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USEFUL INFORMATIONS

– MAURITIUS –

## ***History***

The First Europeans to have visited Mauritius were the Portuguese at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The Dutch who settled in the island in 1598 names it Mauritius after Prince Maurice of Nassau. Among other things, the Dutch introduced sugar cane and the Java deer before leaving in 1710 where they found in the mean time a far better settling place: The Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. About five years later, in 1715, the French occupied the island, renaming it "Isle de France".

It was under the French Government, Mahé de Labourdonnais, that Mauritius knew its first development: a harbour was built. Port Louis, named after the ruling King Louis XV, became the capital of Mauritius. Trade on the island thrived; Mauritius could supply enough sugar and rum to the surrounding islands and visiting vessels.

From this strategic position in the Indian Ocean, the French were plaguing English vessels on their way to and from India. In 1810, the British conquered the island which they occupied, and Mauritius was formally ceded to them in the "Traité de Paris" of 1814. Most of the French settlers, remained on the island and were allowed to keep their customs, religion, laws and language.

A few years later, in 1835, the British abolished slavery - slaves at the time came from Madagascar, Senegal and Mozambique mainly - and this led to the importation of Indian indentured labourers to work in the sugar cane fields. They eventually settled in Mauritius and their descendants constitute nowadays the majority of the population.

Rapid development of the infrastructure continued. Free primary education was given to the population so that local civil servants could be trained to run the affairs of the country.

Mauritius achieved independence on the 12 March 1968 and adopted a constitution based on the British parliamentary system. The first post-independence years were difficult but after more than 15 years of planning and hard work, Mauritius achieved economic and political stability. Mauritius changed its status to that of a Republic on the 12 March 1992.

The Mauritian Constitution is based on the Westminster model. Political power is vested in the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. Elections are held every five years.

## ***Attractions***

### ***Pamplemousses botanical garden***

The jewel of the crown! The gardens are known to naturalists throughout the world for their countless species of indigenous and exotic plants, including the giant Victoria Regia water lilies, and the talipot palm, said to flower once every sixty years and then die. The garden was created by Pierre Poivre in 1767 in the Estate of the French Governor Mahe de Labourdonnais. The latter's Chateau de Mon Plaisir, built in 1735, can still be seen there.

### ***Coloured Earths of Chamarel***

Among the oddest sites of the island are the seven-coloured dunes at Chamarel, believed to result from the weathering of volcanic rocks. These undulating and vividly contrasted layers of earth are a short drive away from the beautiful Chamarel waterfalls.

### ***Casela Bird Park***

Set in a magnificent site between Bambous and Tamarin in the Rivière Noire district, the Casela Bird Park hosts some 140 varieties of birds from around the world. The main attraction remains the Mauritian Pink Pigeon, one of the rarest birds in the world, still fighting to avoid the fate of the Dodo. One of the giant tortoises is 150 years old. The park is open every day from 9 am to 5 pm and the entrance fee is Rs 125/150 on weekdays/weekends.

### ***Ile aux Cerfs***

There are no stags (cerfs) remaining on this small island which now belongs to Le Touessrok Sun Hotel and attracts large numbers of holiday-makers on the east coast. The ferry runs several times each hour between 9 am and 4pm. Le Touessrok Sun Hotel residents travel for free. What you get when you step off the ferry is a sheltered, crowded beach and lagoon for water sports or sunbathing, restaurants and several souvenir stalls. You can walk only around the seaward half of the island, that is, clockwise from the landing site. On the island, there is a boat house where you can hire water skis, pedalos, sailboards, surfcats, Laser dinghies and canoes. Two-hour boat trips are offered to the Grande Rivière Sud-Est waterfall; and there's also a tour around Ile aux Cerfs.

### ***Domaine Les Pailles***

Ten minutes south of Port-Louis lies the nature park of Domaine Les Pailles, stretching over 3,000 acres at the foot of the Moka mountain range. You can choose between touring the park in a Land-Rover, riding in a horse-drawn carriage or in a train. The gardens also feature a replica of an ancient sugarmill, an "alambic" - an apparatus formerly used in distilling rum, a spice garden and a natural spring.

### ***Aquarium***

Situated between Pointe-aux-Piments and Trou-aux-Biches, hosts some 200 species of indigenous fish, invertebrates, coral and sponges, providing the visitor with a unique opportunity of admiring the fauna and flora of the Indian Ocean.

### ***Domaine du Chasseur***

Situated in the south-east of the island, near Mahébourg, in the heart of abundant greenery, Le Domaine du Chasseur covers about 1,950 acres. It is also an exciting natural hunting ground with its herds of some 1,000 deer and hundreds of wild boar. Lovers of leafy walks can choose between 5 and 15 kms long, allowing them to admire rare kinds of trees and protected species, such as the famous windhover kestrel. A panoramic restaurant with a very good typically Mauritian menu completes the attractions of this unusual trip, which has become a must for hunters, walkers and... gourmets.

### ***Le Val Nature Park***

Situated in the South-east of the island at Cluny, Le Val offers a view of the natural aquatic life of shrimps, eels and freshwater fish. The park also hosts anthurium green-houses, watercress ponds, deer parks, as well as monkeys and various bird species.

### ***Vanilla Crocodile & Tortoise Park***

Enter this glittering forest and discover a haven of luscious tropical flora: find a variety of endemic and exotic plants. In these lush green surroundings where banana and palm trees as well as giant bambous grow, more than a thousand Nile crocodiles are bred. On a guided tour, you will meet these animals in their breeding ponds, in perfect safety.

### ***Waterpark***

Black hole, Giant slides, Kids' pool, Mushroom shower, Candy Spot, Adults' pool, Jacuzzi, Pirates' Feast Fast food, Lazy River, Food kiosk, Crazy River, Multi Slide, Mountain skull, Wave pool, Pirates' Plaza, La Malle aux Tresors Logo Shop.

## ***Transportation***

### ***Taxis***

Available outside most hotels, otherwise they can be arranged at your hotel reception. Rates may differ between drivers, so it pays to ask at reception how much they consider the journey to cost and then negotiate with the driver.

### ***Buses***

Bus services on the island are excellent, but a bit slow. There are several operators and they can get you to just about any part of the island. The main hubs are Curepipe and Port Louis. Tickets are cheap, but be sure to keep them easily accessible, as the inspectors check often.

### ***Car Hire***

Driving is on the left. Driver's License for at least 12 months. There are many scenic drives and over 1,600 km of roads all over the island which range from smooth and firm to potholed and unpaved. There are several rental car companies and your travel agent will happily advise you. A great way to see the island is to hire a car and driver for the day.

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