Madagascar is so cool because of its uniqueness. Madagascar split from the African continent 88 million years ago and plants and animals evolved that are different than anywhere else in the world.

Although there are variations dependant to various parts of

Madagascar, the climate is generally quite warm throughout

the year because of its position relative to the equator and

because of the kinds of ocean currents its surrounded by.

Being located below the equator, Madagascar has its summers

from November to March and winters from May to October.

Because of how Madagascar split from the African content 88 million years ago, Madagascar is home to many organisms that aren't found anywhere else in the world. This makes Madagascar very unique and a hotspot for studying ecology. Approximately 90% of all plant and animal species found in Madagascar are "endemic" meaning they are found only in Madagascar and nowhere else in the world.

More than 80 percent of Madagascar's 14,883 plant species are found nowhere else in the world, including five plant families. One of these five, the Didiereaceae family, composed of four genera and 11 species, is limited to the spiny forests of southwestern Madagascar. Madagascar is also host to 6 of 9 types of Baobab trees in the world and its "Avenue of the Baobabs" one of Madagascar's most prominent tourist attractions.

Lemurs are primates that look like an animal in between a dog, a cat and a squirrel

that have incredibly unique and exciting behaviors that include singing like a whale.

There are more than thirty species of lemurs in Madagascar today that vary in size

from the 25 grams pygmy lemur to the largest Indri Lemur weighing more than 12 kgs.

Lemurs are one of the most threatened animals in the whole planet and according to

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, 22 species of lemurs are critically endangered,

48 are endangered, while 20 are vulnerable.

The fossa inhabits the forests of Madagascar and are close relatives of the mongoose.

They grow to a length of 6 ft (1.8 m) from the tail to the nose and weigh up to 26

pounds (12 kgs). The animal has a slender body and appears more like a cat with

little resemblance to their relative mongoose. The fossa uses it long tail like a

tightrope walking pole to move swiftly through trees.

The panther chameleon is native to Madagascar and has been introduced to other

islands in the surroundings. It is one of the most colorful with widest color

variations of all the chameleons, they are also larger and the most sought after by

reptile keepers and traders. Like other Chameleons, panther chameleon has a bony

extension on the rear part of its head called the casque. It hunts and traps its pray

using its extensile tongue that has specialized muscles that propels the tongue to

snare by use of sticky mucus and vacuum created by the muscles at the tip of the tongue.

Tomato frogs are found only in Madagascar, mainly in the northwestern region of the

island and are chiefly terrestrial, living in the forested areas. Due to

deforestation, their habitat has been destroyed but seemingly they adapt well to the

cultivated areas, and they are common in gardens. They are brightly colored and ooze

off some white sticky mucus when threatened, though they are not toxic, they are

irritating to the mucous membrane.

The colors used in the flag represent the tradition, history, and culture of the

country. The Merina Kingdom of Madagascar that ruled over the region prior to

colonization by France used red and white as the traditional colors. These two colors

were used in the flag of Queen Ranavalona III, one of the monarchs of the Merina

kingdom. Thus, the use of these colors in the present-day flag of the country

represents the nation’s history and the ethnic origin of the Malagasy people who

arrived from southeast Asia. The colors are thus shared with the flag of Indonesia.

The green color used in the flag represents the Hova people of the country who are

the biggest class of peasant commoners. The Hova community is well-known for its

important role in the independence movement of Madagascar.

The national seal of Madagascar was adopted in 1998. It contains a red map of the

island set in a white circle with the head of a red Zebu below. Green and red rays

emanate above the white disc, representative of the sun. Above the red and green rays

are the Malagasy words REPOBLIKAN'I MADAGASIKARA (Republic of Madagascar). On the

lower half of the circle is the Ravenala (Madagascar plant) and the motto:

TANINDRAZANA - FAHAFAHANA - FANDROSOANA ("Homeland - Liberty - Development")

Madagascar's financial sector is made up of 11 banks and several financial

establishments and micro-finance institutions. Its currency has fairly stabilized

over the last ten years indicating good tidings ahead. The official currency of

Madagascar is called Ariary. It has the ISO standard code of MGA and is identified by

the symbol “Ar.” The currency is subdivided into 5 iraimbilanja and is one of the two

non-decimal currencies in circulation in the world today with the other being the

Mauritanian ouguiya. The currency’s name was derived from pre-colonial currency,

silver dollar. Iraimbilanja literally translates to “one iron weight” named after

fifth worth of an ariary old coin. Malagasy Ariary replaced the franc as Madagascar’s

official currency on January 1, 2005.

The Malagasy language is of Malayo-Polynesian origin and is generally spoken

throughout the island. The numerous dialects of Malagasy, which are generally

mutually intelligible, can be clustered under one of two subgroups: eastern Malagasy,

spoken along the eastern forests and highlands including the Merina dialect of

Antananarivo, and western Malagasy, spoken across the western coastal plains.

French became the official language during the colonial period, when Madagascar came

under the authority of France. In the first national Constitution of 1958, Malagasy

and French were named the official languages of the Malagasy Republic. Madagascar is

a francophone country, and French is mostly spoken as a second language among the

educated population and used for international communication.

In 2018, the population of Madagascar was estimated at 26 million, up from 2.2

million in 1900. The annual population growth rate in Madagascar was approximately

2.9 percent in 2009. Approximately 42.5 percent of the population is younger than 15

years of age, while 54.5 percent are between the ages of 15 and 64. Those aged 65 and

older form 3 percent of the total population. Only two general censuses, in 1975 and

1993, have been carried out after independence. The most densely populated regions of

the island are the eastern highlands and the eastern coast, contrasting most

dramatically with the sparsely populated western plains.

At 592,800 square kilometres (228,900 sq mi), Madagascar is the world's 47th largest

country, the 2nd largest island country and the fourth-largest island. The country

lies mostly between latitudes 12°S and 26°S, and longitudes 43°E and 51°E.

Neighboring islands include the French territory of Réunion and the country of

Mauritius to the east, as well as the state of Comoros and the French territory of

Mayotte to the north west. The nearest mainland state is Mozambique, located to the west.

Offset Time Zone Abbreviation & Name Example City Current Time

UTC +3 EAT Eastern Africa Time Antananarivo

Climate

Madagascar has a tropical maritime climate that is influenced by altitude, the monsoons and proximity to the sea. The highlands have a temperate climate with warm, rainy weather from mid-September to April and cooler temperatures from May to early September.

WINTER/DRY SEASON

During the dry winter months of April through early September, the days are warm, but

the nights can become very cold! Although it is the dryer season, you can expect some

rainfall during the beginning of our itinerary when we explore the rain forests of the east coast.

Many travelers think that, because they are traveling to Africa, it will most likely

be warm. This is not the case at night and early morning from May through September—

particularly in June, July and August. The nights and early mornings can be chilly

(possibly near freezing), so we recommend bringing warm layers you can “peel” off as

it warms up throughout the day. A warm jacket or fleece pullover is perfect.

SUMMER/GREEN SEASON

Late September through April is a much warmer period, and you will need fewer warm

clothes, although you can still expect cooler temperatures in Ranomafana and

Andasibe-Mantadia at night and early in the morning. We still recommend layers during

this time.

REGIONAL CLIMATE DIFFERENCES

As part of the Hauts-Plateaux, Andasibe-Mantadia and Ranomafana are cooler than other

parts of the country, and the forest is humid, damp and under a thick overhead canopy

that shades the forest floor.

Isalo National Park is typically sunny, hot and dry during our walks and pleasant in

the evenings (it can even be quite hot at night in October and November). Zombitse-

Vohibasia National Park on the west coast is drier than either the east coast or the

central highlands because the trade winds lose their humidity by the time they reach

this region. The southwest and the extreme south are semidesert.

Anjajavy, nestled along the Mozambican Channel, is not as dry, and the summer months

can be very hot, possibly reaching into the 100s°F.

Sunscreen, a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses and lightweight clothing are essential for

the second half of this adventure.

East coast

The east coast consists of a narrow band of lowlands about fifty kilometers wide,

formed from the sedimentation of alluvial soils, and an intermediate zone composed of

steep bluffs alternating with ravines bordering an escarpment of about 500 metres

(1,640 ft) in elevation, which gives access to the Central Highlands. The coastal

region roughly from north of Baie d'Antongil, the most prominent feature on the

Masoala Peninsula, to the far north of the island. The coastline is straight, with

the exception of a bay, offering less in the way of natural harbors than the west

coast.

Tsaratanana Massif

The Tsaratanana Massif region at the north end of the island contains, at 2,880

metres, the highest point on the island. Further north is the Montagne d'Ambre, which

is of volcanic origin. The coastline is deeply indented; two prominent features are

the natural harbor at Antsiranana, just south of the Cap d'Ambre, and the large

island of Nosy Be to the west. The mountainous topography of the Tsaratanana Massif

limits the potential of the port at Antsiranana by impeding the flow of traffic from

other parts of the island.

The Central Highlands, which range from 800 to 1,800m in altitude, contain a wide

variety of topographies: rounded and eroded hills, massive granite outcrops, extinct

volcanoes, eroded peneplains, and alluvial plains and marshes, which have been

converted into irrigated rice fields. The Central Highlands extend from the

Tsaratanana Massif in the north to the Ivakoany Massif in the south. They are defined

rather clearly by the escarpments along the east coast, and they slope gently to the

west coast.

The west coast, composed of sedimentary formations, is more indented than the east

coast, thus offering a number of harbors sheltered from cyclones, such as the harbor

at Mahajanga. Deep bays and well-protected harbors have attracted explorers, traders,

and pirates from Europe, Africa, and the Middle East since ancient times; thus, the

area has served as an important bridge between Madagascar and the outside world.

Silting up of harbors on this coast, caused by sediment from the high levels

erosion suffered inland in Madagascar, is a major problem.

The southwest is bordered on the east by the Ivakoany Massif and on the north by the

Isala Roiniforme Massif. It includes two regions along the south coast, the Mahafaly

Plateau and the desert region occupied by the Antandroy people.

Antananarivo, also known by its colonial shorthand form ‘Tana’, is the capital and

largest city of Madagascar. The administrative area of the city, known as

Antananarivo-Renivohitra ("Antananarivo-Mother Hill" or "Antananarivo-Capital"), is

the capital of Analamanga region. The city sits at 1,280 m (4,199 ft) above sea level

in the center of the island, the highest national capital by elevation among the

island countries. It has been the country's largest population center since at least

the 18th century. The presidency, National Assembly, Senate and Supreme Court are

located there, as are 21 diplomatic missions and the headquarters of many national

and international businesses and NGOs. It has more universities, nightclubs, art

venues, and medical services than any city on the island. Several national and local

sports teams, including the championship-winning national rugby team, the Makis are

based here.