

PRASLIN ISLAND

Although it is Seychelles' second largest island, Praslin is still small. It occupies just 38km² and has around 6,500 residents; it also has a more laid-back vibe than nearby Mahé.

First claimed by French explorer Lazare Picault in 1774, Praslin was initially named 'île de Palme', in honour of its magnificent palm forests. For many visitors, the towering indigenous trees of the Vallée de Mai National Park, especially the famed cocos de mer, remain a reason to visit. Forest aside, Praslin is also blessed with a naturally beautiful coastline. From tiny boulder-strewn coves to sweeping curves of powder sand, it is a beach-lover's paradise.

Snorkelling and diving opportunities abound, with Curieuse Marine National Park bordering the island's north coast, and a number of popular aquatic day trips are available. Praslin's peace and beauty make it one of our favourite islands.

PRASLIN'S SOUTH AND EAST COAST

Stretching from the idyllic, if treacherous, waters of Anse Georgette in the unspoilt northwest, along Grande Anse, the longest beach in Seychelles, to Vallée de Mai at the island's heart and the harbour hub of Baie Sainte Anne, these areas offer varied exploration opportunities.

Expect deserted beaches for swimming, sunbathing and chilling; wonderful forest walks in the national park; a handful of small shops; and a number of good hotels. The properties listed below are our top tips for the area and are listed geographically from west to east.

Spread over 101 hectares of intricate waterways, lush forest and three powder-sand beaches, **Lémuria Resort** is strikingly attractive. Its 105 ocean-facing suites and villas make it Praslin's largest hotel, yet it has retained an exclusive feel. A range of high-quality, refined accommodation options is



Imaginatively decorated roadside boutique

complemented by three restaurants offering a choice of formality and cuisines, a multi-level, boulder-strewn swimming pool, and a Shiseido-branded spa.

An array of free resort activities is available, from tennis on the floodlit courts to windsurfing, kayaking and mountain biking, whilst for a fee, scuba diving and deep-sea fishing can be arranged at the onsite PADI centre. Alternatively, the manicured 18-hole championship golf course, the only one in Seychelles, offers spectacular vistas from a tortuous course that is challenging for both amateurs and professionals.

For younger guests, aged 4–12 years, the professionally supervised Turtle Club organises an impressive variety of indoor and outdoor activities, making Lémuria one of the most family-friendly beach properties in our portfolio.

Adjacent to Lemuria's golf course to the south, **Cap Jean Marie Villas** is at the other end of the accommodation spectrum. Owned and run by a delightfully gentle Seychellois couple, Iris and Terry Adeline, its three self-catering villas are simple and its atmosphere laid back. The villas are spacious, airy and thoughtfully decorated – and set amongst coconut palms on the edge of Anse Kerlan beach, where turtles nest from September to January. Each has a small shaded terrace, open-plan kitchen and lounge, and an en-suite double bedroom.



The kitchens and equipment are geared to self-catering visitors, but continental breakfasts and home-made Creole dinners can be arranged if requested in advance. There are few facilities here beyond the cushioned sunloungers and basic snorkelling kit, but the owners are very happy to help with any arrangements. For a no-frills island escape, this is a great option.

Indian Ocean Lodge is a small, family-friendly hotel offering affordable accommodation and competent service on the stunning sandy beach of Grande Anse. Dotted around the palm-filled gardens are 32 en-suite rooms in eight, two-storey buildings. Light and cheerful, each room boasts a veranda or balcony looking across the lawn to the sea, and can comfortably accommodate two adults and two children, making this a good option for travelling families. The sea is a few seconds' walk away, and there's also a good-sized swimming pool. Indian Ocean Lodge runs a free daily shuttle to Côte d'Or Beach, which is particularly useful if seaweed on the beach at Grande Anse is an issue during your stay.

Stretching along an extensive 1.8km of coastline at Anse Bois de Rose, in the quiet southwest, the family-friendly Hotel Coco de Mer and its affiliated sibling, Black Parrot Suites, make up one of Praslin's best-value small resorts.

We re-visited **Coco de Mer** last year, just after it was renovated; it's looking great! Its 40 en-suite chalets (18 'Superior' rooms, on the seafront terrace; 22 standard rooms, set slightly back) are unchanged; all have

ocean views and refreshing, bright, modern interiors. The difference is in the hotel's communal areas, which are now looking much smarter. There's a raft of free activities, a popular swimming pool, two restaurants serving very good food, and a definite Creole vibe. Extremely helpful staff, and very reasonable prices charged for any 'extras', make Coco de Mer very popular; book early to get space.

Just to the west of Coco de Mer, in a smaller, separate complex, the 12 adult-only Junior suites in the **Black Parrot Suites** are the resort's best. Following a 'hotel-within-a-hotel' concept, Black Parrot is all about contemporary style, indulgence and exclusivity, yet within easy access of Coco de Mer's public facilities. The rooms here are modern in décor with impressive picture windows, enormous bathrooms and tactile furnishings. Outside, there is a private, cliff-top swimming pool, with stunning views down the beach. The new Waterfront Spa opened in November 2011.

Every Monday a luxury catamaran sails from here for a four-night cruise around the islands. This takes a maximum of eight guests; ask us for more details about this innovative and popular '**Sail the Seychelles**' option.

Perched on the edge of the coastal hilltop at Pointe Cabris, Praslin's easternmost point, **Le Château de Feuilles** is the island's premier boutique hotel. Established over 35 years ago, it was renovated in 2005 to create a wonderful blend of south of France chic and safari style. With only nine rooms, catering to a maximum of 20



Coco de Mer has a long stretch of beach with plenty of room for lounging

guests, and a secluded location, Le Château de Feuilles guarantees privacy. Its thatched granite bungalows and suites are tucked away amid clipped hillside lawns and all enjoy 180° panoramic views across the white sandy beaches of Anse Consolation and Anse Marie-Louise to the 12 surrounding islands.

The room interiors and terraces are beautiful and consciously natural, with bare timber, palm leaves, linen and glass used throughout, yet mod-cons are in abundance, from a Nespresso coffee machine to complimentary WiFi. The build quality and attention to the smallest design details of Le Château de Feuilles is probably of a higher standard than any other place mentioned in this brochure.

There is a resident masseuse, a stunningly sited cliff-top Jacuzzi, a swimming pool and an open-sided restaurant serving top-quality fare. The closest beach is a 10-minute walk, but a complimentary hire car is always included in your stay here. For a magical excursion, the private island of Grande Soeur, 6km northeast of La Digue, is reserved at weekends for the exclusive use of Le Château's guests. A barbecue beach picnic and some good snorkelling make this a unique and thoroughly enjoyable trip.



Cliff-top panorama from the pool at the stunning Château de Feuilles



Fairy tern on Cousin Island

Dine with sand underfoot at many of Praslin's beachfront hotels - as here at Hotel L'Archipel, on Anse Gouvernment

CÔTE D'OR

The beach from which Côte d'Or takes its name is Anse Volbert: a 2.5km stretch of golden sand which sweeps along Praslin's north coast. This is home to a number of restaurants, small hotels and watersports centres, yet it retains a very casual, low-impact air. With so much space, there is rarely a privacy issue.

The panoramic view from the beach includes the small islets of Chauve Souris, Buccaneer and St Pierre, as well as the more distant islands of Curieuse and Cousine, which can be reached on day trips. Swimming from the beach is good all year round, with the calmest waters between October and May.

Beside the secluded beach of Anse Gouvernment, in a private estate of coconut trees and flowers, **Hotel l'Archipel** is a colonial retreat with a more formal atmosphere than most. Its peppermint-painted buildings and panoramic sea views are distinctly tropical, and the 30 rooms and suites, spread across the hillside estate, attract honeymooners plus a slightly older, European crowd. Accommodation options are based on style, size and location, but all are spacious, cool and well spread out.

A stately central building houses the bar, restaurant, reception, boutique and internet room, whilst immediately adjacent, the hillside infinity pool has views down to the sandy beach. Aquatic activities –

windsurfing, fishing, diving, snorkelling and island boat trips – can be arranged from the watersports centre; alternatively there are board games for a quieter diversion. Massages are also available on request.

Beside the quiet, eastern end of Anse Volbert beach, **Les Villas d'Or** is a lovely self-catering option within easy access of the village's restaurants and shops. From its smart gold signage to well-tended gardens and efficient management, this is a high-quality property. There are 12 spacious, well-equipped villas, two of which are two-bedroom family villas, set around planted gardens. The villas themselves are traditional in style with brick walls, green corrugated-iron roofs and broad wooden terraces. Inside they are



fitted with lovely hand-crafted furniture and an array of mod-cons, including a DVD player. (A selection of DVDs is available to borrow.)

The villas are primarily for self-catering, although continental breakfasts with fresh fruit are delivered daily – and free evening transport is offered to local restaurants. This isn't a place for the very active (you'll often have the swimming pool to yourself), but it's a great place just to relax and we recommend booking well in advance.

On a blissfully quiet section of Anse Volbert, **Acajou Hotel** is a friendly, original and well-run hotel, ideally located for a seaside holiday. 'Acajou' refers to the mahogany wood (sourced from sustainable forests) that characterises most of the hotel's 32 log-cabin-style rooms. Housed in two groups of mirror-image buildings, and a newer deluxe seafront house, the rooms are spacious and thoughtfully furnished with a private balcony.

Acajou has a central pool, a tropical garden filled with hibiscus, frangipani, takamaka and casuarina trees, a small gym, a massage room, a boutique and internet facilities. There are also two restaurants and a beach bar, and the village is a pleasant walk along the sand.

In the heart of the Côte d'Or, **Côte d'Or Chalets** is a good self-catering option for families on a budget. The seven semi-detached chalets offer pleasant accommodation, each with a spacious and clean bedroom, small kitchenette and a shady timber deck. Chalets can be interconnected for families or groups, and the friendly local owners will cook Creole dinners on request.

The chalets do not overlook the sea, but are less than a minute's walk down the path to the beautiful beach and sheltered waters of Anse Volbert, while shops, restaurants and a watersports centre are all close.

In the heart of Anse Volbert village, **Les Lauriers Petit Hotel** is also a block back from the beach, in lush tropical gardens. This cheerful and good-value hotel has six en-suite rooms, each with air con, minibar, tea- and coffee-making facilities and a terrace. There are also eight new free-standing villas, with a TV and WiFi added to the mix, and a larger bathroom. Whilst not luxurious, the rooms are comfortable and the location good: it's a short wander down to local eateries and the beach, so car hire is not essential.



Les Lauriers also has its own ice-cream bar and a popular open-sided restaurant – complete with a life-size boat – which offers a Creole buffet and daily barbecue. Edwin, one of the friendly owners, runs fishing, snorkelling and island-hopping trips.

Minutes from the stunning sands of Anse Volbert, the family-run **Le Duc de Praslin** has 27 en-suite rooms. Of these, 21 are new and highly contemporary with beautifully decorated interiors: dark timber furniture, crisp white bed linen, crushed silk curtains and pearlescent shell lampshades. There are stylish bathrooms, private garden-view terraces and a great selection of mod-cons as standard. Six older rooms do not have the same luxuries, but are spacious and tastefully decorated.

Most rooms face the central garden, with its swimming pool, jacuzzi, main lounge and a network of koi-filled streams. There is also a small spa offering massages and a library with internet connection. Le Dauphin Restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner as well as authentic Creole cuisine. Guests also have the option of dining at the funky, beachfront Café des Arts (one of the

best restaurants in Seychelles), which is barely 100m away. The management team is excellent and always on hand for planning guided or independent excursions.

Day Trips from Praslin

Excursions to Praslin's neighbouring islands and marine wonders are easily arranged during your stay. Some of the more popular places to visit include:

La Digue: Only 30 minutes on the ferry and yet a step back in time to a far slower pace of island life. See pages 258-259 for more on this island.

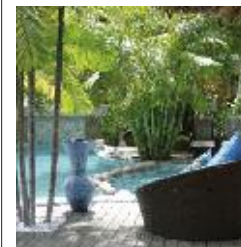
Curieuse Marine National Park: The diversity of this marine park, which boasts coco de mer palms on the hillside as well as diving at Pointe Rouge and snorkelling around St Pierre, make for a great day out in close proximity.

Coco Marine National Park: Another easy boat trip, Coco offers gentle, fish-filled snorkelling around a trio of small islets fringed by a coral reef.

Cousin Island: Only 2km from Praslin, this small granitic island managed by Nature Seychelles is significant for sea birds, endemic land birds and breeding hawksbill turtles. Weekday visits are now possible.

Aride National Park: Uninhabited bar a few conservation workers, Aride combines a colourful coral reef with native woodland, two scenic beaches and over 1.25 million breeding sea birds.

Looking from the beach, the laid-back Villas d'Or are a stone's throw away



A shady spot at Le Duc de Praslin



La Réserve stands on its own, beside forested slopes and the waters of a marine park.

Set in beautifully lush tropical gardens at the western end of Anse Volbert beach, **Paradise Sun** is a large but smart and family-friendly resort. The 80 rooms, some designed for those travelling with children, are in attractive, mainly two-storey Creole-style chalets, each facing towards the sea across palm-dotted lawns. Louvred doors, broad timber terraces and crisp natural interiors feature throughout, and though the rooms are not particularly large, they are contemporary and thoughtfully decorated.

The hotel has a pleasant pool and an excellent small spa. Friendly staff can arrange a number of complimentary activities, from canoeing and kayaking to table tennis, volleyball, board games and on Wednesdays a sunset cruise.

The only hotel within the marine national park, **La Réserve** surrounds Anse Petite Cour, a near-private, sheltered bay north of Côte d'Or. One of Praslin's most established and best hotels, this is a smart

and professional family-run place, with colourful, colonial architecture in tangerine and white, extensive gardens and a distinctly Seychellois feel.

The 40 rooms are in two very different categories – the modern 'Deluxe' rooms and the more traditionally decorated 'Superior' rooms – but all are sea-facing and of a high standard. As well as a huge, curved pool (one of the largest in Seychelles), complete with a glaciais waterfall and sunken pool bar, there are two restaurants (one extending on a jetty over the sea), a free gym and kayaks, and WiFi access (for a fee) across the entire property. Guided excursions, some complimentary, range from snorkelling trips to St Pierre and Curieuse to walking in the Vallée de Mai.

Also worth considering for a central beachfront hotel is **Village du Pêcheur**. Its 14 rooms are right in the heart of the action on Anse Volbert, though their replica Louis XVI furniture will not be to everyone's taste.



Young coco de mer palm in Vallée de Mai

Vallée de Mai

In the heart of Praslin lies one of the world's smallest natural UNESCO World Heritage Sites: **Vallée de Mai**. This remarkable palm forest, with its unique community of plants and animals, is a remnant of the prehistoric forests of Gondwanaland, the 200-million-year-old southern super-continent. The super-sized vegetation in this lush valley lends Vallée de Mai a real Indiana Jones air.

It's a magical place, with towering trees, endemic fauna (including black parrots), streams and waterfalls, and a wonderfully cool, calm atmosphere no matter what the weather. This primeval forest is also home to the magnificent coco de mer palm, which lays claim to the largest seed in the plant kingdom.

Neatly swept paths around the forest are clear and well signposted, allowing for easy navigation alone or with a guide; the small ticket office provides useful maps; and plaques along the routes highlight points of interest. It is a thoroughly engaging setting and a real must-see attraction on Praslin!

Excursions to the Vallée de Mai can be easily arranged from most of the island's hotels whilst you're on holiday, or pre-booked with us before you leave home.



The iconic coco de mer

