

# Seychelles



# Seychelles Snapshots

## FAST FACTS

Population: 87,000

Territory size: 445 sq km

Languages: English,  
French, Creole

Capital: Victoria

Highest point: Morne  
Seychellois (907m)

Largest island: Mahé

Distance from Mahé to  
Mauritius: 1720km

Distance from Mahé to  
Bombay: 2800km

Average weight of a  
coco fesse (Seychelles  
coconut): 10-15kg

Bel Ombre is one of several possible locations for the treasure trove of the legendary pirate Olivier Levasseur, known as 'La Buse' (the Buzzard).

The Seychelles was named in honour of the French finance minister to Louis XV, Jean Moreau de Séchelles.

The Seychelles is a paradise for tourists, no doubt about it, and most tourists leave with a very positive impression of the country. Whether or not the Seychelles is heaven for its own population is another story. Politically, the situation has barely evolved in 30 years. The ruling party, the Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF), led by President James Michel, has been governing the country since 1977. The Seychellois aspire to *sanzman* (change). Freedom of the press is still quite limited. The opposition newspaper, *Regar*, had to close down in 2006, and the SPPF continues to exert a firm grip on the media.

Economically, the country is in a transition period. The Seychelles is the richest country in Africa, but it has also long been one of the most highly indebted countries in the world, according to the World Bank. The year 2008 marked a turning point: due to increasing international pressures, local authorities decided to float the Seychelles rupee and deregulate the economy. Prices immediately rose by about 30%. Surprisingly, it didn't result in rioting and protests. Even better, it paid off; the country has achieved growth in a climate of global recession. Foreign investors are back. Tourism remains a major source of income for the nation, although visitor numbers fell by 5% in 2009 compared with 2008. That said, some Seychellois feel increasingly concerned about the repercussions of tourism development on their daily lives. Large tracts of unspoiled beaches have been more or less privatised by recent hotels. 'We fear that direct access to our beaches may be made more and more difficult', locals said to us. Others fear that their country is being 'sold' to foreign investors, who buy large tracts of land.

With the increase in acts of piracy in the entire Western Indian Ocean, the Seychelles found itself exposed to attacks led by Somali pirates in 2009 and 2010. The government called on the international community for assistance and has signed an agreement with the USA to combat piracy in the Seychellois territorial waters. At the time of writing, the Outer Islands were off-limits to foreigners.

## HISTORY

Until the 18th century the Seychelles was uninhabited. The islands were first spotted by Portuguese explorers, but the first recorded landing was by a British East India Company ship in 1609. Pirates and privateers used the Seychelles as a temporary base during lulls in their marauding.

## THE COLONIAL PERIOD

In 1742, Mahé de Labourdonnais, the governor of what is now Mauritius, sent Captain Lazare Picault to investigate the islands. Picault named the main island after his employer (and the bay where he landed after himself) and laid the way for the French to claim possession of the islands 12 years later.

It took a while for the French to do anything with their possession. It wasn't until 1770 that the first batch of 21 settlers and seven slaves arrived on Ste Anne Island. After a few false starts, the settlers began growing spices, cassava, sugar cane and maize.

In the 18th century, the British began taking an interest in the Seychelles. The French were not willing to die for their colony and didn't resist British attacks, and the Seychelles became a British dependency in 1814. The British