

## PLACES TO VISIT IN MAURITIUS:

### **CHAMAREL:**

The coloured earths of Chamarel were promoted as Mauritius' first tourist attraction back in the 1960's. Even today souvenir test-tubes containing the multi-coloured earth can be bought from beach vendors and tourist boutiques. Specimens of the earth can also be bought from the yellow-roofed administration building at the entrance of the site. The land belongs to Bel Ombre Sugar Estate and a small entrance charge is made to visit the earths. An example of the horizontal mill, like a giant's washing mangle, lies in front of the administration building. It was introduced by Charles Telfair, one of Bel Ombre's first owners.



Sunrise is the best time to see the Coloured Earths. Geologists are still intrigued by the rolling dunes of multi-coloured lunar-like landscape. The colours, red, brown, violet, green, blue, purple and yellow never erode in spite of torrential downpours and adverse climatic conditions. The phenomena has never been explained but it is believed the earths are composed of mineral rich volcanic ash. Of more stunning beauty are the 83m (272ft) high Cascade Chamarel. They fall from the River St Denis in the Black River Mountains and plunge seaward to form the River du Cap. Wooden walkways from the roadway enable closer views of the waterfalls.

### **CASELA BIRD PARK:**

Casela Bird Park is home to 142 species of birds including the lovely long necked Pink Pigeons which until recently were threatened with extinction. The lovely dusky pink birds were donated by the Black River Aviary and can be seen alongside hundreds of other exotics from Asia, Australia, Africa and the Americas. A guide to the park is available at the entrance. The Park covers 25 acres (10 hectares) and sits on the flanks of Rempart Mountain with views of cane clothed countryside rolling down to the west coast. There is a restaurant and snack bar and walks criss-crossing ponds and streams. Down a set of steps beyond the aviaries there is a mini-zoo of tigers, monkeys, lemurs, stag and a lake of graceful flamingos.



### **TROU AUX CERFS:**

Trou aux Cerfs is a crater, 300m (984ft) in diameter. It was formed as a result of volcanic activity millions of years ago and is now choked with silt, water and a dense forest of vegetation. It is possible to scramble down the sides to the water level but caution is advised. There is plenty of parking and a kiosk to shelter walkers. There are spectacular views of the island: looking west the first majestic vista is Rempart Mountain which Mark Twain described as a "vest pocket Matterhorn". This is flanked to the right by the three peaks of Les Trois Mamelles, standing proud, as Mauritians say, like three breasts. To the north west the humps of Mont St Pierre are dwarfed by the bulk of the Corps de Garde. In the foreground sprawl of Curepipe and Phoenix and in



the distance Port Louis. Discernible by the jumbled range of the Moka Mountains, is the isolated peak of the thumb-like Pouce and the tiny ball forming the head of Pieter Both. Other peaks rise and fall like papier mache replicas dumped on the landscape by a child.

### **THE ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS OF PAMPLEMOUSSES:**

The Royal Botanical Gardens of Pamplemousses is the highlight of any visit to the north. These world famous gardens were renamed Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanical Gardens in 1988 in honour of the late Prime Minister by many locals still refer to them by the former name. Pamplemousses is believed to have taken its name from a citrus plant commonly called the pamplemoucier which was imported by the Dutch from Java. The fruit which grows in the area is thick skinned and bitter and resembles a large grapefruit. The Tamils call it the bambolmas and it is believed that this is the origin of the French word pamplemousse or grapefruit.



The white wrought iron railings and gates won first prize in the International Exhibition in 1862 at Crystal Palace in London but today are rather worn and rusty. Admission is free.

The garden's origins go back to 1735 when Labourdonnais bought a house in the grounds which he called Mon Plaisir. What began as a humble self sufficient vegetable garden developed into a major fresh food source for ships calling at Port Louis. In 1768, Mon Plaisir became the residence of the French intendent and horticulturist, Pierre Poivre who laid the seeds for its present success as a garden of international acclaim. He introduced plants from all over the world and raised indigenous species, the fruits of which can be admired today. They include 80 palms and about 25 species indigenous to the Mascarene Islands, amongst them stately palms, fruit and spice trees, ebony, mahogany, latania and pandanus and occupy some 60 acres of beautiful landscape.

Allow at least 2 hours to visit the gardens. Amongst the most impressive sights is the peaceful pond concealed by the enormous floating leaves of the Giant Amazon water lily.

The flowers open white but fade into a dusky pink by the end of the second day. The collection of palms is extensive, amongst them being Royal Palm, Queen Palm from Brazil, Raffia Palms from Madagascar, Lady Palm from China and the Talipot Palm which dies after flowering when it is between 40 and 60 years old.

### **Historical and Naval Museum of Mahebourg:**

At Pointe des Regattes is a monument to the French and English who died in the 1810 Battle of Grand Port. The battle lasted several days and was a great attempt by the British to conquer the island. It ended in defeat for the British and both sides suffered heavy casualties. The French victory is inscribed on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. The fascinating aspects of this battle can be seen in the Historical and Naval Museum of Mahebourg, a dilapidated colonial residence built in around 1771 that belonged to the Commandant of the District of Grand Port, Jean de Robillard. His initials are inscribed on the wrought iron balustrade of the house. After the Battle of Grand Port, De Robillard turned the house into a hospital and the commanders of the French and British forces, Rear Admiral Victor Duperre and Admiral Sir Nesbit Willoughby, convalesced alongside each other and no doubt sobered by the appalling loss of men and ships, shook hands symbolising the beginning of an entente cordiale. The house was bought by the government in 1950 and turned into a museum under the direction of the Mauritius Institute. It is at the southern outskirts of the village on the Mahebourg-Curepipe road.

The museum occupies three floors, two of which are accessible to the public. On the ground floor wreckage of sailing ships that took part in the Grand Port battle, original cannon, cannonball, paintings and swords and weaponry of Robert Surcouf, the eighteenth-century corsair, popularly known as the king of the Corsairs. A large relief map shows the complicated reefs of Vieux Grand Port where the great battle took place. The bell, recovered from the wreckage of the St Geran which sunk off the east coast in 1744, is also on display. There is an interesting newspaper cutting of Charles Seabourne, who with survivors from the ship Trevesa, landed at Bel Ombre in the south in 1923 after spending 25 days at sea. On display are the ship's biscuits, a razor and the lid of a cigarette tin which they used to measure water rations. In a separate showcase is a Roll of Honour dedicated to Mauritians who died in World War II. On the first floor are Labourdonnais' four-poster bed, two palanquins or wooden sedan-type chairs, which were borne by slaves to convey their masters through the country and a collection of coins, curios, model sailing ships and early maps, labelled in French and English.

### **MARIE REINE DE LA PAIX:**

Marie Reine de la Paix is situated on the flank of Signal Mountain and from its wide paved walkway there are breathtaking views of the city. Erected just after World War II, Marie Reine de la Paix has always been a place of pilgrimage. In October 1989, thousands of islanders attended the mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II when he made his first official visit to Mauritius.



### **SIGNAL MOUNTAIN:**

Signal Mountain is in Port Louis. It is possible to drive up by taking Labourdonnais Street south from the junction with Georges Street. At the end of Labourdonnais Street the road rises up the flanks of the mountain and narrows in parts but the drive is worth the effort. From the small parking area there are different views of the capital, spreading inland in neat blocks to the foot of the Moka Mountains with flatlands of the north in the distance. To the west there are views of Grand River North West and the filao-fringed headland of Pointe aux Sables. A very steep path to the summit of Signal Mountain leads to the radio transmitter station.



### **LA CITADELLE:**

From the ramparts of La Citadelle (also known as Fort Adelaide), there are panoramic views of the entire city with its amphitheatre of mountains, the Champs de Mars Race course and the harbour. The fort was named after Queen Adelaide, wife of William IV and built between 1834 and 1840 as a lookout post to check civil disorder within the city. Limited parking space is available with a security guard in attendance. For many years the fort was abandoned and fell into ruin but recently it had been the venue of pop concerts and sound and light shows.



### **GOVERNMENT HOUSE:**

Government House consisted originally of a wooden hut covered with palm tree leaves. Part of the building was constructed during the governorship of Nicolas de Maupin (1729-1735) and enlarged in 1738 by Labourdonnais when it was officially called the Hotel du Gouvernement. The first British governor, Robert Townsend Farquhar, extended it still further. Today it is the official centre of government although parliamentary issues are debated in the modern Legislative Assembly Chamber behind it. In the courtyard is a statue of Queen Victoria which in summer time is shaded by the crimson blooms of a flamboyant tree.



Beyond it is the statue of William Stevenson, who was the British governor of Mauritius from 1857 to 1863. The wrought iron gates in front of Government House remain closed except on official occasions such as the opening of parliament. The interior is not open to the public.

### **NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM:**

The Natural History Museum is on the ground floor of a two storied building houses in

Port Louis. It contains exhibits of the dodo, marine flora and fauna. Exhibitions on culture and art are also held there from time to time.

### **TROU AUX BICHES AQUARIUM:**

Trou aux Biche Aquarium offers a fascinating glimpse of the teeming marine life around Mauritius and is the next best experience for those visitors who are unable or unwilling to witness the exciting underwater for real. One million litres of water are pumped daily into the 36 tanks on an open circuit and sterilised by ozone and ultra violet rays. One tank 16m (52ft) long contains 150,000 litres of water where sharks, moray, eels, murines and other deep water specimens are kept. Lagoon fish including the graceful sea turtles are kept in a smaller tank 7m (23ft) long containing 35,000 litres of water.



Exhibits of reef fauna are contained in the remaining tanks. There are some 250 species including the laff or stone fish.

### **ILE AUX CERFS:**

Ile aux Cerfs (Stag Island) is on the east coast of the island. It comprises of 700 acres of luxuriant woodland where deer roam wild. It has excellent beaches for swimming and snorkelling and the shallow lagoon is particularly safe for children. It takes about 3 hours to walk round of the island but visitors are advised not to stray off the marked paths. The northern tip is reserved for public facilities and include first aid post, showers, toilets, shops and a boat house for watersports and boat trips. There is a tortoise and deer pen. Public services operate from the jetty at Pointe Maurice via gardens off to the main approach road of Touessrok. The



crossing takes about 20 minutes and motorists may leave vehicles in the shaded free parking area. Boats leave every half hour from 9am to 5pm. Staying overnight and picnicking are prohibited but refreshment is available from the hotel managed beach bar and restaurants.

## **LA VANILLE CROCODILE PARK**

La Vanille Crocodile Park is situated in the south of Mauritius. It was opened in 1985 and occupies the valley of a former vanilla growing area. The site is the equivalent of a tropical rain forest with exotic palms, freshwater streams and local flora and fauna. The park is the brainchild of Owen Griffiths, an Australian zoologist and his Mauritian wife who discovered that the area was suitable for the farming of Nile crocodiles. The first crocodiles, one male and four females, were imported from Madagascar and their offspring placed in heated indoor nurseries for one year before they were released into ponds.

The crocodiles are kept in secure enclosures, according to age, until they reach maturity. The site is a tourist attraction with a collection of monkey, deer, giant tortoise, tenrec, rabbits, bats, wild pig and a giant Telfair Skink which is indigenous to Round Island. There is also an exhibition room containing specimens of Mascarene reptiles with descriptive notes in English. Among the exhibit are the luminous green True Chameleon and one of the largest species of lizard, the giant Phesuma from Madagascar. There is a car park, restaurant / snack bar and toilets.

### **Central Market**

The highlight of any visit to Port Louis is the Central Market where the oriental atmosphere of an old island port prevails. Here Muslim traders in flowing white robes, swarthy-skinned Indians and Chinese and colourful Creoles stand alongside shouting their wares to passers-by. The entrance to the market is via Farquhar Street, one block back from the harbour through wrought iron gates. The gates, built in 1844, are crowned with iron whorls and scrolls in which are inserted the initials VR after Queen Victoria. The market is noisy, hot and smelly throughout the day with customers wending through carpets of tropical produce and conical mounds of pungent herbs and spices. The stalls have something for everyone, whether it be a souvenir, fresh fruit or a herbal remedy guaranteed to cure all ailments from diabetes to diarrhoea. The market opens at 6am everyday including Sundays.

## **Temples**

With 52% of its population following Hinduism, Mauritius naturally has many colorful temples around the Island where worshipping and offering to the idols happens on regular basis; while interestingly to the contrast setting, in many of the villages one can come across small grotto types of brightly adorned worship places.

### **Ganga Talao (Grand Bassin temple)**

Grand Bassin or Ganga Talao is sacred lake situated on 1800ft above sea level in a crater, surrounded by startling panorama. It has many deities besides the 108ft tall “Mangal Mahadev” statue, the highest statue in the whole island and the “Hanuman” statue on the hill. In 1897, A “PUJARI”/Hindu priest Shri jhummon Gin Gosagne, who lived in the Northern village of Terre Rouge, had a vision of a sacred lake surrounded by dense forests. A group of sages set out to find that sacred lake. They discovered the lake and called it Pan Talao after fairies; according to popular belief of those days, fairies use to come down to the lake for their ritual bath each evening. In 1972, sacred water from Ganges in India was brought, and was poured in the lake, since then the lake is known as “Ganga Talao”. In the year 1998, the lake was declared sacred.

Ganga Talao is an extremely important holy place and has a significant importance in Mauritian culture. Mass of pilgrims’ walks down to Ganga Talao on Mahashivratri and it is one among the very important event in Mauritius

### **Maheswarnath Temple**

Is the biggest Hindu temple in the Island, situated in the village of Triolet. It was built in 1819 in honor of the deities Shiva, Vishnu, Muruga, Brahma, and Ganesha. Fascinatingly, Triolet also happens to be the longest village of Mauritius. The village of Triolet has a traditional Sunday early-morning market.

### **Tamil Kovils**

The Murukan cult had its root planted in Mauritius ever since the first batch of Tamil immigrants came as artisans and traders under French rule. Their close attachment to their religion prompted them to build kōvils. Thus, kōvils were erected as per the norms laid down in the agamas. An Indian nationalist Rājaretnum Mudaliar who served the cause of Tamil education in Mauritius was so infatuated with the Murukan Cult that he asked permission to organize a kāvadi procession in Port Louis in 1874. A fine example of Kovil in the Island:

- Sockalingum Meenatchee Amman Kōvil of Port Louis.
- The Dandāyudhapāni Kōvil of Clemencia is considered as the oldest Murukan Kovil.
- Sri Veera Makali Amman Thirukkovil - Terre Rouge - Port Louis

## **Mosques**

With good deal of Muslim presence in the Island, mosques can be found in almost every city, town, and villages. One can hear the call for prayers daily 5 times in a day. The Capital and its surrounding area itself has many mosques, but the most popularly visited and talked about mosque is the second oldest mosque “The Jumah Mosque” in Port Louis. as it is focus of Islamic cultural and religious life in Mauritius and also known for its interesting architecture and features The first Mosque

The first ever mosque was built some time during 1805, during the French rule; it was built on area of 120 toises (about 5,000 square feet). It was destroyed by a violent hurricane in 1818. However, it was rebuilt soon after. The mosque was originally called, Camp des Lascars Mosque, while today officially known as the Al-Aqsha Mosque. The mosque is no longer the small lime-washed structure it was during the days of French rule. It has undergone considerable changes over the years to meet the needs of a growing congregation.

## **The Jumah Mosque**

Following the growing numbers of Muslims, in 1852, a congregation of Muslim traders purchased two plots of land on behalf of the Muslim community. The prominent feature of this mosque is its open courtyard where stands an old Badamia (Indian almond or Terminalia Cattapa) Tree, which is older than the Mosque itself and was wisely incorporated in the overall design. In 1872 American Consul, Nicholas Pike interestingly described this place: “As you stand under it (the Badamia Tree) on a clear night, myriads of stars glittering overhead, it is not difficult to fancy yourself transported to some Oriental land, where Allah alone is worshipped.” Visitors are welcome in the peaceful inner courtyard except on Fridays and in the month of Ramadan.

## **Churches**

Since the arrival of the French in 18th century, the Roman Catholics have remained the most important Christian religious group on the island, nevertheless other Christian denominations have also boomed. Anglicanism came in with British colonization in 1810 while Presbyterians came in 1851. Moreover, there is presence of added Christianity origins such as Baptists, Seventh Day. Catholics, Adventists, Methodists, Jehovah’s Witnesses...

As anywhere in the world Mauritian Christians too regularly attend, their Sunday Mass and many symbolic and colorful churches and Chapels adorn the island.

## **St.Louis Cathedral**

This Gothic style church is known for its large mosaic installation, burial crypt, and the addition of an outdoor sculpture to promote racial harmony. The sculpture is truly symbolic to the co-existence of Mauritian society and Adelaide Schlafly gifted it in memory of her late husband, Daniel Schlafly, a Catholic man who was dedicated to the cause of racial justice and peace. Église Notre Dame du Bon Secours

This church standing in quietude of Trou d'Eau Douce village is another fine example of Mauritian Christian Churches. Notre Dame Church Of Cap Malhereux This picturesque red color Church standing in front of the Cap Malhereux coast is truly a magic sight; this Church has become a popular Emblem for Mauritius tourism brochures.

### **Pere Laval shrine**

Tomb of Revered Père Laval opposite the Ste Croix Church, attracts around thousands of pilgrims each week, reaching up to hundred thousand of marching pilgrims towards his tomb during his Death Anniversary on September 9th. Fr Laval worked in the island since 1841 and died in 1864. He had dedicated his life towards consecrated mission of service to the poor and the abandoned; therefore, Mauritian of all beliefs recognizes him today. Pope John Paul II beatified him in 1979.

### **Pagodas**

With the presence of small Mauritian Chinese community, sighting of Pagodas in the Island is obvious; one such Beautiful Pagoda stands opposite the racecourse, an illustration of traditional Chinese architecture. This can be also seen from the top of Adelaide Fort.