



Chill OUT

Mauritius has it all; endless, shimmering sandy beaches, elegant resorts and a wonderfully kind and courteous people. It also offers a drove of world-class golf courses making it a serious contender for a great golf holiday to escape the winter chills. ►

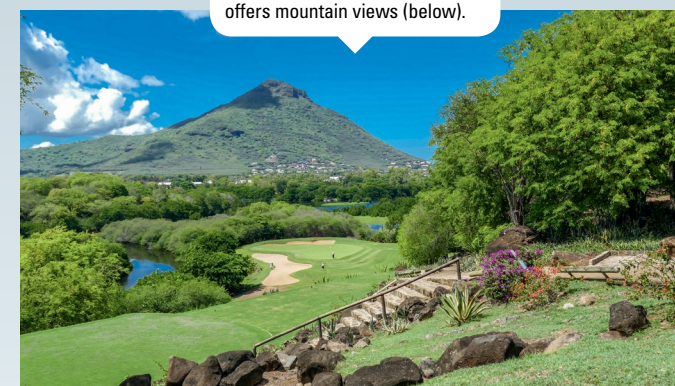
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The Heritage Resort Le Telfair will host the AfrAsia Mauritius Open again later this year.



The glassy pool at Le Telfair is superb, while Tamarina Golf Club offers mountain views (below).



A typical beach scene in Mauritius. Can you picture yourself here?

The Paradis GC is worth playing simply because of its stunning seaside location.



The small island nation of Mauritius – set deep in the Southern Indian Ocean, a thousand miles east of Madagascar and the same again from South Africa – has long been attracting honeymoon couples, families and holidaymakers looking for a touch of the exotic.

How does this tropical Garden of Eden stack up for mainstream golfers more interested in finding the fairway than fancy poolside cocktails? In the past, a game of golf could be uncovered on courses established by British army personnel as far back as 1834.

But when the island's ubiquitous sugar cane industry faltered (though you would never think it looking at the place today) golf gained a foothold and resorts saw the wisdom of offering a round or two to their clients. During the past 20 years, championship courses were built near resorts in the southwest and northeast of the island, in addition to the old British track, Gymkhana Golf Club, which is the oldest in the southern hemisphere and fourth oldest in the world.

Today, Mauritius has emerged as a significant golf holiday option. With eight

superb 18-hole championship courses and the brand new Mont Choisy Le Golf course opening this November, there is a growing case to pack the clubs along with the swimmers.

I set up base at **Heritage Resorts Le Telfair**, one of the island's finest five-stars, a property I was introduced to a dozen years ago when invited to the grand opening. It seems they got it right back then as I could detect no perceptible difference; a mature, full-service resort with a great range of activities snuggling up to a magnificent stretch of beach, the ideal place to chill out and get oriented for your first few days.

Heritage also has one of the finest courses on the island. This year, it will host the third outing of the AfrAsia Bank Mauritius Open and it was here in 2015 that this co-sanctioned European Tour, Sunshine Tour, and Asian Tour event kicked off. The Tour players will be delighted to return to this immaculate golf complex. With prizemoney topping €1 million and an open invitation for players to bring their families to enjoy Le Telfair's sumptuous beachside facilities, it is becoming a top-draw for the best golfers from all three Tours.

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finer-conditioned courses I've ever encountered. I've played it several times now and they really have nurtured this course into amazing shape. Ground conditions are impeccable. And yet it's testing!

From the tips, the tour elite will be both challenged and entertained. For us mere humans, there's room off the tee but strategy is key to every hole. Of course, you need to play the Heritage more than once to begin to appreciate the elevation changes, defiant par-3s and wide water hazards that come at you with increasing regularity. Beyond that there are amazing panoramas, especially looking back towards the resort and the Indian Ocean with the barrier reef better appreciated from this lofty height.

I was keen to see what else the island had to offer and rented a car. On the east side of Heritage Le Telfair is the recently opened **Avalon Golf Estate**. There are a lot of great holes on this new Peter Matkovich-designed track which are not all about the drive and more about accuracy.

The course is cut through an old tea plantation with rivers and ravines, backed by mountains and always sweeping views

of the southern coastline. It's a great inland championship course interspersed with indigenous flora and fauna that will no doubt come on in the next few years much like its neighbours.

Just a few minutes in the opposite direction from Le Telfair is **Paradis Hotel & Golf Club**. Paradis is not quite in the same league as Heritage or Avalon but it is worth sampling for its breathtaking location. Next to the sea, the fairways are uniformly flat, some tree-lined, others hugging palm-fringed shores with Le Morne Mountain towering over the entire scene. The dark mountain is a great contrast to the lush, palm-fringed beachside holes. All in all, it's an easy round, gentle and well-paced; perfect for a relaxed Sunday outing.

A few minutes further north is a course of an entirely different nature, **Tamarina Golf, Spa & Beach Club** – a track with neither palm tree nor beach view in sight.

This is something straight 'Out of Africa' with giraffes or the roar of a lion expected at every turn. All we saw was a wee monkey skirting the forest. It also has mountain views, again sombre and foreboding and yet another dramatic backdrop to line your drives with.

The course winds through rugged savannah framed with mature trees along with hidden dips and fall-offs. The holes seem to have been designed to give evermore exhilarating views of Mount Rempart and its jagged peaks.

I decided to do a diagonal drive from Tamarina right across the island to Le Touessrok, my last visit 'favourite' on the opposite side of the island. But the drive and subsequent weariness didn't have a good effect on my game. GPS is completely unreliable on the island by the way and signs not easy to find let alone read. Yet, somehow, I made it to Le Touessrok and boarded a water shuttle to cross over to the heavenly **Ile aux Cerfs Golf Club**. This is the way to arrive in style and leave your troubles behind.

Ile aux Cerfs Golf Club is a unique experience. Bernhard Langer put his name to this project and the result is a course even he would find difficult to subdue. After some recent, fairly major modifications to make it more 'golfer friendly', Ile aux Cerfs is still a test and a half. You need your 'A-game' here and unfortunately I left mine in the car park. It's the kind of course that intrigues and beguiles with some magnificent holes ▶



Ile aux Cerfs GC can only be reached by boat and the golf is absolutely stunning.

especially near the end where you are forced to cross dense gullies with nothing but trouble between you and a safe landing.

Anahita, just a couple of miles south of Ile aux Cerfs – or the **Four Seasons Golf Club Mauritius at Anahita** to give it its full title – offers a massive 7,500-yards with fairways wide enough to accommodate a jumbo jet. You're hard pressed to find the rough here but don't be lulled into complacency; it's still packed with challenge and character.

The AfrAsia Bank Mauritius Open came here last year and there are some stunning oceanfront holes interwoven with rocks and tropical shrubbery. To one side are mountains and the other a vast crystal-clear lagoon so it's a great amphitheatre of golf with plenty of movement in the holes to keep you thinking.

The resort associated with Anahita is a new lifestyle concept in holiday accommodation. Guests reside in rambling, spacious suites and villas scattered throughout a wide tropical garden. We took a grand tour of some of the commodious villas and were delighted to learn you could have a butler arrive to cook breakfast – or indeed have dinner delivered from the restaurant. Each villa has its own infinity pool and offers fully-equipped kitchens, spacious lounges and well-appointed bedrooms. This would be ideal for families or friends travelling together.

Also nearby in the northeast corner are **Constance Belle Mare Plage's** twin wonders, **The Legends** and **The Links**.

At the time of my visit, they were hosting the MCB Tour Championship, the European

Senior Tour's season-ending event. Offering two entirely different challenges, the Legends, where the championship is played, is built deep into the forest reserve, blending natural beauty, wildlife and tight, challenging play that has water hazards guarding fairways and greens every step of the way. The Links course, as its name suggests, is open but it's certainly no easier than its neighbour. With blind holes and sharp doglegs interspersed with harsh rocky outcrops to trap the wayward shot, it is as engaging as it is enlightening to walk across.

Mont Choisy Le Golf is the last and latest golf facility to be added to the golfing stock of this island. It's situated on the northwest side of Mauritius about a half hour from Port Louis, the island's capital and close to some very fine beaches. Again, designed by Peter ►

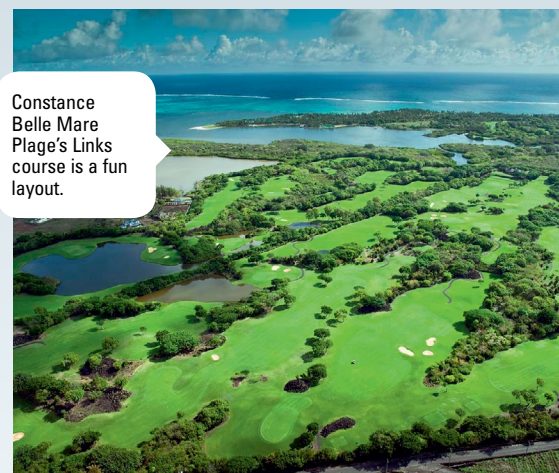




Water is a constant of the Constance Belle Mare Plage's Legends course (and top right).



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Constance Belle Mare Plage's Links course is a fun layout.

Matkovich it's due to open in November, this year, hopefully in time for the AfriAsian event when I'll take a closer look.

It's perhaps better to consider Mauritius a two-centre destination where you spend a few days enjoying the amenities and golf facilities of both regions. I'd recommend a few nights in Le Telfair relaxing on the beach and sampling the courses in the south and southwest before decamping to the north and northeast to enjoy those courses and amenities.

Should you take the urge, there's a lot to do in Mauritius besides eating, sleeping on the beach and playing golf. It's worth sneaking out of the resorts at least for a day or two to explore some more of this magical island. Taxi fares are not too high especially if you share. Markets are plentiful and colourful and the

less touristy the better especially when it comes to prices.

Driving in Mauritius is at best an adventure. We paid AU\$65 per day for a well-used, very small Hyundai that came complete with its own set of rather unusual noises. Roads along the west coast and through the middle of the south and east was nerve-jangling with pedestrians, motorbikes, dogs and cats all using the road as an appendage to their everyday activities. Signage is also difficult to find let alone see. It was still fun driving though and it does give you flexibility to explore and see more of island life. If there are four of you, it might prove better hiring a car and driver for the day, a great way of shopping and sightseeing.

One of the most delightful aspects of Mauritius I found was the people themselves. Mauritians really are an elegant, gracious people – from the taxi driver, the ladies working in the sugar cane plantations to the waiting staff and petrol attendant, they all have a natural charm and friendliness. It's interesting that they are also one of the most culturally diverse populations on the planet. The majority are of Indian descent (68%). Creoles (of African descent) another quarter and the rest an interesting mix of Chinese, South African and French with a few Brits thrown in from the old colonial days. Muslims mix with Christians and Hindus and in this day and age, it really does seem to be an exemplary society.

Perhaps living in paradise helps! 🌍