

# MADAGASCAR HIGHLIGHTS

November 6-21, 2017\*

## AMPIJOROA-BETSIBOKA EXTENSION

November 21-25, 2017

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*\*Dates differ slightly from those that appear in our 2017 catalog.*

*Unique is the adjective most often used to describe Madagascar. This huge island first began to split away from the African continent during the age of the dinosaurs and has since followed an independent evolutionary course, allowing an amazing variety of different life forms to evolve from a few colonizing ancestors. Ranging from the bizarre to the sublime, this is island evolution gone wild and there is no other destination like it. Few places in the world are as threatened as the native environments of Madagascar and nearby islands. Intense human settlement and population increase for at least 1500 years has led to the destruction of vast areas of the native habitats. Rainforests that once covered the wet eastern slope of the island are now fragmented and mostly inaccessible. While the special spiny forests of the south western coastal strip are still in good shape, there are few protected examples of these restricted habitats. Long gone are the giant lemurs, dwarf hippos, and elephant birds, and today even the remaining lemurs and native birds survive precariously. There is a sense of urgency to visiting Madagascar. The country is at a critical turning point and if ample reserves are not created and protected in the near future, many species will soon become extinct. This tour is designed to visit a wide range of Madagascar's habitats, with enough time in each to seek out the special endemic birds, lemurs, and other fascinating creatures.*

*Of the birds, five entire families are endemic to the Madagascar region: the Mesites, Ground-rollers, Cuckoo-roller, Asities and Madagascar Warblers. Recently the previously endemic family of Vangas has expanded to include the Woodshrikes of Asia. The distinctive Vasa Parrots, (including a species from New Guinea) have been elevated to a new family within the parrot assemblage. An endemic subfamily of large cuckoos, the couas, forms an important part of the avifauna. Even more remarkable is the high degree of endemism among the land-birds. November is the best season for observing the avifauna, as breeding activity begins before the rains break in November. Birding here is not easy, for the diversity is not high, the habitats are often dense, and bird populations are low (40% of the endemic species are considered endangered or at risk)--but the big reward is seeing some very distinctive forms that few naturalists have encountered in the wild.*

*The lemurs are the most famous of Madagascar's wildlife. These "primitive primates" range in size from the tiny mouse lemurs (at 7 inches total, the smallest primates in the world) to the child-sized Indri. These attractive and appealing animals are found throughout the forests. Of the 87 surviving species (recent taxonomic revision has split some thirty new species) some are colorful, social, and diurnal while others are drab, solitary, and nocturnal. Other larger mammals are few on the island, but include primitive insectivores like the tenrecs and several carnivorous relatives of the mongoose like the Fossa. Among the highly endemic reptile fauna is an incredible array of weird and colorful chameleons (over 60% of the world's species), cryptic leaf-tailed geckos and fluorescent day geckos, skinks and other lizards. The flora is surprisingly rich, including over 1000 species of orchids and many spectacular flowers that have become popular in tropical gardens the world over. In the desert*

*southwest we will find some of the world's strangest plants.*

*This year we will offer an extension to the remote Ampijoroa National Park. This extensive protected area with nearby wetlands will give us the chance to add more Madagascar endemics to our list including several highly threatened species like Madagascar Fish-Eagle, Madagascar Harrier, Madagascar Jacana, White-breasted Mesite, Schlegel's Asity and Van Dam's Vanga. A boat trip on the nearby Betsiboka Delta will enable us to search for the critically endangered Bernier's Teal and Madagascar Sacred Ibis. We will also see a good variety of different lemurs including the beautiful Coquerel's Sifaka.*

**November 6-8, Days 1-3: Travel To Madagascar; Arrive Antananarivo.** Participants should plan to arrive at Antananarivo Madagascar (known as *Tana*, airport code TNR) before or on November 8. We will meet in the lobby of our charming hotel at **6:30 p.m. on November 8**, for a get acquainted session and dinner. Depending on your route to Tana, either through Paris (CDG) or Johannesburg (JNB), flights may require departure from the U.S. on November 6. Transfers between the airport and hotel will be provided for all participants, regardless of your arrival time. The beautiful boutique hotel conveniently located near the airport is home to quite a few birds. The gardens can produce Madagascar Bruch-Warbler, Madagascar Wagtail, and Madagascar Bulbul. We have occasionally seen Madagascar Hoopoe and the scarce Sooty Falcon here. When you arrive in this bustling city, one cannot help being struck by the distinctness of the Malagasy culture, a strange mixture of African and Asian influences which are reflected in the landscape and architecture. This is a delightfully friendly and safe city (although be aware of pickpockets) despite the sometimes seeming chaos and undoubted poverty. Upon request, the VENT office will be happy to make lodging arrangements for early arrivals.

NIGHTS (November 6 & 7): In transit

NIGHT (November 8): Hotel Aubeis Vert, Antananarivo (Tana)

**November 9, Day 4: Morning Birding Lake Alarobia; Fly to Tulear.** This morning we will make our introduction to Malagasy birding with an excursion to nearby Lake Alarobia, a private sanctuary. Set within the city, this reserve protects large numbers of ducks and egrets from persecution including good numbers of White-faced Whistling-Duck and Red-billed Teal usually accompanied by smaller numbers of Hottentot Teal and with luck both Knob-billed (Comb) Duck, and the rare endemic Meller's Duck. A fantastic assortment of egrets roost or breed in the sanctuary, including a few splendidly adorned Madagascar Pond-Herons as well as the more common Squacco Heron, Black and Dimorphic egrets. Mascarene Martins are common overhead and in surrounding areas we may encounter Madagascar Kestrel, Madagascar Coucal, Madagascar Swift, Madagascar Wagtail, Madagascar Brush-Warbler, Madagascar Swamp-Warbler, Madagascar White-eye, Madagascar Munia (Mannikin) and Red Fody.

This afternoon we will fly southwards to Tulear on Madagascar's arid southwest coast, followed by a one-hour drive on the recently improved road to Ifaty. The coastline north of Tulear is delightful with clear blue water, small fishing villages fringing coral reefs, and beautiful sandy beaches. The zebu cattle are the cultural basis of this region and carts drawn by them are a frequent sight. Amidst the coastal scrub, cotton fields, and dry flats near town can be found some of the typical birds of the west-coast, including Namaqua Dove, Madagascar Bee-eater and Madagascar Cisticola.

NIGHT: Les Dunes d'Ifaty, Ifaty

**November 10, Day 5: Spiny Forest Reserve, Ifaty.** The semi-desert region of southwestern Madagascar is unique, and this will be an outstanding day to explore the spiny forests, patches of coastal scrub, mudflats, and an area of freshwater lakes. These isolated, dry forests are botanically fascinating with some of the strangest plants on our planet found here. The spiny forest is composed almost entirely of endemic plants such as *Didiera* (spiny octopus-like trees), cactus-like *Euphorbia*, *Pachypodium* (Elephant's Foot) and *Adansonia* (towering baobab trees).

Birding along a trail through the spiny forest is a fascinating experience, for the birdcalls are distinctly different from anywhere else in the world. Venturing out at dawn, before the day becomes uncomfortably hot, we will stroll amongst the myriad multi-stemmed succulents, squat baobab trees and thorny scrub in search of such spectacular endemics as Madagascar Harrier-Hawk, Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk (scarce), Madagascar Sparrowhawk, Banded Kestrel (scarce), Madagascar Buttonquail, Madagascar Green-Pigeon, Gray-headed Lovebird, Lesser Vasa Parrot, Olive-capped and Running Couas, Madagascar Hoopoe, Thamnornis (re-named Subdesert Tetraka), as well as Sickle-billed, Hook-billed, White-headed, Lafresnaye's and Chabert Vangas, Archbold's Newtonia, Sakalava Weaver and Souimanga Sunbird.

Two very special birds here are the near mythical Subdesert Mesite, which we may find adopting its strange, cryptic posture on a thorny branch, and the Long-tailed Ground-Roller, an elusive ground dweller best located by its low, hooting call. This elusive bird is primarily crepuscular in habit and can be extremely difficult to locate, but by rising early and working the forest at dawn we have a good chance of seeing it. Local villagers who specialize in showing visitors the Long-tailed Ground-Roller will track these through the sandy desert and locate them for us. They track them by their footprints, an amazing feat by a family team. We regularly have superb views of this strange bird, which is somewhat reminiscent of a roadrunner. While looking for the ground-roller and other special birds, we will have the opportunity to see many of the strange plants of the spiny desert. As the day warms up, so too does reptile activity and with a bit of luck we should see the numerous Three-eyed Lizards or a Chameleon species or two. We may be lucky enough to find a beautiful Spider Tortoise, rare Dumeril's Boa or obscure mammals like Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec or day roosting Hubbard's Sportive-Lemur.

Following our early morning excursions to the spiny desert, we will return to our beachside hotel for the afternoon. With its relaxed ambiance and very comfortable facilities, our hotel is a most pleasant place in which to rest and relax during the heat of the day. When the tide is low, some interesting shorebirds turn up on the adjacent beach. Shorebird possibilities include Whimbrel, Common Greenshank, Terek and Curlew Sandpipers, White-fronted Plover and Greater Sandplover.

During the late afternoon we will search for the rare endemic Madagascar Plover in addition to the more abundant and widespread Madagascar Lark, Kittlitz's and Three-banded Plovers. With luck, an area of freshwater wetlands may produce Little Bittern, Greater Painted-Snipe and the elusive Baillon's Crake. If necessary we will return to the Spiny Forest in search of any of the unique birds we may have missed.

NIGHT: Les Dunes d'Ifaty, Ifaty

**November 11, Day 6: Ifaty to Tulear to Nosy Ve; On to Anakao.** This morning we will board a speedboat for our excursion to the small, uninhabited, coralline islet of Nosy Ve. Located to the south of Tulear, Nosy Ve supports a notably accessible colony of Red-tailed Tropicbirds, which permit close approach as they have been left unmolested by local people due to a taboo or *fady*. With a bit of luck we may also find the spectacular Crab Plover roosting on the sandbar here, as well as good numbers of other migrant shorebirds and a large tern roost (if the tide is correct). Please note it may be a wet landing at Nosy Ve so a pair of sandals or reef/water shoes is useful here. After exploring Nosy Ve we will then continue by boat to the spectacular Anakao Ocean Lodge, hopefully having seen all of the birds. The lodge, which is stunningly beautiful, is also home to the endemic Littoral Rock-Thrush and Subdesert Brush Warbler. On previous visits we have seen Lafresnaye's Vanga, Madagascar Button-quail and flocks of drinking Grey-headed Lovebirds.

NIGHT: Anakao Ocean Lodge, Anakao

**November 12, Day 7: Tsimanapetsotsa National Park.** Last year we visited this remote national park and our visit was so successful we felt it would be great to include it in every tour. This large national park is centered on a giant brackish lake that supports a resident population of both Greater and Lesser Flamingos. The nearby escarpments of uplifted limestone have numerous sink holes and caves (complete with blind fish). The old

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growth woodlands of Baobabs and Elephant Foot trees support good populations of Verreaux's Coua and Lafresnaye's Vanga while Ring-tailed Lemurs can also be quite numerous. Giant Banyan figs grow into the sinkholes in a tangle of roots and shady canopy. Fruiting trees may attract Greater Vasa-Parrot, Madagascar Green-Pigeon whilst the nutritious leaves are food for the rare Radiated Tortoise. On the barren flats that cover the margins of the lake can be found quite good populations of the rare Madagascar Plover and small freshwater soaks will give us our best chance for the elusive Madagascar Sandgrouse.

NIGHT: Anakao Ocean Lodge, Anakao

**November 13, Day 8: Anakao to Isalo.** In the early morning we will depart Anakao by boat for Tulear. Here we will explore a small flat-topped mountain aptly known as *La Table* to search for the recently discovered and increasingly rare and localized Red-shouldered Vanga. The coral scrub is also home to the localized endemic Verreaux's Coua.

Later in the morning we will visit the Arboretum d'Antsokay, an excellent birding location where we have a good chance of finding Madagascar Buttonquail, Madagascar Nightjar at a day roost, Gray-headed Lovebird, Madagascar Coucal, Crested Drongo, Chabert Vanga, Green-capped Coua, and Sakalava Weaver. The Arboretum, developed by Swiss botanist Petignat Hermann (1923-2000) is a fabulous botanic garden that demonstrates both the floral diversity of south-west Madagascar and also the medicinal use of plants by the local tribal people.

Following lunch we will drive north towards Isalo in the remote interior of southern Madagascar, a geographically diverse region of grasslands, rugged sandstone formations and uplifted massifs. The grasslands here are home to some special birds including the elusive Madagascar Partridge and the declining Madagascar Harrier (a split from Reunion Harrier), while the localized Forest Rock Thrush can often be spotted around our excellent hotel. If conditions are suitable, one night at dusk we will try and spotlight the Torotoroka Scops-owl.

NIGHT: Isalo Rock Lodge, Isalo

**November 14, Day 9: Isalo to Zombitse Forest National Park and return to Tulear.** We will spend the best birding part of the day exploring the Zombitse Forest. This forest is a remnant example (185 square kilometres) of dry deciduous forest that allows comfortable access to a network of forest trails. Birding is outstanding at Zombitse which is home to more than eighty species, most of which are endemic. It is home to the extremely localized Appert's Tetraka. A recent genetic assessment has indicated that the Madagascan Tetrakas should be elevated to a new endemic family - the Malagasy Warblers called the Bernieridae. Zombitse also provides a very good chance to see Coquerel's Coua, Crested Coua (one of the most attractive members of this endemic subfamily known for its wide range of weird vocalizations), Giant Coua (another southern specialty), displaying Cuckoo-Roller, the scarce Rufous Vanga and with a bit of luck hopefully a day roosting White-browed Owl. Other birds we will look for include the Madagascar Sparrowhawk, Madagascar Buttonquail, Madagascar Turtle-Dove, Lesser Vasa-Parrot, Gray-headed Lovebird, Madagascar Magpie-Robin, Common Newtonia and Madagascar Paradise-Flycatcher.

We have an excellent chance to see the spectacular nearly-white Verreaux's Sifaka, amongst the most spectacular of all lemurs. Less well known but frequenting Zombitse are the Red-fronted Brown Lemur, the nocturnal Pale Fork-marked Lemur and endemic Zombitse Sportive Lemur. These smaller lemurs can sometimes be seen at their day roosts in tree hollows.

NIGHT: Hotel Moringa, Tulear

**November 15, Day 10: Tulear and return flight to Antananarivo.** Depending upon the flight schedule we may try for any of the specialty birds we have been unable to locate. We will then fly north to Antananarivo and settle into our comfortable boutique hotel with its own wetland out front. This is a good place for photography as the birds are quite tame. Over many previous visits we have seen some quite good species here ranging from

Humblot's Heron, Madagascar Pond-Heron and Baillon's Crake. More common are a variety of ducks and herons ranging from White-faced Whistling-Duck to Black Heron.

NIGHT: Hotel Tamboho, Antananarivo

**November 16, Day 11: Tana to Perinet.** Following breakfast we will make our way out of Tana and head eastwards across the Highland Plateau to the famous reserve of Perinet and the superb forest of Mantadia National Park. Along the way we should encounter several open country species such as the peculiar Hamerkop, Yellow-billed Kite, Plain Martin and Madagascar Cisticola. With a bit of luck we may also find the attractive Madagascar Pratincole at Mangoro River. It is about a five hour drive to our final destination.

Our accommodations for the next four nights will be in the spacious and very comfortable Sahatandra Hotel, ideally located at the edge of the forest. Being so close to the reserve means that wildlife is often right on our doorstep: fluorescent green day geckos scuttle on the outside walls of our chalets; Madagascar Wagtails flit along the paved walkways. We may well encounter such gems as Madagascar Nightjar, Greater Vasa-Parrot and African Stonechat right around our cabins.

NIGHT: Sahatandra River Hotel, Andasibe

**November 17-19, Days 12-14: Mantadia National Park and Perinet Special Reserve.** Among the most sought-after of Madagascar's birds are those families endemic to the Malagasy region: the peculiar Mesites, exquisite Ground-rollers, the Cuckoo-Roller, elusive Asities, Madagascar warblers, and the near endemic Vangas and Vasa-Parrots. Some species, such as the ubiquitous Cuckoo-Roller, Pitta-like Ground-Roller, and a number of the vangas are reasonably common and regularly encountered, while many of the others remain rare, local or elusive. We will of course make a special effort to locate as many representatives of these charismatic families as possible, as well as those of the endemic sub-family, the couas. In order to be successful we will need at times to focus on certain local specialties and this is especially so in Madagascar's eastern forests.

The moist rainforest cloaking Madagascar's eastern escarpment protects the richest assemblage of birds and other wildlife on the island, including many that are rare or poorly known. The superb Mantadia National Park protects a large expanse of some of Madagascar's most gorgeous primary forest. Though it has only recently been opened to the public, Mantadia is now an essential destination on any birding trip to Madagascar, having rapidly gained a reputation as an excellent site for a handful of highly sought-after forest birds. Not least among these are a number of species formerly considered to be restricted to the poorly accessible rainforests of the far northeast, such as Red-breasted Coua and Scaly Ground-Roller. We will have at least one (likely two) full mornings exploring Mantadia where there is a good chance of several highly desirable forest birds such as Madagascar Blue-Pigeon, Scaly, Pitta-like and Short-legged Ground-roller, Crossley's Vanga (previously called a babbler, recent DNA-analysis suggests this species is an aberrant terrestrial vanga!), Common and Dark Newtonias, Green and Stripe-throated Jerays, and Forest Fody. We also hope to find Red-fronted and Blue Couas, Velvet Asity (increasingly difficult), and flocks of vangas that may include White-headed, Chabert, Blue, Red-tailed, Hook-billed or the bizarre Nuthatch Vanga. Small wetlands in the area are home to the endangered Madagascar Grebe and the shy Meller's Duck. Other attractions in this scenically beautiful reserve include the vocal Black and White Ruffed Lemur, the elusive Diademed Sifaka (considered by many to be the world's most beautiful lemur) and Painted Mantella, a spectacularly colored forest frog reminiscent of South America's poison-dart frogs. Much of the birding in Mantadia National Park can be enjoyed from the wide road that runs up into the reserve, although seeing the skulkers of the forest understory will require that we take to the forest trails.

On one of our days here we will explore the Perinet Special Reserve. Over 100 species have been recorded from within this small reserve and here we will search for such specialties as Madagascar Crested Ibis, France's Goshawk, Madagascar Flufftail, the elusive Madagascar Wood-Rail, White-throated Rail, Madagascar Rail,

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Madagascar Blue-Pigeon, Greater Vasa-Parrot, Madagascar Cuckoo, Madagascar Spinetail, the sensational Madagascar Pygmy-Kingfisher, Madagascar Paradise-Flycatcher, Ashy Cuckoo-shrike, Ward's Flycatcher, Tylas Vanga, Madagascar Starling, Long-billed and Spectacled Tetrakas, White-throated Oxylabes, Nelicourvi Weaver and Souimanga Sunbird. If we are lucky, we may locate one of Perinet's forest rarities such as Madagascar Serpent Eagle, Henst's Goshawk, Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk or Dusky Tetraka.

While in the Perinet area, we will also make a special effort to see the reserve's most famous residents: the huge, singing lemurs known as Indri, the world's largest extant species of lemur. If we are fortunate we will be treated to a close encounter with a family group, their eerie, whale-like cries echoing through the forest. Other lemurs we hope to see include Common Brown and Grey Bamboo lemurs, and we will also search known roosting sites for the nocturnal Eastern Avahi, often called the Woolly Lemur. Another "must see" member of the island's fauna is the Giraffe-necked Weevil, a tiny red and black insect named for its unusually proportioned neck.

Nocturnal outings are thrilling and indeed an essential part of any trip to Madagascar, and Perinet is undoubtedly one of the best sites to search for the island's night birds, lemurs and chameleons. Specialties here include Madagascar Long-eared Owl, Rainforest Scops-Owl and the rare and little known Collared Nightjar. While seeing these birds will be the focus of our walks, we will not neglect the immense variety of non-avian life that emerges after dark. Although Madagascar is famous for the spectacular lemurs that have adapted to a daytime existence, a number of species of these primitive primates remain, like their African cousins the galagos, denizens of the night. We will search for and should find Crossley's Dwarf and the diminutive Brown Mouse lemurs, and we may also encounter some of Madagascar's other evolutionary masterpieces such as the bizarre Lowland Streaked Tenrec. The island's reptile and amphibian fauna is equally fascinating and even the most hardened birder would not fail to be impressed by the plethora of colorful and bizarre frogs, chameleons and geckos to be seen on an evening's stroll through the rainforest. In particular, we will search for the giant Parson's Chameleon and two species of bizarre leaf-tailed geckos: the huge *Uroplatus fimbriatus* and the aptly named *Uroplatus phantasticus*.

NIGHTS: Sahatandra River Hotel, Andasibe

**November 20, Day 15: Return to Tana.** We will have a final morning of birding to target any species we may have missed before we retrace our steps to Tana. Our beautiful hotel is located close to Tana Airport. Quite a few birds live in the gardens including Madagascar Hoopoe and the occasional Barn Owl if we are lucky.

NIGHT: Hotel Au Bois Vert, Antananarivo (Tana)

**November 21, Day 16: Departure for home.** Participants not continuing on the extension will have time in Tana to shop, do some sightseeing or relax. A shopping excursion to a nearby craft market can also be organized. Transfers will be arranged from the hotel to the airport according to departing flight times.

## **AMPIJOROA-BETSIBOKA EXTENSION**

**November 21, Day 1: Antananarivo to Ampijoroa.** Today will largely be a travel day as we make the drive north and west from Antananarivo towards the town of Mahjunga. One stretch is quite good for the rare Madagascar Harrier but largely the habitats have been completely deforested. As we reach the Betsiboka River we should find Madagascar Pratincoles in good numbers on the riverine rocks and hopefully the Madagascar Flying-fox (a giant fruit bat) will have a camp nearby we can study in the telescope. In the afternoon we will reach Ampijoroa and a walk about the park headquarters may well produce Sickle-billed Vanga and the stunning Coquerel's Sifaka.

NIGHT: Blue Vanga Lodge, Ampijoroa

**November 22, Day 2: Ampijoroa National Park.** We will spend the day searching for all of the key endemic species this outstanding park offers. With luck they may well have Schlegel's Asity staked out nesting. Hopefully after superb views of this quite unbelievable bird we will move into drier habitats to search for White-breasted Mesite and Van Dam's Vanga which may require some searching for as they are both low density species. After a break in the heat of the day we will take a boat trip out on a nearby reservoir, Lac Ravelobe, where we hope to see one of the pairs of the extremely rare Madagascar Fish-Eagle. The extensive wetlands support good populations of the localized Allen's Gallinule and it is a good site for a view of the scarce Humblot's Heron. We will have a short drive to a nearby village wetland that supports one of the few known populations of publicly accessible Madagascar Jacana. Hopefully African Pygmy-geese will be present. This species decline seems to be linked to the proliferation of introduced aquatic weeds like Water Hyacinth. There will be plenty of other birds to distract us ranging from Madagascar Green-Pigeon, Coquerel's and Red-capped Coua, to Rufous and White-headed Vanga, Madagascar Pygmy-Kingfisher and with luck Madagascar Crested Ibis, Sooty Falcon or the scarce Banded Kestrel.

NIGHT: Blue Vanga Lodge, Ampijoroa

**November 23, Day 3: Ampijoroa to Mahjunga; afternoon boat-trip to Betsiboka Delta.** We will have the cool of the morning to try for any of the special birds we are still trying to track down. Later we will make the drive to Mahjunga where we will embark on a boat trip to the Betsiboka Delta. Here with the right timing we should find the Bernier's Teal and the Madagascar Sacred Ibis. Both species are only currently being seen in this location. In addition there should be quite a few shorebirds including the delightful Terek Sandpiper. We will go spot-lighting on one night on the edge of the national park. We should have a good chance to see Gray Mouse-Lemur, maybe Milne-Edward's Sportive Lemur and with luck the Western Avahi.

NIGHT: Karibo Lodge, Mahjunga

**November 24, Day 4: Return to Antananarivo.** Depending upon the flight schedule of Air Madagascar we may fly back or drive back. Upon returning to Antananarivo we will enjoy a farewell dinner and toast our memories of extraordinary Madagascar.

NIGHT: Hotel Tamboho, Antananarivo (Tana)

**November 25, Day 5: Departure for home.** The remainder of your time in Tana will be free for you to shop, do some sightseeing or relax. A shopping excursion to a nearby craft market can also be organized. Transfers will be arranged from the hotel to the airport according to departing flight times.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

- This Madagascar tour itinerary depends closely on Air Madagascar internal flights which may change without notice. If this happens, the itinerary will be altered and we will take all reasonable precautions and actions to ensure the tour follows the advertised itinerary as closely as possible, with all of the special regions still being visited.
- In some areas it can be very hot. Field activity is best restricted to early and late in the day. On most mornings, we will be up and out very early.
- At times in Perinet and Ifaty, we may be walking on narrow and/or steep forest trails (entirely optional) to find a few special birds. Virtually all birding will be done on foot which does require substantial time spent walking these trails. Anyone considering this tour should be able to spend several hours at a time on their feet (with rest breaks in between). Our pace will, however, be slow as we bird in the forests.
- Please note if exploring Antananarivo on your own that pickpockets are possible, especially in the crowded markets, so please secure your valuables in your room safe before heading out.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 8 participants.

**TOUR LEADER:** **Dion Hobcroft**

**Dion Hobcroft** has been working for VENT since 2001. He has led many tours (more than 150) to Australia, New Guinea, New Zealand, Bhutan, Indonesia, India, China, Southwest Pacific, Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Japan, Russia, Alaska, Tanzania, Uganda, Madagascar, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and the Antarctic. In 2007 and 2013–2016 alone, Dion showed more than 2,000 species of birds to VENT clients. His informative, relaxed, and educational nature, combined with sharp eyes and ears, has established Dion as a favorite of many tour participants. His fieldwork for over 40 years on birds and other terrestrial vertebrates has allowed him to amass an extraordinary knowledge of the biodiversity in the Asia-Pacific region. Born in Tasmania and based in Sydney, Dion has traveled widely throughout Australasia, listing over 1,200 species, placing him in the top echelons of the region's birders. He is very tuned-in to the songs of bird species in the Asia-Pacific region and specializes in rare and elusive species. He is delighted to show these skulking rarities to his travel companions. Dion has published several papers on field ornithology, served on national and state rare bird committees, managed *Birdline NSW*, run introduction to ornithology courses for Sydney University, and, before he traveled so continuously, was a popular speaker with various natural history societies. Dion has worked for many research and government agencies ranging from the Antarctic Division, Department of Environment NSW, Agriculture Protection WA, Taronga Zoo, Australian Museum, and the Queensland Department of Primary Industry. Dion lives in Sydney with his wife, Lise, and two children, Grace (age 15) and Daniel (age 11).

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the main tour is **\$8,795** in double occupancy from Antananarivo and includes all meals from Dinner on Day 3 through breakfast on Day 16, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation, internal flights (economy class), boat ride on Day 9, park entrance fees, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leader and local guides. It does not include airfare from your home to Antananarivo and return, airport departure taxes, visa fees, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may be charged.

The single supplement fee for the main tour is **\$925**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodation, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

The fee for the extension is **\$2,595** in double occupancy from Antananarivo and includes all meals from lunch on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 5, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation, internal flights (economy class), park entrance fees, boat ride on Day 2, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leader and local guides. It does not include airfare from your home to Antananarivo and return, airport departure taxes, visa fees, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may be charged.

The single supplement fee for the extension is **\$175**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodation, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The initial deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you would like to pay your initial deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay the initial deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard, Visa, or American Express at the time of registration. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com)) should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.



**PAYMENTS:** Initial tour deposits may be made by MasterCard, Visa, American Express, check, money order, or bank transfer. All other tour payments, including second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc., must be made by check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.*

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where you, the customer, are not at fault and have not cancelled in violation of the terms and conditions of any of the contract for transportation or travel services, all sums paid to VENT for services not received by you will be promptly refunded by VENT to you unless you otherwise advise VENT in writing.

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**FUEL & FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES:** In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

**TRIP INSURANCE:** **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness.** VENT recommends *Travel Insured International* as our preferred insurance provider. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. Contact *Travel Insured International* (800-243-3174 or [www.travelinsured.com](http://www.travelinsured.com)) prior to registration for details. Not all insurance

providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than *Travel Insured International*, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

**Medical Insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation during the trip is recommended for this tour.** This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by *Travel Insured International*. If you do not choose to purchase the insurance through Travel Insured International, you may do so through another insurance provider. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: [www.insuremytrip.com](http://www.insuremytrip.com).

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. ***Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be responsible for any air ticket penalties.***

**BAGGAGE:** To ensure your comfort and that of your companions, please limit yourself to one medium-sized suitcase or duffel bag and one carry-on bag.

**CLIMATE:** The temperatures will be warm to hot during the day and pleasantly warm at night. At Perinet, it can be cloudier and distinctly cool at night. At Ifaty, Tulear and Isalo, it can become very hot during the mid-day. We retire for a siesta during the heat of the day when possible. Although this is Madagascar's dry season, rain is possible.

**CLOTHING:** Light-weight, neutral (dull)-coloured clothing that can be easily rinsed out and dried quickly (cottons or cotton blends) is recommended for the field. Long-sleeved shirts and long pants will help protect you from insects, thorny plants and sunburn. Shorts will be appropriate for some occasions. A sweater or jacket is useful for cooler nights and early mornings. Bring a bathing suit as there will be opportunities to swim. Dress is casual throughout. For protection from the sun a good wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses and sunscreen is highly recommended. You should also bring raingear including an umbrella. Strong-soled shoes or hiking boots are essential as we will spend a good amount of time on our feet. On the island of Nosy Ve we will have to land on the beach (a wet landing) and reef-walking shoes or sandals are ideal for this. Some of the trails may be steep and possibly slippery (if it has been raining) for very limited sections, typically about a 100 yards or less. We have designed this tour to avoid as much of the difficult terrain as possible and overall it is an easy tour. A walking stick can be useful on these sections. The uphill walks are all optional. Generally an inexpensive laundry service will be available throughout the tour which should help you in deciding what to pack. Making use of laundry service means you will not need to bring as many items of clothing as you would otherwise.

**CURRENCY:** ***It is only possible to exchange US dollars, Euros and Pounds Sterling in Madagascar*** and the best place to do it is at the airport upon arrival. Please remember cash notes have to be printed after 2007, and in mint condition to be exchanged, with no tears, discoloration or other damage. The local currency known as Ariary-Ariary is the only acceptable or usable form of cash. Visa, American Express, MasterCard and Diners Club credit cards are accepted at just a very few locations in Tana, but have limited use elsewhere in the country. Please note Ariary-Ariary cannot be changed outside of Madagascar when you leave, so if you have surplus currency please change it back at the International Airport.

**DOCUMENTS:** A passport valid for at least six months at the time of entry with at least three blank pages is required for United States and Canadian citizens to enter Madagascar. U.S. and Canadian citizens staying in Madagascar for less than 30 days will be able to receive a visa upon arrival. The cost for this in 2016 was \$30 USD payable in cash on arrival. Citizens of other countries should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions. **It is very important that your passport be on your body at all times. We caution against carrying your passport in your backpack or purse.**

If you have been to certain countries in mainland Africa (excludes South Africa) or Asia or had a stop-over for one night *en route*, Madagascar health authorities may check to see that your cholera and yellow fever inoculations are up to date and shown on your International Health Card, although this has not been the case in recent experience.

**EQUIPMENT:** You should pack a pair of binoculars in good repair along with a belt pack or backpack (for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medication, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope, however, if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so although there is limited use for scopes on this tour. You will want to pack an alarm clock, a water bottle or canteen, a strong flashlight, a washcloth, film or flash cards and batteries for your camera (**Madagascar is a very photogenic place and offers lots of opportunity for photography**), and between-meal snacks such as trail mix. Insects are few and generally not a problem, but the best way to avoid any chance of disease is to not get bitten, so bring a small amount of repellent such as Cutter's or OFF. Rarely, small terrestrial leeches can be a minor nuisance at some sites, but fortunately they also are discouraged by standard insect repellents. A walking stick can assist with balance if going up or down hill on the very limited sections where we may encounter this terrain.

**COMMUNICATION:** Wifi is available in most of our hotels, typically just in the lobby area. It is often quite slow and frustrating but ok for small emails, not good for sending videos! It is quite easy to get your phone set to international roaming and text message home as an easy alternative. Contact your wire provider for the best plan. As a general rule turn off your mobile data in your phone settings when overseas.

**HEALTH:** It is important to note that modern medical facilities and prescription drugs are not common in Madagascar, so you should be in reasonable health to consider this tour. If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

Malaria is present including the chloroquine-resistant strain; all areas are at risk with the coastal regions more so than others. There are several options for malaria prophylaxis including mefloquine (lariam), malarone, and doxycycline. These medications are available by prescription only. Please consult your physician or local travel clinic for recommendations. Yellow fever vaccinations are required for entry into Madagascar if you are arriving from an infected area. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), or you can check their website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel). Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html) (click on travel health).

**MISC:** Electricity - 220/240 volts, two prong European type plugs  
Language - Madagascar: Malagasy, French; very little English is spoken  
Time - Madagascar is 8 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time

**SUGGESTED READING:** A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

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The following three recently published books are highly recommended and offer complete and up to date information on all the birds and mammals of Madagascar:

Garbutt, Nick. *Mammals of Madagascar; a Complete Guide*. 2007. A&C Black Publishers. A superb, detailed account of all Madagascar's mammals. **This is a MUST for this tour.**

Morris, Peter and Frank Hawkins. *Birds of Madagascar, a Photographic Guide*. 1998. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press. A very attractive, useful and informative photographic guide to the birds of Madagascar.

Sinclair, Ian and Olivier Langrand. *Chamberlain's Birds of the Indian Ocean Islands (including Madagascar)*. 2013. Struik Nature. A complete and pocket-sized account of all birds in Madagascar, Mauritius, Reunion, Rodrigues, Seychelles, and the Comoros. **This is THE field guide to have on tour.**

Other books worth considering are:

### ***Birds***

Langrand, Olivier. *Guide to the Birds of Madagascar*. 1990. New Haven: Yale University Press. This expensive, yet informative guide is now somewhat outdated but worth reading for additional life history information about the birds of Madagascar.

### ***Mammals***

Harcourt, Caroline. *Lemurs of Madagascar and the Comoros: The IUCN Red Data Book*. 1990. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. (available from Island Press: 1-800-828-1302). Not intended to be a field guide, but has black-and-white photographs of each species, and information on ecology and distribution. A new edition is expected in 2006.

Mittermeier, R. A., I. Tattersall, W. R. Konstant, D. M. Myers and R. B. Mast. *Lemurs of Madagascar*. 1994. Conservation International. ISBN 1-881173-08-9. A durable paperback field guide to all species, with range maps and photos and discussions of lemur biology. Probably the book on lemurs for most visitors.

Tattershall, Ian. *The Primates of Madagascar*. 1982. New York: Columbia University Press. A more comprehensive and technical work; also contains chapters on the extinct, giant lemurs and the early history of western exploration of Madagascar.

### ***Reptiles & Amphibians***

Glaw, Frank and Miguel Vences. *A Fieldguide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Madagascar*. 3rd ed. 2007. M. Vences & F. Glaw Verlags GbR. ISBN 3-929449-01-3. This is the recommended fieldguide to the diverse reptiles and amphibians of Madagascar. Other chapters briefly cover the mammals and freshwater fishes of Madagascar.

### ***General Natural History***

Garbutt, Nick, Hillary Bradt, and Derek Schuurman. *Bradt Wildlife Guides: Madagascar Wildlife, a Visitor's Guide 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* 2001. Bradt Publications. A useful and compact guide to general wildlife and ecotourism destinations in Madagascar, with superb photographs.

Burney, David A. and Ross D.E. MacPhee. *Mysterious Island: What Killed Madagascar's Large Native Animals?* 1988. Natural History: 47-55.

Durrell, Gerald. *The Aye-aye and I: A rescue mission in Madagascar*. 1993. Harper Collins. An enjoyable book on Durrell's adventures in Madagascar.

Goodman, Steven and Jonathan Benstead (editors). *The Natural History of Madagascar*. 2004. Chicago University Press. This huge volume is the ultimate guide to Madagascar's natural history with sections written by the leading experts covering every environmental aspect. Much new research is presented here in a comprehensive form, however, this book is only recommended for those with a serious interest in the subject.

Jolly, Alison. *A World Like Our Own: Man and Nature in Madagascar*. 1980. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Jolly, Alison. *Lords and Lemur: Mad Scientists, Kings with Spears and the survival of diversity in Madagascar*. 2004. A highly recommended book about Berenty in particular and Madagascar wildlife in general.

Houghton Mifflin.

Jolly, Alison and Frans Lanting. *Madagascar's Lemurs: On the Edge of Survival*. 1988. National Geographic. 174(2):132-161.

Lanting, Frans. *Madagascar: A World Out of Time*. 1990. Aperture Press.

Preston-Mafham, Ken. *Madagascar, A Natural History*. 1991. Facts On File, Inc. (460 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016). ISBN 0-8160-2403-0. Foreword by Sir David Attenborough. Includes 300 superb color photographs. An excellent coffee-table book on Madagascar.

Shoumatoff, Alex. *Look at That*. New Yorker, March 7, 1988: pp 62-83.

Tyson, Peter. *The Eighth Continent: Life, Death and Discovery in the Lost World of Madagascar*. 2000. Avon Books. A highly recommended and informative book with recent coverage of a wide range of Malagasy natural history and cultural topics.

Wilson, Jane. *Lemurs of the Lost World: Exploring the Forests and Crocodile Caves of Madagascar*. 1995. Impact Books. An enjoyable read about two expeditions and further wildlife explorations in Madagascar.

Wright, P.C. *Lemurs Lost and Found*. Natural History, July 1988: pp 56-60.

### ***Fish***

Lieske, E. and R. Myers. *Collins Pocket Guide to the Coral Reef Fishes of the Indo-Pacific and Caribbean*. 1996. Harper Collins. This comprehensive book illustrates over 2000 species of coral reef fishes and most of the species likely to be seen in Madagascar are covered.

### ***General Travel***

Bradt, Hilary. *Bradt Country Guides: Madagascar*, July 2014. Bradt Publications. **The recommended travel guide**. Others are the Lonely Planet Madagascar and Comoros guide and Marco Turco's "Visitor's Guide to Madagascar".

Dodwell, Christina. *Madagascar Travels*. 1995. Hodder & Stoughton. A story of the author's travels through Madagascar, with particular emphasis on the cultural and social aspects of traditional Malagasy life.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on January 27, 2017, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and

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the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.

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