

# TRAVEL

## ITALY'S HIDDEN GEM

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VANCOUVER SUN SATURDAY, MAY 28, 2016

SECTION E



Seychelles is nothing less than another Galapagos, with wondrous plants and animals — species you won't find anywhere else, writes Suzanne Morphet. PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

SUZANNE MORPHET

I'd been chatting with my taxi driver for a few minutes when I mentioned I was from Canada. He turned and looked at me with a mixture of surprise and curiosity. "I couldn't find your accent," he said, adding with a smile, "You're my first Canadian."

It's true, not many Canadians visit Seychelles. Last year was a record year for tourism to these tropical islands, with more than a quarter of a million visitors. Yet only 3,000 came from North America, and most of those were from the United States.

Perhaps it's not surprising given that Seychelles is in the middle of the Indian Ocean, 1,500 km from Africa, and considered expensive — a destination for honeymooners or the rich and famous.

So when my daughter emailed me from South Africa, where she'd been studying at Cape Town University and asked if I could join her in Seychelles, my first answer was no. If I wanted a tropical beach holiday, I could go to Mexico or Hawaii.

Then I happened to pick up an issue of National Geographic with an article entitled Return to Seychelles. I learned these islands offer far more than gorgeous beaches. They're nothing less than another Galapagos, with wondrous plants and animals — species you won't find anywhere else. Seychelles,

# SEYCHELLES

## A PARADISE FOR PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE



There are more turtles than people in Seychelles. The Aldabra Giant Tortoise is the biggest species.

for instance, is home to one of the world's smallest frog and tortoises that weigh a quarter of a ton, a tree that produces the biggest seed of any plant (the nut of the coco-de-mer is shaped like a woman's pelvis), and one of the rarest birds in the world — the magpie robin.

### THE MOTHER OF ALL CARNAVALS

Serendipitously, we would be visiting during Seychelles's Carnival, which — just like some of its flora and fauna — is unique in the world, partly because it takes place after Lent and partly because it includes performers from many countries.

This year, Carnival performers came from as far away as China, South Korea and Indonesia, making for a surprising and diverse showcase of dancing and music.

Of course, it wouldn't really have been Carnival without a troupe of barely dressed Brazilians, female buttocks flashing in the tropical sun while their King Momo paraded in a black and gold-sequined jumpsuit in spite of April's 30 C-plus heat and high humidity.

A Brazilian in the crowd, Thiago Khoury, admitted he was initially skeptical of a Carnival in Seychelles, but "now that I'm here, the streets, the people are so vibrant, I'm as excited as I would be if I was in Brazil."

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