



Réunion

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Why Go?

Réunion is one of the Indian Ocean's last great island adventures. The diversity of landscapes is truly astonishing for such a small pocket. Jutting out of the ocean like a basaltic shield cloaked in green, this scenically magical island is a mini-Hawaii. What to expect? Emerald forests, tumbling waterfalls, awesome mountainscapes, twisting roads, soul-stirring panoramas, energetic coastal cities and a sprinkling of white- or black-sand beaches. The formidable Piton de la Fournaise, one of the world's most accessible active volcanoes, adds to the thrill. Small wonder that Réunion is a dream destination for nature and outdoor lovers. Hiking is the number-one activity, but canyoning, paragliding, rafting, horseback riding, diving, whale watching and climbing are also available.

There's also plenty to compel culture aficionados. Réunion has a fascinating Creole, African, Indian, Chinese and French heritage, with a wealth of architectural treasures and vibrant festivals that are a great occasion to immerse yourself in local culture.

When to Go

- ➔ Réunion's climate experiences only two distinct seasons: the hot, rainy summer from December to April and the cool, dry winter from late April to November.
- ➔ The peak tourist season is during the French school holidays from July to early September. From October through to the New Year holidays is also busy, but after this everything eases down during cyclone-prone February and March.
- ➔ Temperatures on the coast average 22°C in winter and 27°C in summer. In the mountains, they drop to 11°C and 18°C respectively.
- ➔ The drier winter months are the most favourable for hiking, as some of the trails are simply impassable when it's wet. The east coast is considerably wetter than the west.
- ➔ The whale watching season runs from June to October.

AT A GLANCE

- ➔ **Currency** Euro (€)
- ➔ **Languages** French, Creole
- ➔ **Mobile phones**
GSM network through Orange and SFR; international roaming and local SIM cards available
- ➔ **Money** ATMs in major towns; credit cards widely accepted
- ➔ **Visas** Not required for most Western nationals for three-month stays

Fast Facts

- ➔ **Capital** St-Denis
- ➔ **Country code** ☎262
- ➔ **Population** 840,000
- ➔ **Time** GMT + four hours

Exchange Rates

For current exchange rates see www.xe.com

A\$1	€0.67
C\$1	€0.72
¥100	€0.77
NZ\$1	€0.60
UK£1	€1.17
US\$1	€0.75

Resources

- ➔ **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com)
- ➔ **Île de la Réunion Tourisme** (www.reunion.fr)
- ➔ **Allons La Réunion** (www.allonslareunion.com)

Arriving in Réunion

All long-distance flights to Réunion arrive at St-Denis, landing at Roland Garros international airport, which is located about 10km east of St-Denis. Taxis from just outside the airport cost from €20 to central St-Denis. Between 6.30am and 6pm, there's also a regular shuttle bus service from the airport to central St-Denis (€4, 12 daily). The ride takes about 20 minutes.

ESSENTIAL FOOD & DRINK

Réunion is a culinary delight: thanks to a mix of cuisines and prime fresh ingredients (plentiful seafood, succulent meat, spices, aromatic plants, and fruit and vegetables bursting with flavours), you're certain to eat well wherever you go. National favourites include *rougail saucisse* (sausages cooked in tomato sauce) and *carri* (curry), served with rice and vegetables.

Given that Réunion is an island, it's hardly surprising that seafood features prominently on the menu. Gorge yourself on fish and freshwater crayfish.

Desserts are equally exciting, with tropical fruit pies and jams, delicious cakes, exotic sorbets and ice creams.

In towns and cities, you'll also find plenty of patisseries selling croissants and pastries. Baguettes can be bought from every street corner.

What about drinks? Flavoured rum is Réunion's signature drink: there are dozens to try, from vanilla to lychee. Local wine is also great, if not exceptional.

Restaurants range from modest to top-end establishments. You'll also find *snacks* (fast food outlets) and food trucks; they are cheap and serve no-frills, typical Creole fare and sandwiches. The tastier Creole food is often served at B&Bs, which are famous for their *tables d'hôtes* meals (home cooked meals).

Keeping Costs Down

- ➔ Buy simple Creole dishes at takeaway outlets
- ➔ If you'd like to try an upmarket restaurant, go for lunch – lunch menus are much easier on the wallet than à la carte evening dining
- ➔ Get around the island by bus
- ➔ It's always better to arrange car hire before you arrive
- ➔ Opt for B&Bs or *gîtes*, preferably in the Hauts (hills)