



The People

The inhabitants of the island archipelago of Seychelles are known as Seychellois and, today, the society to which they belong represents the evolution of peoples from across the globe who began to settle the islands in 1756, as part of a French expedition.

The first to make their presence felt on the islands in an enduring fashion were a French party consisting of a prophetic assortment of a handful of European settlers, accompanied by their black slaves and retainers. After experiencing great hardship in the early years, as a result of the French Revolution, the colony in Seychelles consisted of 69 French, including three soldiers, 32 free 'coloureds' and 487 slaves.

As in many parts of the globe, the abolition of slavery in 1865 created a vacuum in the workforce, which began to be filled in the mid-nineteenth century by contingents of Indian and Chinese workers, many of whom settled on the islands to become the merchant class.

The colonisation of the islands by the British after the defeat of Napoleon further moulded the islands and their population until they gained independence in 1976. This was followed in 1977 by a coup d'état, after which there followed an extended period of socialist, one party rule, with multi-party politics only returning in 1991. Today, with a population of some 94,000, predominantly Catholic inhabitants, Seychelles is a republic within the Commonwealth governed by a president who is head of both state and government and who is elected by popular vote for a 5-year term of office.

The nature of Seychellois society and its orderly evolution has ensured an enviable degree of ethnic integration, social harmony and political stability over many years which have all intertwined to lay a solid foundation for the social, economic and social growth that have been experienced in recent years and particularly since the opening of its international airport in 1972.

The Seychellois, who for much of their existence have been cut off from the rest of the world, have developed into an enterprising, flexible and innovative people who are very open to change and keen to be a part of the mainstream of human endeavour.

Levels of religious and ethnic tolerance within society are high and the outgoing nature of the Seychellois has ensured that they take their rightful place among the community of nations. Seychelles is an active member of the African Union, the Southern African Development Community and the United Nations.

Seychelles now boasts the highest nominal per capital GDP in Africa, excluding the French regions, and it is one of only a handful of countries in Africa with a high Human Development Index.

The stunning natural beauty of the islands and their many attributes including possessing some of the finest beaches and rarest flora and fauna on the planet has enabled the Seychelles Islands to embrace tourism which today, with over 300,000 arrivals per annum, is the backbone of the economy employing roughly 15% of the workforce.

"Investing in Seychelles' blue future"



The Seychellois are a people with strong maritime traditions and as an island people, they have relied on artisanal and semi-industrial fishing for a great part of their 260 year-old history, with this economic activity traditionally providing an important source of employment but also vital food security.

Today, the Seychellois stand at the threshold of an exciting future signalled by the great economic potential of their surrounding ocean but also by significant challenges related to its sustainable development.

Valuable potential new resources in the form of hydrocarbon reserves and mineral deposits, clean energy from the ocean, sustainable methods of fishing and revolutionary forms of aquaculture combine with innovative financial and technical tools such as financial debt restructuring, blue bonds and Marine Spatial Planning to point the way to possible new forms of prosperity for this large ocean nation.





The Ocean

Geologically, the Seychelles forms part of the granitic Mascarene Plateau, which separated from the Indian Plate and is home to the planet's oldest oceanic islands. Spread over a vast area measuring 800 km by 1,000km, the Seychelles archipelago with its 115 islands possesses an exclusive economic zone of 1,374,000 km². A further 397,000 km² of marine space is shared with the Republic of Mauritius as part of the Extended Continental Shelf. Seychelles has total sovereign rights over much of this vast ocean space along with the fishing and all sub-sea minerals and petroleum resources.

Traditionally, the ocean has always been also a vital source of food for the islanders which included various forms of artisanal fishing, harvesting turtle and dolphin (marswin) meat from the Inner as well as the Outer Islands; mining guano (the faecal deposits of sea birds) from, particularly, the Outer Islands and the collection of crops such as coprah, birds eggs, various types of shells as well as the highly prized mutton bird (fouquet) from the remoter Outer Islands.

In stark contrast to Seychelles' land, which has over 50% set aside for conservation, less than 1% of Seychelles' 1.4 million km² of marine waters is currently protected. That figure, however, is targeted to rise to 30% or 400,000 km² via marine spatial planning to ensure species and habitats enjoy long-term protection, improve resiliency of coastal ecosystems with a changing climate, and ensure sustainable economic opportunities for fisheries, tourism and other activities.

Oil companies have been exploring the ocean for hydrocarbon deposits since the 1960s, an activity that is ongoing, along with a search for minerals found in poly-metallic nodules. The ocean as a source of clean, renewable energy and sustainable power for a small, remote island nation is also being studied but the ocean's most immediate richness lies in its marine life and complex marine ecosystems for which its cleanliness is paramount. Not to be overlooked is the fact that cleanliness of the ocean impacts directly on other species, such as colonies of nesting birds and migrating marine mammals, in addition to the people residing on and visiting the islands.

Seychelles' waters contain an impressive wealth of species ranging from a wide selection of demersal and pelagic fish to the coralline algae that cement the reefs found on most islands; 351 species of sponges; 55 species of anthozoa; 5 endemic species of crustacean; 5 species of turtle; 27 species of mammals including endangered sei, blue and fin whales; 8 species of dolphin and a small but important population of 20-25 dugong around the Aldabra Atoll. Unfortunately, corals continue to be under pressure from warming waters and coral bleaching.

Great potential exists in the form of future transition to sustainable artisanal and industrial fishing, and also aquaculture whose modus operandi are currently being brought in line with current best practices. A big advantage here is that the waters of Seychelles are some of the cleanest in the world, scoring highly among sovereign states on the ocean health index.



The Islands

The Seychelles archipelago comprises 115 islands situated between 4 and 10 degrees south of the equator in the western Indian Ocean. A group of 42 granitic islands, referred to as the Inner Islands, are home to the principal islands of Mahé, Praslin and La Digue as well as the vast majority of the population. The remaining islands are coralline reef islands cays and atolls that make up the Outer Islands, many of which remain uninhabited.

The Outer Islands which resemble a string of stepping stones extending in an arc towards the west coast of Africa comprise: the Inner Islands; Amirantes; the Southern Coral Group; Alphonse Group and finally the Farquhar and Aldabra groups which are much closer to the coast of Africa than to the Seychelles Inner Islands.

Early Arab explorers of the 9th century B.C. certainly knew of these islands as did the Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama who gave the Amirantes Islands their name. Seychelles was once also a lair for 18th century pirates escaping the navies of Great Britain and France.

The grand diversity of these magical islands, many still slumbering in their first innocence, is what makes Seychelles unique and underpins its attractiveness as a popular tourism destination. While the granitic islands offer towering granite peaks, primeval forests and a dizzying array of flora and fauna including some of the rarest species on the planet, their coralline brethren offer an aspect of turquoise lagoons, shallow at low tide, around which necklaces of low-lying coral islets are strung as if on strings of surging surf.

Occupying a surface area of only some 450 sq. km, the islands have set aside almost half of their limited land area as protected areas. Seychelles is regarded as priority area for marine conservation by The Nature Conservancy, a biodiversity hotspot by Conservation International and as a centre of plant biodiversity by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and the World Wildlife Fund. Endemism stands at 50-85% for animal groups and 45% for plants.

Seychelles has had considerable success in establishing its network of protected areas and in the de-ratification of several of its islands, paving the way for spectacular revivals of endangered avian species and for the effective protection of turtles and other marine life. This, in many cases, has been underpinned by a successful integration of biodiversity concerns and tourism development.

Several of its smaller islands have become showcases for conservation success, among them Bird Island, home to a major sooty tern breeding site; Denis Island, new home to endangered Seychelles warblers and Seychelles foodies; Aride, known as the Seabird citadel of the Indian Ocean; Zil Pasyon (Felicite) for reinstating much of the island's original flora; Cousine for its conservation of endemic birdlife and reinstatement of original flora and Curieuse, home to Aldabran giant tortoises, mangroves, turtles, coco-de-mers and the Seychelles black parrot.

Today, the Seychelles Islands are home to no less than two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: Praslin Island's Valley de Mai where grows the fabulous double-lobed coconut, the Coco-de-Mer, and the giant raised coral atoll of Aldabra, which earned its name from the early Arab explorers, with its rich ecosystems and population of 100,000 giant land tortoises living in the wild.



Aldabra is home to several endemic species including the flightless rail, Aldabra drongo and Aldabra fody and a rich treasure house of other flora and fauna including huge colonies of frigate birds and boobies, seven species of mangrove, green and hawksbill turtles, seasonal humpback whales and whale sharks, spinner dolphin and an elusive family of dugong. There are also eight endemic species of short grass.

Notwithstanding its several successes and undoubted determination, the future still holds many challenges in terms of Seychelles' reaction to and mitigation of climate change, rising sea levels, global warming, coral bleaching, shoreline erosion, control of invasive alien species, sustainable harvesting of fish stocks, and efficient management of Protected Areas.



The Economy

During colonial times, Seychelles' economy was initially based upon artisanal fishing and also agriculture, chiefly involving the export of vanilla, cinnamon and coprah (dried flesh of the coconut), followed later by the introduction of semi-industrial fishing.

Around 1970, of the approximately 22,000 Seychellois in employment, some 5,000 worked on plantations, nearly 4,000 in the public sector and about the same number in the private sector just as the newly constructed hotels of the emerging tourism industry began employing a significant number of people. At this time, there were large numbers of fishermen, unskilled labourers and domestic servants.

Since Seychelles' independence in 1976, per capita output has swelled to roughly seven times the old near-subsistence level. Starting out as an economy where production, investment, prices, and incomes were determined centrally by the government, growth has been since spearheaded by the tourist sector, which employs about 30% of the labour force and contributes more than 70% of foreign exchange earnings. The fisheries sector is the second most important sector of the Seychellois economy with an annual contribution to GDP varying from between 8-20 % and employing 17% of the total population. The burgeoning offshore financial services domain represents something in the order of 8% of GDP.

In the wake of the 2008 global recession, Seychelles defaulted on interest payments due on a \$230 million Euro-bond. It subsequently requested assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and immediately enacted a number of significant structural reforms, including liberalization of the exchange rate, reform of the public sector to include layoffs, and the sale of some state assets. In December 2013, the IMF declared that Seychelles had successfully transitioned to a market-based economy with full employment and a fiscal surplus.

In view of Seychelles' economic progress since the debt restructuring, in the eyes of the World Bank, the Seychelles Islands have recently graduated to the status of a high income country which dictates that it needs to find its own ways to generate future economic growth rather than being dependent on development aid finances.

To mitigate threats to its island economy in terms of possible future external shocks, the government has moved to reduce the dependence on tourism by promoting research and development into farming, fishing (including aquaculture), offshore renewables, hydrocarbon exploration, small-scale manufacturing and the knowledge-based economy of the offshore financial sector. In particular, recognizing the potential environmental threats of economic growth, Seychelles has focused on building a better knowledge and understanding of its ocean, its myriad resources and marine life, coming to perceive their true value and fragility as one of the planet's most diverse and productive ecosystems.



This need to future-proof its economy by diversifying and developing all those sectors which potentially contribute to the country's economic prosperity dominates current thinking, creating the additional challenge of achieving goals and targets with only a small population and limited financial resources.

Driving this economic diversification is a desire to reduce economic vulnerability, coupled with emphasis on increasing the GDP from marine sectors, creating high-value jobs and ensuring food security through the protection and sustainable use of marine resources.

The emerging, holistic way of looking at the ocean and its future contribution to the nation's economic growth, demands the engagement of the government, private sector and communities in terms of balancing sector development with conservation planning and implementation.

This vision involves boosting investment in existing, ocean-based economic sectors and the development of new ocean-based economies while also growing employment in these areas and achieving greater security through improved co-ordination, new research, innovation and knowledge about Seychelles' ocean space.

Seychelles stands at a crossroads in its history, experiencing a period of intense change, both local and global, which demands critical decisions be taken concerning the tightly-interlinked development and protection of its diversified economy, ocean, islands and people.

One important tool in its implementation is the Seychelles' Marine Spatial Planning initiative, which serves to prioritize and better organize the use of Seychelles' EEZ to more effectively provide for sustainable use of the ocean and its resources. Another is the development of SeyCCAT, which will inject significant capital into Seychelles' endeavours to protect its marine environment and invigorate this new economy.