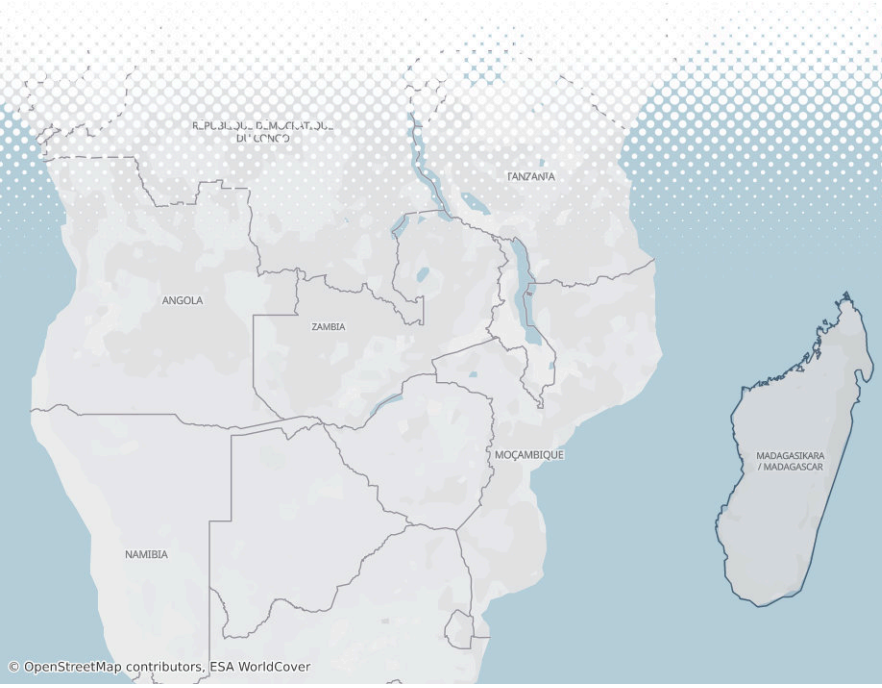


Madagascar

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Madagascar is the world's fourth-largest island, about 400 km off the coast of southeast Africa. It split from other land masses millions of years ago. Because of this, most of its plants and animals live nowhere else on Earth. The best known are the **lemurs**, but you will also see chameleons, baobab trees and spiny forests. The landscapes change fast: rainforest in the east, dry forest and limestone *tsingy* in the west, red highlands in the middle and desert-like country in the south.

The island suits travelers who come for nature and wildlife, and who accept slow travel. Distances are long, roads are often poor, and the local saying *mora mora* ("slowly, slowly") describes the pace well. The dry season, from about April to November, is the easiest time to travel. Most first-time visitors pick one or two regions rather than trying to see everything. The classic route follows the highlands south from the capital to Isalo and the southwest coast. The beaches of Nosy Be in the north are an easy add-on.

Money & payments

Madagascar is mainly a **cash economy**. Outside top hotels, tour agencies and some restaurants in the capital and on Nosy Be, you will pay in cash. Visa cards work at more ATMs than Mastercard. ATMs exist in the capital and larger towns, but not in villages or national parks. Withdraw enough before you leave a city.

- Bring euros or US dollars in clean, recent notes. You can exchange them at the airport, at banks and at official exchange offices.
- The highest note is small in value, so you will carry thick bundles of cash. Keep it split between bags.
- Card payments, where accepted, often carry a surcharge of a few percent.
- Budget for park entry fees, guides and a driver. These are usually the largest costs of a trip, larger than food or hotels.

Currency

CURRENCY	1 MGA	1 MGA
MGA	**0.000198 EUR**	**0.000218 USD**
	1 EUR = 5,052.55 MGA	1 USD = 4,584.43 MGA

Cash preferred

Typical costs

Rough prices in touristic areas, per person

Hotel (double room, per night) mid-range hotel, double room	120,000 – 300,000 MGA €24 – €59
Dinner (mid-range restaurant) tourist restaurant, per person	40,000 – 90,000 MGA €8 – €18
Inexpensive meal meal at a local hotely	8,000 – 20,000 MGA €2 – €4
Local beer large THB	5,000 – 10,000 MGA €1 – €2
Coffee	2,000 – 8,000 MGA €0 – €2
Water 1.5 l bottle	2,000 – 4,000 MGA €0 – €1

Tipping

Tipping is not part of traditional Malagasy culture, but it is now expected in tourism. Guides and drivers earn low salaries, and tips make up an important part of their income.

- **Park and local guides**: a tip at the end of the walk is expected.
- **Drivers**: on a multi-day tour, tip at the end of the trip, not per day.
- **Restaurants**: leave around 5–10 % in tourist restaurants. In small local eateries (*hotely*), rounding up is enough.
- **Porters and hotel staff**: a small amount per service is welcome.

Tip in ariary rather than foreign coins, which cannot be exchanged.

Tour guide at the end of each walk or tour	Expected
Restaurant 5–10 % in tourist restaurants	Optional
Taxi agree the fare first	Not customary
Hotel small amount for porters	Optional
Bar	Not customary

Electricity

Most sockets take European round-pin plugs, so most European chargers work without an adapter. Power cuts are common, even in the capital, and many lodges in parks run on generators or solar power only in the evening.

ELECTRICITY



Type C

ELECTRICITY



Type E

ELECTRICITY



Type J

ELECTRICITY



Type K

220 V · 50 Hz

Language

Malagasy and French are the official languages. French is widely used in hotels, restaurants, banks and on signs. English is spoken in top hotels and by many trained park guides, but rarely elsewhere. A few words of French will help a lot. A few words of Malagasy, such as *salama* (hello) and *misaotra* (thank you), are always welcome.

Malagasy place names are long, but the rules are simple: the final vowel is often almost silent. Antananarivo is usually shortened to **Tana**.

Useful phrases

MG

Hello	Salama sa-LAHM
Thank you	Misaotra mee-SOW-tch
Goodbye	Veloma ve-LOOM
Yes	Eny EN
No	Tsia TSEE
How much?	Ohatrinona? oo-a-TCHEE-noon
Excuse me	Azafady a-za-FAHD

FR

Hello	Bonjour
Thank you	Merci
Please	S'il vous plaît
How much?	C'est combien ?
Where is...?	Où est... ?

Staying connected

- **SIM cards**: Yas (formerly Telma), Orange and Airtel sell prepaid SIM cards at the airport and in town shops. You need your original passport to register a SIM.
- **Coverage**: mobile data works in cities and along main roads. In national parks, on remote coasts and on long drives in the west and south, expect no signal for hours.
- **Mobile money**: locals pay with mobile money services such as MVola and Orange Money. Visitors rarely need them.

Safety & emergencies

Most visits to Madagascar pass without problems, but the country needs more care than many destinations.

- **Petty theft**: pickpocketing and bag snatching are common in Antananarivo, especially in markets, crowds and around Analakely. Carry little, and keep your phone out of sight on the street.
- **After dark**: do not walk in cities at night. Use a taxi arranged by your hotel.
- **Roads at night**: avoid travel between towns after dark. Roads are unlit, and armed robberies on some highways happen at night.
- **Remote areas**: parts of the south and west see cattle-raider (*dahalo*) violence. Travel there with a reputable local operator.
- **Politics**: the military took power in October 2025, and a transition period is ongoing. Avoid demonstrations and large gatherings, and follow local news.
- **Cyclones**: the cyclone season runs from November to April, with most storms between January and March. Storms can close roads and cancel flights.

Check your government's current travel advice before you go.

Emergency numbers

POLICE	AMBULANCE	FIRE BRIGADE
117	124	118

Health

Health preparation matters more here than in most destinations. See a travel clinic at least eight weeks before you leave.

- **Tap water**: do not drink it. Use bottled or filtered water, also for brushing teeth.
- **Malaria**: there is a risk across most of the island, highest on the coasts. Ask your doctor about antimalarial tablets, and use insect repellent and a mosquito net.
- **Vaccinations**: hepatitis A and typhoid are usually recommended. You need a yellow fever certificate only if you arrive from a country with yellow fever risk.
- **Plague**: small outbreaks happen most years, mainly in rural highland areas. The risk to tourists is very low.
- **Medical care**: the best clinics are in Antananarivo, and care elsewhere is basic. Serious cases often need evacuation to Réunion, Mauritius or South Africa, so take travel insurance that covers medical evacuation.
- **Pharmacies**: towns have pharmacies, often with French medicine brands. Bring your own supply of any prescription medicine.

Visas & entry

Almost all visitors need a visa or an entry permit, but it is simple to get. Travelers of almost every nationality can apply for an e-visa online before the trip, or buy a visa on arrival at Antananarivo airport and other international airports. Tourist visas are issued for 15, 30, 60 or 90 days. The fee depends on the length of stay.

- Your passport should be valid for at least six months after arrival and have blank pages.
- Carry proof of onward or return travel.
- If you buy the visa on arrival, bring the fee in cash, in euros, US dollars or ariary.

> Visa and entry requirements change frequently. Verify current requirements with the official immigration authority or your country's embassy before travel.

Etiquette

- **Fady (taboos)**: each region and village has its own taboos, called *fady*. Some forbid certain foods, others forbid touching sacred sites. Ask your guide what applies before you enter a village or a sacred place.
- **Pointing**: do not point at graves or tombs with a straight finger. Locals point with a bent finger.
- **Tombs and ancestors**: ancestors are very important in Malagasy culture. Treat tombs with respect and do not photograph them without permission. In the highlands, families hold *famadihana* ceremonies, where they rewrap the remains of ancestors. You may only attend by invitation.
- **Photos**: ask before you photograph people, especially in rural areas.
- **Greetings**: a handshake and *salama* or *bonjour* is normal. Take time to greet people before you ask a question.
- **Bargaining**: bargaining is normal at markets and with handicraft sellers. Stay friendly and keep it light.
- **Gifts**: do not hand out sweets or money to children. If you want to help, give school supplies to a teacher or a local organisation.

Holidays & opening hours

On public holidays, government offices and banks close, and many shops close too. Around Independence Day, towns hold parades and fireworks, and transport gets busy.

Public holidays

Jan 1	New Year's Day
Mar 29	Martyrs' Day
May 1	Labour Day
Jun 26	Independence Day
Aug 15	Assumption Day
Nov 1	All Saints' Day
Dec 25	Christmas Day
movable — May	Ascension Day
movable — Mar/Apr	Easter Monday
movable — May/Jun	Whit Monday

Shops and offices usually open from around 8:00 to 17:00. Many close for a long lunch break, often from 12:00 to 14:00. On Sundays most shops close, while markets are busiest on weekday mornings.

Getting around

Distances are long and roads are slow, so plan fewer stops than a map suggests. Most visitors travel with a **private car and driver**, booked through a local agency or their hotel.

- **By air**: domestic flights link Antananarivo with Nosy Be, Toamasina, Mahajanga, Morondava, Toliara, Diego Suarez, Fort-Dauphin and Île Sainte-Marie. Flights save days of driving, but schedules change often and delays are common. Reconfirm your flight a day before. The national carrier, Madagascar Airlines, runs most domestic routes.
- **In national parks**: you must visit with a licensed local guide, whom you hire at the park entrance.
- **By car with driver**: the most practical way to follow the RN7 south through the highlands, or to reach the west coast. Rental cars without a driver are rare.
- **By minibus**: shared minibuses called *taxi-brousse* connect almost every town. They are very cheap but slow, crowded and leave when full. Premium minibus companies run more comfortable services on the main routes, with fixed departure times.
- **By train**: the only passenger line most visitors use runs between Fianarantsoa and Manakara. It is a slow, scenic trip, but services are irregular and often cancelled.
- **By boat**: ferries and speedboats connect the mainland with Nosy Be (from Ankify) and Île Sainte-Marie (from Soanierana-Ivongo). Check the sea conditions before you go.
- **In towns**: taxis have no meters, so agree on the fare before you get in. In smaller towns, *tuk-tuks* and rickshaws (*pousse-pousse* or *cyclo-pousse*) are common.

Driving

Few visitors drive themselves in Madagascar, and hiring a car with a driver is usually the better choice.

- **Roads**: only some national roads are paved, and even these have deep potholes. Many roads in the west become impassable in the rainy season (roughly December to March). A 4×4 is essential for routes such as the road to Tsingy de Bemaraha National Park.
- **Hazards**: expect zebu cattle, carts, cyclists and people walking on the road, and plan to arrive before dark.
- **Checkpoints**: police and gendarmerie checkpoints are frequent. Keep your passport, driving licence and car papers ready.
- **Licence**: bring an International Driving Permit together with your national licence.
- **Fuel**: stations are attended, and you pay in cash. Petrol is sold as *essence* or *sans plomb* and diesel as *gasoil*. Fill up in towns, because stations are far apart in rural areas.
- **Electric vehicles**: there is practically no public charging network.

URBAN	RURAL	PETROL	DIESEL
50 km/h	80 km/h	Sans plomb, Essence	Gasoil

Drive on the right

No motorway vignette needed

No toll roads are in operation. The Antananarivo–Toamasina motorway (AR1), still under construction, will charge tolls when it opens.

Food & drink

Rice (*vary*) is the center of every Malagasy meal, often eaten three times a day. It comes with a side dish called *laoka*: meat, fish or beans, usually with greens. The national dish is *romazava*, a light beef stew with leafy greens. Other favorites are *ravitoto* (pounded cassava leaves with pork) and *henakisoa sy voanjobory* (pork with Bambara groundnuts). Zebu beef appears on almost every menu, and the coasts serve excellent seafood.

For breakfast, locals eat *vary sosoa* (soft rice) or *mofo gasy*, small rice cakes sold at street stalls. Street snacks include *sambos* (samosas), *koba* (a sweet cake of rice flour, banana and peanuts) and fresh tropical fruit. Most locals eat at a *hotely*, a small, cheap eatery with a short menu. Hotels and tourist restaurants also cook French dishes.

The local beer is THB (Three Horses Beer). *Rhum arrangé*, rum soaked with fruit, vanilla or spices, is served almost everywhere. After a meal you may be offered *ranovola*, water boiled in the pot with toasted rice. Madagascar is also famous for its **vanilla**, used in both sweet and savory dishes.

What to eat & drink

BREAKFAST

Mofo gasy · mofo gasy
Small sweet rice-flour cakes from street stalls.

Vary sosoa · vary sosoa
Soft, watery rice, often with a small side dish.

DINNER

Zebu steak
Grilled beef from the humped zebu cattle.

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Sambos
Fried samosa-style pastries with meat or vegetables.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Koba · koba
Cake of rice flour, banana and peanuts, steamed in banana leaves.

DRINKS

THB
Three Horses Beer, the national lager.

Rhum arrangé
Rum infused with fruit, vanilla or spices.

Ranovola · ranovola
Water boiled with toasted rice from the pot.

SIGNATURE DISHES

Romazava · romazava
Beef stew with leafy greens, eaten with rice.

Ravitoto · ravitoto sy henakisoa
Pounded cassava leaves cooked with pork.

Henakisoa sy voanjobory · henakisoa sy voanjobory
Pork with Bambara groundnuts.

Madagascar – Plan Your Trip
Turn the places from this guide into a real itinerary, with smart routing, time estimates, and everything you need for a perfect trip.
3M+ downloads · 4.6 stars · 15 years of trip planning
App Store · Google Play
Scan to download the app

Where to explore

Highlands and the capital

Antananarivo, the capital, sits on hills in the center of the island. Most trips start here. The hilltop Queen's Palace looks over the city, and the royal hill of Rova d'Ambohimanga is an easy half-day trip. East of the capital, Parc National d'Andasibe-Mantadia is the easiest place to hear the loud call of the indri, the largest lemur. South along the RN7, Antsirabe is a calm town with colonial buildings and rickshaws. Ambositra is known for Zafimaniry wood carving. Ranomafana National Park protects mountain rainforest with golden bamboo lemurs.

West coast

Morondava is the base for the Avenue of the Baobabs and for trips north to Tsingy de Bemaraha National Park, famous for its limestone pinnacles. South of Morondava, Kirindy Mitea National Park protects dry forest and baobabs. Further north, Mahajanga is a lively port town with a seafront promenade.

South

Near the RN7, Andringitra National Park offers hikes below granite peaks, and Parc National de L'Isalo has sandstone canyons and natural pools. The road ends in Toliara, the gateway to the southwest coast. Popular beach villages include Ifaty to the north of the city and Anakao to the south. Between Isalo and Toliara, Zombitse-Vohibasia National Park is a short stop for birds and lemurs.

East and north

Toamasina is the country's main port and the start of the Pangalanes Canal. Further south, Manakara is the end of the railway from Fianarantsoa. In the far north, Diego Suarez is the base for the rainforest of Parc National de la Montagne d'Ambre and the red Tsingy Rouges. Off the northwest coast, Nosy Be is Madagascar's main beach resort, with boat trips to smaller islands.

Madagascar Essentials

Madagascar's diverse geography ranges from the iconic Grandidier's baobabs of Morondava to the jagged limestone needles of Tsingy de Bemaraha. The island's history is preserved at the Royal Hill of Ambohimanga and the Rova of Antananarivo, the former seat of the Merina Kingdom. Nature reserves like Ranomafana and Andasibe-Mantadia protect numerous lemur species within primary rainforests, while Isalo National Park features dramatic sandstone canyons. In the north, the vibrant red laterite formations of Tsingy Rouges contrast with the high-altitude granite massifs of Andringitra.





A Avenue of the Baobabs

The Avenue of the Baobabs, or Alley of the Baobabs, is a prominent group of Grandidier's baobabs lining the unpaved Road No.8 between...

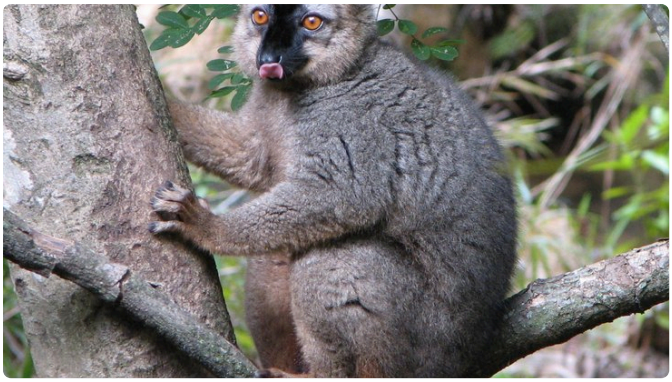
Madagascar (-20.25033, 44.41927)



B Tsingy de Bemaraha Strict Nature Reserve

Tsingy de Bemaraha Strict Nature Reserve is a nature reserve located near the western coast of Madagascar in Melaky Region.

Madagascar (-18.43923, 44.72239)



C Isalo National Park

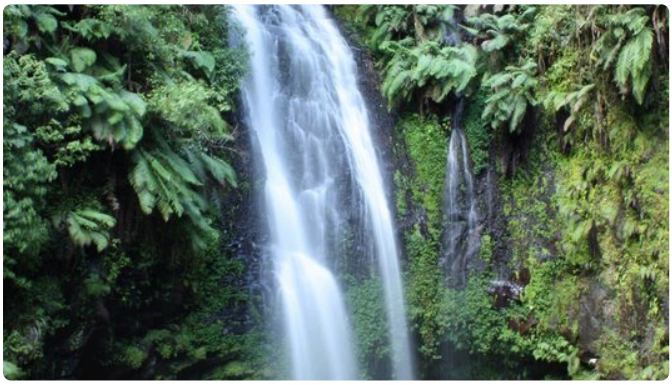
Isalo National Park is a National Park in the Ihorombe Region of Madagascar, in the southwestern corner of the Province of Fianarantsoa.

Madagascar (-22.55822, 45.40007)

D Royal Hill of Ambohimanga

Ambohimanga is a hill and traditional fortified royal settlement in Madagascar, located approximately 24 kilometers northeast of the...

Madagascar (-18.76048, 47.56232)



E Montagne d'Ambre National Park

Montagne d'Ambre National Park is a national park in the Diana Region of northern Madagascar.

Madagascar (-12.61329, 49.15402)



F Masoala National Park

Masoala National Park, in northeast Madagascar, is the largest of the island's protected areas.

Madagascar (-15.51456, 50.12629)



G Ankarafantsika National Park

Ankarafantsika National Park is a national park near Andranofasika in the Boeny Region of Madagascar.

Madagascar (-16.21982, 46.94112)



H National Park Ranomafana

This national park is well-known for its twelve lemur species. High concentration of birds is also present.

Madagascar (-21.23050, 47.40717)



I Andasibe-Mantadia National Park

Andasibe-Mantadia National Park is a 155 square kilometre protected area, located about 150 km east of Antananarivo, consisting principally...

Madagascar (-18.82667, 48.44778)



J Queen's Palace

The Rova of Antananarivo is a royal palace complex in Madagascar that served as the home of the sovereigns of the Kingdom of Imerina in the...

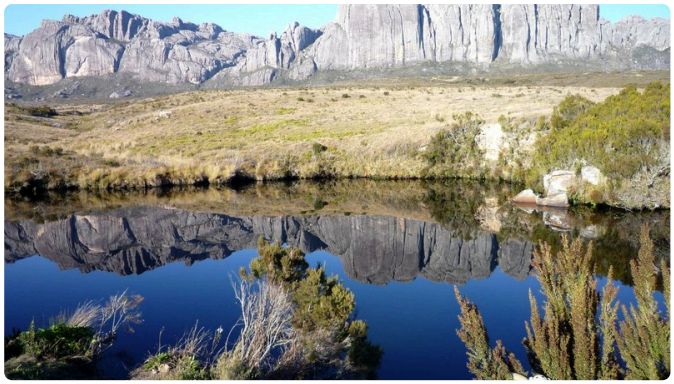
Ramboatiana Street, Madagascar (-18.92342, 47.53220)



K Red Tsingy

These vibrant red rock formations are composed of eroded laterite rather than limestone. Located near the Irodo River, the sharp pillars and canyons were formed by the erosion of sandy soil, creating a unique geological landscape.

Madagascar (-12.63622, 49.49380)



L Andringitra National Park

Andringitra National Park is a national park in the Haute Matsiatra region of Madagascar, 47 kilometres south of Ambalavao.

Madagascar (-22.22809, 46.92525)

Landmarks of Madagascar

Madagascar's landmarks span from the sacred Royal Hill of Ambohimanga, a 500-year-old citadel and UNESCO World Heritage site, to the distinct geological formations of the Tsingy Rouges and Petits Tsingy. The island's biodiversity is showcased at the Arboretum d'Antsokay and the Village des Tortues conservation center. Historical sites include the 1947 uprising monument and the traditional Antaimoro Paper Manufactory, while the Avenue of the Baobabs features ancient Adansonia grandidieri trees reaching up to 30 meters in height.



A Royal Hill of Ambohimanga

Ambohimanga is a hill and traditional fortified royal settlement in Madagascar, located approximately 24 kilometers northeast of the...

Madagascar (-18.76048, 47.56232)



B Red Tsingy

Unique rock formations composed of red laterite, created by the erosion of the Irodo River. Unlike limestone formations, these fragile pinnacles are shaped by oxidized clay and sand.

Madagascar (-12.63622, 49.49380)

C Avenue of the Baobab

A prominent group of Grandidier's baobabs lining the dirt road between Morondava and Belon'i Tsiribihina. These centuries-old trees are endemic to Madagascar and reach heights of 30 meters.

(-20.25535, 44.41422)

D Petits Tsingy

Sharp limestone karst formations located near the entrance of the Tsingy de Bemaraha National Park. The site features a network of walkways and bridges through the jagged pinnacles.

(-19.14121, 44.81294)

E La Fenêtre

A natural sandstone rock formation in Isalo National Park that creates a rectangular opening. It is a known location for viewing the sunset through the stone "window."

(-22.64115, 45.30874)

F Mount Saint Louis

This mountain overlooking the town offers splendid panoramic views. You can imagine how the people watched the Ocean and coming ships.

Madagascar (-25.00807, 46.96522)

G Montagne des Francais

A limestone massif near Antsiranana featuring deciduous dry forests, caves, and several species of endemic baobabs. It contains ruins of colonial-era French military fortifications.

(-12.32610, 49.33631)

H Arboretum d'Antsokay интересный днем

A botanical garden founded in 1980 that preserves over 900 species of plants native to southwest Madagascar, including many endemic succulents and medicinal species.

(-23.41452, 43.75624)

I Emerald Sea

A shallow turquoise lagoon located at the entrance of Diego Suarez Bay. It is separated from the Indian Ocean by a coral reef and a string of small islands.

(-12.17039, 49.36750)



J History of Madagascar

The History of Madagascar started from the ancient supercontinent of Pangaea, containing amongst others the African continent and the...

11A, Madagascar (-19.32452, 48.97932)

K Le Village des Tortues

A conservation and breeding center near Ifaty dedicated to protecting the endangered Radiated and Spider tortoises from poaching and habitat loss.

(-23.12277, 43.61809)

L Antaimoro Paper Manufactory

A traditional workshop in Ambalavao where handmade paper is produced from the bark of the Avoha tree, decorated with fresh flowers according to ancient techniques.

(-21.83026, 46.94174)

M Baobab in Love

Two Adansonia za baobabs that have grown together in a permanent embrace. This natural curiosity is located near the famous Avenue of the Baobabs.

(-20.10386, 44.54919)

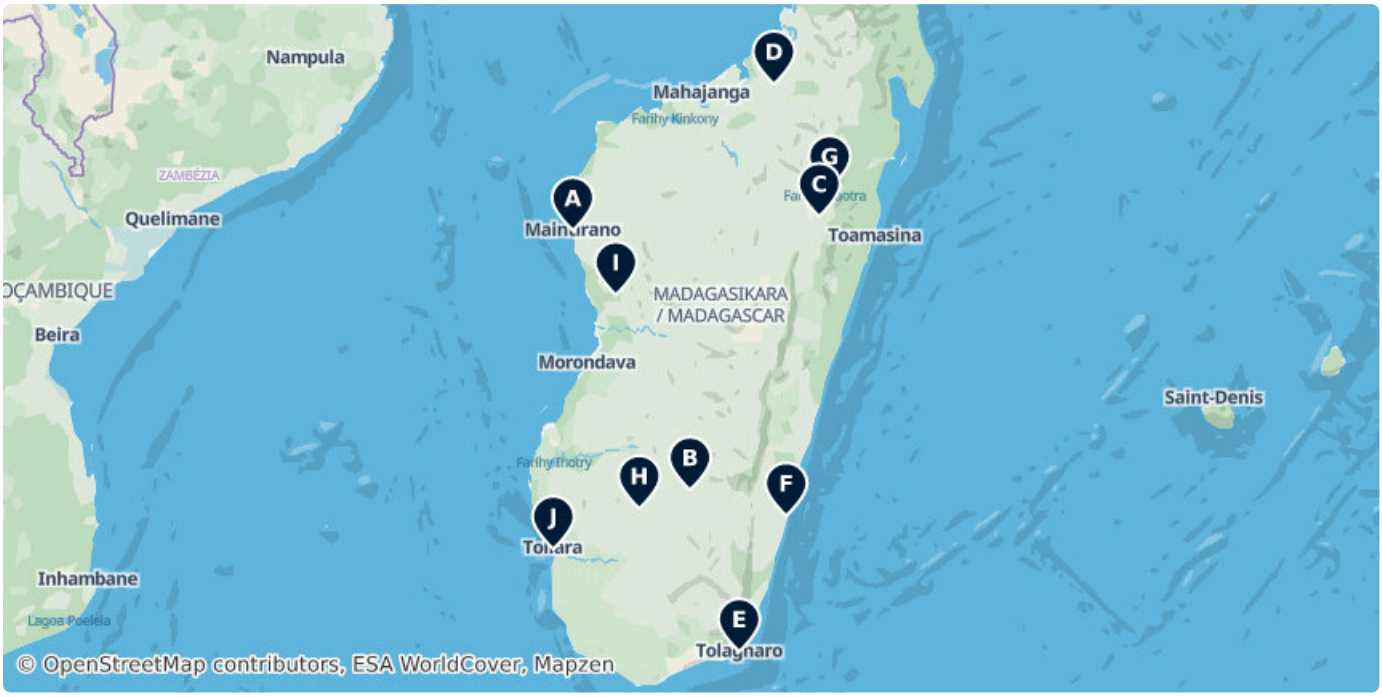
N Mausolée national Andrainarivo

A national monument and burial site in Antananarivo dedicated to significant figures in Madagascar's history.

(-18.91186, 47.54686)

Religious Sites in Madagascar

Madagascar's religious landscape is defined by a blend of colonial-era architecture and local traditions. This collection highlights significant Roman Catholic cathedrals, such as those in Tôlanaro and Ihosy, alongside Protestant temples of the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM). The list also includes the Zoma Mosquée, illustrating the country's diverse spiritual heritage across regions ranging from the western coast of Maintirano to the southeastern shores of Farafangana.



A Cathédrale de l'Assomption

Roman Catholic cathedral serving the Melaky region on Madagascar's western coast.

Madagascar (-18.06072, 44.02916)

B Cathédrale Saint-Vincent de Paul

The seat of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ihosy, located in the Ihorombe region.

Madagascar (-22.39667, 46.11628)

C Cathédrale de la Très Sainte Trinité

The primary Roman Catholic cathedral for the Diocese of Ambatondrazaka in the Alaotra-Mangoro region.

(Unnamed Road), Madagascar (-17.82046, 48.42032)

D Cathédrale Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption

Catholic cathedral serving the Diocese of Port-Bergé in the northern Sofia region.

Madagascar (-15.56526, 47.61413)

E Cathédrale Saint-Vincent-de-Paul

Colonial-era Catholic cathedral located in the coastal town of Tôlanaro, also known as Fort-Dauphin.

Madagascar (-25.03186, 46.99471)

F Cathédrale du Sacré-Cœur de Jésus

Central Roman Catholic cathedral for the Diocese of Farafangana on the southeastern coast.

Madagascar (-22.82101, 47.83318)

G Fjkm Nazareta Vaovao Vohimena

Protestant temple affiliated with the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM).

(-17.35210, 48.60675)

H Zoma Mosquée

Local mosque serving the Muslim community in the town of Sakaraha.

7, Madagascar (-22.70207, 45.21249)

I Fiangonan'i Jesoa Kristy eto Madagasikara Bekopaka Tsingy Famonjena

Protestant FJKM church located in Bekopaka, serving the community near the Tsingy de Bemaraha National Park.

Madagascar (-19.14584, 44.79554)

J ECAR Notre-Dame des Flots

Roman Catholic church situated in the coastal fishing village of Anakao.

(-23.36553, 43.67995)

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