

Madagascar



December 17th 2015 to
January 5th, 2016



..and so the adventure begins.

After a crazy flight route to get to our final destination of Antananarivo which took us from Stockholm via Munich, Paris, Amsterdam and Nairobi we finally arrived to "Tana" after some 33 hours of travelling. The big surprise was that we did not loose any luggage on our transfers/stop-overs...

We arrived in the city of Antananarivo in the afternoon on Friday the 17th of December. A city of some 3,5 million inhabitants, but without any "real" city centre or working infrastructure in roads. Small winding streets took us from the airport to our hotel www.hotel-mellis.com.

After having spent the evening – exhausted – in our hotel to eat, we set-out on the following morning in a minibus with our driver and guide on our first stop-visit of this 3-week travel. The target of the day was to reach Andasibe with a stop-over at the Marovezo reptile sanctuary on the way. We stopped in on of the supermarkets to stock-up on some lunch-on-the-way food. A fairly well-stocked grocery, but without fridge we could only buy non-chilled food of course.



Antananarivo – a city of 3,5 million people ...

The country has some 23 million inhabitants. The country is the fourth largest island in the world with some 594,000 m2. The country is larger than Sweden and one of the poorest in the world.



A world of colours in Marovezo

We found an amazing variety of Chameleons in the sanctuary...



The Marovezo Sanctuary was the highlight of the day. We saw both the Panther Chameleon as well as the Parsons Chameleon and the tiny Boettgers Chameleon – all in beautiful colours. It was also possible to see them catch and eat flies and change colours.



The hard to spot leaf-tailed Gecko, Bophis frog, the colourful Mantella Baroni frog + the tomato frog. All these species and more were kept for either breeding and/or to be re-introduced into their natural habitats. Many of these species are really seen in the jungle, so it was great to see them before being re-introduced into their habitats.



Colourful Chameleons and frogs!





The rain forest of Andasibe

Our first encounter with the Malagasy National Parks...

We got upgrade from Vakona Forest Lodge to Andasibe hotel www.andasibe-resto.com. The rooms were spacious with fans (no a/c). The food was however typical Malagasy “trying their best” but not really succeeding.

The National Park was good and we were fortunate to see the shy and elusive Indri. We also spotted some Lemurs. The Bamboo Lemur and the red-fronted Lemur among many.

We had lunch at Vakona Forest Lodge and visited the Lemur

Island nearby. Maybe a bit “touristic” but the Lemurs on this island were almost domesticized. With a local guide he then lured the Lemurs with some bananas and all of a sudden we had Lemurs clinging all over us.

All –in-all we had two successful days in Andasibe and then packed-up to travelled some 5-6 hours to Antsirabe via Antananarivo.





We came really close to the Lemurs..

...maybe a bit too close to some of these highly sociable animals...



The Fossa (picture to the left) is an extremely elusive and agile nocturnal animal. We found this poor guy in captivity in Andasibe.

They also kept Nile Crocodiles in a closed off water-pond (not impressed).

There are however many trails to choose from, but most essential is to have good “trackers” / “spotters” who leave early to spot the animals as the rain forest is vast. It can otherwise be difficult on your own to find these difficult animals.

We stopped at the “Lemur Island” where we got to mingle with almost tame Lemurs (pictures right and below).



Sifakas, Lemurs and more Chameleons!





The country side on routeA colourful day through the country landscape...



A day for transfer from Andasibe via Tana to Antsirabe. Although 5-6 hours in a minibus, we got to view a beautiful and very green landscape. People seemed to be hard working in their rice fields where old and young were all helping out with the shores.

We also saw many vegetable and fruit selling stalls along the road and stopped at times to watch and rest. People were very friendly and inviting when we took photographs.



“...and this little piggy went to market”





The colonial town of Antsirabe

Our first encounter with the Malagasy National Parks...

We eventually arrived at Antsirabe in the late afternoon. Booked at the oasis in the centre www.couleurcafeantsirabe.com.

The city of Antsirabe was said to be resort / vacation city for the French during the colonial times away from Tana on the east coast. The Norwegians were also here and laid cobble stone streets. Of what could have been and should have been a colonial flavoured experience where little actually remained. Today there has been very little maintenance and restoration of the old colonial

buildings. The Malagasy people do not really see the French ties as something positive, and thus does not want to maintain or renovate anything French in town. There is a lovely old hotel, which is in desperate need of renovation. This used to be a French water-hole during the hay days.

We were transported around the all-famous pousse-pousse (rickshaws), the most common taxi in the city. We tried the **Italian restaurant Zandina** which served great pizzas and beer.





8 hours en-route to Ranomafana..

Our first flat tire – not surprising on these poor roads...

Although another long stretch on the poor roads of Madagascar, we got to see some lovely country side and sceneries along the way. We also had our first flat tire (one of two) and not surprising at all. The switched tires and put on a spare tire which was even more worn then the one we had broken.

We stopped at a village market and walked through the place as it was virtually impossible to penetrate by minibus with all the people everywhere. 80% of the population lives in the rural areas and are involved in agriculture. The country ranks 231 out of 256 in BNP per capita – and it shows.



Colourful market in small village!





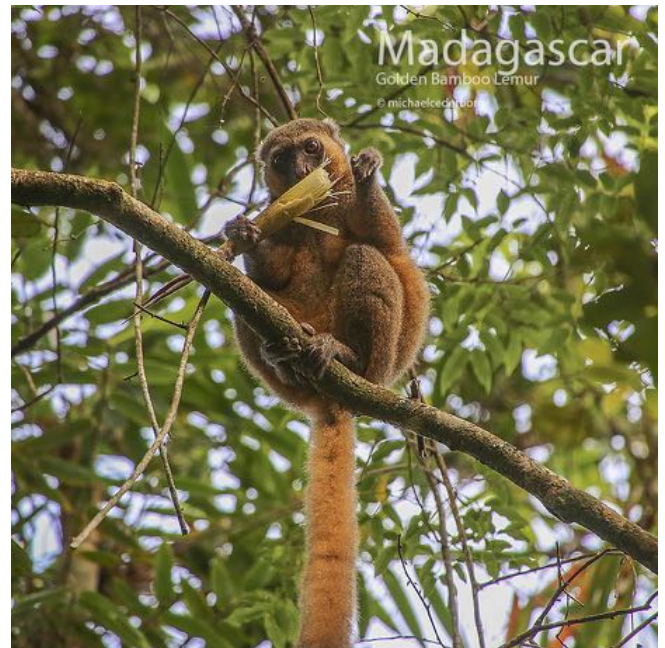
The National Park of Ranomafana

The most popular of all the parks in Madagascar...

Ranomafana means “hot water” and was named after its thermal springs. This was a popular retreat for the French just as much as Antsirabe.

The Centreste Hotel became our base for the two nights when we visited the National Park. The terrain was very demanding “up-n-down” through thick rain forest at times. We got to see the brown Bamboo Lemur as well as some more Sifakas’ in the forest.

We acquainted the Golden orb-web spider and the very rare yellow crab spider. The Namorona river flows through the valley and displays some impressive waterfalls on its way down. The very tiny village of Ranomafana is not much to see however.



Parsons Chameleon and Sifakas in Ranomafana





The weekly market in a small village.

Absolutely amazing market to visit in the country side...

Our guide Arnel had been talking about this weekly market for a couple of days and said we had to start early from Ranomafana in order to get the car through the city and park it on the way going out otherwise we would not be able to pass for hours.

He was indeed right. The streets were already filling up when we arrived there in the early morning on the market day – Wednesday. What a magnificent market it was. I have rarely seen such a colourful and packet market elsewhere. It was heaven to walk through the maze of stalls and crowds being able to take photographs freely. We spent hours here before we moved on towards our next destination Isalo National Park.



Weekly market in country side!





Anja reserve and Fianarantsoa

The longest day en route – 10 hours in total...!

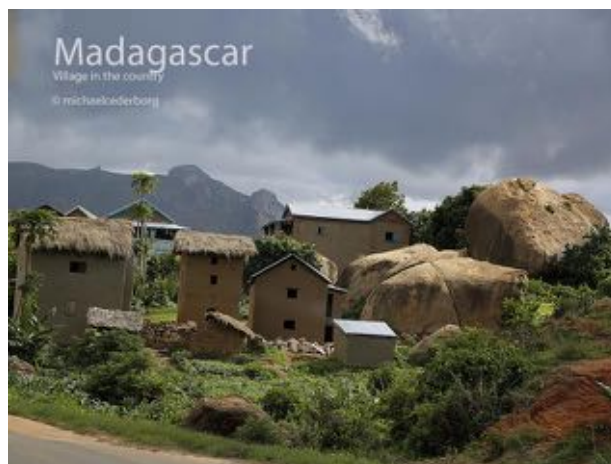
We had to stop in **Fianarantsoa** on the way to Isalo N.P. to change our tire. This was a pleasant surprise as the second largest city in the country had an old town quite well maintained up on a hill. We walked to cobble-stoned alleys and took in the scenery.

We also stopped at **Anja reserve to spot the famous Ring-tailed Lemur**, also the National animal of Madagascar. We had to order sandwiches ahead in a small village as the only supermarket in Fianarantsoa was closed on Christmas eve as was our traveling day.

The landscape changed dramatically as we go further southwest. The houses became huts with thatched roofs and the landscape became barren and looked more like savannah.



Children at Anja reserve and a village en-route...





Isalo National Park (1)

And the beautiful resort- Le Relais de la Reine...



After our longest transfer on the trip – 10 hours – it was heaven to arrive at the lovely **Relais de Reine in Isalo National Park**. This Oasis in the middle of nowhere had run by a French sister and brother offered top quality housing and food. It was such a treat to stop her for a couple of days after “rough” going. We were also invited to a large Christmas Eve party together with all the guests. Even Santa Clause paid a visit and distributed presents. Arthur and Gustaf qualified for this being below 18 years of age – although a bit embarrassed. www.lerelaisdelareine.com





Isalo National Park (2)

In **Isalo National Park**, we hiked up the canyon alongside the river in the scouring heat. It was a beautiful trek as usual and we got to see the **Verreaux Sifaka** as well as the **Ring-tailed Lemur**. The reward at the end of the trek was a natural pool and a waterfall where we could rest-up and take a well deserved cooling off.





From Tulear to Anakao beach

Zebu and cart transport out to our waiting boat...



We spent only one night in Tulear in transit to our final destination – Anakao beach. Our hotel in Tulear www.moringa-tulear.mg was a positive surprise in this otherwise godforsaken harbour town where everyone who comes here seems to only stop-over to get to the nicer beaches either north or south of the town. A hotel with well functioning a/c is truly a luxury in this country. The food in the otherwise empty restaurant was quite alright as well. In the morning we were transferred to the harbour by our useless guide – Mr. Armel. The transfer out to our waiting boat was quite fun....



Anakao beach (1)

Two different lodges and two different standards...!

After some 50 minutes of speedboat transfer from Tulear we arrived at our lodge – www.safari-vezo.com The lodge owner Catharine who had been running the place for 23 years greeted us. It was a nice feeling to come and spend the last of our vacation on the beach just chilling and doing absolutely nothing.

The food was really very good (seafood and fish of course) and a selection of drinks, beer and wine. The drawback was the huts which didn't have a/c's nor fan. The electricity was only on between 6:30 PM and 11:00 PM in the evening. Wi-Fi only on occasion and for a short while in the evening. The nights were unbearable without any cooling. We decided to find a different base for our remaining vacation 5-6 nights.

We did a day-tour out to Nosy Ve Island to do some snorkelling. The reeves where non-existent or near enough dead and the fish barely seen. The Island however was beautiful with its white sandy and desolate beaches. We enjoyed this excursion.



Safari Vezu Lodge and visit to Nosy Ve Island...





Anakao beach (2)





Anakao beach (3)

Moving across to the luxurious Anakao Ocean Lodge...!

We took a local pirogue to check out the more exclusive Anakao Ocean Lodge – www.anakaooceanlodge.com. We decided there and then to move across the following day even though we had to pay extra for all these days on top of what had already been paid for at Safari Vezo.

The bungalows were equipped with a/c and spacious bathrooms including shower (at the other place it was just a bucket and a scoop to use). The food was fancy and good, but also a lot more expensive as we had to pay extra for all food and drinks (ca: 2500 sek/day only for food and drinks).

We made another attempt to snorkel at the reef and visited also the other Island – Zatrana further out. Other than that, it was very lazy days filled with reading, playing cards and just doing nothing. It takes a while to get used to, but was really nice we got the hang of it.



Safari Vezu Lodge and visit to Nosy Ve Island...





Air Madagascar cancels flight...

...and we get to stay one more night in Tulear...!

Ready to go back and spend our last night in Antananarivo, we are informed at the airport that our flight has been cancelled. They have not even tried to put us on the last and only flight back to Tana.

We engage in a heated discussion where many other passengers also are very upset to say the least. Many with missed onward international flights. We are forced to stay one extra night in Tulear and take the only and last flight back – just in time for our International flight back home the following day instead..



We leave this amazing and beautiful country...



One of the poorest countries in the world...

Between 2009 and 2014 all international aid was stopped to Madagascar in protest to the coup carried out by Andry Rajoelina. The country was then vertically isolated from the rest of the world, which worsened the already poor economy and development of the country.

The lack of infrastructure, primarily functioning roads becomes obvious when one travels through the country. This effects the transporting of goods to/from companies and farmer's possibility of getting their products to cities, markets and harbours.

It is extremely time consuming to get around the Island as the roads are in such a bad condition through out the country. It can take hours only to travel some 30-40 kilometres in places.

The country has also regularly been hit by natural catastrophes such as typhoons, cyclones, flooding's and draft, which has had detrimental effects on the frail economy and the harvests. Around 5 million people lives in and around these areas which are most exposed to natural disasters.

There was however some hope in connection to the newly elected president who took office in January 2014 only be exchanged again during the fall of 2015. The growth of the country did increase by some 3,3% last year, but there is a long way to go. The relatively few tourists who find their way to the Island, is not enough to give the economy the so well deserved revenue which it needs.

