Cut off from the African mainland more than 100 million years ago, the flora and fauna of Madagascar have evolved independently from the rest of the planet. The result: nearly eighty percent of its species exist nowhere else on Earth, garnering Madagascar the nickname “the Eighth Continent.” Explore three of Madagascar’s fascinating national parks in search of lemurs, chameleons, orchids, baobabs, geckoes and much more. Search for the Indri indri, the largest species of lemur, in the orchid-filled rainforest, then hike through the dramatic, eroded limestone towers known as “tsingy” in search of the crowned lemur and demonic-looking leaf-tailed gecko. Despite the deforestation the island has experienced, Madagascar remains one of the most beautiful and fascinating places on Earth, and much of its natural heritage continues to flourish in its parks.

GROUP SIZE: 10-17 guests

PRICING: $7,995 per person double occupancy / $8,945 single occupancy

STUDY LEADER: James Costa, is Executive Director of the Highlands Biological Station in Highlands, North Carolina, and Professor of Biology at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina, where he has taught courses in genetics, entomology, biogeography and evolution. An entomologist with a special interest in social evolution, Jim has been a Research Associate in Entomology in the Museum of Comparative Zoology since 1996, and the author of numerous research papers, reviews, and the book The Other Insect Societies (Harvard, 2006).

Over the past dozen years Jim’s research and writing have largely focused on Charles Darwin, Alfred Russel Wallace, and the history of evolutionary biology, including three books with Harvard University Press: The Annotated Origin (2009), On the Organic Law of Change (2013), and Wallace, Darwin, and the Origin of Species (2014). He was awarded the silver Wallace Medal by the London-based Alfred Russel Wallace Memorial Fund in 2017 for his contributions to Wallace scholarship. That year also saw the publication of Jim’s latest book, Darwin’s Backyard: How Small Experiments Led to a Big Theory (W. W. Norton). A finalist for the 2018 American Association for the Advancement of Science/Subaru Prize, Darwin’s Backyard is a life of Darwin seen through the lens of the naturalists’ incessant and charming “experimentising.”

Jim has held fellowships at Harvard’s Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study (2004-2005) and the Berlin Institute for Advanced Study (2012-2013). He lectures widely in the US and Europe, is a regular travel program leader/lecturer for the HAA/Harvard Museums of Science and Culture, and for many years co-instructed Harvard’s Darwin summer program at the University of Oxford, England.
SCHEDULE BY DAY
*B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner*

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3
DEPART U.S.

Depart the U.S. on overnight flights to Antananarivo, Madagascar.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4
ARRIVE ANTANANARIVO

Upon arrival at Antananarivo’s Ivato International Airport, transfer to the Palissandre Hotel, located in the heart of the city.

This evening, meet your Harvard study leader, fellow travelers, and private specialist guide for welcome drinks and dinner in the hotel’s restaurant.

Overnight: Palissandre Hotel (D)

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5
ANTANANARIVO

This morning, explore part of Madagascar’s history at the Royal Hill of Ambohimanga, a UNESCO World Heritage site located 1 hour north of the city. Here, learn about the rise and fall of the royal dynasty on the island, which was influential in Madagascar becoming a modern nation-state. Explore Ambohimanga’s fortified royal palace and take in the panoramic views of the small villages and patchwork rice fields below.

On the way back into Antananarivo, stop at a local textile production site that makes a variety of products from raffia. Learn how the products are made and what they are used for before continuing back to the hotel.

Overnight: Palissandre Hotel (B, L, D)

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6
ANDASIBE-MANTADIA NATIONAL PARK (PERINET)

This morning depart the capital city, heading towards Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, located on the eastern part of the island (total drive time approximately 3.5 hours). Along the way, stop at Peyreras Reserve. This small reserve is home to numerous species of chameleons, insects endemic to the region, and several species of snakes and amphibians, allowing an up-close viewing of this unique wildlife.

Upon an early afternoon arrival, take some time to relax after the long drive.

At dusk, transfer to the nearby VOIMMA Reserve for a walk in search of nocturnal species. VOIMMA stands for "Vondron'olona miaro mitia ala," which translates to "local people love the forest." The reserve was founded in 2012 by a group of local residents who wanted to manage their land on their own, and be a part of ecotourism. Highlights of the night walk may include the woolly lemur, Goodman’s mouse lemur, and various tree frog and chameleon species.

Tonight, stay in the newly-built Mantadia Lodge, overlooking the virgin rainforest and paddy fields in the Andasibe-Mantadia National Park.

Overnight: Mantadia Lodge (B, L, D)

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7
ANDASIBE-MANTADIA NATIONAL PARK (PERINET)

Today visit Mantadia National Park, located approximately 1 hour from the lodge over a very bumpy road. Once within the park, explore the high-altitude, primary (or virgin) rainforest in Mantadia National Park. Trails here can be quite steep, but the route taken depends on where the lemurs are that morning. You may end up hiking off of the maintained trails into the brush in order to get a better look at the lemurs.

Highlights today include the diademed sifaka, black-and-white ruffed lemur and the Indri
indri. The park is also home to a variety of orchids, which play an important role in the forest’s ecosystem.

After enjoying a picnic lunch in the park, return to the lodge for the remainder of the afternoon at leisure.

Overnight: Mantadia Lodge (B, L, D)

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 8
ANDASIBE-MANTADIA NATIONAL PARK (PERINET)

Early this morning, head to Analamazaotra Reserve, which forms part of Andasibe-Mantadia National Park. The reserve is home to a variety of wildlife that is found nowhere else in the world. Nine species of lemur live within the reserve, including the critically endangered Indri indri, the world’s largest lemur standing at three feet high. In addition to lemurs, keep an eye out for one of the world’s largest chameleons, the Parson’s chameleon, which grows up to two feet long and is bright green.

This afternoon, visit a nearby private reserve for an opportunity to see several species of lemurs up close. The reserve is located on an island, access only by a very short canoe ride. Some of the species you’ll see on the island include the bamboo lemur, white-ruffed, and common brown lemurs.

Overnight: Mantadia Lodge (B, L, D)

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9
ANTANANARIVO

After breakfast begin the 3.5 hour drive back to the capital city, passing by the many small villages and rice paddies that dot the countryside. Back in Antananarivo, pay a visit to a local chocolatier, the famous Chocolaterie Robert, which is the first commercial producer of locally sourced chocolate in Madagascar. A trip to the local crafts market rounds out your afternoon.

Overnight: Palissandre Hotel (B, L, D)

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10
JOFFREVILLE

Air Madagascar frequently changes its schedules, so timing on this day must be flexible.

Today, take an Air Madagascar flight north to Antsiranana, also known as Diego Suarez, located on the northern tip of the island. The area was named after the Portuguese explorer Diego Soares, who visited the bay in 1543. One of the largest deep-water harbors in the Indian Ocean, the city and harbor served as a strategic base for the allies during World War II.

From Antsiranana, transfer approximately 45 minutes southwest to the town of Joffreville, where you will stay for the next two nights. As time allows, visit a nearby private reserve, where you can walk in search of the unique flora and fauna in the area. On site at the reserve is a gigantic Aldabra tortoise which is thought to be between 250-300 years old.

For the next two nights, stay at Nature Lodge, a property set high in the hills just outside of Joffreville with views over the surrounding landscape.

Overnight: Nature Lodge (B, L, D)

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11
JOFFREVILLE

This morning, embark on a full day excursion to the Montagne d’Ambre National Park with a picnic lunch provided. Formed in 1958 to protect the unique flora and fauna in the area, the park is located in a lush rainforest filled with beautiful lakes and waterfalls. Walk in search of crowned and brown lemurs, chameleons, leaf-tailed geckos and a variety of bird life. Keep an eye out for the brookesia chameleon, the smallest in the world, which can fit on your fingertip.

Late this afternoon, return to the lodge for the remainder of the evening at leisure.

Overnight: Nature Lodge (B, L, D)
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12
ANKARANA

You leave the forested region behind today, heading southwest towards Ankarana, driving through the varying landscapes of Antankarana country (total drive time approximately 3 hours to the lodge). The Antankarana are an ethnic group that lives in the area, and the name means “the people of the tsingy,” the dramatic, jagged rock formations that are found in this part of the island.

On the way to your lodge, turn off of the main road for a trip to see the Red Tsingy. A short and easy walk from the parking area takes you to the base of the picturesque formation. These tsingy have been formed out of red limestone, creating a colorful wave of rock that changes hue throughout the day.

Continue on towards the lodge, with the chance to stop at a viewpoint overlooking the canyons and tsingy below.

After arriving at Ankarana lodge, take time to settle-in and enjoy the beautiful landscape.

Overnight: Ankarana Lodge (B, L, D)

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14
NOSY BE

This morning, depart the land of tsingy and drive southwest to Ambanja, a drive of approximately 3 hours. During the drive, pass through a very fertile part of Madagascar where plantations of coffee, cocoa, and ylang ylang dominate the landscape.

In Ambanja, visit the Millot Plantation, which has been under cultivation since Lucien Millot founded it in 1904. Learn about the process of making chocolate, starting with the fruit of the cacao tree, the cocoa pod, and the processes that follow. You will also learn how some essential oils are refined in the plantation’s distillery.

From Ambanja, board a speed boat for the 1 hour ride across the water to Nosy Be, the biggest island in the Nosy Be Archipelago. Nicknamed the island of perfumes thanks to its long-running ylang ylang industry, Nosy Be is covered with a variety of cultivated fields including sugar cane, coffee, cassava and sweet potatoes. From the harbor, proceed to your lodge for the night, where you will have the remainder of the afternoon at leisure.

Overnight: Ravintsara Wellness Hotel (B, L, D)

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15
DEPART FOR U.S.

Today, transfer to the Nosy Be airport in time for your flights home. (B)

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 16
ARRIVE HOME

Arrive back home early this morning.