to be expensive; shared minibuses are also available but are often packed to capacity and uncomfortable. A shuttle bus provides a service to hotels in the city centre and is considered the safest and most affordable option.

#### **TIME**

Local time is GMT +3

#### **CONTACTS**

Tel: +261 (0)202 244 041.

#### **CAR RENTAL**

A number of car rental companies are represented at the airport, including Sixt, Hertz and Avis.

#### **AIRPORT TAXIS**

Taxis are available.

#### **TRANSFER BETWEEN TERMINALS**

The Domestic and International Terminals are connected and may be reached on foot.

**FACILITIES**

Facilities include a bureau de change, a restaurant, shops and lounges.

**DEPARTURE TAX****FASCENE AIRPORT (NOS)****LOCATION**

The Fascene Airport is located 11 miles (18km) from Hell-ville (Andoany).

**GETTING TO THE CITY**

There are taxis available at the airport to take you to your destination. Some hotels offer shuttles, but these should be arranged in advance.

**TIME**

GMT +3

**CONTACTS****AIRPORT TAXIS**

Taxis are available outside the airport terminal.

**FACILITIES**

Facilities are very limited at this small airport.

**DEPARTURE TAX**

---

Copyright © 2017 Globe Media Ltd. All rights reserved. None of the information may be reproduced without prior permission. By its very nature much of the information in this guide is subject to change at short notice and travellers are urged to verify information on which they're relying with the relevant authorities. Globe Media cannot accept any responsibility for any loss or inconvenience to any person as a result of information contained above.