

05. Réunion



Raphaëla Le Gouvello Education packet - Windsurfing solo across the Indian Ocean

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The crossing



Réunion Island is a mountain rising out of the sea. It was formed by two volcanoes: Piton des Neiges (3,069 meters / 10,069 feet) and Piton de la Fournaise (2,632 meters / 8,635 feet). Piton des Neiges went extinct 300,000 years ago, but Piton de la Fournaise is still active. Réunion is in the Indian Ocean, just north of the Tropic of Capricorn – 10,000 kilometers (over 6,200 miles) from mainland France.

The island's weather is a perpetual summer, in a tropical climate cooled by the trade winds. The dry, cool season runs from May to October. "Winter" lasts from June to August, but the only wintry thing about it is its name, except near the mountaintops. The hot, wet season, from November to April, is when the island gets two-thirds of its annual rainfall. The combination of elevation, topography and exposure to the trade winds creates countless microclimates that are one of Réunion's most unusual features – and a nightmare for the weather forecasters at Météo France!

Once slaves, now a part of France

The island was uninhabited until around the middle of the 17th century. At first the French used it as a prison. The first group of mutineer soldiers was put ashore there in 1643. Slavery came in with the establishment of plantations for coffee, and later sugar cane. When slavery was abolished in 1848, a process of assimilation began. The island became an overseas part of France (a "department" overseas) in 1946.

Activities

- ▶ Are there any other volcanoes in France? Where?

Look up volcanism: What is a volcano? What were some famous eruptions? What else can you find out about volcanoes?

- ▶ From the ice of the Antarctic to the lagoons of Pacific islands, France has overseas communities located all over the world.

Find the following on a globe:

The overseas parts of France itself (French "departments" overseas): Guadeloupe, Guyane, Martinique and Réunion; the French "collectivities" overseas (formerly called "territories" overseas): New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Mayotte, St-Pierre-et-Miquelon, Wallis and Futuna Islands, and the French Southern and Antarctic Territories.

Did you know?

The native language of most of the population isn't French but Réunion Creole. French people from mainland France are called "Zoreils," which sounds close to the French word for "ear" ("oreille"). No one is sure where the nickname originated. One story is that because the French couldn't understand Creole very well, they constantly had to ask people to repeat themselves, so everyone thought they were hard of hearing ("durs d'oreilles"). But another story is that the Zoreils were white slave owners who cut an ear off their slaves for identification.