

Curieuse Marine National Park

Curieuse Marine National Park, was designated on the 11th June 1979, the island has an area of 286 hectares and is the fifth largest of the granitic Seychelles Islands. It is situated a little over 1 kilometer from Praslin, with its highest peak, reaching up to 172 meters above sea level. Teeming with native wildlife, the island consists of two ranges of high ground enclosing a shallow bay named Baie Laraie. Most of the land is sloping ground between 10 and 100 meters above sea level, supporting a variety of plants and animals.

Geology

Geologically speaking, the island is similar to the nearby island of Praslin. The central hills are made up of reddish-grey granite. The surrounding lowland areas consist of weathering products of granite, together with more recent calcareous deposits. The soils of Curieuse are mainly lateritic red earths. On the central range of hills, these have been severely eroded, reduced to bare sub-soil and quartz gravel. In some flatter areas on the northern plain these soils have been less eroded.

History

Curieuse Island was formally named “Ile Rouge” by Captain Lazare Picault, due to its red- coloured soil caused by regular fires. The mountaintop became so exposed, and the red earth colour was visible from long-distance to seafarers. In 1768 the French claimed possession of Curieuse, naming it after the schooner *Curieuse*, commanded by Lieutenant Lampériaire and not as popular beliefs by Captain Marion Dufresne. The latter visited La Réunion, Mauritius, and Rodrigues, but never visited the Seychelles, even though he fitted out *La Digue* and *La Curieuse* for the expedition to Seychelles.

In mid-1771 a year later after the French settlement on Ste Anne, “the Eagle” a British ship under the command of Lieutenant Lewis visited Curieuse. He was accused by the French of setting fire to the island. Apparently, he did so, to revitalise the prize of the Coco de mer on the Indian market.

In 1803, Curieuse was used for the first time as a leper colony, and it remained one until 1965. It is believed that this helped protect the ecosystem from human influence. Today, ruins of the leprosarium remain. Another significant reminder is Dr. William Macgregor’s former residence at Anse José known as the Doctor’s House.

In 1967 a huge fire destroyed much of the vegetation on the Island, including more than 150 coco de mer palms. Like previous fires, many of the islands' native trees were destroyed. The destruction prompted the government to take ownership of the Island and introduced various restoration and conservation projects. Reforestation and contour barriers were later started under Mr. Moulinie and Mr. Micky Mason and later by Mr. Willy André. This was done from the advice of an English agronomist.





What to do?

For a relatively small island, Curieuse hosts an amazing diversity of habitats. The nature trails on the island allow you to visit many of these, giving you a feel for the grassland grazed tortoises, the tall lush woodland, lowland freshwater marsh, mangroves forest and seashores, but also the plentiful wildlife that inhabits the park, such as endemic birds, shorebirds, sea turtles, lizards and many species of crabs and insects.

There are several demarcated trails for visitors to enjoy on the island. You can start from the centre-east plateau and walk pass Baie Laraie to Anse José on the other side of the island, forging your way over the boardwalk, through the mangroves forest. The other trail starts from the rangers' quarters and runs along the shores of the ruins of the Turtle pond and the Mango plantation. It then cuts across the island, beneath the slope of Curieuse Peak to Anse Badamier on the north coast.



A living laboratory - Over the years various conservation projects and expeditions have been undertaken in the Curieuse Marine National Park, and many are still ongoing. From mangrove to tortoise and turtles, today the park is also involved in coral reef restoration projects.



A visit to the island will not be completed without admiring the coral reef garden. Pointe Rouge is the best place for diving. You will encounter a number of spectacular fish species, different corals species, sea turtles and many other marine creatures.





How to get there?

Day trips to visit Curieuse Island are organized by licensed tour operators based on Praslin and La Digue, offering boat excursions to the Island with Creole BBQ lunch

Flora and Fauna

As a popular destination for visitors, Curieuse nests a vast array of flora and fauna. From the famous Coco de Mer, to spectacular snorkeling spots, this marine park offers an undeniable experience out in nature.

Coco de Mer

Curieuse is the only other location aside of Praslin (Valleé de mai), where the Coco de Mer, the largest nut in the world, grows naturally in dry scrubs on the hills.



Many sailors had seen the nut rising up from the sea bed, and thought they grew on underwater trees, in a forest at the bottom of the Indian Ocean. This belief gave the tree its name, "Coco de Mer", which is French for "Coconut of the Sea". The most renowned feature of the Coco de Mer is its enormous fruit which is the largest in the plant world. The fruit takes between 6 to 10 years to mature and is generally two-lobed but may have four or even six lobes. It typically reaches a size of 40-50 cm in diameter.



The fruit of the Coco de Mer typically weighs between 15 to 30 kg. The largest fruit recorded weighed 42 kg making it the world's heaviest nut. The seeds need two years to germinate, and the plant must grow 20-40 years to start flowering.

Aldabra Giant Tortoises

There is a large breeding herd of free roaming Aldabra Giant Tortoises which were introduced between 1978 - 1982 in an attempt to establish a breeding colony within the inner islands. There is a tortoise nursery at Baie Laraie, where the tortoises are nurtured until they are five years old, and then they are released into the wild. Males, are usually bigger than their female counterparts, and are on average around 120 cm in length and can weigh a hefty 250 kg.





Marine Life

The marine park is prized for its marine biodiversity, ranging from shallow water reefs to the deepest parts. This includes the mangrove ecosystem, rocky intertidal shores, seagrass beds and sandy beaches.



Spinner Dolphin

An occasional visitor to inshore waters around the island.



Green Turtle

Forages on algae and sea grasses in shallow inshore areas.



Courtesy Blue Safari

Hawksbill Turtle

A widespread species frequenting shallow reef areas around the island.



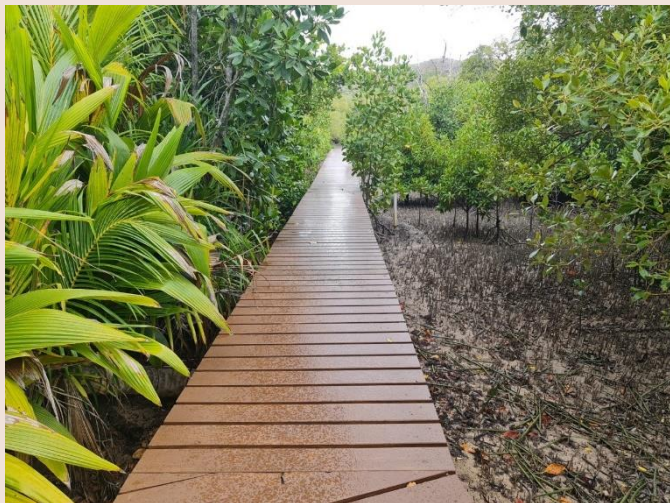
Courtesy Blue Safari





Mangrove Forest

One of the most appealing features of the island is the mangrove ecosystem bordering Baie Laraie. Six of the seven species of mangroves known to Seychelles are found there.



Scenic Rock Formation

The island offers outstanding sights of gigantic cliffs. Some of these rock formations are so defined that one would have the impression that they have been sculptured.

