



it pulled away, gently but firmly pushed by the waters of the Indian Ocean. The tip of southern Africa was now an island, an island known as Madagascar.

Remote from any other land, the plants and animals on Madagascar evolved separately from species in the rest of Africa. This means that almost all the plant and animal species on Madagascar are endemic. In other words, they are found only there.

Madagascar is one of the most isolated places in the world, earning it the nickname the Island at the End of the Earth. Experts are not sure exactly when the landmass broke off of Africa, but believe it was between 200 million and 165 million years ago. They are also not sure if an earthquake was the cause of the separation, but believe it is the best explanation.



A wide variety of produce and other foods are for sale at markets in Madagascar.

Madagascar is the fourth-largest island in the world; only Greenland, New Guinea, and Borneo are larger. It is home to some of the most amazing animal and plant species on the planet and warm, friendly people. The first settlers on the island came not from Africa, but from across the Indian Ocean. The various groups made lives for themselves in this distant land, creating a unique culture, known as the Malagasy. Each year, hundreds of thousands of tourists arrive to see what life is like in such an unusual place. They come to watch the lemurs, smell the orchids, and get to know the people who make their home on the Island at the End of the Earth.

Tongasoa!

TONGASOA! WELCOME! WELCOME TO MADAGASCAR, one of the most amazing places in the world. It is a land filled with unusual plants and animals and some spectacular landscapes.

Madagascar is one of the world's largest islands. It is roughly 1,000 miles (1,600 km) long and 350 miles (560 km) wide, making it slightly larger than the U.S. state of California. It lies in the Indian Ocean off the east coast of Africa. The nearest African nation is Mozambique, and the wide stretch of water that separates Madagascar from Africa is called the Mozambique Channel.

Opposite: Jagged limestone towers break up the land at the Tsingy de Bemaraha Strict Nature Reserve.

Madagascar's Geographic Features

Area: 226,658 square miles (587,041 sq km)

Highest Elevation: Maromokotro, 9,436 feet (2,876 m)

Lowest Elevation: Sea level along the coast

Longest River: Mangoky, 350 miles (563 km)

Largest Lake: Alaotra, approximately 900 square miles (2,300 sq km)

Length of Coastline: 2,999 miles (4,826 km)

Highest Recorded Temperature: 97°F (36°C) in 1997

Lowest Recorded Temperature: 32°F (0°C) in 1932

Average Annual Precipitation: 39 to 59 inches (100 to 150 cm)



The Whale Highway: The East Coast

The east coast of Madagascar is a long, slender region, running from the Antongil Bay in the north down to the southern tip of the island. Madagascar's second-largest city, Toamasina, is found in this region. The east coast is beautiful, with sandy beaches and graceful palm and coconut trees. The east coast is sometimes called the Whale Highway, because each year migrating humpback whales gather offshore to breed.

One of the most prominent features in the east coast is the 400-mile (645 km) Pangalanes Canal. The French created it at the beginning of the twentieth century by building canals to connect rivers and lagoons. They built it for boats to have a safe place to travel, away from the rough waves of the Indian Ocean.

A man canoes down a river in northeastern Madagascar.