Madagascar

Bird Photo Tour



Scaly Ground Roller by Greg de Klerk

Madagascar offers a birding a wildlife tour like nowhere else on Earth. This unique island is the world's fourth largest and, due to its size and incredible biological diversity, is often referred to as the "Eighth Continent". Its fauna and flora have evolved over millions of years of isolation and the remarkable selection of utterly unique and often spectacular wildlife is quite simply mind-blowing. Incredibly Madagascar hosts no less than five endemic bird families and a plethora of other impressive endemic birds, of which many will offer up fabulous photographic opportunities. We will also spend time seeking out and photographing the amazing lemurs, colourful chameleons, and fascinating flora of this appropriately named "laboratory of evolution." Virtually every plant and animal on the island is endemic; but sadly, most are threatened by continued deforestation, thus making Madagascar one of those "must-visit-soon" destinations.

Itinerary & Map



Madagascar Bird Photo Tour

Day 1	Arrival in Antananarivo (Tana)
Day 2	Antananarivo to Andasibe (Perinet)
Days 3 & 4	Andasibe-Mantadia National Park & Analamazaotra National Park
Day 5	Andasibe (Perinet), transfer to Antananarivo
Day 6	Antananarivo; flight to Fort Dauphin & transfer to Berenty
Day 7	Berenty Lemur Reserve
Day 8	Berenty Lemur Reserve to Fort Dauphin, flight to Antananarivo
Day 9	Antananarivo; flight to Tulear & transfer to Ifaty
Day 10	Ifaty
Day 11	Ifaty to Tulear, Nosy Ve & Anakao (San Augustin)
Day 12	Tulear, flight to Antananarivo
Day 13	Antananarivo, flight to Mahajanga, boat tour of Betsiboka Delta
Day 14	Mahajanga to Ampijoroa Forest Station
Day 15	Ampijoroa Forest Station
Day 16	Ampijoroa, drive to Antananarivo
Day 17	Final departure

Highlights

- ***Madagascar is home to an exceptional variety of wildlife including many endemic birds, mammals, insects, amphibians, and reptiles! Often referred to as the 'Eighth Continent due to its incredible biodiversity.***
- ***We will get to see an incredible variety of species during this tour including chances for over 100 endemic birds, over 20 species of lemurs, and over 30 species of reptiles and amphibians***
- ***Our chances of finding at least one representative of the 5 endemic bird families (Asities, Ground Rollers, Mesites, Cuckoo-roller, and Tetrakas & Allies) is excellent and we are likely to get photographs of them as well.***
- ***Spend time photographing the 'dancing' Verreaux's Sifakas at Berenty and other iconic species such as Indri at Perinet and Ring-tailed Lemur at Berenty***
- ***Opportunities to see and take photos of several rare and declining species including a number that are considered endangered or critically endangered such as Madagascar Fish Eagle, Meller's Duck, Van Dam's Vanga, Madagascar Grebe, Malagasy Sacred Ibis, Bernier's Teal, Malagasy Pond Heron, Humblot's Heron, and Madgascar Jacana***
- ***Night photography is another highlight in Madagascar and the night walks we do are very productive. These often yield several species of nocturnal lemurs (mouse lemurs, dwarf lemurs, sportive lemurs and Avahi's), frogs, and chameleons***
- ***Spend ample time exploring some of Madagascar's iconic sites such as Andasibe-Mantadia, Analamazaotra, Ampijoroa, Berenty, and Ifaty***

Sites in detail

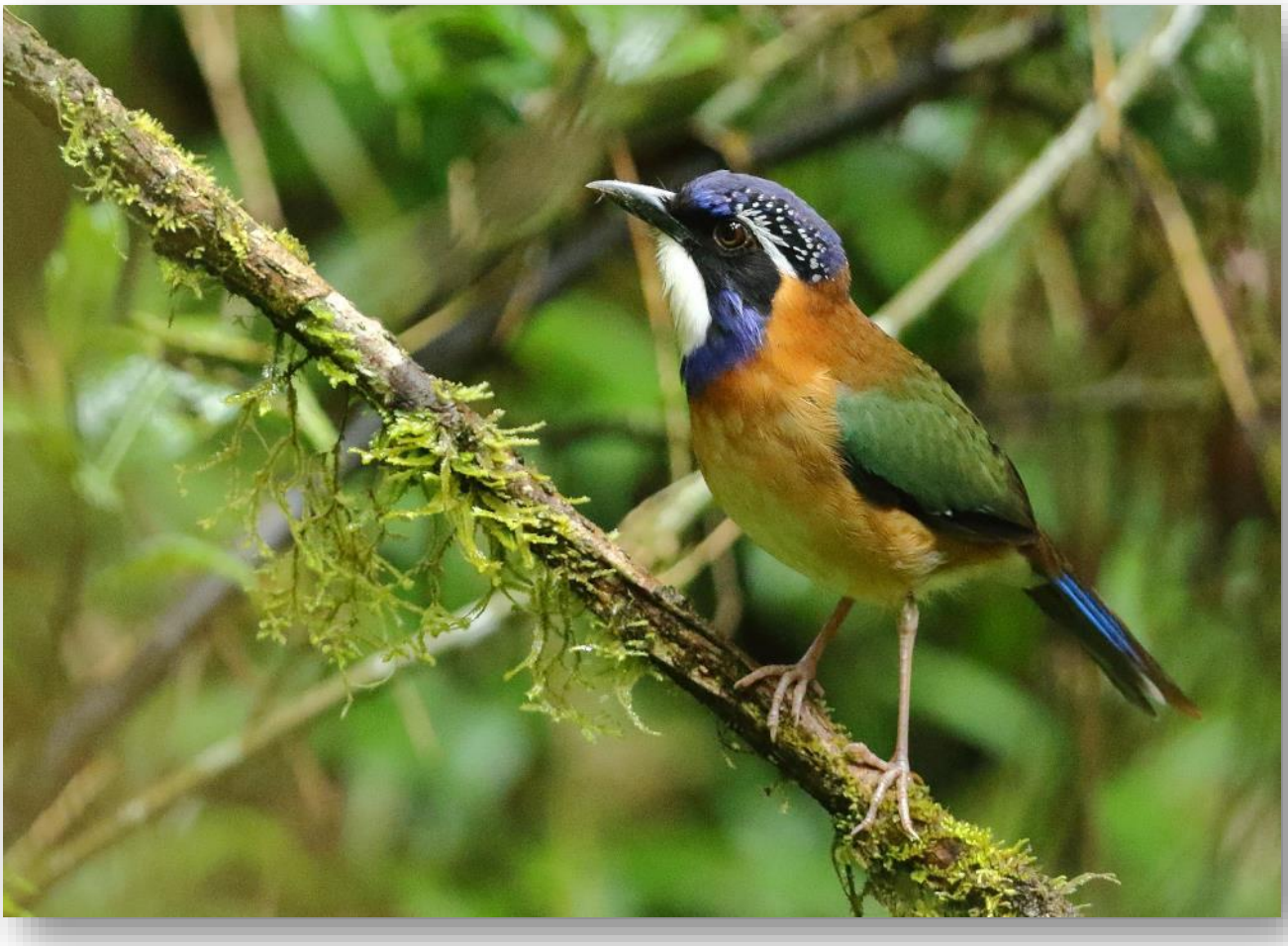
Lac Alarobia. This private sanctuary set within the city of Antananarivo protects large numbers of ducks and herons. As evening sets, the small lake literally teems with waterfowl. Large numbers of White-faced Whistling Duck and Red-billed Teal should be seen, usually accompanied by small numbers of Blue-billed Teal, Knob-billed Duck and sometimes Fulvous Whistling Duck, as well as the very rare and endangered Meller's Duck. The Lake also supports a fantastic assortment of heron's egrets that roost or breed in the sanctuary, including a few splendidly adorned Malagasy Pond Herons and Dimorphic Egrets. African Openbill, a very scarce bird in Madagascar, is sometimes also recorded here. Mascarene Martins are common overhead and are sometimes joined by Malagasy Black and Little Swifts. We will also be watching in adjacent areas for more Madagascar endemics and near endemics, which may include Malagasy Kestrel, Malagasy Coucal, Malagasy Kingfisher, handsome White-throated Rail, Madagascar Wagtail, Malagasy White-eye, Madagascar Mannikin and Red Fody.



Indri by Daniel Danckwerts

Analamazaotra National Park. The moist rainforest cloaking Madagascar's eastern escarpment protects the richest assemblage of birds on the island, including many that are rare or poorly known. Over 100 of these have been recorded from within the small reserve of Analamazaotra National Park and we will search for such specials as Madagascar Flufftail, the elusive Madagascar Wood Rail, Madagascar Blue Pigeon, scarce Greater Vasa Parrot, vociferous but retiring Madagascar Cuckoo, Madagascar Spinetail, brilliant Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascar Cuckooshrike, Ward's Flycatcher, Tylas Vanga, Madagascar Starling, Long-billed Bernieria, Spectacled Tetraka, furtive White-throated Oxylabes, Nelicourvi Weaver and Souimanga Sunbird.

Amongst the most sought-after of Madagascar's birds are those of the five families endemic to the Malagasy region: the peculiar mesites, exquisite ground rollers, Cuckoo-roller, tetrakas and allies, and the near endemic vangas. Some of these, such as the magnificent Cuckoo Roller, sensational Pitta-like Ground Roller^ and a number of the Malagasy warblers and vangas are reasonably common and regularly encountered, whilst most of the others remain rare, local or elusive. We will make a special effort to locate as many representatives of these charismatic families as possible, as well as those of the endemic sub-families, the couas and asities.



Pitta-like Ground Roller by David Hoddinott

In the forested hills around Andasibe, we hope to find the localised Red-fronted and Blue Couas, Rufous-headed Ground Cuckoo, Velvet Asity, and flocks of vangas that may include White-headed, Chabert's, Madagascar Blue, Red-tailed and the bizarre Nuthatch Vanga.

Whilst in the Andasibe area, we will make a special effort to see the reserve's most famous residents: the huge, singing lemurs known as the Indri. A journey in search of these magnificent creatures is an incredible experience, and if we are fortunate we will be treated to a close encounter with a family group; their eerie, whale-like howling echoing through the forest. Other lemurs we hope to see include Brown and Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemurs, while we will also search known roosting sites for the nocturnal but inquisitive Common Sportive Lemur. Another 'must see' member of the island's fauna is the Giraffe-necked Weevil, a tiny red and black insect named for its unusually proportioned neck!

In the evenings, we will embark on night walks. Nocturnal outings are a thrilling and indeed, essential part of any trip to Madagascar and Andasibe is one of the best sites to search for the island's night birds. Specialities here include Madagascar Owl, Rainforest Scops Owl and both Madagascar and the rare and little-known Collared Nightjar. Whilst seeing these birds will be the focus of our walks, we will not neglect the immense

variety of non-avian life that also emerges after dark. Although Madagascar is famous for the spectacular lemurs that have adapted to a daytime existence, a number of species of these primitive primates remain, like their African cousins the galagos, denizens of the night.

We will search for and should find Crossley's Dwarf and the diminutive Goodman's Mouse Lemurs, and may also encounter some of Madagascar's other evolutionary masterpieces such as the bizarre Lowland Streaked Tenrec. The island's reptile and amphibian ('herp') fauna is equally fascinating and even the most hardened birder would not fail to be impressed by the plethora of colourful and bizarre frogs, chameleons and geckos to be seen on an evening's stroll through the rainforest. In particular, we will search for the giant Parson's Chameleon and three species of eccentric leaf-tailed geckos: the huge Common Flat-tail Gecko, the aptly named Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko and the Southern Flat-tail Gecko, which looks as though its body has been adorned with moss.



Rainforest Scops Owl by Reece Dodd

Andasibe-Mantadia National Park. Andasibe-Mantadia National Park lies a short distance from Andasibe, protecting a larger expanse of primary forest at a somewhat higher altitude. Though it has only recently been opened to the public, Andasibe-Mantadia is now an essential destination on any birding trip to Madagascar, having rapidly gained a reputation as an excellent site for a handful of highly prized forest birds. Not least amongst these are several species formerly considered to be restricted to the poorly accessible rainforests of the far north-east, such as Red-breasted Coua and Scaly Ground Roller. We will concentrate on finding these specials, while also watching for more widespread yet no less desirable forest birds including Madagascar Ibis, Henst's Goshawk, Pitta-like and Short-legged Ground Rollers, Crossley's Vanga, Common Sunbird-Asity, Common and Dark Newtonias, Wedge-tailed, Green, Stripe-throated and Common Jeries, Rand's Warbler, the newly described Cryptic Warbler and Forest Fody.

We will also scan across a small forest pond that often holds a pair of Meller's Duck and Madagascar Grebe, two highly threatened and declining endemics. Other attractions in this scenically beautiful park include the vocal Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur, the elusive Diademed Sifaka (considered by many to be the world's most beautiful lemur) and Baron's Mantella, a spectacularly coloured forest frog. Much of the birding in Andasibe-Mantadia National Park can be enjoyed from the wide road that runs up into the reserve, although seeing the



Ring-tailed Lemur by Daniel Danckwerts

skulkers of the forest understory will require that we take to some of the steep and at times slippery trails into the rainforest.

Berenty Lemur Reserve. Berenty is justly famous for its lemurs, not only because its deciduous woodland is home to no less than six species of these primitive primates, but also for the ease with which they may be seen and appreciated in the wild. Red-fronted Lemur occurs in large numbers during the day, while White-footed Sportive Lemur and Red-and-grey and Grey Mouse Lemurs are regularly encountered on night walks through the reserve, though the undoubted favourites are the delightful diurnal Ring-tailed Lemurs and Verreaux's Sifakas.

Whilst the bands of cat-like, quizzical ringtails are often the first to steal visitors' hearts, their appeal is easily matched by the strikingly patterned sifakas, with their soulful expressions and bizarre, bipedal dancing locomotion. To spend time with groups of these gentle creatures will certainly be one of the highlights of our Madagascar adventure. A further mammalian highlight of Berenty is visiting the Madagascar Flying Fox roost, where about 300 of these impressive animals sporting 1.25-metre wingspans spend their day squabbling and presumably sleeping.

Here we will also be on the look-out for the numerous Giant Couas that stroll along the well-cleared paths through the woodland, and we may be lucky enough to find dimunutive Madagascar Buttonquail as they scurry through the leaf litter. Potential new species we may also find here include Grey-headed Lovebird, Hook-billed Vanga, Frances's Sparrowhawk, Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk, Helmeted Guineafowl and Madagascar Sandgrouse.

Berenty Reserve. The reserve belongs to the De Haulme family who have set aside sections of gallery forest along the Mandrare River to conserve its population of lemurs and other wildlife. We'll venture out in the evening to search for Torotoroka Scops Owl and the impressive White-browed Owl but may also encounter a host of other nocturnal creatures such as the strange Lesser and Greater Hedgehog Tenrecs, the huge Madagascar Hissing Cockroach and several species of attractive geckos.



Red-shouldered Vanga by Glen Valentine

Ifaty. Much has been written about the strange Didierea woodland, or 'Spiny Forest' around Ifaty, but this in no way lessens the feeling of awe that overcomes one as we set foot in this botanical wonderland. Venturing out at dawn, before the day's heat, we will stroll amongst the myriad of multi-stemmed succulents, squat baobab trees and thorny scrub in search of such spectacular endemics as the ultra-low-density Madagascar Sparrowhawk, Madagascar Harrier-Hawk, Crested, Running and Red-capped Couas (represented here by the distinctive green-capped race), Madagascar Hoopoe, Lafresnaye's Vanga, Archbold's Newtonia, unique and melodious Thamnornis, Subdesert Brush Warbler and Sakalava Waver.

Two very special birds that occur here are the strange Subdesert Mesite, which we may find adopting its cryptic posture on a thorny branch, and Long-tailed Ground Roller, an elusive ground dweller best located by its low,

hooting call. Flocks of noisy Sickle-billed Vanga are another feature of this bizarre, Tolkienesque landscape. We should also see the numerous Three-eyed Lizards as the day heats up in the mid-morning, while we may be lucky enough to find a beautiful Southern Spider Tortoise or rare Dumeril's Boa.

In addition, the tropical ocean off Ifaty is alive with marine life and we will have some time to don masks and snorkels and appreciate the multiple colours of a coral reef or relax in the warm shallows in front of our hotel. We'll also spend a little time birding the surrounding fields for the uncommon and range-restricted Madagascar Plover, while wetlands and salt pans may hold numbers of Greater and Lesser Flamingos, Black-winged Stilt, Kittlitz's and Three-banded Plovers, assorted migratory waders, Humblot's Heron and Malagasy Harrier if we are very fortunate. White-throated Rail and Baillon's Crake also occur here on occasion and are worth looking out for in the vast wetlands.



Golden-brown Mouse Lemur by Daniel Danckwerts

Nosy Ve. From Tulear, we will board a speedboat for an excursion to the small uninhabited islet of Nosy Ve to the south. The main attraction of Nosy Ve is its colony of Red-tailed Tropicbirds, which allow close approach as they are left unmolested by local people due to a taboo, or fady. We may also find Crab-plovers* roosting on the sandbars here and White-fronted Plovers on the shoreline. Depending on time and weather conditions, we may have an opportunity to snorkel on the beautiful coral reef encircling the island.

Near Anakao (San Augustin), we'll enjoy lunch and search for another target species - the localised Littoral Rock Thrush.

Mahajanga area. A seasonal pan near to Mahajanga often harbours a variety of shorebirds that usually include Black-winged Stilt and Kittlitz's Plover and, if we are very fortunate, the rare, endemic Madagascar Plover may also be in attendance. Depending on water levels, the far end of the pan may be blanketed in water lilies and if

this is the case we will almost definitely be rewarded with rafts of beautiful African Pygmy Goose and perhaps the odd Greater Painted-snipe. The adjacent scrub and thickets also usually support good numbers of Madagascar Cisticola, Olive Bee-eater, Madagascar Mannikin and Red Fody.

Betsiboka Delta. We'll explore part of the Betsiboka Delta from on a motorised boat. This seldom-visited region is home to two of Madagascar's rarest and most endangered birds, Bernier's Teal, and Malagasy Sacred Ibis, and we have an excellent chance of finding both specialities during our morning's outing. Other noteworthy birds we may encounter on this journey are Humblot's Heron, African Openbill, Greater Flamingo, African Spoonbill (a very rare bird in Madagascar) and Madagascar Harrier-Hawk.



White-breasted Mesite by Daniel Danckwerts

Ampijoroa Forest Station. Ampijoroa Forest Station is a ranger base and research centre that also provides hutted and camping accommodation situated in the extensive deciduous forests of the Ankarafantsika Reserve. It is famous as the home of World Wildlife Fund's Plough-shear Tortoise captive breeding program and is an ideal base from which to search for the numerous endemic birds of the region.

On arrival at the forestry station, we should encounter numerous 'camp residents' such as the gaudy Broad-billed Roller, screeching Lesser Vasa Parrot, Crested Drongo, Madagascar Magpie-Robin, Sakalava Weaver, Madagascar Hoopoe, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascar Green Pigeon and Malagasy Turtle Dove.

We'll walk the network of trails through the dry forest surrounding Ampijoroa in search of the many birds restricted to this region. Foremost amongst these are the secretive White-breasted Mesite and the jewel-like Schlegel's Asity, the latter of which recalls a miniature Bird-of-paradise! We will also concentrate on finding the

highly localised Van Dam's Vanga and the two species of coua that are restricted to these deciduous forests: Red-capped and Coquerel's. Other birds we will be on the lookout for whilst searching for these specials include Madagascar Ibis^, Madagascar Buttonquail, Frances's Sparrowhawk, Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher, and Rufous, Hook-billed, White-headed, Chabert and Red-tailed Vangas.



Schlegel's Asity by Glen Valentine

No less than eight species of lemur occur in the near vicinity of the camp and we are likely to be treated to excellent views of the comical Coquerel's Sifaka and Common Brown Lemurs during the day, while at dusk the rare Mongoose Lemur becomes active. Western Avahi (Woolly Lemur), Milne-Edward's Sportive, Fat-tailed Dwarf^ and Grey Mouse Lemurs^ are all nocturnal and will be searched for after dark. If we are lucky, we may also find the recently described (1998) Golden-brown Mouse Lemur^, one of the world's smallest primates and only known from the immediate vicinity around Lake Ravelobe (hence its scientific name Microcebus ravelobensis.)

Reptiles are also plentiful along the trails, and we hope to see the impressive Giant Hog-nosed Snake, as well as several smaller species of snake (all harmless – amazingly, there are no venomous snakes in Madagascar!), Oustalet's Chameleon (the world's largest species) and the aptly named Rhinoceros Chameleon, with its enlarged nasal protuberance. Impressively spiky Cuvier's Iguanids scurry around the campsite along with Wide-tailed Plated Lizards. We will also spend some of the afternoon birding along the edge of the adjacent Lake Ravelobe, where we hope to find the critically endangered Madagascar Fish Eagle, a pair of which is resident here. Wintering Sooty and Eleonora's Falcons are sometimes seen hunting overhead, while White-throated Rail, Humblot's Heron, Madagascar Jacana and Allen's Gallinule favour the waterside vegetation. We may also encounter noisy groups of Sickle-billed and Blue Vangas moving along the forest fringe.

It is crucial to be aware that Madagascar has been on a long path of ecological and environmental destruction, and this regression has accelerated dramatically on many fronts since late 2019. Most primary arterial roads are beyond the point of repair, either through a lack of any maintenance, or destruction caused by increasingly powerful and more frequent cyclones. Typical drives that used to take 6 hours are now taking double that time or more.

The southern third of the country is experiencing a severe famine due to drought, exacerbated by the total obliteration of any vegetation cover due to slash and burn agriculture, charcoal production, and logging. The area amounts to little more than a heavily eroded desert with many abandoned rice paddies and ghost towns.

Areas such as Ifaty have seen significant human encroachment into the remnant spiny forest patches, causing an evident decrease in species density and diversity.

Internal flight delays and last-minute schedule alterations are to be expected and we may have to re-arrange the tour itinerary due flight schedule changes. We will take all reasonable action to ensure the tour follows the advertised itinerary as closely as possible. Where flights get cancelled or rescheduled, we will need to embark on long road journeys, or use charter flights if available (these are very expensive). Chartered flights present extra costs to the tour, so it is imperative that you consult with your travel insurance company to ascertain what amount they may cover should the situation arise.

Tour Grading & Key

Photography		Excellent to incredible photographic opportunities featuring a wide variety of wildlife.
Overall Ease		Moderate paced tour suited for those in good health with a reasonable level of fitness. Not suited for anyone with mobility challenges or serious medical conditions.
Accommodation		Generally comfortable standard of hotels and resorts. Some more basic lodges are clean & comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Most of the walking isn't difficult on this tour but some trails in the rainforest can be steep and slippery, especially after rain. Trails are generally uneven with roots and rocks, especially in the rainforest zone.
Vehicles / Roads		Road conditions are poor. Very long and rough drives are to be expected, more so if flights are delayed/cancelled. Vehicles don't always have functioning air conditioners. Seas during the boat trip to Nosy Ve Island can be rough.
Birding Ease		Mostly unchallenging, several difficult rainforest skulkers that may require repeat efforts.
Annoyances		Can be hot to very hot at some sites. A few long & demanding days. The dire & poor state of the Madagascar environment away from protected areas can be depressing. Electricity supply is variable & cannot be relied on. Internal flights can be unreliable.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 17;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services;
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions & activities;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- This tour requires a reasonable level of fitness, and guests should be in good general health as most of the birding and photography will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time. Some trails in the rainforest can be quite steep and slippery, especially after rain. We will limit our time on narrow trails but will venture inside the forest to attempt to see and photograph the specials that reside here.
- Accommodation throughout the trip is of a generally comfortable standard and the hotels, lodges and resorts are clean and comfortable. Some of the accommodations, are basic and less comfortable from what you have come to expect in the developed world; we will, however, make efforts to make this tour as comfortable as possible. There is no camping on this trip.

- The seas during the boat trip to Nosy Ve Island can be rough, and it is advised that you carry a suitable rain jacket and protection for photographic/electronic gear aboard the boat (a thick waterproof plastic bag is very useful in this regard). Tidal variation may require us to walk (in water) across sharp substrate when accessing and/or leaving Nosy Ve. It is advised that you carry a pair of shoes that you do not mind getting wet (plastic sandals are very useful).
- In some areas, it can be hot to very hot, especially at midday. We will thus make several early starts to maximise the most pleasurable time in the field.

Bird Photo Tours

- Our Bird Photo Tours are a hybrid between our Classic birding tours and dedicated photographic tours. You don't have to be a professional photographer or have the biggest lens; this is for everyone with an interest in photography and birding. Whether you're using a bridge camera or the latest body and prime lens, our aims are the same.
- These tours are not aimed at seeing the most species possible on the route, rather taking time to photograph key targets and any other interesting species we may find. Naturally, the overall species list will be lower than a comparable birding focused tour.
- Whilst we may use blinds, feeders and hide setups on some of these tours, we will not be spending an entire day nor even several hours fixed in one spot.
- These tours are suitable for photographers who prefer opportunistic photography over entire days in a hide.
- Our leaders will assist in helping everyone secure good photographic opportunities and advise as much as they can on camera setup. However, they are not professional photographic tour leaders.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour starts on day 1 in Antananarivo with an afternoon visit to Lac Alarobia. If you arrive in the evening or afternoon on this day, then you will not be able to join this activity. The tour concludes after breakfast on day 17 in Antananarivo.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

For international flights the main port of entry is Ivato International Airport, Antananarivo (IATA: TNR).

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.