

Northern Madagascar



If you're unable to decide between an over-easy beach vacation or a 'lace up your boots and forge a new trail' kind of holiday, you'll dig travel in Northern Madagascar.

White-sand beaches, air perfumed with ylang-ylang and vanilla, snorkelling in a sea of emerald, mangrove swamps and centuries-old baobabs are all hallmarks of Madagascar's most interesting, diverse and, at times, disparaged region. Villages of simple homes made from sticks sit flush with the lux new tourist resorts.

The eclectic region is split into two distinct parts. Nosy Be is Madagascar's premiere kick-back-and-relax beach destination. The island is as swanky (and expensive) as the country gets, with a number of posh resorts (although they're not exactly Bora Bora luxury-wise). Overall it's a charming place, with gorgeous water and delicious seafood, where it's very easy to lose track of time for a week or so.

The Diego Suarez area is Madagascar's best-kept secret, and especially appealing to those seeking paradise lost – it sees far fewer visitors. Here you'll find two national parks still so wild that four new species of lemur were discovered in 2006 alone! There are kilometres of hiking trails through psychedelic forests of spindly red rocks and past trees with tumours shaped like giant squid growing off their sides. On the coast, palm-fringed sandy shores, sparkling sapphire water and an emerald sea keep beach bums smiling for days. Diego is the place to go if you want to race quad-bikes over dunes or try kitesurfing in one of the three beautiful bays framing the city.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Enjoying rum punch and grilled lobster under the palm trees at Chez Loulou, and catching another amazing sunset on Nosy Be's **Andilana beach** (p171)
- Indulging in a little adventure – either via quad-bike or kite-board – and checking out the brilliant scenery around **Diego Suarez** (p175)
- Taking solitary walks in the dappled rainforest of **Parc National de Montagne d'Ambre** (p184)
- Discovering spires of ruby-red *tsingy* and nearly a dozen species of lemur in the wild **Réserve Spéciale de l'Ankàrana** (p186)
- Uncovering the underwater world while diving off **Nosy Komba** (p172)



■ HIGHEST POINT: 1785m

■ PRINCIPAL TRIBE: Antakàrana

