

The Seychelles Islands

Introduction:

Since 75 million years ago when the sparkling archipelago of 115 isles first floated free of the giant landmass of Pangaea, to occupy its solitary niche in the azure expanse of the Indian Ocean, the Seychelles islands have remained a sanctuary – a place where Nature's bounty has been conserved and protected in such forms as the planet's tiniest frog, the super-rare jellyfish tree, the wondrous coco-de-mer and Aldabra, the world's largest raised coral atoll.

The Seychelles islands, where almost half of the limited landmass is protected as nature reserves and parks, are home to no less than two UNESCO World Heritage Sites and to some of the most spectacular seabird colonies in the world. Still largely untouched today, the islands primeval beauty cascades from lushly forested granite peaks, through ancient hillside glades, to the grandeur of a pristine, sapphire ocean. From among these secluded isles, awaits the experience of a lifetime amid the reassuring harmony and welcoming friendliness of a multi-ethnic Seychellois society that still lives life close to its roots.

Culture:

Seychellois culture is a direct result of the islands colourful history of exploration, slavery and plantation life. Explorers and slaves alike brought with them their own cultures, customs and beliefs resulting in a culture explosion and fusion which lead to the miss matched, sometimes contradictory, yet fascinating Seychellois culture of today where simultaneous belief in the church and witch craft and speaking Creole and English is nothing out of the ordinary.

Language:

The Seychelles has three official languages; English, French and Creole with Creole as the main language spoken by everyone. Creole is derived from C17th French yet is dotted with a few African words and expressions resulting in a language that echoes the history of the slaves and one of the countries who tried to claim Seychelles as its own.

Many of Seychelles inhabitants, especially those in the service/tourism industries who often deal with foreigners, are also well versed in German and Italian although never having received any formal training in said languages.

Family/Marriage

Seychellois households often consist of an extended family arrangement with grandparents, aunts, uncles and siblings living together in harmony under one roof. No pressure is put on children to move out so it is also not unusual for a 'thirty-something' to be living at home. One generally only moves out only when moving in with a life partner. Wedding ceremonies follow that of a typically traditional wedding - the bride beautiful in her white dress as vows are exchanged after which a huge reception is held.

Religion

Approximately 90% of Seychellois are Christians with 89% of them being Catholic. On Sundays churches can be seen packed with brightly dressed figures all in their Sunday best. Religious feasts such as Easter and The Assumption of Mary are celebrations to be seen! Seychelles also has a small congregation of Muslims, Hindus and Bahais whose festivals are a colourful site with street processions and bright costumes. (See festivals and events).

Black magic

With the arrival of African and Malagasy slaves, came the introduction of witchcraft, superstitions and gris-gris. Gris-gris is a form of black magic and herbalism used to gain revenge, increase one's luck or even to gain the love of that someone special. It was outlawed by Britain in 1958 but survived underground for a time. It was believed that if you put a chicken bone under the pillow of the one you want to be with, they would confess their undying love to you. The practice of wakes is another result of gri-gris. It was believed that during the first night of a person death, a black magician could come and steal the body and turn the deceased into a zombie or mummy. Hence the wake – to keep watch over the deceased lest he come back as something dark and evil.

Music and Dance

Music and dance lie at the core of Seychellois culture and was, during the time of slavery, one of very few ways in which slaves could express themselves. Musical instruments consisted mainly of drums (Tam-tam) and tambour and string instruments such as the zez and mouloumpa. Today, Seychelles music is influenced largely by country and western and reggae/rap leading to the introduction of guitars, violins and keyboards.

There are two main traditional dances in Seychelles, the Sega doused in African flavor and the Moutya fuelled by the anger and suppression of mixed race slaves. The Sega consists of people dancing by swaying their hips and shuffling their feet around a fire to the beating of drums while lyrics recounting events of everyday life sail through the air. The Moutya is a more erotic version of the Sega and is accompanied by a potent brew consisting of coconut palm sap mixed with sugar to give it an extra kick. Dancing starts off slowly in time to the beat of the drums, but speeds up and becomes more erotic as the beating becomes faster and faster and faster.

Art

Seychelles is coloured by a number of artist and a variety of art forms including painting, sculpting, batik and jewellery making. Art works generally depict sensual scenery, tropical vegetation and the browns of beaches and blues of the oceans who tease them. On Mahe Island there are a number of art galleries exhibiting work of famous artists including Michael Adams and Edgard Marday. (Please see Places of Interest)

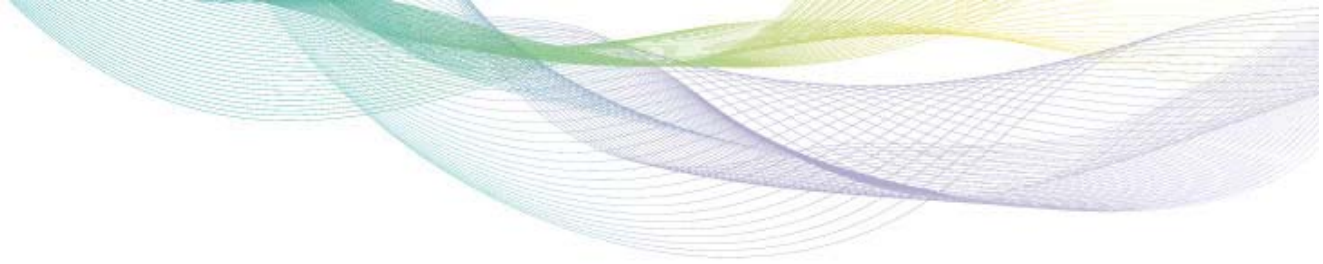
Cuisine

Creole cuisine draws from a variety of culinary styles resulting in tastes to please every pallet. With curry's from India, rice dishes and stir fries from China, garlic, ginger and herbs from France, rice and fish (the country's staple diet) is turned into mouthwatering dishes every time. Among the Seychellois favorites are tec-tec soup (made from small white shells collected off the beach), fruit bat stew, shark chutney and millionaires salad (made from palm hearts). Favorite beverages include EKU or Seybrew beer, brewed and bottled in Seychelles, as well as citronella and vanilla tea.

Flora:

With almost 50% of its total land mass set aside for conservation it is not difficult to fathom that Seychelles is teeming with a number of endemic specimens found no were else on earth. Its unique topography of sandy shores, thick forests and mountains is what makes it possible for the islands to support such a diverse collection of flora.

One of the most well-known endemic species is the Coco de mer. It is found growing wild on only two of the 115 islands of the Seychelles, Praslin and Curieuse. Its nut, consisting of two halves joined in the center, is the largest in the world and can easily weigh more than 20kg. The Coco de Mer is one of only six endemic palms, all of which can be seen at the Vallee de Mai on Praslin Island.



Mahe Island is no stranger to unique vegetation either thanks to the eight surviving specimens of jellyfish trees found tucked away amidst the thick mountain vegetation. Believed to be extinct, samples of this unusual tree were rediscovered in 1970. The jellyfish tree is easily identified by its flowers which look like round jellyfish minus their long tentacles.

Colouring the islands shore are 766 species of flowering plants and 85 species of fern, 69 of which are endemic to Seychelles. Within spraying distance of the sea's salty water, one will find 54 species of shrubby salt bushes and preventing coastal erosion is what is left of what once used to be miles of mangrove forests. Glacis or weathered down granite on exposed mountain sides, do themselves act as perfect habitats for certain plants to grow. They often have small pockets filled with mosses etc. which can act as fertilizer. Within these small pockets, pitcher plants grow quite comfortably. They are well known for their pitcher like receptacles which contain liquid capable of digesting insects that may fall into the pitcher.

Beneath the waves, the Seychelles is home to 350 species of red, brown and green seaweed and eight species of sea grass. The different types of sea grass act as shelter for small fish and serves as the main diet for sea turtles.

Fauna:

From its skies to the floor of its ocean, Seychelles has much to offer in terms of fauna. Most notable is its remarkable range of bird species and its giant tortoise congregation. Endemic species of birds found on Mahe Island include the Scoops Owl, Seychelles Kestrel and White Eye. On Praslin Island one can see the Black Parrot, Seychelles Blue Pigeon and the Seychelles Cave Swiftlet. La Digue Island is home to the ever rare Paradise Flycatcher with Frégate Island housing the Black Paradise Flycatcher as well as the Cave Swiftlet. (For more information, please see 'Birding')

Seychelles has three endemic mammal species including the Seychelles fruit bat which is caught by locals and turned into a stew. Other species include the Aldabra Fruit Bat and Sheath-tailed Bat which weighs between 10 and 11 kg.

Eleven endemic species of amphibians and 16 endemic species of reptiles live on Seychelles soil including the turtles and tortoises which have become synonymous with the islands thanks to the giant land tortoise, Esmeralda. Esmeralda is a giant male tortoise who resides on Bird Island. He has slowly made his way into the Guinness Book of World Record as the largest living land tortoise weighing a total of 304kg. He is said to be approximately 214 years old and is believed to be the oldest creature on earth.



Historical Timeline:

- AD851 First Arab recorded sighting of Seychelles
- 1502 Seychelles was visited by Portuguese ships
- 1506 Seychelles first appeared on Portuguese maps
- 1609 Pirates used Seychelles as a base while terrorizing ships in the Indian Ocean
First British landing recorded by John Jourdain
- 1730 Olivier Le Vasseur, La Buse, the well-known Seychelles pirate is publically hanged in Reunion.
Just before his hanging he threw a piece of paper in the air with cryptic clues as to where he hid the treasure he had stolen. It is believed to be buried somewhere on Bel Ombre and the search for the treasure is still on today.
- 1742 Mahe was named after the Governor of Mauritius – Mahe de La Bourdonnais when French explorer Captain Lazare Picault landed in Seychelles. This was the first landing of France in the Seychelles.
- 1756 Seychelles was claimed by France and was formally named Seychelles
- 1768 Seychelles sees it first settlers when the British Navy released a number of slaves
- 1770 Coco de Mer was discovered by Barre
- 1778 Lt Charles Routier de Romainvill from France established the first permanent settlement in Seychelles which today is known as 'Victoria'
- 1794 Seychelles is annexed by Britain
- 1802 Cotton becomes Seychelles most important export followed by coconut oil and wood
- 1811 French administration comes to an end
- 1835 Slavery in Mahe was abolished
- 1862 Avalasse (storm) hit Seychelles
- 1903 Seychelles became a British Crown Colony by Edward VII
Clock Tower was erected in commemoration of the event in Victoria
- 1906 Copra becomes Seychelles main export
- 1914 Seychelles undergoes severe economic hardship due to WWI
- 1926 Electricity arrives to the island
- 1939 - 1945 Seychelles served as a base for Royal Navy Ships and RAF planes
- 1958 Gris gris - a type of black magic and herbalism brought to Seychelles by the African and Malagasy slaves was banned by Britain forcing the practice underground for a time.
- 1964 First Political Parties were formed in Seychelles
France Albert Rene formed the Seychelles People United Party James Mancham formed the Seychelles Democratic Party (won elections in both 1966 and 1970)
- 1971 Airport was built and opened by Queen Elizabeth - Tourism begins to soar
- 1975 Seychelles becomes an autonomous colony
- 1976 Seychelles is declared a Republic on the 29 June
A coalition government is formed between Sir James Mancham (President) and Albert Rene (Prime Minister)
- 1977 Albert Rene seizes full power in a coup d'etat
- 1978 Seychelles becomes a one party state under Rene
- 1982 Aldabra proclaimed a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- 1983 Valle de Mai on Praslin proclaimed a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- 1991 Seychelles becomes a democratic multiparty state
- 1993 First multiparty election is held and is won by Rene (60% of votes)
- 2004 James Alix Michel took over as the new President
- 2006 President Michel wins presidential elections
Parliament bans political or religious organizations from running radio stations resulting in a rare outbreak of unrest
- 2007 Elections are held early due to oppositions MP's boycotting parliament after political parties were banned from owning radio stations - Ruling party SPPF wins elections

The Seychelles Islands: Facts And Figures

Geography:

The Seychelles archipelago lies in the Western Indian Ocean, northeast of Madagascar at the following coordinates:

4 35 S, 55 40 E

Seychelles total land area is **455 sq km**.

Its coastline measures a total of **491km**.

The highest point in Seychelles is Morne Seychellois reaching 905m and is on the main island, Mahe.

Climate: Seychelles has a tropical marine climate. It experiences high humidity and is warmest during the northwest monsoon from March to May. The cooler season is during the southeast monsoon which falls between May and September.

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	YEAR
RAINFALL (mm)	392	300	180	192	101	51	63	110	125	221	230	306	2271
SUNSHINE hrs per day	5.1	6.2	6.8	7.6	8.4	7.9	7.4	7.5	7.6	7.1	6.7	5.2	6.9
MEAN MAX TEMP (Deg. C)	29.8	30.3	30.0	31.3	30.5	29.3	28.3	28.4	29.0	29.5	30.0	29.8	29.8
MEAN MIN TEMP (Deg. C)	24.1	24.7	24.8	25.0	25.5	24.8	24.1	24.0	24.3	24.3	24.0	23.8	24.4
HUMIDITY (Average %)	82	80	79	80	79	79	80	79	79	80	80	82	80

Average Monthly Data at Seychelles International Airport (sea level)

Population:

Seychelles has an estimated total population of 81,895.

25.4% are between the ages of 0-14 years

68.5% are between 15 – 64 years

6.1% are 65 years and over

The population growth rate is 0.432%.

Average life expectancy in Seychelles is 72.34 years

Male: 66.98 years

Female: 77.86 years

Ethnic groups in the Seychelles include: French, African, Indian, Chinese and Arab.

Language: Creole: 91.8%

English (as an official language): 4.9%

Other: 3.1%

The literacy rate in Seychelles is 91.8%

Religion: Roman Catholic: 82.3%

Anglican: 6.4%

Other: 11.3%

Government:

Official Name of Seychelles: Republic Of Seychelles

Capital: Victoria - smallest capital in the world

Government Type: Republican

Independence: 29 July 1976 from Britain.

Legal System: based on English common law, French civil law and customary law

Executive Branch: Chief of State: President James Michel (14 April 2004 – present)

Head of Government: President James Michel

Cabinet: Council of Ministers appointed by the president

Elections are held every 5 years

Political Parties: Democratic Party (DP) - James Mancham, Paul Chow

Seychelles National Party (SNP) – Wavel Ramkalawan

Seychelles People Progressive Front (SPPF) – France Albert Rene, James Michel)

Seychelles Flag:

The Seychelles flag was officially adopted on 8 January 1996.

Red, White, Green – official colours of the Seychelles Peoples United Party

Blue, Yellow – official colours of the Democratic Party.

Economy:

Tourism and tuna fishing are the main drivers of the Seychelles economy with tourism providing more than 70% of hard currency earnings.

Seychelles main industries include:

Tourism (employs 30% of work force)

Fishing

Coconut and vanilla processing

Copra

Boat building

Employment:

Agriculture: 10%

Industry: 19%

Service: 71%

Tourism: 30% (of service industry)

Exports:

Canned tuna, frozen fish, cinnamon bark, copra, granite products

Imports:

Currency and equipment, foodstuffs, petroleum products, chemicals

Currency:

The official currency of Seychelles is the Seychelles Rupee (SCR).

The Rupee is divided into 100 cents.

Notes are in denominations of SRC 500, 100, 50, 25 and 10.

It is not a freely convertible currency and can only be purchased or exchanged within the Seychelles.



Transport Systems:

Airports: 15 (8 paved, 7 unpaved)
Roadways: 458km (440km paved, 18 km unpaved)
Merchant Marine: 1 cargo ship
4 chemical tankers
Ports/Terminals: Victoria

Communication:

Country code: 00248
Telephones: 21 400
Mobile Phones: 57 000
Radio Broadcast stations: AM 1, FM 1, Shortwave 2
Radios: 42 000
Televisions: 11,000
Internet hosts: 72
Internet Providers: 1
Internet Users: 20 000

* Facts and figures courtesy of CIA – World Fact Book