

# Mauritius Directory

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## ACCOMMODATION

Mauritius is by far the best country of the three destinations covered in this book for variation and choice in accommodation. It's so good, in fact, that it can be overwhelming. Camping is possible in Mauritius, although there are no camp sites as such. You should ask locals where it's acceptable to pitch tents, and perhaps expect some funny looks. The best value and often the most characterful

accommodation in Mauritius can usually be found in guesthouses or *chambres d'hôte*, where families rent out one or more of their own rooms to travellers. This is a fantastic way to meet locals and there's usually the option of eating with them as well. *Chambres d'hôte* are particularly popular in Rodrigues (where they're often the only place to stay) while those in Blue Bay are some of the most luxurious and unique in the country.

Private houses for rent are available all over Mauritius. They tend to be holiday homes rented out by their owners through agencies at considerable expense, and of course value for money varies enormously. Most hotels and travel agencies can point you in the direction of private rentals.

Hotels cover the rest of the accommodation range. In Mauritius they range from threadbare, no-star affairs (the capital's non-luxury hotels tend to fit into this category), the like of which you'll find all over Africa, through to five-star luxury complexes each seemingly built to outdo the others. While Mauritius enjoys a very well-to-do and exclusive reputation, its main trade is actually in midrange three-and four-star hotels, although its luxury five-star hotels such as Le Touessrok and the Oberoi are truly world-standard, with jaw-dropping luxury and price tags to match.

Generally speaking, for a double you can expect to pay under Rs 2000 for budget accommodation, between Rs 2000 to Rs 10,000 for midrange, and over Rs 10,000 for top-end accommodation. Recommendations under Sleeping entries are in ascending order of price.

## ACTIVITIES

There's way more than sun worship and pampering to be had on Mauritius – you'll find world-class diving, snorkelling and a huge range of water sports, as well as some good hiking to keep you occupied here.

### Deep-Sea Fishing

The fisheries around Mauritius support large predators such as marlin, wahoo, tuna and sharks, luring big-game fishermen from around the world. November to April is the prime season for marlin, when the water is

## PRACTICALITIES

- Mauritius uses the metric system for weights and measures.
- Electric current is 220V, 50Hz; British-style three-pin sockets are most common, though you'll also find the continental two-pin variety.
- The two most important, widely read dailies are the French language *L'Express* ([lexpress.mu](http://lexpress.mu)) and *Le Mauricien* ([lemauricien.com](http://lemauricien.com)). The *News on Sunday* and the *Mauritius Times* are English-language weeklies.
- There are three free channels in Mauritius run by the state Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) – MBC1, MBC2 and MBC3. There are also numerous pay channels. Programming is mainly in Creole but with foreign imports in French, English and numerous Indian languages.
- Radio is a more popular medium, with a huge number of local commercial stations broadcasting in Creole and Hindi, and the BBC World Service and Voice of America, readily available. A couple of the most popular radio stations include Kool FM 89.3 Mhz and Taal FM 94.0 Mhz.

at its warmest. Tuna, wahoo and sharks can be found year-round. Annual fishing competitions are held at Grande Rivière Noire in November and February.

Game fishing has far less environmental impact than commercial fishing, but the weight and the number of fish caught has shown a marked decline since its heyday in the 1970s. It's now rare to catch anything over 400kg. Using the practice of 'tag-and-release' is an option for those who want the thrill without depriving the ocean of these magnificent creatures.

Anglers get to take home a trophy such as the marlin's nose spike, or a couple of fillets, but the day's catch belongs to the operator, who sells it to be served up at local restaurants.

Most of the big hotels run boats, and there are several private operators based at Grande Rivière Noire, Trou aux Biches and Grand Baie. Most outfits have a minimum hire time of around six hours, and each boat can normally take three anglers and three guests. Expect to pay upwards of Rs 12,000 per boat.

### Diving & Snorkelling

Diving and snorkelling are very well established in Mauritius and its dive sites compare well to others in the Indian Ocean, although several dive operators during research were keen to point out that Mauritius 'is no Maldives' – a reference to its often lower visibility and less stunning coral. Basically the rule is to choose where you dive carefully and you should have a superb time. The best place

to dive in Mauritius is Rodrigues, where the corals are fantastic and the diver numbers are tiny, so you feel like a pioneer. On the mainland, Blue Bay and Flic-en-Flac have the best diving spots, the particular stand-outs being dive sites Colorado in Blue Bay and Rempart Serpent and La Cathédrale in Flic-en-Flac. Snorkelling can be enjoyed almost anywhere, but again it's particularly fruitful in Rodrigues. Nearly all bigger hotels organise regular snorkelling excursions, often at no charge. For more information on diving in Mauritius, see p27.

### Hiking

For those interested in more than the usual beach activities, Mauritius offers some attractive hikes. Most are in the Central Plateau area around the Black River Gorges National Park; see p87 for detailed descriptions. Lion Mountain (north of Mahébourg) is another popular climb, while a day exploring the east coast of Rodrigues is a must for anyone wanting to get away from it all.

As a general rule when hiking, you should pay attention to 'Entrée Interdit' (Entry Prohibited) signs – they may mean you're entering a hunting reserve. 'Chemin Privée' (Private Rd) signs are generally there for the benefit of motorists; most landowners won't object to the odd pedestrian. It's best to ask if you're unsure about where you should and shouldn't walk.

One possibility is to go with a guide. **Yemaya Adventures** (☎ 752 0046; [www.yemayaadventures.com](http://www.yemayaadventures.com)) and **Maurisun Adventure & Tours** (☎ 263 0192; [www.maurisun.com](http://www.maurisun.com); Royal Rd) in Grand Baie both offer

escorted hikes. On Rodrigues, contact **Osmosis** (☎ 832 3051; osmosis@intnet.mu; Port Sud-Est; 🕒 7am-5pm), based at the Mourouk Ebony Hotel.

### Horse Riding

Mauritius has some lovely rambling countryside, which is perfect for riding excursions. There are opportunities for horse and pony riding at Domaine Les Pailles (p65), an estate run as a tourist attraction, at Mon Choisy (p69) and in Rodrigues (p129).

### Surfing

A small scene led by Australian and South African surfers built up in the 1970s around Tamarin on the west coast (the surf movie *The Forgotten Island of Santosha* was made here), but the wave crashed during the 1980s.

These days, the scene around Tamarin comprises a small community of local and Réunionnais surfers. You can plug into what's happening and rent surfboards from one of the several surf shops in Tamarin.

The surf at Tamarin itself is fairly tame; better breaks in the area include Le Morne and One Eye's (named after the one-eyed owner of Le Morne estate), both at the northern end of Le Morne Peninsula. There are also good surfing locations near Baie du Cap. Lefts and Rights is further south by Îlot Sancho, and there's a tricky break opposite the public gardens in Souillac. The surfing season lasts from around May to September.

### Undersea Walks & Submersibles

One popular but environmentally ruinous way to enjoy the underwater world if you don't dive is to take an 'underwater walk' – available at a number of places but most commonly found in the tourist hub of Grand Baie. Participants don a weight-belt and a diving helmet and stroll along the seabed feeding the fish in a sort of Jules Verne journey beneath the sea way. Oxygen is piped down from the surface – using solar-powered compressors, no less – and divers are on hand in case there are any problems.

Undersea walks carry a greater risk of damaging the sensitive marine environment and they're absolutely no substitute for diving or even snorkelling, so your money is far better spent on enjoying or learning the latter two. Submarine trips are fun and less of an environmental worry, although again they're really only for those who can't or won't dive.

### Water Sports

Mauritius is a great place to enjoy water sports, with most bigger hotels offering a dizzying range of activities from sailing to kayaking. Kitesurfing has really taken off recently, with Rodrigues being a superb place to do this, as well as at various spots along the eastern coast of the mainland.

### Yacht Cruises

The main centre for cruises is Grand Baie, from where luxury catamarans depart regularly for day trips to the northern islands, sunset cruises and the like. Perhaps the most interesting outing is a trip on the *Isla Mauritia*, a classy old schooner run by Yacht Charters in Grand Baie (p73). On the east coast, a couple of companies offer cruises from Pointe d'Esny (p115) to Île aux Cerfs.

All of these cruises can be booked through tour agents. Most of the big hotels also arrange cruises for their guests. Packages usually include lunch and snorkelling. Whether there's actually enough wind to fill the sails is in the hands of the gods.

### BUSINESS HOURS

Banks in Mauritius generally open from 9.30am to 4pm Monday to Friday. Government offices usually open from 9am to 4pm Monday to Friday and 9am to noon Saturday. Restaurants usually open from around 10.30am to 10.30pm Monday to Saturday. Shops typically open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, and 8am to noon on Saturday. Some close on Thursday or Saturday afternoons. However, on Rodrigues in particular, shops and offices close much earlier than 4pm; to be on the safe side it's best to do all your business in the morning.

### CHILDREN

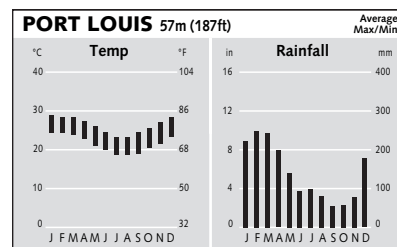
Travelling with children in Mauritius presents no particular problems. In fact, kids generally have a ball. The main attraction is undoubtedly the seaside. The beaches at Pereybère, Belle Mare, Blue Bay and Flic en Flac are particularly child-friendly. The domestic and wild animals on display at Casela Nature Park (p103) near Flic en Flac and La Vanille (p119) to the west of Mahebourg should also go down a treat. Older children might be interested in the interactive displays and machinery at L'Aventure du Sucre (p84), the sugar museum at Pamplemousses. Domaine Les Pailles (p65) near Port Louis offers activities to suit

all ages, from pony and train rides for the little ones to quad-biking and full-blown trekking for teenagers.

To put their holiday in context, there's a wonderful series of cartoon books by Henry Koobes (published locally by Editions Vizavi Ltd). The English-language titles include *In Dodoland*, *SOS Shark* and *Meli-Melo in the Molasses*.

### CLIMATE CHARTS

For further information on choosing the best time of the year for visiting Mauritius, see p55.



### CUSTOMS

In Mauritius, visitors aged 16 years and over may import 200 cigarettes or 250g of tobacco; 1L of spirits; 2L of wine, ale or beer; 250mL of *eau de toilette*; and up to 100mL of perfume.

There are restrictions on importing food, plants and animals, for which import permits are required. Other prohibited and restricted articles include spear guns and items made from ivory, shell, turtleshell or other materials banned under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES); it is also illegal to take such items out when you leave.

With regards to currency, visitors to Mauritius may import a maximum of Rs 700 in local currency, and take out Rs 350, but there are no restrictions on foreign currency.

### DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Mauritius is an exceptionally safe country to travel in. Your biggest annoyances are likely to be environmental (mosquitoes in some places, sun burn and the occasional upset stomach), although there are some other things to bear in mind.

Taxi drivers in Mauritius can earn up to 30% commission from certain shops, hotels,

restaurants and other businesses to which they take clients. Keep this in mind if a taxi driver tells you that the place you want to go to is full or closed or more expensive than one he knows. Insist first on going to your chosen destination.

Lying under a coconut palm may seem like a tropical idyll, but there have been some tragic accidents. Take care when walking under coconut trees and don't lie (or park your car) beneath them.

The Indian Ocean is a warm tropical ocean, so there are several aquatic nasties to watch out for. Fortunately, few travellers encounter anything more serious than the odd coral cut. For more information, see p312.

All beaches below the high-tide line are public property, so you are entitled to plop your towel down on the sand, whatever some over-officious security guard might tell you.

### Cyclones

Mauritius lies within the cyclone belt. Most cyclones occur between December and March. While direct hits are relatively uncommon, storms miles away can bring very strong winds.

As soon as a cyclone is detected, a system of alerts is used to inform the public of the level of danger. In Mauritius there are four levels of alert. The alerts and then regular bulletins are broadcast on radio and TV.

### Theft

Petty theft is not a major problem in this region, but one that you should be aware of. Favourite haunts for thieves are the beaches. Île aux Cerfs is a particular hot spot. The best strategy is not to take any valuables to the beach – and never tempt a passing thief by leaving your belongings unattended.

Be extra careful in crowded places such as markets and avoid walking around with your valuables casually slung over your shoulder. When travelling on public transport, keep your gear near you.

If you hire a car, it's best not to leave anything valuable in it at all. If you must do so, hide everything well out of sight. Wherever possible, park in a secure car park or at least somewhere busy – never park in an isolated spot, especially at night.

Don't leave vital documents, money or valuables lying about in your room. Many hotels provide room safes, which are well worth

using. Otherwise, leave your valuables in the safe at reception and get a receipt. While most hotels are reliable, to be extra sure, pack everything in a small, double-zippered bag that can be padlocked, or use a large envelope with a signed seal that will reveal any tampering. Count money and travellers cheques before and after retrieving them from the safe.

If you do have something stolen, report it to the police. The chances of them recovering anything are remote, but you'll need a statement proving you have reported the crime if you want to claim on insurance.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

### Mauritian Embassies & Consulates

Mauritius has diplomatic representation in the following countries:

**Australia** (☎ 06-281 1203; mhccan@cyberone.com.au;

2 Beale Crescent, Deakin Canberra, ACT 2600)

**France** (☎ 01 42 27 30 19; ambassade.maurice@online.fr; 127 Rue de Tocqueville, 75017 Paris)

**Germany** (☎ 030-263 9360; www.mauritius-embassy.de; Burgraf Centre, 84 Kurfürstenstrasse, 10787 Berlin)

**Seychelles** (☎ 611100; birdlife@seychelles.net; Conservation Centre, Roche Caiman, PO Box 1310, Mahé)

**South Africa** (☎ 342 1283/4; 1163 Pretorius St, Hatfield 0083; Pretoria)

**UK** (☎ 020-7581 0294; mauritius.embassyhomepage.com; 32-33 Elvaston Place, London SW7 5NW)

**USA** (☎ 202-244 1491; www.maurinet.com/embasydc.html; Suite 441, 4301 Connecticut Ave NW, Washington, DC, 20008)

### Embassies & Consulates in Mauritius

Many countries do not have representatives in Mauritius, and usually refer their citizens to the embassy in Pretoria, South Africa. Countries with diplomatic representation in Mauritius include the following:

**Australian High Commission** (Map pp58-9; ☎ 202 0160; www.mauritius.embassy.gov.au; 2nd fl; Rogers House, 5 President John Kennedy St, Port Louis)

**British High Commission** (Map pp58-9; ☎ 202 9400; bhcc@intnet.mu; 7th fl, Les Cascades Bldg, Edith Cavell St, Port Louis; ☎ 8.15am-3.45pm Mon-Thu, 8.15am-1.30pm Fri)

**Canada** (Map pp58-9; ☎ 212 5500; canada@intnet.mu; 18 Jules Koenig St, Port Louis; ☎ 10am-noon Mon-Fri)

**France** (Map pp58-9; ☎ 202 0100; www.ambafrance-mu.org; 14 St Georges St, Port Louis; ☎ 8am-1pm)

**Germany** (Map pp58-9; ☎ 211 4100; 32 Bis St Georges St, Port Louis; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri)

**Italy** (☎ 211 1427; fax 269 0268; DML Bldg, M1 Motorway, Port Louis)

**Seychelles** (Map pp58-9; ☎ 211 1688; gfok@intnet.mu; 616 St James Ct, St Denis St, Port Louis)

**Switzerland** (Map pp58-9; ☎ 208 8763; swiss.consul@intnet.mu; 2 Jules Koenig St, Port Louis; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri)

**USA** (Map pp58-9; ☎ 202 4400; mauritius.usembassy.gov; 4th fl, Rogers House, 5 President John Kennedy St, Port Louis; ☎ 7.30am-4.45pm Mon-Thu, 7.30am-12.30pm Fri)

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Given the range of beliefs and customs in Mauritius, hardly a week goes by without some celebration. You can usually find out about the latest *cavadee*, *teemeedee* or other ceremonies from the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority in Port Louis (p56).

On Rodrigues, the main cultural event is the Festival Kréol, which takes place over three days at the end of October. Concerts, crafts exhibitions and other events – including lots of eating – break out all over the island.

The Fête du Poisson, held on Rodrigues in the first week of March, marks the opening of the fishing season. It is celebrated with all sorts of festivities including fishing expeditions – and lots more eating.

Regattas featuring traditional wooden fishing boats are popular in Rodrigues. Most take place in the lagoon off Port Sud-Est between January and December, but the most prestigious event of the year is the regatta held off Pointe de l'Herbe in May.

### Hindu Festivals

#### CAVADEE

One of the more unusual Mauritian festivals, the Thaipoosam Cavadee takes place in January or February each year at most Hindu temples, and features acts of self-mutilation by devotees. Honouring a vow to Subramanya, the second son of Shiva, pilgrims pierce their tongues and cheeks with skewers. They then march from their chosen temple to the banks of a river carrying the *cavadee* (a wooden arch decorated with flowers and palm leaves, with pots of milk suspended from each end of the base) on their shoulders.

The Thaipoosam Cavadee is a public holiday, but other small *cavadees* occur during the rest of the year at selected temples.

#### TEEMEEDDEE

This is a Hindu and Tamil fire-walking ceremony in honour of various gods. The ceremonies occur throughout the year, but

mostly in December and January. After fasting and bathing, the participants walk over red-hot embers scattered along the ground. The Hindu temples in Quatre Bornes, Camp Diable (near Rivière des Anguilles) and The Vale (near Goodlands) are noted for this event. A feat along similar lines is sword climbing, seen mostly between April and June. The best demonstrations occur at Mont Choisy and the towns of Triolet and Solitude (between Port Louis and Trou aux Biches).

#### OTHER HINDU FESTIVALS

Each year, most of the island's Hindus make a pilgrimage to Grand Bassin, a crater lake in the south of the island, for the festival Maha Shivaratri. For information about the celebration, see the boxed text on p89.

Hindus also celebrate the victory of Rama over the evil deity Ravana during Divali (Dipavali), which falls in late October or early November. To mark this joyous event, countless candles and lamps are lit to show Rama (the seventh incarnation of Vishnu) the way home from his period of exile.

Holi, the festival of colours, is known for the exuberant throwing of coloured powder and water, and tourists are not exempt from the odd dousing. The festival symbolises the victory of divine power over demonic strength. On the night before Holi, bonfires are built to symbolise the destruction of the evil demon Holika. This festival is held in February or March.

Other major public festivals include Pongal (January or February), Ougadi (March or April) and Ganesh Chaturti (August or September). The latter celebrates the birth-day of Ganesh, the elephant-headed god of wisdom and prosperity.

### Muslim Festivals

Muslims celebrate Eid al-Fitr to mark the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, which is the ninth month of the lunar year. Eid al-Fitr is always a public holiday.

### Chinese Festivals

The Chinese New Year is celebrated with the Chinese Spring Festival, which is a public holiday and falls in late January or early February. On New Year's Eve, homes are spring-cleaned and decked in red, the colour of happiness, and firecrackers are let off to

ward off evil spirits. On the following day, cakes made of rice flour and honey are given to family and friends. No scissors or knives may be used in case someone is hurt and thus begins the New Year with bad luck.

### Christian Festivals

The most important date for many Mauritian Christians is 9 September, Père Laval Feast Day, which marks the anniversary of the priest's death. Pilgrims from around the world come to his shrine at Ste-Croix to pray for miracle cures (p66).

## FOOD

Food is likely to be a highlight of any visit with the huge choice of cuisine and some excellent restaurants throughout the country. Be aware that any restaurant aimed at tourists is likely to be anything from 50% to 200% more expensive than a local equivalent and that it pays to plan where you'll eat – many places offer up uninspiring, drab food simply because they're guaranteed customers from big resorts nearby. Choose carefully with the options in this book or ask hotel staff for advice.

In general a budget meal of two courses and some alcohol will cost less than Rs 200. Moving up a notch, you can expect to pay between Rs 200 and Rs 500 in a midrange place, while the bill at a classy, top-of-the-range establishment will be at least Rs 600 per head. For information about just some of the culinary delights in store in Mauritius, see p47.

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Mauritius has a paradoxical relationship to homosexuality. While gay and lesbian rights are legally guaranteed and much of the population is young and progressive, there remains a rigidly conservative streak to the Mauritian character. As a result gay life remains fairly secretive – mainly existing on the internet, in private and at the occasional party. While there were no gay or lesbian bars or clubs on the island at the time of writing, there were one-off club nights and parties organised. A gay rights march in Rose Hill in 2006 was the first ever permitted in the country and a sign that the small, nascent gay movement is gaining in confidence, although there's still a huge way to go.

For gay and lesbian travellers there's little to worry about. Mauritians are generally very



open-minded people and we've never heard of any problems arising from same-sex couples sharing rooms during their holidays. You're still best to avoid public displays of affection outside your hotel and generally to be aware that what might not be abnormal at home may be considered shocking here.

## HOLIDAYS

The following public holidays are observed in Mauritius:

**New Year** 1 & 2 January

**Thaipooam Cavadee** January/February

**Chinese Spring Festival** January/February

**Abolition of Slavery** 1 February

**Maha Shivaratri** February/March

**Ougadi** March/April

**National Day** 12 March

**Labour Day** 1 May

**Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary** 15 August

**Ganesh Chaturti** September

**Divali** October/November

**Arrival of Indentured Labourers** 2 November

**Eid al-Fitr** November/December

**Christmas Day** 25 December

## INSURANCE

A travel-insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is a good idea. Some policies specifically exclude dangerous activities, which can include scuba diving, motorcycling and even hiking. Always check the small print.

You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than having to pay on the spot and claiming later. If you have to claim later ensure you keep all documentation.

Check that the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight home.

For more information on health insurance, see p307.

## INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access has improved in recent years, with nearly all towns having at least one internet café where you can surf the web. There's a growing trend for hotels to have wi-fi or internet access from the rooms (for those with their own laptop), although sadly even in the five-star hotels these services tend to be charged. We mention in the body of reviews when wi-fi or ADSL line connections are free – otherwise expect to be charged for use.

## LEGAL MATTERS

Foreigners are subject to the laws of the country in which they are travelling and will receive no special consideration because they are tourists. If you find yourself in a sticky legal predicament, contact your embassy (see p136). In general travellers have nothing to fear from the police, who rarely harass foreigners and are extremely polite if they do need to stop them. Foreigners are nearly never stopped when driving in Mauritius, unlike locals.

## MAPS

The best and most detailed map of Mauritius is that published by the **Institut Géographique Nationale** (IGN; [www.ign.fr](http://www.ign.fr)). The Globetrotter travel map is good for its detailed insets including Port Louis, Curepipe and the botanical gardens at Pamplemousses. Both are available from local bookstores and supermarkets.

There are no decent maps of Rodrigues, but the Ti Boussol, the best one available, is on sale at the airport and tourist shops of Port Mathurin for Rs 80.

## MONEY

The Mauritian unit of currency is the rupee (Rs), which is divided into 100 cents. There are coins of 5, 20 and 50 cents, and Rs 1, Rs 5 and Rs 10. The banknote denominations are Rs 25, Rs 50, Rs 100, Rs 200, Rs 500, Rs 1000 and Rs 2000.

## ATMs

Armed with your PIN, it's perfectly possible to travel on plastic in Mauritius since ATMs are widespread. Even Rodrigues has a smattering of them. They're mostly located outside banks, though you'll also find them at the airports, at larger supermarkets and in some shopping malls. The majority of machines accept Visa and MasterCard, or any similar cards in the Cirrus and Plus networks, while Amex now has a tie-in with Mauritius Commercial Bank (MCB).

## Credit Cards

Visa and MasterCard are the most useful cards to carry, though Amex is catching up. Nearly all tourist shops and the more upmarket restaurants and hotels accept payment by credit card, as do car-hire companies, tour agents and so forth. Anywhere outside the main tourist haunts and small businesses still expect payment in cash.

A few places add on an extra fee, typically 3%, to the bill to cover 'bank charges'. The cheaper car-hire companies are the worst offenders. To be on the safe side, always ask. Cash advances on credit cards are available from most major banks, including MCB, Barclays, the State Bank and HSBC. Just remember to take your passport.

## Moneychangers

Major currencies and travellers cheques can be changed at the main banks, exchange bureaus and the larger hotels. Exchange bureaus sometimes offer slightly better rates than banks, but there's usually little difference. Hotels tend to have the worst rates and may add an additional service commission. As a general rule, travellers cheques bring a better rate than cash. There is no black market in Mauritius.

Banks don't charge commission on changing cash. As for travellers cheques, the system varies. Some banks, such as HSBC, charge 1% of the total, with a minimum of Rs 200, while MCB and the State Bank levy Rs 50 for up to 10 cheques. Don't forget to take along your passport when changing money. And make sure you hang on to the encashment form, which will have to be presented if you want to change Mauritian rupees back into foreign currency at the end of your stay.

## Taxes

Most items apart from unprepared food are subject to 15% VAT. There's no clear rule about whether this tax is included in prices quoted for meals, rooms and activities. If it's not clear, be sure to ask or you may be in for a nasty shock. Top-end hotels and restaurants sometimes add a service charge of about 10% to 15%.

## PHOTOGRAPHY

Print and slide film are widely available locally and there are decent developing studios in Port Louis, Flic en Flac and Grand Baie. For information on taking photographs, see the boxed text p140.

## POST

The postal service in Mauritius is quick and reliable. Postcards cost Rs 10 to send to anywhere in the world and most shops sell stamps as well as the local post office. Poste restante is available at central post offices. You usually have to pay a small fee to collect letters and may be asked for your passport.

## SHOPPING

If the beaches begin to pall, you can shop till you drop in Mauritius. Given such a wide choice, there is no reason to purchase items made from endangered species – avoid any seashell, coral or turtleshell products.

Bargaining is very much part of life in Mauritius. It's usual to bargain in markets and anywhere where prices aren't marked, and sometimes even on marked prices if you're a big spender. As a tourist, however, you'll need well-honed bargaining skills to get much of a discount.

## Clothing

The textile industry is one of Mauritius' biggest earners. Many of the brand-name clothes on sale in Europe, Australia and America are produced in the factories around Curepipe, Floréal and Vacoas. Shoppers can save by buying at the source, and many of the bigger suppliers have outlet stores where you can snap up items at a fraction of their usual retail price. Those really watching the rupees can opt for convincing – and not-so-convincing – copies of well-known designer brands. One of the best places to pick up genuine seconds is the market at Quatre Bornes (p92). Other vendors tend to congregate on President John Kennedy St in Port Louis, and in the Rose Hill and Curepipe markets in central Mauritius. Check carefully for minor flaws and dodgy stitching.

Floral Knitwear in Floréal is renowned for its stylish sweaters and other knitted garments. The company supplies Gap, Next and other international outfitters, but you can buy the same items before the branded labels have been added for a fraction of the final cost at their Floréal emporium.

Shibani and Maille St are two other local companies producing high-quality knitwear. Maille St specialises in cashmere sweaters in colours to die for. For kids there's Gecko, while Habit and the fetchingly named IV Pl@y target teens with up-to-the-minute streetwear. You'll find branches of these shops in Port Louis' Caudan Waterfront complex, Sunset Blvd in Grand Baie and other upmarket shopping malls.

## Handicrafts & Souvenirs

Locally produced basketry, essential oils, sugar, spices, teas and T-shirts all make very portable souvenirs. The Craft Market in Port

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## PICTURE PERFECT

The Indian Ocean islands are the very image of paradise, and many photographers strive to capture that image on film. For the most comprehensive guide to taking photographs on the road, get a copy of Lonely Planet's *Travel Photography*.

### TECHNICAL TIPS

Take into consideration the heat, humidity, tropical sunlight and equatorial shadows. If you're shooting on beaches, it's important to adjust for glare from water or sand, and to keep sand and salt water well away from your equipment.

### Photography

The best times to take photographs on sunny days are the first two hours after sunrise and the last two before sunset. This brings out the best colours. At other times, the harsh sunlight and glare washes everything out, although filters help counter the glare.

### Video

As well as filming the obvious things – sunsets, spectacular views – remember to record some of the ordinary details of everyday life. Often the most interesting things occur when you're actually intent on filming something else.

Video cameras have amazingly sensitive microphones, and you might be surprised how much sound they pick up. This can be a problem if there is a lot of ambient noise – filming by the side of a busy road might seem OK when you do it, but you might hear only a deafening cacophony of traffic noise when you view it back home.

### RESTRICTIONS

Don't photograph or film airports or anything that looks like police or military equipment or property. Photography is generally not permitted in Hindu temples and mosques – usually there is a sign warning against photography.

It may be insensitive to take photos at certain religious ceremonies, so again, it's best to ask first.

### PHOTOGRAPHING PEOPLE

Although there are no cultural taboos about photographing people in this region, you should still ask their permission first as a matter of politeness.

A zoom lens is a relatively unobtrusive means of taking portraits – even if you happened to have obtained permission, a reasonable distance between you and your subject should reduce your subject's discomfort, and result in more natural shots.

### UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY

Photographs taken underwater can be startling – at depth, flash photography reveals colours that aren't there for the naked eye. Nowadays, reasonably priced and easy-to-use underwater cameras are available. For souvenir snapshots, disposable underwater cameras are a good option.

If you're serious about underwater photography, it's worth investing in a good flash. As you descend, natural colours are quickly absorbed, starting with the red end of the spectrum. In other words, the deeper you go, the more blue things look. To put the colour back in you need a flash.

In general, 28mm or 35mm lenses work best underwater. Even with these you have to get close to achieve good results, which requires patience when photographing fish. With experience and the right equipment, the results can be superb.

(Continued from page 139)

Louis' Caudan Waterfront complex offers perhaps the widest choice and the quality is high. Other good places to browse are Port Louis' Central Market and the Grand Baie Bazaar. Vendors at both also sell Malagasy handicrafts, including leather belts and bags, embroidery and semiprecious-stone solitaire sets.

From Rodrigues you can take home a very natty vacoas-leaf hat or basket. The island is also famous for its honey and lemon and chilli preserves. Jewellery and other items made from coconut shell by handicapped people are available from Care-Co in Port Mathurin.

### Model Ships

Whether or not you could conceive of having one at home, it is difficult not to be impressed by the skill that goes into producing Mauritius' famous model ships. Small-scale shipbuilding has become a huge business and you'll see intricate replicas of famous vessels, such as the *Bounty*, *Victory*, *Endeavour*, *Golden Hind* and even the *Titanic*, for sale all over the island; it's hard to believe that shipbuilding dates back to only 1968, when an unknown Mauritian carved a model ship for fun and launched a whole new industry.

The models are made out of teak or mahogany (cheaper camphor wood is liable to crack), and larger ships take up to 400 hours to complete. Men usually work on the structure and the women do the rigging and sails, which are dipped in tea to give them a weathered look.

If you're thinking of buying, shop around to compare prices, which range from Rs 2400 up to Rs 80,000 or more. One of the best model ship-builders is **Voiliers de L'Océan** (☎/fax 676 6986; Sir Winston Churchill St, Curepipe; ☎ 7.30am-6pm); the company also has an outlet, MAST, in the Caudan Waterfront complex. The biggest factory is **Historic Marine** (☎ 283 9404; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat & Sun) in Goodlands, in the north of the island. In both cases the staff will be happy to show you around the workshop (weekdays only) without any pressure to buy.

To pack your goods home safely, shops will get the models for carry-on luggage or in sturdy boxes to go in the hold, and deliver them to your hotel or the airport at no extra charge.

## SOLO TRAVELLERS

While Mauritius is very popular with honeymooners and other couples enjoying romantic breaks, there's no taboo about travelling alone and locals are extremely friendly and open, so you'll have plenty of chances to meet people and are unlikely to feel lonely. Single rooms are usually very easy to come by, although at certain midrange and top-end hotels, it's common to charge a flat fee for the room, which can make travelling alone an expensive experience.

## TELEPHONE

The telephone service has received massive investment over the last few years. Calls no longer get lost or misrouted and there are public phones on almost every street corner. The state-controlled Mauritius Telecom has a virtual monopoly on landlines, although there's an open market for mobile services – Cellplus (owned by Mauritius Telecom) and Emtel compete with each other for every mobile-phone user in the country.

Coin-operated phones can only be used for calls within Mauritius. You need to feed in a minimum of two Rs 1 coins to make a call, which buys you about two minutes' phone time. They also accept Rs 5 coins.

You can dial abroad using IDD from private phones and public card-phones. Some public phones now accept credit cards, though they're few and far between.

The rate for a call to Australia, Europe or the USA is about Rs 20 per minute. These rates fall by around 25% during off-peak hours (10pm to 6am from Monday to Friday and noon on Saturday to 6am the following Monday).

When phoning Mauritius from abroad, you'll need to dial the international code for Mauritius (230), followed by the local number minus the first 0. There are no area codes in Mauritius.

## Mobile Phones

Coverage on Mauritius is generally excellent, and has recently been extended to Rodrigues. If you have a GSM phone and it has been 'unlocked', you can keep costs down by buying a local SIM card from either **Cellplus** (☎ 203 7649, www.cellplus.mu; Mauritius Telecom Tower, Edith Cavell St, Port Louis) or **Emtel** (☎ 212 5400, www.emtel-ltd.com; Air Mauritius Bldg, President John F Kennedy St, Port Louis). A

starter pack costs around Rs 600 including Rs 125-worth of calls. To top-up your credit you can buy prepaid cards almost anywhere.

Local calls are charged at between Rs 1.50 and Rs 5 per minute depending if you're calling someone on the same network or not. International calls cost a couple of rupees per minute on top of the standard Mauritius Telecom rates.

### Phonocards

*Télécartes* (phonocards) are on sale at Mauritius Telecom offices, bookstores, news-vendors, supermarkets and the like. They come in denominations of Rs 50, Rs 100, Rs 250 and Rs 500. A Rs 50 card gives you roughly three minutes to Australia, Europe or the USA.

### TIME

Mauritius is GMT+4 hours, both on the mainland and on Rodrigues. When it's midday in Port Louis, it's 8am in London, 9am in Paris, 3am in New York and 6pm in Sydney. Mauritius does not operate a system of daylight savings; being equatorial its sunset and sunrise times vary only slightly throughout the year.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

Independent travellers remain a proportionally small number in comparison with the package gang, but provision for helping them has improved hugely in recent years, the **Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority** (MTPA; ☎ 208 6397; www.tourism-mauritius.mu) running a national network of friendly tourist kiosks where you can pick up basic maps and a reasonably useful guide covering the main sights and activities.

MTPA also has a desk in the arrivals hall at the **SSR airport** (☎ 637 3635), though it's only open from the first flight until 1pm. It also operates kiosks in **Flic-en-Flac** (☎ 453 8660), **Ruisseau Créole** (☎ 483 7189), **Pamplemousses** (☎ 243 9900), **Trou d'Eau Douce** (☎ 480 0925) and in **Port Mathurin** (☎ 832 0866). Also useful is Mauritius Telecom's 24-hour phone service, **Tourist Info** (☎ 152). At any time of day or night you can speak to someone (in English) who will at least try to answer your questions.

### TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Mauritius makes a relatively decent provision for those with mobility problems. Modern buildings conform to international standards for disabled access, although public toilets,

pavements and lifts tend not to be as good. Most top-end hotels have wheelchair access, lifts and specially equipped bathrooms. In big hotels, there are always plenty of staff around to help and it is often possible to hire an assistant if you want to go on an excursion or a boat trip. With a bit of extra warning, some riding stables, dive centres and other sports operators can cater for people with disabilities.

None of the public transport systems offer wheelchair access. Anyone using a wheelchair will be reliant on taxis and minibuses.

### VISAS

You don't need a visa to enter Mauritius if you are a citizen of the EU, the USA, Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand or a number of other countries. You can find more information on the website <http://pmo.gov.mu/dha/ministry/novisa.htm>. Initial entry is granted for a maximum of one month. If you change your departure plans, make sure you don't exceed your permitted stay.

Extensions for a further three months as a tourist are available from the **Passport & Immigration Office** (Map pp58-9; ☎ 210 9312; fax 210 9322; Sterling House, Lislet Geoffrey St, Port Louis). Applications must be submitted with one form, two passport-size photos, your passport, an onward ticket and proof of finances. Two letters may also be necessary – one from you explaining why you want to stay longer, and one by a local 'sponsor' (it can be someone providing accommodation). Providing you can satisfy these demands there should be no further problems, but since the police are responsible for passport control, and quite a few visitors overstay their entry permits, there are 'get tough' periods.

### WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Mauritius is safe for women and you'll not feel out of place travelling solo either. It's still sensible to avoid walking around late at night outside of resorts, particularly as most places have very poor or non-existent street lighting. Port Louis is one extreme example where it really would be foolish to walk about alone after dark. In general men are well-behaved and respectful, but after a few drinks in the evening this can't be taken for granted.

## TRANSPORT AROUND MAURITIUS

### AIR

Mainland Mauritius has only one airport, the well-run **Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport** (<http://mauritius-airport.intnet.mu>). There are two domestic airlines, Air Mauritius and Catovair, both of which connect mainland Mauritius with the island of Rodrigues. For more details see p124.

Air Mauritius also offers helicopter tours and charters from SSR International Airport and a number of major hotels. A full one-hour island tour costs Rs 26,000 for up to four passengers; a quick 15-minute jaunt will set you back Rs 10,000. For information and reservations, contact **Air Mauritius Helicopter Services** (☎ 637 3552; [helicopter@airmauritius.com](mailto:helicopter@airmauritius.com)) or ask your hotel to organise a transfer or trip.

### BICYCLE

Cycling isn't really a practical means of long-distance transport in Mauritius – there is simply too much traffic – but bikes are fine for short hops along the coast. Given that the coast is pleasantly flat, it's amazing how much ground you can cover in a day. The coast roads are also quieter than those in the interior, so you can relax and take in the landscape.

In general, the roads are well maintained, but look out for potholes along country lanes. Avoid cycling anywhere at night, as most roads are poorly lit and traffic can be erratic.

You can rent bikes (usually mountain bikes) from most hotels and guesthouses and also from some tour agents and car-rental outlets in the main tourist centres such as Grand Baie, Flic en Flac and Trou d'Eau Douce. The cheapest deals will start at around Rs 100 per day. You'll usually be asked for a deposit of Rs 5000, either in cash or by taking an imprint of your credit card. Most bikes are in pretty reasonable condition, but be sure to check the brakes, gears and saddle (some are mighty uncomfortable) before riding off into the blue-beyond. The bike should have a lock; use it, especially if you leave your bike at the beach and outside shops.

### BOAT

The only scheduled domestic passenger services are between Port Louis and Rodrigues. The *Mauritius Trochetia* and the older *Mauritius Pride* between them sail four times a month in each direction; the outward journey takes about 36 hours and the return to Port Louis roughly 25 hours. Tickets and information are available through travel agents or direct from the Mauritius Shipping Corporation: contact **Coraline Shipping Agency** (Map pp58-9; ☎ 217 2285; [masc@coraline.intnet.mu](mailto:masc@coraline.intnet.mu); Nova Bldg, 1 Military Rd, Port Louis) or, on Rodrigues, the **Mauritius Shipping Corporation** (Map p126; ☎ 831 0640; [www.mauritiusshipping.intnet.mu](http://www.mauritiusshipping.intnet.mu); Rue François Leguat, Port Mathurin). Return fares cost Rs 2450/4900 for a seat/cabin in the *Mauritius Pride* and Rs 3000 for a 2nd-class cabin in the *Mauritius Trochetia*. These are popular services, so it is advised that you book ahead.

Various private operators offer cruises to offshore islands, or snorkelling and fishing excursions. See p134 and the listings under individual towns for more information about these services.

### BUS

Anyone on a budget will fare well using the network of bus routes that criss-cross the island. Bus travel is cheap and fun – you'll usually find yourself chatting to gregarious locals – and although you won't set any land-speed records, it's generally a fairly easy and reliable way to get around.

It's best to stick to express buses whenever possible, as standard buses seem to stop every few metres and can take up to twice as long to reach the same destination. To give an idea of journey times, it takes approximately an hour by standard services from Mahébourg to Curepipe, an hour from Curepipe to Port Louis and an hour from Port Louis to Grand Baie.

Long-distance buses run from around 6am to 6.30pm, though there is a late service between Port Louis and Curepipe until 11pm. Generally there are buses every fifteen minutes or so on the major routes, with less frequent buses on the express services. Buses in country areas can be few and far between.

As an indication, fares range from Rs 12 for a short trip up to a maximum of Rs 30 for the run from Port Louis to Mahébourg. Air-conditioned express buses may be a couple of rupees extra. Tickets are available from the



**MAIN BUS COMPANIES IN MAURITIUS**

Company	Main routes
Mauritius Bus Transport ☎ 245 2539	Pamplemousses to Crève Cœur
National Transport Corporation (NTC) ☎ 426 1859; cnt.bus@intnet.mu	Port Louis to Centre de Flacq, Curepipe, Flic en Flac, Floréal, Grande Rivière Noire, Pamplemousses, Quatre Bornes, Rose Hill, Souillac; Quatre Bornes to Baie du Cap; Curepipe to Baie du Cap, Floréal, Quatre Bornes, Souillac, Flic en Flac
Rose Hill Transport ☎ 464 1221	Port Louis to Rose Hill
Triolet Bus Service (TBS) ☎ 261 6516	Port Louis to Cap Malheureux, Grand Baie, Mont Choisy, Pereybère, Trou aux Biches; Pamplemousses to Cap Malheureux, Grand Baie, Grande Gaube, Mont Choisy
United Bus Service (UBS) ☎ 212 2026	Port Louis to Curepipe, Mahébourg, Ste-Croix

conductor; keep some small change handy. Retain your tickets, as inspectors often board to check them. Press the buzzer when you want to get off.

The buses are single-deck vehicles bearing dynamic names such as 'Road Warrior', 'Bad Boys' and 'The Street Ruler'. It's perhaps not surprising that some drivers harbour Formula One racing fantasies; fortunately, the frequent stops slow things down a touch. Though the buses are in varying states of disrepair, the fleet is gradually being upgraded.

The buses are almost always packed, especially on the main routes, but turnover is quick at all the stops. If you start the trip standing, you're likely to end up sitting.

Be warned that you could have problems taking large bags or backpacks on a bus. If it takes up a seat, you will probably have to pay for that extra seat. A few travellers have even been refused entry to a full bus if they have a large bag.

There is no country-wide bus service for Mauritius. Instead there are five large regional bus companies (see the table, above) and scores of individual operators. Unfortunately, there are no published timetables available. Your best source of information is to phone the company or the umbrella body, the **National Transport Authority** (☎ 202 2800). Locals also usually know the best way to get from A to B.

**CAR & MOTORCYCLE**

By far the easiest and quickest way to get around Mauritius and Rodrigues is to hire a car. Prices aren't as low as they could be, considering the numbers of visitors who rent vehicles, but you should be able to negotiate a discount if you're renting for a week or more.

Mauritian roads range from the one stretch of motorway – running from SSR International Airport to Port Louis and Grand Baie – to heavily potholed minor roads. Even on the motorway you'll find people wandering across the road and a generally relaxed attitude. As in most places, the greatest danger comes from other drivers, not the roads. Mauritian drivers tend to have little consideration for each other, let alone for motorbikes. Buses are notorious for overtaking and then pulling in immediately ahead of other vehicles to pick up or drop off passengers; always show extra caution when a bus comes in sight. At night be aware you'll face an assault course of ill-lit oncoming vehicles, totally unlit bikes and weaving pedestrians. Motorcyclists should also be prepared for the elements, as sudden rain showers can come out of clear skies.

**Car**

Generally, drivers must be more than 23 years of age (some companies require a minimum age of 21) and have held a driving licence for at least one year, and payment must be made in advance. You can pay by credit card (Visa and MasterCard are the most widely accepted), though small companies might add a 3% 'processing fee' for this service. All foreigners are technically required to have an international driving licence. Few rental agencies enforce this, but it's safest to carry one as the police can demand to see it.

Rates for the smallest hatchback start at around Rs 1000 a day (including insurance and unlimited mileage) with one of the independent operators; add Rs 150 or so for air-con. International chains such as Hertz and Sixt charge from Rs 1400 a day. On top of that you will be required to pay a refund-

able deposit, usually Rs 15,000; most companies will take an imprint of your credit card to cover this. Policies usually specify that drivers are liable for the first Rs 10,000 of damage in the event of an accident.

While there are dozens of rental outlets in Mauritius, during the peak Christmas holiday season cars can be hard to come by. It's best to book several weeks in advance, especially if you don't want to pay the earth. All the major international car-rental companies listed below have airport desks or can deliver to the airport. Some reliable local companies are given here too.

**ADA** (☎ 675 2626; www.ada.fr in French)

**Avis** (☎ 208 1624; www.avis.com)

**Budget** (☎ 467 9709; www.budget.com)

**Exodus** (☎ 454 4396; www.exoduscarhire.com)

**Hertz** (☎ 670 4301; www.hertz.com)

**Motorcycle**

There are only a few places where you can rent motorbikes, which is a shame as this is a great way to explore the quiet coastal roads. While you'll occasionally find a 125cc bike, most are 100cc or under; the smaller models are sometimes referred to as scooters.

Whatever the engine size, most places charge upwards of Rs 450 a day including a helmet. As with car rental, payment is requested in advance along with a deposit of Rs 5000 or so.

Most of the bikes are fairly well worn, but parts are widely available should anything fail. Beware of 'imitation' parts, which are copies of genuine manufacturer spares, cast in inferior metal.

Towns offering motorcycle hire include Grand Baie, Flic en Flac, Mahébourg and Port Mathurin. You should be aware that most motorcycle hire is 'unofficial' so you may not be covered in case of a collision.

**Parking**

Parking is free and not a problem in most of Mauritius, though it's best not to leave your car in an isolated spot. City parking requires payment. There are supervised car parks in Port Louis, but elsewhere you'll have to park on the street, which involves buying parking coupons. These are available from petrol stations and cost from Rs 50 for 10 coupons, with each coupon valid for 30 minutes. The same coupons can be

used all over the island. Street parking is generally free at night and at weekends; the exact hours, which vary from one town to another, are indicated on signposts.

**Road Rules**

Local motorists seem to think they'll save electricity by not switching on their headlights and the police are better at people control than traffic control. Traffic congestion is heavy in Port Louis. There are many pedestrian zebra crossings, but cross with care. Don't expect courtesy and don't expect drivers to be worried about insurance – you'll get knocked over.

Driving is on the left and the speed limit varies from 30km/h in town centres to 80km/h on the open road and is clearly signed. Even so, not many people stick to these limits and the island has its fair share of accidents.

Drivers and passengers are required to wear seat belts. For lack of sufficient breathalysers, the alcohol limit (legally 0.5g/L) is defined by the police as one glass of beer.

**HITCHING**

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and we don't recommend it. Travellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. People who choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go.

Getting a lift in Mauritius is subject to pretty much the same quirks of luck and fate that you experience hitching anywhere. The only place where it really does come in handy is Rodrigues. Since few people there own cars, hitching is a popular way to get around, especially on Sundays, when buses are few and far between. Those driving in Rodrigues will make friends by offering lifts to locals who'll try and flag you down almost anywhere. Obviously, proceed with caution and don't offer lifts to groups if you're alone.

**TAXI**

It's sometimes possible to imagine that every adult male in Mauritius is a taxi driver. Taxi drivers will often shout out at travellers they see wandering around Port Louis or Grand Baie, while ranks outside hotels usually overflow with drivers. Negotiation is key – meters are

rarely used and you'll usually be ripped off if you get in a taxi without agreeing a price. During the journey most cabbies will also tout for future business; if you aren't careful you may find that you've agreed to an all-day island tour. If you aren't interested, make this very clear, as many drivers won't take no for an answer.

Many guesthouse managers/owners have attempted to mitigate their guests' constant frustration with rip-offs by arranging prices with local taxi drivers. The quotes given under such arrangements, particularly those from small guesthouses, are often acceptable; they can usually arrange competitively priced airport pick-ups as well. Once you've got a feel for the rates, you can venture into independent bargaining.

Taxis charge slightly more at night and may ask for an extra fee if you want the comfort of air-con. It's also worth remembering that some taxis charge around Rs 1 per minute waiting time. It seems minimal, but it adds up if you stop for lunch or do some sightseeing on foot. Your best bet is to negotiate a set fare with the driver that includes waiting time. As a rough bargaining guide, here are some of the fares you can expect to pay for one-way trips.

From	To	Cost
Flic en Flac	Port Louis	Rs 400
Mahebourg	Blue Bay	Rs 100
SSR airport	Mahebourg	Rs 400
SSR airport	Flic en Flac	Rs 1000
SSR airport	Port Louis	Rs 800
SSR airport	Grand Baie	Rs 1000
Trou aux Biches	Grand Baie	Rs 200
Trou aux Biches	Port Louis	Rs 300

### HIRING TAXIS

For between Rs 1500 and Rs 2500, you can hire a taxi for a full-day tour of sights around the island (the fare varies with how much ground you intend to cover). You can cut costs by forming a group – the price should *not* be calculated per person. If you want to squeeze a tour of the whole island into one day, keep in mind that this won't leave much time for sightseeing. You're better off splitting the island tour into two days. Once you've agreed to a price and itinerary, it helps to get the details down in writing. Although most drivers can speak both French and English, double-check before setting off to ensure you won't face a day-long communication barrier. If you're lucky, you'll get an excellent and informative guide, but note that most cabbies work on a commission basis with particular restaurants, shops and sights. If you want to go to a restaurant of your choice, you may have to insist on it. Again, small guesthouses can usually recommend a reliable driver.

### SHARE TAXI

When individual fares are hard to come by, some cabs will cruise around their area supplementing the bus service. For quick, short-haul trips they pick up passengers waiting at the bus stops and charge just a little more than the bus. Their services are called 'share taxis' or 'taxi trains'. Mind you, if you flag down a share taxi, you'll only be swapping a big sardine can for a small one, and if you flag down an empty cab, you may have to pay the full fare.

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