

CAPE VERDE

The Cape Verde Islands, with their natural unspoilt beauty, diverse cultures and miles of white sandy beaches offers an idyllic escape, and just five and a half hours from London, a paradise waiting to be discovered. An archipelago of 10 islands, Cape Verde is located 500 kms to the west coast of Senegal, West Africa. The islands benefit from a tropical climate, with average temperatures between 22°C and 28°C, which coupled with the warm inviting waters of the Atlantic Ocean make this a real alternative to the Caribbean and an exciting investment opportunity. Colonised by the Portuguese in the 15th Century, the islands have since gained independence and a democratic government that is striving to develop the economy by way of tourism, making this an ideal time to invest in what is tipped to be one of the world's top tourist destinations.



SAL ISLAND

Sal Island houses one of the islands' two international airports and the southern town of Santa María is becoming one of the main Cape Verdean tourist resorts. Although still relatively undiscovered, you will find various bars, restaurants, nightclubs and shops where you can soak up the local atmosphere.

With long stretches of unspoilt white sandy beaches, it is the idyllic location for those wishing to get away from it all and enjoy a spot of sunbathing and swimming in the warm waters of the Atlantic Ocean. If you're looking for a little more action you may wish to try some of the many sporting facilities available, including basketball and tennis and mini golf, or perhaps try your hand at water sports. Cape Verde has been ranked amongst the top five world windsurfing locations and

Sal and Boavista both have well equipped schools providing lessons and hire.

Those wishing to fish can opt to pass a few tranquil hours sitting quietly on the shoreline or perhaps join in the hustle and bustle on the quayside where the local restaurant owner gather to barter with the returning fishermen for their "catch of the day" or you may prefer to join one of the many fishing excursions on local boats offering Game Fishing, Pier Fishing or for those looking for a little more adventure, deep sea fishing for shark and blue Marlin.

If you want to explore more of the islands natural beauty you can stray a little further from the beaten track on foot or by bicycle. Cycle hire and hiking trips are readily available and as Sal is essentially flat there are the gentler routes for those not wishing to do anything too strenuous in the tropical heat.

There are lots of other places of interest you may wish to visit, including the salt producing lagoon formed in the crater of an extinct volcano, from which the islands takes its name. The salt pits are no longer in use but definitely worth a look. You can also visit the port town of Palmeira, where the lobster farms can be found, or the foaming lagoon and natural rock pools at Buracona, where you can dive in the underwater caves.

Diving is also popular elsewhere on the islands, and there are various local schools and clubs offering lessons and equipment for hire, allowing you to explore this mysterious underwater world amongst the many caves, reefs and tunnels to be found off the coast.

If you prefer a spot of island hopping the local boats and ferry services can provide hassle free travel and there are organised daily excursions to the equally beautiful neighbouring island of Boavista

Santiago was the first inhabited island and emerged as a commercial trading post with Africa. The economy developed mainly through the use of slave labour and has maintained a strong African flavour more so than the other islands.

Home to the second international airport, this is the biggest and more developed of the islands. Here you will find the Cape Verde capital of Praia, a lively town boasting numerous bars and restaurants and a bustling nightlife.

This is an island of contrast where in the capital city you will find yourself in noisy local markets or lively bazaars, however much of the rest of the island is rainforest with the lush greenery of exotic plants & trees. From here you can experience some stunning scenery and breathtaking landscapes and if you hike into the more mountainous regions you may even be lucky enough to spot wild monkeys in the tree tops.

Whilst the leisure activities available here are more limited than those on the island of Sal, Praia has all the energy of a large town with busy street markets and shops where you'll find no shortage of locals selling their handcrafted goods. You may prefer to take a break from the hum of city life and pass a relaxing afternoon amongst one of the many beautiful flower gardens or stroll down to the esplanades overlooking the stunning bay of Prainha. Santiago has a colourful past and a trip to the old City of Cidade Velhe is a must, providing insight into Cape Verde's exciting history. The once capital city still bears the ruins from the many battles and pirate attacks endured.

Boavista is a relaxing sanctuary of tropical

beaches and clear inviting seas. The coastline boasts over 55kms of white sands and dunes but the most beautiful beach is that at Curralinho, known locally as Santa Monica due to its similarities with its American namesake. This is a sunbather's paradise and with 16km of spectacular emerald green waters and powder fine sand you can stroll along the shore without encountering another sole for miles, whilst the steady Saharan winds and a rich underwater landscape make this a wonderland for surfers and divers.

The most eastern of the Cape Verde islands and closest to the African continent, the island derived its name from a sailor's delighted cries of "Captain, good sight (boa vista)", on spying land whilst facing a terrible storm.

The land was later given to Captain Rodrigo Alfonso for the purpose of raising cattle and remained uninhabited until the early seventeenth century when a group of Englishmen began to extract salt and the capital town of Sal-Rei (salt king) emerged.

Boavista is home to the smallest population of all of the Cape Verde islands, with the majority of its inhabitants still living in and around Sal-Rei, which bears testament to the strong colonial influences, reflected in much of the town's architecture.

The improvement in the economy attracted other industries including date farming, weaving and most notably ceramics, which continues today and a visit to the ceramics factory at Rabil is highly recommended where you will find cooking pots, floor tiles and decorative crafts still produced using typical African methods.

With prosperity came pirates and a visit to the ruins of the Duque de Bragança fort, built on the islet of Sal-Rei, provides a reminder of the numerous attacks endured in the 19th Century. Whilst new developments are in the planning, much of Boavista remains unspoilt and quieter than many of the other islands. A short drive from Sal-Rei will take you past the mountainous peaks of Rabil and Fundo das Figueiras, formations created from the island's volcanic origins. Further on you will find smaller settlements and the rural villages of Povoação Velha, Monte de Santo Antonio, and Joao Galego until you reach the most eastern point of the archipelago and the solitary lighthouse of Morro Negro.

OTHER ISLANDS

Fogo is home to a volcanic peak reaching a height of almost 3000 metres, surrounded by lush forests and the numerous fruit and coffee plantations, which previously sustained this island's economy. Whilst the hike to the summit takes a little over four hours and is quite challenging in places, it is well worth the effort to reach the natural park of Monte Velho, which offers spectacular scenery and breathtaking views of the islands.

Prior to the rise in tourism, as well as coffee, one of the island's main industries was grapes and the local wine known as Manecom is still produced here. A visit to Sao Filipe, the islands capital, is also recommended. This

beautiful city was home to many powerful land owners in the 18th century and the impressive Colonial houses and well maintained squares and plazas are a reminder of the wealth of these early European settlers.

Brava is the smallest inhabited island and also the greenest due to its height. In contrast to the beautiful beaches and secluded lagoons, the island is also renowned for its abundant gardens and tropical flowers. New developments are taking advantage of this island's abundant scenery, providing luxury accommodation with stunning views. Brava's economy is supported mainly through its agricultural produce and fishing. The Bravian people are renowned mariners and the seas are rich in fish and lobster. The island has also preserved its old commercial ties with America, to where many of its ancestors previously emigrated; importing many products from the USA and English is spoken here more widely than on many of the other Cape Verde islands

The town of Nova Sintra, at the base of the mountains in what was once an old ravine, is said to be the most beautiful of all of the Cape Verdean towns. It takes its name from Sintra in Portugal and the streets are lined with typical Portuguese houses and abundant with the glorious exotic flowers for which it is famous. A visit to the Tavares flower garden is recommended or you may prefer to spend a lazy afternoon swimming in the sheltered lagoons.



CURRENCY

The local currency is the Cape Verde Escudo (CVE), which has a fixed currency exchange rate with the Euro, of 110.265. However, the Euro is accepted in most places, with the exception of taxis, and locals offering their services at the airport will be very keen to receive a tip in euros.