

a day in the life...

Victoria Parsonson describes just another Tuesday in Mandritsara...



**5.45am** – Wake up, manage to drag self out of bed, realise it's already 37 degrees. Kill several cockroaches which have invaded my room overnight. Check to see if there is electricity – hurrah, fill kettle up from barrel of water, today will be a coffee day. Wash using a bucket ration. There has been no running water for several weeks.

**7am-8.30am** – Malagasy lesson number one (conducted entirely in French, all my lessons are in French). We pray before each lesson, which is an awesome reminder of fact that I am learning this language to serve God and do the work here that he has given me - there is no better motivation to get stuck into verb tables... Today my language teacher gave me a 50-question test on everything from the preceding week. I find the translating from Malagasy into French particularly challenging; it's one thing to understand what a Malagasy phrase means, but to then have to rephrase it in French at 7am...

**8.45am** – Today MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship) are due for their monthly flight. There is a small field – I mean airstrip – a couple of kilometres away, where the plane can land. I

help to take the Landrover out to prepare for the landing. Hi-viz vests, get the windsock out, whistles to clear the field of local folks, goats and oxen. Get out the sole wooden bench that acts as the 'arrivals hall'... They laugh at me when I try to directly translate 'windsock' into French and ask me why on earth I'm talking about socks. It's a wind sleeve they tell me. Surely that is obvious?! *Une manche à l'air*.

**9.30am** – MAF plane arrives. Last minute panic as a stray goat decides to start eating the middle of the airstrip for lunch, and refuses to budge. Cue us standing in the middle of the airstrip trying to get the goat out of the way just a few seconds before the plane lands. Thankfully we succeed, and leap out of the way of the plane.

**10am** – Drive back to the hospital with the MAF pilot. We pass long queues waiting in line in front of the one communal village tap that's working, with big yellow jerrycans, the sun beating down on them – it is now 40 degrees – waiting to see if the water supply will be turned on for a short time. The water situation is getting pretty bad.



**Victoria Parsonson** recently finished FY2 in Birmingham, and is now a medical and paediatrics officer for two years at Hopitaly Vaovao Mahafaly, a missionary hospital in rural north-eastern Madagascar. This article is adapted from her blog at [mandritsara.blogspot.com](http://mandritsara.blogspot.com)

**10.30am** – Go to market to buy vegetables and rice, the staple food. It's always pot luck as to what there might be to complement the standard tomatoes, onions and marrow. Today we found aubergines. The mango season has begun as well; half a penny each... There has been no power in town for several weeks either, which means no butter.

**12.00-2.30pm** – lunch break. People have long lunch breaks – partly to avoid the heat, and because of the culture of everyone going home to eat proper lunch together. It's impossible to get anything done between the hours of midday and 2pm, as everyone disappears!

**2.30pm** – Start learning this morning's Malagasy lesson. I'm not supposed to be working yet as I am still language-learning but I get a call from the ward to ask if I can come and do a neoflon (a cannula for a small baby). The baby is very dehydrated but thankfully I manage to get it in. Thanks to CMFs Developing Health Course, I know the theory of intraosseous lines with white needles (we don't have guns here) but haven't had to do it yet, and I'm thankful that I can put that off for another time. I fashion a splint out of a cardboard box and a bandage.

**4pm-5.30pm** – Malagasy lesson number two. My teacher tests me on everything I'm meant to have learnt from this morning, and then launches into the next thing to be learnt. Lessons are progressing quickly, and it's tough to keep up, but I'll be expected to use it fluently in hospital work and outpatient consultations in just a few more weeks.

**6pm** – Thunder and lightening is building over the mountains and is getting close with an

almost constant rumble and flashes. Sadly it hasn't brought any rain with it though, and we need the rain so much. Once it's less than 2km away we unplug all the electrical appliances including the fridge, as power surges are common and have destroyed appliances in the past.

**6.45-7pm** – Perhaps the most important part of the day, water time! The hospital's water tower is switched on, and for a glorious 15 minutes' ration for each missionary house, water comes out of the taps. During this time we have a routine that is carried out with military precision whereby as many buckets are filled as possible, which will need to last us for the coming 24 hours.

**7.30pm** – Tuesday night Bible study. This is perhaps a bit like a UK 'home group' with all of the missionaries working in the project – usually about twelve of us. I love these times, as I don't understand any of church on Sunday, so it's a great time to have fellowship together.

**9.25pm** – Suddenly remember to go and plug the fridge back in, oops.

**9.30pm** – Swat a few more bits of moderate-sized wildlife that have invaded my room, and off to bed – it all kicks off again at 5.45am tomorrow morning, and here, you never know what each new day will bring. Which is part of the excitement and the wonder of serving God out here in this little corner of Madagascar – no two days are ever the same, and anything can, and will, happen...

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving (Colossians 3:23-24).* ■