

Destination Madagascar & Comoros

FAST FACTS

Madagascar

Population: 19,448,815

GDP per capita: €652

Average annual income per capita: €565

Average life expectancy: 62 years

Annual rate of inflation: 12%

Degrees a chameleon can swivel its eyes: 180

Length of an aye-aye's tail: 45cm

Comoros

Population: 711,417

Average annual income per capita: €464

Average life expectancy: 62.7 years

Annual rate of inflation: 5%

Fruit-bat population: 1200

They don't make places like Madagascar any more – and they never did, for *la Grande Ile* is like nowhere else on earth. Cast adrift from Africa about 165 million years ago, its cargo of strange animals and plants has been evolving in isolation ever since. Most famous are the acrobatic lemurs and bizarre chameleons, but the island's extraordinary plants include forests of spiny 'octopus' trees and bottle-shaped baobabs.

The country's biodiversity may have ancient affinities with Africa but its people definitely don't: they are descended from Indo-Malayan seafarers who arrived here along Indian Ocean trade routes a mere 2000 years ago. Their staple crop is rice grown on terraced hillsides that would be reminiscent of Indonesia – if it weren't for the villages of European-looking multistorey brick houses with shuttered windows and carved balconies. The language also has affinities with Southeast Asia, but Malagasy culture is steeped in its own brand of taboo and magic: you can still see highland families dance with their dead relatives in the 'turning of the bones' ceremony.

All this forms the backdrop to a country striving to shake off a French colonial legacy under the leadership of a sharp-suited yogurt baron named Marc Ravalomanana. Since independence, Madagascar has struggled under one incompetent and corrupt government after another; it is still one of the poorest countries in the world. President Ravalomanana's tenure began in 2002 with a controversial election win that left his opponents smarting. But so far the new boy has been as good as his word: he has repaired the main highways and introduced a new currency; his expansion of Madagascar's national park system has been met with worldwide approval; and Unesco granted the country a third World Heritage site in 2006. Growing confidence in the economy has seen \$20 billion wiped from Madagascar's foreign debt by the World Bank.

All this in four short years – a pace of reform almost unheard of in nearby Africa. Ravalomanana has clearly got his sights set on attracting foreign investment and has promised to use his entrepreneurial flair to fight poverty and hunger. Of course change comes slowly for the average citizen, but despite protestations from his political opponents public optimism was high enough to return Ravalomanana to a second term in office late in 2006.

Meanwhile the president's former rival, Didier Ratsiraka, is licking his wounds under French protection after a Malagasy court sentenced him to 10 years' jail *in absentia* for corruption. This decision had chins wagging in the capital, Antananarivo, but of more pressing concern to some has been the recovery of Madagascar's vanilla crop after devastating cyclones in 2003. Madagascar grows half the world's supply of the fragrant beans, but rival producers such as Uganda are shaping up as serious competition.

With a recent history that sounds like a Graham Greene satire, it's business as usual in the Comoros as squabbling politicians use inter-

island rivalry to secure their own powers. A peace accord between the three islands of the Union des Comores allowed for better definition of the role of the central government: each island retains its own president but presidency of the union is now shared on a rotating basis. In May 2006 a businessman and Islamic moderate educated in the Middle East, Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, was elected as the second island president, taking over from President Azali Assoumani.

In Mayotte political discussion continues to revolve around the island being recognised as a French *département d'outre mer* (overseas territory) in the coming few years, a move sought by local leaders for its economic benefits.

Getting Started

If you were brought up on tales of exotic wayfarers such as Gerald Durrell and Dervla Murphy, you probably have a mental image of Madagascar as a hot, sticky land where nothing works properly and nobody moves after midday, and where diabolical roads cause long delays for nearly everything. Well you're in for a surprise, as this is one of the most pleasant and charming countries you'll ever visit. The colonial legacy has left just enough Gallic order to keep transportation, banking and other necessities moving, without ruining this naturally fascinating land and its endemic culture. Sure, things go wrong, as they do everywhere in the developing world: bridges fall into rivers, cyclones destroy villages and buses break down. But just as some roads are slow and bumpy, many are new and smooth; taxis-brousses (bush taxis) break down with monotonous regularity but Air Madagascar flies shiny new planes; and you may get sick of rice in the *hauts plateaux* (highlands) but you can feast on seafood on the coast. There's none of the random menace that mars so many African destinations and – *merci, bon Dieu* – the food is excellent.

The main problem is deciding how to make the best use of your time – each of Madagascar's fascinating corners offers something different, but the island is so large that travel (or, if you don't use a travel agent, organising transport) will take up a fair chunk of your time. Decide whether your priority is bumming around on beaches, hiking pristine rainforests in search of lemurs, climbing bizarre rock formations or canoeing down a river for several days – to suggest but a few. Key points to remember are that you should definitely book ahead during European holiday periods, and that you will need to speak at least some French, even if it's only enough to cope with basic comforts.

The following information is intended to point you in the right direction while planning your trip – please refer to the Directory (p263) for more detailed information. Perhaps the most useful advice we can offer is to get into the mindset of the locals, who believe that what can't be changed isn't worth worrying about. The Malagasy phrase '*mora mora*' (slowly, slowly) pretty much sums up the attitude of the Malagasy to impatient or demanding travellers.

The Comoros have an indolent, carefree atmosphere, but chances are that if you're visiting these tropical islands you'll already have time on your hands and a sense of adventure anyway. The islands' small size and good roads make them pretty easy to travel around, but you'd still be well advised to prepare yourself for some frustrating moments: travelling between the islands, for example, can sometimes mean delays and it would be wise to have some time up your sleeve in case you have to stay longer than planned.

WHEN TO GO

Because Madagascar is so large, it experiences several climates simultaneously. For example, you could be pegged out on a beach in the southwest and a few days later be rugged up against the cold in the *hauts plateaux*. In general, the best time to travel in most areas is April and October/November. The only time you should avoid is January to March, when heavy rain can make many roads muddy and impassable, and when there's a high risk of cyclones in the east and northeast. The coolest time to travel is during the winter months (May to October), when the Central Highlands (including Antananarivo) can get cold, wet and windy, although it can still be hot and sunny in the west and southwest.

The west and southwest get scorchingly hot during the summer, but winter in these regions is pleasantly cool, with blue skies and little rain. Fort Dauphin

See Climate Charts (p267) for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

Antimalarials Most of Madagascar, and all of the Comoros, is a high-risk malaria area (p289).

Insect repellent Better still, don't let the blighters bite you in the first place (p292).

Waterproofs and warm clothing Much of Madagascar is colder and wetter than you think.

A decent tent with a groundsheet Tents can be hired in Madagascar, but they're not always good quality.

Water purifiers Better to treat your own water (p292) than lug litres along with you on hikes.

Modest clothing Your skimpy little number won't be appreciated in the Islamic Comoros.

Torch (flashlight) You'll need it for night walks, cave explorations and unlit camping grounds, and during power cuts.

Earplugs Taxi-brousse drivers love their radios, and cheap hotels are usually noisy, too.

Tampons Not easy to find in many places, and often expensive.

can experience rain as late in the year as July. In the east and northeast be prepared for rain and overcast skies at any time; on the Masoala Peninsula and around Maroantsetra the wettest months are from July to September.

Hotels, popular tourist attractions and all forms of transport, including planes and buses, fill up during European holiday periods, ie July to August, Christmas and Easter. Prices also go up at these times. The period between June and October is vanilla season on the east coast, so flights between towns such as Maroantsetra, Mananara and Antalaha often fill up far in advance.

The Comoros are hot and sticky year-round. If you're visiting between October and April, be prepared for torrential monsoon rains. The coolest part of the year is between April and September. In July and August plane tickets to the Comoros are expensive and hard to come by, thanks to expat Comorians returning from Europe for their annual holiday. During the holy Muslim month of Ramadan (dates vary from year to year), shops open for only a couple of hours a day, and many restaurants, bars and discos are closed.

COSTS & MONEY

Madagascar is a pretty cheap travel destination and by global standards represents good value for money, although transport is getting more expensive due to the rising cost of fuel. A couple staying in midrange hotels (solo travellers will mostly have to pay for double rooms in hotels), eating at fairly decent restaurants and travelling mostly by public transport, with the odd domestic flight, could reckon on about €40 per person per day. However, to get off the beaten track you may want to hire a 4WD for a few days, which will set you back another €90 or so per day (plus fuel). Most hotels offer significant discounts for children under 12. Budget travellers camping or sleeping in very cheap hotels, eating street meals and going everywhere by public transport can get by on about €20 per day. For both food and lodging, prices in Antananarivo and Nosy Be are a bit higher than elsewhere in the country.

Price-conscious travellers could be in for a nasty shock in the Comoros, particularly in Mayotte: fixed exchange rates and imported goods make these islands some of the most expensive destinations in the Indian Ocean. Hotel rooms, however basic, rarely fall below €25, while private taxi charters cost around €40. Meals at Comorian restaurants cost at least €7 for a main course and in Mayotte the cost is usually even higher, with pizzas costing €12 not being unheard of!

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Most books are published in different editions by different publishers in different countries. As a result, a book might be a hard-cover rarity in one country, but readily available in paperback in another. Some of the following

HOW MUCH?**Madagascar**

Cup of coffee €0.80

Seafood feast €12

Shared-taxi ride €0.90

50km bus trip €2.10

A zebu €180

Comoros

One dive €28.50

Seafood feast €12.25

Shared-taxi ride €0.80

Half-day canoe hire
€14.65

A goat €20.35

See also the Lonely Planet Index on the inside front cover.

titles may be hard to come by – your bookshop or library can advise you on availability – but we guarantee they will be almost impossible to find in Madagascar or the Comoros, so stock up on reading material before you go.

Maverick in Madagascar, by Mark Eveleigh, is a quirky tale of the author's travels on foot down Madagascar's northwest coast and the infamous western 'Zone Rouge'.

Zoo Quest to Madagascar, by David Attenborough, is a marvellously dated account of the intrepid TV presenter's trip to Madagascar in the 1960s.

The Aye-Aye and I, by Gerald Durrell, is another golden oldie – the irrepressible Durrell took his team of long-suffering naturalists and filmmakers to Madagascar to capture the island's rarest lemur.

The Coelacanth: A Fish Out of Time, by Samantha Weinberg, is a fascinating account of a quest to find the prehistoric coelacanth and has lots of good background material on the Comoros.

The Eighth Continent: Life, Death, and Discovery in the Lost World of Madagascar, by Peter Tyson, is a blend of scientific journalism, conservation politics and travelogue. The author accompanied four scientists on their journeys through Madagascar.

Lemurs of Madagascar is a pocket-sized field guide, published by Conservation International, with superb illustrations that will help you identify every lemur species.

Muddling Through Madagascar, by Dervla Murphy, is the eccentric travel writer's account of an accident-prone trip to Madagascar with her 14-year-old daughter.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Internet sites on Madagascar and the Comoros are fairly numerous, but most are in French and few are entirely up to date. The following have some or all of their content in English as well as French.

8th Continent (www.ucpzone.com.madagascar/en/) This site should convince you to visit Madagascar and support its ecotourism projects, and contribute to a greater understanding of the land and its environment.

Angap (www.parc-madagascar.com) The official website of Madagascar's national parks association has maps and information on each park and reserve in the country.

BBC Country Profiles (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles) Comprehensive background information and the latest news headlines on both Madagascar and the Comoros.

Comoros Home Page (www.ksu.edu/sasw/comoros/comoros.html) Comprehensive, if slightly random, information and a long list of links, plus some photos.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) General information on Madagascar and the Comoros, with links to traveller reports and useful websites.

Visit Madagascar (www.visitmadagascar.org) A very professionally produced website with lots of information on Madagascar and its people, landscapes and wildlife.

World Factbook (www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ma.html) Reams of rather dry statistical information on every aspect of the country. Pretty comprehensive, but this site is run by the CIA...

LANGUAGE

French is the official language in both Madagascar and the Comoros. In Madagascar it is widely spoken all over the island, although in some remote areas only Malagasy is spoken and written on menus, signs etc. If you don't speak French, you are strongly advised to learn some or travel with someone who does – especially if you're planning to travel independently off the beaten track. English is not spoken by anyone much at all, except in some hotels in major tourist centres, and that usually includes any travellers you might meet along the way. It's also extremely helpful to

'If you don't speak French, you are strongly advised to learn some or travel with someone who does'

TOP PICKS



Antananarivo
MADAGASCAR
Mozambique Channel

LEMUR-WATCHING SPOTS

You won't see these fabulous primates anywhere else, so make the most of it! Beady eyes, luxuriant fur and treetop acrobatics are all on offer at the following places.

- Parc National d'Andasibe-Mantadia (p192)
- Parc National de Ranomafana (p103)
- Réserve Spéciale de l'Ankàrana (p186)
- Réserve Privée de Berenty (p136)
- Station Forestière d'Ampijoroa (p147)

TROPICAL BEACH PARADISES

After days slogging through the jungle slipping on mud or wedged into a taxi-brousse, here are the perfect spots to kick back and indulge your inner sloth.

- Anakao, near Toliara (p127)
- Nosy Iranja, off Nosy Be (p174)
- Île aux Nattes, off Île Sainte Marie (p215)
- Lokaro Peninsula, near Fort Dauphin (p134)
- Itsandra beach, near Moroni, Grande Comore (p242)

HIKES & TREKS

Madagascar is a walker's destination. Conditions and levels of difficulty vary, but most visitors will be strapping on their walking boots at some point. These are some of the most breathtaking walks on the island.

- Grotte des Portugais, Parc National de l'Isalo (p123)
- Grands Tsingy, Parc National des Tsingy de Bemaraha (p151)
- Peninsula circumambulation, Masoala Peninsula (p223)
- Ascent of Pic Imarivolanitra, Parc National d'Andringitra (p110)
- Parc National de Mananara-Nord, northeast coast (p217)

use a travel agency or tour operator where some English is spoken – you'll find it invaluable if a flight is cancelled or something else goes wrong. Similarly, if you hire a car ask for an English-speaking driver; even if they have only basic English they will be a great asset to your trip.

You should be able to get by on high-school French and if you haven't spoken it for a while it'll soon come back to you as you'll get plenty of practice. Carrying Lonely Planet's *French Phrasebook* is a good start: the gentle, charming Malagasy can be rather reserved and a phrase or two in a language they understand will go a long way towards breaking the ice. Try to master a few basics, such as numbers, how to obtain food and accommodation, and – pretty important, this – how to get online at an internet café (once you log on to Google you're away, but French-language keyboards are the Devil's work and you'll need to negotiate log-ins and time limits).

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

The north route is around 250km, plus a bit more for Parc National de Montagne d'Ambre and Réserve Spéciale de l'Ankàrana. Flying between Diego and Nosy Be will save time.

THE NORTH

Two weeks / Diego Suarez to Nosy Be

The remote north of Madagascar offers rainforest hikes, spectacular rock formations and white beaches just waiting to be lazed upon.

Spend a few days hiking or rock climbing around colonial **Diego Suarez** (p175), then head out to sleepy **Joffreville** (p183) for a trek in the magical forest of **Parc National de Montagne d'Ambre** (p184).

Return to Diego before setting out for three days in **Réserve Spéciale de l'Ankàrana** (p186), a wilderness of caves, pinnacles and canyons.

At the end of your trip, you could continue to **Ambilobe** (p188); from there it's easy enough to find onward transport to **Ambanja** (p174) and on to **Ankify** (p174). From here you can catch a ferry across to **Nosy Be** (p160), Madagascar's premier beach destination.

On the 'big island', head north from **Hell-Ville** (p165) to **Andilana** (p171) to find the best beaches. Factor in a few days to enjoy the coral reefs and white sand of outlying islands such as **Nosy Iranja** (p174; the place to splurge on a luxury hotel), **Nosy Komba** (p172) or **Nosy Sakatia** (p173).



ROUTE DU SUD

One month / Antananarivo to Toliara

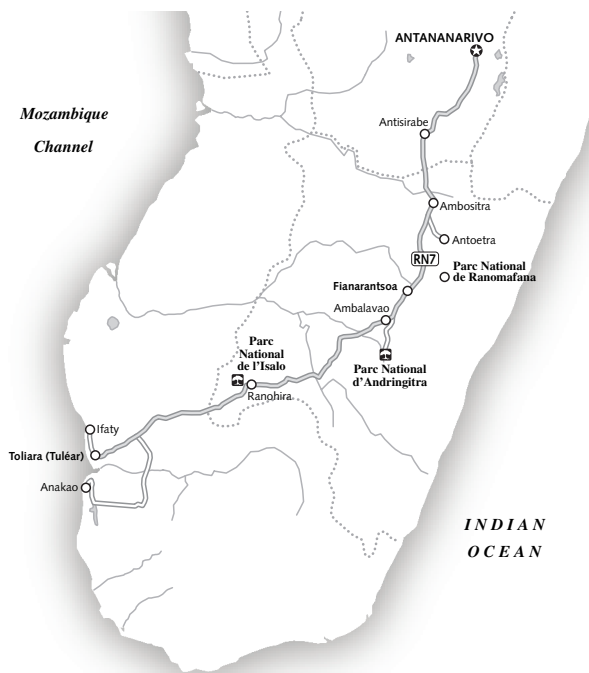
The lovely smooth tarmac of the Route Nationale 7 (RN7), commonly known as the Route du Sud, will whisk you from Antananarivo down to Toliara, stopping en route for some fantastic trekking opportunities.

Begin in **Antananarivo** (p70), with a few days to adjust to Malagasy life and take in the sights. From **Antsirabe** (p95), with its wide colonial streets and hordes of colourful rickshaws, it's a short journey to **Ambositra** (p100), the shopping capital of Madagascar, where you can take your time to choose a few souvenirs from myriad carved handicrafts. Excellent side-trips include hiking or cycling to Zafimaniry villages around **Antoetra** (p102), but allow at least three days if you want to get off the beaten track.

Further south you'll pass through spectacular mountain scenery until you reach **Fianarantsoa** (p105), but there's no real reason to linger here – backtrack to **Parc National de Ranomafana** (p103) for a pristine rainforest experience. Time your visit to the beautiful highland town of **Ambalavao** (p109) to coincide with the noises and smells of Madagascar's largest zebu market, then spend a few days hiking among the granite peaks of **Parc National d'Andringitra** (p110). **Ranohira** (p119) is an ideal base for three or four days' trekking in nearby **Parc National de l'Isalo** (p122), with its jagged sandstone massifs, cool canyons and endless plains.

After some pretty hard travelling and trekking, peg yourself out on the perfect beaches of **Anakao** (p127) or **Ifaty** (p124), near **Toliara** (p115); from there you can fly back to Antananarivo or travel on to Fort Dauphin (p130) or Morondava (p153).

The Route du Sud is 941km of tarmac, plied by numerous taxis-brousses (bush taxis) as far as Toliara. You can speed it up by leaving out some of the treks en route.



EAST COAST**One month / Antananarivo to Île Sainte Marie**

Tripping down the dizzy escarpment to the east coast, you can take in some of the country's best wildlife watching, from wailing lemurs to leaping whales, plus pirate graveyards, superb beaches and diving. Unless you take your own car all the way, you'll need to be flexible enough to travel by taxi-brousse (bush taxi), canal boat and even dugout canoe!

Begin in **Antananarivo** (p70), spending a few days strolling along the cobbled streets. Then head east along the surfaced Route Nationale 2 (RN2) to the charming village of **Andasibe** (p195), jumping-off point for the luxuriant, misty rainforests of **Parc National d'Andasibe-Mantadia** (p192). Spend at least a couple of days waking to the cries of the legendary indri (Madagascar's largest lemur species), hiking and bird-watching before winding down the RN2 again to the coast. At **Brickaville** (p197) rent a car or hitch to the tiny villages of **Ambila-Lemaitso** (p230) or **Manombato** (p230). From here, take to the waterways and lakes of the French-built **Canal des Pangalanes** (p228), stopping off at **Palmarium Reserve** (p229), or the tranquil fishing villages on the way north.

Stroll among the crumbling colonial grandeur of **Toamasina** (p197), have close encounters with semi-tame lemurs at **Parc Zoologique Ivoloïna** (p203) and seek out white beaches at **Mahavelona** (p204), **Mahambo** (p205) and **Fenoarivo-Atsinanana** (p205). Or head straight to **Soanierana-Ivongo** (p206), from where you can catch a boat across to **Île Sainte Marie** (p206). Should you need some serious R&R you could splash out on a fabulous luxury hotel, soak up the island's torrid pirate history, watch breaching whales or go diving. The brave-hearted can seek further adventures by continuing further north on the Vanilla Coast (p216).

The east coast route is around 500km of road, track, canal and sea! A shorter version leaves out the resorts north of Toamasina and heads straight for Île Sainte Marie.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

THE VANILLA COAST

One month / Île Sainte Marie to Diego Suarez

The crazy world of the Vanilla Coast is tailor-made for travellers with plenty of time and a well-developed sense of adventure. Those who do attempt this journey will not regret it.

Begin with a few days relaxing in **Île Sainte Marie** (p206) to fortify yourself for the mission ahead. From here, fly or catch a cargo boat to **Mananara** (p218) for a trip to remote **Parc National de Mananara-Nord** (p216), or spend a night on **Aye-Aye Island** (p218). Fly, trek or catch another cargo boat northwards to **Maroantsetra** (p220), the base for visiting the lost world of **Nosy Mangabe** (p219) and its dramatic surrounding coastline. From here, it's on to the stunning **Masoala Peninsula** (p223), where you can have the privilege of hiking or mountain-biking around the little-visited rainforests flanked by marine parks. The less energetic can spend a few days sea-kayaking or snorkelling at Cap Masoala or Tampoalo. Return to Maroantsetra and fly across to **Antalaha** (p225), or trek all the way to **Cap Est** (p225).

Once in Antalaha, a good road leads to the dramatic beaches at **Sambava** (p226), with a side trip to charming **Andapa** (p227) and **Parc National de Marojejy** (p227) or **Réserve Spéciale d'Anjanaharibe-Sud** (p227). These are hard hiking areas, so factor in some recovery time, or opt for easier walks in the region of Andapa. From Sambava, you can fly or continue by taxi-brousse to **Diego Suarez** (p175).

This route is around 900km, much of it without proper roads. Between June and October rough seas make cargo boats dangerous, so you'll have to walk or fly some sections.



THE WILD WEST

Two weeks / Antsirabe to Morondava

Travel in Madagascar's harsh western region, home of the fiercely proud Sakalava people, can be daunting at first, but a number of organised tours (p97) are available if you want to make things easier on yourself.

Begin in **Antsirabe** (p95), a genteel and civilised town in the Central Highlands and the best place to find a group if you're looking to do an organised tour. The hot little town of **Miandrivazo** (p150) nearby is the push-off point for canoe trips down the **Tsiribihina River** (p149). It takes around three days to drift down to the village of Antsiraraka, then three hours by 4WD to **Belo-sur-Tsiribihina** (p151).

From Belo, continue south to **Morondava** (p153), or take the rough road north to **Parc National des Tsingy de Bemaraha** (p151). Once there you can explore the Grands and Petits Tsingy, before the long day's drive back to Morondava, stopping to get those sunset photos at the impressive **Avenue du Baobab** (p156). Morondava itself is a laid-back seaside town that makes a good base for a visit to the **Réserve Forestière de Kirindy** (p156), home to the elusive *fosa* and the giant jumping rat, or a pirogue ride down the coast to the fishing village of **Belo-sur-Mer** (p157). From Morondava you can fly, sail or drive (if you're brave) down to Toliara (p115) in the south. Alternatively, you can fly or drive back to Antananarivo (p70).

The wild west route is about 630km, encompassing tarmac, river and dirt roads. Leaving out Parc National des Tsingy de Bemaraha will reduce it to about a week.



TAILORED TRIPS

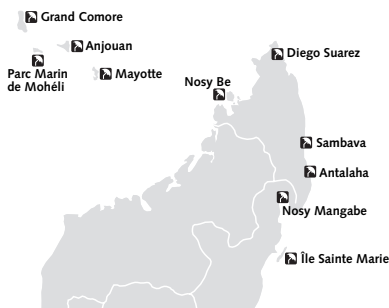
BEACH ODYSSEY

The dizzying variety of perfect beaches and coral-fringed islands of Madagascar and the Comoros means that unless you're prepared to take several internal flights or spend months travelling, you'll have to be selective.

Begin in **Mayotte** (p255), where the charms lie almost entirely underwater, with several diving companies available to help you discover them. Snorkel with sea turtles, then island-hop to the hidden bays and rocky islets of the **Parc Marin de Mohéli** (p248). Continue to **Grande Comore** (p235) to relax on the white sands of the beaches at It-sandra or Mitsamiouli. **Anjouan** (p249) offers less in the way of beaches than the other Comoros islands, but is still worth a visit for the chance to swim in the perfect bay of **Moya** (p254).

A flight or perhaps a passing yacht can take you to **Nosy Be** (p160) and its outlying islands, which provide at least a week's worth of diving, sailing, fishing or simply lazing on beaches that are fit for the most discerning castaway.

The beach odyssey needn't end there – you can always head from Nosy Be to **Diego Suarez** (p175) and set off eastwards, ticking off the beaches at **Sambava** (p226), **Antalaha** (p225) and **Nosy Mangabe** (p219), with perhaps a spot of whale-watching on your way to **Île Sainte Marie** (p206).



BIODIVERSITY TOUR

A good cross-section of Madagascar's biodiversity is accessible along or near RN7 between Tana and Toliara, although most is found in the rainforests of the eastern seaboard. This itinerary provides a snapshot of what's available.

Beginning in **Toliara** (p115), seek out some of the amazing birds in the spiny forest behind **Ifaty** (p124), then visit the fascinating botanic garden at **Arboretum d'Antsokay** (p127). From there, head north to the mountains, stopping at **Parc National Zombitse-Vohibasia** (p124) before the long drive to **Parc National de Ranomafana** (p103). Spend at least two days looking for birds and lemurs along the trails in this beautiful rainforest park, and take a guided walk to watch nocturnal species.

From Ranomafana, continue via Antananarivo to **Parc National d'Andasibe-Mantadia** (p192) to observe indris and other lemur species, plus more stunning birds, chameleons, plants and insects.

If time permits, other worthwhile options are to cut across from Antsirabe to **Morondava** (p153) for the dry western deciduous forest at the **Réserve Forestière de Kirindy** (p156), the best place to see the elusive *fosia*; fly to **Fort Dauphin** (p130) and visit **Parc National d'Andohahela** (p136), or **Réserve Privée de Berenty** (p136) for some excellent wildlife photo opportunities; and drive to **Station Forestière d'Ampijoroa** (our favourite; p147) for a superb ecotourism experience with a great variety of lemurs, waterbirds and crocodiles.



On the Road



TOM PARKINSON

Tom was originally the sole author for this 6th edition of *Madagascar & Comoros*. Tragically for everyone who knew him, Tom passed away unexpectedly in January 2007, aged 28. While conducting research for the book, Tom managed to find time to complete the full Maroantsetra–Cap Est trek (p224); this is the end-of-trip team photo. Tom is pictured 5th from the left.

A TRIBUTE TO TOM FROM BECCA

Aaron and I had the opportunity to travel to the SOS Children's Village (p99) outside Antsirabe to which Tom Parkinson's parents had chosen to donate money in his name. We asked to visit the school to take some photos for his parents, but the director was so honoured to have 'delegates from Lonely Planet', as he called us, that he organised an entire ceremony in our honour that included planting a tree in Tom's name. It was a heart-wrenching experience, laying that small tree into the earth, then listening to the director speak about the Parkinsons' generosity and how the money they had donated allowed the school to construct more buildings, including a centre to teach older children the technical skills, such as welding, construction and carving, they will need to get a job in Madagascar's sluggish economy. My speech, given in broken French, was not nearly as eloquent.



AARON ANDERSON

It was an absolutely gorgeous Monday on Andilana beach (p171). The sun was hot and I had been researching hard for the last week straight, so was treating myself to a day of snorkelling in the clear blue water in front of me, and lazing on Chez Loulou's beach chairs drinking Three Horses beer while reading Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. The dog in the picture befriended Becca and me, and would sprint across the beach and up a steep flight of stairs every time he saw us.

BECCA BLOND

I love animals, so I was really stoked when I got a chance to see my first lemur. This picture was taken in Anja Reserve (p110). It's a small community-run reserve that protects a big colony of ring-tailed lemurs. The park is small so you have a pretty good chance of getting close enough to a lemur for a photo like this one. Although the hiking isn't technical it involves lots of rock scrambling and tight spaces – not easy with a broken ankle, but I was determined to see one of these creatures. The park was started by a guide named Adrien, who was a friend of Tom's and took him trekking when Tom was researching this guide. He started to cry when I told him of Tom's passing.



For author bios, see p303.

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