

Wetland Tourism: Seychelles - Port Launay Wetlands



Seychelles, Port Launay Ramsar Site sign © Environment Department - Seychelles

The Port Launay Wetlands cover an area of 120.6 hectares on the western coast of Mahé, the main island in the Seychelles. The wetlands are one of the highest-diversity mangrove areas in the Seychelles, having all the seven species of mangroves (*Rhizophora mucronata*, *Bruigiera gymnorrhiza*, *Sonneratia alba*, *Avicennia marina*, *Lumnitzera racemosa*, *Xylocarpus granatum*, *Ceriops tagal*) present in the region. They are also the foraging site for the Seychelles Sheath Tailed Bats (*Coleura seychellensis*), a critically endangered bat that is endemic to the Seychelles. The Port Launay

Wetlands have large areas of mud flats during low tide, as well as freshwater habitats that are continuously fed by fast-flowing rivers from the high altitude wetlands, Mare Aux Cochons, another Ramsar Site.

The Seychelles receive around 125,000 overseas tourists per year on average, and with a resident population of fewer than 100,000 people, tourism is a vital part of the islands' economy. Most overseas tourists come from Western Europe, but a growing number now also come from Japan, South Africa, China and Russia.

The Ramsar Secretariat selected 14 case studies for a publication on wetlands and sustainable tourism, to be launched at the 11th Conference of Parties, July 2012. www.ramsar.org/tourism

The Port Launay Wetlands and nearby Port Launay and the Port Glaud wetlands are together visited by an average of 4,000 visitors each year, including both local residents and overseas tourists . Both wetlands have beautiful beachfronts, and these and their dense mangrove forests are the main attractions of the sites for tourists. Viewing sunsets at these sites is especially popular. There are also some tourism activities, which are led by local guides who are organized by local hotels for their guests, local tour operators, or the National Sports Council. These activities include canoeing, walks and sightseeing.

The Port Launay Wetlands are jointly managed by the Constance Ephelia Resort, a five-star hotel that was opened adjacent to the wetlands in 2010, and

the NGO “Sustainability for Seychelles” under an arrangement with the Seychelles National Parks Authority (SNPA) and the Seychelles Department of Environment, the official management authority for the site. The Ephelia Resort is situated on two stunning beaches overlooking Port Launay Marine Reserve. By helping to protect the Reserve, the Ephelia Resort protects the high quality environment and landscape that is an important part of the resort’s attraction for tourists, and which is used in its marketing.

Tourism to the site is provided by 10-12 local tour operators, who employ trained guides to provide interpretation and guidance in the wetlands to visitors. The Ephelia Resort also provides guides for their guests as a complimentary service. No entrance fee is charged for visiting the site.



Seychelles, Ephelia Resort, © Environment Department - Seychelles



Seychelles, Mangroves, Full Growth © Environment Department - Seychelles

There are some economic benefits

for local people from the sale of crafts, souvenirs, fruits and vegetables, foods and snacks. However, as the number of tourists visiting the site is relatively low, the revenues generated from sales to tourists are also quite low. As well as the Ephelia Resort, four smaller guesthouses also benefit from being near the site.

No income is generated directly through tourism to support conservation of the site, though the Ephelia Resort does undertake awareness raising activities. So far these have included sponsoring wetland posters, T-shirts, field equipment, and the organisation of field trips, including activities for

World Wetlands Day in 2011.

Currently there are no direct threats to the site, although in the past there was clearance of mangrove areas for tourism development. The Seychelles’ strict laws on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Environmental Protection restrict indiscriminate developments throughout the islands, and the site also comes within the National Wetlands Conservation and Management Policy, under which pollutant discharges into mangrove areas are prohibited, as is pollution of wetlands and rivers.

There is a small amount of illegal cutting of mangroves for handicraft production or to make

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A Ramsar Case Study on Tourism and Wetlands

fish traps and, very occasionally, vandalism at the site. The Seychelles operates a Green Line telephone service for people to report any vandalism, encroachment, or illegal clearance, and the Environmental Police Unit responds to reports made to the Green Line.

No impacts are presently visible from tourist visitation, chiefly because the numbers of visitors at the site is still relatively low and visitor groups are well managed.

In June 2011, the Ephelia Resort and the NGO Sustainability for Seychelles were awarded a grant worth US\$40,000 to support their work on the Port Launay Wetlands. The grant is provided by a UNDP-GEF/SGP "Mainstreaming Biodiversity" project funded by the Global Environment Facility. It supports activities by the Ephelia Resort and Sustainability for Seychelles to enhance collaboration between the resort and community partners to promote better conservation of the natural areas near the resort and the Ramsar-listed mangrove swamp in Port Launay, and to raise awareness of resort staff, clients, and community of the importance of the environment and how they can help to protect it. To supplement this grant, the hotel management also providing a matching amount for this project.

Under the project, the resort has produced an

education video for clients and staff, a brochure for clients highlighting all of the environmental features of the resort, tips for having an eco-friendly holiday, and interpretive signboards to raise awareness of the importance of various habitats in the area. The resort has hosted a series of mangrove planting events involving the community and staff, focusing on regenerating degraded areas. A community workshop was held at the resort to involve all stakeholders in the development of a plan for better co-management of the mangrove swamp, which falls partly within the resort boundaries. Workshops for staff are now being planned to help them become environmental ambassadors for the resort and the community. There are also plans to develop boardwalks inside the mangrove area for visitors and locals to get in and see the beauty of the vegetation, the tidal fluctuations, and the various life forms.

The project also includes preparation of a management plan for the Port Launay site and establishment of an information centre and publication of a guidebook to the wetlands, which will add to the interpretation of the wetlands for visitors and local residents. The CBD Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development are being taken into account in preparation of the management plan.

Sources:

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www.env.gov.sc; www.egov.sc; for all the ministries and departments involving tourism, lands, agriculture

www.seychelles.travels for Seychelles Tourism board.

<http://www.constancehotels.com/ephelia-resort.html>

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