



SEYCHELLES ISLANDS OVERVIEW

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.



GRANITIC ISLANDS

Mahe Island

The largest of Seychelles main islands, Mahe, is a granitic island measuring 27km in length and 8km in breadth. It is the site of Seychelles’ main port as well as the Seychelles International Airport opened in 1971 by Queen Elizabeth.

The world’s smallest Capital, Victoria, can also be found on this island, as can 90% of Seychelles 81,895 strong population. The island offers a multitude of activities and attractions to keep one busy including art galleries, museums and some magnificent beaches!



Praslin Island

Lying 45km northeast of Mahe, this 11.3 x 4 km island is the ‘Seychelles on the brochures.’ Your first step onto this island’s shores is one you will not easily forget as a feeling of complete calm washes over you almost instantaneously. Smaller and quieter than Mahe, Praslin has less than half of Mahe’s accommodation facilities but by no means falls short of its natural beauty. The Curieuse Marine National Park borders the Northern coast of Praslin and provides some of the best snorkeling and diving in the Seychelles’ waters. Due to its close proximity to the smaller islands of the archipelago, Praslin is the perfect base for those who have ‘island hopping’ at the top of their itinerary.



La Digue Island

The timeless island of La Digue where traditional customs have been preserved (as much as is possible) is the fourth largest and most renowned of all 115 islands that make up the Seychelles Paradise. It can be reached by ferry departing from Praslin, or for the more adventurous and less cash strapped, by helicopter.

The best way to enjoy this island is by taking a day trip out to the island (as apposed to staying overnight) and exploring it by bicycle. With only two up hills and covering an area of only 15sq km it truly is a fantastic ride that will take you back to your carefree childhood days. For the less energetic, ox carts and the occasional taxi are available but one would almost want to leave modern transportation behind and immures oneself in the true traditions of this tiny island.

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Fregate Island

Lying 4° South of the Equator, this granitic island is a true Garden of Eden. A sanctuary to unique indigenous flora and fauna. It is the only place where one finds the giant Tenebrionid Beetle, as well as a myriad of rare birds and other harmless creatures.

Frégate attracts travellers seeking a five star luxurious tropical island experience with the additional benefit of an environmentally friendly holiday. When the resort was built, strict island policies were put in place to safe guard the natural environment for its precious fauna & flora, and in keeping with this effort only 40 guests are allowed on the island at any one time.

Silhouette Island

Silhouette Island boast a magnificent 5* property, Labriz, complete with streams, a river, a gorgeous lagoon, a tortoise sanctuary and a wonderful stretch of beach. It is situated 17km off the coast of Beau Vallon Bay and is blanketed in thick forests that swoop down to the shore. With many waterfalls, rivers and playing home to one of world's smallest frogs, 9.8mm in length, it is a nature lover's playground!

North Island

North island offers 5* luxury in an environment where conservation is at the forefront of design. The lodge on North Island, meticulously handcrafted from natural materials, lies amidst endangered species of flora and fauna and is home to 360° of pure heaven. Its 11 private villas crafted in a Robinson Crusoe meets modern day luxury style, are equipped with all the facilities one has come to expect of a 5* luxury resort!

CORALLINE ISLANDS

Bird Island

Bird Island constitutes 170 acres of complete natural indulgence free of the modern technology of TV's, radios and in room telephones.

The island is privately owned and was declared a nature reserve in 1986 due to its extraordinary proliferation of seabirds and other migratory birds that call this island home. Bird Island Lodge is the island's only hotel and is a true escape into a tropical wilderness.

*No.7 in World's Top Eco-destinations – BBC Wildlife Magazine

Denis Island

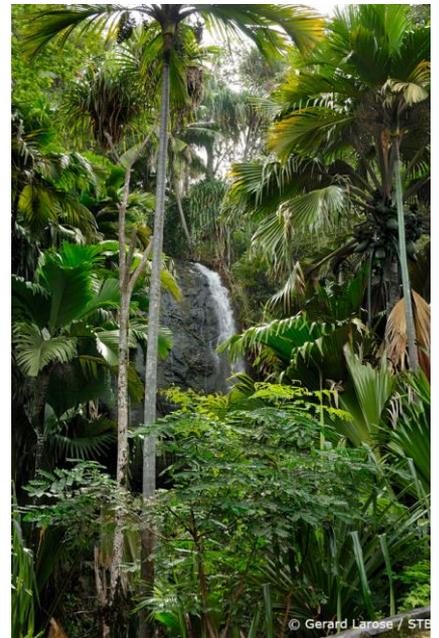
Denis Private island is a jewel measuring 2km x 1.5km, blanketed in thick wooded palms and surrounded by soft, sandy beaches. The sparkling waters that surround the island are idea for snorkeling, swimming and diving.

A bottle containing the Act of Possession, buried by Denis de Trobriand, is still buried somewhere on the island, so while taking a walk keep your eyes open for the perfect hiding place where this treasure may still be hidden.

December is the perfect season for turtle nesting and viewing humpback whales and spinner dolphins on Denis Private Island – December and January being the season for seeing nature at its best.

Desroches Island

Desroches Island is a nature lovers hide away! Set on an island offering only one hotel and over 14kms of white sandy beach, it is a true escape into nature. The resort offers luxurious villas to cater for couples or large families/groups, fitted with only the best amenities, and even a butler service for the larger villas if needed. Desroches offers some of the best snorkeling and fishing in the Seychelles and offers up an entire island to be explored on foot or by bicycle. For its younger visitors, Kids Haven offers a variety of different activities for them to partake in, from Tuesday to Sunday that will be sure to keep them busy as they too explore the wonders of the island.



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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 nowhere 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.

DIVING/SNORKELING

What makes Seychelles diving is not just the beauty of the soft corals, the wonderful topography, the abundant fish life and the chance to see turtles, whale sharks and other big pelagics. Diving in Seychelles is exclusive, relaxed and fun. Spear fishing is banned so the fish are less skittish than in most regions. This is easy diving, in warm, clear water with excellent visibility and plenty of both macro life and obliging big stuff – a diver's, and particularly a dive photographer's dream. The boat rides to the dive sites are short, the dive schools are world class and the instructors speak English (and often numerous other languages).



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CLIMATE

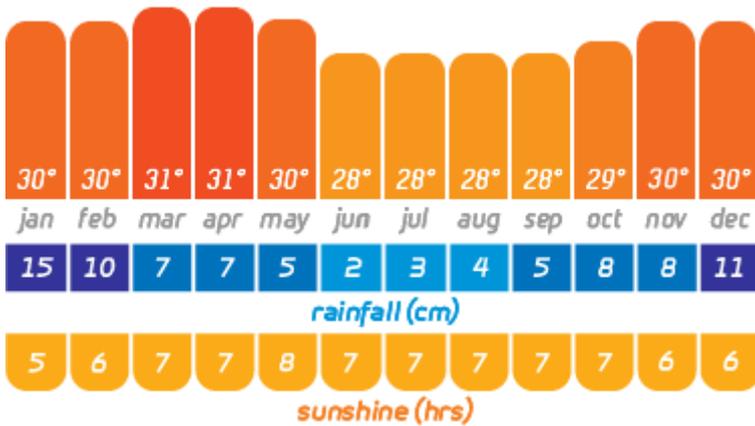
Seychelles archipelago lies in the Western Indian Ocean, northeast of Madagascar at **4 35 S, 55 40 E**

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

Average Monthly Data at Seychelles International Airport (sea level)



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.

ELECTRICITY

220-240 volts AC 50 Hz. Seychelles uses the British standard square three-pin, 13 amp sharp electric plug. Visitors from countries other than the United Kingdom are advised to bring their own adaptors.

CLOTHING

Very casual, light tropical clothing (suits, jackets and ties are rarely worn). For evening dining, however, hotels and restaurants usually require gentlemen to wear long trousers/chinos and short sleeve shirts, and for ladies to wear a light cotton dress or smart cotton slacks. These dress requirements also apply to the exclusive island lodges. Should you be in doubt please enquire at our office for any further information.

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.

