

TRAVEL

WELCOME TO PARADISE! THE MAURITIAN RESORT FIT FOR THE A-LIST

In the luxurious Maradiva in Mauritius, **Steve Dinneen** finds a five-star resort that’s worth checking into time after time

It is rare that I feel an urge to return to a hotel – part of the joy of travel is to experience a place for the first time, after all. But I’ll make an exception for Maradiva, the five star resort in Mauritius where your dreams of borderline-pornographic beachfront perfection are dragged, startled and blinking, into reality.

This all-villa resort – the only one on the island – features 64 residences over a sprawling 11-hectares. It is a place where you will share your breakfast with some bequipped bird of paradise or other, where you could happily while away an entire trip lounging beside your own personal plunge pool, and where a manicured coral beach is never more than staggering distance away.

The last time I checked in was 2019, just before the world shut down. Had I visited a month later, I might have been stranded like that couple who got stuck in the Maldives, forced to endure paradise day after day.

Back then the design ethos centered around heavy, colonial-chic furnishings, all dark mahogany and rustic terracotta. A £21m redesign in 2023 saw the resort adopt a lighter, breezier style, which, while less distinctive, sits more comfortably with the picture of beachside living that probably exists in your mind’s eye.

It is a place where clichés take solid form. You enter a covered reception with views through the resort to the ocean beyond. Guests are ferried from bar to pool to restaurant by a fleet of golf buggies. Hang in a hammock, swim in the ocean, or swap one body of water for another and sink ice cold cocktails in the infinity pool.

Despite being a sizeable resort, Maradiva feels incredibly discreet – even during peak season, I barely saw another guest. The villas are designed



BOOK THIS

Maradiva is a member of the Leading Hotels of the World. Villas at Maradiva start from €800 per night. For more information visit maradiva.com.



discover a more rugged island than you might at first expect. While you will certainly recognise the picture postcard beaches, Mauritius is a place of volcanos and forests, of dense towns with labyrinthine markets and sprawling colonial estates.

A trip through the gorges of the Black River is highly recommended: here you can wander vast and ancient forests filled with centuries-old Banyan trees and crystal-clear pools that are perfect for a spot of skinny dipping.

Mauritius doesn’t attempt to hide its colonial past – this would be difficult on an island still covered with sugar plantations – and the stunning Maison Eureka is a wonderfully preserved glimpse into the history of the island. Here you can enjoy a traditional Mauritian lunch before

TRY THIS

Nestled in a remote corner of Mauritius you will find Laferm Coco. Started by Stefan and Christine Rouillard, a Mauritian couple who opened the farm nearly a decade ago on a patch of unloved land, it has become a leading farm-tourism experience, with log cabins available for overnight stays.

Here you will find neat little fields packed with guava and papaya and bananas and coconuts and turmeric, all hemmed in by jagged volcanic mountains. Farmyard animals flap and graze and squabble. There’s a



duck pond that looks like it’s been lifted from a children’s picture book, a pair of cows that lazily regard you from patches of wild grass, and dozens of bright orange chickens that follow you around in the hope you might spare them some grain.

When I visited, getting there was an adventure in itself, involving the navigation of a series of maze-like dirt tracks, although Stefan says they have since improved the roads – they are now accessible by “almost any vehicle” – and added signs. Let’s hope it’s not too easy to find, however – the feeling of being lost in paradise is part of the appeal.

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exploring the grounds, which end with a series of waterfalls and more opportunities to swim.

Even bigger is Chateau de Labourdonnais, a gigantic Victorian mansion on a sugarcane plantation that’s been preserved as a museum (here you can find a huge amount of memorabilia relating to the Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre novel Paul et Virginie, set on the island). Chateau de Labourdonnais hosts rum tastings, too, should you wish to become more closely acquainted with another Mauritian industry.

Personally, against my usual instincts to explore, I went straight back to the resort, stopping on the way to buy sticky-sweet lychees at the side of the road, eager to luxuriate in the cosseted quietude of Maradiva, a place that forever draws you back.



An unbearably tense and brilliantly acted new show

One of London’s leading theatre lights returns. But **Lucy Kenningham** found this play a little *too* out there

DEATH OF A UNICORN
DIR. ALEX SCHARFMAN
★★★★★

After seeing The Brightening Air at the Old Vic, I left the theatre with the overwhelming urge to seize control of my own destiny. It follows an extended family as they prepare to meet after a long time apart. The occasion: the birthday of the blind ex-clergyman Father Pierre. It is a play in which everybody yearns: for love, money, or a certain something that remains elusive... Loosely based on Chekhov’s Uncle Vanya – playwright Conor McPherson (The Girl from the North Country) says the play is “haunted by” Chekhov’s masterpiece – The Brightening Air is brimming with questions, the most urgent being: what kind of life is worth living? Characters question each other’s life choices: ‘What is your dream?’ they ask earnestly. Nobody has any answers.

It’s a family drama that revolves around three siblings: Dermot, Stephen and Billie, the latter two still living in the decaying family farmhouse. Dermot has his own family but is hellbent on tearing it apart. Uncle Pierre, meanwhile, is accompanied by a woman who is his wife in all but the essential activities, if you know what I mean. Each one is deeply dissatisfied with their lot.

Like Chekhov, McPherson is at his best when conjuring up fraught relationships, and in this play’s most

thrilling moments, the audience is drawn into an intense emotional bubble, its characters expanding and contracting with the tension. At times it’s almost unbearable, a sign of McPherson’s talents.

Unlike Chekhov, The Brightening Air is also imbued with mythic qualities and the odd dose of actual magic. McPherson says the play is drenched in folklore; I’d describe it as more spattered, the symbolism somehow feeling both too on the nose and rather nonsensical.

A case in point: Dermot’s estranged wife Lydia is desperate to get her hands on some magic water that will make the recipient fall in love with her. She wants to use it on her unfaithful husband, who turns up to the family gathering with his new, young girlfriend Freya. Lydia cannot let her husband go, despite the audience willing her to release herself from Dermot’s spell and settle down with his brother, Joe, who is clearly in love with her.

Whether Lydia is indeed under a spell or whether she is simply incapable of changing her mind is left to the audience.

In the second half, Father Pierre abruptly regains his sight – was he lying for sympathy all along? Or has he been blessed by God? “I can see you all,” he says profoundly. Yet he hasn’t come to any great revelation. The effect of these unexplained magical qualities muddies the waters of what would have been more successful as a realist play.

It is nevertheless a brilliantly acted, incredibly smooth production from a gifted playwright. Rosie Sheeny is hilarious as the train station-obsessed, plain-talking younger sibling Billie. Chris O’Dowd is devilishly funny as the alcoholic, unfaithful Dermot, while Hannah Morrish gives a forlorn and credible performance as his long-suffering wife, Lydia. At times it’s very funny, too. The godfearing masses are described as “ignorant minions of the dark,” and the three sneering siblings are branded “Cheshire cu”tis” (I’ll be nabbing that one for sure).

McPherson describes the theatre as “a pagan church where we watch an eternal story play out upon the altar”. But there’s no obvious moral lesson to be learned from The Brightening Air. Still, it left me feeling strangely energised. To hell with fatalism and unrequited love. Let’s throw out all the myths. And I suppose, judged upon this, McPherson’s play is really quite successful.

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