



Seychelles

KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth: 1976

Population: 93,000 (2013)

GDP p.c. growth: 2.3% p.a. 1990–2013

UN HDI 2014: World ranking 71

Official languages: Creole, English and French

Time: GMT plus 4 hrs

Currency: Seychelles rupee (SRs)

Geography

Area: 455 sq km

Coastline: 491 km

Capital: Victoria

The Republic of Seychelles lies in the western part of the Indian Ocean, north of Madagascar and 1,593 km 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.

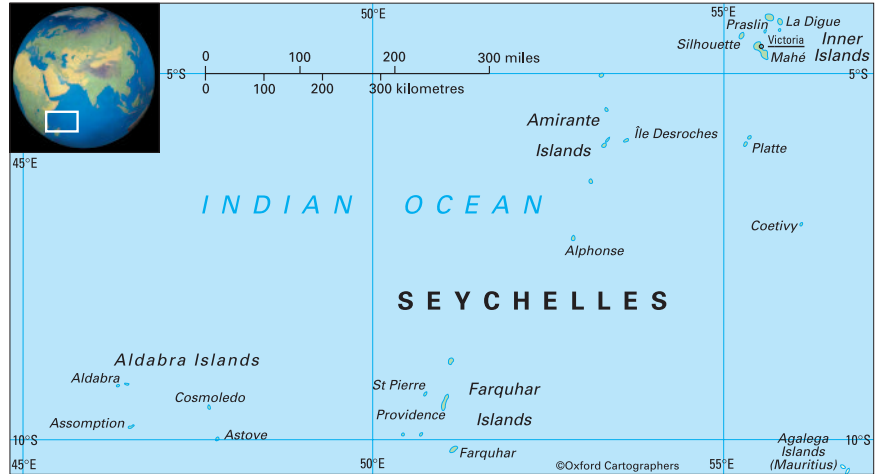
Area: 455 sq km; maritime zone more than 1.3 million sq km.

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 (905 metres) 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 May–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 per cent. 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 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 88 per cent of the land area and there was no significant loss of forest cover during 1990–2012.

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. Six mammal species and nine bird species are thought to be endangered (2014).

Main towns: Victoria (capital, pop. 21,700 in 2010) and Anse Royale (4,168), both on Mahé.

Transport: There are 510 km of roads, 97 per cent paved; only Mahé, Praslin and La Digue have surfaced roads. Cruiseships and cargo ships call at Mahé.

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

Society

KEY FACTS 2013

Population per sq km: 204

Life expectancy: 73 years

Net primary enrolment: 94% (2011)

Population: 93,000 (2013); 88 per cent on Mahé, seven per cent on Praslin, three per cent on La Digue and two per cent on the other islands, with 53 per cent living in urban areas; growth 1.3 per cent p.a. 1990–2013; birth rate 17 per 1,000 people; life expectancy 73 years.

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 76 per cent, Anglicans six per cent, and small numbers of other Christians); Hindus two per cent and Muslims one per cent (2010 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.

Health: Public spending on health was four per cent of GDP in 2012. 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. Some 96 per cent of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 97 per cent have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2012). Infant mortality was 12 per 1,000 live births in 2013 (43 in 1978).

Education: Public spending on education was four per cent of GDP in 2011. There are

ten years of compulsory education starting at the age of six. Primary school comprises six years and secondary five, with cycles of three and two years. Some 94 per cent of pupils complete primary school (2010). The school year starts in January. Teaching is in Creole, French and English.

The Seychelles Polytechnic opened in January 1983 at Anse Royale on the island of Mahé. It offers courses in business and the visual arts to diploma level and has been providing first-year degree courses in conjunction with the University of Manchester, UK, since 2001. The Seychelles Institute of Technology was established in Providence, Mahé, in 2005–06, incorporating the technical studies programmes of the polytechnic. Other important tertiary institutions include the National Institute of Education, National Institute for Health and Social Studies, Agricultural and Horticultural Training Centre, Maritime Training Centre and Seychelles Tourism Academy. The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 3.40:1 (2011). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 99 per cent (2010).

Media: *The Rising Sun* and *Seychelles Nation* (state-owned) are published daily. Weeklies include *Le Nouveau Seychelles*, *The People* (owned by the People's Party) and *Regar* (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.

Some 95 per cent of households have TV sets (2010). There are 216 personal computers per 1,000 people (2007).

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.

For every 1,000 people there are 234 landlines, 1,473 mobile phone subscriptions and 504 internet users (2013).

Public holidays: New Year (two days), Labour Day (1 May), Liberation Day (anniversary of the 1977 coup, 5 June), Constitution 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 2013

GNI: US\$1.2bn

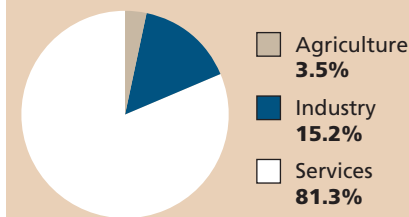
GNI p.c.: US\$12,530

GDP growth: 4.1% p.a. 2009–13

Inflation: 8.1% p.a. 2009–13

Despite having one of the highest per capita incomes in Africa, Seychelles is vulnerable economically, 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

GDP by sector (2013)

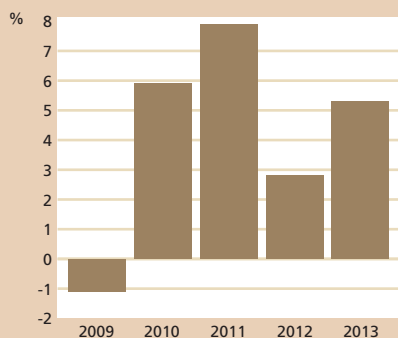


trade deficit. GDP grew by 1.4 per cent p.a. 1979–89.

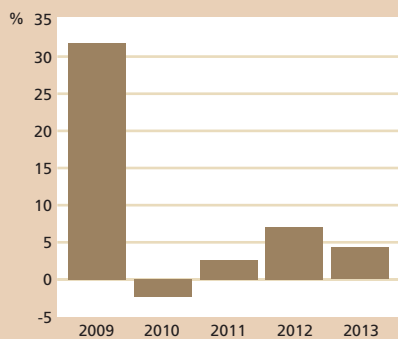
Consequently, the government made efforts to diversify the economy, encouraging farming, fishing and manufacturing in the whole country including the outer islands. State-owned and parastatal enterprises accounted in the mid-1990s for more than half of GDP and some privatisation of state enterprises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

But the economy underwent a small overall decline during 2001–04, before growth strengthened to seven to ten per cent in 2005–07, 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 shrank by 2.1 per cent in 2008 and by 1.1 per cent in 2009. However, in response to economic reforms initiated in late November 2008, in 2010–11 the economy bounced back, with two years of strong growth, followed by good steady growth in 2012–15.

Real growth in GDP



Inflation



History

Although visited by Phoenicians, Malays and Arabs, and used in the 16th century CE 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,

Seychelles on the international stage

The most prolific Seychellois writer was Antoine Abel (1934–2004), who was known for his novels, short stories, poems and plays. He wrote in three languages – English, French and Creole – winning the French literary prize Prix Mascareignes in 1979.

Eddy Allen Maillet, born in 1967, is an international football referee who hails from Seychelles.

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 per cent of the votes, the SPUP 47 per cent; 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.

In December 1991, the government passed legislation to provide for multiparty democracy. Eight parties were registered by July 1992, and a constitutional commission elected to prepare a new constitution which paved the way for presidential and legislative elections in July 1993. René took 59 per cent of votes in the presidential election and Sir James Mancham 36 per cent; and the SPPF gained a large majority – 27 of the 33 seats – in the National Assembly.

In the March 1998 elections, President René (with 67 per cent of the votes) was returned and his SPPF won 24 of the 25 Assembly seats (30 of 34 when seats allocated on a proportional basis were included). Mancham (14 per cent) was overtaken by Wavel Ramkalawan of the United Opposition party (19 per cent) as opposition leader.

Constitution

Status: Republic with executive President

Legislature: National Assembly of Seychelles

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 34 seats, 25 of which are elected by universal adult suffrage, on a first-past-the-post basis, and up to nine 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: 3–5 and 16–18 December 2015 (presidential), 29 September – 1 October 2011 (legislative)

Next elections: 2020 (presidential), 2016 (legislative)

Head of state: President James Alix Michel

Head of government: The President

Ruling party: People's Party

Women MPs: 44%

Following the 1998 elections Wavel 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, securing 54 per cent of the votes, defeating Ramkalawan (45 per cent), in a much closer contest than in 1998. Though the SNP significantly strengthened its position in the parliamentary elections in December 2002, with 11 of the 34 elective seats and 43 per cent of the votes, the ruling Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF) – with 23 seats – 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, France Albert 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.

Michel was endorsed by the electorate in the July 2006 presidential contest when, with 54 per cent of the votes cast, he defeated the SNP's Wavel Ramkalawan.

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

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

In the May 2011 presidential election Michel was re-elected, winning 56 per cent of the votes cast. His principal rival, Ramkalawan of the SNP, secured 41 per cent of the votes. A Commonwealth expert team present declared the electoral process credible. Among its recommendations were that the government carry out a thorough review of electoral

Further information

President's Office:	www.statehouse.gov.sc
Electoral Commission:	www.ecs.sc
National Assembly of Seychelles:	www.nationalassembly.sc
National Bureau of Statistics:	www.nsb.gov.sc
Central Bank of Seychelles:	www.cbs.sc
Seychelles Tourism Board:	www.seychelles.travel
Commonwealth Secretariat:	www.thecommonwealth.org
Commonwealth of Nations:	www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Seychelles

Media

<i>Seychelles Nation</i> :	www.nation.sc
Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation:	www.sbc.sc
Seychelles eNews:	www.seychellesweekly.com

legislation, and establish an independent electoral commission, as recommended in the April 2010 report of the Constitutional Review 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 per cent of the votes cast. The PDM took 11 per cent of the votes but failed to win any of the elective seats. After the nine seats decided by proportional representation had been added, the People's Party had 33 seats and the PDM one seat in the new National Assembly. Turnout was 74 per cent, down from around 86 per cent in the last three elections.

The Electoral Commission was appointed in August 2011 and the Forum for Electoral Reform – inaugurated in January 2012 with the support of all five registered political parties – embarked on a series of public hearings, with a view to making recommendations on reform of election law.

President Michel was returned in the election of December 2015. He won 47.8 per cent of the votes cast in the first round (held over 3–5 December), Ramkalawan of the SNP taking 33.9 per cent and Patrick Pillay of Lalyans Seselwa 14.2 per cent. In the second round (16–18 December), Michel, with 50.15 per cent, narrowly defeated Ramkalawan (49.85 per cent). Turnout was 90.1 per cent. Commonwealth observers, led by former Prime Minister of Tonga Lord Sevele, said the election was 'peaceful, generally well conducted and transparent' but expressed concern about widespread allegations of vote buying.

International relations

Seychelles is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, African Union, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, Indian Ocean Rim Association, Non-Aligned Movement, Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, Southern African Development Community, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Seychelles became a member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association on 15 November 2011 and the World Trade Organization on 25 April 2015, the organisation's 161st member.

Traveller information

Immigration and customs: Passports must be valid at least until the date of departure. Visas are required by most Commonwealth nationals. Prohibited imports include food; and plants and animals, and parts of plants and animals, except where prior permission has been granted by the relevant authorities.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left. Visitors holding a foreign driving licence are allowed to drive.

Scheduled and chartered flights operate between some of the islands. There are taxis on Mahé, Praslin and La Digue and rates are government-controlled.

Travel health: Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include dengue fever, hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid.

There were 230,000 tourist arrivals in 2013.



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