Origins

Millions of years of **geological activity**, alongside a lack of human habitation, gifted St Helena a spectacularly **preserved landscape** and **biodiversity**.

The island first surfaced around **12 million years** ago, as the tip of a volcanic mountain emerged above sea level. The island was shaped by this 'older' volcano, as well as by a 'newer' one a few million years younger.

Today, both **volcanoes are extinct**. The island though remains a demonstration of how volcanoes, lava flows, landslides and erosion craft breathtaking mountains, valleys, ridges, cliffs and black sand beaches – an **awe-inspiring** intricacy of scenery, even within such a tiny landmass. The plants and animals that existed on the island before humans arrived are **unique to the globe**.

The island rises more than **3 miles above the ocean floor**, and on-island elevation varies from sea level to **820m**.

St Helena's **rocky exterior** rises abruptly from an otherwise uninterrupted expanse of ocean. Constant erosion at its exterior has left layer upon layer of geological history – four or five millions years of its volcanically active life – clearly exposed.

In its interior, **dramatic rock formations** like 'Lot' and 'Asses Ears' tower above the landscape. Altered lavas and ashes create colourful, **undulating 'paint palettes'** along the hillsides. You can walk the same paths that **Charles Darwin** tread, viewing the same geological formations described in his 1844 *Geological Observations on the Volcanic Islands*.

One of the remotest islands on Earth; an extraordinary place to visit.

Nearly halfway between southern Africa and Brazil, the subtropical St Helena Island rises dramatically from the midst of the South Atlantic Ocean.

The 47 sq. mile island is home to a globally important natural environment, both land and sea, with spectacularly contrasting scenery and astounding biodiversity – all available within a few minutes' drive.

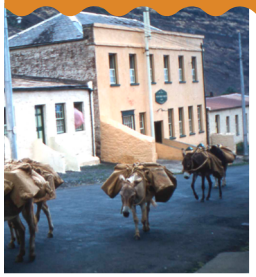
The island's unique culture and cuisine reflect the melting pot of peoples and nationalities that have transited St Helena since its 1502 discovery. The community of around 4,400 'Saints' is renowned for being safe (serious crime is a rarity), welcoming (the driver of each car waves to the other as they pass) and more deeply connected to 'people and planet' than to modern technology (mobile phones were introduced in late 2015).

An off-the-beaten-track, bucket-list location, St Helena is a breath of fresh air in today's busy modern world.

visit.sthelena
st.helena.tourism
@sthelenatourism

+290 22158
sthelenatourism.com
visit@sainthelena.gov.sh

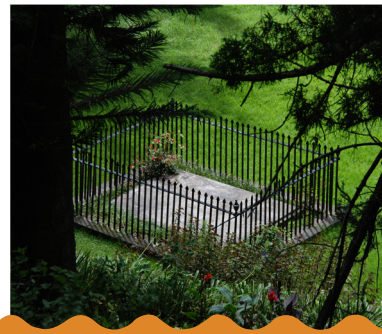
St Helena Island
A breath of fresh air






History and heritage





Human history

The **diversity** of St Helena's human history is fascinating.

Discovered by the **Portuguese in 1502**, the island wasn't settled until the **British arrived in 1659**. From then until the opening of the Suez Canal (1869), St Helena – as one of the only islands in the area – was a **strategic port of call** for vessels traversing the South Atlantic.

Remnants of this transient history are apparent at every turn. The centuries-long presence of the **East India Company** is clear in the Georgian architecture. At least one building still features engraved **Chinese** writing left by indentured labourers. The most important physical remaining trace of the **transatlantic slave trade** on Earth is located in Rupert's Valley.

St Helena's remote location also made it ideal as a **place of exile**, whether for **Napoleon Bonaparte, Zulu Chiefs, Bahraini nationalists** or **Boer Prisoners** of War.

The **melting-pot heritage** created by those who transited the island, or who stayed here to live, whether military men, indentured servants or slaves, is clear in the people of St Helena today.

St Helena's history and heritage isn't all locked away in museums or behind restricted access: Rather, its freely accessible at every turn. Look out for historic **cannons, anchors, fortifications** and **monuments** as you traverse the island, including on the range of nature trails. Stroll through **centuries-old fortifications**, observe church service in the **oldest Anglican church in the southern hemisphere**, attempt to climb the **699-step Jacob's Ladder**, or simply wonder at the island's capital of Jamestown, 'one of the best examples of **unspoiled Georgian architecture** anywhere in the world'.

Key moments

1502 Portuguese navigator João da Nova discovers the island on May 21st and names it "Saint Helena"

1515 Portuguese renegade Fernão Lopez becomes the island's first known permanent resident

1633 The Dutch formally claim St Helena but abandoned it by 1651

1659 A fleet of settlers and slaves, commanded by Captain John Dutton (first Governor, 1659-1661) arrives at St Helena, therefore annexing it on behalf of the British East India Company

1673 The Dutch briefly reclaim the island before the British regain possession

1677 Astronomer Edmond Halley visits to map the stars of the Southern Hemisphere

1761 Astronomer Neville Maskelyne visits

1774 St James Church, the oldest Anglican Church in the Southern Hemisphere, is built

1815 Napoleon Bonaparte arrives in exile

1821 Napoleon dies on-island

1829 Jacob's Ladder is constructed

1836 English naturalist & geologist Charles Darwin visits

1840 Napoleon's body is exhumed and returned to France

1840 From here until 1863, more than 26,000 'liberated Africans' arrive, offloaded from captured slaver vessels as part of Britain's effort to abolish the transatlantic slave trade

1869 The Suez Canal opens and deals a heavy blow to St Helena's importance as a shipping stopover (and its economy)

1882 Jonathan the Giant Tortoise arrives to the island

1890 Chief Dinizulu and 13 others arrive in exile

1900 6,000 Boer Prisoners of War on-island through 1902

1947 King George VI, Queen Elizabeth and Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret visit

1957 Three Bahraini Nationalists arrive in exile which lasted 3 years

1966 The flax industry closes and deals another blow to the island's economy

1980s Electricity begins coming into use across the island

1981 Overseas Territories' British Citizenship is revoked

1995 TV is introduced to St Helena

2002 British citizenship is restored for St Helena

2007 Internet (broadband) introduced

2015 Cell service introduced

2017 St Helena's first (and only) airport opens