

HALF-TERM FUN

SURREY time & leisure

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**TOM
KERRIDGE**
ON HIS NEW PUB VENTURE

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ISLE OF PLENTY

While Mauritius is known for its glorious beaches, there is so much more to discover, as Tina Lofthouse finds out

Gazing up at a vast waterfall across a deep valley of lush vegetation, I wondered if I had stumbled upon a set for Jurassic Park. There are birds everywhere, some are dip-dyed scarlet, others fluorescent yellow. Giant tortoises have been grazing alongside me, I've just eaten the 'world's coldest ice cream' and millennia-old mounds of red, violet, orange and yellow clay have created another weird landscape that could also be a film set – a mini psychedelic Dune perhaps. I can hear what sounds like French being spoken, and yet it's not.



Things are feeling quite surreal and very Alice in Wonderland... but then this island was once home to the dodo, forever immortalised by Lewis Carroll in his fiction. So, where on earth am I? This is not the vision I had of Mauritius nor is it anything like the beachy scenes that flood Instagram on #mauritius. Maybe it was the rum I'd had. I'd been offered several to taste.

But no, it is indeed Mauritius. Just another side to it than the luxury beach breaks often associated with this island paradise off the south-east coast of Africa. Given its small size, you can explore easily. You can follow The Tea Route, go coast to coast to stunning beaches, visit atmospheric museums in colonial houses and hike through forests in the national parks.

I was staying at the newly refurbished Maradiva Villa Resort & Spa, a five-star-deluxe spot set in a pretty bay near Flic en Flac on the west coast of the island. Your backdrop is the mountains, and, if you wish,



Villa at Maradiva with private plunge pool



Infinity pool at Maradiva

the evening's entertainment need only be the incredible sunset. Maradiva is one of those places where you can be as sociable or as secluded as you like. You can enjoy some cocktails in the bar, join a barbecue beachside or head to one of the restaurants that include Indian fine dining and a new Japanese place. Equally, you can dine in privacy on your villa's expansive veranda. It's a charming spot and you can easily while away your holiday in the infinity pool, enjoying the spa, kayaking or doing yoga on the beach.

From Maradiva's shore, you can see the historic Le Morne Brabant peninsula with its monolithic peak rising up out of the sea, a reminder of the island's tragic past when slaves, brought to work on the sugar plantations, escaped and hid out in the mountainside. It is a UNESCO Heritage Site and heralded as a symbol of freedom.

Mauritius has no indigenous population. It was most likely discovered by Arab and Malay sailors, and then the Portuguese, and

was colonised by the Dutch, the French and British. Many of the slaves came from Africa. When slavery was abolished, indentured labour was brought from India. Some 68% of the current population is of Indian heritage. Every culture has left their mark on the island, resulting in a vibrancy that is unique. You'll hear French-based Creole as the main spoken language, but also Indian languages, and English and French.

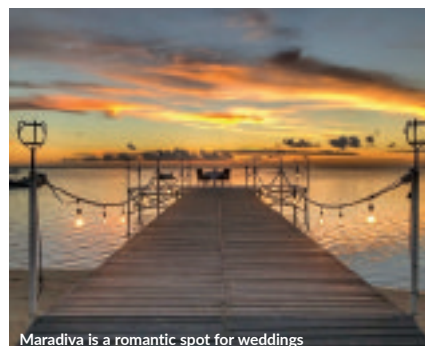
Mauritius may be diverse, but it is harmonious. If you want to see how it melds together, head to the capital Port Louis. An archway to Chinatown sits alongside the ornate Jummah Mosque. There are colourful Hindu temples and peaceful Buddhist pagodas hidden away off the bustling streets. You can snack on sticky Chinese bakes, dholl puri (a flatbread stuffed with dal) and gateaux piment – hot morsels of split pea and chilli fritters.

One more multi-hued sunset and my time on this delightful island was up. The journey home began, made simpler by Jet Prime where you can wait for your flight in a private lounge and have your luggage and formalities taken care of while you sip Champagne!

I could have easily spent much longer in Mauritius. It is a place that rewards the curious visitor, while at the same time offering a relaxing and luxurious beachside holiday. [Tina](#)

■ Villas at Maradiva from €1,335 per night.

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www.timeandleisure.co.uk



Maradiva is a romantic spot for weddings