

Diving in Mauritius, Réunion & Seychelles

A growing number of travellers come to the Indian Ocean for the mother lode of dive sites, and justifiably so. Though largely overshadowed by the iconic Maldives, scuba diving in Mauritius, Réunion and Seychelles is increasingly popular. Beneath the clear turquoise waters is a trove of unbelievable riches: rainbow-coloured fish and large pelagic species (and yes, sharks are part of the package!), a dramatic seascape, a few wrecks and a host of drop-offs and reefs. It's not the cheapest place on earth to dive (Thailand or the Red Sea it ain't) but it's a great place to learn, and in turn love, scuba diving. Good news: bar a few areas, the dive sites are never crowded.

The dive sites presented here (see the relevant regional maps for their location) are only a sampling of hundreds of sites available.

HOW MUCH?

Introductory dive: €40-65

Single dive: €40-65
(including equipment rental)

Open Water certification course: €300-450

MAURITIUS

So, you want variety? Abundant marine life, dramatic seascapes, atmospheric wrecks – Mauritius has it all, not to mention well-established, high-quality dive operators. Mauritius is almost entirely surrounded by a barrier reef, within which turquoise lagoons provide great possibilities for snorkellers, swimmers and novice divers. And there is the *pièce de résistance*: Rodrigues, which has virgin sites and outstanding fish life.

Dive Sites

THE NORTH

The north coast is a magnet for divers of all levels, and it's no wonder – there's a good balance of thrilling dives, wrecks, drop-offs and easy dives.

The islands off the coast (Île Plate, Coin de Mire) are the main highlights, with splendid sites and diverse fish life – not to mention a sense of wilderness. **La Fosse aux Requins** will make your spine tingle. On the northwestern side of Île Plate, a bowl-shaped basin carved into the cliff is home to an eerie concentration of blacktip sharks (numbering from five to about 30 on certain days) that keep swirling around. Why? Possibly because the waters here are rich in oxygen thanks to the swell. Good news for novice divers in search of excitement: this shallow dive (12m) is accessible with an Open Water certificate, though the current can be a bit tricky. One proviso: the encounter with the sharks is probable but cannot be guaranteed!

Coin de Mire is another diver's treat, with a few stunning drop-offs – we recommend **Carpenters** and the aptly named **The Wall**. Both have fairly good coral formations and tons of fish life. Near the Wall, the shipwreck **Djabeda** is a former Japanese freighter that was scuttled in 1998 in 30m. It's more atmospheric than fishy.

To the northwest, Trou aux Biches is the main jumping-off point to a variety of superb dives. Be sure to fill your logbook with **Holt's Rock** (also known as Stenopus), which features two rocky domes and big boulders; **Lobster Rock**, in about 20m, geared to novice divers; and **Tombant de la Pointe aux Canonniers**, between Holt's Rock and Lobster Rock, suitable for experienced divers, with an exhilarating drop-off that tumbles from 32m to about 60m. Other reputable walls in the area: **Caravelle**, **Corsaire Wall** and **Kingfish**, all embellished with black coral and seafans. In the mood for wrecks? Make a beeline for **Waterlily** and **Emily**, as well as the photogenic, 45m-long **Stella Maru**, all of which are accessible to novice divers.

See under the various Activities headings in the North Mauritius section (p78) for local dive centres.

THE WEST

The Flic en Flac area ranks among the best in Mauritius when it comes to diving. Conditions are optimal year-round – it's protected from the prevailing winds – and visibility is usually excellent. We can't gush enough about **Rempart Serpent** (Snake Rampart), possibly the quirkiest dive in Mauritius. Located a 15-minute boat trip from Flic en Flac, it takes its name from the sinuous rock lying about 25m below the surface, which attracts perhaps the greatest concentration in the world of weird and wonderful scorpion fish, stonefish, moray eels and lionfish. Another fave is **La Cathédrale**, with a memorable seascape – think a warren of cavelets, stipples, passages and ledges. It's full of reef species, including fusiliers, surgeonfish, groupers, snappers, angelfish and lobsters. One downside: it's so popular that it's fairly congested. **Couline Bambou** and **Manioc** are less crowded but no less attractive.

Wreck fans will be spoiled here too, with a handful of atmospheric wrecks, including the **Kei Sei 113**, scuttled in the 1980s. Resting at about 35m, it's accessible to seasoned divers only. Beginners might try the **Tug II**, a 20m-long tugboat scuttled in 1981 that sits on the sand in about 20m. It's now home to thousands of colourful fish. Hint: lie without moving on the sandy bottom and you'll see swaying conger eels slip down into their burrows.

And the southwest coast? The area between Le Morne Peninsula and Rivière Noire (Black River) has a few diving hot spots, including the fishy **Passe St Jacques** and **Casiers**. The weak points are the average visibility and the fairly dull topography.

See p99 for local dive centres.

THE SOUTHEAST

Off the southeast coast it's the dramatic underwater terrain that impresses more than anything, making for unique profiles. You'll be rewarded with a profusion of caves, tunnels and giant arches – it's very scenic – as well as large numbers of pelagics thrown in for good measure. The hitch? From June to August most sites are exposed to the prevailing winds – expect choppy seas in rough weather.

Colorado is the magic mantra. As befits its name, this site looks like an underwater version of the famous American valley. This 400m-long canyon is peppered with chasms, tunnels, crevices and boulders where masses of lobsters, jacks, groupers and barracuda seek shelter. Another must-dive is **Roches Zozo**, close to Colorado. It features a huge rock that rises from the sea-

Don't worry too much about the effects of the 2004 tsunami – most sites in Mauritius, Réunion and the Seychelles are not coral dives.

THE FIRST TIME

You've always fancied venturing underwater on scuba? Now's your chance. Mauritius, Réunion and the Seychelles are perfect starting points for new divers, as the warm waters and shallow reefs are a forgiving training environment. Most dive centres offer courses for beginners and employ experienced instructors.

Just about anyone in reasonably good health can sign up for an introductory dive (from €40), including children aged eight and over. It typically takes place in shallow (3m to 5m) water and lasts about 30 minutes. It's escorted by a divemaster.

If you choose to enrol in an Open Water course, count on it taking about four days, including a few classroom lectures and open-water training. Once you're certified, your C-card is valid permanently and recognised all over the world.