

# Country Guide for MADAGASCAR



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## 1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

**Location:** Indian Ocean, 500km (300 miles) off the coast of Mozambique.

Ministère du Tourisme de Madagascar (Ministry of Tourism)  
PO Box 610, Tsimbazaza, 101 Antananarivo, Madagascar  
**Tel:** (2022) 26298. Fax: (2022) 26710.  
**E-mail:** mintour@dtf.mg

La Maison du Tourisme (Tourist Board)

Place de l'Indépendance Antaninarenina, PO Box 3224, 101 Antananarivo, Madagascar  
**Tel:** (2022) 35178 or 813 15. Fax: (2022) 695 22. E-mail: mtm@simicro.mg  
**Web site:** www.tourisme-madagascar.com

Consulate of the Republic of Madagascar  
16 Lanark Mansions, Pennard Road, London W12 8DT  
**Tel:** (020) 8746 0133. Fax: (020) 8746 0134. Opening hours: 0900-1300 (general office) 1000-1300 (visas) Monday to Friday.

British Embassy

**Postal address:** BP 167, 101 Antananarivo, Madagascar  
**Street address:** Lot II I, 164 Ter Alarobia Amboniloha, 101 Antananarivo, Madagascar  
**Tel:** (2022) 49378/79/80. Fax: (2022) 49381.  
**E-mail:** ukembant@simicro.mg  
**Consulate in:** Toamasina.

Embassy of the Republic of Madagascar  
2374 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008  
**Tel:** (202) 265 5525/6. Fax: (202) 265 3034.  
**E-mail:** malagasy@embassy.org  
**Web site:** <http://www.embassy.org/madagascar>  
**Consulate in:** San Diego, CA.

Embassy of the United States of America

**Street address:** 14/16 rue Rainitova, Antananarivo, Madagascar  
**Postal address:** BP 620, Antsahavola, 101 Antananarivo, Madagascar  
**Tel:** (2022) 21257 or 20956. Fax: (2022) 34539.

Embassy of the Republic of Madagascar

649 Blair Road, Gloucester, Ottawa, Ontario K1J 7M4  
**Tel:** (613) 744 7995. Fax: (613) 744 2530.  
**E-mail:** ambamadott@on.aibn.com  
**Web site:** <http://www.madagascar-embassy.ca>

Canadian Consulate

c/o QIT - Madagascar Minerals, BP 4300 Lot II - M62C, 169 Villa 3H, Ivandry, 101 Antananarivo, Madagascar  
**Tel:** (2022) 42559. Fax: (2022) 42559. E-mail: qmmtnr@dts.mg

**Country dialling code:** 261.

## 2 GENERAL

**Area:** 587,041 sq km (226,658 sq miles).

**Population:** 16,300,000 (1998).

**Population Density:** 23.0 per sq km.

**Capital:** Antananarivo (formerly Tananarive). Population: 2,000,000 (1998).

**Geography:** Madagascar, the fourth-largest island in the world, lies in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Mozambique. It includes several much smaller islands. A central chain of high mountains, the Hauts Plateaux, occupies more than half of the main island and is responsible for the marked differences - ethnically, climatically and scenically - between the east and west coasts. The narrow strip of lowlands on the east coast, settled from the 6th century by Polynesian seafarers, is largely covered by dense rainforests, whereas the broader west-coast landscape, once covered by dry deciduous forests, is now mostly savannah. The east coast receives the monsoon and, on both coasts, the climate is wetter towards the north. The southern tip of the island is semi-desert, with great forests of cactus-like plants. The capital, Antananarivo, is high up in the Hauts Plateaux near the island's centre. Much of Madagascar's flora and fauna is unique to the island. There are 3000 endemic species of butterfly; the many endemic species of lemurs fill the niches occupied elsewhere by animals as varied as racoons, monkeys, marmots, bushbabies, sloths and even (though this variant is now extinct) bears; there is a similar diversity of reptiles, amphibians and birds (especially ducks), and also at all levels of plant life.

**Government:** Republic since 1992. Gained independence from France in 1960. Head of State: President Didier Ratsiraka since 1997. Head of Government: Prime Minister René Tantely Andrianarivo since 1998.

**Language:** The official languages are Malagasy (which is related to Indonesian) and French. Local dialects are also spoken. Very little English is spoken.

**Religion:** 51% follow Animist beliefs, about 43% Christian; remainder Muslim.

**Time:** GMT + 3.

**Electricity:** Mostly 220 volts AC, 50Hz. Plugs are generally 2-pin.

### **Communications:**

**Telephone:** IDD is available to major towns. Country code: 261, followed by two-digit number for access provider: 20 for TELMA (the most reliable), 30 for Telecel, 31 for Sacel, 32 for SRR and 33 for Madacom. (A standard dialling code is expected to be introduced soon.) After the international and access codes, numbers should be 7 digits including 2 initial digits for geographical area. Outgoing international code: 16.

**Mobile telephone:** GSM 1800/900 networks are in use. Madacom is the main network provider; coverage reaches major cities and main roads.

**Internet/E-mail:** Public Internet access exists in large cities.

**Telegram:** The main post office (PTT) in Antananarivo offers a 24-hour telegram transmission service.

**Post:** The Poste Restante facilities at main post offices are the most reliable option. Airmail to Europe takes at least seven days and surface mail three to four months.

**Press:** There are no English-language newspapers; six dailies are published in French and/or Malagasy.

**BBC World Service and Voice of America frequencies:** From time to time these change.

**BBC:**

MHz15.4011.946.1903.255

**Voice of America:**

MHz17.8215.429.6457.125

### 3 PASSPORT

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
<b>British</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Australian</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Canadian</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>USA</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>OtherEU</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Japanese</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes

**Restricted entry:** Madagascar does not recognise passports issued by the Palestinian Government.

**PASSPORTS:** Passports valid for 6 months after date of entry required by all.

**VISAS:** Required by all except:

transit passengers continuing their journey by the same or first connecting aircraft within 24 hours provided holding onward or return documentation and not leaving the airport.

**Types of visa and cost:** Tourist: £40 (single-entry); £50 (multiple-entry). Business: £55 (single-entry); £65 (multiple-entry).

**Validity:** Visas are issued for stays of up to 90 days and are valid for 6 months from date of issue.

**Application to:** Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy). Some nationalities are able to get a visa at Antananarivo airport on arrival. Contact the embassy for further information prior to departure.

**Application requirements:** (a) Passport. (b) 1 application form. (c) 4 passport-size photos. (d) Return ticket or confirmation of booking from travel agent. (e) Additional £1.50 for recorded postage if applying by post. (f) For business visas, a letter of recommendation on company-headed notepaper with details about the applicant's business activity.

**Working days required:** Same day (personal applications); 7 days (postal applications).

## 4 MONEY

**Currency:** Malagasy Franc (Mgfr) = 100 centimes. Notes are in denominations of Mgfr25,000, 10,000, 5000, 2500, 1000 and 500. Coins are in denominations of Mgfr250, 100, 50, 25, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1.

**Currency exchange:** Malagasy Francs can be bought only at banks and official bureaux de change in hotels and at the airport in Antananarivo. Hotels have a less favourable exchange rate.

**Credit cards:** Visa, American Express, MasterCard and Diners Club are accepted at the capital's Colbert and Hilton hotels. These and other cards have limited use elsewhere in the country. Check with your credit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

**Travellers cheques:** These can be exchanged in banks and major hotels. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in US Dollars or French Francs.

**Currency restrictions:** The import of local currency is limited to Mgfr5000. The export of local currency is prohibited to non-residents. The import and export of foreign currency is unlimited, subject to declaration of amounts over FFr50,000. Independent travellers must have proof of a minimum spending of FFr2000 while in Madagascar. These regulations are for foreign tourists; business travellers should enquire at a Malagasy Consulate.

**Banking hours:** 0800-1100 and 1400-1600 Monday to Friday.

## 5 DUTY FREE

The following goods can be imported into Madagascar without incurring customs duty: 500 cigarettes or 25 cigars or 500g of tobacco; 1 bottle of alcoholic beverage.

**Note:** All perfume is subject to duty. All vegetables must be declared. Animals need a detailed veterinary certificate. Dogs and cats must be vaccinated against rabies. All products incorporating Malagasy flora or fauna (including dried flowers) require export permits, which should be obtained at time of purchase. Tourists should be aware that many items on sale may have been manufactured illegally and may not be taken out of the country, with or without a permit.

## 6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Jan 1 2001 New Year's Day. Mar 8 International Women's Day. Mar 29 Commemoration of the 1947 Rebellion. Apr 16 Easter Monday. May 1 Labour Day. May 24 Ascension. May 25 African Unity Day. Jun 4 Whit Monday. Jun 26 Independence Day. Aug 15 Assumption. Nov 1 All Saints' Day. Dec 25 Christmas. Dec 30 Anniversary of the Republic of Madagascar. Jan 1 2002 New Year's Day. Mar 8 International Women's Day. Mar 29 Commemoration of the 1947 Rebellion. Apr 1 Easter Monday. May 1 Labour Day. May 9 Ascension. May 20 Whit Monday. May 25 African Unity Day. Jun 26 Independence Day. Aug 15 Assumption. Nov 1 All Saints' Day. Dec 25 Christmas. Dec 30 Anniversary of the Republic of Madagascar.

## 7 HEALTH

	<i>Special Precautions</i>	<i>Certificate Required</i>
<b>Yellow Fever</b>	Yes	1
<b>Cholera</b>	Yes	2
<b>Typhoid and Polio</b>	Yes	-
<b>Malaria</b>	3	-
<b>Food and Drink</b>	4	-

**1:** A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from travellers arriving from, or having passed through, an area considered by the Malagasy authorities to be infected; enquire at Embassy. Children under one year are exempt.

**2:** A cholera vaccination certificate is recommended for travellers arriving from, or having passed through, an area considered by the Malagasy authorities to be infected; enquire at Embassy. See the Health appendix for more information.

**3:** Malaria risk, predominantly in the malignant falciparum form, exists all year throughout the country and is highest in coastal areas. Resistance to chloroquine has been reported.

**4:** All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated. Water used for drinking, brushing teeth or making ice should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilised. Milk is unpasteurised and should be boiled. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is advised, but make sure that it is reconstituted with pure water. Avoid dairy products that are likely to have been made from unboiled milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably served hot. Pork, salad and mayonnaise may carry increased risk. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled. Rabies is present. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. For more information consult the Health appendix. Bilharzia (schistosomiasis) is present. Avoid swimming and paddling in fresh water. Swimming pools which are well-chlorinated and maintained are safe. Hepatitis A, B, and E are endemic and precautions are advised. Dysenteries, diarrhoeal diseases and many viral diseases including severe haemorrhagic fevers have been reported.

**Health care:** Health insurance is strongly recommended; it should include cover for emergency repatriation. Private and public healthcare is available, but public facilities can be very limited. It is highly recommended that visitors bring medication for stomach upsets.

## Travel - International

**AIR:** Madagascar's national airline is Air Madagascar (MD).

**APPROXIMATE FLIGHT TIME:** From Antananarivo to London is 13 hours 50 minutes (including connection in Paris). There are regular flights from Madagascar to Réunion, Mauritius, Kenya, Tanzania, the Comoro Islands, the Seychelles and Zimbabwe.

**INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS:** Antananarivo (TNR), 17km (11 miles) from the city. Airport facilities include restaurant and bureau de change (open during arrivals and departures of international flights). It is linked by a regular bus service to the Air Madagascar office and the Hilton Hotel (the centre for Madagascar Airtours). Taxis asking special higher rates are also available at the airport.

Further airports are at Nossi Bé (links to the Seychelles);

Mahajanga (links to East Africa and the Comoro Islands);

Toamasina (links to Mauritius and Réunion islands);

and Arivonimamo (international standby airport), which is 45km (28 miles) from the capital.

**DEPARTURE TAX:** Approximately £18. Transit passengers and children under 2 years are exempt.

**SEA:** International tour operators promote Madagascar as a stopping place on extended cruises of the Indian and western Pacific Oceans. Expensive private cruises can be arranged from the USA and Europe. Toamasina is the main port.

## Travel - Internal

**AIR:** Most of Madagascar can be reached by air (there are more than 200 airfields), the exceptions being a few towns in the central highlands. Air Madagascar flies to 51 towns and localities in the island and they offer an 'Air Tourist Pass' which allows unlimited travel for certain periods.

**DEPARTURE TAX:** Mgf6000 for domestic flights.

**SEA/RIVER/CANAL:** Madagascar has a strong maritime tradition and there are many coastal transport services. Rapids render many of the rivers unnavigable; local tour operators can organise small-boat safaris on the Betsiboka and the Tsiribihina. The Pangalanes Canal runs for almost 600km (370 miles) along the east coast. Much of it is currently too clogged with silt for commercial traffic; the Tourist Board can arrange sailing holidays.

**RAIL:** There are passenger rail services from the east coast port of Toamasina via Antananarivo to Antsirabé (branch line to Lake Alaotra); and from Manakara, also on the east coast, to Fianarantsoa. The northern line is to be extended. The southern line passes through spectacular rainforests. First-class carriages are air-conditioned. Light refreshments are sometimes available. The rail service is intermittent in that trains arrive on one day and return on the following day. Children under 4 travel free. Children aged 4-6 pay half fare.

**ROAD:** The road network is in need of repair. Tarred roads of varying quality link the main towns in the central highlands and continue to the most populous parts of the east and northwest coasts. There are three main routes, from Antananarivo to Majungo (RN4), to Toamasina (RN2) and to Fianarantsoa (RN7). There are isolated sections of tarred road elsewhere, but dirt tracks are more common. Many roads are impassable in the rainy season (November to March). In



1988, the World Bank approved a US\$140-million loan to rehabilitate the network. Traffic drives on the right. Bus: A flat fare is charged, irrespective of the distance travelled. Services can be unreliable and buses tend to be crowded. Taxi: Flat fares apply except in Antananarivo and Fianarantsoa, where fare is calculated according to whether the ride is confined to the 'lower town' or goes on to the 'upper town'. There are two types of taxi: the Taxi-be, which is quick and comfortable, and the Taxi-brousse (bush taxi), which is cheaper, slower, makes more stops and generally operates on cross-country routes. Fares should be agreed in advance and tipping is unnecessary. Rickshaw: The pousse-pousse takes passengers except where traffic or gradient makes it impractical. Prices are not controlled and vary according to distance. Stagecoach: A few covered wagons continue to take passengers in Antananarivo. Car hire: This is not widespread and car-hire agencies can only be found in the main tourist towns. It is advisable to make enquiries in advance about insurance requirements for car hire. Motorbike hire: Available from several companies in Madagascar. Documentation: A national driving licence is sufficient.

## 8 ACCOMMODATION

Since hotel development is in its early stages, some areas are better served than others, notably the capital Antananarivo, Nossi Bé and Toamasina. However, recent projects aimed at increasing the number of international-standard establishments have led to the opening of national tourism centres where good- to medium-standard accommodation is now available at moderate prices. As well as classified or classifiable accommodation, group and youth lodging is available. European-style accommodation is scarce outside the larger towns, and those visiting remote areas should travel with an open mind. Enquiries should be addressed to the Tourism Office in Antananarivo or Air Madagascar agencies. The 'Guide to Madagascar' by Hilary Bradt provides excellent information on hotels and is available through the Madagascar Consulate in the UK or through **bookshops. Grading:** Hotels are classified from 1 to 5 stars (5-star being equivalent to an international standard of about 3 stars); a secondary system of ravinala (travellers' palms) is used for more 'rustic' accommodation. More information is available from the Ministry of Tourism (see address section).

## 9 RESORTS & EXCURSIONS

The Ministry of Tourism (see address section) offers a wide range of tours, some lasting as long as a month.

**Note:** Those who intend to make their own arrangements should be aware that bandits operate in certain highland regions and that the terrain and climate make surface travel exceedingly difficult (and often impossible) throughout much of the country for much of the year.

The Central Highlands

The capital and several other important towns are situated in the central section of the Hauts Plateaux, the chain of rugged, ravine-riven mountains that run from north to south down the centre of Madagascar.

**Antananarivo:** Antananarivo, often abbreviated to Tana, has a distinctively French flavour and atmosphere: French is widely spoken and road, as well as shop signs (such as boulangerie or épicerie), are mostly in French. The city is built on three levels. Dominating the city is the Queen's Palace and associated Royal Village or Rova. Now a national monument (opening hours:

0900-1200 and 1400-1700), it was once the residency of the Merina Dynasty which, in the 19th century, united all Madagascar for the first time. On the lowest level is the market of Analakely. The Zuma Market, claimed to be the second-largest in the world and certainly worth a visit, is busiest on Fridays. The Tsimbazaza Zoological and Botanical Garden is open 0800-1100 and 1400-1700 Thursday, Sunday and holidays. The Tourist Information Office is nearby. It is wise not to wander too far after dark.

**Ambohimanga:** Ambohimanga, the birthplace of the Malagasy state, is 20km (12 miles) from the capital. Known variously as 'the blue city', 'the holy city' and 'the forbidden city', it is surrounded by forests. The citadel was an important Merina stronghold and retains several structures associated with their ceremonies. Its main gate is an enormous stone disc; 40 men were needed to roll it into position.

**Mantaso:** Mantaso, 80km (50 miles) from the capital, is a popular spot for picnics. The area was landscaped for the Merina Queens by a shipwrecked Frenchman and includes an artificial lake, pine forests and Madagascar's first industrial park.

**Ampefy:** Ampefy, 90km (60 miles) from the capital, is a volcanic region with spectacular waterfalls and geysers. Dams are used here to catch eels.

**Perinet:** Perinet, 140km (90 miles) from the capital, is a nature reserve, home of the indri (a tail-less lemur) and many species of orchid. Also known as Andasibe.

**Antsirabe:** Antsirabe, 170km (110 miles) from the capital, is a thermal spa and Madagascar's main industrial centre. The volcanic hills surrounding the town are dotted with crater lakes. Madagascar's second-highest mountain, Tsiafajovona, may be seen to the west of the road from Antananarivo.

#### The North

The lush north is dominated by two great mountains. Tsarantanana, at 2880m (9450ft) the island's highest, is covered with the giant ferns and lichens peculiar to high altitude rainforests. Montagne d'Arbre (1500m/4900ft) is a national park and is famous for its orchids and lemurs. The monsoon falls in the north between December and March.

**Mahajanga:** Mahajanga, a provincial capital, stands at the mouth of Madagascar's largest river, the Betsiboka. The road to the capital is open between July and October. Boats depart for Nossi Bé and several other islands. The beach here is said to be free of sharks. The island's finest grottoes are at Anjohibe, 90km (60 miles) inland. There is a nature reserve at Ankarafantsika.

**Nossi Bé:** Nossi Bé is Madagascar's most important holiday resort. An island surrounded by smaller islands lying off the northwest coast, it is one hour by air from the capital. Exotic perfume plants such as ylang-ylang, vanilla (Madagascar is the world's largest producer), lemon grass and patchouli are grown here. The main town is Hell-Ville. Nearby, there is a ruined 17th-century Indian village.

**Antseranana:** Antseranana (formerly Diégo Suarez) is a cosmopolitan seaport overlooking a beautiful gulf at the northernmost tip of the island. It is a provincial capital. There are many lakes, waterfalls and grottoes in the rainforests above the port. Wildlife and flora includes lemurs, crocodiles and orchids. Permission to visit the national park at Montagne d'Arbre nearby must be obtained from the Ministère des Eaux et des Forêts, which has an office in the town. Boats may be taken to Nossi Bé. There is a good sandy beach at Ramena, but sharks may be a problem. The road southwards to the capital is only open between July and October.

**Ile Ste-Marie:** Ile Ste-Marie(Nossi Boraha) lies off the east coast, 150km (90 miles) north of Toamasina. Its dense vegetation and the difficulty of navigating the lagoons which surround it made it an ideal base for pirates and, later, a colony for convicts. There are many clove plantations and several historic sites, including Madagascar's oldest Catholic church. The island is also known for its beautiful white-sand beaches and coral reefs.

**Toamasina:** Toamasina, on the northeast coast, is the country's main port and a provincial capital. It is an eight-hour drive from Antananarivo and, like the capital, it has several busy markets, including the Bazaar Be. Around 11km (7 miles) north of the town are the Ivolina Gardens, containing every kind of vegetable species from the eastern forests and many varieties of animal life.

**Vatomandry:** Vatomandry, further south, is a very popular beach resort even though the sharks prevent swimming.

#### The South

The arid south is noted for its many remarkable species of cactus- and baobab-like plants and for the highly developed funerary art of its inhabitants, past and present.

**Fianarantsoa:** Fianarantsoa, a provincial capital, is an important centre for wine and rice production and a good base for exploring the southern highlands. Places to visit in the surrounding mountains include Amabalavao, said to be the 'home of the departed', where antemore paper and lamba aridrano silk are made; nearby Ambondrome and Ifandana crags, where the revered bones of exhumed ancestors may be seen (the latter was the site of a mass suicide in 1811); Ambositra and the neighbouring Zafimaniny villages, where intricate marquetry products are made; the Isalo National Park, situated in a chain of sandstone mountains (camping is possible but it can only be reached by four-wheel-drive vehicle or on foot with a guide); and Ranomafana, a thermal spa.

**Mananjary:** Mananjary is a popular beach resort on the east coast (but not for sea-bathing because of sharks).

**Taolanaro:** Taolanaro(formerly Fort Dauphin), in the southeast corner of the island, is the site of the first French settlement. Parts of the 17th-century fort remain. The city and surrounding area are famous for seafood and for orchids and carnivorous pitcher plants, which can be seen at the Mandona Agricultural Centre at Sainte-Luce Bay.

#### The West

Western Madagascar was once covered with deciduous forests, but is now mostly savannah. The economy is based around the zebu, a species of ox introduced in the 8th century by settlers from South-East Asia.

**Toliara:** Toliara, a provincial capital on the southwest coast, has excellent bathing beaches and opportunities for skindiving, fishing, sailing and other watersports.

#### National Parks

**Tsingy de Bemaraha Strict Nature Reserve:** Tsingy de Bemaraha Strict Nature Reserve: Spread across 152,000 hectares this reserve is located 60-80km inland from the west coast in the northern sector of the Anstingy region of the Bemaraha Plateau, north of the Manambolo River

Gorge. Undisturbed forests, lakes and mangrove swamps are home to a variety of rare and endangered birds and lemurs. Rocky landscapes and limestone uplands are cut into large peaks with a mass of limestone needles. Rivers flow on the plateau and springs arise on each flank of the Tsingy making this an important water catchment area. Ancient cemeteries can also be found in the Gorge. Currently visitors are restricted to the pinnacle region to the south or to the forests in the north, both of these areas are accessible overnight with guides based at Antsalova and Bekopaka.

## 10 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

**Tennis:** There are courts in most main towns. **Golf:** Facilities at Tana. **Watersports:** Many towns have municipal pools. Sea-bathing along the east coast is not advised due to sharks. Main diving centres are Nossi Bé (with its neighbouring islands Tanikely, Nossi Mitsio and Nossi Radama), Nossi Lava, Toliara and Ile Ste-Marie (Nossi Boraha). Scuba-diving centres are located on the north and west coasts. Water-skiing and sailing centres are located at Ambohibao (Lake Mantasoa), Antsiralse (on Andraikiba Lake) and Ramona. **River-rafting:** can be done in season on the Manambole, from Ankavandra in the west to Bekupaca. **Trekking:** Local tour operators can organise a variety of trekking and hiking trips in many different parts of the country. They are generally designed to cater for specific interest groups - speleologists, mineralogists, ethnologists, ornithologists, those who wish to see rare orchids or lemurs, etc. **Pony-trekking** is also possible. **Spectator sports:** There are numerous football pitches and during the dry season it has been known for rice fields to be used as pitches. Basketball and volleyball are very popular and covered stadiums have been built.

## 11 SOCIAL PROFILE

**Food & Drink:** In Madagascar eating well means eating a lot. Malagasy cooking is based on a large serving of rice with a dressing of sauces, meat, vegetables and seasoning. Dishes include ro (a mixture of herbs and leaves with rice); beef and pork marinated in vinegar, water and oil, then cooked with leaves, onion, pickles and other vegetables and seasoned with pimento; ravitoto (meat and leaves cooked together); ramazava (leaves and pieces of beef and pork browned in oil); vary amid 'anana (rice, leaves or herbs, meat and sometimes shrimps) often eaten with kitoza (long slices of smoked, cured or fried meat). The people of Madagascar enjoy very hot food and often serve dishes with hot peppers. Local restaurants are often referred to as hotely. **Drink:** The choice of beverages is limited. The national wine is acceptable. Malagasy drinks include litchel (an aperitif made from litchis), betsa (fermented alcohol) and toaka gasy (distilled from cane sugar and rice) and 'Three Horses' lager. Non-alcoholic drinks include ranon 'apango or rano vda (made from burnt rice) and local mineral waters.

**Nightlife:** There are a few discotheques, sometimes with bands and solo musicians. Casinos can be found at Antananarivo, Toamasina and on Nossi Bé. Most main towns have cinemas and theatres, and touring theatre groups perform local plays throughout the country. Traditional dance troupes can also be seen.

**Shopping:** Handicrafts include lamba (traditional squares of cloth in various designs and woven materials); zafimaniny marquetry, which is applied to furniture, chessboards and boxes; silverwork such as mahafaly crosses and vangavanga bracelets; jewellery made from shells and precious stones; items woven from reeds, raffia and straw; antemore paper decorated with dried flowers; and embroidery. All products incorporating Malagasy flora or fauna (including dried

flowers) require export permits (see Duty Free section). Shopping hours: 0800-1200 and 1400-1800 Monday to Saturday.

**Special Events:** There are many customary events and celebrations (see Social Conventions below), especially in rural areas. Mphira gasy (Malagasy singers) sing and dance theatrically in groups recounting a story and presenting its moral; typically a performance lasts from 30 minutes to an hour. The rice harvest is celebrated in many places.

**Social Conventions:** Visitors to Madagascar remark on the welcoming nature of the people, though some unprepared Westerners may be irritated by their relaxed attitude to time (public forms of transport, for example, will not generally move until they are full - no matter how long it takes to fill the last seat). Dress is casual, except for the very smartest hotel and restaurant functions. Entertaining is done in restaurants and bars, and a good degree of acquaintance is necessary before being invited to a family home. Outside major towns, the people are poor but very hospitable; however, to offer money for lodging could be construed as an insult. Therefore it is advisable to offer a contribution to the host towards the next family or village festival, which should be warmly received. It is also advisable to give a certain amount to the village headman. Respect should be paid to the many local taboos (fady) - but as these vary from region to region this is not easy and very often the best that a traveller can do is show that his intentions are honourable; however, it is clear that advice should be sought before approaching tombs and graves. It remains the practice in some regions (though it is increasingly rare due to the enormous cost) to invite an ancestor to a village celebration, disinterring the body so that the ancestor may attend physically, and later re-interring the body with new shrouds; this traditional observance (known as famadihana) amply demonstrates the continuing hold of traditional beliefs. Visitors invited to such an occasion should consider it a great honour. Photography: Do not photograph military or police establishments. Tipping: Not customary, although waiters expect 10% of the bill. In European-style hotels and restaurants the French system of tipping is followed. One should also tip in Chinese and Vietnamese establishments.

## 12 BUSINESS PROFILE

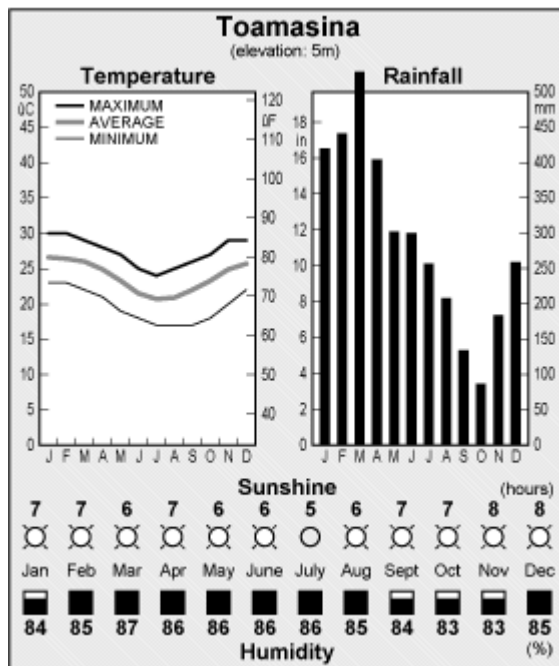
**Economy:** Madagascar's mainly agricultural economy relies heavily on coffee production to earn foreign exchange, and this has suffered lately from a decline in world coffee demand. Vanilla, cloves, sisal, cocoa and butter beans are the island's other important cash crops. Rice and cassava are produced primarily for domestic staple consumption. Fishing is underdeveloped thus far: the Government, which still exercises extensive control over the economy, is hoping to improve its performance. The country has appreciable mineral deposits of chromium ore, bauxite and titanium ore deposits, all of which are being exploited. The recent discovery of oil deposits is set to bring about further development as well as hopefully resolve Madagascar's energy problems. About 12% of the gross national product derives from manufacturing industry, mainly textiles and food-processing. The service sector is relatively underdeveloped at present. The Government has been looking at ways of developing the tourism industry, and has focused on the island's abundance of exotic wildlife as a major attraction (however, there is already some conflict developing between environmental lobbyists and international mining concerns). Although the Madagascan economy has considerable potential, there are major problems to overcome. Growth throughout the 1990s was around 1% annually and the exchequer continues to rely heavily on loans and grants from the EU (especially France) and the World Bank. Much of the population suffers from desperate poverty and a chronic lack of basic services, and their plight has not been helped by erratic government policy-making. A series of cyclones which caused huge damage during the late 1990s has also set the economy back, especially the agricultural

sector. France accounts for about 30% of all Madagascar's trade; the USA and the CIS are other important trading partners.

**Business:** Tropical lightweight suits are appropriate wear. If arranged far enough in advance, the Embassy can arrange interpreters for business meetings.

**Commercial Information:** The following organisation can offer advice: Fédération des Chambres de Commerce, d'Industrie et d'Agriculture de Madagascar, BP 166, 20 rue Paul Dussac, 101 Antananarivo (tel: (22) 21567; fax: (22) 20213).

## 13 CLIMATE



**Hot and subtropical climate, colder in the mountains. Rainy season:** November to March. Dry season: April to October. The south and west regions are hot and dry. Monsoons bring storms and cyclones to the east and north from December to March. The mountains, including Antananarivo, are warm and thundery from November to April and dry, cool and windy the rest of the year.

**Required clothing:** Lightweights are worn during the summer on high central plateaux and throughout the year in the north and south. Warmer clothes are advised during evenings and winter in mountainous areas. Rainwear is advisable.

## 14 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

**History:** According to local legend, the island was first inhabited by the Vazimba, a race of white pygmies. These people, if they existed, were displaced by successive waves of Polynesian migrants from the Malayo-Indonesian archipelago, which began as early as the 6th century AD. The settlers brought with them the zebu (a humped ox) and South-East Asian crops and methods

of cultivation: parts of Madagascar, especially in the south, still retain a strong South-East Asian flavour. In the 9th century, Madagascar was an important trading power in the western Indian Ocean. Bantu tribes from mainland Africa later settled on the west coast. The island was unified under one ruler for the first time in the early 19th century. The Merina Dynasty, which established the modern capital, ruled until 1896, when it was overthrown by a French military force. The French introduced cash crops to their new colony. In 1948 the Malagasy people sought to re-establish their independence through armed insurrection. They were unsuccessful, but the uprising paved the way for independence, which came in 1960. Philibert Tsirana's PSD Party ruled with the support of France and the people of the coastal regions until 1972, when highland agitation against French influence prompted the Army Chief of Staff, Major-General Ramanantsoa, to assume executive power for the purpose of pursuing a more nationalistic policy. Three years later the military government resigned after selecting Lt-Commander Didier Ratsiraka as head of state. A gradual civilianisation of the Government culminated in 1977 in elections to the National People's Assembly, which were won by the sole legal party, Avant-garde de la Révolution Malgache (AREMA). A left-wing splinter party, the Mouvement National pour l'Indépendance de Madagascar (MONIMA) was allowed to contest the 1983 presidential elections, but President Ratsiraka was re-elected. Elections scheduled for 1988 were postponed. In February 1989, General Rakotoarijaona resigned after ten years as Prime Minister. His controversial replacement was Colonel Ramahatra, a highlander who claimed descent from the Merina Queens. His appointment re-opened a long-standing rift between the highland and lowland (coastal) clans and allowed disparate lowland opposition groups - ranging from Christian Democrats to old-style Maoists - to put aside their feuds and unite against highland/Merina factions in the Government. However, President Ratsiraka is allied to neither camp and has generally enjoyed the consistent support of the French since they managed to persuade him to drop his initial attachment to Marxism in the 1970s. At elections held in May 1989, Ratsiraka's AREMA party took 120 of the 137 seats in the National Assembly. In the latter part of 1991, however, the Government was seriously threatened by widespread civil unrest. The army, which had killed hundreds of protestors, was divided, but an influential section of it, supported by the French, wanted Ratsiraka out. After at first resisting the entreaties of the opposition leadership - a collection of churchmen and retired military figures - Ratsiraka reached agreement with them at the end of October 1991 on the installation of an 18-month transitional administration led by himself. As this period came to an end, presidential elections were held in two rounds in November 1992 and February 1993. In the second round, Ratsiraka was defeated by a professor of medicine, Albert Zafy, representing the Comité des Forces Vives (CFV). Zafy's inauguration saw violent clashes between security forces and federalists in a number of northern towns, which intensified in the run up to deferred legislative elections. The result in June 1993 produced an unstable coalition government led by Francisque Ravony of the anti-Zafy Mouvement pour le progrès de Madagascar (MPM). But the ceaseless realignment of political sympathies meant that by early 1994, Ravony could no longer depend on a secure majority in the Assembly. In June, his government's economic reform programme (based on the adoption of measures 'suggested' by the IMF and World Bank) was rejected; a new coalition in the government (known as G7) proposed a motion of censure against Ravony, but it was narrowly defeated. In July 1995, Zafy himself announced that he was unable to work with Ravony and, coincidentally, proposed a constitutional amendment which transferred the power to select the Prime Minister from the Assembly to the President alone. At a subsequent referendum, Zafy's amendment was approved. Ravony duly resigned in October, and Zafy replaced him with Emmanuel Rakotovahiny. In May 1996 a motion of censure against the government was approved by the National Assembly; Rakotovahiny resigned, to be replaced by Norbert Ratsirahonana, former President of the High Court. Two months later Zafy resigned in the face of a threat of impeachment by the Constitutional High Court which alleged a number of breaches of the constitution. Zafy was, however, allowed to stand at the ensuing presidential election passed peacefully in November 1996, but narrowly lost to Ratsiraka. In the latest parliamentary elections of 17 May 1998, AREMA gained a convincing victory; Tantely Andrianarivo assumed the premiership.

**Government:** Under the terms of a new constitution adopted by popular referendum in August 1992, legislative power resides in a bicameral legislature, comprising a partially-elected Senate and fully-elected National Assembly, each of which has a 4-year term. Council of Ministers appointed by the Prime Minister. The President is elected by popular vote for a five year term. The Prime Minister is appointed by the President from a list of candidates nominated by the National Assembly. Executive power rests with the prime minister.