

Mauritius

Bridget McGrouther discovers the art of relaxation in this heaven on earth



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To be in Mauritius is truly heaven on earth, but to be in a spa on this idyllic island is simply paradise. No wonder Mark Twain famously wrote after a visit in 1896, "You gather the idea that Mauritius was made first and then heaven, and that heaven was copied after Mauritius."

Sun worshippers and beach lovers can soak up the year-round rays on pristine white sands, fringed by palm trees. Turquoise seas reveal a myriad of colourful fish and coral coves, just waiting to be explored. Tropical flowers such as the bright red flamboyant tree and dainty golden drops bloom by the roadside, while lush, green mountains tower above, such as the brooding and domineering Le Morne on the rugged south coast.

Sugar and pineapple plantations grow in verdant countryside while children greet you with broad smiles in villages and towns. Conversations take place in a number of tongues reflecting the multicultural society of Indians, African-Creoles, Franco-Mauritians and Chinese. The air carries a tantalising aroma of curries and spicy Creole dishes, while pulsating sega music is played by local bands. It's a heady concoction of sights and sounds, flavours and colours on an Indian Ocean island just 36 miles long by 35 miles across.

It's hard to improve on perfection, but now spas have been introduced in luxurious hotels with their intoxicating fragrances and mesmerising massages, heaven sent to have you floating on Cloud Nine.

Our introduction to unadulterated bliss began at the Taj Exotica, an upmarket hotel frequented by celebrities such as Mark Knopfler in the strangely-named resort of Flic en Flac. Each villa has its own private plunge pool and in the hours of darkness, the twinkling water beckons a midnight dip, shimmering seductively in the flickering candlelight under the stars.

Our ultra-chic suite with its imaginatively-styled interiors was the epitome of cool, but the hotel's Jiva Spa offers an even more spiritual experience. A genuine Indian Ayurvedic doctor is on hand to give advice about tailor-made treatments of massages and heat therapies suited to each individual's needs. Somehow, as hot oils washed all over me, I preferred this doctor's orders to the pills and tablets handed out by the NHS!

Our stay in the west was short but very sweet and next stop was the breezier east coast, where the five-star Residence blazed the pamper trail by opening its first purpose-built Sanctuary Spa on the island. Guests here are not only treated to relaxing reiki, yoga and hot stone therapies, but butlers were on hand to meet their every whim. Even those sun-bathing on the beautiful Belle Mare beach are looked after with icy face towels, cool cocktails and fresh fruit.

If your partner can't be persuaded to join you for a his 'n' hers massage, then there are plenty of other relaxation techniques to enjoy such as golf, kite-surfing, game fishing, horse-riding and exploring the seabed on an undersea walk or mini submarine. The north of the island, dubbed the Creole Cote d'Azur, is the liveliest area with shopping, bars and restaurants.

Popular with honeymooners as well as the rich and famous, a holiday on Mauritius doesn't come cheap, but then what would you pay for a ticket to Paradise?



mauritius - the facts

When to go...

Apart from the busy Christmas to New Year period, Mauritius doesn't really have a high or low season, although the winter months from July to September are popular, when the weather is dry, warm and less humid. Heavy downpours take place from January to April, when the temperature is hot and sticky.

Family fun...

Larger hotels have crèche facilities and playgroups for young children. Many of the beaches are sandy with sheltered coves, suitable for swimming. Spot monkeys while hiking in the Black River Gorges.

Flights...

Air Mauritius flies direct from London Heathrow, with a connection required from regional UK airports (020 7434 4375, www.airmauritius.com). Emirates fly from Glasgow via Dubai (0844 800 2777, www.emirates.com).

How to book...

Susie Freeman Travel is a specialist on Mauritius. (01488 668821, www.susiefreemantravel.com)

Further info...

Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority UK, 32 Elvaston Place, London SW7 5NW (020 7584 3666, www.mauritius.net)

A comfortable resting spot?



Taj Exotica and The Residence

For the ultimate in relaxation, try Taj Exotica Resort & Spa in Flic en Flac ((00230) 403 1500, www.tajhotels.com) and The Residence, Belle Mare ((00230) 401 8888, www.theresidence.com)