

# Understand Madagascar

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# Madagascar Today

Despite the return to political legitimacy following the 2013 legislative and presidential elections, Madagascar has struggled to regain the development oomph it had garnered in the mid-naughties. Political instability remains high, reforms are lagging, donors and investors are keeping their distance and Madagascar's fabulous potential remains mostly untapped. Malagasies are incredibly weary of their country's underperformance, but the mood is one of wilful optimism, not defeat.

## Best on Film

**Madagascar** (2011) A three-part series by the BBC, narrated by Sir David Attenborough, showcasing the island's wildlife.

**Madagascar** (2005) With a stellar cast of voice-overs, this cartoon raised Madagascar's profile.

## Best in Print

**The Eighth Continent: Life, Death and Discovery in the Lost World of Madagascar** (2013) by Peter Tyson

**The Aye-Aye and I** (1992) by Gerald Durrell

**A History of Madagascar** (2001) by Mervyn Brown

## Etiquette

**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.

## No Panacea

The 2013 presidential elections were a necessary first step for Madagascar to turn the page of the transition, but they have proved insufficient to solve the country's chronic political instability. President Hery Rajaonarimampianina was elected with little popular support and no party and he has struggled to get a majority in parliament and pass reforms.

Hery, as he is popularly known, has found himself stuck between a rock and a hard place with mostly hostile opposition parties (coup leader Andry Rajoelina's MAPAR and ousted president Marc Ravalomanana's TIM) and a large group of flip-flopping independent members of parliament.

The tempestuous relationship between the executive and legislative came to a head in May 2015 when, sensing that attack was its best defence, the national assembly impeached the president before he could dissolve it.

Hery was saved by the Constitutional Court, which threw out the impeachment procedure, but a month later the assembly put forward a motion of no-confidence against Prime Minister Jean Ravelonarivo. The motion failed, but only just.

## International Wariness

These political quarrels have slowed Madagascar's return to 'business as usual'. It's taken 18 months for the National Development Plan to be approved and the municipal elections to take place, and two years for the senate to be installed.

Vital economic reforms are lagging. Madagascar notably needs to crack down on corruption, fraud and tax evasion, clean up its enormous civil-service payroll