

# MARVELLOUS MAURITIUS

An island of 300,000 square km (115,831 square miles), Mauritius lies east of Madagascar and Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean. My last visit to Mauritius was by cruise ship in April 2008. Upon arrival at the capital of Port Louis (pronounced “Port Loo-ee”), I rented an air-conditioned automatic seven-seater Renault Espace from Europcar and drove our party of five around the very Caribbean-looking island of Mauritius. From Port Louis I took the motorway north to the resort town of Grand Baie.

Then we visited the luxurious Oberoi Mauritius, a resort hotel on the island’s northwest coast. Afterward we returned to Port Louis and then crossed the island on the motorway to Mahebourg on the much less-touristed southeast coast. Driving north from Mahebourg, we passed the monument marking the site where the Dutch first landed in 1598. Continuing north, we stopped at a seaside park for a brief picnic before touring the ruins of Fort Frederik Hendrik in Vieux Grand Port. This fort had been occupied by the Dutch East India Company until

the Dutch finally abandoned the island in 1710. Upon returning to Port Louis, we found that we still had half an hour in which to window shop downtown before returning our rental car back at the port.

While the Arabs may have known of Mauritius as early as the tenth century, the first Europeans to sight the island were the Portuguese, who landed in about 1507 but did not settle. During 112 years of Dutch occupation, tobacco, sugar cane and deer were all introduced, and slaves were transported to Mauritius from Africa. The French claimed the island in 1715 and remained until the arrival of the British in 1810. Under an agreement with the French, the British allowed the local inhabitants to continue to use the French language and to retain their religion and legal system. Sugar cane production, begun under French rule, was the staple of the economy for more than two centuries. However, following independence in 1968, textile production and tourism have both flourished.

Today Mauritius has one the highest population densities of any country in the world, with nearly 600 inhabitants per square km overall and some 3,000 people per square km in Port Louis and in the towns of the central plateau! The republic’s total population is 1.25 million, and the total area of the island is 1.25 million square km (482,628 square miles). Mauritius has four main ethnic groups. Indo-Mauritians, predominantly Gujaritis, constitute 68% of the population while Creoles, descended from African slaves, represent 27%. On the other hand, Sino-Mauritians are 3% and Franco-Mauritians are 2% of the population, respectively.

The upscale resort of Grand Baie, the first stop on our island drive, was called De Bogt Zonder Eyndt, or “bay without an end,” by the Dutch during the seventeenth century. Nowadays yachts, catamarans and fishing boats can be seen in the bay surrounded by this town of 2,800 people. The Oberoi Mauritius is a world-class resort situated directly on the Indian Ocean. From the hotel guests can view some of Mauritius’ mountains across the bay.

With a population of 16,000, sleepy-looking Mahebourg with its tree-lined streets is situated near the international airport in the unspoiled southwestern part of the island. I drove through Mahebourg while winding my way north along an excellent but uncrowded



Welcome band on dock



Coconut palm



Grand Baie shop



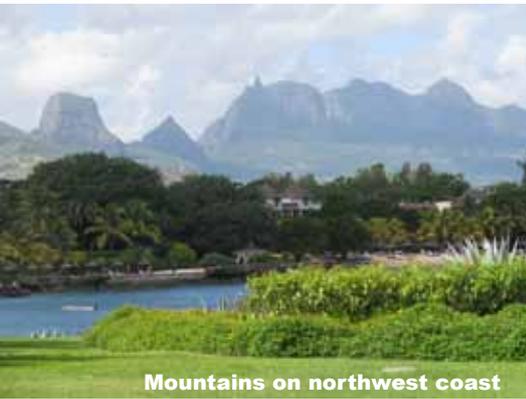
Grand Baie yacht



Beach near Grand Baie



Grounds of Oberoi Mauritius



Mountains on northwest coast



Infinity pool at Oberoi Mauritius



East coast highway



Renault Espace rental car



Site of first Dutch landing in 1598



East coast waterfront



East coast town



Fort Hendrik ruins



Washerwomen in river

highway cutting through sugar cane fields. After crossing the bridge over the Champagne River, I stopped to photograph the obelisk erected at the actual spot near the village of Vieux Grand Port where the Dutch first landed. After our seaside east coast picnic we visited the ruins of a prison, a powder magazine, a clinic, a bakery and a church which were all contained within the old Dutch fort that had served as the local office of the Dutch East India Company.

Back in Port Louis at the end of our island tour we walked through the capital's attractive Company Gardens city park and elsewhere in the downtown area. Port Louis, with a population of 172,000, is spectacularly situated under two jagged but green mountain peaks.

Nearly completely surrounded by a barrier reef, Mauritius offers some superb diving and snorkeling opportunities. The island is noted for the variety of its dive sites, and there are more than three dozen dive centers in the country. The best diving seasons are from October through December and also March and April. The water temperature varies from a high of 28C/82F. between December and February to a low of 22C/72 F. in August. Overall, the best time for tourists to visit Mauritius is from May to early December when it is coolest and driest. On the other hand, during the period from December to April the humidity is high. The end-of-year

school holidays constitute the peak tourist season, and August is also crowded. The months of January and February, at the height of the cyclone season, are normally avoided by tourists.

The three major air routes from Cairo to Mauritius are on Emirates via Dubai for approx. EGP8,100 round trip, on Kenya Airways and Air Mauritius via Nairobi for approx. EGP7,880 round trip, and on South African Airways via Johannesburg for approx. EGP 8,300 round trip. On the latter route the flights between Cairo and Johannesburg are operated by EgyptAir.

**ABOUT TED COOKSON:** Egypt's most widely-traveled travel agent, Ted has been to every country in the world! He has also visited 310 of the 319 destinations on the list of the Travelers' Century Club (visit [www.eptours.com](http://www.eptours.com) and refer to World Travel Club). A travel agent in Cairo since 1986, Ted manages EGYPT PANORAMA TOURS, a full-service travel agency, at 4 Road 79 (between Roads 9 and 10, near the "El Maadi" metro station) in Maadi. Contact Egypt Panorama Tours (open 7 days a week 9 AM-5 PM) at: Tel. 2359-0200, 2358-5880, 2359-1301. Fax 2359-1199. E-mail: [ept@link.net](mailto:ept@link.net). Web site: [www.eptours.com](http://www.eptours.com). The password for residents is `eptcool`. Both text and PDF versions of all of Ted's travel articles published since 2002 are archived online at [www.eptours.com](http://www.eptours.com) under "Ted's International Travel Articles." Many of the archived articles also contain video clips!