

Madagascar Itinerary 27th September - 5th October 2008



Computer Aid
International

Discover Madagascar, *the last Eden*.

Madagascar is a continent in miniature with microclimates, vastly different habitats and a huge number of endemic species. The international conservation community has singled it out as one of the ecologically richest countries on the planet. This bike ride takes you on a 5 day cycle in the north east of the island. We cycle through highland villages and paddy fields, the lush tropical fruit plantations and coastal trails. The terrain is an exciting combination of tarmac and dusty red-earth off road trails. Far away from the modern comforts of daily life, this will be an unforgettable experience and worth every penny you raise for Computer Aid International.

Day 1 **Saturday 27th September**

Fly from London to Madagascar via Paris. Arrive in Madagascar at 9.55pm (local time) and transfer to our hotel in Antananarivo, the capital city of Madagascar, known locally as Tana. Sleep and relax after the long flight.

Day 2 **Sunday 28th September**

Afternoon bike fitting after lunch (provided at the hotel). Afternoon optional tour of Tana then hear more about the week ahead. Overnight in Tana.

Day 3 **Monday 29th September**

Tana –Lake Mantasoa

85km (20km off road)

The morning is spent visiting a school where we will see the difference our support for Computer Aid is making to disadvantaged children. Then we head off for the first day's cycling.

We cycle out of Tana. Once out of the bustling city, the roads become much quieter and for most of the day we cycle on good roads, through villages and lush green rice paddies. After 12kms we turn towards the village of Ambohimalaza, a cobbled uphill slope takes us to this charming village. We continue through the village and uphill where the road meets a rutted track which we cycle along for a further 2km. We leave the bikes and walk up the hill through dense tropical forest to a secluded cemetery where an ancient royal tomb dating back to the 17th century is situated. From the summit of the hill we enjoy a view of Tana in the far distance, before retracing our route back to the main road and continuing on towards Lake Mantasoa.

As we cycle past highland villages, the scenery changes and the roads are lined with grey eucalyptus trees contrasting against the bright red earth. After 48km we turn south in the direction of Lake Mantasoa. From here we cycle 13km on dusty off-road trails to the small village of Mantasoa and follow a bumpy road with sharp ascents and descents. The hillsides are covered with eucalyptus and pine trees and as we cycle up to a height of 1,300m the breathtaking views across the lake are worth the effort. We reach the lake and skirt round the shores to our overnight stay at a hotel overlooking the lake.

Day 4 **Tuesday 30th September**

Mantasoa - Andasibe

98km (13km off road)

We retrace the last 13km of yesterday's off-road trail to rejoin our route. After a few steep climbs we turn away from the lake and back to a landscape dotted with rice paddies and huts. After Ambatoloana we rejoin a good road which is mainly downhill and winds between lush forest and bamboo. There are flat and hilly sections for the rest of the morning. After a relaxing picnic lunch we cycle through the village of Moramanga and up a long hill followed by a zigzagging downhill stretch of road. The next 20km of varying gradients takes us through the village of Andasibe then we turn off the main route and enter the Nature Reserve. After 9kms we reach our overnight stay. Tonight there is an opportunity to take part in an optional tour to Andasibe Nature Reserve to spot nocturnal Indri Lemurs.

Wednesday 1st October

Day 5

Andasibe – Lake Rasoa

75km (7km tough off road)

1 hour coach transfer (approx 60km)

1 hour coach transfer (approx 60km) we begin with an early morning breakfast and cycle 9km to the Andasibe Nature Reserve. We change into our walking shoes for a 1 ½ hour guided walking tour on forest paths to visit the black and white Indri Lemurs and enjoy the indigenous flora and fauna. We rejoin our bikes and head for the main road. Today is possibly the most challenging as we will be gaining 1,000m and descending 1,900m. We cycle on road with some long gradual uphill and downhill with some stunning panoramic views over the surrounding hills. The scenery changes again and our route is lined with lush banana and mango plantations, lychee trees and the endemic Ravinala palm, whose enormous fan-like leaves are used for roofing in the area. The air becomes noticeably hotter as we descend. Around 1pm we break for lunch.

After lunch we transfer 1.5hrs by coach just past the town of Brickaville. It's back on our bikes for the last 7km towards the sea across a rough off-road dirt track, mainly downhill. We pass through the little hamlet of Manambato to the shore of Lake Rasoa where we have dinner and overnight stay. There is no hot water at our accommodation, however after a hot day a cooling shower will be a most welcome relief!

Day 6

Thursday 2nd October

Lake Rasoa – Tamatave (Toamasina)

104km (7km tough off road)

The cycle back to the main road is this time uphill and off-road. For the next 30km the road is mostly flat, straight and lined with lychee trees and bamboo forests. As the day progresses, the road begins to gently undulate. We are now deep in the lush eastern plains of Madagascar as we cycle through palm tree plantations and an array of tropical fruits – banana, mango and papaya. For the last 20km, the road levels out and we approach Madagascar's second largest town, Toamasina (known locally as Tamatave) - a lively port with unpaved streets, buzzing with life. On the suburbs we regroup and cycle together through markets, packed with local people carrying out their day to day routines. After 2km we turn off onto a quiet road which leads to our next overnight stop.

Day 7

Friday 3rd October

Tamatave (Toamasina) – Foulpointe (Mahavelona)

68km (8km off road)

Early morning start as we set off for the zoological park of Ivoloina, 10km north of Toamasina. We cycle through busy suburban villages, alongside a river for a kilometre, then over a narrow trail to the park. We meet our guides for a one hour nature walk, to experience some of the many species of plant life we don't see close up from a bicycle.

After the visit, we cycle back to the road then make a river crossing over one of the many floating bridges we use today. The road is flat, quiet and rural with little traffic. It will be another hot day so there will be plenty of water stops throughout the ride. Eventually we reach sand dunes and follow the beautiful coastline northwards, passing modest resorts and the occasional village. As we cycle up the coast, we continue crossing the river and a lagoon separates the road from the coast. The final kilometre cuts across an off road trail to the beach and to our resting place for the night, Manda Beach. Dinner is at a nearby restaurant, a short stroll across the beach.

Day 8

Saturday 4th October

Free morning - Tana

The morning is free to relax on the beach, take a pirogue out to the reef, play a game of tennis or a round of golf. After lunch (not included) we have a transfer back to Tana (8-10hrs by land or 1 hr flight – latter not included in tour cost [cost tbc]) to fly home via Paris.

Day 9

Sunday 5th October

Arrive in London at 4.10pm (local time.)