



Antipode: Seasons with the Extraordinary Wildlife and Culture of Madagascar

Heather E. Heying

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By definition, "antipode" is a point on the earth diametrically opposite from another. As a field biologist specializing in reptiles and amphibians, Heather Heying has been to some of the most remote places on the globe. Her career consists of trekking through dense rainforests, sitting for hours at a time observing elusive creatures, and spending weeks on end in remote, sometimes inhospitable locales. But nothing she previously experienced quite prepared her for the three seasons she spent studying the tiny, bright, poisonous frogs found only at what is the antipode of her world, both geographically and figuratively - the island-nation of Madagascar.

The majority of Madagascar's wildlife is endemic -- found nowhere else. Lemurs rule the forest canopy, while on the ground, snakes and lizards search for evening meals of frogs and bugs, all against a gorgeous backdrop of rainforest. It's a biologist's paradise - but at times can also be a foreigner's worst nightmare. Madagascar in no way resembles what most Westerners know as normal existence. Technologically, it is laps behind the first world. Time shuffles by at a slow gait. Poverty is rampant - people pride themselves on how many pots of rice a day they eat. Language and culture barriers, combined with bureaucratic red tape, can make travel virtually impossible.

In stories that are in turns moving, insightful, hilarious, and beautiful, Heather recounts her experiences -- from run-ins with naked sailors and unusually hostile lemurs to tropical hurricanes and greedy tourist entrepreneurs. As she carefully navigates an obstacle-strewn path, she gradually uncovers the hidden lives of the beautiful yellow and blue poison frogs she studies. And all the while, she is coming to understand her role as a female Westerner in a foreign society, and her intense love for and fascination with the stunning cultures and wildlife of Madagascar.

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