



Understand Madagascar

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Madagascar has been plagued by a political crisis since 2009; all the Malagasy want now is to turn the page.

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Humans only settled in Madagascar 2000 years ago, but they came from all over the Indian Ocean and Europe.

MALAGASY LIFE 201

Learn your *fady* from your *famadihana*, and understand the complex beliefs that shape Malagasy society.

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Cast adrift in the Indian Ocean more than 100 million years ago, Madagascar has followed its own evolutionary path, with remarkable results.

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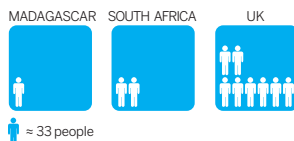
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population per sq km



Madagascar Today

The Dark Years

Madagascar has been in the throes of a political crisis since Andry Rajoelina came to power following violent uprisings in March 2009; his predecessor, Marc Ravalomanana, handed power to the army and fled to South Africa.

The international community decided that Rajoelina's accession to power was unconstitutional and refused to recognise his High Transitional Authority (HAT) as a legitimate government.

A power-sharing deal brokered by France, South Africa and the African Union between HAT and the opposition was reached in August 2009, only to be dismissed by HAT a couple of months later. The sanctions were swift and drastic: all international aid funding, which represented about 50% of the government's public funding, was withheld.

In August 2010, Marc Ravalomanana was condemned, in absentia, to forced labour for life for the deaths of 30 protesters during the uprisings of February 2009 (the presidential guards had fired on the crowd without warning).

HAT's self-imposed deadline of running elections within 24 months came and went, but the Southern African Development Community (SADC) kept working behind the scenes on a compromise. In March 2011, after months of negotiations, SADC presented a draft roadmap for an exit to the crisis.

Light at the End of the Tunnel?

It took a few iterations but the roadmap was finally signed by all political parties on 17 September 2011, with the exception of former president and political exile Didier Ratsiraka. One of the insistences of SADC was the 'unconditional return' of all political exiles, a point that Rajoelina tempered by adding that exiles would not be immune from judicial pursuits.

- ▶ Population: 19.6 million
- ▶ 77% live below the national poverty line
- ▶ Life expectancy: 60
- ▶ Literacy: 71%
- ▶ Average number of children per woman: 4.7

Dos & Don'ts

- » Respect local *fady* (taboos), which are cultural and social dictates that relate to food, behaviour and certain times of the week or year. Guides will explain.
- » Don't point; bend your finger or indicate with your palm.
- » Bring rice or a bottle of rum if you're invited to a Malagasy home.
- » Don't attend cultural celebrations such as exhumation or circumcision ceremonies unless you have been invited.

Top Books

- A History of Madagascar** (2001) by Mervyn Brown
- The Eighth Continent: Life, Death and Discovery in the Lost World of Madagascar** (2000) by Peter Tyson
- The Aye-Aye and I** (1992) by Gerald Durrell