



South Africans donning festive attire made a colourful contribution to this year's Carnaval in Seychelles. The festival usually lasts a weekend.

# MIX OF CULTURES, LIVELY CUISINE

## SEYCHELLES FROM E1

And just like in Rio or Sao Paulo where Carnaval lasts two or three days, Seychelles makes a weekend of it, with a lot of entertainment, a food fiesta, children's parade, and energetic after-parties.

### EXPLORING THE ISLANDS

As fun as Carnaval is, the real reason to come to Seychelles is still its extraordinary natural beauty and biodiversity.

On most of the so-called Inner Islands, enormous granite boulders bookend white sand beaches that are fringed with palm trees and turquoise water. The mountainous main island of Mahe also boasts spectacular sunsets from its highest peak.

As mountains go, 905 metres isn't all that high, but for an island smaller than Salt Spring, it seems huge, as does Morne Seychellois National Park, with its dramatic drop-offs and challenging hikes through stands of jackfruit trees and across moss-covered granite outcroppings.

The Outer Islands are a different breed altogether. Most are low-lying sandy cays and coral atolls, including the Aldabra Atoll, one of the largest raised coral atoll in the world, with more tortoises than there are people in all of Seychelles.

And speaking of people, they're almost as diverse as the flora and fauna.

Most Seychellois, about 90,000, live on Mahe and are descendants of slaves, European settlers and Chinese and Indian traders.

My taxi driver seemed to confirm the country's claim to be a peaceful melting pot of cultures when he told me he's half French and half Indian, married to a French woman, and their baby daughter looks Brazilian, with "big eyes, long eyelashes and curly, black, soft hair."

All that cultural mixing has produced a lively Creole cuisine. Grilled fish and octopus are local specialties, along with fragrant coconut milk curries.

If you want something novel, try fruit bat stew. It's become frowned upon, but some restaurants still serve it. Interestingly, before people settled in Seychelles, bats were the only mammals here. If you're really interested in food as well as culture, consider visiting during the annual Creole festival in the last week in October.

### CHALLENGING PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS

The country is trying to change people's perception of Seychelles as a destination mainly for the wealthy. This year the president is expected to announce a moratorium on the building of any more five star resorts. And recently the

## IF YOU GO

Four airlines fly to Seychelles from North America via a hub such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi or Johannesburg; Emirates, Etihad, Ethiopian, and South African Airways.

**Seasons:** Seychelles is just below the Equator and hot year-round. May to September is slightly cooler and windier. Water visibility for snorkelling and scuba diving is best from March to May and September to November.

**Accommodation:** Seychelles Secrets offers the least expensive properties. [seychellessecrets.com](http://seychellessecrets.com)

Four and five-star resorts on Mahe include the new Carana Beach (40 chalets from about US\$220/night) AVANI (124 rooms from US\$280/night [avanihotels.com](http://avanihotels.com); and Savoy Resort (163 rooms from about US\$435/night) [savoy.sc](http://savoy.sc)

tourism board launched something called Seychelles Secrets — a collection of 67 (to date) small hotels, guest houses, self-catered chalets and holiday homes that have been vetted and recognized as providing



With its picturesque beaches, it's no wonder many couples choose to honeymoon in Seychelles.

good value for money. One tourism officer told me it's possible to find accommodation from US\$50 a night.

Still, if you strike it rich, resorts like North Island and Fregate Island Private will always exist.

It would be easy to dismiss their over-the-top rates as ridiculous, but profits are channelled into ecological restoration.

And when species are saved, as they have been on these islands, all of Seychelles benefits.

*The writer was a guest of Seychelles Tourism Board. No one from the board read or approved of this article before publication.*

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~~~~~ Prices are per person double occupancy & subject to final confirmation ~~~~~