



This page: The bridge connecting Le Touessrok with Frangipani Island  
Facing page: the view from the Four Seasons; wasabi prawns from Mozambique, a speciality of Shanti Maurice's Star restaurant; a water taxi at La Plantation d'Albion Club Med

# MAURITIAN

# magic

The pearl of the Indian Ocean with a magnetic allure is getting in touch with its family side, discovers **Peter Swain**



If the thought of starting the day with a light *petit déjeuner sur la mer* appeals, Mauritius is the place. Sitting with one's toes in the cerulean Indian Ocean, 50 metres from dry land, as a succession of wading waiters deliver just-picked guava, mango and papaya, followed by a croissant and a cappuccino made with freshly ground local coffee beans, can have a wonderfully soothing effect on the psyche. If, while the children are being entertained by a well-trained team, breakfast is followed by 18 holes of championship golf, a little reef snorkelling or a day in an Ayurvedic spa, all rounded out with a dinner prepared by a Michelin-starred chef at one's private poolside bougainvillea-scented loggia, nirvana is almost guaranteed.

The island's breezy mélange of Eastern romanticism and French

colonial chic, set in a modish tropical locale with sublime service, has been wowing arbiters of exotic taste for some time, but of late the soigné Mauritian travel scene has been changing to reflect the shifting tastes of its loyal clientele. In search of sybaritic gratification, many singletons first visited the island in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s, they began returning either for hedonistic beach weddings or secluded honeymoons. Now they are back again with their families. Reflecting this evolution, resorts that once relied exclusively on the beauty of their beaches, the length of their fine wine list and the elegance of their spas, have added well-resourced toddlers-to-teenagers children's clubs, games centres, tennis courts, internationally renowned golf courses such as Anahita and Le Touessrok, and a panoply of water-sport activities, including diving

on the reef that surrounds the island.

Of course, succeeding generations of well-heeled thirtysomethings are still being seduced by the palm-fringed littoral of the 65km by 45km teardrop-shaped island 800km east of Madagascar. The spas at the likes of Shanti Maurice and The Residence have been updated from merely chilled-out to ultra-Zen, but the whole hospitality offering has of late become much more varied with most of the dozen or so luxe hotels adding two- to five-bedroom villas to their portfolio, with three generations sharing not unusual. Using the formula honed in Chamonix and Lake Placid, sporting facilities for families at well-established destinations like La Plantation d'Albion Club Med or LUX\* Belle Mare are now quite superb. The result: happy kids with happy parents who want to return the following year. And with interest





From left-right: the child-friendly *Heritage Le Telfair*; a stylish beach day-bed at *La Plantation d'Albion Club Med*; *Beau Champ Restaurant* at *Four Seasons Resort*



The pool of the royal suite at the *Royal Palm*; the entrance area of *The Residence*; *Four Seasons' Anahita* golf course and the azure waters beyond



The beachfront scene at *Heritage Le Telfair*; Robinson's bar on *Le Touessrok's Ilot Mangénie*; the veranda of a *Heritage Le Telfair* superior room

in environmental issues growing, children are even being introduced to the mysteries of the Mauritius kestrel, the pink pigeon and the almost-extinct olive white-eyes, sadly down to the last 150 pairs.

Unfortunately, one famous bird can no longer be seen. When the first Dutch settlers arrived 400 years ago, the dodo was happily perambulating around the interior. The flightless bird's habitat was soon replaced by French- and British-run sugar plantations, with a simultaneous influx of Chinese, Indian and African workers, and it is this eclectic blend of now predominantly Creole-speaking cultures that makes Mauritius so beguiling. The breakfast menu at the Four Seasons, for instance, includes a sublime Madagascar crab Benedict, as well as river prawn frittata and rice congee. For dinner at the Royal Palm, guests can sample smoked marlin,

foie gras, and *cari poule* (chicken curry), preceded by a rum produced in one of the five local distilleries, or *alouda*, a milk-based libation containing basil seeds, all accompanied by the distinctive swaying melodies of native Seggae dance music. Underlining the heady multi-ethnic mix, the Hindu temples and Chinatown in Port Louis, the capital, sit next to Catholic churches and African markets.

Such is the loyalty of Mauritian visitors, a thriving property scene has even sprung up aimed mainly at Europeans who expect in the near future to spend at least a month a year on the island. Francophone guests are the biggest buyers, but other European travellers as well as those from southern Africa, the Middle East and Asia are discovering the recherché charms of the island, agreeing with Mark Twain that: "You get the idea Mauritius was made first, and then heaven." ■





*The Ocean Villa's living room at Belle Mare; surfing off the St Regis resort; the spa at Heritage Le Telfair*



*The enticing pool at Belle Mare; a rope bridge provides entertainment at Le Touessrok's children's club; an aerial view of Shanti Maurice*



*A thatched gazebo gives shade on the beautiful beach at Belle Mare; the colonial stylings of a suite at Heritage Le Telfair; the lantern-lit entrance to Le Touessrok*

## CHECKING IN: THE RIGHT RESORTS

Featuring svelte Asian fusion design, the two peninsula-end Royal Residence Villas with their own private beaches and jetties, close to the immaculate Anahita golf course, are the pick of the 136 residences at the **Four Seasons** ([fourseasons.com/mauritius](http://fourseasons.com/mauritius)). With a pleasing colonial ambience, guests at **Heritage Le Telfair** ([heritageletoffair.mu](http://heritageletoffair.mu)) also have a championship course on site, after which they can choose between Japanese or traditional Mauritian cuisine in the converted sugar plantation Bel Ombre Château. Newly opened in September just to the west on the UNESCO World Heritage Le Morne peninsular, the 172-room **St Regis** ([stregis.com/mauritius](http://stregis.com/mauritius)) features its usual bespoke butler service, together with a tea garden and private cinema. The newly minted LUX\* group has also upped the hospitality ante with the rebranding of its **Belle Mare** and **Grand Gaube** ([luxislandresorts.com](http://luxislandresorts.com)) into family-friendly resorts. Kids love the Apple Mac areas, while parents appreciate Kelly Hoppen design, hammock-strewn beaches and cheekily fresh coffee bars. Farther north, the singularity of the **Royal Palm** ([royalpalm-hotel.com](http://royalpalm-hotel.com)) on Grand Baie is its haute cuisine, esteemed by several French presidents, whose families

also appreciated the Clarins spa. Francophones also like the all-inclusive fare at **La Plantation d'Albion Club Med** ([clubmed.com](http://clubmed.com)), which includes free champagne after 6pm, the perfect tonic after battle on one of the six tennis courts. The Ayurvedic spa at the heart of the very Zen **Shanti Maurice** ([shantimaurence.com](http://shantimaurence.com)) engenders a rather calmer vibe, with Austrian chef Willi Reinbacher making magic from his own cottage garden produce. Its secluded lagoon location makes **Le Touessrok** ([letouessrokresort.com](http://letouessrokresort.com)) similarly ideal for sophisticated honeymooners, who also like the resort's private island retreat, Ilot Mangénie; Bernard Langer's golf course, on the other hand, is a beautiful beast. Just a few miles up the coast, the **One&Only Le Saint Géran** ([lesaintgeran.oneandonlyresorts.com](http://lesaintgeran.oneandonlyresorts.com)) has Michelin-starred chef Vineet Bhatia at the helm. The new KidsOnly Club for three to 11-year-olds reflects the resort and the island's changing priorities. Nearby **The Residence** ([theresidence.com/mauritius](http://theresidence.com/mauritius)) has even introduced personal training sessions for children in its new family-friendly Sanctuary Spa. Accentuating the importance of general wellbeing and synchronising body with mind from an early age, the hotel's ethos is very much the mantra of today's Mauritius.

