

The magic of Mauritius

Majestic mountains, crystal clear lagoons and endless culinary delights tempt Emily Louise Overy in Mauritius

The St. Regis Mauritius' private beach

Known as the jewel of the Mascarenes Archipelago, the paradise of Mauritius lies 2,000km off the south-east coast of Africa. It was first discovered in the 10th century, before permanent settlement on the island by the Dutch in 1638. It was then seized by France in 1715, until British influence took over in 1810. Helpfully for UK visitors, English is the island's official language, although from the moment you arrive, this exotic escape reveals an abundance of colour, culture and influence from India, Africa, China and Europe. In winter, temperatures average at a comfortable 23 to 25°C, soaring to 30°C and beyond in the summer. With more than 80 per cent humidity as standard though, you'll be sure to need your bikini no matter what time of year you visit.

HOME FROM HOME

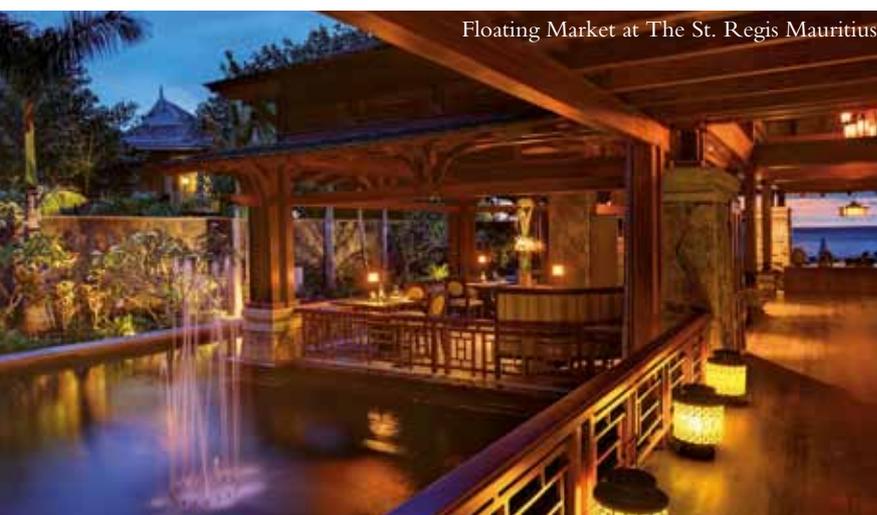
Upon landing at Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport, we took a



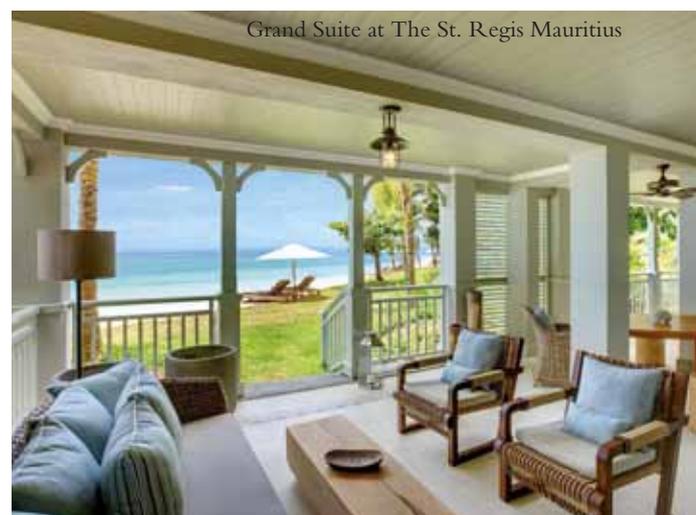
The beach at Heritage Le Telfair



Frédérica Nature Reserve



Floating Market at The St. Regis Mauritius



Grand Suite at The St. Regis Mauritius

90-minute drive to the luxurious Heritage Le Telfair resort in Bel-Ombre, a quiet coastal village nestled in the lush Savanne District. A friendly welcome, refreshing glass of tropical fruit cocktail and cool towel soaked in citrus oils were gifted to us upon arrival – just the ticket after a 12-hour flight.

The resort's suites include spacious ocean-view superior rooms, inspired by the island's African roots, complete with a large terrace perfect for sipping cocktails while watching the sunset, and a rainfall shower big enough for two.

You'll also be spoilt for choice when it comes to a romantic meal – with 11 restaurants offering a wealth of endless gourmet delights, whether you'd prefer to tuck into Asian, Indian, Mediterranean or local Mauritian dishes, including Parma ham on a bed of shredded palm, crispy squid, battered vegetable rolls and a chou chou vegetable salad. After over-indulging in such foodie heaven, a leisurely walk

around the capital city of Port Louis is a must at just an hour's drive from Bel-Ombre. Its markets are a buzzing hub for shopping and souvenirs, such as spices, fabrics and keepsake trinkets, while the cosmopolitan city also offers great street food, tours and sightseeing for those wanting to delve into Mauritian history by way of museums.

ON LAND AND SEA

Back at Le Telfair, newlyweds can also take an early morning speedboat across deep blue waters to swim with friendly bottle-nosed dolphins before enjoying a cruise around the south coast to the island's shallow lagoons that are alive with tropical fish. Lap up the sun and chill out on the pristine white sands, or take part in a kite surfing session with an instructor. Those feeling brave enough can ride the famous Eye wave just off the south coast – a renowned spot for professional

championships in the sport. If the sea isn't your thing, why not take a quad bike around the hotel's neighbouring Frédérica Nature Reserve? Cruising through sugar cane and pineapple fields, African-like savannah and tropical rainforest is exhilarating.

Le Telfair also boasts one of the most beautiful golf courses in the Indian Ocean, and is currently in the process of negotiating the hosting of future major championships. It's not hard to see why with more than 100 hectares of naturally hilly landscape featuring tranquil lakes, streams and tropical trees. Golf novices can also try out the driving range should they want to work on their swing – certainly the case for me, having got divots to travel further than my golf balls!

SPLASH OUT

After packing so much into each of my days at Le Telfair, I found the perfect way to unwind was to visit the thermal pool or



Le Morne



The St. Regis Mauritius



Spa room at The St. Regis Mauritius

indulge in a treatment at the Seven Colours Spa, which uses a holistic approach to mental and physical wellbeing by asking you to match your feelings to one of seven colours. This enables your therapist to select appropriate products that suit your body's needs. Its outdoor location makes it the perfect tonic to ease tension and aching muscles before returning to your room and glamping up for a romantic evening meal. The spa also offers a variety of luxurious treatments – a massage in a couples' suite is just what the doctor ordered for a post-wedding treat.

ROAD TRIP

For the second part of our trip we drove along the south coast to reach the Le Morne peninsula and The St. Regis Mauritius resort – now one of the most exclusive parts of the island with many stories to tell. The region's main talking point is the iconic Le Morne Brabant Mountain: an UNESCO World

Heritage landmark that echoes the island's history and symbolises the abolishment of Mauritian slavery.

If desired, couples can follow in the steps of history and take an early morning trek up Le Morne with a friendly instructor. Breathtaking scenery and once-in-a-lifetime views greet you at the summit, although take some good hiking boots and gloves as the steep rock face is not for the faint-hearted!

A QUESTION OF SPORT

Activity-loving couples are spoiled for choice at The St. Regis, with tennis, a water sports club, biking, kite surfing, scuba diving and Mauritius' largest outdoor heated pool, all within easy strolling distance. One of my highlights was early morning biking into the local village – a great way to see the true Mauritius and its friendly fishing communities. If you want to delve deeper into local culture, there's no better way than to visit a Hindu temple. Mauritius has a

strong multicultural society due to its rich immigrant history, although more than half of the islanders practise Hinduism.

SIT BACK AND RELAX

Rest assured that when you return to The St. Regis from your packed days of sightseeing, everything is at your fingertips. Your own private butler is on-hand 24 hours a day: whether you'd like to order room service, send someone to shop on your behalf or scatter rose petals about your room and put the champagne on ice, nothing is too much trouble. While the hotel's spacious deluxe ocean-view rooms are a home from home with all the amenities you could need, including large rainfall showers, widescreen TVs, swimming-pool-like bath tubs, walk-in wardrobes and balconies fit for kings.

You'll certainly be in need of somewhere comfortable to rest after some serious overindulgence in one of the hotel's many esteemed restaurants, which offer a choice



Golf course at Heritage Le Telfair



of six distinct culinary delights. From the French-inspired and traditional Mauritius cuisine of Le Manoir Dining Room, to the south-east Asian dishes at Floating Market, my personal favourite was Simply India, the signature restaurant of Michelin star-adorned celebrity chef Atul Kochhar. With a menu boasting an amuse bouche of soft shell crab and pan-seared scallops, a main course of chicken tikka pie and berry chutney, and spiced warm chocolate cake with saffron and berry jelly for dessert, it's easy to see why. Just remember to pack some loose-fitting clothes for the later stages of your holiday – your waistline will thank you for it!

For further information, visit the website www.tourism-mauritius.mu ♥

Don't leave without...

your Jungle Formula maximum aerosol and nighttime plug-in, containing 50 per cent DEET and plant extracts for the most effective protection from mosquitoes and midges. I left the island without a single bite on me.



The essentials

- ♥ **Currency** – Mauritian rupees.
- ♥ **Language** – English is the official language, but French is spoken in most places too.
- ♥ **Getting around** – Taxis are quite expensive, as are hotel-organised shuttles, so buses are a much cheaper option. They can be quite slow, which is great for seeing the island, but some may prefer a hire car for a quicker way of getting from A to B. Mauritians drive on the left, the same as in the UK.
- ♥ **Health** – Injections for tetanus must be up to date (boosters are recommended every 10 years). You'll also need an injection for Hepatitis A. Mosquitoes are common so take an electric plug-in repellent with you that contains at least 30 per cent DEET. Always spray yourself with a repellent before venturing outdoors.
- ♥ **Safety** – Well known for its low crime rate, just stick to the usual safety procedures you would on any holiday.

Let's fly away...

Air Mauritius flies from London Heathrow to Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport in just over 12 hours. Find out more at www.airmauritius.com

Where to stay...

Heritage Le Telfair
www.heritageresorts.mu/en/

The St. Regis Mauritius
www.stregismauritius.com