

Madagascar

[music: *Retany* by *Tarika*]

Hello and welcome to another episode of the *nomadamin* English podcast. I'm *Amin Bahmani Yeganeh*, an English teacher and the founder of *nomadamin*. Every episode, a fascinating subject is chosen to help you improve your English, and gain new perspectives on the world. I, the storyteller, will be using intermediate English, well... intermediate-ish, I mean, with a **pinch** of higher-level language, to help you expand your English even more. But, there's nothing to worry about. If you miss something, you can always skip back and listen to any part you want, as many times as you want. Full transcripts are also offered at <http://nomadamin.com/podcast>.

[Introduction]

The eighth continent, the great red island, the island of lemurs, a place like no other, the wonderful country of Madagascar!

[Geography]

First things first. Let's **spot** Madagascar on the map. Well, it is located in the Indian Ocean, just off the southeastern coast of Africa. Madagascar is the fourth largest island in the entire world. Its capital and largest city is Antananarivo, which often is shortly called Tana by the local. What else... the currency is named ariary, which I suppose you've just heard about for the first time. However, to help you have an idea about it, I should say, at this moment of recording, January 2025, a US dollar is worth 4700 ariaries, which **sums up** the financial situation over there. **Be that as it may**, if you're an Iranian like I am, you might not feel too bad for them after you realize that one ariary is actually worth around 150 Iranian rials. Isn't that just wonderful?! But let's move on before I get started with our beloved country.

[People]

Now, let's talk about the people. People, people, people... The population is around 30 million, and most people are of Malayo-Indonesian and African **descent**, which gives the country a rich cultural mix. In fact, you could see the origins in their faces. I mean, once you meet these people, you could guess that they are partly east Asian and partly African.

They speak Malagasy and French, which are the two official languages. Like any other language, Malagasy is also spoken with different **dialects** depending on the region. French is also widely spoken, as Madagascar was a French **colony** until 1960.

The Malagasy are warm, welcoming, and even more importantly happy people, and I LOVE that. I mean, they just give you a positive vibe with their big smiles, or by simply waving at you, or sometimes even with a, y'know, little dance move,

and I think it's priceless. 'Cause sometimes, you might **get up on the wrong side of the bed**, or you might not be having a good day, it happens, right? And then, you see these guys with that big smile, and it just **turns that frown upside down**. What else is there to say? I guess it's worth mentioning that family is quite important in their culture. Now, I know it sounds like a big cliché, but it really amazed me how almost everyone told me about their family shortly after we had met for the first time. Don't get me wrong! I didn't dislike it. It actually showed their warm **personable** attitude. And on that sweet note, let's move one to the next part.

[music: *Era* by *Vakoka*]

[Urban Life]

In Madagascar, the urban life, as we know it in the rest of the world, is not easy to find. Yes, the capital is a bit more modern, but even there, you shouldn't expect too much. To give you an example, the first night I was in Tana, I spent like an hour wandering around the hotel looking for a supermarket, and to my own surprise, I didn't find any. Remember, I was in the capital and in a... what the hell, let's say an **upscale** neighborhood. Now, I'm not saying there was no supermarket there, but you couldn't find them **on every corner** either. Or, as another example, I can mention the dirt roads. I had never seen so many dirt roads in any other capital, and I guess that's why you could see a lot of SUVs around, which I wouldn't mind, to be honest.

[Wildlife/Nature]

Madagascar's geography, as an island, has made it the land for **rare** animals and plants, many of which cannot be found anywhere else. That's one of the reasons why the country is such a **tourist magnet** for nature lovers.

Undoubtedly, the most iconic animal in Madagascar is the lemur. These lovely creatures are found only on the island and come in many different **species**, ranging from the small mouse lemur to the large indri, which is known for its scream-like haunting calls.

Speaking of icons, I gotta mention the Avenue of the Baobabs. What can I say? I'm genuinely **at a loss for words**. These wonderful huge trees, some of them around 1400 years old, are like nothing else. And the landscape they give you, especially at the sunset, **oh my word**, it's like cartoons.

There's so much more to talk about, in terms of the nature I mean, but I'm giving you one more, and that's Tsingy National Park. Basically, it's a range of **limestone** mountains which used to be under water many many years ago. Through the years, **erosion** has happened to them and created these **pointy** limestone forests. What a **scenery**! Absolutely **breathhtaking**! But, unfortunately it comes at a price. So, before you get all excited and start thinking of visiting there, I **gotta** tell you something. Visiting Tsingy could be a challenge. First off, you'd have to do a bit of climbing which would make you **sweat, to say the least**.

But that's not all, there would also come a time when you would need to cross a bridge, a hanging bridge, a hanging bridge around 30 meters above the ground. Anyway, I don't want to scare you off or anything. In fact, I'm proud to let you know that I did cross that bridge, without crapping my pants believe it or not, which means you could do it too.

[The Cartoon]

Before completely moving on from the wildlife part, there is a frequently asked question which I need to answer. Funnily enough, it goes back to the popular cartoon Madagascar. Now, if you have also watched this cartoon, you'd know that there's a whole gang of animals in there, including a lion, a giraffe, and some penguins. As a result, a lot of people imagine these animals actually live in there, which is not simply true. So, as expected, you cannot rely on cartoons to educate yourself about the wildlife. But, don't feel disappointed. I mean, there are still so many other species to get fascinated by, such as lemurs and baobab trees as mentioned earlier, as well as different kinds of chameleons, and some kind of **humped** cows called zébu, which you will hear more of in today's episode.

[music: *Massalé* by *Granmoun Lélé*]

[Food]

One of the biggest joys of visiting a new place is to taste the local food, right!? Personally, I'm always **up for** trying **exotic** dishes, flavors, **what have you**. And, when it comes to food, I'm not **picky**, which also helps the whole experiencing thing. But I'm afraid that Madagascar is not the best or easiest place in terms of food. So, if you're a picky eater, you'd better have some snacks with you whenever you leave the hotel.

Anyhoo, rice is the main **staple**, and it's eaten at almost every meal. Something else that you'd perhaps see on every menu is a dish called zébu, which is **named after** a native kind of **cattle** which look like cows but with humps, as mentioned before. It's cooked in many different ways, like grilled, stewed, or even in a soup. But no matter how it's cooked, it doesn't taste good. **I'm tellin' ya**.

[Souvenirs]

Let's see what we can take back home, of course besides the exciting memory of a great adventure. I'll start with vanilla. Madagascar is one of the largest producers of vanilla in the whole world, so I think fresh vanilla could be a great option as a **souvenir**. What else... wooden sculptures are another choice, often in the shape of local species like lemurs, chameleons, or the famous baobab trees. And last but not least, I'd recommend Malagasy coffee. As a coffee **aficionado** myself, I guarantee the quality. Good stuff!

[Closing]

Alright folks, **that's a wrap!** [I] hope you enjoyed our journey to Madagascar. You can also find the photos I've shot there on my Instagram account, [@nomadamin](https://www.instagram.com/nomadamin).

At the end, let me remind you that the *nomadamin* podcast is and will be free to make high-quality education accessible to everyone. So, if you enjoy listening to this podcast, please make a donation using the button on the player or the link in the description to support the channel and play your part. It would also be appreciated if you share it with your friends and other English learners.

With the hope that this episode has given you an idea for your next adventure, until next time, **veloma!**



Words List

a pinch of: a small amount of something
first things first: more important things should be done before other things
to spot: to see someone or something
to sum up: to give a brief summary of something
be that as it may: despite that, nevertheless
descent: the origin of a person in terms of family or nationality
dialect: a form of the language that is spoken in a particular part of the country
colony: a country under the political control of another country
to get up on the wrong side of the bed: to be in a bad mood
to turn the frown upside down: to become or make somebody else happy after being sad
personable: charming, nice
upscale: expensive and used by rich people
on every corner: in many places along the streets
rare: not common, unusual
tourist magnet: a place attracting many tourists
species: a group of animals or plants whose members are similar
at a loss for words: unable to think of anything to say
oh my word: an expression of surprise or wonder
limestone: a rock that is formed mainly by accumulation of organic remains
pointy: having a sharp point
scenery: landscape
breathtaking: wonderful, magnificent
gotta: have got to, have to
to sweat: to have drops of salty liquid coming out of your skin
to say the least: to show something is more serious than you are actually saying
humped: arched, bent
up for something: wanting to do something
exotic: unusual and exciting because of coming from far away
what have you: and other similar things
picky: someone who is picky does not like many things
anyhoo: anyway, anyhow
staple: a basic or main food
to name after: to give someone/something the name of another person/thing
cattle: a group of animals including cows often kept for their milk or meat
I'm tellin' ya: emphasizing that what you are saying is true
souvenir: a thing that is kept as a reminder of a person or place
aficionado: a person knowledgeable and enthusiastic about something
that's a wrap: that's finished, that's done
veloma: a Malagasy word to say goodbye