



## BEST OF MADAGASCAR BIRDING TOUR

### TOUR-SPECIFIC INFORMATION



*The rainforests of eastern Madagascar hold such beauties as **Pitta-like Ground Roller**.*

## TOUR OUTLINE

This 14-day Madagascar birding tour gives you the opportunity to see a great many Madagascar endemics and near-endemics while also allowing you to experience bizarre and unique wildlife such as **Giraffe-necked Weevil**, an assortment of strikingly patterned lemurs and many chameleon species (Madagascar is home to the world's largest and smallest chameleon species)! This tour takes you from the rainforests of the central plateau to the otherworldly dry spiny forest of southwestern Madagascar, all the way enjoying endemic and unusual birds and wildlife.

## PACE OF TOUR

This Madagascar birding tour is a fairly lengthy tour which may be tiring at times. One of the particularly tiring elements of this tour is the need for some very early starts, to ensure that we can get our birding in early before it heats up too much (this is especially the case while birding in the spiny forest of the southwest). The tour includes a lot of time on your feet walking in the hilly rainforests of eastern Madagascar and also birding in the sandy, dry spiny forest of the southwest.

To ensure we take advantage of the early morning peak in bird activity, we will sometimes leave the accommodation armed with simple (but adequate) breakfast packs, however, we will still likely enjoy a few sit-down breakfasts on this tour. Similarly, lunches will sometimes involve lunch packs, or simpler sandwiches/wraps which we eat while out birding (usually enjoying a picnic lunch) rather than a large sit-down meal. Occasionally, brunch is a better option, and this is likely as well. We do this so that we do not waste large amounts of time during the day when we could otherwise be out birding. Although these meals may be simpler, we will always ensure you are well fed so that you do not go hungry. A range of snacks is usually available to participants which can be bought from fuel stations, etc. Dinner is usually the main meal of the day and will of course be a sit-down meal which are generally of a good standard.

It is possible to opt out of some activities, such as various morning and afternoon excursions. On some days, however, this won't be possible (if we're moving between accommodations), although you can always wait in/near the vehicle while the rest of group heads out (please do ask your tour leader for specifics).

There will be the option for night birding excursions on this birding tour, however, (as with most of our birding excursions) these trips are not mandatory, and we strongly recommend sitting out if you are finding the tour too tiring.

We generally ensure that we do have some meaningful down-time regularly on the tour, particularly on our non-travel days, while on the days when we travel between accommodation, there is less time for down-time (as this is otherwise spent traveling between destinations).

The guide discusses the daily plan with the group in detail each evening. Note that we do retain a sense of flexibility within reason, to allow for us to better maximize your birding and wildlife experience.

## WALKING AND STYLE OF BIRDING

The tour is generally considered 'moderate' in terms of physical exertion. Most of the birding on

this tour is done on foot along trails with very little roadside or vehicle-based birding. The tour involves a few longer walks through rainforests which can be quite hilly for which we may be out for the whole morning. Walking sticks or hiking poles are a great idea as they provide added stability to help with balance and are compulsory for anyone who is not steady at walking. The guide will discuss the day's itinerary beforehand and will explain in greater detail what the day will entail and if you feel you'd prefer to sit out an activity we can likely make alternative plans.

## LENGTH OF DRIVES

There are a few days in which there are long drives, made even longer with lunch/birding/fuel stops, however most drives, when not moving between accommodations, involve far less travel. Some of the longer transfers of this trip include

- a. Andasibe to Antsirabe,
- b. Antsirabe to Ranomafana,
- c. Ranomafana to Isalo,
- d. Isalo to Ifaty,

The above are all essentially full-day drives. We'll likely leave in the morning (e.g. 8-9 am) and spend the whole day traveling and birding en route to our overnight accommodation, likely arriving in the late afternoon (e.g. 4-5 pm).

## SAFETY

This tour does not spend much time in large cities (besides starting/ending in Antananarivo (Tana) and spending a night in Antsirabe) and we generally stay in tourist areas which are considered safe. While out birding, we suggest rather not leaving personal items of value in the vehicle if it is unattended, if you are ever in doubt, please just check with the tour leader.

We will not be visiting any areas of extreme altitude where altitude sickness will be an issue, with the highest elevation visited on this trip likely to be in the highlands of around 4,900 feet (1,500 meters) above sea level.

## HEALTH, PESTS AND DANGEROUS ANIMALS

As with any trip to Madagascar, particular care should be taken when choosing what food you eat as 'travelers' diarrhea' is unfortunately very common, even when eating at restaurants of a high standard. This is mostly due to the water used to wash food and it is best to avoid any unpeeled/uncooked vegetables/salads. If in doubt, please check with the local guide or tour leader before ordering your meal. Only drink bottled water and ensure you use bottled water when brushing your teeth.

While out birding on foot there could be ticks around, and so it is mostly recommended to wear long trousers and check yourself for ticks after the day out in the field. Additionally, it is a good idea to spray your legs/trousers and particularly boots/socks with anti-tick spray. Leeches may be

encountered in rainforests, however, as this tour takes places during the dry season, they are likely to be less of an issue.

Rabies (although rare) does still exist in Madagascar and although the chances of you encountering rabid animals is very low on this trip, we strongly advise against touching/petting domestic animals, particularly while out in rural areas. Please consult with your tour leader if you are ever unsure though.

Even though none of Madagascar's terrestrial snake species are highly venomous, some are considered mildly venomous and should not be touched. Please be vigilant while we are out walking.

In southwest Madagascar, while staying at Ifaty, it is possible to enjoy swimming and snorkeling in the sea. Highly venomous sea snakes occur in the seas surrounding Madagascar, and if any of these snakes are encountered while swimming or snorkeling, you should stay well away.

## **Malaria**

We strongly recommend anti-malaria drugs for the entirety of this Madagascar tour as we will be in moderate to high risk areas for most of the tour. Thankfully, this tour visits Madagascar in the dry season, before the summer rains have arrived, which reduces malaria risk, however, we strongly suggest seeking the advice of a medical professional before your trip. Any one of the following three drugs are highly affective (albeit not 100 %, due to resistant strains of malaria) as malaria preventative measures:

Malarone® (atovaquone/proguanil),

Doxycycline, and

Larium® (mefloquine).

Mosquito repellent, long trousers/jeans and long-sleeved shirts, particularly at night when malaria (*Anopheles*) mosquitoes bite, are advised, in addition to the drugs.

In the unlikely event that one still contracts malaria after taking anti-malaria drugs and other precautions, the disease can still be easily treated if diagnosed soon after symptoms develop: suspect malaria if flu-like symptoms develop within a few weeks/months of visiting Madagascar. If it is malaria, it can be treated with an alternative to the prophylactic that you chose.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Depending on the final group size, we will likely use a medium-sized bus on this Madagascar birding tour, ensuring everybody has a window seat. Occasionally, we may split up the group into smaller vehicles when visiting areas with rougher or tighter roads. As with our other birding tours, we will use a seat rotation policy within the vehicle which will be explained to you by your tour leader at the start of the tour.

## DOMESTIC FLIGHTS

There is one domestic flight on this birding tour on the penultimate day of the tour as we fly from Tuléar back to Tana which is of around two hours flight time. We generally try book this flight for the late morning but cannot always guarantee this flight option. This day's itinerary will depend on our scheduled flight time. Air Madagascar flights are, unfortunately, completely unreliable, and scheduled flight times can change on the day of the flight until as late as one hour before departure, so we will bear this in mind when deciding on the day's itinerary.

## ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation on this tour is of a good quality. It is worth noting that buildings in Madagascar are often not heated like they are in North America and Europe, etc., and so for colder evenings (such as potentially while on the central plateau) it may be worth packing warmer sleeping clothes.

Should you wish to arrive a day or two before the start of the tour, we strongly suggest staying at Relais des Plateaux in Antananarivo, where we are staying for our first night on tour. Please contact the Birding Ecotours office to help organize this for you.

It is possible to get laundry washed at most of the establishments used on this tour, with many establishments only accepting laundry if we have a minimum of two nights, and the laundry is provided on the first day/arrival day.

## ELECTRICITY

Lighting in rooms tends to be low wattage, so you might like to bring a good quality torch/flashlight if you like reading in bed!

Electrical sockets are the same as in Europe (except the UK) – 2-prong and 220 Volts ITA Type C. It is good practice to bring international adapters, as many establishments are changing their plug outlets to better align with international clients.

## WEATHER

This tour takes place during the cool and dry season when temperatures on the central plateau (days 1-9) may be cool at night but hot and humid during the daytime, with an average maximum of 79-83°F (26-28°C). During our time in the dry southwest (days 9-13) temperatures can get very hot during the daytime with average maximum temperatures of around 82-86°F (28-30°C).

Although this tour takes place in October, during the dry season, rain is still a possibility while on the central plateau, especially towards the end of the month. Because of the possibility of rain, we suggest bringing light preventative gear (like a poncho or light rain jacket).

## WHAT TO BRING: CLOTHING AND OTHER ITEMS

Please see our blog on '[What to bring on a birding tour](#)' which will help you pack for this Madagascar birding tour.