



Education Authority Document

Madagascar 2026

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to delineate some of the key procedures in place for Operation Wallacea trips to Madagascar. When creating the document, reference has been made to the National Guidance produced by the OEAP (Outdoor Education Advisory Panel – see <http://oeapng.info>) in the United Kingdom in addition to guidelines from the Expedition Provider's Association and BS8848 (the British Standard for organising and managing visits, fieldwork, expeditions and adventurous activities outside the UK). Additional guidance has been sought from bodies including but not limited to the HSE (Health and Safety Executive) DoE (Department for Education), AALA, and numerous Acts of Parliament.

This document may be useful for a number of parties interested in the expeditions, in particular but not limited to: The Educational Visits Coordinator (or equivalent) appointed by the school or college; the senior teacher(s) accompanying the trip (the group leader); parents or guardians of the students on the trip; students or other participants on the trip. Operation Wallacea are members of the Expedition Providers Association (EPA) and hold a Learning Outside the Classroom badge (LotC).

Objectives and structure of the expedition

Objectives

The Operation Wallacea expeditions in Madagascar have three key objectives:

- 1) To train the expedition participants in Madagascan wildlife ecology, Indian Ocean reef ecology, and scuba diving (health allowing).
- 2) To carry out long term biodiversity monitoring in the Mahamavo dry forests and reefs of Nosy be.
- 3) To gather data on biodiversity, community economics and forest structure to provide information needed to assess the forest as a community managed protected area for sustainable use.

Structure

The structure of the expeditions is a little different to that with many other expeditions or educational trips that are run by schools. The expeditions last for two weeks, with usually the first week spent in the forest of Mahamavo, and the second week spent at the marine site in Nosy Be (figure.1).

Operation Wallacea is running two biodiversity research programmes in Madagascar; the first in conjunction with ECO Services in the Mahamavo forests in North Madagascar, and the second in conjunction with Scuba Nosy Be on the island on Nosy Be off the North West coast of Madagascar.

The school groups fly to Antananarivo (the capital city) where they spend one night and transfer to Ambondromamy where they spend a second night. In Ambondromamy they are met and transferred to Mariarano close to where the expedition start point is located, a small village about four hours drive from Mahajanga. The terrestrial section of the expedition is based here. The road to Mariarano is unpaved and so students are transported in large 4x4 vehicles. Once at Mariarano, the students stay in tents and trek into the surrounding forest to complete surveys of the wildlife. There is a satellite camp that can be accessed by trekking through the forest, and the groups will split their time between the Mariarano camp and the satellite camp, Matsedroy (figure.2).

After the first week, the group will be transported from Mariarano in 4x4 vehicles to Ambondromamy, where they will overnight before being transported to Antananarivo. Here they will overnight again before

travelling to Antananarivo airport from which they will travel to Nosy Be by plane. The group will land on the island of Nosy Be and be driven in approved vehicles to the marine site, where they will be based for their second week.

Here, those students medically fit to do so will complete a scuba diving course (SSI Open Water), and all students will complete a marine ecology course. Those students who are already dive trained (or those who do not wish to or are not able to learn to dive) will participate in a more in-depth version of the course, which will include in-water practicals by diving or snorkelling. At the end of the second week the students will either fly directly from Nosy Be or fly to Antananarivo to meet their international flights (they may also require an overnight stay in Antananarivo). All accommodation and internal travel is organised by our in-country travel partners, Ecotours.



Figure 1. Map including major transport locations

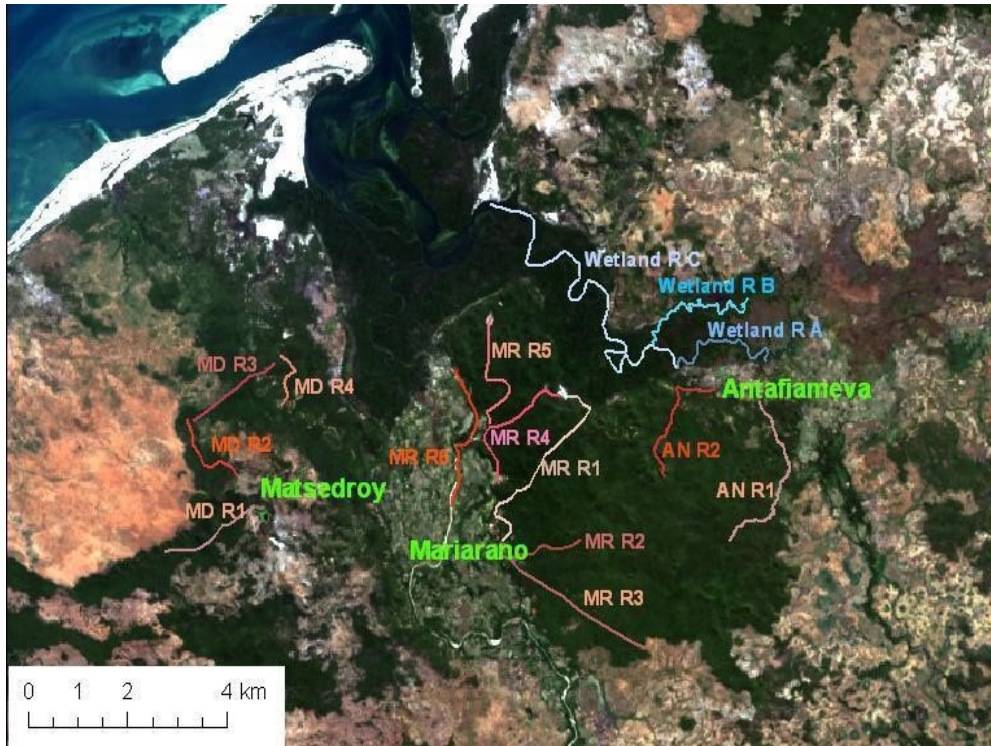


Figure 2. Location of the Mahamavo research sites and stratified sampling routes

Start and finish of the expeditions

Groups need to arrange international flights to arrive in Madagascar on the Tuesday, before their first day of activities begins on the Thursday. Return flights can be arranged any time on the Thursday from Nosy Be or Friday from Antananarivo, after the final day of marine activities on the marine site on Wednesday. Operation Wallacea will be responsible for the safety and welfare of the groups from the point at which they are met outside the airport on the day they arrive, until they are dropped off at the international departure gate at the airport on the day that they leave the country. The only exception to this would be if the group decide to organize their own excursions in Madagascar prior to or after participating in the Operation Wallacea expedition. If this were the case, Operation Wallacea would liaise with the school to agree suitable start and finish times and locations and would be responsible for the safety and welfare of the group between those designated points.

Travel arrangements

Operation Wallacea will book international flights for the group from their country of origin through to Madagascar, unless it is specified by the group leader that the group wish to organise their own flights. Operation Wallacea will then arrange transport to and from the expedition sites at the start and finish of the expedition. Most groups will fly in on a Tuesday and depart on a Thursday and as such their schedule will be as follows:

- Tuesday: Land in Antananarivo, Madagascar (Ivato Airport) anytime, overnight in Antananarivo in hotel organized by Madagascar Tour Consult.
- Wednesday: Transfer overland from Antananarivo to Ambondromamy by bus or 4x4 vehicles (approx. 12hours) and overnight in a hotel in Ambondromamy.

- Thursday: Transfer overland from Ambondromamy to Mariarano (approx. 8hours) by bus and 4x4 vehicles. Thursday at 12:30pm the expedition officially starts.
- Thursday afternoon to Wednesday morning: participate in forest-based courses and surveys.
- Wednesday: Transfer overland from Mariarano to Ambondromamy (approx. 8hours) by bus and 4x4 vehicles, and overnight in Ambondromamy.
- Thursday: Travel overland from Ambondromamy to Antananarivo (approx. 8hours) and overnight in Antananarivo.
- Friday: Overland transfer to Antananarivo airport and flight to Nosy Be (approx. 2hours) and overland transfer to the marine site.
- Friday afternoon to Wednesday afternoon: participate in marine based courses.
- Thursday: Transfer overland to Nosy Be airport for international or domestic flight.

Booking Process

School and college students have the option to either book as a group, where there is a contract between the school and Operation Wallacea, or as individuals, where the contract is between Operation Wallacea and the participant (and their parent or guardian, if the participant is under the age of 18 at the time of booking the expedition). Once a school group has demonstrated interest in the expeditions, they are given a full presentation about the site where students, parents and teachers have the opportunity to ask any questions they feel are necessary. Following from this the school, or collection of individuals, are given an agreed amount of time to secure their places on the trip with a deposit. Operation Wallacea's terms and conditions are made available prior to booking, and acceptance of those terms and conditions is necessary before the booking can be confirmed.

Inclusion

In line with the Equality Act (2010) Operation Wallacea's policy is to make all reasonable adjustments to enable students of all physical and mental ability levels to participate in the programme. Likewise, participants will not be discriminated against on the basis of any protected characteristic (e.g. gender, race or religion). Any specific needs (such as requirements due to religious customs, or those arising from a physical disability) are discussed with the school shortly after the booking has been made. If it is not possible to make suitable adjustments without substantially jeopardising the quality or safety of the programme for the remainder of the participants, then those students unable to participate would be offered a full refund of any monies paid.

Risk Management

Prior to the expedition

A thorough assessment of all research sites and activities are completed before the start of each expedition and reviewed throughout via in-house audits. Risk assessment and management instructions are put in place for general activities (such as trekking), for specific activities (such as the marine surveys) and specific sites (such as Mariarano). The risk assessments are published on the Operation Wallacea website and hard copies are available on request, free of charge.

During the expedition

The risk management policies are dynamic and can be amended by the senior Opwall staff on-site should new or unforeseen risks present themselves. All medical incidents and near misses are recorded throughout

the season, in addition to the completion of in-house audits. Any major incident (e.g. requiring emergency evacuation or significant deviation from the planned expedition activities) results in an incident report being written by the senior Opwall staff member on-site and statements being taken from parties involved as appropriate. Additionally, the Operation Wallacea Senior Management Team is informed of any major incidents immediately, in case the in-country team should require any further support.

Training Before the Expedition

Operation Wallacea staff work closely with teachers to ensure that pupils are ready and prepared for the expedition abroad. Various joint meetings take place with the Operation Wallacea schools team and the teachers regarding facilities on site and skills required. A training package is sent to each of the schools including the following:

Details of the level of fitness required from the pupils

The level of fitness required by students is outlined in detail in the training presentation. For those students that have limited outdoors experience professional UK based outdoor adventure companies can be recommended to provide this additional training. Furthermore, bleep tests can be sent to the school to be carried out by teaching staff if this is deemed necessary or helpful

Other information

Operation Wallacea also make available a student handbook (downloaded from the Opwall website) containing full details of the facilities at each site, the learning outcomes for the expedition, and the planned itinerary.

Additionally, participants are given a kit list (which is also available on the Opwall website) and some identification guides for the local fauna and flora. The Operation Wallacea staff are always available to talk to any student, parent, or teacher, who has any questions about any aspects of the expeditions, and the preparation required.

Roles and competencies of designated leaders

Qualifications, licensing and technical competency

Operation Wallacea is not eligible for a license through AALA (Adventurous Activities Licensing Authority) as we do not conduct licensable activities and because we operate outside of the UK. Many of the activities organised by Operation Wallacea are research focussed and so no formal qualifications exist. Wherever possible though, the procedures for ensuring technical competency of key staff are in line with AALA recommendations. Where new staff are recruited (i.e. those who have not worked for us before) the selection process includes a review of the CV or resume, a telephone interview, and obtaining at least two positive relevant references from previous employers. The qualifications or experience levels necessary for the various activities are described below, in addition to the roles and responsibilities of the key staff.

Role of the teachers

The teachers accompanying the students are responsible for ensuring the safety of the group during their travel from their country of origin to Madagascar. Flights can be purchased by the teachers or by Operation Wallacea, depending on the school's requirements.

Once the groups are met in Madagascar by Operation Wallacea staff or partners, the teachers will be travelling with the group and are responsible for pastoral care issues, and for helping to organise their group. At the end of the expeditions the teachers and the group are returned to the airport and the teachers are responsible for accompanying the group back to their country of origin. During the expedition the responsibility for the safe provision of activities, and organising the full itinerary, rests with Operation Wallacea rather than the teachers accompanying a group, as the teachers are not expected to have specific technical expertise in activities such as SCUBA diving. However, the teachers should, prior to the trip, have familiarised themselves with the activities to be carried out. They also should have ensured that the Educational Visits Coordinator (or equivalent in their area) is aware of the trip and has been sent the relevant Operation Wallacea documents (e.g. risk assessments and this document) and that the trip has the approval of the senior management team at the school.

Role of Operation Wallacea staff

Venture Leader

The Venture Leader is responsible for the overall running of the expeditions and the safety of the volunteers and staff working on the project. The main venture leader for the Madagascar project will be Emma Whalley, who has managed expeditions for Operation Wallacea for over 3 years.

The Venture Leaders will ensure that in each of the locations the correct level of leadership is provided for each of the survey groups and that the various risk amelioration measures are being adhered to, in addition to ensuring that the overall objectives of the project are being met.

The Venture Leaders will also ensure that the agreed protocols for the different activities are being adhered to (for example we have a safe trekking procedure) and that volunteers and staff alike are properly briefed with regard to suitable conduct within their role whilst on the expedition.

Site manager – Terrestrial sites

Each forest camp will have its own camp manger appointed by the venture leader prior to the field season. Each camp manager has relevant previous experience in running field camps. The terrestrial programme as a whole is managed directly by the Venture Leader, Emma Whalley, for the terrestrial project.

Survey leaders – terrestrial surveys

All surveys will be led by a survey leader at a maximum ratio of 1 staff member to 8 students. The survey leader will have, as minimum, an undergraduate degree in a relevant discipline and experience in leading young people or students in an outdoor education setting. All survey leaders will receive on-site training in protocols for leading small groups on short treks, such as those likely to be encountered in Madagascar.

Site manager – Marine site

The marine camp will have its own camp manger appointed by the venture leader prior to the field season. This camp manager has relevant previous experience in running field camps. The marine as a whole is managed by the Venture leader, Emma Whalley, for the Madagascar projects.

In-water activity leaders

In water scuba activities will be led by a SSI Dive Instructor or SSI Divemaster. Dive training will be conducted in groups no larger than 8 students to 1 Dive Instructor and 1 Dive Master. Qualified divers will

be supervised in the water at a ratio no greater than 6 divers to 1 Divemaster. Snorkel activities will also be supervised at a ratio no greater than 8 snorkellers to 1 Divemaster or Rescue Diver.

Leadership during vehicle transfers

Leadership for forest to marine site transfers and overland trip Land transfers

The groups will transfer overland in either buses or 4x4 vehicles and will be arranged through Shaun Reveley of Madagascar Tour Consult, an English tour operator who has been based in Madagascar for more than fifteen years. One of Shaun Reveley's English-speaking staff will accompany each of the overland transfers. For those taking the overland trip transfers have also been arranged through Shaun Reveley. They will ensure that all the vehicles used comply with Madagascan regulations and are driven in a safe and careful manner. All their drivers have over 5 years' experience driving in Madagascar. Seatbelts are not available on every seat in every vehicle, as this is not a legal requirement in Madagascar, but the vast majority of the buses used do have seatbelts, and wherever seatbelts are available the drivers will advise all passengers to wear them.

Plane transfers

The plane transfers to and from the mainland to Nosy Be are organised by Air Madagascar and our in-country partners Madagascar Tour Consult.

Medical Procedures

This section summarises the medical and evacuation procedures report which has a much more detailed description of the staffing, First Aid facilities and procedures to be followed.

Information and records

All participants will be required to enter their medical details onto the Operation Wallacea data portal. Details of how to log on are sent out upon receiving the booking from the participant. The data is stored securely and is initially only available to certain Operation Wallacea staff members, and, for groups of school students, the teacher leading the group. All medical forms are assessed by Operation Wallacea. The venture leader may seek to contact the participant to gather further information, which they would then enter on to the portal.

All medical problems, illnesses, injuries and near misses are recorded at each of the sites. At the end of the season, these data are collated and a health and safety report is completed and published on the website. This report classifies incidents into 7 categories and allows comparison between the expeditions and other activities. The policy of publication of the accidents and illnesses recorded on the expedition is a unique aspect of the Operation Wallacea expeditions and helps ensure the procedures on site are followed fully.

Medical facilities

A comprehensive medical kit is provided at each site, the content of which is agreed prior to the season in consultation with professional medics. These kits are designed to deal with as many nonemergency medical eventualities as reasonably possible onsite, and also to support emergency incidents and stabilise a casualty for transfer to more extensive medical facilities where needed.

Emergency Procedures

A document describing the medical and evacuation procedures in full, for Madagascar, is available on the health and safety pages of the Operation Wallacea website.

Carefully planned evacuation protocols are in place for the sites in Madagascar. All staff will have training on the evacuation procedures and protocols.

Because of the high variability of influential factors such as weather conditions and nature of potential injuries, a number of different evacuation scenarios must be prepared for prior to the season. All staff are fully briefed in these scenarios.

Once a major incident or emergency is identified the Venture Leaders will advise Operation Wallacea HQ in the United Kingdom. The Venture Leaders will take overall control as Incident Coordinator in conjunction with other senior staff if they are in a position to assist. Operation Wallacea's medical and evacuation plans are designed so that, in a serious incident, Operation Wallacea are able to be self-sufficient (and not reliant on a third party such as an insurer or medical assistance company) in terms of getting prompt and effective care to a patient or moving that patient to care.

Insurance

All participants are required to have medical and travel insurance and to provide these details in advance of their expedition. Operation Wallacea have comprehensive combined liability insurance with up to £10,000,000 for public/product liability.

Safeguarding and Child Protection

We endeavour to ensure that all school students participating in our activities are safe in accordance with the Protection of Children Act (1989 and 2004). This is done a number of ways as outlined below. It is important to note that it is not possible, practical, and in many cases useful, to obtain government supported vetting checks (such as Disclosure and Barring Service) for all staff that students will come into contact with during their time on the expedition. As such Operation Wallacea adopts the following policies where vetting service checks are included where appropriate amongst other safeguarding methods but are not the sole precaution taken.

Supervision and accompanying adults

Operation Wallacea offer a free teacher place with every 8 students thus giving an automatic ratio of at least 1 to 8. For each activity provided by Operation Wallacea in the field a ratio of 1 staff member to 8 students applies.

These ratios do not include other supervisory staff such as guides or cooks. Overall there is a level of at least 1 to 3 adult staff to students on site providing a very high level of supervision, and there are always both male and female staff members on site to assist with supervising groups. Teachers are asked to accompany students on as many activities as possible.

Local Guides

Some groups leaving a camp may be accompanied by a local guide. No formal guide qualifications exist in Madagascar, (particularly that are available to the local people in the remote communities in which we work) so the appointment of guides relies primarily on their levels of experience and their suitability gauged via personal references from senior village members. ECO Services has the responsibility of employing locals as guides. A number of skills are required by all guides including:

1. Knowledge of the local area
2. An awareness of dangerous species

Each newly appointed guide would have training on how to respond to dangerous situations, basic first aid and how to lead a group. Their training follows a 3-stage induction period: shadowing a more experienced guide; then leading a group while supervised; and finally leading a group on their own. Groups will also be accompanied by a scientific leader in cases where local guides are used.

Sleeping and accommodation arrangements

Separate male and female sleeping facilities are available both in the forest and at the marine site. Accommodation for staff members and teachers accompanying the groups is also separate. Bathroom facilities are shared, but toilets are always private and lockable from the inside, as are the shower facilities.

The details of the accommodation are sent out to participants prior to the expedition so that the school has plenty of time to consider any pastoral issues that may arise as a result of the sleeping arrangements.

Minimum number of students

No activities are planned which will involve a single pupil being accompanied or supervised by a single staff member or adult, without another pupil or adult being present. There may be occasions where a one-on-one situation is unavoidable (e.g. a student is struggling with one of the skills required to pass their SCUBA course, and the instructor spends some extra time with them working on that skill). These occasions though are rare, and all staff members are fully briefed on how to conduct themselves when in these situations.

Vetting and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks

Staff who work for Operation Wallacea in the UK, and then lead the various expeditions around the World, are subject to an enhanced DBS check. All locations where students are sleeping have a DBS checked staff member in attendance. DBS and other vetting service checks are included where applicable amongst other staff team members. The teachers accompanying these school groups will, at the responsibility of their employer, be vetted through the DBS (or national equivalent system if one is available), and whilst on expedition will stay with the students overnight at each location.

Codes of Practice

All Operation Wallacea staff in the field are required to sign a code of conduct before they are employed. The Code of Conduct commits each staff member to not entering into relationships with school volunteers as well as conformity to restrictions on alcohol use and a complete ban on drug abuse. Operation Wallacea will dismiss staff that do not follow the code of conduct.

Training

All staff are, in addition to their code of conduct, given specific training on suitable conduct with young people. They are made aware of their position of trust and are given examples of how to behave in certain situations. Staff who do not speak English are read the code of conduct in their own language, and any staff employed by third party providers or partners are subject to the same code of conduct.

Complaints procedure

Any complaint by a school pupil about inappropriate behaviour from any staff member or other student will be treated as a formal complaint and documented. The accompanying teacher will be informed immediately and together with the senior Operation Wallacea staff member on site will investigate the complaint. If the complaint is upheld then any individuals involved will be dismissed from the expedition and a police file created if a criminal offence has occurred.

Communications

All groups entering the forest on surveys carry a two-way radio to communicate with the camp. A satellite telephone is also kept in Mariarano and at Matsedroy so that there is an instant form of outgoing communications if necessary. On Nosy Be the main form of communication is via the mobile phone network which is reliable. The boats used by Operation Wallacea have mobile phones.

There are Operation Wallacea 24-hour emergency officers based in the UK (tel +44 (0) 1790 763194) in the event of an emergency message needing to be passed on to the field. The direct numbers for the key staff in Madagascar during the expeditions are published on the contacts page on the website shortly before the start of the expeditions.

Transport

All transport arrangements conducted by Operation Wallacea in the field are subject to stringent protocols.

Buses and 4x4 vehicles

The buses are given a full safety check prior to the start of the season and are checked prior to every journey. These checks include fluid levels and tyres. The drivers are briefed prior to every journey and a staff member travels with every group of vehicles to ensure that safe driving practices are followed.

Research Boats at Mahamavo

Small wooden pirogues are used to conduct surveys of wetland birds. Each of the pirogues is given a safety check prior to use to ensure that it is stable in the water, has a secure stabiliser, and does not leak. The wetland areas are only about a meter deep. All volunteers and staff on these surveys must wear lifejackets.

Dive and research boats on Nosy Be

There is a whiteboard system operating from the camp at Ambondrona, so that all boats leaving the centre have to sign out and complete various safety checks (presence of life jackets, oxygen, First Aid kits, etc). The whiteboard contains details of where each boat has gone and the estimated return time. Ambondrona base is in phone contact with each of the boats. Most of the dive training will take place in the pool at camp (confined water dives) and within eyesight of the beach camp (open water dives).

Accommodation and Camp Security

Accommodation is in tents in Mariarano and Matsedroy and they are all single sex. All tents are located in the heart of the camps and in close proximity of both the teachers and medical staff in the event of emergency. There is a security guard on patrol 24hrs a day at all the camps to ensure nobody who is not part of the project can access the site.

Forest Camp Address:

Opwall/ECO Services Forest, Camp Mariarano, Commune Mahamavo, Mahajanga II Boeny Region, Madagascar

Accommodation is in tents in Mariarano and Matsedroy and they are all single sex. All tents are located in the heart of the camps and in close proximity of both the teachers and medical staff in the event of emergency. There is a security guard on patrol 24hrs a day at all the camps to ensure nobody who is not part of the project can access the site.

Marine Camp Address:

Scuba Nosy Be/Opwall Marine Camp, Ambondrona, Nosy Be, Madagascar

Integrity and Cultural Aspects of the Expedition

The model of conservation used by Operation Wallacea is strongly rooted in principles of suitable economic growth in areas whose biodiversity is under threat. This means that huge efforts are made to ensure that conservation is tied with development of alternative income sources to minimise, for example, logging and hunting.

Operation Wallacea has been working in Madagascar since 2010 and have been working closely with local communities especially in the terrestrial sites, where significant local employment is created, direct contributions are made to forest management associations (COBAs) and to the local administration (Communes). Where possible local services and products are used, and scholarships have been provided to Malagasy students from the University of Mahajanga to work in Mahamavo. A number of solidarity projects have also been undertaken with Opwall and Volunteer support, including the rehabilitation of a primary school classroom and provision of new teaching materials. As a result of these contributions, and care taken by Opwall staff and partners there is strong local support for our activities in the communities where school groups will be staying. All pupils are encouraged to get involved in the community if they wish, and a visit to the local village is part of the experience in Madagascar.