

— R I A ' S C O L O N Y —

A E R I A L V I E W

C O U N T R Y G U I D E

MADAGASCAR

Everything you need to visit, understand or move there

Ria's Colony

AERIAL VIEW · COUNTRY GUIDE

MADAGASCAR

An African island with an Austronesian language, 3 World Heritage Sites, a transitional government and the easiest visa on the continent. Everything you need to visit, understand or move there, with the sources to check it yourself.

BY

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This guide is the practical companion to our Madagascar culture piece, [The Island That Sailed in From Somewhere Else](#), post 11 of 14 in [Exploring the Cultures of Africa: 54 Countries, One Continent](#).

What is in this guide

Every figure carries a bracketed source number. The contents below are clickable, and so is every source in the register at the back. Where two credible sources disagree, we say so in the text instead of picking the tidier number.

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01 Madagascar in twenty numbers

Madagascar is politically and geographically African, and linguistically Austronesian. It is the world's fourth largest island, one of the poorest countries on earth, and home to species that exist nowhere else.

TABLE 1 · THE COUNTRY AT A GLANCE

METRIC	FIGURE	WHAT IT MEANS, AND THE SOURCE
Land area	587,041 km ²	Land 581,540 km ² plus water 5,501 km ² . Almost four times the size of Georgia (US), slightly less than twice Arizona. [4]
Coastline	4,828 km	Land borders: 0 km. Madagascar shares no frontier with any country. [4]
Population	31.35 million	2025 estimate. The last full census, in 2018, counted 25,674,186 people. [4, 67]
Population density	53 / km ²	Most people live on the eastern half of the island, clustered in the central highlands and along the east coast. [4]
Median age	20.5 years	Growing at 2.15% a year, with a fertility rate of 3.47 children per woman. [4]
Capital	Antananarivo	Population about 3.87 million (2023). The name means "City of the Thousand." [4]
Government type	In transition	Constitutionally a semi-presidential republic. Since October 2025 it has been run by a transitional council. See section 04. [4, 5]
Independence	26 June 1960	From France. It is the national holiday. [4]
GDP (official rate)	\$17.42 billion	2024 estimate, current dollars. [4]
GDP (PPP)	\$52.97 billion	2024 estimate in 2021 dollars. GDP per capita of \$1,700. [4]
GDP growth	3.2% in 2025	Down from 4.3% in 2024. Projected at 3.0% for 2026, recovering to 4.5% in 2027. [26]

METRIC	FIGURE	WHAT IT MEANS, AND THE SOURCE
Inflation	8.0% in 2025	Projected to rise to 9.0% in 2026 before easing. The central bank policy rate is 12%. [26, 27]
Currency	Malagasy ariary (Ar)	About Ar4,300 to Ar4,340 per US dollar in early September 2026. One of only two world currencies not divided by powers of ten: 1 ariary is 5 iraimbilanja. [29, 30, 31]
Official languages	Malagasy and French	Malagasy 99.9%, French 23.6%, English 8.2% (2018). Shares exceed 100% because people gave more than one answer. [4]
Religion	Majority Christian	FJKM, Lutheran and Anglican 34%, Roman Catholic 32.3%, other Christian 8.1%, traditional or animist 1.7%, Muslim 1.4%, none 21.9% (2021). [4]
Highest point	Maromokotro, 2,876 m	Mean elevation across the island is 615 m, which is why the highlands are cold at night. [4]
World Heritage Sites	3	Tsingy de Bemaraha and the Rainforests of Atsinanana (natural), and the Royal Hill of Ambohimanga (cultural). [4]
Endemism	About 90%	Roughly 90% of the island's flora and fauna occur nowhere else. Every living lemur species is native to Madagascar. [4, 1]
Electricity access	36.1%	2022 estimate: 71.6% urban, 10.9% rural. The president put the 2026 figure at about 36% with access, meaning roughly 64% without. [4, 10]
Poverty	66.5% to 75%	The World Bank estimated 66.5% for 2025; the African Development Bank reports 75% for 2022 on the national line. Both are among the highest rates in the world, and 95.2% of jobs are informal. [26, 27]

A note on sourcing: the CIA World Factbook, which most country guides lean on, was retired in February 2026. The structural figures above come from [OpenFactBook](#), which preserves and continues the same dataset using CIA, World Bank and REST Countries data. Where it has gone stale, notably on who holds office, we say so and cite something newer. [\[4\]](#)

ONE NUMBER WORTH PAUSING ON

Life expectancy is genuinely contested in the data. The Factbook-derived dataset puts it at 68.8 years for 2024. The World Bank series on the same page puts it at 63.8 years. That is a five year gap between two respectable sources on the same profile. We have not found a way to reconcile them, so treat any single life expectancy figure for Madagascar as approximate. [\[4\]](#)

02 The land

A narrow coastal plain, a high central plateau, and a climate that changes three times between the east coast and the south. Madagascar separated from Africa roughly 160 million years ago, and its wildlife has been evolving on its own ever since.

Madagascar sits in the Indian Ocean off the southeastern coast of Africa, east of Mozambique and across the Mozambique Channel. It is the world's fourth largest island and the second largest island country, with 4,828 km of coastline and no land border with anyone. [4]

The terrain runs from a narrow coastal plain into a high plateau and mountains through the centre, peaking at Maromokotro at 2,876 m. Mean elevation is 615 m, which matters more than it sounds: Antananarivo sits at roughly 1,280 m, and highland nights in July can drop to around 8°C. The climate is tropical along the coast, temperate inland, and arid in the south. [4, 62]

The separation from Africa happened around 160 million years ago, and the island was then isolated from other major landmasses for tens of millions of years. Ocean currents keep it isolated biologically even now, which is why the endemism rate is so extreme. [1, 4]

What is under the ground, and what grows on it

RESOURCE OR LAND USE	FIGURE	NOTE
Natural resources	Graphite, chromite, coal, bauxite, rare earths	Also salt, quartz, tar sands, semiprecious stones, mica, fish and hydropower. [4]
Top exports	Garments, nickel, vanilla, cloves, gold	2023, by value. Nickel and vanilla are the swing factors in any given year. [4]
Vanilla	Leading world producer	Madagascar is described as the leading global vanilla producer; one commercial estimate puts its share at about 80% of world supply. Treat the exact percentage as an estimate, not a measured figure. [4, 28]
Agricultural land	70.3%	Arable land is only 5.2%; permanent pasture is 64.1% (2023). Rice is the dominant crop by tonnage. [4]

RESOURCE OR LAND USE	FIGURE	NOTE
Forest cover	17.5%	2023 estimate. Deforestation pressure is one of the central conservation problems on the island. [4]
Export partners	USA 16%, France 15%, Japan 8%	Then China 6% and South Korea 6% (2023). [4]
Natural hazards	Cyclones, drought, locusts	Cyclone season runs November to April, peaking around February. Madagascar's volcanoes have not erupted in recorded history. [4, 63]

THE CYCLONE QUESTION, PLAINLY

From November to April the east coast and highlands take heavy rain and cyclones. Unpaved roads in parts of western Madagascar become impassable, some lodges and businesses close entirely, and January to March is when tour operators actively advise against travel. Tsingy de Bemaraha is only reachable in the dry season. If your trip is weather sensitive or road dependent, plan for May to October. [\[63\]](#)

03 A short history

Madagascar was one of the last large habitable landmasses on earth that humans settled, and the people who settled it came from two directions at once.

Large scale settlement began between roughly 350 and 550 CE by people from island Southeast Asia, particularly the region of southeastern Borneo. Arab and Persian traders reached the island as early as the 7th century, and migrants from Africa arrived around 1000 CE. The result is a population carrying both African and Asian ancestry, and a language that belongs to the Austronesian family while sitting off the coast of Africa. [\[4, 1\]](#)

A major genetic study of Malagasy populations found African ancestry averaging about 59% and Asian ancestry about 37%, with highland populations generally carrying more Southeast Asian ancestry and many coastal populations more African ancestry. We cover this in depth in the culture piece. [\[1\]](#)

TABLE 2 · THE DATES THAT SHAPED THE COUNTRY

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENED
c. 350 to 550 CE	Large scale settlement by Austronesian speaking people from island Southeast Asia, bringing rice cultivation and the ancestor of the Malagasy language. [4, 1]
7th century onward	Arab and Persian traders reach the island. African migrants arrive around 1000 CE. Madagascar becomes part of the wider Indian Ocean trading world. [4, 1]
16th to 19th century	A Merina kingdom based in Imerina, in the central highlands, expands through warfare, alliance and diplomacy under Andrianampoinimerina and Radama I until it dominates much of the island. The expansion was not peaceful. [4, 1]
Late 17th to early 18th century	Madagascar operates as a pirate stronghold, and serves as a slave trading centre into the 19th century. [4]
1828 to 1861	Ranavalona I resists European influence, expels foreign missionaries and persecutes Malagasy Christians as part of an effort to protect the kingdom's independence. [1]
1896	France conquers the island and makes it a colony. The last monarch, Ranavalona III, is exiled to Réunion and then Algeria, where she dies in 1917. [4, 1]

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENED
29 March 1947	A revolt against French rule. The dead are commemorated every year on Martyrs' Day, still a public holiday. [64]
26 June 1960	Independence from France. [4]
1970s to 1980s	Didier Ratsiraka's government follows a socialist path, nationalises parts of the economy and builds ties to the Soviet bloc. [1]
1992 to 1993	Free presidential and National Assembly elections end 17 years of single party rule. [4]
2001 to 2002	A disputed presidential election between Ratsiraka and Marc Ravalomanana nearly splits the country before the High Constitutional Court declares Ravalomanana the winner. [4]
2009	After protests, Ravalomanana hands power to the military, which confers the presidency on Antananarivo's mayor, Andry Rajoelina, in what amounted to a coup. [4]
2013 to 2014	UN supported elections. Hery Rajaonarimampianina wins a runoff and is inaugurated in 2014. [4]
2023	Rajoelina wins another term with 59.0% of the vote in an election most of the opposition boycotted. International observers saw no evidence of systemic fraud. [4]
September to October 2025	Nationwide protests over water and electricity shortages escalate. See section 04. [5, 10]

04 Government today

This is the part of the guide most likely to be out of date by the time you read it. Madagascar is being run by a transitional government, and the next scheduled election is in September 2027.

In September and October 2025, protests over water and electricity shortages spread nationwide. On 13 October 2025 the army unit CAPSAT declared it had taken control of all military forces, and President Andry Rajoelina fled the country. Rajoelina issued a decree dissolving the National Assembly, which had planned impeachment proceedings; the Assembly went ahead and impeached him with 130 votes in favour and one blank. [5, 6]

Colonel Michael Randrianirina, head of CAPSAT, was confirmed by the High Constitutional Court and inaugurated as president on 17 October 2025. He is styled President for the Re-Foundation of the Republic of Madagascar. He has denied that his leadership resulted from a coup. Madagascar's own official defence summary records it differently, stating that the military "seized control of the government in October 2025." [5, 4]

TABLE 3 · WHO HOLDS POWER, SEPTEMBER 2026

OFFICE	HOLDER	SINCE
Head of state	Col. Michael Randrianirina, Chair of the Council of the Presidency for the Re-Foundation of the Republic [5, 9]	17 October 2025
Prime Minister	Mamitiana Rajaonarison, previously head of SAMIFIN, the financial intelligence unit [7]	15 March 2026
President of the National Assembly	Siteny Thierry Randrianasoloniaiko [5]	15 October 2025
Next presidential election	Scheduled for September 2027, with a referendum promised within two years to establish a Fifth Republic [6]	Announced

Watch the dates here. Herintsalama Rajaonarivelo served as prime minister from October 2025 until 9 March 2026, when Randrianirina dismissed him along with multiple cabinet members. The OpenFactBook profile we use elsewhere in this guide still lists Rajaonarivelo as head of government and still shows November 2028 as the next election, both of which are now wrong. This is a live illustration of why we cite and date everything. [8, 4, 6]

How the system is meant to work

On paper Madagascar is a semi-presidential republic. The president is directly elected by absolute majority in up to two rounds for a five year term, renewable once. The prime minister is nominated by the National Assembly and appointed by the president. The legislature is bicameral: a 163 seat National Assembly, all directly elected for five year terms, and an 18 seat Senate (12 indirectly elected, 6 appointed). Suffrage is universal at 18. [4]

The legal system is civil law based on the old French civil code, with customary law applying in matters of marriage, family and obligation. The highest courts are the Supreme Court, the High Constitutional Court (9 members, single seven year terms) and the High Court of Justice, which hears cases against the president and senior officials. Traditional dina courts operate as subordinate courts. Administratively the country is organised into provinces and regions, with Antananarivo, Antsiranana, Fianarantsoa, Mahajanga, Toamasina and Toliara as the six historic provinces. [4]

WORTH KNOWING BEFORE YOU PLAN ANYTHING LONG TERM

Madagascar does not grant citizenship by birth on its soil. Citizenship passes by descent, and the rule is gendered: the father must be a citizen, except for a child born out of wedlock, where the mother must be. Dual citizenship is not recognised. The residency requirement for naturalisation is not published in the dataset we use. [4]

For anyone from the diaspora, or anyone considering a permanent move, that combination matters more than any visa rule in this guide. Take legal advice from a Malagasy lawyer rather than relying on a summary, including this one.

The governing agenda, and the honest caveat

Randrianirina declared 2026 "The Year of the Malagasy People," with a roadmap centred on social protection, drinking water, electricity, road construction to open up isolated regions, and new national identity cards ahead of elections. The anti-corruption element is real in its framing: Madagascar ranks 140th of 180 countries on Transparency International's index. Whether any of it lands depends on implementation speed and funding, and France has pledged support for the transition. [10]

If you are making a decision that depends on Malagasy politics, check the current position before you act. Start with the [presidency](#) and your own government's travel advisory.

05 People, language and culture

Madagascar is usually described as having eighteen main ethnic groups. They are not sealed off from each other, many Malagasy people have mixed backgrounds, and they share one language across the whole island.

The Merina live mainly in the central highlands around Antananarivo and became the dominant political power during the Imerina kingdom's expansion. The Betsileo, also highlanders, are known for intensive rice cultivation and hillside terraces. The Betsimisaraka are further east, the Sakalava historically across much of the west, and groups including the Antandroy and Bara in the south. Genetic studies find higher Southeast Asian ancestry in many highland populations and higher African ancestry in many coastal ones, with considerable variation. [1]

Malagasy is an Austronesian language, most closely related to languages spoken in southeastern Borneo, and it has absorbed words from African Bantu languages, Arabic, French and others. It is spoken across the island in regional varieties. French remains the language of urban business, tourism and government. English is spoken by about 8% of the population. [1, 4, 55]

Religion, ancestors and fady

Christianity is the largest religious tradition, with strong Catholic and Protestant presences, and Islam is practised particularly in communities with long Indian Ocean trading histories. Neither replaced older Malagasy beliefs. Many people practise Christianity or Islam alongside traditions involving the razana, the ancestors, sacred places and taboos. [1]

Fady is a system of taboos that may prohibit a food, animal, place, action or behaviour. The rules vary considerably between communities, so something forbidden in one village may be completely ordinary in the next. In communities where these traditions remain important, breaking a fady may be believed to bring misfortune or disturb the relationship between people and ancestors. [1]

THE SINGLE MOST USEFUL PIECE OF VISITOR ETIQUETTE IN THIS GUIDE

Ask before you photograph, enter or walk on anything that might be sacred, and ask your local guide rather than assuming. Tombs, specific trees, particular stretches of water and certain days can all carry fady. Guides at every national park are mandatory anyway, and this is one of the reasons that rule exists. [1, 40]

Read more

We have written a full standalone piece on Madagascar's history, ethnic groups, religion, food, music, textiles, ceremonies and biodiversity. This guide is built to sit alongside it rather than repeat it:

riacolony.org/blog/madagascar-history-culture-people-traditions ^[1]

It covers famadihana, the reburial ceremony associated with Merina and Betsileo communities in the highlands; hiragasy, the highland performing art inscribed by UNESCO on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2023; the valiha and the kabosy; salegy and Jaobjoby; the lamba and highland silk weaving; and the Mahafaly aloalo funerary sculptures of the south. ^[1]

06 Where to go

Madagascar's attractions are spread across a very large island with difficult roads, so the honest advice is to pick a region rather than try to cover the country. The classic overland route is the RN7 running south from Antananarivo.

MENABE, WEST

Avenue of the Baobabs

The row of Grandidier's baobabs on the road near Morondava, and the most photographed landscape in the country. Best between May and October, when the western roads are passable. [63]

ALAOTRA-MANGORO, EAST OF THE CAPITAL

Andasibe-Mantadia National Park

The easiest serious wildlife park to reach from Antananarivo and the best known place to see and hear the indri, the largest living lemur. Entry 45,000 Ar for adults, 25,000 Ar for children under 12. Guide fees are set by circuit: about 25,000 Ar for the short indri trail, 40,000 Ar for the full Mantadia circuit. [40]

MELAKY, WEST

Tsingy de Bemaraha

A UNESCO World Heritage Site of razor sharp limestone pinnacles, and the hardest of the flagship parks to reach. Entry 55,000 Ar adults, 30,000 Ar children, plus a compulsory helmet fee of 5,000 Ar per person per day. Dry season only. [4, 40]

IHOROMBE AND ATSIMO-ANDREFANA, SOUTH

Isalo National Park

Sandstone canyons, natural pools and ring-tailed lemurs, near Ranohira on the RN7. Published entry is 45,000 Ar, though visitors report being charged 50,000 and 65,000 Ar, so ask at the gate. The eroded rock known as the Queen of Isalo appears on the 1,000 ariary note. Open daily 6:30am to 4:30pm. [40, 66]

HAUTE MATSIATRA AND VATOVAVY, SOUTHEAST

Ranomafana National Park

Montane rainforest, and the third of the three parks most itineraries combine with Andasibe and Isalo. Budget roughly 210,000 to 255,000 Ar, about 50 to 62 euro, in entry and guide fees for all three across five or six days. [40]

ANALAMANGA, THE CAPITAL

Antananarivo

The Rova, or Queen's Palace, the Andafiavaratra Palace and the Tsimbazaza zoo and botanical garden are the standard stops. Tana is also where you sort cash, SIM cards and domestic flights before heading out.

[52, 55]

ANALAMANGA, NEAR THE CAPITAL

Royal Hill of Ambohimanga

Madagascar's only cultural World Heritage Site, and the spiritual and political seat of the Merina monarchy. [4]

ANALANJIROFO, NORTHEAST

Île Sainte-Marie

Humpback whales arrive from Antarctic waters from around June, breeding and calving in the sheltered channel between the island and the mainland. Sightings peak in July and August and can run into September. [62, 63]

DIANA, NORTH

Nosy Be and Nosy Tanikely

The main beach and diving destination, with international flights of its own. The Nosy Tanikely marine reserve charges a flat 10,000 Ar for all visitors. Whale shark season begins in the waters around Nosy Be toward the end of September. The Donia festival on Nosy Be runs for a week, usually in May or June. [40, 61, 62]

DIANA AND SAVA, NORTH AND NORTHEAST

Montagne d'Ambre and Marojejy

Two northern parks, both 45,000 Ar for adults and 25,000 Ar for children. Marojejy is the place associated with the silky sifaka. [40]

MENABE, WEST

Kirindy Forest

Known among wildlife watchers for fossa, Madagascar's largest carnivore, whose mating behaviour usually happens in the first week of November. Female fossas return annually to the same tree. [63]

TWO RULES THAT APPLY AT EVERY PARK GATE

- A certified Madagascar National Parks guide is mandatory, and has been since 2010. Guides are assigned at the gate, and you cannot pre-book a specific person. There is no need to book permits in advance. [40, 42]
- Payment is cash in ariary only. No cards, no foreign currency, no digital payment. Smaller park offices often cannot break large notes, so carry small denominations. Malagasy nationals pay a separate lower rate, typically 2,000 to 5,000 Ar. [40, 42]

Madagascar National Parks oversees 48 parks and reserves. Its fee schedule is published at parcs-madagascar.com, but is sometimes updated mid year without announcement, which is the most likely explanation for the conflicting entry prices reported above. [40]

07 The table

Rice sits at the centre of Malagasy food culture. It is the staple for much of the population and is commonly eaten several times a day, including at breakfast.

In the highlands, rice cultivation has produced extensive terraces and irrigation systems, particularly among Betsileo and Merina communities. Along the coasts, fish and other seafood matter far more, and some coastal cooking uses coconut and other ingredients associated with the wider Indian Ocean world. Zebu, the humped cattle found throughout the island, have a role far beyond food: cattle ownership can represent wealth, prestige and social standing, and zebu feature in ceremonies around marriage, funerals and other major life events. [1]

TABLE 4 · WHAT TO ORDER

DISH	WHAT IT IS
Vary	Rice. Not a side dish but the thing the meal is organised around. Everything else is the accompaniment. [1]
Romazava	A light meat and leafy green stew or broth, widely regarded as one of Madagascar's national dishes. Served with rice. [1]
Ravitoto	Pounded cassava leaves, often cooked slowly with pork. A highland staple. [1]
Vary amin'anana	Rice with leafy greens, prepared with meat depending on the recipe. [1]
Coastal fish and seafood	Along both coasts. Regional cooking traditions vary, with coconut common in some coastal cuisines. [1]
Zebu	Grilled, stewed or in brochettes. Also the national symbol, alongside the traveller's palm. [1, 4]

This table is drawn from our own Madagascar culture piece, which is sourced in turn. We have deliberately kept it to dishes we can point to a source for. You will also meet things on the ground that we have no authoritative source for, including rice flour breakfast cakes, banana leaf wrapped peanut and rice cakes, chilli condiments and the local lager: worth trying, but we are not going to dress up general travel knowledge as documented fact.

ON FOOD PRICES

We have not found a reliable price index for individual dishes in Madagascar. For orientation: street stall meals are reported at roughly \$1 to \$2, and restaurant meals aimed at expatriates and tourists at roughly \$8 to \$15. Treat both as rough guides rather than quotes, and expect wide variation between Antananarivo, Nosy Be and rural towns. [\[47, 55\]](#)

08 The calendar

Madagascar's public holidays mix Christian dates, the French colonial inheritance, and two Islamic holidays observed for Muslims. The travel calendar is governed by something else entirely: the dry season.

TABLE 5 • PUBLIC HOLIDAYS, 2026

DATE	HOLIDAY	NOTE
1 January	New Year's Day	Thursday
20 March	Eid al-Fitr	For Muslims. Islamic dates move with the lunar calendar and are set by moon sighting, so they can shift by a day. [64]
29 March	Martyrs' Day	Commemorating those who died in the 1947 revolt against French rule. Fell on a Sunday in 2026. [64]
6 April	Easter Monday	Monday
1 May	Labour Day	International Workers' Day
14 May	Ascension Day	39 days after Easter Sunday
25 May	Whit Monday	Seventh Monday after Easter
27 May	Eid al-Adha	For Muslims. Date moves.
26 June	Independence Day	The national day, marking independence from France in 1960. [4, 64]
15 August	Assumption Day	Saturday
1 November	All Saints' Day	Fell on a Sunday in 2026
25 December	Christmas Day	Friday

Holidays are regulated under Decret 62-150 of 28 March 1962, which also lets the government move a holiday falling on a Sunday to the following Monday. Sources differ on the total count: one lists twelve national holidays for 2026, another counts thirteen of which three are observed only by specific groups, and aggregators variously report fifteen or sixteen. Confirm locally before you plan around a specific date. [64, 65]

Festivals and seasonal events

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENS
Around March	Alahamady Be, the traditional Malagasy new year associated particularly with highland communities, marking the start of the year on a traditional calendar with Arabic and Islamic influences on month naming. It is distinct from 1 January, which is the official New Year's Day, and has been revived by some communities and cultural groups. [1]
May or June	Donia on Nosy Be, a week long music festival and the best known cultural event on the island. Zegny Zo is another event in the same broad window. [61, 62]
June to September	Humpback whales arrive from Antarctic waters, breeding and calving off île Sainte-Marie and passing both coasts. Sightings peak in July and August. [62, 63]
26 June	Independence Day, marked nationwide with parades and celebrations. [61]
Varies by family	Famadihana, the reburial ceremony most strongly associated with Merina and Betsileo communities in the highlands. The timing is set by each family rather than by a national calendar, and the cost means some families save for years. It is not a scheduled tourist attraction. [1]
Every seven years	The Sambatra among the Antambahoaka of southeastern Madagascar, a large communal festival connected to circumcision ceremonies. [1]
End of September onward	Whale shark season begins in the waters around Nosy Be. [61]
First week of November	Fossa mating season, of interest mainly to serious wildlife watchers, best sought in Kirindy Forest. [63]

When to actually go

The dry season, broadly April or May through October or November, is when roads are passable, wildlife viewing is best and the Avenue of the Baobabs and Tsingy de Bemaraha are accessible. July and August are peak seasons, with European and North American holidays overlapping whale season, so lodges, internal flights and whale watching boats book out well ahead. April to June and September to November are the shoulder months and generally the best value. September and October are frequently named the strongest all round months, with baby lemurs about and the tail of whale season still running. [\[61, 63\]](#)

December to March is cheapest and greenest, and the best window for reptiles, amphibians and diving visibility. It is also hot, wet and cyclone prone, with January to March carrying real risk of closed roads and parks. One note of caution in the winter months: nights in the central highlands and along the eastern escarpment can be genuinely cold, dropping to around 8°C in Antananarivo in July. [\[61, 62, 63\]](#)

09 What it costs

Madagascar is inexpensive by international standards, and the published cost data is unusually thin. We are going to show you the spread between sources rather than average them into a single confident number.

TABLE 6 • VISA AND PERMIT FEES, 2026

ITEM	COST	NOTES
eVisa or visa on arrival, 1 to 15 days	30 EUR / \$35	Tripled from 10 EUR on 16 February 2026. The single biggest recent change to the cost of a short trip. [11, 12, 13]
eVisa, 16 to 30 days	35 EUR / \$41	Only 5 EUR more than the 15 day visa, which makes the shorter tier poor value for most trips. [11, 13, 14]
eVisa, 31 to 60 days	40 EUR / \$47	Unchanged in the February 2026 revision. [11, 13, 14]
eVisa, 61 to 90 days	50 EUR / \$59	Listed as a fee tier on the official portal, but see the contradiction flagged below. [11, 13, 14]
Visa extension in country	About 210,000 Ar	Roughly 41 EUR or \$48, at an immigration office before your visa expires. [12, 13]
Company registration, SARL	300,000 to 700,000 Ar	About \$66 to \$155 in filing fees including notary, legal publication and chamber registration. Minimum share capital is a separate 2,000,000 Ar, about \$440. [39]
Minimum capital, SA	10,000,000 Ar	About \$2,200, plus three directors, for larger ventures with multiple shareholders. [39]

A CONTRADICTION ON THE OFFICIAL PORTAL, AND WHAT WE WOULD DO ABOUT IT

The official eVisa portal publishes four fee tiers, the longest being 61 to 90 days. On the same page it states that the tourist eVisa "is a single entry visa with a maximum duration of 60 days." The US State Department, separately, says Malagasy tourist visas are valid for 90 days. These cannot all be right. [\[11, 16\]](#)

If your trip needs more than 60 days, do not book flights on the assumption that a 90 day tourist eVisa will be issued. Email the portal at contact@evisamada-mg.com, or plan on a 60 day visa plus an in country extension. Also note that only the tourist visa runs through the eVisa system at all: business, research and every other category still goes through a Malagasy embassy or consulate. [\[11, 14\]](#)

TABLE 7 • NATIONAL PARK FEES, 2026

PARK	ADULT	CHILD	NOTE
Andasibe-Mantadia	45,000 Ar	25,000 Ar	Guide 25,000 Ar for the indri trail, 40,000 Ar for the full Mantadia circuit. [40]
Isalo	45,000 Ar	25,000 Ar	Visitors report 50,000 and 65,000 Ar at the gate. Guide 30,000 Ar for the Canyon des Singes and Piscine Naturelle circuit, group of up to four. [40, 66]
Tsingy de Bemaraha	55,000 Ar	30,000 Ar	Plus a compulsory helmet fee of 5,000 Ar per person per day. [40]
Montagne d'Ambre	45,000 Ar	25,000 Ar	Northern park near Antsiranana. [40]
Marojejy	45,000 Ar	25,000 Ar	Northeast, in the Sava vanilla region. [40]
Nosy Tanikely marine reserve	10,000 Ar	10,000 Ar	Flat rate for all visitors. [40]
Night walks, all parks	Add 20,000 to 25,000 Ar	Same	Per guide, on top of day fees. [40]
Parks without published circuit fees	20,000 to 35,000 Ar half day	30,000 to 50,000 Ar full day	For a group of up to four. Porter services around 12 EUR. Tipping is customary. [40, 42]

For context, Madagascar's park fees of roughly 45,000 Ar, about 10 to 13 EUR a day, are well below Kruger in South Africa at around \$33 a day for international visitors, or Tanzanian parks at \$20 to \$100 and up. The mandatory guide is what closes some of that gap. [\[41\]](#)

TABLE 8 · LIVING COSTS IN ANTANANARIVO, AND WHY THEY DISAGREE

SOURCE AND DATE	SINGLE PERSON	FAMILY OF FOUR	RENT, 1 BED
Wise, 2026 [43]	\$797 a month including costs	Not stated	\$346 average
Wise, citing \$450 without rent [43]	\$450 a month excluding rent	\$1,532 a month	\$346 average
WhereToEmigrate, March 2026 [45]	869 EUR a month	1,722 EUR a month	372 EUR, city centre
LivingCostIndex [48]	\$1,034 including rent	\$2,050 including rent	Not stated separately
ExpatriLife, 2026 [46]	Groceries \$100 to \$200	Not stated	\$300 to \$500 Ivandry or Ambatobe, \$150 to \$300 central
Nomads.com, July 2026 [49]	\$1,497 a month	\$2,001 a month	\$477 a month
CostLiving, 2026 [47]	\$600 budget, \$1,000 moderate, \$1,550 comfortable	Not stated	\$300 to \$600 central, \$150 to \$300 outside the capital
Expatistan, March 2026 [44]	3,104,145 Ar a month	Not stated	Not stated

These are not small discrepancies. A single person's monthly cost ranges from \$450 to \$1,497 depending on which aggregator you believe, because these sites rely on thin, community submitted data for Madagascar. Expatriatan prints its own warning that its estimates are based on only a few data points. Our reading: a modest local standard of living sits somewhere around \$600 to \$1,000 a month, and anything approaching a Western expatriate standard with imported goods and Western style housing runs well above that. Do not budget from any single figure here, including ours.

Daily travel budgets, and two figures for scale

- Budget travel on guesthouses and Malagasy restaurant food: about \$40 to \$60 a day. [\[55\]](#)
- Mid-range safari lodges: about \$100 to \$200 a night. Nosy Be resorts range from about \$50 to \$300 a night. [\[55\]](#)
- Park entry plus a guide: roughly \$50 to \$100 per park day. [\[55\]](#)
- Vaccines and antimalarials before you go: about \$300 to \$800 depending on what you need. Travel health insurance adds roughly \$100 to \$300 for a ten day trip. [\[24\]](#)

For scale on the other side of the ledger: the average monthly net salary in Antananarivo is reported at around \$270, and 95.2% of Malagasy jobs are informal. A visitor's daily park budget can exceed a month of local average earnings. That is worth holding in mind in how you negotiate, tip and behave. [\[48, 26\]](#)

10 Getting there and around

There are no direct flights to Madagascar from anywhere outside Europe and its immediate Indian Ocean and African neighbours. Almost everyone connects, and once you land, flying domestically is often the only realistic way to cross the island.

Getting there

Antananarivo Ivato International (TNR) is the main gateway, and Nosy Be Fascene (NOS) also takes international traffic. As of September 2026, eleven airlines serve Antananarivo: Air Austral, Air France, Air Mauritius, Airlink, Corsair, Emirates, Ethiopian Airlines, EWA Air, Kenya Airways, Madagascar Airlines and Turkish Airlines. Roughly 530 flights depart TNR each month, about 126 a week, to 18 airports. [\[50, 51\]](#)

The only intercontinental flights are to and from Europe. Air France is the only carrier flying nonstop between Europe and Antananarivo, year round from Paris Charles de Gaulle. There are no direct services from the United States, Canada, South or Central America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, South Asia, China, Japan, East or Southeast Asia, Central Asia or Oceania. Paris, Addis Ababa and Nairobi are the usual connecting hubs, with Ethiopian Airlines operating the most services into the country. [\[50, 52\]](#)

IF YOU ARE FLYING FROM WEST AFRICA

There is no direct route. The practical options are connecting through Addis Ababa on Ethiopian, through Nairobi on Kenya Airways, or through Johannesburg on Airlink. Budget a full travel day in each direction, and build in enough connection time that a delay does not cost you a domestic onward flight, which may only operate a few times a week.

[\[50, 51, 52\]](#)

Getting around

Madagascar Airlines, formerly Air Madagascar, runs the domestic network from Ivato. Its subsidiary Tsaradia, which used to operate domestic routes, ceased operations on 26 May 2024, and the parent now flies those routes directly. Domestic destinations from Antananarivo include Antsiranana, Mahajanga, Maroantsetra, Morondava, Nosy Be, Sainte-Marie, Sambava, Toamasina, Tôlanaro and Toliara. The airline launched a new loyalty programme, Valisoa Club, on 1 January 2026. [50, 53, 54]

On the ground, the taxi-brousse, a shared minibus, is the backbone of intercity travel, reported at roughly \$3 to \$15 a trip depending on distance. Local taxis in Antananarivo run about \$0.50 to \$1.50 a ride. The RN7 south from the capital is the classic overland route and links Antsirabe, Fianarantsoa, Ranohira and Isalo, and Toliara. [47]

Two structural limits are worth planning around. The railway network is 836 km of narrow gauge track as last counted in 2018, and is not a practical way to plan a trip. And unpaved roads in parts of western and rural Madagascar become impassable from November to April, which is why itineraries taking in the baobabs and the tsingy are generally only offered from May to mid October. [4, 63]

Madagascar counts 93 airports as of 2025 and drives on the right. For freight, Toamasina handles the large majority of container traffic, with congestion reported to stretch dwell times well beyond target. [4, 39]

11 Before you fly

Madagascar is more medically demanding than most first time visitors expect, and its medical system cannot absorb a serious emergency. That is the single most important line in this guide.

SAFETY, PLAINLY

The US State Department rates Madagascar Level 2, "Exercise increased caution," as of an advisory issued 5 December 2025, citing crime, unrest and health. Some areas carry a higher risk designation. That Level 2 is a downgrade: the advisory was raised to Level 3, "Reconsider travel," in late September 2025 during the protests, and lowered again in December once conditions settled. [16, 17, 19]

- Violent crime, including armed robbery and assault, occurs throughout the country, particularly after dark, in remote areas, and along major national roads in the south and west. [16]
- Petty crime is common, especially in tourist locations. [16]
- Strikes and protest activity related to political and economic conditions occur regularly, particularly in periods near elections. The next presidential election is scheduled for September 2027. [16, 6]
- Violent confrontations between the Dahalo, criminal gangs that steal cattle, and security forces have increased in several regions, particularly south and west of the capital. [16]
- Medical infrastructure is very limited in populated areas and extremely limited in rural areas. Serious medical emergencies require medical evacuation. [16, 18]

Advisory levels change. Level 1 and 2 advisories are reviewed every twelve months and Level 3 and 4 every six, so check the live page before you book: [travel.state.gov Madagascar advisory](https://travel.state.gov/Madagascar). If you are not a US citizen, check your own government's advisory as well, since assessments differ. [16, 18]

HEALTH

RISK	WHAT TO KNOW
Yellow fever	Required for travellers who have been in a country with risk of yellow fever transmission within the last six months. Not required if you fly directly from a country without that risk. Long layovers in a yellow fever country can trigger the requirement, so check your full routing. [16, 25]
Malaria	Present across the country, with one clinical guide describing risk in every region except Antananarivo itself. Plasmodium falciparum dominates and is chloroquine resistant. CDC

RISK	WHAT TO KNOW
	chemoprophylaxis options are atovaquone-proguanil, doxycycline, mefloquine and tafenoquine. Fill the prescription before you leave and take enough for the whole trip. [20, 25]
Plague	Endemic to Madagascar, with a seasonal upswing every September through April. There is no vaccine. [24, 25]
Chikungunya	An outbreak has been confirmed in Mahajanga, Toamasina and Antsirabe since mid-2025, with cases still being confirmed in early 2026. Chikungunya mosquitoes bite in the daytime, so daytime bite protection matters as much as night time. [25]
Polio	No active transmission, but the country is vulnerable to outbreaks of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus. A single adult booster is generally recommended. [23]
Routine and other	Typhoid, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, rabies, measles (MMR) and Tdap are on the recommended list. Measles cases are rising internationally, and CDC advises all international travellers be fully vaccinated against it. [20, 23]
Water and food	Only 53.5% of the population has improved drinking water access, falling to 36% in rural areas. Stick to bottled or filtered water and well cooked food. [4]
The system itself	Physician density is 0.17 per 1,000 people and health spending is 3.5% of GDP. Evacuation for a serious emergency is typically to Mauritius, Réunion or South Africa. [4, 69]

Book a travel clinic appointment four to eight weeks before departure, and buy insurance that explicitly covers medical evacuation rather than just treatment. This is not boilerplate. In Madagascar the evacuation clause is the part of the policy you are actually buying.

MONEY

- The ariary is a cash-first currency. ATMs exist in Antananarivo (BNI, BMOI and BFV-SG branches among them) and in Toamasina and Nosy Be, but are absent or unreliable in smaller towns and around national parks. Withdraw what you need in Tana before heading out. [55]
- Park fees, as covered in section 09, are cash in ariary only. [40]
- Carry small denominations. The 50,000 Ar note is often impossible to break at small vendors. [56]
- MVola, tied to Telma or Yas SIMs, and Orange Money both require a registered local SIM. You cannot use them on a foreign roaming number. Tier one accounts typically have daily outgoing transfer limits around 2,000,000 Ar, about 400 EUR. [56]
- The practical setup is three parallel methods running at once: physical cash in small notes, a loaded mobile money wallet, and a Visa or Mastercard for ATMs and hotel checkout. [56]

POWER, AND AN HONEST DISAGREEMENT

Sources genuinely conflict on Madagascar's electrical standard. Several reference sites list 127 V and 220 V both in use at 50 Hz, varying by region, city or even hotel, with sockets of types C, D, E, J and K. Others list a flat 220 V at 50 Hz with only types C and E in practice, and at least one lists 127 V with types C and E. What everyone agrees on is 50 Hz and that European style round pin sockets dominate. [59, 60]

Practical translation: bring a universal adapter that covers C and E at minimum, and check the label on anything single-voltage, such as a hair dryer or a kettle, before you plug it in. Dual voltage devices marked 100 to 240 V are fine either way. [59, 60]

Separately, expect outages. Electrification is 36.1% nationally, the Jirama grid suffers load shedding, and industrial sites commonly run hybrid setups of grid plus generator plus solar and battery. Water and electricity access were central to the protests that brought the current government to power, and remain its stated priority for 2026. [4, 39, 10]

SIM CARDS AND CONNECTIVITY

Three main operators: Telma, now trading as Yas, plus Orange and Airtel, with Blueline or bip as a fourth. Telma has the widest overall coverage and the longest 4G history, and Orange is the usual urban alternative. 4G reaches roughly 50 towns including Antananarivo, Toamasina, Mahajanga and Nosy Be; the rest of the country runs 3G or 2G, and there are areas with no signal at all. [55, 58]

Registration is mandatory. You need your passport to buy a SIM, a photo may be taken at the point of sale, and unregistered SIMs get deactivated. Kiosks from all the major carriers sit near arrivals at Ivato, and buying there is usually fastest. International eSIM providers work and let you land connected, but

local operator eSIMs still require an in person ID check at a shop, which removes most of the convenience. Internet penetration nationally is about 20%. [\[55, 57, 58, 4\]](#)

Download offline maps before you leave Tana. The RN7 south and the western baobab region both have unreliable signals. [\[55\]](#)

BEFORE YOU GO: A CHECKLIST

- ☐ eVisa applied for on [the official portal](#), or plan to use the visa on arrival counter. Same price either way.
- ☐ Passport valid at least six months beyond your stay, plus a passport photo
- ☐ Return or onward ticket, proof of accommodation, and evidence of sufficient funds
- ☐ Travel clinic appointment four to eight weeks out, with antimalarials prescribed and collected
- ☐ Yellow fever certificate if any part of your routing touches a yellow fever risk country
- ☐ Insurance that explicitly covers medical evacuation
- ☐ Your own government's current travel advisory checked, not just the US one
- ☐ Ariary cash plan: enough withdrawn in Antananarivo for park fees and rural days, in small notes
- ☐ Universal power adapter covering type C and E
- ☐ Offline maps downloaded, and a local SIM or eSIM sorted
- ☐ DEET or icaridin repellent, long sleeves, and permethrin for clothing and nets

12 Relocating to Madagascar

Visiting Madagascar is administratively easy. Moving there is not. The two processes barely resemble each other, and the mistake that catches people is assuming the tourist route can be upgraded from inside the country. It cannot.

A · Tourism: the eVisa and visa on arrival

Every nationality is eligible for a Madagascar eVisa, and this is genuinely one of the more open visa regimes on the continent. You can apply online before you travel or simply use the eVisa counters on arrival, and the price is identical either way, with no surcharge for applying online. The eVisa covers eight international airports: Antananarivo (TNR), Nosy Be (NOS), Antsiranana or Diego Suarez (DIE), Mahajanga (MJN), Sainte Marie (SMS), Toamasina (TMM), Toliara (TLE) and Taolagnaro (FTU). [11, 14, 15]

1. Apply on the official portal between one week and six months before departure. The portal states that evisamada.gov.mg is the only official site for online applications, and warns explicitly about fraudulent lookalike sites. Be careful here: a number of commercial sites charge a service fee on top of the government fee. [11]
 2. Complete the form with identity and travel information, and upload a passport valid at least six months beyond your stay, a passport sized photo on a white background, your return or onward ticket, proof of accommodation and evidence of sufficient funds. [14, 19]
 3. Pay by card. Fees run from 30 EUR for up to 15 days to 50 EUR for the longest tier, as set out in section 09. [11, 13]
 4. Wait for your Electronic Travel Authorisation, issued no later than 72 hours after your registration is validated, and usually within 24 to 48 hours. [11, 14]
 5. Print it or keep it on your phone for police control on arrival, and carry your yellow fever certificate if your routing requires one. [11, 16]
- The tourist eVisa is single entry. You cannot leave and re-enter on the same visa. [14]
 - Only the tourist visa runs through the eVisa system. Business travellers, researchers and every other category must apply through a Malagasy embassy or consulate. [14]
 - Extensions are available in country at an immigration office for about 210,000 Ar. Apply before your visa lapses. [12, 13]
 - Diplomats and employees of certain organisations are exempt from visa fees. [11]

- Entry and transit are refused to citizens of Palestine, even without leaving the aircraft. [15]

B · Work and residency: the convertible visa route

THE ONE THING TO GET RIGHT

Without a long-stay visa or residence permit, a foreigner cannot settle in Madagascar for more than three months for any reason, cannot work for money, and cannot invest or create a business. And the long-stay route starts with a document you can only get before you arrive: a convertible or transformable visa, issued by a Malagasy embassy or consulate, valid for just one month. You then have that one month, from arrival, to convert it in country. Miss the window and you are in trouble with immigration and can be expelled. [37, 36]

1. Before leaving your country of residence, obtain a convertible or transformable visa from a Malagasy embassy or consulate. It is valid for 30 days and exists specifically to let you apply for long-term status once you are inside Madagascar. [36, 37]
2. If the move is employment based, your employer prepares the ground: a job description and salary, evidence where required that the role could not readily be filled by a Malagasy national, company registration and tax compliance documents, an employment contract approved by the Ministry of Civil Service, Labour and Social Laws, employment authorisation issued to EDBM, and a signed letter of request to the Minister of the Interior and Decentralisation. [35, 45]
3. Enter Madagascar on the convertible visa and open your file. For investor and professional filings, EDBM operates a one-stop service where you get a dossier number and book your Interior Ministry submission slot. [38]
4. Secure the work permit, the permis de travail, issued by the Ministry of Labour. Employers handle this for sponsored staff; self-employed people must apply themselves. Employers also register foreign workers with CNAPS, the national social security system, and must keep contributions current. [43, 45, 38]
5. Convert the visa within one month of entry, through the Immigration Service of the National Police, the Direction de l'Immigration et de l'Émigration, under the Ministry of the Interior. File originals, give fingerprints and pay stamp duties. [37, 38]
6. Apply for the residence card, the carte de résident, which authorises legal stay beyond one year for work, business, study or family. Note carefully: being granted a long-stay visa does not automatically mean being granted a residence permit. They are two decisions. [38, 48]

- Timeline: residence and work permit processing is reported at two weeks to three months, although one advisory service puts total bureaucratic time at up to four months. [33, 71]
- Once you hold a residence permit you are exempt from the entry visa requirement, can enter and leave freely, and can move throughout the territory. [37]
- Permanent residency generally follows a period of continuous legal residence, commonly described as two to five years on temporary permits tied to employment, with stable income, a clean record and evidence of integration. Criteria vary and are not transparently published. [34]
- Foreign spouses of Malagasy citizens may qualify on an accelerated timeline where residence and cohabitation are proven. [38]

C • Business and investment: EDBM

The Economic Development Board of Madagascar, on Avenue de l'Indépendance in Antananarivo, runs a genuine one-stop shop. At EDBM a company can obtain its business identification card, tax registration confirmation and commercial registration number, and apply for visas, work permits or professional cards, as well as register for social security and health insurance. EDBM also administers the Registre du Commerce et des Sociétés, certifies eligibility for the Free Zone regime, and grants authorisation for foreign investors to acquire land, though land lease titles still come from the Ministry of Land Management. [32, 33, 68]

1. Secure a physical local address with a signed lease. You cannot register without one. A coworking arrangement as headquarters is reported to work for a first year. [32, 39]
2. Choose a structure. Most foreign investors form a SARL, the equivalent of an LLC, with minimum capital of 2,000,000 Ar, about \$440. A SA, for larger ventures with multiple shareholders, needs 10,000,000 Ar, about \$2,200, and three directors. [39]
3. File through EDBM with notarised articles of incorporation, a Malagasy address, bank deposit confirmation, and in practice a local resident director. Filing fees including notary, legal publication and chamber registration run 300,000 to 700,000 Ar. [39]
4. Register with the tax administration, the national statistics agency INSTAT, and the Ministry of Justice, which maintains the register of companies. EDBM acts as the interface for other authorisations and licences, although the individual agencies keep decision making power. [33]
5. If you plan to export, apply for Free Zone or Export Processing Zone status through EDBM with a business plan, projected employment and export commitments. The regime requires exporting the large majority of production and carries significant tax and duty advantages. [39, 33]

On timelines, the published figures are flattering and the reality is longer. The US State Department records EDBM registrations taking an average of eight days against a sub-Saharan African average of 21.5 days. Other sources give a nominal 3 to 5 days, a nominal 15 calendar days, a realistic 10 to 15 working days, and up to four months once red tape is included. Certified extracts from the register take 5 to 10 business days, and official legal documents are issued in French. [32, 33, 39, 68]

THE RISK NO PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL WILL TELL YOU ABOUT

Madagascar's own investment climate assessment by the US State Department is blunt: EDBM often refers foreign investment projects to the Office of the Presidency for approval, which limits the number of projects it can approve itself. As a result many foreign investment projects require presidential-level approval, with no predictable timeframe and no standard requirements. Some of the largest foreign investment projects in Madagascar have been pending presidential approval for several years, resulting in significant financial loss to foreign investors. [32]

Read that alongside section 04. The presidency in question is currently a transitional one, with elections scheduled for September 2027. If your project is large enough to need that approval, the political timetable is part of your risk model, not background colour. [6]

The counterweight, in fairness: Madagascar's Investment Promotion Law guarantees equal treatment for foreign and local investors, and EDBM incentives including tax holidays and duty exemptions are open to both on the same criteria. Labour costs are low, and growth is projected to recover to 4.5% in 2027 on nickel, agriculture and investment-led demand. [70, 26]

D · Citizenship and belonging long term

This is where Madagascar differs most sharply from relocation-friendly countries, and it deserves to be read twice. There is no citizenship by birth on Malagasy soil. Citizenship passes by descent only, and the rule is gendered: the father must be a Malagasy citizen, unless the child is born out of wedlock, in which case the mother must be. Dual citizenship is not recognised. The residency requirement for naturalisation is not stated in the dataset. [4]

Practically, that means you should plan your long-term position around your residence card and your business registration, not around an expectation of naturalisation, and you should assume that acquiring Malagasy citizenship could require renouncing your existing one. Marriage to a Malagasy citizen is described as an accelerated route to residence, which is a different thing from citizenship. Anyone in the diaspora with a Malagasy parent, and anyone considering a permanent move, should take advice from a Malagasy lawyer on their specific family circumstances. We are describing a published dataset, not giving legal advice. [4, 38]

13 The good, the bad and the ugly

We would rather you read this here than discover it on arrival. All three are true at once, and none of them cancels the others out.

THE GOOD

- Roughly 90% of Madagascar's flora and fauna occur nowhere else on earth, and every living lemur species is native to the island. There is no substitute destination. [\[4, 1\]](#)
- Three UNESCO World Heritage Sites across two natural and one cultural inscription, plus hiragasy on the Intangible Cultural Heritage list since 2023. [\[4, 1\]](#)
- The visa regime is genuinely open. Every nationality is eligible, you can apply online or simply use the arrival counter at the same price, and authorisation is issued within 72 hours. [\[11, 14\]](#)
- Park fees are low by regional standards: about 10 to 13 EUR a day against roughly \$33 at Kruger and \$20 to \$100 and up in Tanzania. [\[41\]](#)
- Living costs are low, with a modest local standard of living plausible on roughly \$600 to \$1,000 a month. [\[43, 47\]](#)
- EDBM's one-stop shop is real, and business registration at an average of eight days compares well with the 21.5 day sub-Saharan average. [\[32\]](#)
- Equal treatment for foreign and local investors is guaranteed in law, with tax holidays and duty exemptions available to both, plus a Free Zone regime for exporters. [\[70, 39\]](#)
- Growth is projected to recover to 4.5% in 2027, led by nickel, agriculture and investment demand. [\[26\]](#)

THE BAD

- The 15 day eVisa fee tripled from 10 EUR to 30 EUR on 16 February 2026, and the official portal contradicts itself on whether the maximum tourist stay is 60 or 90 days. [\[12, 11\]](#)
- Only tourist visas are available online. Business, research and all other categories still require an embassy or consulate. [\[14\]](#)
- Electricity access is 36.1% nationally and 10.9% in rural areas, with daily load shedding on the Jirama grid. [\[4, 39\]](#)
- Internet penetration is about 20%, and 4G reaches only around 50 towns. [\[4, 55\]](#)
- The railway is 836 km of narrow gauge and not a realistic travel option, and unpaved roads across much of the west and rural interior are impassable from November to April. [\[4, 63\]](#)

- Cyclone season from November to April can close roads and parks outright, with January to March the period operators advise against. [63]
- Inflation was 8.0% in 2025 and is projected at 9.0% for 2026, with the policy rate held at 12% and the ariary depreciating from an average of 4,523 per dollar in 2024 to 4,635 in 2025. [26]
- Published cost of living data is thin and contradictory, with monthly single-person estimates ranging from \$450 to \$1,497 and one major aggregator warning that its own Madagascar figures rest on very few data points. [43, 44, 49]
- Toamasina port handles the bulk of container freight with congestion stretching dwell times well beyond target. [39]
- There is no citizenship by birth, descent runs through the father, and dual citizenship is not recognised. [4]

THE UGLY

- The military seized control of the government in October 2025, in the country's own official defence summary's words, and Madagascar is under a transitional administration with elections not scheduled until September 2027. [4, 6]
- Poverty is among the highest in the world: 75% on the national line in 2022 per the African Development Bank, 66.5% estimated for 2025 by the World Bank. And 95.2% of all jobs are informal. [26, 27]
- Maternal mortality is 445 deaths per 100,000 live births, physician density is 0.17 per 1,000 people, and serious medical emergencies require evacuation out of the country. [4, 16]
- Plague is endemic with a seasonal upswing from September to April and no vaccine, a chikungunya outbreak has been running since mid-2025, and chloroquine-resistant malaria is present across almost the whole island. [24, 25]
- Violent confrontations between Dahalo cattle-rustling gangs and security forces have increased in several regions south and west of the capital, and violent crime occurs along major national roads in those areas. [16]
- Child marriage remains widespread: 38.8% of women were married by 18 and 12.7% by 15, as of 2021. [4]
- Madagascar ranks 140th of 180 countries on Transparency International's corruption index, and large foreign investment projects can sit pending presidential approval for years at significant cost to investors. [10, 32]
- Only 53.5% of the population has improved drinking water access, and rural improved sanitation access is 25.2%. [4]

- Mahafaly aloalo funerary sculptures and other tomb objects have been removed from their original settings and sold through museums and the international art market, separating them from the communities whose traditions gave them meaning. [\[1\]](#)

14 About Ria's Colony

For the life you are becoming.

Ria's Colony is a trade and tourism company that helps people understand African countries, travel between them, and do business across their markets, because right now all three are often harder than they should be. [2]

People across Africa still know surprisingly little about many parts of their own continent. There are travellers who could be visiting places they know almost nothing about, businesses that could be selling into markets they have never considered, and destinations that could be reaching people who would genuinely value what they offer. The gap is rarely opportunity. It is information, understanding and the right connections. [2]

This guide is part of Aerial View, one of four Ria's Colony products working toward that goal.

PRODUCT	WHAT IT DOES
Aerial Connect	Helps businesses research new African markets, find customers and partners, and build a local presence before they invest heavily. Market entry strategy, business development, partnership introductions, market representation and trade missions.
Aerial View	Practical travel information, destination stories and local knowledge, plus destination and hospitality partnerships. The product behind the guide you are reading.
Style Mirror	Original stories about African countries, cultures, economies and the issues shaping life across the continent, including our culture series.
Style Vault	Practical courses that help people build skills for opportunities across Africa, from communication to negotiation.

The method across all four is short: Learn. Feel. Go. Connect. The values we hold ourselves to are curiosity, courage, care, integrity, belonging, joy, excellence and roots. [2]

Where to go next

- [The Madagascar culture piece](#), the companion to this guide.
- [Exploring the Cultures of Africa: 54 Countries, One Continent](#), the full series.
- [Nigeria: The Complete Country Guide](#), the other country guide in this format.
- [The African ETA Tracker](#), for visa and travel authorisation changes across the continent.
- [Aerial View services and prices for travellers](#).
- [Aerial Connect](#), if you are looking at Madagascar as a market rather than a destination.

A NOTE FROM TORI, RIA'S COLONY

Every country has two versions. There is the one you can photograph in a weekend, and the one you only start to see once you understand the history, the food, the politics and the choices that shaped it.

Madagascar makes that gap unusually wide. The baobabs and the lemurs are on every list. The Austronesian language, the ancestors, the fady, the 75% poverty rate and the colonel currently running the country are not. We have tried to give you both honestly, with a way to check every number yourself.

One request, particular to this island. Almost everything worth seeing here exists nowhere else, and much of it sits next to communities living with severe hardship. Hire the guide. Pay the fee. Ask before you photograph. Learn the local fady before you walk somewhere sacred. It costs you very little and it matters a great deal.

Wherever you go next, Andasibe for the indri, Sainte-Marie for the whales, or an EDBM filing for a business idea you have been sitting on, we hope you leave with more understanding than you arrived with.

Safe travels.

Tori

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15 Source register

Every figure in this guide carries a bracketed number. Official and primary sources are used wherever they exist, and where only a secondary source or an aggregator was available, we have said so in the text rather than presenting it as settled.

Compiled 12 September 2026. Fees, exchange rates, advisories and office holders change, and Madagascar is in a political transition, so check the live link before you rely on any number here.

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