



# ***Iris Ministries Madagascar Information Packet***

*We're so glad you are considering coming to Iris Madagascar! God is bringing the right people at the right time and you get to be part of His work.*

*This information packet is designed to help prepare short term visitors for the practical details of their time with us. We ask that you carefully read through this packet before coming. We know it won't answer every question, so please contact Lindsay Furmanek, our head of Hospitality, any time at [Hospitality@IrisMadagascar.org](mailto:Hospitality@IrisMadagascar.org) with your additional questions and just so that we can get to know you better before you come.*

*Thanks!*

*Caroline Thomas  
Director, Iris Madagascar*

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# INTRODUCTION TO IRIS MADAGASCAR

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Madagascar, one of the world's poorest nations, is the fourth largest island in the world and is located off the south east coast of Africa. It is almost twice the size of Arizona, USA, and is home to approximately 22 million people. The official languages are French and Malagasy, but the number of English speakers in the cities is also rising. The country was originally settled by Indonesians and was a French colony from 1896-1960. Today the nation has a unique cultural blend of Asian, African, and European influence.

Spiritually, the constitution guarantees religious freedom. Yet, ten out of the forty people groups are unreached. Most people still hold to at least some of their indigenous beliefs, with witchcraft being more overt in the bush but still existent in the city. Still, many people do call themselves Christians. Unfortunately, however, a large number of those are simply following a religious tradition void of truth and without a relationship with Jesus Christ. Islam is also present in the country. Although it is not prevalent throughout the nation, it is growing and is the primary faith of the most unreached people.

Iris Madagascar opened in 2010. Our initial ministry was to open a children's center in response to the great problem of orphaned and abandoned children in and around the capital city of Antananarivo. As of this writing (February 2015) we have 106 children. We take in any child from birth to age 18 and also run a school for those living in the center. Each one has a different story and each one is special, from the newborn twin girls coming when their mother died unexpectedly to older boys found sleeping on the pavement in the winter. As a very small and young ministry the children's center has been our primary focus, but we have been involved in other ministry areas and expect to see them grow in the coming months and years.

# TOPICS

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## Accommodations

Iris Madagascar does not currently own any property. We rent all of our houses, including our children's center. At the moment we are renting a house for short term visitors that has three bedrooms available. Two of these rooms are large and can house quite a few people (think dorm-style with bunk beds) and the third is for couples. The house also has two bathrooms and a kitchen with a refrigerator and oven. We cannot promise this house will be available at the time you wish to visit, but we can coordinate that with you during your application process.

We do not have a set price for visitors staying in our guest house, but a suggested amount is \$8 per night, which includes rent, utilities, guards, laundry, and lunch with the children at the center. Any donations that are given help us to continue renting the house for you and other visitors. Visitors are responsible to provide their own breakfast and dinner. For teams, it may be possible for you to hire a cook to help you during the time you are here, but individuals should expect to shop and cook for themselves.

You should also be aware that at times you may not have running water all day long. There is often not enough water pressure to meet demand at certain parts of the day. In addition, during the rainy season (November-March) electricity goes off often during storms, but it is usually not for more than a few hours. Still, it is wise to have a flashlight or candles handy.

## Airport Arrival and Departure

The Antananarivo airport (TNR) is a good modern airport. Visitors are able to get a free 30 day tourist visa when they go through passport control (see the Visa section for more information). You will go through the "sans visa" (no visa) line, unless you obtained a visa from your local embassy before you came. If you are unsure if you qualify for the free 30 day tourist visa because of your nationality, we encourage you to check with the nearest Malagasy embassy.

Please make sure you send us a copy of your flight itinerary. Our center is an easy fifteen minute drive from the airport, and we will be happy to pick you up there.

## **Contact Information**

### ***Street Address***

Use our street address when applying for a visa, sending DHL to our door, or taking a taxi:

Caroline Thomas  
Lot 161 Ter  
Ambohinambo  
Talatamaty  
Antananarivo

### ***Post Office Box***

Use our post office box whenever sending mail or packages to us. Please note that it can take several weeks for us to receive a shipment.

Caroline Thomas  
BP 222  
Ivato Airport  
Antananarivo 105  
Madagascar

### ***Phone***

If you need to call us you may try any of the following numbers:

+261-32-12-669-00 Caroline Thomas  
+261-32-12-669-02 Julio Ramonjison  
+261-32-12-669-00 Jeremy Lantz

### ***Online***

Email:

General - [Madagascar@IrisGlobal.org](mailto:Madagascar@IrisGlobal.org)

Visit Inquiries - [Hospitality@IrisMadagascar.org](mailto:Hospitality@IrisMadagascar.org)

Facebook: Iris Madagascar

Website: [www.IrisMadagascar.org](http://www.IrisMadagascar.org)

### ***Notes on Communication***

Please do not promise to call or email home upon your arrival as this is not always possible. The above phone numbers can be used for you or your family to contact us in the case of emergency only, please. If your flight schedule changes at any time for any reason, please do contact us as soon as possible. If you arrive and for some reason someone does not meet you at the airport, ask for a phone to call the numbers above and if all else fails, take a taxi to the street address provided above.

## Donations

### ***To the Center***

We are entirely dependent on the provision of God and generosity of others in response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Our center in Madagascar is self-supporting and does not receive a regular budget from the global Iris office, although we do receive sponsorship gifts through the Iris Global sponsorship program. We have witnessed many miracles as God has continued to meet our needs. There is no obligation for you to make a donation to the center, but if you wish to do so, you may give submit your donation in cash at the office after you arrive or contact our finance administrator at [Jeremy@IrisGlobal.org](mailto:Jeremy@IrisGlobal.org) if you wish to give from overseas.

### ***To the Children***

Please do not give gifts directly to the children in the center. If you would like to give to a particular child, speak with your hospitality host and we will help you give in an appropriate manner. If you have items such as candy or toys to share with all of the children, again please speak to your host first and we will help coordinate the best time to give those things. We want the relationship between you and our children to be based on love and not on material things. Additionally, some of our children may be shy or lack English skills so they tend not to initiate contact with visitors and don't receive their attention as much, while our extroverted kids take most of the visitor's attention. Look for both of these types of children to encourage and love them.

### ***General Giving***

It is common for visitors to go through some level of culture shock. For some it is extremely difficult to be around poverty without emptying their pockets or bank accounts to do something about it. We appreciate that compassion but have seen first-hand the dangers involved when someone starts giving out money. In addition, it can create a very difficult situation for those who are working to build long term cross-cultural relationships. **We ask that you do NOT give out money or material things to anyone inside or outside of Iris without first consulting our leadership.** You are still welcome to participate financially in the needs you see, but it will usually be better if you make your donation to Iris and our Malagasy staff can use it to meet the need with more cultural understanding.

## Health

### ***Vaccinations***

We ask that you consult a doctor or travel health clinic at least six weeks before your arrival to determine which immunizations you may need. You should at least be up to date on your country's normal vaccination routine. When arriving, you will not normally need to show proof of any vaccinations. In addition, if your passport shows that you have visited a country with risk of yellow fever in the previous six months, you will need to show proof of your yellow fever vaccination.

## ***Malaria***

Although the entire country of Madagascar is listed as a malaria region, here in Antananarivo it is not as big of a problem. None of our missionaries or children use mosquito nets, although they are available. For their own health, however, we do still ask visitors to take malaria prophylaxis, especially if they intend to visit the rainforest because it will have a significant impact on their brief time here and travel home if they contract malaria.

## ***Insurance***

Iris requires that each short term visitor has emergency medical insurance or travel insurance. This insurance must include emergency medical evacuation. Beyond that, you can choose a health plan and level of coverage that fits your needs. Here are a few resources that have been used by other Iris Missionaries:

[www.missiontripinsurance.com](http://www.missiontripinsurance.com)

[www.globalhealthinsurance.com](http://www.globalhealthinsurance.com)

[www.sevencorners.com](http://www.sevencorners.com)

[www.talent-trust.com](http://www.talent-trust.com)

## ***Local Health Facilities***

We have a very basic clinic at our center that is mainly reserved for our children, but there are also other health care facilities nearby. If you experience a medical emergency we will do our best to help you find appropriate treatment. In that case, you will be responsible for your own medical costs and you should expect to pay for all health services at the time of service. If you do have health insurance, you will need to submit a claim for reimbursement afterward.

## **Identification**

At times you may be required to prove your identification. Around our neighborhood you are not required to carry your identification, but when you leave our community to visit other parts of the city you must keep a copy of your passport with you. If you travel outside of the city (such as to visit the rainforest) you should take your original passport and be

## **Internet**

Internet is available in Antananarivo and both speed and cost have improved greatly in recent years. We are unable to provide internet for you, but you will have the opportunity to buy a 3G SIM card for your phone, tablet, or USB internet dongle and the recharge it with pre-paid services. The internet data has various increments but will cost approximately \$14 USD per 1 GB. Many enjoy using it in their smartphones and then using their smartphones as a wifi hotspot for their computer.

## **Money**

### ***Access Points***

ATM machines are easily available throughout the city. Any card powered by Visa (look for the Visa logo

on the front) can be used with your PIN at any ATM and at the larger stores and supermarkets that are able to receive payments by credit or debit card. The nearest of these ATM machines and supermarkets are within easy walking distance. If your card is powered by MasterCard, however, there are not as many access points. There is an ATM machine within a longer walk that you can use, but you will not be able to use your card at the supermarket.

Every bank and card has different kinds of fees. Even the same card can have different fees for different types of transactions. Please take the time to contact your bank and learn what the fees will be for your card before you use it. It is also prudent to alert your bank that you will be traveling in Madagascar so that they do not lock your card in a fraud alert.

### ***Currency and Exchange Rate***

The currency here is the Malagasy Ariary (MGA). This currency replaced the Malagasy Franc in 2005, but, since most people grew up using Francs (FMG) you will often be given the price in Francs and have to translate that into Ariary. This is relatively easy as 1 Ariary always equals exactly 5 Francs. So, if the cost is 20,000 Francs, you will reach into your wallet and pay 4,000 Ariary. It is also worth noting, however, that the highest printed bill is only 10,000 Ariary (about \$4 USD), so if you are making any large purchases you end up carrying a lot of cash and it may not always fit in your wallet. In that case a small shoulder bag or purse is very useful.

### **Phones**

Having a phone is not required while you are visiting us, but you may find it helpful in case you need to contact us with questions or if an unexpected situation arises. You can bring any unlocked GSM phone, purchase a SIM card on a local carrier for a very small cost, and then buy phone credit only as needed. This credit can also be converted to internet data on 3G capable phones.

Note: We think that Madagascar is operating on the 900/1800 frequency bands so if you bring a phone they will need to be compatible with those frequencies. Quad band phones should include those frequencies already.

### **Rainforest**

While here you may want to take a trip to the rain forest. It is a wonderful opportunity to get out of the city and see some of the uniqueness of Madagascar. You will drive through the bush on extremely windy roads (take motion sickness tablets before you go) and have the opportunity to see lemurs in their natural habitat. There is an expensive and high class resort, but we normally go to a mid-range lodge with beautiful cottages right on the edge of the rainforest. You may even be woken up by the call of the Indri lemur. A trip can be either one or two nights depending on your schedule. The price can vary greatly depending on your desires for food and lodging, but on average it may cost about \$225 for individuals or \$125 per person in a group of 10.

## Restaurants

There is an unending supply of restaurants in Antananarivo, and you may wish to try some while you are here. We can help you arrange a taxi, but some are even within walking distance. Here are a few that we have enjoyed:

- **Savanna Café** – Beautiful French café with a balcony overlooking the rice fields that has great food and amazing coffee and dessert.
- **Raphia** – Indian restaurant and hotel with very good meals (delicious Indian tea!). For the kids they have swings, a slide, and a seesaw with tables where you can eat or order from their all day snack menu.
- **City Pizza** – Pizza for a great price, close by with pick-up available.
- **Aero Pizza** – Pizza, roast chicken, chips, and burgers, with home delivery available.
- **Gastro Pizza** – Pizza, cakes, and ice cream, with home delivery available.
- **La Rotisserie**– French restaurant with proper cooked meals and a beautiful swimming pool.
- **Thai Restaurant**– Very nice Thai food.

## Shopping

Visitors are responsible for their own breakfast and dinner, and we will show you the local market and supermarket where you can buy everything that you will need within easy walking distance. In addition, for those who are interested we can arrange transportation for you to visit the Malagasy craft market. This is a long line of little shops selling just about every type of craft or artifact someone might want as a souvenir. If you have any need or interest in any other shopping you can let us know and we can see what might be available for your.

## Support

Short term visitors are responsible for their own financial support and all of their expenses while they are here.

## Taboos

Every culture has taboos. We are still students of the culture and are learning more about cultural taboos. Although we don't believe in the superstitious aspect of these taboos, we don't want to offend others or cause them to stumble so we are careful with our choices. When you arrive we can address some of these things in your orientation, but here are a few to think about:

- In the West it is common for someone to pretend to "steal" a child's nose and have it sticking out between his fingers. That hand gesture is a very offensive sexual gesture here.
- Clapping one hand over the top of your closed fist is a very offensive sexual gesture.
- Honking your car horn five times in a row means you are swearing at the other person.
- Tombs and cemeteries are very superstitious places because of the belief in and worship of ancestral spirits. Some Malagasy people have a hard time even walking past a cemetery.

- In our neighborhood you may not have goats or grow onions.
- Blowing your nose loudly in front of others is seen as rude and should be excused!
- Please do not eat food in front of any Malagasy person without being fully prepared to share. They are naturally very generous people, especially with food and not sharing is seen as very rude!

## Things to Do

You may have some down time and be interested in some fun local activities. Although things are probably very different than you are used to back home, here are some activities you may enjoy:

### ***Swimming***

- **Pan D'or** (10 minute drive) – Chinese hotel with big pool.
- **Club Le'car** (10 minute drive) – French sporting center with a small kids pool, a large big pool, tennis, and other activities.
- **La Rotisserie** (10 minute drive) – French restaurant with a small clean pool and an additional small baby pool.
- **Forme** (less than 10 minute drive) – A workout place with a weight room, lap pool, and workout classes.
- **Le Chat'o** (15 minute drive) – Lovely kids activity park with many inflatable bouncy castles, trampolines, a restaurant, a shallow pool, laser tag, and more. Approximately \$6 USD per child and \$2 USD per adult.
- **Crocodile Farm** (30 minute drive) – Here you can see not only crocodiles but lemurs, chameleons, snakes, fossa, and much more. You can also plan to crocodile for lunch.
- **Local Zoo** (1 hour drive) – This is not a typical zoo with many world animals, but you will see lemurs and other Madagascan animals.
- **Lemur Park** (2 hour drive) – This would make a good day trip to get up close with many types of lemurs and other domestic animals. The park is small (about the size of 8 football fields) but the animals roam freely throughout. See [www.lemurspark.com](http://www.lemurspark.com).
- **Andisibe Rainforest** (4-5 hour drive) – This is the closest rainforest and makes a wonderful weekend trip to see the lemurs in their natural habitat and get away for some rest. A weekend trip may be done for approximately \$75 per person, but prices can vary greatly depending on the size of the group, choice of food and accommodation, and type of transport.
- **Coastal Cities** (8-12 hour drive) – Toamasina and Mahajanga make a wonderful place to go away for a longer beach vacation. The drive can be long and difficult for those who get car sick, but the location is beautiful. Prices vary greatly based on choice of accommodation, food, and transport.

## Transport

We will make appropriate transport arrangements for you depending on your activities. You should be prepared for any taxi or bus rentals and also to contribute fuel for personal vehicles used.

## Visas

Visitors can obtain free tourist visas for a stay of up to 30 days. There is also a 90 day tourist visa available, but we normally only receive visitors for a maximum of 30 days. In order to get the free tourist visa when you arrive at the airport, **you must have proof of a return plane ticket, showing your plan to leave the country before the visa expires.** If you do not, then you may be required to purchase an exit ticket before your visa is issued. Also please note that tourist visas are non-renewable and non-transferable to other visa types; they require that you do leave the country at the end of your visa before you are able to re-enter and apply for a new one.

When completing your visa application, be sure to indicate that you are coming as a tourist, not as a ministry worker. You may use the following for the contact information on the visa application

Caroline Thomas  
Lot 161 Ter  
Ambohinambo  
Talatamaty  
Antananarivo

Phone: +261-12-669-00

## Weather

Because Antananarivo sits at an elevation of 1300-1400 meters (4,265-4,593 feet), it has a very mild climate. The rainy summer season extends from November through March with temperatures around 27° C (80.6° F) in the day and still sometimes reaching as low as 16° C (60.8° F) at night. If you burn easily and plan to be in the sun you will want to use sunscreen, but you'll also need to be prepared for rain. Still, the nights can get somewhat cool.

During the winter months daily highs will be around 22° C (71.6° F), but it feels quite cool when you are not in the sun. Average lows during the winter can be 10° C (50° F), which feels very cold because the houses are built for a warm climate and are not insulated. Thus, warm clothes are a *must* in the winter months.

Being an island, we must note that Madagascar is subject to the annual cyclone season in the Indian Ocean from January to March. Because we are in Antananarivo in the center of the country, however, these storms give us bad weather but rarely bring any danger here. Still, occasionally a larger storm may reach us and cause a power outage so it is good to be prepared with backup supplies.

## Wish List

Frequently visitors ask what they can bring for the children and the center. For this reason we have a "wish list" that changes regularly. If you are interested in receiving this list simply email

[Hospitality@IrisMadagascar.org](mailto:Hospitality@IrisMadagascar.org).