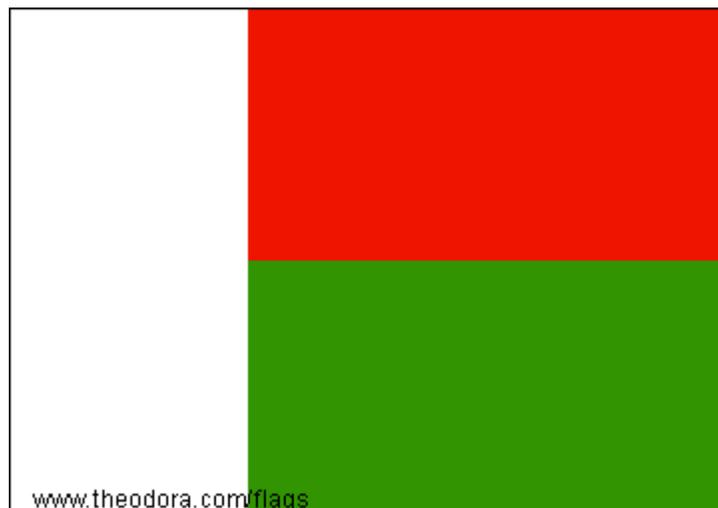


General Facts on Madagascar

Madagascar is the fourth-largest island on earth, situated in the Indian Ocean east of the Southern African state of Mozambique on the east coast of Africa.

The island's population is estimated at just over 18 million people, consisting mostly of Malagasy (98%).

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Brief History

First settlers

Exactly when the first people arrived in Madagascar is unclear, but archaeologists have found human remains of African descent that dates back approximately 2000 years. The next group of human settlers on the island was Indonesians who arrived there at about 700 AD.

In centuries to follow, more Javanese, Africans and Arabs settled on the island. Many of them had sailed for thousands of kilometers aboard fragile vessels, driven along by the monsoons and surviving by the skin of their teeth.

Little is known of the island's early history, but it seems that although some degree of racial or tribal mixing did occur, the families and tribes of Indonesian descent (known as the Merina) settled mainly on the central highland while tribes of African descent established themselves around the

coast. The Arabs were mostly traders who established lucrative slave trading posts on the coast from where thousands of Malagasy were sent to the Middle East and elsewhere as slaves.

By the 16th century, the tribes on the island had been organized into four kingdoms. In the West was the kingdom of Menabe (later known as the kingdom of Boina) with Mahajanga as its capital. On the east coast was the kingdom of the Betsimisaraka and in the southern highlands was the empire of the Betsileo (actually consisting of four smaller kingdoms). The powerful Merina kingdom in the central highlands was formed by several formal rivalry groups and had its capital at Antananarivo.

Arrival of Europeans

The first known European to discover Madagascar was Diego Diaz, a Portuguese navigator who anchored there on 10 August 1500. Diaz was looking for a port of call along the "Spice Route" to India and was able here to replenish his stocks of food and fresh water from the island.

Following this discovery, several Europeans undertook expeditions to the island and during the course of the 17th century the Portuguese, English, and French successively and unsuccessfully attempted to colonize Madagascar. A French military outpost was established at Fort Dauphin in the south-east and the "Compagnie de l'Orient" was founded to systematically explore and "tame" the newly conquered island.



ABOVE: Old photo of Betsimisaraka girl with hair in traditional style.

Merina Kingdom

King Andrianampoinimerina (1787–1810) and his son, Radama I (1810–28) succeeded in unifying most of the island's tribes under powerful Merina rule. He established good relationships with the British who by now showed keen interest in the island. British missionaries were allowed to introduce schools and Christianity while the British also trained Merina troops. The London

Missionary Society (LMS) arrived with a contingent mainly made up of Welsh missionaries to spread the Word and the Merina court was converted to Christianity.

After Radama I's death, he was succeeded by his wife who took the name of Ranaivalona I. This xenophobic queen immediately strengthened her army and declared the Christian faith illegal. Under her rule trade relations with Great Britain were severed, all former reforms were abolished and all Christian missionaries were persecuted and forced to leave. She maintained relationships with France, however, and even established an embassy in Europe.

French Colony

A few decades later, during the reign of queen Ranaivalona III, France and Britain signed a treaty which outlined their respective spheres of influence. Britain recognized French control over Madagascar in return for France recognizing British sovereignty on the island of Zanzibar. In 1885 Madagascar was declared a French protectorate after Britain relinquished its claims to the island.

In 1896 the island, together with the nearby Comoro islands, became a French colony. French was declared the official language and a system of forced labor was introduced.

When political resistance escalated, French military rule was instituted and the Malagasy monarch, Queen Ranaivalona III, exiled to Algiers. In March 1947, a nationalist revolt against the French was harshly suppressed. Estimates of those killed as a result range from 11 000 to 80 000. When the revolt was finally put down in August, its leaders were exiled.

During the Second World War, British and South African forces occupied Madagascar to protect it from a possible Japanese attack. After the war, the island was handed back to France.

Independent republic

In 1958 the first step towards independence was taken when Madagascar became an autonomous republic within the French Community with its own president (Philibert Tsiranana). Two years later – in 1960 - Madagascar became an independent republic. In May 1973 Major General Gabriel Ramanantsoa took power by ways of a military coup and on 15 June 1975 Didier Ratsiraka was named president. Following a referendum in the same year, the country's name was officially changed from "Malagasy Republic" to "Democratic Republic of Madagascar" (Republique de Madagascar).



ABOVE: Didier Ratsiraka.

Ratsiraka turned the country into a socialist state - nationalizing banks, insurance companies, and all natural resources. His regime was characterized by repression, corruption and strict censorship. As in so many other African countries, the Malagasy brand of Marxism bled the country dry and led to economic disaster and suffering. In 1989 riots broke out after Ratsiraka was reelected and this forced him to adopt a multiparty system in 1990 and to agree to share power with opposition leader Albert Zafy.

In February 1993 Zafy won the elections in a landslide victory. However, Zafy was impeached by parliament in 1996 for abusing his constitutional powers during an economic crisis. Following this, he lost the 1996 presidential election to Ratsiraka, who became president yet again early in 1997.

In 2001, the country wavered on the brink of a full-scale civil war after Ratsiraka allegedly rigged the results of the presidential elections. After several months of political stale-mate, nationwide demonstrations and isolated cases of violence, Marc Ravalomanana, a Christian businessman from Antananarivo, was declared Madagascar's new president.



ABOVE: President Marc Ravalomanana being sworn in with a Christian ceremony – the island's first president not to implore traditional rituals with his inauguration.

General Statistics

- Total Land Area: - 581 540 sq. km (USA: 9 529 000; UK 244 000; RSA: 1 222 000).
- Coastline: - 4 828 km.
- Time: - Greenwich Mean Time plus three hours.
- Rainfall: - 380 mm (south and southwest) - 3050 mm (eastern parts).
- Population: - 18 million (July 2005 est.).
- Population growth rate: - 3,01% (2001 est.).
- Infant mortality rate: - 85,26 deaths/1,000 live births (2000 est.).
- Life expectancy at birth:
- Total population: 54,95 years .
 - Male: 52,71 years.
 - Female: 57,26 years (2000 est.).
- Total fertility rate: - 5,84 children born/woman (2000 est.).
- Ethnic groups: - Malayo-Indonesian (Merina and related Betsileo), Cotiers (mixed African, Malayo-Indonesian, and Arab ancestry - Betsimisaraka, Tsimihety, Antaisaka, Sakalava), French, Chinese, Reunionese, Indian, Creole, Comorian.
- People Groups:
- Malagassy 98,6% (18 main ethnic groups).
 - Other 1.4 %.
- Capital: - Antananarivo (1,42 million).
- Literacy: - 46% (USA 95 %; UK 97 %; RSA 64%).
- Official Language - French and Malagasy (total of 6 languages, Malagassy most generally spoken).
- Economy: - Agriculture (34% of GDP), industry (12% of GDP) and services (54% of GDP). (1997 est.)
- Industries: - Meat processing, soap, breweries, tanneries, sugar, textiles, glassware, cement, automobile assembly plant, paper, petroleum, tourism .
- Labor force: - 7 million (1995)

- Natural resources: - Graphite, chromate, coal, bauxite, salt, quartz, tar sands, semiprecious stones, mica, fish, hydropower.
- Independence: - 26 June 1960 (from France).
- Government type: - Democratic republic.
- Administrative divisions: - 6 provinces: Antananarivo; Toamasina; Mahajanga; Antsiranana; Fianararisoa; and Toliara.

Religious Statistics (2001)

Religious freedom is guaranteed in the constitution.

Christian - 47,6 % (growth +3,3%)

Christian Detail

- Protestant – 28% (growth +4,3%)
- Independent – 2,5% (growth +4,9%)
- Roman Catholic – 20,7 % (growth + 2,6%)
- Anglican – 1,7 % (growth +4%)
- Other Marginal groups – 0,2%
- Largest Groups: Lutheran; Church of Jesus Christ; Episcopal; United Pentecostal; Catholic; Evangelical Indigenous Mission; FTMA; Seventh Day Adventist; Pentecostal Church Jesus Saves; Free Evangelical; Assemblies of God; Bible Baptist.

Traditional Religions - 44,7% (growth +2,2%)

Muslim - 7% (growth +6,2%)

Other/atheist - 0,5% (including Baha'1 and Buddhist)

NOTE: Also see article: "Traditional Religion of Madagascar"

SOURCES:

- "Operation World" by Patrick Johnstone & Jason Mandryk. (2001 Paternoster Publishing).
- The World Factbooks, CIA, USA 1989-2001.