



Northern Madagascar

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Why Go?

If you're unable to decide between a discovery trip and a 'lace up your boots and forge a new trail' kind of trip, you'll love travel in Northern Madagascar. Activity junkies will be spoilt for choice with everything from diving to kitesurfing, while all travellers will revel in the region's diverse landscapes.

The area around Nosy Be is Madagascar's premier beach destination, with exquisite lodges, more sea-based activities than you'll have time to try, excellent seafood and idyllic scenery. It couldn't be more different from the mainland, where arid plains, strange geological formations and wind-battered coastline lend the place a frontier feel. As for the SAVA region, those who make it to this isolated part of the country will be rewarded with world-class trekking through primordial rainforest.

The region also hosts Madagascar's flagship cultural events, the Donia and Zegny'Zo - unique chances to discover Malagasy artists.

Best Places to Eat

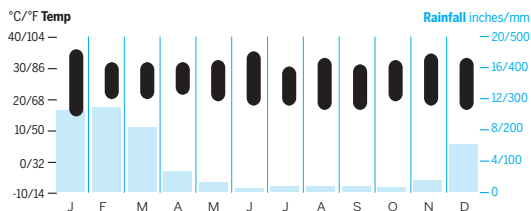
- » La Table d'Alexandre (p133)
- » Le Melville (p141)
- » Les Bungalows d'Ambonara (p128)
- » Chez Mama (p131)

Best Places to Stay

- » Eden Lodge (p137)
- » Camp Two, Parc National de Marojejy (p153)
- » Le Grand Bleu (p132)
- » Tsara Komba (p134)

When to Go

Hell-Ville



May-Jun The Donia and Zegny'Zo festivals bring together artists from across Madagascar.

Jul-Sep Hump-back whales make their annual visit to Madagascar and can be seen around Nosy Be.

May-Nov Access to the western part of Parc National de l'Ankarana is guaranteed.

i Getting There & Away

Nosy Be is the only airport outside Antananarivo (Tana) to have direct flights to France (with Air Madagascar) and Italy (charter flights). There are also direct flights from Nosy Be and Diego Suarez (Antsiranana) to the neighbouring islands of the Comoros and Réunion.

Air Madagascar (☎82 211 93; www.air-madagascar.com) flies daily from Nosy Be and Diego Suarez to Antananarivo.

Sailing yachts regularly come into Nosy Be, and many are prepared to take passengers. Their principal destinations are the Comoran island of Mayotae, Mozambique and South Africa.

The road journey from Diego Suarez to Antananarivo (Ar50,000, 24 hours) is a long and arduous one. To/from the east, expect a day of potholes between Vohémar (Iharana) and Ambilobe.

NOSY BE

Despite being Madagascar's number-one beach destination, the island of Nosy Be remains relatively low-key. It's the most expensive destination in Madagascar, and rooms can cost twice as much here as on the mainland. Still, compared to Europe, prices are competitive (except for the most exclusive resorts), and many visitors find the lack of major development and *mora mora* (literally, slowly slowly) lifestyle worth the extra euros.

The climate is sunny year-round, and Nosy Be is paradise for water-based activities. Diving is the island's top draw, but there is plenty of swimming, snorkelling and sailing for those keen to stay close to the surface.

Once you've had enough of seascapes, head for the rolling landscapes of the little-explored hinterland: as well as the brilliant Réserve Naturelle Intégrale de Lokobe, there are cocoa, ylang-ylang and vanilla plantations, crater lakes and waterfalls, and miles of dirt tracks accessible only by foot or quad bike.

Despite all these assets, Nosy Be can have a bad name as the capital of sex tourism. It's true that Ambatoloaka is seedy in places but it is by no means representative of the whole island, and definitely not of the surrounding islands, which are all tiny, remote and heavenly.

It's also worth knowing that tourism operators and the authorities in Nosy Be have come down hard on prostitution and that perpetrators face heavy prison sentences.

History

Nosy Be's first inhabitants are believed to have been 15th-century Swahili and Indian traders. Later, the island served as a magnet

for refugees, merchants and settlers of all descriptions.

In 1839, the Sakalava queen Tsiomeko fled to Nosy Be and turned to the French for help in resisting her Merina enemies. In 1841, the Sakalava ceded both Nosy Be and neighbouring Nosy Komba to France.

In recent years, with increasing tourism development and local environmental pressures, deforestation has become a problem on the island, as has destruction and damage of offshore coral reefs.

Dangers & Annoyances

The biggest scam in Nosy Be is the sale of so-called 'direct transfers' from Nosy Be to Diego Suarez. Touts and agencies will claim that after the boat trip from Nosy Be to Ankify, you will be whisked away in a comfortable minibus, all for a mere Ar80,000. Don't fall for it: standard taxis-brousses (bush taxis) are all you'll find in Ankify. So resist all offers on Nosy Be, take the boat to Ankify (Ar10,000) and once in Ankify, choose your taxi-brousse (Ar30,000) as you would at any taxi-brousse station (the one in best condition and/or the fullest).



Activities

Nosy Be has a plethora of activities. Most are sea-based (diving, snorkelling, day trips to islands etc), but operators have also started to offer activities to explore the island's beautiful hinterland.

Diving

Nosy Be and the surrounding islands are home to a rich diversity of marine life and offer world-class diving. Boxfish, surgeonfish, triggerfish, damselfish, clown fish, yellowfin tuna, barracuda, eagle rays, manta rays and humpback whales (July to September only) can all be spotted. Around Nosy Sakatia you're likely to see clown fish, barracuda, turtles, and perhaps dolphins and whale sharks.

On average, visibility on dives is about 15m year-round – much more on good days. The best months are April to December. July and August can be windy, especially to the north around Nosy Mitsio. The best months for seeing whale sharks are October and November, while manta rays are more prevalent from April to June and October to November.

Most operators run daily morning trips long enough for two dives, with boats leaving around 8am and getting back in time for lunch. Prices are about €40 for a *baptême* (first dive), €40/70 for one/two dives with