



Madagascar Guidebook





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meet Nathan Jansen, our
Managing Director



Welcome to Mercy Ships - we're grateful you'll be serving alongside us, joining our mission to bring hope and healing to those who need it most. We are thrilled to serve Madagascar again.

This guide has country specific details and is an addendum to the primary **Volunteer Guidebook**. Within this guide, you'll find all the details you need to prepare for your time with us in Madagascar. We're so excited for you to join, and we hope you are too!

Madagascar Country Information

Madagascar is an island country located on the eastern coast of Africa. Madagascar was one of the last major habitable landmasses on earth settled by humans and is the fourth largest island in the world. The island was conquered by the French in 1896 who made it a colony. Independence was regained in 1960.

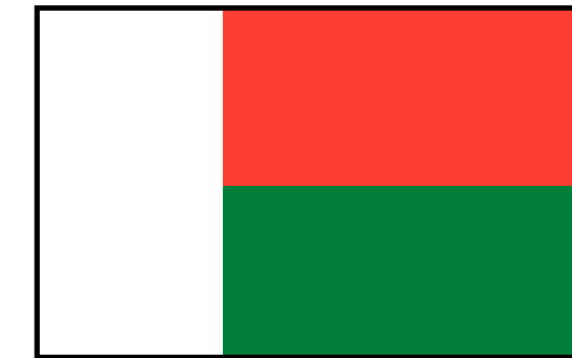
While the Malagasy are a tolerant people, it is also a fairly conservative nation, and the way we dress and act should show respect to our host country.

Key Details

Capital City:	Antananarivo (Tana)
Currency:	Ariary (MGA)
Population:	28.8 million
Population under age 25:	60%
Primary religions:	Indigenous Beliefs (52%), Christian (41%), Muslim (7%)
Primary languages:	French and Malagasy
Physicians per 1,000 people:	0.2



Field Service



Scheduled Dates:

May-December 2026.

Planned Programmatic Specialties:

- Orthopedic
- General
- Maxillofacial & ENT
- Pediatrics
- Ophthalmic
- Reconstructive Plastics
- Gynecology

Medical Educational Sponsorship

What to Expect in Madagascar

Cultural Awareness

Some notable cultural nuances:

- Take caution when using a camera. Ask permission to photograph people of any age (ask parents if you want a picture of a child) and show them the image afterwards. It is forbidden to photograph any state institutions in Madagascar (incl. public buildings - e.g. City Halls, Airports) as well as police, soldiers, roadblocks and tombs.
- It is considered offensive to step over people's belongings. If you find yourself accidentally doing so, you can apologize by saying excuse me which is "azafady".
- If pointing to a person, tomb or holy place, do so with a bent finger.
- If you are invited to a religious ceremony, consider it a high honor and do best not to refuse.

Security

The port is guarded by security, and we also have a security team on board. When ashore, it is important to practice safe habits - travel in groups of two or more, obey the curfew, and utilize common sense in terms of where and with whom you go.

Weather

Madagascar is tropical along the coast (up to 120 inches of rain per year), temperate inland, and arid in the south with varying amounts of rainfall. Tropical storms and cyclones are of concern between December and March.

Weather in Madagascar is fairly warm year-round, however, we advise you to bring warm clothes options to wear on board as it can get chilly. Average temperatures for our time in Toamasina, Madagascar:

Shore Leave

Our crew are welcomed (and encouraged!) to explore our host country. Shore leave may be restricted at times during the field service depending on local epidemiology or safety concerns. This is always a dynamic situation, so any restrictions or changes will be communicated to crew by the captain.

Crew Clinic

Our Crew Clinic provides primary healthcare and urgent healthcare for all Crew on board. Our Crew Clinic is staffed by a doctor and nurse that function similarly to a general practitioner or family practice.

Madagascar Security Ratings	
Overall	4 (High)
Crime	3 (Moderate)
Civil Unrest	3 (Moderate)
Terrorism	2 (Low)

Temperature in Madagascar												
Month:	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
High	26 °C	26 °C	26 °C	25 °C	23 °C	21 °C	20 °C	21 °C	24 °C	26 °C	27 °C	26 °C
Low	17 °C	17 °C	16 °C	15 °C	12 °C	10 °C	10 °C	10 °C	11 °C	13 °C	15 °C	16 °C
High	79 °F	79 °F	79 °F	77 °F	73 °F	70 °F	78 °F	70 °F	75 °F	79 °F	81 °F	79 °F
Low	63 °F	63 °F	61 °F	59 °F	54 °F	50 °F	50 °F	50 °F	52 °F	55 °F	59 °F	61 °F

Malagasy ve ianao?

Malagasy is the official language of Madagascar, along with French. It is spoken by around 25 million people as a first language.

We recommend searching the app store on your smart phone or tablet for applications that can kick-start the language learning process in a fun way before your travel. Practicing just 10 minutes a day can make a difference.

Here are some common phrases to know.

	Malagasy	French
Hello	Salama / Manakory / Manahoana, TompokoTenki.	Bon jour / Bon soir
How are you?	Manao ahoana ianao?	Comment ca va? / Comment allez vous?
Thank you	Misaotra	Merci
Please	Azafady	Si vous plait
I am sorry	Miala tsiny aho	désolé
Goodbye	Veloma	Au revoir
Yes	Eny	Oui
No	Tsia	Non
What is your name?	Iza no anaranao	Comment t'appelles-tu ? / Comment vous appelez-vous ?
My name is...	[Your name] no anarako.	Je m'appelle [your name.]
How much does that cost?	Hoatrinona?	Combien ça coûte ?
I do not speak Malagasy.	Tsy mahay miteny gasy aho.	Je ne parle pas français. (I do not speak French.)
Where is the bathroom?	Aiza ny toalety? / Aiza yn kabone? (in the countryside)	Où sont les toilettes ?
God Bless You	Hotahian' Andriamanitra anie ianao.	Que Dieu vous bénisse.

Dress Code

	Appropriate to Wear	Inappropriate to Wear	More Information
Business/office wear (for non-uniform, internal-facing roles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart-casual trousers, skirts, and dresses • Smart-casual blouses and shirts, including polo shirts • Suit jackets • Smart-causal shoes. Smart sandals are appropriate for women. Smart trainers/sneakers can be worn during normal office work. • Jeans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shorts • Casual T-shirts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knees should be covered when standing and sitting for both men and women. Dresses and skirts should be mid-thigh or longer. Skirts that fall between mid-thigh and knee should be worn with leggings or opaque tights/hose underneath. • Sleeveless tops with wide straps are fine. • Men are not required to wear business suits and/or neckties but they can be worn if preferred.
Official meetings and functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart trousers, skirts, and dresses • Smart blouses and shirts • Suit jackets • Smart shoes • Smart sandals are appropriate for women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shorts • Flip-flops • Jeans • Casual T-shirts • Trainers/sneakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men should wear a shirt and necktie if the meeting is formal. • Women should generally wear dresses or skirts, rather than trousers. • If African fabrics/styles are worn, they must be suitable for a business environment. Get advice from a local crew member if unsure.
In the Hospital, in Reception, and during patient interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart-casual trousers, skirts, and dresses • Smart-casual blouses and shirts, including polo shirts • T-shirts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shorts (of any length) • Leggings • Sportswear • Flip-flops 	
Casual wear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeans • T-shirts • Trainers/sneakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very tight or high-cut shorts ('running' shorts) • Spaghetti-strap tops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flip Flops and open toed sandals without a back strap are never permitted on the gangway or wet decks. These are appropriate for use in the shower or in your cabin only.
Exercising in the on board gym and on crew-only decks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lycra/Spandex leggings and tops • Exercise shirts • Basketball jersey-style tops • Short 'running' shorts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compression wear worn without any covering • Sports bras worn without any covering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tight-fitting exercise gear should be covered up when walking through the ship.

Next Steps...

Travel Information

We have a team dedicated to helping you arrange travel for our volunteers. Click the button below to view the Travel guide for your field service.



[CLICK HERE](#)

Reminder!

The General Volunteer Guidebook

The information listed below can be found in the General Volunteer Guidebook. We recommend that you become familiar with the information in that guidebook as well. To view the guidebook, click the button below.

- Code of Conduct
- Community Life and Expectations
- Staying in Touch
- Dress Code
- Uniform Guidelines
- Crew Bank
- Packing Lists

[CLICK HERE](#)



Thank you!

We can't wait to continue the Mercy Ships legacy, bringing hope and healing to people just like Houleye! Years of blessing, sacrifice, smiles, hard work, and hope are ahead of us. Thank you for your part!



meet Houleye