

## Reunion

### Overview:

Reunion Island (in French, La Reunion) is a multicultural society composed of people originally from France, Mozambique, India, China, Madagascar, and the Comores. Islanders use their ethnic origins to define themselves as Cafres (African ancestry) Z'oreilles (born in mainland France), malabars or Tamouls (from Tamil Nadu southern India), Z'arabes (from Gujarat in northern India), Chinois (from China), Malgaches (from Madagascar), Comores (from Comores), Petits blancs (poor rural whites living in the highlands), or Creoles blancs (white landowners). The term Creole today also applies to people with a mixed ethnic background. All the residents of the island are administratively French citizens. .

### Territory:

Living in Reunion means adapting to the eccentricities of this volcano, but the local inhabitants, the Reunais, have adopted a laissez faire attitude and welcome the foreign tourists and scientists who come to witness this phenomenon. Moreover, the rich volcanic soil has spawned many forests of tamarinds, redwood and fern trees and beautiful 'yellow flower' type shrubs. Farms in the volcano's vicinity, like around Bourg-Murai, have evergreen grazing, which supports a thriving dairy industry

### Location:

Reunion Island lies in the Indian Ocean, off the eastern coast of Madagascar. At 970 square miles, (2,512 square kilometers), it is the largest of the Mascarene islands. High plains separate two volcanic systems. Climatic variations range from humid to dry tropical to Mediterranean. More than half the land is not suitable for cultivation. Periodic cyclones can be devastating. The capital is Saint Denis.

### Latitude and Longitude:

Latitude: 20° 51' 35" S; Longitude: 55° 27' 12" E

### Time Zone:

GMT+4

### Total Land Area:

2512

### EEZ:

200

### Climate:

The hot months on the island are from January to March and the coldest from July to August. In winter the Piton de Neige lives up to its name and in early times slaves used to trek to the top to fetch ice for their masters. Tropical, but temperature moderates with elevation; cool and dry from May to November, hot and rainy from November to April

### Natural Resources:

The soil yields abundant tropical fruit, vanilla and geraniums (for making geranium oil). Other locally produced products include rum from sugar cane, and local cheeses, done the French way.

### ECONOMY:

Total GDP:	
1998	3,400,000,000.00 USD

Per Capita GDP:	
1998	4,800.00 USD

% of GDP per Sector:			
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary

% of Population Employed by Sector			
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
1990	73%	19%	8%
2007	73%	19%	8%

### External Aid/Remittances:

RÃ©union receives substantial annual subsidies from France.

### Growth:

GDP - real growth rate: 3.8% (1998 est.)

Labour Force:	
1995	261,000

Unemployment	
Year:	Unemployment Rate (% of pop.)
1998	42.8%

### Industry:

The economy was traditionally based on agriculture. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the most important crops were coffee and cloves and then sugarcane.

### Niche Industry:

Fishing is considered a niche industry for RÃ©union. The fishing sector accounts for a marginal proportion of regional GDP1 (0.4% in 2004) and employs 0.5% of the

active population but makes a considerable contribution to the island's exports (15% of export income), in particular, with niche products such as toothfish.

**Tourism:**

For visitors St Denis is a must with its antiquated streets and shops, most of which still boast the quaint neo-classical style architecture with verandas and shuttered doors and windows in bright colours. Houses in this capital range from sumptuous villas to cute little house called 'cases'. Everything closes between 12 and 2pm - like in France - so people can go home for lunch or siesta. In this bustling city restaurants range from Chinese, Indian, Creole to French and Italian and prices range from R80-R150 for a meal. The spicy Creole food is marvellous and my favourite was curried shrimps and calamari. Locally produced products are cheaper than imported items



<b>Imports and Exports:</b>	
Sugarcane has been the primary crop for more than a century, and in some years it accounts for 85% of exports. The government has been pushing the development of a tourist industry to relieve high unemployment, which amounts to more than 40% of the labor force.	
<b>Tot. Value of Imports</b>	2,147,483,647.00 US (1997)
<b>From Eu:</b>	
<b>Import Partners (EU:)</b>	France Germany Italy
<b>Partners Outside EU:</b>	Bahrain
<b>Import Partners:</b>	Bahrain 3%, France 64%, Germany 3%, Italy 3%
<b>Tot. Value of Exports</b>	214000000 US (1997)
<b>To Eu:</b>	France 74%
<b>Export Partners:</b>	
<b>Partners Outside EU::</b>	Japan Comoros
<b>Export Partners:</b>	France 74%, Japan 6%, Comoros 4%
<b>Main Imports:</b>	manufactured goods, food, beverages, tobacco, machinery and transportation equipment, raw materials, and petroleum products
<b>Main Exports:</b>	sugar 63%, rum and molasses 4%, perfume essences 2%, lobster 3%,

**TRANSPORTATION/ACCESS**

**External:**

**Number of Airports: 2**

Airports - with paved runways: total: 2 One of the airports has runways between 2,438 to 3,047 m and the second has runways between 914 to 1,523 m

**Number of Main Ports: 1**

There is only one seaport in Runion - Le Port, Pointe des Galets Merchant marine: total 1 ships (1,000 GRT or over) totaling 28,264 GRT/44,885 DWT. It is a chemical tanker.

**Internal:**

**Air**

**Road:**

Highways: total: 2,724 km paved: 1,300 km (including 73 km of four-lane road) note: 370 km of road are maintained by national authorities, 754 km by departmental authorities and 1,600 km by local authorities (1994) unpaved: 1,424 km

**Sea:**

**Other Forms of Transportation:**

**Economic Zones:**

**Energy Policy:**

Numerous global and local interests bind islands and regions around the problems of energy self-sufficiency and adaptation to climate change. The Regional Council of Runion Island, the actors of energy on Runion Island and some Islands and territories currently programming the development of renewable energies at a large scale, met together on Runion Island, from 2005 October 26 to November 4, to establish five workgroups for the period 2006 to 2013. Their role is to organise, draft, finalise, disseminate and update a database entitled: Energy Self Self-sufficiency Strategies for Islands: 2000 2000-2025 2025-2050 The main priority in the response considered for adaptation and mitigation, is to switch toward energy systems using renewable and clean technologies.

Year	Total Energy Production (Mwh)	Type			Total Energy Consumption (Mwh)	Sector				
		Thermic (Mwh)	Geothermic (Mwh)	Other (Mwh)		Domestic (Mwh)	Commercial (Mwh)	Public Service (Mwh)	Industry (Mwh)	Public Lighting (Mwh)
	1,940,000,000	0	0	0	2,147,483,647	0	0	0	0	0



**Official Currency:**

Euro

**Banking and Insurance:**

Number of Banks and Credit Unions: 5

Number of Agricultural Credit Unions: 1

Number of Insurance Companies:

Since January 2002 the Euro has been the official currency for the French Overseas Departments (Departements d'Outre-Mer) of French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Runion. For further details, exchange rates and currency restrictions, see the France section. US Dollars are also accepted in some places. All major currencies can be exchanged at banks and bureaux de change. American Express, Diners Club and Visa are accepted. MasterCard has limited acceptance.

Cards can also be used in ATMs. Check with your credit or debit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available. Travellers cheques are accepted in most places, and may qualify for discounts on luxury items. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in Euros, US Dollars or Pounds Sterling.

**Financial Services:**

**Communications/E-Commerce:**

**Public Ownership:**

**Land Use:**

Land use is broken down into the following categories: arable land: 17% permanent crops: 2% permanent pastures: 5% forests and woodland : 35%

**Agriculture/Forestry:**

Thanks largely to its topography, Réunion represents the highest diversity of habitats in the Mascarenes. Four main altitudinal vegetation zones can be distinguished: lowland dry or semi-dry vegetation (palm savanna, semi-dry ebony forest), intermediate-altitude humid forest, mountain cloud forest, and high-altitude ericaceous heathland communities. In some instances, coastal vegetation, marshland vegetation, riverine vegetation, secondary forests and forest plantations, agricultural land, and early successional stages on volcanic lava flows are also considered in this Part. Natural dry and semi-dry lowland and coastal vegetation have been almost completely destroyed. However, 20–30 percent of the vegetation, especially in the uplands, is conserved in its primary or natural state. Thus, Réunion retains a much larger area of natural ecosystems than the other Mascarenes. Although urbanisation, agriculture and alien plant invasions have transformed large areas in La Réunion, the island has by far the greatest area of intact habitats in the Mascarenes, but remaining natural areas are under threat.

**Marine Activity:**

**Fishing:**

Small-scale coastal fishing focuses on 'red'-bellied fish and species of small pelagic fish living in the narrow coastal area. Annual declared catches total between 1,500 and 2,500 tonnes. There is no accurate gauging of the fishing effort and it is clear that stocks in the coastal regions are being over-fished. Longlining of large pelagic fish pertains mainly to swordfish but also long-finned, tunny and big-eye tuna and other species such as dolphinfish. Catches are estimated at approximately 3,000 tonnes. The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) – the regional fishing organisation responsible for managing stocks in the region – is highlighting the over-fishing of stocks of swordfish and big-eye tuna. Accounting for 0.25% of the Indian Ocean's tuna catches, the Réunion fleet plays a marginal role in this over-fishing. 'Southern Ocean' fishing primarily targets Southern Ocean toothfish and crayfish. This is a relatively recent fishery. However neither catches (approximately 6,000 tonnes per year) nor stocks are being monitored following community standards.

**Marine Life:**

Some of the island marine life includes swordfish, tunny and big-eye tuna, dolphinfish, tilapia, trout, drum, toothfish and crayfish.

**Critical Issues:**

Due to the sharing of fish among family and friends, as well as potentially wide distribution by fish markets and restaurant of large fish, marine toxins in the fish can lead to human sickness and disease.

**JURISDICTIONAL RESOURCES**

**Capital:**

The capital is Saint Denis.

**Political System:**

Reunion is a department of France following French laws and customs. The political system is French. The representative of the French state is the prefect, who is appointed by the French president. There are one general council and one regional council, whose presidents are elected by their members, that finance development projects. City mayors are popularly elected, along with five deputies to the French National Assembly.

**Political Parties:**

Communist Party of Reunion or PCR; Rally for the Republic or RPR; Socialist Party or PS; Union for French Democracy or UDF.

**Important Legislation:**

**Principal Taxes:**

French taxes apply. French real estate investors draw their profits from the tax breaks on the initial investment, rather than from the rental yields. The DOMs are well-served by these tax breaks, particularly by the Loi Girardin. Foreign buyers can hardly hope to compete with the French, whose cost of capital is considerably lower.

**Associated Power:**

**Citizenship:**

People of Reunion are considered Citizens of France

**Paradiplomacy:**

**HUMAN RESOURCES**

The labor force consists of workers in services (seventy-three percent), industry (nineteen percent), and agriculture (eight percent). Major industries include sugar, rum, handicrafts, and flower oil extraction.

2004			
Island	Area (km sq.)	Population	% of Total Population
Reunion	2,510	743,981	%

Unemployment is a major problem, state programs of social welfare are important. More than sixty percent of the population receives welfare benefits. The government has been pushing the development of a tourist industry to relieve high unemployment, which amounts to more than 40% of the labor force.

Population:	
Year	Resident Population

Age of Population:	0-14	15-24	25-49	50-64	65 and up
2002	236000	154,951	154,951	154,951	43,011

**Migration:**

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<b>Crude Birth Rate:</b>	
1997	2.34%

**Life Expectancy:**  
total population: 73.18 years male: 69.78 years female: 76.74 years

<b>Crude Death Rate:</b>	
2002	2.07%

**Ethnicity:**  
Whites and people of African, Tamil, and mixed ancestry consider themselves the original inhabitants of the island, in contrast to Gujaratis and Chinese. However, all native residents feel a strong difference between themselves and people from mainland France. The French, who generally do not stay more than three or four years on the island, are rarely considered full members of the society. Both populations live close to each other but inhabit different cultural worlds.

**Class Division:**  
The transformation of Reunion into a French department slowly substituted a pseudo-industrial and consumer society for a colonial and rural society. There are large disparities in wages and deep social inequalities between workers. The minimum wage is around ten percent lower than it is in mainland France, while the wages of those in the public sector are approximately forty percent higher. The gap between rich and poor accounts for the current social tensions. The white and Indian communities are substantially better off than are other segments of the population. Immigrants from France hold the key positions in administration, and in the private sector, their wages are higher than are those of other groups. People of African descent are still at the bottom of the social scale. The outbreak of rioting in February 1991 reflected the seriousness of socioeconomic tensions.

**Languages:**  
Although French is the official language, Creole is the language of everyday life. Based on French, with a mixture of Malagasy and Tamil words, it is used with relatives and for informal interactions. French is generally used in formal situations. Although everybody understands it, many people cannot speak it; therefore, its use is a marker of educational achievement and social status.

**Religion:**  
The dominant religion is Roman Catholicism, totaling eighty-six percent of the population. Christianity was established by the first settlers. Although indentured contracts specified that a laborer's religion be respected, the Catholic Church and the authoritarian administration attempted to convert newcomers. Tamils were obliged to go to church, wear French clothes, and give Christian names to their children. Contract workers had to express Christian attitudes and practice Christian rites to be accepted by their employers and the larger society. In the eighteenth century, Catholic priests attempted to prevent the construction of Hindu temples and the public practice of Hinduism. When it was finally authorized, the priests continued to spread a negative perception of the Hindu religion as "pagan." Although they have been largely christianized, people of Indian origin refer to Hindu Gods in important matters. While it has been adapted to a new social context, folk Hinduism has been maintained almost as it was in India at the time of emigration more than one century ago. Among the expressions of this religion are fire walking, animal sacrifices, and rituals of possession by a deity or ancestor. This Hinduism is strongly connected with the idea of protection against bad luck, the evil eye, and the negative forces of the visible and invisible world.

**Literacy:**  
definition : age 15 and over can read and write total population: 79% male: 76% female: 80%

**Education System:**  
In 1954, fifty-seven percent of the population was illiterate, but today the rate is less than 10 percent. Education is valued in families of Tamil, Gujarati, and Chinese ancestry. For the lower and middle classes, school is a democratic institution that allows one to achieve a better future. Pupils with African and mixed origin who frequently grow up in a family with a single mother, often experience failure at school. In contrast, education is particularly valued in families of Tamil, Gujarati, and Chinese ancestry. For the lower and middle classes, school is a democratic institution that allows one to achieve a better future. There are seven thousand students at the ever-expanding University of La Réunion.

<b>Total Pre-schools:()</b>	
<b>Total Primary Schools</b>	
<b>First Level:</b>	
<b>Second Level:</b>	
<b>Third Level:</b>	
<b>Total Secondary Schools:</b>	
<b>Total Professional Schools</b>	
<b>Universities:</b>	1

<b>Number of Schools per Island:</b>										
	<b>Pre-school</b>		<b>Elementary</b>			<b>High-school</b>		<b>Prof.</b>	<b>University</b>	
	<b>Pub</b>	<b>Priv</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Pub</b>	<b>Priv</b>		<b>Pub</b>	<b>Priv</b>
Reunion								10	2	

<b>Students Enrolled:</b>					
<b>Year:</b>	<b>Pre-School</b>	<b>Elementary</b>	<b>High-school</b>	<b>Prof.</b>	<b>University</b>
2006	0	0	0	16,975	12,198

<b>Teachers</b>							
<b>Year</b>	<b>Pre-School</b>	<b>Elementary</b>			<b>High-School</b>	<b>Prof.</b>	<b>University</b>
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>			

Children of Tamil ancestry learn to separate the world into two basic spheres of action: that of the family and the community, in which the Indian value system predominates, and that where the cultural models of the larger society are dominant.

#### **Medical Services:**

In rural areas, modern medicine is complemented by traditional local practices based on a mixture of different beliefs (Hindus, Christian, and Malagasy). Many people consult devineurs who can predict the future and give advice about their problems.

## **HISTORY AND CULTURE**

#### **History:**

Discovered at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the island was reached by the French in 1643. Reunion (then called Mascarin) was devoid of inhabitants. The French sent twelve convicts into exile there. In 1649 they officially claimed the island in the name of the king and named it Bourbon. Colonization started in 1665, when the French East India Company sent the first twenty settlers. After 1715, settlers produced coffee and spices, which ultimately were replaced by sugarcane. In 1792, France renamed the island La Reunion. The labor force needed on the sugarcane plantations was supplied by slaves from Mozambique and Madagascar. At the end of the seventeenth century, the population could be divided into white French landowners and African and Malagasy slaves. A great number of white settlers arrived too late to gain access to the land and, excluded from the plantation system, retired in the highlands, where they constituted a poor white population (Petits blancs). The abolition of slavery in 1848 led white landowners to recruit indentured laborers for their plantations, particularly Tamils. Most Tamils stayed at the end of their five-year contracts and continued to work for the white landowners. At the turn of the century, some Chinese and Muslim Gujaratis arrived to sell food and textiles. In 1946, Reunion became one of the four overseas departments of France, and it became an administrative region in 1974. Having lost their cultural links with their societies of origin, African and Malagasy slaves were subject to deculturation and pauperization. By contrast, whites, Chinese, Muslim Gujaratis, Tamils, and French from the mainland have been able to maintain most of their original systems of value while adapting it to the local context.

#### **Referenda:**

#### **Recent Significant Events:**

Occupation of Reunion started when a few mutineers from Fort Dauphin (Madagascar) were left stranded on the island in 1646. They lived in historic caves near the present town of St Paul where there was plentiful water, edible plants and wildlife. The island became prosperous under a new governor 'Mahe de la Bourdonnais' in 1735. He was a great sailor and entrepreneur and his statue is prominently displayed in St Dennis, the capital city. In 1792, three years after the French Revolution the island was renamed Ile de la Reunion. In 1825, as a result of a thriving coffee trade the island had 25 000 free settlers and 71 000 slaves, the latter constituting the foundations of the present day Creole population. With the abolition of slavery in 1848 free workers from Africa, India, Madagascar and China helped to diversify the agriculture into sugar cane, vanilla, cotton, rice, perfume plants and commercial trade. From 24th September to 5th October 2000 MINSAs staged a very successful volcanology excursion to the largest, and only active, Mascareigne archipelago volcanic island of Reunion in the South Indian Ocean. The excursion was first suggested and subsequently organised by Thinus Cloete (Council for Geoscience) in conjunction with Luc Chevalier (Council for Geoscience) who organised the technical programme - Jill Richards (MINSAs secretary) assisted with administration, finances etc. The excursion was attended by 17 participants from South Africa and Germany and included earth scientists from the minerals industry, Council for Geoscience and the Universities of Durban-Westville, Pretoria and Wits.

#### **Music, Dance, Handicraft and Patrimony:**

Reunion Island can best be described as a combination of French, African, Indian, and Chinese cultures. This blend can be heard in traditional ecclesiastic choral music emanating from one of the island's magnificent churches and listen to the chants of the Muslim's ringing from the mosque on the opposite corner. Folk music is lively and diverse, often heard during street fairs or performed in cafes or bistros. Part of the culture can be found in the local cuisine. French, Creole, Indian, Chinese...even Italian foods, all prepared with a bit of an island twist, making use of the seafood available here as well as locally grown fruits, vegetables, and spices that are a traditional part of Reunion Island cuisine.

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#### **Useful Links:**

[IslandStudies.ca](http://IslandStudies.ca)  
[www.upei.ca](http://www.upei.ca)  
[www.google.ca](http://www.google.ca)

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