



## INTRIGUING LA DIGUE

This diamond-shaped island is one of the most alluring destinations in the Seychelles. Read on to discover why. BY KALPANA SUNDER

**Indian Ocean Idyll**  
Clockwise from above: Soaking up the sun on Grand Anse Beach; granite boulders line the shores of Anse Source D'Argent; a souvenir shop at L'Union Estate.

Of the 115 islands in the Seychelles, few beg to be explored more than La Digue. With its lapis lazuli waters, Creole culture, and regular ferry services that easily link it to the main islands of Praslin and Mahé, it certainly sees its fair share of visitors. Yet it's managed to stay happily laid-back nonetheless, traversed by more brightly colored ox-carts than cars. It's the fourth-largest island in the archipelago, but still small enough (at 10 square kilometers) that you can easily make your way around its



coast by bike, the preferred mode of transportation in these parts. Here's where to point your handlebars ...

**STRAIGHT TO THE SHORE** There's no shortage of idyllic beaches on La Digue, whose surrounding reefs are home to sea turtles, stingrays, octopuses, and a multitude of colorful fishes. The two best snorkeling spots are **Anse Sévère** and **Anse Source d'Argent**, both on the west coast. The latter is among the most beautiful beaches in the Indian Ocean, with scalloped, palm-lined coves and sculptural granite formations that have been used as the backdrop for advertising campaigns for Bacardi rum, Campari, and Bounty chocolate bars. In the southeast, the waters of **Grand Anse** may have currents that are too dangerous for swimming, but its shores provide a perfect lunch stop with beachside restaurants serving beers and grilled fish.

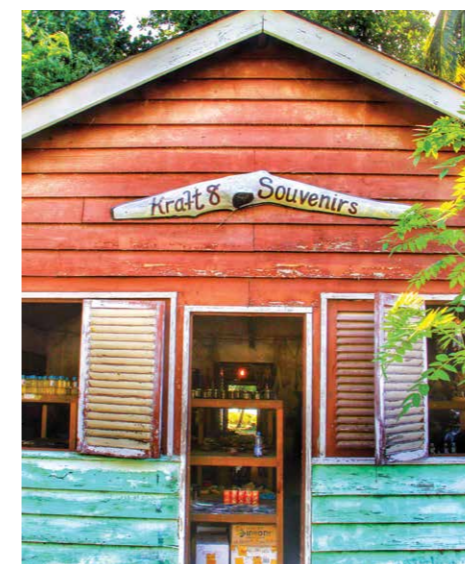
**A PLANTATION TURNED PARK** Spread over 300 hectares at the southern end of the island is **L'Union Estate**, a former vanilla and coconut plantation that's now a state park. These two crops were once the primary sources of income for La Digue, and here, visitors can watch how coconut oil is traditionally made, from husking the fruits to processing them

in an ox-driven mill and bottling the finished product. Also on the grounds is the original plantation house, trails for horseback riding, and a colonial-era cemetery of mossy grave-stones where some of the island's first settlers were laid to rest.

**CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL** The oldest denizens of the island are the Aldabra giant tortoises, most readily seen roaming in a spacious enclosure on the grounds of L'Union. Birders, meanwhile, will want to venture to the western side of the island, where the 21-hectare **La Veuve Reserve** is the world's only natural habitat of the black paradise flycatcher, known locally as *la veuve*, or "the widow." You might also spot the Seychelles bulbul or red fody flitting through the reserve's takamaka trees.

**A FEAST OF CREOLE FARE** La Digue's spicy food is best sampled at the open-air restaurants of **Zerof Guesthouse** (248/423-4067; zerofguesthouses.com) and **Chateau St. Cloud Hotel** (248/423-4356; chateau-stcloud.com), where buffet tables are laden with Creole curries, grilled tuna and grouper, lentil soup, papaya and mango chutneys, and palm-hearts salad.

**THE PERFECT SPOT FOR SUNSET** Leave ample time in the late afternoon to pedal up the west coast to La Passe, the island's main village. Along the way, you'll pass through sleepy lanes of breadfruit and casuarina trees and pretty Creole homes with high sloping roofs, shuttered windows, and trellised gardens. A seat at the oceanfront **Tarosa Café** (248/423-4407) is exactly where you'll want to be when the sun sets behind the boat-filled harbor. ●



KALPANA SUNDER

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