

# Regional Transport

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## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### ENTERING THE COUNTRY Mauritius

When entering Mauritius you must have a passport valid for at least six months from the date of entry, a visa for Mauritius (if necessary; see p150) and a ticket out of the country (together with a visa if necessary for your next port of call). If you don't have an onward ticket, you could be invited to buy one on the spot.

Immigration authorities will also want to know where you are staying in Mauritius (if you don't know just give them the name of any large hotel in this book) and may cause problems if you leave this answer blank. They may also grill you on your finances, especially if you are staying more than the standard two weeks; possession of a valid credit card is usually fine.

### Réunion

As Réunion is a department of France, the formalities for entering the country are almost the same as those for entering mainland France, bar a few exceptions (see p253 for details on visa requirements). All visitors must possess a passport valid for at least three months from the date of entry, a visa (if required) and a return or onward ticket (plus a visa if necessary for your next destination).

### Seychelles

'Titres de séjour' (a kind of tourist card/visa) of up to one month are issued free for all tourists on arrival. You just need to present a passport valid for at least six months from the

date of entry, a return or onward ticket (with a visa for your next destination if required) and evidence of booked accommodation at least for your first few nights (mentioning the name of a hotel usually suffices). You may also be asked for evidence of sufficient funds to cover you during your stay; possession of a valid credit card is usually fine. For more information on visas, see p299.

### AIR

Expensive flights have always been the biggest deterrent to travellers interested in visiting this region, and the sheer distance of the islands from most countries will never allow this to be a particularly cheap destination, despite prices having fallen in recent years.

By far the cheapest way to get here is to buy a package deal that includes flight and hotel accommodation. This can actually work out cheaper than just buying a return scheduled flight, and as you're totally free to ditch the hotel after a few days and travel around yourself, this is an option you should consider, even if you can't stand the idea of package holidays. A vast number of travel agents offer tour packages to these destinations; shop around online for the best bargains.

The principal hubs for airlines flying to this region are Paris and London. In general, prices are overall lowest on the Paris–Réunion route, although only just; London–Mauritius may be cheaper in high season. Depending on where you are coming from, it may work out cheaper to fly via Paris and Réunion and then take an onward flight to Mauritius or the Seychelles.

#### THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

### Airlines

**Air Austral** (airline code UU; ☎ in Mauritius 202 6677, in Réunion 0262 90 90 91, in Seychelles 323129; www.air-austral.com)

**Air France** (airline code AF; ☎ in Mauritius 202 6747, in Réunion 0820 82 08 20, in Seychelles 297180; www.airfrance.com)

**Air Madagascar** (airline code MD; ☎ in Mauritius 203 2150, in Réunion 0262 21 05 21; www.airmadagascar.com)

**Air Mauritius** (airline code MK; ☎ in Mauritius 207 7070, in Réunion 0262 94 83 83, in Seychelles 322414; www.airmauritius.com)

**Air Seychelles** (airline code HM; ☎ in Mauritius 202 6655, in Seychelles 381000; www.airseychelles.net)

**British Airways** (airline code BA; ☎ in Mauritius 202 8000, in Seychelles 224910; www.britishairways.com)

**Condor** (airline code DE; ☎ in Mauritius 213 4141, in Seychelles 288888; www.condor.com)

**Corsair** (airline code SS; ☎ in Réunion 0262 94 82 82; www.corsairfly.com)

**Emirates** (airline code EK; ☎ in Mauritius 213 9100, in Seychelles 292700; www.emirates.com)

**Kenya Airways** (airline code KQ; ☎ in Seychelles 322989; www.kenya-airways.com)

**Qatar Airways** (airline code QR; ☎ in Seychelles 224518; www.qatarairways.com)

**South African Airways** (airline code SA; ☎ in Mauritius 202 6737; www.flysaa.com)

**Virgin Atlantic** (airline code VS; Mauritius only; www.virginatlantic.com)

### Tickets

The main point to remember when buying your air ticket is to start early. Mauritius, Réunion and the Seychelles are popular destinations and some flights are booked months in advance. Somewhat paradoxically, it's also worth looking last minute as that's when other good bargains sometimes become available; however, this can never be guaranteed of course.

If you are after a simple return ticket within fairly fixed dates, then it's easy to book online. Some of the better international online ticket sites include the following:

**Ebookers** (www.ebookers.com)

**Expedia** (www.expedia.com)

**Flight Centre International** (www.flightcentre.com)

**Flights.com** (www.flights.com)

**STA** (www.sta.com)

**Travelocity** (www.travelocity.com)

### INTERCONTINENTAL TICKETS

It is possible to include Mauritius, Réunion and the Seychelles as part of a Round-the-World (RTW) ticket. These can be bought

through one of the three big airline alliances (Oneworld Alliance, Sky Team and Star Alliance) or through a travel agent. RTW tickets put together by travel agents tend to be more expensive but allow you to devise your own itinerary. In general RTW tickets are valid for up to one year and are calculated on the basis of either the number of continents or the distance covered.

Oneworld Alliance also offers a Visit Africa pass, which covers eight African countries including the Seychelles. Fares are calculated according to the number of flights taken and you must fly to and from Africa with one of the alliance members.

Another option is to fly from A to Z with as many stopovers as you want going in one direction, rather than buying individual tickets; this is especially worth investigating for the Seychelles. If you choose this option, always do it through a knowledgeable travel agent and not the airlines. That way, the fare may be calculated on the basis of mileage rather than the sum of your journey's parts.

Online ticket sites for intercontinental tickets:

**Airbrokers** (www.airbrokers.com)

**Airtreks.com** (www.airtreks.com)

**Oneworld Alliance** (www.oneworldalliance.com)

**Sky Team** (www.skyteam.com)

**Star Alliance** (www.staralliance.com)

### Africa

You can fly to Mauritius direct from a number of cities in Africa, including Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban (South Africa), Antananarivo (Madagascar), Moroni (Comoros) and Nairobi (Kenya). Airlines serving these routes include Air Mauritius, Air Madagascar and South African Airways (SAA).

The Seychelles is not particularly well connected with Africa. The only direct flights are to and from Johannesburg and Nairobi with Air Seychelles and Kenya Airways.

Réunion can be reached direct from Johannesburg, Madagascar, Comoros and Mayotte with Air Austral and Air Madagascar.

**Rennies Travel** (www.renniestravel.com) and **STA Travel** (www.statravel.co.za) have offices throughout southern Africa. Check their websites for branch locations.

### Australia

The cheapest flights from Australia to this region are usually via Singapore. Another option

## CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

### Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motor travel generates CO<sub>2</sub> (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

### Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow jetsetters to offset the greenhouse gases they are responsible for with contributions to energy-saving projects and other climate-friendly initiatives in the developing world – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, supports the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: [lonelyplanet.com](http://lonelyplanet.com).

is to fly via Africa. Two well-known agencies for discount fares with offices nationwide are **STA Travel** (☎ 1300 733 035; [www.statravel.com.au](http://www.statravel.com.au)) and **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133; [www.flightcentre.com.au](http://www.flightcentre.com.au)). For online bookings, try [www.travel.com.au](http://www.travel.com.au).

Air Mauritius operates reasonably competitively priced direct flights from Sydney, Melbourne and Perth to Mauritius.

The cheapest way to get to Réunion is to fly to Mauritius and pick up the boat for St-Denis. A quicker alternative would obviously be to fly from Mauritius to St-Denis.

Return flights to the Seychelles from Melbourne and Sydney via Singapore are offered by both Air Seychelles (flying via Singapore) and Air Mauritius (flying via Mauritius).

## Continental Europe

Most visitors from Europe arrive in Mauritius and Seychelles on hotel-flight package holidays, although this is much less the case for Réunion. Air Mauritius and Air Seychelles fly to a number of European destinations, including London, Paris, Zürich, Geneva, Rome, Munich, Frankfurt, Brussels and Vienna. Because of the French colonial connection, however, fares are generally cheaper from Paris than from other European cities. All flights from Europe to Réunion go via Paris. Note that prices shoot up during July

and August and over the Christmas and New Year holidays. However, flights to Mauritius and Seychelles on Emirates via Dubai (and on Qatar Airways to Seychelles via Doha) are both very competitively priced and worth investigating, with connections from all over Europe.

## FRANCE

Air Mauritius and Air France operate frequent flights from Paris to Mauritius. Another alternative is to look for special offers between Paris and Réunion and then take the boat or a return flight to Mauritius from Réunion.

There's more competition – and consequently lower fares – on the Paris–Réunion route. Air France, Air Austral, and Corsair (belonging to tour operator Nouvelles Frontières) all fly to St-Denis. Air Seychelles and Air France cover the Paris–Seychelles route.

Recommended agencies:

**Anyway** (☎ 0892 302 301; [www.anyway.fr](http://www.anyway.fr))

**Lastminute** (☎ 0899 785 000; [www.lastminute.com](http://www.lastminute.com))

**Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 0825 000 747; [www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr](http://www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr))

**OTU Voyages** (☎ 01 55 82 32 32; [www.otu.fr](http://www.otu.fr)) This agency specialises in student and youth travellers.

**Voyageurs du Monde** (☎ 0892 237 373; [www.vdm.com](http://www.vdm.com))

## GERMANY

Condor flies direct from Frankfurt to Mauritius and the Seychelles, and from Munich to Mauritius. Prices are not cheap to either destination, although a cheaper option for Mauritius is to fly via Paris on Air France; Air Seychelles operates direct flights from Frankfurt which can be quite reasonable. As with almost any country, you're often best off buying a package deal and taking advantage of the flight cost savings.

Recommended agencies:

**Expedia** (☎ 01805 007143; [www.expedia.de](http://www.expedia.de))

**Just Travel** (☎ 089 747 3330; [www.justtravel.de](http://www.justtravel.de))

**Lastminute** (☎ 01805 284 366; [www.lastminute.de](http://www.lastminute.de))

**STA Travel** (☎ 069 743 032 92; [www.statravel.de](http://www.statravel.de))

## UK & Ireland

Both Air Mauritius and British Airways operate direct flights between London and Mauritius. A cheaper option, especially off-season, is to fly Air France via Paris.

Flights for Réunion generally connect through Paris. The return London–Réunion fare with Air France is no bargain, but you can sometimes get a cheaper deal by flying with one of the discount airlines on the London–Paris leg and buying a separate Paris–Réunion return.

Air Seychelles covers the London to Seychelles route and sometimes special deals make this route good value. Emirates via Dubai and Air France via Paris offer other good connections to Seychelles. All Irish travellers will need to connect through London or Paris.

Recommended travel agencies in the UK:

**Flight Centre** (☎ 0870 499 0040; [www.flightcentre.co.uk](http://www.flightcentre.co.uk))

**Flightbookers** (☎ 0871 223 5000; [www.ebookers.com](http://www.ebookers.com))

**North-South Travel** (☎ 01245 608 291; [www.northsouthtravel.co.uk](http://www.northsouthtravel.co.uk)) North-South Travel donates part of its profit to projects in the developing world.

**Quest Travel** (☎ 0871 423 0135; [www.questtravel.com](http://www.questtravel.com))

**STA Travel** (☎ 0871 230 0040; [www.statravel.co.uk](http://www.statravel.co.uk))

**Traifinders** (☎ 0845 058 5858; [www.traifinders.com](http://www.traifinders.com))

**Travel Bag** (☎ 0800 082 5000; [www.travelbag.co.uk](http://www.travelbag.co.uk))

## USA

Given the huge distance involved in travelling from North America to the Indian Ocean, you'll be paying a handsome sum to travel this route. Nearly all flights to the Indian Ocean from the US and Canada connect through London or Paris.

Rather than getting a through ticket, however, it's usually cheaper to take a discount flight to London or Paris and buy the onward ticket separately.

Discount travel agents in America are known as consolidators (although you won't see a sign on the door saying 'Consolidator'). San Francisco is the US ticket consolidator capital, although good deals can be found in Los Angeles, New York and other big cities.

## SEA

Opportunities for sea travel to Mauritius, Réunion and the Seychelles are limited. The luxury cruise liner *MS Mauritius Trochetia* leaves Toamasina in Madagascar for Réunion and Mauritius approximately every two weeks. One-way fares to Réunion (28 hours) are €210/177 for a 1st/2nd-class cabin (based on two people sharing), and €247/227 to Mauritius (47 hours). More expensive deluxe cabins are also available. For tickets, go to **Tropical Service** (☎ 53 336 79; 23 Blvd Joffre), near the Hotel Joffre in Toamasina.

The only other alternatives are passing cruise liners, yachts and the occasional cargo-passenger ship. The cost is high, unless you can work your way as a crewmember. Cruise liners usually only stop for a day or two in each destination, but cruises do offer the opportunity of seeing the outer islands in the Seychelles group.

Companies offering Indian Ocean cruises:

**African Safari Club** ([www.africansafariclub.com](http://www.africansafariclub.com))

**La Compagnie des Alizés** ([www.voile-reunion.com](http://www.voile-reunion.com))

**MS Royal Star** ([www.msroyalstar.com](http://www.msroyalstar.com))

**P&O** ([www.pocruises.com](http://www.pocruises.com))

**Seabourn** ([www.seabourn.com](http://www.seabourn.com))

**Silversea** ([www.silversea.com](http://www.silversea.com))

# TRANSPORT AROUND THE REGION

The following section covers transport between Réunion, Mauritius and the Seychelles. Be aware that if you're planning to travel to both Mauritius and Réunion, it makes much better financial sense to visit Mauritius first and fly on to Réunion, as return flights work out around €120 cheaper when originating in Mauritius. The flat fare system of flights from Réunion to Mauritius hikes the fare by 40%.

## AIR

### Air Passes

There are currently no air passes of significance relating to the region, unless you manage to combine one or more of the islands within a RTW ticket (see p303). The Indian Ocean Pass, available for some time for people travelling between the islands of the Indian Ocean, has been discontinued.

### Mauritius to Réunion

Air Mauritius and Air Austral between them operate several flights a day from Réunion to Mauritius. Return fares start at around €164 in low season if you fly Mauritius–Réunion–Mauritius, but are a far less reasonable €280 if you fly Réunion–Mauritius–Réunion. As well as the flights to St-Denis, there is a daily flight from Mauritius' Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Airport to Pierrefonds Airport, Réunion's second airport in the south of the island near to St-Pierre. Return fares start at around €160 for a round trip from Mauritius, and, again are priced less competitively at €280 for a round trip when flying from Réunion. At the time of writing there were again no direct flights between Rodrigues and Réunion, although this may change (they have been introduced and cancelled due to heavy losses in the past), so you currently have to fly via Mauritius.

### Mauritius to Seychelles

From the Seychelles, there's a choice between Air Mauritius and Air Seychelles, which between them operate four to five flights a week. Tickets cost from €305 for a return in low season.

### Réunion to Seychelles

There was no direct air connection between Réunion and the Seychelles at the time of research. Those wishing to make this trip normally change planes in Mauritius, through which there are the best connections. Tickets are not cheap – the combination of the two return flights is around €550, although on the plus side you're able to break the trip and visit Mauritius.

In December and January (during the school holidays in Réunion) Air Austral operates one weekly flight from Réunion to Seychelles.

## SEA

The **Mauritius Shipping Corporation** ([www.mauritiusshipping.intnet.mu](http://www.mauritiusshipping.intnet.mu)) operates two boats between Réunion and Mauritius, with several sailings each month. The one-way journey takes about 11 hours. The newer and more comfortable boat is the *Mauritius Trochetia*. The return fare from Réunion in low/high season starts at roughly €160/230 for a berth in a 2nd-class cabin. From Mauritius, the price is Rs 4800/6700.

The sister ship, *Mauritius Pride* is slightly cheaper. For a reclining seat in low/high season, you'll pay around €135/160 return from Réunion and Rs 3000/3600 from Mauritius. The equivalent fares for a berth in a two-person cabin are €220/245 and Rs 5650/6900.

Tickets and information are available through travel agents or direct from the Mauritius Shipping Corporation representative **Coraline Shipping Agency** (Map pp58-9; ☎ 217 2285; [msc@coraline.intnet.mu](mailto:msc@coraline.intnet.mu); Nova Bldg, Military Rd, Port Louis).

# Health

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As long as you stay up to date with your vaccinations and take some basic preventive measures, you'd have to be pretty unlucky to succumb to most of the health hazards covered in this chapter. Mauritius, and to a lesser extent Réunion and the Seychelles, certainly have a fair selection of tropical diseases on offer, but you're much more likely to get a bout of diarrhoea or a sprained ankle than an exotic disease. One recent subject of concern in Mauritius and Réunion has been the Chikungunya epidemic of early 2006, which, while having returned to normal at the time of writing, is still something you should be aware of and a situation you should monitor.

## BEFORE YOU GO

A little planning before departure, particularly for pre-existing illnesses, will save you a lot of trouble later. Before a long trip, get a check-up from your dentist and from your doctor if you have any regular medication or chronic illness, eg high blood pressure or asthma. You should also organise spare contact lenses and glasses (and take your optical prescription with you); get a first-aid and medical kit together; and arrange necessary vaccinations.

Travellers can register with the **International Association for Medical Advice to Travellers**

(IAMAT; [www.iamat.org](http://www.iamat.org)). Its website can help travellers to find a doctor who has recognised training. You might also like to consider doing a first-aid course (contact the Red Cross or St John's Ambulance) or attending a remote medicine first-aid course, such as that offered by the **Royal Geographical Society** ([www.wildernessmedicaltraining.co.uk](http://www.wildernessmedicaltraining.co.uk)).

If you are bringing medications with you, carry them in their original containers, clearly labelled. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing all medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

## INSURANCE

Find out in advance whether your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or will reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures (in many countries doctors expect payment in cash). It is vital to ensure that your travel insurance will cover the emergency transport required to get you to a good hospital, or all the way home, by air and with a medical attendant if necessary. Not all insurance policies cover this, so be sure to check the contract carefully. If you need medical help, your insurance company might be able to help locate the nearest hospital or clinic, or you can ask at your hotel. In an emergency, contact your embassy or consulate.

### RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The **World Health Organization** ([www.who.int/en/](http://www.who.int/en/)) recommends that all travellers be adequately covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, as well as for hepatitis B, regardless of their travel destination.

Although no vaccinations are officially required, many doctors recommend hepatitis A and B immunisations just to be sure; a yellow fever certificate is an entry requirement if travelling from an infected region (see p311).



Membership of the **African Medical and Research Foundation** (AMREF; [www.amref.org](http://www.amref.org)) provides an air-evacuation service in medical emergencies in some African countries, sometimes including Mauritius, Réunion and the Seychelles, as well as air-ambulance transfers between medical facilities. Money paid by members for this service goes toward providing grass-roots medical assistance for local people.

## MEDICAL CHECKLIST

It is a very good idea to carry a medical and first-aid kit with you, to help yourself in the case of minor illness or injury. Following is a list of items you should consider packing.

- antidiarrhoeal drugs (eg loperamide)
- acetaminophen (paracetamol) or aspirin
- anti-inflammatory drugs (eg ibuprofen)
- antihistamines (for hayfever and allergic reactions)
- antibacterial ointment (eg Bactroban) for cuts and abrasions (prescription only)
- steroid cream or hydrocortisone cream (for allergic rashes)
- bandages, gauze, gauze rolls
- adhesive or paper tape
- scissors, safety pins, tweezers
- thermometer
- pocket knife
- DEET-containing insect repellent for the skin
- sunblock
- oral rehydration salts
- iodine tablets (for water purification)
- syringes and sterile needles (if travelling to remote areas)

## INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel-health advice available on the internet. **Lonelyplanet.com** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) is a good place to start. The World Health Organization publishes a superb book called *International Travel and Health*, which is revised annually and is available online at no cost at [www.who.int/ith/](http://www.who.int/ith/). Other health-related websites of general interest are **MD Travel Health** ([www.mdtravelhealth.com](http://www.mdtravelhealth.com)), the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) and **Fit for Travel** ([www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk)).

You may also like to consult your government's travel-health website, if one is available:

**Australia** ([www.dfat.gov.au/travel/](http://www.dfat.gov.au/travel/))

**Canada** ([www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspssp/tmp-pmv/pub\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspssp/tmp-pmv/pub_e.html))

**UK** ([www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/index.htm](http://www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/index.htm))

**USA** ([www.cdc.gov/travel/](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/))

## FURTHER READING

*A Comprehensive Guide to Wilderness and Travel Medicine* by Eric A Weiss (1998)

*Healthy Travel* by Jane Wilson-Howarth (1999)

*Healthy Travel Africa* by Isabelle Young (2000)

*How to Stay Healthy Abroad* by Richard Dawood (2002)

*Travel in Health* by Graham Fry (1994)

*Travel with Children* by Cathy Lanigan (2004)

## IN TRANSIT

### DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Blood clots can form in the legs during flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. This formation of clots is known as deep vein thrombosis (DVT). Although most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some might break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they could cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and breathing difficulty. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT during flights, walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids, and avoid alcohol.

### JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

If you're crossing more than five time zones you could suffer jet lag, resulting in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag, try drinking plenty of fluids (nonalcoholic) and eating light meals. Upon arrival, get exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep, etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. The main side effect of these drugs is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger (ginger tea, biscuits or crystallised ginger).

## IN MAURITIUS, RÉUNION & SEYCHELLES

### AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

Health care in Mauritius and Réunion is generally excellent; the Seychelles is pretty good by African standards, but some travellers have been critical of the standard of the public health system. Generally, public hospitals offer the cheapest service, but may not have the most up-to-date equipment and medications; private hospitals and clinics are more expensive but tend to have more advanced drugs and equipment and better trained medical staff.

### INFECTIOUS DISEASES

It's a formidable list but, as we say, a few precautions go a long way...

#### Chikungunya

This viral infection transmitted by certain mosquito bites was traditionally rare in the Indian Ocean until 2005 when an epidemic hit Réunion, Mauritius and Seychelles. Chikungunya (the unusual name means 'that which bends up' in the East African language of Makonde, a reference to the joint pain and physical distortions it creates in sufferers) is rarely fatal, but it can be, and it's always unpleasant. Symptoms are often flu-like, with joint pain, high fever and body rashes being the most common. It's important not to confuse it with dengue fever, but if diagnosed with Chikungunya then expect to be down for at least a week, possibly longer. The joint pain can be horrendous and there is no treatment, those infected need simply to rest inside (preferably under a mosquito net to prevent reinfection), taking gentle exercise to avoid joints stiffening unbearably. Over 200 people died in Réunion from Chikungunya in 2005 to 2006, but at the time of writing the epidemic was over and should not be considered a major threat. Still, the best way to avoid it is to avoid mosquito bites, so bring plenty of repellent, use the anti-mosquito plug-ins wherever you can and bring a mosquito net if you're really thorough.

#### Cholera

Cholera is usually only a problem during natural or artificial disasters, eg war, floods or earthquakes, although small outbreaks can also occur at other times. Travellers are rarely affected. It is caused by a bacteria and is spread via contaminated drinking water. The main symptom is profuse watery diarrhoea, which causes debilitation if fluids are not replaced quickly. Most cases of cholera can be avoided by paying close attention to the drinking water available and by avoiding potentially contaminated food. Treatment is by fluid replacement (orally or via a drip), but sometimes antibiotics are needed. Self-treatment is not advised.

#### Diphtheria

Diphtheria is spread through close respiratory contact. It usually results in a temperature and a severe sore throat. It is more of a problem for long stays than for short-term trips. The vaccine is given as an injection alone or with tetanus, and lasts 10 years.

#### Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is spread through contaminated food (particularly shellfish) and water. It causes jaundice and, although it is rarely fatal, it can cause prolonged lethargy and delayed recovery. If you've had hepatitis A, you shouldn't drink alcohol for up to six months afterwards, but once you've recovered, there won't be any long-term problems. The first symptoms include dark urine and a yellow colour to the whites of the eyes. Sometimes a fever and abdominal pain might be present. Hepatitis A vaccine (Avaxim, VAQTA, Havrix) is given as an injection: a single dose will give protection for up to a year, and a booster after a year gives 10-year protection. Hepatitis A and typhoid vaccines can also be given as a single dose vaccine (Hepatyrix or Viatim).

#### Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is spread through infected blood, contaminated needles and sexual intercourse. It can also be passed from an infected mother to the baby during childbirth. It affects the liver, causing jaundice and occasionally liver failure. Most people recover completely, but some people might be chronic carriers of the virus, which could lead eventually to cirrhosis or liver cancer. Those visiting high-risk areas for extended

periods or those with increased social or occupational risk should be immunised. Many countries now routinely give hepatitis B as part of the routine childhood vaccination. It is given singly or can be given at the same time as hepatitis A (Hepatyrix).

A course will give protection for at least five years. It can be given over four weeks or six months.

### HIV

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the virus that causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), is an enormous problem throughout Africa, but is most acutely felt in sub-Saharan Africa. The impact of the virus on South Africa's health system is devastating. The virus is spread through infected blood and blood products, by sexual intercourse with an infected partner and from an infected mother to her baby during childbirth and breast-feeding. It can be spread through 'blood to blood' contacts, such as with contaminated instruments during medical, dental, acupuncture and other body-piercing procedures, and through sharing used intravenous needles. At present there is no cure; medication that might keep the disease under control is available, but these drugs are too expensive for the overwhelming majority of Africans, and are not readily available for travellers either. If you think you might have been infected with HIV, a blood test is necessary; a three-month gap after exposure and before testing is required to allow antibodies to appear in the blood.

### Malaria

The risk of malaria in Mauritius and Réunion is extremely low; there is no risk in the Seychelles. The disease is caused by a parasite in the bloodstream spread via the bite of the female *Anopheles* mosquito. The early stages of malaria include headaches, fevers, generalised aches and pains, and malaise, which could be mistaken for flu. Other symptoms can include abdominal pain, diarrhoea and a cough. Several different drugs are used to prevent malaria, and new ones are in the pipeline – up-to-date advice is essential as some medication is more suitable for some travellers than others. There are antimalaria pills available and it is best to ask your doctor for further advice.

### Meningococcal Meningitis

Meningococcal infection is spread through close respiratory contact and is more likely in crowded situations, such as dormitories, buses and clubs. Infection is uncommon in travellers. Vaccination is recommended for long stays and is especially important towards the end of the dry season. Symptoms include a fever, severe headache, neck stiffness and a red rash. Immediate medical treatment is necessary.

### Poliomyelitis

Poliomyelitis is generally spread through contaminated food and water. It is one of the vaccines given in childhood and should be boosted every 10 years, either orally (a drop on the tongue) or as an injection. Polio can be carried asymptotically (ie showing no symptoms) and could cause a transient fever. In rare cases it causes weakness or paralysis of one or more muscles, which might be permanent.

### Rabies

Rabies is spread by receiving the bites or licks of an infected animal on broken skin. It is always fatal once the clinical symptoms start (which might be up to several months after an infected bite), so post-bite vaccination should be given as soon as possible. Post-bite vaccination (whether or not you've been vaccinated before the bite) prevents the virus from spreading to the central nervous system. Three preventive injections are needed over a month. If you have not been vaccinated you will need a course of five injections starting 24 hours after being bitten or as soon as possible after the injury. If you have been vaccinated, you will need fewer post-bite injections, and have more time to seek medical help.

### Tuberculosis (TB)

TB is spread through close respiratory contact and occasionally by infected milk or milk products. BCG vaccination is a live vaccine and should not be given to pregnant women or immunocompromised individuals.

TB can be asymptomatic, only being picked up on a routine chest X-ray. Alternatively, it can cause a cough, weight loss or fever, sometimes months or even years after exposure.

### Typhoid

Typhoid is spread through food or water contaminated by infected human faeces. The first symptom is usually a fever or a pink rash on the abdomen. Sometimes septicaemia (blood poisoning) can occur. A typhoid vaccine (Typhim Vi, Typherix) will give protection for three years. In some countries, the oral vaccine Vivotif is also available. Antibiotics are usually given as treatment, and death is rare unless septicaemia occurs.

### Yellow Fever

Although not a problem in Mauritius, Réunion or the Seychelles, travellers should still carry a certificate as evidence of vaccination if they have recently been in an infected country. For a list of these countries visit the **World Health Organization website** ([www.who.int/wer/](http://www.who.int/wer/)) or the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website** ([www.cdc.gov/travel/blusheet.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/blusheet.htm)). A traveller without a legally required, up-to-date certificate may be vaccinated and detained in isolation at the port of arrival for up to 10 days or possibly repatriated.

### TRAVELLERS' DIARRHOEA

Although it's not inevitable that you will get diarrhoea while travelling in the region, it's certainly possible. Sometimes dietary changes, such as increased spices or oils, are the cause. To avoid diarrhoea, only eat fresh fruits or vegetables if cooked or peeled, and be wary of dairy products that might contain unpasteurised milk. Although freshly cooked food can often be a safe option, plates or serving utensils might be dirty, so you should be highly selective when eating food from street vendors (make sure that cooked food is piping hot all the way through). If you develop diarrhoea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution containing water (lots), and some salt and sugar. A few loose stools don't require treatment, but if you start having more than four or five stools a day, you should start taking an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug, such as ciprofloxacin or norfloxacin) and an anti-diarrhoeal agent (such as loperamide) if you are not within easy reach of a toilet. However, if diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours or is accompanied by fever, shaking chills or severe abdominal pain, you should seek medical attention.

### Amoebic Dysentery

Contracted by eating contaminated food and water, amoebic dysentery causes blood and mucus in the faeces. It can be relatively mild and tends to come on gradually, but seek medical advice if you think you have the illness, as it won't clear up without treatment (which is with specific antibiotics).

### Giardiasis

Giardiasis, like amoebic dysentery, is also caused by ingesting contaminated food or water. The illness usually appears a week or more after you have been exposed to the offending parasite. Giardiasis might cause only a short-lived bout of typical travellers' diarrhoea, but it can also cause persistent diarrhoea. Ideally, seek medical advice if you suspect you have giardiasis, but if you are in a remote area you could start a course of antibiotics.

### ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS Heat Exhaustion

This condition occurs following heavy sweating and excessive fluid loss with inadequate replacement of fluids and salt, and is particularly common in hot climates when taking unaccustomed exercise before full acclimatisation. Symptoms include headache, dizziness and tiredness. Dehydration is already happening by the time you feel thirsty – aim to drink sufficient water to produce pale, diluted urine. Self-treatment is by fluid replacement with water and/or fruit juice, and cooling by cold water and fans. The treatment of the salt-loss component consists of consuming salty fluids as in soup, and adding a little more table salt to foods than usual.

### Heatstroke

Heat exhaustion is a precursor to the much more serious condition of heatstroke. In this case there is damage to the sweating mechanism, with an excessive rise in body temperature; irrational and hyperactive behaviour; and eventually loss of consciousness and death. Rapid cooling by spraying the body with water and fanning is ideal. Emergency fluid and electrolyte replacement is usually also required by intravenous drip.

### Insect Bites & Stings

Mosquitoes in the region rarely carry malaria, Chikungunya and dengue fever, but they (and

other insects) can cause irritation and infected bites. To avoid these, take the same precautions as you would for avoiding malaria, including wearing long pants and long-sleeved shirts, using mosquito repellents, avoiding highly scented perfumes or aftershaves etc. Bee and wasp stings cause major problems only to those who have a severe allergy to the stings (anaphylaxis), in which case carry an adrenaline (epinephrine) injection.

Leeches may be present in damp rainforest conditions; they attach themselves to your skin to suck your blood. Salt or a lighted cigarette end will make them fall off. Ticks can cause skin infections and other more serious diseases. If a tick is found attached, press down around the tick's head with tweezers, grab the head and gently pull upwards.

### Marine Life

A number of Indian Ocean species are poisonous or may sting or bite. Watch out above all for sea urchins – while most hotel swimming areas have been carefully cleansed of these nasties, never take that for granted, and always

check using a diving mask. Be extremely careful of urchins when swimming outside of roped-off areas – they can be very numerous where they exist and dwell in shallow as well as deep water. Other far rarer creatures to look out for include the gaudy lion fish with its poisonous spined fins, and for the cleverly camouflaged – and exceptionally poisonous – stonefish. Some shells, such as the cone shell, can fire out a deadly poisonous barb. The species of fire coral (in fact a type of jellyfish) packs a powerful sting if touched. Shark attacks are almost totally unheard of but very occasionally sharks do come into these waters, and while most are harmless, don't take that for granted.

### Water

As a general rule, tap water in Mauritius, Réunion and the Seychelles is safe to drink, but always take care immediately after a cyclone or cyclonic storm as mains water supplies can become contaminated by dead animals and other debris washed into the system. Never drink from streams as it might put you at risk of waterborne diseases.