

## Madagascar

Country name	Madagascar
State title	Republic of Madagascar
Name of citizen	Madagascan
Official language	French ( <i>fra</i> ) <sup>1</sup> ; Malagasy ( <i>mlg</i> )
Country name in official languages	Madagasikara ( <i>mlg</i> ); Madagascar ( <i>fra</i> )
State title in official languages	Repoblikan'i Madagasikara ( <i>mlg</i> ); République de Madagascar ( <i>fra</i> )
Script	Roman script
Romanization System	Not required
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	MG/MDG
Capital	Antananarivo
Area / Population	587,000km <sup>2</sup> / 28,812,195 (2023 est.) <sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

Madagascar is the fourth largest island in the world, lying in the Indian Ocean about 400km from Mozambique. Due to its geographical separation, Madagascar's plant and animal life has evolved in isolation and the country is home to many unique species.

Since gaining independence from France in 1960, Madagascar has seen periods of political instability, and in the past few years has additionally experienced drought and food insecurity.

### Geographical names policy

For HMG use, geographical names should be taken from official sources from Madagascar, where these are available.

The national mapping agency is *Foiben-Taosarintanin'i Madagasikara* (FTM), also known as *Institut Géographique et Hydrographique de Madagascar*: <http://www.ftm.mg/> [currently unavailable].

There has in the past been a national names authority, *Komitim-Pirenena Miandraikitra ny Anarantany* (KPMA) or *Comité National des Noms Géographiques*, within this institute, though this has not functioned for some time, with names work being undertaken by the wider Institute staff.

<sup>1</sup> ISO 639 codes are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/madagascar/>

In the absence of freely available official sources, the [Africa Geoportal](#) may be used as a helpful source of geospatial data and names<sup>3</sup>; the US Board on Geographic Names (BGN) [Geographic Names Server](#) can also be used as a source for names<sup>4</sup>.

## **Languages**

Malagasy and French are official languages in Madagascar, Malagasy being spoken by some 99% of the population, with French spoken by about 25% (obviously in most cases as an additional language).

Malagasy is the western-most Austronesian language and is most closely related to languages spoken in Malaysia and Indonesia (some 7000km east) and further east into the Pacific, though over the past 1000 years trading with Africa, it also now incorporates many loan words from Bantu languages and Arabic.

Many government and official sources continue to be written in French, rather than Malagasy, and official mapping sources may also be in French. Either language form of place names may be used on HMG products, though if two language variants are seen, it is recommended that the Malagasy form take precedence. It is notable that administrative division names are more frequently seen in their Malagasy form, and it is these forms that appear in the administrative divisions tables below.

## **Inventory of Characters (and their Unicode encodings)**<sup>5</sup>

The **Malagasy** alphabet has 21 letters (all but c, q, u, w and x from the English alphabet). Some letters can occur with diacritical marks though these are often not written. Specifically: ◌́ (grave accent: Unicode 0300) indicates the stressed syllable in a word (usually only used for disambiguation); ◌͈ (combining dieresis Unicode 0308) is sometimes used for the velar nasal [ŋ/ in the International Phonetic Alphabet] (e.g. this diacritic appears in the administrative centre name Antsirañana).

Also, more occasionally, ◌́ (acute accent: Unicode 0301) may also be seen in French-style orthography or some dialectal forms; ◌̂ (circumflex: Unicode 0302) is sometimes used in foreign loan words; ñ (Unicode 00F1) may sometimes appear in place of ñ.

<sup>3</sup> This is a source collated from multiple sources, including Esri, organisations working in Africa and crowdsourced information. It should be used as a supplementary reference.

<sup>4</sup> Given that Madagascar's colonial period ended over 60 years ago, and that French IGN maps will be in French rather than the more Malagasy style of current place names, colonial era French sources should not be used.

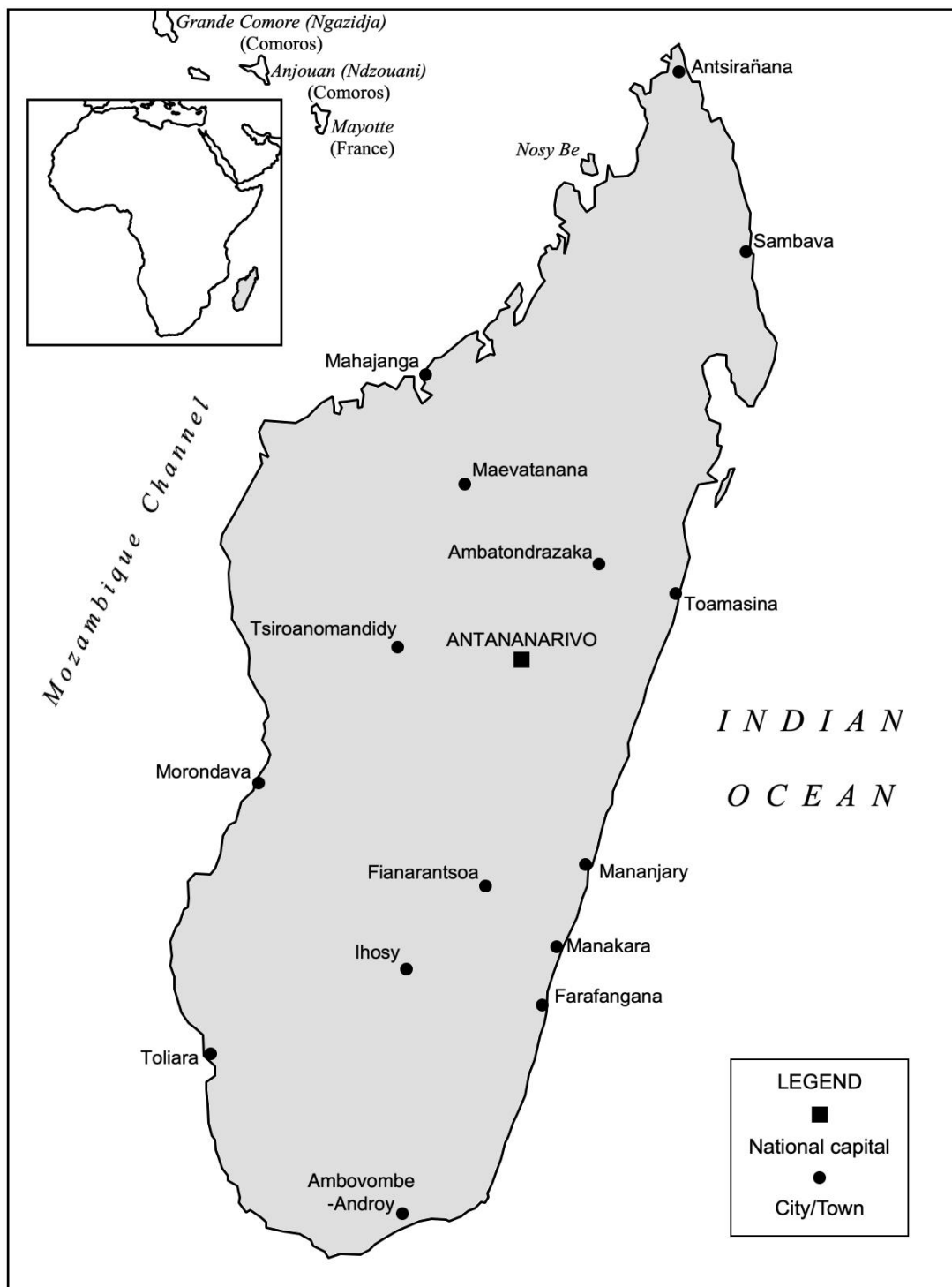
<sup>5</sup> See [www.unicode.org](http://www.unicode.org)

**French** contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

Upper-case character	Unicode encoding	Lower-case character	Unicode encoding
À	00C0	à	00E0
Â	00C2	â	00E2
Ç	00C7	ç	00E7
È	00C8	è	00E8
É	00C9	é	00E9
Ê	00CA	ê	00EA
Ë	00CB	ë	00EB
Î	00CE	î	00EE
Ï	00CF	ï	00EF
Ô	00D4	ô	00F4
Œ	0152	œ	0153
Ù	00D9	ù	00F9
Û	00DB	û	00FB
Ü	00DC	ü	00FC
Ÿ <sup>6</sup>	0178	ÿ	00FF

<sup>6</sup> Rarely encountered.

Map of Madagascar



Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

## Administrative structure

Madagascar is composed of 6 provinces (province (*fra*)/faritany (*mlg*)) at the first-order administrative level.

It is of note that in 2007 Madagascar announced a plan to adopt a new structure of either 22 or 23 regions to replace the provinces. This intention was officially confirmed a number of times subsequently, but there has as yet been little verification, and it remains unclear whether the provinces have indeed been disbanded<sup>7</sup>. Initial reports differed on the proposal being 22 or 23 regions, most recently these have settled to comprise 23 shown in the second table below.

Since there is little evidence that the provinces no longer have any function, PCGN recommends for HMG purposes that the province structure continue to be shown. Though, notably, the data supplied by Madagascar for the UN Second Administrative Level Boundaries (SALB) project has shown the region structure as the first-order level since 2007: <https://salb.un.org/en/data/mdg> and the list of regions is shown for information below the first table.

Note that both provinces and regions shown below have been shown in their Malagasy forms, where these differ from French, as it is these forms that are most usually seen (though see footnote 6).

### Provinces

Province	ISO 3166-2 code	Administrative centre	Location of centre
Antananarivo	MG-T	Antananarivo	18°55′00″S 47°31′00″E
Antsiranana	MG-D	Antsiranana	12°17′03″S 49°17′29″E
Fianarantsoa	MG-F	Fianarantsoa	21°26′52″S 47°05′18″E
Mahajanga	MG-M	Mahajanga	15°42′50″S 46°18′57″E
Toamasina	MG-A	Toamasina <sup>8</sup>	18°09′05″S 49°24′29″E
Toliara	MG-U	Toliara <sup>9</sup>	23°21′10″S 43°40′12″E

### Regions

Region	Region centre	Parent Province	Code used by UN
Alaotra Mangoro	Ambatondrazaka	Toamasina	MDG033
Amoron'i Mania	Ambositra	Fianarantsoa	MDG031
Analamanga	Antananarivo	Antananarivo	MDG029

<sup>7</sup> Though the regions were agreed in 2007, the 2010 [Constitution](#) describes the Provinces as the first-order divisions.

<sup>8</sup> Sometimes seen as Tamatave in French sources.

<sup>9</sup> Sometimes seen as Tuléar in French sources.

<i>Region</i>	<i>Region centre</i>	<i>Parent Province</i>	<i>Code used by UN</i>
Analajirofo	Fenoarivo Atsinanana <sup>10</sup>	Toamasina	MDG033
Androy	Ambovombe-Androy <sup>11</sup>	Toliara	MDG034
Anosy	Taolagnaro <sup>12</sup>	Toliara	MDG034
Atsimo Andrefana	Toliara <sup>9</sup>	Toliara	MDG034
Atsimo Atsinanana	Farafangana	Fianarantsoa	MDG031
Atsinanana	Toamasina <sup>8</sup>	Toamasina	MDG033
Betsiboka	Maevatanana	Mahajanga	MDG032
Boeny	Mahajanga	Mahajanga	MDG032
Bongolava	Tsiroanomandidy	Antananarivo	MDG029
Diana	Antsiranana	Antsiranana	MDG030
Fitovinany	Manakara	Fianarantsoa	MDG031
Matsiatra Ambony <sup>13</sup>	Fianarantsoa	Fianarantsoa	MDG031
Ihorombe	Ihosy	Fianarantsoa	MDG031
Itasy	Miarinarivo	Antananarivo	MDG029
Melaky	Maintirano	Mahajanga	MDG032
Menabe	Morondava	Toliara	MDG034
Sava	Sambava	Antsiranana	MDG030
Sofia	Antsohihy	Mahajanga	MDG032
Vakinankaratra	Antsirabe	Antananarivo	MDG029
Vatovavy	Mananjary	Fianarantsoa	MDG031

<sup>10</sup> Also seen with its French name, Fénérive-Est.

<sup>11</sup> Sometimes just Ambovombe.

<sup>12</sup> May also be seen Fort-Dauphin in French sources. Malagasy form with diacritical marks may also be seen: Tôlañaro.

<sup>13</sup> Note that this region name has been supplied in its French form to the UN SALB project (Haute-Matsiara).

## Other Significant Locations

PCGN Recommended Name <sup>14</sup>	Variant Names/Spellings	Location	Feature Type
Sofia		15°26'09"S 47°19'36"E	River
Betsiboka		15°48'55"S 46°16'13"E	River
Onilahy		23°34'05"S 43°45'28"E	River
Mangoky		21°17'43"S 43°30'55"E	River
Farihin' Alaotra	Lac Alaotra ( <i>fra</i> )	17°30'00"S 48°30'00"E	Lake
Maromokotro		14°01'15"S 48°58'00"E	Mountain – Madagascar's high point (2876m)
Ankaratra		19°25'00"S 47°12'00"E	Mountain range
Andringitra		22°09'24"S 46°52'32"E	Mountain range
Tsaratanana	Massif du Tsaratanana ( <i>fra</i> )	13°50'00"S 40°00'00"E	Mountain range

## Useful references

- Africa Geoportal: <https://www.africageoportal.com/>
- BBC Country Profile: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13861843>
- CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/madagascar/>
- Ethnologue: [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com) (for information on languages)
- FCDO Geographical Names Index (GNI):  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/geographical-names-and-information>
- FCDO Travel Advice: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/madagascar>
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#iso:code:3166:MG>
- Madagascar Institut National de la Statistique: <https://www.instat.mg/>
- Omniglot: [www.omniglot.com](http://www.omniglot.com) (for information on languages and scripts)
- PCGN Country Names list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names>
- Unicode: [www.unicode.org](http://www.unicode.org)
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server: [GNS Search & Download WebApp \(nga.mil\)](https://www.nga.mil)

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<sup>14</sup> PCGN usually recommends conventional English names for international features, unless national variants are specifically required, or the relevant countries share an official language.