



Workation? Bleisure? Whatever you call it, you could do a lot worse than a remote working stint on a faraway Seychellois island, writes **Iga Motylska**

# Paradise also has Wi-Fi

I've given myself a month. An entire month with no other work distractions – no emails, no Zoom calls – to rework that pesky final chapter of my novel.

I read somewhere, don't ask me where, that in order to produce a semi-decent novel, you ought to be stimulated creatively, enveloped by awe-inspiring nature that rejuvenates the senses, remain active and challenge yourself to do things you've never done before. And so, I've chosen the Seychelles as my playground.

My routine will consist of reading on powdery white beaches sprinkled with granite boulders and painted in a palette of aquamarine hues.

I'll go snorkelling in search of tropical fish and, with a bit of luck, spy hawksbill turtles which, despite being endangered, are a common sighting here. There'll be sticky treks through virgin forests and bicycle adventures with stops for freshly-made juices. I'll indulge in spicy Creole seafood curries to get a taste of the archipelago. And I will go for frequent rum degustations because no one blinks at the sight of day drinking on a tropical island. Perhaps I'll pick up some Creole phrases and learn to dance the Sega. I'll write in the shade of my palm-frond beach gazebo and...

"Madam... madam." My driver's words shake me from my afternoon nap. In reality, there's no novel, no month to laze. I'm in this picture-perfect Indian Ocean archipelago for one week. And I am here to work. Mostly.

## Safe haven

Many of the larger global hotel brands and resorts – such as Constance, Savoy, Kempinski, Avani and the Eden Bleu Hotel – offer all-inclusive MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferencing and Eventing) packages. Pre-pandemic, the Seychelles was experiencing an overall increase in demand for these kinds of business travel groups.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"Are you ready for dinner?" asks the driver. "It's time to try that crab I've been telling you about."

At La Pirogue Restaurant and Bar, I meet other travellers and representatives from the Seychelles Tourism Board, where we talk about all things holiday, tourism, sustainability and coral-reef friendly sunscreen.

On my driver's recommendation, I order the Creole crab. I get started on it with my knife and fork. I struggle.

Seeing my laboured efforts, the waitress brings me a finger bowl and a crab claw cracker. I twist the claws and crack the knuckles, while trying to appear as though I eat crab regularly. Eating a crab elegantly ➤



### Easy peasy

Before the world shut down, the island nation ranked 100th of 190 countries and eighth in the sub-Saharan African region on the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index. A fair number of South African-owned businesses operate here and several ABSA branches are located on each of the three largest and most visited islands – Mahé, Praslin and La Digue.

is not the kind of skill you can fake. Harder to fake still while listening to local experts break down the stats on the archipelago's unique charms as a destination for the business crowd.

Beyond the holidaymakers, a fair share of South African companies, entrepreneurs and the lucky folks who (at least until the pandemic changed everyone's schedules and lifestyles) manage to combine business travel with a healthy dose of leisure time – choose the Seychelles as their “bleisure” (or should that be “workation”) destination of choice.

Because it's just south of the equator, to the east of Tanzania and north of Madagascar, this watery paradise is a year-round travel destination. It's only a five-hour direct flight from South Africa and only two hours ahead of home, so there's no worrying about jet lag.

“In addition to being a top tourism destination, the country offers various investment opportunities and is a safe place to do business,” says Christine Vel, Director of the Seychelles Islands for South Africa. “We have laws and policies which



### Beach, please!

Also on Praslin is Anse Lazio, consistently voted one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. This crescent-shaped golden beach is bookended by a pile of granite boulders that lead into calm crystal-clear waters (no swimming mask is required here), where anchored yachts seem to float in mid-air. It's what Instagram feeds and travel brochures are made of.

offer protection to foreign investors against expropriation or nationalisation that are not offered in other African countries,” she adds.

Juan Nel, who works for Constance Hotels and Resorts, chimes in: “Beyond the picturesque beaches, we have indigenous forests, protected mangroves and granite hills that offer exotic landscapes you'd think only existed on postcards.”

Evidently Nel is in sales. Not that these islands require much marketing. Having seen the postcards and experienced the real thing, I know he's not exaggerating.

### Downtime wanderings

On Mahé Island you can hike to Sauzier Waterfall (pictured); and, on Praslin Island, wander beneath the canopy of palm fronds in the UNESCO-designated Vallée de Mai Nature Reserve. Keep watch for the country's famed “coco de mer”, double-lobed, provocatively-shaped enormous seeds that are endemic to this cluster of islands. They're the world's largest seeds, weighing up to 25kg.

What's harder to reconcile is how anyone gets any major work done in a place where all I want to do is dig my toes in the sand and bliss out.

I wrench my crab's claws apart and manage to suck out some flesh before asking if there's a viable work-play balance.

### WORK INTERRUPTED

Nel insists that those who come to do business do actually get work done. In his line he sees what the executives get up to, notices how the professionals mix it up.

Between meetings and deal-strike sessions, they'll play a round at the scenic 18-hole championship course; fly through a seven-stop forest zip line at a height of 110 metres; even climb up and abseil down granite rocks.

He explains that there's tremendous diversity of experiences beyond the honeymoon fantasy of lolling on a sun-lounger. You can snorkel straight from the beach; take a glass-bottomed boat; scuba dive; hop between islands; hike numerous trails; and experience top-end spas – all between number-crunching, Zoom calls, and logging your work hours so your colleagues know just how productive you're being.

And, when conferencing returns, what could be better? Take the conversation outside, or onto the beach when you need fresh air. There's so much of it here, even if the sense of being in paradise leaves you a little breathless.

In fact, thinking about all this has me wondering if this isn't the perfect place to start my imaginary novel. Perhaps once I get all the meat out of the crab, I'll be ready. ■