

Réunion

COUNTRY PROFILE

Historical profile

The island was uninhabited until the beginning of the seventeenth century when Arab explorers called it *Diva Margabin*. The Portuguese renamed it *Ilha Santa Apolonia* and the French settlers called it *l'Île Bourbon*. After the French Revolution it was given its current name, *La Réunion*. 1642 The island was first occupied by France and was ruled as a colony. 1946 *La Réunion* became a French *Département d'Outre-Mer (DOM)* (Overseas Department). 1973 France established the headquarters of its military forces in the Indian Ocean on the island. 1974 *La Réunion* was further incorporated into the French political system and granted the status of region of France. 1983 France granted autonomy in the administration of *La Réunion* through devolution, establishing a Regional Council. 1992 A contentious newcomer to local politics, *Camille Sudre*, the owner of a pirate television station, created the *Free-DOM* party, which won the largest block of seats in the Regional Council. The result was annulled when *Sudre's* TV broadcasts for his party were deemed to have been political propaganda. 1993 The *Free-DOM* party led by *Camille Sudre's* wife, *Marguerite*, won the elections with a reduced majority. 1996 Unemployment reached 40 per cent. 1998 *Paul Vergés* was elected head of the regional council. 2001 *Gonthier Friederici* became *préfet*. 2002 *La Réunion* adopted the euro as its official currency. 2004 *Dominique Vian* took office as *préfet*. 2005 *Laurent Cayrel* was appointed *préfet*. 2006 *Pierre-Henry Maccioni* was appointed *préfet*. An estimated one-third of the population were afflicted by the mosquito-borne *chikungunya* disease which killed several hundred; the tourist industry suffered a sharp downturn and French army sanitisation crews were drafted in to spray insecticide. 2008 In local elections *Nassimah Dindar* was re-elected *Conseil Général*. She organised a broad spectrum political coalition including the *Mouvement Démocrate*

(*MoDem*) (*Democratic Movement*) with *Parti Socialiste (PS)* (*Socialist Party*), *Parti Communiste de Réunion (PCR)* (*Réunion Communist Party*), *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP)* (*Popular Movement Union*) and other various small, right-wing groupings. 2009 A new metalled road, *Route 17*, connecting the north and south of the island, was opened by *François Fillon* (*Etats Généraux (Overseas Estates General)*). 2010 Growth in tourist numbers from the EU, in the first half of the year, was up 23 per cent. *Didier Robert* was elected president of the Regional Council. Three areas of outstanding natural beauty and biodiversity, *pitons, cirques and remparts*, in the central region of the *Réunion National Park* were added to the *Unesco World Heritage list*. 2012 The second and final round of the French presidential elections, on 6 May, were won by the socialist candidate, *François Hollande*, with 51.63 per cent of the vote against incumbent *Nicolas Sarkozy* with 48.37 per cent; turnout was 80.35 per cent. On 15 May *François Hollande* took office as president and head of state. On 27 August *Jean-Luc Marx* took office as *Préfet* (high commissioner). 2013 *Cyclone Dumile* hit the island in January. Air traffic and shipping came to a standstill and power was cut to some 60,000 homes. A teenage girl was killed by a shark while swimming off the west coast on 16 July. The incident was unusual since it was only a few metres off-shore. It was the second fatal attack in 2013, the first being a surfer further off-shore.

Political structure

Constitution

The Constitution of *Réunion* is the French Constitution of 28 September 1958 (French Fifth Republic). Under the 1946 constitution of the French Fourth Republic, *La Réunion* became a *Département d'Outre-Mer (DOM)* (Overseas Department) of France. In 1974, it was granted additional status as a region of France. *La Réunion* is represented in the French National Assembly in Paris by five directly elected deputies, for five-year terms, and in the Senate by four indirectly elected senators for nine-year terms.

KEY FACTS

Official name: *La Réunion*

Head of State: President of France *François Hollande (PS)* (from 15 May 2012), represented by *Préfet Jean-Luc Marx* (from 27 Aug 2012)

Head of government: President of the *Conseil Général Nassimah Dindar* (since 2004; re-elected March 2008); President of the *Conseil Régional Didier Robert* (from 26 Mar 2010)

Ruling party: Supporters of *Didier Robert* (from Mar 2010)

Area: 2,512 square km

Population: 765,000 (2010)*

Capital: *Saint Denis*

Official language: French

Currency: Euro (€) = 100 cents

Exchange rate: €0.75 per US\$ (Jul 2013)

* estimated figure

Since 1983, following the French government's policy of decentralisation, regional councils have been elected with powers similar to those of the mainland French regions.

Administration is by a préfet appointed by the government in Paris.

Form of state

Democratic, presidential republic
Département d'Outre-Mer (DOM) (Overseas Department) of France, with additional status as a région (region) of France.

The executive

The Conseil Général (General Council) is indirectly elected by the regional council and has powers to raise a budget.

The préfet, appointed from Paris, oversees financial probity, judicial integrity and the official functions of the state. The préfet also plays a role in managing funding awarded from the EU, and has become a representative of the EU in Réunion.

National legislature

The unicameral Conseil Régional (Regional Council) has 45 members elected by proportional representation for terms of four years. Its duties include determining the demand for, among other things, investment, education, training, transport, infrastructure, tourism and the environment, by liaising with local communes and departments.

Legal system

French legal system

Last elections

March 2010 (Conseil Régional)

Results: Conseil Régional: supporters of Didier Robert won 27 seats (out of 45), Parti Communiste de Réunion (PCR) (Réunion Communist Party) 12, Parti Socialiste (PS) (Socialist Party) six; turnout was 57.33 per cent.

Next elections

2014 (Conseil Régional)

Political parties

Free-DOM (right-wing group); Parti Communiste de Réunion (PCR) (Réunion Communist Party); Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) (Gaullist Rally for the Republic); two factions of the Parti Socialiste (PS) (Socialist Party); Union pour la France (UPF) (Union for France); Union pour la Démocratie Française-Centre Démocratique Sociale (UDF-CDS) (Union for French Democracy-Social Democratic Centre). Ruling party
Supporters of Didier Robert (from Mar 2010)

Population

765,000 (2010)*

Last census: 1 January 2006: 781,962

Population density: 262 inhabitants per square km. Urban population: 69 per cent.

Annual growth rate: 1.8 per cent (2003)

Ethnic make-up

African (64 per cent), Indian (28 per cent), European (2.2 per cent) and Chinese (2.2 per cent) descent.

Religions

The majority of the population is Roman Catholic (86 per cent); there are also groups of Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists.

Education

Literacy rate: 89 per cent, adult rate (2003)

Health

Health services comply with French standards, there are some 1,270 doctors, 275 pharmacies and 17 hospitals, including clinics.

Life expectancy: 73.4 years (estimate 2003)

Fertility rate/Maternal mortality rate: 2.5 births per woman (2003)

Birth rate/Death rate: 20 births per 1,000 population; 5.5 deaths per 1,000 population (2003).

Child (under 5 years) mortality rate (per 1,000): Eight per 1,000 live births (2003)

Main cities

Saint Denis (capital, estimated population 137,687 in 2012), Saint Paul (110,309), Saint Pierre (83,451), Le Tampon (79,930), Saint André (54,174), Saint Louis (51,335), Le Port (41,982).

Languages spoken

As well as French, Creole is commonly spoken.

Official language/s

French

Media

Press

In French, *Le Journal de l'Île de la Réunion* (www.clicanoo.com) and *Temoignages* (www.temoignages.re) are published daily in St Denis. Regional publications, in English, include *APA* (www.apanews.net) and *Panapress* (www.panapress.com).

Broadcasting

RFO Réunion (<http://reunion.rfo.fr>) is the public broadcasting network providing radio and television programmes originating from France. The private TV station Antenne Réunion Télévision (www.antennereunion.fr) provides a range of local news and international programmes. All broadcasts are in French.

Other news agencies: Imaz Press Réunion, (tel: 200-656; email: fax: 200-549; email: ipr@ipreunion.com; internet: www.ipreunion.com).

Economy

La Réunion is dependent on France for 75 per cent of its GNP.

The service sector accounts for 75 per cent of GDP, of which trade, transport, telecommunications and health and social services have become the most important components of GDP; tourism brings in much welcomed foreign exchange.

Agriculture, particularly sugar cane production (representing over 50 per cent of available arable land) has fallen by up to one-third of the amount grown in 1980s, in favour of crops for domestic consumption. The fishing industry has three differing categories, small-scale, longline and industrial fishing (which is regulated by quotas and an electronically monitored exclusion zone).

Although social indicators are good, unemployment is a pressing problem affecting almost 40 per cent of the labour force. There is a large income and social divide between the majority of the population, which is impoverished and black, and the rich minority, which is white or Indian.

External trade

As a département d'outre-mer (DOM) of France, Réunion is integrated as an outermost region of the European Union and adopts all EU trade agreements.

Imports

The main imports are manufactured goods, food, beverages, tobacco, machinery and transportation equipment, raw materials, and petroleum products.

Main sources: France (typically over 60 per cent), Bahrain (3.0 per cent), Germany (3.0 per cent), Italy (3.0 per cent).

Exports

The main export is sugar (over 60 per cent), rum and molasses, perfume essences and lobster.

Main destinations: France (typically over 70 per cent), Japan (6.0 per cent), Comoros (4.0 per cent).

Agriculture

Sugar cane, the main crop, is grown on 30,900 hectares. Cash crops include tea and tobacco. Ylang-ylang, vetiver and geraniums are used as components of aromatic essences.

The agriculture sector contributes about 8 per cent to GDP and employs approximately 13 per cent of the workforce. Around 22 per cent of the land is cultivated. Much of the island's food supply is imported.

Typical annual fish catches are over 4,000mt and crustacea catches are over 15mt.

Industry and manufacturing

The industrial sector contributes about 19 per cent to GDP and employs some 12 per cent of the workforce.

The production of processed sugar and rum accounts for most industrial activity. The Ecopipe steel pipe mill (funded by the French government and South African private capital) started operations in 1997 at Le Port, on the west coast of Réunion. It has the capacity to produce 15,000 tonnes a year and employs 80 people.

Tourism

Tourism is now the principal economic activity. As a former French colony Réunion offers an Indian Ocean, tropical holiday with a flavour of France and an infusion of African and Indian cultures. As a *département* of France, the majority of visitors tend to be French.

The Réunion National Park, that covers around 40 per cent of the island, is included on Unesco's World Heritage List, for its volcanic peaks and natural ramparts.

Travel and tourism contributes around US\$1.5 billion to GDP each year and provides employment to over 7 per cent of the workforce (around 17,400 jobs).

Mining

There are no significant mineral resources.

Hydrocarbons

There are no hydrocarbon reserves. Réunion relies entirely on imported petroleum products, provided through France, although fuel distribution and marketing is carried out by commercial oil companies. Natural gas is neither produced nor consumed.

Energy

Total installed generating capacity is some 44MW, approximately 60 per cent of which is provided by hydropower. Réunion has one thermal power plant that runs on imported coal. This produces around 39 per cent of Réunion's electricity needs.

Banking and insurance**Central bank**

Banque de France; European Central Bank (ECB).

Time

GMT plus four hours

Geography

Réunion is an island in the Indian Ocean, lying about 800km (500 miles) east of Madagascar. It is a volcanic, mountainous island.

Hemisphere

Southern

Climate

The climate varies greatly according to altitude: at sea-level, it is tropical, with average temperatures between 20 and 28 degrees Celsius (C); in the uplands, it is much cooler, with average temperatures between 8 and 19 degrees C. From July to November, the temperature in high altitude places can drop to 10 degrees C during the day and to 6 degrees C at night.

Rainfall is abundant; the cyclone season lasts from December to April.

Summer runs from November to April with an average temperature of 27 degrees C. Winter stretches from May to October with an average temperature of 23 degrees C.

Dress codes

Generally light summer clothes are required, with some woollen garments for chilly evenings.

Entry requirements**Passports**

Required by all, except nationals of EU/EEA countries, Monaco, Switzerland with national identity cards; passports must be valid for three months beyond date of departure,

Visa

Required by all, except nationals of EU/EEA countries, North America, Australasia, Japan, Israel and some other countries for stays up to three months. Nationals of the US, Canada and several other countries need a visa if they receive a salary. Nationals of EU/EEA countries, the Vatican, Liechtenstein and Monaco do not require long-term visas issued for stays in excess of three months. Proof of adequate funds for stay, an itinerary, a guarantee of repatriation if necessary, return/onward ticket and, for business travellers, an invitation from a local company or organisation are also required.

Currency advice/regulations

There are no restrictions on the import or export of local and foreign currency, subject to declaration of amounts over eur7,600.

Health (for visitors)

There are no compulsory vaccinations. Passengers from endemic countries should be inoculated against yellow fever.

Advisable precautions

Vaccinations for diphtheria, tetanus, typhoid fever, hepatitis A and tuberculosis are advisable, and precautions should be taken against malaria. Malaria and chikungunya are caused by mosquitoes, precautions including mosquito repellents, nets and clothing covering the body should be used.

Credit cards

Major credit cards are accepted.

Public holidays (national)**Fixed dates**

1 Jan (New Year's Day), 1 May (Labour Day), 8 May (1945 Victory Day), 14 Jul (Bastille Day), 15 Aug (Assumption Day), 1 Nov (All Saints' Day), 11 Nov (Armistice Day), 20 Dec (Abolition of Slavery Day), 25 Dec (Christmas Day).

Variable dates

Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Monday.

Working hours**Banking**

Mon–Fri: 0800–1600.

Business

Mon–Fri: 0800–1200; 1400–1800.

Government

Mon–Fri: 0800–1900; Sat: 0900–1400.

Shops

Mon–Sat: 0830–1200; 1430–1800.

Some food stores are open on Sunday.

Telecommunications**Telephone/fax**

The telephone network is entirely automatic and is linked to metropolitan France and the rest of the world via satellite.

Mobile/cell phones

There are GSM 900 and 1800 services available.

Electricity supply

220V

Weights and measures

The metric system is in use.

Social customs/useful tips

Maloya dance music, once banned by the French as being a threat to the French state, in 2012 was being played on French radio and spreading around the world.

Getting there**Air**

National airline: Air Austral.

International airport/s: Roland-Garros Airport (RUN), 8km from Saint Denis; post office, restaurants, duty free shop, car hire.

Other airport/s: Pierrefonds Airport (ZSE), 5km from Saint Pierre.

Airport tax: None.

Surface

Water: There are limited passenger services to Réunion. A cruise liner from Mauritius visits regularly.

Main port/s: Port Réunion.

Getting about**National transport**

Road: A *route nationale* circles the island, following the coast and linking all the main towns, and another crosses the island from south-west to north-east linking Saint Pierre and Saint Benoît. There are 370km of main roads, 754km of

secondary roads and nearly 1,600km of smaller secondary roads, all in good condition.

Buses: A comfortable bus service (*cars jaunes*), links most towns.

Car hire

A French or international driver's licence is required. The highway code is the same as for France. Driving is on the right.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

The addresses listed below are a selection only. While World of Information makes every endeavour to check these addresses, we cannot guarantee that changes have not been made, especially to telephone numbers and area codes. We would welcome any corrections.

Telephone area codes

The international dialling code (IDD) for Réunion is +262; this is followed by another 262 and then the subscriber's number.

Useful telephone numbers

Available services for visiting cell phone users:

Emergency calls: (free) 112

Telephone enquiries: (call SFR for information) 222

Subscriber services: (local rate) 900

Chambers of Commerce

Réunion Chamber of Commerce Industry, 13 Rue Pasteur, PO Box 120, 97463 Saint-Denis cedex (tel: 942-100; fax: 942-290; e-mail: sg.dir@reunion.cci.fr).

Banking

Banque de la Réunion, 27 rue Jean Chatel, 97711 Saint Denis, Cedex 9 (tel: 400-157; fax: 400-060).

Banque Nationale de Paris Intercontinentale (BNPI), 67 rue Juliette-Dodu, Saint Denis (tel: 403-030).

Banque Régionale d'Escompte et de Depot (BRED), 33 rue Victor-Mac-Auliffe, Saint Denis (tel: 901-560).

Caisse d'Épargne Ecureuil, 55 rue de Paris, Saint Denis (tel: 948-000).

Crédit Agricole, 18 rue Félix-Guyon, Saint Denis (tel: 909-100).

Banque Française Commerciale (BFC'OI'), 60 rue Alexis-de-Villeneuve, Saint Denis (tel: 405-555).

Central bank

Banque de France, 1 rue la Vrillière, 75001 Paris, Dept 75, France (tel:

(+33-1) 4292-4292; fax: (+33-1) 4292-4500)

European Central Bank (ECB), Kaiserstrasse 29, D-60311 Frankfurt am Main, Germany (tel: (+49-69) 13-440; fax: (+49-69) 1344-6000).

Travel information

Air Austral, PO Box 611, 4 Rue de Nice, 97473 Saint Denis Cedex (tel: 909-090; fax: 909-09; e-mail: reservation@air-austral.com).

Air France, PO Box 845, 7 Avenue de la Victoire, 97477 Saint Denis Cedex (tel: 403-800; fax: 403-840; e-mail: mail.runsh@airfrance.fr).

Fédération Réunionnaise du Tourisme, Résidence Sainte Anne, 18 rue Sainte Anne, 97400 Saint Denis (tel: 413-967; fax: 943-180; e-mail: fr-pat@wanadoo.fr).

Maison de la Montagne, 5 rue Rontaunay, 97400 Saint-Denis (tel: 907-878; fax: 418-429; e-mail: resa@reunion-nature.com).

Ministry of tourism

Delegation Régionale au Commerce, à l'Artisanat et Tourisme, Préfecture de la Réunion, 31 rue de Paris, 97400 Saint-Denis, (tel: 319-999; fax: 316-666; e-mail: DRT974@tourisme.gouv.fr).

National tourist organisation offices

Comité du Tourisme de la Réunion, PO Box 615, Place du 20 Décembre 1848, 97472 Saint Denis Cedex (tel: 210-041; fax: 210-021; e-mail: ctr@la-reunion-tourisme.com).

Ministries

Direction Départementale des Affaires Sanitaires et Sociales, Rue Georges Brassens, BP 199, 97490 Sainte-Clothilde (tel: 486-060; fax: 486-008).

Direction Départementale du Travail et de l'Emploi, 24 Rue Maréchal Leclerc, 97488 Saint Denis Cedex (tel: 486-600; fax: 486-666).

Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles, 31 Rue Amiral Lacaze 97400 Saint Denis (tel: 219-171; fax: 416-193).

Direction Régionale de la Jeunesse et des Sports, 14 Allée des Saphirs, BP 297, 97487 Saint Denis Cedex (tel: 901-616; fax: 213-864).

Other useful addresses

Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi 10 Rue Champ Fleury, 97490 Sainte Clothilde (tel: 219-236; fax: 417-383).

Association pour le Développement Industriel de la Réunion, 18 Rue Milius, 97468 Saint Denis Cedex (tel: 214-269; fax: 203-757).

British Consul, 94b Avenue Leconte Delisle, 97490 Sainte Clotilde (tel: 291-491; fax: 293-991).

Civil Aviation Management, 11 Avenue de la Victoire, 97489 Saint Denis Cedex (tel: 930-000; fax: 211-331).

Compagnie Générale Maritime (CGM), 2 Rue de l'Est, BP 2010, 97822 Le Port Cedex (tel: 420-088; fax: 432-304).

Conseil Economique et Social de la Réunion, PO Box 7191, 10 Rue du Béarn, 97719 Saint Denis (tel: 979-630; fax: 979-631; e-mail: webmaster@cesr-reunion.fr).

Conseil Général, Hôtel du Département, 2 Rue Source, 97400 Saint Denis (tel: 903-030; fax: 903-999).

Conseil Régional, Hôtel de la Région, Avenue René Cassin, Le Moufia, 97494 Sainte Clothilde Cedex (tel: 487-000; fax: 487-071).

Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques, Service Régional de la Réunion, 15 Rue de l'Ecole, 97490 Sainte Clotilde (tel: 295-157).

Palais du Justice, 166 Rue Juliette Dodu, 97488 Saint Denis (tel: 405-858; fax: 219-532).

Rectorat de la Réunion, 24 Avenue Georges Brassens, 97702 Saint Denis, Messagerie Cedex 9 (tel: 481-010; fax: 481-366).

Société de Développement Economique de la Réunion (SODERE), 26 Rue Labourdonnais, 97469 Saint Denis (tel: 200-168; fax: 200-507).

Other news agencies: Imaz Press Réunion, (tel: 200-656; email: fax: 200-549; email: ipr@ipreunion.com; internet: www.ipreunion.com).

Internet sites

Africa Business Network: <http://www.ifc.org/abn>

African Development Bank: <http://www.afdb.org>