

# Madagascar Equipment Checklist

## Willis's Walkabouts 2016 – Version 3 – March'16

### Personal Papers

- **Passport** (also a photocopy of the page with your photo, kept separate in case of loss)
- **Re-entry visa for Australia (for non Australians)**. Also be prepared for airport taxes, domestic and international, up to about US\$20 at a time
- **Airline tickets**
- **Visa for Madagascar** – You can obtain a tourist visa at airport in Tana when you arrive. All tourist visitors to Madagascar need one. From 1 Nov 2015, visas no longer free. See Madagascar itinerary for current costs.
- **A credit/debit card** (Visa is the best, Mastercard also okay) which can be used in ATMs. American Express is not as widely accepted. Most larger towns have one or more ATMs for easy extraction of cash in local currency (Ariary). However, you can generally only withdraw a maximum of around Ar400,000 (AUD\$170) per transaction, though you can put through multiple transactions on the same machine in the same day. To minimise fees, make fewer and larger withdrawals where possible, and if using credit rather than debit card, put some money into your credit card account before you leave. Note that apart from ATMs, credit cards are rarely accepted, except at some upmarket hotels, at Air Madagascar offices and at some larger travel agencies.
- **Euros € or US \$** in cash for emergencies? As Madagascar is an ex-French colony, Euros are more widely accepted than US dollars. Travellers Cheques are outdated. I wouldn't bother with cash. Changing money at banks is a long and laborious process, and obviously requires us to be in town during banking hours. This can be difficult with our travels. If you don't have a credit or debit card, I would highly recommend getting one. Travelling with large amounts of cash on your person is not really a safe thing to do in a poor, developing country.
- **Waist belts, neck straps, leg pouches** are all good places to carry money and documents. Do not carry all your money and identification in one place. Main area of risk with pickpockets and muggings in central Tana. Be aware! Always travel by taxi at night. Do not flash large sums of money around. Keep a small amount in easy access pocket and larger stash somewhere secure.
- **Travel Insurance** - Your policy should cover costs incurred by the need to change airline reservations, medical expenses, lost baggage, lost passports, air tickets & personal papers, lost money (always limited). It should be possible to make a claim while in Madagascar. It should cover you while bushwalking. Not all policies will do this. I need to see a copy. My liability insurance requires you to have travel insurance.

### Photography & closer views of wildlife

- Bring **spare batteries** for any camera requiring them. You can recharge batteries between walks but you'll need an adapter (Euro plugs). Car chargers may also work.
- If you are serious about wildlife photography, you need a long telephoto lens. Russell uses a 300 mm lens and past experience has shown him that it is not long enough for many shots. Note, to state the obvious, that just because you have a big camera, does not mean you get priority over the rest of the group for wildlife viewing. Everyone should get the opportunity for a good look, stand in the prime position for viewing etc.

- **Binoculars!** Always handy! If you have a camera with long lens, you can probably do without, but everyone else is strongly recommended to take a small pair of binoculars. They will seriously enhance your wildlife viewing enjoyment. And one per person is far better than one per couple.

## Personal Health

- **Anti-malaria medication.** Take advice from a specialist travel doctor, your GP, and good travel website. Malaria (including cerebral malaria) is a risk in Madagascar, including in the *hauts plateaux* (high country), and it is crucial to protect yourself by avoiding bites especially between dusk and dawn, and also by taking tablets. There is chloroquine resistance so it is important to take one of the prescribed kinds of tablets that work for the strains of malaria in Madagascar (eg mefloquine-Larium, Malarone, doxycycline). Some antimalarials require that you start taking them several weeks before you travel/enter a malarial area. Take note! We will be travelling at the end of the dry season so there will not be as many mosquitos as during the wet, but malaria is still a real risk.
- **Insect Repellent** – Worth taking for mosquitos. DEET based repellents are best. Loose fitting clothing with long-sleeved shirts, and long trousers will allow you to cover up at dusk. For extra protection, spray or wash your clothes in permethrin. Consider carrying needle & thread or duct tape for patching holes in mosquito nets provided in some hotels.
- **Vaccinations:** Tetanus, polio, and diphtheria (available as all-in-one vaccine) and Hepatitis A are recommended. There is no risk of yellow fever in Madagascar. Typhoid is also recommended. See your local travel doctor and discuss your requirements at least 8 weeks before you travel.
- **Personal medications:** bring a copy of the prescription for any prescription item you carry.
- **Personal first aid items:** sunscreen [note that if you are taking doxycycline for malaria, your skin will be extra sensitive to the sun. Sunscreen can be purchased in Tana or a few other places (supermarkets) if you need a top up], insect repellent, bandaids, blister kit or similar, etc. I will have a reasonable first aid kit for the walks but you might want your own antiseptic such as tea tree oil or betadine plus any other items you are likely to need. Extra batteries for hearing aids! Very hard to find in Madagascar.
- **Antibiotics.** You should seriously consider carrying antibiotics for anti-gastro purposes (aka travellers' diarrhoea). See your travel doctor. These can be very useful if you come down with bacteria-caused travellers gastro issues. Even with all precautions, several people will likely encounter these problems each trip.
- **Vitamin tablets** are not a bad idea though hotel meals are good.
- **Toothbrush & Toothpaste**
- **Ear plugs** for noisy nights might be useful (not that I expect many noisy nights).
- **Water purification tablets** or giardia proof filter. Unless bottled water is purchased (and we will try to avoid this where possible to reduce our environmental impact and reduce costs!), all water should be purified before drinking.
- **Lip Eze or Chapstick, moisturiser**

- **Toilet Paper** - can be purchased in Tana, Toliara etc. All supermarkets & some markets. BYO for multi-day treks. Remember Leave No Trace. Please be sure to bury paper or burn or take it with you to dispose of it appropriately later. The trip leader will carry a toilet kit with trowel to bury #2's but cannot provide toilet paper for everyone for all trekking days. Note that not everyone visiting Madagascar has the same strong environmental principles we do. In some places, you may encounter quantities of toilet paper "white flowers" and associated mess, even with a long drop toilet nearby. Be warned. Also, used toilet paper is generally not flushed down the toilet here. The sewerage system can't handle it. Put used toilet paper in the small bin that will be provided at the side of the toilet.
- **Hand sani-gel** is extremely handy. Use liberally, after handling money, before eating, after toileting etc etc. Let's all try to avoid travellers' gastro.

## Equipment

- **Eating utensils** - bowl, spoon, knife, cup (fork & plate are optional)
- **Water bottles** – at least two 1L bottles or a 1L bottle and a wine bladder. Good idea to have a pack system with which your water is accessible while you are walking – ie so there is no need to stop and take off the pack and open it up to get water. Drink regularly as you walk. 'Camelbak' type systems can be useful. In hot weather, be sure to 'pre-hydrate' sufficiently at breakfast before we head off (about 1 L).
- **Sleeping bag** - suitable for colder nights to approx. 5 deg C (Andringitra NP area). Temperatures below this are possible but unlikely. Most nights are likely to be substantially warmer. Perhaps consider a lighter sleeping bag and a cotton sleep sheet, with a booster bag liner (thermo liner) you can use on colder nights.
- **Sleeping mat**
- **Small lightweight tent** - the inner section-mosquito dome without fly could be used on warm nights camping outside on dry west side of island. Handy if the tent is free-standing. It is not always easy to drive pegs into hard earth or special camping platforms provided at some national parks, and also difficult to get purchase for pegs in soft sand on sandbanks during river trip.
- A **space blanket** can be useful extra warmth.
- **Head Torch** – ideally one that uses standard sized AA batteries or take plenty of AAA spares (the latter are harder to find, & those that you can buy are often very low quality). Useful for camping (obviously), night spotlighting walks, and also for the underground sections of the Big Tsingy walks – and I highly recommend a headtorch for this, so your hands are free.
- A **small towel** is useful. The commercial quick dry 'pack towels' are excellent.
- A **backpack with a pack liner and/or cover**. It is very important that everything in your pack stay dry in the heaviest possible rain.
- **Extra bag for storing gear** you do not need while you are on walks to leave at hotel. Avoid small roly suitcases or hard sided bags that we will struggle to fit into the pirogues.
- **Binoculars** - as noted in photography section above. It is strongly recommended that everyone take a small pair of binoculars (unless of course you have a camera with a big lens). Ideally, one pair per person, not one per couple. It can be very frustrating have a brief opportunity to see something unique and not see it because your buddy had the binoculars. Similarly, if one of you is a photo enthusiast and has a camera with big lens, take a pair of binoculars for the other to use. Trust me! I have seen the issues that arise when people do not have binoculars, esp. when most of the rest of the group do.

- A **small umbrella** might be useful for extra shade on the Tsiribihina River trip. These can be purchased in the town of Miandrivazo on the afternoon we arrive.
- If you have any electronics you want to recharge in hotels, remember that Madagascar is 220V, similar to Australia, but uses **European style two-pin round plugs**. Take an adaptor.
- **Bonus useful extras** – Malagasy phrasebook, pocket knife (peeling fruit etc), duct tape, bandanna, pictures of family etc back home to show to locals (great conversation starter!)

## Luggage

- **Luggage weight on domestic flights in Madagascar** Technically you are allowed 1 check in bag per person, maximum weight 20 kg. When we check in as a group, one could argue that our baggage allowance should therefore be eg 10 pp x 20 kg = 200 kg, regardless of number of bags. Not so! The emphasis is on number of bags, rather than total weight. As such, please pack lightly & ensure you have some extra space in your check in luggage for a few kilos of group food dinner supplies so we can get through with 1 bag per person (otherwise leader will have 2 bags – own gear plus all dinner supplies – and will need to pay excess baggage).

## Food

- Most Malagasy people eat white rice ('vary') three times a day, with garnish of greens, meat, or fish (all termed 'laoky' lit. 'stuff to eat with rice'). Madagascar is apparently the largest consumer of rice per capita in the world. For locals, a lack of real nutritious food is a serious issue in some parts of the country.
- Having said that, it is very easy for tourists to eat well in Madagascar. Hotels and guesthouses serve good food, sometimes with a French bias, and it is generally always excellent. This will generally consist of beef (zebu), chicken, or even fish with rice, veges or french fries (pommes frites) as an accompaniment
- Snacks - Packaged biscuits of various are widely available in towns and villages. Chocolate bars may also be found. Local markets will have fruit and vegetables, availability dependent on season (wash first). Baguettes are available in bigger towns with a bakery. Get to love 'La Vache Qui Ri' soft spreadable cheese triangles. Tins of sardines are also good. Generally however there is not as much choice as you will be used to. In larger towns, there are small supermarkets with a greater variety, including muesli bars, oatmeal, dried fruit, powdered milk etc (eg in Toliara, Antsirabe, Tana), and we will stop here as required.
- If you have a favourite something, bring it! Especially energy dense hiking snacks such as CliffBars or similar.
- Bringing food into Madagascar Given its isolation & unique flora+fauna, one would assume that Madagascar would have strict rules about bringing meat, fruit & veges into the country, like Australia. At this stage however (last check, Sept'15), they don't. There are no questions to this effect anywhere on the immigration card that you will fill out on the flight from Jo'burg to Tana (or whatever route you are flying to get to Madagascar). Customs appear to be mainly concerned with people bringing consumer products into the country for sale etc. So if you are bringing ingredients for hiking breakfasts and lunches plus any snacks, go careful but you should be all be fine. Similarly, we have not had any problems to date bringing in any of the dried veges and meat ingredients for hiking dinners.

## Clothing

- Two sets of clothes for warm to hottish weather.
- One set of clothes for mild to cooler weather
- If your walking clothes are not suitable for going to restaurants, etc, you will need another set which are. It is important to be able to be neatly and cleanly dressed at all times when you are not actually doing a walk.
- Some hotels will offer a laundry service or you can handwash in basin or shower. **Sard Wonder Soap** or a small bottle of **Travellers Washing Detergent**, together with a nail brush, and an elastic camp clothesline are very useful if you are planning to wash anything yourself.
- **Toiletries** – useful additions include moist wipes for freshening up and antibacterial hand sanitizer gel. Use the latter regularly, especially after handling money, shaking hands etc to help avoid traveller's diarrhoea. And get into the habit of not touching your face, especially mouth, nose, and eyes, with your hands.

These sets of clothing should include the following

- **Trousers.** Lightweight, quick drying trousers are recommended. Jeans are NOT suitable.
- On the walk in mountainous Andringitra NP, you need something which will keep your legs warm in case of cold rainy weather (eg thermal bottoms).
- **Shirts.** Light and heavier as above.
- **Sweater, fleece** or something similar for warmth.
- **Socks** (3 to 4 pair) Good quality socks are always a must. Plastic bags between layers of socks can keep your feet dry if we do encounter rain (unlikely).

Remember the layer principle. During the walks, you need to be able to put on and take off various layers of clothing so that you neither overheat nor get cold.

In addition to the sets of clothing mentioned above, you need

- **Hats.** You need a broad-brimmed hat to keep the sun off, and beanie to keep your head warm on colder nights in the mountains.
- Gaiters - optional, short 'sock saver' type if any. Long gaiters not needed.
- **Thermal top & bottoms**
- Wind and waterproof parka
- Overpants or 'rain chaps' may be useful but we are unlikely to encounter heavy rain.
- Footwear. Any **boots** should be well broken in before the start of the trip. A second pair of sturdy shoes or sandals is a good idea.
- Sunglasses.
- Bathing – if you wish. No real opportunities for birthday suit bathing. We will always have a guide & sometimes porters with us. If we have an opportunity to swim (eg Isalo, Andringitra, Morondava), you need to wear something, which could be 'aussie cozzi' good quality underwear & bra.
- Sit mat – can be handy for sitting on dirty, dusty, rocky ground. Also helps with padding when sitting in pirogues.
- Trekking Poles – if you usually walk with these, definitely bring them along. Your knees will thank you, esp. with a full pack. Apparently, research has shown that using trekking poles can add about 15 years to the trekking life of your knees. Maybe they are not so useful offtrack in spinifex country in the Kimberley, but they are great on

track in Madagascar. Two is better than one for natural walking action. We will be on lots of rocky terrain, so consider putting rubber stoppers on the metal ends of your poles to help traction on rock (available at most outdoors stores).

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## Dangers and Annoyances

Travelling throughout Madagascar is not inherently dangerous. Petty theft is the main risk (esp. walking in Tana, also muggings here) – do not keep your valuables in a pack or external money belt, and watch your pockets when in crowded areas. It is best to use a money belt or special money pouch hidden under your clothes, and avoid carrying large sums of money. Avoid opening your wallet & flashing large sums of money – which may seem small sums to us, but > 90% of the population is on less than \$1/day so.... Remember you are extremely rich compared to many of the people you will meet. Please be careful and don't do anything to put unnecessary temptation in front of anyone.

To avoid getting into trouble with the police, carry your passport with you at all times (a photocopy will not be sufficient).

Some areas along the coast are subject to danger from sharks and strong currents. Make sure to seek local advice before heading into the water.

A combination of packed, unroadworthy vehicles and reckless drivers makes taxi-brousse (bush taxi) travel potentially hazardous. This is why we are organising our own transport!

## Tipping

From Bradt Guide to Madagascar (2014 edition):

“This is a tricky subject on which to give universal advice, yet it is the one that consistently causes most anxiety in travellers [esp. those from countries where tipping is not the norm, eg Australia]. **Tipping is normal for drivers, guides porters, etc** who have performed their duties impressively. In restaurants, a tip of 5-10% is plenty. Baggage handlers at airports and some hotels are masters of the disappointment act. They may feign offence at the amount if they think you are new to Madagascar, but a tip of 100 – 500 Ar (AUD 5 – 25 cents) is plenty for carrying baggage. [If you don't need help with bags at the airport, be strict and tell them so! Don't let them take your bags.] Taxi drivers don't expect a tip.

**National Park Guides** should be tipped according to their service. There is no obligation to tip but those enthusiastic guides who have done well in spotting animals, speak good English, and have shown themselves to be knowledgeable about the flora and fauna might expect to be rewarded with a gratuity of **Ar2000 – Ar20,000/day (AUD\$1 - \$10)**.

The hardest tipping question is how much to pay the **drivers and guides** who have spent several days with you and given excellent service. The answer here is to keep in mind the cost of living in Madagascar and tip proportionately: teachers and doctors typically earn about 85 Euros a month (which on a per day basis is 4 Euros/AUD\$6/Ar14,000), while unskilled workers may earn less than 20 Euros a month (which on a per day basis is 0.7 Euros/AUD\$1/Ar2500). [Also keep in mind that we are a group, so adjust your tipping accordingly. Don't go overboard with generosity but don't be super stingy either. Something along the lines of **Ar5000 – 10000 per person per day** if you want to contribute to the guide/driver tip].

**Give tips in ariary** rather than foreign currency [which can be very hard for people living a long way away from banks to change into useful ariary].”

Updated by Merel Dalebout – October 2015