



TOKY-OH YES!

IT'S not your imagination, everyone really is visiting Tokyo right now. The Japan Times reports that foreign arrivals to the country hit a record 42.7 million last year, sailing past the 40 million mark for the first time.

A weak yen, easy entry and a renewed global obsession with Japanese food, fashion and design have turned the capital into the destination of the moment. Yet Tokyo's magic isn't just its headline acts, it's the way ancient rituals and hyper-modern life coexist, often on the same street. Here's how to do the highlights and then some.

Out with the old

START with a walk around the Outer Imperial Palace, an easy, scenic introduction to the city. The wide gravel paths trace the old Edo Castle moats, offering a sense of space in a metropolis known for density. Plus, it's a reminder that Tokyo was once a feudal capital long before it became a neon megacity.

Shrines are another link to the past. Meiji Jingu, Tokyo's most famous, sits in a forested setting near Harajuku, but if you're after something more whimsical, seek out Gotokuji Temple, a hub of the maneki-neko, the beckoning cat.

In with the new

SHOPPING is an art form here and Ginza is a hot-spot. Go to Loft, where stationery, beauty products and homewares are stacked floor by floor (all tax-free for visitors), or opt

Neon thrills and quiet rituals in the city everyone's suddenly obsessed with



BY
NICOLE TRILIVAS

Inviting: Tokyo with Mount Fuji in the background. Inset above, the holistic breakfast at the Hoshinoya Tokyo hotel

for a pair of custom Tigers at the nearby Onitsuka Tiger Ginza Concept Store.

For foodies, go to Isetan in Shinjuku, basically the Harrods of Tokyo, with a lower-level food hall (depachika) filled with giftable sweets. For something more niche, head to Hiroo for Hyozemon, a specialty store where handcrafted wooden chopsticks in ebony, rosewood and even sakura (cherry tree) make for a surprisingly meaningful souvenir.

Bites and nights

A VISIT to Tsukiji is still essential, even after the wholesale fish market moved. A sprawl of stalls selling sashimi, tamagoyaki, knives and street snacks, it's best explored with an empty stomach and no fixed plan.

While everyone flocks to Harajuku and Shinjuku, carve out time for less popular neighbourhoods like Shimokitazawa, a laid-back maze of vintage shops, indie stores and cafés that feel more Brooklyn than Blade Runner.

While you're there, grab a ramen lunch at Chukasoba Kotetsu and order tokusei chuka-soba.

When evening falls, Golden Gai in Shinjuku is touristy but fun. A gritty warren of alleys packed with minuscule bars, it's still popular with salarymen unwinding after work, not to mention visiting Australians. Go for a sake sour at the intimate Open Book.

Another late-night ritual is Tokyo's jazz kissaten, old-school vinyl listening cafés. Eagle, A10, Banten – everyone has a favourite. Mine is Narcissus.

Settle in

THE city's financial district, while not obvious,

makes for a good central base. For a city defined by motion, Hoshinoya Tokyo is a study in stillness, as well as one of the capital's most distinctive hotels.

A short walk to the Imperial Gardens, this ryokan-style property reimagines traditional hospitality.

Its greatest rarity is the rooftop onsen, one of the very few natural hot spring baths in central Tokyo. Fed by mineral-rich waters piped up from deep underground, the open-air baths – divided by gender and enjoyed sans swimsuit! – are transformative after a day of walking.

Beyond bathing, Hoshinoya offers plenty of other only-in-Japan experiences. The katana-training session is a standout, done in the early morning hours on a nearby helipad overlooking the city.

The holistic breakfast is another: served in-room and designed to gently restore balance, it features a bento box of seasonal fish, rice and fermented vegetables. It's a quiet, grounding start that sets the tone for the day.

Getting around is refreshingly easy. Tokyo's subway system is famously efficient, eat-off-the-floor clean and pretty intuitive. Add the Suica card straight to your digital wallet to tap in and out.

When you want something more seamless for airport arrivals, early starts or nights out, a pre-booked Blacklane car service delivers door-to-door ease and a polished way to travel in style.

TRAVEL FACTS

Fly Dublin to Tokyo from €585 return with airlines such as KLM, Qatar Airways, Emirates and British Airways. Rooms at Hoshinoya Tokyo from €520, hoshinoresorts.com.

THE last time I was in Mauritius was for a family wedding, which meant I didn't get much of a chance to explore the bold and beautiful accents of the island nation away from fly-and-flop wedding or honeymoon clichés.

This time, in a bid to not be beach/resort bums, and instead do all the stuff I wish I'd done last time I was here, I land in Mauritius and promptly hire a car.

As an increasingly pescatarian and dedicated explorer, my post-festive trip to Mauritius is surprisingly less indulgent than I'd been prepared for. With a largely Hindu population and an abundance of fresh ingredients from fruits to spices, it feels it will be simple to stick to and excel at dietary promises and exercise resolutions.

I just had to check in to the right place to do all this...

A villa of one's own

AS A writer, I am permanently aware of how much privacy and solitude I am granted to read and write wherever I go. A quiet desk, good light and wi-fi – or not, depending on how procrastinative I'm feeling – is the holy grail. I am elated whenever I discover these elements combined at my destination and the pen flies. My partner is demoted to the pool area.

Throw in a private garden villa with its own plunge pool and I'm Simone de Beauvoir on steroids. Maradiva Villas, the most exclusive resort in the westerly town of Fliq en Flaq, is the go-to for stars such as Anne Hathaway and Matthew McConaughey. Rumour has it the latter enjoyed a fortifying tequila rocks each evening.

Which is just as well, as the villa – in all its expansive, tropical hideaway glory complete with marble bathroom, outdoor shower and in-room dining on speed dial – needs to be left once in a while.

I've heard the bar is next-level fancy so off I hotfoot it to Lantana, for a chic Ricard and water. I like to pretend I'm French when I'm on holiday, though my magenta sunburned back gives my true origins away in a glance.

Matthew's tequila selection is swamped by local rums and everything else you could ever want. You might also start tapping into the anti-inflammatory approach of ayurvedic principles, which I'm about to learn more about at the spa. I drain my Ricard and enquire about the alcohol-free drinks of Mauritius.

There's the divisive la mousse noire, a grass jelly drink, alouda (milk, basil seeds, agar-agar jelly, vanilla and often rose syrup) and Mauritian vanilla black tea, iced or hot. Chilled hibiscus tea becomes a firm favourite of mine over the week, too.

Discover one's doshas

DR PRAVEEN Nair is an ayurvedic medicine specialist from Kerala in India based at Maradiva, and takes an hour to introduce us to the basic principles of

each person's unique doshas. There are three fundamental energy patterns – Vata, Pitta and Kapha – and he explains how we can kick-start our practice and assemble its principles into daily life.

He's a calm and kindly direct man who you somehow don't mind gazing at you and judging your lifestyle. Like most staff working at Maradiva, he is the consummate host and source of much wisdom and kindness, qualities typical of the Mauritian spirit.

After talking through our daily patterns and tendencies, and any ailments or issues, he deciphers what our doshas might be.

He explains the different daily changes or decisions you can take to seek more balance, as well as therapies you can engage with in Mauritius, including at Maradiva, which sports one of the most tranquil and lovely spas I've ever seen.

I zone out to another dimension during a full-body ayurvedic massage on a carved wooden contraption that is surprisingly comfortable. My body coated in approximately ten gallons of essential oils, I slither to the villa to dress for lunch.

Paying attention at the buffet

ANY time of year is the right time of year for a health rehaul or cleanse – it just so happens I am in Mauritius the first week of January. In order to pay attention to my doshas, it's important I spend some time at the gleaming buffet that is calling to me from 7am each morning and 7pm each night. Consider me summoned by a higher power.

Enter Hindu-inspired plant-based dishes and Creole heat, which facilitates French decadence and Western indulgence.

I'll also consult a Mauritian Hindu chef on how the fusion cuisine is uniquely its own and takes inspiration from decadent, rich European styles of cooking with fresher, tropical takes rooted in cooking for large families, taking in the cultural history of the country's colonial and slave-bringing past.

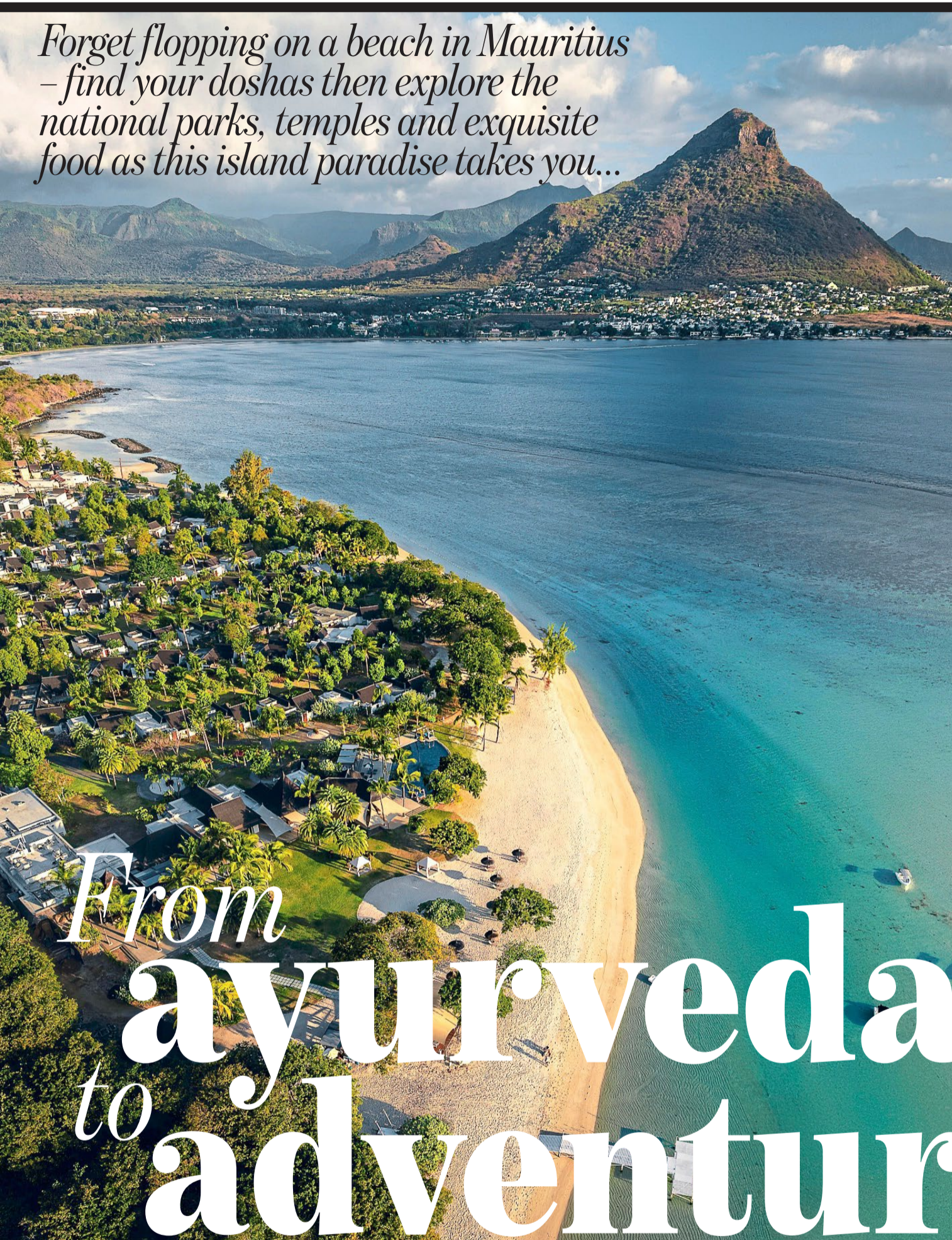
Cassine and Beach House Grill are both sea-facing spots offering fine-dining local chef's table fare and a casual (yet excellent) grill, respectively.

Mauritian thali quickly becomes the most fulfilling plant-based smorgasbord I never knew I'd missed so much. Tofu rougaille, vegetable vindaye, stewed taro leaf curry, chayote fricassee, pumpkin fricassee, butter bean curry, biryanis, and gato piments (savoury split pea chili cakes) are delicious. Then there's the bread – Dholl puri (lentil stuffed naan), roti, French baguette and salty butter. Take that, dosha.

My seafood game hits all-time highs: mangrove oysters, urchin, steamed and grilled crab and herby langoustines, scallop gratin and smoked marlin.

Just when I am ready to stop grazing with abandon, a whole new world of Mauritian delights present themselves as we scour local

Forget flopping on a beach in Mauritius – find your doshas then explore the national parks, temples and exquisite food as this island paradise takes you...



From ayurveda to adventure

BY
ALEXANDRA PEREIRA

Blissful: Clockwise from main, the tranquil setting of Maradiva Villas Resort and Spa; Tamarin Falls; A pool villa at Maradiva; The spa at the hotel; and some of the delectable food on offer

street food stalls along the beach in Fliq en Flaq, but also down in the south of the island – we loved Mo Filao’s – and up north in the capital Port Louis, where there’s an entire Chinatown to choose from.

The Chinese diaspora influence brings us steamed boulders (fish or chayote dumplings, pear-shared gourd from the squash family), mine bouillie (boiled noodles) and herbal soups – just delectable.

I find myself addicted to the complimentary chillies, vinegars and pickles also served alongside each local dish, tapping into the quarter Indianness of my DNA. Green chilli sauce, a

lemon pickle, pineapple pickle and tamarind chutney are all served and I find myself packing random concoctions in my tiny suitcase home.

Being sure to leave room for ayurvedic-friendly desserts, I delight in fresh pineapple, papaya, dragonfruit, mango, lychee and coconut soufflé. Not to mention the divine basil creme brulee that still plays on my mind.

Later I come to discover Maradiva’s elegant a la carte hideaways just off the coast, tucked behind some trees. Haiku provides titillating live-kitchen grilling of all kinds of delights, as well as sushi and simpler dishes from backstage. As a Japa-

nese offering in such an elevated hotel, the sushi needs some finesse but it’s all about the live kitchen frivolities and chatting with other guests around the counter.

The paradisaal showstopper is Cilantro, an Indian fine dining room of low lighting, booths and expert service, with the kind of manager who remembers your drink three nights later in a buzzing and busy parade of dressed up couples and families. We devour pani puri, chicken malabar and saffron creme brulee, then die and go to heaven above.

Nature’s playground

BY DAY, we make the most

of having a car and access to such a tiny place – the island is 2,000sq km – and set to exploring mountains, waterfalls and lagoons. While Maradiva can whip up tours and itineraries no problem, plus drivers and day trips to the likes of wild dolphin swim spots and hikes up chief mountain La Morne, we opt for privacy, wonky driving, getting lost and laughing about it all when the heavens open for their daily downpour, usually over within minutes.

Highlights include Black Gorges National Park, Tamarin Falls and don’t miss a pop into Mahebourg near the airport.

If you’re on the island a

while, a plethora of different yoga schools, hiking routes, climbs, forests, towns, villages, watersports, temples, shrines and more beckon – and so much of that is doable in even a week or two. A yogi wonder named Dajinn leads classes on the beach for Maradiva guests, and incredibly powerful one-on-one sessions too.

You can borrow bikes, kayaks, SUP boards, pedalos and take a glass-bottomed boat ride out beyond the reef to snorkel the seaworld below. Spotting angel fish, parrotfish, grouper and purple coral, it’s hard to believe any of this was real as we shiver back home some 18 hours later.

TRAVEL FACTS

Fly Dublin to Mauritius with Emirates from €1,095, emirates.com. At Maradiva Villas Resort and Spa, for bookings made before April 30 with travel dates up until October 31, luxury suite pool villas are available from €750 per night, with other suites at 50 per cent off. All bookings will also be upgraded to include dinner. See adamsandbutler.com and maradiva.com.