

LA DIGUE ISLAND

The fourth-largest inhabited island of Seychelles, La Digue covers only 10km² and its population of just over 2,000 people enjoy a decidedly unhurried existence. A trip to the island, just 6km east of Praslin, and accessed only by daily ferries, is like stepping back in time. Colourful ox-carts still provide transport, priorities revolve around simple pleasures, and a leisurely pace prevails.

Since the production of copra and vanilla declined, a handful of hotels and guesthouses have opened. These have been joined by a few restaurants, artists' studios and watersports operators, yet much of the island's appealing simplicity remains. La Digue boasts one of Seychelles most stunningly photogenic beaches at Anse Source d'Argent, with its powder sand and pink granite boulders, as well as a genuinely traditional Creole community. The small Veuve Nature Reserve here is also home to most of the world's 200-or-so remaining Seychelles black paradise flycatchers.

La Digue's flat roads are easy to explore. In fact, it's so simple to cycle between the beaches that staying right next to one seems unimportant. For a laid-back break, La Digue is hard to beat and merits a few days on any island-hopping holiday.

On La Digue's northern headland, **Hotel L'Océan** is a funky little establishment filled with all sorts of curiosities; marine mosaic murals adorn the walls, and mermaid

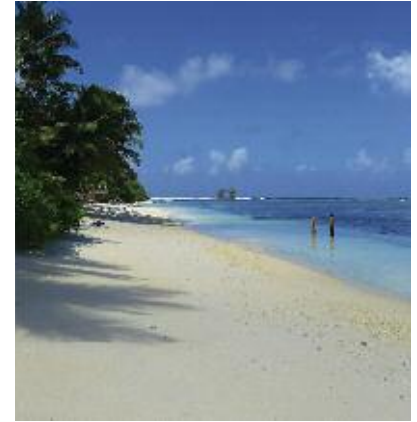
statues are dotted around the garden. The entertaining staff are keen to ensure that guests have an enjoyable stay.

The hotel stands on a gentle hillside, surrounded by palms and granite boulders, its three terraced levels benefiting from cooling breezes. The eight en-suite rooms all face the ocean with terrific views from their balconies, and naturally themed interiors. Timber, palm, shell and bleached coral all feature against a backdrop of white walls.

The popular Patatran Restaurant serves Creole fare at tables which are as creatively decorated as the rooms. There is no swimming pool, but the ocean is across the road and there are many beaches nearby. Geared mainly to adult visitors, this is a fresh and fun hang-out, within easy access of the village and beach.

La Digue's most stylish accommodation, **Le Domaine de l'Orangerie**, straddles a quiet road beside the sea. Here spacious villas stand in immaculate tropical gardens which are dotted with stone Buddhas and miniature Japanese pagodas. All offer a level of chic design that's in a different league from anywhere else on this island.

There are 45 villas – 10 double-storey 'Garden Villas, 31 Villas de Charme, three Villas de Charme Elégance, and one Villa Présidentielle – all located a few steps away from Anse Sévère beach. Beautifully furnished in dark timber, earthy tones and eclectic Indonesian *objets d'art*, they boast a raft of mod-cons, including WiFi, air conditioning, fans, minibars and satellite



La Digue's beaches are beautiful and often quiet

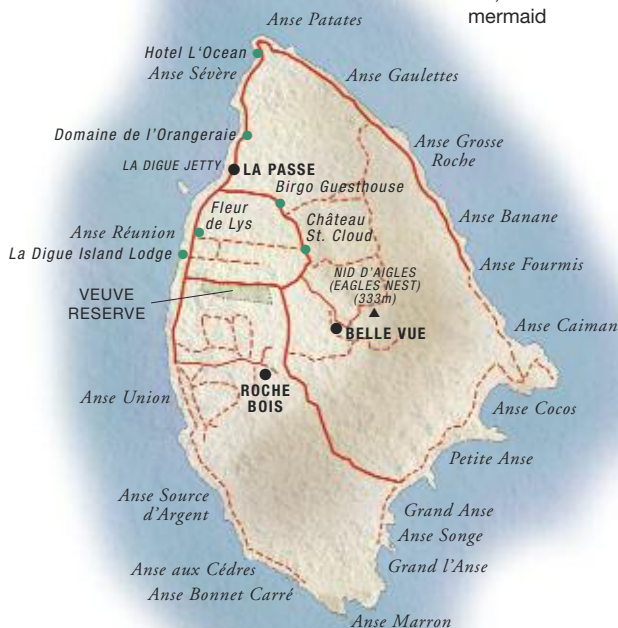
television; the Garden Villas and Villa Présidentielle also have kitchenettes. For families, some rooms can be interconnected.

Staff will prepare Creole cuisine in your 'home', or alternatively you have the choice of eating in the all-day dining area which offers a selection of Mediterranean signature menus with Creole and Asian influences. New in 2011 were a spa and a boutique; we await the opening of a swimming pool and fitness centre.

A five-minute cycle ride from the nearest beach, **Birgo Guest House** is tucked away on a quiet, leafy inland road. It's a low-key, island-style guest house with pleasant rooms, basic facilities, a swimming pool and local staff. Set in well-tended gardens, boasting a trickling water feature and the odd strutting cockerel, are eight en-suite rooms. The majority of these are simple, older 'Superior' rooms, in traditional terraces with stone walls, red tin roofs and



All rooms at Hotel L'Océan have sea views



a broad front veranda. More recently, two immaculate, airy 'Deluxe' rooms have been added, offering more space and modern, if slightly offbeat, décor.

There is a spacious, open-sided reception-cum-lounge, but no restaurant. (Only bed and breakfast is offered, although we can arrange half-board in conjunction with Château St Cloud.) Birgo is simple and not on the seafront, but it is very reasonably priced and a lovely place to stay, with a friendly island vibe.

Built for French owners at the height of the Napoleonic era, **Château St Cloud** lies in the quiet, lush centre of the island, at the foot of La Digue's tallest peak, Belle Vue. Yet given its striking grey-and-white manor-house appearance and colonial history, the hotel itself is a surprisingly informal retreat.

The 14 rooms here vary enormously in size, style and location, with some comfortably capable of accommodating a family of two adults and two children. Timber hillside cabins offer private terraces and seclusion for those who don't mind the steep access; contemporary 'deluxe' suites in the plantation house have vast and lovely interiors; and simple 'standard' rooms surround the swimming pool.

If you are happy to accept the 10-minute trip to the sea and opt for one of the hotel's larger rooms, Château St Cloud is a good choice, with spacious grounds, a Creole restaurant and a relaxed atmosphere.

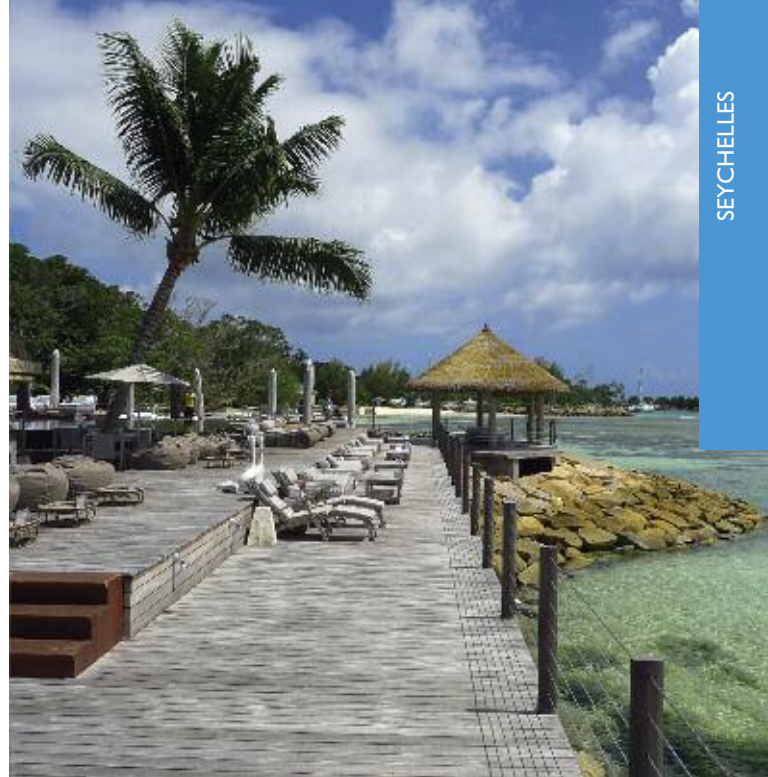
Established 15 years ago by a Scottish-Seychellois couple, Ron and Mary, **Fleur de Lys** is an immaculate little self-catering complex of eight carefully crafted island bungalows. Well spaced around an open tropical garden, the bungalows' green-tin, pagoda-style roofs, timber latticework and

brilliant whitewashed walls are built with care and are well maintained.

Inside, the open-plan living/dining room, and the en-suite bedroom are light, bright and cool, with comfortable furnishings, if a little lacking in Creole character. The kitchen is well equipped for those keen to self cater, though access to local restaurants is easy, and staff are willing to prepare a homemade Creole meal with notice. The nearest beach is about 150m away, but bike access puts others within easy striking distance. Fleur de Lys is a reliably good, well-priced option.

The expansive resort of **La Digue Island Lodge** is strung along the lovely sandy stretch of Anse Réunion beach, on the western coast of La Digue. Set in manicured tropical gardens, its 70 rooms, in five separate categories, make this La Digue's largest property by far. Fortunately it is spread over a large area, and so retains a fairly low-impact feel. At its most rudimentary, the picturesque Yellow House offers very basic rooms in a National Heritage building which has been preserved, largely unaltered, since the 1900s. These rooms fall far below the standard of the modest, motel-style rooms of Le Petit Village, which have a garden setting away from the sea. However, both give access to the resort's facilities at very reasonable rates.

Most of the lodge's other rooms are distinctive, palm-thatched, A-frame chalets dotted around the gardens. Sub-divided into Beach Chalets and Garden Chalets, each of these appealing A-frames has a double bedroom, an en-suite bathroom, and a small mezzanine upper deck which can accommodate two older children. Although not flash, these afford interesting,



comfortable accommodation. The whitewashed Beach House offers nine large, slightly dated rooms, all overlooking the beach.

Anse Réunion's palm-fringed, sandy shore is lined with palm parasols and sunbeds, and you'll also find a good-size swimming pool, a beachfront restaurant, a boutique and a PADI dive centre.

Given its location and facilities, La Digue Island Lodge should be fantastic. However, like much on the island, it is in something of a time warp – so whilst it is good, it is not exceptional. Come here for a central, reliable base, which offers comfortable accommodation, reasonable service and access to a lovely beach; don't come expecting an exclusive, luxury retreat.

Water Restrictions

Between June and September, when rainfall is low, water restrictions are sometimes imposed across the island of La Digue. This usually means that mains water will not be available for some of the time, typically 1–4pm and 10pm–6am, although timings do change. For the vast majority of the time, although there are no formal water limitations in place on La Digue, it's worth remembering that water is a precious commodity on the island and is best not wasted.

Domaine de l'Orangerie: La Digue's trendiest place

Getting around La Digue

La Digue has few private vehicles. When you arrive on the ferry, we'll arrange for a transfer to take you to your hotel. This is likely to be in a small mini-van, or even an ox-cart. Most hotels offer bicycle hire and this is how people generally get around the island – on mostly flat, smooth coastal roads with very light traffic; it will also help you to keep fit and work on your tan!



Life is slow on La Digue – travel is mostly by bike or ox and cart