



St Helena Island

15.9650°S www.sthelenatourism.com 5.7089°W

St Helena Island, South Atlantic Ocean

Key information

1) St Helena is a unique, remote, safe British Overseas Territory

- It is one of the remotest islands on Earth, at 1,200 miles from southern Africa and 1,800 miles from Brazil. The nearest land is Ascension Island, at 703 miles northwest.
- It is English-speaking but with a unique 'Saint' dialect
- It accepts the Pound Sterling (though most commonly uses its own version of the pound, which isn't accepted in the UK; no ATMs exist on-island; and travellers cheques/international debit or credit cards can only be handled at the Bank or the Mantis St Helena Hotel.)
- The electricity supply is the same as the UK (240V, 50Hz and socket is 13-amp flat pin).
- It is on GMT year-round
- It's a subtropical climate
- It is extremely safe (serious crime is a rarity; no dangerous animals exist here; no wars, political unrest etc; the island is not prone to extreme weather events, even thunderstorms are only experienced perhaps once a decade or less)
- The tight-knit community of 4,439 is renowned for being welcoming and friendly – drivers all wave at passing cars and pedestrians and everyone says hello to each other in the streets
- It's a breath of fresh air in today's world, a bit like taking a step back in time in small-town Britain gone by

2) Its community has remained COVID-free throughout the whole pandemic

- 0 community spread throughout the whole pandemic
- Current COVID entry restrictions, flights, and sea arrivals info always available at www.sthelenatourism.com

3) Air access

- Airlink is the sole service provider operating flights with the island's sole airport, St Helena Airport (HLE). As of mid-2022, flights with Johannesburg's OR Tambo International Airport (JNB) were running every other Saturday, with an Ascension shuttle included for some flights. (Pre-pandemic, flights had operated weekly, with an additional mid-week Cape Town flight including during peak season).

4) At just 47sq. miles, St Helena is less than 1/3 the size of the Isle of Wight but has more than 30% of the biodiversity in the whole of the UK and its Overseas Territories

- Globally important environment, with endemics at a level near to that of the Galapagos (its sometimes called the Galapagos of the South Atlantic)
- The Wirebird is one of the most popular endemics and a huge attraction for bird watchers. It is the island's last surviving endemic land bird, with just 626 adults in the world. Peak nesting season is September to March.



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- St Helena and its sister islands have the highest percent of threatened tree species in the world, at 69% of tree species threatened, according to a 2020 State of the World's Trees report
- Amazing environmental work to get hands-on with, alongside local conservationists, including helping to save endemic/endangered flora like Gumwoods by planting a tree at the Millennium Forest conservation site.

5) The best things come in small packages

- St Helena is a very small island; yet it offers a world of landscapes, heritage attractions, remnants of history, and cultural experiences within that small space.
- Our blurb that attempts to exemplify that large offering in a small space is: St Helena Island is one of the remotest islands on Earth. Located 1,200 miles from Africa and 1,800 miles from South America, the 47sq. mile island is a sub-tropical paradise where the mountainous terrain and micro-climates create an astounding diversity of landscapes all within a few minutes' drive. You can easily discover the island's essence through its highly accessible natural and built attractions. Dive into a culture evolved from influences of Europe, Africa and Asia. Sample some of the most thrilling adventures, heart-warming encounters and culinary marvels. The British Overseas Territory is a breath of fresh air in today's world, boasting clean air, a sparkling ocean environment, a small and safe community (population 4,439) and a lack of reliance on modern technology (cell service was only introduced in 2015). It is an off-the-beaten-track, bucket-list destination that your friends will envy. The island is comfortingly familiar yet heart-warmingly different – a world of its own. On St Helena, there is so much to explore.

6) Category VI MPA

- 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. Fresh catches can be enjoyed immediately with local guides.
- The waters are high-visibility, populated with endemic and other marine life, and perfect for snorkelling and diving. The water temperature is generally 19-26°C and underwater visibility is generally 15-25meters
- Some of the most affordable diving in the world, with each dive inclusive of rented equipment costing around £30; equally affordable marine life excursions year-round. Yacht trips also available.
- Year-round accessibility of ship wrecks.
- Year-round viewing of birds including White Terns, Noddies, Masked Boobies, Petrels and Red-Billed Tropic Birds.
- Year-round possible sightings of Chilean Devil Rays; Pantropical, Bottlenose, Rough-toothed dolphins; and turtles.
- Humpback whale season is June-December; whale shark season is December-March (the island hosts a world-renowned, unique population of whale sharks which people can swim/snorkel with but not SCUBA dive).

7) Walking and hiking

- Walking/hiking is one of the island's most popular attractions. It's hard to believe so many microclimates and varieties of landscape exist within one tiny volcanic



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outpost. Some walks feature 'paint pallets' of rolling, multi-coloured hills; some feature geologically stunning, barren cliff faces falling drastically into the sea; some feature Jurassic Park-like jungles of ferns and eucalyptus; some feature waterfalls, some take you past masked boobie populations and end in swimmable coastal ponds; others feature everything in between.

- Walking the island is a geologist's paradise. Geology and erosion are responsible for the island's diverse and spectacular scenery, and both are readily accessible by walking. The volcanic island is associated with the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. Its north-eastern volcano appeared above the ocean's surface around 12 million years ago, while its younger and larger south-western volcano appeared between 11 and 7.5 million years ago. The rocks that today form St Helena are no more than 5 percent of its volcanic pile. The island's highest point currently is 823m above sea level. The island does not have sandy white beaches but does have a beach of black volcanic sand at Sandy Bay.
- The 'Post Box Walks' are 21 walks each ending with a 'post box' containing a signature book and stamp – can you complete them all? The difficulty of each walk varies, some only for the most experienced walkers and others family-friendly. The distance of the walks is 1.5km-12km, and time taken is generally about one hour to about half or a full day.
- Walking guides are recommended for walks – specifically for the brave-hearted adventurers who want to take on the harder walks and paths.
- The best of the sunshine is December to June (February and March have the least cloud and maximum sunshine hours). The cloudiest weather is between August and November, which is also when the wind is strongest.

8) Cuisine and culture

- The cuisine of St Helena shows how the island is truly a melting pot of peoples and cultures. Sundays are for 'curry and roast' – a mix of traditional British Sunday roast coupled with Saint curry. Onions frying with curry powder is a common smell on the island. 'Plo' (a local dish of rice, meat and veg similar to pilaf), fishcakes, black pudding, fried (freshly caught) conger eel, coconut fingers, cheese straws and other savoury treats are also associated with the island. Home-hosted cooking classes and meals are an ideal way to get hands-on experience with the cuisine and its history.
- Sundowners at the seaside; fishing and fry-ups on the rocks; Sunday drives 'round the country'; get-togethers and parades (especially around Christmas); a healthy work-life balance; and strong familial and moral values are important to the culture. Cook-ups (BBQs) filled with ample food and drink are an important social aspect of St Helena.
- St Helena Coffee is world-renowned – 250g costing about £100 on the international market, as the supply is very limited and the reputation very good. But on-island, you can buy the coffee at very affordable prices, and can even get hands-on helping to harvest the green-tipped bourbon Arabica beans (which haven't crossbred since their introduction to the island in the 1700s). Harvest season is October-February.

9) Tours and activities include:

- Full island tours



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- Marine tours
- Post Box and other walks
- Nature photography classes
- Flora/fauna voluntourism
- Traditional craft lessons (lace, flax weaving)
- Sunset picnic at High Knoll Fort
- Home-cooking classes
- Tour of the island's fortifications and canons
- Donkey walks
- Golf
- Geocaching
- Kayaking
- Historical tour of Jamestown
- Coffee plantation tour
- Endemic tree planting at Millennium Forest
- Wirebird watching
- St Helena Museum
- St Helena Distillery tour and tasting
- Plantation House
- Napoleonic sites
- Transatlantic slave legacy tours
- Boer POW cemetery
- Rock climbing
- Mountain biking
- Camping

10) Other

- Jonathan the Tortoise is St Helena's most famous resident – he holds two Guinness Book of World Records titles: The oldest known living land animal in the world, and the oldest chelonian to have ever lived. In 2022, by the local veterinarian's best estimates, Jonathan celebrates his 190th birthday. Some significant scientific announcements about research into his DNA should soon emerge in *Nature*.
- Recently introduced what is probably the most remote go-kart track in the world.
- Amazing variety of highly accessible ruins, built heritage and history – from the well-known final residence and initial burial site of Napoleon Bonaparte to “the most significant physical remaining trace of the transatlantic slave trade on Earth.”
- Jacob's Ladder – 699 steps cut out into the mountainside – is one of the main tourist attractions. The ladder is 600 feet high and the record climb is currently just over 5 minutes.
- a. Incredible night sky viewing, protected in legislation. Bob Bower, Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society and Member of the British Astronomical Association, visited in April 2018 and said: “The Milky Way is so good it can be mistaken for a cloud. St Helena really does have an asset because, being close to the equator, we get to see 90% of the whole sky.”



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- The 'four seasons' do not exist in St Helena. Instead, the climate is usually mild year-round (15-28°C), though mornings and nights can be cold. The hottest period is generally January to March and the coldest is generally June to September – with 'rainy season' usually taking place March to September. The weather also constantly changes due to the winds and the clouds created from the centre of the island, so it can rain in the morning and be sunny in the afternoon. There can also be a considerable contrast in weather between the coast and the interior of the island due to the variances in altitude and vegetation, so it is highly recommended to bring a light rain jacket with you.
- Currently, the ideal visitor to St Helena is someone who is not reliant on cheap, fast or consistent internet. While this may change with the nearing introduction of the Equiano cable (likely 2023, allowing a total island capacity of a few hundred gigabits per second up to multiple terabits), currently broadband and mobile data (facilitated via satellite) are charged per megabyte, at some of the most expensive internet costs in the world. Mobile data packages are £10/150Mb or £20/350Mb. For broadband, listed upload speeds are between 512kbps and 768kbps, while listed download speeds are between 1,024kbps and 2,048kbps. Packages range from £13.31/month for 1.1Gbs of data, to £160.06/month for 31Gbs. Usage is free between midnight and 6am. Hotspots are available in a few locations, charged at 10p per minute.
- Amazing research opportunities, from studying the effect of the fibre optic cable introduction (likely 2023) to researching the South Atlantic Anomaly.
- Hire car is a good way to travel on-island, though the roads – mostly steep, one-lane roads dotted with passing bays and winding tightly down mountainsides – may take some time to get used to. Taxis and bus services are available and, if staying in Jamestown, a lot can be done by walking. Experiences like party bus rides, island trips via a small train, a charabanc, kayak hire, ferry hire etc are also available.
- The island remains a popular stopover/destination for cruise ships and yachts.
- Heritage travel has brought many people to St Helena. It's nearly impossible to research family history or heritage ties to the island outside of St Helena, and it's impossible to make physical connection with ancestry in St Helena without visiting the island. Many have come to uncover members of their family trees within the local Archives; others have come to discover the place of exile of their ancestors (like 13 Zulu descendants in 2009); others come to discover the Chinese or African heritage of the island. This kind of journey is ideal for the lengthened stay times necessary during current COVID entry measures.
- The destination is unique and unforgettable, different to anywhere else you've ever visited. Sometimes it can feel a bit like a video game – there are no addresses marking the buildings or sites along the single-lane roads; often the shops may be out of the goods you desire; and opening hours exemplify the lack of rat-race lifestyle. But the island reconnects you to nature; to sustainability; to a relaxed pace of life; to connecting with other people – as on St Helena, you can't buy cheap or fast internet, but you can experience a level of genuine, person-to-person and person-to-nature interaction that you can't buy anywhere else.



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Brief history:

St Helena was discovered by the Portuguese in 1502 and was settled by the British in 1659.

Throughout history, its location made it strategically important for shipping and as a place of exile. Among the most notable exiles were King Dinizulu, 6,000 Boer Prisoners of War, 25 Zulu Chiefs, 3 Bahraini nationalists and French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte.

Slaves, 'liberated Africans' and Chinese indentured labourers also left significant impacts on the island's people and heritage, as did the Falklands War, in which many islanders fought on the deployed *RMS St Helena*.

St Helena's importance to shipping was mainly in restocking and refuelling vessels. This saw, among other notable instances, a German U-Boat in World War II take down the fuel tanker *Darkdale* as it sat in James Bay; some island residents still recall the burnt-orange flames enveloping the spilled fuel on top of the sea as the ship and its contents burned. The island was also a vital location during Britain's efforts in the 1800s to abolish the transatlantic slave trade.

Its location also enabled survival of St Helena's endemic species, many still being discovered/rediscovered and almost all of which (due to the small size of the island) are on the IUCN Red List. In early years the island's endemics attracted visitors such as Charles Darwin, and as the climate crisis gains the spotlight, St Helena's endemics are now recognised as globally important (though the island unfortunately relies heavily on inconsistent external project funding to restore and protect habitats and biodiversity).

Its location has also allowed incredible night-sky viewing, attracting visitors such as Edmond Halley. Legislation has just been approved to protect its dark skies from light pollution.

Today, St Helena is also important for satellite connectivity and climate change data (as otherwise very few locations exist in the South Atlantic for data collection etc).

Its capital, Jamestown, is described as a "quintessential" and "one of the best examples of unspoiled Georgian architecture anywhere in the world." Jamestown's St James Church is known as the oldest Anglican Church in the southern hemisphere.

The island was only accessible by ship (the *RMS St Helena*) until October 2017, when its first and only airport (St Helena Airport) opened to commercial passenger flights. Today, travellers can fly to/from the island or (a very limited number of passengers per voyage) can book travel to/from the island on the *MV Helena*, the island's cargo ship. The island's first and only higher-education establishment, the St Helena Community College, also officially opened in 2017. Around five students per year at most are able to be awarded government-funded scholarships to universities overseas. The island has a locally elected council but its Governor is appointed and sent to the island by the Queen. A mixture of local and English law governs the island.

Today, flight costs and travel time (especially with the current COVID-19 measures) are relatively significant compared to other tourist destinations. However, the on-island costs for world-quality



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experiences including tours, meals, local cooking lessons, marine trips etc, are comparatively cheap – evening out the costs.

For visitors the costs are relatively cheap, but for locals, the cost of living is a struggle with the 2019/20 median annual wage estimated at just £8,690. It is almost a cultural tradition for people to leave the island for better work and educational opportunities elsewhere, sending money home in order to build houses and improve the livelihoods of their families. Although the island is a British Overseas Territory and its residents British citizens, St Helena is funded via the UK's Overseas Aid budget and has been on a flat line budget for a number of years. Therefore every tourism visit helps the local population increase its standard of living; helps the developing island enhance its sustainability and protect its natural environment; and enhances opportunities for health, education, banking, and other vital infrastructure needs that will allow a better future for the local population.

For the past few decades, St Helena has been said to feel almost like 'a step back in time to small-town Britain' – comfortably familiar and yet heart-warmingly different. The close-knit community of 4,439 'Saints', as the locals are called, are extremely friendly and welcoming. On an island where TV wasn't introduced until 1995, broadband wasn't introduced until late 2007 (and St Helena still has some of the slowest and most expensive internet in the world, pending nearing introduction of the Google Equiano undersea fibre optic cable of which St Helena's branch was landed in August), cell service wasn't introduced until late 2015, it makes sense that person-to-person interactions hold more value and are more genuine than in most places in the first world today.

About the community/brand:

- Saints are **welcoming, generous** and **passionate** about their island. They love community events like parades and festivals; they place great value food and drink bringing people together socially; they value being resourceful and independent ("when you grow up on an island where many things aren't always available, you have to be resourceful and develop a variety of skills; you have to reuse and up-cycle"); they love family, spirituality, sustainability and heritage.
- St Helena is about ocean views in every direction. It's about one minute being in a desert-like landscape, then a few yards away being surrounded by rolling green hills. It's about 360-degree views of the island, and the Atlantic at every horizon when viewed from the endemic cloud forest at Diana's Peak. It's about breath-taking views of the Milky Way at night.
- St Helena is the sound of ocean waves gently lapping up against the rocks or the hulls of boats; a ship's horn sounding off in the harbour; Scout's bugles and drums during traditional parades; a mix of accordion-style country, reggae, 90s rock ballads and modern chart hits; birds nesting in the trees at sunset; and the easy chatter of Saint dialect, of people greeting each other in the streets and children playing freely and happily. It's about silence, tranquillity and absorption into nature.
- St Helena is the taste of fish caught fresh from the sea; 'comfort-food' Saint curry; local fruit picked off the trees.



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St Helena is the smell of onions and curry powder on a Sunday; and the smell of pure, fresh air and vegetation, a depth of cleanness and freshness allowed by the lack of local pollution surrounded by nothing but thousands of miles of the Atlantic Ocean.

Contact and details:

- Current flights and COVID entry information: www.sthelenatourism.com.
- Tourism enquiries: visit@sainthelena.gov.sh.