

welcome to Madagascar



What a Wonderful World

Madagascar is unique: 5% of all known ani-mal and plant species can be found here, and here alone. The remarkable fauna and flora is matched by epic landscapes of an incredible diversity: you can go from rainforest to desert in just 300km. Few places on earth offer such an intense kaleidoscope of nature. Making the best of it, however, can be challenging (and expensive): Madagascar is the world's fourth-largest island and its roads are dismal. But those who relish an adventure will come into their own: the off-road driving is one of a kind, and there are national parks that only see 100 visitors a year, regions that

live in autarchy during the rainy season and resorts so remote you'll need a private plane or boat to get there.

Turn to the Sea

With 5000km of coastline, 450km of barrier reef and 250 islands, no stay in Madagascar would be complete without a few days on the island's shores. Divers will revel in the choice of sites, from underwater 'cathedrals' to shipwrecks, and will relish the chance to see rays, whale sharks, reef sharks and many other kinds of sharks. Snorkellers will be awed by the sheer grace of turtles and marvel at the rainbow of colours displayed by corals and fish. For those keen to keep their heads above water, the idyllic beaches will prove



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Lemurs, baobabs, rainforest, beaches, desert, trekking and diving: Madagascar is a dream destination for nature and outdoor lovers – and half the fun is getting to all these incredible attractions.

(left) Sakalava woman carrying fish on her head, Morondava (p113)
(below) Crystal-clear waters of La Mer d'Emeraude (p145)



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hard to resist. And once you've swayed in your hammock to your heart's content, you can join a local fisher for a pirogue (dugout canoe) trip, go sailing to explore nearby islands or board a whale-watching boat to admire humpbacks breaching – one of nature's most majestic spectacles.

Of Life & Death

Madagascar has been populated by successive waves of migrants from various corners of the Indian Ocean, each bringing their own customs and beliefs. This cultural melting pot has evolved into an intricate set of beliefs and rituals that revere ancestors' spirits. For travellers, getting accustomed to the central role that

death plays in everyday life is often an opportunity to reassess their own beliefs, and attending a *famadihana* (traditional exhumation and reburial) or a traditional circumcision ceremony can be the highlight of a trip. There is much history to discover, too, from the 12 sacred hills of Antananarivo to the pirate cemetery of Ile Sainte Marie and the vestige of Madagascar's industrial revolution in Mantasoa.