

MAURITIUS COUNTRY INFORMATION



In preparation for your Mauritian Sojourn please find below some interesting facts about the country. For further information you can visit the official Mauritius Tourism Authority's website: www.tourism-mauritius.mu



Country information:

Situated in the South Western Indian Ocean, the island of Mauritius lies at approximately latitude 20° south and longitude 57° east of Greenwich. It is about 800 km to the east of Madagascar and is part of the Mascarene Archipelago. The Mascarene Archipelago consists of three islands, Mauritius, Reunion (which is part of France) and Rodrigues. The Republic of Mauritius itself comprises the island of Mauritius, Rodrigues, Saint Brandon, Agalega and the *Chagos Archipelago*.

Full country name: Republic of Mauritius

Area: 1,860 sq km

Population: 1.2 million

Capital City: Port Louis (pop 150,000)

People: Indo-Mauritian (68%), Créole (27%), Sino-Mauritian (3%), Franco-Mauritian (2%)

Language: English, French, Hindi, Urdu, Bhojpuri

Religion: Hindu (51%), Christian (30%), Muslim (17%)

Government: Parliamentary democracy

Facts for the Traveller:

Time: GMT/UTC + 4

Dialling Code: 230

Electricity: 220V or 125V, 50Hz

Port Louis:

A good place to get the feel for the city is the Port Louis Market, near the water in the heart of downtown. The burgeoning capital of Port Louis is a large city (in proportion to the size of Mauritius), though it contains a relatively small percentage of the country's total population. During the day, it bustles with big-city commercial activity. By night, in contrast, all is quiet - except for the swish new Le Caudan Waterfront, where you'll find a casino, cinemas, shops, bars and restaurants. With sections devoted to fruits and vegetables, meats and fish, souvenirs, crafts, clothing and spices, be ready to practise some hard bargaining. While in the neighbourhood, most visitors drop by the Natural History Museum to see a stuffed replica of that 'abnormal member of a group of pigeons', the dodo, which has been extinct since the late 17th century. The museum also houses stuffed representations of several other extinct birds as well as specimens of animals and fish that are still with us. The only other regular exhibitor in the city is the Mauritius Postal Museum, featuring a collection of Mauritian stamps and assorted philately. If you're interested in Islamic architecture, stop by Port Louis' oddly located Jummah Mosque, built in the 1850s in the middle of Chinatown, and Fort Adelaide, which so closely resembles a Moorish fortress that locals call it the Citadel. Fort Adelaide is the only one of Port Louis' four British forts that's still accessible and not in ruins; the views from its hilltop, harbour-side location are great.

Curepipe:

The town of Curepipe is in the south-central highlands of Mauritius and is well linked by bus to Port Louis, about 20km (12mi) to the north, and to other towns and villages. Curepipe owes its size and prominence the malaria epidemic of 1867, during which thousands of people fled mosquito infested Port Louis for healthier, higher ground. With the flavour of an English market town, Curepipe is the centre of the island's tea and model-ship building industries and the best place to scatter your money. Unless these are of particular interest to you, the town

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itself may be worth a quick visit at most. The surrounding countryside has a more universal appeal. Curepipe's main street of historical interest is Elizabeth Ave. There, the recently renovated colonial-style Hôtel de Ville (1902) functions as the town hall. In its gardens, you'll find a statue of the fictitious lovers Paul and Virginie from Bernadin de St Pierre's 1788 novel of the same name. West of the town centre, Curepipe's botanical gardens are not as spectacular as those of Pamplemousses, but they are well kept and informal, with nature trails branching off of the main paths. Just north of the gardens, Trou aux Cerfs crater is the town's biggest natural attraction. It's been extinct for ages, and the crater floor is now heavily wooded, but a tarred road leads up to and around the rim to rest stops with beautiful views.

Tamarind Falls:

A few kilometres south-west of town, Tamarind Falls are awkward to reach without your own transportation and good hiking boots, but the rewards are worth the hassle. At the bottom of the series of seven falls, you can enjoy a dip in the deep waters, and the parkland around the falls is perfect for hikes

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanical Gardens:

In the village of Pamplemousses, these gardens (also known as the Royal Botanic Gardens) were started in 1735 by Governor Mahé de La Bourdonnais as a vegetable garden for his Mon Plaisir Château. The grounds were gussied up by French horticulturalist Pierre Poivre in 1768 in his bid to introduce spices, but afterwards lay neglected until 1849, when a British horticulturalist, James Duncan, took over. His legacy is seen today in the garden's array of palms. These modest but well kept gardens are a highlight of a visit to Mauritius. Though there are few flowers inside, one key attraction is the park's giant *Victoria regia* water lilies, native to the Amazon. From the centre of a huge pad, the lily's flower opens white one day and closes red the next. Other attractions include golden bamboo, chewing gum trees, fish poison trees, a 200-year-old Buddha tree and - for Christians - a cross tree with leaves shaped like crucifixes. The fragrant flora of the garden - ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, camphor and sandalwood - is another high point, as are glimpses of Mauritian wildlife that are all but unavailable elsewhere on the island. Look for enclosures of Java deer and giant tortoises. There's also an art gallery and a cemetery, whichever way your tastes run. Pamplemousses is 11km (7mi) north-east of Port Louis, and there are regular buses between the two.

South of Port Louis

A scant 12km (7mi) south of Port Louis, the town of Moka - in terms of ambience - is a world apart from the capital. Not only is it the island's centre of academia, it's also blessed with sylvan landscapes, towering mountains and a number of impressive manor houses. Here, the University of Mauritius shares the bulk of the island's scholars with the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, founded to preserve and promote Mauritian Indian culture. The Gandhi Institute's Folk Museum of Indian Immigration houses around 2000 volumes of Indian archives dating from 1842 to 1910 as well as a small collection of artefacts, such as jewellery worn by early Indian immigrants, traditional musical instruments, books and assorted household knick-knacks.

Closer to Port Louis, Domaine Les Pailles is an elaborate cultural centre that includes facilities for horse-drawn carriage and train rides, plus a working replica of an ox-powered sugar mill, a rum distillery, an herb garden, a natural spring and a children's play area. An onsite riding centre, Les Écuries du Domaine, has horses for dressage and jumping and Welsh ponies for the wee ones. Continuing in the spirit of providence, the centre also has a handful of ethnic restaurants and its own jazz club and casino. Domaine Les Pailles is a 10 minute taxi ride from

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either Port Louis or Moka, or you can take a bus between the two and walk half an hour from the main road.

Moka Town is almost midway between Port Louis and Curepipe, just east of the M2. Buses ply between the cities daily, or you can take a taxi.

Over half the population of Mauritius is Hindu and roughly another fifth is Muslim; both groups descend from labourers brought to the island by the British to work the cane fields. While some of the resident Chinese and Sino-Mauritians were also brought over as labourers, most came to Mauritius as entrepreneurs, and many still control the lion's share of village-based commerce. The remaining population is composed mainly of Créoles, descendants of African slaves, and Franco-Mauritians, the original settlers of the island. Franco-Mauritians, who make up about 2% of the population, still control many of the sugar plantations, although many emigrated to South Africa and France following independence. English is the official language of the island, though you're bound to hear French, Créole (a melange of French and various African dialects) and a smattering of Indian languages. The island's main contribution to the performing arts is the Créole séga, a foot-shuffling, body-gyrating, downright erotic dance that's generally performed on the beach to the rhythm of Latin American, Caribbean and African pop. Séga variations to Créole music are popular in the island's discos and are certainly more entertaining than the well-choreographed 'cultural shows' you'll see in hotel lounges.

Passports and Visas:

*You must have a valid passport that does not expire for at least **six months** after your return home date. Please ensure your passport has at least 2 blank pages for any visas required and for entry/departure stamps. Most countries including the UK, USA and South Africa do not require a visa to enter Mauritius. However, some countries do – please check with your local embassy.*

Money Matters:

The local currency is the Mauritius Rupee. Traveller's cheques in any major currency can be exchanged without any problem in Mauritius - and they bring a better rate of exchange than cash. Credit cards are widely accepted, with cash advances available from most major banks. Cheaper hotels and local cafes generally don't add tax or service charges to their bills, while mid-range to upscale restaurants and hotels add a 15% government tax. Tipping is optional in restaurants, though airport porters expect a little something, and bargaining is a part of life on Mauritius.

Insurance:

Minimum travel insurance is mandatory. Please ensure that you have purchased sufficient travel insurance to cover emergency medical evacuation, loss of luggage and flight delays. Credit card travel insurance is not normally adequate for travel in Africa. Please ensure that you have yourself and your belongings adequately insured before your departure. Insurance is compulsory for all trips. If you do not possess a policy, African Sojourns can issue insurance, however it is better to purchase your policy at home as this will cover you for repatriation back to your home country.

Health Precautions:

Malaria is found in Mauritius but the risk is extremely low. Expert opinion differs regarding the best approach to malaria prophylactics – please consult your doctor. Please remember that the best insurance against contracting malaria is to try to prevent one from being bitten:

- *Use mosquito repellents liberally*
- *Wear long-sleeved shirts and trousers/slacks in the evenings*
- *You should spray your room prior going to dinner with an insecticide like "Doom" which will kill any mosquitoes that may have flown into your room*
- *Mosquito coils are also effective.*
- *Take the malaria tablets recommended for the region you're travelling to, and keep taking them until the course is complete.*

When to Go:

Apart from the busy Christmas to New Year period, Mauritius doesn't really have a high or low season. The depths of Mauritian 'winter' occur from July to September, when daytime temperatures drop from sticky to balmy. With less rain and humidity, this is one of the choicest times to visit. January to April is when the long days can be very hot and humid and there is the threat of cyclones. Visitors should be prepared to during the time for some heavy rain storms. December through to March is the best time for diving, when the waters are at their clearest; June through August is best for surfing; and October through April is excellent for big game fishing, when the large predators feed close to shore.

Suggested Packing List

Clothing:

- *Light weight trousers/jeans/shorts/skirts*
- *Tee shirts*
- *Swimming costumes and sarongs*
- *Light weight sweater and/or windproof jacket*
- *Sun hat*
- *Shoes (sandals for the beach and comfortable shoes for the evening)*
- *Swimming shoes if you don't like the rough sand*
- *Trainers or comfortable walking shoes*
- *Smart/casual wear for the evening*
- *A general antibiotic can be useful (obtain this from your doctor before you leave home)*

We wish you a wonderful holiday!