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HIKING IN SEYCHELLES

SEYCHELLES TOURISM BOARD

MAHÉ  
PRASLIN  
LA DIGUE  
SILHOUETTE

**15**

ROUTES  
TO DISCOVER

EDITION  
2017-2018

# HIKING IN SEYCHELLES

RÉMY RAVON & ROMAIN LATOURNERIE



**SEYCHELLES TOURISM BOARD**

IN COLLABORATION WITH THE SEYCHELLES NATIONAL PARKS AUTHORITY



## Foreword

By the Seychelles Minister of Tourism,  
Mr **Loustau Lalanne**



Our beaches are regularly ranked among the most beautiful in the world. Our blended cuisine has made our dining establishments famous. Our hospitality is lauded by all our visitors. Our hotels are seen as models in many respects. But the world may not be aware of the trove of natural wonders hidden in our mountains. The 115 Seychelles islands, and the interior islands in particular, boast an extraordinary biological heritage. And what better way to explore this incredible biodiversity than by hiking?

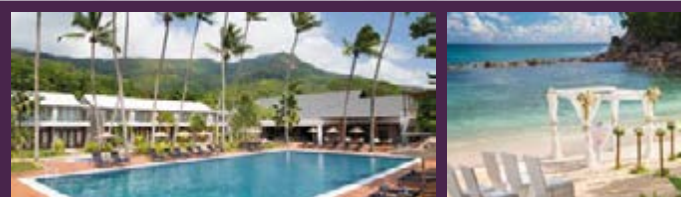
This is the first official guide to hiking in Seychelles. While it cannot claim to be exhaustive, it does list the top 15 routes on the four most frequently visited islands in the archipelago. This guide is meant to be an invitation. Come admire our colorful capital from the summit of Copolia. Explore Morne Seychellois National Park by hiking the sumptuous Casse Dent trail. Feast your eyes on the ocean blue from the Anse Major Trail. Come face to face with giant tortoises on the Grand Barbe Trail. Treat yourself to a breath-taking view from Morne Blanc or Nid d'Aigle on La Digue.

No matter which route you take, we recommend that you engage with all your senses during your journey. Our paths and forests have thousands of secrets to share with attentive ears, keen eyes and perceptive noses. The fragrance of a crumpled cinnamon tree leaf, the delicate architecture of a wild orchid, the cry of a native falcon—you will take all these treasures and more with you in your memories. In these pages you will find a trove of useful information about the precious, fragile environment that our trails explore. For an even more rewarding experience, consider contacting a certified professional guide.

Finally, one last word about our partners, particularly the teams from the National Parks Authority who work diligently all year long to preserve and maintain these natural areas. You can help them by doing your part to protect the environment. Hikers should leave no trace on the natural world around them, leaving it intact for the next visitors. We are proud to share our treasure with you. Please help us do everything we can to protect it.



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## READ BEFORE SETTING OUT

### 65 Million Years Ago

The Seychelles archipelago was created by significant geological movements that occurred around 65 million years ago. The combination of the fragmentation of the supercontinent known as Gondwana and underwater volcanic eruptions led to the formation of the Seychelles Bank, with the country's main islands located in its center. It is currently believed that Mahé, Silhouette, Praslin and La Digue are among the oldest islands on the planet. And their topography reflects this. Mountainous yet highly eroded, the landscape is made up of narrow coastal plains and medium-elevation plateaus bordered on both sides by central ridges. These are generally 400 to 900 m high (1,300 to 2,900 ft.). Morne Seychellois, the country's highest peak, stands at exactly 905 m (2,969 ft.). The Seychelles archipelago also comprises another type of geological formation. The coral islands are located on the outer edge of the bank and have a completely different geological profile. Less rugged, their highest points are never more than several dozen meters above sea level.



### 500 km from the Equator

Despite being located just 500 km (300 miles) from the Equator, Mahé and its neighboring islands enjoy a climate that is actually more tropical than equatorial. The ocean's influence means that the weather is warm and humid throughout the year, with slight seasonal variations. For instance, the interior islands have a wet season and a dry season. The former lasts from June to October, while the latter runs from December to April. The difference is mainly seen in wind and precipitation. The winds dominate the dry season while the wet season is marked by precipitation. Temperatures, meanwhile, vary relatively little throughout the year, ranging from 27° C to 31° C on average (80° F-88° F), and humidity is quite high, between 79% and 82%. As the interior islands are located farther to the north, they enjoy a major advantage—being well removed from the cyclones that occur in the Indian Ocean. The information provided is based on averages and thus only gives a general idea. Variations are inevitable, especially given the effects of climate change that are disrupting seasonal cycles in this intertropical zone.





## From the 17th Century to the Present

Rugged mountains perched on ancient rocks, a sheltered climate influenced by the ocean and isolated from the continents, and a warm, humid tropical climate—the Seychelles granitic islands have all the elements needed to develop exceptional biodiversity. The bounty of the Seychelles natural heritage was recognized as early as the 17th century, as recorded in the writings of the first European visitors. The navigator John Jourdain, the naturalist Marianne North, the sea captain Nicolas Marion-Dufresne and the botanist Pierre Poivre all expressed the same wonder when confronted with the richness and abundance of nature in Seychelles. This diversity was subsequently ravaged by several centuries of agriculture and forestry under the dominion of French and, later, English colonists.

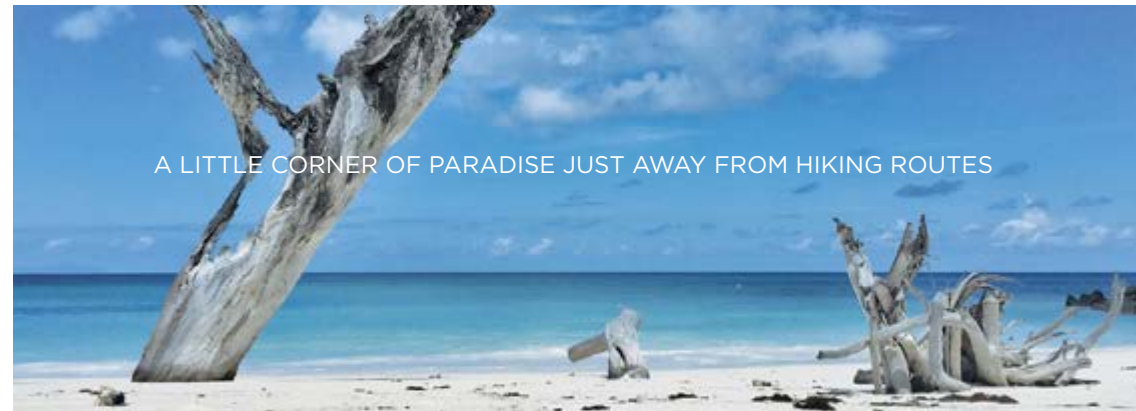
Prior to the 17th century, it was the islands' fauna that was decimated by landing parties from pirate ships and military vessels. Starting in the 18th century, however, plantations began to gradually devour wild areas. Staple crops like corn, rice, manioc, coffee and sugar cane were the first to be planted, followed later by cotton and coconut. Then, at the close of the 19th century and the dawn of the 20th, came the golden age of spices and aromatic plants that wrought havoc on the native environment. Vanilla arrived first, but it was the more recently introduced cinnamon that invaded the Seychelles forests, followed by the rage for patchouli in the 1940s. One after another, these crops made the archipelago a success in terms of global trade. But they left scars that are still visible today. In Morne Seychellois National Park, it is not uncommon to come across the remnants of a distillery in the underbrush or a perfectly preserved stone bridge. These ruins bear witness to the extensive agricultural activity that once dominated these now tranquil and silent places.

It was not until the end of the 1970s that Seychelles began to make conservation a priority. The country quickly developed ambitious plans to protect and restore the environment. Authorities have been waging a campaign against invasive species and making concerted efforts to reintroduce endemic or indigenous species for nearly four decades. Three national parks preserve our biological heritage on the islands. On Mahé, Morne Seychellois National Park covers more than 3,000 hectares (11.5 sq. mi.) on the northern and central parts of the island (more information below). On Praslin, Vallée de Mai Nature Reserve covers 675 hectares (2.6 sq. mi.). On Silhouette, 93% of the island has been designated as a national park.

## An Endless Variety of Flora

It is no wonder that many landscapes in the archipelago match up perfectly with the image of the Garden of Eden that many people have in their minds. In his 1986 reference book, botanist Francis Friedmann listed five distinct categories of plants in Seychelles: exotic plants, mangrove species, coastal forest species, plants that grow at low elevations and those that grow in rainforests and/or at high elevations.

The first of these, known as exogenous species, were introduced by humans over the centuries as crops, as ornamental plants, or even by accident. The most famous of these include Chinese hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*), bougainvillea (various species), and royal poinciana (*Delonix regia*), which are commonly found in natural areas and gardens. We should also mention the tea plants imported by British colonists. Production has almost completely ceased, with the exception of one active plantation located inside Morne Seychellois National Park. Large trees were also introduced for their wood, their fruit or simply their aesthetic appeal. The large amboine trees (*Pterocarpus indicus*) are among these, as are several species of ficus.



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During the era when aromatic and spice plants were cultivated on the islands, species such as clove (*Eugenia aromatica*) and cinnamon (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*) were also planted and grown on a massive scale. Most of these species have become acclimatized and some are flourishing to such an extent that they are outcompeting native species. The poster child for this now widespread problem is the silk tree (*Albizia falcataria*). The largest tree in the Seychelles forest, it forms beautiful canopies, but as a fast-spreading, fast-growing, water intensive plant it is extremely harmful to native flora. Exotic plants that have been deemed invasive are currently being targeted by authorities, despite the beauty of their flamboyant colors and shapes.

Mangroves, the second category established by botanists, are the habitats with the fewest exotic species. The ebb and flow of the tide and the need for salt tolerance drastically limit the number of species that can grow in these environments. You are unlikely to find much else besides the plants known locally as “mangliers”. They are totally unrelated to the nearby species that grow in the coastal forests. These occupy a special category, living along the edges of beaches and on the rocky coastline. One thing they have in common is that they produce fruits and seeds that float in order to propagate along the coasts.

Two iconic species dominate this category: the coconut trees (*Cocos nucifera*) that flourished in the archipelago before humans set foot on the islands and the takamaka (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) with its enormous trunk. Many bushes and plants in this region are common to the islands located in the Indian Ocean or the larger Indo-Pacific region. Some examples of these are sea cabbage (*Scaevola sericea*) or the less common twin-apple (*Ochrosia oppositifolia*). Only two species are strictly endemic to Seychelles: the coastal pandan (*Pandanus balfourii*) and the three-leaved bois cafou (*Allophylus sechellensis*).

A different group of plants has developed in low-lying areas a bit further inland. Up to 500 m (1,600 ft.), the Seychelles landscape is quite rugged, comprised of dry granite glaci formations, crevasses and wetlands.

This explains the diversity of plant species that has developed in the area. Other commonly occurring plants include bois de natte (*Mimusops sechellarum*), bois calou (*Memecylon eleagni*), bois de pomme (*Syzygium wrightii*), bois dur (*Canthium bibracteatum*) and café marron (*Randia lancifolia*). Tropical horticulturists also highly prize the pleomele (*Dracaena reflexa*) seen in large quantities on Anse Major and other coastal trails.

Another species can be spotted in drier areas: red vanilla (*Vanilla phalaenopsis*), which looks like a vine even though it is actually a curious endemic variety of orchid. It has no leaves, just thick stems that sprout new growth when they fall on the ground. Red vanilla is often found encircling the trunks of bois de lait plants (*Euphorbia pyrifolia*), known for their stinging sap. But the undisputed stars of the lowland forests are the famed coco de mer trees (*Lodoicea maldivica*), which have made Praslin’s Vallée de Mai, and the country as a whole, famous.

In habitats below 500 m (1,650 ft.), the percentage of endemic species varies from island to island and biotope to biotope. Several important endemic organisms exist in these low-elevation habitats, however. Of particular note are the Seychelles palms, whose hearts are considered a delicacy. The Seychellois people have nicknamed this dish “the millionaire salad”. A victim of its own success, the tree has become increasingly rare and is now carefully protected. The same is true for other endemic palms such as the latanier palm (*Phoenixophorium borsigianum*) with its sumptuous fronds and the mille-pattes palm (*Nephrosperma vanhoutteana*) with its aerial silhouette. A feature common to all the palm trees endemic to Seychelles are the spines that cover the base of their trunks and sometimes their leaves. According to a local legend, land tortoises used to scratch their shells on them.

At higher elevations, between 500 and 900 m (1,650-3,000 ft.), the forest is dominated by the last plant family: the high-elevation and moisture-loving species. In this habitat, the canopy is dominated by capucins (*Northea horneii*), Seychelles pandanus (*Pandanus sechellarum*) and bois rouge (*Dillenia ferruginea*). The



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soil is most commonly composed of a very thick moist substrate in which mosses and ferns thrive; some of these plants were only very recently discovered. Species favored by connoisseurs include the famous “fanjon” tree fern (*Cyathea sechellarum*), which can grow to 7 m (23 ft.). It should be noted that the endemic palms (see above) are also found in the forests at higher elevations where the moisture levels are conducive to growth.

This is also true of a number of orchid species, which you can only spy if you look very carefully, as most of them are concealed in the undergrowth. Finally, the bare peaks, the mountaintop glacial formations, are the perfect habitats for endemic species; on some mountains, 100% of the species are endemic. The quintessential example of species that adapted to this arid climate is the incredible pitcher plant (*Nepenthes pervillei*), the archipelago’s only carnivorous plant. It lures insects to its pitcher and digests them after they fall to the bottom. A spectacular plant that rewards any intrepid botanist who makes the trek to the summit.

Several dozen endemic animal species coexist on the islands of the archipelago alongside hundreds of indigenous and exotic species. Unsurprisingly, the Seychelles islands, like all places in the intertropical zone, are plentifully supplied with insect species. Happily, though, the islands are not home to any species that pose a danger to humans. Apart from the forest scorpion (*Lychas braueri*) and the giant millipede (*Archispirostreptus gigas*) whose bites can be quite painful, humans have nothing to fear, except perhaps the mosquitoes. For entomological enthusiasts, the forests boast superb collections of spiders, grasshoppers, butterflies, leaf insects, stick insects and beetles.

The skies are no less interesting, as the country is home to 12 endemic species, including some of the world’s rarest birds. The most iconic is the Seychelles scops owl (*Otus insularis*), a species that only survives today thanks to a massive conservation effort. The same is true of the world’s smallest kestrel, the Seychelles kestrel (*Falco araeus*), whose range covers only a few square kilometers. Bird watchers will be delighted by views of the rare Seychelles paradise flycatcher (*Terpsiphone corvina*) on La Digue or the Seychelles black

parrot (*Coracopsis barklyi*), one of Praslin’s many wonders. A more common sight, especially on the hiking trails, is the Seychelles blue pigeon (*Alectroenas pulcherrimus*), with its unique tricolor plumage.

Large populations of reptiles and amphibians also live on the Seychelles islands. The isolation of the archipelago gave rise to remarkable endemic species in these families as well. One example is Gardiner’s frog (*Sooglossus gardineri*), the world’s tiniest frog, measuring less than 15 mm (0.5 in) long. It lives under the leaf litter in the rainforests. Another forest species, the Seychelles wolf snake (*Lycognathophis seychellensis*), is a not-uncommon sight along the trails. Ubiquitous in the wilds and in inhabited areas, the many species of gecko cannot fail to delight attentive observers.

Finally, as is the case for all the small islands in the Indian Ocean, Seychelles is home to only a few species of mammals. Two main species share the territory: the sky is the domain of the tree-dwelling Seychelles flying fox (*Pteropus seychellensis*), which is present in large numbers on Mahé. On the ground, the tailless tenrec (*Tenrec ecaudatus*) has colonized many forests and can be spotted along hiking trails. This small spiny insectivore originates from Madagascar. It could easily be mistaken for a hedgehog, although the two species are not closely related.

## Hotels, Lodges and B&Bs

Seychelles boasts every kind of lodging imaginable, but hikers may want to stay in the hotels, lodges or B&Bs closest to the trailheads. Public transportation may not be the best option, depending on the location and time of day. Be sure to use the maps to find the best accommodation. Hotel managers and their teams are full of helpful advice about choosing the best route for your interests and skill level. Some establishments even offer guided hikes. Be sure to ask at your accommodation.

*For further information: [www.seychelles.travel](http://www.seychelles.travel)*







## Seychelles National Parks Authority

The Seychelles National Parks Authority (SNPA) manages all national marine and terrestrial parks created after 1979. The terrestrial parks are Morne Seychellois National Park on Mahé (see above), Praslin National Park and Veve Nature Reserve on La Digue. The marine parks are Sainte Anne, Baie Ternay, Ile Coco, and the islands of Curieuse and Saint Pierre. Both the land and surrounding waters of Silhouette island are also protected.

In all, around 100 agents work on behalf of these protected areas as forest rangers, guards, scientists or administrative employees. They have many responsibilities. The SNPA conducts scientific research and collaborates on these projects with leading international institutes. The teams also offer environmental education programs in local schools. More broadly, they work to ensure that human activities and environmental protection measures can peacefully coexist.

In 2009, the SNPA and its forestry unit began overseeing trail maintenance, endemic species conservation and the protection of vulnerable ecosystems. They carry out programs that reintroduce species into the most damaged habitats. They are also responsible for the ongoing fight against invasive species. The unit forms the first line of defense against poaching and all illegal activities.

The SNPA is funded by the Seychelles government and also relies on the taxes paid by park visitors. Another portion of its resources comes from international programs aimed at protecting biodiversity.



  
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# 15 ROUTES ON 4 ISLANDS

# SILHOUETTE

# 2

ITINÉRAIRES

# MAHÉ

9

# PRASLIN

3

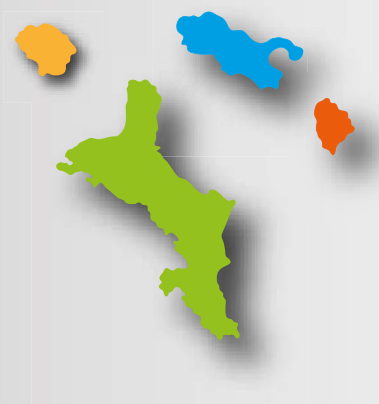
# LA DIGUE

1





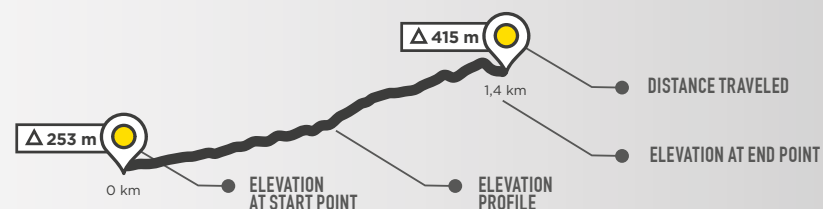
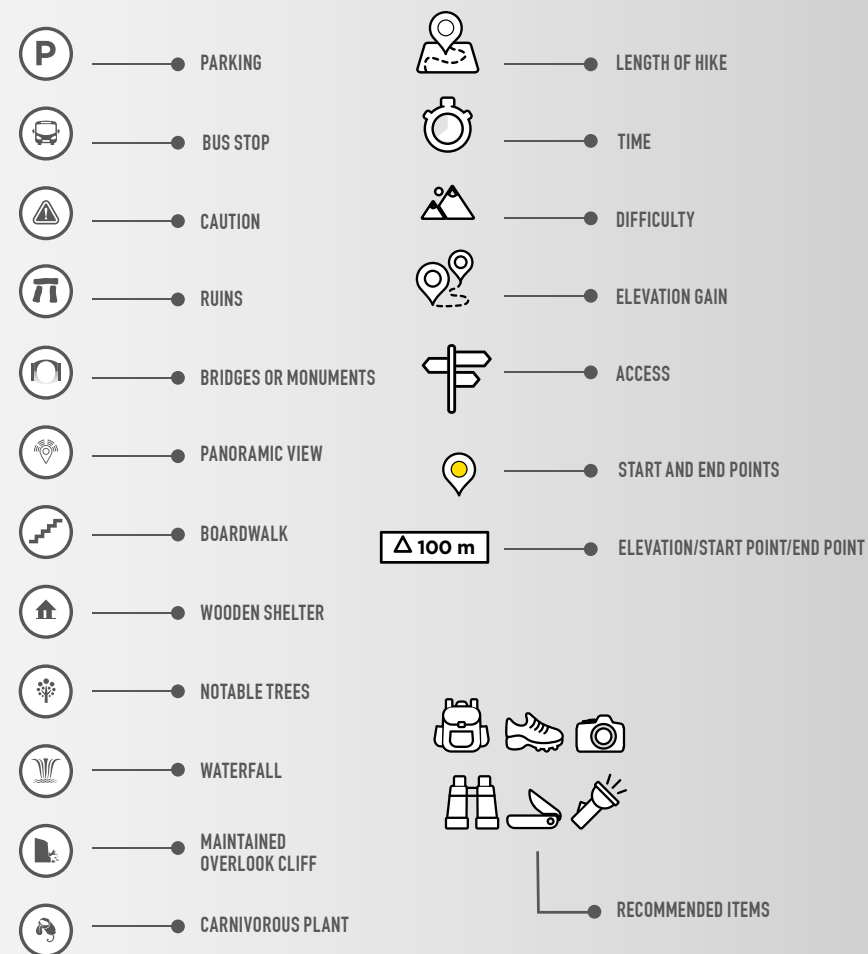
# INDEX AND TIPS FOR USING THE GUIDE



## You can hike all the routes described in this guide on your own.

That is why the hike to the top of Morne Seychellois has not been included, for instance, as the section near the summit can be dangerous and requires an escort. Hikers are free to enjoy all 15 of these trails on their own. However, there is no doubt that an official guide can make the experience much richer. The best Seychellois guides know our mountain and forest ecosystems inside and out. They can point out the most interesting species along the way and tell you about the history of the area. You should be careful when choosing your guide, however. Some professionals have an online presence, but you may also want to ask for recommendations at your hotel or in tourist information offices. You should never accept solicitations from unregistered guides. Taxi drivers in particular are likely to offer their services as forest guides. You should know that they are not insured for this work, that they often do not know the area, and that they do not pay the required taxes to the national parks. Stay alert, be responsible and do not hesitate to ask for advice. Use the symbols in this book as a guide for what to bring with you: hats, shoes, sunscreen, extra water, and so on.

# SYMBOL KEY





MAHÉ

ROUTE

01

## DANS GALLAS



ONE OF THE ONLY HIKES THAT  
BOASTS VIEWS OF THE EAST AND  
WEST COASTS OF MAHÉ.



**LENGTH: 2.9 KM (1.8 MI.)**



**TIME: 1 HR 15 MIN.**



**DIFFICULTY: MODERATE**



**TOTAL ASCENT/DESCENT:**

**556 M (1,824 FT.)**



We recommend that you start in the morning so you can fully appreciate the view before the clouds roll in at midday. The trail starts from the Le Niol road, across from the last bus stop.

### RECOMMENDED ITEMS







## Enjoy nature and history on this hike above the capital.

The trail begins behind the Seychelles National Parks Authority annex offices, just above the road and across from the bus stop. The site tends to be quite waterlogged. The trail then climbs continuously upward to the right into the muddy slope, which is held back with a wooden retaining fence. This forest has been logged for mahogany, the wood used to make furniture and ship masts.

Here you will see a highly varied collection of endemic palms with sharp spines ringing their trunks. This is also where water is collected for distribution throughout northern Mahé. Above the trail you will observe a series of reservoirs. When you reach the vehicle track, turn left and follow the sign to Dans Gallas.

The first scenic overlook will soon appear on the left near the telephone antennas; you will be treated to a magnificent view of Beauvallon and all the coves to the northwest. Behind you, Mount Le Niol rears its head in the sunlight.

You should then turn right toward Dans Gallas, which the sign says is 500 m (0.3 mi.) away. The vehicle track continues to the left. The trail once again climbs sharply upward. There are some interesting trees in this area, including the bois joli cœur, also known as bois carotte in Réunion. Crumple one of the leaves to enjoy its fragrance.

As the elevation increases, you will enjoy a series of views of the west coast, each more beautiful than the last. After 20 or 30 minutes of strenuous climbing, you will reach a structure with a green sheet metal roof, which provides shelter from the rain.

Once you are under the tree cover again, keep your eyes open for some old stone walls built in the 19th century. During that period, a group of Ethiopians known as the Gallas settled in the area after having escaped Arab vessels with help from the British Navy.

From there, the trails zig-zags its way under trees and between immense moss-covered granite blocks. The large trees that surround you are cinnamon trees (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*), jackfruit trees (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*) and sea almonds (*Terminalia catappa*).

You will then come to a more challenging section, during which you will have to climb some metal ladders. The trail comes to a large vertical rock and splits in two. Continue on the left-hand path. After a rather steep, wet and slippery climb, you will reach the top of a large plateau topped with a ridge. The trail continues to wend its way through vegetation and geological features. The ascent continues in a stony valley; you will turn off to the left to follow the crest.

You will have a clear view of Victoria and the port area. At the end of the trail, you will find yourself on a rock and concrete promontory where you can let the ocean air refresh you. You will be able to look out over a large portion of the eastern coast, where blue hues contrast with the intense green of the vegetation below.

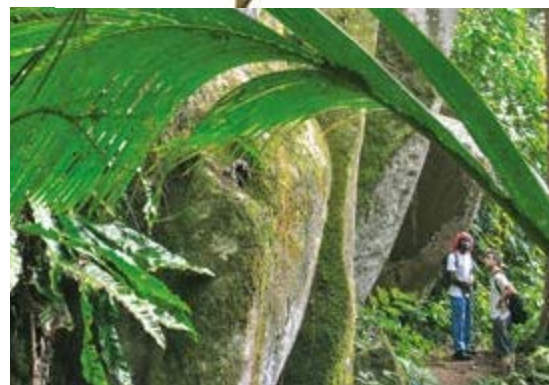
### Cerulean Flaxlily. (*Dianella ensifolia*)

This herbaceous plant is frequently seen along the trail. It produces a pearl-shaped fruit colored a vivid cobalt blue. The leaves are used to make traditional medicines, insecticides and dyes.



### Cinnamon (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*)

Native to Sri Lanka, this tree was imported to Seychelles and cultivated on a massive scale in the lowland forests. While the spice is made from the interior bark of the tree, you can in fact get a whiff of its characteristic fragrance by crumpling a leaf.





MAHÉ

ROUTE

02

## COPOLIA TRAIL



FORESTS, GLACIS AND A PANORAMIC VIEW AWAIT YOU ON THIS POPULAR HIKE ALONG THE EAST COAST.



**LENGTH: 1.6 KM (1 MI.)**



**TIME: 45 MIN.**



**DIFFICULTY: EASY**



**TOTAL ASCENT/DESCENT:  
242 M (794 FT.)**



From Victoria, head toward on the Sans-Souci road. After a few kilometers, park near the Copolia Lodge. The trailhead is just across from the hotel, near the bus stop.

### RECOMMENDED ITEMS







**This is one of the most popular hikes for locals; it leads to a rocky plateau with a panoramic view of the east coast.**

Next to the Sans-Souci road, the trail begins with a descent into the forest, in the shade of a large white trumpet tree (*Tabebuia pallida*), known for its white and pale pink flowers. Immediately on your left you will see the hut for the police officers who are in charge of security for the trail. A few thefts were reported some time ago, but these days hikers can enjoy the trail without worrying about safety. After a few minutes, the path climbs up the other side of a ravine, continuing upwards between mossy rocks. The hike crosses several ravines, causing it to alternate between ascents and descents.

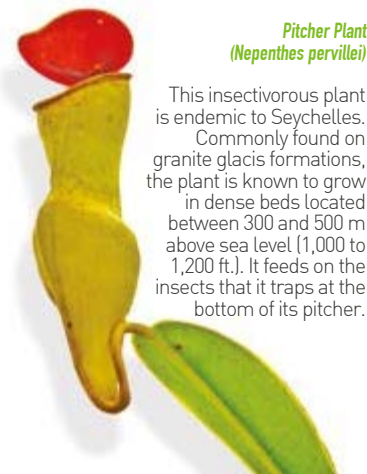
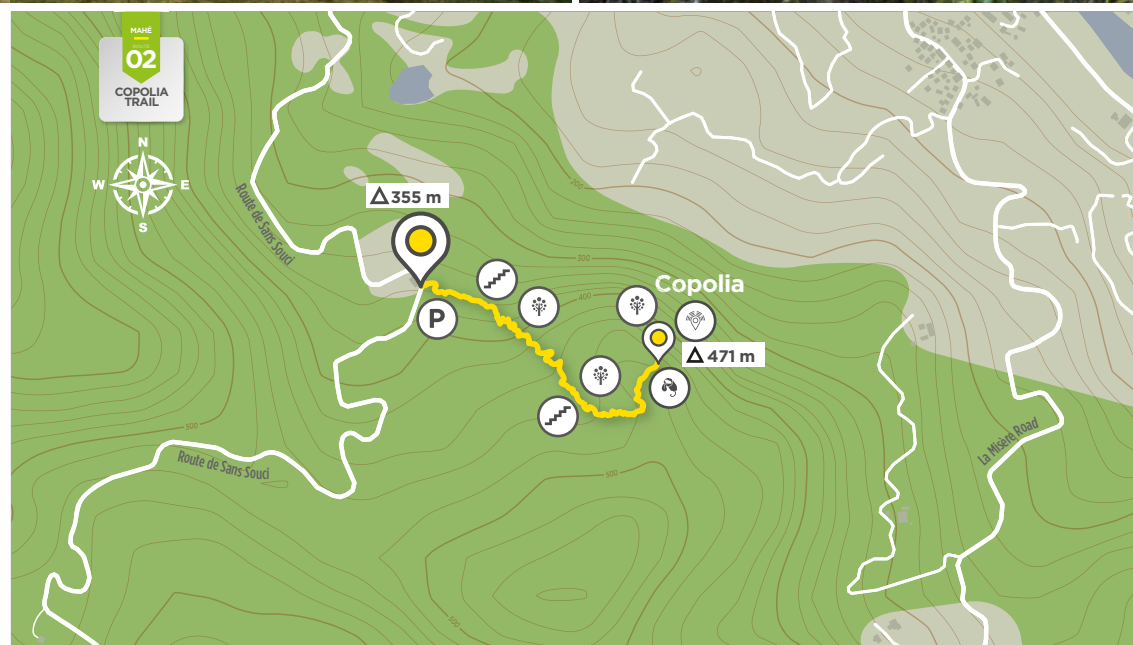
After several hundred meters, large blocks of granite begin to loom on either side of the trail. The slope is quite steep and you may find yourself getting winded, so this is the perfect time to rest and take a closer look at the ferns that border the narrow passage. You may even spy a helicopter insect hiding under them; this type of grasshopper is endemic to the country. You will then cross several wooden footbridges that span gaps in the terrain.

After 1.3 km (0.8 mi.), you will find yourself in the glacié area, which is rockier as well as more exposed. You will then climb a narrow metal ladder that puts you at the summit of the hike. Walk out onto the sunny granite plateau. On one side is a view of the canopy and on the other is the west coast of Mahé. Cairns built by hikers are scattered here and there.

You can also see the surrounding peaks. From left to right: Trois Frères (towering over Victoria), Morne Seychellois, Morne Blanc and Congo Rouge. On yet another peak stands the Rose-Bell telecommunications antenna. When you reach the overlook near the edge of the cliff, the view is sure to take your breath away. The vista includes the open ocean and the neighboring islands, Moyenne and Curieuse.

You can explore the granite blocks, but take care not to fall into the crevices between them. Extra precautions should be taken with children. This is the perfect spot to observe the mountainous endemic plants that grow at this elevation, especially the large beds of carnivorous plants.

The famous pitcher plant (*Nepenthes pervillei*) only lives at sites higher than 350 m (1,200 ft.) on these glacié formations. Two other notable plants are the rare mountainous variety of pandan and the bois calou trees (*Memecylon elaeagni*). To return, simply retrace your steps. Be careful as you descend; the trail can become hazardous in the rain.



**Pitcher Plant**  
(*Nepenthes pervillei*)

This insectivorous plant is endemic to Seychelles. Commonly found on granite glacié formations, the plant is known to grow in dense beds located between 300 and 500 m above sea level (1,000 to 1,200 ft.). It feeds on the insects that it traps at the bottom of its pitcher.

**Mille-Pattes Palm** (*Nephrosperma vanhoutteanum*)

Of the palms endemic to Seychelles, this is one of the tallest. The mille-pattes palm can reach 10 to 13 m (33 to 43 ft.) when full-grown. Although this species is threatened, it can still be found on a dozen islands in the country, including Mahé, Praslin and La Digue.





MAHÉ

ROUTE

03

## GLACIS TROIS FRÈRES

ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR HIKES ON MAHÉ, THOUGH IT DOES NOT INCLUDE THE SUMMIT, FOR SAFETY REASONS.



**LENGTH: 1.4 KM (0.9 MI.)**



**TIME: 35 MIN.**



**DIFFICULTY: EASY**



**TOTAL ASCENT/DESCENT:  
237 M (778 FT.)**



From the Sans-Souci road, take the small paved road that leads toward the mountain, located just across from the grocery store. Pass through the residential area to reach the trailhead.

### RECOMMENDED ITEMS





## Another popular hike on Mahé, the Trois Frères trail was once a pilgrimage route.

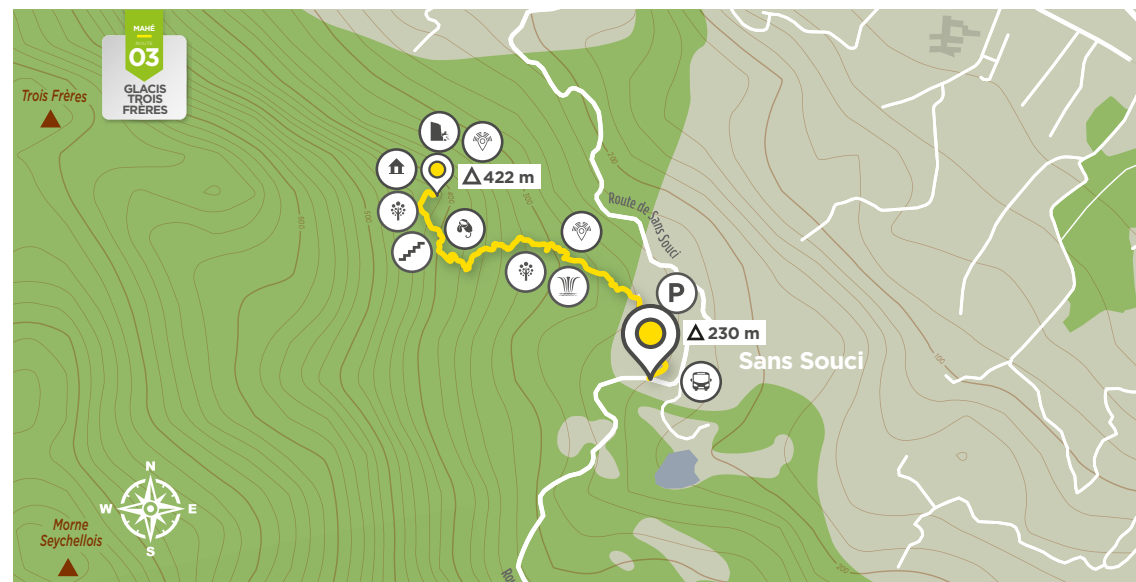
As soon as you join the paved road, your eyes are drawn to the left toward the famed Trois Frères cross. A Catholic pilgrimage has been held there for many years during the Easter celebrations. But visitors are cautioned against hiking to that point as the trail is not secure. It is recommended that solo hikers end their hike at the old shelter. At this point, in the residential area, the path turns off to the left into the forest and leads upward along a moderate slope with no cover. One of the first overlooks is visible on the right, a view of the Victoria port as well as Sainte Anne island and its marine national park, but as you are not very high up there is no need to spend much time here. The trail leads into the forest once again, under the shade of the white trumpet trees (*Tabebuia pallida*).

Under your feet, the eroded soil turns into a path paved with large stones, built many years ago. On your left, a limpid spring flows from the wall and provides a much-needed cooling drink. Filtered by vegetation and granite, the water is drinkable unless you are informed otherwise.

Just after this little fountain you will see the first glaciis formation of this hike. Behind you there is also a magnificent granite face to admire. The hike continues atop shaped granite blocks that act as paving stones. The climb in this section is very steep. On the top of the glaciis, you will need to pay careful attention to the signs. You must head to your right, following the symbol for the overlook. DO NOT take the left-hand trail.

The trail ends shortly afterward on a rocky outcropping. This small glaciis plateau features a number of plants, some of them endemic. Here you will find cerulean flaxlily (*Dianella ensifolia*), pandans and a few other interesting trees. There is also a glorious view of the west coast just above the capital, and you can have fun trying to identify different neighborhoods. A trail leads higher up to the site of the cross, but it is rather hazardous, particularly in the last few hundred meters.

As you make your way back down, take the time to note the different species of endemic palms along the path. Note the difference between the latanier palm, Seychelles stilt palm, thief's palm, mille-pattes palm and palm cabbage. When you arrive back at the trailhead, why not take the time to enjoy a refreshing drink and admire the soaring branches of the trees overhead? You can often spot the famous Seychelles blue pigeon (*Alectroenas pulcherrima*), also known as the Seychelles blue fruit dove.

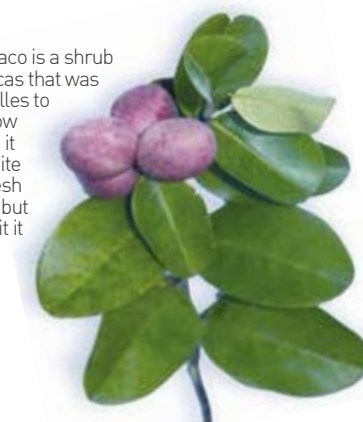


**Seychelles Mantis**  
(*Mantis Polyspilota seychelliana*)

A cousin of the praying mantis found in Europe, this insect is endemic to the archipelago. It is found on the interior islands and, surprisingly, on Aldabra. Discovered a century ago, this species lives mainly in trees up that grow at or below an elevation of 600 m (2,000 ft.).

**Cocoplum**  
(*Chrysobalanus icaco*)

The cocoplum or icaco is a shrub native to the Americas that was imported to Seychelles to combat erosion. Now an invasive species, it produces edible white or red fruits. The flesh is mostly tasteless, but when you bite the pit it releases a coconut flavor.





MAHÉ

ROUTE

04

## GLACIS LA RÉSERVE

A SHORT, EASY HIKE THAT BOASTS A  
SUPERB COLLECTION OF PALMS AND THE  
CHANCE TO EXPERIENCE A HUGE GLACIS  
OVERLOOKING THE WEST COAST.



**LENGTH: 0.9 KM (0.6 MI.)**



**TIME: 25 MIN.**



**DIFFICULTY: VERY EASY**



**TOTAL ASCENT/DESCENT:  
134 M (440 FT.)**



On the Montagne Posée road, park near the Cable &  
Wireless station at Bon Espoir.

RECOMMENDED ITEMS







## A lovely cross-section of Seychelles flora and fauna on a short, easy hike in south Mahé.

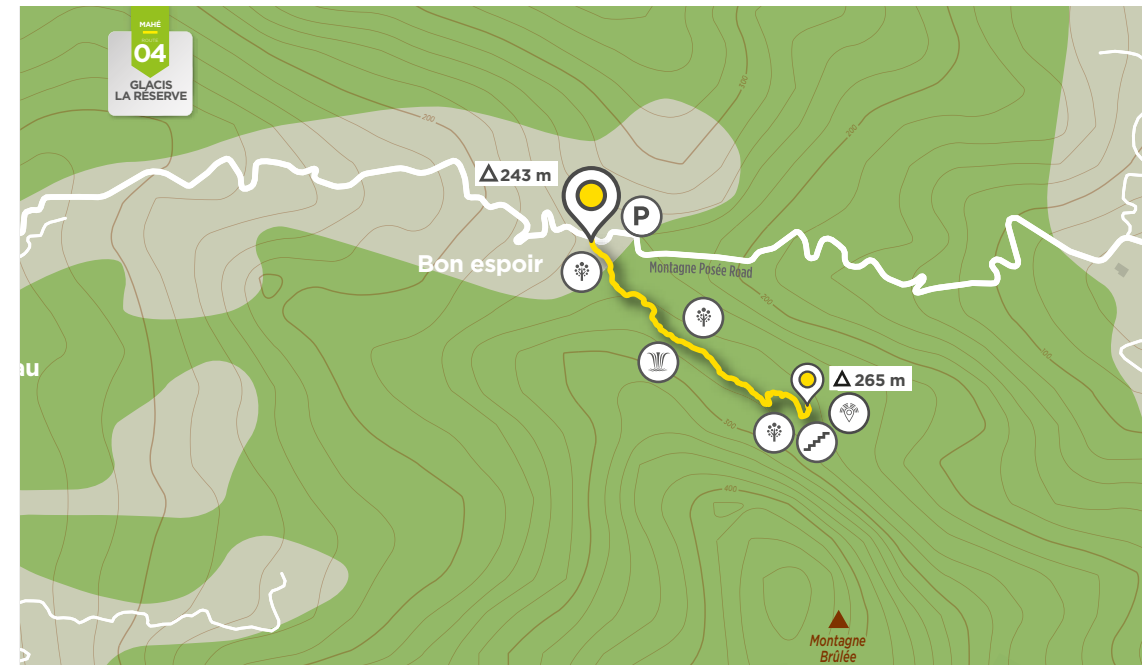
This short hike is one of the only ones to offer a chance to explore the Montagne Posée range in the southern part of the island. This forest is well preserved, despite not belonging to Morne Seychellois National Park.

The path begins in a mahogany plantation that is still active today. From there, you move into the forest, where a unique collection of endemic palms lines either side of the trail. Five Seychelles species are present here, with the characteristic spines on their trunks. One of the rarest, though it is quite common here, is called the great palm cabbage, and its heart is prized in creole cuisine. Another plant commonly spotted on this trail is red pineapple (*Ananas bracteatus*). It is aptly named, as the fruit it produces at the end of the year is bright fuchsia. You can also see cardamom plants (*Elettaria cardamomum*) with their long, tender green leaves.

After around 700 m (0.4 mi.), the path leaves the forest and slopes gently upward on a glacis covered in bois de lait plants (*Euphorbia pyrifolia*). These bushes have white trunks and yellow-and-green leaves that you should avoid touching due to the stinging white sap they produce. Be sure to pay close attention to the marks on the ground because it is easy to get lost or miss the endpoint. While you are here, look for the wild vanilla plants that grow between the granite blocks. In season, these orchids are ornamented with small white flowers.

On the right, you will see a lush valley with many birds soaring overhead, including the elegant white-tailed tropicbird. Look behind you to the opposite slope and you will notice a group of large buildings with green roofs arrayed on a plateau in the middle of the forest. This is the Mahé prison, and sounds from it can actually reach you when the wind is blowing in the right direction. On top of the glacis formation you can spot the wood, stone and metal structure of the observatory. It must be reached from the right, as a deep crevasse separates it from the main trail. By peering carefully over the edge of the chasm, you can make out the lush garden enclosed in the sheer granite cliffs. Within it, trees such as frangipani grow very tall in an effort to reach the sunlight.

Once you reach the promontory, you can drink in the magnificent panoramic view of the east coast. You will see the longest white sand coves on the island, Anse Boileau and its immense lagoon. Far out into the distance to the left, on the horizon, you can just see Praslin and La Digue when the weather is fine. Those with keen eyes will be able to pick out the smaller islands in the southeast. These are Félicité, Récif (an islet) and Frégate. The quick return journey follows the same route. Since it is so short, this hike can be added to any visit to the east coast. It would be the perfect morning walk before heading to Anse Royale or Anse aux Pins for lunch in one of the many restaurants next to the lagoon. Whether you take a little nap on the beach afterward is entirely up to you.



### Red Pineapple (*Ananas bracteatus*)

Like most plants in the bromeliad family, red pineapple is native to South America. It is a close cousin of the fruit we all know. Fairly common on Seychelles trails, it is more appreciated for its bright colors than for its taste. People are discouraged from trying it, as it is said to be a powerful laxative.



### Red Vanilla (*Vanilla phalaenopsis*)

As its name suggests, this endemic Seychelles plant looks like a fleshy vine comprising multiple stems and no leaves. Red vanilla belongs to the orchid family. It produces a beautiful white flower with a yellow center.





MAHÉ


ROUTE


05

## CASSE DENT


THIS HIKE CAN START FROM SEVERAL DIFFERENT POINTS, BUT THE BEST ROUTE IS THE ONE THAT FOLLOWS THE SANS-SOUCI ROAD DOWN TO THE MANGROVE FOREST IN PORT GLAUD ON THE WEST COAST.




 **LENGTH: 8.2 KM (5.1 MI.)**

 **TIME: 4 HRS**

 **DIFFICULTY: HARD**

 **TOTAL ASCENT/DESCENT:**  
**843 M (2,766 FT.)**

 On the Sans-Souci road from Victoria, stop on the right-hand side of the road about 1 km (0.5 mi.) after the Mission Lodge. The trail begins beside the road.

### RECOMMENDED ITEMS







## A long, rewarding exploration of the forest in the heart of Morne Seychellois National Park.

Here you find yourself in the middle of a former agricultural area where various crops were cultivated over the years: patchouli, cinnamon, tea, and more. Large trees were then planted for lumber production: mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) and santol (*Sandericum koetjape*). After an initial ascent, the trail slopes downward, becoming a little tricky due to the wet, sometimes muddy soil.

This moisture is a boon to the mosses that grow on the spines of the latanier palm. Take care on the rocks, as they can be slippery. Here you can observe tiny ferns that are still something of a mystery; they are currently being studied by scientists. Another remarkable species in this forest is the tree fern known locally as the "fanjon". The trail crosses several ravines, so it can be a bit of a roller coaster. At the bottom of one descent, you will see the crumbling stone walls of a former distillery on a plateau.

After several dozen meters, you will see two peaks in an opening on the left; the one on the right is none other than Morne Blanc. Further down the path you can spot the islands off the west coast. You will then cross through a forest of cinnamon trees. A little further on you will come to a ravine choked with large boulders where the parasol pandans flourish, stretching toward the sunlight on their aerial roots.

After a small river, the trail slopes upward slightly to the right, flanked by spectacular uprooted silk trees that have fallen over from their own weight. After a little more than 2 km, you will cross a series of footbridges that span a ravine that is much deeper than the ones that came before. On the side of the path you might see the famous Seychelles wolf snake, an endemic species, from time to time. Keen-eyed hikers will also spot small orchids on the slopes.

At the top of a rise, once you have left the forest, you will be treated to more vistas of the west coast. After a little over 4 km (2.5 mi.) you will turn to the right at a black glacia in the Mare aux Cochons valley and head in the direction of Port Glaud. This is the halfway point of the hike. A bit further on you can stop to enjoy the waterfall and catch your breath.

After this refreshing stop, you will climb the ladders on the right, then begin the final descent to the coast. At this point you will see a path on the right that leads to Bel Ombre. Our route continues to the left toward Port Glaud and Mont d'Or, which are 2 km and 1 km (1.2 mi and 0.6 mi.) away, respectively. After this intersection, on the left, do not miss the ruins of a still at what was once a major distillery. Be careful on your way down as you cross a series of large boulders; these can be slippery. This section is challenging and you will need to follow the markings carefully.

After 5.2 km (3 mi.), a small path leads into the vegetation to the right. After 30 m or so, it opens out onto an incredible view of the Constance Ephelia hotel and its peninsula, as well as Port Launay, the Marine Park and Sainte Thérèse island.



At the 6 km mark (mile 3.5), you will come around a bend to find yourself at the former home of the Mont d'Or distillery. After crossing through the garden and the ruins, you will then need to head left toward Port Glaud. You will first cross a glacia, followed by bucolic trek through high grasses that culminates in an area populated with homes and orchards. The endpoint of the hike is located next to the main road, near the bus stop and soccer field.

### Orchids - Various Species

Several species of orchids grow in this rainforest in the national park. You will see specimens of every shape and color. We should point out the smallest of them all, *Bulbophyllum intertextum*, just a few centimeters high, and the beautiful *Calanthe triplicata*; Mahé is the only island in the archipelago where this orchid is found.

### Seychelles Frog (*Tachycnemis seychellensis*)

The Seychelles frog is mainly observed at night. By day it sleeps on the side of latanier palms or under pandan leaves. Females are green, while the males are paler, almost white.





MAHÉ

ROUTE

06

## SALAZIE NATURE TRAIL

THIS HIKE PASSES THROUGH THE FOREST, CONNECTING TWO ROUTES THAT CROSS THE SOUTHERN PART OF MORNE SEYCHELLOIS NATIONAL PARK.



**LENGTH: 2.9 KM (1.8 MI.)**



**TIME: 1 HR**



**DIFFICULTY: EASY**



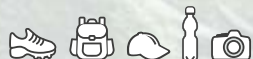
**TOTAL ASCENT/DESCENT:**

**329 M (1,079 FT.)**

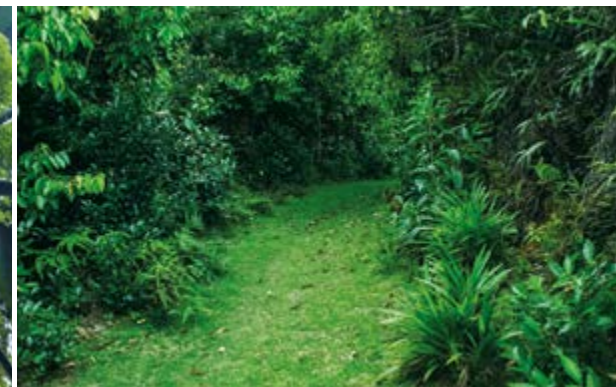
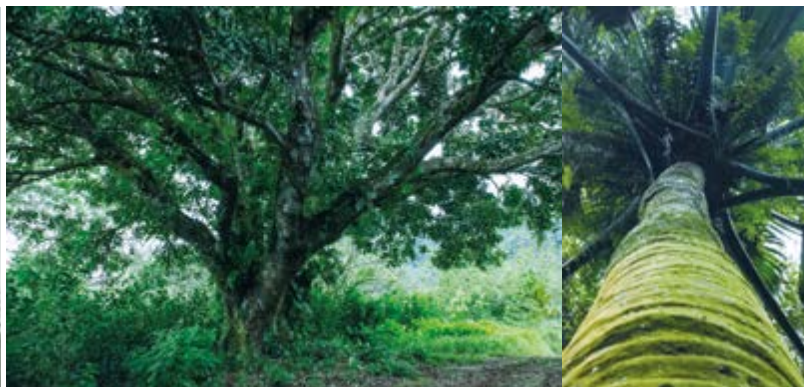


As you are coming from Victoria on the Sans-Souci road, look for the sign on your left and drive for a few dozen meters down the forest path, where you can park your vehicle.

**RECOMMENDED ITEMS**







### Rare trees and endemic birds on a forest trail with relatively few visitors.

The trail begins here on a former tea plantation near the water source that supplies the entire west coast of Mahé. Today, the area is used for lumber production, particularly mahogany and santol.

This is also the natural habitat of the Seychelles scops owl (*Otus insularis*), which is endemic to Mahé. A nocturnal creature, it is difficult to observe in the forest and hikers have little chance of seeing it. On the other hand, the large bats that congregate in the trees are easy to spot.

You will then take a wide farm track, part of which is open to vehicle traffic for much of the hike. In the acacias to your right, Seychelles blue pigeons (*Alectroenas pulcherrimus*) are often observed as they come to feed. If you look to the right, you can also get a rare view of Morne Seychellois, the highest point in the area and for many thousands of miles around. From this angle, the crest at the peak could be confused with another national symbol, the love nut.

After a few hundred meters, the trail leads to a building whose roof offers shelter to farm laborers during rainstorms. You will then cross a river on a cement bridge. Leave the track when it turns to the right and continue straight toward a water maintenance building. After this landmark the trail, which is still quite wide, will begin to climb a steep slope. To your right you will be able to see a magnificent glacis. A few minutes later, you will come to another panoramic viewpoint with a vista that includes several different peaks. From left to right: Mission Lodge, Congo Rouge, above them Morne Seychellois and lastly the Copolia glacis. In the middle of the path you will see, in season, a white, five-petaled flower called star of Bethlehem. Do not pick or touch this, as the sap is irritating to the skin.

At the end of a grassy trail, the path turns to the left when you reach a cement block. You will then find yourself under the shade of the trees. At the crest of a small hill covered with dense vegetation, you will see a secondary path that leads off to the left and up a flight of 20 steps. There you will find, at the base of an enormous block of granite, a large coco de mer (*Lodoicea maldivica*), the famous palm tree endemic to Seychelles that produces the love nut. You will not have the chance to see one of the curiously shaped fruits, however, as this tree is a male, completely isolated from the females that are found almost exclusively on Praslin.

For logistical reasons, you could end your hike here at the base of the tree and retrace your steps back to your vehicle. It takes the same amount of time to continue the hike straight ahead, if you have arranged for transportation at the end. The Misère road is located just a few hundred meters away.

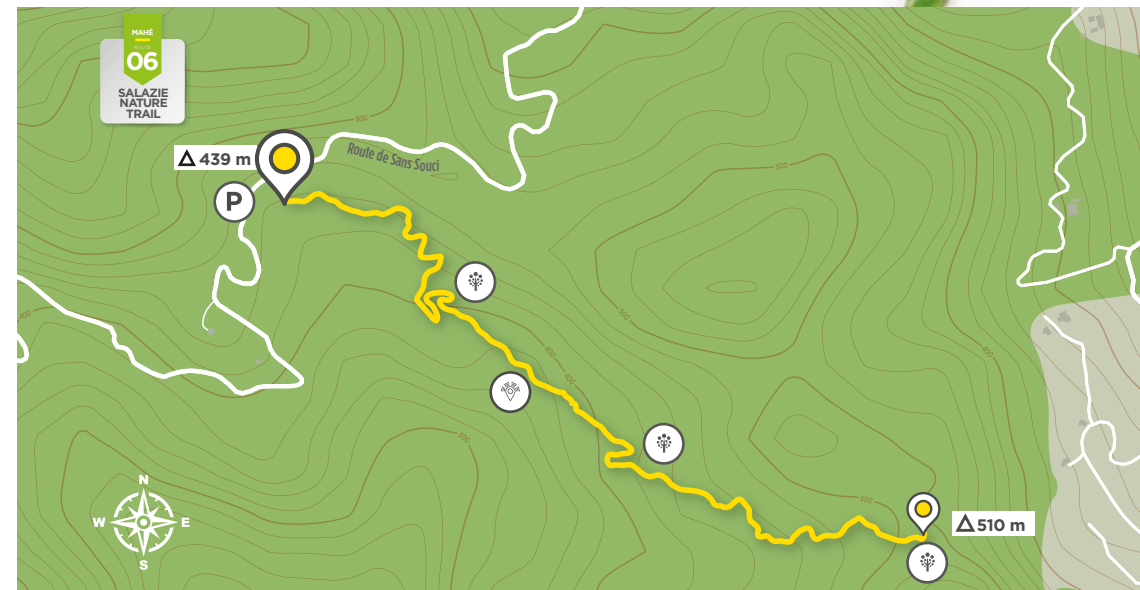
#### Tea Plant (*Camellia sinensis*)

Imported from East Africa by English colonists, tea plants have flourished here, and you can still find large spreads of these plants on what were once tea plantations. In season, these small bushes (about 1.5 m or 5 ft. tall) put out beautiful white flowers with yellow centers..



#### Seychelles Blue Pigeon (*Alectroenas pulcherrimus*)

Measuring 25 cm (10 in.) long and 38 to 40 cm (15 to 16 in.) wide, the Seychelles blue pigeon is a stocky bird from the Columbidae family that is easily recognizable due to its tricolored plumage in dark blue, light gray and red. It can be seen on Mahé and several other islands in nearly all forest zones and at all elevations. It mainly eats the fruits and seeds it finds in large trees.





MAHÉ

ROUTE

07

## MORNE BLANC

AN ASCENT IN THE HEART OF THE FOREST  
TO THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OVERLOOK ON  
THE WEST COAST.



**LENGTH: 3.2 KM (1.9 MI.)**



**TIME: 40 MIN.**



**DIFFICULTY: MODERATE**



**TOTAL ASCENT/DESCENT:**

**447 M (1,467 FT.)**



The trailhead is located alongside the Sans-Souci road, about 300 m (1,000 ft.) above the Tea Factory. We recommend that you start in the morning so you can fully appreciate the view before the clouds roll in at midday.

### RECOMMENDED ITEMS





## An incredible ascent through the forest culminating in an awe-inspiring view.

The hike begins here on the side of the road on a plantation that once produced tea (*Camellia sinensis*). The trail climbs up a steep slope deep in the forest, where the trees protect hikers from the sun for most of the journey. As soon as you set out, you will be struck by the mix of vegetation that grows at this medium elevation. The tea plants are now overshadowed by cinnamon and pandan trees.

At 200 to 400 m (650 to 1,300 ft.) above sea level, the forest is composed of imported species such as the luxurious but invasive silk trees and the cinnamon trees that were brought here for cultivation. There are also many endemic species, including the six palms that only grow in Seychelles; these are easily recognizable due to the spines on their trunks. According to legend, giant tortoises used to scratch their shells on them. The intense humidity is conducive to mosses, ferns and, a little further up, lichens.

After several hundred meters and two boardwalks, the trail wends its way through large granite boulders, between which crevasses can be spied from time to time. One of these, marked on the trail, is named "Puits du Morne Blanc" or the Morne Blanc Pit. If you lean carefully on the barrier, you can just make out the bottom. We recommend that you do not leave the trail, especially on the higher part of the route, as there may be hollows hidden under leaf litter and vegetation.

At the end of the trek, the slow climb up the mountainside gives you time to admire the wealth of flora and fauna on Morne Blanc. Here you can observe the endemic Seychelles wolf snake (*Lycognathophis seychellensis*) and a multitude of insects, including the spectacular stick insect (*Carausius morosus*) that is often seen on certain ferns, along with its cousins.

Once you reach the ledge, after crossing some small bridges, the path ends at a specially constructed observation area. A breath-taking view encompassing more than 180 degrees looks out over the west coast of Mahé and the neighboring islands. From right to left, your eye rests on Cap Ternay, Launay Bay, Conception island, Thérèse island and Île aux Vaches Marines. If the sky is clear, you will be able to see all the way to Grande Anse and Boileau, and then to Lazarre Bay to the south. Do not miss the amazing sight below the observation area: the deep, intense green of the rainforest and the incredible granite glacis, the hallmarks of Mahé landscapes. The return journey is naturally all downhill. Watch out for wet sections and mossy rocks. When you stop for a rest, enjoy the sight of the cerulean flaxlily (*Dianella ensifolia*), whose flowers form little cobalt balls that look as though they are made of clay.



**Dancing Snail (*Pachnodus Niger*)**

This small black ground snail lives in the forest. It is endemic to Seychelles and has the unusual characteristic of shaking its shell back and forth in rhythm when you touch it gently. Hence its nickname, the dancing snail.

**Stick Insect (*Carausius morosus*)**

Several species of stick insects, ranging from large to small, coexist on the archipelago. Here they are known as the "cheval de bois" (wooden horse). Their camouflage prevents them from being easily observed, but if you keep your eyes peeled you can spot them on ferns along the trails.





MAHÉ

ROUTE

08

## ANSE MAJOR

SUMPTUOUS VIEWS, PERFECT BEACHES  
AND UNIQUE FLORA ARE THE MAIN  
ATTRACTIONS OF THIS RENOWNED,  
POPULAR AND ACCESSIBLE HIKE.



**LENGTH: 2 KM (1.2 MI.)**



**TIME: 40 MIN.**



**DIFFICULTY: EASY**



**TOTAL ASCENT/DESCENT:**

**218 M (715 FT.)**



At the southern end of the Bel Ombre road, the trail  
begins among the last houses in the village.

RECOMMENDED ITEMS







This is probably the most popular hike in Mahé, as it leads to one of the island's most beautiful beaches. Anse Major offers the prospect of a refreshing swim after you exert yourself a little.

At the very end of the road on the edge of Bel Ombre, you will see a drinking fountain on your right. The trailhead is very close by on your left, past a chain that prevents vehicles from entering the track. The main overlook for the trail is located 1.5 km (1 mi.) away. Budget 30 minutes to reach the shelter that looks out onto two enchanting creeks. You will reach these about 10 minutes later.

The first part of the trail can be a little churned up at the end of the rainy season due to run-off. After this, the walk becomes more pleasant, with granite underfoot. The path cuts crosswise across an immense glacis. On your right, the ocean and the horizon, dotted with a few islets. Below, the shifting turquoise colors where the waves meet the rocks. To your left, an array of somewhat unusual plant life.

The drier coastal ecosystem bathed by the sea spray has some surprises in store. There are the cocoplums (*Chrysobalanus icaco*) and the royal poinciana (*Delonix regia*) that turns red in December. Pleomele (*Dracaena reflexa*) and hard alstonia (*Alstonia macrophylla*) also rear their leafy heads against the azure sky. On the ground are a multitude of succulents, including agave plants whose pointed leaves will tickle the calves of passing hikers. You will also see the coral wood trees (*Adenanthera pavonina*) whose bright red seeds are used to make jewelry.

Nearly flat for most of its length, the trail occasionally crosses some natural hollows, including Roche l'Eglise. Its walls are covered with old wasp nests made from dried mud. Views of the ocean regularly reveal themselves as you come around a bend. At times the glacis descends straight into the sea, mixing the blue of the open ocean and the green of the guayacan trees, another species that has become rare and precious.

Avoid straying from the trail on the glacis, especially on the ocean side where hikers can be trapped by the crevasses. Take care on the rocks as well, as these can be slippery. Some sections are equipped with security chains, and we recommend waiting until the end of the trail to get near the water.

When you see the shelter ahead, you will know that the end is in sight. It overlooks the famous Anse Major, which you will want to reach as soon as possible to enjoy a swim in this magical setting. It is actually made up of two small bays in one, separated by only a few large rocks. The second, larger bay is a curving thin band of sand where the ocean, forest and river meet. On one side, there is warm salt water. On the other, it is cool and fresh. If you are hiking with a guide, be sure to ask them to find a cool coconut for you. A must-try. Note that you can reserve a private boat and sail directly from the beach for a faster return journey to Bel Ombre marina..



#### Coral Wood (*Adenanthera pavonina*)

Coral wood, bead tree, red sandalwood—this species of the Fabaceae family is known by many names. A native of Asia, coral wood produces bright red seeds with a lacquered shine prized by makers of traditional jewelry. Known for their uniform weight, the seeds were also used to weigh precious stones.



#### Royal Poinciana (*Delonix regia*)

At low elevations, royal poinciana turns scarlet in late November, to the delight of photographers. This remarkable tree is part of the Caesalpinioidae sub-family. Originally from Madagascar, it is now found throughout most of the world's tropical regions.

#### Bois Rouge (*Dillenia ferruginea*)

This tree, known locally as bois rouge, is endemic to Mahé, Praslin, Silhouette and Curieuse. Its range is limited to a total of 215 sq. km (83 sq. mi). Used for many years as a construction material, this tree is no longer threatened. Its thick, veined leaves and white flowers make it easily recognizable.





MAHÉ

ROUTE

09

## MARE AUX COCHONS

A HIKE IN THE HEART OF MORNE SEYCHELLOIS NATIONAL PARK, WHERE THE POND IS A NEXUS OF WATERWAYS AND PATHWAYS



**LENGTH: 9.6 KM (5.9 MI.)**



**TIME: 5 TO 6 HRS**



**DIFFICULTY: MODERATE TO HARD**

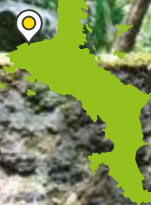


**TOTAL ASCENT/DESCENT:  
270 M (886 FT.)**



On the Victoria road from Beau Vallon, turn right in the direction of Le Niol and park near the last bus stop.

### RECOMMENDED ITEMS







## An incredible wetland in the mountains at the intersection of several trails.

The Mare aux Cochons hike lies at the very heart of Morne Seychellois National Park. It is here that a number of trails meet after ranging all over the northwestern part of Mahé. A former agricultural area, this low wetland is now protected, along with the many natural resources it contains.

From Le Niol, the trail begins in an inhabited area. The hike soon leads into wilder territory, alternating between the shady forest and open ground. After several hundred meters, you arrive at the first overlooks of the west coast and its surrounding islands. The way to the pond is regularly indicated.

In terms of plant life, the vegetation is made up primarily of species that were imported for farming purposes, such as the cinnamon trees that perfume the path, as well as nutmeg and clove. When you come to the intersection with the trail that leads down to Danzil on the coast, turn left and you will soon see the ruins of a distillery abandoned in the 1960s and 1970s.

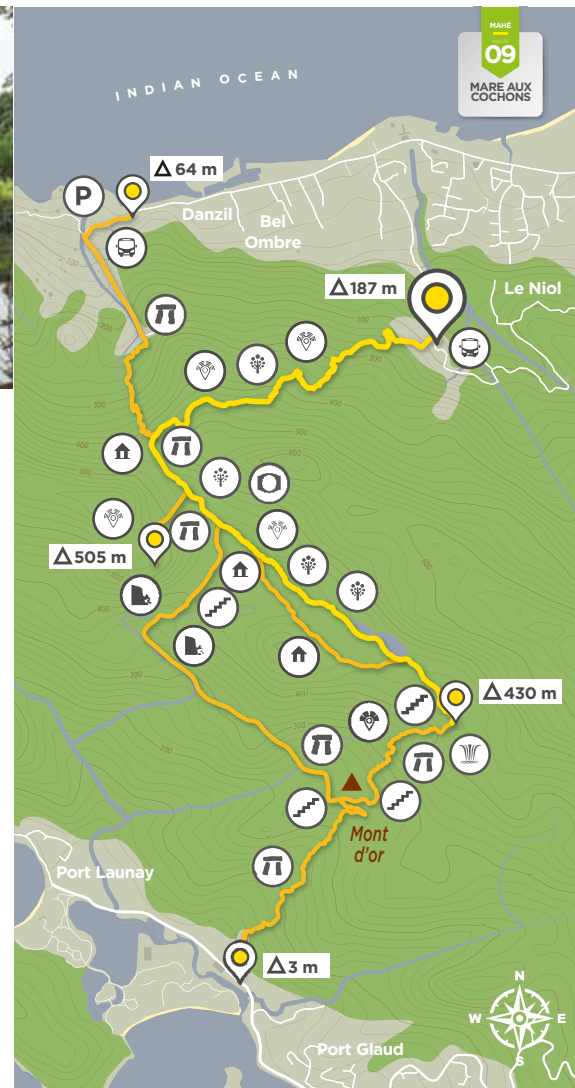
The trail now starts to ascend to the Belize plateau. Take a break under the shelter to prepare yourself for the next leg of the journey. Around you, several peaks stand out from the horizon, including Mount Le Niol, which has towered over the trail on your left since the beginning of the hike. After another few minutes of walking, you will come upon one of the most surprising monuments in the forest. The "old bridge of the Swiss priests" was built for agricultural purposes by Capuchin monks who had settled in the archipelago.

As you near the valley, the vegetation begins to change and you can now observe endemic trees such as bois rouge (*Dillenia ferruginea*), Seychelles pandanus (*Pandanus sechellarum*) or parasol pandans (*Pandanus hornei*) with their above-ground roots.

The path is winding but flat in this section, which is the highest elevation wetland in the country. The body of water in the center of the valley often acts like a mirror reflecting the surrounding peaks, and picnic areas are available nearby. Note that you can walk all the way around the pond by taking the path that begins at the easternmost part of the valley.

From the pond, we recommend returning to Le Niol for logistical reasons, but you should know that it is also possible to continue on other routes. Toward Port Glaud, for instance, if you want to see caves and waterfalls, or toward Port Launay via Mont d'Or on the Casse Dent trail (see map).

This part of Mare aux Cochons has several loops that you can add to your hike if you are looking for a little extra challenge. For instance, on your way back you can add a one-hour detour to the Antin glacis, clambering up ladders and traversing wooden bridges. Consider total walking time carefully, as long treks can quickly tire hikers who are not accustomed to the humid heat in these mountains. There are no major challenges on the return journey to Le Niol, however. For the most part, the path slopes gently downward all the way to the end.



### Seychelles Frog (*Soogloosus gardineri*)

This frog lives in the leaf litter covering the ground of the tropical rain forest. Endemic to the archipelago, it is one of the smallest frogs in the world, rarely growing larger than 15 mm (0.5 in) long. Being earless, it was long thought to be deaf, until its auditory organs were found in its mouth.



### Seychelles Flying Fox (*Pteropus seychellensis seychellensis*)

This bat is extremely common on the country's main islands. You can see them flying at any time of day. This species is endemic and lives in colonies of up to 300 individuals. It plays a vital role in the regeneration of the Seychelles forest by spreading seeds.



### Seychelles Wolf Snake (*Lycognathophis seychellensis*)

The Seychelles wolf snake is endemic to the archipelago and lives solely in the rainforests, where it is often spotted next to the trails. Dark-colored with yellow accents, this harmless snake is the only member of its genus. International bodies have listed it as endangered.





SILHOUETTE

ROUTE

10

## GRAND BARBE



ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL, AND CHALLENGING, HIKES IN THE COUNTRY. THE TRAIL RUNS FROM ONE SIDE OF SILHOUETTE ISLAND TO THE OTHER, EXPLORING ITS WILDEST REGIONS.



**LENGTH: 6.5 KM (4 MI.)**



**TIME: 3 HRS**



**DIFFICULTY: HARD**



**TOTAL ASCENT/DESCENT:**

**421 M (1,381 FT.)**



Our recommendation: hire a boat to take you to Grand Barbe beach and then take the mountain trail to reach the village of La Passe.

**RECOMMENDED ITEMS**







**This exceptional trail is particularly challenging, and is generally for expert hikers. Here we have only described a one-way route, from Grand Barbe to La Passe.**

Doing a round-trip hike across the island, a total of nearly 11 km (7 mi.), will likely be too challenging for most visitors. Extreme heat, rugged terrain and a trail that becomes quite acrobatic in places combine to make this a trek that would be unsuitable for less experienced hikers. We highly recommend that you hire a veteran guide from the island for this hike.

The starting point is the large natural beach of Grand Barbe, next to an extensive wetland. Here you must locate the path that leads into the heart of the island, exploring fields, forests and mangroves. Listen for the raspy breath of the local inhabitants. A dozen giant Seychelles tortoises live in the nearby underbrush. This is one of the last remaining wild populations living on the granitic islands. You will very soon find yourself in the center of the historic Grand Barbe village, where the few dozen inhabitants make a living on various plantations. Nowadays, only a couple of caretakers live in the village year-round. Note the ruins that have been partially reclaimed by vegetation. Once you pass the wooden houses, the trail passes under coconut trees on its way to the glaci. Along the way, you will see the peak of Mount Dauban, 700 m (2,300 ft.) high.

A wooden bridge spans the back of the mangrove swamp, and then you begin the climb. The trail wends its way between roots, granite blocks, coconut trees and palms. Then, the forest quickly disappears and you find yourself under the open sky on granite. The slope is quite steep, so much so that it is nearly impossible to climb it here without specially designed shoes with excellent grip.

Stop for a well-earned rest. After a little over 1 km (0.5 mi.), look back over your shoulder at the bright green canopy. It makes a stunning contrast with the turquoise shades of the ocean. After another 1.5 km (0.9 mi.), the vegetation begins to change. A few cinnamon trees and latanier palms form a low forest that provides a welcome respite after the blistering heat of the glaci. About 500 m (0.3 mi.) ahead you can see the cement chapel with its Virgin Mary, built by the Dauban family. Below, the trail turns off to the right.

Mangoes, takamakass and ferns round out the list of vegetation. In some places, the trunks of silk trees jut out into the path. Proceed cautiously and attentively so as not to lose your way. After 3.5 km (2 mi.), the trail leaves the forest plateau and once again climbs sharply upward. Take a moment to catch your breath before you begin the climb. You are just a few dozen meters from the summit of the hike, at an elevation of 400 m (1,300 ft.). The descent begins gently enough, but it becomes increasingly challenging due to the rocks and roots. Take a few moments to admire the giant bats roosting in the towering trees.

After 5 km (3 mi.), the path continues its descent, this time at the base of large rock formations jutting up over 15 m (50 ft.) high. At the first fork, turn right toward La Passe. At the second fork, turn right once more and pass the reservoir. The trail leads to the back of the village where the employees responsible for maintaining the island live. The endpoint is the concrete road where the main buildings are located.

#### Breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*)

The breadfruit tree produces a fruit that is extremely popular in the tropical regions of our planet, from the Antilles to Oceania. It is made into flour, put into soup, cut into cubes, baked in the oven, sliced or grated. It is an important source of carbohydrates for many people.



#### Santol Fruit (*Sandericum koetjape*)

Native to Asia, the santol produces fruits similar to those of the mangosteen tree. The whitish pulp has a deliciously tangy taste. It is often found in recipes from Thailand and the Philippines. Be careful not to swallow the seeds, however, as these are not edible.





11

**ANSE  
MONDON**

**SPEND A FEW HOURS EXPLORING THE  
NORTHEASTERN COAST OF SILHOUETTE  
ON THIS HIKE THAT ENDS AT THE  
BEAUTIFUL ANSE MONDON BEACH.  
ONLY ACCESSIBLE ON FOOT.**



**LENGTH: 3.2 KM (2 MI.)**



**TIME: 1 HR 30 MIN.**



**DIFFICULTY: MODERATE**

**TOTAL ASCENT/DESCENT:**

**387 M (1,269 FT.)**



Starting from La Passe village, walk through the entire Hilton Labriz complex northward, then walk along the “presidential” beach until you reach the information sign.

## RECOMMENDED ITEMS







### From a tropical beach to a wild creek, through the northern Silhouette mountains.

The starting point for the hike begins at the end of the incredible “presidential” beach. From where the Hilton Labriz gardens end, you should walk around 500 m (0.3 mi.) along the beach to come to the actual trailhead, which is marked with a sign on the right at the edge of the forest. A sign will indicate that you are now in Silhouette National Park.

Here the trail slopes upward through a dense forest of coconut trees and granite rocks. On the side of the path you will see sprouts of what the locals call gros baume, a medicinal plant that the Seychellois use to cure stomach aches. If you do not have a guide with you, keep an eye on the trail, which can be obscured by leaves, rocks and fallen branches. After 10 or 15 minutes of walking, the sign pointing the way to Anse Mondon, which is 2.5 km (1.5 mi.) away, will confirm that you are on the right track.

At this point you are still walking through the forest, where the heat and humidity can quickly make the climb a bit difficult. The flora around you is more varied, with large coconut trees as well as cinnamon, mango and a few citrus trees. The trail is regularly blocked by fallen trees, particularly the overly large trunks of the immense silk trees. After 30 minutes, a new sign will point the way to your final destination.

The path follows the side of a ravine where you will see many of the Seychelles giant millipedes (*Sechelleptus seychellarum*) that are endemic to the archipelago. After 45 minutes, at about the halfway point, you will see a vista off to your right, showing the turquoise-blue sea.

A short plateau precedes the descent toward the north coast. The stones here are easily dislodged, so you should pay careful attention to the path in this section. After 2.2 km (1.3 mi.), a path leads off to the left toward a black glaciis boasting an incredible view of Anse Mondon. The dark rock, the intensely green foliage and the shimmering blue water contrast with the spotless alabaster of the circling white-tailed tropicbirds, creating an unforgettable natural tableau. On the left, Mount Pot-à-Eau towers over it all.

We recommend that you take care during the descent, as it is quite slippery. After a little over an hour of walking, the trail reaches a wooden bridge spanning a lovely river. A floodplain is now visible, featuring a few ruins that hark back to a time when this area was used for farming. One of the houses was built more recently and is well preserved. Just before the beach, the unmistakable sounds of bat colonies will bring you to a halt. The flying foxes have made a home for themselves in the large trees.

This is the last sight before you reach the beach. In some seasons, especially February and March, you may see that the sand has temporarily disappeared from the coast. The preceding months, on the other hand, offer the best chance of observing sea turtles as they lay their eggs at night. The return trip takes the same route, after a truly magical swim in gentle, crystal-clear waters.



#### Seychelles Giant Millipede (*Sechelleptus seychellarum*)

This arthropod is endemic to Seychelles and lives on around 15 islands in the archipelago. It is one of the main organisms that actively clean the forest, disposing of organic waste. The largest population lives on Silhouette. It is still on the IUCN red list of threatened species.



#### Silk Tree (*Albizia falcata*)

These majestic giants of the Seychelles forests are also the worst enemies of endemic plants, depriving them of water and sunlight. Immense and commonly found throughout many tropical regions, they grow quickly and sometimes topple over from their own weight.





PRASLIN

ROUTE

12

VALLÉE  
DE MAI

PRASLIN, HOME TO ONE OF THE  
WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS TROPICAL  
FORESTS.



**LENGTH: 3 ROUTES BETWEEN  
1 AND 2 KM (0.6 TO 1.2 MI.)**



**TIME: 1 TO 2 HRS**



**DIFFICULTY: EASY**

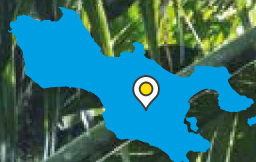


The entrance to Vallée de Mai is located about halfway  
along the main road that connects Grande Anse  
to Baie Sainte Anne.



**ENTRY FEES**  
Around 26€ per person

**HIRING A GUIDE**  
10€ per person



The famous Vallée de Mai is a must-see, one of the best-preserved gems in the archipelago.

Designated as a nature reserve in the 1960s, Vallée de Mai has in the intervening decades become a showcase for the biodiversity of the islands. This nearly 20-hectare (50-acre) forest is home to a large population of coco de mer trees (*Lodoicea maldivica*), which are endemic to Praslin and are also known for their unique nut, the love nut. This tree, which produces the world's largest seed, was the reason that this site was classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983.

In addition to these famous attractions, visitors can also view a diverse collection of endemic plants. Miraculously preserved, Vallée de Mai offers visitors a fairly accurate glimpse of what tropical forests might have looked like millions of years ago. Before the advent of flowering plants and other recent arrivals, they would have been dominated by palms and ferns. Walking under this extraordinary canopy is quite the privilege, and an easily accessible one at that. This is even more true for lovers of rare fauna, as Vallée de Mai is also home to several species of endemic animals, including the shy Seychelles black parrot.

There are three routes that you can take to immerse yourself in this unique world. Ranging from 1 to 2 km (0.6 to 1.2 mi.) long, they will show you the forest highlights in just one or two hours. Taking a private or group guided tour will also add to the experience and give you a deeper understanding of the local natural wonders.

**Black Parrot**  
(*Coracopsis barklyi*)

Endemic to Seychelles, this parrot is now only found on Praslin. Protection and reintroduction measures are in place for this bird, which is considered a national symbol. The population is estimated at only a few hundred individuals.



**Ferns**

At least 80 species of ferns have been identified in the Seychelles rainforests, and not all of them have been fully studied. Three species represent this poorly understood family of plants: the famous fanjon (*Cyathea sechellarum*), which can grow to 8 m (25 ft.), bird's nest fern (*Asplenium nidus*) and giant fern (*Angiopteris evecta*).



**Fanjon**  
(*Cyathea Sechellarum*)

This tree fern is endemic to Seychelles. Found in the most rain-soaked forests, it can grow to 7 or even 8 m (20 to 25 ft.). Once harvested for its fibrous trunk, which was used to make plant-based leather, it is now strictly protected. The growing leaf stalk resembles an episcopal crosier, hence the nickname "bishop fern". There are four species of this fern, including an endemic species that was recently rediscovered on Mahé.





PRASLIN

ROUTE

12'

FOND  
FERDINAND

A SMART ALTERNATIVE TO THE  
VERY POPULAR VALLÉE DE MAI.



**LENGTH: 2 KM (1.2 MI.)**



**TIME: 1 TO 2 HRS**



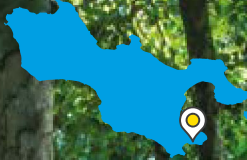
**DIFFICULTY: EASY**



The entrance to Fond Ferdinand is located in southern Praslin along the coastal road near Anse Marie Louise.



**ENTRY FEES**  
Around 8€ per person



The Fond Ferdinand ravine is an increasingly popular alternative to the famous Vallée de Mai.

**Seychelles Bulbul**  
(*Hypsipetes crassirostris*)

A common sight along the trails, the bulbul is endemic to Seychelles and belongs to the Passeriformes order of birds. It can be easily identified by the dark crest on its head and its yellow-orange beak. Omnivorous and territorial, it will not hesitate to chase away any birds that venture too close to its nest.



**Red Fody**  
(*Foudia madagascariensis*)

This small songbird is a native of Madagascar and it has now colonized all the islands in the region, where it competes with local endemic species. It is called a "cardinal" in Mauritius and Réunion, where it is admired for the red-colored males display in the mating season.



**Coco de mer**  
(*Lodoicea maldivica*)

The famed coco de mer is sometimes called a coconut tree. It is actually a member of the palm family, however, and it produces the largest known seed of any plant. The love nut has made Seychelles famous throughout the world. It is strictly protected and trade in this plant is tightly regulated.



This former palm plantation was ravaged by fire in 1990; it was painstakingly restored before being opened to the public in 2012. Today, the site boasts a magnificent forest of coco de mer trees covering more than 150 hectares (370 acres), parts of which are open to visitors. Enjoy the tranquility of the trails, which are less busy than those in the UNESCO site just a few km away.

Starting from the visitor's center, guided hikes follow a well-maintained trail that wends its way up the side of the mountain.

Although there is less biodiversity than in Vallée de Mai, it is easier to admire the love nuts here because, though they are smaller, the trees are so close you could reach out and touch some of them. This is the perfect place to learn to distinguish the male trees from the female ones so you can understand the slow reproductive process of this unusual tree. Up to seven years can pass between the time the nut is fertilized and when it falls to the ground, its weight ranging from 15 to 25 kg (33 to 55 lb.).

Local guides provide information throughout the hike, which affords a panoramic view of the nearby islands once you reach the peak. Coco, Félicité, La Digue, Curieuse, etc. are all on display. Designated a special reserve in 2005, Fond Ferdinand is administered by its own foundation. It boasts another notable advantage: the entry fee is much cheaper than the fee at Vallée de Mai down the road.

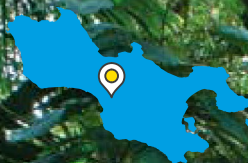


PRASLIN

ROUTE

13

## SALAZIE PASQUIÈRE



A LARGE LOOP THAT CROSSES THE ISLAND  
THROUGH THE PLAINE HOLLANDAISE  
ON TWO MAIN TRAILS, PASQUIÈRE AND  
SALAZIE.



**LENGTH: 6.9 KM (4.3 MI.)**



**TIME: APPROX. 3 HRS**



**DIFFICULTY: MODERATE**



**TOTAL ASCENT/DESCENT:**

**519 M (1,703 FT.)**



The trailhead is located in the Grande Anse region of the southern coast. Park your vehicle above the Britania cemetery and walk along the road as it switchbacks

### RECOMMENDED ITEMS







## Traverse Praslin from south to north and cross the stunning Plaine Hollandaise in the center of the island.

After a stroll near the cemetery, where the names on the headstones will remind you of the cosmopolitan origins of the Seychellois people, the trail will suddenly become quite challenging. The path begins with a steep climb up the last meters of a paved road. Take time to admire the colors of the creole houses and the rural ambiance of this neighborhood, far from any major roads. After a few twists and turns, earth will replace asphalt and the path will take you into the shade of a forest. After 300 to 400 m (~0.25 mi.) of climbing, you will come to a banana grove. Continue straight into the forest, slightly downhill. At the junction, turn left onto the Pasquière track. On your way back, you will return by way of the right-hand path, the Salazie track.

Among the tall grasses, ferns and French plums, the path runs beside the Plaine Hollandaise, which partially turns into a wetland when it rains. This is the realm of rushes and pandans. This extraordinary slice of nature, ringed by walls, is often yours to discover alone.

Walk beside the canal that delivers water to the north coast. At the end of the path you can admire a view of the Raffles hotel, Anse Takamaka and the nearby islands. On this slope, the descent is quite steep. If it is raining, take extra care here until you reach the paved trail. You will then come to a different overlook featuring Curieuse and Anse Saint-José. Below, you will see where the river meets the Pasquière spring, the site of a bottling plant.

Once you reach the coast, take the road to your right toward Côte d'Or-Anse Possession. This is your chance to observe the typical vegetation in the mangrove habitat and the different species of mangroves there. You may want to have a swim at Anse Possession before you get back to the hike. If you object to walking on pavement, you can hitch a ride or take one of the many buses that serve this area to Anse Volbert. Once there, head in the direction of the Exotic Guesthouse. After an initial ascent, you will go through the charming farming village of Salazie and follow the course of the river.

At the end of the paved track, the path climbs up straight ahead, and then snakes through the forest. Cross the small wooden bridge and continue heading upwards on a gentle incline. Observe the pineapple and red vanilla plants along the way. At the following intersection, ignore the path to the left and keep straight. You will come to the highest point of the Salazie track, marking the beginning of the descent to Grande Anse, which you will reach in 30 minutes. Enjoy the stunning views along the way and continue on until you once again find yourself on the Plaine Hollandaise boardwalks. From here, just keep going downhill until you reach the original junction. Make your way down to the Britannia cemetery, your start and end point.



### Seychelles Tiger Chameleon (*Archaus tigris*)



The tiger chameleon is an endemic Seychelles reptile, and the sole member of its order. It is only found on Mahé, Praslin and Silhouette. It is included on the red list of threatened species. Today, fewer than 2,000 individuals survive.

### Black Mangrove (*Bruguiera gymnorhiza*)

There are eight species of mangroves in the Seychelles. This one, the black mangrove, has roots that form an upside-down V. The fruit has a thick, short germ topped with a calyx.



### Star of Bethlehem (*Hippobroma longiflora*)

This is a plant native to tropical and subtropical regions. Although listed as one of "Bach's Flower Remedies", this toxic species contains alkaloids, among other things. As a result, it has been dubbed "cow killer" and "goat killer".



PRASLIN

ROUTE

14

**ANSE  
GEORGETTE**  
via **ANSE LAZIO**

DISCOVER TWO TROPICAL BEACHES  
AND PASS THROUGH THE INCREDIBLE  
LANDSCAPES OF PRASLIN'S  
NORTH POINT.



**LENGTH: 7 KM (4.3 MI.) OUT AND BACK**



**TIME: APPROX. 3 HRS**



**DIFFICULTY: MODERATE**



**TOTAL ASCENT/DESCENT:**

**APPROX. 200 M (650 FT.)**



Park near the Lemuria hotel and walk toward the Newcome forest house on a paved path.

**RECOMMENDED ITEMS**





Spy the tropical beach off in the distance and approach it gradually through forests and over glacia formations. At the end of the trek, you will be ready for a swim. This route gives you the chance to enjoy the experience twice in just a few hours.

The walk begins in the open on a wide, sun-soaked road that may admit vehicle traffic. Soon, the path reaches a promontory that gives you your first glimpse of the beautiful Aride Island and Booby Island. It then takes you to a multicolored house inhabited by a large family. Nearby, admire the hydrangeas, Madagascar periwinkle, hibiscus, lemon trees and hedges of yellow allamanda. In the distance ahead of you, the turquoise waters of Anse Lazio beckon, only a 30-minute walk away. The vehicle track ends here. Do not hesitate to ask for directions from the people who live in the house. The route continues downhill in a snarl of rocks and roots. Under the cover of the trees and surrounded by ferns, the descent becomes gentler as it passes between the large rocks. You are now at the famous Anse Lazio with its masses of reddish granite.

After your dip in the ocean, return the way you came. The climb is challenging, but you will quickly reach the large house. From there, take the trail behind the hedge of yellow allamandas through a coco de mer grove. You will climb up to the crest, then descend the other side toward Anse Georgette. On your way down the going will be easier, but rain sometimes washes away the soil. Once you reach the bottom of the ravine, the track fords the narrow river and then ascends and descends several times in the middle of a dense rain forest. As there is no signage, you will need to pay close attention to where you are going.

As you exit the forest, you once again find yourself on the crest. There is an excellent view of Anse Lazio, and the path continues until you come to a fork. The left-hand path goes to Montplaisir. Head to the right toward Anse Georgette, and take the first left at the junction. The Gulf of Lemuria can be seen below. After 50 m (150 ft.), you will come to another fork. Continue to the right and enjoy the exceptional landscape that combines ocean views and glacia formations. Take care during your descent, as the path is steep and slippery. The beach access is at the end of the gulf. To return, you can either retrace your steps or pass through the Lemuria hotel (with permission) to reach your original starting point.



### Alternate route: Anse Georgette via Montplaisir.

Note that there is another option. You can reach Anse Georgette directly without visiting Anse Lazio; the starting point for this route is the Montplaisir bus stop.

#### Gros baume (*Plectranthus amboinicus*)

This plant, native to East Africa, was introduced for its aromatic and medicinal properties. In Seychelles, it is used to treat coughs, sore throats and digestive complaints.



#### Seychelles Skink (*Mabuya seychellensis*)

While it resembles other lizards of the same family found in the Mascarene Islands (on Réunion and Madagascar), this skink is in fact endemic to Seychelles, where it has established populations on many islands. It is often spotted along the trails.





LA DIGUE

ROUTE


15


NID  
D'AIGLE




CLIMB TO THE HIGHEST POINT IN  
LA DIGUE AND GET A 360° VIEW  
OF ITS WONDERS.




 **LENGTH: 1.3 KM (0.8 MI.)**

 **TIME: 40 MIN.**

 **DIFFICULTY: EASY**

 **TOTAL ASCENT/DESCENT:  
213 M (698 FT.)**

 From the village of La Passe, take a taxi to Belle Vue restaurant. The trailhead is located at the base of the building, marked by the "mountain" sign. If you choose to hike the entire trek from the village to the peak, it is much longer and much more challenging.

RECOMMENDED ITEMS







## Climb to the top of La Digue to view vistas and beaches and to enjoy a look at the nearby islands rising from the ocean.

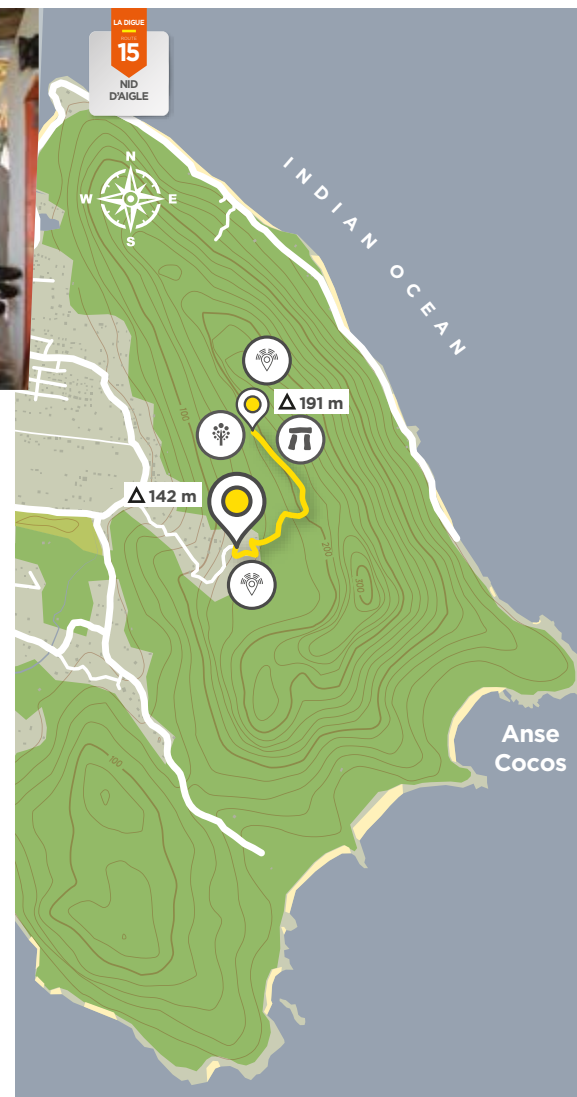
Below a superb terrace with a panoramic view, the trail begins on a flight of stairs practically inside the Belle Vue restaurant. A wooden sign marked "Mountain" points you in the right direction. Immediately on the left you are treated to a view of the lagoon in the distance. At the fork, ignore the right-hand path and keep straight, hugging the mountainside between the rocks. The forest is mostly made up of cinnamon trees, but you will also see a surprising amount of ornamental bamboo along the trail. These plants attest to the fact that not long ago this mountainous place was an inhabited farming area. The last residents left only 30 or 40 years ago. You will also see stars of Bethlehem next to the trail: a white flowers as beautiful as they are toxic. This is also one of the rare habitats for the Seychelles palm grasshopper (*Enplotettix gardineri*), a threatened endemic species.

Once you reach the crest, you can go one of two ways. The Nid d'Aigle track continues to the left, mostly in the open, flanked by shrubs. The sun and heat can be hazardous on this part of the trek. You must wear a hat or a cap. The way is now mostly flat as you cross the summit plateau. On the right, you have a view of the neighboring islands, dominated by the largest, Félicité, and its islets. The trail takes you to a large antenna next to a concrete hut. This is not the end point. The hike continues straight ahead, then down a gentle slope to the right, and slightly uphill again. On the right, you will see other islands, first Marianne, and then Grande Sœur and Petite Sœur.

Under the large trees, take a moment to admire the ruins of the old village. The walls of the houses are now jumbled together with the ruins of the distillery. The last few dozen meters are once again in the open. After one last short ascent, you will climb to your left onto the glacis. The view above the canopy is enthralling. Nid d'Aigle affords a panoramic view of the island's landscapes, with Praslin in the background. The colors of the roofs against the green of the forest makes for an especially picturesque image.

As you come back down, if you are feeling particularly energetic, we highly recommend that you take advantage of your time on La Digue to visit the La Veuve reserve. This is the last corner of forest where you can observe the Seychelles paradise flycatcher (*Terpsiphone corvina*): one of the most endangered birds on the planet, and the star of your photo album from your stay on La Digue.

Indulge in a meandering stroll along the trails. That is the best way to enjoy the unparalleled tranquility of this enchanting island. Note that the most popular form of transportation here is the bicycle, a great option for giving your muscles a break after a nice long hike or for visiting one of the incredible beaches nearby.



### Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone corvina*)

Nicknamed the "widow", this rare bird is endemic to Seychelles and lives almost exclusively on La Digue. Females are easily recognized by their long tails. It is estimated that the population of Seychelles paradise flycatchers comprises only 150 couples.



### Seychelles Giant Day Gecko (*Phelsuma sundbergi ladiguensis*)

This diurnal giant gecko is endemic to La Digue and the surrounding islets. It feeds on insects and nectar and can grow to 16 cm (6 in.) long. It is easily recognized due to its green body and the red-orange spots on its back. It is most often seen in palm trees, but it can also be found near inhabited areas.









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## About the Authors

Photographers, publishers, graphic designers and journalists, Rémy Ravon and Romain Latournerie have spent many years exploring the islands in the Indian Ocean to discover their cultural and natural treasures. Together they have hiked dozens of km of Seychelles trails, patiently observing the flora and fauna around them in the company of local guides. They have identified, measured, mapped, photographed and described these 15 exceptional trails for you.

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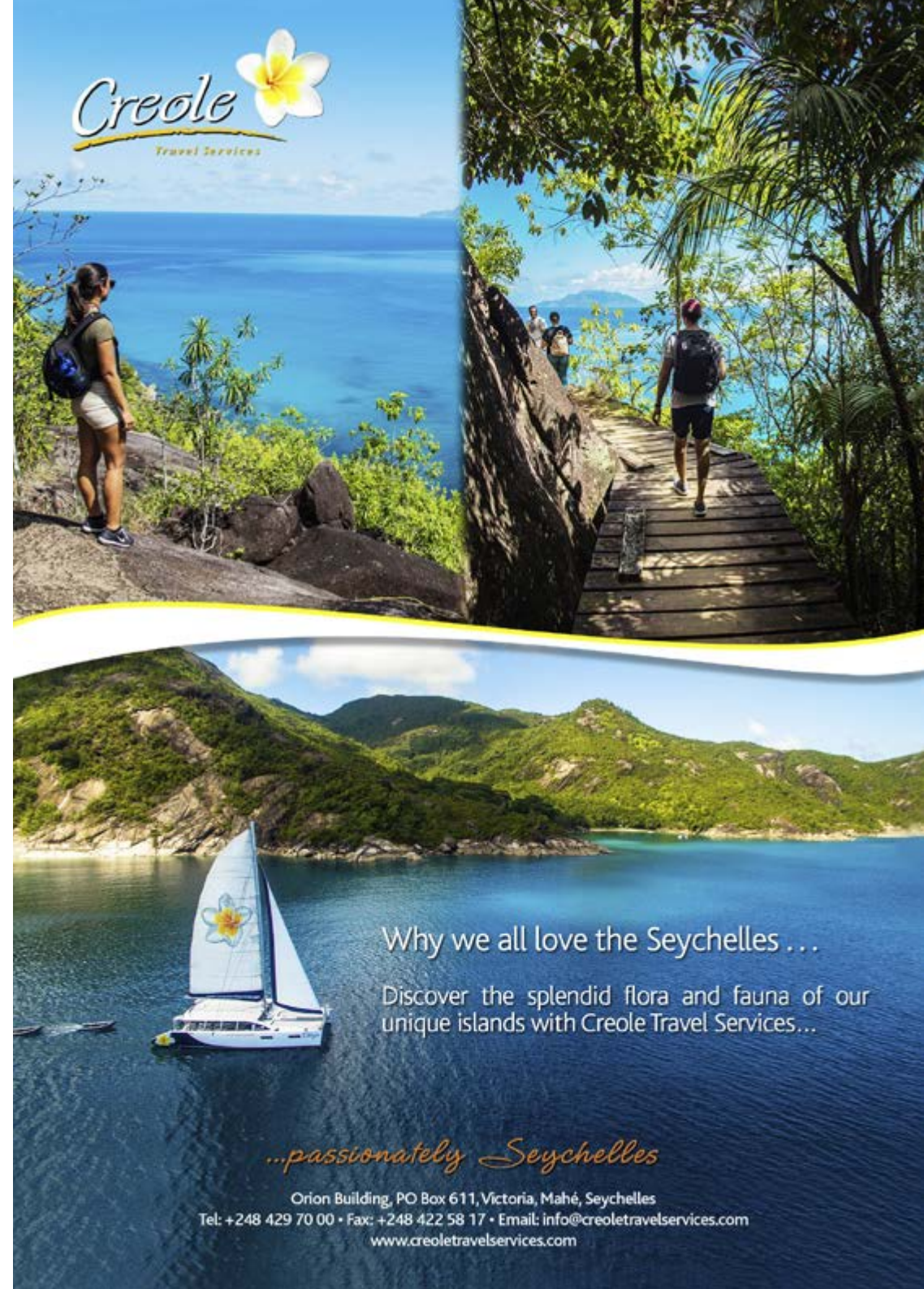
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