



## INTRODUCTION TO THE SEYCHELLES

Seychelles' destiny - and extraordinary good fortune - was to be discovered, in historical terms, comparatively recently. It was just over 200 years ago that settlers first set foot on these verdant isles to find them teeming with a kaleidoscope of life forms - vast colonies of land and sea birds, giant tortoises and flying foxes (giant fruit bats) - that had existed, unmolested and in splendid isolation, for millions of years.

A name synonymous with the world's most beautiful islands, each one a gemstone set in the perfect azure of the Indian Ocean, today the Seychelles archipelago is home to no less than two UNESCO World Heritage Sites and is also a sanctuary for a myriad natural treasures that together have earned it the reputation as the 'Galapagos of the Indian Ocean'.

Located between 6 and 10 degrees south of the equator amid 1,300,00 square kilometres of sparkling ocean, these 115 secluded islands have a total population of merely 81,000. The islands of the Seychelles have to be counted among the best kept secrets on earth and, without doubt, rank among the safest and purest destinations anywhere.

Seychelles: the world's smallest micro-continent?

The 43 Inner Islands that cluster around the principal islands of Mahé, Praslin and La Digue are the world's only oceanic islands of granitic composition. They represent the mountain peaks of the ancient super-continent of Pangea that once encompassed the total landmass of a young, evolving planet and are thought to have erupted from the earth's core some 750 million years ago.

Around 200 million years ago, the forces determining the continental drift split Pangea into Laurasia (modern Europe, Asia and North America) and Gondwanaland (South America, Africa, Antarctica, Australasia and India). 75 million years later Madagascar, Seychelles and India separated as one landmass, carrying with them certain species of fauna, such as the flying fox, that remain common to both locations, before Seychelles finally split from India about 65 million years ago.

North Island, and its close neighbour Silhouette Island, contain the only evidence of volcanic ash found above sea level in Seychelles. They are both granitic islands but are thought to be considerably younger than Mahé,



Praslin and La Digue. Their syenite formation probably dates back to about 90 million years ago when Seychelles and India separated.

Seychelles' Outer Islands are coralline and made up of coral or volcanic rocks from deep within the earth's crust. Produced by seismic events, these islands are mere juveniles in comparison to their aged granitic peers and date back only a few million, or perhaps even a thousand years.

#### Seychelles' purity positioning

Seychelles' magnificent islands possess unrivalled beauty ranging from the verdant mist forests of virgin granite peaks to the powder-soft sands of secluded beaches and together represent the ultimate tropical destination for the discerning traveller, living up to the country's slogan - "Seychelles ... as pure as it gets".

Tourism is the mainstay of the nation's economy and is considered one of the chief components in the sustainable development of the country, benefiting from policies, planning and marketing structures that take into account both the conservation of natural and cultural resources as well as the carrying capacity of the islands.

Respect for other crucial factors such as the preservation of the social values of local communities, as well as the fragile and prolific bio-diverse eco-systems, such as coral reefs and mangroves, remain very much at the heart of planning initiatives.

Seychelles takes its role as custodian of a truly unique environment very seriously and, over many years, enlightened conservationist policies have set aside nearly 50% of a limited landmass as natural reserves. Seychelles boasts two UNESCO World Heritage Sites – Aldabra, the world's largest raised coral atoll (approximately 500 square kilometres) that is home to 150,000 giant tortoises and an abundance of flora and fauna, as well as the Vallée-de-Mai on Praslin, the only place on earth where you will find the fabled Coco-de-Mer (the world's heaviest seed) and the rare Black Parrot.

This impressive national heritage has remained virtually untouched for millions of years and today combines with other real advantages, such as the absence of venomous creatures, tropical disease (there is no malaria), cyclones, crime and poverty, to make Seychelles a most desirable tourist destination.

Racially harmonious and politically stable, Seychelles is one of the last true sanctuaries on the planet where man can still live healthily and in harmony with nature, benefiting from a carefree, island-style way of living and enjoying the space to breathe pure air and to roam free.



### Reefs and Coral

Seychelles is a prime diving location located at the northern bank of the submerged Mascarene Plateau, a submerged volcanic ridge stretching from Seychelles to Mauritius.

Covering an area of 115,000 square kilometres with depths ranging from eight to 150 metres, it is more extensive than Australia's Great Barrier Reef and is at present the focus of a study by the Shoals of Capricorn, a research programme sponsored by the Royal Geographical Society and the Institute of British Geographers.

Corals tend to be extremely slow-growing organisms, some as old as 10,000 years, which support large numbers of fish and other marine flora and fauna within a balanced and harmonious environment. The phenomenon of coral bleaching that has taken place periodically since the 1980's has thus been a cause of much global concern. In 1998 high sea temperatures affected corals in the shallow waters close to the equator by starving them of their ability to photosynthesise. This impacted on corals in the Seychelles and other areas of the Mascarene Plateau but these are now regenerating.

### Language

Seychelles has three official national languages; Creole, English and French, with German and Italian also widely spoken. Creole, derived from old French with some additional loan words from Africa and Madagascar, is now a written as well as a spoken language, a fact that has contributed much to the development of the Creole culture.

### Climate

Seychelles' location 6 degrees below the equator, results in a warm, tropical climate throughout the year. Seychelles lies outside the cyclone belt, making for an equitable year-round climate with the highest average monthly temperature seldom going above 32 degrees C and the lowest seldom below 27 degrees C. The trade winds that early Arab traders used to travel the length of the east African coast are still a dominant climatic feature with the cool, dry south east trade winds blowing from May to September and the wetter, north west trades from December to March. December and January are usually the wettest months with around 300mm of rain being recorded on average.

### Access

Seychelles is easily accessible by air with Air Seychelles, the national carrier, flying from Johannesburg, Nairobi, London and other European, Middle and Far Eastern capitals. Seychelles maintains tourist offices in France, Germany, Italy, Kenya, Sweden, South Africa, Spain and the United Kingdom. British Airways, Air France and other good airlines also fly to the Seychelles.