

**A TRAVELER'S
CODE
OF ETHICS
FOR
MADAGASCAR**

The Traveler's Code of Ethics was created by the travel agency Atalante, and was soon adopted by the Lonely Planet travel guides. Other partners associated with the Traveler's Code of Ethics include the Mayor of Paris, the magazines Grands Reportages and Trek Magazine, and the brand name Aigle. Finally, a number of tour operators have supported the effort through the publication of the Traveler's Code of Ethics.

We reprint this Code of Ethics in much the same form as it was originally written, but have adapted it in places by adding a few observations that we feel are unique to travel in Madagascar.

A Traveler's Code of Ethics for Madagascar

Two worlds meet every time a person travels from one country to another. We might be a traveler, a tourist, or an explorer, but we must never forget that we are always a guest. The countries that we visit are our host countries. It is this relationship between host and guest that can be so very delicate, and that can often make all the difference in whether our trip was enjoyable and a success – or not.

There are many ways to travel and discover other places, but no matter how we go we invariably leave behind signs of our passage. These signs can be positive or negative. With each trip we learn a little more, but each place is different, and over and over again we face questions and doubts about how to act, about what is proper and what is not.

Respect is Key to a Successful Visit

This Code of Ethics is simply a collection of behaviors and attitudes that we would like to encourage in all travelers. Discovering other cultures without judging them, using common sense, and remembering some useful advice will result not only in a successful and pleasurable trip for you, but also in sustainable, positive development for Madagascar.

- One of the most appealing aspects of travel is in the diversity of people and cultures that one meets. Every culture, religion and lifestyle has rules and traditions which should be recognized and respected rather than judged. A successful trip requires respect and humility for the people and their way of life. This respect is expressed by simple, everyday attitudes and actions.
- Every country lives according to its own rhythm. Madagascar is a land of «mora-mora,» where time takes on a slower meaning. Impatience and a rushed attitude will get you nowhere, and will in fact be counter-productive.
- Keep your dress in line with local tradition. Wearing clothes that are too skimpy, tight, ostentatious, or sloppy will offend some people. The same goes for body contact – for example, patting children on the head, pointing, and hugging in public.
- A good photographer respects his or her subject. Take the time to establish a rapport with the people you wish to photograph. Ask their permission (ask the parents of children), and if they refuse, be gracious and accept their wishes.
- Do not promise to mail photographs to people unless you are positive you can and will send them. You can have prints made from digital cameras in the larger cities, and your guide may be able to distribute the prints during his or her next visit.
- To prevent the introduction or spread of disease, be sure to get all recommended vaccinations before you leave home. Equally important is to use the correct dosage of anti-malarials when you are in the country. Overuse of malaria prophylactics can increase parasite resistance to the drugs, to the ultimate detriment of the local people.
- Preventing mosquito bites remains the only completely effective method of preventing malaria. Put on more clothes at sundown (socks, long pants, long sleeves), and use mosquito repellent.
- Sexual tourism is an attack on human dignity and is against the law. It does not always

resemble prostitution. Often travelers will return from some country or another raving about the «fantastic sexual freedom» of the people without realizing that it is motivated only by poverty. While some laws and local customs may seem permissive, be aware that child molestation is severely punished. Today, many foreigners languish in Malagasy prisons awaiting their release. In addition, the prevalence of AIDS in Madagascar is increasing rapidly. It is your responsibility to encourage sexual behavior that prevents the spread of this disease (abstinence, fidelity, and using protection).

- Homosexuality remains a relatively taboo subject in the Malagasy culture (even though a tradition of transvestites existed in the royal courts during the Merina Empire). We recommend being discrete in public and keeping your sex life in your hotel room.

Money, Property and Food Have Different Values in Different Places

- Many misunderstandings originate from differences in the standard of living between travelers and the people of the host country. To be welcomed in a village or a family may be a huge financial sacrifice for many local people. Everything that is offered to the traveler – like everything the traveler offers in return – must be measured in the local value. (Remember that the monthly income in Madagascar averages 20–30 euros – sadly inadequate to decently keep a family.)
- Donations and gifts are not innocent gestures, but can sometimes have a condescending, contemptuous or misplaced connotation (for example, throwing coins or candies to children in order to make them go away). Giving presents and over-tipping relative to the local level of affluence can destabilize the local economy. Children who beg or get money for photos often are kept out of school and may earn more money than their father. This can lead to the disintegration of the traditional family structure (lack of respect for the father and family elders). Don't hesitate to ask your guide about what level of giving is appropriate in any particular situation.
- Gifts such as medicines can be dangerous if they are distributed to individuals indiscriminately. Hospitals and clinics, if they exist, can handle such items in a safer and

more equitable way.

- Staying in foreign or government-run hotel chains does little to support the local economy. Using local hotels and other local services (transportation, guides, cooks, porters and housekeepers) will ensure that your money directly benefits the local people.
- A camera or even just a pair of shoes may represent the equivalent of several months or years worth of income for many local people. Showing such things off or treating them carelessly can be shocking to locals and can cause serious misunderstandings.
- Bargaining is a cultural part of the Malagasy business tradition. Refusing to participate is often misinterpreted, and it can contribute to a rise in the cost of living. Remember that what might be a ridiculously low price for the traveler could be considered a significant sum for the person who receives it.
- As a general rule, travelers should avoid the temptation to buy sacred or traditional objects that are part of the country's cultural heritage from poor people. Always be very sure that the object was made with the sole purpose of being sold to tourists before you buy it.

Leave Only Footprints, Take only Photos

- A country's natural and cultural wealth are often its main tourist attractions. Travelers have a responsibility to respect and safeguard the host country's environment.
- Travelers should never litter, and should leave behind as little garbage as possible. Always try to use biodegradable materials (wrappers, etc.) if possible. Non-biodegradable materials such as plastic bags and batteries should be brought home with you in your luggage if there are no recycling or safe disposal systems handy. (Battery disposal is a growing problem in Madagascar, where they are dumped indiscriminately, often in waterways and gardens.)

- Some garbage, such as cardboard and toilet paper, can easily be burned. Ask locally about waste management. In many places in Madagascar, plastic bottles, glass jars and wrappers can be left with the locals who reuse them as ornaments or for utilitarian purposes.
- In many areas of Madagascar, deforestation is a major problem, and firewood is scarce. Whenever possible, gas or kerosene (paraffin) should be used for cooking. If wood must be used, utilize only dead wood found on the ground. Charcoal is made using green wood from live trees and is a very inefficient form of fuel; its use should be limited only to those areas which have well-developed reforestation programs in place.
- Some ecosystems, especially in National Parks, are fragile and must be treated with extra care: stay on paths and trails, avoid trampling vegetation, do not use motorized vehicles or drive off-road, etc.
- Wildlife viewing should never alter an animal's natural behavior or disturb its daily life. Maintain a distance from the animal that it regards as safe, and avoid making loud noises. Feeding animals modifies their natural diet and can be harmful to them. When fed, lemurs can become aggressive and thieves. Never disturb reptiles (especially snakes), which dislike being handled.
- Unfortunately, some guides, in an attempt to please tourists or gain better tips, do not respect wildlife viewing rules – sometimes feeding the animals, getting too close, or otherwise harassing them. It is your responsibility to firmly oppose this unacceptable behavior.
- Avoid fishing in lakes or the ocean where fish are rare or endangered. If you're an avid fisherman, adopt a policy of «catch and release.» Hunting is prohibited in many areas of Madagascar. There is no place in Madagascar for tourists who come to fill their freezers with fish fillets and duck meat. Bring a camera, not a gun.
- It is important to respect the rules and regulations of the National Parks and

Reserves. Paying the entry or daily fees provides desperately needed money for conservation activities in these protected areas. Always ask for a receipt to assure the fees are not being misappropriated.

- We strongly encourage travel to areas around National Parks as this can help distribute the benefits of ecotourism to the surrounding communities, thus helping the parks themselves. Unfortunately, many protected areas have not profited from their official designations.

- The Convention for the International Treaty on Endangered Species (CITES), which protects more than 2,500 species of endangered animals and 340,000 species of endangered plants, prohibits the trafficking of animal skins, ivory, coral, shells and scales. It also prohibits the exportation of exotic live animals and plants (a serious problem in Madagascar).

- Clean water is becoming a rarer and rarer commodity. Use water judiciously and always avoid polluting it. Use biodegradable, phosphate-free detergents and soaps. Washing should always be done downstream from human habitation and well away from all drinking water sources.

- Always obtain permission before using village wells or pumps. Do not wash anywhere near drinking water facilities, even if the local people do it.

- A number of «fady» or taboos should be respected in all regions of Madagascar. These are really common sense and common courtesy. For local fady specific to each region, inquire of village elders.

- Do not spit or relieve yourself on or near a tomb.

- Do not argue in public. If a reprimand is necessary, do it in private.

- Never hit a Malagasy. While this may seem like common sense, things can sometimes get out of control when the rum flows freely.

- Always respect the requests of the «ray amandreny» (village elders).

A Final Note

Travelers to Madagascar bring money, which is essential for the development of the country and which can do much good. But travelers, through their naïveté, can also do great harm to the country and its people. The solution to preventing this negative impact is simple: travelers should always make inquiries, learn about the people and the place, become informed. We believe that no travelers are intentionally bad; they are only ignorant.

We have worked many years to share our philosophy of travel with as many travelers and tourism professionals as possible. There are many approaches to the issue and nothing is fixed in stone. However, we feel it is our obligation and duty to preserve the world's cultural richness by conducting our work with respect and humility.

Madagascar is a welcoming and friendly land. The Malagasy people love travelers from foreign countries and will go out of their way to help you. Listen to these people; listen to their stories and to their advice. They will help you to fit in, to avoid making cultural faux-pas, and they will open your eyes to a most remarkable and fabulous world – the world of Madagascar.