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SEYCHELLES GUIDE

wordtravels



The beautiful Seychelles islands are regularly credited as one of the most romantic destinations in the world. The Seychelles casts a siren-like spell over travellers, with crystalline turquoise waters, pristine coral reefs, and powdery beaches that encircle vast granite pinnacles and verdant rainforest.

The islands stretch like an array of jewels across nearly one million square kilometres of the Indian Ocean east of Kenya, and even have their own suggestively shaped fruit, the famous 'coco de mer' double coconut, to emphasise the country's seductive charms. Only a few of the 115 islands are inhabited, with most of the local population (known as Seychellois) gathered on the main island, Mahé, around the capital city of Victoria.

The Seychellois population comprises an eclectic mix of the descendants of freed African slaves, Arab, Indian and Chinese traders, and British and French settlers and seafarers who go about their business speaking a Creole patois. The multi-party democratic republic was once a thriving pirate's haven, but today it serves as a refuge for sun-seekers, honeymooners and nature lovers who congregate in the top quality hotels and resorts on the shores of the main islands.

Whether you come to soak up the equatorial sun on silver sands, dive among more than 800 species of fish in the island waters, marvel at flocks of colourful birds flitting between rare jungle trees, or to cement your marriage vows, you will find the Seychelles archipelago to be paradise on Earth. Although primarily enjoyed as a luxury destination, there is an increasing drive to develop the budget tourism options on the islands, opening the doors of paradise to travellers who may previously only have dreamed of a holiday on these exotic shores.

THE BASICS

TIME

Local time is GMT +4.

ELECTRICITY

Electrical current is 220-240 volts, 50Hz. Plugs are of the British type, with three flat pins.

LANGUAGE

Creole, English and French are all spoken in the Seychelles.

TRAVEL HEALTH

Health regulations in the Seychelles require that travellers from areas infected by yellow fever have a vaccination certificate. Immunisation against hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid are recommended. Visitors are advised to bring their own medication to avert the risk of travellers' diarrhoea, as well as sun block and insect repellent, as local supplies can be erratic and costly. During the rainy season in particular, visitors should take precautions against mosquito bites due to the risk of dengue fever and the chikungunya virus (although these diseases are rare in Seychelles). Tap water meets WHO standards, but most visitors prefer to drink bottled water, which is widely available. Medical facilities on the more remote islands are limited or non-existent, but visitors will find a government hospital and several private clinics in Victoria. Medical insurance with full evacuation cover is necessary.

TIPPING

Charges for most services include a service charge of between five and 10 percent, therefore tipping is not obligatory. If service has been exceptional, a small tip on top of this is warmly welcomed.

SAFETY INFORMATION

Safety is not generally an issue in the Seychelles; violent crime is unlikely and most visits are trouble-free. There have been some incidents of theft and assault, but these are targeted mainly at residents. Visitors should be vigilant, particularly after dark in Victoria and in isolated areas. Avoid taking valuables to the beach, where they could be pilfered by petty thieves. Women should avoid walking alone on isolated beaches.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Nudism is unacceptable, and topless bathing is not tolerated on many, but not all, beaches. Punishments for drug offences can be severe.

BUSINESS

In the Seychelles, business is conducted relatively informally. Men and women are not required to wear formal suits, although a smart appearance is advised. Business is usually conducted in English or French. Business hours are generally 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday.

COMMUNICATIONS

The international dialling code for Seychelles is +248. The outgoing code is 00 followed by the relevant country code (e.g. 0044 for the United Kingdom). Direct lines to most countries are available at major hotels. There is excellent GSM 900/1800 coverage for mobile telephones, and most hotels offer a postal service, email and internet connection. There are internet cafes in Victoria.

DUTY FREE

Travellers to the Seychelles over 18 years do not have to pay duty on 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco; two litres of spirits and two litres of wine; 200ml of perfume or eau de toilette. Prohibited items include drugs, narcotics, firearms, spear-fishing equipment, and camouflage clothing. It is forbidden to export unprocessed coco de mer, shells, fish and live tortoises. A permit is required for processed coco de mer.

CLIMATE

Seychelles is constantly hot and humid, with an average annual temperature of 84°F (29°C), and a similar average sea temperature, which seldom drops below 81°F (27°C). The heat is usually pleasantly tempered by sea breezes. The islands lie outside of the hurricane belt, so storms are rare, but tropical rains fall during January and February. It is easy to escape the showers, though, because it can be sunny on one side of an island while it rains on the other.

The Seychelles are a glorious holiday destination at any time of year, but the best time to visit depends on the desired activities. For instance, it is slightly windier between May and September, making this the ideal time to visit for those wanting to sail or enjoy other wind-based sports; whereas the best time of year for scuba diving and snorkelling is April and May or October and November, when the visibility is at its best.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR SOUTH AFRICANS

South Africans must have a passport valid for the duration of their stay and will be issued with a visitor's permit on arrival, valid for three months.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR AMERICANS

United States citizens require a passport valid at least for the length of their stay and will be issued with a visitor's permit on arrival, valid for three months.

PASSPORT/VISA

No foreigners require a visa to enter Seychelles. A visitor's permit, valid for a maximum of three months, is issued on arrival and may be extended on application for up to 12 months. All visitors do, however, require a passport valid for the duration of their visit, a return or onward ticket, sufficient funds to cover their stay (a minimum of USD 150 per day), and proof of accommodation. Extensions are possible if applied for at least a week before expiry of visitor's permit. It is highly recommended that passports have at least six months validity remaining after your intended date of departure from your travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

MONEY

The Seychelles currency is the Rupee (SCR), divided into 100 cents. Visitors can now pay in SCR and are no longer obligated to pay for all services in major foreign currency notes, but are entitled to use their preferred major foreign currency as well (Euros are the most widely used), or to pay by credit card. It is important to note that it is illegal to exchange foreign currency for Rupees at unofficial outlets, or with individuals, so make sure to get change in the currency used to purchase goods or services. Credit cards are widely welcomed throughout the Seychelles. Money can be exchanged at banks and the airport on Mahé, or at hotels. To change Rupees back into foreign currency on departure requires the official receipt from the initial transaction. ATMs are available at major banks in Victoria and Praslin.

MAHE

Despite the fact that it is heavily populated and well developed, the island of Mahé, the largest of the Seychelles archipelago, contains plenty of hidden treasures, not least of which is a legendary pirate's cache purportedly buried at Bel Ombre. The southern end of the island still sports deserted beaches, and even the busy northern urban enclave, which includes the international airport and capital city, Victoria, exudes laid-back charm.

Forming the backbone of the island is a spectacular mountain range that includes Morne Seychellois, the island's highest peak. Around the peak is one of the island's beautiful national parks, offering great hiking and stunning scenery. More than 60 idyllic beaches fringed with swaying palm trees can be found along the shoreline, offering a host of activities from excellent dive centres to various water sports operators. There are several interesting sights to see, particularly in friendly Victoria.

Although not renowned for its nightlife, Mahé is the liveliest island after dark and resorts like the Berjaya Beau Vallon Bay Beach Resort and Casino, and several nightclubs and restaurants serve up traditional Creole delights and provide some evening entertainment.

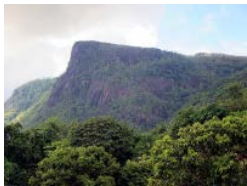
ATTRACTIONS IN MAHE

Victoria



Having the dubious honour of being the smallest capital city in the world, Victoria may also be considered one of the most charming, and this quaint capital is easily explored on foot. The best place to soak up the friendly atmosphere is at the busy daily market (closed on Sundays), where local crafts are sold alongside fish, fruit and vegetables. A hint of the French and British colonial history is still palpable, reflected in historical buildings like the courthouse and main post office. Among the colourful houses, visitors can also spot a cathedral and the Victoria clock tower, a replica of the clock first erected at Vauxhall Bridge in London in 1897. The city is also home to many artists, and works by talented locals are popular buys at local galleries.

Morne Seychellois National Park



The largest national park in the Seychelles, Morne Seychellois National Park takes up more than 20 percent of the area of Mahé. The park is made up of a number of habitats and ecosystems ranging from coastal mangrove forests to misty mountain peaks. Morne Seychellois contains no settlements, although you may stumble across the ruins of old cinnamon distilleries. Dominating the landscape is Morne Seychellois, the highest peak on the island, at 2,970 feet (905m). The national park has a network of 12 well-marked hiking trails covering just over nine miles (15km), traversing some truly beautiful landscapes. Visitors can find maps and other information in Victoria.

Seychelles National Museum of History



Step back into the days of the buccaneers at the Seychelles National Museum of History, which features excellent displays of historic artefacts relating to the cultural and natural history of the islands. Exhibits include a range of interesting objects salvaged from shipwrecks, coral, and voodoo dolls to items that belonged to well-known pirates in days of yore. The museum also holds the oldest known map of the Seychelles, which dates back to 1517. Though the museum is small, its single gallery offers a fascinating glimpse into the culture and history of the Seychelles, and visitors interested in local history will be rewarded by spending a quick hour or two perusing the exhibition.

National Botanical Gardens



The century-old Botanical Gardens at the south end of Victoria extend for six hectares (15 acres), and are planted with a wide variety of indigenous and exotic trees, including the Seychelles islands' unique 'coco de mer' palms. For those staying on the island of Mahe and not travelling much further afield, the botanical garden may present the only opportunity to see this highly unusual plant, which is found nowhere else in the world. The orchid garden is also particularly lovely. There is a restaurant and souvenir shop in the gardens. The National Botanical Gardens provide a cool, green oasis in the city, the perfect spot for a stroll or a picnic.

St Anne Marine National Park



A treat for nature lovers, guided tours are offered from Victoria harbour to the St Anne National Marine Park, which covers six islands off the coast of Mahé, near the city. The islands included in the park are Ste Anne, Ile Moyenne, Ile Ronde, Ile Longue, Ile Cachee and Ile aux Cerfs. The park encompasses one of the most important nesting sites for Hawksbill turtles, and beneath its clear waters, ideal for snorkelling, the glory of the coral reefs can be enjoyed. Glass bottomed boat trips and sunset cruises are also available, and the national park is a beautiful and popular spot for wedding photos. All Marine National Parks in Seychelles are open daily, including public holidays.

EVENTS IN MAHE

Independence Day - 2014-06-29

The Seychelles Independence Day celebrations, which take place at the end of June each year, are not to be missed. Visitors will be treated to impressive displays of national pride and patriotism, as public spaces and parks fill with families and fireworks light up the evening skies. The Independence Day celebrations are a key event in the Seychelles, and visitors are encouraged to wave the colourful blue, yellow, red, white and green Seychelles flag and join in the festivities. Although few travellers plan their trips to coincide with the event, those who happen to be in the Seychelles on 29 June are in for a real treat.

Seychelles Marathon - 2018-02-25

The Seychelles Eco-Friendly Marathon is held on the last Sunday of February every year. Runners from across the globe descend on the Seychelles to take part in this scenic event. Participants can enjoy the natural beauty of Mahe Island as they run, walk or jog along the beaches, and onlookers cheer from the side-lines or from their sunbathing spots. The race starts at Beau Vallon Beach and follows the peninsula round to Victoria before turning to follow the same route back to the finish. In addition to the full marathon, there is a half marathon and both a 5km and 10km race.

PRASLIN ISLAND

The popular holiday island of Praslin lies 21 miles (34km) northeast of Mahé in the Seychelles archipelago, a popular stop for cruise liners and a vacation destination for honeymooners and beach lovers. Visitors to Praslin have a choice of two ways to get to the island. The first option is by boat from Mahé Island; there are a number of ferries and high-speed catamarans operating between Mahé and Praslin, and fast catamarans make the crossing in just 45 minutes. Praslin Island also has a small airport, Iles des Palmes Airport, which is only serviced by Air Seychelles. Visitors to the Seychelles wishing to get to Praslin by air can book a ticket either on one of the scheduled flights to the island or on a chartered plane, which generally tend to go to more than one of the islands in the Seychelles group.

The island's favourite beach, Anse Lazio, is one of the world's most exquisite, but the entire island is ringed with beautiful secluded beaches, sporting coral reefs and crystal clear waters. Praslin is known for being the almost exclusive home of the rare 'coco de mer' palm, that produces the world's largest nut, and delights ornithologists with glimpses of some of the world's rarest birds, like the black parrot and fruit pigeon. Several large resort hotels have been developed on the island, but this has not interfered with the natural beauty or abundant flora and fauna, or its reputation as being as close to the Garden of Eden as one can get. There are a few villages sprinkled across the island, housing the permanent population of a few thousand souls, most of whom work in the hotels and resorts or depend on fishing for their livelihood.

LA DIGUE

With post-card-perfect sandy beaches, tangled jungles and swaying palm trees, La Digue Island is the epitome of a tropical island getaway. A few minutes east of Praslin by boat, La Digue is the fourth largest of the Seychelles' inhabited islands with a population of about 2,000 people and an area of roughly four square miles (10 sq km).

Though it is a popular Seychelles holiday destination, La Digue Island has managed to avoid the enthusiastic tourist development that threatens some areas of Praslin and Mahé. La Passe is the only real settlement on the island, with a small casino and a quaint jetty where both rickety fishing boats and sleek yachts are moored.

Life on La Digue clings to Creole traditions more than other islands, and tourists can buy fresh fish direct from fishermen on the quayside, play dominoes late into the night at local bars, or accompany residents to Mass wearing their Sunday best. The laidback feel of the island is personified by the main mode of transportation, the slow-moving ox cart.

Urban life is only a small part of a holiday on La Digue Island; 40 percent of the island is devoted to nature reserves, enjoying the protection of National Park status. Most of the island's population lives on the low eastern plateau, with the rest given over to local flora and fauna like the Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher and the Aldabra Giant Tortoise.

As far as beaches on La Digue Island go, Anse Source d'Argent is by far the most popular. Voted among the top beaches in the world numerous times, Anse Source d'Argent is still only one of many beautiful beaches on La Digue.

Outdoor activities abound on La Digue, and visitors can enjoy climbing Eagle's Nest Mountain, taking bicycle tours of the jungle, or horseback riding on the L'Union Estate.

AIRPORTS

SEYCHELLES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (SEZ)

LOCATION

The airport is located seven miles (11km) from Victoria on the island of Mahe.

GETTING TO THE CITY

Taxis are available to carry passengers to any point on the island. A bus service to Victoria is also available and departs every 20 to 30 minutes.

TIME

Local time is GMT +4.

CONTACTS

Tel: +248 384 000.

CAR RENTAL

Car rental agencies represented at the airport include Sixt.

AIRPORT TAXIS

Taxis leave from just outside the terminal. Taxi fares vary, so it's best to enquire before the journey starts.

TRANSFER BETWEEN TERMINALS

The airport has one international and one domestic terminal. The terminals are a short walking distance from each other.

FACILITIES

Airport facilities include a tourism kiosk, duty-free shopping, banking and currency exchange facilities, ATMs, restaurants and bars, and an executive

lounge.

DEPARTURE TAX

WEBSITE

www.victoria-seychelles.airport-authority.com

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