

## ESSENTIAL MADAGASCAR

17 SEPTEMBER 2023 - 5 OCTOBER 2023

Tour Cost (\$AUD):TBA  
Single Supplement (\$AUD):TBA

Tour Duration:19 days



### OVERVIEW

*Essential Madagascar is a unique adventure visiting the remarkable island nation that broke away from the Gondwana supercontinent more than 150 million years ago. Our 19-day tour is an exciting mix of extraordinary flora and fauna, spectacular scenery and vibrant culture as we journey from the capital Antananarivo to the island's southern tip.*

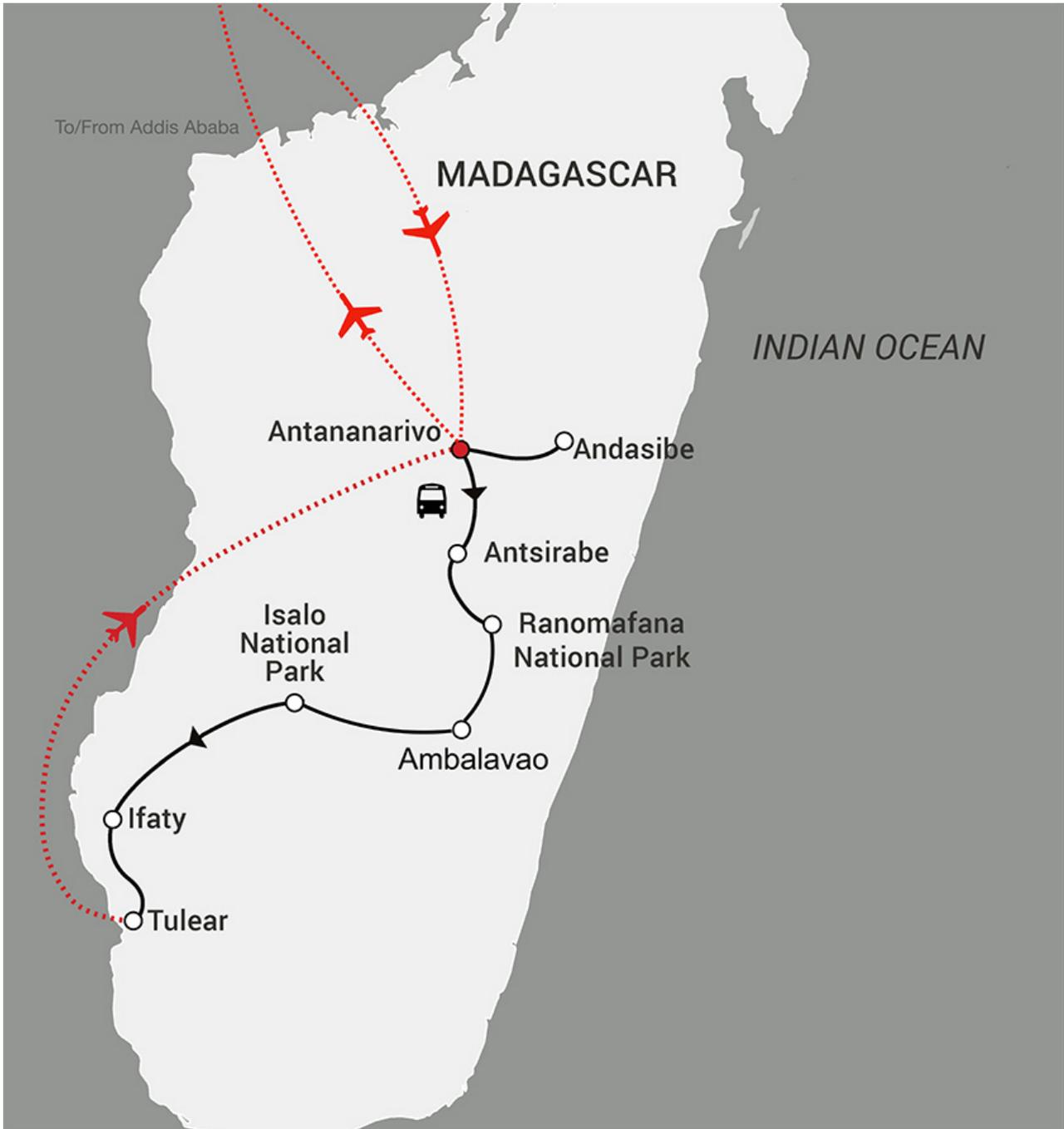
The unique island of Madagascar is like somewhere out of a Jules Verne novel; there is simply no place like it on the planet! Millions of years of evolution have bestowed on Madagascar astonishing flora and fauna, of which 80% can be found nowhere else on earth. We explore the vibrant capital, Antananarivo – affectionately known as ‘Tana’ by the locals – before heading to the central highlands and the southern part of this extraordinary island. Flying back to Tana, we then head by road to Andasibe where we visit Lemur Island and meet the unique Indri Lemur – the largest of all lemurs, often described as looking like a four-year-old in a panda suit, due to its upright posture. Along the way we absorb the music, dance and culture of the Malagasy people as our Tour Leader, Diary, guides us with warmth, care and humour through his remarkable homeland.

**Tour Fitness Level: Active**

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## TOUR MAP



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### ITINERARY

#### 17/09/2023 Australia – Dubai

Depart from your chosen capital city on your flight to Dubai.

**18/09/2023 Dubai – Addis Ababa (D)**  
**Depart Dubai Emirates EK 723, 10.30**  
**Arrive Addis Ababa 13.35**

On arrival in Addis Ababa we transfer to our hotel for our overnight stay.

#### Best Western Bole Hotel

Addis Ababa

**19/09/2023 Addis Ababa – Antananarivo (D)**  
**Depart Addis Ababa Ethiopian ET 853, 08.50**  
**Arrive Antananarivo 13.30**

On arrival into Antananarivo we transfer to our hotel which is located in a district known as 'Little Paris'.

#### Hotel Colbert

Antananarivo

#### 20/09/2023 Antananarivo (BLD)

This morning we head out to the UNESCO World Heritage site of the Summer Palace of Ambohimanga. This is the palace considered to be the cradle of Madagascar and from where the King, in the 1780s, proclaimed that 'only the sea is the limit of my kingdom'.

#### 21/09/2023 Antananarivo (BLD)

Antananarivo – or Tana, as it is affectionately known by locals – is a terraced city of low-rise buildings which form a labyrinth of arches, narrow paths, balconies and staircases. Today we embark on full day tour of this exciting city.

#### 22/09/2023 Antananarivo – Antsirabe

Leaving Tana behind we drive south, passing through typically beautiful highland country. Here the landscape is dotted with beautiful valleys and rice paddies and we have many photographic opportunities as we head towards Antsirabe. The third biggest city in Madagascar, Antsirabe it is the rickshaw capital of the island and, after lunch, we take a sightseeing tour of the city by rickshaw and discover some of the amazing arts and crafts of the Malagasy people.

#### Royal Palace Hotel

Antsirabe

#### 23/09/2023 Antsirabe (BLD)

Today we immerse ourselves in Malagasy culture which is characterised by singing, dancing and kinship. We visit a local family and learn about their traditions and customs, and experience a unique hospitality from our hosts.

#### 24/09/2023 Antsirabe – Ranomafana National Park (BLD)

Heading further south, we soon reach the woodcarving town of Ambositra. We stop here to see perhaps some of the most unusual and skilled craftsmanship to be found anywhere in the world. Some of the intricate carving and inlay work is simply stunning. Soon after Ambositra we start to see people dressed in the traditional clothing of the area, the colourful pancho lamba. Reaching the turnoff for Ranomafana National Park, we follow the Namorona River to arrive at our destination. As night falls we take a walk into the National Park to discover frogs, chameleons and the nocturnal mouse lemur, which is the smallest primate in the world.

#### Centrest Hotel

Ranomafana Village

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### 25/09/2023 Ranomafana National Park (BLD)

Today is a special one, as we enter the magnificent 41,000-hectare rainforest that is home to the golden bamboo lemur. Discovered only in 1986 and found nowhere else in the world, this lemur feeds exclusively on a native bamboo, which contains cyanide and is found only in this area. This rainforest is also home to a dizzying array of reptiles and other species of lemur including red-bellied lemurs and the amazing Milne Edwards Sifaka, commonly known as the chocolate lemur. Ranomafana is also a paradise for birdlife, much of it endemic to Madagascar.

### 26/09/2023 Ranomafana National Park – Ambalavao (BLD)

Today we take a short drive to the rustic town of Ambalavao. In a granite and almost desert landscape, Ambalavao is a beautiful small town that is typical of the Central Highlands where the houses have wooden balconies with elaborate balustrades. The town is known for its paper making, which dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Ambalavao is also renowned for an extraordinary Zebu market which takes place every Wednesday, beginning early morning. This is a highlight of our day tomorrow.

### Aux Bougainvillea Hotel

Ambalavao

### 27/09/2023 Ambalavao – Isalo (BLD)

In Madagascar, the zebu is a symbol of wealth and power. This sacred animal is often given as a dowry at weddings, and is also used as a means of transport, but also for special occasions. This morning we visit the remarkable Zebu market, where these animals are traded. Herders come from miles around to buy and sell these animals, and it is a lively and exciting spectacle. Leaving Ambalavao, we continue our drive south through the highlands. En route to Isalo we stop at Anja Park, a community-owned reserve that is home to the ring-tailed lemur

– the national animal of Madagascar – and many species of bird, including the Madagascar hoopoe and crested drongo. We then continue across the Horombe Plateau where the vegetation and landscape change dramatically. Finally we descend to the fringes of Isalo National Park.

### Hotel le Jardin du Roy

Isalo

### 28/09/2023 Isalo (BLD)

Encompassing the entire length of the Isalo massif, this 81,000-hectare national park is characterised by vast eroded sandstone formations. Along the trail there are some Bara burial sites that line the path as it passes through scenery resembling the Grand Canyon. Soon we descend further and come across an oasis where tumbling waterfalls form a natural swimming pool. This kingdom is home to an amazing array of flora, which is unique even in Madagascar. After lunch we return to our hotel where the afternoon is at leisure. Early evening we venture out to 'La Fenetre de l'Isalo' – a natural sandstone outcrop shaped like a window, which offers wonderful photographic opportunities as the sun goes down.

### 29/09/2023 Isalo – Ifaty (BLD)

After breakfast we start our journey to the southwest of the island. Along the way we see the big colourful tombs of the Mahafaly tribe, and visit a local rum-making village. Soon after we see our first ancient Baobab trees as we enter the silver grey spiny forest which finally gives way to the azure waters of the Mozambique Channel. After lunch in Ifaty we explore the incredible botanical gardens where we can see Octopus trees and Baobab trees the height of skyscrapers! The vegetation of this park is 90% endemic to Madagascar.

### Ifaty Beach Club

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Ifaty

### 30/09/2023 Ifaty (BLD)

The economy in and around Ifaty is centred on fishing. For generations the people of this area have fished employing the same traditional techniques that are used today. We visit the fascinating village of Ambolimailaka and meet fishermen and local Vezo people who inhabit this part of the island. A unique part of the country, this is a fantastic opportunity to experience the 'Zanzibar quarter' of Madagascar.

### 01/10/2023 Ifaty - Tulear - Antananarivo - Andasibe (BLD)

This morning we have some free time before transferring to Tulear airport for our domestic flight to Tana.

### Depart Tulear Air Madagascar MD 715, 11.10 Arrive Antananarivo 12.15

On arrival we transfer to Andasibe. The drive takes us through granite outcrops and then through a mosaic of paddy fields and lovely Merina villages that form the highlands of Madagascar.

### Vakona Forest Lodge

Andasibe

### 02/10/2023 Andasibe (BLD)

Perhaps the most important national park in Madagascar, Analamazaotra is home to the largest lemur in the world, the Indri. Entirely endemic and unable to exist in captivity, this vegetarian lemur resembles a panda. It has no tail, walks on two legs, and can reach a height of more than three feet. It is

sometimes described as looking like a four-year-old in a panda suit. The Indri is monogamous and when one partner dies, the other will continue mourning for its spouse for the rest of its life. The Indri is found only in this park and today there are only about thirty families in existence. This afternoon we travel to the Perinet Reserve where we visit Lemur Island. Here we have the opportunity to interact with the five species of semi-tame lemurs that live here.

### 03/10/2023 Andasibe - Antananarivo - Addis Ababa (B)

This morning we to Antananarivo airport for our flight to Addis Ababa.

### Depart Antananarivo Ethiopian ET 852, 14.30 Arrive Addis Ababa 19.10

On arrival in Addis Ababa we transfer to our hotel, for our overnight stay.

### Best Western Bole Hotel

Addis Ababa

### 04/10/2023 Addis Ababa - Dubai (B)

The morning is at leisure. Later we transfer to the airport for our flight to Dubai.

### Depart Addis Ababa Emirates EK 724, 16.00 Arrive Dubai 21.10

On arrival in Dubai we connect with the flight to our chosen Australian city.

### 05/10/2023 Arrive Australia

We arrive back in Australia today.