

OFF COURSE: SEYCHELLES

FOCUS ON SEYCHELLES

'PARADISE' IS A BIT OF AN EXAGGERATION ON MANY TRAVEL BROCHURES, BUT NOT ON THE SUNNY SEYCHELLE ISLANDS, WHERE THE NEW ÎLE AURORE NOUVELLE RESORT IS TAKING SHAPE OFF MAHÉ. DON'T MISS THESE SEVEN SEYCHELLOIS SIGHTS.

SEE THE SEYCHELLES



St Pierre Island

WORDS AND PICTURES BY JEREMY JOWELL

1 Visit the Vallée de Mai on Praslin, the second largest island in Seychelles. This World Heritage Site falls within Praslin National Park and is famous for the coco-de-mer seed that grows on coconut palm trees and can weigh up to 20 kilograms. You may also spot the country's national bird, the rare black parrot.
www.seychellesislandsfoundation.org

2 Stroll through the lush botanical gardens of Jardin du Roi on the island of Mahé. Many of the herbs and flowers grown in this botanical garden and spice farm are used by local people as medicines. The many species of plants and trees include avocado, nutmeg, coco-de-mer, grape fruit, orchids, aloe vera and the colourful parrot claw flower. Spices grown here are vanilla, cloves, saffron, cinnamon, nutmeg and black pepper. Afterwards, stop at the garden restaurant for a typical Creole lunch of grilled silver snapper served with lentils, star fruit, papaya, mango slices, steamed rice and banana cooked in coconut milk.
Telephone: +248 37 13 13

3 Take a day's boat excursion to three small islands off Praslin. The bird sanctuary of Cousin Island was originally bought by Birdlife International to save the endangered Seychelles warbler from extinction. Cousin is now home to 300 000 birds and is the most important nesting site for hawksbill turtles in the western Indian Ocean. It's open from Tuesday to Friday.

Next is Curieuse Island, another protected reserve with a breeding programme for giant Aldabra tortoises. After a picnic braai, end the day with some snorkelling at the small rocky outcrop of St Pierre Island. The fish are plentiful and the offshore reef is alive with a multitude of angelfish, parrotfish and other colourful shoals flitting around the coral. If you're lucky, you may even see a hawksbill turtle.

www.7south.net/English/Excursion_English/cousin-curieuse

4 On Mahé, visit the Sir Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke Market in the capital, Victoria. Wander aimlessly around the vegetable and spice stalls, enjoying the sights and smells



The market on Mahé

while chatting to the friendly locals. The fish section is always lively as the men display their daily catch of jackfish and red snapper. Don't forget your camera!
www.mymapofseychelles.com/Indian_Ocean/Seychelles/Victoria/Sir_Selwyn_Selwyn-Clarke_Marke



Aldabra Island

5 No visit to Seychelles is complete without a trip to the laid-back island of La Digue. It can be a day trip from Praslin, but a few days are recommended to soak up the relaxed atmosphere. Digue is famous for some of the world's most beautiful beaches, notably Anse Source d'Argent, where many com-

mercials and fashion shoots have been filmed. It's a stunning location, with white sand and huge granite boulders. Try arriving in the late afternoon after all the day-trippers have left.

There are almost no cars on the island – most people get around by bicycle and the traditional old-fashioned ox cart. Hire a bike and after pedalling past the pretty cemetery, explore the northern coast. Head inland to Veuve Nature Reserve, home to the rare black paradise flycatcher. Also worth a visit is L'Union Estate, a coconut plantation where the coconut oil, copra, is produced.
www.seychelles.travel/en/about_seychelles/island.php?rc=1&aid=15

6 The Seychelles is one of the world's top 10 dive sites – spend some time exploring the multitude of marine life and coral gardens in the clear warm waters. Memorable encounters include glimpses of green turtles and the opportunity to swim with whale sharks between mid-October and late-November. There are a variety of locations and options to choose from.
www.diveseychelles.com.sc

FACT FILE

The Seychelles archipelago consists of 115 islands and is located just south of the equator. It has a year-round tropical climate, with temperatures ranging between 27 and 32 °C. Cool and dry south-east trade winds blow from June to September. The north-west winds that bring rain blow from October to May. December and January are the wettest months. The best months for snorkelling and scuba diving are September and October. Whale sharks are regularly sighted around the inner islands between August and November.

Seychelles Tourism Board,
021 551 5855, www.seychelles.com

7 A trip to the far-flung atoll of Aldabra is the experience of a lifetime. This World Heritage Site is home to 120 000 giant Aldabra tortoises and is the most remote island in the Indian Ocean. Aldabra is a renowned location for wildlife research and conservation and is an area of unique beauty. The atoll consists of four islands encompassing a 30-kilometre lagoon. When the tide rushes in through the channels, the lagoon fills with an astounding array of underwater life, including turtles, rays, sharks and vast numbers of fish.

Apart from the marine creatures and large tortoise population, Aldabra is home to many species of bird, including flamingos, frigates, red-footed boobies, herons and the last flightless bird in the Indian Ocean, the white-throated rail.

It is difficult and expensive to get to Aldabra. The easiest way to visit is to secure a berth on a live-aboard dive boat. All access and excursions to Aldabra are strictly controlled by the Seychelles Island Foundation. For more information about travel possibilities to Aldabra, email sif@seychelles.net or visit www.sif.sc



Green turtle