

BIG FIVE

TOURS & EXPEDITIONS

Enriching Lives Through Distinctive Journeys

Republic of

Seychelles

Travel Guide



The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions and answers to some frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip. Be sure to check the reading listing included here for more information.



CLIMATE

The islands lie outside the cyclone belt but receive monsoon rains from November to February with the northwest trade winds. This hot and humid season gives way to a period of cooler weather, though the temperature rarely falls below 23°C, and rougher seas when the trade winds blow from the southeast (May to September).

Suggested clothing: Tropical lightweights, with rainwear advisable during the rainy season. Sun hats and sunglasses essential all year round.

PASSPORTS / VISAS

Passports: For international travel, a U.S. passport valid for at least six months from date of departure, containing **at least** two blank pages is necessary.

Visas: U.S. and Canadian citizens do not require visas in advance. Citizens from other countries, consult the nearest Seychelles consulate.

Important: Please look at your passport prior to travel to insure that:

- 1) Your passport is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.

Please note: Pages reserved for amendments and endorsements cannot be used for visas.

AIRPORT FORMALITIES

Approximate flight times: From New York is 20 hours and 40 minutes (via London).

Departure tax: US\$40 or equivalent, payable in foreign currency or by credit card (local currency is not accepted). Children under 12 years of age are exempt.

Duty Free: The following items may be imported into the Seychelles by persons of 18 years or older without incurring customs duty: *200 cigarettes or 250g of tobacco; 1l of spirits or 1l of wine; 125ml of perfume or 250ml of eau de toilette; gifts to a value not exceeding SRs130.*

Prohibited items: The import of non-prescribed drugs and all firearms, including air pistols, air rifles and spearfishing guns, is prohibited. Video tapes must be declared and may be retained for security reasons. The import of animals and food and other agricultural produce is strictly controlled and subject to licensing.

Restricted exports: Shells, unprocessed coco-de-mer, processed or live fish and live tortoises may not be exported.

LUGGAGE

Traveling light is always the first and best rule! We recommend passengers limit their luggage to one medium-sized soft bag per person or two small duffle bags. In this security conscious era, airline luggage restrictions may change without notice. Also, luggage limits vary depending on ticket class, plane size, destinations, etc. It is always best to confirm with airlines for specific limitations.

Generally speaking, from the US, economy class passengers are allowed to check in two (2) normal size

pieces of luggage (each piece measuring no more than about 62 linear inches, which means length plus width plus height), and not exceeding 70 pounds per bag.

Scheduled flights from other countries and within foreign countries generally limit luggage to 44 pounds total, plus one carry-on personal item. Further restrictions apply for charter flights. For charter flights on small planes in Costa Rica and Southern Africa, for example, the total **including** carry-on is usually 11 to 15 pounds, depending on the destination. We will advise you of those restrictions in your final documents.

Most airlines now allow only one carry-on bag in addition to one personal item such as a laptop or handbag. Most bags within the 22 x 14 x 9 (or, a total of 45 linear inches) size restriction will be considered legal carry-on size by major domestic U.S. airlines. Many US airlines check-in desks have sizing boxes within which your bag must fit. Obviously, no knives or cutting instruments are allowed in carry-on baggage.

All luggage should have identification inside as well as secure baggage tags on the outside.

Please note that the US National Transportation and Safety Board now suggests that you do not lock your checked luggage. If a screener has to open your bag, the locks may have to be broken. This applies to flights within the US and international flights originating in the US. This, however, does not address other international travel issues. We suggest that you lock your luggage and bring a couple of spare locks in the event one or more are cut off. But the choice is up to each individual traveler to make.

Hint: Some companies such as Aurora Luggage (<http://www.auroraluggage.com/>) post the most current luggage requirements for many individual airlines on their web sites.

CAMERAS & FILM

Photography: Please, approach people with an attitude of respect, just as you would want to be treated. Do not take anyone's picture without permission. Many times it is necessary to negotiate a fee beforehand. Never take any photos of airports, police or government buildings, military installations, or borders.

Equipment: Bring cameras and lenses you are comfortable using. If you get new equipment before you go, do so as far in advance as possible. Shoot and develop at least a dozen rolls before departure to work out problems. And, don't forget your camera operation manual, filters, and a flash unit. *Cameras should be packed with good cushioning.* The roads are sometimes rough, and constant vibration can do damage. Keep your camera with you as much as possible, *and do not leave it on the floor of the safari vehicle when on the road.* Roads in the wildlife parks and reserves are gravel or dirt and dusty. Make sure you have lens caps for all your lenses. Clean your equipment frequently. Bring along a puffer brush and lens cleaning tissues.

Lenses: A combination of fixed and/or zoom lenses with focal lengths from 28 mm to 200 mm is good for general travel photography, although you can take excellent photographs with only a 50 mm lens. Zoom lenses such as 35-80mm, 70-210 mm, or 100-300 mm will help you capture the sights in a variety of different settings. Many times, however, animals are very close and you will not need high-powered zoom lenses. But serious photographers will want them handy. A macro lens is helpful for shooting close-ups, but a good set of

extension tubes will work very well. A 2x converter is also a handy. Point and shoot cameras are nice for a group or indoor shots, but leave something to be desired when photographing animals on a safari. Bring a small cleaning kit and blower brush to keep equipment clean.

Video: If you are planning to shoot video on a safari, be sure to bring plenty of tape and batteries with you. Do not plan to buy videotape. Videotape is not affected by airport x-ray; only magnetic fields or prolonged exposure to heat will damage videotape. Your battery charger should be capable of automatically adjusting to 240 volts. You will probably have no problem finding a plug in most of the lodges and larger tented camps, but be prepared with plenty of batteries

Batteries: Put fresh photo-quality batteries in your camera and other electric equipment before you leave and bring at least two sets of spare batteries with you. Your camera will be useless without them, and batteries can be hard to find and expensive.

Film: It is always best to bring along whatever you need with you. Film is generally more expensive abroad and it may be hard to locate. Larger lodges in Africa sell film, but it is expensive. You'll be surprised at how much film you use when you are trying to capture all those special moments and rare animal poses. Even those not all that interested in photography will probably shoot a couple of 36-exposure rolls per day, and enthusiastic shooters will easily double or triple that amount. Be sure film is fresh and, when possible, keep it refrigerated. A film speed of ASA/ISO 64 is an excellent choice for color slide film. Use this speed when possible rather than higher speed films. There is a noticeable difference in quality that it is worth the extra effort to keep your camera steady at a somewhat slower shutter speed than you would otherwise use. For color prints, there are several good choices, including Kodak and Fuji films (ASA/ISO 100 & 200) for daylight photography, ASA/ISO 400 & 1000 are good for lower light and nighttime situations.

It is helpful to set up a numbering system for your film, marking each roll with masking tape and numbers or letters, before leaving home. This way you can code the rolls of film and where they were shot. It's quite a job to sort through hundreds of pictures with no clue where or when they were taken.

Avoid airport x-ray machines whenever possible and request a hand search of your film only. While security people are often obliging, some are not so allow a little extra time. X-rays are cumulative on exposed and unexposed film so the more times film is x-rayed, the more risk of damage. This is especially true with older machines found in many countries. Lead bags for film are available for purchase and are worth the small investment. Do not have film in your camera because it may be opened for inspection.

Note: Recent news reports warn that new explosive detectors used in more than 100 US airports to scan checked baggage will ruin unprotected, unexposed film. This technology will eventually be in place at all airports worldwide. Experts suggest either carrying your film in your carry-on luggage and/or placing film in safety, lead-lined bags to prevent X-ray damage.

HEALTH

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required by all travellers over 1 year arriving from infected areas or who

have passed through partly or wholly endemic areas within the preceding 6 days.

Food & drink: Mains water is normally chlorinated, and whilst relatively safe may cause mild abdominal upsets. Bottled water is available and is advised for the first few weeks of the stay. Milk is pasteurised and dairy products are safe for consumption. Local meat, poultry, seafood, fruit and vegetables are generally considered safe to eat.

Other risks: Hepatitis A and B occur with occasional outbreaks of dengue fever. Typhoid occurs in rural areas and Rabies may be present in certain areas. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay

Health care: There is a large general hospital in Victoria and there are clinics elsewhere on La Digue, Mahé and Praslin. Visitors may obtain emergency treatment for a basic consultancy fee. Additional medical insurance is advised.

DEALING WITH JET LAG

With the joys and adventures of international travel come certain unavoidable inconveniences such as occasional lost luggage or bouts of jet lag. In fact, studies reveal that as much as 90% of long distance travelers experience a degree of jet lag.

Jet lag describes that out-of-sorts feeling associated with long flights, particularly those across time zones. Symptoms and severity vary but may include drowsiness, fatigue, irritability, difficulty concentrating, headaches, insomnia, and swelling of the extremities.

The number of time zones crossed affects the severity of jet lag. The internal body clock follows circadian rhythm, which is controlled by the hypothalamus that processes nerve signals. That clock is designed for regular cycles of light and darkness. Depending on the number of time zones crossed, it may take several days for that rhythm to be restored.

But that is not the only influence. Other factors include cabin pressure, stale air, lack of humidity, and your overall physical condition at the beginning of your trip. Although jet lag can not be completely avoided, there are some simple things you can do to help minimize its affects.

Consider the following for your next scheduled trip.

- Start your trip well rested with a good night's sleep prior to departure. Getting adequate rest before starting on your journey will help minimize the amount of catching up you'll have to do when you arrive at the destination. Once home, try to schedule a day of rest before returning to work.
- Drink plenty of fluids -- water and juices will help you to stay well hydrated. Seasoned travelers recommend that you carry a bottle of drinking water with you and drink eight ounces every hour.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine just before and during flights. Both possess diuretic properties that promote dehydration. Alcohol also causes drowsiness and contributes to feeling sluggish.
- Once settled onboard, reset your watch to the time zone to which you are traveling. This small act helps you begin adjusting to your destination's local time.
- As much as possible, create a dark environment during flight. Studies have shown that bright lights strongly affect individuals' body clocks. If necessary, try

eyeshades and earplugs to help block distractions and convince your body that it is nighttime. Closing window shades and turning off overhead lights may also help. Sleep on the plane if your flight has an early morning arrival time.

- Wear loose-fitting clothing and comfortable shoes that will help in the event you experience mild swelling. Experienced travelers often bring lightweight slippers to wear during flights.
- Although not always feasible, look for opportunities to walk around while in flight. Do simple isometric exercises (contracting and relaxing as many muscle groups as possible) in your seat. These will improve circulation, help promote increased alertness, and reduce chances of swelling.
- If you arrive in the morning, plan to stay awake. If possible, wait until the local bedtime to sleep. Many people swear that this is key in determining how quickly they adapt to local conditions. You will sleep better and will be less likely to suffer insomnia than if you nap upon arrival.
- During extended stopovers, showers are sometimes available. If you have the opportunity, shower. Trans-Pacific pilots report that taking a shower in Hawaii helps them recover more quickly from the general effects of jet lag after the flight.

SAFETY

Common sense safety precautions you normally observe when traveling anywhere should be followed to minimize the risk of personal injury or property loss. While on a safari, lodges and camps are located in or near wildlife parks and reserves, and be aware that you may find wildlife wandering onto the grounds after dark. **Remember that this is not an amusement park, these animals are wild.** It is always best to follow guidelines of each property with regard to safety. Incidents involving animals in East Africa are rare and are almost always the result of someone doing something they have been advised not to do.

Leave jewelry at home! Do not leave cash, traveler's checks, airline tickets, etc. in an unattended room, even in a locked suitcase. Most of the lodges, hotels, and camps have safe deposit facilities at the front desk for your valuables. Use them.

In cities here as in cities at home, be aware! During the day and in crowds, be careful when carrying purses or cameras. Do not carry large amounts of currency or valuables. Take taxis from hotels and do not accept rides from unauthorized cabs. Do not walk around unfamiliar cities alone at night. Be wary of entering into conversation with unknown people on the street. These are the same precautions a visitor would observe in North American cities. Common sense is the best defense.

Pamphlets addressing safety issues abroad are available from the *Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.* Or, from *Bureau of Consular Affairs' website: <http://travel.state.gov>.*

TRAVELER'S ETIQUETTE

You are guaranteed to come up against cultural differences between our modern society and that of Africa. Africans think and do things differently from the way we do them. Traditions and philosophies, some of which are very old, govern

attitudes toward time, business, family, and politics. But this is at the heart of why we travel -- to experience the world through other cultures and other people.

Travel necessitates being a good-natured realist as well as a romantic. Being a genial traveling companion makes for an enjoyable travel experience for everyone and a great safari. Observing simple rules of common courtesy will better assure the success of your travel.

SEYCHELLES OVERVIEW

The Seychelles Archipelago occupies 400,000 sq km (150,000 sq miles) of the Indian Ocean northeast of Madagascar and contains 115 islands and islets. These fall into two groups of markedly different appearance, stemming from their distinct geologies. **Granitic:** a dense cluster of 42 islands, unique in being the only mid-ocean group in the world with a granite rock formation. Their lush green vegetation is tropical in character. Indigenous forest exists on the higher slopes. **Coralline:** isolated coral outcrops speckling a vast area of the Indian Ocean to the southwest of the granitic group. They rise only a few feet above sea level but are covered with rich and dense vegetation. Aldabra, the largest atoll in the world, contains one-third of all Seychellois land and is a UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site. Mahé: Surrounded by coral reefs, this is the largest of the islands, and houses the international airport, the port and capital, Victoria. Praslin: The second largest island is two to three hours by boat or 15 minutes by air from Mahé. It is famous for the Vallée de Mai, also a UNESCO World Heritage Site which contains the double-nutted coco-de-mer palm. Local specialties include kat-kat banane, coconut curries and la daube (made from breadfruit, yams, cassavas and bananas).

GENERAL INFORMATION

Area: 455.3 sq km (175.8 sq miles).

Population: 80,410 (official estimate 1999).

Population Density: 176.6 per sq km.

Capital: Victoria (Mahé). **Population:** 70,000 (1998).

Geography: The Seychelles Archipelago occupies 400,000 sq km (150,000 sq miles) of the Indian Ocean northeast of Madagascar and contains 115 islands and islets. These fall into two groups of markedly different appearance, stemming from their distinct geologies:

Granitic: A dense cluster of 42 islands, the only mid-ocean group in the world with a granite rock formation. Their lush green vegetation is tropical in character, with a profusion of coconut palms, bananas, mangoes, yams, breadfruit and other tropical fruit. Indigenous forest exists on the higher slopes, where cinnamon and tea are planted. All, including the second largest, Praslin, are less than 65km (40 miles) from Mahé.

Coralline: Isolated coral outcrops speckling a vast area of the Indian Ocean to the southwest of the granitic group. They rise only a few feet above sea level but are covered with rich and dense vegetation due to fertilisation by copious amounts of guano. There is no permanent population. Aldabra, the largest atoll in the world, contains one-third of all Seychellois land and is a UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site. The largest island in either group is Mahé, lying 4°S of the equator. It is 27km (17 miles) long by 8km (5 miles) wide and

contains Victoria, the capital and main port, and 90 per cent of the population. Mahé is typical of the Granitic Islands, being mountainous and covered with jungle vegetation. Its highest point, indeed the highest point in the Seychelles, is Morne Seychellois (905m/2970ft). The isolated nature of the Seychelles has given rise to the evolution of many unique species of flora and fauna, including the coco-de-mer palm and unique varieties of orchid, giant tortoise, gecko, chameleon and 'flying fox' (fruitbat). National parks and reserves have been set up to protect this heritage. The Seychellois are descended from a mixture of French and British landowners, freed African slaves and a small number of Indian and Chinese immigrants, creating a unique culture.

Government: Republic since 1976. Gained independence from the UK in 1975. Head of State and Government: President France Albert René since 1998.

Language: The official language is Seselwa; Creole, English and French are also spoken.

Religion: 92 per cent Roman Catholic with Anglican, Seventh Day Adventist, Muslim, Baha'i and other minorities.

Time: GMT + 4.

Electricity: 240 volts AC, 50Hz. British three-pin plugs

COMMUNICATIONS

Telephone, fax, telegram: SEYTELS offers a 24-hour service for telegrams, telephones and faxes via SEYTELS / Cable & Wireless Ltd, Francis Rachel Street, Victoria, Mahé. Phonecards are available. IDD is available. Country code: 248. Outgoing international code: 00.

Mobile telephone: GSM 900 network.

Internet: ISPs include Atlas Ltd (www.seychelles.net).

MONEY

Currency: Seychelles Rupee (SRe: singular; SRs: plural) = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of SRs100, 50, 25 and 10. Coins are in denominations of SRs5 and 1, and 25, 10 and 5 cents. A number of gold and silver coins are also minted (with face values as high as SRs1500), but these are not in general circulation.

Note: Tourists must pay hotel bills in foreign currency (in the form of cash, travellers cheques or credit or debit cards). Payment in local currency is only allowed if an exchange receipt can be shown as proof of the conversion from foreign currency into local currency. The duty-free shop at the airport only accepts credit cards or foreign cash.

Currency exchange: Exchange facilities are available at the airport banks, which are open for all flight departures and arrivals. The following banks have branches in the Seychelles and will exchange travellers cheques and foreign currency: Barclays Bank, Bank of Baroda, Banque Française Commerciale, Central Bank of Seychelles, Development Bank of Seychelles, Habib Bank Ltd, Nouvo Banq and Seychelles Savings Bank. Currency exchange receipts should be kept in order to facilitate re-exchange on departure.

Credit & debit cards: American Express and Visa are widely accepted; Diners Club and MasterCard have more limited use. Check with your credit or debit card company for details

of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

Travellers cheques: Accepted in most hotels, guest houses, restaurants and shops. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in US Dollars or Pounds Sterling.

Currency restrictions: The import and export of local and foreign currency is unlimited.

Banking hours: Mon-Fri 0830-1430, Sat 0830-1330.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Jan 1-2	New Year.
Apr 9	Good Friday.
Apr 12	Easter Monday.
May 1	Labor Day.
Jun 5	Liberation Day (Anniversary of 1977 Coup).
Jun 10	Corpus Christi.
Jun 18.....	National Day.
Jun 29	Independence Day.
Aug 15	Assumption/La Digue Festival.
Nov 1	All Saints' Day.
Dec 8	Immaculate Conception.
Dec 25	Christmas Day.

INTERNAL TRAVEL

Sea: Privately owned schooners provide regular inter-island connections between Mahé, Praslin and La Digue. Boats can be chartered privately to get to the other islands.

Road: Traffic drives on the left. There are paved roads only on La Digue, Mahé and Praslin; elsewhere the roads are sandy tracks.

Bus: SPTC buses run on a regular basis on Mahé and Praslin from 0530-1900. There are a number of 18-seater coaches for airport transfers and excursions. Prices for buses and coaches are very reasonable.

Taxi: There are about 135 taxis on Mahé and Praslin with government-controlled rates. There is a surcharge for taxi fares on Praslin between 1900-0600.

Car hire: There are over 550 cars or Mini Mokes for hire on Mahé, and a limited number on Praslin. It is advisable to make advance reservations, especially in the high season. Conditions of hire and insurance should be carefully checked. Hire is on an unlimited mileage basis and the price includes Third Party insurance and tax. Minimum age is 21. Petrol is approximately 30 per cent more expensive than in Europe. Bicycles may be hired on La Digue and Praslin. Traffic regulations: There is a speed limit of 65kph (40mph) on the open road, decreasing to 40kph (25mph) in built-up areas and throughout Praslin. *Documentation:* A national driving licence is sufficient.

SPORT & ACTIVITIES

Watersports: Coral reef diving is possibly the main sporting attraction in the Seychelles. Spearfishing is forbidden and, perhaps as a consequence, the fish are not afraid of people. The clear water makes conditions perfect for underwater

photography. The coastal waters are a haven for 100 species of coral and over 900 species of fish. The annual Subios underwater festival is held in the Seychelles over a 3-week period in November and attracts underwater experts from all over the world. Snorkelling is also very popular, with many snorkelling spots conveniently close to the beaches; most of the larger hotels rent out snorkelling equipment. A favourite location for snorkelling is the St Anne National Marine Park, which encompasses six islands off the coast of Mahé. Details about the Seychelles' best dive sites are also available from the Seychelles Tourist Office.

Game fishing is a comparatively new sport in the Seychelles, but the abundance of fish has already made the islands popular with enthusiasts. Fishing seasons are governed by weather conditions: from May to September, the trade winds blow from the southeast; and from November to February, from the northwest. Black, blue and striped marlin, sailfish, yellowfish and dogtooth tuna, wahoo and barracuda are just a few of the game fish found in these tropical waters. Power boats, cabin cruisers and yachts are available for charter for anglers and others wishing to explore the islands at their own pace. Vessels may be booked in advance by the day, week or month. Windsurfers, canoes and sailing dinghies may be hired on the more popular beaches, such as Beau Vallon Bay on Mahé, and water-skiing and paragliding are available at many other resort areas. Equipment may be hired.

Other: A new 18-hole golf course has recently been opened on Praslin at the Lemuria Hotel. There are also opportunities for squash, tennis and badminton. Organised hiking and walking tours are available to explore the islands' flora and fauna; some of the best trails are on Aride, Mahé, Praslin and Silhouette.

SOCIAL PROFILE

Food & Drink: Seychellois Creole cuisine is influenced by African, Chinese, English, French and Indian traditions. The careful blending of spices is a major feature and much use is made of coconut milk and breadfruit. Local specialities include kat-kat banane, coconut curries, chatini requin, bourgeois grillé, soupe de tectec, bouillon brède, chauve-souris (fruit bat), cari bernique, salade de palmiste (made from the 'heart' of the coconut palm and sometimes known as 'millionaire's salad') and la daube (made from breadfruit, yams, cassavas and bananas). Breadfruit is prepared in similar ways to the potato (mashed, chipped, roasted and so on) but has a slightly sweeter taste. Other locally produced fruits and vegetables include aubergines, calabashes, choux choutes, patoles, paw-paws (papaya), bananas, mangoes, avocados, jackfruits, grapefruits, guavas, lychees, pineapples, melons, limes and golden apples. Lobster, octopus, pork and chicken are used more frequently than beef or lamb, which must be imported. Most restaurants offer a few items of what is termed 'international' cuisine, generally with a bias towards preparations of fresh fish and shellfish, as well as the Creole delicacies mentioned above. There are Italian and Chinese restaurants on Mahé. Some of the main hotels have bakeries and home-baked bread is also a feature of some of the small guest houses and lodges. Waiter service is the norm. All restaurants which are members of the Seychelles Restaurateurs' Association quote an average price per person for a 3-course meal inclusive of two glasses of wine and coffee. Prior notice should be given in restaurants for groups of four or more and advance bookings should be

made for restaurants on Round and Cerf and for La Réserve restaurant on Praslin.

A wide range of wines, spirits and other alcoholic beverages is available in the Seychelles. Seybrew, a German style lager, is made locally. The same company produces Guinness under licence and soft drinks. Local tea is also popular – see below under Shopping. A hotel licence permits hotel residents to drink at any time. Alcohol can be sold to anyone between Mon-Fri 1400-1800, Sat 0800-1200 and 1400-1800. Other bars open 1130-1500 and 1800-2200. It is illegal to drink alcohol on any road or in public.

Nightlife: Largely undeveloped and unsophisticated. There is, however, much to be enjoyed in the evenings, and a speciality is the local camtolet music, often accompanied by dancers. Several hotels have evening barbecues and dinner dances. Theatre productions are often staged (in Creole, English and French) and there are cinemas in Victoria and casinos at Beau Vallon Bay Hotel and the Plantation Club.

Shopping: Local handicrafts include work with textiles (such as batik), fibres (such as basketwares, table-mats and hats) and wood (such as traditional furniture, ornaments and model boats). Pottery and paintings may also be bought. Special souvenirs might include jewellery made from green snail shells. Tea-growing and manufacturing in the Seychelles is done on a small scale. Local tea can be bought in the shops or when visiting the tea factory on Mahé, where many blends of tea may be sampled at the Tea Tavern. Vanilla is cultivated as a climbing plant around the base of trees as it can be pollinated by hand. Pods can be bought in shops and used as flavouring. Cinnamon grows wild on all the islands. It can be bought as oil or in quills made from dried bark which can be freshly grated before use.

Shopping hours: Mon-Fri 0900-1600, Sat 0800-1200. Some shops close weekdays 1200-1300.

Special Events: For a full list of events, contact the Seychelles Tourist Office. The following is a selection of special events occurring in the Seychelles in 2004:

Mar Atlas Seychelles Charity Fishing Tournament, Mahé. May 25 FetAfrik: Africa Day Celebrations. Jun Agricultural and Horticultural Show, Mahé. Aug-Sep Round Table Annual Regatta, Mahé. Oct 25-Nov 2 Creole Festival (celebration of Creole food, dance and music). Dec Christmas Show, Mahé.

Social Conventions: The people live a simple and unsophisticated island life and tourism is carefully controlled to protect the unspoilt charm of the islands. Before the international airport opened in 1971, the islands could be reached only by sea, and since they are miles from anywhere, visitors were few and far between and the people were little influenced by the outside world. They developed their own language and culture which – like so many things on the islands – are unique. Shaking hands is the customary form of greeting. The Seychellois are very hospitable and welcome guests into their homes. When visiting someone's home, a gift is acceptable. A mixture of imperial and metric systems operates. For example, petrol is dispensed in litres, whilst bars sell bottled and draught beer in half-pint measures. Casual wear is essential and formal clothes are only worn by churchgoers. Swimwear should only be worn on the beaches. Tipping: Tips in restaurants, hotels, to taxi drivers, porters and so on are usually already included, as 5 to 10 per cent of the bill or fare. All hotel and restaurant tariffs include a service charge, but payment is not obligatory.

ECONOMY

Tourism is the largest industry in the Seychelles' economy; it now accounts for over 20 per cent of GDP, and draws 70 per cent of foreign exchange earnings. The service sector as a whole covers three-quarters of the Seychelles' economy.

Despite a shortage of fertile land, the agricultural sector produces copra for export, a variety of cash crops including tea and vanilla, and staple foods like cassava and sweet potatoes for domestic consumption. Fishing became increasingly important from the 1980s onwards, both through expansion of domestic operations and the lucrative sale of licences to foreign fleets. Industry comprises a small mining sector which extracts guano (rich in minerals) and some natural gas, plus light and small-scale industries including food and drinks (notably a tuna-canning operation), boat-building, metals, chemicals, wood products and tobacco. There is also a thriving re-export business based on a recently established export-processing zone. Extensive searches for offshore oil and gas reserves have so far been unsuccessful. The economy's heavy dependence on tourism makes it especially vulnerable to external factors over which it

has no control. In 1995, in an attempt to diversify the service economy away from tourism, the Government started to promote the Seychelles as an 'offshore' financial services centre. This has been moderately successful, especially given that this is now a highly competitive and – because of concerns about fraud – controversial field.

After several years of recession, the economy is growing slowly. The main financial problem is the size of the country's external debt. The Seychelles must import many essential products – an expensive process given the islands' location – and this consumes the bulk of the foreign exchange earned from tourism.

The Seychelles is a member of the African Development Bank and the Indian Ocean Commission (which provides for regional economic co-operation). The Seychelles' principal trading partners are the UK, Yemen (the main source of imported oil), Germany and the countries of the South African Customs Union (South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland).

Business Office hours: Mon-Fri 0800-1600.

🌀 Introduction to the Islands 🌀

GRANITIC ISLANDS

Mahé: Surrounded by coral reefs, this is the largest of the islands, and hosts the international airport, the port and capital (Victoria), the majority of the population (90 per cent) and most of the hotels. It is an island of powdery white sands (there are almost 70 beaches on Mahé alone) and lush vegetation, rising through plantations of coconut palms and cinnamon to forested peaks that afford unparalleled views of neighbouring islands. Excursions can be made in glass-bottomed boats from Victoria to nearby St Anne Marine National Park, which encloses the islands of St Anne, Beacon (classified as a nature reserve), Cerf (offering accommodation in chalets and renowned for Creole food), Long (closed to the public), Round (reputed for its tuna steaks) and Moyenne (privately owned, but open to visiting tourists); or by coach, taking in such attractions as the market, the Botanical Gardens (with coco-de-mer, giant tortoises and orchids), and a replica of London's Vauxhall Bridge Tower in Victoria, before setting off around the island to visit colonial-style mansions in graceful decline, old plantations of cinnamon and vanilla, and everywhere the greenest of vibrant green jungles. Tourists may also visit the Morne Seychellois National Park, occupying the highest part of the island. The National Museum in Victoria celebrates Seychellois history, folklore and music, and has particularly fine displays depicting the history of spice cultivation.

Praslin: The second-largest island is 2 to 3 hours by boat or 15 minutes by air (25 scheduled flights per day) from Mahé. It is famous for the Vallée de Mai, another UNESCO World Heritage Site, which contains the double-nutted coco-de-mer palm. Regular excursions are available to smaller islands such as Cousin, Aride, Curieuse and La Digue.

La Digue: Just over 3 hours by schooner from Mahé or 30 minutes from Praslin, this beautiful island is the breeding ground of the rare black paradise flycatcher. There are very few cars and the ox-cart remains the principal means of

transport (although bicycles may be hired). There are beautiful old plantation houses, such as Château Saint-Cloud, as well as a vanilla plantation, copra factories and superb beaches.

Frégate: The most easterly and isolated of the granitic islands, Frégate is associated with pirates (Ian Fleming was obsessed with the notion that a pirate's hoard was buried here). It is also the home of the almost extinct magpie robin. Frégate is 15 minutes by air from Mahé.

Thérèse: Notable for its rock-pools and tortoise colony. Accessible from Port Glaud by a 5-minute boat trip.

Cousin: 2 hours by boat from Mahé, Cousin was bought (in 1968) by the International Council for Bird Protection, which operates it as a nature reserve. Amongst the rare bird species thus protected are the brush warbler, the Seychelles toc-toc and the fairy tern. The best time to visit is April or May, when 1.25 million birds nest on the island. All visits to the island must be made as part of an organised tour. Local rangers act as guides; a full tour of the island takes between 1 and 2 hours. Local operators can arrange these trips, usually in conjunction with visits to other islands.

Aride: 2 hours from Mahé, Aride is the most northerly of the granitic islands. Home to vast colonies of seabirds, in 1973 it was bought by Christopher Cadbury, President of the Royal Society for Nature Conservation. It is open to visitors from October to the end of April.

Curieuse: Approximately 3km (2 miles) long, Curieuse is covered by lush vegetation and huge takamaka trees. It has been designated a reserve for giant tortoises (imported from Aldabra). Day trips may be arranged from Praslin.

Silhouette: Thought to have been home to one of the Indian Ocean's most notorious pirates, Hodoul, this island may be seen from Beau Vallon Beach on Mahé. It has a population of

about 200. Sights include an old plantation house of traditional Seychellois timber construction.

CORALLINE ISLANDS

Aldabra: The world's largest atoll, home to 150,000 giant land tortoises (reputedly five times more than on the Galapagos Islands) and listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, consists of 13 islands which make up about one-third of the Seychelles' land mass. Until recently Aldabra was only accessible by boat, but Assumption Island, in the south of the atoll, now has an airstrip. Aldabra remains under strict supervision of the Seychelles Island Foundation which, nevertheless, intends to open it to a controlled number of visitors.

Denis: 5 to 7 hours by boat or 30 minutes by air from Mahé, Denis is also on the edge of the continental shelf and attracts many deep-sea fishermen. Marlin may be caught from October to December. The island's seabird population has, over the years, left rich deposits of guano, which has encouraged the growth of lush vegetation. The minimum stay is 2 days.

BIRD: 6 to 8 hours by boat or 30 minutes by plane from Mahé, this island is famous for the millions of sooty terns that migrate here to breed between May and September. Its location at the edge of the Seychelles continental shelf (the sea floor drops rapidly to 2000m/5000ft) also makes it a favoured destination for fishermen. Another claim to fame is Esmeralda, said to be 150 years old and the largest tortoise in the world.

Desroches: The largest of the Amirantes archipelago, Desroches is 193km (120 miles) southwest of Mahé (1 hour by air). The surrounding coral reef keeps the coastal waters calm and makes it an ideal destination for those seeking watersports. Although Desroches was only recently developed as a resort, there are facilities for water-skiing, windsurfing, sailing, fishing and scuba diving; water scooters may also be hired. The diving is particularly good: there are sea cliffs, tunnels and caves – and, of course, multitudes of

fish of many different species. Lessons are available. Visibility is best from September to May. Accommodation is in 20 chalets set amongst casuarina trees and coconut palms.

PLANTS AND WILDLIFE

As a result of their extraordinary, isolated history, the Seychelles are rich in rare plants which flourish nowhere else on the planet. 81 species are unique survivors from the luxuriant tropical forests that covered the islands until humanity's belated arrival 2 centuries ago. Outstanding amongst these is the coco-de-mer (sea coconut), native to Praslin, which grows in the Vallée de Mai. Its seed is the largest in nature, and gave rise to many legends when it was washed ashore on the coasts of Africa, India and Indonesia. Since the islands were unknown, the nuts were thought to have grown under the sea – hence the name. Among the many orchids is the vanilla, once widely cultivated for the essence produced from its aromatic pods. Its ornate leaves and lovely flowers make a wonderful display. It is not, however, necessary to travel the length and breadth of the islands to see interesting plants, as many of them can be viewed in Victoria's Botanical Gardens. The Seychelles are also a major attraction for birdwatchers. Millions of terns nest on the islands – among them that most beautiful of seabirds, the fairy tern. Up to 2 million sooty terns nest on Bird Island, and on Aride can be found the world's largest colonies of lesser noddies, roseate terns and other tropical birds. Some species, on the other hand, are less well represented and are rare almost to the point of extinction. The paradise flycatcher has dwindled to some 30 pairs on one island, La Digue. The Seychelles magpie robin is confined to Frégate, the black parrot to Praslin and the melodious brush warbler to Cousin.

It was only some 20 years ago that active conservation of endangered species began in the Seychelles. Since then, with the establishment of island sanctuaries and nature reserves, much has been done to make the Seychelles a paradise for birds – and for those who love to watch them.

SELECTED READING LIST

In addition to the many comprehensive and readily available guides produced by Lonely Planet, Fodor, Insight, The Rough Guide, and others, here are a few other titles that might interest you. These books may be obtained through most bookstores or on the World Wide Web.

SEYCHELLES

Sarah Carpin, Paul-Andre Turcotte

Pirate treasure is believed to be hidden somewhere on one of the small islands of Seychelles, which were used for many years as secret hideaways. Modern-day treasure-seekers are lured to the Indian Ocean archipelago by the promise of unspoiled golden beaches and the search for that elusive tropical paradise. For scenic splendor, isolated coral reef beaches, lush vegetation and a gentle tropical climate, the Republic of Seychelles is almost too good to be true. In this informative guide, Sarah Carpin examines the rich natural history of the islands, the short but vibrant history which has shaped the country since people first arrived here just over two hundred years ago, and offers tips on how to discover these paradise islands. Special topics include an argument by

a Victorian traveler, General Gordon, that the islands were the site of the Garden of Eden; the unique conservation needs of the far-flung atoll of Aldabra, 'the Galapagos of the Indian Ocean', and how gold fever may strike even today.

JOSEPH BEUYS: DIARY OF SEYCHELLES

Giorgio Bonomi

Fascinating photographs, published here for the first time. Experiences, historical documents, conversations, artworks and memorabilia take the reader on a wonderful journey through the life of the artist Joseph Beuys. He is one of the leading emblematic figures of the post-World War II international contemporary art scene. This volume brings an unusual and symbolic life in distant lands to the knowledge of cultural circles worldwide.