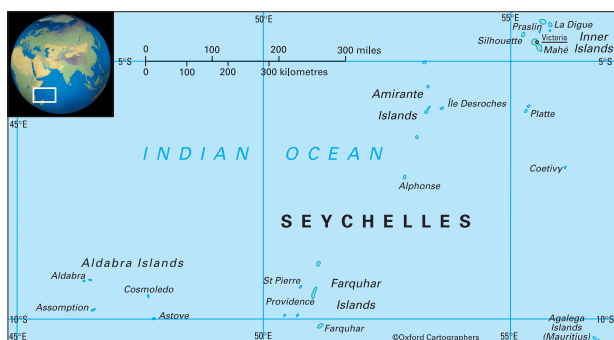


Seychelles



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1976
Population:	84,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	1.7% p.a. 1990–2009
Official languages:	Creole, English and French
Time:	GMT plus 4hr
Currency:	Seychelles rupee (SRs)

Geography

Area:	455 sq km
Coastline:	491km
Capital:	Victoria

The Republic of Seychelles lies in the western part of the Indian Ocean, north of Madagascar and 1,593km east of Mombasa, Kenya. It is an isolated archipelago of outstanding natural beauty comprising about 115 islands, the largest and most economically important of which is Mahé.

Area: 455 sq km; maritime zone more than 1.3 million sq km.

Main towns: Victoria (capital, pop. 21,900 in 2009) and Anse Royale, both on Mahé.

Topography: There is a compact group of 41 mountainous granite islands, including Mahé (the largest), Praslin and La Digue. All three have high central granite ridges, the highest point being Morne Seychellois (905m) on Mahé. The other islands are built of coral, and are scattered, low-lying and sparsely populated.

Climate: Tropical. The south-east trade winds blow from May to October. The north-west monsoon winds bring heavy squalls of rain. January is the wettest month, July and August the driest. Temperature remains constant throughout the year, at 24–31°C, and humidity at around 80%. The country is outside the cyclone belt.

Environment: The most significant environmental issue is dependence on rainwater for supply of water.

Vegetation: The granite islands support luxuriant tropical forest on the mountain slopes. The coral islands are also densely covered with vegetation more characteristic of sandy coral soils. Generally, the most common trees are the coconut palm and casuarina. Others include banyans, screw pines and tortoise trees and the

did you know?

Seychelles is an archipelago of about 115 islands, spread across a maritime zone of more than 1.3 million sq km; 41 are mountainous granite islands, the highest point being Morne Seychellois (905m) on the largest island, Mahé; the other islands are built of coral, and are scattered, low-lying and sparsely populated.

Almost 89% of Seychelles is covered by forest, more than any other country in the Commonwealth, and this figure has remained constant over 1990–2005.

Seychelles has one of the highest incomes per capita in Africa – US\$8,480 in 2009 (a figure exceeded only by the oil-rich states of Equatorial Guinea and Libya).

giant coco de mer palm, which is unique to the Seychelles and lives for up to 1,000 years. Of about 200 plant species, 80 are indigenous, including the bois rouge, the giant bois de fer and the capucin. Forest covers some 89% of the land area.

Wildlife: Fruit bats, flying foxes, geckos and skinks are common, and there are more than 3,000 species of insects. The giant tortoise (which appears on the Seychelles coat of arms) survived near-extinction; there are now several thousand on Aldabra. There are many species of rare birds such as the bare-legged scops owl, Seychelles kestrel, black parrot, magpie robin and paradise flycatcher. Four islands are bird sanctuaries, including Bird Island, which is inhabited by millions of fairy terns.

Transport: There are 458km of roads, 96% paved; only Mahé, Praslin and La Digue have surfaced roads. Cruiseships and cargo ships call at Mahé.

Seychelles International Airport is at Point Larue, 10km from Victoria. There are airstrips on several outlying islands.

Society

KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 185
Life expectancy: 73 years (est.)
Net primary enrolment: 99%

Population: 84,000 (2009); 88% on Mahé, 7% on Praslin, 3% on La Digue and 2% on the other islands, with 55% living in urban areas; growth 0.5% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 16 per 1,000 people (est.); life expectancy 73 years (est.)

The population is of mixed African, French, Indian, Chinese and Arab descent. There are small minorities of Europeans, Indians and Chinese.

Language: The official languages are Creole, English and French. Seychellois Creole (Kreol Seselwa) is French-based and very widely used.

Religion: Mainly Christians (Roman Catholics 82%, Anglicans 6%, and small numbers of other Christians); Hindus 2% and Muslims 1% (2002 census). Belief in the supernatural and *gris-gris* (the old magic of spirits) often coexists with Christian and other beliefs. Sorcery was outlawed in 1958.

Media: *Seychelles Nation* is the government-owned daily. The weekly *Regar* is owned by the opposition Seychelles National Party.

The Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation provides public radio and TV services in Creole, French and English. Multichannel cable and satellite TV services are also available.

There are 216 personal computers (2007) and 382 internet users (2008) per 1,000 people.

Education: Public spending on education was 5.0% of GDP in 2006. There are ten years of compulsory education starting at age six. Primary school comprises six years and secondary five. Some 98% of pupils complete primary school (2008). The school year starts in January. Teaching is in Creole, French and English.

Providers of tertiary education include the Seychelles Polytechnic, Seychelles Hospitality and Tourism Training Centre, the Farmers' Training Centre, the Maritime Training Centre, the Industrial

Training Centre, and the National College of the Arts. Seychelles Polytechnic offers courses to diploma level and has been providing first-year undergraduate degree courses in conjunction with the University of Manchester, UK, since 2001. Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 99% (2008).

Health: A network of polyclinics provides general medical care, dentistry and other services. There are also private general practitioners. The public health service depends heavily on medical personnel from overseas. There is no malaria, yellow fever or bilharzia. Infant mortality was 11 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (43 in 1978).

Communications: Country code 248; internet domain '.sc'. Payphones are available in most districts on the inner islands. Internet connections are good in Seychelles. There are several internet cafes on Mahé, Praslin and La Digue. The main post office is in Victoria.

There are about 262 main telephone lines and 1,096 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

Public holidays: New Year (two days), Labour Day (1 May), Liberation Day (anniversary of the 1977 coup, 5 June), National Day (18 June), Independence Day (29 June), Assumption (15 August), All Saints' Day (1 November), Immaculate Conception (8 December) and Christmas Day.

Religious festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Good Friday, Easter Monday and Corpus Christi.

Economy

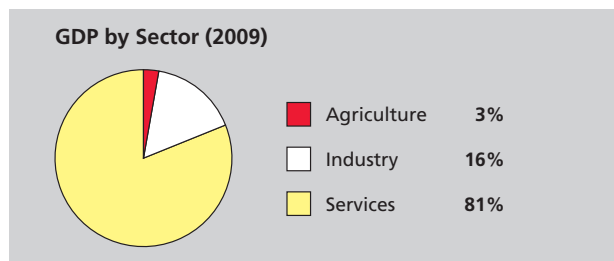
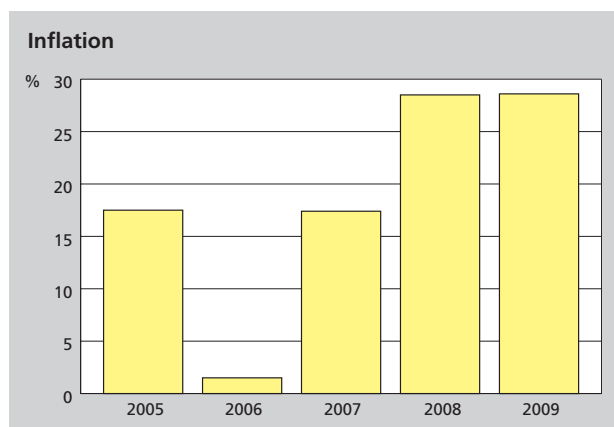
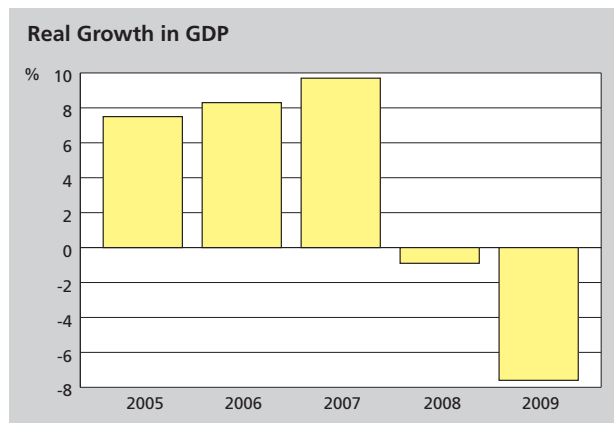
KEY FACTS 2009

GNI: US\$746m
GNI p.c.: US\$8,480
GDP growth: 3.2% p.a. 2005–09
Inflation: 18.2% p.a. 2005–09

Overview: Seychelles is vulnerable, due to its small size, isolation, limited natural resources and dependence on tourism, which accounts for the bulk of foreign-exchange earnings. Though tourism worldwide grew strongly during the 1990s, and cheaper long-haul flights made destinations such as Seychelles more accessible, the industry became increasingly competitive. Imports needed for tourism were in large part responsible for the country's trade deficit. GDP grew by 1.4% p.a. 1979–89.

Consequently, the government made efforts to diversify the economy, encouraging farming, fishing and manufacturing, in the whole country including the outer islands. State-owned and parastatal enterprises accounted in the mid-1990s for more than half of GDP and some privatisation of state enterprises was under way during the 1990s. By the late 1990s, there was good growth for several years, and fishing became the largest foreign currency earner.

But the economy underwent a small overall decline during 2001–04, before growth strengthened to 7.5% in 2005, 8.3% in 2006 and 9.7% in 2007, as a result of increased foreign direct investment and tourism receipts. Then, in 2008, in the teeth of the world economic downturn the economy stalled, and Seychelles turned to the IMF for emergency support. With a sharp fall in tourism income and cuts in public expenditure GDP declined by



7.6% in 2009. In response to economic reforms initiated in late November 2008, in 2010 the economy bounced back.

Trade: Principal exports are canned tuna, prawns, fish, cinnamon bark, patchouli, vanilla, plus re-exports of petroleum.

Constitution

Status: Republic with executive president
Legislature: National Assembly
Independence: 29 June 1976

The independence constitution provided for a multiparty state. The 1979 constitution made Seychelles a one-party state, the sole candidate for a presidential election to be nominated by the ruling party. This constitution was amended in 1992, when multiparty democracy was reintroduced and, after a process of consultation involving referendums, replaced by the 1993 constitution.

Under the 1993 constitution, Seychelles is a unitary republic, with a multiparty democracy. It has a unicameral parliament, the National Assembly, comprising up to 35 seats, 25 of which are elected by

universal adult suffrage, on a first-past-the-post basis, and up to ten seats on the basis of proportional representation. Parliamentary and presidential elections take place every five years, not necessarily at the same time. The president appoints a cabinet – not including members of parliament – and is empowered under the 1993 constitution to rule by decree.

In August 1996, the constitution was amended to create the office of vice-president.

Politics

Last elections: May 2011 (presidential), September/October 2011 (legislative)
Next elections: 2016 (presidential), 2016 (legislative)
Head of state: President James Michel
Head of government: the president
Ruling party: People's Party

In December 1991, the France Albert René government passed legislation to provide for a multiparty alternative to the one-party system. Eight parties were registered by July 1992, and a constitutional commission elected to prepare a new constitution which paved the way for elections in July 1993 for the presidency and to the National Assembly. René took 59% of votes in the presidential election and Sir James Mancham 36%, and the Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF) gained a large majority – 27 of the 33 seats – in the National Assembly.

In March 1998, in the second multiparty presidential and legislative elections since independence in 1976, René was returned for another term as president and his SPPF won 24 of the 25 seats in the National Assembly (30 of 34 when seats allocated on a proportional basis were included). René polled 67% of the votes and Mancham, who polled only 14%, was overtaken by Wavel Ramkalawan of the United Opposition party (19%) as opposition leader.

Following the 1998 elections Ramkalawan formed a new party, the Seychelles National Party (SNP), to succeed his United Opposition party. In an early presidential election in September 2001, René was returned to office receiving 54% of the votes, defeating Ramkalawan (45%), in a much closer contest than in 1998.

Though SNP significantly strengthened its position in the parliamentary elections in December 2002, with 11 of the 34 elected seats and 42.6% of the votes, the ruling SPPF remained in control of the National Assembly. Following the elections the SPPF chose vice-president and finance minister James Michel as their candidate for the presidential contest due in 2006, René being allowed only two terms under the constitution. In April 2004, after almost 27 years as head of state, René stood down and Michel became president. René continued as head of the ruling SPPF.

Michel was endorsed by the electorate in the July 2006 presidential contest, when he defeated Ramkalawan by a similar margin to that in 2001 when René was last returned.

In the parliamentary elections held in May 2007, the ruling SPPF, with 56% of the votes, again won 23 seats and the SNP, with 44%, won 11.

At its 24th National Congress in June 2009 the SPPF was renamed the People's Party.

On publication of the Constitutional Review Commission's report in April 2010, the president asked the attorney-general to draft amendments to the 1993 constitution in response to the report. Among the most significant changes envisaged were strengthening the provisions concerned with the rights of citizens; clarifying the limits on presidential tenure; and ensuring the independence and effectiveness of institutions such as the proposed Electoral Commission, the Supreme Court and judiciary. The attorney-general recommended that such constitutional changes should be approved in a national referendum before they come before parliament, even when the government could count on the support of the necessary two-thirds of National Assembly members.

In the May 2011 presidential election Michel was re-elected, winning 56% of the vote. His principal rival, Ramkalawan of the SNP, secured 41% of the vote. A Commonwealth expert team present declared the electoral process credible. Among its recommendations were that the government carry out a thorough review of electoral legislation and establish an independent electoral commission.

Following the presidential election in May 2011 the SNP boycotted parliament citing the slow pace of electoral reform. Some disaffected SNP members then formed a new party, the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM), to fight the parliamentary elections which were held from 29 September to 1 October 2011. The elections were again won by the People's Party led by President James Michel, taking all 25 elective seats in the National Assembly and receiving 89% of the votes cast. The PDM took 11% of the votes but failed to win any of the elective seats.



History

Although visited by Phoenicians, Malays and Arabs, and used in the 16th century by the Portuguese as a stopover point, the Seychelles remained largely uninhabited until the 17th century. Pirates and privateers set up bases on the islands and in 1741 the Governor of Mauritius (then called Île de France) sent Lazare Picault to explore them. The French claimed possession of the islands in 1756 and French settlers from Mauritius, with their African slaves, began to arrive from 1770.

British attempts to take possession in the late 18th century were confounded by the pacifying tactics of Governor Queau de Quinssy, who several times surrendered to British aggressors, then after their departure, raised the French flag again. After the Napoleonic Wars, by the Treaty of Paris (1814), the Seychelles was ceded to Britain, together with Mauritius. From then until 1903, it was administered from Mauritius.

The Seychelles had long provided a transit point for slaves from Africa. Britain abolished trade in slaves at the beginning of the 19th century (abolishing slavery itself in 1834) and British vessels were active in attacking Spanish, Arab and other slaving vessels. About 3,000 Africans rescued from Arab slave traders on the East African coast between 1861 and 1874 were removed to Seychelles, to become labourers on the plantations. The British also exiled some West African chiefs, who were continuing to resist British control, to Seychelles. There was also some Chinese and Indian settlement in the 19th century, most commonly by traders.

Poverty was widespread by 1918, due partly to a fall in vanilla prices (an artificial substitute having been discovered). New cash crops such as cinnamon and copra were then introduced. In the 1940s, the Association of Seychelles Taxpayers protested against the UK's management of the islands. In 1964 the Seychelles Democratic Party (SDP), led by James Mancham, and the Seychelles People's United Party (SPUP), led by France Albert René, were founded. The SDP favoured retaining close ties with the UK; the SPUP campaigned for autonomy.

Universal adult suffrage was introduced in 1967, for elections of members of the legislative council. The council became a 15-member legislative assembly in 1970 (later National Assembly) and general elections were held in which the SDP won six seats and the SPUP five. Mancham became chief minister. At the next elections in 1974, the SDP won 52% of the votes, the SPUP 47%; Seychelles achieved internal self-government in the following year.

Parliament then voted for independence, a new constitution was finalised in 1976, and Seychelles became an independent republic within the Commonwealth. Mancham became president and René prime minister.

At independence Mancham and the SDP's policies favoured development based on tourism and offshore financial services and alignment with the West, whereas René and the SPUP wanted a non-aligned policy and the development of a self-reliant economy centred on nationalised industry. The SPUP staged an armed coup in June 1977, while Mancham was in the UK attending a Commonwealth summit and Seychelles became a socialist state, with René as its president and the SPUP, renamed the Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF), the sole political party. There was extensive nationalisation of enterprises, including hotels and industries.

There were a number of threatened coup plots against the René government, the most serious in 1981, when about 50 mercenaries, recruited in South Africa, attempted a landing in Mahé. When their weapons were discovered at the airport, the mercenaries escaped by hijacking an Air India jet, leaving five of their number behind.

However, opposition from exiled political supporters of the SDP and Mancham continued throughout the 1980s, and was reinforced by the turning of the international tide against centralised economic control and one-party rule towards the end of the decade. By 1990, opposition within the country also became vocal, and the government began to consider the need for change.

International relations

Seychelles is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, African Union, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, Non-Aligned Movement, Southern African Development Community and United Nations.

Traveller information

Local laws and conventions: The possession or trafficking of drugs is illegal and can incur serious punishments.

It is an offence for anyone, including children, to wear camouflage clothing, and pornography in the form of obscene articles, publications, videotapes and software is prohibited. Collecting shells is strictly forbidden in nature reserves, marine parks and reserves in Seychelles. Permission must always be sought before taking photographs of local people.

Shaking hands is the customary form of greeting. Casual wear is the norm. Beachwear should be for the beach only. Businessmen are not expected to wear suits and ties, although a smart appearance is advised. Most executives speak English and/or French. Office hours are Mon–Fri 0800–1600.

Immigration and customs: Passports must be valid for six months from the date of entry. Visas may be needed for some nationals and visa requirements should be checked well in advance of travel.

The import of non-prescribed drugs, firearms, plants and plant products, animals and animal products, fireworks and explosives are prohibited. Videotapes must be declared on arrival and may be retained for security reasons. The importation of fruit, seeds, vegetables and meat products is strictly prohibited.

Any flora taken as souvenirs should have a certificate and an official export permit, which must be produced when checking in at the international airport.

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required by all those arriving from infected areas.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left and visitors can drive with a national driving licence. There are a limited number of cars available for hire on Mahé and Praslin, and reservations should be made well in advance.

Care should be taken when driving in mountainous areas, as roads are narrow and winding and there are few safety barriers. There is a 65kph speed limit on the open road and a 40kph speed limit in built-up areas and throughout Praslin.

Buses are the only means of public transport. Taxis can be found on Mahé and Praslin, and rates are government-controlled. Visitors should negotiate the fare before beginning their journey. Bicycles are a popular means of transport and are easily hired on the islands.

Privately owned schooners carry passengers between Mahé, Praslin and La Digue, and boats can be chartered privately to get to the other islands. Air Seychelles also provides scheduled and chartered flights between some of the islands.

Travel health: Comprehensive health insurance is essential.

Tap water is normally chlorinated; bottled water is widely available.

Money: Local currency is the Seychelles rupee. Visitors will find that most services on the islands, including hotel bills and care hire, require payment in hard currency. Using local currency is only allowed if an exchange receipt can be shown as proof of the conversion from foreign currency into local currency. Travellers cheques are widely accepted and should be in US dollars or pounds sterling to avoid additional charges. Most international credit cards can be used, and there are ATMs on Mahé and Praslin. Banking hours are Mon–Fri 0830–1430, Sat 0830–1100.

There were 158,000 tourist arrivals in 2009.

Further information

Government of Seychelles: www.egov.sc

Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org

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