



MADAGASCAR: 6-DAY MASOALA PENINSULA PRE-TOUR

12 - 17 OCTOBER 2023



Helmet Vanga is a member of one of the four endemic avian families of Madagascar.

This Masoala Peninsula birding tour visits the largest intact lowland rainforest in all of Madagascar. Due to its geographical separation, and deforestation in areas surrounding the peninsula, it means several species of rare and exotic wildlife are now restricted to Masoala Peninsula. The area is surely one of the continent island's least disturbed and beautiful areas, with untouched rainforest sweeping right down to clean, white-sand beaches. The lodge that we stay in on Masoala Peninsula is right on the edge of the rainforest and we often wake up to the calls of **Greater Vasa** and **Lesser Vasa Parrots** and fall asleep to the sounds of **Rainforest Scops** and **White-browed Owls**. Of course the highlight of any Masoala Peninsula birding tour will likely be the unbelievable **Helmet Vanga** (of which we have an excellent chance of seeing) as well as the even more range-restricted and rare **Bernier's Vanga**. Further tricky species, which are easier here than anywhere else on the main Madagascar birding circuit, include **Brown Mesite**, **Scaly** and **Short-legged Ground Rollers** and **Madagascar Pratincole**.



*The range-restricted **Bernier's Vanga** will be searched for in the lowland forests of Masoala Peninsula.*

Masoala Peninsula supports several rare and range-restricted lemur species such as **Red Ruffed**, **White-fronted**, **Seal's Sportive**, **Masoala Fork-marked** and **Moore's Woolly Lemur**. The lowland rainforests of Masoala are also home to good numbers of the largest, and most bizarre nocturnal lemur, the **Aye-aye**, although sightings of this most-wanted lemur are far from guaranteed.

This Masoala Peninsula birding tour is a pre-tour to our **Best of Madagascar: 14-day Birding and Wildlife Tour** and can also be booked as a stand-alone tour. It can also be combined with our preceding pre-pre-tour, **Madagascar: 7-day Northwest (Ankarafantsika/Betsiboka Delta) Pre-tour**, and, following the main tour, with our **6-day Berenty Reserve Extension**.

Itinerary (6 days/5 nights)

Day 1. Flight to Maroantsetra

We fly to Maroantsetra and transfer to our hotel. Birding around the hotel grounds is unfortunately very limited and besides **Crested Drongo**, **Malagasy Coucal** and **Malagasy Palm Swift**, we're unlikely to see too much else. A short walk to the nearby estuary may however produce some water birds such as **Purple** and **Striated Herons**, **White-fronted Plover**, **Greater Crested** and **Lesser Crested Terns**, **Eurasian Whimbrel** and **Common Sandpiper**. In the evening we will however look for the striking and cute **Lowland Streaked Tenrec** which is fairly reliable around the lodge grounds at night.

Overnight: Masoala Resort, Maroantsetra



Lowland Streaked Tenrec can be seen in our lodge grounds in Maroantsetra.

Day 2. Boat transfer to Masoala National Park

Today we will take a boat trip across Antongil Bay, Madagascar's largest bay. We travel past the island of Nosy Mangabe and eventually reach the Masoala Peninsula, which contains Madagascar's largest tract of lowland rainforest and its largest national park, in the form of Masoala National Park. The boat crossing is normally fairly quiet bird wise however we may see **Greater Crested** and **Roseate Terns**.

On arrival, we will quickly unpack and head out onto the trails behind our ecolodge heading into the nearby rainforest where we can get started on our long list of targets. Some of the birds we will target in this section of the rainforest might include **Brown Mesite**, **Blue Coua**, **Madagascar**

Spinetail, Madagascar Blue Pigeon, Velvet Asity, Red-tailed and Chabert Vangas, White-throated Oxylabes, Long-billed Bernieria and many others. During our time in Masoala's rainforests we will be on the lookout for **Madagascar Ibis** which quietly feed on the forest floor and are easily overlooked. In the early evening we might see **Madagascar Pratincoles** hawking insects overhead while the night sounds often include **Rainforest Scops** and **White-browed Owls**.

The best time for birding in the tropical lowland rainforests of Masoala Peninsula is during the mornings, with bird activity dropping off markedly in the afternoons. As such, our routine generally involves spending the entire morning out hiking and birding, then coming back for lunch and mostly taking the afternoons easy to bird around the lodge grounds (where **Greater Vasa** and **Lesser Vasa Parrots** may be seen, or perhaps the resident group of **Eastern Lesser Bamboo Lemurs**) or just enjoy the serene setting and perhaps a dip in the ocean.

In the evenings we can do a night walk or two where we may encounter various chameleon species and **Seal's Sportive** and **Moore's Woolly Lemurs** while the *crème de la crème* would be the rare and almost alien-looking **Aye-aye**.

Overnight: [Ecolodge Chez Arol](#), Masoala



White-browed Owl is often seen from our camp on the edge of the forest.

Days 3 – 4. Birding Masoala National Park

We bird the incredible forests and remote tropical beaches of Masoala National Park for some of Madagascar's most awesome birds, including **Helmet** (top of our list of target birds), **White-headed** and **Nuthatch Vangas, Red-breasted** and **Red-fronted Couas, Short-legged** and **Scaly Ground Rollers, Brown Mesite, Cuckoo-roller**, and many other sought-after birds.

On one of these days we will visit another nearby section of Masoala National Park which protects a different type of forest habitat, this being the littoral forest which is less dense, has a much lower canopy and is dominated by pandanus palms. Here our primary target is the range-restricted and highly sexually dimorphic **Bernier's Vanga** which is fairly reliable here. Other species which are often easier to find (and get better views of) in this forest include **Blue Vanga**, **Common Newtonia**, **Stripe-throated Jery** and **Malagasy Green Sunbird**. The coastal rock formations here often hold the tricky **Madagascar Pratincole** too.

Of course, we will be on the lookout for some incredible lemurs during our daytime birding hikes too and hope to find **Red Ruffed** and **White-fronted Lemurs**.

Overnight: [Ecolodge Chez Arol](#), Masoala



Madagascar Pratincole can be seen along Masoala Peninsula's coastline.

Day 5. Boat Transfer to Maroantsetra, flight to Antananarivo

Today our time on the beautiful Masoala Peninsula ends and we return via our boat trip to Maroantsetra and from there fly to Antananarivo. Once back in Tana we will transfer to our hotel.

Overnight: [Relais des Plateaux](#), Antananarivo

Day 6. Departure, or day 1 of main trip

Today either your international flight will leave for home or you will start on our Madagascar main tour.

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration:	6 days
Limit:	6 – 8
Dates:	12 – 17 October 2023
Start:	Antananarivo (Tana)
End:	Antananarivo (Tana)
Price:	€2,650 per person sharing, assuming 6-8 participants, plus about €832 for the domestic flights, which we will book for you (2023)
Single supplement:	€132 (2023)

At request clients can upgrade to the new lodge in Masoala, given a significant surcharge.

Price includes:

Meals
Accommodation
Guiding fees
Entrance fees
All transport while on tour
Bottled water throughout the tour

Price excludes:

International flights
Return flight Tana/Maroantsetra/Tana
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts
Drinks
Laundry
Personal insurance
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))