

RIA'S COLONY

For the life you are becoming.

COUNTRY GUIDE · WEST AFRICA

CAPE VERDE

*Culture, Government, Visas,
Relocation & Travel —
The Complete Guide*

Everything a traveller, mover, or investor needs to know before setting foot on the ten volcanic islands of the Cape Verdean archipelago.

*Exploring the Cultures of Africa:
54 Countries, One Continent*

riacolony.org

Prepared for the Colony · 14 September 2026



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About Ria's Colony

Africa is one continent. Moving across it should be easier.

Ria's Colony is a trade and tourism company that helps people understand African countries, travel between them and do business across their markets — because right now, all three are often harder than they should be. There are travellers who could be visiting places they know almost nothing about, businesses that could be selling into markets they've never considered, and destinations that could be reaching people who would genuinely value what they have to offer. The opportunities are there. Finding the right information, people and way in is usually the harder part.

We work across that gap using media, travel information, learning, research, business development and connections — through four products:

- Aerial View — practical travel information and destination knowledge for people exploring Africa.
- Aerial Connect — market research, introductions and business development for companies entering African markets.
- Style Mirror — original stories about African countries, cultures, economies and the issues shaping life across the continent.
- Style Vault — practical courses that build skills people can use in business, work and everyday life.

This guide is part of Aerial View's country-guide collection and sits alongside our 54-country culture series, which is where this Cape Verde profile began. Our promise is simple: give people accurate, sourced, practical information so they can travel, move and do business across Africa with confidence — not guesswork.

A note on how to use this guide

Every figure, fee, and rule in this guide is sourced and linked so you can verify it yourself and check for the latest version — immigration rules, fees and exchange rates change, sometimes quickly. Treat the numbers here as a well-researched starting point, not a substitute for checking the official portal or your nearest Cape Verdean embassy or consulate before you travel or apply for anything. Ria's Colony is not a law firm, immigration agency or financial advisor, and this guide is not legal, tax or immigration advice.

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1. Cape Verde at a Glance

Cape Verde — officially the Republic of Cabo Verde — is a ten-island archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean, roughly 500–570 km off the coast of Senegal. It was uninhabited until Portuguese navigators arrived in 1460, and the population that developed afterward came from Portuguese settlers and Africans brought to the islands through the slave trade. That history produced a distinct Creole nation: its own language (Kriolu), its own music (morna, funaná, coladeira), its own food, and one of Africa's most stable democracies.

Fact	Detail
Official name	Republic of Cabo Verde (Cape Verde)
Capital	Praia, on Santiago Island
Population	≈527,326 (World Bank, 2025)
Diaspora	700,000+ Cape Verdeans and descendants abroad — more than the resident population
Official language	Portuguese
National / everyday language	Kriolu (Cape Verdean Creole)
Currency	Cape Verdean escudo (CVE), pegged at 1 EUR = 110.265 CVE
Government	Semi-presidential, multi-party parliamentary democracy
Time zone	UTC−1
Religion (2021 census)	73% Roman Catholic, 16% no religious affiliation, smaller Protestant and Muslim communities
Main airports	Amílcar Cabral Intl. (Sal, SID) · Nelson Mandela Intl. (Praia, RAI) · Cesária Évora Airport (São Vicente, VXE) · Boa Vista (BVC)
Tourism	1.18 million visitors in 2024, roughly 25% of GDP
Life expectancy	79 years (women), 71 years (men) — highest in mainland sub-Saharan Africa
Malaria	Not present on the islands (a rarity in West Africa)

Source: [World Bank population data](#); [Ria's Colony](#), "[Cape Verde: The Country Built From a Feeling](#)"

Source: [Expat.com](#), "[Living in Cape Verde: The Ultimate Expat Guide](#)"

2. Where the Culture Came From

This section is a condensed version of Ria's Colony's full culture feature on Cape Verde, part of our 54-country series, Exploring the Cultures of Africa. Read the full story — with the history of sodade, morna, Cesária Évora, and the Mindelo Carnival — at the link in the Sources section.

Settlement, slavery and a new people

Portuguese navigators reached the Cape Verde islands in 1460, and settlement began on Santiago in 1462. Cape Verde's Ministry of Foreign Affairs says there is no evidence of human presence before that point. The islands quickly became part of the Portuguese Atlantic trading system — a provisioning stop and a hub for the slave trade. Africans brought from the West African mainland and Portuguese settlers and administrators mixed over generations into what the Cape Verdean government describes as the formation of a new Cape Verdean people, with Kriolu emerging as the language of that community.

Drought, famine and migration

The islands are dry, agricultural land is limited, and rainfall is unreliable — so drought had consequences far beyond a bad harvest. Historical estimates compiled by economists Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen put famine mortality as high as 44% of the population between 1773–1776, 42% between 1830–1833, and 40% between 1863–1866, with 20th-century famines (1940–43 and 1946–48) killing an estimated 15–18% of the population. Leaving became, for many families, a way of surviving — and migration has shaped Cape Verdean life ever since.

Independence and democracy

Portugal ruled until independence on 5 July 1975, won through the PAIGC independence movement founded by Amílcar Cabral in 1956 (Cabral, born in Portuguese Guinea to Cape Verdean parents, was assassinated in 1973 and did not live to see independence). Cape Verde was governed as a one-party state until 1991, when it held its first multi-party elections and became a parliamentary democracy — one now widely regarded as among the most stable in Africa.

A nation bigger than its islands

Cape Verde's diaspora — in New England (dating back to 19th-century whaling ships), Portugal, the Netherlands, France and elsewhere — outnumbers the population still living on the islands. Morna, the country's UNESCO-listed musical tradition, carries this history in its lyrics of love, departure and homeland — and sodade, the Kriolu word for longing, is the closest thing Cape Verde has to a national feeling.

Read the full culture story

"Cape Verde: The Country Built From a Feeling" — the full Ria's Colony feature covers Kriolu, Catholic and African-rooted religious life, cachupa and grogue, morna and Cesária Évora, pánu di téra weaving, and the Mindelo Carnival in depth.

3. People, Language & Religion

Language

Portuguese is the official language — used in government, courts, schools and official documents. Kriolu (Cape Verdean Creole) is what most people actually speak day to day, at home, in markets and on the street. It's a Portuguese-lexified Creole with African-influenced grammar, and it comes in several regional varieties — broadly split between Barlavento (Windward) and Sotavento (Leeward) islands. A standard written form, ALUPEK, exists but coexists with other spelling conventions.

- Practical tip: Portuguese will get you through almost any official interaction. A handful of Kriolu phrases go a long way socially — Cape Verdeans notice and appreciate the effort.

Religion

The 2021 national census recorded 73% of the population as Roman Catholic and 16% with no religious affiliation, with smaller Seventh-day Adventist, Nazarene, Christian Rationalist and Muslim communities. Catholic festivals, patron-saint celebrations and family rites (baptisms, weddings) remain a major part of public life, often blending with older, African-rooted cultural practices carried to the islands by enslaved people.

Ethnicity and identity

Most Cape Verdeans identify with a mixed African and European heritage, often described as *mestiço* or Creole — though that doesn't mean uniform ancestry or identical island histories. Regional identity, especially in accent and Kriolu vocabulary, is strong: someone from São Vicente sounds noticeably different from someone from Santiago.

4. Government & Political System

Cape Verde is a semi-presidential, representative multi-party democracy. It is regarded as one of Africa's most stable and most electorally democratic nations, ranking as the third-most liberally democratic country in Africa on the V-Dem Democracy Indices. The 1980 constitution, substantially revised in 1992 and since, splits power between a president (head of state), a prime minister (head of government) and a unicameral National Assembly of 72 seats — with an independent judiciary headed by the Supreme Court.

Role	Detail
Head of state	President José Maria Neves — directly elected by popular vote for a 5-year term, renewable once consecutively
Head of government	Prime Minister Francisco Carvalho (PAICV), in office since June 2026
Legislature	Unicameral National Assembly (Assembleia Nacional), 72 seats, elected by proportional representation for 5-year terms
Judiciary	Independent; Supreme Court is the highest court, judges serve for life once appointed
Ruling party (2026)	PAICV (African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde), after winning the 2026 parliamentary election
First multi-party elections	1991 — ended one-party PAICV rule that followed independence in 1975

Government leadership changes periodically through elections — always verify current office-holders before citing them in formal or business material.

Source: [Wikipedia](#), "[Politics of Cape Verde](#)" and "[Cabinet of Cape Verde](#)"

Source: [GlobalSecurity.org](#), "[Cabo Verde / Cape Verde — Government](#)"

5. Money, Currency & Cost of Living

Currency

The Cape Verdean escudo (CVE) is pegged to the euro at a fixed rate of 1 EUR = 110.265 CVE, which has held steady for years and makes budgeting predictable. Euros are widely accepted in tourist areas alongside escudos; the US dollar and other currencies are not. Cards are increasingly accepted in Praia, Sal and Mindelo, but carry cash for smaller islands, markets and minibuses.

Monthly budgets (single adult, 2025–2026 data)

Category	Modest	Average	Comfortable
Rent (studio/1BR)	US\$250	US\$400	US\$600
Utilities (water, power, internet)	US\$70	US\$90	US\$120
Food	US\$200	US\$300	US\$450
Transport	US\$30	US\$80	US\$150
Health insurance	US\$110	US\$220	US\$330
Leisure & misc.	US\$80	US\$190	US\$370
MONTHLY TOTAL	≈US\$750	≈US\$1,300	≈US\$2,050

A family of four should plan on roughly US\$1,765–4,630/month depending on lifestyle and schooling choices. Sal and Boa Vista run 20–30% higher than Praia or Mindelo because of tourist demand; Mindelo and smaller islands are the most affordable.

Everyday prices

- Local restaurant meal: CVE 400–700 (≈US\$3.60–6.35)
- Mid-range restaurant meal: CVE 1,200–2,000 (≈US\$11–18)
- Domestic beer at a bar: CVE 150–300 (≈US\$1.35–2.70)
- Minibus (aluguer) ride: CVE 50–300 depending on distance
- Average monthly net salary: ≈CVE 30,000 (≈US\$300)

Source: [Expat.com](#), "Living in Cape Verde: The Ultimate Expat Guide" (Numbeo-sourced budgets, Aug 2025)

Source: [Trading Economics](#), Cape Verde Escudo currency data

6. Visiting Cape Verde: Tourist Visas & Entry

Entry rules changed on 1 January 2026 — read this carefully

As of 1 January 2026, Cape Verde ended visa-on-arrival payment for nationals of 96 countries, under Decree No. 244/GMAI/2025. Travellers from those countries must now obtain a visa from a Cape Verdean embassy or consulate before departure — the option to pay online and collect the visa at the airport is gone for them. Always check your specific nationality on the official EASE portal before booking flights.

Step 1 — Check if you need a visa in advance

Citizens of a defined list of countries (mostly across Africa, Europe and the Americas) can enter Cape Verde visa-free for stays of up to 30 days, extendable to a maximum of 90 days in a calendar year. Everyone else needs a visa arranged in advance through an embassy or consulate — and, as of 2026, that now includes the 96 nationalities newly moved off the visa-on-arrival list.

Step 2 — Complete EASE pre-registration (everyone, no exceptions)

Regardless of nationality or visa status, every traveller arriving by air must complete EASE (Efficient, Automatic and Safe Entry) pre-registration at the government portal, www.ease.gov.cv, preferably at least 5 days before departure. This is a security and health pre-screening tool, separate from your visa. It covers tourism, business visits, medical treatment and study of up to 30 days per entry; travellers in airport transit are exempt.

Step 3 — Pay the Airport Security Fee (TSA)

All arriving (and departing) travellers pay an Airport Security Tax of CVE 3,400 (≈EUR 31 / US\$34), payable online through EASE or on arrival at the airport. Children under 2, Cape Verdean citizens and permanent residents are exempt.

Visa types and indicative fees

Visa / entry type	Length of stay	Indicative cost	Notes
Visa-exempt entry (EASE only)	30 days, extendable to 90 days/year	TSA fee only: ≈CVE 3,400 (≈EUR 31)	For eligible nationalities; extensions handled locally
Visa on arrival (where still available)	30 days	≈EUR 25–34	No longer available to the 96 nationalities named in the 2026 decree
Standard tourist visa (pre-arranged)	Up to 90 days (single entry)	≈EUR 45–60 consular fee	Apply via nearest Cape Verdean embassy/consulate
Multiple-entry tourist visa	Valid up to 5 years, 90 days max per stay	Fee varies by embassy	Useful for frequent visitors or those planning to apply for residency
Transit / airport stopover visa	Short transit only	Fee varies	Required for some nationalities even in transit as of 2026

What you'll be asked for

- Passport valid at least 6 months beyond your arrival date
- Proof of onward/return travel
- Proof of accommodation (hotel booking, lease, or host attestation)
- Proof of sufficient funds — visa-exempt/short-stay travellers must be able to show roughly CVE 20,000 per person plus CVE 10,000 per day of the planned stay, or equivalent, under official entry conditions
- Yellow fever certificate — required only if arriving from an endemic country (Senegal and other West African states with yellow fever risk)

If you overstay

Overstay penalties reported by visa-processing guides include fines of roughly CVE 10,000–50,000, deportation at the traveller's expense, and re-entry bans of 1–3 years — but Cape Verdean immigration officers themselves note they have limited resources for active enforcement, and travellers in the country legitimately trying to regularise their status are treated far more leniently than those simply not engaging with the process at all.

Remark

Tourist-visa realities vary a lot by nationality and change often — this is the single fastest-moving part of any Cape Verde plan. Cross-check your specific passport on the official EASE portal and your nearest embassy's website before booking anything nonrefundable.

Source: [EASE — Government of Cape Verde official pre-registration portal](#)

Source: [VisasNews, "Cape Verde: Visa on Arrival Suspended for Citizens of 96 Countries" \(Jan 2026\)](#)

Source: [U.S. Department of State, Cabo Verde travel information](#)

Source: [Government of Cape Verde, general conditions of entry for foreign citizens \(official PDF\)](#)

7. Moving to Cape Verde: Relocation Routes

Cape Verde offers several practical pathways to live there long-term, from a tax-free digital nomad visa to permanent residency through real estate. None of these are instant — expect weeks to months of paperwork — but the country is genuinely more open to foreign residents than most people assume.

Route 1 — Remote Working Cabo Verde (digital nomad visa)

Launched in December 2020, this is one of the more attractive digital nomad programmes worldwide. It grants an initial 6-month stay, renewable once for a total of 12 months, and — the headline benefit — complete exemption from Cape Verdean income tax on foreign-earned income, because holders are not treated as tax residents.

- Eligibility: average bank balance of ≈EUR 1,500 over the preceding 6 months
- Proof of remote employment or client contracts based outside Cape Verde
- International health insurance covering the full stay
- Cape Verde accommodation booking and a clean criminal record
- Fees: ≈EUR 20 administrative fee plus the ≈EUR 34 airport departure fee; processed online, roughly 2 weeks' turnaround

Route 2 — Temporary residence

Suited to 6-month stays for family reasons, medical treatment or short professional assignments. It's extendable, and — since a 2025 overhaul — can now be applied for through Cape Verde's online consular portal rather than only in person at an embassy.

Route 3 — The Green Card: permanent residency through real estate

Since 2018 (Law No. 30/IX/2018), Cape Verde has run a real-estate-linked permanent residency programme administered by the Directorate of Foreigners and Borders (DREF).

Green Card at a glance	Detail
Minimum investment	EUR 80,000 in a below-average-GDP municipality, or EUR 120,000 in an above-average-GDP municipality
Eligible property	Completed residential/tourist property, or property under construction with a valid contract
Status granted	Permanent residency, renewable every 5 years
Minimum physical stay	None required to keep the card
Family included	Spouse and dependent children
Tax perks	Exemption from the property transfer tax (IUP) on qualifying purchases, plus a 50% IUP reduction for 10 years; no capital gains tax on property held over 2 years; no inheritance or wealth tax
Route to citizenship	Eligible to apply for naturalisation after 5 years of habitual residence; Cape Verde permits dual nationality
Processing time	Typically 2–4 weeks once the full application is submitted

How the Green Card process runs

- 1. Identify and purchase a qualifying property, with all funds transferred from abroad through a Cape Verde-licensed bank.
- 2. Gather documents from your home country: police clearance certificate (translated into Portuguese and legalised or apostilled), medical certificate, international vaccination certificate.
- 3. Obtain a valid entry visa or confirm existing valid residence status.
- 4. Submit the full application in person at DREF, with the purchase agreement, land registry certificate, bank transfer declaration and personal documents.
- 5. Receive the Green Card, then renew every 5 years by proving continued ownership.

Route 4 — Work permits and employer sponsorship

Foreign nationals planning to work typically need a long-stay visa (valid up to 120 days) that permits entry for the purpose of applying for a work permit, followed by a work-permit process usually taking about 4–6 weeks and requiring the employer to justify hiring a foreign worker.

Route 5 — Family reunification & marriage

Permanent residency is also available through marriage to, or family reunification with, a Cape Verdean citizen or resident, and through standard employment. As with the other routes, the process generally begins with a 6-month temporary residence permit that's renewed until a final decision is reached.

Practical relocation remark

Multiple long-term expat accounts describe Cape Verdean immigration as bureaucratic but not adversarial — approvals can be slow and inconsistently explained office to office, but overstaying by a short period while your residency application is genuinely in progress is treated informally rather than punitively. That said, don't rely on informal leniency as a plan; file early and keep your paperwork trail complete.

Source: [uqglobal.com](https://uqglobal.com/cape-verde-residency-citizenship-by-investment-programs/), "[Cape Verde — Residency & Citizenship by Investment Programs](https://uqglobal.com/cape-verde-residency-citizenship-by-investment-programs/)"

Source: [Rivermate](https://rivermate.com/cabo-verde-work-permits-and-visas/), "[Cabo Verde: Work Permits and Visas](https://rivermate.com/cabo-verde-work-permits-and-visas/)"

Source: [Expat.com](https://expat.com/living-in-cape-verde-the-ultimate-expat-guide-visas-and-entry-section/), "[Living in Cape Verde: The Ultimate Expat Guide](https://expat.com/living-in-cape-verde-the-ultimate-expat-guide-visas-and-entry-section/)" — [visas and entry section](https://expat.com/living-in-cape-verde-the-ultimate-expat-guide-visas-and-entry-section/)

8. Taxes for Residents & Newcomers

Cape Verde taxes on the basis of residence: anyone present more than 183 days in a calendar year is a tax resident and must declare worldwide income; non-residents are taxed only on Cape Verde-sourced income. There is no double-taxation treaty with the US or UK, so American and British movers should get professional tax advice — Americans remain subject to FATCA reporting regardless of where they live.

Personal income tax (IRPS) — progressive brackets

Annual income (CVE)	Approx. USD	Rate
Up to 122,040	≈\$1,220	0% (exempt)
122,041 – 145,440	\$1,220 – \$1,454	14.5%
145,441 – 180,000	\$1,454 – \$1,800	19.5%
180,001 – 224,400	\$1,800 – \$2,243	25.5%
224,401 – 315,000	\$2,243 – \$3,149	29.5%
315,001 – 405,600	\$3,149 – \$4,052	33.5%
Above 405,600	\$4,052+	37% (top rate)

Other taxes to know

- VAT (IVA): standard rate 15%, reduced rate on basic foodstuffs, medicines and essential health services
- Property transfer tax (IUP): standard 1.5% of asset value on acquisition/transfer — reduced or waived under the Green Card programme
- Municipal property tax (IMI): annual, roughly 0.5–1.2% of cadastral value, varies by municipality
- Airport Security Tax (TSA): CVE 3,400 on every departure, including for residents
- Social security: employers contribute roughly 15–20% of gross salary, employees roughly 8–11%
- Digital nomad exemption: Remote Working Cabo Verde visa holders are not tax residents and pay zero Cape Verdean tax on foreign income for the visa's duration

Source: [Expatriate.com, "Living in Cape Verde" — tax section](#)

9. Healthcare & Insurance

Cape Verde has the best public-health indicators in mainland sub-Saharan Africa — life expectancy of 79 (women) and 71 (men) — and malaria does not exist on the islands, a genuine rarity in the region. But care is uneven: Santiago, São Vicente and Sal have modern facilities, while smaller islands (Brava, Santo Antão, Maio) have only basic health centres, and serious or specialised cases (neurosurgery, complex oncology, cardiac surgery, organ transplants) require evacuation to Portugal or another better-equipped country.

Public vs. private

- Public: National Health Service, theoretically universal for nationals and foreign residents with a valid permit; two national reference hospitals — Agostinho Neto (Praia) and Baptista de Sousa (São Vicente); affordable consultations, but waits for specialists and imaging can stretch weeks to months.
- Private: Modern clinics in Praia, Mindelo and Sal, often staffed by doctors trained in Portugal, Brazil or Cuba. General consultation ≈CVE 2,000–3,000 (≈US\$20–30); specialist ≈CVE 3,500–5,000 (≈US\$35–50).

Insurance

International health insurance — including medical evacuation coverage — is strongly recommended for anyone staying long-term. Expect to budget roughly US\$110–440 per month for comprehensive adult coverage, depending on age, coverage level and insurer (Allianz Care, Cigna Global, April International and AXA Global Healthcare all offer relevant plans).

Before you go

- Recommended (not mandatory unless arriving from an endemic country): hepatitis A & B, typhoid, tetanus/diphtheria, polio
- Mandatory only for arrivals from yellow-fever-endemic countries: yellow fever certificate
- Chronic-condition travellers should bring 3–6 months of medication, as specialised drugs can be irregularly stocked on outer islands

Source: [*Expat.com, "Living in Cape Verde" — healthcare section*](#)

Source: [*U.S. Embassy Praia — recommended doctors and clinics list*](#)

10. Schools & Education

Cape Verde's education system follows the Portuguese model: compulsory schooling to age 16, taught in Portuguese, split into Ensino Básico (years 1–6), Secundário (years 7–12) and higher education. Public schools are free, including for expat children with valid residence permits, though quality and class sizes (often 30–40 students) vary significantly between islands.

Option	Where	Approx. annual cost	Notes
Public school	All main islands	Free	Portuguese-only instruction; strongest on Santiago, São Vicente, Sal
Private Portuguese-language school	Main cities	CVE 50,000–150,000 (≈US\$500–1,500)	Smaller classes, sometimes stronger foreign-language teaching
Cabo Verde International School (CVIS)	Sal only	EUR 4,000–7,000 (≈US\$4,400–7,700)	The only true international school; English-medium, British-style curriculum, IGCSE exams
Distance / home-schooling	Anywhere	EUR 400–1,000 (≈US\$440–1,100)	Common where families don't want to switch curricula; requires declaration to local education authorities

11. Housing, Renting & Buying Property

Renting

The rental market runs mostly on private arrangements and word-of-mouth rather than agencies. Leases typically run 12 months, renewable, with 30–60 days' notice, a 1–2 month security deposit, and sometimes first-and-last-month payment up front. Furnished rentals usually include basics (bed, table, stove) but rarely linens or full kitchenware. Utilities are billed separately, adding roughly CVE 5,000–10,000 (≈US\$50–100)/month.

City / area	Studio / 1BR	2–3BR
Praia (capital)	CVE 20,000–50,000 (≈US\$200–500)	CVE 40,000–80,000 (≈US\$400–800)
Sal (Santa Maria)	20–30% above Praia rates	20–30% above Praia rates
Mindelo (São Vicente)	CVE 15,000–30,000 (≈US\$150–300)	CVE 30,000–55,000 (≈US\$300–550)
Smaller islands (Santo Antão, Fogo, etc.)	Often half of Praia rates	Limited supply, sometimes rustic

Buying

Foreigners can buy property in Cape Verde without major restriction, and doing so is the basis of the Green Card residency route described in Section 7. Prices per square metre for new seafront apartments run roughly EUR 1,500–3,000 in Sal, EUR 800–1,500 in Praia, and EUR 600–1,000 in Mindelo. A notary fee of 2–3% applies, plus the 1.5% property transfer tax (IUP) unless reduced or waived under Green Card terms.

Buyer caution

Land title in Cape Verde can be genuinely unclear on some plots — a legacy of a complex traditional land system. Have title independently verified by a local lawyer before signing anything, and pay developers in construction-progress instalments rather than large sums upfront, since some development projects have stalled when developers ran into financial trouble.

Source: [Expat.com](#), "Living in Cape Verde" — housing section

Source: [uqlobal.com](#), Cape Verde Green Card programme

12. Getting There & Getting Around

Flying in

Cape Verde has four international airports: Sal (SID), Praia (RAI), São Vicente/Mindelo (VXE) and Boa Vista (BVC). There are no direct scheduled flights from North America; most travellers connect via Lisbon (TAP Air Portugal is the main option, with one-way fares often starting around EUR 130–150), or fly seasonal charter routes from European cities (Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Milan, Rome and others) direct to Sal or Boa Vista, the main beach-resort islands. From West Africa, Dakar (Senegal) has some of the shortest connecting flights, under two hours.

Flying between islands

Cabo Verde Airlines (the national carrier, which absorbed the former domestic operator BestFly) runs the main inter-island network, hubbed through Praia because more than half the population lives on Santiago. Short hops — e.g. Praia to Sal — take under an hour and typically cost roughly CVE 4,000–10,000 (≈US\$36–90) one-way, cheaper with advance booking.

Ferries

Ferries connect some island pairs — notably Santiago–Fogo and São Vicente–Santo Antão — from roughly CVE 1,500 (≈US\$14), with crossings of 1–3 hours. This is often the only or most reliable way to reach Santo Antão, since it has no international airport.

Getting around locally

- Aluguers (shared minibuses): the backbone of local transport — cheap (CVE 50–300) but depart only once full, so budget patience.
- Taxis: generally unmetered — agree the fare before you get in. Expect ≈CVE 200–500 for a short urban ride.
- Car rental / purchase: worthwhile for exploring hiking islands like Santo Antão or Fogo independently; a used car costs roughly US\$5,500–11,000, rentals roughly US\$300–500/month, and petrol runs about CVE 145/litre (≈US\$1.45).

Source: [Expat.com, "Living in Cape Verde" — transportation section](#)

13. Island by Island: Where to Go

Cape Verde's ten islands split into two groups: Barlavento (Windward) in the north and Sotavento (Leeward) in the south. Each island has its own character — this is not one beach destination but several very different ones.

Island	Known for	Good for
Sal	White-sand beaches (Santa Maria), kitesurfing, resort tourism	Beach holidays, water sports, easiest international access
Boa Vista	Vast dune beaches, turtle nesting, desert-like landscape	Quiet beach escapes, desert dunes, marine life
Santiago	Capital Praia, Tarrafal beach, Serra Malagueta hiking, strongest African-rooted culture (batuku, funaná)	City life, business, the most "African" cultural experience
São Vicente	Mindelo — the cultural capital, Carnival, live-music scene, Cesária Évora's birthplace	Nightlife, music, festivals, culture
Santo Antão	Dramatic green valleys, cliffside trails, no international airport (reached by ferry)	Serious hiking and landscape photography
Fogo	Active volcano Pico do Fogo (2,829m, the country's highest point), volcanic-soil wine and coffee	Volcano trekking, unique wine tourism
Brava	Smallest inhabited island, remote and authentic	Off-the-beaten-path travel, wild coastal trails
Maio	Undeveloped beaches, slow pace	Quiet, low-tourism relaxation

Beaches worth knowing

- Praia de Santa Maria (Sal) — the country's most touristed beach, restaurants and loungers
- Praia de Chaves & Praia de Santa Monica (Boa Vista) — long, near-empty white-sand stretches
- Tarrafal (Santiago) — white sand in an authentic fishing village setting
- São Pedro (São Vicente) — popular with surfers, known for sunsets

Currents can be strong on exposed beaches — check locally before swimming, and favour supervised beaches if you're not a confident swimmer.

14. Food & Drink

Cachupa is Cape Verde's national dish — a slow-cooked stew of corn, beans and vegetables, with meat or fish depending on what's available. Cachupa rica (with meat) is the richer version; leftovers fried the next day, often with egg, become cachupa refogada, a common breakfast.

- Seafood: tuna, octopus (polvo) and lobster (lagosta) feature heavily, especially in coastal towns; caldo de peixe (fish soup) and pastel com diabo dentro (a fried pastry filled with spiced fish) are worth seeking out.
- Grogue & pontche: grogue is a sugarcane spirit distilled locally, especially on Santo Antão; pontche mixes it with honey and citrus.
- Fogo coffee: grown on the volcanic slopes of Fogo, known for a distinctive, powerful flavour.
- Xerém: a corn porridge often served with fish — a homestyle staple rather than a restaurant showpiece.

15. Music, Festivals & Everyday Culture

Morna — UNESCO-listed since 2019 as an Intangible Cultural Heritage practice — is Cape Verde's best-known musical form, closely associated with the late Cesária Évora, the "Barefoot Diva," whose 2004 album *Voz D'Amor* won a Grammy for Contemporary World Music. Coladeira, funaná (built around the gaita accordion) and batuku round out the country's musical range, each with its own rhythm and regional home — funaná and batuku both trace strongly to Santiago.

Major events worth planning around

- Mindelo Carnival (São Vicente, February) — the country's biggest festival, with strong Brazilian-influenced costumes and samba-school-style parades
- Baía das Gatas Music Festival (São Vicente, August) — three days of major Cape Verdean and international acts on the beach
- Kriol Jazz Festival (Praia, April) — the archipelago's most prestigious music event
- Gamboa Festival (Santiago, May) — traditional music and folklore
- Santa Maria Festival (Sal, September) — concerts, water sports and street entertainment

Beyond the festival calendar, patron-saint celebrations happen island by island through the year, mixing Mass, processions, music and food — often a reason for diaspora family members to fly home.

16. Safety: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

The good

- The US State Department rates Cape Verde Level 1 — "Exercise normal precautions" — its lowest advisory tier, alongside destinations like Portugal, Japan and Canada.
- Political stability is genuinely exceptional for the region: peaceful multi-party transitions since 1991, an independent judiciary, and strong governance rankings.
- No malaria. Life expectancy tops sub-Saharan Africa. Petty crime, not violent crime, is the dominant risk.
- Cape Verdeans are widely described by long-term residents and visitors as warm and welcoming to foreigners.

The bad

- Praia, the capital, carries an elevated Level 2 ("Exercise increased caution") risk rating within the country for petty and, less commonly, violent crime — pickpocketing, purse-snatching, mugging and armed robbery all occur, driven in part by high unemployment ($\approx 12\%$ overall, $\approx 21\%$ among youth).
- Some crimes involve groups of minors, who are legally immune from prosecution before age 16 — a known frustration for local law enforcement.
- Isolated armed robberies have been reported outside hotel complexes on Sal and Boa Vista after dark.
- Infrastructure and medical specialisation thin out fast once you leave Santiago, São Vicente and Sal — inter-island transfers are sometimes necessary even for non-critical care.

The ugly

- A persistent, multi-year drought has strained water supply on several islands — plan for water-use limits and don't assume tap water is drinkable outside Praia, Mindelo and Sal.
- Some real estate land titles remain genuinely unclear, a legacy of a complex historical land system — this has caught out under-cautious foreign buyers.
- The country's famine history is a serious part of its past, not folklore — 20th-century famines killed an estimated 15–18% of the population as recently as the 1940s, a fact worth understanding as social and historical context, not just a statistic.

Practical safety habits

Prefer cashless payment where possible and carry only the cash you need for the day. Stay alert in markets, at festivals, on public transport and at ATMs. Avoid displaying visible wealth (watches, jewellery). Don't walk unfamiliar areas of Praia after dark. Emergency numbers: 132 (police), 131 (fire).

Source: [U.S. Department of State, Cabo Verde Travel Advisory \(Level 1, issued 18 Dec 2025\)](#)

Source: [OSAC \(Bureau of Diplomatic Security\), Cabo Verde Country Security Report](#)

17. FAQ

Do I need a visa to visit Cape Verde?

It depends entirely on your nationality and has changed as of January 2026. Citizens of many countries can still enter visa-free for up to 30 days (extendable to 90), but 96 nationalities were moved off the visa-on-arrival system and must now apply in advance. Everyone, regardless of nationality, must complete EASE pre-registration before flying.

Is Cape Verde safe?

Broadly yes — it carries the US State Department's lowest advisory level, Level 1. The main risk is petty and occasional violent crime concentrated in parts of Praia and, after dark, around some hotel areas on Sal and Boa Vista. Basic street-smart habits go a long way.

What currency should I bring?

Euros. The escudo is pegged to the euro, euros are widely accepted alongside escudos in tourist areas, and you avoid a second conversion. Cards work in cities but carry cash for smaller islands and minibuses.

Can foreigners buy property?

Yes, with no major restriction, and it's the basis of the Green Card permanent residency route (EUR 80,000–120,000 minimum investment, depending on the municipality). Independently verify land title before signing anything.

Is there a digital nomad visa?

Yes — Remote Working Cabo Verde, up to 12 months, with zero Cape Verdean income tax on foreign-earned income.

Does Cape Verde have malaria?

No. It's one of the few West African destinations where malaria is not present.

What language should I learn?

Portuguese for official/business purposes; Kriolu for everyday social life. English is common in tourist zones on Sal and Boa Vista but much less so elsewhere.

How do I get between islands?

Cabo Verde Airlines for speed (hubbed through Praia), ferries for some routes (notably to Santo Antão, which has no airport).

18. Sources & Further Reading

Every fact, fee and figure in this guide is drawn from the sources below. Immigration rules, fees and exchange rates move — always check the official source directly before you travel, apply, or invest.

- [Ria's Colony — "Cape Verde: The Country Built From a Feeling"](#)
- [Ria's Colony — "Exploring the Cultures of Africa: 54 Countries, One Continent" \(series\)](#)
- [Ria's Colony — About](#)
- [EASE — official Government of Cape Verde pre-registration portal](#)
- [Government of Cape Verde — general conditions of entry for foreign citizens \(official PDF\)](#)
- [VisasNews — "Cape Verde: Visa on Arrival Suspended for Citizens of 96 Countries"](#)
- [U.S. Department of State — Cabo Verde Travel Advisory](#)
- [U.S. Department of State — Cabo Verde international travel information](#)
- [OSAC \(U.S. Bureau of Diplomatic Security\) — Cabo Verde Country Security Report](#)
- [Expat.com — "Living in Cape Verde: The Ultimate Expat Guide"](#)
- [uglobal.com — "Cape Verde: Residency & Citizenship by Investment Programs" \(Green Card\)](#)
- [Rivermate — "Cabo Verde: Work Permits and Visas"](#)
- [Trading Economics — Cape Verde Escudo currency data](#)
- [Wikipedia — "Politics of Cape Verde"](#)
- [Wikipedia — "Visa policy of Cape Verde"](#)
- [GlobalSecurity.org — "Cabo Verde / Cape Verde — Government"](#)

Before You Go

Cape Verde is a small country with an outsized story — famine and resilience, colonisation and independence, departure and sodade, all folded into ten volcanic islands in the Atlantic. Whether you're visiting for a week on Sal, chasing morna in Mindelo, or filing Green Card paperwork in Praia, the same rule applies: verify the details that matter (visas, fees, title deeds) against the primary source before you commit, and let the culture — not just the checklist — shape how you experience the islands.

Ria's Colony

This guide is part of Ria's Colony's ongoing work to make Africa easier to understand, travel across and do business within. For more country guides, culture features and travel information, visit riascolony.org, or read the full 54-country culture series this profile is drawn from.

riascolony.org/blog/series/africa-culture-series-54-countries

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