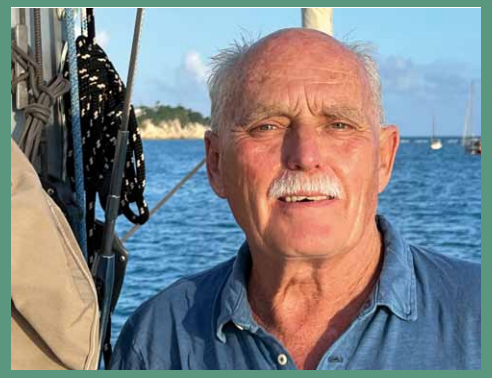
Bruno Fazzini

Seychelles

Cruising Guide

FIRST EDITION

il Frangente
EDIZIONI



BRUNO FAZZINI has loved sailing since he was a boy. It was initially a hobby, but he took it up professionally in 1994 when he started skippering Swan and Oyster yachts, both for private owners and charter firms. He has sailed the length and breadth of the Mediterranean for many years and has crossed the Atlantic numerous times. His travels have led him to explore the Pacific Ocean, Indonesia, the Tasman Sea, and the Andaman Sea. He specialises, however, in the Seychelles, as he has navigated its islands extensively.

Since 2003, he has run a charter business to two parts of the world: the Mediterranean in summer; and the Indian Ocean in winter, including cruises around Thailand, Malesia, Myanmar and Andaman. In autumn, he heads to the Seychelles and Madagascar. His work enables him to stay onboard his yacht for much of the year and place his immense sailing experience at his guests' disposal.

Seychelles Cruising Guide

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INTRODUCTION

GENERAL INFORMATION

White beaches, crystal-clear waters and lush vegetation make the Seychelles archipelago a tropical paradise with breathtaking anchorages. Its islands are also famed for their vast and unique variety of endemic flora and fauna, including numerous rare protected species. To safeguard this vast natural heritage, the government has set up a series of parks, which cover 50% of the islands' surface area. The Seychelles have two UNESCO World Heritage sites: Aldabra, the world's largest coral atoll, and Vallée de Mai on the island of Praslin, where *coco de mer* grows in its forest.

The archipelago comprises 115 granitic and coral islands in the west of the Indian Ocean, stretching between 4-10° S and 45-50° E. Forty-one of them are known as the "Inner Islands", and include Mahé, Praslin and La Digue. The remaining 71 are divided into five groups of atolls and banks of sand called the "Outer Islands".

Huge granite boulders lying on the islands' shores are a unique feature of the Seychelles archipelago.

HISTORY

The Republic of Seychelles has a population of about 96,000 and is a Commonwealth country. Its history is relatively recent, as the islands were uninhabited for centuries, with fleeting visits being made by Arab and Maldivian navigators as they crossed the Indian Ocean. The islands were mentioned for the first time in European sources in 1502 when they were sighted by the Portuguese navigator Vasco De Gama. They were later named "Amirantes" (Admiral Islands) in his honour. During the 17th century, the archipelago was mainly ignored as a potential overseas territory. Its only purpose was as a stopover for sailors to pick up fresh water and food, especially giant-tortoise meat, as they headed to the East Indies. The French were the first Europeans to take possession of the islands, doing so in 1756. They gave the archipelago its current name, calling the largest island Isle de Séchelles, which is modern-day Mahé. Colonisation only began in 1770, when a handful of Europeans and slaves, mainly from East Africa and Madagascar, were sent to the islands to plant the first spice crops. When the French Revolution broke out, the descendants of the original colonisers claimed the right to own and self-administrate the archipelago which, in the meantime, had become a perilous area, with pirates plundering British merchant ships returning from the East Indies laden with their precious cargo. When French Mauritius fell into British hands, the Seychelles also became a British colony after the Treaty of Paris in 1814. Under British rule, a strong local economy sprang up based on vast agricultural estates, as well as coconut, cotton and sugar cane plantations.

The Seychelles declared independence from Great Britain in 1976, after which it established a presidential republic, which is still in place today.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

The current population of the Seychelles can trace its origins back to the major European colonisers: first the French then the British. They also descend from the slaves introduced here from continental Africa in the early 18th century, as well as from the numerous Indian, Arab and Chinese merchants that sailed the Indian Ocean's trade routes. Today, it is a multi-ethnic society in which, over the centuries, a host of cultures have contributed to the current state of peaceful coexistence.

Its vast array of art and cultures reflects the archipelago's cosmopolitan origins. There is thus no dominant culture, but a melting pot, which has created a harmonious blend of flavours, sounds and colours. Local cuisine, for example, comprises a mixture of dishes and flavours inspired by French, African, Indian and Chinese cuisine. French and English colonialism, however, have left their mark on the architecture, as seen in the villas of contemporary landowners. Music is also a blend of cultures, spawning a heterogeneous scene that ranges from European music to African-influenced percussion.

LANGUAGES

The three official languages of the Seychelles are Creole, French and English. Creole is the main language, being spoken by Seychellois both at home and in public. It is a combination of French, Swahili and English, with it taught at school alongside the other two languages.

ECONOMY

The Seychelles's economy is based on tourism and its tuna-fishing industry. Its capital Victoria has a large canning plant that employs 2,500 people and processes 400 tonnes of tuna a day. Its main exports, besides canned tuna, are vanilla, coconuts, coconut oil, soap and guano. The Seychelles are also one of the last tax havens, so numerous financial companies have headquarters and offices in Victoria.

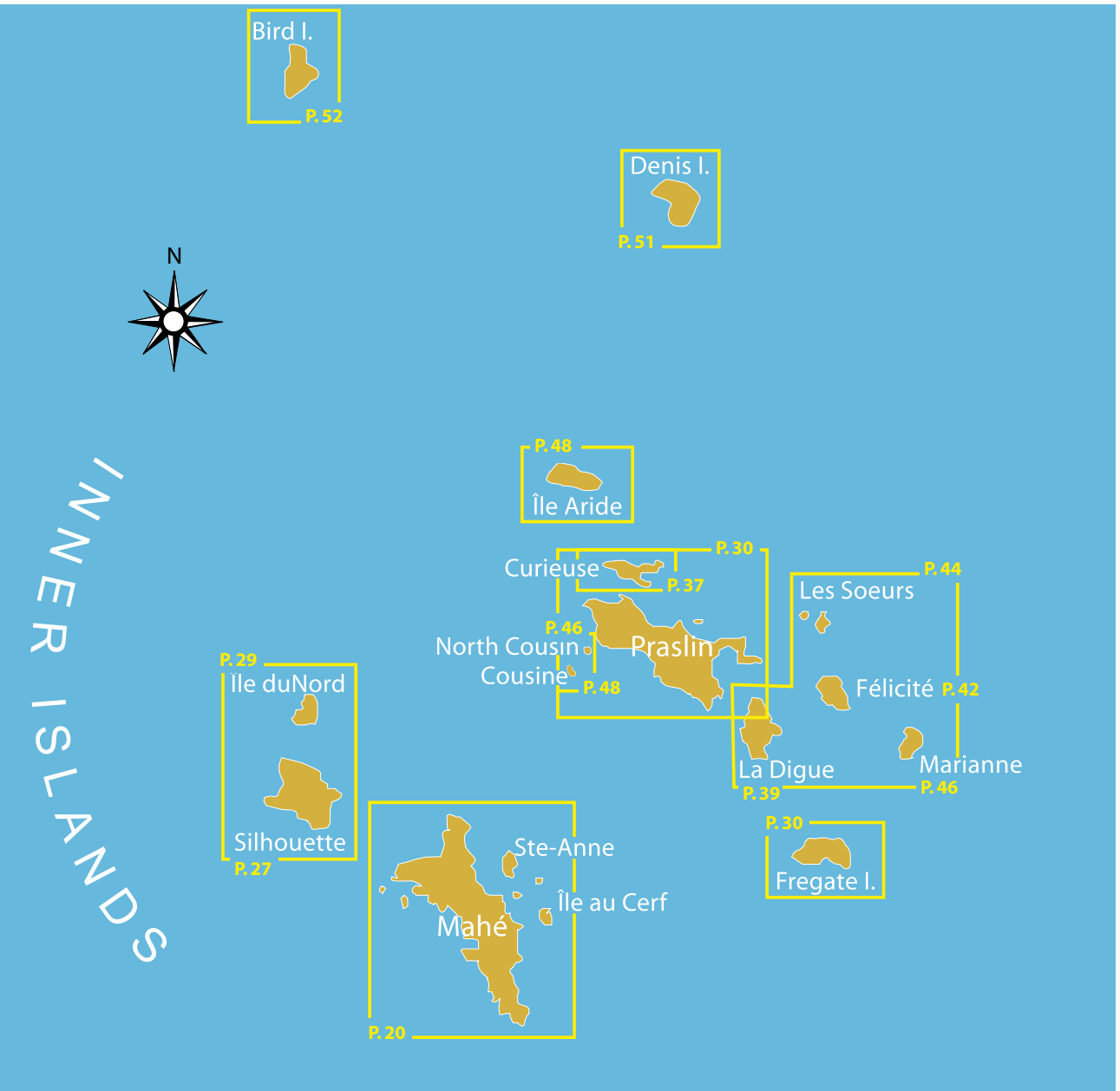
HEALTH

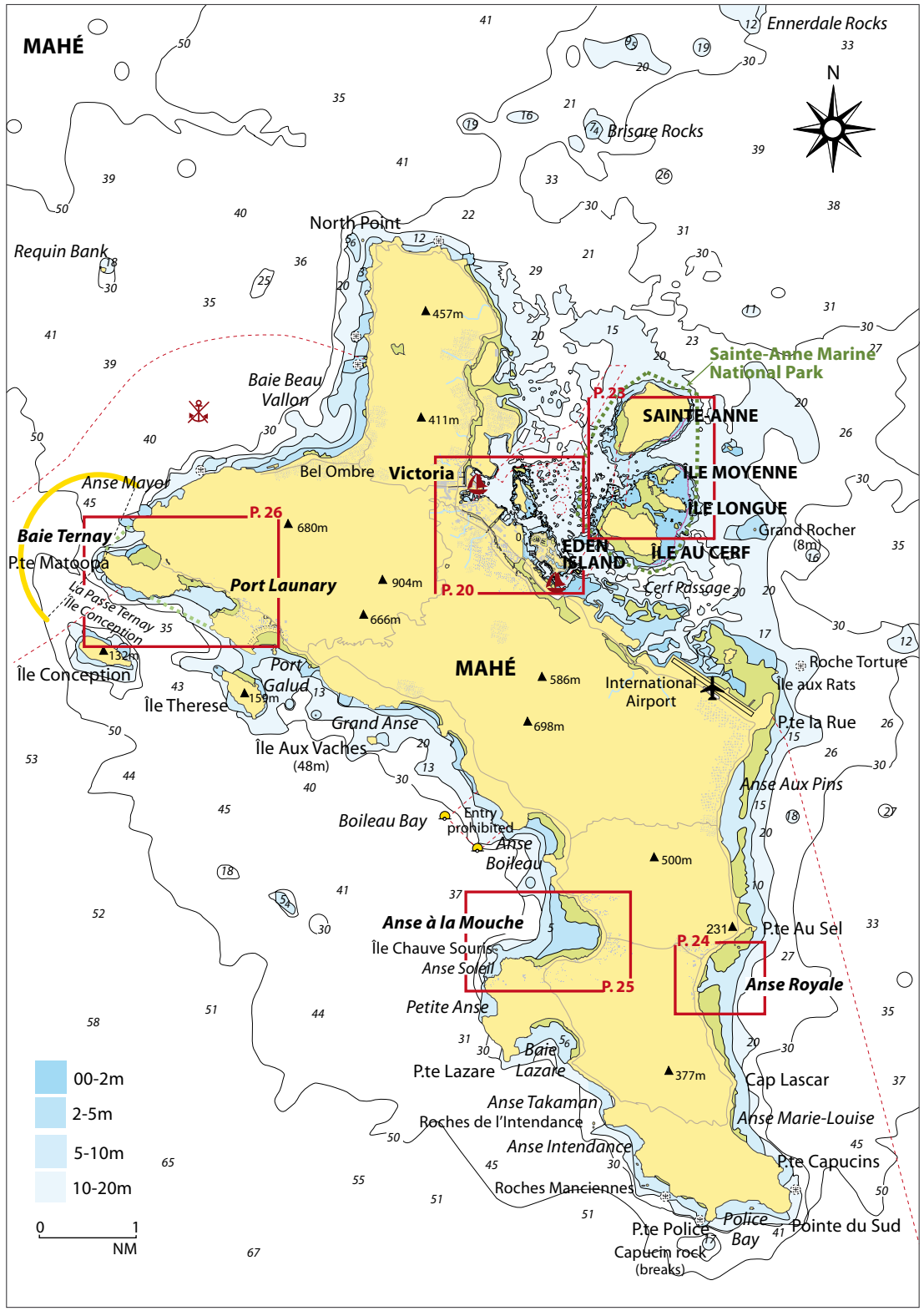
Visiting the Seychelles is not considered to be a health risk. You will need to take the usual precautions required for all tropical climates, mainly protecting yourself from the sun. To prevent bothersome insect bites, you protect should protect yourself with mosquito repellent. To fend off sand flies, which live in almost all tropical regions, you have to apply essential oils, especially just before sunset.

In general, there are no dangerous animals. Any spiders, reptiles and insects you may encounter are usually harmless.

Healthcare is good, with there being two hospitals in Mahé, one in Praslin, and one in La Digue. Doctor's and dental surgeries can be found across the archipelago.

INNER ISLANDS





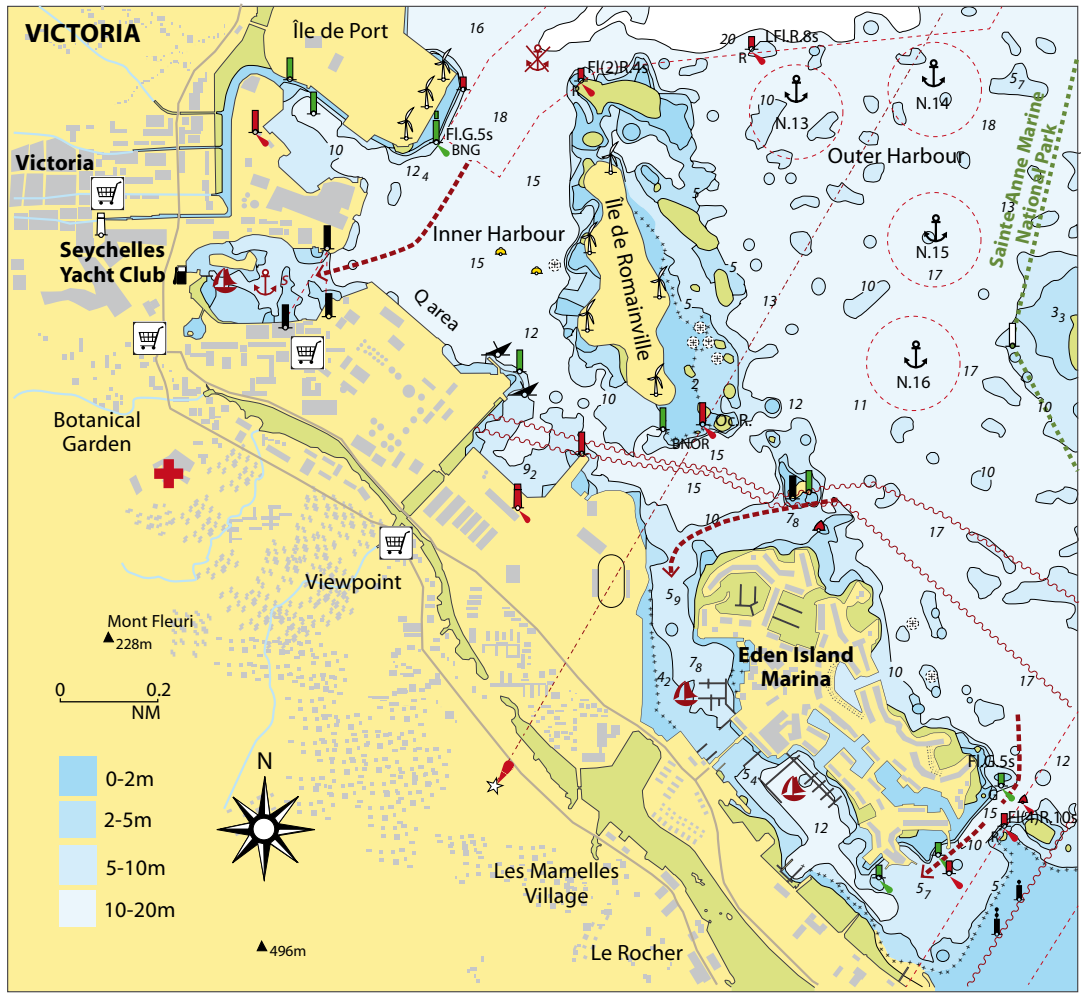
MAHÉ

Victoria

Victoria is the capital of the Seychelles; it stands on the northeastern coast of Mahé Island.

The main attractions are its clock tower, which resembles the one at Vauxhall Bridge, London, its courthouse, National Botanical Gardens, Seychelles National History Museum, and Sir Selwyn-Clarke Market. It is also home to the national stadium Stade Linité and to Seychelles Polytechnic. The inland port sits just east of the city; the two main sectors of the local economy, fishing and tuna processing, are based here. One of Port Victoria's largest bridges was destroyed by the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004.

Victoria offers two two main mooring options:



Seychelles Yacht Club

Seychelles Yacht Club lies at the heart of Victoria, but finding a berth at the quay is hard work as it is a fuel dock. Alternatively, anchor off and come ashore by dinghy. As it is inside the main port, the club is well-sheltered from any swell and fairly well-sheltered from the wind. Depths are not an issue, so even at low tide you can go alongside the fuel dock in a monohull drawing more than 2m.

The only drawback is that there has been a recent spate of thefts on anchored yachts, especially at night.

Eden Island Marina

This beautiful, well-equipped marina sits in a residential complex of recently built villas and hotels. The shopping centre next door contains a variety of shops, bars, restaurants, a well-stocked, top-quality supermarket, and a soon-

Aerial view of Eden Island Marina.

to-open casino. It is just a 15-minute taxi ride from the airport and the city centre.

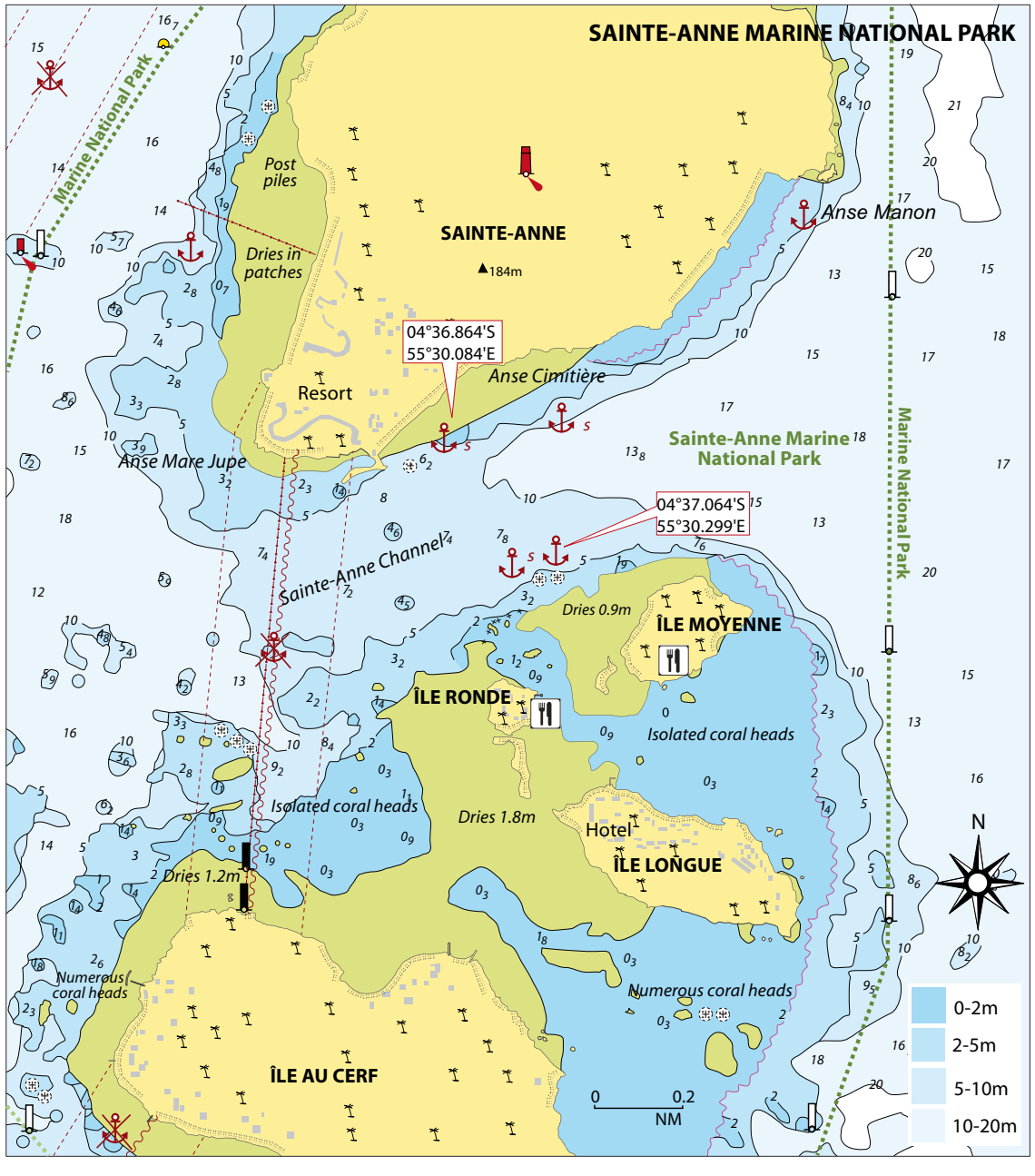
Booking a berth by email or phone is strongly advised.

Sainte-Anne Marine National Park

This anchorage is in the channel between the islands of Sainte-Anne and Île au Cerf. It is the closest to Victoria - not even 2M away - but provides a taster of what to expect in the more remote islands. It is well-sheltered both from the monsoon and trade winds; at high tide, the water is clear and makes for reasonable snorkelling. You should seek out swimming spots by dinghy and enjoy the white sandy beaches of Sainte Anne. The anchorage is close to the city and thus very popular, especially at weekends. Late afternoon, however, everyone leaves, and peace and quiet reign once more.

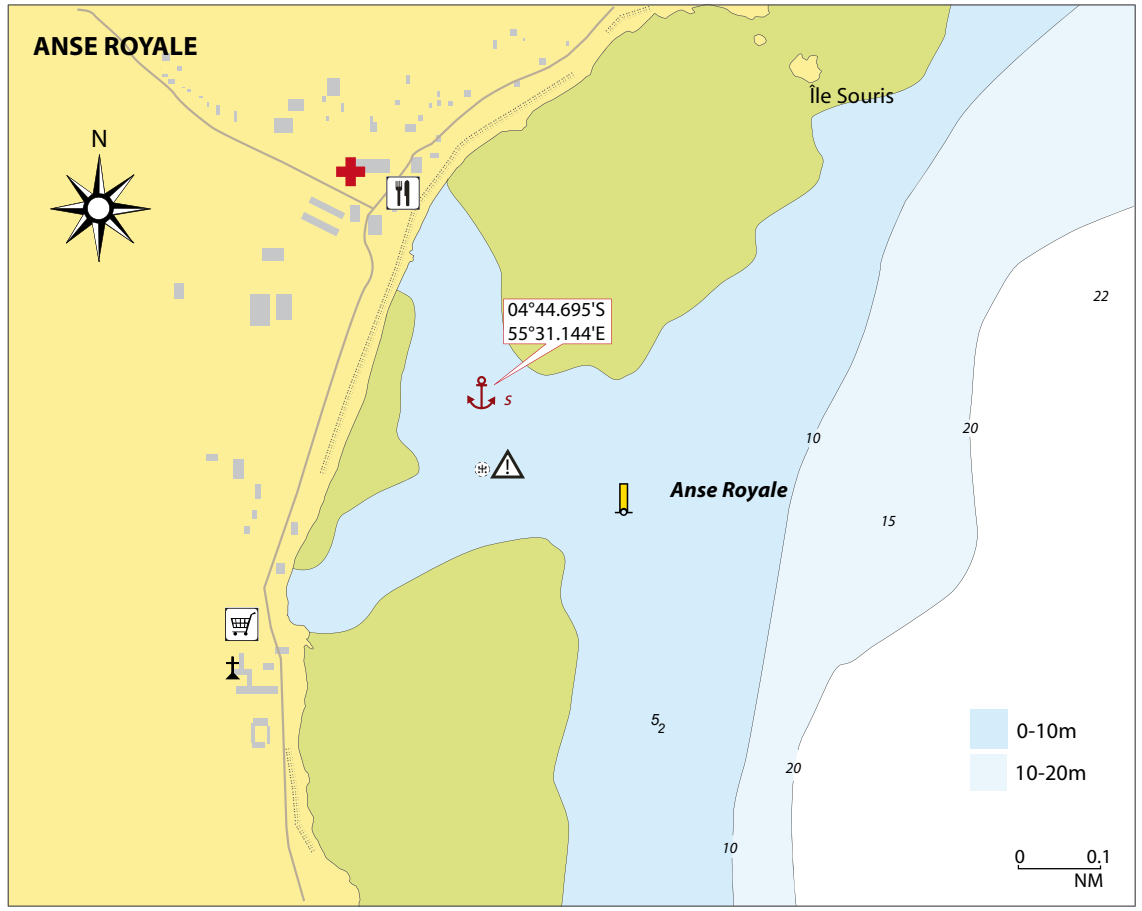
Anchorage In a trade wind, you can anchor in the channel's southern part, between Île au Cerf and the easternmost islets at the reef edge. In a monsoon wind, you should anchor off Sainte Anne. Sandy bottom with excellent holding. A marine park launch will pass by to collect fees as soon as you anchor.

Breathtaking view of the crystal-clear turquoise waters of Sainte-Anne Marine National Park.



Anse Royale

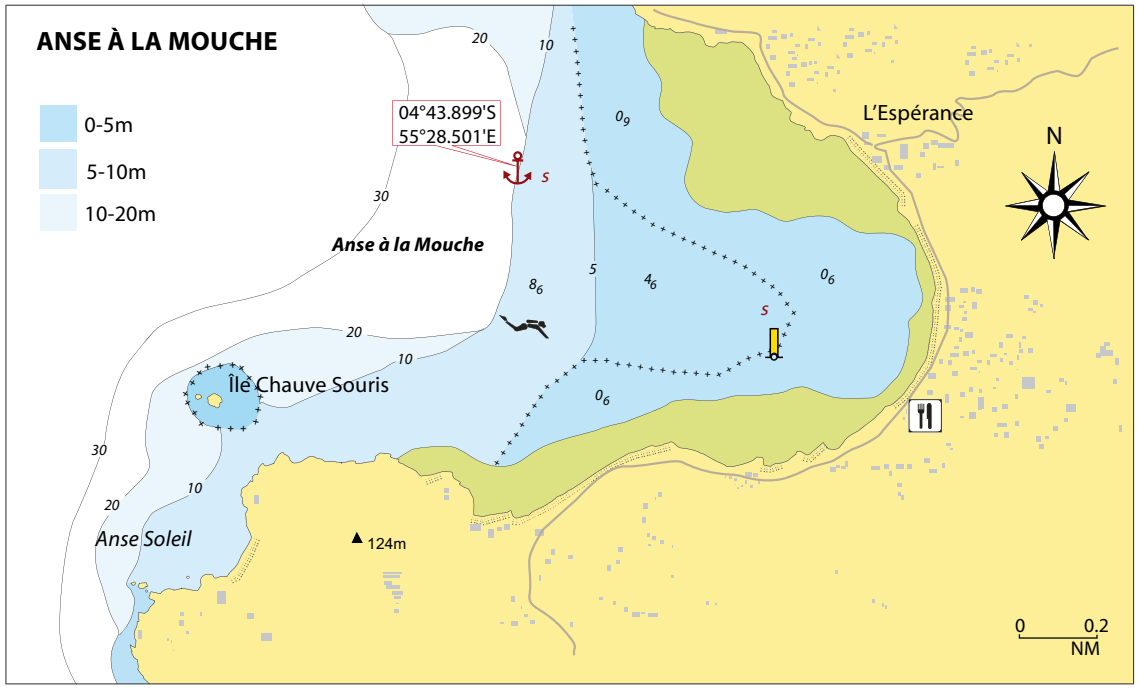
This reasonable anchorage sits to the SE of Mahé. It is protected by a reef, with protection being excellent during the monsoon wind. It is also tenable in a moderate trade wind when the swell is not too rolly. Buoys usually mark the passage, but they are often pushed out of position by the sea. The entrance is nevertheless easily identified during the day when the sun is high. A night approach is not recommended. Anchor on a sandy bottom in 5-10m. Excellent holding. The bay has a white sandy beach studded with the huge granite boulders typical to the Seychelles. A number of restaurants look onto the bay. In town are a couple of minimarkets, a pharmacy, a fuel station and a small market selling fruit, vegetables and fish. It also has a hospital (see the Introduction p. 7).



Anse à la Mouche

This large beach with peaceful, shallow waters sits on the SW side of Mahé. The snorkelling is reasonable, and the beach is an excellent place for a swim or a stroll. As it is on the island's W coast, the sunsets are spectacular, and you can watch the sun sinking into the sea.

Anchorage Excellent in a trade wind, but untenable in a monsoon. Anchor off the beach in 5-6m on sand. Good holding.



Port Launary Marine Park

It lies on the NW coast of Mahé; it boasts several beaches and small islands. The scenery is breathtaking, and its waters are peaceful and shallow. The beach is popular, mainly with the guests at the nearby Constance Ephelia Resort, which has an excellent restaurant. Reasonable snorkelling along both shores. The moorings off the beach are reserved for the motorboats that take tourists on daily cruises and fishing trips. Inside, beyond the resort, are the ubiquitous minimarket, a car-hire, and the bus station for Victoria.