

Mauritius: a small slice of pure paradise.

If I left you with that thought for a moment or two, I would imagine the first image you would visualise is white sand...literally – white sand, palm trees, crystal clear water bathed in beautiful sunshine. That is certainly what I first envisaged when my trip to the beautiful island approached, although there is much more than meets the imagination of elegant palm trees and a beach life.

My journey to Mauritius was all due to the fact that I had a stop over there on my way through to Cape Town, South Africa from Australia. I have to admit when I was contacted in regards to Air Mauritius offering a deal with connecting flights to Africa (offering 2 night's accommodation on your way through and back through Mauritius), I jumped at the chance of being able to explore the island, even if it was only for a total of 4 days. (IMAGE: mauritius01) (URL: <http://wheneearth.net/underwater-waterfall-mauritius-island>)

Naturally, I Google-imaged my destination, and least to my surprise, it really was the image of paradise you hold in your mind; excited was an understatement. Throughout my travels, I have been to my fair share of stunning beaches and locations, however because Mauritius is such a small island, it's almost an undiscovered gem, it's completely untouched and still keeps it's beauty even though holiday makers from all over the world flock there at any given opportunity. It's hard to imagine, in fact, white sand in the middle of the Indian Ocean not to be accompanied by masses of families and honeymooners, to my surprise the beaches were far from that; deserted. Perhaps it was the time of year that I visited; temperatures around 28 degrees in September and October are extremely pleasant, and big groups of people were scarce.

My first stay in Mauritius was actually extremely brief as my flight the day after I arrived was an 8am flight – a 4:30am get up. You know the feeling - it's painful. The day that I did spend when I first arrived on the island was very relaxing and desperately needed after gruelling 14hour plane journey. I stayed at the Hennessy Park Hotel (URL: <http://www.hennessyhotel.com>), which is based within the industrial district of Mauritius; understandable considering I needed to be close to the airport, and it accommodated to all of my needs.

The hotel interior was so glamorous and calming with huge glass entry and exit doors, water features, pendant light, marble and frosted glass counter-tops and luxurious seating situated in cosy corners for privacy. (IMAGE: mauritius02, mauritius03, mauritius04)

If you're on a business trip then this is the ideal place to settle for a couple of days. The hotel had the most wonderful spa and recreational area which was perfect for me because I'm very much into fitness and after 14hours worth of sitting down, I really need to run, or walk, or do something to feel good. The gym had every piece of equipment, and someone always on hand to help out if you were unsure of equipment or simply required a towel. Likewise with the staff throughout the whole building; so friendly and welcoming and nothing was too much trouble. I highly recommend a massage wherever you are in Mauritius; they have a high variety of treatments, all of which are reasonably priced for the 60+ minute sessions that you choose. (IMAGE mauritius05, mauritius06, mauritius07)

On my return to Australia, I spent a full 2 days on the other side of the island, quite a contrast to my visit 4 weeks prior. Villa's Carolina Beach Hotel in Flic En Flac (URL: <http://www.villa-caroline-hotel-mauritius.mu>), had amazing reviews and was by far the best part of the hotel was the amazing rooms which looked onto the beach. Waking up to blue sky, white sand and a light breeze through the palms on the beach was amazing (IMAGE mauritius08 and Mauritius 09). I had an all-inclusive deal, which I think the majority of visitors paid for when they stay at the Villas Carolina because they provide delicious buffets for breakfast, lunch and a dinner and additional snacks and tea throughout the day. Amongst the families and honeymooners, there is a sense of calmness about Mauritian people that is so refreshing, and they're so interested in talking to you about your experiences and your reasoning for visiting their beloved volcanic island. Due to the fact that I was a lone-traveller, the staff at all times of the day made sure I wasn't empty handed with a cold drink or far from an activity that they were getting everybody involved with. (IMAGE: mauritius10 and mauritius11)

Of course the jet-lag that I endured wiped me out for most of my stay, and long, lazy days on the beach were ideal for this. Never the less, walking along the beach for miles is easy, and there's so much to see and do around the island that encourages me to return for a third time. The early morning dolphin trips are a must, as well as kayaking in the (I'm not kidding) transparent water, snorkelling with the fish and venturing into the sleepy towns are also well worth it. There's an array of shops and café's for those hot afternoons and the nightlife in Flic

En Flac is supposed to be one hell of a party. Whatever you desire from your trip, you can have it in Mauritius. Action-packed, or soothing and relaxing, the choice is yours. Paradise has no limits. (IMAGE: mauritius12, mauritius13, mauritius14).

My Tips:

- If you're unable to go all-inclusive, in most hotels they have a conversion of the price in Euros for food / drinks / treatments. This helps for working out how much you would be paying at home.
- The obvious: sun cream, hat, sunglasses and something to throw on when you go for lunch / walk / dinner is ideal, just to be respectful of others and the Mauritian culture.
- Get involved – talk to the local people and those that are taking care of you in your accommodation, the best way to find secret locations is all through local people who undoubtedly have the best knowledge of where to go, and what / not what to do.
- The island is small and can be covered quite easily, if it was up to me I would have spent a week in Mauritius so that I could lay on the beach some days and really explored in land too on other days.