

AFRICA · WILDLIFE · BEACHES · HIKING · ADVENTURE · ROAD TRIPS · OFF THE BEATEN PATH



Madagascar

Madagascar has been isolated for so long that most of its wildlife exists nowhere else: more than 100 kinds of lemur, chameleons small enough to sit on a fingertip, and baobabs lining red-earth roads. Journeys between rainforest, limestone tsingy and white beaches are long and slow, so pick fewer places, hire a good driver and use internal flights.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Madagascar and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 9 September 2026.

 CAPITAL Antananarivo	 CURRENCY Malagasy ariary (MGA) £1 ≈ MGA 6,114	 LANGUAGE Malagasy, French	 BEST TIME Apr–Nov
 DAILY BUDGET £30–£220 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, D, E, J, K 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 14h 30m via Paris, Addis Ababa or Nairobi ~£750–£1,250 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+3 standard time

The world's fourth-largest island feels more like a small continent, with rainforest in the east, spiny forest and semi-desert in the south-west and dry deciduous forest in the west. A first trip usually follows Route Nationale 7 south from Antananarivo through the highlands to Antsirabe, Ranomafana's rainforest, the Isalo canyons and the coast at Ifaty, with a detour east to Andasibe for the indri. A second loop flies or drives west to Morondava for the baobabs and the Tsingy de Bemaraha, and many trips end with beach time on Nosy Be.

Distances look modest on the map but take far longer on the ground, and most visitors hire a car with a driver-guide rather than squeezing into taxi-brousses. Park fees and compulsory local guides add up, but rooms and food are cheap, so mid-range travel is good value. Domestic flights are useful, though schedules change often. The wildlife is the reward: lemurs leaping through the canopy, leaf-tailed geckos camouflaged on bark and humpback whales off Île Sainte-Marie from July to September. It suits patient travellers who care more about nature than nightlife.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

WILDLIFE

Andasibe-Mantadia National Park

The most accessible rainforest from the capital, three to four hours by road, and home of the indri, the largest living lemur, whose eerie song carries across the forest each morning. Night walks reveal chameleons and mouse lemurs.
- 2

NATURE

Avenue of the Baobabs

A short stretch of dirt road near Morondava lined with Grandidier's baobabs up to 30 metres tall, some thought to be several hundred years old. Come at sunset or sunrise, when the light turns the trunks orange.

3

ADVENTURE

Tsingy de Bemaraha

A UNESCO-listed labyrinth of razor-sharp limestone pinnacles in western Madagascar, explored with harnesses, ladders and rope bridges. The access tracks are usually passable only in the dry season, roughly May to November.

4

NATURE

Isalo National Park

A sandstone massif in the south carved into canyons, palm-fringed natural pools and grassy plateaux. Day hikes lead to the Piscine Naturelle and the Canyon des Makis, where ring-tailed lemurs and sifakas live.

5

BEACH

Nosy Be

The main beach island off the north-west coast, scented by ylang-ylang plantations. Use it as a base for snorkelling at Nosy Tanikely, black lemurs in Lokobe and boat trips to quieter islands nearby.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Antananarivo

≈ 3.5 million people

The hilly, congested capital is mostly a transit stop, but the restored Rova (Queen's Palace) on the summit and the Lemurs' Park outside town fill a day before heading out.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Toamasina

≈ 330,000 people

Madagascar's main port is a humid east-coast town with broad, palm-lined boulevards; most travellers pass through on the way to the Pangalanes canal or Île Sainte-Marie.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Antsirabe

≈ 250,000 people

A cool highland spa town founded by Norwegian missionaries, known for its pousse-pousse rickshaws, gem workshops and zebu-horn crafts; the usual first overnight stop on the RN7.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Madagascar

Best time: **Apr–Nov**.

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

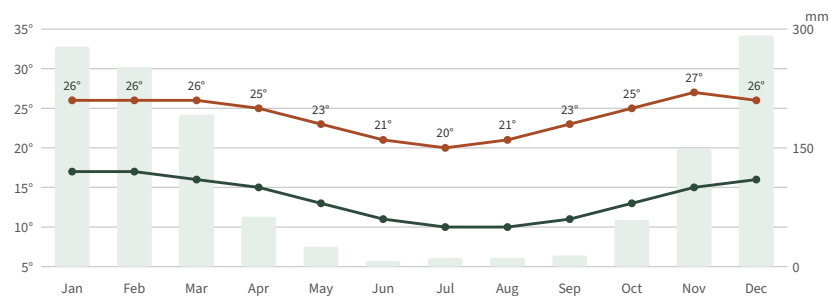
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Antananarivo

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

May–Jun	Donia Nosy Be's Indian Ocean music festival brings bands from Madagascar and neighbouring islands to the island for several days around the Pentecost weekend.
Jun	Independence Day Celebrated on 26 June with parades and fireworks, while children carry paper lanterns (arendrina) through the streets the evening before.
Jul–Sep	Famadihana In the highlands, families exhume their ancestors, rewrap them in fresh silk shrouds and dance with them to brass bands; attend only if invited, usually through a guide.

How much does Madagascar cost?

SHOESTRING £30 per person / day ≈ MGA 183,426 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £90 per person / day ≈ MGA 550,277 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £220 per person / day ≈ MGA 1,345,121 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Romazava The national dish: a light beef broth with brèdes mafana, a leafy green that tingles on the tongue, ladled over a generous plate of rice.	Ravitoto Cassava leaves pounded to a dark-green paste and slow-cooked with fatty pork, sometimes with coconut; rich, earthy and always served with rice.	Mofo gasy Slightly sweet rice-flour cakes cooked in round moulds over charcoal, sold at street stalls at dawn with a cup of coffee.
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Getting around

Most visitors hire a car with a driver-guide, which makes slow roads comfortable and solves rural logistics. Taxi-brousses (shared minibuses) cover the whole country cheaply but are cramped and slow. Madagascar Airlines flies to Nosy Be, Morondava, Toliara, Fort Dauphin and Diego Suarez, saving days, but timetables change at short notice. The Fianarantsoa–Manakara railway is an adventure rather than dependable transport.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



220V — bring a UK-to-C/D/E/J/K adapter

DIALLING CODE

+261

TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

TIPPING

Tip national park guides, drivers and porters at the end of a trip, in ariary; in restaurants 5–10% is appreciated but not expected.

ETIQUETTE

Respect fady, local taboos that vary from village to village and site to site; ask your guide. Don't point directly at tombs, and always ask before photographing people.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Ivato International Airport (TNR), Antananarivo; Fascene Airport (NOS), Nosy Be

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance or police emergency: Telephone: **17**

Mobile: **117**

To contact the police station directly, call **19**, or **119** from a mobile phone.

Fire: Telephone: **18**

Mobile: **118**

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

TIME ZONE

UTC+3 (standard time)

DRIVING

On the right

Visas & entry for Madagascar

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can visit Madagascar for up to 15 days without a visa. You must pay a 10-euro administration fee on arrival and be ready to show your onward or return tickets.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya

Dengue

Hepatitis B

Measles

Polio

Rabies

Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

High risk of malaria

- There is a high risk of malaria in Madagascar: antimalarial tablets recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Madagascar

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Sun 1 Nov 2026	All Saints' Day
Fri 11 Dec 2026	Republic Day
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Mon 8 Mar 2027	Women's Day
Sun 28 Mar 2027	Easter Sunday
Mon 29 Mar 2027	Easter Monday · Martyrs' Day
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Thu 6 May 2027	Ascension Day
Sun 16 May 2027	Pentecost
Mon 17 May 2027	Pentecost Monday
Sun 30 May 2027	Mother's Day
Sun 20 Jun 2027	Father's Day
Sat 26 Jun 2027	Independence Day
Sun 15 Aug 2027	Assumption Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Malagasy

ENGLISH	MALAGASY	SAY IT
Hello	Manao ahoana	ma-now AHN
Thank you	Misaotra	mee-SOW-tra
Please	Azafady	a-za-FAHD
Excuse me	Miala tsiny	mee-AH-la TSEEN
How much is this?	Ohatrinona ity?	oo-a-TREEN-oon EE-tee

Know before you go

Leave a spare day before your international flight home: domestic flights are often rescheduled or cancelled at short notice.

Bring euros in cash to change at banks or bureaux; ATMs are found only in larger towns and mainly take Visa, and cards are rarely accepted outside upmarket hotels.

Book a reputable driver-guide early for July, August and October, the busiest months, and agree in writing whether fuel, park fees and the driver's meals are included.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.