



HARTLEY'S SAFARIS

FINDING YOUR AFRICA



Mauritius



# INTRODUCTION

Mauritius is part of the tropical Mascarene Islands group and is situated in the Indian Ocean just over 1,600 kilometres (1,000 miles) east of the African continent. Covering an area of around 1,864 km<sup>2</sup> (720 mi<sup>2</sup>), the island is almost entirely surrounded by coral reefs with a rich and spectacular array of marine life.

The country has a well-developed tourism industry, much of it focused on snorkelling, diving, sailing and other water sports or simply enjoying the many excellent palm-fringed beaches. Mauritius has good golf courses and many hotels that specialize in catering for those seeking exclusive getaways. Many hotels have well-structured entertainment schedules including bands and individual performers and offer visitors a wide range of holiday activities.

Mauritius has a complex mix of cultures and traditions reflecting the Indian origins of many of its citizens but also influences from its French, British, and to a lesser degree Dutch, colonial background. There is also a small Chinese population on the island. Creole is the most prominent language.

The island's economy is based on agriculture and well developed financial sectors.





# HISTORY

Mauritius and other islands of the Mascarin Group were visited by sailors from Asia and Middle East as early as the 10th century but the island was only settled sometime later. The first Portuguese explorers landed on the island in 1498 but it remained largely unknown until the Dutch claimed it in 1598.

The Dutch attempted to establish a colony there at various times in the 17th century but these efforts all failed and France then stepped in claiming the island for themselves and naming it Ile de France in 1715.

The island was used as a French naval base for the next century and during this period settlers from India and elsewhere began arriving. The colonial "musical chairs" continued and in 1810 British forces defeated the French and took control of the island. The British finally relinquished control in 1968 after a growing independence campaign. The island became a part of the Commonwealth in 1991. Since independence the country has held regular elections.

## PEOPLE, CULTURE AND ECONOMY

People of Indo Mauritian ancestry constitute the majority of citizens of the country which only has a population of 1.3 million people. Some 80% of the population speak Creole and although English is the official language it is not widely spoken. Around 50% of the population is Hindu and about 25% are Christian. The cuisine of the island reflects this diversity and also that of its colonial background.

Mauritius has a well-developed financial system with many companies running offshore banking, insurance, fund

management and other operations from Port Louis. There is a strong textile sector and sugar is one of the most important agricultural crops. Various other crops are also exported.

## MAURITIUS IN BRIEF

- Capital City: Port Louis
- Area: 2040km<sup>2</sup> / 926 mi<sup>2</sup>
- Population: 1.3 million
- Time zone: GMT +4
- Currency: Rupees (MUR)
- Electricity: 220V
- Geography: The main island is of volcanic origin and is almost entirely surrounded by coral reefs. There are several smaller islands.
- Language: Creole and English



## WHEN TO GO

Mauritius is an all-year destination thanks to its subtropical climate. Although it can be enjoyed year round, it is best to visit during the winter months (May - October), with an average temperature of 24 °C. During the summer months (November to April) days are hotter and more humid and coastal temperatures can reach 34 °C. This is the best time for big game fishing, but there is a risk of cyclones between January and March. December is peak season.

## CLIMATE

Port Louis	Temp °C		Rainfall mm
	Min	Max	
Jan	24	28	220
Feb	24	28	240
Mar	23	28	240
Apr	22	27	190
May	21	26	130
Jun	20	24	90
Jul	18	23	90
Aug	18	23	80
Sep	18	24	50
Oct	20	25	50
Nov	21	27	70
Dec	23	28	170





# HIGHLIGHTS

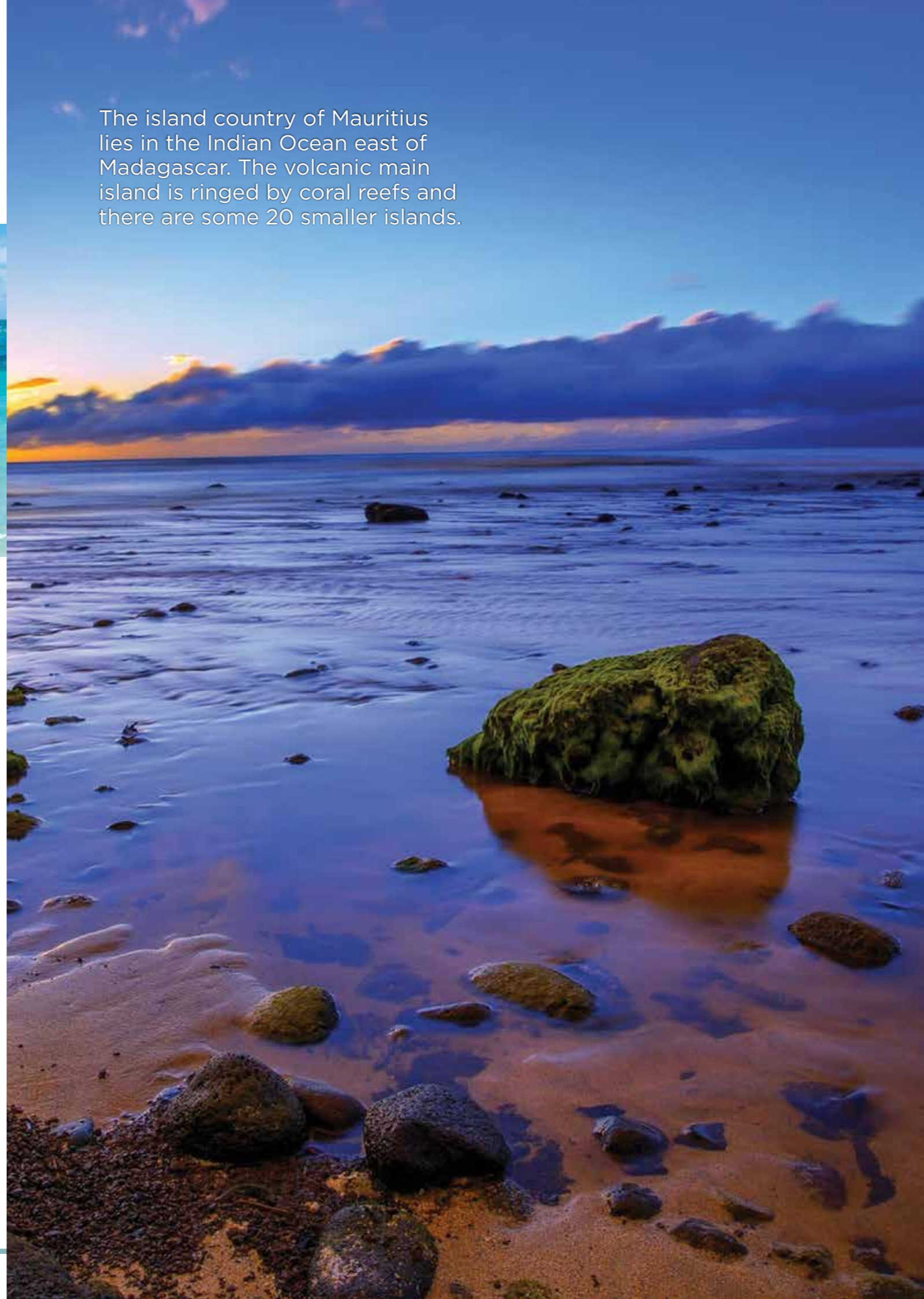
## WATER SPORTS AND BEACHES

The 177 km (110 miles) coastline is the country's biggest tourism draw-card. Coral reefs circle the island and along with the white beaches fringed with palm trees provide images of what many visitors imagine to be a "postcard" picture of a tropical island.

The warm clear water and profusion of coral provides a habitat for a wide range of species of fish, plants and other marine life and although there is the possibility of cyclones between January and March the island has a warm to hot climate that encourages beach holidays. Experienced dive-masters are available to lead diving and snorkelling trips at most resorts, and diving equipment is provided. Some people prefer to snorkel on their own in the shallow in-reef areas. Many resorts also offer coral and fish viewing trips in glass bottomed boats. For those who enjoy active holidays sailboards, canoes, jet skis and other equipment can also be rented.



The island country of Mauritius lies in the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar. The volcanic main island is ringed by coral reefs and there are some 20 smaller islands.



## CULTURAL TOURS

Mauritius has a long and multicultural history and there are museums, churches, monuments and other buildings scattered all over the island that reflect this varied past. The National History Museum in Port Louis explains much of the island history, including Battle of Vieux Grand Port between the French and British in 1810, just one of the battles of the Napoleonic wars. The Blue Penny Museum contains some of the rarest stamps in the world and has a rich collection of maps and photographs explaining the island history.

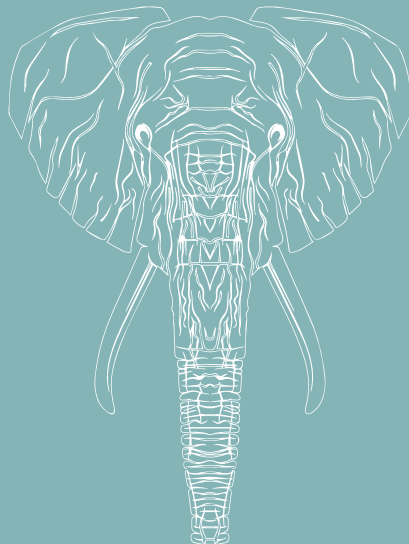
There are a number of cathedrals dating back to the first part of the 19th century as well as examples of colonial buildings. The central market gives visitors an insight into the islands culture and the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam gardens display a vast range of plants from Mauritius and elsewhere.



## BLACK RIVER GORGES NATIONAL PARK

This is the country's only National Park and is an excellent example of the natural forest that once covered larger areas of the island. There are organized bus and minibus tours of the park and there is also a network of hiking trails. The 67 km<sup>2</sup> (25 mi<sup>2</sup>) park is a declared UNESCO (United Nations Environment, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage site and protects 163 of the islands 311 species of endemic plants as well as providing habitat for most of the islands 29 endemic bird species. Highly endangered species such as the Pink pigeon, Mauritius kestrel and the Echo parakeet are found here.





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