St Helena Island®

A breath of fresh air

Key information

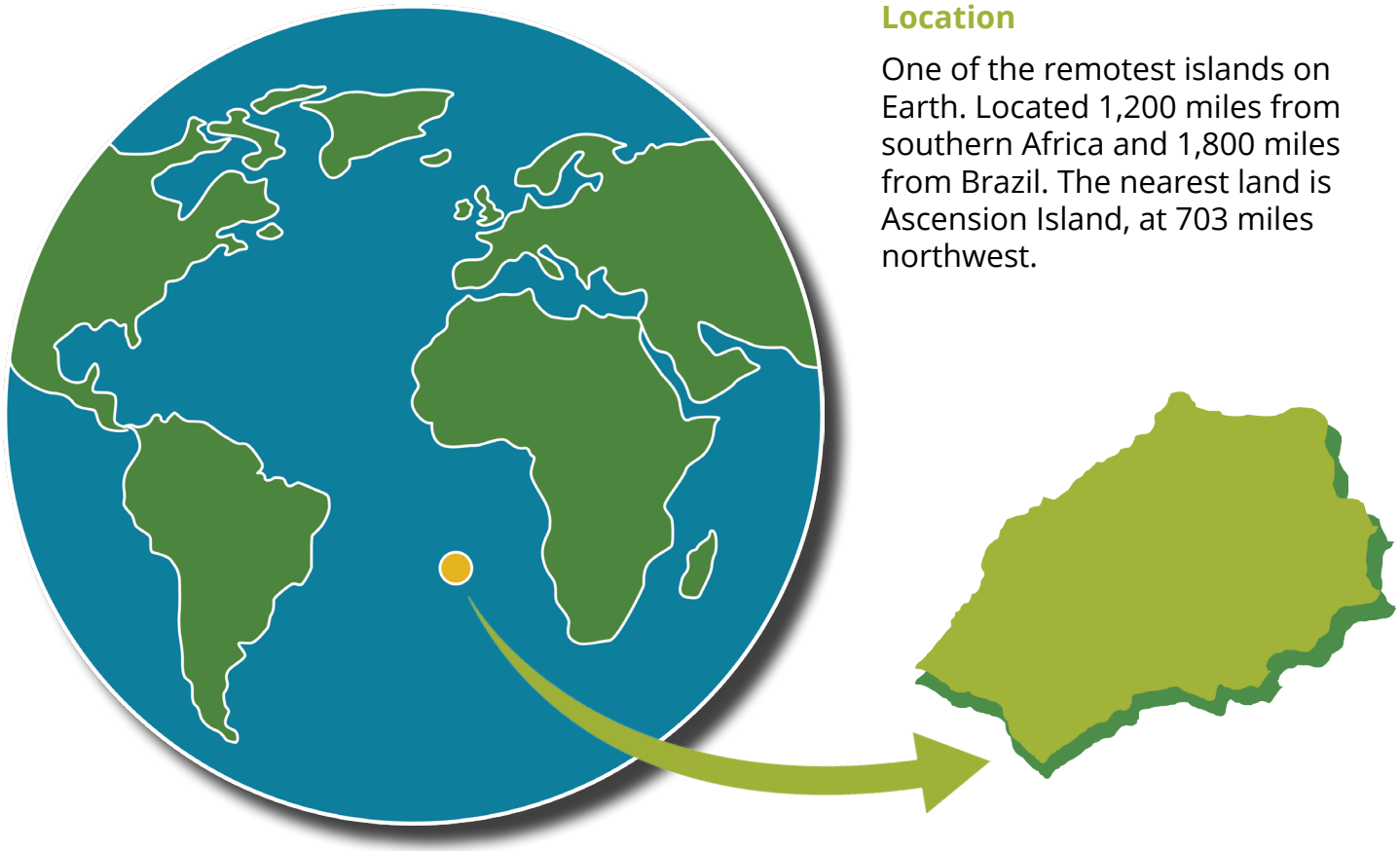
St Helena Island, South Atlantic Ocean

St Helena is one of the remotest islands on Earth. A subtropical paradise where the mountainous terrain and microclimates create an astounding diversity of landscapes all within a few minutes' drive.

Experience the unique charm of this British Overseas Territory. Its small population allows you to discover the island's natural and built attractions in freedom and tranquility.

Dive into the clear, warm waters of the South Atlantic and swim with whale sharks. Discover the safety and security of the tight-knit, melting-pot Saint (St Helenian) culture influenced by Europe, Africa and Asia. Complete all 25 Post Box Walks as you hike the varied terrains and habitats. Sample thrilling adventures, heart-warming encounters and culinary marvels.

St Helena is a breath of fresh air in today's world, boasting clean air, a sparkling ocean environment, a small and safe community (population around 4,000) and a refreshing lack of reliance on modern technology (mobile service was introduced 2015). It is an off-the-beaten-track, bucket-list destination, both comfortingly familiar and heartwarmingly different – a world of its own. On St Helena, there is so much to explore.



Location

One of the remotest islands on Earth. Located 1,200 miles from southern Africa and 1,800 miles from Brazil. The nearest land is Ascension Island, at 703 miles northwest.

Fast facts

- English-speaking (but with a unique 'Saint' - St Helenian - dialect)
- The British Pound (GBP) and the St Helena Pound are used interchangeably on-island (note however, if you depart with St Helena Pounds, that they are not accepted in the UK)
- Electricity supply same as the UK (240V, 50Hz, 13-amp flat pin socket)
- GMT year-round
- Warm, subtropical climate
- Globally significant land and ocean environments
- A small population compared to land size
- Landscapes free from major developments, allows astounding views no matter where you are on the island
- Extremely safe: Serious crime is a rarity; the island is free from dangerous animals, war, and political unrest; the island is not prone to extreme weather events; and the island's volcanoes are both extinct.



"It's a breath of fresh air in today's world: a bit like stepping back in time to small-town Britain gone by."



Accessibility

Airlink is the sole service provider operating flights with the island's sole runway at its sole airport, St Helena Airport (HLE). Flights operate each Saturday between Johannesburg's OR Tambo International Airport (JNB) and the island, with an additional connection to Ascension Island included monthly. During summer/peak visitor season (December-March), an additional mid-week Cape Town flight is often included.

The island is accessible by sea and the yachting community can find information on Noonsite.

Globally important environment and biodiversity

At just 47sq. miles, St Helena is less than 1/3 the size of the Isle of Wight and yet is home to more than 30% of the endemic biodiversity in the whole of the UK and its territories.

The Wirebird is the island's last surviving endemic (found nowhere on Earth but St Helena) land bird, with around 600 adults. An attraction for bird watchers, peak nesting season is September to March. Other endemics include plant, invertebrate and marine species, and most are on the IUCN Red List. St Helena and its sister islands also have the highest percent of threatened tree species in the world, at 69% of tree species threatened, according to a 2020 *State of the World's Trees* report.

Within the island's globally important environment, is also the last remaining natural cloud forest on British soil (the St Helena Cloud Forest, within the Peaks National Park in the heart of the island and a focus for international conservation efforts).

Visitors can help save St Helena's species by taking part in ongoing conservation and environmental projects and initiatives, for instance by planting an endemic Gumwood tree at one of the former endemic forests now being restored.

Category VI MPA

The island is surrounded by a Category VI Marine Protected Area that is nearly the size of France. Only sustainable, one-by-one fishing is allowed within this Exclusive Economic Zone – tuna being one of the most popular catches. Abiding by spearfishing seasonality and catch limits, fishing trips can be arranged on boats or off the rocks and fresh catches can be enjoyed immediately with local guides.

The waters are high-visibility, populated with endemic and other marine life, and perfect for snorkelling and diving. The water temperature is generally 19-26°C and underwater visibility is generally 15-25 meters. Diving and marine excursions including yacht trips and boat cruises are very affordable. Popular swimming locations are Rupert's, the Jamestown Wharf and Lemon Valley.

Year-round, shipwrecks are popular snorkelling and diving attractions and sightings are possible of Chilean devil rays; pantropical, bottlenose, and rough-toothed dolphins; and turtles. Year-round viewing of birds includes white terns, noddies, masked boobies, petrels and red-billed tropicbirds. Seasonally, humpback whales visit June-December and whale sharks December-March (the island hosts a world-renowned population of whale sharks; regulated swimming and snorkelling alongside them is allowed, but diving prohibited).

Walking and hiking

Walking/hiking is one of the island's most popular attractions, due especially to the incredible diversity of landscapes, elevations and microclimates. Some walks feature 'paint pallet' multi-coloured hills; some feature geologically stunning, barren cliff faces falling drastically into the sea; whilst others are Jurassic-like forests of ferns and eucalyptus; some feature waterfalls,

take you past Masked Boobie populations or end in swimmable coastal ponds.

Evidence of the island's rich geological history, which is responsible for the island's diverse and spectacular scenery, is readily accessible by walking. Experience the drastic difference in landscape between St Helena's highest and lowest points. The highest rises to 820m - more than twice the height of the Eiffel Tower - above sea level and shrouded in persistent mist and deep green ferns. At sea level, the terrain becomes barren and rocky as the island meets the ocean, allowing access to coastal ponds, rocky bays, and black-sand or cobble stone beaches.

The 'Post Box Walks' are a series of 25 nature trails showing the diversity of the island, each ending with a 'post box' containing a signature book and stamp to use as a souvenir– could you complete them all? The difficulty of each walk varies, some suitable only for the most experienced hikers and others family-friendly. The distance of each ranges from 1.5km-12km. Estimated walking time ranges from one hour to a full day. Walking guides are recommended especially for the harder trails.

St Helena is about ocean views in every direction. It's about one minute being in a desert-like landscape, then a few yards away being surrounded by rolling green hills. It's about 360-degree views of the island, and the Atlantic at every horizon when viewed from the endemic cloud forest at Diana's Peak. It's about breathtaking views of the Milky Way at night.

Culture and cuisine

The cuisine of St Helena demonstrates the true melting pot of peoples and cultures. Sundays are for 'curry and roast' – a mix of traditional British Sunday roast coupled with Saint curry. 'Plo' (a local dish of rice, meat and veg similar to pilaf), fishcakes, black pudding, fried fresh fish, coconut fingers, cheese straws and other savoury treats are also associated with the island. Home-hosted cooking classes and meals are an ideal way to get hands-on experience with the cuisine and its history.

Local coffee and liquor are popular purchases. St Helena Coffee is world-renowned – 250g costing about £100 on the international market, as the supply is very limited and the reputation extremely good. But on-island, you can buy the coffee at very affordable prices, and can even get hands-on helping to harvest the green-tipped bourbon Arabica beans (which have been disease-free and free from crossbreeding since their introduction to the island in the 1700s). Harvest season is October-February. The St Helena Distillery produces a range of local liquors, including the popular spiced rum and St Helena Coffee liqueur.

The culture of St Helena is authentically focused on people and planet: sundowners at the seaside; fishing and fry-ups on the rocks; Sunday picnics 'in the country'; get-togethers and parades (especially around Christmas, as well as each 21 May, which is the island's national day); a healthy work-life balance; and strong family and values are important to the culture. Saints feel a deep connection to their natural environment, land and sea, and enjoy spending time with friends and family.

The island enjoys a very high level of safety and security apparent in everyday life, and its close ties to Britain are also apparent. St Helena has three primary schools, one secondary school, the St Helena Community College and a Research Institute. It is governed by a mixture of English and local law: and has a locally elected council alongside a UK-appointed Governor.

History and heritage

St Helena's geological history extends back millions of years. Its northeastern volcano appeared above the ocean's surface around 12 million years ago, while its younger and larger southwestern volcano appeared between 11 and 7.5 million years ago.

For millions of subsequent years, St Helena remained uninhabited. The island's remote natural environment thrived undisturbed, nurturing endemic habitats and globally unique biodiversity.

It wasn't until 1502 that St Helena was discovered by the Portuguese. The island remained uninhabited until the British settled it in 1659.

From then until the opening of the Suez Canal, the island's remote location made it strategically important for restocking/refuelling vessels. It was also ideal as a place of exile. Among the most notable exiles were King Dinuzulu, 6,000 Boer Prisoners of War, 25 Zulu Chiefs, 3 Bahraini nationalists and French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte.

Slaves, 'liberated Africans' and Chinese indentured labourers also left significant impacts on the island's people and heritage, as did the Falklands War, in which many islanders fought on the deployed *RMS St Helena*. The island was also a vital location during Britain's efforts in the 1800s to abolish the transatlantic slave trade, and today still houses "the most significant physical remaining trace of the transatlantic slave trade on Earth" (*Dr Andrew Pearson*).

Over the centuries, the island's niche qualities drew famous visitors including Charles Darwin (for the unique natural environment and biodiversity), Edmund Halley (for the incredible night sky viewing) and British royalty. The transient human history of the island - with a diversity of peoples, nationalities and aspects of history each making leaving an imprint - is still apparent in both built and cultural heritage.

TV was introduced in 1995, broadband in 2007 and mobile service in 2015. Until late 2017, the island was only accessible by sea - a five-day ship voyage from Cape Town. In October 2017, St Helena's first and only airport (St Helena Airport - HLE) opened to commercial passenger flights. Today, travellers can fly to the island in just six hours.

In 2025, the island remains extremely far from over-touristed; yet due to its small economic size, the increased visitor numbers enabled by the airport has already had an impact, becoming the largest revenue-generator after grants and aid. St Helena's isolated, mid-Atlantic location makes it important for satellite connectivity and climate change data. The island remains a popular stopover/destination for cruise ships and yachts.

Today, many of the species that had once thrived on St Helena are on the brink of extinction, with invasive plants and animals threatening endemic habitats and populations. Local and international conservation efforts help combat invasives and restore the natural habitats, and many endemic species are still being discovered or rediscovered.





Top experiences

1 Swim with whale sharks: These gentle giants grace our waters from December to April, offering the opportunity for a bucket-list adventure. St Helena is renowned for its exceptional whale shark encounters, where these protected creatures curiously swim with snorkelers, making the best memories. Our local marine tour operators are dedicated to sustainable practices, ensuring your encounter is both safe and contributes to the conservation of this magnificent species.

2 Conquer all 25 Post Box Walks: The island boasts 25 Green Flag accredited trails known as Post Box Walks. This ultimate hiking challenge offers a diverse range of experiences, with trails varying from 0.5km to 12km. For those seeking a true sense of accomplishment, collecting all 25 unique walk stamps earns a commemorative certificate from the Tourist Office.

3 Complete the Jacob's Ladder challenge: Challenge yourself to complete the 699 steps of Jacob's Ladder. Once completed, visit the Museum of St Helena to collect a commemorative certificate. Fitness fanatics can also attempt to beat the record for fastest ascent, which currently stands at 4 minutes and 40.75 seconds.

4 Meet the oldest living land animal: Jonathan is a 193 year old (2025) giant Seychelles tortoise. He holds two Guinness World Records: the oldest known living land animal and the oldest chelonian to have ever lived. Since 1882, Jonathan has grazed the lawns of Plantation House, the Governor's residence. Visitors can meet Jonathan by booking a Plantation House tour.

5 Dive beneath the waves: St Helena offers world-class diving with up to 40m visibility, warm waters (19-25°C), and a thriving marine ecosystem boasting over 780 species. Explore eight accessible shipwrecks, now vibrant havens for diverse fish populations.



Tours and activities

- Full island tours
- Marine tours
- Post Box Walks and other hikes
- Nature photography
- Voluntourism
- Traditional craft (lace, flax weaving)
- Cooking and cuisine
- Fortifications and history
- Divng and snorkelling
- Golf
- Geocaching
- Watersports
- Heritage and culture
- St Helena Coffee experiences
- Bird watching
- St Helena Museum
- Local product tours and tastings
- Governor's residence and Jonathan tours
- Napoleonic sites
- Transatlantic slave legacy tours
- Boer POW cemetery
- Rock climbing
- Mountain biking
- Camping
- Astrotourism

St Helena is the taste of fish caught fresh from the sea; comforting home-cooked Saint curry; local fruit picked off the trees.

It is the smell of onions and curry powder frying in oil. The smell of pure, fresh air and vegetation. A depth of cleanness and freshness allowed by the lack of pollution.



Helpful tips

Some of the things that make St Helena so authentic, refreshing and heartwarming are also the things that can leave visitors feeling unprepared upon arrival. Because St Helena functions somewhat differently to the rest of the modern world, here are some handy tips to help prepare you for your visit or relocation:

1) It is highly advisable to bring GBP with you, as no ATMs exist on-island and local businesses cannot yet process international debit/credit cards. International cards can however be used to withdraw funds at the Bank of St Helena (note opening hours). The Bank also offers a pre-loadable Tourist Card that can be used at most local businesses.

2) Often the demand for hire cars is greater than the amount available: Therefore it is advisable to book your rental car in advance of your visit. Driving the single-track mountainous roads and using the passing bays can take some getting used to and you must read the Highway Code before driving on-island.

3) Except for emergency services, nothing operates 24 hours/day and many businesses are closed on Sundays and in the afternoons/evenings (including fuel stations). Additionally, the island is remote and reliant on imports, certain items can be unavailable and/or scarce.

4) On St Helena, everyone knows everyone; if someone stares at you, they're simply wondering who you are and waiting for you to say hello! The tight-knit community of around 4,000 people is renowned for being welcoming and friendly. Drivers all wave to one another as they pass, and pedestrians stop to say hello to each other in the streets.

5) While ongoing projects are working rapidly to improve the island's digital connectivity, international cell providers do not operate on-island and internet facilities are available but limited and expensive.

6) The climate is usually mild year-round (15-28°C), though mornings and nights can be cold and the weather can change location-to-location and hour-to-hour, so it is highly recommended to bring a light rain jacket with you.

Seasonality

	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Spearfishing				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Whale sharks	■	■	■	■								
Humpback whales						■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Rays, dolphins, fish, turltes, seabirds	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Cruise ships	■	■	■	■						■	■	■
Yachting season	■	■									■	■
Coffee harvesting										■	■	■
Wirebird nesting	■	■	■						■	■	■	■
Hot season	■	■	■									■
Cool season						■	■	■	■			

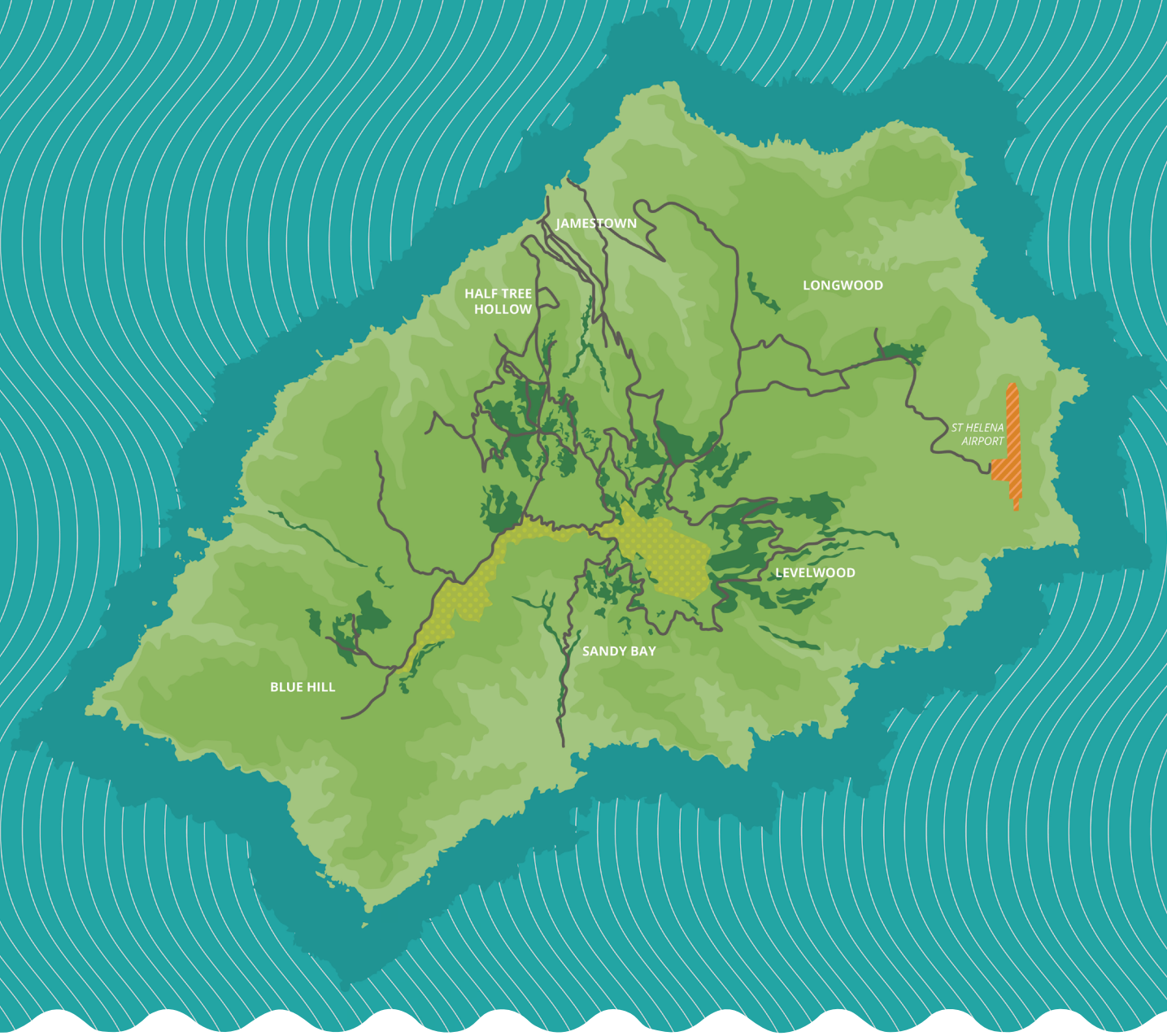
St Helena is the sound of ocean waves gently lapping against the rocks or the hulls of boats; a ship's horn sounding off in the harbour; Scout's bugles and drums during traditional parades; a mix of accordion-style country, reggae, 90s rock ballads and modern chart hits; birds nesting in the trees at sunset; and the easy chatter of Saint dialect, people greeting each other in the streets, and children playing freely and happily. It's about silence, tranquillity and absorption into nature.







"I love the quality of life in terms of work-life balance: the priorities being family, the outdoors and the community."



St Helena Island

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