Madagascar: The Exotic Island Essay, Research Paper

Madagascar: The Exotic Island

Looking at a map of the southern hemisphere, one wouldn?t expect

such a seemingly “small” island to be so exotic and bountiful, but the

island of Madagascar is just that. A 226,658 square mile (587,041

square kilometers) piece of land, with a a coastline of about 2,480

miles (3,990 kilometers), it?s a beautiful and different view of its large

neighbor, Africa.

The island itself is made up of ridges, rivers, valleys, and tropical

forests sectioning off the different regions of the landscape,

scattered trees and tall grasses to one side, narrow coastal plains,

and low plataeus and plains off to another. To the north is Mt.

Maromokotro, the highest peak on the island at 9,436 feet (2,876

meters). Coral beaches line the east coast, adding to the natural

beauty of the already lovely landscape.

The tropical climate provides varying amounts of rainfall?from 83

inches (211 centimeters) in the northwest to 14 inches (36

centimeters) in the southwest. The drought-infested south is

extremely hot and dry, and the west is hot and wet. Indian Ocean

cyclones bring periodic heavy rains and destructive floods. Once

covered by forests, most of the island now has a savannah-steppe

vegetation with a few forests in the west and evergreen forests on

the eastern edge of the central plateau. An interesting climate for

such a unique place.

The animals there are also different and the likes of which not found

anywhere else; not even in Africa. 50 species of lemurs inhabit the

island, as well as 800 different types of butterflies. Though near the

once-dubbed “Dark Continent”, the species and vegitation seem to

have remnants of Eastern India, proof perhaps that the island is a

breakaway of the decidedly larger continent of Asia.

The peoples of the large island are as diverse as the wildlife, ranging

from the Malagasy to the French, several native groups mixing with

those of foreign origins. The population in itself has near doubled

since 1950, 80 percent, mostly rural. Malagasy and French are the

officials languages of the island, with Christians (both Roman Catholic

and Protestent) making up the most of the religious groups.

Half still follow traditional ways, however. Education is free to all

citizens of Madagascar ranging in age from 6 to 14. However, some

tend to skip school and go straight to work. This is especially

common in the rural areas. Most hospitals are concentrated in urban

areas, but they are very understaffed for the numerous varieties of

tropical diseases that are abundant in the area, most commonly

malaria. The life expectency for natives is 51 years of age,

approximately 20 years less than our own in the U.S.

As you could probably guess, Madagascar?s land is a valuable asset

for farming. Agriculture is a large part of the economy. 86% of all

adults in Madagascar are employed in an industry pertaining to

farming, including farming itself.

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