

Travel through time at the Vallée de Mai

A UNESCO World Heritage Site with a difference



(Main and cropped) Waterfall Vallée de Mai
Credit Gerard Larose

in the world, and inhale the sweet smell of a freshly husked Coco de Mer. Moving on, you have the choice of several well-maintained paths of varying lengths to take through the forest. The forest is accessible to all with some parts suitable for wheelchairs and buggies. It is worthwhile taking the longer path if you have the time in order to truly experience this majestic forest.

As you wander through the maze of towering palms listen out for the high-pitched melodious call of the Seychelles Black Parrot, floating through the forest. These elusive birds stay high in the canopy so when you hear their calls take the time to stop and look up. The parrots are particularly fond of the fruits of the endemic palms, and once you find some the cheeky parrots should not be too far away.

Pause at any streams that you cross to look for Seychelles Tree Frogs resting on the palm leaves. These green frogs are nocturnal so are more active at night, but with a well trained eye they can be picked out from the similarly green background of the leaves. Freshwater pools

A visit to the Vallée de Mai is to travel through time to when dinosaurs ruled the earth and man was a mere speck on the evolutionary horizon. Evoking images of Jurassic Park, this prehistoric forest is of international importance, which is reflected by its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

On arrival at the Vallée de Mai you are welcomed at the modern and tasteful visitor centre, which has wheelchair access. Not only does it provide basic amenities such as toilets, lockers and car parking, the centre also has a well-stocked café serving a variety of fresh local products to revive you before or after your journey through the forest. Why not enjoy an ice-cold juice made from local fruits before starting on your adventure?

After purchasing your ticket the journey begins! When you arrive at the gate to this ancient forest take a minute to examine the Coco de Mer nuts and catkins at the shelter. Feel how heavy the Coco de Mer nut is, the largest seed



The smiling Giant Bronze Gecko is often found on male Coco de Mer catkins photo by L Chong-Seng

close by are also home to endemic freshwater crabs and crayfish, often found hiding under the rocks.

On your way up to the viewpoint you can try to spot one of the other giants of the forest, the Giant Bronze Gecko. This prehistoric looking reptile is often seen feeding on the flowers of the male Coco de Mer catkins. Their large, bronze bodies are unmistakable and they seem to have a permanent smile. Several other species of geckos are encountered in the forest as well, and the brightly coloured day gecko is the most conspicuous. This vibrant green gecko also loves feeding on the Coco de Mer catkins but can be seen lower down on the trunks of the palm. Enjoy the spectacular view over the Vallée de Mai from the viewpoint and keep your eyes peeled for some of Seychelles' other endemic bird species, including the noisy Seychelles Bulbul, softly spoken Seychelles Blue Pigeon and the flighty Seychelles Sunbird.

On your way back to the visitor centre do not forget to look out for the six endemic species of palm, found only in Seychelles. These can be hard to tell apart so it is best to take one of the free guided tours with one of the knowledgeable Seychelles Islands Foundation (SIF) staff, available every day. These free tours are invaluable in unlocking the secrets of the forests and making your visit even more memorable. After such an action-packed and incredible experience don't forget to visit the Vallée de Mai souvenir shop before you leave. With a wide variety of products on offer you are bound to find something suitable to remind you of your visit. Why not a Coco de Mer key ring, or an 'I love Vallée de Mai' mug? Remember that the Vallée de Mai is managed by SIF, a public trust, and that proceeds from the Vallée de Mai go towards the management and protection not only of the Vallée de Mai but Aldabra Atoll, Seychelles' other UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Of course to make even more of your visit to the Vallée de Mai, download our free Vallée de Mai app before you go! Free to download from iTunes app store or Google Play, this virtual guide gives more information on the Vallée de Mai and what you can expect during your visit.

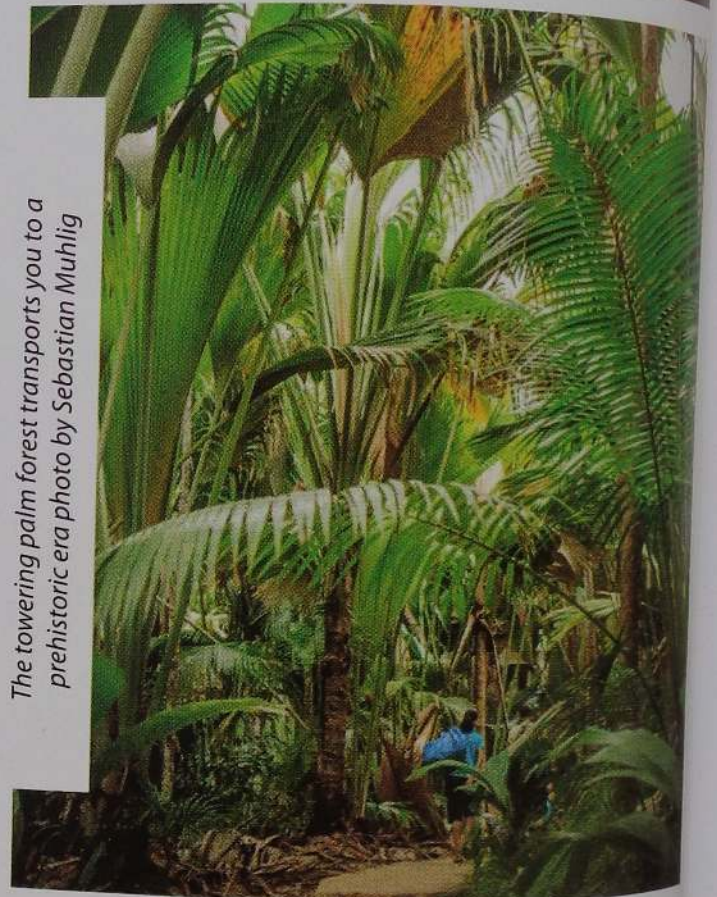
For more information go to www.sif.sc or @SIF_Seychelles, or follow the Seychelles Islands Foundation page on Facebook.



The Seychelles Tree Frog can be found near freshwater streams photo by D Pouponeau



The towering palm forest transports you to a prehistoric era photo by Sebastian Muhlig



Look for the Seychelles Black Parrot high in the tree canopy photo by B Koch

