

KENYA, TANZANIA & MADAGASCAR

with Zanzibar

35 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Nairobi

Today we arrive in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya.

Part of Maasai land when the British arrived, this modern capital grew with the development of the railway. Derived from a Maasai word meaning "Cold Water," Nairobi is a pleasant mix of colonial British with modern and traditional African influences.

Overnight in Nairobi.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Nairobi - Ol Pejeta Conservancy

Today we travel from Nairobi, through the "White Highlands," so called because of the large number of Europeans who settled here, northwards to the lower slopes of Mt Kenya, rising to 5199 m (16,728 feet), Africa's second highest peak. Our (+/- 4 hour) drive will take us into the Central Highlands, the heartland of the Kikuyu people. This is a very fertile region, well-watered, intensively cultivated, and thickly forested. The land was coveted by the Europeans who began arriving in ever-increasing numbers once the railway through the area was completed. The settlers established coffee and tea plantations on the eastern slopes of Mt Kenya and cultivated wheat on the western slopes.

Our destination is Sweetwaters, a luxury tented camp clustered around a water hole and set in the pristine calm of the private Ol Pejeta Conservancy, a non-profit organization supporting endangered species, tourism and community outreach. Ol Pejeta is East Africa's largest Black Rhino sanctuary, the only place in Kenya to see chimpanzees, and holds some of the highest predator densities in Kenya.

This afternoon we'll enjoy our first game drive within the conservancy.

Overnight at Sweetwaters.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 3 Ol Pejeta Conservancy

Ol Pejeta is a mosaic of grass plains, wooded grassland, acacia woodland and evergreen thicket extending for over 350 square kilometers. The conservancy boasts an astounding variety of animals, including the "Big Five."

We will have morning and afternoon game drives today, as well as a chance to visit the Sweetwaters Chimpanzee Sanctuary -- the only place in Kenya where this highly endangered and remarkably intelligent species can be seen. The facility was initially established to receive and provide lifelong refuge to orphaned and abused chimpanzees from West and Central Africa. Here the chimpanzees are carefully nursed back to health so they can enjoy the rest of their days in the safety of a vast natural enclosure.

Overnight at Sweetwaters Camp.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 4 Ol Pejeta - Great Rift Valley - Lake Nakuru National Park

This morning we travel to Lake Nakuru, a shallow soda lake in the Rift Valley (+/- 5 hours). The Rift Valley was created millions of years ago under the strain of enormous volcanic eruptions which resulted in a giant split in the earth's surface from Syria to Mozambique. Lava flowed into the valley, forming escarpments on either side of the gigantic trough which can be up to 80 km (50 miles) wide, big enough to be visible

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from space. At the lake, depending on the water levels, we may have the opportunity to see flamingos,* in addition to the over 340 species of birds that have been recorded in the Rift Valley!

Lake Nakuru is very shallow and can fluctuate up to five metres (12 feet) each day. When the water is low, you can see a white band of crystallized soda along the shoreline. This is also one of the best places in Kenya to view the rare White Rhino as we explore the park on our afternoon game drive.

* This, and other Rift Valley lakes, have been known in the past for huge numbers of flamingos; however, this can be very "hit and miss" owing to seasonal variations in rainfall and water level, and the increasing frequency of drought. The best we can do is hope for the best!

Overnight in Lake Nakuru National Park.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 5 Lake Nakuru - Maasai Mara National Reserve

Early this morning we depart from Lake Nakuru National Park and continue our journey through the Rift Valley, passing by Lake Naivasha and nearby Mount Longonot, a relatively young volcanic reminder of the Rift's violent past. We arrive at our lodge (via bad road) in the Maasai Mara National Reserve in time for lunch (+/- 6 hour drive).

The Maasai Mara is a natural extension of the Serengeti eco-system and has an amazing concentration of wildlife. The largest population of lions in Kenya is found here, along with large herds of plains game. The Maasai Mara may also be the best place in Kenya to view cheetah. Later this afternoon we enjoy another game drive.

Time-permitting, we may be able to visit a Maasai village to witness the local way of life and meet its residents. If time does not permit, we will attempt this visit the village on our way back to Nairobi.

Overnight in the Maasai Mara.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 6 Maasai Mara National Reserve

The Maasai Mara National Reserve consists of rolling grassland and is located at the northern end of the Serengeti Plain. Considered the best of Kenya's parks, it is on the pathway of the yearly wildebeest migration, which comes north from Tanzania about the end of June and returns to Tanzania around the end of September. "The Mara" sustains all of the "Big Five" -- lion, elephant, leopard, rhinoceros and buffalo -- as well as an astonishing wealth of herding animals and other wildlife. You can see the stately Maasai men and youth along the road tending their cattle and goats.

We have a full day in the reserve, with morning and afternoon game drives.

In the Mara you will also have an optional opportunity to ascend over the northern Serengeti at daybreak in a hot air balloon (optional expense). From over 300 m (984 feet) above, you will be able to view the vast land and the myriad animals that inhabit the Maasai Mara. Today or tomorrow are the best days to participate in this activity - details sent upon booking.

Overnight in the Maasai Mara National Reserve.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 7 Maasai Mara National Reserve

We enjoy another full day with game viewing in Maasai Mara. Depending on the season and current game locations and viewing conditions, we may divide our day into morning and afternoon drives, or take our lunches with us in order to venture further into the reserve if conditions warrant.

Overnight in the Maasai Mara National Reserve.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 8 Maasai Mara - Nairobi

After breakfast we depart for Nairobi (+/- 6 hours including stops). En route, just outside the capital, we visit the Karen Blixen Museum. Baroness Karen Blixen-Finecke emigrated from Denmark to Kenya in 1918 and, in 1937, wrote under the pseudonym, Isaac Dineson, "Out of Africa." The novel tells the tale of the Baroness's experiences on a Kenyan farm. Her home is now a museum, restored to the style in which she maintained it.

Overnight in Nairobi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Nairobi - Amboseli National Park

Today we travel south from Nairobi to the Amboseli National Park (+/- 4 hours, depending on lodge location and animals spotted en route).

Just across the border from Tanzania, this park is situated on the African plain at the foot of snow-capped Mount Kilimanjaro, the continent's tallest mountain at 5894 m (19,300 feet). Here the cone-shaped mountain seems to hover majestically over the shimmering African plains.

The Amboseli National Park is also famous for its large herds of elephants. Here they cover themselves in red dust, giving them an even more imposing appearance. On this afternoon's game drive we hope to view animals grazing on the open plain with Mt Kilimanjaro providing the classic backdrop (weather-permitting).

Overnight in the Amboseli National Park.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 10 Amboseli, Kenya - Lake Manyara National Park, Tanzania

This morning we cross the border into Tanzania at Namanga and travel to Lake Manyara National Park via the town of Arusha, the starting point for the northern safari routes of Tanzania. Today's journey is +/- 5 hours, depending on animals spotted, views of Kilimanjaro, and the border crossing.

Manyara is the smallest of the northern parks in Tanzania (330 sq km, of which two thirds is the actual lake) hosting a wide variety of vegetation, ranging from savannah to ground water forest to riparian habitats. The park is host to thousands of pelicans, ibis and flamingo that can be heard from afar. Other common visitors to this beautiful lake are hippos and the majestic African fish eagle, which can be seen swooping down from its perch to snatch a fish from the still waters of the lake.

After lunch at our lodge we will have an afternoon game drive in the park, located at the base of the Great Rift Valley escarpment and comprising of forest, woodland, grasslands, and swamps. Wildlife interest at Lake Manyara is not confined to bird life only; animals such as buffalo, elephant, giraffe, impala, hippo and a great variety of smaller animals also inhabit the park.

Overnight at Lake Manyara.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Lake Manyara - Serengeti National Park

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This morning we enter the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, a beautiful rolling landscape with periodic views over the Ngorongoro Crater. Before descending onto the Serengeti Plain, we'll stop at a viewpoint overlooking the crater.

The name "Serengeti" derives from a Maasai word meaning "Land-without-end." This is a land of superlatives, both in the vast landscape that surrounds you and the incredible biodiversity it supports. It is here that you have a chance to witness one of the most compelling natural dramas on earth -- the annual migration, a sight unparalleled anywhere in the natural world. Our afternoon game drive provides an excellent introduction to this fantastic landscape and the biodiversity it supports. Today's journey is roughly 5 hours, depending on animals and lodge placement.

Overnight in the Serengeti National Park.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 12 Serengeti National Park

Today we have a full day of game viewing on the Serengeti. We will visit the "kopjes," a series of low, incongruous hills dotting the open landscape that often provide a vantage point for hungry predators contemplating the endless stream of hooved animals parading past them. Depending on the season and the timing of the rains, up to 1.5 million wildebeest and a half a million zebra embark on a single-minded and perilous quest for water and grazing land. Following this spectacle, of course, are the meat-eating opportunists, hoping to capitalize on the physical toll this journey exacts on the desperate grazers. Even outside of "migration" time, large herds are still seen as they bear their young and feed, gaining strength for their annual return to the park's northern reaches. Resident species that do not migrate make for rewarding animal viewing in any season.

It may be possible to take an optional hot-air balloon safari over the plains at daybreak; today is the best day to participate in this activity -- details will be sent upon booking.

Overnight in the Serengeti National Park.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 13 Serengeti - Olduvai Gorge - Ngorongoro Conservation Area

Travelling back to Ngorongoro today we make a stop at Olduvai Gorge, site of the Leakey excavations in the 1960s and 70s that established this region as the prehistoric habitat of some of the earliest species of hominids with some finds dating back 1.8 million years. Experts in the life sciences have argued that the Olduvai contribution to the story of human origins remains unsurpassed by any other prehistoric site in the world. A small museum on site outlines the unique geological and human history of the area.

Called the 'eighth wonder of the world' and stretching across some 8300 sq km, the Ngorongoro Conservation Area boasts a blend of landscapes, wildlife, people and archaeology that is unsurpassed in Africa. The volcanoes, grasslands, waterfalls and mountain forests are home to an abundance of animals and to the Maasai. Ngorongoro Crater is one of the world's greatest natural spectacles and its magical setting and abundant wildlife never fail to enthral visitors. Depending on road conditions, gorge stop, animal sightings, and lodge placement, this journey can be 5-6 hours.

Overnight in the vicinity of Ngorongoro Conservation Area.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 14 Ngorongoro Conservation Area

Today we enjoy a half-day tour in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area.* After an early breakfast we descend into the crater far below for a game drive in this incredible setting, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We explore the Ngorongoro Crater, 20 km (13 miles) wide and 700 m (2,300 feet) high where we may see the "Big Five" as well as many herbivores like wildebeest, gazelle, zebra and hippopotamus, as well as thousands of flamingos on Lake Magadi.

* In order to reduce congestion and stress on wildlife, the Tanzanian government limits visitors to half-day visits of the crater. Depending on what time "window" we are assigned, our excursion may take place first thing in the morning, or later in the afternoon (both of which are equally advantageous for game viewing, given the relatively mild climate at this altitude).

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Overnight in the vicinity of Ngorongoro Conservation Area.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 15 Ngorongoro - Gibb's Farm - Arusha

This morning we descend the Ngorongoro Highlands, retracing our steps back to Arusha via a lunch stop at Gibb's Farm. Founded during German colonial times and still privately owned, Gibb's Farm is now a small hotel perched on the outer slopes of the Ngorongoro Highlands, surrounded by coffee plantations with long views over lush and beautiful agricultural country.

We pass again through the town of Mto Wa Mbu ('Mosquito Creek'), famous for its lively cosmopolitan atmosphere and red bananas, which taste the same as regular bananas but their skins are a startling bright red.

We arrive back in Arusha later this afternoon.

Overnight in Arusha.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 16 Arusha - Fly to Zanzibar: Town Tour

This morning we fly to Zanzibar and transfer to our hotel in Stone Town.

Zanzibar is an archipelago made up of Zanzibar and Pemba Islands, and several islets. Zanzibar Island is 96 km (60 miles) long and 32 km (20 miles) wide, occupying a total area of approximately 1040 km sq (650 sq miles). It is characterised by beautiful sandy beaches with fringing coral reefs, and the magic of historic Stone Town -- said to be the only functioning ancient town in East Africa.

Zanzibar's local people are an incredible mixture of ethnic backgrounds, indicative of her colourful history. Islam is the dominant religion, and practiced by most Zanzibaris, although there are also followers of Christianity and Hinduism. Population is estimated at 800,000, with the largest concentration being Zanzibar City, which has approximately 100,000 inhabitants. Zanzibaris speak Swahili (known locally as Kiswahili), a language spoken extensively in East Africa. Many believe that the purest form is spoken in Zanzibar as it is the birthplace of the language.

This afternoon we have a walking tour of Stone Town, the old city and cultural heart of Zanzibar, little changed in the last 200 years. It is a place of winding alleys, bustling bazaars, mosques and grand Arab houses whose original owners vied with each other over the extravagance of their dwellings. This one-upmanship is particularly reflected in the brass-studded, carved, wooden doors -- there are more than 500 different examples of this handiwork. Our tour takes us to the House of Wonders, the Palace Museum (People's Palace), the old slave market, the Arab Fort, and the Hamamni Persian Baths. Stone Town has some excellent gifts shops with plenty of souvenirs and handicrafts to choose from.

NOTE: The exact order of our Zanzibar sightseeing may vary depending on variables such as weather and other logistical considerations.

Overnight on Zanzibar (Stone Town).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Jozani Forest & Stone Town

This morning we visit the Jozani Natural Forest Reserve located in the central east region of Zanzibar Island, home to the rare red colobus monkey, endemic to Zanzibar. These monkeys are full of character and roam freely. They can also be seen at very close quarters just outside

the reserve's perimeter and are incredibly photogenic. Jozani is home to other species including Syke's monkeys, small buck and bushpigs.

This afternoon is free to enjoy Stone Town. Most of the houses that can be seen today were built in the 19th Century when Zanzibar was one of the most important trading centres in the Indian Ocean region. The coralline rock of Zanzibar was a good building material, but it is also easily eroded. This is evident by the large number of houses that are in a bad state of repair. Several buildings have already been renovated and the Stone Town Conservation Authority has been established to coordinate the restoration of the town to its original magnificence.

Overnight on Zanzibar (Stone Town).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Spice Tour - East Coast

Today we check-out of our town-based hotel and travel to the island's east coast.*

En route we enjoy some touring along the way. The history of Zanzibar would be incomplete without a 'spice tour' -- cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon, pepper and many other spices were as important to the Sultans of Oman as the infamous slave trade. They can be seen in the plantations just outside Zanzibar town, and our morning tour includes opportunities to dazzle the senses with fresh spices. A detailed description is given about a variety of spices and their uses in cooking and cosmetics. It is fascinating the sheer number of spices produced and their incredible value for many ailments and culinary applications.

We then travel to our resort-style hotel located on a beach outside of Stone Town.

* PLEASE NOTE that local government on Zanzibar has levied a tax of US\$1.00 per person for every night spent on the island. This amount is payable, in cash, directly to each hotel upon check-out. We regret that we are unable to pay this in advance on your behalf.

Overnight on Zanzibar.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 19 Zanzibar: East Coast Resort

A day at leisure to enjoy the beach and to rest up after our journey...

Overnight on Zanzibar.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 20 Zanzibar: Beach to Stone Town

Today we transfer back to Stone Town in order to better place ourselves for our flight to Antananarivo tomorrow.

NOTE: Due to ever-changing flight schedules to Madagascar, we may have to leave Zanzibar a day earlier or later in order to make the connection; the routing may also go through Johannesburg or Dar es Salaam instead of Nairobi. Final arrangements will be advised closer to departure. Due to a lack of air connections in the region, we regret in advance if this journey is somewhat convoluted.

Overnight in Zanzibar Stone Town.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 21 Zanzibar, Tanzania - Antananarivo, Madagascar

Today we fly from Zanzibar to Antananarivo, the Malagasy capital city (via Nairobi).

Antananarivo means 'City of the Thousand', supposedly because a thousand warriors protected it. Until the French conquest in 1895 Madagascar's history centred around the royal palace or rova, and the rock cliffs near the palace became known as Ampamarinana, 'the place of the hurling', as Christian martyrs met their fate at the command of the Queen. There was no reason for the French to move the capital elsewhere: its pleasant climate made it an agreeable place to live, and plenty of French money and planning went into the city we see today.

Overnight in Antananarivo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 22 Antananarivo - Fly to Taolagnaro - Berenty

Today we fly to Fort Dauphin (Taolagnaro). * On arrival we drive (on a very poor road, approx 4 hours) to Berenty through beautiful landscape (mountains, endemic plants, baobab, cactus, sisal). The reserve lies some 80 km to the west of Tolagnaro, amid a vast sisal plantation, and the drive there is part of the experience. For the first half of the journey the skyline is composed of rugged green mountains, and "Travellers' trees" (ravenala) dot the landscape. Near Ranopiso is a grove of the very rare three-cornered palm, Neodypsis decary.

Before reaching the spiny forest we will stop at an Antanosy 'tomb' (actually the dead are buried elsewhere) known as the tomb of Ranonda. It was carved by the renowned sculptor Fiasia. The artistry of this unpainted wooden memorial is of a very high standard although the carvings are deteriorating in the frequently wet weather.

The following species of lemur are often seen: brown lemur, ring-tailed lemur and sifaka. The lemurs here are well-used to people. There are approximately 350 ring-tailed lemurs in Berenty, and the population has stayed remarkably stable considering that only about a quarter of the babies survive to adulthood. The young are born in September and at first cling to their mother's belly, later climbing on to her back and riding jockey-style.

* Due to frequent changes to air schedules, lodge availability, and seasonal variations, the final order of our overnight points often change from one departure to another. Overall content will remain the same, but there may be some adjustments prior to your chosen date.

Overnight at Berenty Private Reserve.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 23 Berenty Private Reserve

We have a full day to experience Berenty.

Berenty is famous for its population of ring-tailed lemurs and sifakas. Henri de Heaulme, and now his son Jean, have made this one of the best-studied 260 hectares of forest in Madagascar. Although in the arid south, its location along the river Mandrare ensures a well-watered habitat for the large variety of animals that live there. In previous years the forest itself was threatened by the rampant spread of the cactus-like 'rubber vine', *Cissus quadrangularis*, but this is being vigorously tackled.

NOTE: There are some moderate to strenuous walks on this tour that, though optional, are an integral part of experiencing the highlights of the country. Reasonable level of physical fitness and steadiness on one's feet is important for the participant to fully and comfortably enjoy such tour activities.

Overnight at Berenty Private Reserve.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 24 Berenty - Taolagnaro - Fly to Antananarivo

Today we drive back to Taolagnaro (Fort Dauphin), on the same bad road, to connect with our flight back to Antananarivo where we spend

the night prior to our onward road journey to Andasibe tomorrow.

Overnight in Antananarivo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 25 Antananarivo - Andasibe: Mantadia/Analamzaotra

Today we travel by road to Andasibe and the popular rainforest reserve of Andasibe-Mantadia. The drive over the highlands and escarpment is pleasant and the scenery is stunning. Since this is in the eastern escarpment, the climate is cooler and the rain falls mostly at night. Please note that this is a full day of travel.

This area is home to at least nine species of lemur (including the recent discovery of the Aye-aye). Our most likely encounter will be with a troop of grey bamboo lemurs, which are diurnal and sometimes feed on the bamboo near the warden's house. On a nocturnal lemur hunt one should also look for mouse lemurs and the greater dwarf lemur, which hibernates during the cold season. After dinner we'll have a night walk in order to experience the sights and sounds of the forest after dark.

Overnight in Andasibe.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 26 Andasibe: Mantadia/Analamzaotra

Today we have a full-day visiting Analamazaotra Special Reserve (walks/hikes in the reserve).

This reserve protects the largest of the lemur family, the Indri. It stands about three feet high, with a barely visible tail, and black and white markings. Most visitors see Indris in Analamazaotra Special Reserve, and if they don't see them they definitely hear them. It is their voice that makes this lemur extra special: while other lemurs grunt, the indri "sings." It is an eerie, wailing sound somewhere between the song of a whale and a police-siren, and it carries for up to two miles as they call to each other across the forest. There are various legends connected with the Indri, which reveals the esteem in which the local people hold them. A popular tale tells of a man who climbed a forest tree to gather wild honey and was severely stung by the bees. Losing his hold, he fell but was caught by a huge indri which carried him on its back to safety.

This is also a good place for bird watching. There are flowering trees of a species much favoured by the Madagascar green sunbird, which has an iridescent green head and throat. There are also plenty of the cuckoo-like blue couas, blue pigeons, paradise flycatchers, two species of falcon (Newton falcon and Madagascar falcon), two species of black vasa parrot, and many others.

This afternoon we have a leisurely nature walk in the area.

Overnight in Andasibe.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 27 Andasibe - Antsirabe

We depart by road for Antsirabe, founded in 1872 by Norwegian missionaries attracted by the cool climate (1500m / 4,700 ft) and the healing properties of the thermal springs. Along the crest of the island lie the central highlands, a plateau region of red soil giving the country the nickname, "the Red Island."

Antsirabe means "place of much salt," and is the agricultural and industrial centre of Madagascar. This is the centre of a rich agricultural area lying on the slopes of the island's second highest peak. During our time in Antsirabe, we should be able to take a ponsee ponsee (rickshaw) ride.

Overnight in Antsirabe.

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Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 28 Antsirabe - Ranomafana

This morning we depart for Ranomafana.

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The village of Ranomafana is situated by a river in the lush greenness of the eastern rainforest. The name Ranomafana means "hot water" and it was the waters, not the lemurs, which drew visitors in the colonial days to this place. Today the draw is the Ranomafana National Park, a fragment of high altitude rainforest that first came to world attention with the discovery of the golden bamboo lemur in 1986.

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Overnight in Ranomafana.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 29 Ranomafana National Park

Today we enjoy morning and evening walks/hikes.

Hidden in these trees are at least 12 species of lemur: diademed (Milne-Edwards) sifaka, red-bellied lemur, red-fronted lemur, ruffed lemur and three species of bamboo lemur. At night you can add mouse lemur, avahi, lepilemur, fat-tailed dwarf lemur, and even aye-aye. Then there are more than 110 species of birds with 36 endemic; reptiles, butterflies and other insects. There is also much variety in the vegetation and scenery, all of which can be observed from well-constructed trails.

During our walks we are most likely to see red-fronted brown lemurs and perhaps the rarer red-bellied lemur. The golden bamboo lemur is less easily seen. The most memorable of the easily found lemurs is a subspecies of the diademed sifaka, Milne-Edward's sifaka. Unlike the more familiar Verreaux's sifaka which is largely white, this is dark brown with cream-coloured sides.

This evening we experience the park after dark with a night walk.

Overnight in Ranomafana.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 30 Ranomafana - Fianarantsoa

This morning we journey by road onward to Fianarantsoa. On our way we pass forest, open country, rice paddies modest country homes.

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Fianarantsoa means 'Place of good learning'. It was founded in 1830 as the administrative capital of Betsileo and is one of the more attractive Malagasy towns. The Upper Town, with its narrow winding streets and plethora of churches, is one of our stops today. Fianarantsoa also has a wonderful market, which features a great variety of herbal medicines and dried fish brought up by train from Manakara.

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On arrival we'll have an informal panoramic tour of the town including a walk up to a viewpoint overlooking the city. We'll have a walk though the old town and hope that the colourful market is on.

Overnight in Fianarantsoa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 31 Fianarantsoa - Ranohira & Isalo National Park

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Today we travel by road to the vicinity of Isalo National Park. En route we stop at Ambalavao to visit the traditional weaving atelier, Antemoro. We also visit Anjaha Park hoping to spot the ring-tailed lemur.

In Isalo, we encounter the the warm weather of the south amidst a different kind of scenery -- the savanna of the vast plateau of Ihorombe, near the Massif of Isalo. The Isalo National Park was created in 1962 to preserve the ancestral beauty of the site. Archaeological relics and funeral sanctuaries create a magical atmosphere made of strong contrasts. Lemur calls and bird chirps are heard in this green oasis along rivers filled with lush plants. While the sandy cliffs with rare riparian vegetation complete the picture.

Overnight Ranohira.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 32 Isalo National Park

Today we spend exploring the Isalo National Park on foot.*

Established in 1962, the Isalo National Park protects 815 sq km of sandstone massif wildly eroded by wind and rain into bizarre ridge featuring wild forms, impressive gorges and canyons, and tiny stalagmite pinnacles. The climate is dry tropical with warm temperatures all year around. One of our options today is a walk to the Piscine Naturelle where a natural stone cave overlooks a crystal-clear waterfall flowing into a deep green pool surrounded by leafy pandanus trees. This tranquil pool is a virtual oasis in the heat, and offers a welcome relief after the long hike to get there.

* NOTE: Due to the nature of the terrain and the heat in this area, the walks here are more difficult on average than others on our program. By now your Tour Leader will have a good sense of overall group abilities and individual limitations and can provide advice on your suitability for today's excursions.

Overnight in Ranohira.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 33 Ranohira - Tulear

Today we travel by road to Tulear (Toliara) to better place us for tomorrow's flight back to 'Tana.

Overnight in Tulear.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 34 Tulear - Fly to Antananarivo

Today we fly back to the capital. Ever-changing flight times-permitting, we may be able to accomplish some sightseeing upon arrival.

Tana will surprise you with its rice paddies, pollution, Asian influences, lots of stairs up steep hills, palaces, cobbled streets, and churches. This is not Africa or Asia, Madagascar is totally unique. This is a bustling place with lots of churches, a mosque, a zoo and plenty of markets. The capital is basically built on 12 hills and steep steps lead to the main Independence Square in the town center. The architecture is a mixture of old wooden houses, modern offices and French colonial style buildings.

Tana does not have much in the way of "tourist attractions" per se, but we hope to take in the highlights, including the Rova, the shell of the Royal Palace built in 1864 for Queen Ranavalona II by the Scotsman, James Cameron. Everything that was wooden burned in 1996, but the imposing stone fortress of a shell still stands.

Overnight in Antananarivo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 35 Departure

□ Departure from Antananarivo.

□

□ BON VOYAGE!