

CAPE VERDE

The new tourism hotspot

Until

now, Cape Verde has been a virtual unknown in the British tourism market, but this is set to change. The 10-island, former Portuguese colony off the west coast of Africa is one of the last year-round, safe and unspoiled beach destinations relatively close to the U.K.



José Maria Pereira Neves
Prime Minister

Tourism is being hailed by Prime Minister José Maria Pereira Neves as "the engine of growth and development of Cape Verde", and, apart from its natural attributes and unique music, showcased worldwide by Cesária Évora and Tito Paris, the archipelago also has the right economic conditions to achieve its aims.

"We have achieved macro-economic stability with low inflation, lower taxes, public debt under control, and, in 2004, were considered the best governed country in

Africa," says Neves. "We had above 7% GDP growth in 2005 and are creating the legal and institutional conditions to boost external investment, as well as modernizing all transport, water, electricity and telecommunications infrastructure." In 2008, Cape Verde will also be removed from the U.N.'s list of less developed countries.

Minister of Transport, Manuel Inocêncio Sousa is at the helm of the governmental drive to boost tourism through investment in transport infrastructure, with airports, roads and ports all being modernized. "With our investments, we are creating the conditions for the direct arrival of tourists in the principal tourist centers of

A recent U.K. survey showed the archipelago top of the list of new tourist destinations for the British, who are predicted to soon overtake other European tourists to visit these volcanic islands, only six hours away and situated below the Canaries.

"Cape Verde is a stable, secure and confident country, yet still brimming with opportunities for tourists and investors," says President Pedro Pires. "We are a small country of less than half a million people, but have beautiful scenery, a rich culture and a perfect climate of almost constant sun without the excessive heat. Many new investors have now cottoned on to the opportunities and are coming here".

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Cape Verde, whereas previously only Sal Island had the necessary infrastructure," he says. "Now we can develop unspoiled islands like Boa Vista, which are almost totally circled with beaches, but presently lacking transport."

One entity key to boosting tourism is Airports and Air Navigation Security (ASA), which has increased the number of international airports from one to four well ahead of schedule. "A major achievement was opening Praia's new airport," says ASA chairman Mário Paixão Lopes. "This airport is the only one to have more national than tourism interest as it serves the most populated island, Santiago, and previously was only connected with the world via Sal Airport. With this opening, there has been a reconfiguration of international and domestic air routes."

The two other new airports are on the islands of São Vicente and Boa Vista, both completed in less than two years and opening presently. The latter will serve charter flights, allowing the burgeoning tourist industry to really take off, while São Vicente will boost tourist traffic both locally and to the islands of São Nicolau and Santo Antão, as well as serving the industrial zone of Lazaretto. Meanwhile, Sal Airport is being renovated and is at the center of cooperation with the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

Twenty-year airport management plans have been jointly drawn up and a new radar monitoring system installed to improve security and efficiency in preparation for increased air traffic. A new air traffic control center, using the most up-to-date CNS & ATM satellite technology has also been installed with IATA's assistance, giving secure navigation between Europe and South America.

As a result of new developments, international tourist arrivals are predicted to reach 230,000 this year, a 1000% increase from 2004,



Manuel Inocêncio Sousa
Min. of Infrastructure
& Transport

while total passengers should reach 406,000. Consequently, flight load is set to continually increase and prices are dropping as more international charter carriers begin operations.

Maritime transport is another major boom area. The port authority, ENAPOR, headed by Franklim Spencer, manages the archipelago's nine ports. "We have a major geographical advantage being situated at the exact crossroads of four maritime routes—South America, U.S., Canada and Africa, with the best natural harbor in West Africa and the mid-Atlantic.

"Porto Grande on São Vicente is 300m long and 12m deep and has a higher level of security, natural protection and more advanced technology than its competitors. The port is ideally placed to become an international transshipment center and alternative to Dakar or Las Palmas." Vessels up to 200m in length and with a 1,500 container capacity can enter the port and there are full towage facilities available, as well as a 24-hour service, 7,000 m² covered storage and 31,000 m² uncovered. The government is spending U.S.\$300-400 million to further modernize and extend the port and is keen to work with private investors.

The other major harbor, Praia, in the capital, will be extended to boost traffic with the islands of Santiago, Fogo and Maio and has covered storage capacity of 8,700 m² and 24,000 m² uncovered.

Boa Vista will be a tourism-focused port and there are investment opportunities there and at Vale dos Cavaleiros. Spencer is also keen to encourage investors for insular passenger ferry services for tourists and locals. To permit this, all ports are being modernized. The ports' management services will be privatized next year, and will present another investment opportunity.



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