Exploring MADAGASCAR
An Earlham College Almuni Adventure - With Bill Buskirk
Oct 5th - Oct 20th, 2016

solaris expeditions
Exploring Madagascar – With Bill Buskirk

16 Days / 15 Nights in Madagascar
Group Size: 14 + Group Leaders (Bill Buskirk & Marianne Cope)
$6,850 per person/sharing
Single Supplement: Not available for this trip


HIGHLIGHTS:
Street Markets and Historic Boroughs of Antananarivo
Lemurs and Chameleons of Andasibe-Mantadia National Park
Exploring the Kirindy Forest
Photographing the Alley of the Baobabs at Sunset
Hiking in the Isalo National Park
Exploring the Zombitse National Park
Visiting the Sapphire mines of Ilakaka
Hiking in the Tsingy of Ankarana
Visiting Coffee and Cocoa Plantations
Snorkeling with Whale Sharks off Nosy Bey
Tsarabanjina Island – Beach, snorkeling, diving, wildlife, great food, relaxation
Malagasy Cuisine & Culture
Varied and unique accommodations
Amazing sunsets and spectacular landscapes
Phenomenal Birding – Including the chance to see one of the rarest species of bird in the world

TO REGISTER:
Contact Bill Buskirk or Chris Kean
Bill Buskirk: billb@earlham.edu
Chris Kean: ckean@solarisexpeditions.com

Questions: Call Chris Kean – 973.200.6796 / 800.330.6070
# EXPLORING MADAGASCAR
An Earlham Alumni Adventure – With Bill Buskirk

## ITINERARY OVERVIEW

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Exploring MADAGASCAR
With Bill Buskirk
Travel Dates: Wed, Oct 5 – Thu, Oct 20, 2016 (16 days/15 nights in Madagascar)

Wed, Oct 5: Welcome to Tana

In order to make sure that all group members are assembled in Antananarivo for the beginning of our touring program in the morning of Oct 6, we are asking that everyone plan on arriving in Madagascar, today.

Our journey begins in the central highlands of Madagascar, in the capital city of Antananarivo. Founded in the early 1600's by rulers of the Merina dynasty, Antananarivo, or “Tana” as it’s known locally, is a cosmopolitan city in the true sense of the word – residents include a diverse mix of Malagasy tribes, as well as settlers from around the Indian Ocean, Asia, and Europe. A visit to this bustling and colorful city makes for the ideal introduction to Malagasy culture and life.

Upon arrival at Antananarivo’s Ivato International Airport, a driver will be waiting to meet you and transfer you to our hotel. Enjoy the remainder of the day at leisure.

6:30PM For those of you who’ve arrived in time, meet group leader Bill Buskirk in the lobby of the hotel for a dinner (not included in tour price).

Overnight: Pallisandre Hotel & Spa
Room: Standard
Included: Airport Transfer

Thu, Oct 6: History & Culture of Antananarivo

This morning our guide will be waiting to meet us for a tour of the highlights of the city. We’ll visit the Old City and upper town of Antananarivo. The majestic Rova (The Queen’s Palace) overlooks the capital from the highest point of the city, and is surrounded by the city’s historic boroughs. A walking tour through the narrow cobblestone streets reveals residences of the old nobility, colonial houses, palaces, cathedrals, and brightly painted traditional Malagasy homes made entirely of local timber. The city’s colorful markets are also fun to visit – offering great photo opportunities and a chance to take in slice of local daily life as Tananarivians go about their business.

Later in the afternoon we head to wonderful vantage point, not far from the Queen’s Palace, that offers great views over the city. Here, we take a break for sundowner drinks as night falls on Tana, followed by a Welcome Dinner of signature Malagasy dishes.

Overnight: Palissandre Hotel & Spa
Room: Standard
Included: Breakfast, Sundowner Drinks & Dinner

Fri, Oct 7: On to The Eastern Forests

Our morning begins with a birding walk in Tsarasaotra Park, close to Tana’s city center. The park is home to a RAMSAR listed wetlands, amidst the hustle and bustle of the city, with an impressive population of herons, egrets, teal and other birds. Stand out resident species include, Malagasy Pond Heron, Malagasy Kingfisher, Black-crowned Night Heron (yes, they are here too – biogeography is fun!), and the Dimorphic Egret.
After our walk, we leave the capital behind and travel east from Tana, through the highlands to Andasibe-Mantadia National Park. Along the way you’ll pass through rolling terrain of towns and villages surrounded by terraced fields, attesting to the Asian origins of some of the early settlers of this fertile part of Madagascar.

Our destination, Andasibe-Mantadia is part of the UNESCO World Heritage listed Rainforests of the Atsinanana, a stunning stretch of old growth forests that dot the eastern side of the island. The forests here are home to vast species biodiversity, including many rare endemic and endangered species, included nine species of lemur. It is the best park in Madagascar to encounter the Indri Indri, the largest lemur, and a few of the resident Indri groups have been well habituated, making them easy to see. There are eight other species of lemur in Andasibe - the most commonly seen include Grey Bamboo Lemurs, Brown Lemurs and Woolly Lemurs. Often spotted, too, are some wonderful chameleons including the two-foot long Parson’s Chameleon and the Tiny Nose Horned Chameleon. Frogs are plentiful and birding highlights include Madagascar Blue Pigeon, Coral-billed Nuthatches, Madagascar Long-eared Owl, and the Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher.

Home base for the next two nights is Vakona Forest Lodge, a spectacularly remote rainforest retreat in the midst of some of the island’s most beautiful rivers, lakes, and mountains.

All day, and night, the forest is teeming with activity. In the evening, we set out with a guide from the lodge for a forest walk in search of the many nocturnal species that become active after the sun sets.

**Overnight: Vakona Forest Lodge**
- **Room:** Bungalow
- **Meals:** Breakfast

**Sat, Oct 8: Exploring the Andasibe-Mantadia National Park**

We enjoy a full day exploring the Mantadia Forest from Vakona Lodge. The Mantadia is another hotspot for lemur viewing, more than a dozen species are resident here including the smallest species of lemur, the Mouse Lemur. This reserve is also well known for its remarkable plant life – in particular its orchids.

**Please Note:** Hiking in the Mantadia Forest can be somewhat challenging – the paths feature some steep uphills and passage through dense foliage.

**Overnight: Vakona Forest Lodge**
- **Room:** Bungalow
- **Meals:** Breakfast

**Sun, Oct 9: Return to Tana**

This morning we continue explorations of this bio diverse part of Madagascar, with a visit to the Analamazaotra Forest Reserve, an Andasibe-Mantadia National Park protected area, famous for lemur sightings including Indri Indri. A number of Indri groups live within the reserve, and sightings and chances to photograph these beautiful creatures are normally outstanding. Also resident in the reserve are Mouse Lemurs, Hairy-eared Dwarf Lemurs, Aye-aye, Common Brown Lemurs, Gray Gentle Lemurs, and Small-toothed Lemurs. If we are very lucky, a number of tenrec species are found in the reserve, including the remarkable Lowland Streaked Tenrec. The area is also alive with different species of chameleon, frogs, and abundant birdlife.
Later in the day, you drive west, back up into the highlands, to the edge of Antananarivo, where you will be spending the night at Le Relais des Plateaux

**Overnight:** Le Relais des Plateaux  
**Room:** Standard  
**Meals:** Breakfast

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**Mon, Oct 10: The Kirindy Forest & Sunset at The Avenue of the Baobabs**

From Antananarivo we fly west into Madagascar’s Menabe Region, famous for its beautiful landscapes.

Upon arrival in Menabe, our first stop will be the Kirindy Protected Forest. The Kirindy represents a critical remnant of the dry deciduous forest, which once covered vast swatches of western Madagascar. Dry deciduous forests are among the world’s most threatened ecosystems, and in Madagascar they have been reduced to just 3 per cent of their original extent, and are now only found in a small handful of reserves like Kirindy.

Not surprisingly, this forest habitat is home to a number of rare or endangered Malagasy endemics. The rabbit-like Madagascar Jumping Rat only occurs within part of the reserve. Also found are seven species of lemur, most nocturnal, but we should have a good chance at seeing Common Brown Lemurs, and the delightful Verreaux’s Sifakas – famous for their lateral “dance” across pathways and open spaces on the ground. Kirindy is also the best place in the whole island to observe Fossas, especially during their mating season between October and December. Beautiful animals, loosely akin to cats and mongooses, Fossas are Madagascar’s apex mammalian predators and fill the important function of keeping lemur and rodent numbers properly balanced within the ecosystem. (*See an image of a Fossa on the cover of this itinerary*)

Birders among us will be on the look out for some key endemics that occur in the forest including, Madagascar Harrier-Hawk, Madagascar Kestrel, Madagascan Buttonquail, Greater Vasa Parrot, Madagascar Scops Owl, Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher, and the beautiful Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher

Later in the day, we will set out on rural roads to visit the famous Avenue of the Baobabs, one of Madagascar’s most iconic sights, a must see for anyone interested in landscape photography. Your visit to the baobabs will be timed to coincide with ideal late afternoon lighting. This imposing stand of baobabs, up to 1,000 years old, are what remains of the dense tropical forests that once thrived on Madagascar. Over the years, as the country’s population grew, the forests were cleared for agriculture, leaving only the baobab trees, which the locals preserved as much in respect as for their value as a source of food and building material.

After visiting the Alley of Baobabs, return to Morondava for the overnight.

**Overnight:** Hotel Palissandre Côte Ouest  
**Room:** Bungalow  
**Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

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**Tue, Oct 11: Visiting a Vezo Fishing Village & South To Isalo**

In the morning we take a boat ride along the coast to visit a village of Madagascar’s fascinating Sea People, the Vezo – a unique cultural group who make their living as semi nomadic fishermen along the south west coast of the island. The Vezo do not claim kinship with any other Malagasy tribe, their traditions are unique and apart
from their neighbors, but, like most all peoples native to the island – their ancestry has its roots in Asia, even more than Africa. We will have the chance to have a walk through the village, chat with the villagers, and observe something of their daily lives as traditional fishermen – with their time honored sustainable methods, in a world increasingly impinged upon by large commercial fishing interests.

Later in the morning our private charter flight takes us from Morondava down to Ranohira, in the south central highlands of the island (Flying time 90 minutes). Ranohira is the gateway town to the Isalo National Park, home to some of the island’s most stunning landscapes, and one of the highlights of any visit to Madagascar. The Jurassic era sandstone massif upon which the park sits has been eroded and transformed over time into an improbable, otherworldly landscape of rugged ridges, canyons, valleys, and gorges, which cradle spectacular waterfalls.

This is a great area for hiking - in the afternoon set out with our local guide for a trek through the Isalo, taking in the wonderful landscapes, and perhaps cooling off in a rock pool along the way. Wildlife highlights include the chance to see both Ring-tailed and Red-fronted lemurs, and Verreaux’s sifaka, as well as more than 80 species of birds including the rare Benson’s Rock-thrush, the Knob-billed duck and the Madagascar ibis.

In the Isalo, the flora is perhaps even more interesting than the fauna. The area contains 500 species of endemic plants, amongst them rare palms clustered into oases, species of aloe and elephant’s foot (Pachypodium) - a short and thick succulent with a distinctive yellow flower.

Like most places in Madagascar, particularly in rural areas, Isalo National Park has its own set of fady (taboos). Many of the rocks contain ancient tombs in which descendants of the Sakalava ethnic group (‘the people of the long valley’) are buried.

**Overnight: Isalo Rock Lodge**

**Room:** Standard

**Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

**Wed, Oct 12: Zombitse-Vohibasia National Park Excursion**

Today starts with a visit to the nearby Zombitse-Vohibasia National Park for a morning hike.

Zombitse-Vohibasia constitutes the most important remnant of dry deciduous forest in Madagascar. The park acts as a transition zone between the dry and the humid forests of Madagascar, and exists as critical wildlife sanctuary in the midst of a largely deforested landscape of small hold farms, and rural villages. The flora is especially rich within the protected area; towering baobabs and several species of orchids are particularly common. The number of animal species living here is also remarkable - fifteen small mammals, two of them carnivorous and eight lemur species, such as the Verreaux’s Sifaka, Red-fronted Brown Lemur, Ring-tailed Lemur, Pale Fork-marked Lemur and the Hubbard’s Sportive Lemur are seen here.

Birds are also a park highlight. There are 85 species, most of them endemic including the Sickle-billed Vanga, Coquerel's Coua, Madagascar Pond-heron, two species of warbler, the Thomnornis and Lantz's Brush-warbler, and the very rare Appert’s Tetraka, which only occurs in this forest and another nearby.

In the afternoon we go for another hike in the Isalo National Park.
Thu, Oct 13: Sapphires & Malagasy Cuisine

In the morning visit the sapphire mines of Illakaka, just to the south of Isalo National Park. In 1998 sapphires were discovered in the area, transforming Illakaka into a mining boomtown, seemingly overnight. Operations are not as extensive today, as they were in the initial years of production but a visit to the open air sapphire pits are a powerful reminder of the harsh conditions workers in the third world must endure. In true Madagascar form, the good-natured miners suffer visitors well and the photographic opportunities are rewarding, and totally unlike any other photos you will take during the trip.

After lunch we fly back to Antananarivo where we will have some time to relax in the afternoon, before meeting in the evening for a fun, hands-on cooking class focusing on classic Malagasy dishes, followed by a dinner of the dishes we’ve just prepared.

Fri, Oct 14: North to Ankarana

In the morning we leave the Central Highlands behind and fly to the far north of Madagascar, to Diego Suarez (Antsiranana), Madagascar’s most northerly port with its air of faded colonial grandeur, and lovely setting on Andovobazaha Bay. From Diego Suarez we drive south on National Route 6 - a winding country road, through classic northern Madagascar landscapes of small holding farms, patches of forest, and heavily weathered volcanic mountains.

Our destination is the Ankarana Special Reserve, one of the most exciting wilderness areas in Madagascar. The base of the Ankarana is a massive slab of Jurassic era limestone, which, over time, has transformed into a spectacularly eroded karst fortress of sharp ridges, patches of dense tropical forest, deep caves and rushing subterranean rivers. The heaviest areas of erosion have transformed the stone into large swatches of the jagged spires called, “tsingy” – beautiful to see, near on impossible to traverse. Running through and under the tsingy are hidden forest-filled canyons and subterranean rivers, some containing blind fish and Nile crocodiles. There are bat-filled grottos and mysterious caves steeped in legend and history, where traditional rites are still held and fady is strictly observed.

The Ankarana contains one of the highest density of primates of any forest in the world. One of the largest and least disturbed populations of Crowned Lemurs occur here, as does Sanford’s Brown Lemur, Perrier’s Black Lemur, Northern Sportive Lemur and Dwarf Lemurs. Ringtailed Mongoose, Fossa, tenrecs and Madagascar Striped Civet are also a common sight. Resident bird species include, Greater Vasa-Parrot, Cuckoo-Roller, Chabert Vanga, Dark Newtonia, and Sakalava Weaver.

En-route to The Ankarana, we will stop to take in the strinking Red Tsingy, a smaller tsingy of red sandstone located on the banks of the Irodo River. The Red Tsingy presents a cautionary tale of the effects of deforestation – modern day erosion has laid bare these previously covered sandstone formations, and will
soon enough wash them away all together, or continue to reveal new structures, as top layers vanish during successive rainy seasons.

We will be arriving at our lodge, located along the edge of the reserve, in the afternoon, hopefully in time to get an afternoon walk in.

**Overnight: Iharna Bush Camp**  
*Room: Cabana*  
*Included: Breakfast, Dinner*

### Sat, Oct 15: Exploring the Tsingy of Ankarana

Today we spend the day hiking in the Tsingy of Ankarana. There are a number of routes to take, some quite challenging, others more accessible – all reveal facets of this extraordinary landscape. Please make sure you consult our local guide in detail about what to expect from the proposed walks, and decide whether or not the walk is suitable to your level of mobility and fitness.

**Overnight: Iharna Bush Camp**  
*Room: Cabana*  
*Included: Breakfast, Dinner*

### Sun, Oct 16: The Millot Plantation & Nosy Bey

We depart early this morning, continuing our journey south to Andzavibe through plantations of coffee, cocoa, and ylang ylang. This part of the island is volcanic in origin, resulting in incredibly rich and fertile soils, which produce Madagascar’s finest cash crops. We visit one of the most beautiful spice plantations in the world – a vast farm that produces vanilla, herbs (ylang ylang first and foremost), spices (pink and black peppers, chili pepper), and some of the most highly prized organic cocoa on Earth. Our visit of the plantation touches on cocoa production techniques, as well the process of extracting and distilling a variety of essential oils, including ylang ylang and patchouli, that are distilled on the premises and sold to the French perfume industry.

We break for a 3-course lunch on the plantation, which culminates with a desert of chocolate cake – as fresh and delicious as you can imagine.

From Millot Plantation we drive to the port of Ankify where will take a short boat ride, just across the Mozambique Channel, to Nosy Bey.

Nosy Bey is the principal island an archipelago of small islands off the northwest coast of Madagascar. The archipelago enjoys an almost perfect climate of perpetual springtime. The air is full of the scent of ylang-ylang blossoms, pepper and vanilla, lending Nosy Bey its nickname, “Perfumed Island”. This remote outpost of the country has the most developed tourist infrastructure – most come to enjoy the beautiful beaches and watersport friendly waters, however for those who wish to keep active, there are small villages and nature reserves to visit, and, of course, abundant wildlife – both terrestrial and aquatic.

Upon arrival at Nosy Bey, a driver will be there to meet us for our transfer to the southwest coast of the island, to L’Heure Bleue, the secluded seaside eco-lodge we will be calling home for the night, with its great views over Madirokely beach. Along the way, we’ll enjoy some classic Nosy Bey landscapes – volcanic
mountains, palm forests, sugar cane plantations, small villages, and rugged coast line, dotted with bays, fishing hamlets, and sandy beaches.

After some time to settle into our rooms, enjoy the views, and relax, we meet up for an excursion to one of the highest points of the island for sundowners drinks.

**Overnight: Hotel L’Heure Bleue**
*Room: Standard*  
*Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

**Mon, Oct 17: Swimming with Whale Sharks**

Our day begins with a boat trip out into the waters around Nosy Bey for an up-close encounter with one of the ocean’s most beautiful and alluring species, the whale shark. October is a great time to see whale sharks off the northern coast of Madagascar – large numbers migrate through each year, lured by the nutrient rich waters, and mild temperatures of the reefs around Nosy Bey. We will have the chance to kit up with snorkel and fins and swim along with these gentle giants – normally found in small groups feeding close to the surface. This is an experience accessible to all: Even if you are not a great swimmer, seeing the whale sharks swim by from the boat is still a great thrill. Other whale species are also often seen on these outings including Humpbacks, Bryde’s, and Omura’s. Mantas and Mobula rays, Spinner and Thursiop dolphins also occur in the area.

After our whale shark experience, we proceed to the port of Fascene, where our luggage will be waiting as we board a speedboat to one of the islets of the exquisite Mitsio Archipelago.

Our destination is the island of Tsarabanjina, 90 minutes by boat from Nosy Bey, and a world apart. Fringed by white sandy beaches, populated by extraordinary birds, covered with lush vegetation and encircled by coral reefs, Tsarabanjina is home to the small resort where we will spending the last few of nights of our Madagascar adventures. We will balance our time on Tsarabanjina between exploratory excursions, and some welcome down time, where we can recharge the batteries, and reflect on our experiences before gearing up for long journeys home.

**Overnight: Constance Tsarabanjina**
*Room: Beach Villas*  
*Included: All meals, Drinks (including premium liquours), Daily Laundry Service, Resort Activites*

**Tue, Oct 18: Snorkeling the Reefs off Tsarabanjina**

In the morning we head out on a catamaran to visit two different coral reefs found just off the island. We’ll have chance to swim and snorkel with our guides taking in the rich marine life that occurs on and around the reefs.

We return to Tsarabanjina for lunch and some free time before setting out for an afternoon cruise to take in another amazing Malagasy sunset, accompanied by sparkling wines and chef’s canapés. Dolphins also join the boat as it slowly cruises back to the Tsarabanjina dock.
**Overnight: Constance Tsarabanjina**  
**Room:** Beach Villas  
**Included:** All meals, Drinks (including premium liquours), Daily Laundry Service, Resort Activities

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**Wed, Oct 19: The Four Brothers & Avian Rarities**

Our day begins with a visit to Les Quatre Frères (the Four Brothers), islands of silver basalt containing huge caves with impressive overhangs and nesting seabirds such as Northern Gannets, White-tailed Tropicbirds, and Frigatebirds. Also present are Brown Boobies, Brown Noodies, and one of the rarest birds in the world, the Madagascar Fish Eagle.

We carry on to Le Grande Mitsio to see get a close look at the distinctive “organ pipes”, huge basalt columns, and disembark for some snorkeling, a walk among the baobabs, and refreshments, before visiting a remote fishing village to get a glimpse of life on the very edge of the Malagasy society.

Enjoy the remainder of the day back on Tsarabanjina, before meeting up as a group for a final round of sundowner drinks followed by our farewell dinner.

**Overnight: Constance Tsarabanjina**  
**Room:** Beach Villas  
**Included:** All meals, Drinks (including premium liquours), Daily Laundry Service, Resort Activities

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**Thu, Oct 20: Homeward Bound**

This morning we transfer back to Nosy Bey, where we will catch a regularly scheduled commercial air flight back to Tana.

Back in Tana, a driver will be waiting to meet us for a transfer to the Ivato International Airport for check in for our flights home. For those of us whose flights don’t depart until the next day, we will be offering a complimentary additional overnight in Tana, with transfers to the hotel, and back to the airport the next day.

End of Services.

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“May I announce to you that Madagascar is the naturalist’s promise land? Nature seems to have retreated there into a private sanctuary, where she could work on different models than she has used elsewhere”

– Philibert de Commerson, 1771
Palissandre Hotel & Spa

Palissandre Hotel & Spa is set on a hillside in central Antananarivo, overlooking the famous Avenue of Independence and is a perfect base from which to discover Madagascar’s alluring capital city.

Accommodation consists of 46 air-conditioned rooms, some with sweeping views of the city and its everyday hustle and bustle. Each room has an electronic safe, direct phone line, satellite TV, minibar, hairdryer and a well-appointed bathroom. There are also spacious self-catering apartments that work nicely for family groups.

Meals at Palissandre Hotel are taken at La Table des Hautes Terres which provides hearty breakfasts, light lunches on the breezy terrace, and dinner service with both Western and Malagasy cuisine. After a meal, a must do at the hotel is to try some Malagasy rum at L'Amphore Bar.

The hotel’s spa offers an array of treatments, which guests can enjoy, as well as take advantage of the free access to the hammam, gymnasium and the swimming pool.
Vakona Forest Lodge

Located at the edge of Madagascar’s wildlife rich Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, Vakona Forest Lodge is a wonderfully isolated rainforest retreat surrounded by some of the island’s most beautiful rivers, lakes, and mountains. The lodge offers a great rainforest experience, offering comfortable accommodations and interesting activities leading guests into the heart of Madagascar’s most exotic lemur-ridden landscapes.

The lodge’s restaurant is situated at the heart of the complex, suspended above its own lake. This expansive room, with its vaulted ceiling, centers around a central open fire and offers all day dining with a view inside or outside on the open terrace. The main lodge building also has a communal lounge area, a great place to relax after a day exploring the forest. Guests can also enjoy the newly built Turkish hammam.

Dotted around the hillside up steep steps are the 28 Malagasy style bungalows, each of which has its own terrace. Inside the rooms are basic but comfortable. There are beds with mosquito nets and en-suite bathrooms with piping hot showers and plentiful water. On the grounds you will also find a pool and sun deck and a number of paths and sign-posted trails lead you through the surrounding forest.
Hotel Relais des Plateaux

Located just a short drive from Antananarivo’s International Airport, Hotel Le Relais de Plateaux is one of the capital’s most dependable options for a comfortable overnight for guests transiting through Antananarivo en route to other parts of country, or as a place for an overnight before or after a long intercontinental flight.

This “motel style” hotel is set in a peaceful garden; jacaranda trees blooming with vibrant lavender flowers, delicate palms and lush greenery create a serene haven from the hustle and bustle of the city. The hotel wraps around an inner garden, so all of the 42 rooms have a view over the beautiful wooded area or pool. The guest rooms are decorated with furniture created by a Malagasy designer and built from local rosewood. All rooms feature televisions with satellite TV channels, a safety deposit box for valuables, a minibar, free Wi-Fi, a full en-suite bathroom, and a small lounge area complete with an armchair, coffee table, writing desk and air-conditioning/heating – many of these are amenities not found in most hotels in Madagascar. Floor to ceiling windows flood the rooms with natural light and lovely views.

Relais des Plateaux also features a well-regarded restaurant, bar, and a very inviting swimming pool – a great place to relax after long travels.
Palissandre Cote Ouest

Palissandre Cote Ouest is a stylish property situated on Nosy Kely beach, within easy reach of the Avenue des Baobabs. The hotel makes for a great option for those looking to combine some relaxation with explorations of the impressive baobab-strewn dry forest landscapes of western Madagascar.

The hotel has 30 thatched bungalows set in well-maintained gardens scattered among a grove of coconut palms. Each bungalow has air-conditioning, en-suite bathroom and a private terrace, perfect for viewing the stunning sunsets over the Indian Ocean. Family bungalows are also available.

The restaurant overlooks the pool and serves delicious Malagasy cuisine. Cocktails made with local rum and seasonal fruits are the specialty of the hotel’s Tsingy Bar. Palissandre Cote Ouest even has a small spa offering various massages and healing treatments.

Activities such as snorkeling, windsurfing, boat trips into the nearby mangrove lagoons, and visits to traditional fishing villages can all be arranged. Baobab Alley is only 40 minutes away. Walks along the beach reveal glimpses of rural coastal life.
Isalo Rock Lodge

Isalo Rock Lodge is a stylish modern retreat nestled high in red sandstone mountains overlooking the Isalo National Park in southwestern Madagascar. The lodge has been built with care to blend organically into the environment – and, most importantly, to maximize the spectacular views of the rocky canyon the lodge looks out across. Looking out across these landscapes, you are drawn to explore, and a number of hiking and horseback riding excursions into the national park, are right at your doorstep.

The 60 luxurious rooms are tastefully decorated and all feature large en suite bathrooms with deep soaking tubs and rain showers, air conditioning, safe, minibar and a wall of windows looking out over the wilderness. The suites have a large living room / lounge area. All rooms have large comfortable beds with mosquito netting, finely polished cement floors and walls, and contemporary styled furnishings.

The sleek main lodge area is where you find the excellent restaurant, the bar, and a long terrace – a great place to enjoy a drink and take in the views. The distinctive round pool, too, overlooks the mountains and is a great place to relax, and in the evening - star gaze, after a day on safari within the amazingly bio-diverse park.
Iharana Bush Camp

Iharana Bush Camp is a intimate eco bush camp in the southwestern part of the Ankarana National Park in northern Madagascar. It is set on a beautiful lake with the Ankarana Tsingy acting as a stunning backdrop. The views and ambiance are great, and there are some wonderful sunsets to be seen here.

The sixteen traditional cabanas at Iharana Bush Camp have been inspired by local Malagasy buildings. The cabanas, small individual lodges under the shade of mango trees, are split into two levels with a large sitting area, a bathroom with shower and flush loo on the first floor, and the bedroom is on a mezzanine level.

The main lodge is large and spacious with lots of little areas for guests to sit and read or relax. There is a huge terrace outside which looks out onto the lake and the Tsingy Massif. The lodge also has an attractive dining room.

Activities at Iharana Bush Camp include trips to Ankarana where you can see the crowned lemur, Sandford's brown lemur and a variety of geckos and birds, visits to the Grand Tsingy, guided walking, pirogue trips on the lake, and excursions to the bat caves. The lodge also has bicycles available for guests to use to explore the surrounding countryside.
Hotel L'Heure Bleue

Nestled in a lush garden on the tropical island of Nosy-Be, Hotel L'Heure Bleue overlooks Madirokely Bay, away from the bustle of the neighboring village. In addition to fantastic views out over the bay, the hotel features two swimming pools, expansive terraces, as well as a lively bar and restaurant. The hotel’s private beach area is just a step down from the terrace.

The 8 luxury lodges, and 10 waterfront bungalows combine traditional wood construction with modern design and decor. Most rooms offer sweeping sea views, and all feature en suite bathrooms with a shower, cooling ceiling fans, mini-bars and safes. Some bungalows have a private terrace with outdoor seating. Free Wi-Fi is available at reception, bar and restaurant.

Guests can enjoy the shared lounge area and the terrace, as well as meals and drinks in the restaurant and bar. L'Heure Bleue also has a 24-hour front desk, a library and massage services. The Madirokely town center, with a variety of restaurant and pub options is only a 5-minute drive away and Crater Bay is 20 minutes’ drive away.
Constance Tsarabanjina

In the far north of Madagascar, Constance Tsarabanjina enjoys a truly stunning, pristine setting, home to abundant bird life and white powder beaches that give way to turquoise waters rich in marine life. This laid-back, eco-friendly boutique resort, completely secluded on its own private island, offers one of the best experiences in Madagascar.

Accommodation is in 25 rosewood, palm-thatched Beach Villas, each set among tropical plants, on the island’s secluded North and South beaches. Every villa is unique, maintaining an unpretentious, barefoot luxury charm and eco-friendliness, while still incorporating authentic Malagasy touches. Villas feature en-suite bathrooms of natural stone and wood outfitted with tree trunk rain showers and sliding window doors leading out to private terraces for sunbathing, star gazing, and soaking in the endless ocean views.

At Constance Tsarabanjina do as much or as little as you like. The island is ideal for long walks, swimming and snorkeling. Hobie cats are available for near shore sailing, while the dive center hosts diving trips to excellent nearby sites where turtles, grey and white dotted sharks and scorpion fishes can be spotted amid the coral reefs. Walks and boat excursions to observe the local wildlife are also popular. A wonderful staff, exquisite cuisine, and delicious cocktails complete the experience.
**Package Details**

**Trip Price:** $6,850 *Per person/sharing*

**Single Supplement:** Not available for this trip

**Non-Refundable Deposit:** 25% of Trip Price: $1,712.50 per person

**Final Balance:** Due 60 Days Prior to Date of Arrival in Madagascar

**Cancellation Terms & Conditions:**

*Itinerary Start Date: Wed, Oct 5, 2016*

Final Balance is due 60 days prior to date of arrival: **Sat, Aug 6, 2016**

The total trip price is 50% refundable 60 - 45 days prior to date of arrival

If cancellation occurs 44 – 30 days prior to date of arrival, 25% of the total trip price is refundable

If cancellation occurs 29 days or less, prior to date of arrival, total trip price is fully non-refundable

No refunds can be given for unused scheduled services once your journey has begun

All payments to be made to Solaris Expeditions.

Prices quoted are based on cash payment

Notice of cancellation needs to be received in writing, by Solaris Expeditions at our offices in Charlotte, NC

**Your package includes:**

- All airfare within Madagascar (3 private charters, 2 commercial air flights)
- All transfers from airport to hotels (and vice versa)
- All activities listed in the itinerary (visits and excursions)
- All entrance and guiding fees for all visits and excursions
- A private car with an English-speaking driver-guide with Gas for the whole itinerary
- Transport Vehicle insurance and vehicle replacement in case of breakdown or accident.
- Accommodation in hotels listed (or equivalent) in double occupation.
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary
- Boat transfers
- All listed excursions
- All taxes, Park fees

**Your package excludes:**

- International Flights
- All personal purchases (curios, premium brand liquors, telephone calls, Wi-Fi access, etc.)
- Gratuities
- Optional extra activities
- Any meals, and activities not detailed in the itinerary above, pre and post itinerary expenses
- Visa fees if applicable (Currently U.S. Passport holders receive free visa on arrival for stays less than 30 days)

**IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL NOTES:**

Luggage is limited to 15kgs per person in a soft duffle bag (not wheeled). This weight allowance includes hand luggage.

This journey contains long road transfers on unpaved roads, and light aircraft flights

You will be travelling in active Malaria areas. Anti-malarial medication is highly recommended

You will be visiting unfenced wilderness areas full of potentially dangerous wild animals

At some locations in Madagascar you will have limited or no access to Internet and phone service

**PLEASE NOTE:** **ALL GROUP MEMBERS MUST HAVE COMPREHENSIVE TRAVEL INSURANCE FOR THIS TRIP**
What is the Best Way to Get to Madagascar?

This depends a bit on where you are traveling from. South African Airways (out of JFK and Washington, IAD) offers one-stop service via Johannesburg, and the lowest fares and shortest flight times (as of Oct, 2015).

Other options include Delta/Kenyan Airways via Nairobi, and Air France via Paris (CDG).

Airfares should run from about $1,900 - $2,600 per person, depending on routing, and travel dates.

Is October a Good Time of Year to Visit?

October is a great time to travel in Madagascar. Weather conditions are ideal, it’s mating season for birds, it’s the best time of the year to see baby lemurs, and whale sharks are found off shore. October is peak season, because conditions are do good.

Is Madagascar Safe?

Madagascar has some of the kindest and friendliest people you will meet, anywhere, and in general the country is quite safe to travel in. Like many other destinations in the world, however, petty crime, most of it not specifically focused on foreign tourists, is a concern. In the urban areas, it’s a concern in the same way it would be in Rome, Paris, Barcelona, New York, or Bangkok. There are specific areas of the country, which suffer from localized security issues – we won’t be traveling in those areas. As is the case in the vast majority of countries in Africa, driving at night, outside of metropolitan areas is not advisable – we won’t be doing that. Politically, Madagascar is more stable since the recent democratic elections, and there has been a steep fall off in politically related street protests and demonstrations. The majority of our time will be spent in remote wildlife areas, where petty crime is virtually unheard of, and where political unrest is a world away.

While in Madagascar, we will be sensibly vigilant and stick together as a group, again, as we would in many other places in the world. We will travel safe in the knowledge that we will be in the very best of hands, with one of the country’s most experienced and professional local ground services providers looking after us, and making sure everything flow smoothly.

What health considerations do we need to be aware of?


We urge all travelers to consult their travel health care professional about what medications will work best for you, for this trip, given your individual health profile.

Can you accommodate special diets?

Yes, food allergies, vegetarian, and vegan diets should not be a problem. Strict Kosher diets are not possible to follow in Madagascar due to lack of a well-established tradition of kosher food preparation in the country.

We are happy to advise local suppliers in Madagascar about your dietary requirements, per what you advise us, however, Solaris Expeditions can not be held responsible should an error occur with your food, while traveling.

How large a group will you have?

No larger than 16 people – Inclusive of our Bill Buskirk and Marianne Cope.
Will there be free time to explore on our own?

Not too much. We have a very structured, engaging, and active program lined up. There will be time, at journey’s end, to relax and recharge on Tsarabanjina Island.

How strenuous will the activities be?

We will be doing a lot of walking in this trip, often in dense forest, over uneven terrain. Walking in the tsingy can be particularly challenging. In all cases, there will be the option to hang back with the driver, and perhaps even to take an easier trail, when it’s practical to offer that option.

A highlight of the trip will be snorkeling with whale sharks – this activity is well supported by the tender boat, but a comfort in the water a decent open water swimming competency are required. We will not undertake the swim if conditions are not calm and suitable for a broad level of swimming abilities. Pervious snorkeling experience not required.

Will the birding be good?

The birding should be excellent! Madagascar is not Colombia, in terms of having a very large and very diverse number of species present; it is, however, a country of extraordinary endemism. More than 150 species found in Madagascar do not occur anywhere else in the world, or only in Madagascar and a few other nearby islands of the Indian Ocean.

Everyone on the trip can expect to make a number of exciting new additions to their life lists. We will even have the chance to see one of the rarest birds on earth.

Will there be good opportunities for photography?

This trip offer outstanding photographic opportunities on many fronts – landscapes, candid people portraiture/street photography, and wildlife. Unlike the Amazon, where much of the wildlife is high above in the forest canopy, many of the most interesting animals in Madagascar are found on the ground, or near the ground. Many species of lemur, in particular, spend a lot of time on the ground, and are quite easy to photograph. The Malagasy people are friendly and are usually very obliging when it comes to having their pictures taken. As always, our local guides will give us the correct guidance, so we are ever respectful of local customs.

Is this trip suitable for my children?

By all means, if your children are adults, and would feel comfortable in a group where most fellow group members will be above the age of 60.

I have mobility issues/serious medical conditions – can you still accommodate me on this trip?

As much as we would like to, for this trip, because of the challenges of travel in Madagascar, we will not be able to make special accommodations for folks who are unable to fully participate in each day’s scheduled events. A decent level of physical fitness is required, fully mobility is required, and we will sometimes be in very remote parts of the country, where infrastructure is very basic.

PLEASE ADVISE US – Should you have any health concerns that might impact your ability to participate in this trip. The trip contains a fair amount of walking/hiking, often in hilly terrain, and with some sustained uphills. Not excessively difficult, but you do need to be up for the challenge. If you have any doubts, please consult with your doctor about whether this trip poses any risks to you. We reserve the right to say “Sorry, but no, for this trip”, should we see any obvious red flags that suggest the trip is just not right for you, given your medical profile. Folks with complex mental health issues should consider how suitable an intense, very social group travel experience, in a challenging Third World environment is for them, before applying for the trip.
What should I pack, and what do I need to do to prepare for the trip?

We will be providing comprehensive pre-departure information that will address logistical issues like what to wear, what else to bring, what kind of bag to use, luggage weight restrictions, local electrical current, and how much additional money you should bring for tips, meals, etc.

We will also supply a list of recommended reading for the trip.

Is this the right trip for me?

Yes, if you have a passion for natural history, wildlife, the natural sciences, and the Great Outdoors. Yes, if you enjoy exploring lightly visited corners of the world, where tourism infrastructure is not nearly as advanced as other parts of the world. Yes, if you are an open-minded, flexible and adaptable traveler, who can go with the flow and be a good team player when the going gets toughs, as sometimes it does. Yes, if you enjoy a shared learning experience, and enjoy making new friends, or reconnecting, perhaps, with old classmates. Yes, if you want to have a tremendous amount of fun, and see truly beautiful and amazing things that you will never forget.

This would likely not be such a good trip for you if you have little or no interest in Natural History, wildlife, and lots group together time. Travelers also need to be aware that, while some of the accommodation is quite nice, not all of it is, some of the places we will stay are simple, perhaps even rustic. A flexible and adaptable spirit is a must.