

A photograph of a beach at sunset. The sky is a vibrant orange and red. In the foreground, three people are silhouetted against the water. One person is standing on the left, another is leaning over a small boat in the middle, and a third is standing on the right. The water is calm, and the overall mood is serene and peaceful.

All around the island

Holidaymakers can sample a number of different styles of hotels and resorts in Nosy Be

I had only been in Madagascar for half an hour and could already feel its magic. Our driver stopped the car a few kilometres from Nosy Be airport and walked into the plantation of gnarly trees on the side of the road, reappearing with a handful of creamy yellow flowers. "Here, smell," he said, crushing them under my nose. As the sweet fragrance filled the car, I realised this was ylang ylang, an exotic ingredient for perfumes.

There is a spa situated under a massive (and surely magical) banyan tree at Home La Residence

Nosy Be is a jumping-off point to explore the coastline and many smaller islands scattered off north-west Madagascar. Knowing little about Madagascar, we had booked our trip with Sabine Bultemeier of Animaltracks Islandventures. After spending a night at Vanila Hotel (with its magnificent tropical garden and private beach), we boarded a small boat.

Our destination was Naturalia Lodge, an hour away

on an isolated 12km-long stretch of white beach on the mainland (Madagascar itself). Here we discovered lemurs, snorkelled on coral reefs and saw exotic birds. But for me, the highlight was the ecolodge itself. The 10 bungalows, made from natural materials, are scattered around the indigenous forest. There is no pumped water, with a simple system of scooping water from a large barrel next to the shower all you need. There are also self-composting toilets and an ingenious solar water heating system. Outside each bungalow is a large box filled with plastic water bottles. The box has a glass lid and the sun heats up the water bottles, perfect for a hot shower to warm up after snorkelling. A similarly inventive system is used to pour water into the basin – which has no taps. Instead, a piece of hollow bamboo has a spout attached to its side. We scooped water from the barrel into the bamboo, and it slowly poured out of the spout into the basin. Magical.



Diving and de-stressing

From Naturalia we went to Sakatia Lodge, a dive resort on Sakatia Island. Here, the magic is found underwater. Sakatia Lodge is a mecca for divers from around the world. Their NAUI centre offers a range of dives, from shallow pristine coral to night dives, walls and steep drop-offs. There is a reef that rings the island and is perfect for snorkelling. We spent hours marvelling at the kaleidoscopic assortment of coral and tropical fish, and watching giant turtles graze on sea grass.

Just a short hop away, we were back on Nosy Be. After exploring the island in a 4x4, we were hot and tired when we arrived at Home La Residence, on the northern tip of the island. We were greeted with tropical rum cocktails and an infinity pool, idyllic after our dusty trip. This is a self-catering lodge with a variety of options for couples to family groups. There is also the option of eating at the appealing restaurant. To further de-stress, there is a spa

situated under a massive (and surely magical) banyan tree, its multiple branches creating an oasis of calm and serenity.

Feel rejuvenated

Our final stop was Ravintsara Wellness Hotel, on the west coast of the island. Here, our welcoming drink was a large, fresh coconut with a straw – naturally delicious. Set in five hectares of sub-tropical gardens, Ravintsara's spa, hammam and reflexology salon overlook lily ponds surrounded by psychedelic red and orange heliconias and coconut palms. The swimming pool, with palm trees in the middle, is on the edge of the beach, almost merging with the sea. From here, I watched our last sunset, brilliantly tinged with tropical pink. A perfect rejuvenation spot to end a magical holiday.

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How to get there



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