

The following is a translation of an article that appeared in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung Fact Sheet on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2018, the original of which can be viewed here:

<http://www.genios.de/presse-archiv/artikel/FAS/20180513/kommt-die-obergrenze-ein-gespraech-SD1201805135396523.html>

Is there an upper limit?

A discussion with the former Minister of Tourism of the Seychelles about figures.

A fighting fish is swimming in the office of the former Minister of Tourism, who was appointed Minister of Finance last week. "People have been saying for a year and a half that he won't last long. But look, he's doing fine." A dark red Siamese fighting fish circles in a goldfish bowl.

In the Seychelles, where nature conservation is enshrined in the constitution, the fish usually does quite well. But due to global warming, the reefs around the world have suffered, even here. Around Coco Island, the corals have already faded. That is also why the most ambitious project in Maurice Loustau-Lalanne's term of office is so important: debt reduction combined with marine protection.

In 2015, SeyCCAT, a company set up specifically for this project, bought part of the country's bilateral debts with the Paris Club of Creditors at a cost of 21.6 million US dollars. Another five million were acquired by private investors. In return, the Seychelles undertook to protect 30 percent of their sea areas. "15 percent have already been designated as a no-take-area," says the minister, "another 15 percent will follow in the next two years. The same will happen in the southwest, where many sea turtles live." Then he tells how they set up the project together with the NGO, The Nature Conservancy and many supporters, such as the environmental activist Sylvia Earle, the Blue Economy advisers of the Obama government, and donations from private individuals, people like Leonardo DiCaprio. The President of the Micronesian Archipelago visited Palau recently to find out more about SeyCCAT.

But action is also needed on land. After the crisis in 2008, cheap tourism came to the country. We would like to correct this development again. "When we became affordable, we outclassed the product. We were not paying attention," says the minister. "The majority of tourist resorts are currently guest houses and self-catering accommodations, which vary greatly in quality, but we want to balance this out with the "Seychelles Secrets" seal of quality. And those who enter the country in the future and want to stay in a non-licensed accommodation, such as that offered by Airbnb, must expect to be rebooked". In comparison: the 490 "simple" accommodations are compared with about 37 hotels in the luxury category. Most of them belong to non-Seychellois, and with their 2300 rooms they generate about half of the income.

"The Seychelles should be small and sustainable and discreet. They are not a mass market," says Loustau-Lalanne. But while 142,000 arrivals were recorded in 2008, last year the figure was 389,000, 14 percent of which came from Germany, the new frontrunner country. How many tourists can the islands withstand? The minister sighs. "At most 500,000, but not before 2021. That would be my goal. Half a million visitors bringing in \$750 million. But if you send me one guest who spends that kind of money, I'd happily take that, of course."

Unlike Mauritius, where hoteliers like it when their guests don't leave the hotel complex, the ideal Seychelles vacationer visits more than one island and stays in different accommodations, which makes sense, because the islands offer an incomparable natural experience - unlike Mauritius. The minister likes islandhoppers, because they use the ferries, the taxis, they book services like „wedding-organization" and enjoy live music at the Creole buffet in the evening.

If you don't want to hear a word of German while on holiday, you should avoid the Seychelles, because more are coming soon. There are two direct flights with Condor from Frankfurt, one with Austrian from Vienna, Edelweiss flies from Zurich from September. Negotiations are underway with Eurowings. However, the next tourist step does not take place in the air, it concerns those fish species that are so tired of life swimming around the Outer Islands. Some sport fishermen pay up to 45,000 euros for a fishing holiday. Some 16 world records have already been set in Seychelles' territorial waters. "We are constantly breaking our own records," says the Minister, who enjoys fishing himself. He was out just the other day. What did he catch? "Just an Ahi, about sixteen kilos. We had sashimi, right on the boat. That was good." Arezu Weitholz