

# Travel & Outdoors

**WISH YOU WERE HERE**



## Welcome to paradise island

A week-long exploration of Mauritius promises much more than just a 'fly and flop' vacation, writes **Rachel Roberts**

**A**s we drive to Sands Suites Resort & Spa, the first of two sister luxury resorts we will call home over a packed week-long exploration of Mauritius, our guide Cindy tells us that although the African island is a diminutive 60x50km it can feel more expansive because "there are no straight roads anywhere".

And in the coming days, we are to discover it's a fitting description for many facets of the island nation – history, culture, landscape and people included – cast around 3000km off Africa's east coast in the Indian Ocean.

Nearly one million sun-seeking holidaymakers flocked to Mauritius in 2022, a welcome success story after the enforced pandemic hiatus. With 90 plus resorts, dazzling butter-soft white sand beaches lapped by glittering turquoise waters and a spectacular coral reef to explore,

the volcanic isle truly is the stuff of dreams.

The resorts we stay in, Sands (4 star) and its neighbour Maradiva Villas Resort & Spa (5 star), are a paradise in their own right. Located in Flic-en-Flac (more of which later) in the southeastern Black River district, both are exceptional, but my villa accommodation in multi-award-winning Maradiva is truly off the luxury scale. Highlights include a private small pool, outdoor rainforest-style shower, and its close proximity to the beach – 30 steps, I counted!

If sea-swimming doesn't rock your boat, the crescent-shaped infinity pool surrounded by private cabanas surely will. Ayurvedic massages available at the spa will take your chill

*Ayurvedic massages available at the spa will take your chill to the next level*



**The exquisite lobby, main; and villa accommodation in multi-award-winning Maradiva, above**

to the next level (I drifted off within 10 minutes), and there are many complimentary activities including water sports and cooking classes if you want to stay in resort.

But Mauritius has more fascinating tales to share than most beach novels for those in search of something beyond a fly and flop vacation. And our visit to the magnificently restored 19th-century Château de Labourdonnais in the north opens a door on the island's chequered past. This colonial mansion – all elegant teak and late-Victorian grandeur – was once a sugar cane plantation, emblematic of the dark days of

the slave trade. And the following, equally challenging chapter, has rightfully not been airbrushed from the pages of the island's history. At the UNESCO-listed Aapravasi Ghat in Port Louis, we walk up the same 14 steps taken by half a million Indian indentured labourers, lured here by the promise of a better life by the British following the abolishment of slavery in the mid-19th century.

Bearing witness to the unimaginable hardships these people faced is a sobering experience, yet it brings a deeper appreciation of the nation's wonderfully rich society today. Nearly two thirds of the 1.3 million-strong population are descendants of the Indian workers, the remainder tracing back to the African slaves, and this legacy is alive in every aspect of Mauritian life. It's there in the pungent yet less-fiery flavours of the delicious Indian-fusion dishes, the Sega dance once performed after a long day of toil in the plantations, and the rainbow-hued Hindu shrines and temples peppered across the island.

It's also well worth exploring the narrow network of streets in Port



Louis to get a feel for everyday life here. We meander through China Town, lined with shops piled high with ingredients for Chinese medicines and traditional dishes, as our guide Sindy explains that early immigrants from China's southeastern Kwang Tong province arrived in search of work in the early 19th century. While third generation families still live here, it's rare to hear Mandarin spoken anymore, replaced with French, English or Mauritian Creole.

We're spoilt by exceptional eating experiences on a daily basis, but the headliner is an incredible Indian meal at Cilantro, one of Maradiva's four restaurants. Served in family-style, we share platters of exquisite curries that are flavoursome and clean, without the heaviness of traditional Indian dishes. Another favourite is Karay Mario in Mahébourg. It's a popular hang-out for locals (always a good sign), and menus change daily, encompassing Mauritian, Creole and Cajun flavours. Housed in a converted worker's infirmary with white-washed walls accented by a bright red hue typical to the island, we tuck into hearty dishes, all made from local organic produce, including kari pouk ek krevet (chicken curry and shrimps) and zanana karamelize (caramelised pineapple), washed down with ice-cold Phoenix, one of the local beers.

You'll naturally "meet" some of the local wildlife, including the cheeky Bul Bul, a Mohican-sporting, red-ringed bird, who likes to drop by whenever sweet fruit is on the table, and the Red Cardinal Fody, a cute scarlet-coloured sparrow.

Quite apart from its outstanding natural beauty, Mauritius has always been an agricultural hot spot, yielding an abundance of sugar cane used for raw sugar and rum production, the surrounding ocean a rich source of fish. Lychees are also an important export here and as a life-long hater of the fruit, I'm converted into a lover after tasting some from a fresh crop sold at one of the many stalls that line the roads.

The Dutch first landed on the



island in 1598 and France colonised Mauritius in 1715 (bringing the Creole language with them, still spoken today and amusingly popping up on KFC hoardings), before the British took over in 1810. The island gained independence in 1968. The French used a fairly simple, yet charming, way of naming places and landmarks. Flic-en-Flac is a great example; it described the sound of the soldier's boots as they walked through the squishy wet marshland. Similarly, many of the monikers for the island's 111 volcanic mountains get straight to the point. These include Le Pouce, with its thumb-like outcrop and Corps De Garde, the 720-metre high "bodyguard".

We reluctantly wind up our time on Paradise Island with a hike up Le Morne Brabant, arguably the most historically significant peak, where escaped slaves once hid from their masters. Although we're up with the dawn to avoid the heat, the 7km round-trip is not for the faint-hearted. But oh, the pay-off: epic panoramic views of the verdant, lushly carpeted landscape below, ocean and sky seemingly to infinity and beyond. Bucket-list moments surely don't get any better.

**Prices for Sands Suites Resort & Spa start at £230 per suite per night. Prices for Maradiva Villas Resort & Spa start at £425 per villa per night. Ts&Cs apply. Visit [www.sands.mu/en/](http://www.sands.mu/en/) and [www.maradiva.com/en/](http://www.maradiva.com/en/)**



The view from the infinity pool at Maradiva, above; watersports, top

STAYCATION



Night worth

Hotel du Vin at One Devonshire Gardens has been on my list for a while, writes Gaby Soutar

One Devonshire Gardens is a fixture of Glasgow's west end. It's been around since 1986 and was once the location of Gordon Ramsay's Michelin-starred restaurant, Amaryllis.

The property was acquired by Hotel du Vin in 2006 and has expanded over the years, from one townhouse to five, and now has 49 bedrooms.

Still, I've never been. I've always thought about it, but the stars just didn't align.

Evidence of that is the fact that we got totally lost, somewhere between our underground station and the four-star hotel.

Despite the bumbling and darkness, at least this was an opportunity to squint at the beautiful buildings in this posh residential part of the city. We spent a bit too long doing that, though Google Maps sorted us out in the end, after my husband opened the app and asked me the address of our destination. The clue is in the name, I told him.

Thankfully, it's the sort of place you want to arrive at on a dreich wintery evening, when you've just clocked out of work for the weekend. The staff are very warm, and gave us our actual key – not a swipe card, how excellently retro.

The concierge led up the staircases, thickly carpeted in a William Morris-esque pattern, of this B-listed Victorian property, which was built in 1908. We passed beautiful stained glass windows, covered in fruits and flowers, as we clambered towards our Junior Suite, the Graham Beck room, which is named after the Champagne house.

It's been five years since this hotel had its last refurbishment, but the rooms still look fresh.

Ours was huge, with an apple green sofa, Art Deco-style light fittings, and a king size bed with prints of Scottish gentry above the headboard. The bathroom has a walk-in shower, rolltop tub and monochrome plant-inspired wallpaper, covered in cacti, which is presumably a reference to the Glasgow Botanic Gardens, since it's just a short walk away.

There are also plenty of restaurants to visit in that direction.

Since it was getting late, we thought we'd try a reliable pizza place, Paesano, since it's an easy walk in an idiot-proof straight line, along Great Western Road, though we discovered a vast queue outside.

Our second choice was the excellent Eusebi, though it should have been our first, since the combination of cocktail, indoor window seat and

waiting for

Roman sourdough pinas was almost unbeatable.

Of course, you could stay in the hotel, as it has its own whisky bar and the restaurant, which is spread across a couple of levels. Head here for breakfast, which includes hot options on the a la carte menu. These include the full Scottish shebang, oak smoked salmon and scrambled egg, or avocado on toast.

However, we were satisfied with the continental spread of granola, fruit salads, pastries and smoothies. I consider myself an expert on Bircher's muesli, and they do a very good one here. Although not an essential ingredient, it's all in the

It's the sort of place you want to arrive at on a dreich wintery evening

nuts. I'm sure Gordon Ramsay would agree.

I almost reached for a second portion, but we were saving ourselves, since we were booked in to try their new Champagne lunch at noon. This is £35, and includes three courses and a (generous) glass of their house fizz, which is Lombard. That seems a very fair price for a feed in this smart dining room.

After amuse bouche of beetroot and horseradish macaron and smoked eel tart, and rosemary and sea salt



One Devonshire Gardens by Hotel du Vin, main; a lavish bedroom, top; and sumptuous bathroom, above

focaccia, we had starters of Scottish salmon and lobster, braised leek and pear, as well as mushroom parfait on brioche that also featured ingredients including clementine, chestnut, and shitake.

For mains, I tried the Ayrshire pork belly, which came with a stub of fondant potato, kale, red wine jus and artichoke puree. While, the fillet of coley option includes a mushroom duxelle, roasted cauliflower and truffle jus.

Our winning pudding was the black fig, verjus meringue, hazelnut and clementine ice-cream, with a runner up of manjari chocolate cremeux, praline, Jivara chocolate mousse and a scoop of excellent banana and passionfruit ice-cream.

Cue a rolling back up the carpeted stairs moment. Except, sadly, we'd already checked out, since this had been a single night escape. Never mind, I'm glad to have met you at last, One Devonshire Gardens. I won't leave it as long as 37 years next time.

**Hotel du Vin at One Devonshire Gardens, 1 Devonshire Gardens, Glasgow (0141-378 0385, [www.hotelduvin.com](http://www.hotelduvin.com)). Rooms start from £159 room only or £187 bed and breakfast, based on a February 2023 stay, or £179 and £207 in March 2023.**

Mozambique: The perfect blend of surf and safari

The crowds are yet to discover the safe southern sector of this African nation, says Sarah Marshall

Washed clean by a high tide overnight, the long, empty stretch of sand running along Maputo Bay is remarkably pristine. Only one set of prints runs from the sand dunes, considerably larger than my own.

"I dream of finding an elephant down here," muses park warden Miguel Gonçalves, who has seen plenty of evidence to suggest these large mammals cross towards the ocean. "Maybe one day."

Forming part of the recently amalgamated Maputo National Park, a 1,700 sq km mosaic of marine, coastal and grassland areas present an unusual safari offering, giving visitors a chance to see elephants, giraffes, turtles and humpback whales (potentially) within the same day.

Running along a border with South Africa, this region has always been part of an important elephant corridor, although numbers dropped dramatically in the 1980s during the country's civil war. Now numbers are on the rise, game viewing is rapidly improving and investment in tourism looks set to make Mozambique a premier safari and beach destination in years to come.

Connections into the country run from Johannesburg, a direct flight from the UK with Virgin Atlantic, while a new e-visa system, launched at the end of 2022, also promises to make this southeast African country much easier to visit.

Dreamy beaches

Having spent a day exploring the park inland, Miguel is driving me along the empty beach to watch humpbacks breaching on the horizon. Hugging

the hillside in a sheltered bay at the end of the beach, 22 suites sparkle in the dunes, part of the White Pearl Resort in Ponta Mamoli.

Wooden furnishings and floaty linens are decorated in a palette of colours inspired by silky sands, weathered driftwood and frothing waves rolling in from the Indian Ocean.

Best of all, however, is the never-ending view of sky and sea. I spend hours watching the sun dip and rise above the horizon, while listening to the heaving gasps and sighing roars of powerful swells.

A striking city

It's a two-hour drive from White Pearl to Maputo, Mozambique's capital and the exit and entry point for international flights. Although independence was won in 1975, vestiges of Portuguese colonial rule include the language, excellent fusion cuisine and remarkable architecture.

On a walking tour with Maputo a Pe ([maputo-a-pe.com](http://maputo-a-pe.com)), I discover some of the city's highlights. Constructed by the British between 1908 and 1916, with a grand dome designed by an associate of Alexandre Gustave Eiffel, the railway station is ranked as one of the most beautiful train stations in the world.

Elsewhere, the architecture is a curious mix of Art Deco homes and geometrically pleasing social housing designed by famous post-modernist Portuguese architect Pancho Guedes in the pre-independence years. But some of the most colourful public displays are murals and sculptures from local artists, who have contributed to a thriving scene over the past few decades.

**Exceptional Travel ([exceptionaltravel.com](http://exceptionaltravel.com); 01608 638 777) offers two nights B&B at Hotel Cardoso in Maputo and four nights full board at White Pearl Resort from £2,575 per person, including return international flights from London to Maputo and all road transfers. Virgin Atlantic fly to Johannesburg**



Diving with dolphins at the White Pearl Resort in Mozambique