

# St Helena Island

A breath of fresh air





# A BREATH OF FRESH — air —

## Bucket-list adventure

At just 47sq. miles and with a population of just 4,439 (2021 *Census*), our subtropical paradise sits more than 1,000 miles from the nearest continent, alone in the expanse of the sparkling blue South Atlantic Ocean.

For a tiny island, the diversity of attractions is astounding. A globally important environment and biodiversity, the world's oldest living land animal, world-renowned hiking and diving,

melting-pot culture and cuisine, a wealth of history and heritage.

St Helena is an adventure like no other. It's a place where on Sundays, British roast dinner is paired with St Helena curry. Where cell phones were only introduced in 2015 and an airport in 2017. Where you can hike through Jurassic-like forest, picnic in rolling pastureland, and take a dip alongside 'gentle giant' whale sharks in the sparkling blue Atlantic – all in one day.



## Fast facts

**Category VI Marine Protected Area nearly the size of France**

**English-speaking**

**No severe weather or dangerous animals**

**Serious crime is a rarity**

**Subtropical, with hottest months December-March**

**GBP and St Helena Pound used interchangeably**

**GMT year-round**





## Dive into clear, warm waters

The waters around St Helena are renowned for being **high-visibility** (generally 15-25 meters), populated with more than **780 species** of endemic and other marine life, and perfect for snorkelling and diving. The water temperature is generally **19-26°C**.

Only sustainable, one-by-one fishing is allowed – tuna being one of the most popular catches. **Fishing** trips can be arranged on boats or 'off the rocks'. With the assistance of local guides, catches can be enjoyed fresh from the sea.

St Helena offers extremely affordable **diving**, with each dive inclusive of rented equipment

costing around £30. For SCUBA divers, free divers, **snorkellers** and **swimmers** of all levels, the ocean is freely accessible.

Year-round, eight **shipwrecks** are accessible to explore; and sightings are frequent of **seabirds** (i.e. boobies and red-billed tropicbirds) as well as **rays**, **dolphins** and **turtles**. Locals and visitors can **swim with whale sharks** each December-March, and **humpback whales** can be spotted June-December.

**Kayak** and **yacht trips** provide especially eco-friendly ways to view the majesty of the island from sea, while **sunset cruises** are a popular way to enjoy dolphin and seabird sightings.

## Trek a globally important environment

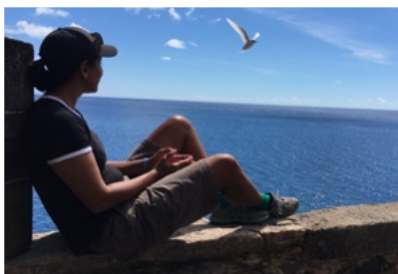
A world's **diversity** of climates and scenery, all within a short distance. **Tranquility**, as you explore the island with few or no other hikers on the path. St Helena is a **hiker's paradise**.

A unique geological history is responsible for the island's spectacular scenery. Within a few metres the landscape can shift from Jurassic-like **forest** into rolling **pastureland** into **desert-like** coastal cliffs. Within this spectacular landscape, reside **500 plant/animal species** found nowhere else on Earth.

A series of 21 of the island's best nature hikes – named '**Post Box Walks**' as each features a 'post box' containing a visitors'

book and stamp to be used as a memento – showcase the landscape. Some walks feature **waterfalls**, take you past **Wirebird** populations, or end in **natural swimming pools**. From sea level up to 820m (twice the height of the Eiffel Tower), Diana's Peak is one of the most popular walks due to its **panoramic views**: It's also within the last remaining cloud forest on British territory (the St Helena Cloud Forest). Difficulty varies from family-friendly to extremely challenging, distance varies from 1.5km-12km, and time is generally one hour to a full day.

A variety of **bird-watching**, **biodiversity** and **nature tours** are available to book.



## Experience unspoilt culture

**Saints** (as St Helenians are known) are a true **melting pot** of the peoples and nationalities that transited or settled on the island over the past 500 years - whether military men, indentured servants or slaves.

Today, Saints are an extremely tight-knit and **welcoming** community. They are deeply **connected to nature**, extremely **proud** of their island, and hold strong **family** and **community** values. They are also extremely **resilient** and **resourceful**, as is forced by utter **isolation**.

On St Helena, TV wasn't introduced until 1995, cell service in 2015 and air access in 2017. With just **4,439 residents**, and a

**lack of reliance on technology**, St Helena is a place where **everyone knows everyone** and has time to stop and chat on the streets. The friendliness of the people; the feeling that you've stepped **back in time** to small-town Britain; the positive **work-life balance**; the sense of true **safety**. It's comfortingly familiar and heartwarmingly different.

**Public holidays**, often including **festivals** and **parades**, are an important aspect of culture. The main ones are Easter (when Maundy Thursday fishing is followed by camping), St Helena's Day (the island's national day, May 21st), Carnival (every other October) and Christmas (events dominate each December).

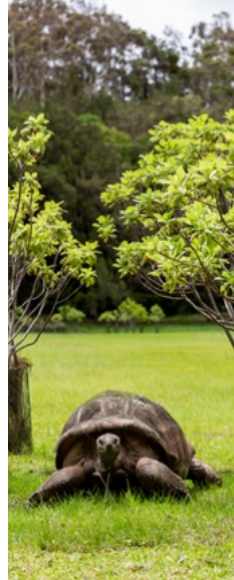
## Sample melting-pot cuisine

Food is **central to Saint culture**. Traditional dishes include **plo** (similar to pilaf) and **curry** (often beef or goat). **Rice** and **potatoes** are cost-effective staples, and **fish** and eel are often cooked straight after being caught.

**Sharing/gifting** food is traditional, e.g. cheese straws, 'bread n' dance' (tomato paste sandwiches), black pudding and coconut fingers. **Restaurants**, **takeaways** and **food trucks** often feature local items.

On weekends its common to have a '**cook-up**' (BBQ), or take a picnic with you on a round-the-island Sunday drive. **Home-hosting experiences** are ideal to get hands-on with the cuisine.

Drink is also central to Saint culture. **St Helena Coffee** is one of the world's most highly valued: The green-tipped bourbon Arabica was imported from Yemen in the 1700s and has remained free from cross-breeding and disease ever since. Just 250g costs £150 at Harrods, but you can enjoy a fresh cup on-island for just upwards of £2. You can even **tour a local coffee plantation** and get hands-on helping to **harvest the beans in October-February**. Meanwhile, the **St Helena Distillery**, known as the remotest distillery on Earth, offers **tours/tastings** by the husband-and-wife team that own and operate the business. Products include local gin, rum, and St Helena Coffee liqueur.

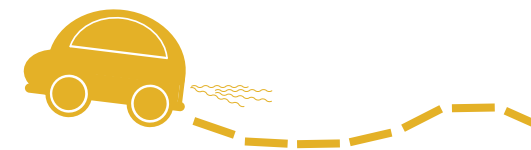


### Access

St Helena is accessible by air and sea. Airlink flights operate each Saturday between OR Tambo International Airport (JNB) and St Helena Airport (HLE). The schedule includes a monthly connection with Ascension Island, and often an additional mid-week flight with Cape Town during December-March.

### Transport

The usual range of transport is available on-island, from taxis and tours to buses and rental cars (when booked in advance).



## Step into a diverse history

The diversity of St Helena's history is **fascinating**. After its 1502 discovery and before the opening of the Suez Canal (1896), St Helena, as one of the only mid-Atlantic islands, was a **vital shipping stopover** between Africa to the Americas. Remnants of this **transient history** are apparent at every turn. The centuries-long presence of the East India Company is clear in the **Georgian architecture**. Many buildings still feature engraved Chinese writing left by **indentured labourers**. The **most important physical remaining trace of the transatlantic slave trade on Earth** is located in Rupert's Valley.

Its remote location also made it ideal as a place of **exile**, whether

for **Napoleon Bonaparte, Zulu Chiefs, Bahraini nationalists or Boer Prisoners of War**.

While the **Museum** of St Helena, the Napoleonic heritage sites, and other locations provide in-depth insight into the island's history, parts of St Helena's history are also accessible at every turn. Stroll through centuries-old **fortifications**, observe church service in the **oldest Anglican church in the southern hemisphere**, or simply wonder at the island's **capital of Jamestown**, 'one of the best examples of unspoiled Georgian architecture anywhere in the world'. A wide range of **history and heritage tours** are available.

### Accommodation

Most accommodation is family-owned B&B style, although self-catering is also available. The Mantis St Helena is the only boutique hotel on-island.



### Tours and activities

- Full-island tours
- Diving/swimming/snorkel
- Marine safaris
- Hiking
- Nature photography
- Flora/fauna voluntourism
- Traditional craft (lace, flax weaving)
- High Knoll Fort sunset picnic
- Home-cooking classes
- Donkey walks
- Golf
- Geocaching
- History and heritage tours
- Coffee plantation
- Bird watching
- Mountain biking
- Camping
- Go-karting





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