

Madagascar national day

A land of diverse cultures, endemic species

Eugene Mahaonison
CHARGE D'AFFAIRES OF
MADAGASCAR

On this auspicious occasion of the 52nd anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Madagascar, it gives me great pleasure to extend the warm greetings and sincere good wishes of the government, the embassy and all Malagasy people to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, to all members of the Imperial family and to the government and people of Japan. May I also take this opportunity to congratulate the Malagasy community living in Japan. As Madagascar celebrates its 52nd anniversary of



independence, I am delighted that The Japan Times has provided us with this opportunity to mark our national day commemoration. I also convey my best wishes to the readers of The Japan Times. Independence represents the most valuable heritage of each country.

To mark this special day, the Embassy of Madagascar is proud to share and present some of its cultural and biological diversity and its well-known richness of natural resources that make it a welcoming and interesting destination for tourism and investment.

With its 18 ethnic groups, but fortunately one shared language, the Malagasy have a diverse variety of cultural traits. One of the most important would be our traditional wedding ceremony called "vodi-ondry". Vodi-ondry is still practiced despite the arriv-

al of modern civil and religious marriage. This ceremony tells us about the importance of family values for the Malagasy people. From a larger perspective, "fihavanana," which is the sense of living together in harmony within and between communities, is cherished as another family-wide value for the Malagasy.

A second important cultural trait one would observe is "famadihana," or the returning of the bones of a family's deceased. The ritual, practiced with great joy and big events, is performed in order to obtain the blessing of the ancestors, guaranteeing the continuity of the family lineage, which is again one of the most valued cultures of the Malagasy.

Decorating all these traditional ceremonies is the beauty and richness of the Malagasy art of public oratory, which could be

appreciated as a performance of its own and relates to the deep oral tradition of the Malagasy people. As Madagascar is now considered a destination for sustainable tourism, visitors to Madagascar will have more opportunities to observe these traditional events while contributing to poverty reduction of local communities.

Apart from its cultural diversity, what makes Madagascar attractive is the uniqueness and the beauty of its nature. In fact, the flora of Madagascar is composed of more than 12,000 species, over 80 percent of which are endemic — found only in Madagascar. For instance, there are six endemic species of baobab in Madagascar (out of eight in the world); about 1,200 species of orchids, including the famous Vanilla of Madagascar; about 150 species of palm trees

and thousands of medicinal plants. Particularly, there is a palm tree called "ravinala" or the traveller's tree. It is majestically erected and could be a relief for thirsty travelers because just by cutting the trunk you will be served a generous helping of drinkable water. This hospitality and the welcoming characteristics of the ravinala could represent most the generosity of the Malagasy people and their natural sense of hospitality that they

reserve especially to all their guests and visitors.

Madagascar is also well-known for its diversity of fauna. Its fauna is exclusively harmless, with no fierce predators. Even its snakes are not venomous. We can see animals that exist nowhere else in the world with more than 80 percent of fauna species endemic (100 percent of lemurs, 98 percent of reptiles and amphibians, 96 percent of butterflies, etc.).

One of the flagships of Madagascar would be without contest the lemur. The most famous is surely the maki lemur — well-

illustrated in the "Madagascar" animated film. Many tourists come from far away just to admire these strange mammals. The lemur is a primate with two large, expressive eyes and a long bushy tail. In Japan, to see examples of them, Ueno Zoo in Tokyo could be visited for observing the little aye-aye, a very fascinating species of nocturnal lemur. The Miyagi Zoo in Sendai and the Zoo of Kitakyushu also have different animals from Madagascar.

Japanese people returning from a trip to Madagascar usually are quite struck by the

warm, welcoming characteristics of the Malagasy people and surprisingly say that Madagascar could be referred as their "Old Japan."

Though, if the Great Island is well-known especially through its vanilla, clove, litchi, flora and fauna, it still has enormous potentials for ecotourism as well as natural resources. I would like to launch a friendly appeal to Japanese businesses and Japanese tourists to discover the Great Island. Madagascar is a land of hearty welcome, a country of hospitality and an island of paradise.



Flora and fauna: Six out of eight species of baobab and many species of lemur are found only in Madagascar. EMBASSY OF MADAGASCAR

Congratulations

to the People of

the Republic of Madagascar

on the 52nd Anniversary

of Their Independence

 Sumitomo Corporation

Congratulations

to the People of

the Republic of Madagascar

on the 52nd Anniversary

of Their Independence

 **TOYOTA TSUSHO CORPORATION**
Metals/ Machinery & Electronics/ Automotive/ Energy & Chemicals/ Produce & Foodstuffs/ Consumer Products, Services & Materials

Head Office : 4-9-8, Meieki, Nakamura-ku, Nagoya 81-52-584-5013
Tokyo Head Office : 2-3-13, Konan, Minato-ku, Tokyo 81-3-4306-5000

www.toyota-tsusho.com

Societe RASSETA

(Official Authorized Toyota Distributor in Madagascar)
P.B. 3779 Lot IVE 92, Soarano, Antananarivo 101, Madagascar
TEL: 261-20-22-257-70 FAX: 261-20-22-224-47
Web site: <http://www.toyota-africa.com/countrytop/madagascar>