

MAURITIUS: HEAVEN ON EARTH

Whether you are seeking adrenaline-boosting activities or relaxing on a stretch of white sand that nuzzles crystal-clear turquoise lagoons, this gorgeous island in the Indian Ocean ticks all the right boxes and more, as **EMMA HARRISON** discovers...

At first glance, you might think you have stepped into some kind of dream, a film set or an enticing Instagram post. But this place is very real and does a pretty stellar job of cranking up the dreaminess levels and spiriting you away on a paradisiacal retreat. Writer Mark Twain was rumoured to have declared Mauritius as 'heaven on Earth' - and it's easy to see why.

Mauritius is blessed with majestic mountains, lush forests, stunning national parks and spectacular waterfalls, which all go a long way to entice visitors to where it sits in the Indian Ocean. Put quite simply, Mauritius is a feast for the senses - in particular, from a visual perspective. Gaze in wonder at the rushing waterfalls, mountainous vistas, as well as tropical forests like the mystical Black River Gorges National Park. But if you're yearning for more than a gorgeous view while sipping a cocktail, then you're in luck - Mauritius is much more than just a pretty face.

ISLAND ADVENTURES

An intriguing archipelago surrounds Mauritius and one of the best ways to explore this collection of islands and islets is by an organised tour by boat or catamaran. One Love Tours will whisk you away on an unforgettable island adventure



where you can explore the turquoise crystal waters of the Indian Ocean. Sit back, relax with a cooling drink as you experience the pure exhilaration of a thrill a minute ride on a speedboat. Each tour can take several hours and there are several stopping off points along the way where you can snorkel, swim and explore.

Step off the boat into the waters and climb up to see Île aux Fouquets, also known as the lighthouse island by the locals, which is located in the bay of Grand Port, southeast of Mauritius. Despite falling into disrepair, this rocky island remains very popular with both locals and tourists and is one of the highlights of these curated tours. For me, an absolute standout moment was seeing a pod of dolphins that suddenly appeared out of nowhere as the colour of the water transformed from shades of turquoise

blue to more of a greenish hue while on the way to see the spectacular waterfall at the Grand River South East. One of the island's highlights is Île aux Cerfs, which has plenty of restaurants, shops and even a golf course! After a delicious meal, why not relax on the sandy beach, which nestles the turquoise coral reef lagoon?

FOR THE THRILL-SEEKERS

For those who hanker after some land-based action, the La Vallée Des Couleurs Nature Park - close to the village of Chamouny - is not only home to some pretty stunning flora and fauna, but is also a great place to enjoy some fun activities that have been designed in tune with nature. Try hiking, quad biking, or zip lining across the world's third longest zip line, where you can enjoy a birds eye view of waterfalls, canyons and valleys below.

You can also visit the geological wonder 23-coloured earth palette, which is spread over 450 acres of land. If you want to amp your coloured-sand game even further, head over to Chamarel to see the Seven Coloured Earths where you can find sand dunes in seven different colourways. Our tip – plan a trip to see it at sunrise to really see the colours in all their glory.

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE LOCAL WILDLIFE

If you are up at sunrise, we are sure you will be feeling peckish and if you are looking for a great place for a flavoursome breakfast – that is also totally instagrammable – head over to the Casela nature park where you can eat with giraffes. You also have the opportunity to feed these curious and gentle creatures. Be prepared to see a strutting peacock or two as well, as they catwalk across the viewing deck. Afterwards, if you feel the need to walk off your breakfast, why not do so with some big cats? Along with the larger members of the animal kingdom, Casela is also home to smaller creatures like monkeys, giant tortoises and over 1,500 birds.

Mauritius is renowned for its wildlife which includes the fruit bat (also known as the Mauritian flying fox), geckos and lizards, colourful tropical fish, and, of course, the Aldabra giant tortoises. It was previously the former home of the dodo, undoubtedly the best-known extinct species, but this flightless bird was last seen in 1662.

SOAK IN THE CULTURE

History lovers can pay a visit to the Bank of Mauritius Museum in Port Louis. It’s free to enter and you can really attain a real sense of history when perusing the coins on display there. The splendour of the Château de Labourdonnais, a real jewel of Mauritian heritage, is a must-see. It was built in 1856 and this 19th-century neoclassical colonial home has been lovingly restored by a team of experts, surrounded by lush orchards and gardens.

On a slightly smaller scale is the pretty Red Roof Church, which is one of the most renowned churches in Mauritius. Formally known as the Notre Dame Auxiliatrice Chapel, it’s famous for its vivid red roof which makes for quite the juxtaposition against the backdrop of the azure sky and the bright turquoise sea. It’s also situated just a ten-minute drive from Cap Malheureux, which has some of the most stunning views out to the islands off the coast.



A PHOTOGRAPHER’S DREAM

The Pamplemousses Botanical Gardens is an excellent place to learn about rare and endangered species, as well as being an incredible setting to capture some epic shots for Instagram. Prepare to get snap-happy at some of the attractions you can see throughout Mauritius, from the dormant crater Trou aux Cerfs to The Sacred Lake of Mauritius, also known as the Grand Bassin. Here you will find a parade of Hindu goddesses and gods, from the majestic Lord Shiva to Saraswati – the goddess of music. It makes for quite the spectacle and visitors are able to light a candle and wash their feet in the lake, which, according to local folklore, is meant to encourage fertility. You can also pay your respects to the larger-than-life statues of Hindu gods Shiva and Durga Maa at the entrance of this sacred site. Shiva is the highest-known statue in Mauritius – standing at 108 feet tall, she is absolutely awe-inspiring.

The Citadel perches above the city on top of Petite Montagne Hill, or to give it its formal name, Fort Adelaide – a famous spot for impressive views of the Capital. The Fort itself is an impressive sight and provides a 360-degree view of Port Louis from Champ de Mars to Chinatown, which, despite



being fairly traditional, has seen a degree of rejuvenation thanks to a group of young people who formed the New Chinatown Foundation in an attempt to bring some identity and vibrancy to the district.

SHOP THE LOCAL PRODUCE

Mauritius is world-renowned for its tea plantations, sugarcane production and, of course, rum distilleries. From the Bois Chéri tea plantation to the Chamarel Restaurant and Rum Distillery, where you can try all manner of rums as well as touring the distillery itself. Want to shop until you drop? There are ample opportunities all over the island thanks to a wide selection of malls including the cavernous Bagatelle Mall but for a more traditional Mauritian shopping experience, head to the capital of Port Louis and meander around the bustling Central Market where you can let your senses be tantalised with herbs, spices, exotic fruits and more.

WHERE TO STAY

Considering where to stay in Mauritius is really easy when you see resorts like the five-star luxury resort Maradiva Villas (maradiva.com). This stunning resort offers a pretty unique experience – every one



of the 65 villas has a private infinity pool and an outdoor garden shower. If you prefer your bathing experience to be more communal, then there is a gorgeous communal infinity pool, which has views of the dramatic Le Morne Brabant and is surrounded by swaying palms.

Maradiva also has private access to the gorgeous Tamarin Bay beach, which is made up of reef-sheltered waters and white coral sand. There are plenty of opportunities to soak in Mauritius’ cultural influences, from relaxing holistic spa treatments, including revitalising Ayurvedic massage, to witnessing the dazzling dance of Sega, an intoxicating traditional dance that originated in Africa and is regularly performed around the island.

Foodies will relish in the fine Indian cuisine at Cilantro and the sizzling dishes served at Teppan, an authentic Japanese restaurant, although you can taste traditional Mauritian cuisine which is a fusion of Chinese, European and Indian cuisines at Coast2Coast or via the in-villa dining.

■ **Luxury suite pool villas from £800 per night**

For a slightly more cost-effective stay, Maradiva’s sister hotel, the Sands Suite Resort & Spa (sands.mu/en) where you can enjoy ocean views from your balcony is a superb choice and has a great choice of watersports activities to choose from. ■

■ **Luxury suites from £340 per night**

What to wear

Mauritius is a magical island destination with plenty of soul. From mountains to beaches, it is the perfect place for those who want to forget their woes and indulge in pure luxury. We're packing all our most glamorous frocks so we can be the queen of the beach on our next jaunt to the sunny shores of Mauritius.

Compiled by
**HANNAH
TAN-GILLIES**

BRINGING GLAM TO MAURITIUS



1. Santorini Tote Bag by Demellier available at demellierlondon.com 2. Printed Corinne Top by Reiss available at reiss.com
3. White Cut-off Shorts by Levi's available at levis.com
4. Cat eye Print Halterneck Jumpsuit by Temperley London available at temperleylondon.com 5. Silver Tiana 100 Mules by Piferi available at piferi.com 6. Black scarf with gold embellishments by Shaku available at shaku.co.uk
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