



Western Madagascar

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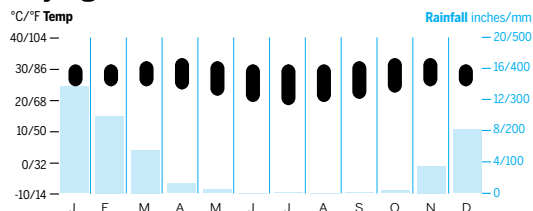
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Why Go?

Madagascar's western region – divided in two, with no roads linking the south and north – is filled with adventurous possibilities and it's from here that so many iconic Madagascar images originate. There are incredible highlights, from soulful river journeys to the otherworldly limestone spikes and crippled spires of the Tsingy de Bemaraha, the fabulous birdwatching of Parc National d'Ankarafantsika and the stomping ground of the fossa at the Réserve Forestière de Kirindy. Throw in the Allée des Baobabs, world-class resorts and so many opportunities to go out into the wilderness and you have a region that showcases all that's memorable about this remarkable country.

When to Go

Majunga



Apr–Oct The region's dry season and only time to see Parc National des Tsingy de Bemaraha.

Nov Fossa mating season at Réserve Forestière de Kirindy and your best chance to spot one.

Dec–Apr Despite the (relatively light) wet season, good for wildlife in Parc National d'Ankarafantsika.

Getting There & Around

With the exception of the well-maintained RN4 between Antananarivo (Tana) and Majunga (Mahajanga), and the RN35 between Antsirabe and Morondava, there are no sealed roads in this region so 4WD is imperative to explore sights off the RN network. The only way to get from Morondava in the south to Majunga in the north is to backtrack through Antananarivo.

BOENY REGION

The area around the regional centre of Majunga allows you to tick some of western Madagascar's most important boxes, from the country's finest cave system at the Grottes d'Anjohibe to the much-photographed Cirque Rouge. Other reasons to explore include the sedate charms of Katsepy and the bird-rich destinations of easily accessible Parc National d'Ankarafantsika, or the far-more-difficult-to-reach Mahavy-Kinkony Wetland Complex. For real adventurers there's the off-the-map allure of Parc National Tsingy de Namoroka and Parc National Baie de Baly.

Majunga (Mahajanga)

POP 232,730

Majunga is a sprawling and somnolent port town with one of the prettier waterfronts of Madagascar's seaside cities – a palm-lined seaside promenade, as well as shady arcades and walls draped with gorgeous bougainvillea. With its large Comoran and Indian populations, and historical connections with Africa, it is one of the most colourful and ethnically diverse places in Madagascar. It is also the gateway to one of western Madagascar's most diverse regions, from stunning caves and rock formations to sacred lakes and bird-rich wetlands.

History

Arab traders established a number of trading posts along the coast here in the 13th and 14th centuries, and the area became a thriving commercial crossroads between the Malagasy highlands, East Africa and the Middle East. Swahili and Gujarati traders settled in Majunga and the nearby town of Marovoay in the 19th century, and these communities were known for the exquisitely carved wooden doors that adorned their houses. A few can still be admired in Majunga and Marovoay.

Sights

La Corniche

AREA

Majunga is all about the Corniche, the palm-lined promenade bordering the sea made up of Blvd Poincaré and Blvd Marcoz. In the evening, residents come here to enjoy a stroll under the setting sun, sip a soft drink or nibble kebabs from numerous street carts. During school holidays (July to September) it has a fair-like atmosphere, with makeshift (and slightly scary-looking) Ferris wheels, horses to ride on and families at play.

At the T-junction with Ave de France, there is an enormous **baobab tree** (circumference, 21m!) thought to be well over 700 years old. It is considered *fady* (taboo) to touch it.

Tours

La Ruche des Aventuriers

ADVENTURE TOUR

(☎ 033 07 631 27, 020 62 247 79; www.laruchedesaventuriers.net; Rue Richelieu) Affordable excursions to all the main sights around Majunga, including three-day camping trips to the hard-to-reach Lac Kinkony.

Aventure & Découverte

ADVENTURE TOUR

(☎ 034 08 521 96, 020 62 934 75; www.aventure-decouverte.com; 401 Rue Ampasika) Specialises

ANTSANITIA BEACH RESORT

About 40 minutes' drive north of Majunga, along an isolated stretch of coast, **Antsanitia Beach Resort** (☎ 020 62 911 00, 020 62 023 34; www.antsanitia.com; r/bungalow/ste from €28/39/70; ☎), pronounced 'An-tsan-tee', is a fantastic place to stay. As well as lovely bungalows with wood and raffia furniture, a gorgeous pool, open-air bar, fabulous restaurant and a wonderful setting, guests enjoy numerous activities, from sailing to hiking, snorkelling, pirogue trips and cultural excursions.

The hotel has put sustainability at the heart of everything it does, so many of the activities on offer involve trips to local villages or outings with local fishers. The resort also employs and trains a number of people from the area, and it donates part of the fees from activities to the local communities' fund. Antsanitia is also doing its bit for the environment: hot water comes courtesy of the sun, 'air-con' courtesy of the sea breeze.