tiny lodge – BIG HEART

When home is a remote island off the coast of one of the world's poorest countries, low-tech tourism is often your best hope of change. Madagascar specialist Aisha Battersby focuses on Tsara Komba, a small island resort that is fully integrated with the local community.

Tsara Komba

Aisha in Madagascar

Tsara Komba

Fisherman in a pirogue off Nosy Komba

Giant day gecko, Nosy Komba

Tsara Komba is a tiny lodge on the remote island of Nosy Komba, off the coast of northwest Madagascar, reached only by boat from Nosy Be. Landing on the beach you wade ashore and are greeted by the lodge's managers and owners Cécile and Maryse.

Cécile and Maryse took over Tsara Komba in early 2008, after it had been hand-built by its previous owners: they make it a warm and welcoming place to stay. Six stone walkways thread up through bougainvilleas, flame trees and frangipani to reach six thatched guest bungalows: polished wood pervades inside and everything is hand-made. There is no television, no air-conditioning and no telephone. This is a place to relax, far from everyday life.

Days at Tsara Komba are long and lazy. You can start the day with freshly cooked crêpes on your

Local girl, Nosy Be

Tsara Komba

Female black lemur, Nosy Komba

veranda. Then explore. Inland steep walking trails snake up through virgin forest – you're likely to see black lemurs, chameleons, geckos and frogs – or you can head off to visit local villages and markets. You can rent a pirogue, the local wooden fishing vessels, to travel along the coast or strap on mask and flippers: the snorkelling is superb, with hawksbill turtles often seen.

As pirogues land on the beach you know lunch has arrived, with fishermen walking up the beach with crayfish, crab, prawns and line-caught fish. All fish and vegetables are bought from the local community: for the locals it means a vital source of trade and income, while for you it guarantees organic, fresh produce.

As evenings approach I recommend a sundowner drink, best taken in the comfort of a squashy armchair on the terrace while lemurs fight and feed in the thick vegetation.

Electricity is used sparingly so as night falls paraffin lamps are lit, flickering and atmospheric as the waves lap gently on the beach. With no light pollution the stars shine bright, though you'll need a torch to find your way back to your room.

Despite – or because of – its remote location, Tsara Komba operates in close co-operation with the local communities. All of the lodge staff hail from the nearby village of Antrema. They receive full training in the hotel profession, salaries are excellent and the village economy benefits. In a remote island off the coast of one of the world's least developed nations, this income is irreplaceable. As well as employment, Tsara Komba has created a health clinic and a proportion of the income from every guest is put aside to buy mosquito nets for houses and for a range of targeted projects: a pump for drinking water, a school and a library.

One of Tsara Komba's most interesting projects is its micro-loan scheme to finance the buying of pirogues, the wooden canoes that are essential to village life that are used to fish, transport goods or people or carry produce to market. Tsara Komba loans villagers 300 Euros to buy a pirogue, which can then be repaid at seven Euros a month. Already a number of loans have been given out, fully repaid and then recycled to fund further pirogues for other people.

A stay at Tsara Komba is more than just a stay at a beautiful little lodge. It is also an opportunity to interact with the local community, meet a wide variety of people and contribute to vital development.

Aisha Battersby
Madagascar Specialist

FACT FILE

A 12-night visit to Madagascar including one night in Antananarivo and nine nights at Tsara Komba costs from £3,340 per person, including return flights, transfers by road and boat and full board accommodation at Tsara Komba. For further details ring Aisha or Victoria on 01993 838 585.