



## 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.

