

## REUNION ISLAND

Well after almost a year and a half on the island I finally decided to write a series of articles about Reunion Island. I will try to make you discover the island the way I do. I came here without expectations. And not in a great state of mind, let's admit it. I had seen pictures or reports on TV, heard about it via friends/family gone on vacation but I must admit that was all. I don't know all the regions of France for sure.

So, I arrived here not really knowing what to expect. Throughout the last 15 months here I've been trying to think of a few articles, and I admit I was having a hard time projecting myself into travel mode. I live on this island and even if I am there as for other adventures, I took back a "sedentary" rhythm. I feel like an observer here. I'm not from Reunion but I'm not a tourist either. I'm just passing through, but I work here and participate in the life of the island but for some time now, maybe the idea that I'll be leaving soon helps me, I realize that I have a lot to say about it and I've found a way to make you discover a little bit of this island.

The island of Reunion is less than a third of Corsica or even half of Seine et Marne, it is 850,000 inhabitants approximately. You could find volcanoes, lagoons, wild, green and tropical vegetation, towns, hamlets in the middle of nothing, a life and architectural history and a language.

What allows this island to be so singular is its climate or should I say its climates. Reunion's microclimates. On the weather app, I can get towns 20km apart and the weather is not the same there. You can be in the West with the lagoon and a big blue sky, then go down along the coast and arrive in the wild South under a tropical rain. You can go up to see the Piton de la Fournaise, see a beautiful sunrise and leave an hour later in the fog or in the pouring rain. But the beautiful sunrise and sunset are always there.

The diverse culture here is also incredible. I warn you, don't count on me for any debate about racism and other prejudice about different cultures or even the good old black/white debate. As everywhere tolerance and intolerance can be confronted and for my part, I have decided in my life to respect everyone, and my role is not to debate that here. I am a "Zoreille" (means "ears"), the name given to the metropolitan people who came here, and I will not change that. Why Zoreille? Several possible explanations exist ears turning red from the sun; or because the metropolitans have to strain their ears to understand Creole, (type of island's language) because they came to spy on the slaves on the island (that was the little culture point). Even if I lived here for the rest of my life, I know that for some people it would be complicated to call me a Reunionese. But I also know that others would not care. Some of my Creole Reunionese friends are happy when I tell them about my life here, my vision of the island and my adventures. So, I will stay on this path and keep my unwavering faith in the tolerance and beauty of this world.

The island was empty when the settlers arrived. The different peoples who generally came from slavery left a diversity of culture. It would take a long time to explain the history of the cultures on this island and my knowledge is still limited, so I will schematize the situation. Here, you can see Chinese temples, Malbars, churches and mosques. Nice for such a small island? And you can hear in some cities the call to prayer. You will see the Malbars (of Indian

origin) practicing fire rituals, or the Chinese New Year being celebrated like nowhere else. All these cultures have been living together for so long that a natural tolerance reigns. This island bears its name very well: Reunion (means bring together). It brings people together. Because of its size, you will always run into someone you know; Because of its culture of Sunday picnics with family, evenings with friends, and you will always be welcomed somewhere.

There are also the Circus (covering most of the island). What are these? No, they are not places for clowns and acrobats! (yes, I'm funny) But it's also a question of show! But this show, kids, is even more incredible! Circus were formed by the collapse of a part of the volcanic chain of the Piton des Neiges, one of the two volcanoes of the island. It formed huge "enclosures", areas where you must leave the car and enjoy hiking to get there. You will have more on the circus during my article on my excursions there.

I wanted to do this introductory article because I wanted to cover several topics to introduce you to this island and prepare you for what you're about to see. This introductory article, a little shorter than usual, goes perhaps in all directions but I needed to introduce some information and explain a little what this island represents.

I hope you enjoy the series of articles you are about to read. I will try to share with you some adventure, tips for living here as well as for coming on vacation. You will have good addresses but also breathtaking landscapes. Get ready to travel.

Kiss kiss Bang Bang