

Welcome to Madagascar

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

Wild World

Madagascar is unique: 5% of all known animal and plant species can be found here, and here alone. The island's signature animal is the lemur of course, but there are many more weird and wonderful creatures: the eerie-looking fossa (a cat-like predator), colourful and camouflaged chameleons, oddly shaped insects, vivid frogs, graceful rays and turtles, several species of sharks, and humpback whales during the winter months. Trees and plants are just as impressive, be they the distinctively shaped baobabs, the fanning *ravinata* (travellers' palm), the hundreds of orchids or the spiny forests of the desert south.

Epic Landscapes

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. There are sandstone canyons, limestone karsts, mountains, fertile hills cascading with terraced rice paddies, forests of every kind – rain, dry, spiny – and a laterite-rich soil that gave the country its nickname of 'Red Island'. With 5000km of coastline, the sea is never very far away, turquoise and idyllic in some places, dangerous in others.

Island Adventures

Making the best of Madagascar can be challenging (and expensive): it is the world's fourth-largest island and its roads are dismal. For those who relish an adventure, however, this is a one-of-a-kind destination: the off-road driving is phenomenal, and there are national parks that only see a few hundred visitors a year, regions that live in autarky during the rainy season and resorts so remote you'll need a private plane or boat to get there. There are also more activities than you'll have time for: hiking, diving, mountain biking, kitesurfing, rock-climbing, you name it. Oh, and there are plenty of natural pools, beaches and hammocks on which to recover, too.

Cultural Insights

Madagascar has been populated by successive waves of migrants from various corners of the Indian Ocean. This cultural melting pot has evolved into an intricate set of beliefs and rituals that revere ancestors' spirits. For travellers, attending a *famadihana* (traditional exhumation and reburial when relatives can communicate with their forebears) can be the highlight of a trip. There is much history to discover, too, from Antananarivo's sacred hills to the pirate history of Île Sainte Marie.



Why I Love Madagascar

By Emilie Filou, Writer

Madagascar is unlike anywhere else I have been to – fantastically beautiful, amazingly diverse for its size (similar to France) and still so unspoilt. Vast tracts of the country are virtually uninhabited and seldom explored, and nothing comes easy. But that's what makes it so unique and rewarding. Plus the fact that after a day of bumping around in a dusty 4WD, or fighting off leeches on muddy trails, you can be served a meal worthy of a fine European restaurant, capped with exquisite rum – that's definitely my kind of travel!

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