



SEYCHELLES CULTURE & HISTORY

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-gri. 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.



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MUSIC & 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 influence 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

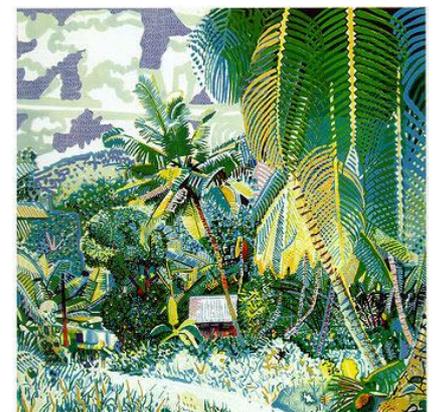
Seychelles is coloured by a number of artist and a variety of art forms including painting, sculpting, batik and jewellery making. Art works generally depict sensual scenery, tropical vegetation and the browns of beaches and blues of the oceans who tease them. On Mahe Island there are a number of art 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.

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 server economic hardship due to WWI



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- 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

