



Exploring Africa's Islands

We often doesn't usually think of islands when the word "Africa" is mentioned. After all, Africa is the second largest continent. There are 47 countries on the African continent, including the disputed territory of Western Sahara. However, some islands do exist off the coast and are usually considered a part of Africa. Some of these are large, some are small, but all are fascinating. These six islands are all independent nations, and bring the total of the number of countries in Africa to 53—the most countries of any continent.



Photo of the island nation Mauritius, from the National Geographic Society. (http://www3.nationalgeographic.com/place/s/countries/country_mauritius.html)

Your Mission: Investigate the 6 African island nations. Use National Geographic's MapMachine as one of your tools to acquire geographic skills and knowledge so you will understand where these nations are, and what the islands' climate, people, land use, and environments are like.

1. **Access the National Geographic MapMachine** to begin your voyage! <http://plasma.nationalgeographic.com/mapmachine/>

Enter "Africa" in the box and select "Find A Place" as shown on the right.



2. **The Big Island.** At this scale, one island southeast of the African continent definitely stands out. It is one of the most famous islands in the world. Zoom to it.

What is the name of this island and the country?

In what ocean is this island located?

What is the name of the country on the mainland of Africa closest to the island you are investigating?

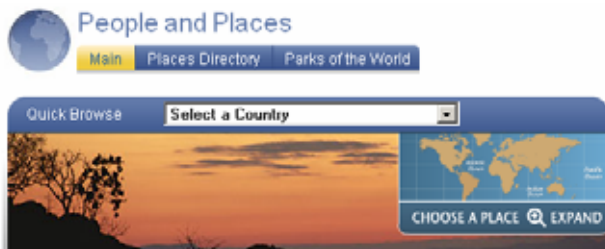
What is the name of the channel that separates this country from the island?

Look at the scale bar. **How wide is the channel at its narrowest point? Do you think you would be able to see the mainland from the island?**

Keep the MapMachine running. In a separate web browser window, look at National Geographic's places index:

<http://www3.nationalgeographic.com/places/index.html>

Select the country that you are examining in the box, as follows:



Read the article. What are the only islands in the world larger than this one?

Using the map and the article, fill in the other information needed in the table below. What, in your opinion, is the coolest thing about Madagascar?

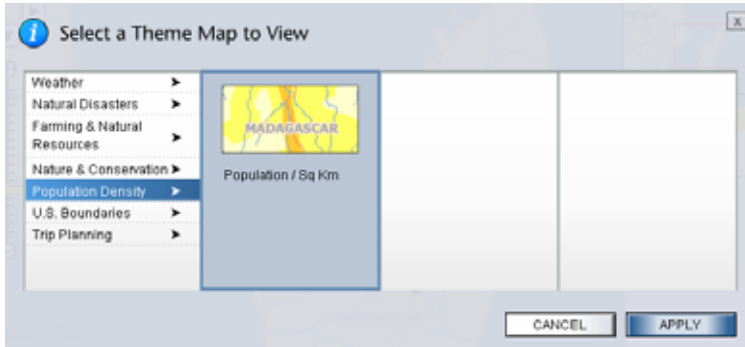
Island Country Name	Ocean	Population	Languages	Agriculture	Coolest Thing
Madagascar					



Go back to the MapMachine.

Based on the road network and the cities in Madagascar, where do you think most people live?

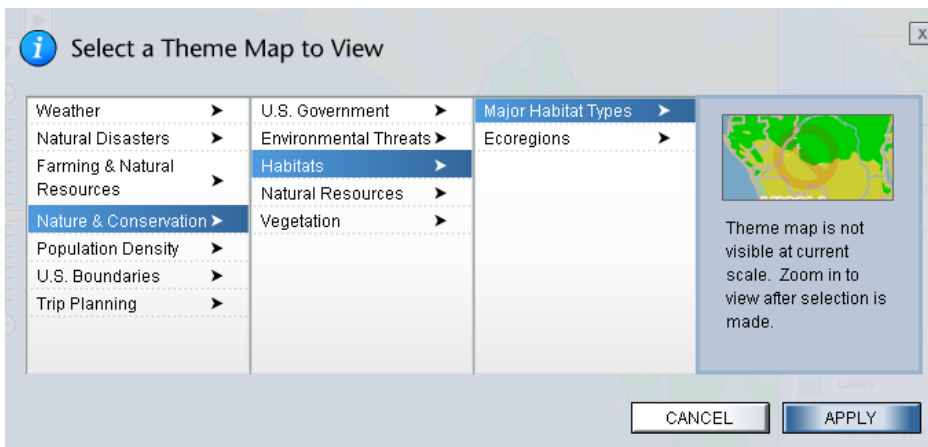
Change the map to a population map under “More Theme Maps” as follows:



Does your hypothesis about the population distribution in Madagascar hold, now that you have studied the population density map?

Which coast has more people—the east or the west coast?

3. **Habitats and Climate.** Next, look at the habitat types of Madagascar. Change the map theme under “More Theme Maps” as follows: Nature & Conservation → Habitats → Major Habitat Types, as follows:



What are the three main habitat types that you find in Madagascar?

Why do you suppose the west half of the island has a different habitat from the east half?

Find out if terrain has something to do with this difference in habitat. Change the map to a physical map. **How would you describe the physical geography of Madagascar?**

How do mountains affect the type of plants that can grow in a region?

Under "Weather," change the map to January precipitation. **How would you describe the pattern in January? Now change the map to July precipitation. Which side of receives more rainfall in July—the east or the west?**

Change back to a map of habitat types and zoom in until you see the name of the habitat shown in bright green on the east side and the habitat shown in dark green on the west side.

Based on your analysis of July rainfall, which vegetation—the Madagascar Dry Forest, or the Madagascar Lowland Forest, is more lush, or "thicker?" Why?

Examine these two ecosystems on National Geographic's WildWorld site, paying attention to the photographs shown.

Madagascar Lowland Forest:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/wildworld/profiles/terrestrial/at/at0117.html>

Madagascar Dry Forest:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/wildworld/profiles/terrestrial/at/at0202.html>

Now that you have examined the photographs, was your hypothesis about which forest would be "more lush" correct?

What are the "causes for concern" listed for the Dry Forest?

Enter the name "Toliara" in the "Find A Place" box. Select the second one in the results window and zoom to it. Change the map to a Satellite map and observe the sediment that is being brought to the ocean by the river just to the south of the city of Toliara. This is the Onilahy River.

Based on your reading of the causes for concern, above, why is this river so full of sediment?



4. **Into the Indian Ocean.** Next, pan the map to the east, about 1000 kilometers due east of the center of Madagascar. **What are the names of the two islands?**

If you sailed due east from these two islands, on what country would you finally land?

How far away is this country?

If you could sail 100 kilometers each day, how long would it take you to reach this country?

Read the first paragraph of the following about Reunion:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C3%A9union>

Next, read about Mauritius at National Geographic:

http://www3.nationalgeographic.com/places/countries/country_mauritius.html

How did these islands form?

Which of the two islands is an independent nation?

Use the article to fill in the information in the table you have been compiling on each island country, above.

Using the MapMachine, what would you say is the main habitat type on Mauritius?

Pan back to the channel between Madagascar and the African mainland, to Comoros.

Is this country comprised of one island or several islands?

Read about this country on:

http://www3.nationalgeographic.com/places/countries/country_comoros.html

What are the differences in the political history between the islands?

Use the article and MapMachine to fill in the information in the table you have been compiling on each island country, above.

Next, investigate the Seychelles:



http://www3.nationalgeographic.com/places/countries/country_seychelles.html

Zoom to the islands in the MapMachine.

How many islands make up the Seychelles?

5. On the Other Side of Africa. Now it's time to explore the islands in a completely different ocean.

Zoom to São Tomé and Príncipe in MapMachine. **In what ocean are these islands? What country on the African mainland is closest to these islands?**

Read about the islands on:

http://www3.nationalgeographic.com/places/countries/country_saotomeandprincipe.html

Use the article and MapMachine to fill in the information in the table you have been compiling on each island country, above.

Finally, explore Cape Verde in MapMachine and on:

http://www3.nationalgeographic.com/places/countries/country_capeverde.html

In what ocean are these islands?

**What country on the African mainland is closest to these islands?
What is the distance between the mainland and the closest island?**

Use the article and MapMachine to fill in the information in the table you have been compiling on each island country, above.

Other islands in the area exist too. For example, read about the Canary Islands:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canary_Islands

Why aren't the Canary Islands in your list of offshore island countries?

Why were these Atlantic Ocean islands important to European explorers? What impact do you think that European colonization had on these islands in the past and in the present?

Which islands experienced the most impact from colonialization?



6. **Dig Deeper.** You have learned about the island nations of Africa: Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, Madagascar, the Comoros, the Seychelles, and Mauritius. **What influence does physical geography have on the islands' environments?**

What influence does cultural geography have on the islands' past, and what influence does it have on how these cultures exist in the present day?

Investigate other islands in the world using MapMachine and through articles at National Geographic and elsewhere. You could start with the resources on:

<http://geography.about.com/cs/islands/>

According to this site, what is the world's most remote island? Use the MapMachine to investigate islands. **Would you agree with this statement, or do you think there is an even more remote island?**

Print your own giant wall map of Africa on:

<http://plasma.nationalgeographic.com/pdf/africaphy.pdf>

Go to Africa someday!

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler/extras/planner/africa/index.htm>

