

Madagascar for Real



Tsingy at the Ankarana Reserve (David Parks photo).

The Ankarana Plateau, an area of dry tropical forest in the far north of Madagascar is a truly world-class landscape. Its 500 foot thick limestone is riddled with caves and canyons. "Tsingy" is the Malagasy name for the bizarrely eroded limestone formations found there and in several other places in Madagascar. These dangerously knife-edged pinnacles rise three to four feet high. The limestone is so hard and uniform that, on the surface or inside the caves, blades left in the erosion process produce melodious tones when struck. The vegetation isn't much gentler. Each spine on the fruit of the so-called Harpoon Plant carries four fishhook-like barbs.

With its huge caverns (some reputed to have crocodiles in their streams), the Ankarana Plateau is exciting both above and below the surface. Cave skylights can be hundreds of feet overhead. Most water sources in the Ankarana are in the caves.



Malagasy guide Goulam in Andrafiabe Cave in the Ankarana Reserve (Larry Barnes photo).