

Madagascar

Forget Hollywood fripperies, Madagascar is like no place else on earth. In fact, all things considered, it barely qualifies as part of Africa: the two are separated by hundreds of kilometres of sea and 165 million years of evolution – long enough for Madagascar's plants and animals to evolve into some of the weirdest forms on the planet. Nowhere else can you see over 70 varieties of lemur, including one that sounds like a police siren, the world's biggest and smallest chameleons, and the last stomping ground of the elephant bird, the largest bird that ever lived. Extraordinary plants include forests of twisted, spiny 'octopus' trees, bottle-shaped baobabs and an orchid that has become a household name. Not for nothing is Madagascar regarded as the world's number one conservation priority.

And the people are no less interesting: arriving here some 2000 years ago along the Indian Ocean trade routes, they grow rice in terraced paddies, and speak a language that has more in common with their origins in Southeast Asia than with the African continent. Their culture is steeped in taboo and magic, imbuing caves, waterfalls, animals and even some material objects with supernatural attributes. Hill peoples live in traditional multistoried brick houses with carved balconies and, in some areas, dance with their dead ancestors in the 'turning of the bones' ceremony.

Throw in a soupçon of pirate history, coastlines littered with shipwrecks, great regional cooking, some of the world's longest place names, and unfailingly polite and friendly people, and you'll experience a refreshing take on the overused 'unique' tag.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 587,401 sq km
- **ATMs** In all major towns
- **Budget** US\$25 to US\$30 per day
- **Capital** Antananarivo
- **Languages** French, Malagasy
- **Money** Ariary; US\$1 = 1983Ar
- **Population** 16.9 million
- **Seasons** Wet (November to March), dry (May to October), hot (October to April)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 261; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 3
- **Visa** One-month, single-entry visa US\$32; issued on arrival



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Parc National d'Andasibe-Mantadia** (p898) Wake to the eerie cries of indris as the sun burns the mist off the rainforest-covered hills.
- **Ifaty** (p896) Dive among sharks in coral canyons or laze on soft, white beaches at this west-coast beach idyll.
- **Parc National de l'Isalo** (p894) Cool off under a waterfall while watching the sandstone cliffs turn red at sunset.
- **Antananarivo** (p884) Tuck into the country's finest dining at this most un-African of cities.
- **Parc National de Ranomafana** (p893) Encounter lemurs, chameleons and colourful birds in primeval forest crisscrossed with tumbling steams.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Any time of year is fine for a visit except from January to March, when heavy rainfall in many areas can make some roads all but impassable, and when there's a high risk of cyclones in the east and northeast. In general, the best time to travel in most areas is April and October/November. The coolest time to travel anywhere is during the dry season (May to October), but during this time the *hauts plateaux* (central highlands; which include Antananarivo) can get cold and windy, with freezing showers.

The west and southwest get searingly hot during summer, but the winter months in these regions are pleasant, with blue skies, cooler temperatures and little rain. Most rain in the northeast falls from July to September; at this time the sea is too dangerous to travel by cargo boat.

Average maximum temperatures vary from about 30°C in coastal areas (higher in summer) to around 25°C on the *hauts plateaux*. In Antananarivo and other highland areas, temperatures during winter can drop to 10°C and even lower during the night.

Hotels and popular tourist attractions often get full, and prices go up, during the European holiday period from July to August, and during Christmas and Easter.

ITINERARIES

It's best to choose one or two regions and concentrate on exploring them well, rather than trying to fit too much into one visit. Here are a few suggestions.

HOW MUCH?

- **Cup of coffee** US\$0.80
- **Seafood feast** US\$13.50
- **Shared-taxi ride** US\$1
- **50km bus trip** US\$2.10
- **A zebu** US\$210

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1.35
- **1L bottled water** US\$0.45
- **Bottle of Three Horses Beer** US\$1.20
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$3.80
- **Sambos (samosas)** US\$0.45

- **One Week** Spend the first day and evening enjoying the sights and sampling great cuisine in the capital, Antananarivo (p884). Then, take a two-day trip south through the *hauts plateaux*, taking in Ambalavao (p894), Ambositra (p892) and Antsirabe (p891), and stopping at whichever town takes your fancy. Along the way, you can admire the scenery, and do some walking and souvenir shopping at the country's finest woodcarving outlets. Head back to Tana, then wend your way east to Parc National d'Andasibe-Mantadia (p898) for a two-night stay in one of the country's most pristine rainforest national parks.
- **Two Weeks** For a taste of east and west, spend a day and night in Antananarivo (p884) and two nights at Parc National d'Andasibe-Mantadia (p898), then fly down to Toliara (p895) and spend a few days in Ifaty (p896) or Anakao (p895) for diving, snorkelling or just lazing on a beach. From there, take a rental car back to Tana, stopping at Parc National de l'Isalo (p894; two nights) and Parc National de Ranomafana (p893; two nights), and your pick of the *hauts plateaux* towns en route.
- **One Month** With a month you can indulge whatever takes your fancy by lingering in any or all of the above locations. Add on a few days to explore the Fort Dauphin hinterland (p897), and finish off with some adventuring on Canal des Pangalanes (p898) near Taomasina.



HISTORY

Archaeological evidence suggests that Madagascar was uninhabited until about 1500 or 2000 years ago, when the first Indo-Malayan settlers arrived in coast-hugging craft that skirted the Indian Ocean. They brought traditions such as planting rice in terraced paddies, Southeast Asian food crops and linguistic roots buried in the subcontinent. The migration accelerated in the 9th century, when the powerful Hindu-Sumatran empire of Srivijaya controlled much of the maritime trade in the Indian Ocean.

European Arrival & Colonisation

Portuguese sailors named the island Ilha de Sao Lourenco, but like subsequent British, Dutch and French fleets they failed to establish a base here. European and North American buccaneers had notably more success, making Madagascar (and especially Ile Sainte Marie) their base in the Indian Ocean during the 17th century.

Powerful Malagasy kingdoms began to develop with the growth of trade with European merchants. Most powerful of all were the Merina of the central highlands, whose chief, Ramboasalama, acquired the weaponry to subdue neighbouring tribes. His son Radama became king in 1810 and, sniffing the winds of fortune, entered diplomatic relations with the British in 1817 and allowed hundreds of Christian missionaries to enter the Merina court. However, his widow and successor, Ranavalona I, nicknamed 'The Bloodthirsty', passionately disliked all things *vahaza* (white); she persecuted the missionaries and ordered the execution of tens of thousands of her Malagasy subjects using barbarous and ingenious methods.

In 1890 the British handed Madagascar over to the French in exchange for Zanzibar. The French captured Antananarivo in 1895 and turned the island into an official colony in 1897. The French suppressed the Malagasy language, however they constructed roads, expanded the education network and abolished slavery. Resentment of the French colonial presence grew in all levels of society, and Nationalist movements had developed by the 1920s. Strikes and demonstrations culminated in a revolt in 1947, which the French suppressed after killing an estimated 80,000 people and sending the rebel leaders into exile.

Nationalism & Independence

By 1958 the Malagasies had voted in a referendum to become an autonomous republic within the French community of overseas nations. Philibert Tsiranana, leader of the Parti Social Démocrate (PSD), became Madagascar's first president, and allowed the French to keep control of most of Madagascar's trade and industry. Tsiranana was forced to resign in 1972 and was succeeded by army general Gabriel Ramantsoa.

The socialist Ramantsoa made friends with China and the USSR, closed down the French military bases and collectivised the farming system, which led to an exodus of French farmers. The economy took a nosedive and Ramantsoa was forced to resign. His successor, Richard Ratsimandrava, lasted just one week before being assassinated by rebel army officers. They were almost immediately routed by Ramantsoa loyalists, and a new government headed by Admiral Didier Ratsiraka came to power.

The Ratsiraka years were characterised by more socialist reforms, but a debt crisis in 1981 and 1982 forced him to abandon the reforms and obey the IMF. In 1989 Ratsiraka was dubiously 'elected' to his third seven-year term, sparking riots that left six people dead. People were still demanding his resignation by 1991, and the ensuing demonstrations brought the economy to a standstill. In 1992 Malagasies voted in a referendum to limit the presidential powers. General elections were held that year, and Professor Albert Zafy thrashed Ratsiraka, ending his 17 years in power.

Years of communist-style dictatorship and economic mismanagement made it hard for Zafy to ignite the economy and gain the trust of the people. He was eventually impeached for abuse of constitutional powers (eg sacking his prime minister). Elections were called in 1996 and Ratsiraka surprised everyone by scraping a victory.

Madagascar Today

In 2001 Madagasians went to the polls for the general elections. During the first round Marc Ravalomanana, a former yogurt seller and businessman, claimed victory, but Ratsiraka refused to accept the vote. Ravalomanana and his supporters mounted mass protests and a general strike at the beginning of 2002. A month later Ravalomanana went ahead and declared himself president anyway,

sparking off clashes between rival supporters that nearly brought Madagascar to civil war. Bridges were bombed, and Ratsiraka's supporters blockaded Antananarivo, cutting off its fuel and food supply for weeks.

The Supreme Court held a recount of the votes and declared Ravalomanana the winner. When the US recognised Ravalomanana as the rightful president, Ratsiraka fled in exile to Paris. Ravalomanana's 'I Love Madagascar' party sealed its popularity at parliamentary elections in December 2002. The new president set about reforming the country's ruined economy, and announced salary increases for politicians in an effort to stamp out corruption. He generally made the right noises to the World Bank, which, along with France and the US, pledged a total of US\$2.3 billion in aid. They, like millions of Malagasies, are hoping that Ravalomanana, a self-made millionaire, can help to finally fulfil Madagascar's huge economic potential.

Ravalomanana has declared his intention of breaking French cultural influence on the country, and restoring Malagasy language and traditions. His actions to date have included the repair and maintenance of many main roads, a feat that won't be lost on visitors, and keeping armies of Malagasies employed for months.

CULTURE

Your first impression of the Malagasies is likely to be of a polite but reserved people. The concept of Fihavanana, which means 'conciliation' or 'brotherhood', is enshrined in society, meaning that confrontation is avoided and compromises are sought. Politeness in general is very important to the Malagasy, and impatience or pushy behaviour is regarded as shocking.

Regarding the Malagasy as Africans is a big no-no. As far as the citizens of 'La Grande Île' are concerned, they are just that – an island people, by implication far superior to the 'primitive' Africans.

The family is the central tenet of Malagasy life, including not only distant cousins but also departed ancestors. At Famadihana (literally, 'the turning of the bones') exhumation ceremonies, people may line up for a photograph with the shroud-wrapped bodies of dead family members laid out neatly in the foreground.

Despite independence, French culture remains influential and the French language continues to be widely spoken.

The Malagasy home, as the centre of the extended family, ancestors included, is furnished with care and attention, regardless of how poor the householder may be. Custom dictates that furniture, doors and windows should all be astrologically aligned and placed in specific parts of the building.

It's still common to find sacred offerings left at the base of baobab trees, beside forest waterfalls or in front of royal tombs. Family outings, usually accompanied by a picnic, to a beautiful spot of family or tribal significance, are a popular leisure activity.

Time and dates have an influence on Malagasy lifestyle. One example of this is seen in the belief in *vintana* (destiny), which influences the dates of parties held to mark circumcisions, marriages or reburials. Friday, which is associated with nobility, is considered a good day to hold a celebration.

PEOPLE

The Malagasy people are officially divided into 18 tribes, whose boundaries are roughly based on old kingdoms. The main ethnic groups are Merina (27%), Betsimisaraka (15%), Betsileo (12%), Tsimihety (7%), Sakalava (6%), Antaisaka (5%) and Antandroy (5%), with a number of smaller groups making up the remainder. Also important is the distinction between Merina highlanders and so-called *côtiers*. Literally, *côtiers* refers to those from the coast, but really means any non-Merina groups.

Traditional Malagasy culture is rooted in reverence and respect for its ancestors. Among most tribes, this is manifested in a complex system of *fady* (taboos) and burial rites, the best known of which is the ceremonial exhumation and reburial known as Famadihana. Half of Madagascar's population still adheres to traditional beliefs, while half belong to the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. A small proportion, mainly on the west coast, is Muslim. Happy clappy-style Christian revival meetings have become popular in recent years, but even among Christians there is generally great respect and reverence for traditional rituals.

Personal adornment and fashion are hugely important to the Malagasy, and men and women alike take great care with their appearance. Hats are the most beloved of all fashion items, and may be worn cocked jauntily over one eye or with the brims demurely turned down to shade the face.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Textiles have always played a huge part in Malagasy society, with some types of cloth even being imbued, it is believed, with supernatural powers. The Merina used cocoons collected from the wild silkworm to make highly valued textiles called *lamba mena* (red silk). The silks were woven in many colour and pattern combinations, and in the past had strong links with royal prestige, expressed by the colour red. Worn by the aristocracy in life and death, *lamba mena* were also used in burial and reburial ceremonies. These days ancestral materials such as *lamba mena* are combined with modern textiles such as lycra, or 'found objects', such as shells or even computer circuit boards. Ask at the Centre Culturel Albert Camus (p884) in Antananarivo for details of textile exhibitions.

ENVIRONMENT

Madagascar split from the African land mass around 165 million years ago and has been in its present position for about 100 million years. The island measures 1600km long and up to 570km wide, and the 5000km-long coastline is sprinkled with small islands, including Ile Sainte Marie to the east.

Madagascar can be divided geographically into three parallel north-south zones, each with its own ecosystem: the west consists of dry spiny desert or deciduous forest; the central highlands (known as the *hauts plateaux*) have now been mostly deforested; and the eastern zone is rainforest. The coasts are marked by alternating mangrove forests and long, sweeping sandy beaches, with coral reefs offshore. The 2876m volcanic Maromokotro peak is Madagascar's highest point. All but the island's southern tip lies north of the Tropic of Capricorn.

Madagascar's unique wildlife is today among its biggest tourist draws and its imminent disappearance is one of the most pressing global conservation issues. Over the last thousand years many large animals, including giant lemurs, have been hunted to extinction.

Madagascar's best-known mammals are the lemurs, which include sifakas and the indri, mouse and ring-tailed lemurs, the incredible aye-aye and noisy black-and-white lemurs. Humpback whales migrate past Madagascar's shores from August through to October.

Madagascar has 209 breeding bird species, of which 51% (120 species) are endemic – the highest proportion of any country in the world. These include the diverse vanga shrikes, couas and various species of ground roller.

Chameleons are the best known of Madagascar's reptiles, and include the world's largest and smallest species. Other reptiles include geckos, harmless snakes such as the tree boa, the potentially dangerous Nile crocodile and strikingly marked tortoises.

Only 10% of Madagascar's original vegetation cover remains. Madagascar's big environmental issues are deforestation and the consequent erosion caused by 'slash-and-burn' farming. Today a wasteland of invasive, sun-loving grass covers more than 80% of the island. It supports very few native animals and plants, and even people have a tough time living on this fragile landscape.

Madagascar has more than 14 national parks and President Ravalomanana has promised to triple the size of protected areas. By visiting a national park, you are economically helping village residents: 50% of park admission fees are returned to villagers to build wells and small dams, buy vegetable seeds, help with tree nurseries and rebuild schools.

FOOD & DRINK

You won't go hungry in Madagascar – eating is a real joy and prices are extremely cheap by Western standards. Rice is the staple and is often accompanied by a stew made from beef, fish, chicken, duck or vegetables. Favourite dishes include *romazava* (beef-and-vegetable stew) and *ravioto* (pork stew with manioc), with *mi sao* (fried noodles with vegetables or meat) or a satisfying *soupe chinoise* (clear noodle soup with fish, chicken or vegetables) the most usual alternatives. Restaurants normally also serve excellent French cuisine, from simple zebu *steack frites* (steak and chips) to *paté de foie gras* (goose liver paté) and *magret de canard* (duck fillet). Western staples such as pizza and pasta are easy to find, too.

French restaurants rarely cater for vegetarians, but local *hotelys* (Malagasy eateries that serve mainly rice dishes and snacks cheaply) can usually whip up some noodles, soup or rice and greens. Seafood fans are in for a treat – every menu in coastal areas features cheap lobster, prawns or squid dishes together with a fish of the day.

The most popular local-brand beers are Three Horses Beer (known as THB) and Gold, but the alcoholic speciality is *rum arrangé* – rum flavoured with fruits and spices. A taste of Malagasy wine is something you probably won't want to repeat, but imported French and South African wines are served in better restaurants.

ANTANANARIVO

Madagascar's seemingly unpronounceable capital (commonly shortened to 'Tana') is like few others on earth. Cobble streets wind up steep, rocky hills past narrow, wooden houses with painted shutters to soaring church spires and grand edifices, recalling European rather than African cities.

HISTORY

Antananarivo was originally known as Analamanga (Blue Forest), and is believed to have been populated by the Vazimba people. In 1610 a Merina king, Andrianjaka, conquered the Vazimba and named his new settlement Antananarivo ('Town of the Thousand') after the garrison he stationed there. Andrianjaka built his own *rova* (palace) on the highest of Antananarivo's hills and founded the Merina dynasty.

In 1895 the French captured Tana, renaming it Tananarive and using it as a seat of government. They built two great staircases, and drained swamps and paddy fields to create the present-day Analakely area. After independence the city's name reverted back to Antananarivo.

ORIENTATION

Ivato airport, which serves both domestic and international routes, lies 12km outside Antananarivo.

Central Antananarivo can be roughly divided into Haute-Ville (Upper Town) and Basse-Ville (Lower Town). The broad Ave de L'Indépendance runs from the train station towards the crowded main market area of Analakely, with a steep staircase leading to Place de L'Indépendance in the rather quieter Haute-Ville. Another staircase, directly opposite, leads to the busy district of Ambondrona. Narrow streets lead further uphill past several churches to the *rova* (queen's palace).

INFORMATION

Bookshops

The best place to pick up English-language magazines is from the street vendors in Place de L'Indépendance.

Librairie de Madagascar (Map p887; ☎ 22 224 54; 38 Ave de L'Indépendance) Sells maps, guidebooks (in French), dictionaries (French-English and Malagasy-English) and a few books in English.

Cultural Centres

Alliance Française d'Antananarivo (☎ 22 208 56, 22 211 07; aftananarive@alliancefr.mg; Lalana Seimad, Andavamamba) Offers French- and Malagasy-language courses, and sponsors various cultural events.

Centre Culturel Albert Camus (CCAC; Map p887; ☎ 22 213 75, 22 236 47; ccac@wanadoo.mg; 14 Ave de L'Indépendance; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sat) Sponsors an extensive program of concerts, dance and film; the centre has a library and exhibition hall.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 22 200 40)

Espace Medical 24-hour clinic (☎ 22 265 66)

Fire (☎ 18)

Police (Map p887; ☎ 17; Lalana Karija)

Internet Access

All of the following places charge 30Ar per minute.

Cyber-Paositra Place de L'Indépendance (Map p887; paositra@dts.mg; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-6pm); Araben'ny 26 Jona 1960 (Map p887; paositra@dts.mg; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-6pm) Both main post offices have good internet centres.

Outcool Web Bar (Map p887; Lalana Andrianary Rationarivo; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 3-9pm Sun) Discounts for longer surfing times.

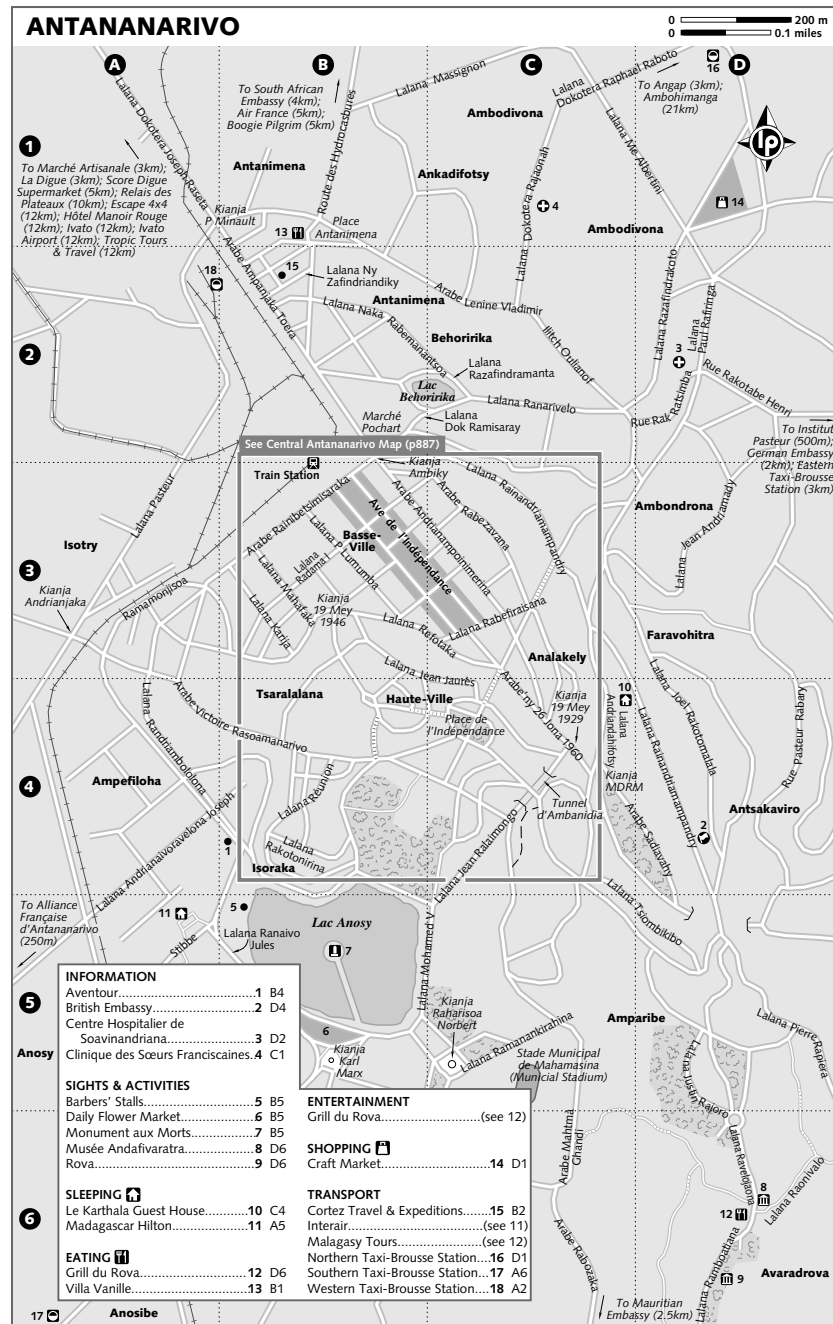
Teknet Group (Map p887; Arabe Ramanantsoa; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 3-8pm Sun) Also has fax and printing services.

Medical Services

Centre Hospitalier de Soavinandriana (Hôpital Militaire d'Antananarivo; Map p885; ☎ 22 397 51; ☎ 24hr) Has X-ray equipment and stocks most basic drugs and medicines; employs several French doctors.

Clinique des Sœurs Franciscaines (Clinique et Maternité St-François; Map p885; ☎ 22 610 46; Lalana Dokotera Rajaonah, Ankadifotsy) Has X-ray equipment and is well run and relatively clean.

Pharmacie Metropole (Map p887; ☎ 22 200 25; Lalana Ratsimilaho; ☎ 8am-noon Mon-Sat) Antananarivo has many good, well-stocked pharmacies. This is one of the best and is conveniently located near Hôtel Colbert.



COURSES

Alliance Française d'Antananarivo (☎ 22 208 56, 22 211 07; aftananarivo@alliancefr.fr; Lalana Seimad, Andavamamba) sometimes runs Malagasy-language courses, as well as providing French lessons.

The **Centre Culturel Albert Camus** (CCAC; Map p887; ☎ 22 213 75, 22 236 47; ccac@wanadoo.mg; 14 Ave de L'Indépendance; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sat) offers French courses only.

SLEEPING

The capital offers most types of accommodation, or you can stay near the airport at Ivato if you have an early flight to catch. Hotel prices usually don't include breakfast.

Budget

Hôtel Manoir Rouge (☎ 22 441 04; www.madatana.com, in French; dm/d/tr €4/6.80/12) Within walking distance of the airport, this long-running budget option is for those arriving late or departing early. Clean rooms and friendly service.

Snack Bar Jim (Map p887; ☎ 22 374 37; gusth@netdub.mg; Arabe Ramanantsoa; d 20,000Ar) This Malagasy snack bar also has a few clean rooms available several storeys up, on the rooftop. There are fantastic views and rooms have internal showers, but toilets are shared.

Hôtel Isoraka (Map p887; ☎ 22 655 81; 11 Arabe Ramanantsoa; d with/without bathroom 50,600/20,600Ar) One of the best budget places, it's up in Haute-Ville and you can splurge on good eating nearby.

Chez Francis (Map p887; ☎ 22 613 65; Lalana Rainandriamapandry; r with/without bathroom 40,000/29,000Ar) A good choice that offers clean, spacious rooms with a hot shower. The more expensive rooms have good views over Tana.

Le Karthala Guest House (Map p885; ☎ 22 248 95; fax 22 272 67; Lalana Andriandahifotsy; d incl breakfast 30,000Ar) A friendly, family-run B&B with a pretty garden courtyard. Rooms are large and very well furnished, with bathrooms. Malagasy meals (5000Ar) are available with advance notice in the evenings.

Midrange

Hôtel Sakamanga (Map p887; ☎ 22 358 09; saka@malagasy.com; Lalana Andriany Ratianarivo; d €15-44) One of the best midrange choices, but advance bookings are advised. Airy, bright rooms with wooden floors all have TV, phone and bathroom; the pricier ones have garden views. A great place to meet travellers of every stripe.

Hôtel le Cactus Vert (Map p887; ☎ 22 624 41; lécactusvert@wanadoo.mg; 15 Lalana Radama I; d 60,000Ar)

Rooms are a bit characterless, but have a full-sized bath and a safe, and some have TV. It has a very good restaurant.

Résidence Lapasoa (Map p887; ☎ 22 611 40; corossol@malagasy.com; 15 Lalana Réunion; s/d €35/38) A fine Haute-Ville choice, with spotless, wood-appointed rooms, all with TV and some with minibar, four-post bed and/or balcony. There's free internet use for guests.

Relais des Plateaux (☎ 22 441 22; relaisdesplateaux@wanadoo.mg; d €38; ☎ (P)) Newest and nicest of the Ivato hotels, this place offers spacious rooms with TV, minibar and safe, and tiled bathrooms with powerful hot shower. Meals are available (mains 10,000Ar). Some English is spoken and airport transfers can be arranged.

Top End

La Varangue (Map p887; ☎ 22 273 97; varangue@simicro.mg; 17 Lalana Printsy Ratsimamanga; d room/studio €50/70) This highly recommended boutique hotel is tucked down a cobbled lane near the Presidential Palace. Rooms feature minibar, coffee-making facilities, TV and phone. It has a fine restaurant (opposite), too.

Hôtel Tana Plaza (Map p887; ☎ 22 218 65; www.sicoh-hotels.com, in French; 2 Ave de L'Indépendance; r with TV, safe & phone €58; ☎ (A) A comfortable business hotel much favoured by tour companies. It has a rather sterile décor, but accepts credit cards, has money-changing facilities and English-speaking staff.

Hôtel Colbert (Map p887; ☎ 22 202 02; colbert@wanadoo.mg; Lalana Printsy Ratsimamanga; r with TV, safe, phone & minibar €89-255; ☎ (P)) Cheaper rooms lack the luxury promised by the flashy lobby, but this standout choice offers great service and a host of facilities, including a stunning spa, bars, a patisserie, two restaurants and a business centre.

Hôtel le Royal Palissandre (Map p887; ☎ 22 605 60; HotelPalissandre@simicro.mg; 13 Lalana Andriandahifotsy; s/d with minibar, TV, phone & safe €111/119; ☎ (P)) An elegant, quiet hotel where the spacious bedrooms all offer understated comfort. More expensive rooms overlook bustling Analakely, and hotel facilities include free internet use for guests, spa, bar and a restaurant with log fire.

EATING

Tana is well served for eateries and it's worth splurging while you're in the capital. Others will have the same idea, so book ahead on Friday and Saturday nights.

The best place to find cheap *hotelys* and stalls serving simple Malagasy fare is along the western end of Arabe Ramanantsoa or around the main market at Analakely.

There's a convenient Shoprite supermarket in Haute-Ville (Map p887) and another at Analakely (Map p887) in Basse-Ville. You can also buy fresh vegetables, meat and fish at the daily main market (Map p887) by the pavilions at Analakely.

Tana's many gleaming *salons de thé* (tea rooms) serve pastries, cakes, coffee, tea and hot chocolate, breakfasts and, in many cases, wonderful ice cream.

Honey Salon de Thé (Map p887; ☎ 22 621 67; 13 Ave de L'Indépendance; cakes 2000Ar; ☎ Wed-Mon) Among the better places to indulge, but it isn't open in the evening or at lunchtime.

Buffet du Jardin (Map p887; ☎ 22 338 87; Place de L'Indépendance; ☎ 24hr) The only option for 24-hour snacks and beer.

Snack Bar Jim (Map p887; Arabe Ramanantsoa; rice dishes 2500Ar; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A convenient hotel in the city centre serving patisserie, steak and delicious rice dishes.

Villa Vanille (Map p885; ☎ 22 205 15; Place Antanimena; mains 8000Ar; ☎ lunch & dinner) A classy establishment, in an old colonial villa, featuring dishes from Mauritius and Réunion, as well as Madagascar, with nightly musical performances.

Impala (Map p887; Arabe Ramanantsoa; 2-course meals 8000Ar; ☎ lunch & dinner) More fun than professional, this bright restaurant, on the 1st floor above Snack Bar Jim, has a lively bar but rather basic fare, such as grilled fish or chicken with chips.

Le Sud (Map p887; ☎ 22 310 22; 21 Rue Dok Vilette; grills 8500Ar; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A new addition to the Haute-Ville bar/resto scene, with dining space centred on a courtyard planted with cactuses. The food is good without being exceptional, and there are always a few Malagasy dishes on the menu.

Restaurant Sakamanga (Map p887; ☎ 22 358 09; Lalana Andriany Ratianarivo; mains 9000Ar; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Like its namesake hotel, this place is usually busy and reservations are advised on Friday and Saturday. Bistro-style food includes imaginative and tasty pasta dishes, and excellent grilled seafood and zebu meals. Daily Malagasy specials are chalked up on a blackboard.

Grill du Roava (Map p885; ☎ 22 627 24; Lalana Ramboantiana, Avaradrova; mains 9000Ar; ☎ lunch & dinner

Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) A stylish restaurant-cabaret just down from the Roava that serves French and Malagasy dishes. The cabaret showcases Malagasy jazz and traditional music (see below).

La Varangue (Map p887; ☎ 22 273 97; varangue@simicro.mg; 17 Lalana Printsy Ratsimamanga; mains 10,000Ar; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A very classy, if small, restaurant in the hotel of the same name. The menu mostly features French cuisine, with a few local touches, and is reputedly the best French food in Madagascar.

KuDéTa (Map p887; ☎ 22 281 54; www.kudeta.mg; 16 Lalana Réunion; grills 11,500Ar; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A very stylish bar-restaurant next to Résidence Lapasoa, with chic décor, friendly English-speaking staff and excellent fare. Bookings essential for Friday and Saturday nights.

DRINKING

Le Sud (Map p887; 21 Rue Dok Vilette) A lively Haute-Ville bar-restaurant with funky décor; bar snacks and burgers available.

Hôtel Glacier (Map p887; Arabe'n'y 26 Jona 1960) A popular place with cheap drinks that gets jumpin' on weekends.

ENTERTAINMENT

Grill du Roava (Map p885; ☎ 22 627 24; Lalana Ramboantiana, Avaradrova; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) A stylish restaurant-cabaret that also showcases Malagasy jazz and traditional music. There are performances every Sunday and Friday at sunset, and musical soirees on the first and third Wednesday of each month.

SHOPPING

The markets in central Tana are great places to browse and buy. The main market is found in the pavilions at Analakely (Map p887), opposite the bottom of the stairs leading up to Haute-Ville. It's a packed, teeming place, selling every fruit, vegetable, fish or meat product you could imagine, and it's held daily. The Marché Communal de Petit Vitesse (Map p887) is a similar, but smaller, market on the tracks west of the train station.

For crafts, the Marché Artisanale is Tana's best-known market. It takes place on a bend in the road about 2km south of the Score Digue supermarket in the suburb of La Digue. There's another, smaller, craft market (Map p885) at Andravoahangy, about 1.5km northeast of the northern end of Ave de L'Indépendance.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

For details of international flights from Ivato airport, see p904. See relevant city sections for details of domestic flights. The following is a list of domestic and international airline offices in Tana.

Air Austral/Air Mauritius (Map p887; ☎ 22 359 90; www.airaustral.com, in French; Lalana des 77 Parlementaires Français)

Air France (☎ 23 230 23; fax 23 230 41; Tour Zital, Rte des Hydrocarbures, Ankorondrano)

Air Madagascar (Map p887; ☎ 22 222 22; www.airmadagascar.mg; 31 Ave de L'Indépendance)

Corsair (Map p887; ☎ 22 633 36; www.corsair.fr; 1 Rue Raintovoa Antsahavola)

Interair (Map p885; ☎ 22 224 06; fax 2262421; Galerie Marchande, Rue Pierre Stibbe, Anosy) In the Madagascar Hilton.

Bus

The bus company **MadaBus** (Map p887; ☎ 032 04 405 11; www.madabus.com; Lalana Rainandriamapandry) is an expensive but efficient service on the Tana-Taomasina and Tana-Toliara routes, stopping at key towns along the way. Departures to both destinations are on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, returning on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. See individual destinations for fares and MadaBus' website for more information. In the capital, bookings, tickets and departures are all from the MadaBus office opposite Chez Francis hotel.

Car & Motorcycle

Car-rental agencies in Tana all handle rentals for use throughout the country; drivers are generally obligatory. Rates usually include driver, insurance and unlimited mileage, but don't include petrol.

Budget (Map p887; ☎ 22 317 08; 26 Ave de L'Indépendance)

Espace 4x4 (☎ 22 441 84; espace4x4@ds.mg; Ivato)

Hertz (Map p887; ☎ 22 229 61; somada@simicro.mg; 17 Lalana Rabefiraisana, Analakely)

You can also rent cars through most of the tour operators listed on p907. See also p906 for general information on car rentals and rates.

Taxi-Brousse

Taxis-brousses (bush taxis) leave from Tana to almost everywhere in Madagascar, departing about every hour to Antsirabe, Fianarantsoa

and Toamasina. See the individual town entries for more details.

There are four main *gares routières* (bus stations), all with a chaotic selection of mini-buses, cars and buses.

Eastern taxi-brousse station (Gare Routière de l'Est) At Ampasampito, about 3.5km northeast of the city centre. Taxis-brousses to Moramanga cost 5000Ar.

Northern taxi-brousse station (Gare Routière du Nord; Map p885) In Ambodivona, about 2km northeast of the city centre, this is the station for transport to Toamasina. To get there take the Malakia bus 4 or a taxi (4000Ar).

Southern taxi-brousse station (Gare Routière du Sud; Map p885; Lalana Pastora Rahajason) At Anosibe about 1.5km southwest of Lac Anosy. Provides transport to all points south, as well as to some points on the east and west coasts. There are regular departures to Antsirabe, Fianarantsoa, Toliara and Fort Dauphin. To get there take the Fima bus 10 or a taxi (4000Ar).

Western taxi-brousse station (Gare Routière de l'Ouest; Map p885) About 400m northwest of the southern taxi-brousse station. Has taxis-brousses to Ivato and the airport.

GETTING AROUND

Ivato airport is 12km from the city centre. Taxis to/from Ivato airport should cost about 12,000Ar. Most tour companies and many hotels can arrange a transfer for a fee.

It's usually no problem to walk between hotels and restaurants, except at night, when it's best to take a taxi; taxis are also recommended if you are visiting places in the suburbs.

There are a few large buses and many minibuses available for getting around Antananarivo. Fares cost 100Ar to 300Ar, but it's often quicker to walk to places nearby. Otherwise, you'll never have much difficulty finding a taxi, even late at night. Taxis don't have meters, so agree on the price before you climb in. Fares around town start at 4000Ar and are more expensive at night.

CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

The central highlands (*hauts plateaux*) are a vast area of rolling hills interspersed with terraced valleys of rice paddies, the picture of rural tranquillity. It's a very scenic region, easily reached from Antananarivo, and features some of the country's most interesting and attractive towns. The main tribes in the region are the Merina and Betsileo.

ANTSIRABE

Antsirabe (pronounced ant-sira-bay) makes an ideal day trip from Tana or a base for excursions into the surrounding countryside. Its origins as a 19th-century spa town are reflected in elegant façades and wide boulevards.

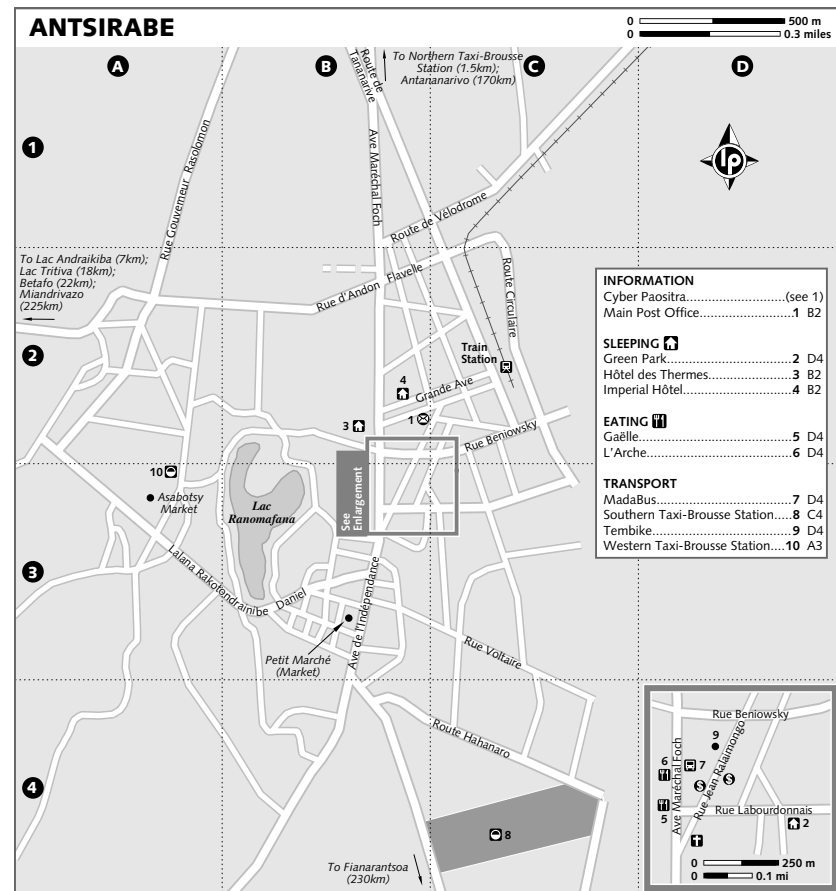
The most convenient internet access is at **Cyber Paositra** (cnr Ave de l'Indépendance & Grand Ave; per min 30Ar; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat), in the main post office. There are banks along Rue Jean Ralaimongo that can change cash and travellers cheques.

With charming round bungalows and upstairs rooms overlooking green lawns where you can pitch a tent, it's not surprising that **Green Park** (☎ 44 051 90; Rue Labourdonnais; camp sites per tent 4000Ar, d/bungalow 22,000/25,000Ar) is often full.

At the **Imperial Hôtel** (☎ 44 483 33; imperial hotel@wanadoo.mg; Grand Ave; r from 25,000Ar), older rooms are large, though just serviceable. The more expensive new rooms are much better, but for the price you'd be better off shopping around.

Hôtel des Thermes (☎ 44 487 61; sht@wanadoo.mg; d/ste 90,000/125,000Ar; ☎ P) is a sprawling 19th-century place boasting an enormous swimming pool and tennis courts. Service is attentive and efficient, and although clean and spacious, the motel-style rooms are rather dated.

There are cheap Malagasy snack bars near the western *taxi-brousse* station and several good restaurants along the main drag, Ave Maréchal Foch. **L'Arche** (☎ 032 02 479 25; mains



7500Ar) serves tasty but unadventurous French food and sometimes features live music. An alternative for more French fare is **Gaëlle** (mains 5000Ar), opposite the cathedral.

Taxis-brousses to Tana cost 6000Ar and leave from the northern *taxi-brousse* station; *taxis-brousses* to Ambositra (6000Ar) and Fianarantsoa (8000Ar) leave from the southern *taxi-brousse* station.

MadaBus (☎ 032 04 900 21) stops opposite L'Arche restaurant; the fare to Tana is €9.

Pousse-pousses (rickshaws) are the main form of local transport, but Antsirabe is ideal for bike riding. Bike rental is available at **Tem-bike** (☎ 032 04 029 27; www.tembike.new.fr), outside the Ville d'Eau hotel, for 4000/7000Ar per half-/full day. Tembike also organises seven-day river trips to the tsingy area of the west coast.

Pousse-pousse trips start at 1000Ar and a short city tour should be about 4000Ar.

AMBOSITRA

Widely touted as the arts-and-crafts capital of Madagascar, Ambositra (pronounced am-bo-sh-tr) is a great place to shop for carved wooden souvenirs. Prices are cheaper than in Tana, and you can arrange to visit the wood-carvers at work, both in town and in nearby Zafimaniry villages. The best souvenir shops are in the upper (southern) part of town, near the Grand Hôtel.

Treks into the countryside are popular and can be organised through **Tsangatsanga Maison des Guides** (☎ 47 714 48), which has an office near the Grand Hôtel, for 30,000/40,000Ar for a half-/full-day trek.

The **Prestige Hôtel** (☎ 47 711 35; r with bathroom 17,000-24,000Ar, without bathroom 8000-11,000Ar) is a rambling hotel tucked in behind the main street in the upper part of town. Staff are friendly and helpful, there's a good restaurant (menu 9000Ar) and it's possible to set up your own tent here (5000Ar).

Hôtel Sympa (☎ 47 713 43; d/tr 10,000/14,000Ar) has clean, basic rooms with shared facilities but no hot water, although the views upstairs may compensate. It's on the left-hand fork of the main road as you head south through town.

Rooms at the **Grand Hôtel** (☎ 47 712 62; Rue du Commerce; dm 6000Ar, d with/without bathroom 18,000/12,000Ar) are a bit dark with a medieval feel, but that's in keeping with the overall ambience. It's in a great location near the craft shops,

and the large dining room has a convivial atmosphere at lunch time.

The most salubrious option, the brightly painted three-storey **Hôtel Mania** (☎ 47 710 21; toursmania@wanadoo.mg; d/tr 22,400/28,000Ar) has clean, comfortable rooms with bathrooms and great views from the top-storey balcony.

Taxis-brousses travel to Antsirabe (6000Ar) and Tana (13,000Ar), and leave from the northern *taxi-brousse* station, 2km north of the fork in the main road. **Taxis-brousses** to Fianarantsoa cost 7000Ar and leave from the southern *taxi-brousse* station.

MadaBus stops in front of the Oasis Snack Bar; the fare to Tana is €17.

FIANARANTSOA

pop 137,700

The name Fianarantsoa can be translated as 'Place Where Good is Learned', but call it Fianar and you won't be misunderstood. This sprawling, hilly town lies in the agricultural heart of the *hauts plateaux*, surrounded by wine- and tea-making villages. It ain't the most prepossessing of places, but it makes a good base for exploring the region and Parc National de Ranomafana (opposite).

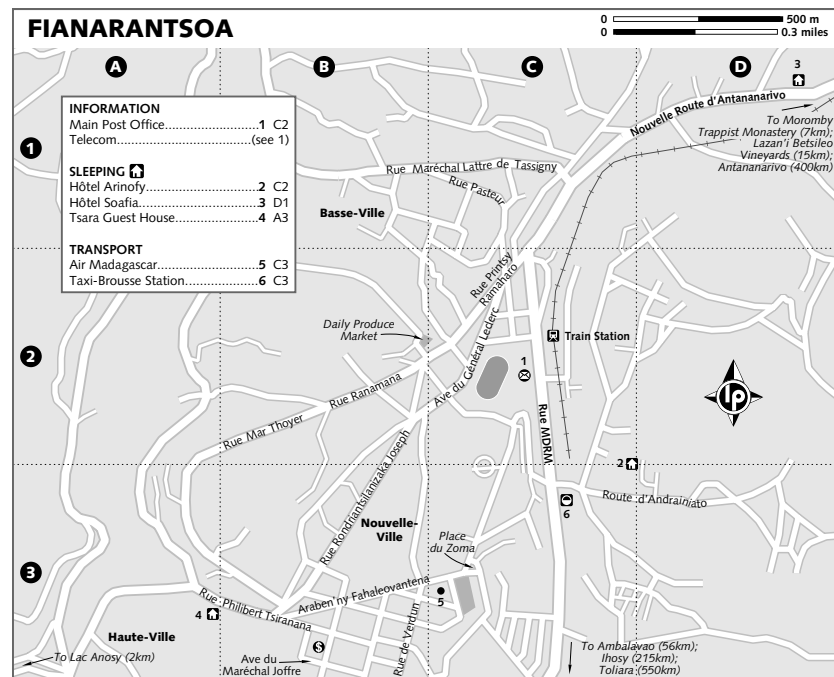
All the banks lining the main street in Nouvelle-Ville exchange money and travellers cheques. There's internet access in the **main post office** (per min 30Ar; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Sat), opposite the train station.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Arinofy (☎ 75 506 38; camp site 8000Ar, d with/without bathroom 19,000/17,000Ar) A stiff climb up from the *taxi-brousse* station, this is a modest but friendly and well-kept place with great views over town. Rooms on the upper floor are best, with hot water and views.

Tsara Guest House (☎ 75 502 06; tsaraguest@wanadoo.mg; r €14-50) One look and you probably won't hesitate to book into this stylish place. The cheaper rooms have shared bathroom but are spotless, and there are incremental degrees of luxury as you move up the price scale, like TV, endless hot water and valley views. Relaxed and friendly.

Hôtel Soafia (☎ 75 503 53; soafia.hot@wanadoo.mg; s/d 30,000/36,000Ar, studio 50,000-80,000Ar; ☎ P) This mad, rambling place on the northern edge of town offers a vast swimming pool, tennis courts, disco, shops and sauna. The wood-panelled rooms are cavernous, and have baths, antique replica telephones, TV and fridge.



All hotels have restaurants of varying standard. Pick of the bunch is the resto at **Tsara Guest House** (☎ 75 502 06; mains 9500Ar), which offers the finest dining in town and a few vegetarian choices.

Getting There & Away

Air Madagascar flies between Fianar and Tana once a week (150,000Ar, one hour).

From the **taxi-brousse station** (Rue MDRM), there are plenty of *taxis-brousses* daily between Fianar and Ambositra (7000Ar), Antsirabe, Tana, Ranohira and Toliara.

MadaBus stops in front of Mad Trekking; the fare to Tana is €23.

PARC NATIONAL DE RANOMAFANA

The 41,500-hectare park is a superb tract of rainforest that offers great lemur- and bird-watching. It was declared to protect the rare golden bamboo lemur, discovered in 1986, and 11 other lemur species call it home. The weather is best, but the park is more crowded, between July and October.

The park entrance and **Angap office** (☎ 8am-4.30pm) are at Ambodiamontana village (ask to

be dropped here if arriving by *taxi-brousse*). **Permits** (1/2/3/4 days 25,000/37,000/40,000/50,000Ar) are compulsory and are available at the Angap office. At the park entrance you can hire guides to explore the trails (5000Ar to 35,000Ar per person, depending on trail length and group size). Nocturnal walks (20,000Ar per person) take one to two hours and are very popular.

The most convenient accommodation option for those arriving by *taxi-brousse* is the basic **Rianala Gîte** (dm 7000Ar), right by the park entrance. **Hôtel Domaine Nature** (☎ 75 750 25; desmada@malagasy.com; d 100,000Ar; ☎ P), about 3km downhill towards Ranomafana village, offers roomy cabins, perched on the hillside above the roaring river, with hot shower, mosquito net and TV. There's a good restaurant here serving the local speciality, crayfish. Way down in Ranomafana village, **Ihary Hôtel** (☎ 75 523 02; d with bathroom 33,000Ar) sits by a quieter stretch of the river and offers rather cramped bungalows with torn mosquito nets. Meals are available (mains 8000Ar).

Ranomafana is about three hours by *taxi-brousse* (5000Ar) from Fianarantsoa along a newly repaired road.

AMBALAVAO

The picturesque little town of Ambalavao (New Valley) is famous for the production of *lamba arindrano*, colourful shawls woven from hand-spun wild silk. Its narrow streets are lined with Betsimileo architecture and every Wednesday the country's biggest zebu market cranks up. The town's greatest attraction is **Fabrique de Papier Antaimoro** (admission free), which makes the famous Antaimoro paper. You can take a free tour of the factory and there's a shop selling fine souvenirs.

In the grounds of the paper factory, **Hôtel aux Bougainvillées** (☎ 75 340 01; ragon@wanadoo.mg; budget r with/without bathroom 19,000/15,000Ar, d/f chalet 30,000/60,000Ar) has a choice of brightly painted two-storey chalets or clean budget rooms. The good restaurant (mains 9000Ar) is popular with tour groups.

At the new, clean **Tsienimparihy Hôtel Restaurant** (☎ 75 341 28; tsienimpari@melwanadoo.mg; d 22,000Ar) rooms all have toilet and hot water, and there's a patisserie-restaurant. It's opposite the main market on the southern side of town (the zebu market is held just outside the south side of town).

Ambalavao is 56km south of Fianar, to where a *taxi-brousse* will cost 5000Ar. Connections to points further north and south can be made at Fianar.

MadaBus stops in front of Hôtel aux Bougainvillées; the fare to Tana is €29.

SOUTHERN MADAGASCAR

Apart from the newly repaired RN7, roads in the rural south can be rough and ready, but those who meet the challenge of independent travel in these parts will be amply rewarded by the world's weirdest vegetation, scenic sandstone massifs and the last stomping grounds of *Aepyornis*, the largest bird that ever lived.

RANOHIRA

The little town of Ranohira is the most convenient base for exploring Parc National de l'Isalo (right). All hotels listed here also have restaurants.

Momo Trek (☎ 033 14 685 46; momo_trek@yahoo.fr), based at Chez Momo (right), organises one- to seven-day treks into the park, including guid-

ing, cooking and camping equipment. Treks start at 165,000Ar per person per night.

At **Isalo Ranch** (☎ in Antananarivo 24 319 02; info@isalo-ranch.com; camp site per person €3, d budget bungalow/rondavel €15/25; Ⓟ) brightly painted thatched bungalows promise more than they deliver, and are a bit old and cramped inside. However, there's a good dining room serving Malagasy meals, and a superb swimming pool where you can enjoy sunsets over the Isalo Massif. It's about 5km south of town, but there are free daily transfers into Ranohira at 7.30am.

Chez Momo (☎ 033 14 685 46; d/tr bungalow 13,000/16,000Ar, tr with hot water 25,000Ar) is the best budget option, with thatched mud-brick bungalows with mosquito nets and shared facilities.

On the right side of RN7 as you head south, but within walking distance of town, the **Les Toiles de l'Isalo** (☎ 033 11 025 25; s/d/tr bungalow 30,000/40,000/45,000Ar) resort-restaurant complex offers simple thatched wooden bungalows. The restaurant (menu 12,000Ar) specialises in grilled zebu meat and does a damned fine job of it, too.

The eccentric stone manor **Hôtel Berny** (☎ 75 801 76; d budget/main 35,000/50,000Ar) features rather cold, dungeon-like rooms on the ground floor, but airy *chambres familiales* (family rooms) with views upstairs. The budget rooms are in a converted shed and a bit dingy.

Relais de la Reine (☎ in Antananarivo 22 336 23; www.3dmadagascar.com/relaisdelareine; d €60; Ⓟ Ⓟ) near the park's southern border, is carved out of the living rock and is one of the country's finest top-end hotels. It's in a brilliant setting, hidden among the sandstone, and offers fine dining, a massage centre and horse-riding.

Taxis-brousses depart daily from Ranohira for Toliar (12,000Ar) and to Ihosy (5000Ar), 91km northeast, for transfers to Fort Dauphin by road.

MadaBus stops in front of Hôtel Berny; the fare to Tana is €37.

PARC NATIONAL DE L'ISALO

The flat, grassy plains of the *hauts plateaux* near Ranohira are abruptly broken by towering sandstone massifs sculpted by wind and water into gorges and craggy bluffs. It's one of the country's most spectacular regions, perfect for overnight hikes, rock-hopping along cool canyons and spotting lemurs. It's best

to visit during the cooler months (April to October), when walking is more comfortable. The Sakalava people used to bury their dead in caves high up on cliff faces, and some areas are *fady* even today.

One-/two-day national park permits cost 25,000/38,000Ar per person per day and are available at **Angap** (☎ 7am-5pm) in Ranohira (opposite). Official guides are compulsory for visits to the park and fees depend on the length of each trek. All trails start and finish in Ranohira, and range from one to seven days in length. Overnight treks can be organised through Chez Momo (opposite) and more up-market hotels, such as Isalo Ranch (opposite) and Relais de la Reine (opposite).

Two popular short trips are a day walk to **Canyon des Singes & Piscine Naturelle**, where you can take a plunge in the cool water, and **Natural Window**, where you can watch the sun rise or set through a large, square hole in the rock.

TOLIARA (TULEAR)

Toliara is the largest town in the south and Madagascar's major west-coast port. It's a hot, languid place, where *pousse-pousses* are the main form of transport and nobody's ever in a great hurry. Many visitors use it as the hub for the seaside villages of Ifaty (p896) and Anakao (below).

Information

There are several good internet cafés around town, all offering access for 30Ar per minute. Try along Blvd Philibert Tsiranana.

All banks exchange money and travellers cheques; there's an ATM at BFV-SG. The post office is located on Blvd Gallieni.

Sights & Activities

Arboretum d'Antsokay (☎ 032 02 600 15; andry.peti.gnat@caramail.com; admission 7000Ar) is a botanic garden, located 12km southeast of Toliara, showcasing Madagascar's extraordinary arid-country vegetation.

The picturesque seaside village of **Anakao** south of town can only be reached by boat and makes a popular excursion for a few days. There's windsurfing, snorkelling offshore at the little island of Nosy Ve and treks to sand dunes littered with fragments of *Aepyornis* eggs. **Safari Vezo** (☎ 94 413 81; Ave de France) can arrange boat transfers to Anakao (return 100,000Ar, three daily), but the trip can take

several hours each way, depending on sea conditions. There's plenty of accommodation and places to eat in Anakao.

Sleeping

There's a good choice of hotels in Toliara if you're laying over between trips up or down the coast.

Hôtel Lovasoa (☎ 94 418 39; Rue de Sacré Cœur; d with/without bathroom 14,000/10,000Ar) Rooms are a bit dark and poky and don't have mosquito nets, but this is a clean, friendly budget option.

Chez Lala (☎ 94 434 17; Ave de France; d with/without bathroom 15,000/13,000Ar) In a handy location for boats to Anakao, with super-clean rooms and bathrooms, and decent food in the attached resto.

L'Escapade (☎ 94 411 82; escapade@wanadoo.mg; Blvd Gallieni; d 33,000Ar) Clean cabins in a walled courtyard all have bathrooms with hot water but no mosquito nets. It's clean, friendly and well run, and the restaurant-bar is upstairs on a breezy balcony.

Hôtel le Paletuvier (☎ 94 440 39; Blvd Lyautey; bungalow with/without air-con 40,600/30,600Ar, d/tw with/without sea view 50,600/40,600Ar; Ⓟ Ⓟ) You can't miss this snow-white confection right on the waterfront near bars and other distractions. New suites are spotless and nicely decorated, but the older-style bungalows are a bit dingy.

Eating & Drinking

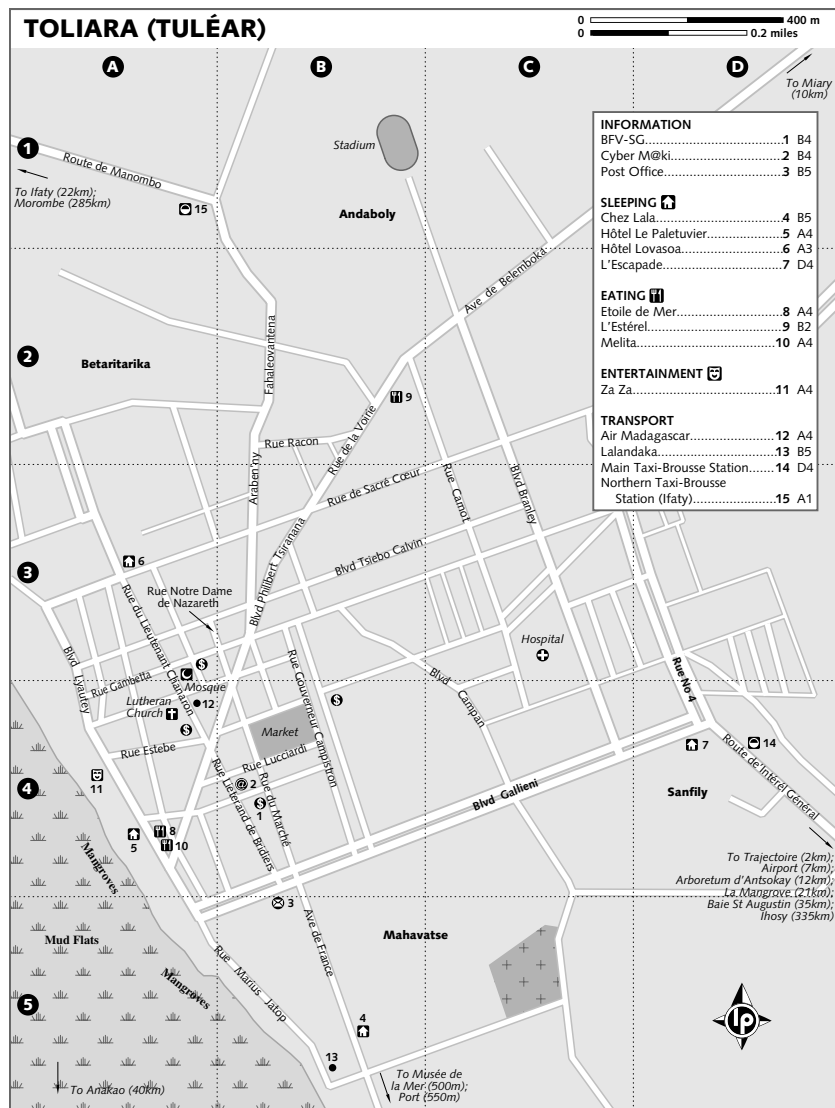
Auberge de la Table (☎ 032 02 600 15; Arboretum d'Antsokay; mains 6000Ar) The restaurant at Arboretum d'Antsokay is recommended and specialises in delicious goat's cheese dishes (5000Ar).

L'Estérel (☎ 94 441 92; Rue de la Voirie; pizza 7500-8800Ar, mains 8000-11,000Ar; ☎ 9am-1am) The best restaurant in town, with authentic Italian thin-crust pizza and pasta dishes, and an extensive chocolate-inspired dessert menu.

Etoile de Mer (☎ 94 428 07; Blvd Lyautey; mains 8000Ar) Great outdoor tables from where you can watch the passing parade and dine from a long list of Malagasy, French and Chinese staples.

Melita (Blvd Lyautey; mains 8000-9500Ar; ☎ 9am-1pm) A new bar-restaurant opposite the Hôtel le Palatuvier that offers meals and snacks all day, and drinks well into the night.

Za Za (Blvd Lyautey) A Toliara institution, Za Za has been going strong for years and gets crowded with people dancing to a mixture of Euro-techno and Malagasy pop.



Getting There & Around

Air Madagascar (☎ 94 415 85) has daily flights from Toliara to Tana (193,000Ar, one hour).

The main *taxi-brousse* station is at the eastern end of town. Several *taxis-brousses* leave daily for Tana.

MadaBus (☎ 032 42 089 69) departs from Place OUA for Tana at 6.30am on Tuesday, Friday

and Saturday. Tickets can be bought at Lalandaka, opposite Compagnie du Sud, and cost €50.

IFATY

Most travellers visit the quiet coastal area of Ifaty (actually an area that includes the villages of Ifaty, Mangilly and Mandio Rano)

to sit under a palm tree on a white sandy beach. And with coral reefs just offshore, sea breezes whispering in the casuarina trees and a relaxed tropical ambience, who can blame them? There's whale-watching in July and August, and the amazing spiny forest along the road just north of Mangilly is well worth a look.

There is nowhere to change money in Ifaty, so bring cash.

Close to the road but only a short walk to the beach, **Chez Julie** (☎ 41 822 48; bungalow with/without bathroom 10,000/15,000Ar) is a good budget place with clean bungalows, but no hot water, and a restaurant.

Mangilly's newest beachside resort, **Ifaty Beach Club** (☎ 032 02 600 47; ifatybeachclub@wanadoo.mg; 2-/3-/4-person bungalow €19/30/40) is a pleasant, relaxed place with a good restaurant. Comfortable wooden bungalows have hot showers and mosquito nets and are but a few steps from the beach. Next door is **Vovotelo** (☎ 032 02 621 48; hotel vovotelo@simico.mg; bungalow €20-50), where cheaper bungalows have no hot water, but there's a pool and decked restaurant-bar area.

Ifaty is 22km north of Toliara along a rutted, sandy road. *Taxis-brousses* leave from the northern *taxi-brousse* station in Toliara until early afternoon and cost 2000Ar. Private transfers from hotels cost about €15.

TAOLAGNARO (FORT DAUPHIN)

Although it's a major regional tourist destination, Fort Dauphin (as it's usually known) amounts to much less in reality than it appears on a map. It nonetheless has a spectacular location on a headland with great beaches and makes an ideal place for a holiday in the sun or a longer exploration of the scenic hinterland.

Much of the area's tourist infrastructure is under the control of the de Heaulme family.

Information

There are several banks that can change cash and travellers cheques; BFV-SG has an ATM.

The **WWF & Angap office** (☎ 92 212 68) can provide information about Parc National d'Andohahela.

Safari Laka (☎ 032 02 329 96; www.safarilaka.com), based at Motal Gina (right), organises a variety of trips by foot, boat and/or 4WD into Parc National d'Andohahela and other locations in the region. **Azafady** (☎ 92 212 65;

www.madagascar.co.uk) is a volunteer organisation that works on community tourism projects and can help you arrange independent trips around Fort Dauphin.

Sights & Activities

Offering fine views, **Fort Flacourt** was built by the French in 1643, but is now little more than a ruin at the northeastern tip of the cape.

There are several great beaches at Fort Dauphin itself. The long beach northeast of town features numerous **shipwrecks**, but is not a swimming beach. **Libanona** beach on the southwestern side of town is best for swimming, while the beach in **Baie des Galions** is good for surfing and windsurfing from late August to May.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Mahavoky Annexe (☎ 032 07 990 70; r without/with sea view 15,000/17,000Ar) If you get an east-facing room, this budget hotel perched above the beach with shipwrecks offers some of the best views in town. Basic but comfortable rooms all have mosquito nets and bathroom with hot water.

Motel Gina (☎ 92 212 66; motelgina2005@yahoo.fr; budget d 15,000Ar, bungalow 31,800-53,000Ar) For your home away from de Heaulme, this is an excellent midrange option, especially if you choose one of the round bungalows. There's a fine French restaurant (menu 15,000Ar) and a host of indoor activities if it's raining. Some English is spoken.

Hôtel le Dauphin (☎ 92 212 38; d €48; P) The long-standing de Heaulme flagship offers roomy bungalows from doubles to *chambres familiales*, the bigger ones with fridge. The unpretentious restaurant offers fine seafood (mains 11,000Ar), with a daily specials board. Also in the de Heaulme brace are Le Galion, opposite le Dauphin, and Hôtel Miramar, which has the best rooms and location, overlooking Libanona beach. Prices are the same for all de Heaulme facilities.

Getting There & Away

Daily flights are available with **Air Madagascar** (☎ 92 211 22) to Tana (192,500Ar, two hours), often via Toliara and Morondava.

Access to Fort Dauphin by road is an adventure in itself. *Taxis-brousses* travel to Toliara several times a week via Ihoisy and take at least 40 hours, more if there's been heavy rain and washouts.

EASTERN MADAGASCAR

The RN2 twists down the mountainsides between Tana and the coast to the resort town of Toamasina (Tamatave), passing one of the country's great rainforest reserves en route. Tamatave is a common starting point for trips on the Pangalanes Canal and points further north.

ANDASIBE (PERINET)

The most accessible parcel of pristine rainforest in Madagascar lies only three hours' drive from the capital. There are actually two reserves: the Reserve Speciale de l'Analamazaotra (often called Perinet, after the now-defunct train station) and the less accessible Parc National d'Andasibe-Mantadia. Both feature excellent lemur- and bird-watching. The highlight is the indris, which greet the dawn with hoots that can carry up to 3km through the forest canopy – that's even louder than a party of Italian tourists on a nature walk.

The **Angap office** (permits per person per 1/2/3/4 days 25,000/37,000/40,000/50,000Ar) is an easy 2km walk from the main Antananarivo–Toamasina road (RN2). Here you must buy permits and can arrange a professional guide; a one- to two-hour indri-watching circuit costs 10,000Ar per person.

Those without transport should stay at **Feon-ny Ala** (☎ 56 832 02; r without bathroom 18,000Ar, bungalow 46,000Ar), where thatched bungalows have toilet, hot shower and mosquito nets but no heating – snuggle up under your duvet and let the indris wake you. The good restaurant (mains 7000Ar) is open all day.

You can pitch a tent next to the Angap office for 6000Ar (be warned: it can rain at any time of year, especially in the wet season), where there's also **le Forestier** (mains 5000-7000Ar; ☎ breakfast & lunch), a resto serving breakfast and lunch (it closes at about 5pm).

Vakona Forest Lodge (☎ 22 624 80; vakona@wanadoo.mg; d 115,000Ar; ☎ P) is an upmarket accommodation option on the road between the two sections of the park (accessible only by private transport) offering spotless chalets and a classy dining area with log fire.

Andasibe is 142km east of Tana along the RN2. **Taxis-brousses** from Tana (6000Ar, three hours) can drop you at the park turn-off, from where it's an easy walk to Feon-ny Ala and the Angap office.

TOAMASINA (TAMATAVE)

Toamasina is a great place to soak up the elegant decrepitude of a faded colonial port, and is also the jumping-off point for the Canal des Pangalanes and the remote northeast corner of the country.

Information

Banks along Blvd Joffre will change cash and travellers cheques. BNI-CL, BMOI and BFV-SG all have ATMs. The main post office can be found on Araben-ny Fahaleovantena.

CyberSky (Blvd Joffre; per min 30Ar; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Sat) The best place for internet access.

Librairie GM Fakra (Blvd Joffre) Stocks a few magazines and newspapers in English, plus town maps.

Sights & Activities

Parc Zoologique Ivoloina (☎ 53 012 17; admission 10,000Ar; ☎ 9am-5pm), a small captive-breeding facility for lemurs, is 13km north of town. It's a lovely, tranquil spot, where small bands of semi-wild lemurs roam the grounds and pose for great photo opportunities.

Touring the **Canal des Pangalanes** is high on most visitors' lists of things to do, whether for a day or longer, more adventurous trips. **Calypso Tours** (☎ 032 40 247 78; Blvd Joffre), based in the Hôtel Eden (below), specialises in trips on the Canal, with day trips per person costing from 60,000Ar, including transfers and guides.

Sleeping

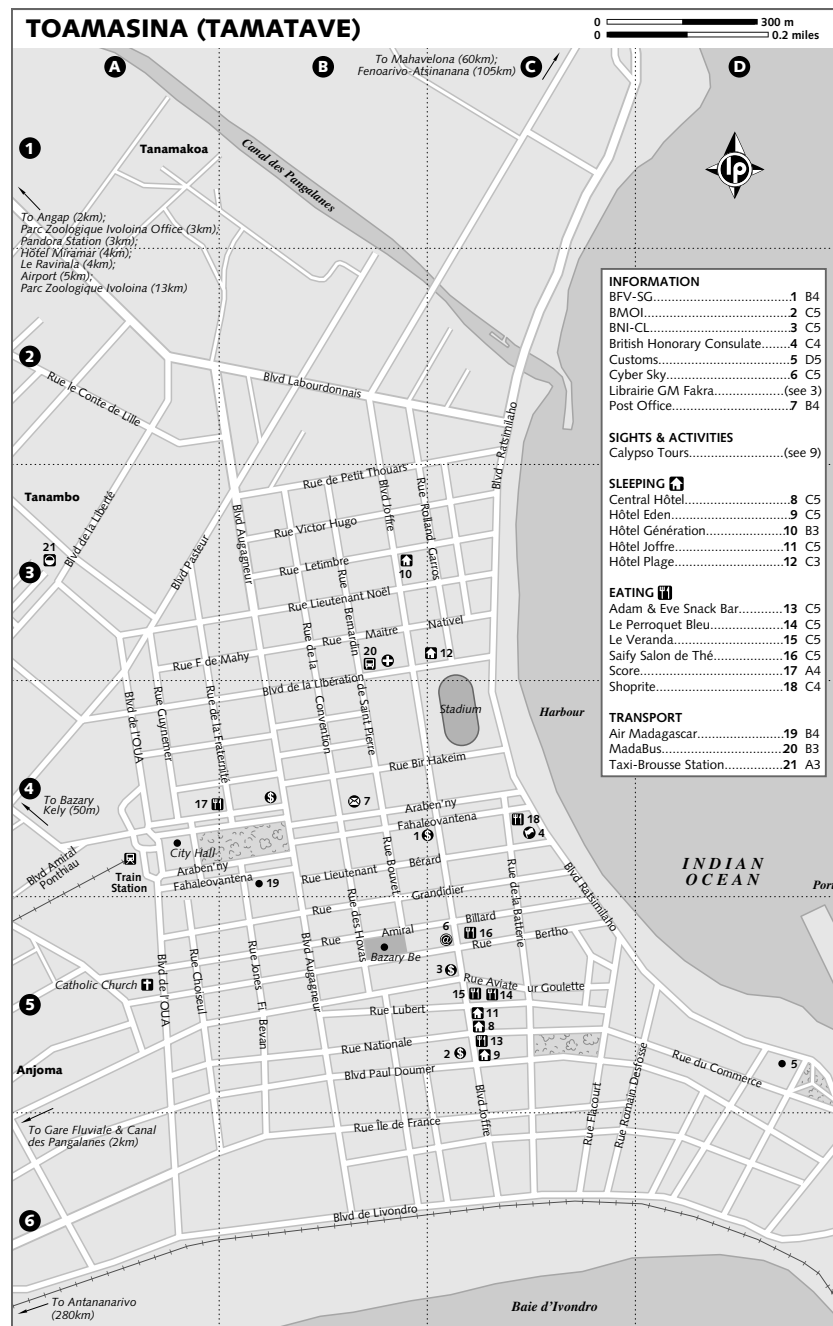
Hôtel Eden (☎ 53 312 90; Blvd Joffre; d with/without bathroom 15,600/13,600Ar) Offers basic rooms without mosquito nets, but it's in a handy location and is a good place for organising trips to the Canal.

Hôtel Plage (☎ 53 320 90; Blvd de la Libération; d with/without bathroom 17,000/15,000Ar) This place will do in a pinch, but the dank, dark rooms have lumpy beds and no mosquito nets.

Hôtel Generation (☎ 53 321 05; generationhotel@wanadoo.mg; Blvd Joffre; s/d 23,900/30,900Ar; ☎) The spacious rooms all have hot shower, TV, fridge and mosquito nets, and get more expensive the higher up you go.

Central Hôtel (☎ 53 340 86; d 35,000Ar) Not as slick as Hôtel Joffre next door but commendable. Rooms have four-poster beds, mosquito net, TV, safe and hot water. Its restaurant, Le Veranda, is up the road (see p900).

Hôtel Joffre (☎ 53 323 90; sodofi@mts.mg; Blvd Joffre; s/d 30,000/60,000Ar; ☎) A spotless, professionally managed place, with a good restaurant-bar opening onto the street.



Eating

Self-caterers have a choice of either Shoprite or Score supermarkets.

Saify Salon de Thé (☎ 53 331 81; Blvd Joffre) Serves indifferent patisserie but good coffee, plus fresh juices and ice cream.

Adam & Eve Snack Bar (☎ 53 334 56; Blvd Joffre; mains 5000Ar; ☎ Tue-Sun) The place to enjoy a good selection of snacks, drinks and ice cream while watching the streetside goings on.

Le Perroquet Bleu (☎ 032 40 270 55; Rue Lubert; mains & pizza 7000Ar) An intimate place decked out in cane, offering good thin-crust pizza as well as grills.

Le Veranda (☎ 53 334 35; Central Hôtel; menu 13,000Ar; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Central Hôtel guests and nonguests alike tuck into a fine selection of French, Chinese and Malagasy dishes or the daily specials.

Getting There & Away

Daily flights are available with **Air Madagascar** (☎ 53 323 56) from Toamasina to Tana (127,800Ar).

Taxis-brousses leave daily for Tana (14,000Ar).

The **MadaBus** (☎ 53 351 48; cap-sainte-marie@wanadoo.mg; ☎ 9am-7pm) departure point is behind the Hotel Sharon; the fare to/from Tana is €25.

MADAGASCAR DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

It's usually possible to find a decent, relatively clean room (with bathroom) from about €13, less with shared facilities. Single rooms are rare and you'll often have to pay for a double. Prices are usually higher during the high season, ie between June and August and around Christmas, New Year and Easter. Prices quoted in this book are high-season prices. For anything other than budget accommodation or out-of-the-way places make advance reservations during the high season.

ACTIVITIES

Top spots for lemur- and bird-watching include Parc National Ranomafana (p893) and Parc National d'Andasibe-Mantadia (p898). Parc National de l'Isalo (p894) is excellent for hiking.

Madagascar is a good country for cycling and bicycles can be rented in many places, although for long-distance trips you'll need to bring your own bike from home. For additional information, check out **Madagascar on Bike** (www.madagascar-on-bike.com).

The waters around Ifaty (p896) are ideal for diving. Companies in every dive spot offer internationally recognised diving courses and many places offer a *baptême* ('try dive'). Many dive centres are closed between February and May, when diving conditions are least favourable.

BUSINESS HOURS

Offices, post offices and banks are normally open from 8am to noon and 2pm to 3.30pm or 4pm weekdays. Most shops are also open until 5.30pm or 6pm on weekdays and 8am to noon on Saturday. Most restaurants are open from noon to 2pm for lunch, and from about 6.30pm to 8pm for dinner.

CHILDREN

Madagascar is a reasonably hard place to travel with young children, so junior travellers are a fairly rare sight. Disposable nappies are available in Antananarivo's supermarkets, but are hard to find elsewhere. Many hotels provide *chambres familiales* (family rooms) or double rooms with an extra single bed for parents with children.

CUSTOMS

It's forbidden to take the following out of Madagascar: live plants (including vanilla), mounted insects, tortoiseshell, fragments of *Aepyornis* (elephant bird) eggshell, precious stones (in export quantities only), jewellery, antique coins, fossils, funerary art and antiquities.

PRACTICALITIES

- Weights, measures and road distances use the metric system.
- Electricity is 220V AC (use European two-round-pin plugs).
- Daily newspapers include *Midi Madagascarikara*, *Madagascar Tribune* and *L'Express de Madagascar* (all in French).
- Radio and TV programming is all in French.

Officially, you are not allowed to take any more than 5000Ar out of Madagascar. For more detailed information, check out **Malagasy customs** (www.madagascar-contacts.com/douanes, in French).

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Travelling throughout Madagascar is not inherently dangerous. Petty theft is the main risk – do not keep your valuables in a pack or external money belt, and watch your pockets when in crowded areas. To avoid getting into trouble with the police, carry your passport with you at all times (a photocopy will not be sufficient).

Some areas along the coast are subject to danger from sharks and strong currents. Make sure to seek local advice before heading into the water. Mosquitoes are ubiquitous and malaria occurs here – wear insect repellent, especially at dawn and dusk.

A combination of packed, unroadworthy vehicles and reckless drivers makes *taxi-brousse* (bush taxi) travel potentially hazardous. To minimise the risks, try to avoid night travel if possible.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Madagascar Embassies & Consulates

Australia (☎ 02-9299 2290; tonyknox@ozemail.com.au; 6th level, 100 Clarence St, Sydney, NSW 2000)

Canada (☎ 613-744 7995; ambmgnet@inexpress.net; 649 Blair Rd, Ottawa, K1J 7M4 Ontario)

France (☎ 01 45 04 62 11; ambamadparis@tiscali.fr; 4 Ave Raphael, Paris 75016)

Kenya (☎ 02 218 393; mbnbo@africaonline.co.ke; BP 41723, 1st fl, Hilton Hotel, Nairobi)

South Africa (☎ 011 442 33 22; PO Box 786098, Sandton 2146)

UK (☎ 020-8746 0133; 16 Lanark Mans, Pennard Rd, London W12 8DT)

USA (☎ 202-265 5522; malagasy@embassy.org; 2374 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Madagascar

The UK has an honorary consulate near the port in Toamasina (Tamatave). The following embassies are all located in Antananarivo.

France (Map p887; ☎ 22 214 88; 3 Rue Jean Jaurès, Ambatomena) Near the Shanghai Hotel.

South Africa (☎ 22 423 03; Rte d'Ambohimanga, Ambohitrarahaba)

UK (Map p885; ☎ 22 273 70)

USA (Map p887; ☎ 22 209 56, 22 212 57; 14 Rue Rainitovo, Haute-Ville) East of the UCB bank.

All inquiries for Canada should be addressed c/o Canadian High Commission, PO Box 1022, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Many of these dates change yearly, so inquire at the tourist office for exact times.

Alahamady Be The low-key Malagasy New Year in March.

Santabary The first rice harvest held in April/May.

Fisemana A ritual purification ceremony of the Antakarana people in June.

Famadihana Literally the 'turning of the bones'; these reburial ceremonies are held especially from June to September.

Sambatra Circumcision festivals held by most tribes between June and September, and in November and December in the southwest.

FOOD

The budget restaurants as listed in this chapter are usually food stalls or small Malagasy *hotelys* that serve mainly rice dishes or snacks for under €2. Midrange restaurants generally serve plain French food, including staples such as *steack frites* (steak and chips), costing about 6000Ar to 8000Ar for a main course. Top-end restaurants serve French *haute cuisine*, which might include lobster profiteroles or goose-liver paté for around €7 per main course.

For more information, see p883.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Homosexual practices are illegal in Madagascar for persons under 21 years of age. Homosexuality is not openly practised, and there are no organisations catering to gay and lesbian travellers. Overt displays of affection – whether among couples of the same or opposite sex – are culturally inappropriate.

HEALTH

If you have just arrived from a country where yellow fever is present, you may be asked for a yellow-fever certificate upon arrival at immigration.

HOLIDAYS

Accommodation and flights are often harder to organise during French school holidays, when many expats from Mayotte and Réunion travel in the region. To find out when these holidays occur, check **L'Academie de la Reunion** (www.ac-reunion.fr/academie/calendri.htm, in French).

Government offices and private companies close on the following public holidays; banks are generally also closed the afternoon before a public holiday.

New Year's Day 1 January

Insurrection Day 29 March; celebrates the rebellion against the French in 1947

Easter Monday March/April

Labour Day 1 May

Anniversary Day 8 May

Organisation of African Unity Day 25 May

Ascension Thursday (40 days after Easter) May/June

Pentecost Monday (51 days after Easter) May/June

National Day (Independence Day) 26 June

Assumption Day 15 August

All Saints' Day 1 November

Christmas Day 25 December

Republic Day 30 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Fast and reliable email facilities (including some post offices) are available in most major towns. Prices start at about 30Ar per minute, but may be higher in remote areas.

LEGAL MATTERS

The use and possession of marijuana and other recreational drugs is illegal in Madagascar. If you're arrested, ask to see a representative of your country. Madagascar is strict in enforcing immigration laws, so don't overstay your visa. The legal age of consent for heterosexual sex is 15 years.

MAPS

Official maps produced by Foiben Taosarintanin'i Madagasikara (FTM) are available at bookshops in Antananarivo and major towns for about 10,000Ar. The maps are fairly dated but generally accurate, and more than adequate for visiting the country. FTM also produces street maps of the provincial capitals.

MONEY

Madagascar is currently changing its currency from the Malagasy franc (FMg) to the pre-colonial ariary (Ar), which is worth five Malagasy francs; the FMg will remain legal tender until 2009. Prices in most businesses are now quoted in ariary. Euros are widely accepted, and US dollars are sometimes accepted in Antananarivo, major cities and tourist areas.

There are ATMs in Antananarivo and other major towns. However, you can withdraw

only around €150 per transaction, and at the time of research ATMs only accepted Visa cards.

Credit cards are rarely accepted, except at some upmarket hotels, at Air Madagascar offices and at some larger travel agencies. The most useful card is Visa, with MasterCard also accepted in a minority of places. Visa and MasterCard can also be used at some banks to obtain cash advances (in ariary). Major banks change travellers cheques and cash in major currencies.

The foreign-exchange counter at Ivato airport has exchange rates that are just as good as those at the banks, and is usually open for international flight arrivals.

POST

There are post offices in all major towns and the postal service is generally reliable. Sending a letter to Europe costs 1500Ar, and 2100Ar to Australia and the USA. Postcards are slightly cheaper.

SHOPPING

Madagascar offers a fantastic variety of handicrafts and souvenirs. Ambohitra in the central highlands (p892) is the shopping capital of Madagascar, with dozens of shops selling carvings and *marqueterie* (objects inlaid with coloured woods). Ambalavao (p894) is known for its production of silk and handmade Antaimoro paper.

If you want to leave your purchasing until you're a taxi ride away from the airport, the best place for shopping is the Marché Artisanale (p889) in Antananarivo. Bargaining hard is expected – start from 50% of the price and work upwards.

Bear in mind that embroidery and raffia do far less environmental damage than wooden products, which are often carved from endangered tropical hardwoods.

TELEPHONE & FAX

Faxes can be sent from telephone offices, post offices and from upmarket hotels. Some internet cafés also offer fax services.

The country code for Madagascar is ☎ 261, followed by 20 if you are dialling from a land line, then the seven-digit number. To call out of Madagascar, dial ☎ 00 before the country code.

The best way to dial internationally is with a *telecarte* (phonecard). Card phones are scat-

tered around all larger towns. Cards are sold at post offices, at Agence d'Accueil Telecom (Agate) offices, and at some shops and hotels. For international calls you will need at least 100 units. Calls can also be made from more upmarket hotels (although rates will be much higher). Rates for international calls are FMg13,500 per minute to France, FMg13,500 to the Comoros, and about FMg20,250 per minute to Europe, the USA and Canada. Calls are 30% cheaper between 10pm and 6am, all day Sunday and on holidays. The international operator can be reached by dialling ☎ 10.

Numbers in Madagascar consist of a two-digit area prefix followed by a five-digit local number (usually given in the form of a three-digit then a two-digit number). The two-digit prefix must be dialled whether you are calling locally, from elsewhere in Madagascar or from abroad. These prefixes are listed throughout this book as part of each telephone number. If you are quoted a five-digit number, add the two-digit area prefix.

To reach remote areas that do not have direct-dialling facilities (all those telephone numbers that have only two digits), dial ☎ 15 for the local operator, then request the number.

Mobile phones are in common usage in Madagascar. Mobile-phone prefixes are 030, 031, 032 and 033. If dialling a mobile phone number from abroad, omit the zero and the 20 prefix, but add the country code.

For calls to mobile numbers from within Madagascar, you will need to dial the zero. When calling landline numbers from a mobile phone, dial ☎ 020 before the seven-digit number.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist offices in Madagascar can provide lists of hotels and guesthouses. Contact **Maison de Tourisme de Madagascar** (Map p887; ☎ 22 351 78; www.madagascar-tourisme.com, in French; 3 Lalana Elysée Ravelomanantsoa, Antananarivo; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-7pm Mon-Fri) in the capital.

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Madagascar has few, if any, facilities for the disabled. Public transport is very crowded and unable to accommodate a wheelchair unless it is folded up. Travelling around by rental car is the best option. In Antananarivo and most of the provincial capitals you will find hotels with

either lifts or ground-floor accommodation. There are very few bathrooms large enough to manoeuvre a wheelchair in, and almost none with any sort of handles or holds.

The following organisations provide information on world travel for the mobility impaired:

Mobility International USA (☎ 541-343 1284; www.miusa.org) Located in the USA.

National Information Communication Awareness Network (NICAN) (☎ 02-6285 3713; www.nican.com.au) Located in Australia.

Royal Association for Disability & Rehabilitation (☎ 020-7250 3222; www.radar.org.uk) Located in the UK.
Society for the Advancement of Travel for the Handicapped (SATH) (☎ 212-447 7284; www.sath.org) Located in the USA.

VISAS

All visitors must have a visa to enter Madagascar. Visas can be arranged in advance at any Malagasy embassy or consulate for the equivalent of about €29/34 for single/multiple entry. One-month, single-entry visas are available on arrival at Ivato airport in Antananarivo (about €30) – but get an update on the situation before arriving without one. Visas are valid for up to three months from the date of entry and must be used within six months of the date of issue.

As long as you have not exceeded the normal three-month maximum, visas can be extended at the immigration office in Antananarivo or any provincial capital. You will need to supply between two to four passport-size photos as well as a copy of your return air or boat ticket. A one-month extension costs about €21 and can take several days to process.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for travel to South Africa are available from its embassy in Antananarivo (see p901).

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Most women do not feel threatened or insecure in any way when travelling in Madagascar. The most you can expect is some mild curiosity about your situation, especially if you are single and/or don't have children. Physical harassment and violent crime are very rare, and in fact male travellers face far more pestering from the hordes of prostitutes who frequent nightclubs.

TRANSPORT IN MADAGASCAR

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Immigration officials generally just check or issue your visa before letting you go on your way. See p903 for information about visa requirements.

Air

Intercontinental flights arrive at Ivato airport, 12km north of Antananarivo.

Air Madagascar is the national carrier, and with recent improvements to the fleet and service, is now relatively efficient.

The following airlines fly to and from Madagascar:

Air Austral (UU; ☎ 22 359 90; www.airaustral.com, in French) Hub Saint-Denis, Réunion. Flies in conjunction with Air Mauritius.

Air France (AF; ☎ 23 230 23; www.airfrance.com) Hub Paris Charles de Gaulle.

Air Madagascar (MD; ☎ 22 222 22; www.airmadagascar.mg) Hub Antananarivo.

Air Mauritius (MK; ☎ 22 359 90; www.airmauritius.com) Hub St Maurice.

Corsair (SS; ☎ 22 633 36; www.corsair.fr, in French) Hub Paris Orly.

Interair (D6; ☎ 22 224 06; www.interair.co.za) Hub Johannesburg.

AFRICA & THE INDIAN OCEAN

Madagascar is well connected with the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius and Réunion, and reasonably accessible from mainland Africa.

Once you're in Madagascar, **Dodo Travel & Tours** (Map p887; ☎ 22 690 36; www.dodotraveltour.com; Lalana Elysée Ravelomanantsoa), in Antananarivo, is a useful place to seek information about flights within this region.

The main hubs for flights to Madagascar are Johannesburg in South Africa and Nairobi in Kenya. There are flights several times weekly between Johannesburg and Antananarivo (about €500 return) on Interair, and twice weekly on Air Madagascar. Travel between Madagascar and Nairobi (about €500 return) generally works better if you purchase your ticket directly from Air Madagascar in Kenya or Madagascar.

Air Austral has regular flights between Réunion and Mauritius and Antananarivo

(from €350 return) and Toamasina (from €350 return).

ASIA

Air Madagascar has recently commenced a direct route from Antananarivo to Bangkok, Thailand. Air Mauritius has flights several times weekly from Singapore and Hong Kong to Mauritius, and South African Airlines flies regularly to Johannesburg from both cities. There are regular connections from Mauritius on Air Austral to Antananarivo, and from Johannesburg you can also connect with an Air Madagascar or Interair flight to Antananarivo.

It's also easy to get flights on Kenya Airways from Hong Kong to Nairobi, from where you can connect to Madagascar.

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

There are no direct flights servicing Australia and Madagascar; the shortest (and often cheapest) route is to travel via Mauritius. Air Mauritius has weekly flights connecting both Melbourne and Perth with Mauritius from about A\$1500 return. From Mauritius there are regular connections on Air Austral to Antananarivo.

Alternatively, Qantas and South African Airways both have flights connecting Sydney with Johannesburg from A\$1600 return in the low season. From Johannesburg, you can connect with an Air Madagascar or Interair flight to Antananarivo. Try these agencies:

Flight Centre Australia (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au); New Zealand (☎ 0800 233 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz)

STA Travel Australia (☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au); New Zealand (☎ 0508 782 872; www.statravel.co.nz)

EUROPE

The main European hub for flights to/from Madagascar is Paris. Air Madagascar and Air France fly three to four times weekly between Paris and Antananarivo. Prices from Paris on both airlines usually start from about €1400 return.

It's also possible to fly from many European capitals to Johannesburg, Nairobi, St-Denis (Réunion) or Port Louis (Mauritius), and from one of these cities to Antananarivo. The best connections are usually via Réunion or Mauritius, which are linked by Air Austral flights to Antananarivo (from €350 return), as

well as by several flights weekly to other places in Madagascar. Contact one of the following agents to get you started:

Air Fare (☎ 020 620 5121; www.airfair.nl, in Dutch) A well-respected Dutch travel agent.

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 08 03 33 33 33; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr) A good French option, with group tours to Madagascar.

OTU Voyages (☎ 0825 004 027; www.otu.fr, in French) Has branches across France.

STA Travel UK (☎ 0870 1600 599; www.statravel.co.uk); Germany (☎ 01805-456 422; www.statravel.de, in German) International travel agent with plenty of other offices across Europe.

Trailfinders (☎ 020-7938 3939; www.trailfinders.com) Excellent, reliable UK travel agent with huge amount of experience.

USA & CANADA

The cheapest way to fly from North America to Madagascar is generally via Paris. It may work out cheaper to get separate tickets – one from North America to Europe, and then a second ticket from Europe to Madagascar.

Another option is to fly from Atlanta or New York to Johannesburg, with a connection to Antananarivo. In the USA, the main travel agency specialising in Madagascar is **Cortez Travel & Expeditions** (☎ 800-854 1029; www.air-mad.com). It has information on good-value airfares and can book Air Madagascar flights. The following companies might also be able to help:

Cheaptickets (www.cheaptickets.com) A good source of online fares.

Flight Centre Canada (☎ 1 888 967 5355; www.flightcentre.ca); USA (☎ 1866 WORLD 51; www.flightcentre.us) Contact it directly for fares.

STA Travel (☎ 800 329 9537; www.statravel.com) Good deals to Paris.

Sea

It's possible to travel to and from Madagascar by boat, but you will need plenty of time and determination. Travel is likely to be on cargo ships – unless you find a ride on a yacht as a crew member – so sleeping and eating conditions, combined with sometimes turbulent seas, can make it a rough trip.

Mombasa (Kenya) and the island of Zanzibar (Tanzania) are the main places to look for cargo boats to Madagascar. It's also sometimes possible to find passage on a yacht heading from South Africa, Réunion or Mauritius to Madagascar.

Tours

For a list of organised tour companies within Madagascar, see p907. Following are a few companies operating general interest tours to, and around, Madagascar from Australia, the UK and the USA.

Adventure Associates (☎ 02-8916 3000; www.adventureassociates.com; Australia) Runs tours to Madagascar, combined with Réunion and Mauritius.

Cortez Travel & Expeditions (☎ 800-854 1029; www.air-mad.com; USA) Well-established operator for Air Madagascar flights and tours.

Lemur Tours (☎ 1-510-620-9708; www.lemurtours.com; USA) Focuses on lemur sightings.

Manaca (☎ 866-362 6222; www.manaca.com; USA) Specialists in ecotourism and responsible travel.

Rainbow Tours (☎ 020-7226 1004; www.rainbowtours.co.uk; UK) Specialist and general-interest guided trips to Madagascar.

Reef & Rainforest Tours (☎ 01803-866965; www.reefandrainforest.co.uk; UK) Focuses on wildlife viewing.

Wildlife Worldwide (☎ 0845-130 6982; www.wildlifeworldwide.com; UK) Wildlife tours.

GETTING AROUND

Air

The national carrier, **Air Madagascar** (Map p887; ☎ 22 222 22; www.airmadagascar.mg; 31 Ave de L'Indépendance, Antananarivo), has a pretty comprehensive and efficient network of domestic routes. Tickets are relatively inexpensive, and air travel is a good way of covering large distances and avoiding long road journeys.

A handy free booklet detailing timetables and routes (but not fares) is available from Air Madagascar's head office in Antananarivo and from some travel agents.

You can pay for tickets in ariary, euros or US dollars at the head office in Antananarivo and Air Madagascar offices in larger towns, but smaller offices may only accept ariary. The office in Antananarivo also accepts travellers cheques and credit cards.

The baggage allowance for most internal flights is 20kg.

RESERVATIONS & CHECK-IN

Air Madagascar flights are frequently full, so it's always worth booking as far in advance as possible.

While it's officially unnecessary to reconfirm your Air Madagascar tickets, it's best to check with the airline a few days in advance and again on the day of departure, as there are frequent last-minute schedule changes.

If you have checked in baggage, be sure to keep your baggage-claim ticket until you are reunited with your luggage at your destination.

Bicycle

It may often be just as fast to travel by bicycle as by *taxi-brousse*. A mountain bike is normally essential. Carry spare parts, although inner tubes and other basic parts are sometimes available in larger towns. The terrain varies from very sandy to muddy or rough and rocky.

It's usually no problem to transport your bicycle on *taxis-brousses* if you want to take a break en route.

Although you are able to rent mountain bikes in many larger towns, including Toamasina, Antsirabe and Ambodifotatra on Île Sainte Marie, they are not normally in good enough condition for long journeys.

Boat

On the northeast coast, cargo boats (sometimes called *boutres*) are the primary means of transport. Overloaded cargo boats, including passenger ferries, have capsized with significant loss of life. Always check for lifejackets and don't get in if the seas are rough or if the boat is overcrowded. Boat travel on the east coast is generally unsafe during the rainy season between May and September.

Bus

Long-distance bus companies, such as **Mada-Bus** (www.madabus.com), operate on the Toliari and Tamatave routes. These mostly use the same stations as the *taxis-brousses* and offer better punctuality, comfort and, arguably, safety. However, *taxis-brousses* remain the main form of public road transport in Madagascar.

Car & Motorcycle

To drive in Madagascar you will need to have an International Driving Permit (IDP).

You'll find petrol stations of some kind in all cities and in most major towns. Spare parts and repairs of varying quality are available in most towns. Make sure to check the spare tyre of any car you rent before setting out.

To rent a car in Madagascar, you must generally be at least 23 years old and have held a driving licence for at least one year. Rental costs include insurance. Due to the often difficult driving conditions and road

hazards, most rental agencies make hiring a driver obligatory with their vehicles. Prices average 100,000Ar to 140,000Ar per day for a 4WD, excluding fuel. For almost all destinations off the main routes a 4WD is advisable, and essential in the rainy season.

Motorcycles can be rented by the half day or full day at various places in Madagascar, including Toliara and Île Sainte Marie (for use on the island only). At most places, they range from a Honda or Yamaha 125cc or 250cc to a tiny Peugeot *mobylette* (moped). Some places also rent motorcycles suitable for longer, rougher journeys, and provide support vehicles as well.

ROAD CONDITIONS

Less than 15% of the country's roads are paved, and many of those that are paved are badly deteriorated. Nonpaved roads are often exceptionally muddy, sandy or rocky. The Ihosy–Fort Dauphin route is very difficult during the rainy season.

Most accidents are caused by human failing (especially drunkenness) rather than by dangerous vehicles and roads. Delays are more common than accidents, so always factor in a few extra hours to allow for breakdowns or social calls en route.

ROAD RULES

Driving in Madagascar is on the right-hand side. The police occasionally stop vehicles and carry out random checks, in the hope of detecting any of the 1001 possible (and probable) infractions of the vehicle code. Occasionally foreigners will be asked for their passport, but as long as your visa is in order there should be no problem.

If you aren't used to local driving conditions, watch out for pedestrians, animals, broken-down cars and slow-moving zebu carts on the road. It is particularly hazardous to drive at night, as there is no lighting, so try to avoid it.

Hitching

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and we don't recommend it. Traffic between towns and cities is thin, and most passing vehicles are likely to be *taxis-brousses* or trucks, which are often full. If you do find a ride, you will likely have to pay about the equivalent of the *taxi-brousse* fare.

Local Transport POUSSE-POUSSE

Brightly coloured *pousse-pousses* (rickshaws) throng some Malagasy towns and you'll probably be hounded by drivers looking for a fare. You may find the idea offensive, but the *pousse-pousse* men need work, not sympathy, as they rent their rickshaws and have to pay a daily amount to the owners. If you have heavy luggage, it's polite to hire two *pousse-pousse*. Tourist rates start at about 1000Ar and are always negotiable, so agree to a fare before you climb aboard. When it's raining, the price sometimes doubles.

TAXI-BROUSSE

Taxis-brousses are a part of daily life in Madagascar and you'll find it hard to travel independently around the country without wedging yourself into one at some point.

Fares for all trips are set by the government and are based on distance, duration and route conditions. Prices are the same for locals and foreigners. If you want to keep a backpack with you in the vehicle, you'll need to pay for an extra seat.

The *taxi-brousse* system is relatively well organised once you get the hang of it. Upon arrival to a town, you may well be besieged by pushy but harmless touts, tugging at your luggage and yelling in your ear to try and win your custom.

Vehicles display the destination in white paint on their windscreen and fares are pinned up in the transport company offices that line the edges of the station.

Tours

Madagascar's many tour operators and freelance guides offer mountain-bike excursions, 4WD circuits, wildlife-watching trips, walking tours, and cultural and historic tours.

An organised tour can be particularly valuable if you don't speak much French, as it can otherwise be hard to break the communication barrier with the fairly reserved Malagasy people, who rarely speak English.

The rule of thumb for organised tours is to check as much as possible beforehand – including vehicles, camping equipment and even menu plans. Try to get all the details, agreed by both parties in advance, in writing.

Following is a list of some of the reliable Antananarivo-based companies that can arrange excursions throughout Madagascar. For details about foreign travel agencies, see p886.

Aventour (Map p885; ☎ 22 317 61; aventours@iris.mg; Immeuble FIARO, Ampefiloha) A relatively new but very efficient company that can organise countrywide tours, car rental and ticketing.

Boogie Pilgrim (☎ 22 530 70; www.boogie-pilgrim.net; Île des Oiseaux, Tsarasoa, Alarobia) Adventurous ecotours and camps in several places in Madagascar, including the Canal des Pangalanes. English speaking.

Cortez Travel & Expeditions (Map p885; ☎ 22 219 74; cortez.expeditions@simicro.mg; 25 Lalana Ny Zafindriandiky, Antanimena) American-based agency offering a wide range of itineraries for individuals and groups.

Espace Mada (Map p887; ☎ 22 262 97; [www.madagascar-car-circuits.com](http://www.madagascar-circuits.com); 50 Arabe Ramanantsoa, Isoraka) Vehicles, guides and off-road excursions.

Mad Cameleon (☎ 22 344 20; madcam@dts.mg; Lot 11-K, Lalana Rasamoely, Ankadivato-Ambony) Tours focusing on western Madagascar, including Parc National Tsingy de Bemaraha.

Malagasy Tours (Map p885; ☎ 22 356 07; www.malagasy-tours.com; Lalana Ramboatiana, Avaradrova) Upmarket operator based at Grill du Rova restaurant, offering tours, trekking and trips along the Canal des Pangalanes.

Setam (Map p887; ☎ 22 324 31; www.setam-mg.com; 56 Araben'ny 26 Jona 1960, Analakely) Bicycle expeditions, orchid tours and Famadhina ceremonies, as well as the usual circuits.

Train

At the time of writing the Malagasy rail system, known as the Réseau National des Chemins de Fer Malgaches (RNCFM), operated only the Fianarantsoa–Manakara line. Plans are, however, afoot to restore the Antananarivo–Toamasina and Antananarivo–Andasibe services.

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