



THE HEART OF

MADAGASCAR

Shaped like a teardrop, Madagascar, the world's fourth-largest island, pierces the Indian Ocean with an evocative mix of Asian, French and African customs. Isolated from mainland Africa, it's home to cool highlands, forested lowlands and turquoise coastlines, all rooted in traditional culture. With many people visiting for the astounding wildlife, few realise that the island is home to 18 ethnic groups, from the zebu-herding Bara to the semi-nomadic Vezo, who still practise their ancient beliefs. Spending some time getting to know the Malagasy people provides a real insight into life on this beautiful island.

PHOTO ESSAY BY LYNN GAIL



OPENING SPREAD:
Malagasy women use mudpacks to protect their skin from the harsh sunlight.

ABOVE:
The layered granite landscape near Fianarantsoa.



LEFT:
A family in Zombitse-Vohibasia National Park.

ABOVE:
Herding zebu through Isalo; the herding journey can take up to a month.



ABOVE:
Farmers harvesting bamboo in the Isalo region.



ABOVE:
A young farmer in Isalo National Park



RIGHT:
Local villagers sift for sapphires in a muddy riverbed in Ilakaka.



LEFT:
A woman sells fresh fruit in Toliara.

ABOVE:
A Vezo woman carrying scarves to sell in the Ifaty coastal region.



THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE
FROM THE LEFT:
 Sifting the sand for bait at Mangily; Young girls carrying fish walk along the coast; Wooden dugout canoes stretch along Ambolomailaka village's beach in Ifaty; A Vezo man paddles his seaweed-laden boat in the Mozambique Channel; Pulling the morning catch in.

FOLLOWING PAGES:
 Vezo fishermen rowing an outrigger canoe, guided by a sail made from old sacks.





NEED TO KNOW

GETTING THERE

Ivato International Airport is about 30 minutes' drive from Antananarivo, Madagascar's capital city.

BEST TIME TO GO

Aim to visit during the dry season from May to October when it's cooler with less rainfall, making it perfect for outdoor experiences.

CURRENCY Malagasy ariary

TIME ZONE GMT+3

FOOD

Madagascar is famous for the breakfast dish *vary amin'anana* – a soupy rice served with chopped greens and dried, smoked meat. For lunch or dinner try the traditional speciality *ravitoto sy henahisoa*, consisting of cassava leaves and chunks of pork cooked in coconut milk. Sweet-toothed travellers should visit one of the French bakeries for melt-in-your-mouth black vanilla macarons.

WHERE TO STAY

Accommodation varies from basic to luxury chateaux. Book in advance for peak season (July to September) as options can be limited.

HOW TO DO IT

While self-drive is an option, Madagascar is best visited with a tour guide who knows the landscape and culture well, and who can introduce you to the local people for a more in-depth experience of the country.

MUST-PACK ITEM

Pack warm layers for the dry season, and good-quality hiking boots as forest terrain can be steep and slippery.

WHY GO

To immerse yourself in the incredible Malagasy culture, to learn about unique, deep-rooted customs, and to connect with the island's people. The vast southern landscape feels limitless as you travel through its wide-open spaces.