



## TOUR INFORMATION FOR MADAGASCAR

*These notes are designed to help you prepare for your tour. Please read carefully.*

**ENTERING MADAGASCAR:** United Kingdom citizens need to have a passport that has a minimum validity of 6 months remaining after the tour has finished and with at least three blank pages for an entry stamp. This is an immigration requirement for many countries. You will also need a tourist visa and a return air ticket to enter Madagascar.

You can get a 30-day tourist visa at the airport on arrival, paying in cash in US dollars or Euros. Click here: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/madagascar/entry-requirements> for further information about entry requirements including how to obtain a visa in advance of travel, if that's what you'd prefer to do.

Evidence of a yellow fever vaccination must be shown only if you are coming directly from an endemic zone, e.g. if flying via Kenya or South Africa.

**Important:** As soon as you book on the tour, please email the Sunbird office a **colour scan of your passport – the page(s) with your photograph and passport details. These are needed by our ground agent in order to buy internal flights.**

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport with you when traveling abroad. It can prove invaluable in helping you get a replacement if your original document is lost or stolen. You should pack the photocopy separately from the original.

**CURRENCY:** The local currency is the Malagasy Ariary (MGA) and there is currently no currency control. Madagascar banks may refuse to accept travelers checks, and cash Euros are now the most widely accepted form of payment in the locations we visit. As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, you need only bring enough money to cover items of a personal nature. Money can be changed easily at the airport on arrival or in our hotel in Antananarivo. Credit cards are only accepted in Antananarivo.

**LANGUAGE:** A little English is spoken in Antananarivo (Tana); elsewhere French is spoken in the main towns. Malagasy, the local language, is spoken everywhere.

**CLIMATE:** The climate varies from place to place, but in September it will usually be mild to warm everywhere except in the cooler mornings at Perinet, Ranomafana and Antananarivo. The warmer areas are during the middle of the day at Mahajanga/Ankarafantsika, Berenty and Ifaty. In all cases it is a dry heat, however the extension to Cap Masoala is usually hot and humid during the middle of the day.

**PACE OF THE TOUR:** On this tour we don't have terribly early starts to get to the habitats, the exceptions being Mahajanga with a 05:00-05:30 breakfast, and Ifaty around the same time. In other locations we will have breakfast between 06:00-06:30. With the frequent schedule changes that Air Madagascar is renowned for, an early flight time is always a possibility.

## MADAGASCAR: Tour Information...2

There are some instances where good general fitness is required: At Ranomafana, the walking is on steep to very steep (and often slippery) dirt trails, with many tree roots traversing the path; there are no flat areas in the Park. It should be noted that historically the special endemics occurred near the main paths but each year there is a tendency to move further into the forest and to see them it requires leaving the main path. This may include steep descents, makeshift stream crossings and steep climbs. The same also applies to the Andasibe / Mantadia area. Uphill and downhill tracks can be steep and long, and there will be pressure on the knees for long periods – a walking stick can be a great asset.

At Ifaty and Ankarafantsika, we walk on sand or sandy substrate.

Elsewhere, we may be away from the vehicle for up to five hours although it is usually a fairly steady pace and consideration will be given for the less agile.

In places like the spiny forest of the southwest, we may have to step over spiky fallen *Didiereias*, and other shrubs, as we search for the special endemics located in the sandy substrate. Walking on sand can be arduous, but it is carried out very early in the morning before the air becomes uncomfortably hot. The excursion is usually all over by 10.00, and we have a relaxing time until the afternoon.

There are long bus journeys between locations. Roads are generally in good condition, but in the central highlands they can be very winding. If a sufferer of travel sickness, appropriate medication should help. Also, inflatable cushions could make the traveling more comfortable.

**HEALTH: It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the regions you are visiting.** Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

It is recommended that you are up-to-date on routine vaccinations. It is further recommended that most travellers have protection against Hepatitis A and Typhoid.

Malaria: We have been informed that chloroquine-resistant malaria has been detected in Madagascar. Please consult with your doctor for the currently recommended prophylaxes. Useful information on all aspects of malaria, including how to reduce your chances of being bitten can be found at the website <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/malaria/prevention>

Insect repellent will provide adequate protection. Many brands use diethyltoluamide (DEET) which, while providing the best protection, can be corrosive and therefore require care when using. There are many 'natural' and less-harmful repellents available from various camping supply stores.

Yellow Fever: We understand that there is no risk of Yellow Fever in Madagascar.

Miscellaneous: Biting insects are generally very scarce. Leeches occur in the rain forest, although few at the time we are there. We recommend using insect repellents with a high concentration of DEET. The best prevention against mosquitoes is to treat your clothing with Permethrin one to a few days before you leave home. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings. Most economical is a 10% concentrate which you dilute and then treat clothing by soaking it in a large bag and then hang out to dry; be sure to look into this option well in advance of the tour.

Water is generally unsafe to drink. We shall provide bottled water for all excursions, and will always have a supply on the bus when travelling, and it will be available on the table for lunch and dinner.

### **MADAGASCAR: Tour Information...3**

You may wish to bring a broad-spectrum antibiotic such as tetracycline, in case of a stubborn bacterial infection. Bringing a basic first-aid kit (with band aids, antibiotic ointment, etc.) is a good idea.

Finally, be sure to bring adequate supplies of all personal medication, as it may be impossible to obtain them during the tour.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website [www.masta-travel-health.com](http://www.masta-travel-health.com)

**ACCOMMODATION:** We stay in good-quality hotels or bungalows with private bathroom facilities in each room. As there is limited space in some locations, it may be necessary to double up.

**LAUNDRY:** Laundry services are available at all hotels and lodges where we stay two nights or more but bring a small container of soap for your own overnight laundering.

**ELECTRICITY:** 220v AC 50Hz. If you have rechargeable batteries, ensure that you have the right adaptors/ converters able to fit the two round-pin French outlets. An international travel plug is useful and can be bought in most airport departure lounges. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

**FOOD:** Most of the meals on this tour are at quite a high standard, featuring excellent seafood on the coast and the opportunity to try some tasty traditional foods. Past participants have found the food to be particularly excellent in Ranomafana, Tulear and Ifaty; high standards are also attained in Tana, Ankarafantsika, Andasibe and Isalo.

Our tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do all we can to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all special requests within a group. Thus, participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regrettably, not be accommodated. Our tours are carefully scheduled to ensure the best possible birding experience and although the leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time, sometimes early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Any participants who need to eat at specific times may need to take supplemental food with them.

**DRINKS:** Bottled water, a soft drink or a beer (or wine if appropriate) are provided at meals, as is coffee or tea. In addition, we keep a supply of bottled water on the tour vehicles. Bottled or filtered water may also be provided in some rooms where we stay

**INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS:** All the hotels we use on this tour have Wi-Fi access except Ankarafantsika and Masoala. Clients can connect in the restaurant area but the connection is not very good.

Mobile phones can be useful while on tour but keep in mind that many countries operate on a different cellular technology. Your phone may be incompatible with the local system, so please check with your local carrier. Fortunately, with the advent of smartphones, it is easy to download applications such as Skype or Google Voice, which can make calling home free or very inexpensive. Another option is to replace the data ("SIM") card in your phone in-country.

## MADAGASCAR: Tour Information...4

Two or three providers have shop fronts at the exit of the airport. The SIM cards, including data are very cheap. If you wish to use this option you will need to check that your smart phone has a SIM card slot.

**CLOTHING:** The following items are basic. Note that men should wear long trousers to dinner in Antananarivo.

Long and short sleeved shirts (quick-drying fabrics are recommended)	Warm sweater
Sun hat and sunscreen	Comfortable, sturdy shoes
Light-weight shoes	Lightweight jacket
Lightweight washable trousers	Lightweight waterproof clothes
Folding stick can be extremely useful (even if you are not a regular user)	Wellington (rubber) boots but often these are never used.
	Folding umbrella

**MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:** Please bring the following.

Alarm clock	Cold water laundry soap (for hand washing clothing)
Notebook and pencil	Washcloth
Torch with spare batteries	Small bar of soap (extension only)
Small rucksack/daypack	Plastic bags
Pocket-knife (with bottle opener)	Wristwatch
Sunglasses	Insect repellent
Water bottle/canteen	Personal medication
Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)	

**Optional:** Telescope and tripod (recommended if you have them), spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide, swimwear, seat cushion. Note: The leader will carry a spotting scope for group use but away from open lake or shore situations the use is minimal.

**LEADER'S EQUIPMENT:** The leader will provide the following:

Telescope and tripod	Small first-aid kit
Reference books	Maps
Laser pointer	Playback equipment

**LUGGAGE:** Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

For the internal flights, airline baggage limits are two bags of no more than 70lbs. The formal baggage limit leaving Antananarivo is 20 kg (44 lbs) per person. Although they are not always levied, the excess baggage charges are high.

For excursions to Mahajanga, the planes are small and the weight limit varies according to the type of plane used, with that information only available on the day of departure. Flights from Tulear may also be subject to restrictions. On any flight, the less luggage the better. From Tulear, excess luggage can be sent back to Tana in the bus, which has fewer restrictions. However, space in the vehicles is not limitless, and soft luggage packs more easily.

As a reminder, do not pack important medicines in checked luggage; always carry them in your carry-on luggage. Conversely, remember to pack sharp, pointed items, such as pocket knives, etc., in your checked luggage.

## **MADAGASCAR: Tour Information...5**

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself**. As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Madagascar is an extremely photogenic country, although bird photography is difficult away from lakes and seashore. Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and simple to obtain. Memory cards may be difficult to obtain and will certainly be more expensive than at home so you should bring with you all that you expect to need. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture and dust-proof bags as a precaution. If you wish to 'digiscope' please ensure that you bring your own telescope.

There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds, mammals and scenery and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays.

Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

**TRANSPORT:** For the main part of the tour (Antananarivo to Ifaty), we use a two-wheel drive Bus. Generally small buses and mini-buses are used when on the other tour sections. While most roads are paved and in excellent condition, there are exceptions where conditions deteriorate. The roads on the high plateau are tortuous with many twists and turns. The leader will arrange a seating rotation. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles.

If you suffer from travel sickness, please bring appropriate medication. A small seat pillow or an inflatable neck brace may be useful for those with back or neck problems, for use both on land and water transport.

During this tour we are obliged to use air travel provided by the national carrier Air Madagascar. This organisation has the habit of changing its scheduled flights up to the very last minute. Whilst every effort will be made to alleviate the disruption to our itinerary, we cannot accept any responsibility for the decisions taken by Air Madagascar management.

A lake excursion at Ankarafantsika is our only boat trip on this tour.

## MADAGASCAR: Tour Information...6

**SMOKING:** Smoking and vaping is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group if possible.

**TIPPING:** All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses when we have group meals together in restaurants. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** Many publications for Madagascar (especially those for birds) are out of print and can be costly to obtain used. Some of them are included here simply because there aren't many other options at the current time.

### Field Guides

Hawkins, F., R. Safford, and A. Skerrett. 2016. *Birds of Madagascar and the Indian Ocean Islands*. Helm Field Guides. **Currently the best available field guide for the region – Recommended!**

Sinclair, Ian and Olivier Langrand. 2003. *Birds of the Indian Ocean Islands: Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion, Rodrigues, Seychelles and the Comoros*. BHB International, Inc. Whilst containing inaccuracies and some poor depictions of the birds, this is the recommended guide to have on the tour. A new edition is rumoured to be in the works.

### References

Bradt, H. 2011. *Guide to Madagascar*. Bradt Publications, Bucks, U.K. A general guide to Madagascar. It has no information on birds.

Dee, T.J. 1986. *The Status and Distribution of Endemic Birds of Madagascar*. International Council for Bird Preservation, Cambridge. U.K. A compilation with much ornithological information, but no illustrations.

Filou, E. and P. Stiles. 2012. *Lonely Planet Madagascar*. Lonely Planet Publications, A general guide to Madagascar. It has no information on birds.

Garbutt, Nick. 2007. *Mammals of Madagascar*. Yale University Press. This is the best mammal guide.

Glaw, Frank and M. Vences. 1994. *A field guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Madagascar*. Moos Druck, Leverkusen and FARBO, Köln ISBN 3-929449-01-3. An invaluable guide for those interested in the subject matter. Difficult to find.

Holden, T. and H. Diller. 1988. *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Africa, including Madagascar*. Collins, London. Contains excellent colour plates of all the lemurs as well as good text and distribution pages.

Harcourt, Caroline. 1990. *Lemurs of Madagascar and the Comoros: The IUCN Red Data Book*. IUCN, Cambridge. The best book available on lemurs.

## **MADAGASCAR: Tour Information...7**

**AFRICAN BIRD CLUB:** Please support this charity which aims to raise money to support conservation projects, encourages an interest in the conservation of birds, and liaises with and promotes the work of existing societies within the region. You will find their contact details and further information about the Club at [www.africanbirdclub.org](http://www.africanbirdclub.org)

**FINAL INFORMATION:** A Final Information sheet with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses, etc. and your flight tickets will be sent to you about three weeks before departure. If you have any questions about the tour please contact us.