

LETTERS FROM THE EDGE

SEAFOOD AND SPICE IN THE SEYCHELLES

AFRICA



Seychelles

WHERE ON EARTH



SEAFOOD and SPICE



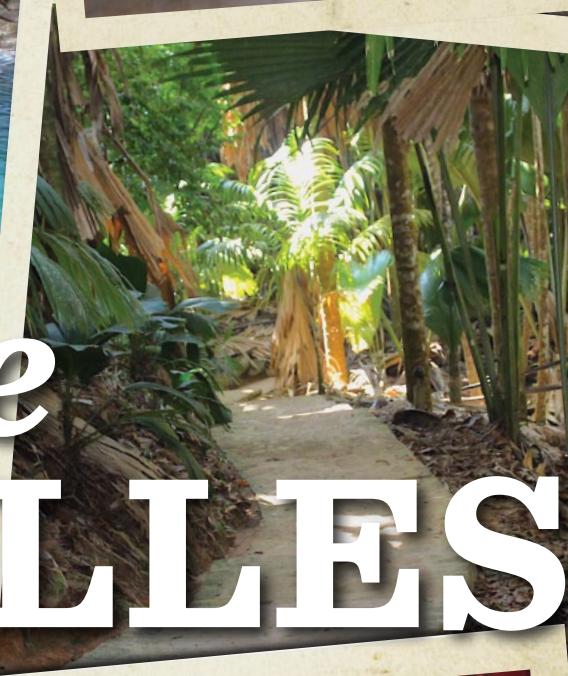
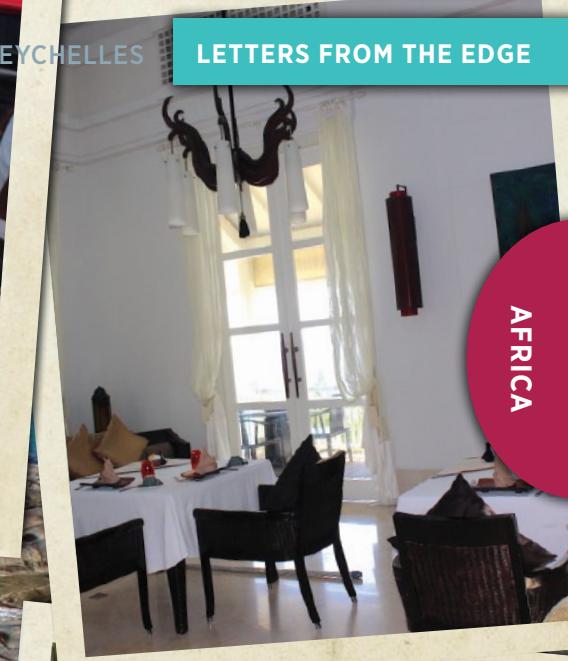


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by **ELYSE GLICKMAN**

in the **SEYCHELLES**

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE
FROM TOP LEFT The Nest Exterior; Selwyn Clark Market; Victoria Mahe Church; Fruit arriving at the Selwyn Clark Market; Banyan Tree Dining room; Valee De Mai Trail; Spice Vendor display; Banyan Ceviche; Seytea Vanilla Iced Tea; Takamaka Rum Stills; Freshly caught fish.
MAIN PHOTO Fleming's view.





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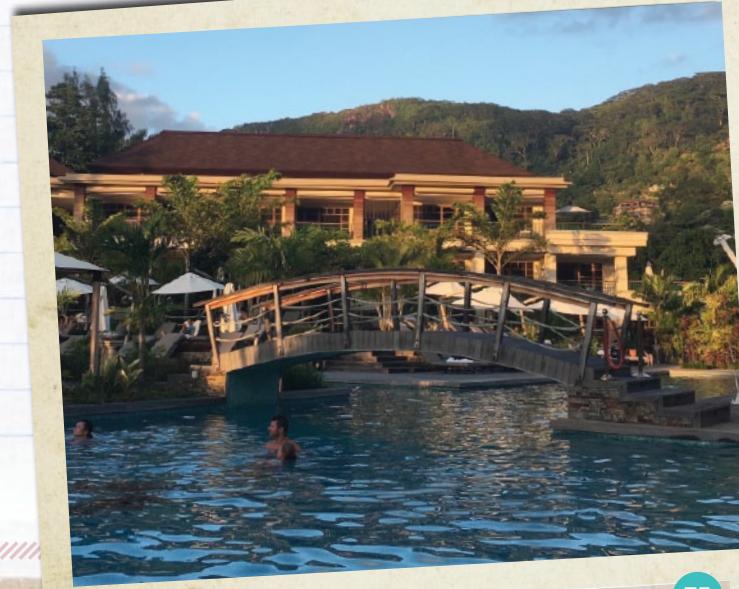
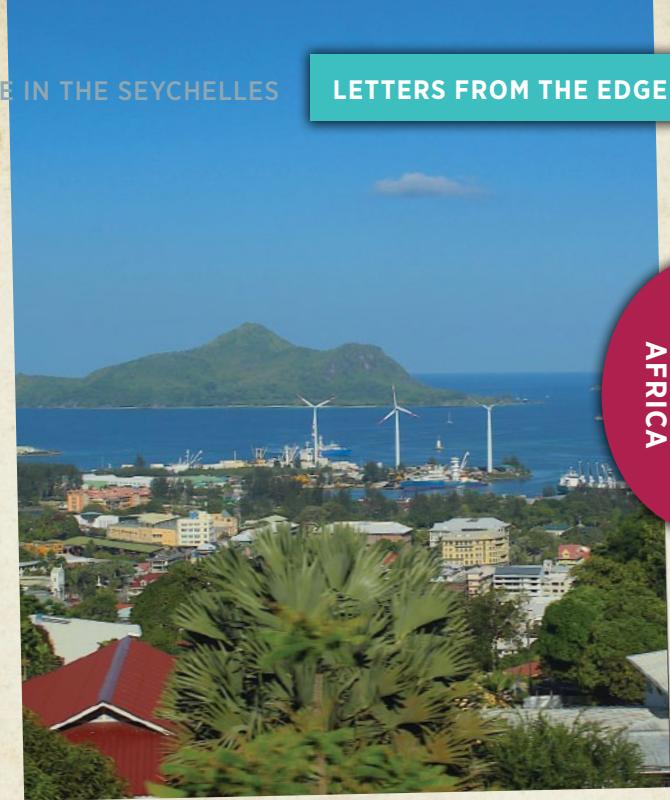
**PHOTOS THIS SPREAD
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT**
Peacocks can be found wandering around the hotel grounds; Selwyn Clark Market vendors; Overlooking Victoria from the hotel; Grilled meat at the Night Market; Savoy Pool bridge.



THE SEYCHELLES ARCHIPELAGO has an air of mystery to it, between its serene natural setting, reputation as a playground for the rich and famous, and notoriety for offshore bank accounts and secret dealings. Perhaps, not surprisingly, it helped author Ian Fleming begin the next phase of 007 James Bond's career in 1958. When not brainstorming inside his suite at The Northolme (the present day Hilton Seychelles Northolme Resort and Spa) and taking in Beau Vallon Beach's pristine vistas, Fleming was off on snorkelling jaunts, hikes in the lush greenery and searches for Seychellois pirate legends and lore. Those adventures found their way into the short stories that filled his eighth book, *For Your Eyes Only*.

The islands' reputation as a feast for the senses has also drawn generations of honeymooners and family travellers from Europe and South Africa, who have easier access thanks to shorter, less expensive flights than tourists from North America. While travel to the Seychelles is still a major undertaking for American and Canadian travellers (averaging about 24 hours from most major cities), airlines such as Ethiopian and Emirates have added more routes to the region and Ethiopian has recently endeavored to make the journey more affordable.

Anybody willing to go the distance will discover the Seychelles are every bit as inspiring as Fleming found them. The islands as they exist today are delightfully approachable and down to earth, even with a preponderance of luxury hotels 007 himself would approve of. As a nation culturally and geographically aligned with the African continent, the Seychelles have a different mood from South Pacific destinations such as Hawaii, Fiji and Tahiti, as well as lighter tourist crowds. The food is perfectly suited for the climate and an active outdoor lifestyle – with light, healthy dishes (deep-fried foods are few and far between) that are bright and flavourful. Though chicken is available, the local pride is the regionally sourced Indian Ocean fish.»





SERVES 1

Ginger and Pineapple Mojito

A REFRESHING island libation from Takamaka Distillery.

Mint Leaves 4-5, muddled	Syrup 2 Tbs	Soda Water $\frac{1}{2}$ cup
Fresh Lime Juice 1 Tbs	Fresh Pineapple $\frac{1}{4}$ cup, pureed	Mint Sprig for garnish
Ginger Simple	Light Rum 60 ml	Lime Slice for garnish

- 1 IN a cocktail shaker place the rum, lemon juice, pineapple puree, ginger syrup, mint leaves and three ice cubes and shake well.
- 2 POUR into a tumbler and top up with soda water.
- 3 ADD some fresh mint leaves and a lime slice, and enjoy cold.

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

Ginger Simple Syrup

White Sugar $\frac{1}{2}$ cup	Fresh Ginger 1 thumb, peeled and cubed	Powdered Ginger $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp
Water 1 cup		

- 1 PLACE all the ingredients in a saucepan and bring to a boil, stirring continuously to dissolve the sugar.
- 2 REDUCE to a simmer for 5 minutes.
- 3 REMOVE from the heat and let cool.
- 4 REFRIGERATE until needed. Remove the chunks of ginger before serving.

On the Market

Even if your hotel offers the most spectacular breakfast buffet, make it a point to spend a morning in Victoria, the Seychelles capital, at the start of your trip. In addition to its several cultural points of interest, and proximity to docks where inter-island tours originate, Sir Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke Market (or Victoria Market, as locals refer to it) offers ultimate cultural and sensory immersion starting at 4:00 am and hitting full steam around 9:30 am. It's the one place where a melting pot of French, British, Indian, Middle Eastern and East African influences can be fully appreciated.

Although the mid-19th-century market was remodelled in 1999, the presence of residents and cooks doing their daily shopping at the no-frills grid of stalls gives visitors a genuine sense of place, even with souvenir vendors and interesting boutiques occupying the second level. Fishmongers have a strong presence, figuratively and literally, selling freshly caught dorado, kingfish, grouper, barracuda, red snapper, tuna and bonito. These are balanced out by about as many spice vendors selling fresh turmeric, cardamom, ginger, coriander, garlic, pepper, caraway, mustard seeds and chili. While some of the produce vendors sell familiar fruits and vegetables, others display varieties grown in the islands that often end up plated alongside a fine hotel or restaurant's catch of the day.

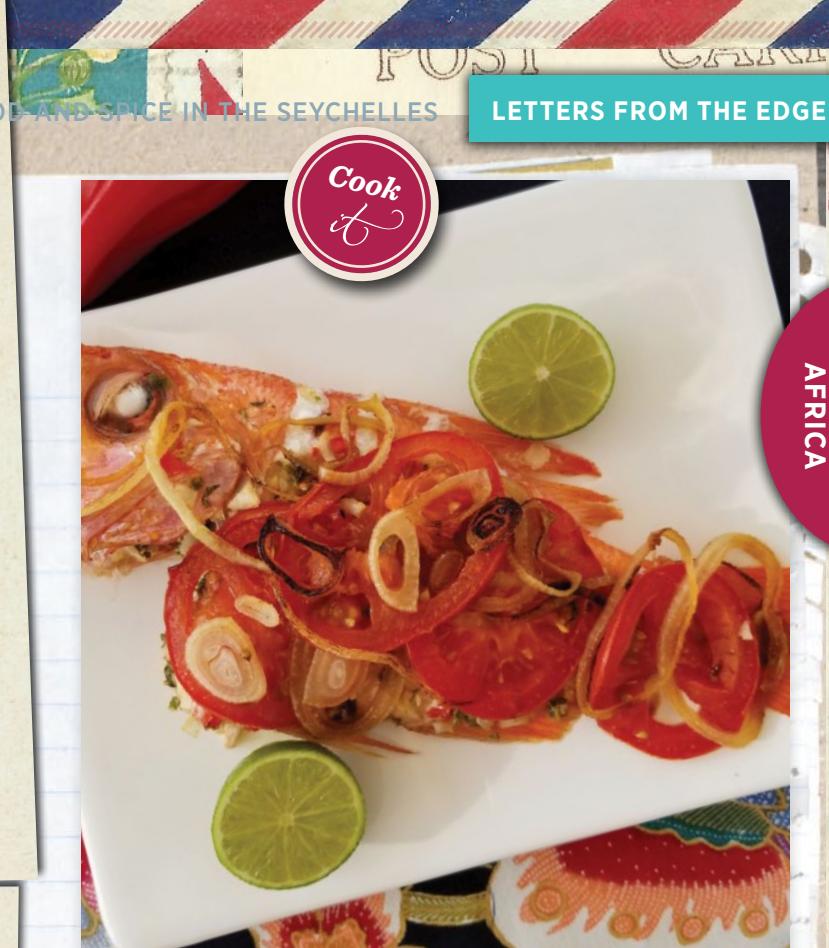
Serious home cooks will want to visit the market to take in the advice vendors freely share regarding the best ways to mix and match herbs and spices to attain the perfect Seychellois Creole sauce or seasoning for a given dish, as well as the best ways to prepare and cook different types of seafood and fish. They'd be wise to pick up some Seytea (eight US dollars for a 100-bag box), a delicious tea with rich, natural overtones of vanilla and tropical fruit meant to be served iced and sold prepared at stalls throughout the islands, topped with a slice of orange.

On Wednesday and Sunday nights, the boardwalk flanking Fleming's beloved Beau Vallon Beach on Mahé transforms into the Bazar Labrin market. While one will find the requisite souvenir shops, a stroll also offers live entertainment and stalls (many of them family-run) specializing in fresh grilled chicken, fish and other Seychelles Creole dishes such as jerk chicken (very different from its Jamaican counterpart), octopus curry, lightly-charred and slightly spicy sausages, skewers and grilled vegetables atop well-used charcoal grills.

Beachside alternatives providing relief from the resorts' nightly themed buffets on non-market nights include La Perle Noire (Italian fare), Baobab Pizzeria »



PHOTOS THIS PAGE FROM TOP Hilton Resort Fish Luncheon; Selwyn Clark Market; Takamaka Rum display.



SERVES 4-6

Red Snapper Creole Style

FRESH FISH WITH a Creole sauce is a classic dish found throughout the islands. This recipe is from Fish & Seafood Recipes of the Seychelles Islands by Flavien Joubert.

Whole Red Snapper
1 x 1 ½-2 kg

Garlic 30 g, crushed

Fresh Ginger
30 g, crushed

Parsley
20 g, chopped

Thyme 20 g, chopped

Fresh Red Chili
10 g, chopped

Whole Lemon
1, juiced

Onions
100 g, finely chopped

Onions 300 g, sliced

Tomatoes
600 g, sliced

Vegetable Oil
60 ml, divided

Salt and Freshly Ground Black Pepper to taste

1 **CLEAN** the fish well and make three large incisions on both sides with a sharp knife.

2 **MIX** the garlic, ginger, parsley, thyme, chili, lemon juice, chopped onions and seasoning. Fill up the incisions on both sides of the fish, and rub more of the mixture on both sides. Marinate for two hours.

3 **PLACE** the fish on a baking tray with the remaining marinade and coat with 35 ml of the oil. Bake in an oven pre-heated to 175°C for 15 minutes.

4 **HEAT** the remaining 30 ml of oil in a skillet and brown the sliced onions and tomatoes. Place the mixture on top of the fish. Bake for another 15 minutes.

5 **SERVE** with rice and chutney.

«and Mahé, serving a variety of regional Indian dishes. Those looking for homegrown alternatives on Praslin Island can check out Village Takeaway while La Digue (home to the world's most photographed beach) offers Snack Bellvue as an alternative to hotel fare. Higher-end restaurants outside of the resorts (such as La Grande Maison and Chez Jules) have a strong French influence, minus a lot of the heavy cream sauces and rich ingredients associated with the motherland.

A diving and sightseeing excursion with Creole Tours includes an unexpected cooking lesson after a two-hour hike through Moyenne Island's Saint Anne Marine National Park. A barbecue marinade, which is applied to pork ribs, fish, and chicken, is prepared from scratch before our eyes, adding an extra taste of authenticity to the day of exploration.

The Lush Life

Alongside some of the biggest names in luxury resorts (Four Seasons, Hilton, Kempinski), several lesser known (but equally swanky) resorts offer some interesting spins on Seychellois fare.

The H Resort Seychelles goes big, starting with its hangar-sized "Creole rock house" lobby adorned with mosaic murals crafted with tiles from the same Italian ceramic artisans whose work adorns the Vatican. There is an interesting array of restaurants, including Trader Vic's Seychelles, Seyshima's Japanese-Creole fusion, plus Vasco's and 1502, nodding to Portugal's influence on local history. The catch of the day at Eden, a restaurant with a simple Creole menu and beach views, was a "Captain Blanc" (a white fish similar to halibut) lightly marinated in citrus, grilled, and then smothered with peppers, zucchini and mango salsa.

The Constance Lemuria Resort on Praslin also fuses five-star elegance with respectful adherence to Seychelles' Creole culture. Guests are greeted with striking Afro-French architecture and décor and a check-in offering of Theodore Tea Paris or freshly squeezed fruit juice and French pastries. The Seychelles' only 18-hole golf course is one of the resort's biggest draws and the exotic vibe introduced in the lobby carries seamlessly into its bars and restaurants. The main restaurant and bar Diva has a hip jet-setter feel, while The Nest keeps dining down to earth and low key, even if lunch is a multi-coursed affair that includes seared tuna with tropical fruit, spicy grilled shrimp, grilled tuna topped with a zesty tomato and pepper sauce, and desserts served with house-made coconut ice cream.

A small plot of land on Mahé that was a private getaway for friends George Harrison and Peter Sellers (Ian Fleming was clearly not the only famous Brit bewitched by the islands) was transformed 15 years ago into The Banyan Tree Seychelles, an intimate Colonial-style "sanctuary for the senses." Lunch here included a mixed fish ceviche with red, green and yellow



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The Hilton's James Bond Bar; Takamaka Rum machinery; Moyenne Island; A turtle crossing; A romantic table at The Nest.



peppers; Creole sauce-topped grilled halibut with greens and breadfruit puree, and fried bananas with coconut ice cream. Among the resort's several dining outlets, offering Thai, Arabic and international fare, is Creole restaurant La Varangue, decorated in tribute to the celebrities' island adventures.

The Seychelles' Sweet Spot

While Trois Frères Distillery has been in existence only since 2002, its seven Takamaka rums were over 200 years in the making. Jean-Francois Jorre de St Jorre built La Plaine St André in 1792, with a goal to bring the islands' agricultural riches to Europe. His plantation thrived through the farming tropical spices for export, cultivating medicinal plants, maintaining copra kilns (for drying coconut meat), and distilling cinnamon and patchouli.

When the original plantation was repurposed as a boutique inn and restaurant, brothers Richard and Bernard d'Offay found a creative way to preserve Jorre de St Jorre's legacy in liquid form. Plants growing on the property are still producing herbs and spices integral to the recipes making up Takamaka's collection of small-batch rums. Other key ingredients that make rums timeless and classic include artesian spring water, sugar from an independent cooperative of farmers covering four different regions of Mahé, and molasses.

The best-selling Dark Spiced Rum is a versatile and smooth spirit carrying notes of vanilla creme brûlée and bananas. Extra Noir consists of rums aged in bourbon and French oak barrels and blended, while St André, which the d'Offay brothers describe as their crown jewel, is aged for eight years in American Oak. The line is rounded out with several white rums suited for cocktails and infusions, along with a white over-proof rum perfect for powerful punches that still allow the flavours of the other cocktail ingredients to shine through.

Daily tours are regularly scheduled at the distillery, starting with an opportunity to feed sugar cane stalks into special machinery that processes cane into the liquid foundation of the rum. Stills, distillation equipment and aging barrels are housed in buildings once used to store products from the harvests. The discussion of the distillation process culminates in a tasting session inside the property's free-standing boutique where rum enthusiasts and new converts can sample and purchase the seven varieties of Takamaka, and other rum-related gifts. 



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www.hresortseychelles.com

Constance Lemuria Praslin
www.constancehotels.com/en/hotels-resorts/seychelles/lemuria

Banyan Tree Seychelles
www.banyantree.com/en/seychelles/Seychelles

Savoy Seychelles Resort & Spa
www.savoy.sc

Trois Frères Distillery
www.takamakarum.com

Los Angeles-based writer ELYSE GLICKMAN's last story for TASTE & TRAVEL was about Bergen.