

TECH, TOYS & TENDERS SPECIAL

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March 2025 boatinternational.com

**LUXURY
& LEMURS**

WHY MADAGASCAR
IS THE HOTTEST
EXPLORER YACHT
DESTINATION
FOR 2025

**CHASING
ITHACA**

*Embark on a yachting
adventure in
Odysseus's wake*

**SB
25**

YOUR GUIDE TO
THE ST BARTHS
BUCKET REGATTA



THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

ORIGINAL, PERSONAL AND EFFORTLESSLY COOL:

INSIDE BENETTI'S 67-METRE *KASPER 7*

DIAMOND BINTA – THE 58M CRUISER WITH A SHOWCASE ENGINE ROOM



VOYAGE

Wild at heart

Rustic luxury surrounded
by unspoiled nature is found
in the new resort of Voacant,
the pager fishermen of
the nomadic Vezo people

PHOTOGRAPHY: GUYANA, GETTY IMAGES

Georgia Boscawen discovers
how a bounty of natural wonders –
plus a new luxury hotel –
are making the Indian Ocean
island of Madagascar
this year's top explorer
yacht destination



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"Madagascar? Isn't that a bit of a strange place for superyachts?" asked my editor, as I presented plans for a trip to the southeast coast of Africa, visions of lemurs swinging from baobab trees playing in my imagination. The answer, of course, was yes it is. Change, however, is afoot with the development of luxury tourism on the Indian Ocean island, and there are now few destinations more exciting for yachts looking to get off the beaten track. In 2024, 25 superyachts had the same idea, and vessels including 75.3-metre *Cloudbreak* and 53.3-metre *Bad Company Support* spent time exploring this extraordinary island, which, at the moment, is overlooked – and misunderstood – in the high-end tourism sector.

I can't quite believe what I'm seeing as the sun finally rises over the Baie de Tintingue, a huge expanse of gin-clear water between the northeastern coast of Madagascar and Sainte-Marie Island, which lies 12 nautical miles off the coast. The sand is whiter than in the Maldives, with flecks of gold, and the water is an almost impossible shade of turquoise. Having arrived under the cover of darkness by boat the previous night, I hadn't really had a chance to see the brand-new Voazara resort. I'd had a cocktail at the beachside Franco's bar but lighting there is kept to a minimum to encourage the feeling of being completely lost in paradise. "We want just a couple of lights on the palm trees, some fires, and that's about it," says the founder, Philippe Kjellgren, who, after pouring his heart into the development of the resort, is delighted to see the first guests' arrival. "Look up there and you'll see one of the brightest views of the Milky Way possible," he says, gesturing to the shimmering river of stars that lights up the sky.

There is no light pollution here, either out to sea or on the island of Sainte-Marie. Known locally as Nosy Boraha, this was the place Kjellgren chose for its untouched charm, primary rainforest and marine life. From June to September, humpback whales gather in the bay as part of their migration. They can even be observed from the "bird's nest", which also serves as an exceptional private dining spot.



Above: Voazara resort on the Baie de Tintingue. Left: the stunning panther chameleon. Below: Franco's, a beachside bar at Voazara.



The resort was built by hand, constructed with natural materials and embellished with local art

But the raw, natural beauty of the island has presented its own challenges. The place is scattered with spots sacred to Fomba Gasy (the local Malagasy religion), so when building you must tread carefully. "There are cultural taboos called *fady* that we need to stick to," says Kjellgren, who is passionate about supporting the local communities. "We also make sure that we respect the locals if they need to sacrifice a zebu [an Asian breed of cattle] or bless the land; it really is an incredible thing to navigate, and very important." Having grown up in Madagascar, Kjellgren has built Voazara to respect the local community's approach to nature and religion. "Almost all the staff here are from the surrounding villages on the island, and we've worked together to build this place by hand."

This is truly how the resort was built – by hand. Consisting of seven bungalows and one magnificent three-bedroom villa, it is constructed with natural materials and embellished with local art. The main villa opens out to the beach, overlooking a row of palm trees through huge wooden doors – which are yet to be closed given how isolated and safe the resort is. In the



Above: a Queen Bungalow at Voazara. Left: the critically endangered black and white ruffed lemur

Madagascar by superyacht

Location 250 nautical miles off the east coast of Mozambique. **The rules** To enter Madagascar, vessels must clear customs with the *directeur général de l'Agence Portuaire Maritime et Fluviale de Madagascar (apmf.mg)*. There are no restrictions regarding length of stay, but captains will need to declare the yacht for each port entry.

According to Africa Global Logistics (a private company that can manage the process for visiting yachts), some areas are classified as a reserve or a marine national park, where yachts may be asked to send mooring requests for entry. The west coast of the island has many coral reefs and shallows that must be carefully navigated. The presence of a local captain or guide on board is recommended.

Some islands or beaches may be *fady* (sacred) and disembarkation must be authorised by the local village chiefs with respect to local practices. A local guide is an essential intermediary for interacting with communities. **Yachts for charter in Madagascar** 37m *Thandeka*, y.c.o.; 75.3m *Cloudbreak*, superyachtsmonaco.com **Contacts** Africa Global Logistics, *aglogroup.com*; local guide and yachting logistics, *madagascarrenes.com*

Below: the rare red ruffed lemur. Right: Masoala Forest Lodge. Bottom: a fisherman on a traditional craft

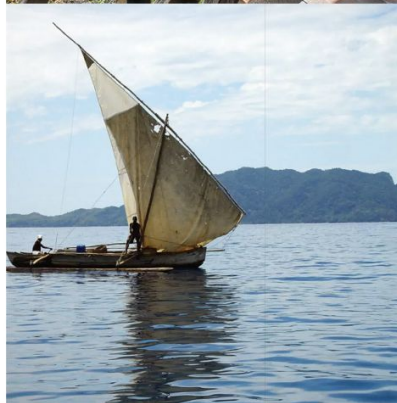


middle, by a deep-seated L-shaped sofa, is a beautiful piece of knotted driftwood that measures two metres across. "We found this bobbing in the bay," says Kjellgren. "It took 20 of us to pick it up and get it up here, but I just love it." Everything feels natural and wild in a way that few properties can replicate. In four days, I haven't looked at a pair of shoes or a watch.

A common misconception about Madagascar – and there are many – is its size. At 1,600 kilometres from top to bottom, most people are surprised to learn that the island is bigger than France and the fourth-largest island on the planet. "We have wildlife here that you'll find nowhere else on earth," says Christophe Caumes, founder of Madagascarrenes, an Indian Ocean-based expedition company. It's thought that 75 per cent of the 200,000 species here can be found only on the island. "People think of the lemurs, of course, but there are all kinds of things like the tenrec (a small hedgehog-like mammal), the panther chameleon and leaf-tailed gecko – there is a lot of cool stuff here." Madagascar has been isolated for more than 80 million years, allowing animals and plants to evolve in isolation.

The lack of large predators or venomous species make exploring here unique too, and this means that spotting nocturnal lemurs, sleeping kingfishers and bizarre, net-casting spiders can be done with limited risk. And the same goes for wildlife in the daytime.

Having taken a short private flight from the airstrip on Sainte-Marie Island to the grassy Aéroport de Maroantsetra, followed by a 20-nautical-mile journey by boat (a trip best suited to a yacht in its entirety), I now stand in the primary rainforest of Masoala. This is an enormous protected rainforest that covers 230,000 hectares and is considered one of the most biodiverse areas on the planet. The chances of spotting the red ruffed lemur – one of the rarest (and largest) lemurs, with just 1,000 thought to be left in the wild – are slim, but the thought of glimpsing any of the lemurs that reside here is exciting. The abundance of wildlife is overwhelming and soon we pass



The shrieking and squawking of the red ruffed lemur fills the rainforest as two of them scramble across the canopy above

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDRÉ BRON; COURTESY MASOALA FOREST LODGE; COURTESY OF SUPERYACHTMONACO

a boa constrictor wrapped tightly around a branch, giant millipedes and a huge leaf-tailed gecko about a foot long hiding in plain sight on the trunk of a tree. Suddenly, the shrieking and squawking of the red ruffed lemur fills the rainforest as two of them scramble across the canopy above their wide eyes staring back at us.

Our base for the evening, the nearby Masoala Forest Lodge, is equally remote and consists of a few stilted cabins hidden in the forest. With no phone signal or fixed lighting outside of the main camp, things are deliberately primitive, but this is no better way of immersing oneself in the rainforest. I climb up a ladder into the open-sided cabin and listen the goings on in the trees through a sturdy mosquito net.

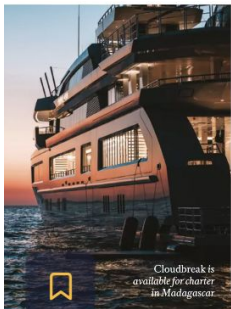
Madagascar is scattered with places like this and government is determined to spread the word. Follow her election in August 2024, Viviane Dewa, the minister of tourism, shared her objective to attract one million tourists by 2028, which is 740,000 more than the current annual figure. And it's not only the flora and fauna that are ready to amaze visitors. The southern part of the country boasts world-renowned surfing spots between Fort Dauphin and Morombe, drawing Olympic-level athletes from around

the world. Meanwhile, Antananarivo, the capital city, is a lively hub full of markets, restaurants and a multitude of cultural experiences.

It may come as a surprise to some that infrastructure and services for superyachts are not out of reach here. "Yachts can refuel in the international port of Ambohidratra on Sainte-Marie Island," explains Caumes. He also explains that, despite natural curiosity, locals are unfazed by visiting superyachts. "There are no problems with security and no animosity towards yachts visiting the country," he says.

Onward journeys, too, are varied in the Indian Ocean with the island of Réunion approximately 400 nautical miles off Madagascar's east coast. "The last big yacht we had here on Réunion was 126-metre *Octopus*," recalls Caumes. "It was an amazing trip with helicopter tours over the active volcano; the trip was actually especially for the volcano eruption." While there is no eruption (thankfully) taking place at the time of my visit to Réunion, we are whisked up to the skies in a helicopter to get a breathtaking glimpse of the Piton de la Fournaise volcano. The terrain here on this small island (an overseas French territory) is extraordinary, with vertiginous valleys, giant volcanic plains, beautiful beaches and forested mountains all packed into 63 kilometres from north to south. The local restaurants are also impressive, in keeping with the high standards of French hospitality.

Madagascar is emerging as a mesmerising destination for luxury tourism, particularly for superyachts seeking unparalleled adventures off the beaten path. Its unspoiled natural beauty, unique wildlife and rich cultural heritage have always offered an extraordinary opportunity, but luxury tourism, too, is on the rise. As one of the poorest countries in the world, Madagascar and its surrounding islands will surely benefit from having more superyachts visit. And once you're here you'll only want to carry on exploring the Indian Ocean, with Réunion, Mauritius and the Seychelles right on your doorstep. ■



Cloudbreaks available for charter in Madagascar