

Overview of Cape Verde

Lying in the Atlantic Ocean off the bulge of Africa and only six hours' flying time from the major airports of Europe, the volcanic Cape Verde archipelago is rapidly emerging as an inspiring holiday destination for those seeking something different.

The nine inhabited islands are bursting with their own individual character and unique musical culture, besides offering plenty of opportunities for relaxation or active pursuits. The rapidly developing island of Sal is particularly popular, with long white sandy beaches luring European beach buffs and watersports enthusiasts. The main tourist town, Santa Maria, near the international airport, is earning its place on the global map as a surfing destination, and also as a major draw for windsurfers and kite surfers, with its trade winds and winter swells.

A former Portuguese colony, Cape Verde has made remarkable strides after independence to ensure that it is one of Africa's most politically and economically stable nations. Despite a lack of natural resources Verdeans have managed to focus their economy on the service industry, particularly tourism.

Most visitors utilise the inter-island ferries or domestic airline to explore more than just one of these ruggedly beautiful islands, each of which has unique sights or experiences to offer. Sao Vicente is the cultural hub of the archipelago, and it is here that visitors will encounter the music and nightlife for which Cape Verde has become rightly famous. Fogo and Brava are littered with volcanoes, while Sal and Mayo offer pristine beaches and undulating dunes.

Key Facts

Language:

The official language is Portuguese, though a patois known as Crioulo tends to be used in conversation.

Passport/Visa:

Visitors of any nationality require a passport valid for the period of six months after intended stay to enter the Cape Verde Islands.

Currency:

The unit of currency is the Cape Verdean Escudo (CVE), broken down into 100 centavos. As this is a local currency it cannot be obtained before arrival and cannot be reconverted outside of Cape Verde. There is a bureau de change at the airport. ATMs can be found at the airport and in Sal, Praia and Sao Vincent. Major credit cards, particularly MasterCard and Visa, are currently accepted in a few main resort hotels and restaurants. Banks will give cash on credit cards but commissions are high.

Electricity:

Electrical current is 220 volts, 50 Hz. Round two-pin attachment plugs and Schuko plugs are used.

Travel to Cape Verde

Overview

Cape Verde has a feast of thrilling experiences for holidaymakers, who are certain to find the type of sun-filled adventure they're after. Those who wish to retreat into a natural paradise where bustling crowds simply do not exist should visit the volcanic island of Santo Antao. Along with world-class treks for hikers, the island showcases the destination's Portuguese roots and is home to the famed Cape Verde rum called grogue, which is enjoyed by visitors and locals alike.

Culture lovers should add Santiago to their itineraries. The island promises an authentic taste of African traditions and, through the 15th-century fortress of Cidade Velha, a glimpse of the region's dramatic history with the slave trade. Sao Vicente is the place to be for travellers who want to dance the night away at lively parties, savour local cuisine at charming restaurants, or windsurf the Atlantic Ocean.

Climate in Cape Verde

The tropical climate of Cape Verde is tempered by trade winds, with temperatures remaining constant most of the year. Temperatures average between 78°F and 86°F (26°C - 30°C) year-round, but it can get hotter on the flatter islands or inland. The weather does vary slightly from island to island in the archipelago, depending on each island's geography and location. There is almost uninterrupted sunshine from November to May but the winds usually keep the heat bearable.

The wind can be strong in Cape Verde and, although it is great for making waves for surfing, it is also important to note that visitors should pay attention to the lifeguard warnings and flags for their own safety when the surf is powerful. The rainy season is during August, September and October; the amount of rain is rather unpredictable and Cape Verde has suffered severe droughts in the past. When it does rain the showers can be dramatic and sudden. The sea temperatures are lovely and warm, which adds to Cape Verde's popularity.

The best time to visit the islands is between March and June, though the best waves for surfers are found from April to June.

Health Notes when travelling to Cape Verde

A yellow fever vaccination is required for those arriving from an infected area. No other vaccinations are required for travel to Cape Verde, but vaccinations are recommended for hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid, and it is generally advised that all travellers be up to date on vaccinations for MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) and tetanus-diphtheria. Malaria medication is recommended for travel to Santiago Island. Outbreaks of Brucellosis are occasionally reported.

Water is unsafe to drink without prior treatment, and milk is unpasteurised. Medical facilities are limited and some medicines are in short supply. Visitors should receive free hospital treatment in general hospitals on presenting their passports, but health insurance is strongly advised, with coverage for emergency repatriation. Those who require prescription medication for their holiday should bring it with them. They should also make sure they have the necessary documents from their doctor to get the medication through customs.

Safety Notes when travelling to Cape Verde

Visits to Cape Verde are usually trouble free. The political situation is stable and the crime rate is low. The only danger is presented by occasional hazardous sea conditions around the islands.

Customs in Cape Verde

Though Cape Verdeans are friendly and hospitable, there are a few local customs that visitors should be aware of. A handshake is generally a proper greeting, but on occasion women may kiss on the cheek. People tend to stand close together when speaking, and may touch each other platonically. Casual dress is acceptable in most situations. Visitors should note there is zero tolerance towards possessing, using or trafficking any type of illegal drugs. Those who are convicted can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines.

Duty Free in Cape Verde

Travellers to Cape Verde are permitted the following items without incurring customs duty: 200 cigarettes, 1 litre of alcohol, 250 milliliters of eau de toilette and 50 grams of perfume, and some gift items. The import or export of narcotics is strictly prohibited.

Doing Business in Cape Verde

Business in Cape Verde is conducted in Portuguese or English. Most of Cape Verde's business links are with Portugal. Business hours are generally 8am to 12:30pm and 2:30pm to 6pm, Monday to Friday.

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Communication in Cape Verde

The country code is +238. The outgoing code is 0 followed by the relevant country code (e.g. 044 for the United Kingdom). WiFi is available in the main town squares on all the islands, and also in major hotels; visitors can purchase local SIM Cards for unlocked phones.

Tipping in Cape Verde

At least 10 percent tip should be given if no service charge has been added to the bill, and tips should be in local currency.

Passport/Visa Note

Visitors of any nationality require a passport valid for the period of six months after intended stay to enter the Cape Verde Islands.

Entry Requirements

Entry requirements for Americans:

US citizens require a valid passport and visa. A visa can be obtained on arrival. All documents must be valid for six months after the arrival date.

Entry requirements for Canadians:

Canadians require a valid passport and visa. A visa can be obtained on arrival. All documents must be valid for six months after the arrival date.

Entry requirements for UK nationals:

UK citizens require a valid passport and visa. A visa is not required for stays of up to 30 days. A visa can be obtained on arrival. All documents must be valid for six months after the arrival date.

Entry requirements for Australians:

Australians require a valid passport and visa. A visa can be obtained on arrival. All documents must be valid for six months after the arrival date.

Entry requirements for Irish nationals:

Irish nationals require a valid passport. A visa is not required for up to 30 days. A visa can be obtained on arrival. All documents must be valid for six months after the arrival date.

Entry requirements for New Zealanders:

New Zealand nationals require a valid passport and visa. A visa can be obtained on arrival. All documents must be valid for six months after the arrival date.

Entry requirements for South Africans:

South Africans require a valid passport and visa. A visa can be obtained on arrival. All documents must be valid for six months after the arrival date.

Cape Verde Embassies

In the United States:

Cape Verde Embassy, Washington DC, United States (also responsible for Canada): +1 202 965 6820.

In the United Kingdom:

Cape Verde Consulate, London, United Kingdom: +44 7876 232305.

In Ireland:

Cape Verde Embassy, The Hague, Holland (responsible for Ireland): +31 00 355 36 51.

Foreign Embassies in Cape Verde

American Embassy

United States Embassy, Praia: +238 260 8900.

Canadian Embassy

Canadian Embassy, Dakar, Senegal (also responsible for Cape Verde): +221 33 889 4700.

British Embassy

British Consulate, Sao Vincente: +238 232 3512.

South African Embassy

South African Embassy, Dakar, Senegal (also responsible for Cape Verde): +221 33 865 1959.

Currency

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Overview of the Attractions in Cape Verde

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Public Holidays in Cape Verde