

# Mauritius

Mauritius is a fascinating, world-in-one-island slice of paradise, the very name of which conjures up images of tropical luxury and stupendous extravagance. While in many places famed for cobalt-blue seas, white sandy beaches and luxury hotels you may eventually find yourself wishing for something other than sunbathing and swimming to do, in Mauritius it's often hard to know what to do next, so full is it of historic sights, cultural diversity, geographic variation and almost limitless activities to distract you from the daily grind of beach and pool. Despite all this, perhaps the island's single biggest asset is the relaxed charm of its warm and welcoming people.

Mauritius is the most developed of the Mascarene Islands, but with a bit of effort and resourcefulness you can escape the crowds and find your own patch of this most diverse of destinations. The smells, noises and bustle of the mercantile capital Port Louis, Africa's wealthiest city, are never far away, while the busy garment markets in the Central Plateau towns of Quatre Bornes and Curepipe and the dramatic virgin forests of the Black River Gorges National Park give the lie to Mauritius being just another beach destination. But what beaches though – from the stunning sand-rimmed lagoons and popular wide public beaches to the picturesque islands off the country's coastline, there's truly something for everyone here. Add to this the joys of Chinese, Indian, French and African cuisine, the rousing beat of *séga* music and the infectious party spirit of the locals, and you soon understand why Mauritius really is so many people's idea of paradise on earth.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Getting off the beaten path in charming, undeveloped **south Mauritius** (p111)
- Diving at the Rempart Serpent and La Cathédrale off the gorgeous beaches of **Flic en Flac** (p103)
- Discovering a totally different side to Mauritius on the beautiful island of **Rodrigues** (p122)
- Exploring the chaotic back streets of the multicultural capital **Port Louis** (opposite)
- Walking in the lush, dramatic landscapes of the **Black River Gorges National Park** (p87)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 230

■ POPULATION: 1.25 MILLION

■ AREA: 2040 SQ KM

## CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Mauritius enjoys a typically tropical climate with year-round heat, although the southeast trade winds help it never to feel too muggy. The summer months are from December to April, when it can nevertheless be extremely humid, and the winter, such as it is, runs from May to November, and is cooler and drier.

The best months to visit Mauritius are May to early December. January and February, the peak cyclone months, are best avoided by water-sports enthusiasts and divers. Cyclones rarely hit Mauritius (although Rodrigues has suffered far more regularly than the mainland) but cyclones way out at sea can bring days of squally rain.

Coastal temperatures range between 25°C and 33°C in summer and between 18°C and 24°C in winter. On the plateau it will be some 5°C cooler. The highlands are also the wettest part of the island – it can rain here at any time of year, and even when it's not raining the area can be cloaked in low-lying cloud.

When the winds are at their strongest in July and August it can be blustery on the east coast, though the breeze brings welcome relief in summer.

Apart from the Christmas-New Year peak, Mauritius doesn't really have high and low seasons. The situation is more dependent on outside factors (such as the French school holidays, which cause a big increase in demand and prices in August).

## PORT LOUIS

pop 172,000

With its spectacular setting beneath the impressive mountain peaks of Le Pouce and Pieter Both, Port Louis makes an impression on anyone arriving on the main road from the airport – descending from the Central Plateau into the hectic city centre with the Indian Ocean spread out in a perspective-defying frieze above the city is a wonderful experience.

Despite being the national capital, the main economic hub and the biggest city in the country, Port Louis occupies a rather strange place in the psyche of modern Mauritius. Its low-lying position has historically made it an undesirable locale, with disease in the 18th and 19th centuries frequently

devastating it, meaning that the professional classes have traditionally lived outside the city, particularly in the Central Plateau towns of Rose Hill, Moka, Vacoas and Quatre Bornes. This trend continues today, to the extent that Port Louis (the final *s* is usually silent, although many Mauritians pronounce it when speaking English) can sometimes seem like a city without a middle class, without a centre and a ghost town after dark.

This impression is totally false, however – Port Louis has plenty going for it, but it's a city that profits from exploration: those who only visit the fantastically Disneyesque Caudan Waterfront will get a very bland impression of the national capital. The bustle and chaos of the streets, the city's famous market, Chinatown, the collection of museums and some wonderfully preserved colonial buildings make Port Louis far more than a place to come for some pricey shopping away from the beach.

## HISTORY

Port Louis was first settled in the 17th century by the Dutch, who called it Noordt Westers Haven. It was the French governor Bertrand François Mahé de Labourdonnais, however, who took the initiative and developed it into a busy capital and port after 1736. Labourdonnais is commemorated with a much-photographed statue at the seaward end of Place S Bissoondoyal (formerly Place d'Armes), the square that marks the city centre.

Few cities have bounced back from as many natural disasters as Port Louis, or Port Napoleon as it was known briefly in the early 19th century before the British took the island. Between 1773 and 1892 a series of fires, plagues and tropical storms all tried, and failed, to level the town. In 1819 cholera arrived from Manila on the frigate *Topaz*, killing an estimated 700 Port Louis residents. Things quietened down until 1866, when malaria suddenly appeared on the scene, causing a further 3700 fatalities. Around this time people started heading for the cooler (and healthier) Central Plateau, so the town's population was mercifully small when the 1892 cyclone whipped through, and destroyed 3000 homes.

The 20th century has seen Port Louis become one of Africa's most important financial centres and ports – to which the

ever-growing number of high-rise glass-fronted banks in the city centre attest.

## ORIENTATION

Port Louis is divided by Mauritius' only motorway, which runs just by the harbour area and the development of the Caudan Waterfront. On the Caudan side there's the sanitised city with smart shops and bars but with little atmosphere, while the vast majority of the city is on the other side of the road – dirty, colourful, chaotic and much more fun.

The centre of the city is hard to pin down exactly – the natural centre is Place S Bissoondoyal, a picturesque palm-lined avenue that runs from the harbour to Government House. From here nearly all the sites of interest are within easy walking distance. The main banks have their offices around this square or along nearby Sir William Newton St, while Royal St, which runs northeast through Chinatown, is also of interest to travellers.

Port Louis' two main bus stations are located either side of the city centre, each a few minutes' walk from Place S Bissoondoyal. Arriving from the airport, you'll be dropped at the more southerly Victoria Square bus station.

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

**Bookcourt** (☎ 211 9262; Caudan Waterfront) The country's best bookshop sells a broad range of English and French books, including guidebooks.

**Editions de L'Océan Indien** (☎ 211 1310; Jules Koenig St) A good selection of titles about Mauritius.

**Librairie Allot Ltd** (☎ 212 7132; 1st fl, Happy World House, Sir William Newton St) Usually stocks the IGN map of Mauritius and a good selection of literature.

**Librairie du Trèfle** (☎ 212 1106; 5 Royal St) An atmospheric place catering for the local market.

### Emergency

**Ambulance** (☎ 114)

**Fire services** (☎ 995)

**Police** (☎ emergency 999, headquarters 203 1212; Line Barracks, Lord Kitchener St)

### Internet Access

**Cyber Café** (☎ 210 6978; Dumat St; ☎ 9am–4pm Mon–Fri) A small place near the Victoria Sq bus station.

**Smart Net Café** (☎ 210 2177; Ramphul Bldg, Chaussée St; ☎ 9am–4pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sat) Small but centrally located.

**Zenith Internet Café** (Astrolabe, Port Louis Waterfront; ☎ 10am–8pm Mon–Thu, 10am–10pm Fri & Sat, 10am–4pm Sun) The best in town, with plug-in for laptops possible.

## Medical Services

**Dr Jeetoo Hospital** (☎ 212 3201; Volcy Pougnet St) Provides 24-hour medical and dental treatment and has a 24-hour pharmacy. Staff speak English and French.

**Medical Trading Pharmacy** (☎ 294 0440; Chaussée St) One of the best pharmacies in the city, just by Company Gardens.

## Money

You'll find ATMs throughout Port Louis, while all the main banks are concentrated around Sir William Newton St. Standard banking hours are 9am to 3.15pm Monday to Thursday, 9am to 3.30pm Friday. Some banks are open on Saturday mornings, while those at the airport are open whenever flights arrive.

**Barclays** (☎ 207 1800; Sir William Newton St)

**HSBC** (☎ 203 8333; Pl S Bissoondoyal)

**Mauritius Commercial Bank** (MCB; ☎ 202 5000; 9–15 Sir William Newton St)

**State Bank of Mauritius** (☎ 202 1111; State Bank Tower, Pl S Bissoondoyal)

## Post

**Central post office** (☎ 208 2851; Place du Quai; ☎ 8.15am–4pm Mon–Fri, 8.15–11.45am Sat) The last 45 minutes before closing are for stamp sales only.

## Tourist Information

**Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority** (MTPA; ☎ 210 1545; www.mauritius.net; Air Mauritius Centre, President John Kennedy St; ☎ 9am–4pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sat) Distributes maps of Port Louis and Mauritius and can advise on car hire, excursions and hotels throughout the country.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Port Louis is a city with a big underclass and as such is not safe at night. After dark all travellers should stick to well-lit main streets and avoid Company Gardens, favoured hang out of pimps and drug dealers. If you don't know your exact route, take a taxi. During the daytime it's a very safe city but beware of pickpockets anywhere, although particularly in the market and around the bus stations.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Most of Port Louis' sights are scattered around the waterfront and southeast along Poudrière St and Intendance St. Although some, such as

Fort Adelaide, are slightly further out, the distances are small and you can easily hop around the shops, museums and the market in a day.

## Central Market

Port Louis' rightly famous **Central Market** (☎ 5.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat, 5.30am–11.30pm Sun), the centre of the local economy since Victorian times, was cleaned up considerably in a 2004 renovation. Many comment that it's lost much of its dirty charm and atmosphere (you're far less likely to see rats, although it's still quite possible!), but it's still a good place to get a feel for the everyday life of many locals, watch the hawkers at work and buy some souvenirs. Most authentic are the wonderful fruit and vegetable sections (including herbal medicines and aphrodisiacs) and the meat, fish and seafood market.

If you're looking for souvenirs, a wide variety of Malagasy handicrafts are available, along with souvenir T-shirts of varying quality. The level of hustling here can be tiresome, however, and you'll have to bargain hard; start by slashing the price quoted by about 30%.

## Blue Penny Museum

Whether or not you fully understand the philatelic obsession with the Mauritian one penny and two-pence stamps of 1847, the **Blue Penny Museum** (☎ 210 8176; www.bluepenny.museum.com; Caudan Waterfront; adult/child/family Rs 150/80/350; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat) is far more wide ranging than its name suggests, taking in the history of the island's exploration, settlement and colonial period. It's Port Louis' best museum, well lit and designed, with a fantastic selection of maps, photographs and engravings from different periods in history, as well as a gallery for temporary exhibitions and a good shop.

### STAMP OF APPROVAL

Philatelists (stamp collectors to the rest of us) go weak at the knees at the mention of the Mauritian 'Post Office' one-penny and two-pence stamps. Issued in 1847, these stamps were incorrectly printed with the words 'Post Office' rather than 'Post Paid'. They were recalled upon discovery of the error, but not before the wife of the British governor had mailed out a few dozen on invitations to one of her famous balls!

These stamps now rank among the most valuable in the world. The 'Bordeaux cover', a letter bearing both stamps which was mailed to France, was last sold for a staggering US\$3.8 million. In 1993 a consortium of Mauritian companies paid US\$2.2 million for the pair of unused one-penny and two-pence stamps now on display in Port Louis' Blue Penny Museum (above). This is the only place in the world where the two can be seen together on public view.

The pride of the museum's collection is two of the world's rarest stamps: the red one-penny and blue two-pence 'Post Office' stamps issued in 1847 (see the boxed text, below). To preserve the colours, they are only lit up for 10 minutes at a time: every hour, on the half-hour. They were purchased by a group of Mauritian companies as a national treasure and are probably the most valuable objects on the entire island!

On the ground floor you'll see the country's most famous work of art: a superbly life-like statue by the Mauritian sculptor Prosper d'Épinay, carved in 1884. Based on Bernardin de St-Pierre's novel *Paul et Virginie* (see the boxed text, p83), it shows the young hero carrying his sweetheart across a raging torrent.

## Natural History Museum

There's only one real attraction at this small but proud **museum** (☎ 212 0639; Chaussée St; admission free; ☎ 9am–4pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 9am–noon Sat) and that's to see the famous – though somewhat grubby – reconstruction of a dodo. Scottish scientists assembled the curious-looking bird in the late 19th century, using the only complete dodo skeleton in existence (see p78). The rest of the museum's three halls get marks for trying, but the majority of the other exhibits are a sad testimony to the fact that fish don't readily lend themselves to the process of taxidermy. Look out, however, for the stuffed birds, including the solitary and red rail, both also now extinct.

## Chinatown

The Chinese have traditionally occupied a quietly industrious position in the life of Port Louis. The region between the two 'friendship gates' on Royal St forms the centre of Port Louis' Chinatown. Here you'll see the rich



you), but you should avoid it at night when it's a flash point for muggings, drug deals and pimps. Once the vegetable patch of the French East India Company in early colonial times, it's now best known for its statues of local sculptor Prosper d'Épinay and the much-loved musician Ti-Frère (see p44).

### Municipal Theatre

This appealing theatre on Jules Koenig St has changed little since it was built in 1822, making it the oldest theatre in the Indian Ocean region. Decorated in the style of the classic London theatres, it seats about 600 over three levels, and has an exquisitely painted dome ceiling with cherubs and chandeliers. Photos of Margot Fonteyn, who danced here in 1975, adorn the foyer. Performances are in the evenings – usually at 8pm. Unless you get lucky and someone lets you glimpse inside, you'll need to buy tickets for a performance to visit.

### Mauritius Postal Museum

This rather lacklustre two-room museum (☎ 213 4812; Pl du Quai; admission free; ☎ 9am–3.45pm Mon–Fri, 9–11.30am Sat) beside the central post office houses a mishmash of commemorative stamps and other postal paraphernalia from around the world. These include copies of the famous 'Post Office' stamps of 1847 (see the boxed text, p57), though you can now see the originals in the Blue Penny Museum. There's also a decent display of 19th-century and early-20th-century communication devices. The museum shop sells replica first-day covers of the famous stamps, which make unusual souvenirs.

### Cathedrals & Churches

Notable places of worship include the **St James Cathedral** (Poudrière St) and **St Louis Cathedral** (Sir William Newton St). Inaugurated in 1850, St James has a peaceful, wood-panelled interior with plaques commemorating local worthies. The more austere, but also busier, St Louis Cathedral dates from 1932 and is popular with the Chinese community.

The modern **chapel and shrine of Marie Reine de la Paix** (Monseigneur Leen Ave) is a popular spot for prayers, and the ornamental gardens offer views over the city. The most important place of pilgrimage for Mauritian Christians is the shrine of Père Laval on the city's northern outskirts (p66).

### SSR Memorial Centre for Culture

This simple **house museum** (☎ 242 0053; Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam St; admission free; ☎ 9am–4pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sat) near the Jardin Plaine Verte was home to Mauritius' father of independence, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, from 1935 until 1968. It's an interesting exhibit on his life, with some fascinating photographs, a collection of his personal belongings and even films about the great man, beloved by all Mauritians.

### Fort Adelaide

Fort Adelaide, also known as the Citadel, resembles a Moorish fortress. Built by the British, the fort sits high on the crown of the hill, offering splendid views over the city and its harbour. The quickest route up is via Suffren St. Allow around 10 minutes for the climb.

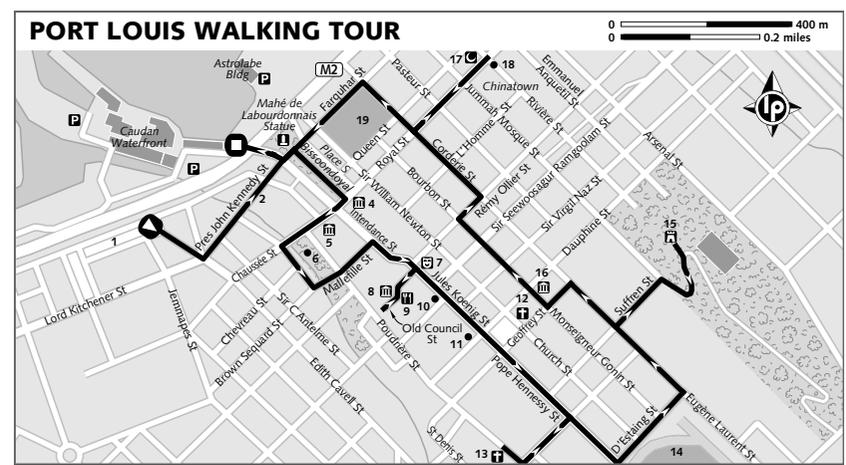
### Champ de Mars Racecourse

This racecourse was a military training ground until the **Mauritius Turf Club** (☎ 211 2147; www.mauritursturfclub.com) was founded in 1812, making it the second-oldest racecourse in the world. Mauritian independence was proclaimed here in 1968. Within the racecourse stands a statue of **King Edward VII** by the sculptor Prosper d'Épinay, and the **Malartic Tomb**, an obelisk to a French governor.

The racing season lasts from May to late November, with meetings usually held on a Saturday. The biggest race of all is the Maiden Cup in September. If you're here on a race day, it's well worth joining the throng of betting-crazy locals. Tickets for the stands cost Rs 150, but admission to the rest of the ground is usually free. For dates of meetings, contact the Mauritius Turf Club or check the local press.

### WALKING TOUR

Begin your exploration on **Victoria Sq (1)**, one of the capital's main bus stations and a chaotic hub of activity from dawn till dusk. Watch the street hawkers, the food sellers and busy locals out shopping as you wander down **President John Kennedy St (2)** and join the city's grandest colonial avenue, **Place 5 Bissoondoyal (3)** (p59), then walk inland towards **Government House (4)** (p59), in front of which a decidedly imperious statue of Queen Victoria still stands guard. Turn right along **Chaussée St** to pay a quick visit to the dodo in the **Natural History Museum (5)** (p57), then cut up through lovely **Company Gardens (6)** (p59),



which provides a rare patch of green in the city centre, with huge banyan trees and other tropical delights (prostitutes and drug dealers notwithstanding). Head up Mallefille St and turn right on Intendance St. Here you'll see the charming **Municipal Theatre (7)** (opposite) pretty perfectly preserved from British colonial times. On the other side of the road, stroll down Old Council St, a charming cobbled lane leading gently uphill to one of Port Louis' most attractive corners. Here you'll find a clutch of colonial buildings, one of which contains the **Photography Museum (8)** (p59) while the **Restaurant du Vieux Conseil (9)** (p63) occupies the courtyard of another and makes a great place for lunch.

Retracing your steps back to busy Jules Koenig St and turning right will take you past the modern and unprepossessing **City Hall (10)** and the more appealing **Supreme Court (11)**, built in 1780, with its ornate gates and shady courtyard. A little further on, **St Louis Cathedral (12)** (opposite) lies off to your left (visible across an open square). You're now on Pope Hennessy St, from where you could take a short detour south along Labourdonnais St to **St James Cathedral (13)** (opposite).

A row of striking, colonial-era bungalows and a grey-stone secondary school, built in 1893, mark the top end of Pope Hennessy St. Beyond lies the **Champs de Mars racecourse (14)** (opposite), though outside the race season there's nothing in particular to see. Better to save your energy for the climb to **Fort Adelaide (15)** (opposite) for expansive views.

From the fort, drop back down to Monseigneur Gonin St to see the grand, colonnaded **archbishop's residence (16)**, then head northwest along Corderie St, lined with cloth merchants, to Royal St. A right turn here brings you to the delightful **Jumma Mosque (17)** (p59) and then to the first of the 'friendship gates' that marks the entrance to **Chinatown (18)** (p57). When you've had your fill of exploring, head down Jumma Mosque St to Farquhar St, turn left and you'll soon find yourself caught up in the pell-mell of the **Central Market (19)** (p57). Finally, take one of the underpasses to the waterfront for some well-earned refreshment.

### SLEEPING

There's not a huge choice of accommodation in Port Louis – there are three business hotels (two of which are very smart and part of the Caudan Waterfront complex), while the rest cater to budget travellers and are all fairly mediocre.

### Budget

**Hotel Le Grand Carnot** (☎ 240 3054; 17 Dr Edouard Laurent St; s/d incl breakfast Rs 500/600) This is an atmospheric, slightly noisy place for backpackers, but the best of the budget gang. The rooms are rather makeshift but pleasant enough; some have big balconies overlooking the busy daily clothes market outside.

**Bourbon Tourist Hotel** (☎ 240 4407; fax 242 2087; 36 Jumma Mosque St; s/d/t incl breakfast Rs 770/880/1200; 🚽) Slap-bang in the middle of Chinatown,

this idiosyncratic 16-room place feels more like a student hall of residence than a hotel. The bathrooms are pretty horrible, although all rooms have air-con, TVs and phones. It's on the 1st floor (go through the tunnel from the street).

**Tandoori Hotel** (☎ 212 0031; Jemmapes St; s/d Rs 600/1200; 🚻) While it's extremely noisy during the day due to its location next to the main bus station, it's perfectly quiet at night here. The rooms are comfortable, but there's no natural daylight in any of the rooms, which lends it a depressing air. The price goes up by Rs 200 per person for air-con.

### Midrange

**Le St Georges Hotel** (☎ 211 2581; www.blue-season-hotels.com; 19 St Georges St; s/d incl breakfast Rs 1500/1950; 🚻 📺 📺) Towering above the surrounding residential neighbourhood, Le St Georges is excellent value for money. The rooms are fairly unexciting but they are clean and equipped with all the necessary comforts. There's a decent breakfast and a pool for relaxing by as well as a pleasant bar and restaurant. The location is also good, just a five-minute walk from the centre of town.

**Le Suffren Hotel & Marina** (☎ 202 4900; www.le-suffrenhotel.com; Caudan Waterfront; s/d Rs 3600/4600; 🚻 📺 📺) The newest addition to Port Louis' hotel scene, Le Suffren is the trendier, less stuffy sister hotel to the Labourdonnais, just a short complimentary boat ride away. For better or for worse you feel like you're almost out of the city despite being just a couple of minutes from the waterfront. The rooms are smaller than the Labourdonnais but the place has a very pleasant, convivial feel with an excellent bar and restaurant.

**Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel** (☎ 202 4000; www.labourdonnais.com; Caudan Waterfront; s/d incl breakfast Rs 5200/6200; 🚻 📺 📺) Definitely the best in town, the Labourdonnais is an ultra-smart business hotel on the Caudan Waterfront. The rooms are excellent – even the standards are huge. All are bathed in light, have cavernous bathrooms and most have excellent views of the city and harbour, particularly the so-called 'turret rooms' at each top corner. Facilities include a gym, pool and business centre.

### EATING

Port Louis has a great eating scene where the ethnic diversity of the city again comes up trumps. Chinatown is packed with good

little Chinese options, while European cafés, smart restaurants on the waterfront and endless snackbars give you plenty of choice. As the middle classes tend to reside outside the city many places are only open for lunch. In the evening and at weekends head to the waterfront for any degree of choice. Another option is to head out of town to Domaine Les Pailles (p65) for a choice of expensive but excellent options.

### Restaurants

#### BUDGET

**Mystic Masala** (Port Louis Waterfront; set menus Rs 60-110 🚻 lunch & dinner) Tasty Indian snacks and light meals are the order of the day at this harbourfront kiosk with its handful of trestle tables. Portions aren't huge but a side order of samosas or a *dosa masala* (pancake-like bread with a spicy potato filling) and a glass of *lassi* (yoghurt drink) or *alouda* (sweet, milky drink) will round things off nicely.

**Le Calife** (☎ 203 4561; Edith Cavell St; mains Rs 100; 🚻 lunch Mon-Fri) This attractive place is one of the best spots for lunch in town, teeming with locals and full of atmosphere. The homemade halal biryani is the speciality here, and most who try come back for more. Other Creole and Indian specialties are also on the menu.

**our pick First Restaurant** (☎ 212 0685; cnr Royal & Corderie Sts; mains from Rs 120; 🚻 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) If the age-old rule that a good Chinese restaurant is full of Chinese diners applies, then First is a winner. Packed with large family groups enjoying vast feasts of delicious Cantonese cooking, this is Chinatown's finest and prices are surprisingly reasonable for the quality of the fare.

**Debonairs Pizza** (☎ 210 9203; Intendance St; sandwiches from Rs 80, pizzas from Rs 180; 🚻 lunch & dinner) The pizza at this fast-spreading South African chain is nothing special, but it's a good place for a quick, cheap lunch. There are tables inside, but takeaway and delivery are available ('we deliver smartly' is the restaurant's slightly odd tagline), as are a number of non-pizza options.

**Tandoori Express** (☎ 210 9898; Astrolabe Bldg, Port Louis Waterfront; mains Rs 75-200, set menus Rs 100-175; 🚻 lunch & dinner, closed Sun & dinner Mon) Popular with local families day and night, this great canteen serves up delicious curries and thalis, superb naan bread and a range of other Indian dishes to suit all tastes. Order and pay inside and your food will be brought out to your waterside table.

### MIDRANGE

**La Bonne Marmite** (☎ 212 4406; 18 Sir William Newton St; set menus Rs 150; 🚻 lunch only Mon-Fri; 🚻) This quaint establishment is one to savour away from the glitzy waterfront gang. Its unfussy menu of Creole, Indian and Chinese dishes is excellent value and the welcome is always friendly.

**Black Steer** (☎ 211 9147; Caudan Waterfront; burgers Rs 150-200, grills from Rs 250; 🚻 lunch & dinner; 🚻) This popular steakhouse overlooks the harbour and offers great steaks, mixed grills, combos and the like. It's now added a few dishes for non-carnivores, such as baked spuds and vegetable curries, but its stock in trade are the excellent hamburgers and rump steaks.

**La Flore Mauricienne** (☎ 212 2200; 10 Intendance St; mains Rs 150-450; 🚻 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat; 🚻) There's something rather Parisian about the bustle and brusque service here, but then this is a long-standing favourite lunchtime haunt of the local business and political elite as well as tourists. The daily specials are always good value, and there's a big selection of dishes including a good vegetarian choice. Inside it's a more formal setting, whereas the terrace is a great place to people-watch.

**Restaurant du Vieux Conseil** (☎ 211 0393; Old Council St; mains Rs 200; 🚻 lunch Mon-Sat) Down a charming side street, this lunchtime institution must have the most delightful location of any restaurant in Port Louis. The food is nothing spectacular, and somewhat pricey, but there's a good choice from crepes and salads to octopus curry and smoked marlin, and the charming setting is worth making a diversion for.

**Namaste** (☎ 211 6710; Caudan Waterfront; mains from Rs 200; 🚻 lunch & dinner, closed lunch Sun; 🚻) One of the best Indian restaurants in town, Namaste manages to be atmospheric despite its location in the sanitised Caudan Waterfront. The specialities here are North Indian (and not huge either), but it's a classy place with excellent service. Book ahead to get a table on the balcony outside as they're always in demand.

### TOP END

**L'Escale** (☎ 202 4000; Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel, Caudan Waterfront; mains from Rs 250; 🚻 6.30am-11pm; 🚻) The main restaurant of the Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel, this refined and elegant spot is one of the best in town. The broad menu includes an excellent vegetarian selection, as well as superb local crea-

tions such as prawn stew and pan-fried red snapper.

**Le Capitaine** (☎ 213 0038; Caudan Waterfront; mains Rs 250-500; 🚻 lunch & dinner; 🚻) Given its location and standards of service, this surprisingly reasonable restaurant specialises in seafood and also offers classic French dishes such as duck confit. It's in a great location with lots of tables on the terrace overlooking the harbour and has a stylish interior décor.

**The Courtyard** (☎ 210 0810; Chevreau St; mains from Rs 400; 🚻 lunch Mon-Fri; 🚻) Built around an eponymous courtyard, this newly opened European-style restaurant also features a stylish, understated indoor dining space. The meaty menu includes Australian beef and fresh local seafood dishes realised with flair. A good spot to impress.

**La Rose des Vents** (☎ 202 4000; Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel, Caudan Waterfront; mains Rs 300-800; 🚻 lunch & dinner, closed Sat lunch & Sun; 🚻) The Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel boasts this upmarket seafood restaurant, famed for its lobster dishes.

### Quick Eats

Port Louis is a snackers' paradise. The Central Market and bus stations provide happy hunting grounds, but you'll find stalls all over town peddling samosas and *gâteaux piments* (deep-fried balls of lentils and chilli), sandwiches or more substantial curries. To spot the best just look for the queues from mid-morning onwards. A perennial favourite is the *dhal puris stall* (cnr Sir William Newton & Rémy Ollier Sts). Nearby, **Bombay Sweets Mart** (7 Rémy Ollier St) is famous for the Indian nibbles colourfully known as *caca pigeon* (literally, 'pigeon droppings'). It also sells other sweet and savoury snacks. If you'd rather sit down to eat, head for Tandoori Express or Mystic Masala (see opposite).

### Self-Catering

Self-caterers should head for the Central Market. There's also the handy **Winner's Supermarket** (Sir Cécilourt Antelme St). Most restaurants, apart from the expensive ones, do takeaway.

### DRINKING

Port Louis is not exactly a happening place at night and come sunset the city is virtually silent as the commuters retire to the Central Plateau towns. What evening life there is tends to be concentrated on the Caudan Waterfront.

**Keg & Marlin** (☎ 211 6821; Caudan Waterfront; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Thu, to 3am Fri, to 1am Sat & Sun; ☎) The location makes this a great place to enjoy a sundowner while watching the world go by. While its outdoor seating is as Mauritian as can be, inside it's a garish imitation of an English pub. There's live music here at weekends and it's unquestionably the main bar in the city, enjoying popularity with expats, locals and visitors alike.

**Beer & Spice** (☎ 210 5376; Astrolabe Bldg, Port Louis Waterfront; ☎ 9am-11pm; ☎) On the other side of the waterfront complex, this quiet and friendly café-bar is a popular place with locals, serving a wide variety of drinks, good sandwiches and decent coffee.

**Latitude 20** (☎ 202 4000; Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel, Caudan Waterfront; ☎ 9am-midnight; ☎) Despite being a hotel bar this is probably still Port Louis' best spot for a cocktail. The nautical theme may not scream good taste, but the drinks are very well made and there's usually a pianist doing his thing in the corner.

**Sunset Café** (☎ 211 9137; Caudan Waterfront; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat, to 11pm Sun; ☎) Usually a place where parched day-trippers end up taking refuge in cold beer, this is an over-priced spot, but not unpleasant, with views over the harbour.

## ENTERTAINMENT

Port Louis offers very little in the way of evening entertainment. A movie, a cocktail or a gamble are about all that's available; for nightlife you'll be better off in Grand Baie or Flic en Flac.

## Casino

**Port Louis Casino** (☎ 210 4203; Caudan Waterfront; ☎ 10am-4am, gaming tables 8pm-4am; ☎) The mighty popular city casino is about the liveliest place in town after midnight – its salient feature externally is its ship-shaped design, crowned at its prow by the campeste lion imaginable. Meow. There are slot machines downstairs and blackjack and American roulette on the 1st floor. Smart-casual dress is required.

## Cinemas

**Star Cinema** (☎ 211 5361; Caudan Waterfront; tickets Rs 150; ☎) This is Port Louis' biggest and best cinema, with three screens offering mainstream international releases. Films are generally dubbed in French and there are usually four or five screenings a day.

**Cinemaxx** (☎ 210 7416; Caudan Waterfront; tickets Rs 100; ☎) The two-screen Cinemaxx usually shows one Hindi or Tamil film and one international release daily. Again, most films are dubbed in French, though occasionally you'll find one with English subtitles.

## Live Music

**Keg & Marlin** (☎ 211 6821; Caudan Waterfront; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Thu, to 3am Fri, to 1am Sat & Sun; ☎) At the weekends the Keg & Marlin transforms into Port Louis' only live-music venue. Standards vary enormously from rock outfits to *séga*.

## Theatre

**Municipal Theatre** (Jules Koenig St) There are frequent plays – in French, English and Creole – as well as jazz and classical music recitals at Port Louis' principal theatre. Ticket prices vary, but most events cost around Rs 100. Look for announcements in the local press or call the tourist office to find out what's on. Theatre tickets can be purchased at the box office in the theatre itself.

## SHOPPING

**Central Market** (☎ 5.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 5.30am-11.30pm Sun) Port Louis' main market has a wide selection of T-shirts, basketry, spices and souvenirs; bargain to get a decent price.

**Craft Market** (☎ 210 0139) Based in the Caudan Waterfront, this market is less fun but also less hassle than central market. You'll find more upmarket souvenirs, such as Mauritian glass and essential oils from the Domaine de l'Ylang Ylang. The model ship manufacturer **MAST** (☎ 211 7170) also has an outlet here.

The Caudan Waterfront is also the place to go for trendy knick-knacks and designer boutiques, including Floreal, Maille St, Shibani, IV Pl@y and Habit. **Power Music** (☎ 211 9143) stocks a good selection of CDs by local artists.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

All of the main airlines serving Mauritius have offices near the waterfront.

**Air Austral** (☎ 202 6677; Rogers House, 5 President John Kennedy St, Port Louis)

**Air France** (☎ 202 6747; Rogers House, 5 President John Kennedy St, Port Louis)

**Air Madagascar** (☎ 203 2150; IBL House, Caudan Waterfront, Port Louis)

**Air Mauritius** (☎ 207 7212; Air Mauritius Centre, President John Kennedy St, Port Louis)

**Air Seychelles** (☎ 202 6655; Rogers House, 5 President John Kennedy St, Port Louis)

**British Airways** (☎ 202 8000; IBL House, Caudan Waterfront, Port Louis)

**Emirates** (☎ 213 9100; Harbour Front Bldg, Place d'Armes, Port Louis)

**Singapore Airlines** (☎ 208 7695; 3 President John Kennedy Street, Port Louis)

**South African Airways** (☎ 202 6737; Rogers House, 5 President John Kennedy St, Port Louis)

## Bus

Port Louis' two bus stations are both located in the city centre. Buses for northern and eastern destinations, such as Trou aux Biches, Grand Baie and Pamplemousses, leave from Immigration Square, northeast of the Central Market.

Buses for southern and western destinations, such as Mahébourg, Curepipe and Quatre Bornes, use the Victoria Square terminus just south of the centre.

The first departure on most routes is at about 6am; the last leaves at around 6pm.

## Car

Car rental is expensive in Port Louis. You'll find better rates in major tourist centres such as Grand Baie, Flic en Flac or Mahébourg. Given the size of the island, all car-rental agencies will deliver a car to your hotel anywhere on the island – therefore it makes sense to contact agencies outside the capital such as Beau Bassin's **Exodus Car Hire** (☎ 454 4396; www.exoduscarhire.com) who will charge a small fee to bring the car to you.

## Ferry

Ferries to Rodrigues and Réunion dock beside the passenger terminal on Quai D of Port Louis harbour, 1km northwest of town. For more information about boats to and from Rodrigues see p125, and p306 for Réunion.

## GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

There are no special airport buses, but regular services between Port Louis and Mahébourg call at the airport; the stop is near the roundabout, roughly 300m from the terminal buildings. Heading to the airport from Port Louis, allow two hours to be on the safe side and make sure the conductor knows where you're going, as drivers occasionally skip the detour down to the airport.

Expect to pay around Rs 700 to Rs 900 for a taxi ride from Port Louis to the airport.

## Car

Given the number of traffic snarls, it's not worth trying to drive around Port Louis. Day-trippers are advised to leave their car in one of the car parks in the waterfront complex. These are open from 7am to 11pm and cost Rs 25 for the first four hours plus Rs 25 for each additional hour.

Cars can be parked on the street for a maximum of two hours at a time in any one place and the appropriate number of parking coupons, available at any filling station, must be displayed on the dashboard. See p153 for more about street parking.

## Taxi

Expect to pay around Rs 50 to Rs 100 for a short taxi ride across town, and slightly more at night. As usual, always agree to a price beforehand. It's best to avoid using taxis during morning and evening rush hours, when you'll probably end up just sitting in a traffic jam. See p153 for more information on taxis.

## AROUND PORT LOUIS Domaine Les Pailles

Just a few miles outside of the capital the strange sugar-estate-turned-theme-park **Domaine Les Pailles** (Map p86; ☎ 286 4225; www.domainelespailles.net; ☎ 10am-5pm) has been transformed into a cultural and heritage centre that makes for an enjoyable day or half-day excursion. The facilities include rides in horse-drawn carriages, a miniature railway, a working replica of a traditional ox-driven sugar mill, a rum distillery producing the estate's own brew, a spice garden, a quad-biking circuit and a children's playground.

Visitors can choose to tour the site by train, horse carriage or jeep, with the cost of entry varying accordingly. The cheapest options are one-hour tours by train at Rs 100/80 per adult/child and by horse-drawn carriage at Rs 110/90. A jeep safari costs Rs 450/250 and more expensive packages including lunch are also available. Quad biking costs from Rs 350 for 30 minutes.

On weekdays it's also possible to horse ride around the estate. Call the riding centre, **Les Écuries du Domaine** (☎ 286 4240; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat), to make a reservation. An hour's riding costs Rs 700 per person.



complete with a nine-hole golf course, tennis courts and riding stables. It has a great beach where guests can indulge in everything from snorkelling to water-skiing, and a choice of three restaurants.

**La Plantation** (Map p67; ☎ 204 3000; www.apavou-hotels.com; Baie des Tortues; s/d with half board Rs 9000/13,500; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) Open since 2000, this huge complex is an all-encompassing resort built in an impressive colonial style (particularly striking is the pool of flowers that greets you in reception, not to mention the 1000-sq-metre pool below). It's got a great location between the Citron River and the ocean, and the beach is lovely.

**Le Victoria** (Map p67; ☎ 204 2000; www.levictoria-hotel.com; Pointe aux Piments; s/d with half board from Rs 9300/13,300 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) This relaxed four-star hotel is popular with families and water-sports enthusiasts and it's easy to see why, with its large sea-facing rooms, good beach and all-inclusive water-sports activities.

**Le Meridien Ile Maurice** (Map p67; ☎ 204 3333; www.lemeridien.com; Pointe aux Piments; room only Rs 15,000; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) This impressive new edition to the luxury hotels in Pointe aux Piments is stylish and enjoys a good stretch of beach. The building itself is not particularly attractive and some won't enjoy the sheer size of the place – this is not for an intimate getaway but rather for an upmarket activity holiday: the variety of water sports on offer is superb and the rooms are huge.

**our pick Oberoi** (Map p67; ☎ 204 3600; www.oberoi-hotels.com; Pointe aux Piments; r from Rs 34,500, with private pool from Rs 68,000; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) Quite simply stunning, the Oberoi is definitely the north's most famous and best hotel. Set in copious gardens, the hotel boasts a gorgeous beach and stunningly set out grounds including a high-flowing waterfall that dominates the ensemble. The best villas here have their own pools and gardens enjoying total privacy and making them perfect for honeymooners. Inside it's all understated luxury, an inventive mix of African and Asian design, making the most of natural light. The two pools can easily lay claim to being the most beautiful in all Mauritius and other features include wonderfully chic public areas, superb restaurants and a world-class spa.

## TROU AUX BICHES & AROUND

Relaxed Trou aux Biches and the neighbouring village of Mont Choisy are fast-

developing tourist destinations full of people seeking better beaches than Grand Baie while staying nearby for activities and restaurants. Trou aux Biches (The Does' Wateringhole) enjoys gorgeous white-sand beaches shaded by casuarina trees, continuing almost unbroken to sleepy Mont Choisy, a charming spot with more great beaches leading up along the gently curving bay to Pointe aux Canoniers, one of the most fashionable spots in the country with a great selection of accommodation and dining options.

The lagoon, sheltered from the prevailing winds, provides great swimming, while the variety and abundance of marine life coupled with good visibility makes for some excellent snorkelling and diving.

There's no doubt that the ongoing development boom here has rather robbed the area of its quiet, unspoilt feel, but it's still cheaper and far less hectic than Grand Baie. Even the beaches are pleasantly uncrowded during the week, although there's fierce competition for picnic spots at weekends.

## Information

Neither Trou aux Biches nor Mont Choisy offer much in the way of shops and other facilities. There are a few grocery stores scattered around and a branch of the **Mauritius Commercial Bank** (MCB; Royal Rd, Mont Choisy), with a 24-hour ATM and a **bureau de change** (☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat).

## Activities

Trou aux Biches and Mont Choisy are both important water-sports centres. Activities on offer range from touring the lagoon in a glass-bottomed boat to parasailing, water-skiing, deep-sea fishing and diving.

Snorkelling equipment (Rs 150 per day) can be rented at the **boat house** (☎ 728 4335; ☎ 9am-5pm) on Trou aux Biches' public beach. They also rent out pedalos and kayaks (Rs 400 per hour) and offer a variety of other activities, including glass-bottomed boat tours (Rs 450 per hour per person), water-skiing (Rs 550 for 12 minutes) and parasailing (Rs 1000 for 10 minutes).

Prices are similar at the **Casuarina Hotel boat house** (☎ 759 1127; Mont Choisy; ☎ 9am-5pm). In addition, they also offer windsurfing (Rs 300 per hour) and catamaran outings to the northern islands (p78).

## DEEP-SEA FISHING

Deep-sea anglers should head for the **Corsaire Club** (☎ 265 5209; fax 265 6267; ☎ 9am-5pm) beside Le Pescatore restaurant in Mont Choisy. A half-day's boat charter costs around Rs 13,000, and a full day will set you back Rs 16,000.

## DIVING

Dive centres that are consistently recommended for their professional and friendly service include **Nautilus Diving** (☎ 265 5495; www.nautilusdivers.com; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat), at the Trou aux Biches Hotel, and **Atlantis Diving** (☎ 265 7172; www.atlantis.freewebspace.com; ☎ 8am-5pm), located further south along the main road.

Other good options in the area include **Prodiver** (☎ 265 6552; www.geocities.com/padgraphics/prodiver; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) at the Casuarina Hotel, **Dive Dream** (☎ 265 5367; www.dive-dream.org; Trou aux Biches; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) and **Blue Water Diving** (☎ 265 7186; www.bluewaterdiving-center.com; Trou aux Biches; ☎ 8am-4.30pm). Dives start at around Rs 1000 to Rs 1200, rising to Rs 1500 or so for a night dive.

## GOLF

The nine-hole **golf course** (☎ 204 6565; ☎ 7am-6pm; green fee Rs 800, club hire Rs 400) at the Trou aux Biches Hotel is one of the few public-access courses in Mauritius. There's a heli-pad for those in a real hurry.

## HORSE RIDING

There's an excellent riding school, **Horse Riding Delights** (☎ 265 6159; Mont Choisy Sugar Estate; ☎ daily by reservation) on the edge of Mont Choisy, just after the junction by the Tarisa Resort. Here you can ride in over 200 hectares of land, populated with deer and giant tortoises.

## SUBMARINE RIDES

If you fancy diving but don't want to get wet, **Blue Safari Submarine** (☎ 263 3333; www.blue-safari.com; Mont Choisy; adult/child Rs 3200/1800; ☎ 9am-4pm) takes you down among the coral and fishes to a depth of 35m. The ride lasts roughly two hours, of which 40 minutes are spent underwater, with departures every hour according to demand. Reservations are recommended at least a day in advance.

### TROU AUX BICHES & AROUND

SLEEPING	
Beach Villas.....	8 B2
Casuarina Hotel.....	9 B2
Colonial Beach Hotel.....	10 A3
Coralia Mont Choisy.....	11 B2
Grand Baie Travel & Tours.....	(see 8)
Hotel Villa Kissen.....	12 B2
Le Canonnier.....	13 B1
Le Sakoa.....	14 A2
Nick Tour.....	15 A3
Residences C'est Ici.....	16 A2
Rocksheen Villa.....	17 B2
Tarisa Resort.....	18 B2
Trou aux Biches Hotel.....	19 B2

EATING	
Chez Popo Supermarket.....	20 A2
Coco de Mer.....	21 A3
Hidden Reef.....	22 B1
La Cravache d'Or.....	23 A3
La Marmite Mauricienne.....	(see 24)
L'Assiette du Nord.....	24 B2
Le Pescatore.....	25 B2
Persand Royal Supermarket.....	26 B1
Pizza & Pasta.....	27 B2
Souvenir Restaurant.....	28 B2

INFORMATION	
MCB.....	1 B2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Atlantis Diving.....	2 A3
Blue Safari Submarine.....	(see 1)
Blue Water Diving.....	3 B2
Boat House.....	4 A2
Casuarina Hotel Boat House.....	(see 9)
Corsaire Club.....	(see 25)
Dive Dream.....	(see 24)
Golf Course.....	5 B2
Horse Riding Delights.....	6 B2
Mauritius Aquarium.....	7 A3
Nautilus Diving.....	(see 19)
Prodiver.....	(see 9)

DRINKING	
Latina.....	29 B1

TRANSPORT	
Flambeau.....	30 B2
Winkworth.....	(see 26)

## Sleeping

It seems almost every building along this stretch of coast is available for rent in some shape or form. Much of the accommodation is in the midrange bracket and consists of self-catering apartments, villas and bungalows, often with terraces or balconies for viewing the sunset. A few of the best are listed here.

For a wider choice, contact **Nick Tour** (☎ 265 5279; nicktour@intnet.mu; Trou aux Biches) and **Grand Baie Travel & Tours** (GBT; ☎ 265 5261; www.gbtt.com; Beach Villas, Mont Choisy); both manage a range of well-maintained accommodation in the area. You should try to book in advance for the best options, but there's nearly always something available at late notice.

## BUDGET

**Rocksheen Villa** (☎ 265 5043; www.rocksheenvilla.com; 161 Morcellement Jhuboo, Trou aux Biches; s/d incl breakfast Rs 550/650, studio from Rs 650; 🍷 🍷) Down a quiet side street about 300m back from the beach (coming from the sea turn left after passing La Marmite Mauricienne) is this homely guesthouse run by a charming Scottish-Mauritian couple. In fact, it has proven so popular that they've built an extension. Well run and spotlessly clean, the place receives consistently good reports from travellers.

**Hotel Villa Kissen** (☎ 265 5523; www.villa-kissen.com; Trou aux Biches; s/d incl breakfast Rs 850, studio Rs 1000; 🍷 🍷) This friendly guesthouse recently relocated to smarter premises near the beach. It's now a great option; each room comes with air-con, a private balcony, TV and safe. The studios have their own kitchens.

## MIDRANGE

**Beach Villas** (☎ 265 5261; www.gbtt.com; Mont Choisy; studio/apartment from Rs 2125/3150; 🍷 🍷) Grand Baie Travel & Tours have eight different properties in the area, all let from the office here. The accommodation is comfy, if a little sterile, consisting of self-catering studios (for two persons) and apartments (for up to four). The small beach is a bit rocky, although there's sand just 50m down.

**Résidences C'est Ici** (☎ 265 5231; www.cest-ici.com; Trou aux Biches; studio/apartment from Rs 3000/3300; 🍷) This hotel has spruce, well-equipped self-catering accommodation at very reasonable prices. The two-person studios through to the apartments for up to five all have their own terrace. It's set among coconut palms right on the beach.

**Colonial Beach Hotel** (☎ 261 5187; cbeach@intnet.mu; Trou aux Biches; s/d with half board Rs 4000/5500; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This small and intimate hotel on the beach offers decent accommodation in white two-storey blocks. There are two pools and good snorkelling right in front of the beach.

**our pick** **Le Sakoa** (☎ 265 5242; www.lesakoa.com; Trou aux Biches; s/d incl breakfast from Rs 4700; 🍷 🍷) Deservedly popular, the Sakoa needs to be booked well in advance as it's a great deal. This spacious accommodation is in wonderful two-storey thatched blocks radiating out from the fantastic beach. The whole place oozes style and carefree charm.

**Tarisa Resort** (☎ 265 6600; www.tarisa-hotel.com; Mont Choisy; s/d Rs 4700; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Mont Choisy's most-luxurious hotel, the attractive Tarisa is block booked by tour operators, mainly the French Look Voyages group, and isn't usually accessible to independent travellers; however, it's worth a try as it's well located and has great rooms.

**Coralia Mont Choisy** (☎ 265 6070; mont\_choisy@intnet.mu; Mont Choisy; s/d incl breakfast Rs 4968/6625, with half board Rs 5685/8065; 🍷 🍷 🍷) The rooms here may be fairly charmless, but there's a decent if rather small beach with a large range of water sports available and a good pool, plus the welcome is at least friendly.

**Casuarina Hotel** (☎ 204 5000; www.hotel-casuarina.com; Trou aux Biches; s/d with half board from Rs 6500/9000, apt room only from Rs 8000; 🍷 🍷) Definitely one of the more interesting midrange places, the Moorish style found externally here is matched by equally inventive apartment layouts. It's also pleasantly small and so feels very relaxed. The only minus is having to cross the road to the beach, but otherwise this place is great.

## TOP END

**Le Canonier** (☎ 263 7000; www.lecanonnier-hotel.com; Pointe aux Canoniers; s/d with half board from Rs 8000/11,500; 🍷 🍷 🍷) The location here is one of the best in the country: the beachy head of a peninsula with attractive beaches on all sides and even a ruined lighthouse (now rather sacrilegiously housing a kids club) on the grounds. It's a pity then that the accommodation is in rather uninspiring beige blocks. Inside the rooms are spacious (and equally beige) but the guests seem delighted with the experience. Oh, and check out that banyan tree – surely the largest in Mauritius?

**Trou aux Biches Hotel** (☎ 204 6565; www.trouauxbiches-hotel.com; Trou aux Biches; s/d with half board from Rs 12,650/18,000; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This classic beach hotel is on a great open stretch of bay that's superb for swimming. It boasts a huge pool and considerable style, although doesn't always feel five star. The huge grounds, comfortable accommodation and big range of activities make it particularly attractive to families.

## Eating

As ever more restaurants set up along here, there is an increasingly broad selection of outlets catering for most tastes. Self-caterers should head for the well-stocked **Chez Popo Supermarket** (Royal Rd) in Trou aux Biches. Around Mont Choisy, **Persand Royal Supermarket** (Royal Rd) is your best bet.

## BUDGET & MIDRANGE

**Souvenir Restaurant** (☎ 265 7047; Trou aux Biches; mains Rs 45-125; 🍷 7am-9pm Mon-Sat, 7am-2pm Sun) Always busy, this unfussy and friendly place sees locals and tourists enjoying quality food at low prices. As well as the restaurant there's a shop inside, giving it the feel of a local hub.

**L'Assiette du Nord** (☎ 265 7040; Trou aux Biches; mains Rs 125-200; 🍷 lunch & dinner) A popular option where you can opt for the terrace or a slightly smarter dining area behind the fish tank partition. Seafood features strongly, served in Chinese, Indian and Creole style. Try fish cooked in banana leaf with madras sauce or perhaps prawns in garlic butter.

**La Marmite Mauricienne** (☎ 265 7604; Trou aux Biches; mains from Rs 150; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This basic but sweet place down the road beyond L'Assiette du Nord has a pleasant outdoor feel, with lots of tables on the terrace (although sadly on a rather busy road). The menu is Mauritian, featuring mostly seafood, noodles and curries.

**Coco de Mer** (☎ 265 7316; Trou aux Biches; mains Rs 180; 🍷 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun; 🍷) This excellent Seychellois restaurant serves up top-notch fish dishes, curries and all manner of seafood. Each meal is accompanied by a delicious selection of salads and a lentil soup, so you're unlikely to leave empty. The Saturday evening buffet (Rs 300) is excellent value.

**Hidden Reef** (☎ 263 0567; Pointe aux Canoniers; mains Rs 250; 🍷 dinner; 🍷) This convivial, smart little addition to a great stretch of restaurants on the main road to Grand Baie has a beautifully lit courtyard for romantic al fresco dining and

a sumptuous menu of freshly sourced seafood and fish. The chocolate brownies are unbelievably good. One of our favourites.

**Pizza & Pasta** (☎ 265 7000; Mont Choisy; mains Rs 250; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Advertised for miles around, this large garden complex just next to the Mont Choisy public beach looks great from the outside and is pretty charmingly set out inside, but the food is sadly mediocre, overpriced and not particularly authentic either.

## TOP END

**La Cravache d'Or** (☎ 265 7021; Trou aux Biches; mains Rs 500; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) One of the best restaurants in Mauritius, La Cravache d'Or enjoys an absolutely gorgeous setting right on the beach, making it perfect for a romantic meal. The small daily-changing menu features meat and fish dishes, although vegetarians can be catered for. Reserve in advance at week-ends, and at any time you'd like to sure of sitting at one of the sea-view tables.

**our pick** **Le Pescatore** (☎ 265 6337; Mont Choisy; mains Rs 700, set menu Rs 2200; 🍷 lunch & dinner) For sheer style and charm Le Pescatore has to be our favourite restaurant in northern Mauritius. Wonderfully chic, light décor and a great terrace overlooking the fishing boats in the sea below set the scene for a truly superior eating experience. Dishes such as lobster in ginger and saké sauce, and St Brandon Berry fish with carrot juice and cardamom give you an idea of what to expect.

## Drinking

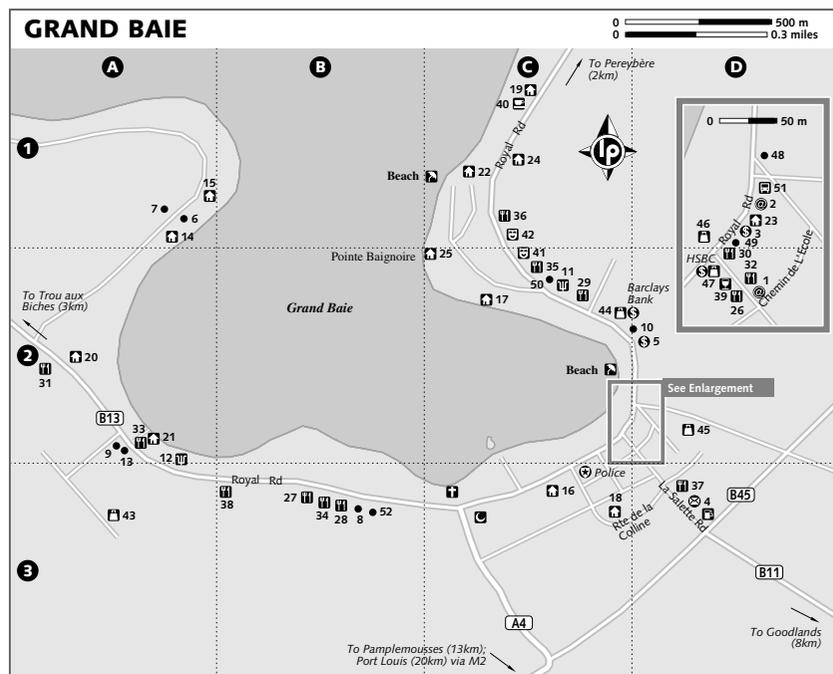
The best bar this side of Grand Baie is **Latina** (☎ 491 5338; Pointe aux Canoniers; 🍷 3pm-2am), a great little roadside DJ bar with friendly staff and dark-red décor. For clubs, you have to head into Grand Baie.

## Getting There & Around

Trou aux Biches and Mont Choisy are served by nonexpress buses running between Port Louis' Immigration Square bus station and Cap Malheureux via Grand Baie. There are bus stops about every 500m along the coastal highway.

A taxi to Grand Baie costs around Rs 200, to Port Louis Rs 300 and to the airport Rs 900. A return trip to Pamplemousses, including waiting time, should be in the region of Rs 500.

To hire a car, contact **Flambeau** (☎ 262 6357; Trou aux Biches) or the slightly more expensive **Winkworth** (☎ 263 4789; persand@intnet.mu), beside



the Persand Royal Supermarket in Pointe aux Canonnières.

## GRAND BAIÉ

pop 2800

Grand Baie was once called De Bogt Zonder Eyndt (Bay Without End) by the Dutch in the 17th century. Now frequently referred to as a resort and famous for its nightlife, Grand Baie is actually a surprisingly cosmopolitan and classy town, and although it's the centre of northern Mauritius' tourism industry, it can hardly be written off as a mere resort. Indeed, its beach is mediocre and its eponymous bay crowded with fishing boats. But despite this, many people prefer to eat, shop and go out in Grand Baie itself for the variety and quality on offer, and make day trips instead to the surrounding villages to enjoy good beaches.

Granted it's popular, but Grand Baie is not a bad place to base yourself. It's the main departure point for cruises to the northern islands (p78). Public transport connections are also good and there's a wide choice of accommodation from cheap apartments to top-notch luxury resorts.

## Orientation

Orientation in Grand Baie is easy, as almost everything is strung out along the coastal highway. The centre point of the town is the Sunset Boulevard shopping complex (including the jetty) at the junction of the coastal highway (known here as Royal Rd), with the road inland to Goodlands and the M2 motorway via the Super U Hypermarket.

The terminus for express buses to and from Port Louis is on Royal Rd about 100m north of the town centre. Nonexpress services via Trou aux Biches stop every few hundred metres along the coast road.

## Information

### BOOKSHOPS

**Papyrus** (☎ 263 0012; Richmond Hill Bldg, La Salette Rd; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-noon Sun) A reasonably well-stocked bookshop with a range of mainly French-language books and magazines.

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Cyber Escapes** (La Salette Rd; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat)  
**Cyber Pirate** (Galeries Espace Ocean; ☎ 9.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon Sun) The best in town.

## INFORMATION

Cyber Escapes.....1 D2  
Cyber Pirate.....2 D1  
Internet Café.....(see 37)  
MCB.....3 D1  
Papyrus.....(see 4)  
Post Office.....4 D3  
State Bank.....(see 29)  
Thomas Cook Exchange Bureau.....5 D2

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Captain Nemo's Undersea Walk.....(see 29)  
Ebrahim Travel & Tours.....(see 49)  
Grand Baie Gym.....6 A1  
Grand Baie Hydro Spa.....7 A1  
Grand Baie Travel & Tours.....(see 48)  
La Colombe Tourist Bureau.....8 B3  
Maurisun Adventure & Tours.....9 A2  
MauriTour.....(see 46)  
Neptune Diving.....(see 13)  
Northview Tours.....10 D2  
Prodiver.....(see 16)  
Shiv Kalyan Vath Mandir Temple.....11 C2  
Sportfisher.....(see 46)  
Surya Oudaya Sangam Temple.....12 A2  
Yacht Charters.....13 A2

## SLEEPING

Chez Vaco.....14 A1  
Filao Village Hotel.....15 A1  
Grand Bay Beach Hotel.....16 C3  
Le Mauricia.....17 C2  
Les Orchidées.....18 C3  
Merville Beach Hotel.....19 C1  
Ocean Villas.....20 A2  
Residence Peramal.....21 A2  
Royal Palm.....22 C1  
Ti Fleur Soleil.....23 D1  
Ventura Hotel.....24 C1  
Veranda Hotel.....25 C2

## EATING

Alchemy.....26 D2  
Café Müller.....27 B3  
Crok Chaud.....28 B3  
Don Camillo.....29 C2  
Ebisu.....(see 31)  
Fusion.....(see 36)  
Grand Baie Store.....30 D2  
Iguana Lounge.....(see 36)  
La Langouste Grisée.....31 A2  
La Vieille Rouge.....32 D2  
Le Capitaine.....33 A2  
Le Tandoor.....34 B3  
L'Épicerie Gourmand.....(see 35)  
Luigi's.....35 C2  
Paparazzi.....(see 47)  
Store 2000.....36 C1

Super U Hypermarket.....37 D3  
Thai Foon.....(see 38)  
Vegetable Shop.....38 B3

## DRINKING

Alchemy.....(see 26)  
B52.....39 D2  
La Rhumerie.....(see 23)  
Lotus on the Square.....40 C1  
Sunset Café.....(see 46)

## ENTERTAINMENT

Buddha Club.....41 C2  
Star Dance.....42 C1  
Zanzibar.....(see 29)

## SHOPPING

Françoise Vrot Studio.....43 A3  
Galerie Vaco Baissac.....44 C2  
Grand Baie Bazaar.....45 D2  
Sunset Boulevard.....46 D1  
Sunset Boulevard.....47 D2

## TRANSPORT

Avis.....48 D1  
Budget.....(see 46)  
Contract Cars.....49 D1  
Europcar.....50 C2  
Express Buses to Port Louis.....51 D1  
GBC Car Rental.....(see 49)  
Keiffel Tours.....52 B3

**Internet Café** (☎ 263 2478, Super U Hypermarket, La Salette Rd; ☎ 9am-8.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-9pm Fri & Sat, 9am-1.30pm Sun) Next to the checkouts.

## MONEY

**Mauritius Commercial Bank** (MCB; Royal Rd; ☎ exchange bureau 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun)  
**State Bank** (Royal Rd; ☎ exchange bureau 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun)  
**Thomas Cook Exchange Bureau** (☎ 8am-8pm)

## POST

**Post office** (Richmond Hill Bldg; ☎ 8.15am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.15am-11.45pm Sat) Out near the Super U Hypermarket; the last 45 minutes before closing are for stamp sales only.

## Sights & Activities

Grand Baie's prime attraction is the range of water-based activities on offer. Otherwise, the only specific sights are a couple of vividly colourful Tamil temples: **Surya Oudaya Sangam** (☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) at the west end of town, and the older **Shiv Kalyan Vath Mandir** towards Pereybère. Both are dedicated to Shiva. Visitors are welcome but shoes should be removed before entering.

## CRUISES

Cruises are a popular activity in Grand Baie. Perhaps the most interesting is that offered by **Yacht Charters** (☎ 263 8395; www.isla-mauritia.com; Royal Rd; ☎ 8am-7pm). Its magnificent sailing ship, the *Isla Mauritia*, was built in 1852 and is claimed to be the world's oldest active schooner. Today the *Isla Mauritia* offers two day-cruises per week on a Wednesday and Saturday, with snorkelling, lunch at Baie du Tombeau and traditional music for Rs 1950, or Rs 975 for under 10s. It's best to book at least a day in advance.

Other companies offer cruises on modern catamarans. The most popular options are the day trips around the northern islands (p78), including a barbecue lunch and stops for swimming and snorkelling. You can also take a sunset cruise, with the option of dinner on board. Prices start at around Rs 1400 per adult (Rs 600 for children under 12) for a day trip around the northern islands, and Rs 600 per person for a sunset cruise (excluding dinner).

One of the biggest operators is **Croisières Australes** (☎ 670 4301; www.mttb-mautourco.com), which owns the two luxury 'Harris Wilson' boats; bookings can be made through MauriTour or any other Grand Baie tour agent (see p74).

**DEEP-SEA FISHING**

Based beside the Sunset Boulevard jetty, **Sportfisher** (☎ 263 8358; www.sportfisher.com; Royal Rd; half-/full day from Rs 9500/12,500 per boat; ⏰ 6am-6pm) has four boats, each taking up to six people (three anglers and three companions). Most tour agents can also arrange trips.

**DIVING**

The local diving industry has emphatically moved down the coast to less built-up Mont Choisy and Trou aux Biches, but a number of operators still maintain a base in Grand Baie. Among these, **Neptune Diving** (☎ 263 3768; neptunediving@intnet.mu; Royal Rd; ⏰ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat), gets consistently good reports. A dive costs around Rs 1200. **Prodiver** (☎ 265 6552; www.geocities.com/padgraphics/prodiver; ⏰ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat), based at the Casuarina Hotel in Trou aux Biches also has an office in Grand Baie outside the Grand Bay Beach Hotel.

**UNDERSEA WALKS**

For nondivers, **Captain Nemo's Undersea Walk** (☎ 263 7819; www.captainemo-underseawalk.com; Royal Rd; per person Rs 1000; ⏰ 8.30am-5pm) provides the unique experience of walking underwater wearing a diver's helmet and weight belt. Solar-powered pumps on the boat above feed oxygen to you during the 25-minute 'walk on the wet side'. Walks are available to everyone over the age of seven. There are trips every few hours from 9am to 3pm. In peak season it's advisable to book a day in advance.

**SEMISUBMERSIBLES**

A number of semisubmersible vessels offer coral-viewing tours. *Le Nessee* (adult/child Rs 800/450) is a distinctive yellow semi-submarine run by Croisières Australes (p73). It departs from Grand Baie's Sunset Boulevard jetty several times daily and the trip lasts just under two hours, with 30 minutes of snorkelling for those who wish. Tickets are available from hotels and tour agents.

**SWIMMING & SPAS**

The beach at Grand Baie is nothing special and the bay here is congested with boats. Instead, you're better off heading for La Cuvette public beach beside the Veranda Hotel on the bay's north side. It's not huge, but the sand is good and the water clean.

Another option is to visit **Grand Baie Gym & Hydro Spa** (☎ 263 4891; www.grandbaiegym.com; 3 X Club

Rd; day membership Rs 650) where as well as enjoying the fabulous pool and gym, you can indulge in a huge range of spa treatments, steam yourself in the hammam and enjoy low-fat dishes at the café. The gym is located in a building across the road from the spa.

**Tours**

Grand Baie's numerous tour agents can provide information on things to do in the area with the aim, naturally, of signing you up for this cruise package or that coach trip. While prices tend to be similar, the details may vary, so make sure you know exactly what is included. All agents sell tickets for glass-bottomed boat trips, undersea walks, *Le Nessee* (left) and the Blue Safari Submarine (p69). Many also offer car-hire services and airport transfers and can organise accommodation.

Your agents with a reliable reputation: **Ebrahim Travel & Tours** (☎ 263 7845; www.gbccar.mu; Ebrahim Flats, Royal Rd)

**Grand Baie Travel & Tours** (GBT; ☎ 263 8771; www.gbtt.com; Royal Rd) This office mainly sells air tickets; its accommodation office is in Mont Choisy.

**La Colombe Tourist Bureau** (☎ 283 9262; www.mauritiustouristbureau.com; Royal Rd)

**Maurisun Adventure & Tours** (☎ 263 0192; www.maurisun.com; Royal Rd) A cut above the competition with its range of adventure tours, including sea kayaking.

**MauriTour** (☎ 263 6056; www.mauritours.net; Sunset Boulevard, Royal Rd) Upmarket all-round travel agency selling air tickets, excursions, accommodation, island tours and cruises.

**Northview Tours** (☎ 263 5023; http://pages.intnet.mu/nor tours; Royal Rd)

**Prodiver Tours** (☎ 263 0632; prodiver@hotmail.com; Royal Rd)

**Sleeping**

Much of the budget and midrange accommodation in Grand Baie takes the form of self-catering studios and apartments. There are some excellent deals around, especially if you arrive at a quiet time of the year and with three friends in tow. A clutch of smart hotels occupies the east side of the bay, but Grand Baie is not a centre for luxury.

**BUDGET**

**Residence Peramal** (☎ 263 8109; residenceperamal@intnet.mu; Royal Rd; studio Rs 1075, apt Rs 1350-1720) Excellent-value self-catering accommodation on a little promontory plum in the centre of Grand Baie. The fan-cooled units (for up to

four people) are modern, spacious and well maintained. Not surprisingly, it gets booked up well in advance.

**Filao Village Hotel** (☎ 263 7482; www.filaovillage.8k.com; Pointe aux Canoniers; studio incl breakfast from Rs 1250; ☎) This is a superb place; pretty thatched blocks house just 12 rooms organised around a decent pool and look out to the bay with access to a little beach. It's out of the way without being remote – a perfect spot for relaxation.

**MIDRANGE**

**Ventura Hotel** (☎ 263 6030; www.hotelventura.com; Royal Rd; s/d incl breakfast Rs 1600/2500; ☎) It may look virtually deserted but this is a decent central option with a surprisingly pleasant pool and public area once you get through the indifferent exterior. You have a choice of double rooms and family rooms, which sleep four. All have TV, air-con, phone and a view onto the pool.

**Grand Bay Beach Hotel** (☎ 263 4984; www.grandbaybeachhotel.com; Royal Rd; s/d/t incl breakfast Rs 1700/2200/2600, apt from Rs 3200; ☎) This well-located hotel in the very centre of town has clean, bright rooms that are great value for money. Rooms come with a balcony, TV, phone and kitchen and there's a cool roof terrace featuring a small pool and some excellent views. You'll pay an Rs 250 supplement for a sea view.

**Ti Fleur Soleil** (☎ 563 0380; www.tifleursoleil.com; Royal Rd; s/d incl breakfast from Rs 1800/2400, apt 4300; ☎) The 'little sunflower' is a sweet, friendly hotel that can't be beaten for its location right in the heart of Grand Baie. The glowing reviews in the guestbook attest to the hotel's popularity although some have moaned about the quality of breakfast. The rooms – all with terrace – are clean and simple. There's a choice of fan-cooled or air-con rooms.

**Ocean Villas** (☎ 263 1000; www.ocean.mu; Royal Rd; r incl breakfast from Rs 2200, apt from Rs 3700; ☎) Recommended for its broad range of accommodation, from straightforward hotel rooms to self-catering units for up to eight people and sleek honeymoon suites remodelled in 2006 with sunken baths. Facilities include an excellent new pool plus a small strip of beach (with limited water sports on offer), a restaurant and the love nest – a private house on the beach.

**our pick** **Chez Vaco** (☎ 263 4391; www.papillonhotelsandvillas.com; Pointe aux Canoniers; s/d Rs 2100/3100; ☎) A welcome addition to Grand Baie's

accommodation scene, this stylish yet budget guesthouse is a real find. Whether it's the charming little garden decorated with local art and comfortable furniture or the small but delightful rooms, all of which successfully create an atmosphere of warm minimalism, this is an innovative place. Rooms 7 and 12 are the largest and have closed-off bathrooms. There's also a free speedboat transfer across the lagoon to Grand Baie from a small beach up the road.

**Les Orchidées** (☎ 263 8780; www.mauritius-island.com/orchidees; Route de la Colline; r incl breakfast from Rs 2500; ☎) Highly recommended and extremely popular (book ahead), this small hotel is set back from the coast in a quiet location just a short walk from the centre of town. Sweet, simple, brightly coloured rooms and a charming pool area make this a great option.

**Veranda Hotel** (☎ 209 8000; www.verandagroup.com; Royal Rd; s/d/t with half board from Rs 5500/7900/10,500; ☎) The rather elegant public areas here give the Veranda a sense of exclusivity unusual for the price. The two pools, good facilities and a recent refit of the rooms also help. The beach is fine, but no great shakes, although the location is handy for town and there's a new Seven Colours spa here to help with relaxation.

**TOP END**

**Merville Beach Hotel** (☎ 209 2200; www.naiade.com; s/d with half board from Rs 7600/11,500; ☎) The Merville enjoys a friendly atmosphere, very pleasant gardens, a sweet little stretch of beach and pleasant rooms in well-maintained yellow thatched blocks. There are also good sports facilities to match, including a dive centre.

**Le Mauricia** (☎ 209 1100; www.lemauricia.com; s/d with half board from Rs 7500/10,500; ☎) One of the more affordable four-stars, Le Mauricia sits in spacious grounds on a prime stretch of palm-fringed beach. It's big and efficient, and has two good-sized pools and all the activities you'd expect: everything from a kids club to a raft of water and land sports. Cheerful and airy rooms come with sea-view terraces.

**Royal Palm** (☎ 209 8300; www.royalpalm-hotel.com; s/d with half board from Rs 35,500/51,000; ☎) The flagship hotel of the Beachcomber group and a member of Leading Hotels of the World, the Royal Palm is nothing short of stunning. Suites are impeccable (for there are no mere rooms here), with a huge number of categories from junior to royal, and the service and

facilities are top-notch. The health spa even boasts its own restaurant serving low-calorie cuisine so you can jump into your private pool (or the sea) with confidence.

## Eating

While the centre of town is packed with eateries, the very best tend to be slightly outside the heart of Grand Baie, particularly toward Le Canonnier and Pereybère. You'll have no end of choice though; the following are just the best of a good bunch.

### BUDGET

**Café Müller** (☎ 263 5230; Royal Rd; salads & sandwiches from Rs 100; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) This charming addition to Grand Baie's café scene is a great place for breakfast or a light lunch. As the name suggests, it's a German-run café and bakery that rustles up great sandwiches in a lovely grassy garden.

**Crok Chaud** (☎ 269 1313; Royal Rd; salads & sandwiches Rs 120; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Sat, 7am-noon Sun) The best coffee in town, hands down, and a damn fine little patisserie, this roadside gem is a great place to start the day, indulge in a mid-morning cake or have a nice lunch.

**La Vieille Rouge** (☎ 518 0579; La Salette Rd; mains Rs 150; ☎ 10am-midnight) The Red Snapper isn't exactly a find, but it's one of Grand Baie's more reliable budget eateries. You'll find a standard selection of Creole curries, Chinese dishes, fresh fish and so forth. It's all tasty and comes in decent portions, although the set menu at Rs 450 seems a little steep.

### MIDRANGE

**Don Camillo** (☎ 263 8540; Royal Rd; pizzas Rs 170-290, pasta Rs 150-220; ☎ dinner daily, lunch Mon-Sat; ☎) Despite its unpromising location beside the Caltex petrol station, Don Camillo is a great place to taste real pizza. In the evening it's positively buzzing – either get there early or reserve.

**Luigi's** (☎ 269 1125; Royal Rd; pizzas & pasta Rs 170-280; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Classic little trattoria serving authentic pizza and pasta dishes plus a range of daily specials, such as seafood gnocchi. Make sure you leave room for one of the scrumptious deserts.

**Le Tandoor** (☎ 263 1378; Royal Rd; www.letandoor.com; mains Rs 200; ☎ lunch & dinner) Excellent Indian cooking makes Le Tandoor stand out amid some stiff competition in Grand Baie. Even though it's located on the main road, there's quite a buzz each evening (reserva-

tions advised) as the place hugs to hungry travellers enjoying excellent curries, naans and tandoori dishes.

**Thai Foon** (☎ 269 1169; Royal Rd; mains Rs 230; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎) Newly opened in 2006 by the original team behind Pereybère's Wang Thai, authenticity is the watchword at Thai Foon. This means fresh ingredients imported from Bangkok, a Thai chef and some excellent Thai cocktails. The eating space is stylish but relaxed, with outside seating available.

**Alchemy** (☎ 269 1137; mains Rs 250; La Salette Rd; ☎ lunch & dinner) This friendly place set back from the coastal road is a great mix of bar and grill. The pizzas are cooked in a traditional wood-fired oven and are excellent, plus there's a big range of steaks and seafood, and imaginative daily specials.

### TOP END

**Le Capitaine** (☎ 263 6867; Royal Rd; mains from Rs 280; ☎ lunch & dinner) This is a popular place serving good standard seafood and fish dishes in a pleasant convivial space that combines style with informality and great bay views. Fresh lobster is the pick of the menu, while other delicious mains include whole crab cooked in white wine, and lobster ravioli with fresh mushroom and cucumber quenelle. Reservations are essential in the evening.

**Paparazzi** (☎ 263 8836; Sunset Boulevard; pizzas from Rs 200, mains from Rs 300; ☎ lunch & dinner) This smart pizza restaurant on the second floor of Sunset Boulevard (on the non-bay side) is a winner. It's far pricier than any other pizzeria in Mauritius, but the quality suggests why. There's free delivery if you're feeling lazy.

**our pick Iguana Lounge** (☎ 263 5758; Royal Rd; mains from Rs 350; ☎ lunch & dinner) Next to Fusion (see below) and incongruously situated facing an Esso garage, Iguana Lounge is one of our favourite places in town. For upscale Mexican – excellent burritos and chili con carne – look no further. Reserve a table in the charming back garden as they're hard to come by.

**Fusion** (☎ 269 1338; Royal Rd; mains Rs 400; ☎ dinner) Possibly the most self-consciously fashionable dining option in Grand Baie, Fusion looks just as it sounds – flash, minimalist, sleek and a little intimidating. You'll see the smart set out for dinner here, sampling fusion-flavoured Mauritian-Asian cooking.

**Ebisu** (☎ 263 1035; Royal Rd; mains from Rs 400; ☎ lunch & dinner) Sharing the same site and management as La Langouste Grisée (see

below), Ebisu offers a sushi bar as well as more substantial teppanyaki theatrics. Reservations are advised in the evenings.

**La Langouste Grisée** (☎ 263 1035; www.lalangouste.grisee.com; Royal Rd; mains Rs 450; ☎ lunch & dinner) This is a restaurant frequented by the great and the good of Grand Baie, offering very stylish dining in an attractive garden overlooking a pond as well as charming indoor tables. As a winner of the Fourchette d'Or in 2005, 'the Topsy Lobster' is generally recognised as one of the best restaurants on the island. Sample dishes from its imaginative Franco-Mauritian menu include Dorado fillet with peanut sauce and banana slices. Lobster is obviously the speciality and vegetarians really shouldn't bother coming.

### SELF-CATERING

The **Super U Hypermarket** (La Salette Rd; ☎ 9am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1.30pm Sun) sells almost everything self-caterers could want. You can also buy groceries and other essentials at **Grand Baie Store** (Royal Rd) and **Store 2000** (Royal Rd), and there's a good **vegetable shop** (Royal Rd) at the west end of town.

For a real treat, **L'Épicerie Gourmand** (Royal Rd; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) is a treasure-trove of imported delicacies including cheese, ham and pâté. It also sells luscious cakes and pastries and ice cream.

### Drinking

**Alchemy** (☎ 269 1137; La Salette Rd; ☎ 8am-midnight) A convivial little bar attracting a mixed crowd of locals and tourists with its cheap prices and retro soundtrack. Saturday is usually *séga* night – this is a good place to catch a performance outside the big hotels.

**B52** (☎ 263 0214; La Salette Rd; ☎ 10am-midnight Mon-Sat) This large, popular spot serves up great cocktails all day long in its al fresco setting back from the main coastal road.

**Lotus on the Square** (☎ 263 3251; Royal Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) The garden of this small, arty café on the road to Pereybère makes a nice place to linger over a latte or cappuccino. It also does refreshing fruit juices and homemade sorbets in unusual flavours such as tamarind, basil and cinnamon.

**La Rhumerie** (☎ 263 7664; ☎ 7am-midnight) Friendly bar with a lethal selection of *rhum arrangés* (flavoured rums); Rs 70 a shot or Rs 300 for five.

**Sunset Café** (☎ 263 9602; Sunset Boulevard, Royal Rd; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-6pm Sun) Inside the Sunset Boulevard complex overlooking the water, this is a pleasant place for coffee.

## Entertainment

### NIGHT CLUBS

**Buddha Club** (☎ 263 7664; Royal Rd; Wed admission free, Fri & Sat Rs 250; ☎ 11.30pm-5am Wed-Sat; ☎) Grand Baie's top nightclub positively sizzles on a Friday and Saturday night when all three dance floors are packed. Smart-casual dress is required.

**Star Dance** (☎ 263 6388; Royal Rd; Tue-Thu & Sun admission free, Fri admission free for women, Fri & Sat Rs 250; ☎ Tue-Sun 11pm-5am; ☎) Next door to Buddha Bar, its rival also has three dance floors with a choice of techno, tropical and '60s to '80s music. It's slightly more relaxed and less selective as well.

**Zanzibar** (☎ 263 3265; Royal Rd; admission Rs 100; ☎ 11.30pm-5am Mon-Sat) There's a nicely intimate, clubby atmosphere to this small bar-disco decked out with sofas and African artefacts. The most relaxed place in town.

### Shopping

**Sunset Boulevard** (Royal Rd) This shopping complex is home to chic boutiques including knitwear specialists Floreal, Maille St and Shibani; Harris Wilson for menswear; and Hémisphère Sud for fabulous leather goods. Cheaper clothing stores, such as Red Snapper and IV Pl@y, are concentrated in and around the Super U Hypermarket.

**Grand Baie Bazaar** (☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) This craft market off Royal Rd has a broad range of Mauritian and Malagasy crafts. Prices aren't fixed, but it's not expensive and there's minimal hassling from vendors.

To purchase some original art, visit the studio of **Françoise Vrot** (☎ 263 5118; www.tropic.scope.com; Reservoir Rd; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6.30pm) to see her expressive portraits of women fieldworkers; or head to **Galerie Vaco Baissac** (☎ 263 3106; Dodo Square, Royal Rd, Grand Baie; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat) to buy one of Vaco Baissac's instantly recognisable works.

### Getting There & Away

There are no direct buses to Grand Baie from the airport, so it's necessary to change in Port Louis and you have to transfer between two bus stations to do so. Almost all people will have a transfer provided by their hotel and

## DEAD AS A DODO

Illustrations from the logbooks of the first ships to reach Mauritius show hundreds of plump flightless birds running down to the beach to investigate the newcomers. Lacking natural predators, these giant relatives of the pigeon were easy prey for hungry sailors, who named the bird *dodo*, meaning 'stupid'. It took just 30 years for passing sailors and their pets or pests – dogs, monkeys, pigs and rats – to drive the dodo to extinction; the last confirmed sighting was in the 1660s.

Just as surprising as the speed of the dodo's demise is how little evidence remains that the bird ever existed. A few relics made it back to Europe during the 18th century – a dried beak ended up at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark, while the University of Oxford in England managed to get hold of a whole head and a foot – but until recently our knowledge of the dodo was mainly based on sketches by 17th-century seamen.

However, in 1865 local schoolteacher George Clark discovered a dodo skeleton in a marshy area on the site of what is now the international airport. The skeleton was reassembled by scientists in Edinburgh, and has formed the basis of all subsequent dodo reconstructions, one of which is on display in the Natural History Museum in Port Louis.

For the full story of the dodo's demise, read Errol Fuller's fascinating book *Dodo: From Extinction to Icon*.

For others arriving after a 12-hour flight, we definitely suggest taking a cab – or better still, ordering one in advance via the hotel.

Express buses run directly between Immigration Square in Port Louis and Grand Baie every half-hour, terminating near Cyber Pirate on Royal Rd. Nonexpress buses en route to Cap Malheureux will also drop you in Grand Baie. Buses between Pamplemousses and Grand Baie leave roughly every hour.

For taxi rides from Grand Baie, expect to pay around Rs 200 to Trou aux Biches, Rs 500 to Port Louis and Rs 800 to the airport. A return trip to Pamplemousses, including waiting time, should set you back Rs 500 or so.

## Getting Around

### CAR

There are numerous car-rental companies in Grand Baie, so you should be able to bargain, especially if you're renting for several days. Prices generally start at around Rs 1200 per day for a small hatchback. Find out whether the management of your hotel or guesthouse has a special discount agreement with a local company. Otherwise, try one of the agents listed here. Motorbikes of 50cc and 100cc are widely available in Grand Baie; rental charges hover at around Rs 500 per day, less if you rent for several days.

**Europcar** (☎ 263 7948; www.europcar.mu; Royal Rd)

**GBC Car Rental** (☎ 263 7845; www.gbccar.mu; Royal Rd)

**Keiffel Tours** (☎ 263 8226; keiffeltour@intnet.mu; Royal Rd)

## BICYCLE

Many hotels and guesthouses can arrange bicycle hire. Rates vary, but expect to pay between Rs 100 and Rs 150 per day, or less if you hire for several days. Most of the local tour operators have bikes for rent; just walk down Royal Rd and see what's on offer.

## NORTHERN ISLANDS

### Coin de Mire, Île Plate & Îlot Gabriel

The islands closest to the northern tip of Mauritius – Coin de Mire, Île Plate and Îlot Gabriel – are popular day trips from Grand Baie.

The distinctive Coin de Mire (Gunner's Quoin), 4km off the coast, was so named because it resembles the quoin or wedge used to steady the aim of a cannon. The island is now a nature reserve and home to a number of rare species, such as the red-tailed tropicbird and Bojer's skink. It's hard to get here as landing is often difficult. You'll need to visit on an organised tour, and even then you may have to be content with visiting another island if the weather changes. Despite its striking shape there's not much to see here anyway – it's the kind of place that looks far better from far away.

Most operators take you to Île Plate, 7km further north, which offers good snorkelling.

Îlot Gabriel is a pretty island lying within the coral reef just east of Île Plate and is a popular lunch stop for day cruises.

Boats to the islands depart from Grand Baie. You can book through almost any of the local tour agents or directly with the cruise

companies (p73). Prices start at Rs 1000 per person, including lunch. Dive centres in Grand Baie (p74) also offer dive trips around these islands.

## Île Ronde & Île aux Serpents

Île Ronde (Round Island) and Île aux Serpents (Snake Island) are two significant nature reserves about 20km and 24km respectively from Mauritius. It is not possible to land on them. Ironically, Île Ronde is not round and has snakes, while Île aux Serpents is round and has no snakes; the theory is that an early cartographer simply made a mistake.

Île Ronde covers roughly 170 hectares and scientists believe it has more endangered species per square kilometre than anywhere else in the world. Many of the plants, such as the hurricane palm (of which one lonely tree remains) and the bottle palm, are unique to the island.

The endemic fauna includes the keel-scaled boa and the burrowing boa (possibly extinct), three types of skink and three types of gecko. Among the sea birds that breed on the island are the wedge-tailed shearwater, the red-tailed tropicbird and the gadfly (or Round Island) petrel. Naturalist Gerald Durrell gives a very graphic description of the island in his book *Golden Bats and Pink Pigeons*.

The smaller Île aux Serpents (42 hectares) is a renowned bird sanctuary. The birds residing on the island include the sooty tern, the lesser noddy, the common noddy and the masked (blue-footed) booby. *Nactus*

geckos and Bojer's skinks are also found here.

## PEREYBÈRE

The rapidly developing northern neighbour of Grand Baie, Pereybère (peu-ray-bear) enjoys a relaxed pace and old-world simplicity you won't find in many places on the north coast. This, however, is set to change as development continues apace. Unlike Grand Baie there's a great beach here, which is why it's a popular place to base a trip from. With the recent addition of Pereybère's first boutique hotel and the growing number of restaurants, watch this space, as the town is clearly set for big things.

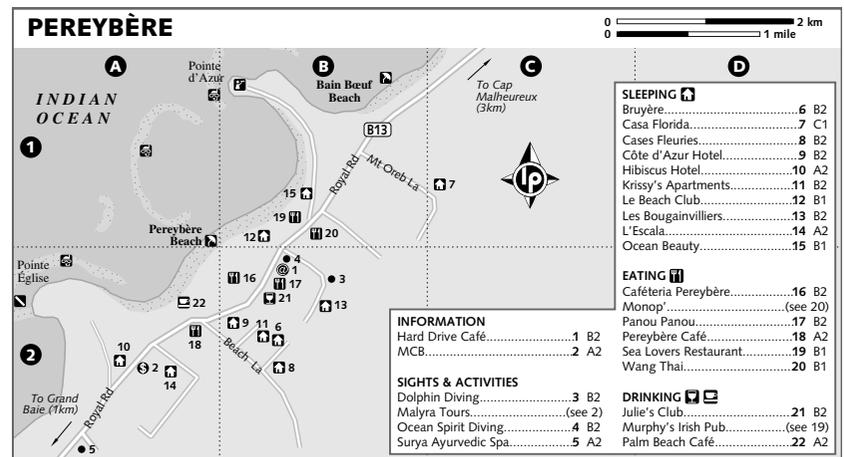
## Information

Pereybère boasts an efficient internet café, the **Hard Drive Café** (☎ 263 1076; Royal Rd; per min Rs 2; ☎ 8am-9.30pm). The **Mauritius Commercial Bank** (MCB; Royal Rd) has an **exchange bureau** (☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) open outside regular banking hours.

## Activities

Most people come to Pereybère simply to unwind beside the beautiful azure lagoon. The swimming is good here and the roped-off area is particularly safe for children. When the weekend crowds get too much, there are quieter beaches a short stroll away at Pointe d'Azur.

There's also good snorkelling offshore. The best coral can be found directly off the public



beach (but watch out for glass-bottomed boats and water-skiers).

Divers can organise expeditions through **Ocean Spirit Diving** (☎ 563 0376; Royal Rd; gringo spirit@yahoo.mu; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon Sun) and **Dolphin Diving** (☎ 263 9428; gurrobyj@hotmail.com; Stephen Rd; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Sat).

Further activities and tours can be booked through **Malyra Tours** (☎ 263 6274; www.villamalyra.com; Royal Rd).

For some indulgent relaxation, head to the very smart **Surya Ayurvedic Spa** (☎ 263 1637; www.spasurya.com; Royal Rd; ☎ 9am-8pm) to treat yourself to some Indian massage or a steam in the hammam.

## Sleeping

While there are a few larger hotels on the beach side of the main road, the majority of accommodation here is made up of charming guesthouses and little hotels in the back streets, a short walk from the town centre and public beach.

## BUDGET

**L'Escala** (☎ 263 7379; lescala@intnet.mu; Royal Rd; studio Rs 500-800, apt from Rs 1000; 🏠) The pleasant atmosphere here somewhat compensates for very basic rooms, with almost nothing save the very barest of essentials in them. However, it's cheap and the owners mean well.

**Bruyère** (☎ 263 7316; dod.chettiar@intnet.mu; Beach Lane; 1/2 r apt from Rs 700/900; 🏠) There are just three delightful apartments in this family home of a charming Scottish-Mauritian couple; all are simply but tastefully furnished with kitchenettes and TVs. It's in a quiet residential area close to the beach and town centre, the last, unmarked house on a no-through road.

**Cases Fleuries** (☎ 263 8868, casefle@intnet.mu; Beach Lane; studio from Rs 1000, apt from Rs 1300; 🏠) There's something surprisingly rarefied in the air here considering the perfectly reasonable prices. A variety of studios and apartments for up to six people are set in a flower-filled garden, and the crowd is a wealthy French one for the most part.

**Krissy's Apartments** (☎ 263 8859, limfat@intnet.mu; Beach Lane; studio/apt from Rs 1050/1600; 🏠) This secure, well-run budget complex consists of three studios and eight apartments, all with self-catering facilities. A cleaner comes once every three days, but the whole place is clean and good value.

**Les Bougainvilliers** (☎ /fax 263 8807; studio/apt Rs 1100/1200; 🏠) Swathed in bougainvillea flowers, this homely place offers a broad range of clean (if slightly oddly furnished) studios and apartments with up to three bedrooms. Currently only half have air-con, but nearly all have kitchens. The management was building a restaurant at the time of our last visit.

**Casa Florida** (☎ 263 7371; www.casafloida.net; Mont Oreb Lane; s/d incl breakfast Rs 1040/1270, apt from Rs 1630; 🏠 🏠 🏠) This place is great value for money, with huge, attractive grounds and a selection of sweet, spacious rooms, all very basically furnished but comfortable with balconies and TV. There's a bar and restaurant, with *séga* on Saturday nights.

## MIDRANGE

**Le Beach Club** (☎ 263 5104; www.le-beachclub.com; Royal Rd; studio from Rs 2000, apt from Rs 3500; 🏠) This complex of studios and two-bedroom apartments is one of the few places on the seafront and has a great little beach, perfect for swimming. The units are furnished in bright tropical colours. It's worth paying a bit extra for a balcony and sea views. Be aware that reception closes at 5pm during the week, at 2pm on Saturday and all day Sunday, so arrange your arrival with them in advance if you're coming in outside these times.

**Côte d'Azur Hotel** (☎ 263 8320; www.hotelcotedazur.net; Royal Rd; d/studio/apt from Rs 2200/2600/3000; 🏠) A choice of extremely well-equipped hotel-style rooms and one- and two-bedroom apartments in a modern block on the main road. All come with air-con, private safe, satellite TV and phone, while some boast a CD player, Jacuzzi and a washing machine.

**Ocean Beauty** (☎ 263 6000; www.ocean.mu; Pointe d'Azur; r incl breakfast from Rs 5000; 🏠 🏠 🏠) Developed by the people who own Ocean Villas in Grand Baie, Ocean Beauty is a boutique hotel aimed squarely at honeymooners. This is boutique basic though, which means the rooms are stylish and atmospheric, but there's very little else to the hotel – even staff are hard to come across sometimes. Despite this, it's a great spot for romance; breakfast is served on your balcony and there's direct access to the lovely town beach. Come here for romance and fun rather than pampering, and beware of the pool that plays Enya at you while you swim.

**Hibiscus Hotel** (☎ 263 8554; www.hibiscushotel.com; Royal Rd; s/d with half board Rs 5850/8600; 🏠 🏠)

The recently refitted Hibiscus boasts thickly vegetated gardens, a super pool and private beach of sorts (although there's quite a bit of rock to negotiate). Accommodation is in clean, comfortable rooms in three-storey blocks.

## Eating

**Pereybère Café** (☎ 263 8700; Royal Rd; mains Rs 90-150, set menus from Rs 320; ☎ lunch & dinner) This popular restaurant across the road from the public beach offers outdoor and indoor dining amid Chinese décor and serves up excellent-value Chinese fare. Reservations are a must for dinner.

**Panou Panou** (☎ 269 1457; Royal Rd; mains Rs 150-200; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This friendly place serves up seafood and grills in an open bar space on the main road opposite the public beach.

**Caféteria Pereybère** (☎ 263 8539; Royal Rd; mains Rs 180-260; ☎ 10.30am-10pm) This friendly all-day café-restaurant behind the public beach offers grilled fish, octopus curry, and steak and chips from an extensive menu. Portions are on the small side.

**Wang Thai** (☎ 263 4050; Royal Rd; mains Rs 180; ☎ dinner daily, lunch Tue-Sun; 🏠) Long the best restaurant in town and a pioneer of authentic Thai food in Mauritius, Wang Thai is a sophisticated, airy place with Buddha statues and raw silks setting the scene for surprisingly affordable Thai cuisine. Treat your tastebuds to such classics as *tom yum thalay* (lemongrass-laced seafood soup), green curries and *phad thai* (mixed fried noodles).

**Sea Lovers Restaurant** (☎ 263 6299; restosealovers@yahoo.com; mains Rs 300-600; ☎ lunch & dinner; 🏠) This is by far the smartest restaurant in Pereybère, with its gorgeous terrace overlooking the public beach and stylish wooden furniture and décor, but when we ate here the service was almost comically messy. While the food was excellent – rich seafood and delicious fish imaginatively cooked – the long waits between courses, the regular arrival at our table of another table's order and the fact that not once did the same waiter come to our table made for a disappointing dining experience. On a different night with better service this could be a superb place.

Self-caterers should head for **Monop'** (Royal Rd; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 7.30am-noon Sun) situated beneath Wang Thai.

## Drinking & Entertainment

Pereybère is far quieter than neighbouring Grand Baie (where you should head if you're seeking some nightlife), though there are a few options for a quiet drink or two.

**Julie's Club** (☎ 269 0320; Royal Rd; ☎ 11am-midnight) Relaxed and friendly bar with live music or some other event most Friday and Saturday nights (including live *séga*).

**Murphy's Irish Pub** (☎ 263 6299; Royal Rd; ☎ 11am-midnight) What were the odds that Mauritius' first Irish pub would land in tiny Pereybère? Perhaps more suited to Grand Baie, Murphy's makes an unusual bedfellow for the swanky Sea Lovers Restaurant, run by the same team. In true Irish-pubs-abroad style, it looks nothing like an Irish pub, but has cold beer and big-screen sports.

**Palm Beach Café** (☎ 263 5821; Royal Rd; ☎ 11.30am-8pm Tue-Sun) The place to sip a coffee or fresh juice lulled by the sound of the waves. It also serves snacks and light meals.

## Getting There & Around

Buses between Port Louis and Cap Malheureux stop in Pereybère as well as Grand Baie. Services run roughly every 30 minutes.

You can rent cars, motorbikes and bicycles through the local tour agents. Cars start at Rs 600 per day and motorbikes at Rs 400 for a 50cc or 100cc bike. Pedal bikes cost upwards of Rs 100 per day. Most of Grand Baie's car-hire companies will also drop off and pick up cars in Pereybère.

## CAP MALHEUREUX

The northern edge of Mauritius has stunning views out to the islands off the coast beyond, most obviously of the dramatic slopes of Coin de Mire. Although it feels like rather a backwater today, 'Cape Misfortune' (thus named for the number of ships that foundered on the rocks here) is a place of great historical importance for Mauritius: it was here that the British invasion force finally defeated the French in 1810 and took over the island.

A little further on lies the minuscule fishing village also known as Cap Malheureux, with its much-photographed church, the red-roofed Notre Dame Auxiliatrice. It's worth a quick peek inside for its intricate woodwork and a holy-water basin fashioned out of a giant clamshell. A sign strictly prohibits newly-weds 'faking' a church wedding for

the photographers here – really, some people, eh? You can attend mass here at 6pm on Saturday and 9am on Sunday.

Heading around the coast the landscape becomes wilder and more rugged. In between the rocky coves and muddy tidal creeks a clutch of hotels occupy the few decent beaches. They offer a perfect hideaway for those who want to get away from it all.

### Sleeping

**Kuxville** (Map p67; ☎ 262 7913; www.kuxville.de; studios from Rs 2600, apt from Rs 4200) There's a huge choice of accommodation on offer at this perennially popular German-run apartment complex about 1.5km west of Cap Malheureux village. Accommodation is in impeccably clean studios or apartments sleeping up to four people; 'gardenside' units are in a newer compound across the road. There's a fine little beach and a small dive centre as well as various other water sports.

**Coin de Mire Hotel** (Map p67; ☎ 262 7302; www.coindemire-hotel.com; s/d with half board from Rs 3000/4800, superior rooms Rs 4600/6000; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This charming place is affordable and relatively comfortable. The gardens are pleasant and the rooms are fine, although there's only air-con and TVs in the superior rooms. There are two pools, a restaurant, a bar (with live entertainment, including *séga*) and a range of water activities. The small rather unimpressive beach is just the other side of the main road but transport to Pereybère and Grand Baie is simple: the bus stops outside the hotel. Now part of the Veranda Group, you'll need to book in advance to stay here.

**Paradise Cove Hotel** (Map p67; ☎ 204 4000; www.paradisecovehotel.com; s/d with half board from Rs 17,000/22,500; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) Fully renovated in 2003, Paradise Cove is a five-star boutique resort aimed at honeymooners. Terribly understated but as utterly luxurious as its name suggests, it's built on an attractive small cove – the beach is at the end of an inlet from the sea, which gives it remarkable privacy. Other great touches include a golf course, tennis courts, free water sports, a dive centre, brightly painted and delightful rooms and 'love nests' on the promontory overlooking the northern islands. With three restaurants, a Cinq Mondes spa and award-winning gardens, this stylish place is a great destination for couples.

### Eating

Outside the hotel restaurants there's just a few eating options in the area.

**Kanaco** (Map p67; ☎ 262 8378; mains from Rs 120-150; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Opposite a Tamil temple, Kanaco is a very friendly, clean, and welcoming family-run place specialising in Mauritian cuisine and seafood.

**Le Coin de Mire Resto Bar** (Map p67; ☎ 262 8070; mains from Rs 180; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Opposite the church in Cap Malheureux village, this place offers a huge range of dishes, from omelettes and fried rice to wild-boar curry. The food is simple but decent, and service and the view from the upstairs dining room are other good reasons to come.

### Getting There & Away

Buses run roughly every half hour between Port Louis' Immigration Square bus station and Cap Malheureux, via Grand Baie. A taxi to Port Louis will cost at least Rs 600, to the airport Rs 1000.

## GRAND GAUBE

Grand Gaube is where the development of northern Mauritius currently ends, although it has itself become the latest flash point for hotel building in recent years. Despite this, it remains a tiny fishing village with a good beach about 6km east of Cap Malheureux. Beyond the small rocky bays of Grande Gaube there are almost no beaches until a long way down the east coast, making any trip beyond here an illuminating glimpse into traditional Mauritian life without the tourists. In 1744 the *St Gérard* foundered off Grand Gaube in a storm, inspiring the famous love story *Paul et Virginie*, by Bernardin de St-Pierre (see the boxed text, opposite).

Inland from Grand Gaube, the landscape is open and windswept, the cane fields rapidly being built over with modern housing estates. There's nothing specific to see in the area, but it has a distinctly Mauritian atmosphere, a world away from the tourist developments on the west coast.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Veranda Paul & Virginie** (Map p67; ☎ 266 9700; http://paul-et-virginie-hotel.com; s/d with half board from Rs 3600/4800; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) The longest-established hotel in Grande Gaube is a

pleasant surprise. It's small enough not to be overwhelming, yet offers all the services and comforts required for luxury: two pools, a couple of restaurants, a Seven Colour's 'wellness' spa, plenty of entertainment and activities, and a kids club. The style is colonial, although the atmosphere is very relaxed. The rooms are stylishly fitted out and spacious, all with sea views, and there's a small but attractive beach.

**Legends** (Map p67; ☎ 698 9800; www.naiade.com; s/d with half board from Rs 13,000/18,500; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) This very large, stylish newer establishment enjoys an idyllic location miles from the mass tourism found further down the coast. Guests here are welcomed with a drum-banging ceremony, and have the run of the pretty bay and the hotel's well-appointed surroundings. The hotel is Feng Shui themed (God help us), but don't be distracted by the waffle about metal elements, Chi flow or the mirror being a 'reflection of serenity' – at the end of the day Legends is a smart beach hotel whose marketing people have just got a little bit over-excited.

### Getting There & Away

Buses run every 15 minutes or so between Port Louis' Immigration Sq bus station and Grand Gaube.

A taxi to Port Louis will cost around Rs 500, to Grand Baie Rs 300 and to the airport Rs 1000.

## PAMPLEMOUSSES

Most visitors to northern Mauritius take the time to visit Pamplemousses for its famous botanical gardens, which are worth a diversion if you fancy an afternoon away from the beach. Officially known as the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanical Gardens (occasionally referred to as the Royal Botanical Gardens), they feature a stunning variety of endemic and foreign plant species. The nearby decommissioned Beau Plan sugar factory has also been converted into a fascinating museum.

The town itself was named for the grapefruit-like citrus trees that the Dutch introduced to Mauritius from Java. It has a typically Mauritian feel and is a million miles away from Grand Baie or Trou aux Biches, although there are no other sights.

### Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanical Gardens

Don't be put off if you've never been particularly interested in botany before coming here – along with London's Kew Gardens the **SSR Botanical Gardens** (Map p67; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm) are one of the best places in the world to be introduced to a huge variety of plants, trees and flowers. It's also one of the most popular tourist attractions in Mauritius and easily reached from almost anywhere on the island.

Named after Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, the first prime minister of independent

### PAUL & VIRGINIE

Mauritius' most popular folk tale tells the story of two lovers, Paul and Virginie, who encounter tragedy when the ship that is carrying Virginie founders on the reef. Although Paul swims out to the wreck to save her, Virginie modestly refuses to remove her clothes to swim ashore, and drowns; Paul dies of a broken heart shortly after.

The story was written by Bernardin de St-Pierre in the 18th century, but was inspired by a real-life tragedy that took place some years earlier. In 1744, the ship *St Gérard* was wrecked during a storm off Île d'Ambre, to the southeast of Grand Gaube, with almost 200 lives lost. Among them were two female passengers who refused to undress to swim ashore and were dragged down by the weight of their clothes. The true story is more a tragedy of social mores than one of romance!

The *St Gérard* was carrying a horde of Spanish money and machinery from France for the island's first sugar refinery. A French dive expedition explored the wreck in 1966 and many of their finds are on display in Mahébourg's National History Museum and the Blue Penny Museum in Port Louis.

You'll run into Paul and Virginie everywhere in Mauritius. The statue by Prosper d'Épinay is perhaps the most famous memorial. The original is in the Blue Penny Museum and there's a copy near the town hall in Curepipe.

Mauritius, the gardens also house the funerary platform where he was cremated. His ashes were scattered on the Ganges in India.

The plants are gradually being labelled and map-boards installed, but this is still very patchy and thus the gardens are really best seen with a guide (up to four people/10 people Rs 50/Rs 40 per person for an hour's tour), as you'll miss many of the most interesting species if you go alone. Alternatively, you can buy an excellent guidebook (Rs 225) at the **booths** (☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sun) located just inside the two entrances, or from tourist shops all over the island before you come.

The gardens were started by Mahé de Labourdonnais in 1735 as a vegetable plot for his Mon Plaisir Château, but came into their own in 1768 under the auspices of the French horticulturalist Pierre Poivre. Like Kew Gardens in England, the gardens played a significant role in the horticultural espionage of the day. Poivre imported spice plants from around the world in a bid to end France's dependence on Asian spices. The gardens were neglected between 1810 and 1849 until British horticulturalist James Duncan transformed them into an arboretum for palms and other tropical trees.

Palms still constitute the most important part of the horticultural display, and they come in an astonishing variety of shapes and forms. Some of the more prominent are the stubby bottle palms, the tall royal palms and the talipot palms, which flower once after about 40 years and then die. Other varieties include the raffia, sugar, toddy, fever, fan and even sealing-wax palms. There are many other curious tree species on display, including the marmalade box tree, the fish poison tree and the sausage tree.

The centrepiece of the gardens is a pond filled with giant *Victoria amazonica* water lilies, native to the Amazon region. Young leaves emerge as wrinkled balls and unfold into the classic tea-tray shape up to 2m across in a matter of hours. The flowers in the centre of the huge leaves open white one day and close red the next. The lilies are at their biggest and best in the warm summer months, notably January.

Various international dignitaries have planted trees in the gardens, including Nelson Mandela, Indira Gandhi and a host of British royals.

The gardens have two entrances, both on the west side. The main gate (supposedly sent all the way from Crystal Palace in London) is the more southerly, opposite the church. The second is in the northwest corner beside the car park.

Labourdonnais' old mansion **Mon Plaisir** (☎ closed Monday) contains a free exhibition of photographs and is well worth a look. To complete the picture there are some animals in open pens including giant tortoises and deer.

### L'Aventure du Sucre

Just across the motorway from the botanical gardens, the former Beau Plan sugar factory now houses this excellent **museum** (Map p67; ☎ 243 0660; www.aventuredu sucre.com; adult/child Rs 300/150; ☎ 9am-5pm). It not only tells the story of sugar in fascinating detail, but also along the way covers the history of Mauritius, slavery, the rum trade and much, much more. Allow at least a couple of hours to do it justice.

The original factory was founded in 1797 and only ceased working in 1999. Most of the machinery is still in place and former workers are on hand to answer questions about the factory and the complicated process of turning sugar cane into crystals. There are also videos and interactive displays as well as quizzes for children. At the end of the visit you can taste four of the fifteen different varieties of unrefined sugar, two of which were invented in Mauritius.

If all that's set your taste buds working, you could sup a glass of sugar cane juice at **Le Fangourin** (☎ 243 0660; mains Rs 150-550; ☎ 9am-5pm), a stylish café-restaurant in the grounds of the museum. It specialises in sophisticated Creole cuisine and all sorts of sugary delights.

### Getting There & Away

Pamplemousses can be reached by bus from Grand Baie, Trou aux Biches, Grand Gaube and Port Louis. Services from Grand Baie and Trou aux Biches run approximately every hour and stop near the sugar museum on the way to the botanical gardens.

Buses from Port Louis' Immigration Square bus station and Grand Gaube operate every 10 to 15 minutes. These buses only stop at the botanical gardens, from where it takes about 10 minutes to walk to the museum.

## CENTRAL MAURITIUS

The island's mountainous centre is often overlooked by visitors seeking a quick fix of sun and sand, which is a shame as the magical mountains, the Black River Gorges National Park and the bustling towns of the Central Plateau all make for very worthwhile visits. As you can drive anywhere in Mauritius in under an hour, it's well worth hiring a car and exploring the country's interior for a day or two. Walkers and bird-watchers will love the Black River Gorges National Park, climbers and hikers will love the idiosyncratic, almost whimsical nature of Mauritius' volcanic mountains and anyone who likes bargain hunting will enjoy a trip to Curepipe or Quatre Bornes for the shopping and markets or to Floréal's textile museum. There's very little else to see in the corridor of towns that runs almost unbroken from Curepipe to Port Louis, but over half the population dwells here (drawn by the cool highland air) and it's about as unlike picture-postcard Mauritius as can be imagined, with busy streets, factories, bustling shops and traffic everywhere. This is modern Mauritius, whether you like it or not.

Southwest of Curepipe lies a more appealing region of lakes and natural parkland. The Mare aux Vacoas reservoir is the island's largest lake. It is flanked to the west by the Mare Longue and Tamarin Falls reservoirs – the latter named after a spectacular series of seven waterfalls immediately north of the lake – and to the south by Grand Bassin. This crater lake, sacred to Hindus, is one of the most important pilgrimage sites in the country.

### Getting There & Around

The Central Plateau towns are served by frequent bus connections with Port Louis. Other useful routes include the direct services between Quatre Bornes and Flic en Flac, on the west coast, and between Curepipe and Mahébourg, to the southeast; the latter service passes via the airport.

If you don't have your own transport, the easiest way to get around is by taxi.

There are no bike or motorbike rental outlets in the area. As for cars, companies elsewhere on the island will always deliver to your hotel.

## HIKING THE CENTRAL PLATEAU & BLACK RIVER GORGES

The mountain ranges fringing the Central Plateau offer a variety of rambles and longer hikes. One of the most popular is the excellent but steep ascent of Le Pouce, on the plateau's northern edge. To the west near Rose Hill, Corps de Garde is more of a challenge but equally rewarding.

The most varied hiking, however, is to be found in the beautiful highland area southwest of Curepipe, where the Black River Gorges National Park offers a range of environments from dry lowlands to the wet, forest-cloaked peaks. Surrounded by casuarina and conifer trees and tumbling waterfalls, it is like no other part of Mauritius. Of several hikes traversing the park, the classic route follows the Macchabée Trail down the Black River Valley to emerge on the west coast.

While Le Pouce and Corps de Garde can be reached by bus either from the plateau towns or Port Louis, accessing the trailheads within the national park will require private transport or a taxi ride.

### Information

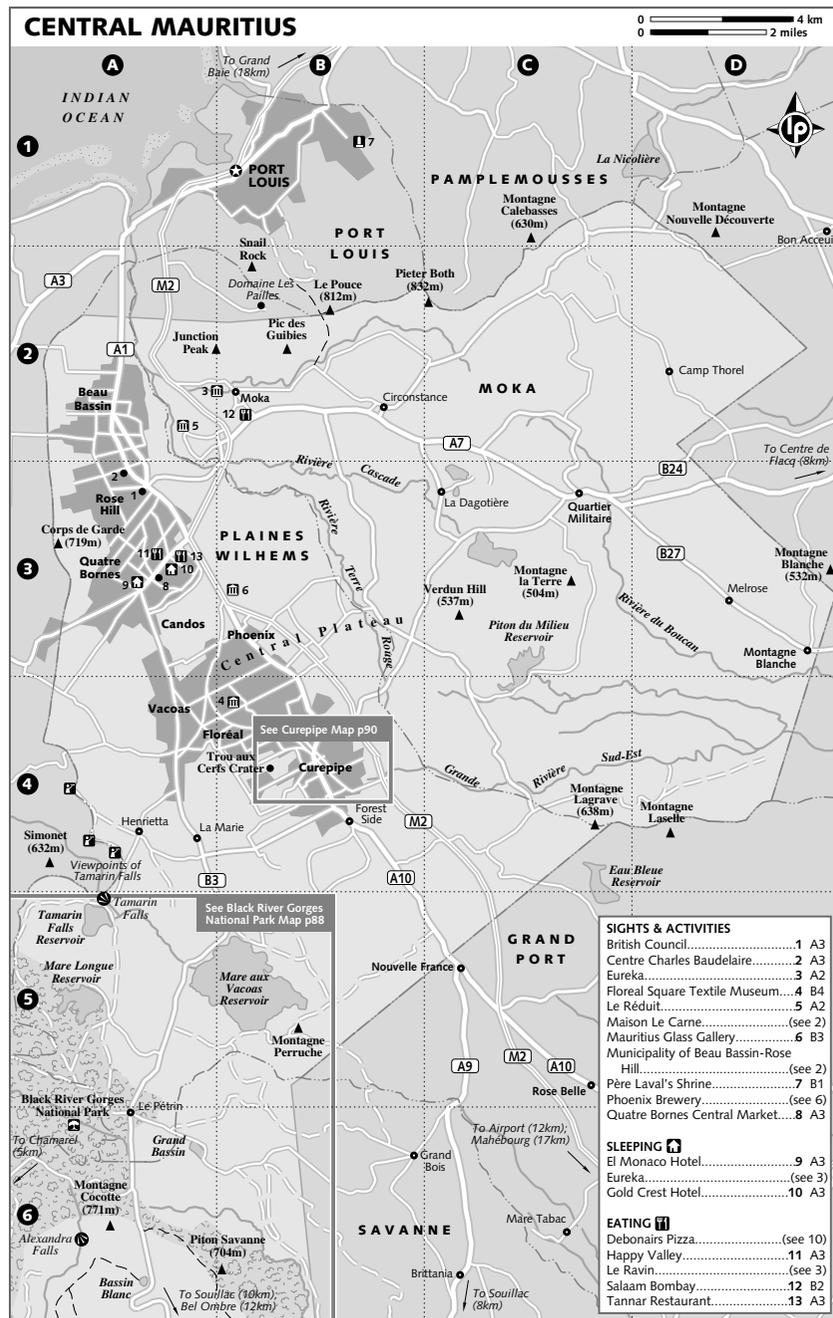
In general, hiking information is thin on the ground. Your best option is to seek advice from local people before setting out. The exception is the national park, where wardens at the two information centres (see p88) can give some advice on the trails, sell decent maps and organise local guides.

### Maps

The two visitor centres sell an excellent national park map for Rs 5, which has all the main trails and landmarks marked on it. The IGN map (p138) isn't completely up to date but shows most of the tracks and footpaths. Roads marked in yellow on this map are generally just rough tracks, sometimes passable only to 4WD vehicles, but perfectly acceptable as footpaths. They're all easy enough to follow, but smaller tracks (shown on the IGN map as dashed lines) are more difficult and may be overgrown, requiring a little bushbashing.

### Central Plateau

On the northern edge of the Central Plateau, the prominent thumb-shaped peak known as Le Pouce makes a great introduction to walking in Mauritius. It's an easy hike,



offering a splendid half-day outing with stunning views over the plateau, and north to Port Louis and the coast. Corps de Garde, to the southwest of Rose Hill, is an impressive peak that also makes for an exhilarating half-day hike.

### LE POUCE

The ascent of Le Pouce (812m) is best tackled from the south, near the town of Moka (p94).

The path starts northeast of Moka. To get there by public transport, hop on a bus heading to Nouvelle Découverte from Curepipe, Rose Hill or Port Louis' Victoria Square bus station and ask the driver to drop you off at the trailhead; services run roughly every half hour. Travelling by car, follow signs for Eureka from the motorway, then take the right turn signed to Le Pouce. After roughly 3km, where the road bends sharply to the right, a dirt track (also signed to Le Pouce) heads off east through the sugarcane fields and marks the beginning of the track.

After about 700m the path starts zig-zagging steeply uphill. A 30-minute climb brings you out on a saddle, from where you get your first views over Port Louis. From there it takes another 20 minutes or so walking east along the ridge to reach the base of the 'thumb'. The final ascent is almost vertical in places; if you don't feel up to it, never mind – even from the base you get sweeping views over the whole island.

Rather than returning the same way, you can head down to Port Louis, emerging into the southeastern suburbs of the city. The path leads steeply down the north side of the ridge from the saddle. Allow about an hour for the descent.

### CORPS DE GARDE

The wedge-shaped massif dominating Rose Hill (p93) offers a very rewarding ascent, though it's not for anyone with vertigo.

To reach the start of the trail from central Rose Hill, follow Dr Maurice Curé St northeast from the junction with Royal Rd. After about 1km, take a right turn into Surverswarnath St (you'll pass a Tamil temple on your left) and continue until you hit a staggered junction with the main road. On the far side, follow St Anne St up to a second staggered junction near the Hart de Keating

stadium and follow Cretin Ave, which leads out into the fields.

The easiest trail to follow begins just beyond the football ground and Hindu crematorium. It runs straight up to the red-and-white radar antenna at the top of the ridge. From here, the main track follows the ridge south, passing a huge perched boulder before reaching a tricky cliff over which you'll need to scramble. There are several more hair-raising sections to test your courage before you reach the nose (719m), which offers amazing views over the plains.

Allow about three hours for the walk if you're starting from the centre of Rose Hill; 1½ hours if you drive up to the trailhead.

### TAMARIN FALLS

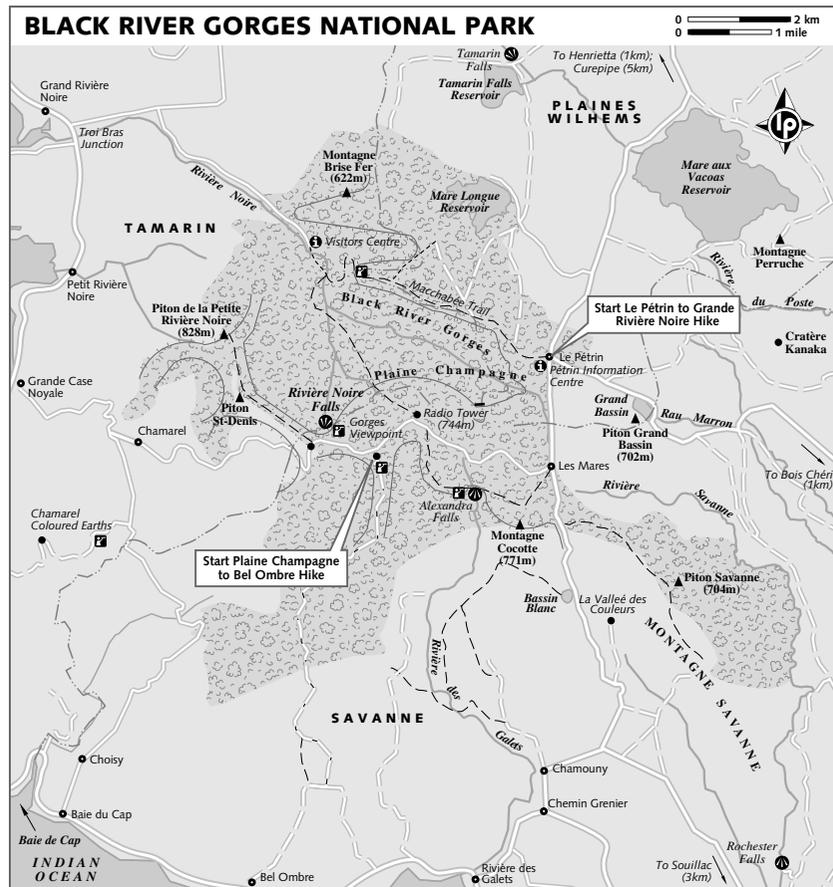
These falls, roughly 8km southwest of Curepipe (p90), are awkward to reach but it's worth the effort for a beautiful, deep, cool bathe at the bottom of the series of seven falls. They are only accessible via a challenging trail that begins near the Tamarin Falls reservoir, south of the village of Henrietta, but you will have to explore to find it. It's best to take one of the local guides usually waiting around Henrietta bus station.

There are buses to Henrietta from Curepipe every 20 minutes or so and from Port Louis roughly every hour. From Henrietta, it's about a 2km walk to the falls.

### Black River Gorges National Park

Mauritius' sole national park is a spectacularly wild expanse of thick forest covering 3.5% of the island's surface and home to over 300 species of flowering plants and nine species of bird unique to Mauritius, including the famous pink pigeon which is staging a very gradual comeback from the brink of extinction.

It's possible to drive or take a bus through the park and stop for great views along the way (although you'll be far from alone), but the best way to see the park is of course on foot. A network of hiking trails crisscross the wild and empty Black River Gorges National Park. While the markings have improved in recent years and there are good maps available, you should check the route and the current state of the trails at the information centres before setting off. Alternatively, you



may want to hire a guide, which can be done via the visitors centre.

The main **visitors centre** (📞 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) is at the park's western entrance, about 5km southeast of Grande Rivière Noire (p108). From here it's possible to proceed only on foot into the park proper. The alternative is the **Pétrin Information Centre** (📞 507 0128; 🕒 8am-3pm Mon-Fri, 8am-11am Sat) at the eastern entrance to the park. Staff at both can advise on the different trails and hand out fairly sketchy maps. They also sometimes act as guides. You should make the arrangements at least a day or two in advance. Rates start at Rs 1200 a day.

There are numerous trails that crisscross the park and nine of the best are detailed in

the official map. All the trailheads are clearly marked and are accessed from one of the two roads running through the park. The main road runs north-south along the park's eastern boundary, past the Pétrin Information Centre, then swings westward at Les Mares to climb up onto the Plaine Champagne. There's a newly constructed viewing point at Alexandra Falls, from where you get a sweeping view over the south coast. Sadly though, there's no view of the falls themselves and you have to make do with the sound alone. About 2km further west is the Gorges viewpoint, affording spectacular views and the company of wild monkeys. After another 10km the road drops to the coast at Grande Case Noyale.

The second road branches south at the Les Mares junction. After 3km it passes Bassin Blanc, a classic crater lake surrounded by forest. Beyond the lake the road zigzags down the valley to Chamouny and Chemin Grenier.

Getting to the trailheads is difficult without your own transport. The best option is to get a taxi to drop you off and then pick up a bus at the lower end; the coast road is well covered by buses travelling between the main towns.

There is nowhere to buy food or drinks in the park, even at the visitor centres. Make sure you bring plenty of water and energy-boosting snacks. You'll also need insect repellent, binoculars for bird-watching, wet-weather gear, and shoes with a good grip.

The best time to visit the park is during the flowering season between September and January. Look for the rare tamalacoque or dodo tree, the black ebony trees and the wild guavas (see the boxed text, p101). Bird-watchers should keep an eye out for the Mauritius kestrel, pink pigeon, echo parakeet and Mauritius cuckoo-shrike, among other rarities; park wardens can indicate the most likely viewing spots. For a full list of hikes see the official map – below are two of our favourites.

#### LE PÉTRIN TO GRANDE RIVIÈRE NOIRE

This is a superb 15km hike that takes you through some of the finest and most scenic countryside in Mauritius. It begins beside the Pétrin Information Centre and traverses the

national park, passing tiny pockets of indigenous vegetation dispersed through acacia and other introduced forest. Though steep in parts, it's moderately easy and reasonably fit walkers should be able to do it in four to five hours.

The first part of the walk follows the Macchabee Trail, a forestry track heading west from Le Pétrin along the ridge to a viewpoint overlooking the Grande Rivière Noire Valley. From here the route descends precipitously along a steep and devilishly slippery track for about 1km, emerging on a wider path that continues down to the river and, eventually, to the visitors centre.

Most people arrange for a taxi to meet them at the visitors centre. If not, the last 5km is a less interesting but easy stroll along a sealed road that brings you out on the coast beside the Jade Pavilion restaurant and supermarket at the Trois Bras junction in Grande Rivière Noire. From here you can pick up buses to Quatre Bornes and Port Louis.

#### PLAINE CHAMPAGNE TO BEL OMBRE

The trailhead for this 16km walk is on the Curepipe-Chamarel Rd, just under 1km west of the radio tower that marks the road's highest point. The trail heads due south to Bel Ombre, passing through lovely mixed forests and plantations. After 10km you leave the park and start to cross private land. The last

#### GRAND BASSIN

According to legend, Shiva and his wife Parvati were circling the earth on a contraption made from flowers when they were dazzled by an island set in an emerald sea. Shiva, who was carrying the Ganges River on his head to protect the world from floods, decided to land. As he did so a couple of drops of water sprayed from his head and landed in a crater to form a lake. The Ganges expressed unhappiness about its water being left on an uninhabited island, but Shiva replied that dwellers from the banks of the Ganges would one day settle there and perform an annual pilgrimage, during which water from the lake would be presented as an offering.

The dazzling island is, of course, Mauritius; the legendary crater lake is known as Grand Bassin (or Ganga Talao). It is a renowned pilgrimage site, to which up to 500,000 of the island's Hindu community come each year to pay homage to Shiva during the Maha Shivaratri celebrations. This vast festival takes place over three days in February or March (depending on the lunar cycle) and is the largest Hindu celebration outside India.

The most devoted pilgrims walk from their village to the sacred lake carrying a *kanvar*, a light wooden frame or arch decorated with paper flowers. Others make their way by coach or car. Once there they perform a puja, burning incense and camphor at the lake shore and offering food and flowers.

Visitors are welcome to attend Maha Shivaratri, but should do so with respect: dress modestly, and remove your shoes before entering temples and holy places.

stretch meanders along some rather confusing tracks, but a reasonably good sense of direction will get you to the coast road without too much difficulty. From Bel Ombre, there are buses to Curepipe and Rivière des Galets.

Allow about four hours for this moderately easy walk.

## CUREPIPE

pop 80,000

Effectively Mauritius' second city, Curepipe is a bustling highland commercial centre famous for its rainy weather and clothes shopping. Its strange name reputedly stems from the malaria epidemic of 1867 when people fleeing from lowland Port Louis would 'cure' their pipes of malarial bacteria by smoking them here, although in fact it's more likely to be named after a fondly remembered town in France.

While it will be of limited interest to most visitors, it makes a pleasant half-day excursion inland from the beach. Shoppers looking for bargain clothes will fare well here and there are a couple of interesting sights, including a perfectly formed mini volcanic crater.

Curepipe is the highest of the plateau towns. At 550m above sea level, temperatures are refreshingly cool in summer, but the town is often swathed in cloud. The damp climate gives the buildings an ageing, mildewed quality. Bring an umbrella, as it can rain without warning at any time of year. According to lowlanders, Curepipe has two seasons: the little season of big rains and the big season of little rains.

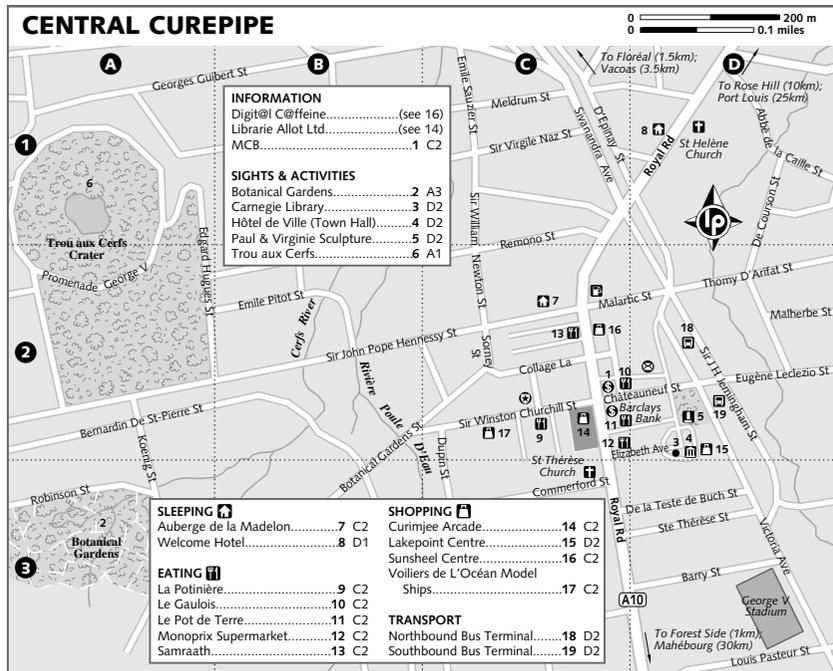
## Orientation

Curepipe is bisected by Royal Rd, which runs approximately north-south. Most of the banks, shops and restaurants are on this street around the junction with Châteauneuf St. Head east along Châteauneuf St for the bus station. Most of the sights, such as the Trou aux Cerfs crater and the botanical gardens, are within easy walking distance of the centre.

## Information

The major banks, most with ATMs, are located on Royal Rd.

**Digit@l C@ffeine** (☎ 670 5335; Sunsheel Centre, Royal Rd; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon Sun) Offers plenty of PCs with access at Rs 1 per minute.



**Librairie Allot Ltd** (☎ 676 1253; Curimjee Arcade, Royal Rd) There's an excellent range of books, papers and magazines in French and English here, hidden away inside the arcade.

**Mauritius Commercial Bank (MCB)** (Cnr Châteauneuf St & Royal Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Exchange Bureau.

## Sights

### TOWN CENTRE

Overlooking a small park in the centre of Curepipe, the **Hôtel de Ville** (town hall) is one of Mauritius' best surviving examples of colonial-era architecture. Its gable windows, veranda and the decorative wooden friezes known as *dentelles* are typical of the style (see p45). The building was moved here from Moka in 1903.

The park's main draw is a copy in bronze of the famous statue of the fictitious lovers Paul and Virginie by Mauritian sculptor Prosper d'Épinay (see the boxed text, p83). The original is on display in Port Louis' Blue Penny Museum (p57).

Next to the town hall, the stone building with the distinctive neoclassical porch houses the municipal **Carnegie Library** (☎ 674 2278; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-3pm Sat). Its collection includes rare books on Mauritius dating back to the 18th century.

### TROU AUX CERFS

About 1km west of central Curepipe, the **Trou aux Cerfs** is an extinct volcanic crater some 100m deep and 1km in circumference. The bowl is heavily wooded, but from the road around the rim – a favourite spot for joggers and walkers – you get lovely views of the plateau. There are benches for rest and reflection, and a radar station for keeping an electronic eye on cyclone activity.

### BOTANICAL GARDENS

These well-kept and informal **gardens** (admission free; ☎ 8am-6pm May-Sep, 7am-7pm Oct-Apr), with their lakes and lawns, provide another pleasant spot for some quiet contemplation. They were created in 1870 to grow plants in need of a more temperate climate than exists at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanical Gardens in Pamplemousses (p83).

## Sleeping

Unless you're on business here, it's hard to imagine why you'd need to stay in Curepipe,

although it's perfectly possible and won't break the bank.

**Welcome Hotel** (☎ 675 3265; fax 674 7292; 196 Royal Rd; d incl breakfast Rs 550, without toilet Rs 450) This very basic place is friendly enough and the fan-cooled rooms are clean and functional, with iron bedsteads. It's a 10-minute walk from the centre of town.

**Auberge de la Madelon** (☎ 670 1885; www.aubergemadelon.ltd.mu; 10 Sir John Pope Hennessy St; s/d incl breakfast Rs 600/750; ☎ ☎ ☎) Excellent value and centrally located, this well-run place is simple and small, with 15 comfy en-suite rooms and a proactive and helpful management. Free wi-fi and a small pool area are the latest bonuses for guests.

## Eating

**Le Pot de Terre** (☎ 676 2204; Pot de Terre Lane; mains Rs 50-125; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 7.30am-2pm Sun) This local favourite is a great place to meet locals and a world away from the tourist-oriented restaurants you'll find on the coast. Clouds of smoke and the sound of animated conversations characterise the joint, with a simple and tasty menu of sandwiches, grills and noodles.

**Samraath** (☎ 793 1413; Petit Bateau Bldg, 2nd fl, Royal Rd; mains Rs 100; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun; ☎ ☎) You really need to know this place is here, but luckily now you do. Down a tiny side street next to the college, this almost-hidden restaurant is a surprise – delightfully painted in bright orange and yellow, the Indian food is superb and the atmosphere and décor are the best in town. Vegetarians will be in heaven here and Chinese cuisine is also served for those who don't fancy a curry.

**La Potinière** (☎ 676 2648; Sir Winston Churchill St; mains from Rs 200, crepes Rs 100-200; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat; ☎ ☎) Curepipe's most obviously upmarket restaurant hides in an unassuming concrete block, but inside all is starched linen and gleaming tableware. It serves predominantly French cuisine, with a choice of sweet and savoury crepes as well as more substantial dishes, and excellent homemade deserts.

**Le Gaulois** (☎ 675 5674; Dr Ferrière St; mains Rs 300-400; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat) This family-run place is a tiny and unfussy affair, which serves predominantly Franco-Mauritian cuisine – grilled lobster, Creole-style bouillabaisse, prawns in garlic sauce – at rather premium prices just off the main drag.

For self-caterers, there's the **Monoprix Supermarket** (Royal Rd) in the centre of town.

## Shopping

Most people come to Curepipe to shop and few leave without some bargains. Try busy Châteauneuf St for bargain clothing outlets. There are several shopping malls around the central crossroads. Of these, the **Curimjee Arcade** (Royal Rd) contains a collection of upmarket duty-free shops selling clothes and souvenirs. Further north, the glitzy new **Sunshell Centre** (Royal Rd) is also worth a look. There's a lovely Indian fabric shop on the ground floor and outlets of Habit and Café Cotton. The new **Lakepoint Centre** (Elizabeth Ave) is the latest arrival and has the pricier clothes shops in it.

Curepipe is a centre for model-ship showrooms and workshops. One such place is **Voiliers de L'Océan** (☎ 676 6986; voiliers@intnet.mu; Sir Winston Churchill St; ☎ 9am-6pm), which has a good selection. You can see the ships being made between 8am and 5pm Monday to Friday.

## Getting There & Away

Curepipe is an important transport hub, with frequent bus services to Port Louis (Victoria Square), Mahébourg, Centre de Flacq, Moka and surrounding towns such as Floréal, Phoenix, Quatre Bornes and Rose Hill. There are two terminals – the northbound and the southbound. Most services go from the northbound (Port Louis, Rose Hill, Quatre Bornes), while Mahébourg is served from the southbound terminal. The terminals lie on either side of Châteauneuf St, at the junction with Victoria Ave.

Expect to pay around Rs 600 for a taxi ride from Curepipe to the airport and Rs 500 to Port Louis.

## AROUND CUREPIPE

The Black River Gorges National Park, some 10km southwest of Curepipe, is a favourite haunt of hikers, but it also provides two spectacular drives. Perhaps the more stunning road, but only by a whisker, is that cutting west across Plaine Champagne before corkscrewing down to the coast; at each bend the view seems better than the last. The other road takes you plunging steeply down to the south. If you are feeling more energetic, you might try one of

the hiking trails; for more information, see p87.

## Floréal

This rather posh suburb northwest of Curepipe has become synonymous with the high-quality knitwear produced by the Floreal Knitwear Company. Of particular interest is the **Floreal Square Textile Museum** (Map p86; ☎ 698 8011; Swami Sivananda Ave; adults/children Rs 100/50; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-4pm Sat) and shopping mall on the main road from Curepipe. Some of the workers who painstakingly put the clothes together will take you step by step through the commercial knitwear business. There's also a short video presentation and displays outlining the history not only of knitwear but of clothes and textiles in general.

You can buy Floreal knitwear in the shop below the museum; prices are good and there's a wider choice than in Floreal's other outlets around the island. The mall contains several equally upmarket clothes boutiques, and there's even a café on hand should you need sustenance. It serves slightly pricey but good quality cakes and light lunches such as salads and homemade quiche.

## Phoenix

This industrial centre is the home of the **Phoenix Brewery** (Map p86), located beside the M2 motorway, which brews Phoenix Beer and Blue Marlin. While Phoenix doesn't hold much of interest for visitors (sadly the brewery is not open to the public), the **Mauritius Glass Gallery** (Map p86; ☎ 698 8007; adults/children Rs 50/25; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat), beside the brewery, produces unusual – and environmentally sound – souvenirs made from recycled glass. You can see them being made using traditional methods in the workshop, which also doubles as a small museum.

## QUATRE BORNES

pop 78,000

For many people Quatre Bornes is nothing more than a big conurbation built up around the tediously busy road linking Flic en Flac to the M1. Its main street, St Jean Rd, is always choked with traffic, but despite this the town is pleasantly lively with lots of shopping. The twice-weekly **clothes market** on Thursday and Sunday is well worth a visit. Locals flock here from miles around to rummage the stalls, where it's possible to

find top-quality garments with almost imperceptible flaws selling at low prices; check carefully though, since quality varies enormously. There's nothing much else to bring you here, however. There's an internet centre on the 2nd floor of the Orchard Centre on St Jean Rd.

## Sleeping

**El Monaco Hotel** (Map p86; ☎ 425 2608; elmo@bow.intnet.mu; St Jean Rd; s/d/t incl breakfast Rs 1200/1400/2000; ☎ ) Just off the main drag in a quiet courtyard with a pool and attractive garden, the Monaco offers functional but perfectly decent rooms with fan, bathroom, TV and telephone.

**Gold Crest Hotel** (Map p86; ☎ 454 5945; www.goldcresthotel.com; St Jean Rd; s/d incl breakfast Rs 1520/1855; ☎ ) Definitely the best hotel in town and probably worth the slight price hike from the Monaco, the spanking new Gold Crest offers all the usual amenities of a business hotel, from smart, comfortable rooms to a good restaurant.

## Eating

**Debonairs Pizza** (Map p86; ☎ 425 2608; St Jean Rd; pizzas from Rs 120; ☎ lunch & dinner) Next door to the Gold Crest Hotel is another outlet of the South African pizza and sub pedlars, Debonairs – a great place for a quick lunch.

**Tannar Restaurant** (Map p86; ☎ 465 3140; St Jean Rd; mains Rs 150-200; ☎ lunch & dinner) This smart oasis amid the chaos of St Jean Rd is definitely the place to go for a high-quality Indian meal. The décor is modern, the whole place a lovely shade of orange and there's an excellent-value range of curries too.

**Happy Valley** (Map p86; ☎ 454 6065; St Jean Rd; mains Rs 160-350; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Wed; ☎ ) Far more down to earth than Tannar is long-standing local favourite Happy Valley. House specials include Peking duck, spicy squid and the aptly named Three Marvels Hot Pot, a seafood and vegetable steamboat. At Sunday lunchtime it's packed with local Chinese families tucking into dim sum (four pieces of dim sum from Rs 50).

## Getting There & Away

Frequent bus services operate between Rose Hill, Port Louis and the bus station in Quatre Bornes beside the town hall. Buses for Curepipe, Floréal and Flic en Flac stop at regular intervals along St Jean Rd.

## ROSE HILL

pop 106,000

Rose Hill, wedged between Beau Bassin and Quatre Bornes in the middle of the Central Plateau conurbation, is virtually a suburb of Port Louis and a major cultural centre for Mauritius. The town sits at the foot of the impressive Corps de Garde mountain (see p87 for more about tackling this peak) and retains a few interesting old buildings from the colonial era. It also has a reputation as a cheap place to shop, particularly for imported Indian textiles.

Most places of interest are strung out along St Jean Rd, which is Rose Hill's main thoroughfare. The intersection of St Jean Rd and Vandermersch St marks the town centre, where you'll find the bus station and the main shopping malls as well as numerous basic restaurants and food stalls. For tiptop Indian snacks, you can't beat the *dhal puris* sold by **Dewa & Sons** (Arab Town market, Royal Rd) to the south of the centre; they're reputed to be the best on the island.

## Sights

Two of the most important cultural centres in Mauritius are located in Rose Hill. The **British Council** (☎ 403 0200; general.enquiries@mu.britishcouncil.org; St Jean Rd; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-2.30pm Sat) is across the main road from the bus station. It has a regular programme of events in English and a good library.

Behind Maison Le Carne is the **Centre Charles Baudelaire** (Map p86; ☎ 454 7929; ccb@intnet.mu; 15/17 Gordon St; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Tue-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat), which puts on an impressive schedule of plays, concerts and other events promoting French culture.

There are also several impressive Creole buildings in the centre of Rose Hill. The **Municipality of Beau Bassin-Rose Hill** (Map p86) on St Jean Rd is housed in an unusual Creole building that was constructed in 1933 as a theatre. Next door, **Maison Le Carne** (Map p86) is a more attractive old Creole mansion. It now houses the Mauritius Research Council.

## Getting There & Away

There are regular buses from Port Louis and Curepipe to Rose Hill, and from Rose Hill to Centre de Flacq on the east coast.

## MOKA & AROUND

pop 8500

The most charming of the Central Plateau towns, the country's academic centre and official home to the President of Mauritius, picturesque Moka is a great place to visit for a taste of Mauritian history. The scenery is dramatic here too, with waterfalls, valleys and the towering Le Pouce Mountain (812m) in the background, which provides stunning views over the Central Plateau and north to Port Louis (see p87 for more about climbing Le Pouce). The undoubted attraction here, though, is the beautiful colonial mansion of Eureka, which is a fascinating place to visit. Almost perfectly preserved from the mid-19th century, it provides some of the most unique accommodation in the country.

### Eureka

A highlight of any visit to Mauritius is **Eureka** (Map p86; ☎ 433 8477; www.maisoneureka.com; house only Rs 175, house & garden Rs 300; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3.30pm Sun), a more or less perfectly preserved Creole mansion built in the 1830s, which stands in woodland on the northwest edge of Moka. A masterpiece of tropical construction, the house boasts 109 doors, which keep the interior deliciously cool during the hot summers and, unless you're unlucky and bump into a tour group, you're also likely to have the place virtually to yourself. The unusual name is believed to have been the reaction to its second owner, Eugène Le Clézio, when his bid to purchase the house at auction in 1856 was successful.

Coming here instantly transports you into the colonial world, with the fine, expansive gardens, the impeccably preserved collection of period furniture imported by the French East India Company and the day-to-day items such as the toilet, which bring the colonial experience to life. There's also a Chinese room and a music room and, the height of sophistication in those days, a colonial shower contraption. Lining the staircase are some fine antique maps of Asia and Africa and a very tatty globe.

The courtyard behind the house is surrounded by stone cottages, which were once the staff quarters and kitchen, and beyond the main house are a number of cottages that function as one of Mauritius' most atmospheric accommodation options (see right). The gorgeous grounds extend to a se-

ries of beautiful waterfalls about a 15-minute walk away on a trail from the main house (swimming is great here in the large pools four or five cascades down).

To get to Eureka, take a bus from Curepipe or Victoria Square in Port Louis and get off at Moka. Eureka is signed about 1km north of the bus stop.

### Le Réduit

Close to the university is Le Réduit (Map p86), a superb mansion surrounded by an extensive park. It was built in 1778 for the French governor Barthélémy David, who succeeded Mahé de Labourdonnais. Now the President's official residence, it is sadly closed to the public.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Eureka** (Map p86; ☎ 433 8477; www.maisoneureka.com; r incl breakfast Rs 3450; ☎ lunch) You can both eat and sleep at Eureka, and while the decent food served on the terrace at lunch (set menu Rs 750) is a delightful but rather overpriced experience, the fantastic group of bungalows to one side of the main mansion are perfect for a romantic retreat. Much of the time you'll be the only people staying here, and it's hard to imagine a more blissful spot. Each bungalow is individually furnished (Simone is our favourite) with ensuite facilities and a double bed. There's even a main house you can rent with three bedrooms (also available individually), which is just as stylish. Watching the sunset here by the small pool is about as good as it gets.

**our pick** **Salaam Bombay** (Map p86; ☎ 433 1003; Royal Rd; dishes Rs 140-340; ☎ lunch & dinner) This friendly place, rather unfortunately located on the side of a busy roundabout, is nevertheless superb. There's a delicious range of tandoor and tikka dishes as well as plenty of choices for vegetarians. You can also eat pizza here, courtesy of the next-door pizza delivery company run by the same management.

**Le Ravin** (Map p86; ☎ 433 4501; mains Rs 300-600; ☎ lunch, dinner by reservation) Next door to Eureka on the main road is this charming French-Creole restaurant on the banks of the river. It's owned and run by the Eureka management, so it's squarely aimed at tourists, although it is a lovely spot and a great place to treat yourself to a long lunch.

## EAST MAURITIUS

Lacking a Flic en Flac or a Grand Baie around which infinite numbers of postcard stands, takeaways and souvenir shops can grow up, the east coast of Mauritius feels enviably untouched by mass tourism, which is fantastic as the island's very best beaches are to be found here – both long stretches of deserted public beach and equally impressive sands behind the elegant gates of five-star hotels. East Mauritius is definitely the most exclusive side of the island and the congregation of luxury hotels around Belle Mare attracts the kind of crowd likely to take a helicopter transfer from the airport when they arrive. However, relaxed Trou d'Eau Douce has retained the feel of a sleepy fishing village despite rubbing shoulders with grand hotels and being the starting point for the country's favourite boat excursion – the Île aux Cerfs. Trou d'Eau Douce also provides the only good source of budget accommodation in the area, and is a good place to base yourself, with plenty of eating, sleeping and activity options.

Inland from the coast, fields of sugar cane interspersed with vegetable gardens slope gently up towards the mountains. The main town, Centre de Flacq, has a good market and is also useful for its banks, shops and transport connections.

### Getting There & Around

The main transport hub for east Mauritius is Centre de Flacq. You'll have to change here coming by bus from Port Louis, the Central Plateau towns or from Mahébourg in the south. There are onward connections from Centre de Flacq to villages along the east coast, although some services are pretty infrequent.

Most hotels and guesthouses have bikes for rent. Otherwise, you can rent bikes in Trou d'Eau Douce. Car rental can either be arranged through your hotel or through one of the big agencies (see p152).

### TROU D'EAU DOUCE

pop 5400

'Sweet water hole' is the major crossroads on the east coast and its unwitting tourism capital as a result. It's a thoroughly lovely place, large and rambling along a wonderful bit of coast and just a short boat jour-

ney away from the massively popular Île aux Cerfs, a favoured weekend picnic excursion for Mauritians. Indeed, as soon as you get to the town centre you'll have 'Île aux Cerfs?' shouted at you by hopeful touts who line the road. Despite this, the town makes a great base for exploring the east coast, with plenty of good accommodation and eating options. The town beach is lovely, although the bay is busy with fishing and speedboats, so be aware. It's pretty much a one-road town, with almost everything strung out along the coast-hugging Royal Rd. The centre is marked by a church, near which you'll find the post office, police station and a small petrol station.

### Information

**Les Hollandais Cybercafé** (Map p96; ☎ 480 0138; Le Maho; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Down a side street between Chez Tino and Soleil des Z'Îles, this cyber café also doubles as a patisserie.

**Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA)** (Map p96; ☎ 480 0925; Royal Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Provides information and can help with accommodation booking, car hire and excursions to the Île aux Cerfs.

**Sous le Manguier** (Map p96; ☎ 419 3855; Royal Rd; ☎ 10am-2.30pm) This restaurant has internet access at lunchtime.

### Activities

The town's only diving centre, **Easy Divers** (Map p96; ☎ 911 4103/782 0186; Royal Rd; ☎ 8am-4pm), can be found opposite the public beach.

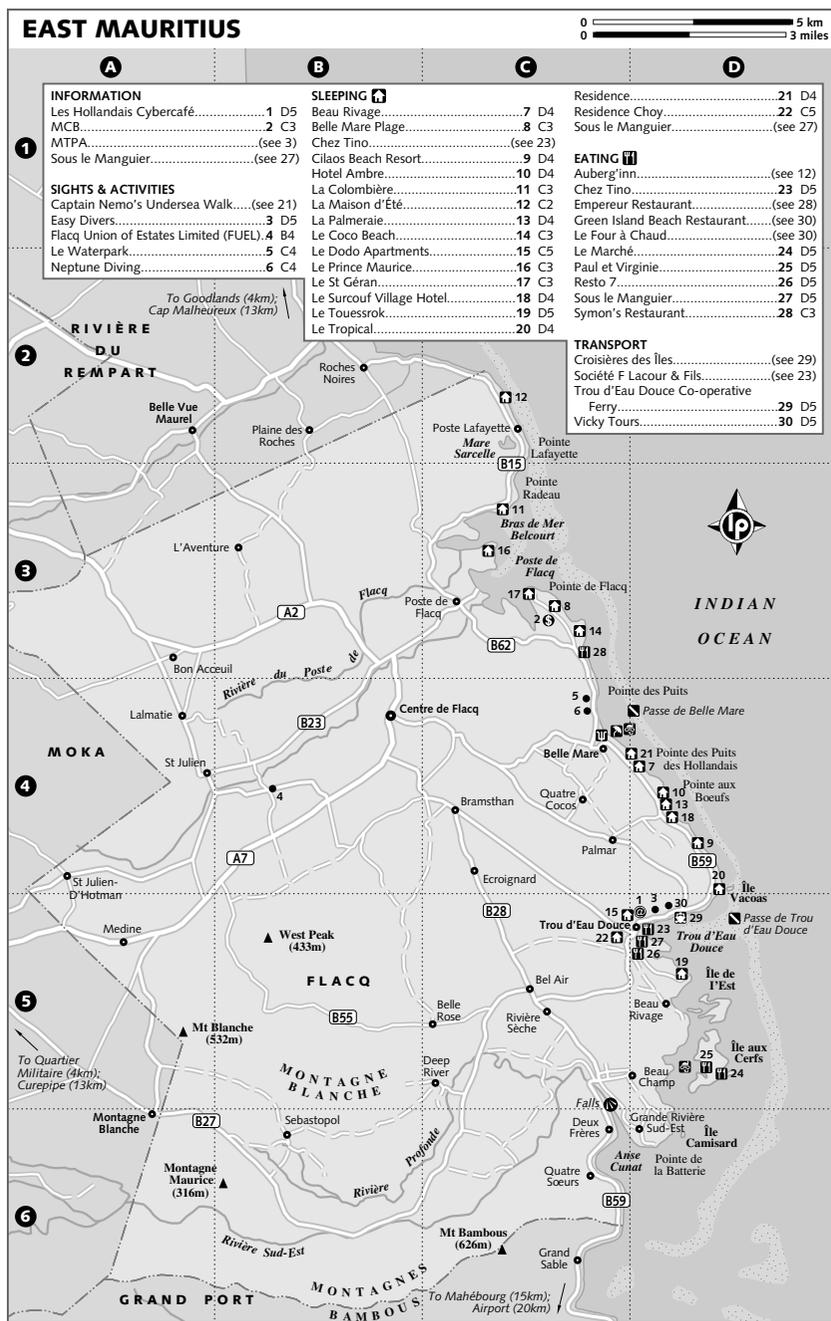
### Sleeping

There's more choice here than anywhere else on the east coast, and you'll find a decent range of budget and midrange accommodation. For luxury, head either way along the coast.

### BUDGET & MIDRANGE

**Sous le Manguier** (Map p96; ☎ 419 3855; slm@intnet.mu; Royal Rd; studio Rs 400, apt Rs 600-1100; ☎) The owners of this restaurant rent out two tidy self-catering apartments (for up to four people) and a small studio.

**Auberge Etienne** (☎ 480 0497; etienet@bow.intnet.mu; Royal Rd; d/studio Rs 500/600) A very small family-run guesthouse with extremely basic facilities. Fan-cooled rooms have TVs and mosquito nets. While there's an extension planned, at the moment it's rather too basic to be much fun.



**Residence Choy** (Map p96; ☎ 480 0144; Royal Rd; studio with/without air-con Rs 850/650; 🏠) A large complex of small studio apartments a short distance from the centre of town, the Residence Choy is very comfortable, providing a good standard of accommodation including self-catering facilities.

**Le Dodo Apartments** (Map p96; ☎ 480 0034; Royal Rd; apt from Rs 700) Four neat and very spacious apartments in a modern block set back from the main road, a short stroll from the town beach. All have a fan, TV and balcony or terrace. Bike hire is available for Rs 100 per day.

**Chez Tino** (Map p96; ☎ 480 2769; Royal Rd; r incl breakfast from Rs 700; 🍴) The charming Chez Tino restaurant also has three en suite doubles on its top floor. They're a little cramped but comfortable. An excellent breakfast in the downstairs restaurant is included.

**Cilaos Beach Resort** (Map p96; ☎ 480 2985; www.beach-bungalows.mu; Royal Rd; studio/apt from Rs 1300/2000) This small complex of apartments and studios is right on the beach just north of Trou d'Eau Douce. It's a bit of a hike into town unless you have a car, but it's very friendly and relaxed – rooms are comfy and clean, and although simple they include kitchens for self-catering. There's also a stable on the site and horse-riding excursions can be arranged.

## TOP END

**Ourpick** **Le Touessrok** (Map p96; ☎ 402 7400; www.oneandonlytouessrok.com; s/d incl breakfast from Rs 22,500/30,000, ste from Rs 35,000; 🏠 🍴 📺 📶 🚗) Already a classic hotel known for the favour of royalty and celebrities, Le Touessrok was given a sublime multi-million dollar refit in 2003 when it became the One & Only Le Touessrok, part of the global luxury chain owned by Sol Kerzner. This partnership ended in 2007, and it's now just Le Touessrok again, but the hotel is so impeccably run and so beautifully designed that even without the One & Only name, it's bound to retain its cachet. Where to begin? The hotel is designed over two islands on a peninsula, so it has several beaches, all of which are superb. The whole place has a Moorish style to it, although the public areas are more minimalist while still beautiful and calming. The rooms are equally tasteful, with vast bathrooms, a personal butler and every possible convenience from free wi-fi to espresso machines, DVD players and remote-control everything. The hotel owns not only Île aux Cerfs (p98), but also the tot-

ally exclusive, Robinson Crusoe-style hide-away, Îlot Mangénie. If you have the money or you're on a honeymoon, this is never going to be a bad choice.

## Eating

**Resto 7** (Map p96; ☎ 480 2766; Sept Croisées; mains Rs 120-350; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Signed 1km south of town, this friendly, family-run place specialises in seafood and local dishes such as lobster and octopus curry as well as more snacky options, like baguettes, all served in an attractive al fresco setting. Don't get the owner started about Sunderland FC. It also offers well-priced boat trips to Île aux Cerfs.

**Chez Tino** (Map p96; ☎ 480 2769; Royal Rd; mains Rs 150-400; 🍴 lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) Pufferfish hanging in vast numbers from the ceiling characterise this brilliant, quirky little place. Reserve a table on the wonderful terrace for the best views and enjoy a superb meal of Mauritian cooking with a heavy focus on seafood.

**Sous le Manguier** (Map p96; ☎ 419 3855; Royal Rd; lunch Rs 250, dinner incl drinks Rs 450; 🍴 lunch, dinner on reservation only) Opposite the church, this excellent *table d'hôte* (where you eat with the family) is, as its name suggests, 'under the mango tree' and you'll get some fantastic home-cooked food. The downstairs restaurant is open during the day, while in the evening the owners invite you to join them for a veritable feast of local specialities on their upstairs terrace.

**Green Island Beach Restaurant** (Map p96; ☎ 515 0240; Royal Rd; mains Rs 250; 🍴 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) It's hard to miss this place with its bright-orange exterior. Here you'll find Sino-Franco-Mauritian cuisine and seafood on offer at slightly higher prices than most other eateries but with a great position overlooking the sea to compensate.

**Le Four à Chaud** (Map p96; ☎ 480 1036; Royal Rd; mains Rs 300; 🍴 lunch & dinner Sun-Fri, dinner Sat) This is the smartest place in town and where you should head for a romantic evening of feasting on *fruits de mer* while enjoying a fantastic wine list. Reserve ahead to get one of the few balcony tables with sea views, and note that the menu is exclusively seafood. The name is a play on words (it's opposite the old lime kiln, or *four à chaux*).

## Getting There & Around

There are no direct buses from Port Louis to Trou d'Eau Douce. You'll need to change at

## WEDDING BELLS

If you have ever fantasised about walking out of your wedding reception onto a tropical beach, Mauritius could be the venue you've been searching for. Most of the luxury hotels on the island offer special wedding and honeymoon packages, with perks including tropical flowers, champagne and special romantic meals for newlyweds. For that extra something, the local civil status officer can perform the ceremony on the hotel beach, or even underwater courtesy of Blue Safari Submarine (see p69).

Under Mauritian law, civil weddings can be celebrated by nonresidents upon production of a certificate of nonresidency, which can be obtained from the **Registrar of Civil Status** (Map pp58-9; ☎ 201 1727; civstat@intnet.mu; Emmanuel Anquetil Bldg, Jules Koenig St, Port Louis). The application process takes at least 10 days, and requires two copies of the birth certificates and passports of both parties. Alternatively, you can let someone else do the work and book a complete wedding package from abroad direct with the hotel or through a travel agent.

Centre de Flacq, from where onward services to Trou d'Eau Douce run every half-hour. Taxis cost around Rs 300 from Centre de Flacq and Rs 1000 from the airport.

**Vicky Tours** (☎ 760 0254; Royal Rd; ☎ 9am-7pm), at the north end of town, rents bicycles for Rs 125 a day.

## ÎLE AUX CERFS

This stunning island off the east coast of Mauritius is one of the most popular day trips in the country for both foreigners and Mauritians alike. In fact it's rather become a victim of its own success, inasmuch as it's now hard to find the deserted beaches that were once the main draw in the first place. While the island was once populated by *cerfs* or stags (imported for hunting from Java) you'll find only touts and tourists there today. However, the further you go from the boat jetty, the more likely you are to find a patch of sand between the sun-bronzed bodies. At low tide you can also wade across to the smaller and quieter Île de l'Est, which is joined to Île aux Cerfs by a picturesque sand bar. In winter, the beaches on the island's west side provide sheltered sunbathing spots.

Much of the Île aux Cerfs belongs to the plush Le Touessrok hotel (p97). The majority of water sports on offer are reserved for hotel guests, although the magnificent 18-hole golf course is also open to outsiders as long as they book in advance.

Many visitors bring picnics to the island, but there are two restaurants on Île aux Cerfs. The **Paul et Virginie restaurant** (Map p96; mains from Rs 250; ☎ noon-3pm) on the beach offers not inexpensive seafood while **Le Marché**

(Map p96; mains from Rs 200; ☎ noon-3pm) serves up Mauritian fare.

## Getting There & Away

Despite what the signs say, there is no public ferry to Île aux Cerfs. Guests of Le Touessrok get whisked over to the island for free on the hotel launch. Lesser mortals have to use one of the private operators in Trou d'Eau Douce. Those with a reliable reputation include **Vicky Tours** (Map p96; ☎ 754 5597; Royal Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm), **Trou d'Eau Douce Co-operative Ferry** (Map p96; ☎ 519 0452; Royal Rd; ☎ 8.15am-5pm), **Croisières des Îles** (Map p96; ☎ 519 0876; Royal Rd; ☎ 8am-5pm), and **Société F.Lacour & Fils** (Map p96; ☎ 480 2311; Royal Rd; ☎ 8am-5pm), all at the north end of town. You can also arrange boats through Resto 7 and Chez Tino (see p97) or through your hotel or guesthouse.

Prices tend to be fairly standard, at around Rs 300 per person for the return trip by ordinary boat (15 minutes each way) and Rs 500 by speedboat (five minutes). Depending how busy it is, boats leave roughly every 30 minutes between 9am and 4pm, with the last boat back at 5pm at the latest.

Most operators also offer various combinations of Île aux Cerfs with glass-bottomed boat trips, snorkelling and a barbecue lunch.

## BELLE MARE & AROUND

North from Trou d'Eau Douce as far as Pointe de Flacq, a 10km-long beach includes some of the best white sand and azure ocean in Mauritius, unsurprisingly also home to the largest stretch of luxury hotels in the country. The beach around Belle Mare is generally regarded as one of the island's finest; Palmar beach, just to the south, is not far behind.

Belle Mare itself is a small, nondescript kind of place with little to recommend it. However, there are several currency exchanges here and two supermarkets.

## Information

**Mauritius Commercial Bank** (MCB; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) has a useful branch with exchange facilities and an ATM near the Belle Mare Plage hotel. You'll find a few supermarkets in Belle Mare, but for other services the closest town is Centre de Flacq.

## Activities

The east coast's most famous dive site, 'the Pass', is located off Belle Mare. To explore this and other local sites, contact **Neptune Diving** (Map p96; ☎ 515 0936 or 251 4152; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) at the Emeraude Hotel.

**Captain Nemo's Undersea Walk** (Map p96; ☎ 263 7819; www.captainemo-underseawalk.com; Rs 870; ☎ 8.30am-5pm), the long-established Grand Baie operation, operates from beside the Residence hotel for nondivers – see p134 for more information about this activity. For a fun half-day out **Le Waterpark** (Map p96; ☎ 415 2626; Coastal Rd; adult/child Rs 350/185; ☎ 10am-5.30pm) offers rides, slides and thrills aplenty.

## Sleeping

Despite being achingly exclusive for the most part, there are a couple of midrange options on the Belle Mare coast. Those seeking solitude should head north along the road towards Poste Lafayette.

## MIDRANGE

**La Colombière** (Map p96; ☎ 410 5282; www.colombiere-sur-mer.com; Poste Lafayette; studio/apt from Rs 1200/3200; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This sweet, low-key establishment faces the Prince Maurice hotel across the lagoon – the truly audacious could probably swim across and have a dip in their pool – although it's hard to imagine an establishment more different. People come here for carefree beach fun and to kitesurf. Most units are in a rather unattractive block and are a bit cramped at the cheaper end, but clean and well equipped. There are two small pools and a tennis court.

**La Maison d'Été** (Map p96; ☎ 410 5039; www.lamaisondete.com; Poste Lafayette; studio Rs 2500/3000; ☎) This was, until recently, Coral Beach Bungalows, but has been transformed by a lovely Franco-Mauritian couple into La Maison d'Été, one of

the most charming and relaxed guesthouses in the country. Six simple but beautifully appointed self-catering studios are arranged around a good pool and are just a few metres from the beach where there's great snorkelling to be had. Jean Claude is an excellent chef and runs a fantastic little restaurant, Auberg'inn, where eating is a treat.

**Le Surcouf Village Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 415 1800; www.lesurcouf.net; s/d with half board from Rs 2500/4500; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This delightful place oozes relaxed charm and unpretentious fun, a world away from its stuffer neighbours. All the bungalows face the lagoon, and there are free glass-bottom boat trips and non-motorised water sports. The white-sand beach is on a peaceful bay and despite not being very wide is still delightful.

**Le Tropical** (Map p96; ☎ 480 1300; www.naiade.com; Royal Rd; s/d full board from Rs 3390/5100; ☎ ☎) There's little to complain about at this well-run and affordable three-star place a little way out of Trou d'Eau Douce. It's pleasantly small with just 60 rooms, and has a good stretch of beach right on the lagoon, which even features some 19th-century canons. Accommodation is in two-storey blocks facing the sea.

**Le Coco Beach** (Map p96; ☎ 415 1010; www.lecoco.beach.com; Poste de Flacq; s/d with half board from Rs 4500/6600; ☎ ☎ ☎) This unforgettable place thinks it's Disney Land, but in reality is just one gigantic mistake. The theme is circus – as seen in the big top-style main building, the staff on rollerskates or the accommodation blocks, which all look like clowns' dressing rooms. Altogether it's huge, but unrelentingly colourful, and walking about is like constantly trying to shake off a hangover. The beaches are good, though, and facilities are extensive. Management clearly realises how awful the theme here is, and a total renovation has been mooted.

## TOP END

**Our pick La Palmeraie** (Map p96; ☎ 401 8500; www.palmeriaie-hotel.com; s/d with half board from Rs 9000/12,500; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This brand new Moroccan-style hotel is the first four-star boutique hotel in Mauritius and offers a brilliant fusion of tradition and modernity. The rooms are simple and colourful, with bathrooms open to the main room and a private toilet, while the public areas are stunning. The clever design stands out, from the Moorish turrets of the orange building down to the gorgeous pool

overlooked by the Oasis Beach Bar. With a choice of two restaurants, a superb Moroccan spa and a great stretch of beach popular with kitesurfers, this is one of the most exciting new additions to the Mauritian hotel scene.

**Hotel Ambre** (Map p96; ☎ 401 8000; www.apavou-hotels.com; Palmar; s/d incl breakfast from Rs 8500/12,500; ☒ ☑ ☐ ☑) This well-run hotel operated by the French Apavou group is one of the more affordable four-stars. There is a large pool, a beautiful, wide and sandy beach and good water-sports facilities are available. Rooms are spacious if a little spartan in some cases.

**Beau Rivage** (Map p96; ☎ 402 2000; www.naiade.com; Belle Mare; s/d with half board from Rs 15,000/22,000; ☐ ☒ ☑ ☐ ☑) This is the jewel in the crown of the Naiade group; it's most glamorous and stylish hotel. The three-storey thatched villas, grouped around a huge pool, blend seamlessly with the palm trees. Inside, imaginative use of sophisticated, tropical colours gives the rooms character and style. A sumptuous place for romance and relaxation.

**Belle Mare Plage** (Map p96; ☎ 402 2600; www.belle-mareplagehotel.com; Poste de Flacq; s/d with half board from Rs 16,000/22,800; ☐ ☒ ☑ ☐ ☑) One of Mauritius' most delightful and exclusive hotels, the Belle Mare Plage quite simply ticks every box. Whether you love golf (with no less than two championship-level courses and a well-respected golf academy, this is a golfer's dream), being pampered in the exceptional spa, enjoying the superb beach and pool, eating in the several restaurants (including the superb Blue Penny Café) or just soaking up the incredible design and style (the entire reception is scented with vanilla and ylang-ylang with water features everywhere), then this is the place for you.

**Residence** (Map p96; ☎ 401 8888; www.theresidence.com; Belle Mare; s/d with half board from Rs 16,000/23,000; ☒ ☑ ☐ ☑) A minimalist dark-wood, high-ceilinged reception area filled with miniature palms, orchids and the odd Asian antique provides a suitably remarkable entrance for this grand, old-world hotel. The beautifully proportioned, multi-level pool means you'll never have to suffer sharing the water with unruly kids again. The beach is spectacular with a huge swimming area – the rest of the hotel is not as stunning as its public areas would suggest, but this is still a sumptuous place for relaxation in style.

**Le St Géran** (Map p96; ☎ 401 1688; www.oneandonlyllyesaintgeran.com; Poste de Flacq; s/d with half board from

Rs 31,500/41,500; ☒ ☑ ☐ ☑) Now the One & Only group's only property in Mauritius after losing Le Touessrok in a divorce with its local partners, this classic hotel will be the focus of the luxury group's efforts and thus will probably only get better and better in the next few years. As it is, it's superb, with a wide choice of beaches, a nine-hole golf course, an excellent water-sports centre, five tennis courts, a kids club and selection of three world-class restaurants including an outlet of Alain Ducasse's famously innovative Spoon. The rooms are large, with butler service, DVD players and gorgeous décor. Regulars here have included Nelson Mandela and John Travolta.

**Le Prince Maurice** (Map p96; ☎ 413 9130; www.princemaurice.com; Poste de Flacq; s/d incl breakfast from Rs 32,500/43,500; ☒ ☑ ☐ ☑) One of the *grande dames* of Mauritian tourism, Le Prince Maurice is still comfortably one of the best hotels in the country. Its location, as the furthest north by some way of the luxury hotels on the east coast, means it feels pleasantly remote. Set in immense grounds the hotel is all about peace, calm and some serious style. The wonderful wooden reception area opens directly onto a huge infinity pool, which merges perfectly with the sea beyond. Its two fabulous beaches are lined with suites, which open directly onto them. A wonderful, classic hotel for a seriously glamorous experience.

## Eating

As the hotels here are so all encompassing, few people leave them to eat out, so eating options are limited. However, all hotels welcome non-guests to dine at their à la carte restaurants and the choice is superb, although prices are commensurately high. Particular notice should go to the Blue Penny Café at the Belle Mare Plage and Alan Ducasse's Spoon at Le St Géran. The following are more affordable options.

**Symon's Restaurant** (Map p96; ☎ 415 1135; Belle Mare; mains Rs 150-250; ☎ 10am-10pm; ☑) This is our choice of the two restaurants next to each other on the main coastal road north of Belle Mare. The Indian food is of quite absurdly good quality, even if the views are ho-hum. A great option.

**Auberg'inn** (Map p96; ☎ 410 5039; Postes Lafayette; mains Rs 200; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat; ☑) This superb place is run as a restaurant open to the public despite also functioning as the hotel restaurant for the charming La Maison d'Été. Chef and owner Jean-Claude serves

up an enticing menu of pizzas, pasta, fusion and seafood. Sample dishes include Bouillabaisse Lafayette, beef carpaccio, and octopus and green papaya curry. Takeaway pizza is also available.

**Empereur Restaurant** (Map p96; ☎ 415 1254; Belle Mare; mains Rs 250; ☎ lunch & dinner Thu-Tue; ☑) Next door to Symon's, this somewhat cavernous but pleasantly cool restaurant offers Mauritian and Chinese food at slightly inflated prices. It's no great shakes, but absolutely fine none the less.

## Getting There & Around

There are very occasional buses to Palmar from Centre de Flacq, but none to Belle Mare. At least one bus an hour runs from Centre de Flacq north via Poste Lafayette to Rivière du Rempart.

A taxi from Centre de Flacq to Belle Mare or Palmar costs about Rs 300.

## CENTRE DE FLACQ

pop 16,700

Centre de Flacq is a world away from picture-postcard Belle Mare and the coast. Here there's the chaotic bustle you'd expect to find in the east coast's main settlement, and while there's nothing much to see or do, it's well worth an excursion if you're bored of the beach.

Five kilometres west of Centre de Flacq along the road to Quartier Militaire, the **Flacq Union of Estates Limited** (Map p96; FUEL; ☎ 413 2583) sugar mill is the largest and most modern on the island. Tours of the plant take place during the cane harvest (July to early November); phone ahead to find out when they run.

## GUAVAS

During the guava season, from February to June, you will see hundreds of Mauritian families scumping the fruit from wild guava trees all over Mauritius. The small red fruits resemble tiny apples and have a tart skin but a delicious soft interior with hard seeds; they taste like fresh strawberries! In case you are worried about picking the wrong thing, you'll see vendors selling bags of the fruit throughout the season for next to nothing. Try them the Indian way, with salt and chilli.

## Getting There & Away

Centre de Flacq is a regional gateway and gets direct buses from Port Louis' Immigration Square bus station and Rose Hill, Curepipe, Mahébourg (via the coast road), Trou d'Eau Douce, Palmar and Poste Lafayette.

Taxis leave from near the market in Centre de Flacq and charge around Rs 300 to go to Belle Mare or Trou d'Eau Douce.

## WEST MAURITIUS

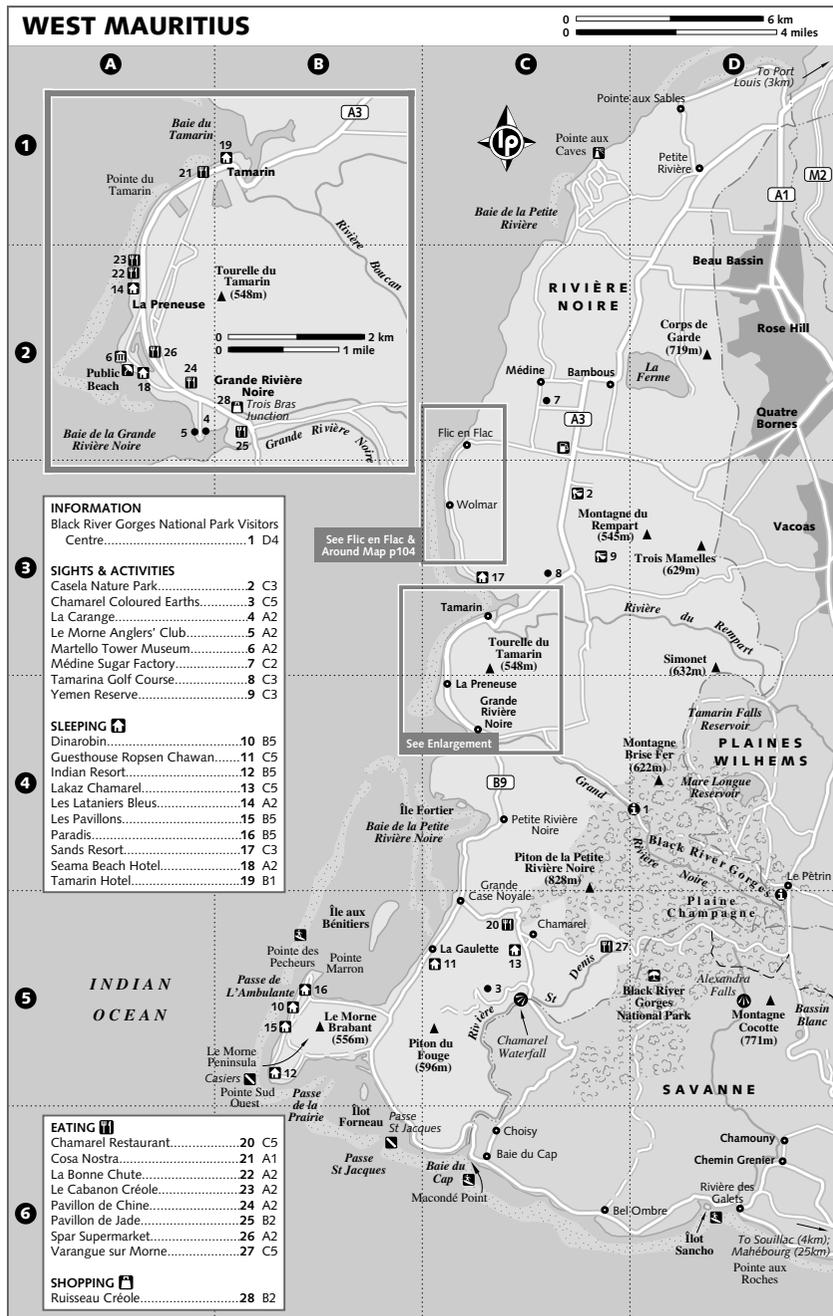
The dramatic mountain outcrops that suddenly shoot up along the otherwise flat landscape as you head south along the western coast of Mauritius are home to one of the fastest-growing regions for tourism in the country. Flic en Flac, which is currently experiencing the biggest building boom of anywhere on the island, will be giving Grand Baie a run for its money very soon as Mauritius' tourism capital.

However, the west coast is far more than just Flic en Flac; there are some superlative beaches on and off all the way down to the extraordinary-looking Le Morne Peninsula at the island's southwestern tip. Along the way there's some excellent diving to be experienced, a small surfing scene in Tamarin, and Grande Rivière Noire is a centre for big-game fishing and dolphin watching. Inland too there's plenty to draw people here; the most visited sight in the southwest is Chamarel's famous coloured earths, in the hills east of Le Morne. There's also Casela Nature Park, near Flic en Flac, and an old watchtower – now a museum – at La Preneuse, north of Grande Rivière Noire. The Black River Gorges National Park (p87) is also within easy striking distance; the park's western entrance is only a few kilometres inland from Grande Rivière Noire.

## Getting Around

The main bus routes in west Mauritius are those from Port Louis down to Grande Rivière Noire, and from Quatre Bornes to Baie du Cap. There is also a regular service between Quatre Bornes and Chamarel.

Your hotel or guesthouse should be able to arrange bike and car hire. Otherwise, one of the outlets in Flic en Flac or La Gaulette should be able to help.



## FLIC EN FLAC & AROUND

pop 3000

The wonderfully named town of Flic en Flac marks the beginning of a superb stretch of beachy coastline that runs down on and off to the very southern Le Morne Peninsula. However, unless you're staying in one of the many high-end hotels, you may feel a little cheated of the tropical paradise promised by the postcards. Development here is in overdrive with the result today being that Flic en Flac has lost its charming village feel and is threatening to become one long strip of hotels, expensive restaurants and souvenir shops. The beach, while gorgeous, can be litter-strewn in places and heaving at weekends when it plays host to throngs of locals from the central highlands who descend en masse for picnics by the sea.

That said, if you stay at any of the resorts outside the town, which includes all the high-end options, Flic en Flac offers some wonderful spots, great diving and a good selection of eating and drinking. Another advantage is that Flic en Flac is located a long drive away from the main coastal road, so you don't have the constant stream of fast-flowing traffic that plagues other towns on the west coast.

Flic en Flac is thought to be a corruption of the old Dutch name Fried Landt Flaak (meaning 'Free and Flat Land'), and it's easy to imagine how magical the place must have looked to explorers arriving in the 18th century.

### Orientation

The centre of Flic en Flac is dominated by Pasadena Village, which is basically a large Spar supermarket with a small shopping centre and a few eateries attached. If you follow the road around here you're parallel to the immense public beach, and it's along here that development is most apparent. However, at the end of the stretch of concrete apartment blocks and ever-changing restaurants you'll enter far more refined Wolmar, a suburb of Flic en Flac where all the luxury hotels congregate.

### Information

The police station and post office are both on Royal Rd near Pasadena Village. The MTPA has a **tourist office** (☎ 453 8860; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) inside Pasadena Village where you can get information and organise car hire, excursions and accommodation.

**Flic en Flac Tourist Agency** (☎ 453 9389; www.fftourist.com; ☹ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-1pm Sun)

Offers tours and cruises, car, bike and motorbike rental and can help find accommodation.

**Mauritius Commercial Bank** (MCB; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) Exchange bureau.

**Smartnet Café** (☎ 8.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-5pm Sun) You'll find this cramped and rather unpleasant internet café inside the Spar supermarket.

**Zub Express** (☎ 434 8868; Coastal Rd; ☹ 10am-6pm) This new cybercafé and general store is at the Wolmar end of Flic en Flac but is a much more pleasant place to go online.

### Sights & Activities

#### CASELA NATURE PARK

This 14-hectare **nature park** (Map p102; ☎ 452 0693; www.caseलयen.mu; adult/child Rs 150/50; ☹ 9am-5pm May-Sep, 9am-6pm Oct-Apr) is on the main road 1km south of the turn to Flic en Flac. It is beautifully landscaped and has sweeping views over the coastal plain. The park houses some 1500 birds, representing species from around the world – some in rather small cages – including rare pink pigeons. There are also tigers, zebras, monkeys and deer living in a semi-reserve, and giant tortoises, one of which is 180 years old. Children are well catered for with a petting zoo, playground and mini golf (Rs 45).

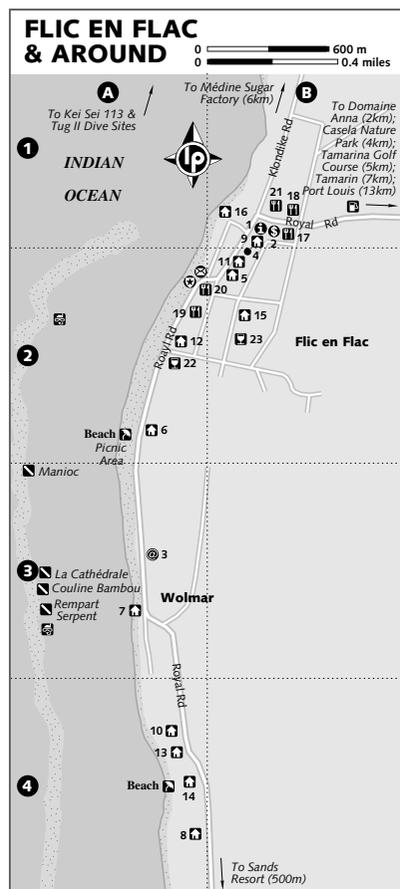
Casela also offers 'safaris' by jeep, mountain bike or on foot around the nearby 45-sq-km **Yemen Reserve** (Map p102; ☎ 452 0693), where deer, wild pigs, fruit bats and monkeys can be seen in their natural habitat; prices vary according to the different packages. Quad biking (around Rs 1700 per hour) and rock climbing (half/full day Rs 1800/2200) are also on offer.

The park has a pleasant **restaurant** (mains Rs 200-350; ☹ 10am-4pm) serving drinks, snacks and more substantial meals to visitors.

### DIVING

The lagoon off Flic en Flac is good for swimming and snorkelling, and some of the best and most varied diving in Mauritius is to be found off the coast here; for more information see p28. The Rempart Serpent and the Cathedral are both outstanding sights.

The two main dive centres in town are **Exploration Sous-Marine** (☎ 453 8450; www.pierre-szalay.com; ☹ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat), based at Villas Caroline, and the cheaper **Sea Urchin Diving Centre** (☎ 752 5307; www.sea-urchin-diving.com; ☹ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat). Nearly all the big hotels in Wolmar have their own dive centres.



### MÉDINE SUGAR FACTORY

Rather unattractively spewing out smoke into the countryside around Flic en Flac is the **Mé-dine Sugar Factory** (Map p102; ☎ 452 0401; adult/child Rs 150/75; 🚗 tours 9am, 10.30am, 12.30pm & 2pm Mon, Wed, Fri Jul-early Nov), one of the country's biggest. If you get stuck behind a sugar-cane lorry overburdened by harvested crops somewhere in the region, you can bet it's heading here. During the cutting season (July to early November) it's possible to take a guided tour (one hour) of the factory. The guide takes you around the mill, explaining the whole complicated production process, and also the distillery, where the 'waste' molasses are turned into rum. The visit ends with a tasting session. The factory's 6km north of Flic en Flac.

### INFORMATION

Flic en Flac Tourist Agency.....	1	B1
MCB exchange bureau.....	2	B1
MTPA Office.....	(see 20)	
Smartnet Café.....	(see 20)	
Zub Express.....	3	A3

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Exploration Sous-Marine.....	(see 16)	
Pasadena Village.....	(see 20)	
Résidence Art.....	(see 11)	
Sea Urchin Diving Centre.....	4	B2

### SLEEPING

Easy World Hotel.....	5	B2
Escale Vacances.....	6	A2
Golden Beach Resort.....	7	A3
Hilton.....	8	A4
La Désirade.....	9	B1
La Pirogue.....	10	A4
Little Acorn.....	11	B2
Manisa Hotel.....	12	A2
Sugar Beach Resort.....	13	A4
Taj Exotica Resort & Spa.....	14	A4
Villa Paul & Virginie.....	15	B2
Villas Caroline.....	16	B1

### EATING

Le Papayou.....	17	B1
Leslie Restaurant.....	18	B1
Moti Mahal.....	(see 16)	
Restaurant de L'Ouest.....	19	A2
Spar Supermarket.....	20	A2
Sunset Garden.....	21	B1

### DRINKING

Bar.....	22	A2
Kenzibar.....	23	B2

### TRANSPORT

Easy Drive Rent a Car.....	(see 5)	
Sixt.....	(see 5)	

### GOLF

The newly opened **Tamarina Golf Course** (Map p102; ☎ 423 8595; Tamarin Bay) is an 18-hole Wright-designed course with some great ocean and mountain views – your hotel can usually organise a visit.

### Sleeping

As a rule, budget accommodation as well as guesthouses and apartments are mainly located in Flic en Flac itself, while the luxury options are further down the coast in Wolmar.

### BUDGET

**Little Acorn** (☎ 453 5277; studio Rs 650) These extremely cheap apartments are fan-cooled and so basic you'd hardly remember you were on holiday. However, they are centrally located and are one of the lowest priced options around.

**Résidence Art** (☎ 453 5277; fax 453 5278; s/d/apt Rs 550/675/1100) These self-catering studios and apartments offer decent value for money in the very centre of town, a short walk from the beach and in easy reach of other amenities.

**La Désirade** (☎ 453 8520; apt from Rs 1000; 🏠) Two large, homely and well-equipped apartments for up to four people hidden from the main road behind a small, flowery garden. The upstairs apartment has air-con and is slightly more expensive.

**Easy World Hotel** (☎ 453 8557; fax 464 5233; r Rs 700, apt from Rs 1200) These decent, clean but basic apartments are set back a little from the main road. All doubles and apartments (which sleep four) are self-catering, although ask to see several since standards vary.

### MIDRANGE

**Escale Vacances** (☎ 453 9389; www.fftourist.com; apt Rs 2150; 🏠 🚗 🚰 🚰) A justifiably popular modern apartment complex across the road from Flic en Flac beach. The fully equipped, one-bedroom duplexes represent excellent value for money; those on the front get sea views, though cop some road noise. It's well run and friendly.

**Manisa Hotel** (☎ 453 8558; manisa@intent.mu; Coastal Rd; s/d incl breakfast Rs 2100/2350; 🏠 🚗 🚰 🚰) Right in the thick of things, the Manisa is at one of the main crossroads at the heart of modern Flic en Flac. Although not the best place for a quiet stay, this is a good deal if you want to be right on the beach and with a younger, party crowd.

**Villa Paul & Virginie** (☎ 453 8537; paulet.virginie@email.com; s/d/t incl breakfast Rs 2200/3300/4000; 🏠) This eccentric, 14-room hotel has the advantage of being in the centre of town while remaining quiet. Each room has a name and decorative theme, such as yin and yang (Japanese simplicity) or Africa (zebra-skin patterns and native art). Some of the décor won't be to all tastes, but at least you can be sure of individuality – no tour groups to be found here.

**Villas Caroline** (☎ 453 8411; www.carolinegroup.com; s/d with half board from Rs 3300/4000, self-catering apt Rs 5700; 🏠 🚗) This hotel has a fantastic location facing directly onto Flic en Flac beach at its widest point. There's a decent infinity pool, live *séga* at the weekends and a great restaurant, the Indian Moti Mahal. Rooms are nothing fancy, but the apartments offer more space and better value.

**Golden Beach Resort** (☎ 453 8235; www.goldenbeachhotel.com; Coastal Rd; s/d with half board Rs 2500/4400;

🏠 🚗) This small and friendly place offers comfortable accommodation to the south of the main strip, just as Flic en Flac gives way to smarter Wolmar. Rooms are comfortable, all equipped with TV and phone. There's a good size pool and a pleasant stretch of beach to which there is direct access.

### TOP END

**Sands Resort** (Map p102; ☎ 403 1200; www.thesands.info; Wolmar; s/d with half board from Rs 9300/13,300; 🏠 🚗 🚰 🚰) With gorgeous views from the pool and beach out into Tamarin Bay and towards Le Morne, this sophisticated but unpretentious hotel enjoys an airy, tropical elegance, from the open, timber-frame lobby to the bedrooms with their subtle, earthy tones, generous bathrooms and sea-view balconies or terraces. There are two restaurants, a spa and plenty of sports activities, including a dive centre.

**Sugar Beach Resort** (☎ 453 9090; www.sugarbeachresort.mu; Wolmar; s/d with half board from Rs 10,500/15,500; 🏠 🚗 🚰 🚰) With its mock-plantation mansion look and its wonderfully colonial lawns, Sugar Bay is a well-run resort catering to a huge number of people coming to enjoy the smart settings and great beach. It's a very family-friendly resort (think lots of kids in the pool and live entertainment at dinner) and shares facilities with La Pirogue next door. Stylish and smart.

**La Pirogue** (☎ 453 8441; www.lapirogue.com; Wolmar; r full board Rs 14,500; 🏠 🚗 🚰 🚰) Next door to Sugar Beach, La Pirogue ('the fishing boat') shares the same management but has a totally different feel. While its neighbour is a plantation mansion, La Pirogue is a fishing village-style settlement, all thatched roofs and laid-back charm. It's a delightful place, with spacious rooms, an excellent range of activities and a beautiful beach.

**Hilton** (☎ 403 1000; www.mauritius.hilton.com; Wolmar; s/d with half board from Rs 25,500/30,500; 🏠 🚗 🚰 🚰) With water everywhere and quite sublime gardens, the Hilton is unsurprisingly going for an exotic tropical paradise feel here. Frankly, once you're here there'll be no reason to leave, with four excellent restaurants (including the acclaimed Fingert Thai), an enormous wending pool, fabulous beach, vast spa and an evening torch ceremony to accompany sunset. Sadly though, even at this price you still have to pay for wi-fi access and, while certainly comfy, the rooms lack inspiration.

**our pick Taj Exotica Resort & Spa** (☎ 403 1500; www.tajhotels.com; Wolmar; s/d Rs 26,660/43,000; ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) Easily the most luxurious hotel on Mauritius' east coast, the Taj Exotica has redefined the top level of accommodation here since it was built in 2004. The accommodation consists entirely of villas – some 65 in three different categories are scattered around the huge grounds. Calm is the overwhelming impression given by the spacious public areas, stunning pool and magnificent, award-winning Jiva Spa. The villas themselves are huge, all equipped with indoor and outdoor showers, private plunge pool and – naturally – a butler.

### Eating

While there are a few decent restaurants in Flic en Flac, you need to know where to look. Most are average, no bargain and cater exclusively to tourists. For the very best (and extremely expensive) options, head to some of the better hotel restaurants, such as Ginger Thai at the Hilton or Cilantro at the Taj Exotica, although nonguests should reserve in advance.

### BUDGET

**Leslie Restaurant** (☎ 453 8172; Royal Rd; mains Rs 100-150; ☒ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This sweet little Creole place at the north end of town is on the main road; it's friendly, and serves tasty curries and Chinese dishes in decent portions.

**Le Papayou** (☎ 453 9826; Royal Rd; mains Rs 100-200; ☒ 9am-10pm) Service can come with a smile or a scowl at this tiny place opposite Leslie Restaurant, but that's all just part of the charm. Locals and tourists both flock here for the cheap prices and eclectic menu. This is also the best place in town to come for breakfast (served from 9am to 11.30am) and good coffee.

**Spar supermarket** (Royal Rd; ☒ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-5pm Sun) This huge supermarket will sort out self-caterers.

### MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Sunset Garden** (☎ 453 8614; Klondike Rd; mains Rs 150-280; ☒ lunch & dinner, Wed-Mon) Don't be put off by the rather garish exterior or the cheesy name. Step into the delightful garden of this newly opened restaurant and you'll be shown to a charming table amid the bushes and trees. Food is of very good quality, encompassing Thai, Mauritian and Chinese, all in very stylish surroundings. There's cabaret on Saturday.

**Restaurant de L'Ouest** (☎ 453 8726; Royal Rd; mains Rs 160; ☒ lunch & dinner) Right in the thick of things, this is a fine place for a meal. While the crowd is almost exclusively foreign and the nightly entertainment (including *séga* on Sundays) is sometimes unwelcome, the Mauritian food is imaginatively prepared and beautifully presented.

**Moti Mahal** (☎ 435 8411; Villas Caroline; mains Rs 300; ☒ dinner only Tue-Sun) It's such a pity that such excellent cooking is served up in what is very much a hotel restaurant. While we can't fault the delicious northern Indian tandoors (the *murg makhani* is sublime), around you it's business as usual for the Villas Caroline hotel, complete with truly soulless live 'entertainment'. Still, for our money, it's the best place in town.

**Domaine Anna** (☎ 453 9650; Médiine; mains Rs 150-300; ☒ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) You'll need to cab or drive it out here, but the Domaine Anna is one of Flic en Flac's most refined dining experiences. The impressive colonial-style building has space for hundreds of diners, but it's not usually too busy, making it a great place for an intimate meal. The speciality on the wide-ranging menu is lobster, and be aware that vegetarians are almost entirely ignored – veggies should call ahead and ask for non-meat options if they plan to come.

### Drinking & Entertainment

While you're always welcome as a nonguest to visit a hotel and take in the evening's entertainment, there's far more moderately priced fun to be had in the town's bars.

**Kenzibar** (☎ 453 5259; ☒ 6.30pm-midnight Tue-Sat) Beside Villa Paul & Virginie, this is the best in town. It has flaming torches, live music and African ambience, not to mention a mean *rhum arrangé*.

There's also a nameless bar opposite the Manisa Hotel facing the public beach. It's regularly overflowing by 10pm and knocks out a mean cocktail.

### Getting There & Away

There is a bus from Port Louis to Flic en Flac and Wolmar every 20 minutes or so. A taxi from Port Louis to Flic en Flac will cost you Rs 400, and Rs 1000 to the airport.

### Getting Around

The big hotels usually offer bicycle and car hire. However, you'll probably find cheaper prices at the switched-on **Flic en Flac Tourist**

**Agency** (☎ 453 9389; www.fftourist.com) in the centre of Flic en Flac. Count on Rs 150 to Rs 200 per day for bikes and upwards of Rs 1200 for the smallest car. The agency also rents out 100cc motorbikes from Rs 500 a day.

Other car-rental outlets include the following:

**Easy Drive Rent a Car** (☎ 453 8557; easyworld@intnet.mu)

**Sixt** (☎ 453 8475; sixtcar@intnet.mu)

## TAMARIN

pop 3500

Tamarin is pleasantly dead-end. Despite having a great beach and being within a short drive of some interesting sights, it's hard to imagine anywhere less likely to see a development frenzy the likes of its nearby neighbour Flic en Flac. If anything, Tamarin's time in the sun (metaphorically at least) has been and gone: it was here that people flocked when surfing suddenly took off in Mauritius in the 1970s. People still do come here for the surf from May to September, as witnessed by a couple of surfing shops on the main road, but frankly it otherwise feels like a forgotten town. Tamarin's most notable building is the Shree Sathya Saj Semelan Centre, painted an incredible bright pink and orange.

Around Tamarin the surrounding landscape is drier and harsher than elsewhere in Mauritius. Salt production is a major industry in the area and the town is encircled by salt evaporation ponds, which give a rather barren feel to the outskirts.

### Sleeping & Eating

There are a couple of budget guesthouses on the road down to the beach from the church although none are really worth recommending. Ask for a room from any of the locals if you specifically want to stay here.

**Tamarin Hotel** (Map p102; ☎ 483 6927; www.blue-season-hotels.com; s/d with half board from Rs 3900/5500; ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) This wonderful place should be in all film location scouts' address books, as nowhere does retro '70s like the Tamarin Hotel. Despite a total refit in 2002, the management decided to retain the colours the hotel was originally painted with in the early 1970s. It's definitely one of the country's most unique hotels as a result, and the colour scheme (matched inside the rooms as well) surprisingly works. There's a great

pool, the beach is just metres away and the atmosphere is extremely friendly.

**Cosa Nostra** (Map p102; ☎ 483 6169; Royal Rd; pizzas Rs 280; ☒ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) A real unexpected gem here is this great pizza restaurant on the main road. It's clearly a smart place, but it has a great garden out the back as well. The pizzas are delicious, although service is very slow. Come here when you aren't in a hurry.

### Getting There & Around

Buses headed for Tamarin leave Port Louis roughly every hour and Quatre Bornes every 20 minutes.

A taxi from Port Louis or from Curepipe costs around Rs 600; from the airport it's about Rs 1000.

### LA PRENEUSE

A few kilometres south of Tamarin, the quiet village of La Preneuse makes an interesting stop for a quick visit to the Martello Tower, which formed part of the old coastal fortifications and now houses an informative museum. La Preneuse was named after a French ship involved in a naval battle with the English in the area in the late 18th century.

### Martello Tower Museum

In the 1830s the British built five Martello towers – copies of the tower at Mortella Point in Corsica (the order of the vowels was obviously not a priority for the British, hence the slight name change) – to protect their young colony. The coastal defences were built as a precaution in case the French navy came to support a feared rebellion: the British were at the time trying to abolish slavery on the island in the face of fierce opposition from local French planters, who believed the lack of cheap labour would destroy the sugar-cane industry.

While the other towers have either disappeared or are in ruins, the one at La Preneuse has been opened as a **museum** (Map p102; ☎ 583 0178; adult/child Rs 50/10; ☒ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sun & Sun). After a short video presentation, the guide points out the tower's ingenious design. With walls over 3m thick in places and topped by a cannon with a 2km range, it certainly seems impregnable, though in this case it was never put to the test.

### Sleeping & Eating

La Preneuse offers a couple of places to stay – one of them excellent – and two interesting

restaurants. Self-caterers can stock up in the big Spar supermarket on the main road.

**Seama Beach Hotel** (Map p102; ☎ 483 5506; s/d/tr incl breakfast Rs 500/800/1200) Reggae plays amid this sprawling complex a short distance from the Martello Tower. It's decorated in a fairly haphazard way, there's only one room with air-con and rooms are basic with small bathrooms, but it's near the beach and cheap.

**our pick** **Les Lataniers Bleus** (Map p102; ☎ 483 6541; http://leslataniersbleus.com; d incl breakfast from Rs 3500; 📺 📺 📺 📺) Surely one of the most charming *chambres d'hôte* (family-run B&B) in the country is this, one of the very first, run by the formidable Josette Marchal-Vexlard. The rooms are delightful, whether in the main block or scattered around the grounds. The beach is just metres from the main house, which is beautifully decked out. The stunning private villa has five bedrooms and a communal kitchen; you can rent one room or the whole villa. The evening meals (Rs 600; by reservation only) are highly recommended and are a great chance to meet fellow travellers and hear about local life from the impressive hosts.

**Le Cabanon Créole** (Map p102; ☎ 483 5783; mains Rs 90; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Friendly service and authentic and inexpensive Creole home-cooking make this traditional family-run place a perennial favourite. It serves a limited range of daily dishes such as *rougail saucisses* and chicken curry; specials, like lobster or whole fresh fish, can be ordered in advance. It's best to reserve in the evenings as there are only a handful of tables.

**La Bonne Chute** (Map p102; ☎ 483 6552; mains Rs 250; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Behind the wall next to the Caltex petrol station is this attractive garden-style restaurant, which has recently been refurbished. The food is great value for the gastronomy on offer: venison in its own red-wine marinade and roast boar in spices are typical dishes served in the large dining area and garden.

### Getting There & Away

La Preneuse is on the same bus route as Tamarin, with services from Port Louis roughly every hour and Quatre Bornes every 20 minutes. A taxi from Port Louis or the Central Plateau towns costs in the region of Rs 600. From the airport count on at least Rs 1000.

## GRANDE RIVIÈRE NOIRE

pop 2200

Two kilometres on from La Preneuse, the otherwise sleepy community of Grande Rivière Noire is a major centre for big-game fishing. Just offshore from the mouth of the estuary, the ocean bottom plunges to 700m, providing the perfect environment for jacks and other bait fish. These small fry attract big predators such as tuna, shark and marlin. If you're after more gentle pursuits, you can also arrange cruises and dolphin-watching expeditions from here, and one of the two main entrances to the Black River Gorges National Park (p87) lies just 5km inland.

### Activities

Deep-sea fishing is the main activity here between November and March. A number of local fishermen offer fully equipped boats. Many of them congregate at **Le Morne Anglers' Club** (Map p102; ☎ 483 5801; www.morneanglers.com; 🍷 6.30am-8.30pm), signed off the main road. You can also arrange trips through **La Carange** (Map p102; ☎ 729 9497; 🍷 6am-5pm) nearby. Prices vary between around Rs 6000 and Rs 10,000 for a half-day trip (six hours) and Rs 10,000 to Rs 15,000 for a full nine hours.

Le Morne Anglers' Club also offers boat charter and catamaran cruises (Rs 1800 per person) along the coast, for a spot of dolphin watching combined with snorkelling and a barbecue lunch.

### Eating

There are a couple of decent Chinese restaurants in town, although there's a wider choice at the touristy Ruisseau Créole just out of town, where you'll find an Italian restaurant, a pizzeria, a steak house and a grill house all serving up high quality but pricey food.

**Pavillon de Jade** (Map p102; ☎ 483 6630; dishes Rs 70-250; 🍷 lunch & dinner; 📺) You'll find this appealing restaurant, with its bright and breezy room and views of the mountains, above a supermarket on the Trois Bras junction just south of Grande Rivière Noire.

**Pavillon de Chine** (Map p102; ☎ 483 5787; mains from Rs 150; 🍷 closed Thu) Further north, this restaurant is more upmarket but opens onto the highway.

### Shopping

**Ruisseau Créole** (Map p102; ☎ 483 8000; www.ruisseaucreole.com; 🍷 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) This upmarket

shopping centre on the main coastal road is one of the big draws to the area. It boasts four restaurants and a host of other good shopping options. Prices are high, though, and it's aimed almost exclusively at foreigners.

### Getting There & Away

The Quatre Bornes to Baie du Cap service covers Grande Rivière Noire, with departures every 20 minutes or so. There are also buses every one to two hours from Port Louis. Taxi fares should be the same as for Tamarin (p107).

## LA GAULETTE & AROUND

pop 2000

South of Grande Rivière Noire, the mountains draw ever closer to the coast. There are pine woods and mangroves along the shore, but little in the way of habitation, beyond some extremely poor shanty towns along the road, until you reach the fishing village of La Gaulette 8km or so later. La Gaulette boasts a couple of restaurants and a well-stocked supermarket. The reason most people come to this area, however, is to visit the famous coloured earths of Chamarel, in the hills 9km east of La Gaulette. Chamarel features on almost every tour itinerary, however, you'll find more colours and fewer people at the rival site near Souillac (p120), although Souillac lacks the beautiful location. From Chamarel, a spectacular mountain road climbs onto the Plaine Champagne in the Black River Gorges National Park, while another, almost as scenic, heads south to Baie du Cap.

### Sights & Activities

For some reason the **Chamarel coloured earths** (Map p102; ☎ 483 8298; admission Rs 75; 🍷 7am-5.30pm), 4km south of the quiet village of Chamarel, have become one of the most famous sights of Mauritius, although they can be quite underwhelming after a long journey. The countryside around Chamarel is beautiful, and so it's well worth an excursion up here, but the coloured earths are more of an interesting curiosity on the side rather than a star attraction. The colours themselves are believed to be the result of uneven cooling of molten rock. In fact, there is a surprising amount of variation, particularly in bright sunlight.

About 3km down the road from the entrance gate to the earths, it's definitely worth stopping off at the viewpoint over the Chamarel

waterfall, which plunges more than 100m in a single drop.

Both sites lie in the grounds of a private estate that once belonged to Charles de Chazal de Chamarel, who entertained Matthew Flinders during Flinders' captivity in Mauritius during the Napoleonic Wars (p121).

To visit the area's other obvious attraction, the nearby Île aux Bénitiers, contact **Ropsen Chawan** (☎ 451 5763; ropsen@intnet.mu), who not only runs a good guesthouse but also offers boat excursions to the island to swim, snorkel and watch the dolphins (Rs 1200 for a half day excursion including a barbecue lunch).

### Sleeping

**Guesthouse Ropsen Chawan** (Map p102; ☎ 451 5763; ropsen@intnet.mu; studio from Rs 700-1800; 📺) The only accommodation in La Gaulette itself is provided by a friendly local taxi driver who has a range of tidy self-catering studios and apartments for up to six people. He also provides evening meals on request (Rs 180 for a main course), organises boat trips and hires out cars (Rs 800 to Rs 1000 per day), mopeds (Rs 500 per day) and bikes (Rs 100 per day).

**Lak Chamarel** (Map p102; ☎ 483 5240; www.lakazchamarel.com; Piton Canot; s/d with half board from Rs 4500/5900; 📺 📺 📺) This 'exclusive lodge' in the countryside around Chamarel is a wonderfully conceived collection of seven houses (being extended to 11 at the time of writing) offering a blissful getaway amid gorgeous forests and streams, with a pool and some beautifully decorated rooms. A small spa was also being built at the time of writing.

### Eating

**La Gaulette Restaurant** (☎ 451 5116; La Gaulette; dishes from Rs 100; 🍷 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun; 📺) The pink colour scheme of this Chinese-Creole restaurant just across the road from Pointe Pecheur (following) won't be to everyone's taste, but the food is perfectly acceptable and not expensive.

**Pointe Pecheur** (☎ 451 5910; La Gaulette; mains Rs 200; 🍷 10am-10pm; 📺) This fun, busy little haunt is popular with locals and travellers alike. The menu features Chinese and Mauritian fare such as squid in saffron sauce and jugged chicken Mauritius style.

**Sirokan Garden** (☎ 451 5115; La Gaulette; mains Rs 300; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This charming Creole restaurant on the main road just as you enter

La Gaulette is known locally as the best place in town for lobster. The food is of excellent standard, as is the rustic atmosphere and friendly service.

**Chamarel Restaurant** (Map p102; ☎ 483 6937; www.chamarel.mu; set menu Rs 665; 🍴 lunch Mon-Sun) Perched on the hillside 1km west of Chamarel, the prime attraction here is the stunning view rather than the pricey food. The views are definitely worth it though, and despite being touristy, the food is good and the service friendly.

**Varangue sur Morne** (Map p102; ☎ 483 5710; mains from Rs 600; 🍴 11am-4.30pm) This former hunting lodge is an institution, and it's not too hard to see why. Its stunning location offers great views over the national park towards the ocean and the superb, meaty menu is impressive with typical dishes such as braised wild boar or shrimp flambéed in Île de France Rum. Sadly it's rather expensive and service can be a bit snooty, although it's still a good place to impress a date. Reservations are advised.

### Getting There & Around

Buses (every 20 minutes) between Quatre Bornes and Baie du Cap stop in La Gaulette. There are no direct buses from Port Louis. Instead you have to go via Quatre Bornes, or take the bus from Port Louis to Grande Rivière Noire and change.

There are infrequent buses from Quatre Bornes to Chamarel, which drop you by the entrance to the estate. Frankly it's a hassle to do this excursion by bus and you'll save a lot of time and effort doing it by taxi or taking an organised excursion here.

A taxi from Port Louis to La Gaulette will cost around Rs 600; from the airport, Rs 900. Expect to pay Rs 600 or so for the return fare from La Gaulette to Chamarel.

You can rent cars (from Rs 900 per day), bicycles (Rs 100 per day) and 50cc motorbikes (Rs 500) from Ropsen Chawan in La Gaulette (p109).

### LE MORNE PENINSULA

Visible from much of southern Mauritius, Le Morne Brabant (556m) is the stunning, vast rock from which this beautiful peninsula takes its name. The peninsula itself has some of the country's best beaches along its 4km shores and is home to a number of upmarket hotels. Almost totally uninhabited by locals, the peninsula nevertheless has a particular

resonance in Mauritian culture – it was apparently here that a group of escaped slaves fled in the early 19th century, hiding out on top of the mountain to remain free. The story has it that the slaves, ignorant of the fact that slavery had been abolished subsequent to their escape, panicked when they saw a troop of soldiers making their way up the cliffs one day. Believing they were to be recaptured, the slaves flung themselves from the cliff tops to their deaths in huge numbers, which explains the origin of the name Le Morne (Mournful One). Although there are no historical records to substantiate the story, it's an important one for Mauritians as a reminder of the island's brutal history.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Indian Resort** (Map p102; ☎ 401 4200; resa.indian@apavou-hotels.com; s/d with half board from Rs 10,500/15,000; 🍴 🍷 🍺 🍻) This vast place at the remotest end of the peninsula is located on a gorgeous stretch of beach and features some lovely gardens and some great antiques scattered around. If anything it suffers from being too large – conferences are common – but for that it has an incredible array of activities on offer, from kitesurfing to four pools, a kids club and huge spa.

**Les Pavillons** (Map p102; ☎ 401 4000; pavillons@naiade.intnet.mu; s/d with half board from Rs 10,600/15,700; 🍴 🍷 🍺 🍻) In the midst of the big five-star hotels is this small and friendly member of the Nāïade group. The rooms are in attractive plantation-style pavilions and the whole place has a nicely upbeat atmosphere. There are three restaurants, clubs for children and teenagers, and decent sports facilities. Not surprisingly, you'll need to book well ahead.

**Paradis** (Map p102; ☎ 401 5050; www.paradis-hotel.com; s/d with half board from Rs 18,200/26,000; 🍴 🍷 🍺 🍻) The Paradis is a mecca for sports enthusiasts. In addition to all the usual water sports, there's a championship golf course, six floodlit tennis courts and a hi-tech gym, plus kids are equally well looked after. When it all gets too much, you can collapse in the health spa for a sports massage or even a special 'after-golf' massage. The rooms are suitably luxurious and the views arguably the best on the peninsula.

**Dinarobin** (Map p102; ☎ 401 4900; www.dinarobin-hotel.com; s/d with half board from Rs 21,600/30,800; 🍴 🍷 🍺 🍻) Infused with the smell of vanilla plants, this stunning place remains

the best on the peninsula, enjoying a spectacular location at the foot of the mountain. Its sublime public areas incorporate a carp-stuffed water world of classy features, while the rooms are superb and elegant. Golfers have access to three championship courses nearby. Guests also have access to the facilities at the Paradis next door.

### Getting There & Away

Buses en route between Quatre Bornes and Baie du Cap stop on the main road by the junction for Le Morne. These buses run roughly every hour. A taxi from Port Louis to the Le Morne hotels will cost in the region of Rs 1000 and from the airport Rs 1200.

## SOUTH MAURITIUS

A highlight of any visit to Mauritius will be taking in the relatively undeveloped south of the island, which includes some of the country's most wonderful scenery and wildest landscapes. While the area around Blue Bay has been a long-established favourite with tourists for its great beaches and crystal-clear waters, the majority of the south coast has no beach, thankfully limiting hotel construction for the most part. One big recent development was the building of three huge luxury hotels on the former sugar estate of Bel Ombre. This was followed in 2006 by the opening of another big luxury hotel in the nearby hamlet of St Felix, all of which will of course contribute to the area's economy, but, many fear, will also mean Mauritius' most unspoiled corner will gradually become more and more like the rest of the island. For now though, the area is the most 'Mauritian' in the country and the drive along the coastal road from Souillac to Le Morne really shouldn't be missed. Other highlights include the typically sleepy town of Mahébourg, the wonderful nature reserve Île aux Aigrettes and imposing Lion Mountain, which dominates the region.

### Getting There & Around

Mahébourg is the main transport hub in this region, with buses departing from here for destinations along both the east and south coasts. Mahébourg is also the best place to

arrange car hire and about the only one offering bicycles and motorbikes for rent.

Towns along the south coast have slightly better bus connections than those in the east. Useful services include those from Souillac to Curepipe and Port Louis, and from Baie du Cap up the west coast to Quatre Bornes.

### MAHÉBOURG

pop 16,000

There's something relentlessly charming about Mahébourg, with its sleepy feel, a mix of old and new and few quirky sights. Budget travellers have a good choice of accommodation here, and it makes a good base for any traveller, with beaches just a short distance out of the town and plenty to see and do in the surrounding area.

Founded in 1805, Mahébourg (pronounced my-bor) was named after the famous French governor Mahé de Labourdonnais. It started life as a busy port, but these days it's something of a backwater, with a small fishing fleet and a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Lion Mountain stands guard to the north while out to sea a smattering of islands mark the far side of the lagoon, which changes from one intense colour to another at great speed.

Mahébourg's most worthwhile site is its interesting history museum. The church also merits a quick look in passing and, if time allows, it's worth venturing just north of town to visit a delightful old biscuit factory. There are no beaches in the town itself, but Blue Bay is within easy reach as well as Pointe d'Esny, from where boats leave for Île aux Aigrettes.

### Orientation

There's a decidedly French air to Mahébourg's grid of tree-lined streets, which spread north and east from the butter-coloured Catholic church. The main commercial area is found to the northeast, focused on the market and nearby bus station. Hotels and guesthouses are scattered among the quiet residential streets lying between Royal Rd and the seafront.

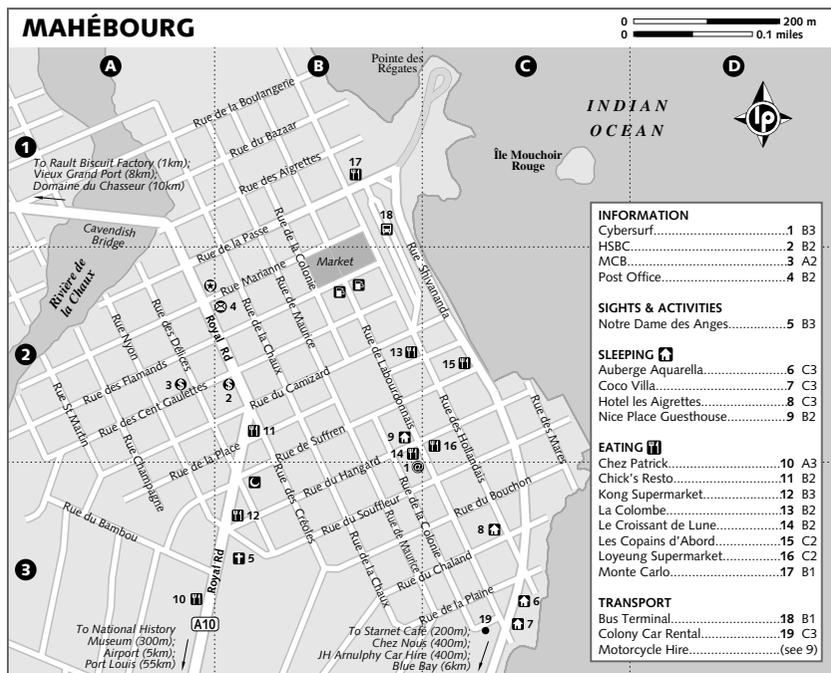
### Information

**Cybersurf** (☎ 631 4247; Rue de Labourdonnais; 🍴 9am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun)

**HSBC** (☎ 631 9633; Royal Rd)

**Man Ramdhayan** (☎ 631 5638) Offers minibus tours of the island; prices start at Rs 400 per person. Book by





clean and well maintained. There's a decent pool and Jacuzzi, and car and bike hire are also available.

**Coco Villa** (☎ 631 2346; <http://mahecocovilla.net>; Rue Shivananda; s/d from Rs 1000/1200; ☺) Next door to Auberge Aquarella, Coco Villa has basic but immaculate rooms, many with sea views and balconies, which make it better value despite not being quite as charming as its neighbour.

**Auberge Aquarella** (☎ 631 2767; [aquarellamu@email.com](mailto:aquarellamu@email.com); 6 Rue Shivananda; s/d/ste incl breakfast from Rs 1380/1610/2500) This excellent hotel is run by a charming couple that take their guests' happiness very seriously. The rooms and bungalows are all stylishly decked out, although you should request one overlooking the sea for the best views. The breakfast is good and evening meals can be provided as well if you request them.

### Eating & Drinking

Despite its size, Mahébourg is not a culinary treat and its nightlife is virtually non-existent. The places below are the better options that exist.

### BUDGET

**Chick's Resto** (Royal Rd; pizza Rs 75; ☺ 9am-11pm) OK it's not the Café de Flore, but Chick's with its outdoor tables is about the only place in town to kick back with a cold beer and shoot the breeze with the locals. Pizza and chicken is also available.

**Le Croissant de Lune** (☎ 716 4080; Rue de Labourdonnais; sandwiches & pizza from Rs 100; ☺ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 7.30am-1pm Sun; ☺) This charming German-run café is a great place for breakfast or a light lunch. It serves up delicious pastries cooked on the premises, pizza and very good sandwiches.

**Monte Carlo** (☎ 631 7449; Rue de la Passe; mains Rs 120; ☺ lunch & dinner Fri-Wed; ☺) This rather sorry place has seen better times and is in a fairly uninspiring location facing the bus station, but the food served up is perfectly good. It serves reliable Creole, Chinese and more pricey French cuisine.

### MIDRANGE & TOP END

**La Colombe** (☎ 631 8594; 5 Rue des Hollandais; mains Rs 200; ☺ lunch & dinner) Disco lights, kitsch décor and friendly staff await you at Mahébourg's

liveliest venue, on a side street set back from the promenade. House specials include venison and wild boar with honey. Things liven up a bit on Saturday, which is occasionally *séga* night.

**Chez Nous** (Map p112; ☎ 631 8906; Barachois; mains Rs 250; ☺ lunch & dinner, closed Wed & Sat lunch; ☺) On a windy bay between Mahébourg and Blue Bay, Chez Nous offers great views across the lagoon from its tables (all indoors due to the wind) and a dodgy selection of Athena posters on the wall (check out those adorable three-year-olds getting married...) The mainly seafood menu is good, with smoked marlin the speciality.

**Chez Patrick** (☎ 631 9298; Royal Rd; mains Rs 275; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☺) Patrick's is hugely popular with tourists for its traditional atmosphere and authentic Creole cooking. Portions are on the small side, however, and when it's busy service can be slow. It's advisable to reserve in the evening.

**Les Copains d'Abord** (☎ 631 9728; Rue Shivananda; mains Rs 300; ☺ 9am-11pm; ☺) With its good location on the seafont promenade and smart décor, Les Copains d'Abord is the best restaurant in town, owned by the former proprietor of the smart Domaine du Chasseur. The cuisine is mixed Mediterranean and Mauritian with particularly good seafood.

### Getting There & Away

Mahébourg is an important transport hub. There are express buses every half hour to and from Port Louis and at least every 15 minutes from Curepipe. Most but not all these buses stop at the airport en route; check before boarding. The shuttle to Blue Bay runs every 30 minutes.

Buses running north from Mahébourg go to Centre de Flacq via Vieux Grand Port every 20 minutes or so. Heading south, there are less frequent services to Souillac via Rivière des Anguilles.

A taxi for the 15-minute hop from SSR international airport to Mahébourg costs around Rs 350. From Port Louis expect to pay Rs 600.

### Getting Around

For car hire, **Colony Car Rental** (☎ 631 7062; Rue de la Colonie) not only offers some of the lowest rates on the island, but the owner is exceptionally helpful. He also does competitively priced airport pick-ups. Otherwise, most guesthouses

can help, or try **JH Arnulphy** (Map p112; ☎ 631 9806; [ste.arnulphy@intnet.mu](mailto:ste.arnulphy@intnet.mu)) beside Chez Nous restaurant. Arnulphy can also help with bicycle hire; rates start at Rs 75 per day. Blue Bay makes a leisurely excursion by bicycle.

Nice Place Guesthouse hires out 100cc motorcycles for Rs 500 a day.

### AROUND MAHÉBOURG

While Mahébourg itself is short of sand, the beaches begin only a couple of kilometres south at Pointe d'Esny and continue down the coast for 4km to the hugely picturesque Blue Bay, aptly named for its brilliant-blue lagoon. In 1997 the Blue Bay Marine Park was established to protect the relatively unspoilt coral reef. Just offshore, rare endemic animal and plant species are being reintroduced to the Île aux Aigrettes Nature Reserve.

### Pointe d'Esny & Blue Bay

The coast from Pointe d'Esny to Blue Bay is lined with holiday villas and expensive houses and is one of Mauritius' most exclusive residential areas. At weekends in particular Blue Bay beach is crowded with picnickers, but during the week it can be blissfully quiet. Gently sloping and protected, the beach is excellent for children. There are a couple of good restaurants and some fine places to stay in the area, and visitors can indulge in the usual array of water sports.

### ACTIVITIES

Blue Bay is the main centre for water-based activities in southern Mauritius. Options vary from snorkelling and diving to cruising around the offshore islands. There are a huge number of sea urchins in the sea here – so always be careful where you put your feet (and preferably wear some form of protective shoe).

The main dive operator is **Coral Diving** (Map p112; ☎ Blue Lagoon 631 9501, Le Preskil 604 1000; [www.coraldiving.com](http://www.coraldiving.com); ☺ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) with centres at both the Blue Lagoon Beach Hotel in Blue Bay, and Le Preskil at Pointe d'Esny.

**Croisières Turquoises** (Map p112; ☎ 631 8347; [croistur@intnet.mu](mailto:croistur@intnet.mu); ☺ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat), near Chez Nous restaurant on the southern outskirts of Mahébourg, specialises in luxury catamaran cruises. Boats sail up to Île aux Cerfs (Rs 2000 per person) several days a week from Pointe Jérôme near Le Preskil hotel.

**SLEEPING**

Blue Bay is a popular place to stay, particularly with families. One slight disadvantage is the rumble of early-morning departures from the nearby airport; there aren't that many, but they can be noisy. Many of the best options here are private lets and *chambres d'hôte*.

**our pick** **Chante au Vent** (Map p112; ☎ 631 9614; www.chanteauvent.com; r from Rs 1200, studio from Rs 1700; P) This guesthouse is excellent value for money and you'll usually need to book in advance to stay here. The rooms in the main house are right on the beach, while the spacious apartments are all on the other side of the road. The breakfast here is great, served on the veranda overlooking the sea.

**Chantemer** (Map p112; ☎ 631 3861; www.chantemer.mu; d incl breakfast from Rs 2200) With only five rooms, you'll need to book well ahead for this attractive and well-run private guesthouse with a lovely garden leading down to the beach. It's all very tastefully decorated with family heirlooms and artworks and the owner goes out of her way to be helpful.

**Villas Le Guerlande** (Map p112; ☎ 631 9882; www.leguerlande.com; d incl breakfast Rs 3450, s/d apt from Rs 2085/4170; ☎) This is a complex of bright and breezy self-catering one-bedroom studios and bungalow-apartments for up to four people. The cheaper, gardenside bungalows are across a quiet road from the beach.

**Blue Lagoon Beach Hotel** (Map p112; ☎ 631 9529; www.bluelagoonbeachhotel.com; s/d incl breakfast from Rs 3240/5000; P) This hotel is at the very heart of Blue Bay next to the public beach and enjoys a good range of facilities, its own beach and an excellent diving school. The rooms are fairly basic but perfectly fine.

**Le Preskil** (Map p112; ☎ 603 4343; www.lepreskil.com; s/d with half board from Rs 7800/10,500; ☎) Set on its own tiny promontory facing the Île aux Aigrettes across the lagoon, this is Pointe d'Esny's most charming hotel, oozing Creole style with its bright but tasteful colours. There's a gorgeous white beach from which there are great views towards the mountains, and the rooms – while packed rather tightly together – all have charm, housed as they are in brightly painted two-storey blocks.

**Shandrani** (Map p112; ☎ 603 4343; www.shandrani-hotel.com; s/d with half board from Rs 11,700/16,700; ☎) On the south side of Blue Bay, this relaxed and family-friendly five-star stands in lush gardens on its own private peninsula. It has no fewer than three beaches

and all the facilities you would expect including four restaurants, a golf course, tennis courts, a dive centre and more. The only slight hiccup is the location under the flight path.

**EATING**

**Le Bougainville** (Map p112; ☎ 631 8199; mains Rs 170-250, pizzas Rs 120-200; ☎ 10am-10pm) In a shady spot behind Blue Bay beach, Le Bougainville attracts a constant stream of customers in search of refreshment. The menu ranges from salads and pizzas to dishes such as chicken with Rodrigues lemon. It's a friendly, relaxed place where locals and foreigners mix and where there's always a good atmosphere.

**Le Jardin Créole** (Map p112; ☎ 631 5801; mains Rs 250; ☎ 10am-10pm; ☎) The plant-filled courtyard of this sophisticated little restaurant at Pointe d'Esny is just the place for a romantic candlelit dinner. The pizzas are excellent, though it's a shame to miss out on luscious Creole mains such as seafood and palm-heart pancake, or grilled tuna with honey, lime and sesame. Reservations are recommended – request a sought-after seat in the garden.

**GETTING THERE & AROUND**

Buses to and from Mahébourg run every 30 minutes. A taxi there will cost Rs 100.

Car rental is available from **Allo Car** (Map p112; ☎ 631 1810; allocar@intnet.mu). The latter also rents bicycles for Rs 100 per day and 50cc motorbikes for Rs 600.

**Île aux Aigrettes**

This popular ecotourism destination is an island nature reserve roughly 1km off the coast. It preserves very rare remnants of the coastal forests of Mauritius and provides a sanctuary for animal and plant species unique to these islands.

Over most of the island, introduced invasive plants have now been replaced with native species. Rats, shrews and other imported animals, which cause damage to rare plant species and threaten indigenous animal species, are slowly being eradicated. At the same time, native species known to have existed on the island in the past – including pink pigeons, giant Aldabra tortoises and Telfair's skinks (a clawed lizard) – are being reintroduced. This is the only place in the world where you are almost certain to see pink pigeons in the wild; the population now numbers over 90 birds.

All this has been achieved by the **Mauritian Wildlife Foundation** (MWF; ☎ 631 2396; www.ile-aux-aigrettes.com; adult/child Rs 800/400), which now manages the reserve and conducts tours of the island; revenues are ploughed back into its conservation work. There are between two and five departures daily from Pointe Jérôme, near Le Preskil hotel (Map p112). Bookings should be made a couple of days in advance either by phoning MWF or through a tour agent. The 90-minute tour of the island involves a good deal of walking; wear comfortable shoes and bring a hat, sunscreen, water and insect repellent.

**VIEUX GRAND PORT TO BAMBOUS VIRIEUX**

North of Mahébourg, the main road hugs the coast as it winds around the base of Lion Mountain and the Montagnes Bambous range. This area was the first settled by the Dutch early in the 17th century, and was one of the first parts of the country to lose its native ebony forest to the burgeoning sugar cane industry. Nevertheless, dense forest still cloaks the mountains. Hunting is a popular activity here, but the vast hunting estates also provide a valuable habitat for many native animal and plant species. One such estate is open to the public and nearby you can visit another where essential oils are distilled using traditional methods. Further north again, nature trails meander through an area of mangrove forest.

There are a few restaurants in the area, but the choice of places to stay is limited. With your own transport, the places described below can easily be covered on a day's outing from Mahébourg or Blue Bay, or from Trou d'Eau Douce to the north. Travelling by bus will involve a fair bit of walking.

**Vieux Grand Port pop 2900**

This is the 'cradle of Mauritian history', where the first human inhabitants of the island landed on 9 September 1598 under the command of Wybrandt Van Warwyck. The Dutch later built a fort 3km further north again in what is now the town of Vieux Grand Port, although a monument marks the actual landing point as well (Map p112). It was the local headquarters of the Dutch East India Company until 1710, when the

Dutch abandoned the island. The site was then taken over by the French.

The battered ruins of Fort Frederik Hendrik stand in a park near the church at the northern end of Vieux Grand Port and include ruins of an old Dutch church, a bakery, a prison, a forge, a powder magazine and a dispensary. A few clay pipes, wine bottles and other items left behind by the Dutch and French occupants are now on display in the **Frederik Hendrik Museum** (☎ 634 4319; admission free; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) beside the entrance gate. The museum also outlines the history of the Dutch in Mauritius. Vieux Grand Port is perhaps more famous as the site of the only French naval victory to be inscribed on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. Relics of the 1810 battle with the English are on display at the National History Museum in Mahébourg.

**Lion Mountain**

Overlooking Vieux Grand Port is Lion Mountain (480m), immediately recognisable from its sphinx-like profile. The mountain offers a splendid half-day hike with stunning views over the coast. It's a very challenging but rewarding walk that climbs up the lion's 'back' to finish at an impressive viewpoint on the 'head'.

The trail begins beside the police station at the north end of Vieux Grand Port. From there an easy-to-find 4WD track heads inland through the sugar cane; turn right at the first junction and follow the trail up towards the ridge. A set of concrete steps begins on the right just after you reach the start of the forested area. The steps lead to a bunker, from where a footpath climbs through the forest to the top of the lion's back. Once here you can detour to the right for a view out over the coast before heading inland to the peak itself.

The main trail is very obvious and runs straight along the ridge and up over a rocky area to the peak. There are a few hairy scrambles over the rocks before you reach the flat area on the lion's head. From here you can see right across the interior of the island. Return the same way you came up.

Allow around three to four hours for the return trip.

**Domaine du Chasseur**

One of Mauritius' most famous private estates, **Domaine du Chasseur** (Map p112; Estate of the

Hunter; ☎ 634 5011; domaineduchasseur.mu) is primarily a hunting reserve for wild boar and deer and attracts hunters from around the world. The 950 hectares of forested mountain terrain also act as a reserve for many endemic bird species, including the Mauritius kestrel – one of the world's rarest birds of prey.

If there are no hunters around, visitors can walk up to the restaurant viewpoint or hop on a jeep (Rs 290) for the 1km ride; if you are eating, the entry fees are deducted from your bill. Better still is the guided two-hour forest walk (Rs 290) to a lookout 800m above sea level.

The estate is equally famed for its mountain-top restaurant, **Panoramour** (mains Rs 500, 3-course menu Rs 920; ☎ 8.30am–4.30pm, dinner by reservation), which is perched 500m up on top of a hill with wonderful views to the coast. The helipad that adjoins the restaurant gives you an idea of the kind of people who drop by for lunch – and the food is rightly delicious and probably even worth the prices given the extraordinary views. The restaurant itself is a rambling tree-house affair that looks like the Bambi family's mausoleum, stuffed as it is with hunting trophies from over the years. All the meat is produced on the estate's farm or shot in the park – wild boar kebabs, venison steaks and duck confit all feature on the menu.

Accommodation is provided near the restaurant in thatched **bungalows** (d inc breakfast Rs 4025). However, the feel is resolutely rustic and there are lots of bugs. If you like creature comforts you'll be better off in a hotel on the coast.

### Bambous Virieux

This small settlement is the site of a pioneering project to restore the mangroves

that were destroyed by the British following the malaria epidemic of 1866 (see the boxed text, below).

A short nature trail has been created through the mangroves at **Le Barchois** (Map p112; ☎ 634 5643; r incl breakfast Rs 2600; ☎ 10am–4pm, dinner by reservation), a hotel where you can stay in simple, rustic rooms with terraces overlooking the water and eat at the excellent seafood restaurant (mains Rs 200 to Rs 400).

### Getting There & Around

Buses between Mahébourg and Centre de Flacq ply the coast road, passing through Vieux Grand Port, Anse Jonchée and Bambous Virieux. There are departures every 20 minutes or so.

A taxi from Mahébourg will cost around Rs 1000 for a day trip taking in the Domaine du Chasseur.

### MAHÉBOURG TO BAIE DU CAP

The south coast of Mauritius, from Mahébourg west to Baie du Cap, contains some of the country's wildest and most attractive scenery. Here you'll find basalt cliffs and sheltered sandy coves, waterfalls and traditional fishing villages where fisherfolk sell their catch at roadside stalls. Behind the coast, sugar-cane fields and forests clothe the hillside in a patchwork of intense greens.

The region's prime tourist attractions – a fascinating crocodile park and a tea plantation – are concentrated around Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac. Further west there's an area of 'coloured earths' to visit, but in general the scenery is the star attraction. While there are a number of beaches, few are suit-

able for swimming; in most cases the lagoon is too shallow or the current too strong.

This area is also the least developed for tourism, although the international chains have recently moved it with a large development of four properties around Bel Ombre.

### Rivière des Anguilles & Around

pop 10,000

The town of Rivière des Anguilles, 26km west of Mahébourg, holds no particular interest in its own right, but there are a number of sights in the countryside around.

### LA VANILLE

This fantastic **zoo** (Map p112; ☎ 626 2503; www.lavanille-reserve.com; adult/child Mon-Fri Rs 195/75, Sat & Sun Rs 150/60; ☎ 9.30am–5pm), which is part nature reserve and part crocodile farm, makes for a fantastic day out and kids will love it. It's clearly signed 2km south of Rivière des Anguilles. The park has a successful breeding programme for giant Aldabra tortoises, as well as a huge crocodile farm and a great range of other animals. The enormous Nile crocodiles are particularly impressive (11.30am is feeding time), as well as the creepy-crawlies on display in the insectarium.

Allow at least an hour for the visit. Should you feel peckish, or curious, try the **Hungry Crocodile Restaurant** (crocodile meat curry Rs 495, fritters Rs 280). It also does more conventional dishes.

### BOIS CHÉRI TEA ESTATE

This 250-hectare **tea estate** (Map p112; ☎ 617 9109; lesaintaubin@intnet.mu; adult/child Rs 115/230; ☎ 8.30am–3.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am–noon Sat) is located about 12km north of Rivière des Anguilles. Visitors are taken on an hour-long tour of the tea-processing plant, before visiting a rather dusty museum to learn about the history of tea. More appealing is the tea tasting that takes place in the company lodge, in the midst of the plantation with panoramic views of the coast. The estate produces seven different sorts of black tea, including the delicious vanilla tea for which it is rightly famous and a coconut-flavoured brew called Dodo tea. It's best to visit in the morning to be sure to see the employees working as things slow down after midday.

### LE ST AUBIN

The Bois Chéri tea company also owns **Le St Aubin** (Map p112; ☎ 626 1513; lesaintaubin@intnet.mu; adult/child Rs 180/100; ☎ 8.30am–4pm Mon-Sat), an elegant plantation house that dates back to 1819, in the village of St Aubin, 2km west of Rivière des Anguilles. The estate no longer produces sugar, but in the gardens of the house there is a traditional rum distillery and a nursery growing anthurium flowers and vanilla; the guide explains all about the fascinating history of vanilla production.

The best vanilla pods are exported, while the remainder are used in the **restaurant** (admission incl set menu Rs 805; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat) of Le St Aubin, along with palm heart, pineapple, mango, chilli and other produce from the gardens. The traditionally furnished house makes a splendid setting for a meal featuring typical Mauritian dishes, including classics such as palm-heart salad or vanilla chicken. Reservations are recommended.

### Souillac & Around

pop 4500

Continuing west along the coast, the next major settlement you come to is Souillac, 7km from Rivière des Anguilles. Again, the town is of little interest, but the coast here is impressively rugged and there are a few interesting places dotted around. Souillac is named after the Vicomte de Souillac, the island's French governor from 1779 to 1787.

### SIGHTS

#### Rochester Falls

These are by no means the country's most spectacular falls, but are worth a detour if you're in the area. There are makeshift signs from Souillac that take you on a rather circuitous but reliable route to the falls (although there are hawkers here and people who want a tip for telling you where to park your car). The falls are a five-minute walk from the hawkers, a beautiful opening in the sugar-cane fields and a dramatic, fast-flowing sight.

#### Robert Edward Hart Museum

Robert Edward Hart (1891–1954) was a renowned Mauritian poet, apparently appreciated by the French and the English alike, although we've yet to meet anyone who's heard of him. His rather uninteresting house, Le Nef, is an attractive coral-stone cottage with great views at the end of a one-way

### REPLANTING THE MANGROVES

Following the 1866 malaria epidemic, in which nearly 3700 people died, the British colonial administration correctly identified the mangrove swamps around the coast of Mauritius as the main breeding ground for malaria-carrying mosquitoes. As part of a campaign of eradication, huge tracts of mangrove were uprooted or burned and swamps were filled in with volcanic boulders. Eucalyptus trees were even brought in from Australia to dry up areas of marshy ground.

As an antimalarial strategy, the programme was very successful. It was only later that scientists discovered the important role that mangrove swamps play in the breeding cycles of many of the tropical fish that the islanders depend on for food.

Today the Mauritian government is taking steps to preserve the remaining swamps and to re-establish mangroves, for example, at Bambous Virieux on the southeast coast of Mauritius. Of course, what is good news for tropical fish will also be good news for mosquitoes!

system signed left off the main road as you approach from Rivière des Anguilles, between the bus depot and bus station.

The cottage was opened to the public as a **museum** (Map p112; ☎ 625 6101; admission free; 🕒 9am-4pm Wed-Mon) in 1967. On display are some originals and copies of Hart's letters, plays, speeches and poetry, as well as his fiddle, spectacles and his trusty Britannic toilet. His award from the National Institute of Sciences for services to 'telepathy, hypnotism and personal magnetism' could do with some explanation. Sadly the few explanations on display are only in French. This is definitely rainy-day tourism.

### Gris Gris & La Roche qui Pleure

Continue east along the road past the Robert Edward Hart Museum and you come to a grassy cliff top, which affords a view of the black rocky coastline where the reef is broken. A path leads down to the wild and empty Gris Gris beach; a wooden sign warns of the dangers of swimming here. The term *gris gris* traditionally refers to 'black magic', and looking at the tortuous coastline, you can see how the area got its name.

Right at the end of the next headland, 600m further on, La Roche qui Pleure (The Crying Rock; Map p112) resembles a crying man – you'll have to stand there puzzling it out for quite some time, and the waves really have to crash for the 'tears' to come out, but it's oddly satisfying when you finally get it.

### La Vallée des Couleurs

The less impressive of the two 'coloured earths' in Mauritius (see p109), **La Vallée des Couleurs** (Map p112; ☎ 622 8686; adult/child Rs 150/75; 🕒 9am-5pm) is nevertheless beautifully situated, with plenty of waterfalls to see, some great flowers and even a collection of giant tortoises to admire, which is good as the coloured earths are by no means stunning, even if there are actually 23 different colours here, as opposed to Chamarel's seven.

A nature trail of sorts leads to the coloured earths past small waterfalls and picnic kiosks with views down to the coast. It takes about an hour to complete the circuit.

There's also a rustic café-restaurant, **La Cabane en Paille** (Map p112; ☎ 723 3115; mains Rs 250; 🕒 10.30am-3pm), serving drinks and slightly pricey but well-prepared local dishes.

### EATING

**Le Gris Gris** (aka Chez Rosy; Map p112; ☎ 625 4179; mains Rs 150-250; 🕒 noon-5pm) This smart restaurant beside the Gris Gris car park is a friendly place serving no-nonsense home-cooking.

**Restaurant Rochester** (Map p112; ☎ 625 4180; mains 275; lunch & dinner, closed dinner Tue) The charming Mme Appadu who ran the Cabane en Paille restaurant at the Vallée des Couleurs for years now runs her own family restaurant in an old colonial building by the bridge to Surinam. The food is traditional Mauritian and it's a popular place for groups.

**Le Batelage** (Map p112; ☎ 625 6083; mains Rs 400-700; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Sadly a bit of a tourist trap (as its location in Le Village des Touristes would suggest), Le Batelage nevertheless enjoys a gorgeous position overlooking the river mouth. The over-attentive staff fuss relentlessly, but the Franco-Creole food is good quality, if unsubtly overpriced.

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

There are buses roughly every half hour from Mahébourg to Souillac via the airport and Rivière des Anguilles. From Port Louis, buses run hourly, calling at Rivière des Anguilles en route. There are also frequent services to and from Souillac to Curepipe, with three buses a day taking the coast road via Pointe aux Roches. Buses heading along the coast to Baie du Cap depart hourly.

A taxi from Souillac to Shanti Ananda Maurice costs around Rs 150, Rs 500 to the airport.

### Bel Ombre

The latest development in Mauritius' hotel scene is a string of luxury developments in the isolated south of the island, most of which are on the grounds of the former sugar estate of Bel Ombre. You're really miles from the bucket-and-spade atmosphere of Flic en Flac or Grand Baie here, although the hotels are fairly tightly placed together, meaning that despite the general removal from the rest of the country, you don't exactly feel in the middle of nowhere.

The main attraction here is the **Domaine de Bel Ombre** (☎ 623 5615; www.domainedebelombre.mu; 🕒 daily), a nature reserve set on the old sugar plantation, which was developed by Charles Telfair between 1816 and 1833. Today it's run for birdwatchers, walkers and nature lovers who come here to see the wild stag,

visit the charming waterfall, quad-bike, putt away on the golf course or eat in one of the superb restaurants. There's even the remains of a chimney from the plantation days.

### SLEEPING

**Mövenpick Resort & Spa Mauritius** (Map p112; ☎ 623 5000; www.movenpick-hotels.com; Bel Ombre; s/d with half board Rs 9200/14,100; 🕒 🍷 🍷 🍷) The most impressive of the three properties built on the Bel Ombre estate and initially known as Le Voile d'Or until it was acquired by the Mövenpick group in 2006. The huge, empty entrance looks like the Temple of Doom at first, but once you're in, it's hard not to be impressed by the stunning central avenue of water between the hotel and the sea. The accommodation is in three-storey buildings facing the sea and the attractions here include the huge spa, which is almost a resort in itself, tennis courts, a diving centre, kids clubs and a great selection of restaurants.

**Le Telfair Golf & Spa Resort** (Map p112; ☎ 433 5500; www.letelfair.com; Bel Ombre; s/d with half board Rs 13,800/19,700; 🕒 🍷 🍷 🍷) This is a very grand hotel built in the colonial style, albeit with a touch of Disney thrown in for good measure. The site itself is superb, spanning the river leading down to a great stretch of beach and encompassing a huge pool. The rooms are as grand as the rest of the grounds would lead you to expect, housed in white, flouncy buildings with large balconies. There are lovely views back towards the mountains from here too.

**Heritage Golf & Spa Resort** (Map p112; ☎ 601 1500; www.veranda-resorts.com; Bel Ombre; s/d/tr with half board Rs 13,800/16,800/23,200; 🕒 🍷 🍷 🍷) The heritage in question here is Mauritius' copious African heritage, although the theme is decorative more than anything else, giving rise to stylish interiors, expansive pools, African art on the walls and drums on arrival. It's a very pleasant, smart place with a great beach and a relaxed atmosphere despite five-star standards.

**Shanti Ananda Maurice** (Map p112; ☎ 603 7200; www.shantiananda.com; St Felix; s/d with half board from Rs 22,600/24,300; 🕒 🍷 🍷 🍷) This property in the village of St Felix opened at the end of 2006 and is brought to you by the owners of the notoriously high-end Ananda in the Himalayas, the exclusive Indian spa resort which is a fixture on the pages of *Condé*

*Nast Traveller*. Shanti Ananda Maurice is only their second resort in the world and it's suitably spectacular, set in 15 hectares of tropical gardens with a wonderful beach and a huge ESPA spa with a dizzying number of treatments. Although not yet operational when we visited, this promises to be one of Mauritius' most spectacular hotels.

### EATING

All the hotels in and around Bel Ombre have several restaurants – all of high standard and at a high price. The pick of the bunch has to be **Le Château Restaurant** (Map p112; ☎ 623 5620; Bel Ombre; mains from Rs 1200; 🕒 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Fri & Sat), a stunning conversion of the old plantation house of the Bel Ombre estate presided over by Dominique Blais, the head chef at Le Telfair. This is a place for an exceptional meal of traditional Franco-Mauritian cuisine with contemporary flourish.

### Baie du Cap

#### pop 2300

The coastline between Baie du Cap and the stunning Le Morne Peninsula is some of the most beautiful in the country, and blissfully free of development. As well as some marvellous stretches of casuarina-lined sand west of Baie du Cap, there's good surf at Macondé Point, on the east side of the bay and some astonishingly dramatic rocky scenery.

The only real sights in the area are a couple of low-key monuments. The first is the **Trevassa Monument** (Map p112), about 1km beyond Bel Ombre village, which commemorates the sinking of the British steamer *Trevassa* in 1923. She went down 2600km off Mauritius. Sixteen survivors were eventually washed ashore at Bel Ombre having survived 25 days in an open lifeboat.

The second is the **Matthew Flinders monument** (Map p112) that stands on the shore 500m west of Baie du Cap. It was erected in 2003 in honour of the arrival here 200 years earlier of the English navigator and cartographer Matthew Flinders. He was less warmly received at the time; the poor bloke didn't know that England and France were at war and he was imprisoned for more than six years. For an interesting read on the subject, take a look at Huguette Ly-Tio-Fane Pineo's book *In the Grips of the Eagle: Matthew Flinders at the Île de France, 1803-1810*.

There are a couple of cheap and cheerful restaurants beside the junction in Baie du Cap village. **Chand Snack** (Map p112; mains around Rs 90; ☎ 7am-10pm; ♿) is slightly smarter and offers a wider choice.

Bus services along here are limited. Baie du Cap is the terminus for buses from Souillac, and from Quatre Bornes via Tamarin. In both cases buses run approximately every 20 minutes.

## RODRIGUES

Rodrigues is one of the most pleasant surprises Mauritius has to offer. Blissfully isolated over 500km northeast of the mainland, this tiny island is a volcanic creation only one million years old, a stunning, mountainous gem where it's hard to feel connected to even Mauritius, let alone the wider world. Often sold rather misleadingly as a 'mini-Mauritius', Rodrigues' differences from its distant master are what actually make people who come here fall for it. Entirely mountainous, far drier than the mainland and with no sugar cane but fruit and vegetables planted everywhere, the vibe is very different indeed. The beaches, while fewer and farther between than on the mainland, are superb and the population, almost entirely African and Creole, is a far cry from Mauritius' ethnic melting pot; most people speak Creole rather than French or English, and over 90% are Roman Catholic.

Rodrigues' unlikely, remote location belies the fact that it's a relatively heavily populated place: although it measures only 8km by 18km, Rodrigues supports a population of about 37,000 people. There's a very autonomous spirit here; while few actually believe independence would be beneficial in the long run, there's a fiercely proud island identity, one no doubt much informed by the population's almost entirely African heritage: most residents are descendents of freed slaves who left Mauritius in the 19th century to enjoy a life free from their former oppressors.

As well as beach holidays and walking, the island offers some of the best diving in Mauritius, being surrounded by extensive coral reefs. Rodrigues is receiving heavy promotion as a back-to-nature destination for holiday-makers from throughout the region. The government seems keen to go the route of sympathetic, small-scale development, with

the emphasis on B&B accommodation, and there is much talk of ecotourism. Sadly, it remains the poorest part of the country with people having a far worse quality of life than on the mainland.

### History

Rodrigues is named after the Portuguese navigator, Don Diégo Rodriguez, who was the first European to discover the uninhabited island in 1528. Dutch sailors were the next to pay a call, albeit very briefly, in 1601, followed a few years later by the French.

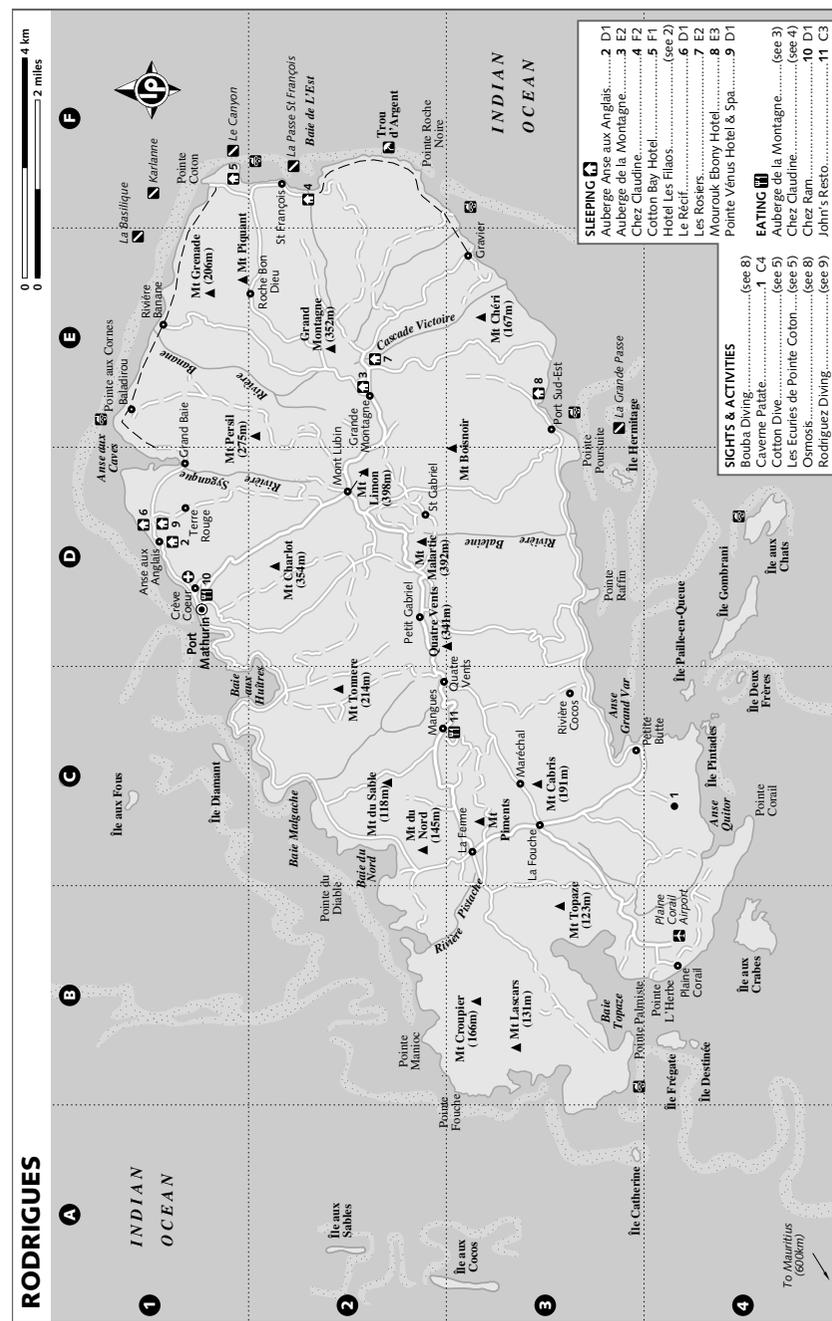
At first Rodrigues was simply a place where ships could take refuge from storms and replenish their supplies of fresh water and meat. Giant tortoises were especially prized since they could be kept alive on board for months. Over the years thousands were taken or killed until they completely died out. Rodrigues also had a big flightless bird, the solitaire, which went the same sorry way as its distant cousin, the dodo.

The first serious attempt at colonisation occurred in 1691 when Frenchman François Leguat and a band of seven Huguenot companions fled religious persecution at home in search of a 'promised land'. They made a good stab at it. Crops grew well and the island's fauna and flora were a source of wonder. Even so, after two years, life on a paradise island began to pall, not least due to the lack of female company. With no boat of their own (the ship they arrived on failed to return as promised), Leguat and his friends built a craft out of driftwood and eventually made it to Mauritius.

The next group to arrive were far more determined. In 1735, the French founded a permanent colony on Rodrigues as part of a European power-struggle to control the Indian Ocean. They established a small settlement at Port Mathurin, but a lack of leadership coupled with the difficult climate meant the colony never really prospered. When the British – who wanted a base from which to attack French-ruled Mauritius – invaded in 1809, they met with little resistance.

One of the more important events under British rule was the arrival of telecommunications in 1901. Rodrigues was one of the staging posts for the undersea cable linking Britain and Australia. The old Cable & Wireless offices are still to be seen at Pointe Canon above Port Mathurin.

Then, in 1967, Rodriguans distinguished themselves by voting against independence



from Britain by a whopping 90% (the rest of Mauritius voted strongly in favour). It was a dramatic illustration of the difference in outlook between the two islands. Following independence, Rodriguans continued to argue that their needs were significantly different from the rest of the country and that, in any case, they were being neglected by the central government. What they wanted was a greater say in their own future.

The campaign was led by Serge Clair and his Organisation du Peuple de Rodrigues (OPR), founded in 1976. His patience and political skill eventually paid off. In 2001 it was announced that Rodrigues would be allowed a degree of autonomy, notably in socio-economic affairs and in the management of their natural resources. The following year 18 counsellors were elected; the Regional Assembly was formally inaugurated in 2002 with Serge Clair as Chief Commissioner. The assembly is now trying to tackle the overriding problems of population growth and poverty.

Almost as momentous for many islanders was the visit of Pope John-Paul II in 1989. Nearly the entire population turned out to celebrate Mass at La Ferme.

Today the economic mainstays of Rodrigues are fishing and agriculture, with tourism and handicrafts playing an increasingly important role.

## Environment

Long-term overfishing coupled with silting (from erosion in the hills) is placing severe stress on the marine ecosystem, with particular concern for the lagoon. **Shoals Rodrigues** (☎ 831 1225; www.shoals-rodrigues.org), an NGO working with local fishing communities, warns that large areas of coral have been damaged, mainly through destructive fishing practices associated with octopus gatherers, who go out on foot to prise the octopus from their shelters. At the same time, fishing with seine nets, which remove young as well as mature fish, is depleting fish stocks. The number of fishing licences has been cut substantially and Shoals is also working to establish a network of marine reserves, which will replenish fish populations throughout the lagoon.

## Wildlife

Over the centuries, the thick forest that covered Rodrigues has been destroyed by felling

and intensive grazing. Much of the vegetation you see today consists of introduced species. Of the 38 or so native plant species remaining, all but two are considered endangered, vulnerable or rare.

The government, in collaboration with the MWF, is acting to protect areas of critical importance by clearing them of introduced plants (which grow much more quickly) and replanting native species. It is hoped that these areas will act as refuges for the island's rare endemic fauna, such as the Rodrigues warbler and the Rodrigues fody. The warbler population has made a shaky recovery from near extinction in the 1960s to an estimated 70 pairs today. The fody population has also increased from a low of 60 pairs in 1983 to approximately 300 pairs today.

Another species under threat is the Rodrigues fruit bat. The population of these large, brown bats had reached critically low levels of just 75 in 1974. With the help of strict laws and conservation measures, the population had inched its way up to 5000 or so before Cyclone Kalunde struck in 2003. It's estimated that some 2000 survived, and the numbers are on the rise again. You can see them gliding over Port Mathurin at dusk to reach their feeding grounds.

The small islands surrounding Rodrigues support important colonies of sea birds. Fairy terns and noddies nest on Île aux Cocos and Île aux Sables, off the northwest coast, while a tortoise park is due to open in 2007 near Plaine Corail airport.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

The main **Air Mauritius office** (Map p126; ☎ 831 1632; fax 831 1959; ADS Bldg, Rue Max Lucchesi) is in Port Mathurin. There is also an office at the **airport** (☎ 832 7700), which is open for all arrivals and departures.

Air Mauritius has connections between Mauritius and Rodrigues (Rs 5734 return, 1½ hours, two to four flights daily), while **Catovair** (Map p126; ☎ 831 0747; www.catovair.com; Patricio Bldg, Rue François Leguat) also operates on the route (Rs 5290 return, 1½ hours, two flights daily except Wednesday).

There is a luggage limit of 15kg per person, with excess charged at Rs 35 per kilo. When checking in at the Mauritius end, you may be asked how much you weigh. Don't worry, you won't have to go through the indignity

of being weighed like a sack of potatoes – an approximation is fine.

All passengers are required to reconfirm their return tickets either immediately on arrival at Rodrigues (there is an Air Mauritius counter in the baggage hall) or at least three days before departure. It's a good idea to phone the airline the day before you leave anyway, just to make sure there's been no change to the schedule.

### SEA

The *Mauritius Pride* and the *Mauritius Trochetia* make the voyage from Port Louis to Rodrigues four times a month, docking at the passenger terminal on Rue Wolfert Harmensz in Port Mathurin. The outbound trip takes about 36 hours; the return to Mauritius 25 hours, depending on sea conditions. 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*. The boats are popular with locals, so book well ahead.

Information and tickets are available from travel agents or direct from the Mauritius Shipping Corporation. Contact **Coraline Shipping Agency** (Map p58-9; ☎ 217 2285; msc@coraline.intnet.mu; Nova Bldg, Military Rd, Port Louis) and the **Mauritius Shipping Corporation** (Map p126; ☎ 831 0640; www.mauritiusshipping.intnet.mu; Rue François Leguat, Port Mathurin). Tickets should be reconfirmed two days before departure.

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Flights arrive at **Plaine Corail Airport** (☎ 831 6301) at the southwest tip of the island. Public bus 206 runs between the airport and Port Mathurin roughly every 40 minutes from 5.30am to 4.30pm. The private **Supercopter bus service** (☎ 831 1859; one-way Rs 150) meets all flights and drops off at hotels in Port Mathurin and Anse aux Anglais; phone ahead to be sure of a seat.

For destinations elsewhere on the island, you can either take the bus to Port Mathurin and then get an onward connection, or arrange for your hotel or a tour operator to pick you up. Prices start at around Rs 300 per person for a round trip.

A taxi to or from Port Mathurin costs Rs 300; to Pointe Coton Rs 600; and to Port Sud-Est Rs 500. Fares are slightly more expensive at night.

### BUS

The main bus terminal is in Port Mathurin. In addition to the airport bus, the most useful bus routes are those to Grand Baie and Pointe Coton in the east of the island, and to Gravier, Port Sud-Est and Rivière Cocos on the south coast. All apart from the Grand Baie buses pass through Mont Lubin in the centre of the island. Buses operate every 30 to 45 minutes from about 6am to 5.30pm Monday to Saturday on most routes. The Sunday service is fairly sporadic.

### CAR

The road system in Rodrigues has improved enormously and sealed roads now lead to most parts of the island. Though 4WD vehicles are no longer strictly necessary, most hire cars are still sturdy pick-ups.

Car rental can be arranged through most hotels and guesthouses and local tour operators (p126), who will deliver all over the island. There's an **Avis** (☎ 832 8100; www.avismauritius.com) at the airport although we recommend the cheaper services of **Chou Chou de l'Île** (☎ 875 2215/831 2410; chouchoudele@hotmail.com), which is based in Baie aux Huitres but will deliver pickups and motorbikes anywhere on the island. Expect to pay at least Rs 1200 per day. Most importantly, make sure you have sufficient petrol before setting off for the day – the island's only **petrol station** (Rue Max Lucchesi; ☎ 6am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 6am-3pm Sun) is in Port Mathurin.

### BICYCLE & MOTORCYCLE

If your hotel or guesthouse doesn't offer bike or motorcycle rental, contact one of the outlets in Port Mathurin (below). The going rate is around Rs 200 per day for a bike and Rs 650 for a 125cc motorbike.

### TAXI

Most taxis on Rodrigues are 4WD pickups. The fare from Port Mathurin to Pointe Coton costs Rs 400 and to Port Sud-Est Rs 400, slightly more at night. You can also hire taxis by the day for an island tour; expect to pay in the region of Rs 1500.

## PORT MATHURIN

pop 6000

This tiny port is the island's hub and, for want of a better word, its capital. The island is run from the local legislative assembly

here, although it feels very far from being an administrative centre. It's a friendly, bustling place with a fantastic market, some attractive mosques and an enjoyable atmosphere. Anyone spending any time in Rodrigues will enjoy Port Mathurin, even if just passing through en route to one of the islands' upmarket hotels.

## Information

### EMERGENCY

**Port Mathurin Pharmacy** (☎ 831 2279; Rue de la Solidarité; ☎ 7.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-3pm Sat, 7.30am-11am Sun) The only pharmacy on the island.

**Queen Elizabeth Hospital** (☎ 831 1628) The island's main hospital is at Crève Coeur, immediately east of Port Mathurin.

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Cyber Logistics** (☎ 832 0869; Rue Mamzelle Julia; per min Rs 2; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat) Offers the cheapest web access in town.

**Rodnet Cybercafe** (☎ 831 0747; Rue Johnston; per min Rs 3; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) Below the Dragon d'Or restaurant.

### MONEY

The banks all have offices where you can change money and withdraw cash from the ATMs.

**Barclays** (☎ 831 1553; Rue de la Solidarité)

**Mauritius Commercial Bank (MCB)**; (☎ 831 1833; Rue Max Lucchesi)

**State Bank** (☎ 831 1642; Rue Max Lucchesi)

### POST

**Post office** (☎ 831 2098; Rue de la Solidarité; ☎ 8.15-11.15am & noon-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.15-11.45pm Sat)

### TELEPHONE

There are plenty of public phones on Rodrigues and both Mauritian networks have reception here. You can buy phonecards at **Téléshop** (☎ 831 1816; Rue Johnston; ☎ 8am-8.30pm Mon-Sat), and there is a cardphone outside for international calls.

### TRAVEL AGENCIES

There are several excellent travel agencies in town offering a range of activities and tours. **Ecotourisme** (☎ 831 2801; www.rodrigues-island.org/ecotourisme.html; Rue Max Lucchesi)

**Rodrigues 2000 Tours** (☎ 831 1894; 2000trs@intnet.mu; Rue Max Lucchesi)

**RodTours** (☎ 831 2249; www.rodrigues-island.org/rodTours.html; Camp du Roi) Part of MauriTours.

**Rotourco** (☎ 831 0747; www.rotourco.com; Rue François Leguat)

### TOURIST INFORMATION

There's a small but very helpful **tourist office** (☎ 832 0866; www.rodrigues-island.org; Rue de la Solidarité; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) in the building of La Résidence. Just walk in through the gate (it looks private but it's quite OK to walk in) and you'll be able to get brochures and advice here from the friendly staff about the vast variety of *chambres* and *tables d'hôte* on the island, plus excursions and hiking.

### Sights & Activities

One of the oldest buildings still standing in Port Mathurin, **La Résidence** (Rue de la Solidarité) dates from 1897, when it provided a fairly modest home for the British Chief Commissioner. Its facilities are now used as function rooms for the new Regional Assembly.

On the south side of town, **Care-Co** (☎ 831 1766; Camp du Roi; admission free; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) is a non-profit association providing training, work and accommodation for people with disabilities and the young unemployed. Around 50 people work at the centre producing various crafts and some delicious, award-winning honey. Visitors are welcome and are given a guided tour of the workshops. There's also a small shop here and another on Rue de la Solidarité.

For an island said to be 97% Catholic, there are two surprisingly well-kept mosques in Port Mathurin. The largest of the two, the **Masjid Noor Mosque** (☎ 831 2130; Rue Père Gandy) has a sign outside in English proclaiming that visitors are very welcome, although it's not always open.

For fine views over Port Mathurin and the lagoon, there's an easy 1km walk from the end of Rue Mamzelle Julia to a lookout atop Mt Fanal. At dusk this is a good place to see Rodrigues fruit bats.

### Sleeping

Port Mathurin makes a convenient base if you are travelling by bus, but frankly it lacks the characterful *chambres d'hôte* you'll find elsewhere on the island. There are plenty of good options though.

**Hébergement Fatehmadode** (☎ 831 1551; mah.mood@intnet.mu; Rue Max Lucchesi; s & d room only from Rs 200, apt from Rs 500) We almost couldn't believe the price when we stayed here – for a tiny sum you get a huge room with access to an even bigger balcony, all spotlessly clean and comfortable including a kitchenette. Sadly there's no air con and the service leaves something to be desired, but this is hands-down the best bargain in town.

**Pension Ciel d'Été** (☎ 831 1587; fax 831 2004; Rue François Leguat; s/d incl breakfast Rs 500/800, with half board Rs 750/1200) This charming colonial-style residence is arranged in well-kept gardens. Though it suffers a bit from road noise, it is a popular choice. Fan-cooled rooms are spartan and religiously charged with Catholic admonishments to sinners framed on the walls.

**Auberge Le Port Paradis** (☎ 831 1062; fax 831 2096; Rue François Leguat; s/d Rs 500/1000; ♿) Near the bus station in a brilliantly located building with some great views of the town, this sprawling place is good value with basic but clean rooms. There's an extra charge of Rs 300 per night for air-con.

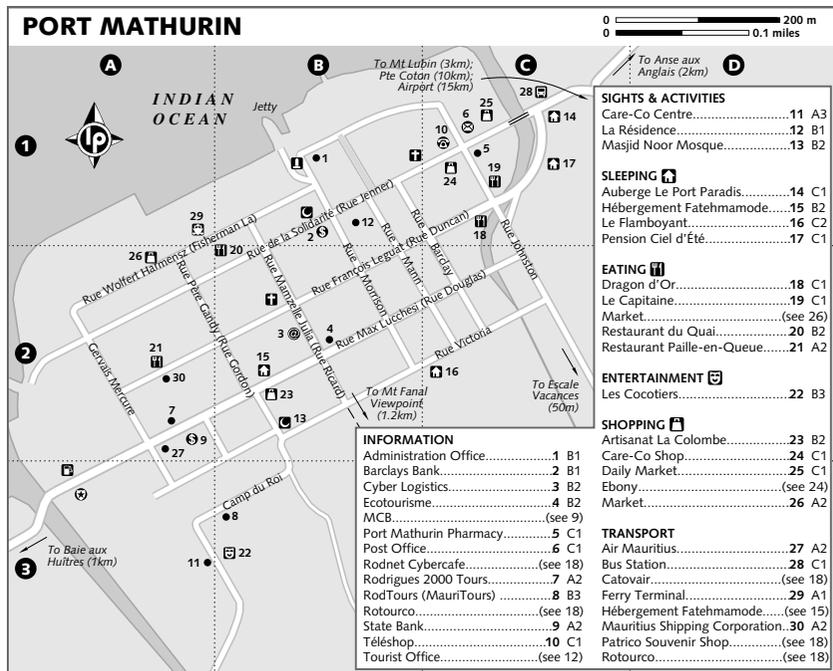
**Le Flamboyant** (☎ 832 0082; www.hotelflamboyant.com; Rue Victoria; s/d incl breakfast Rs 800/1500, with half board Rs 950/1800; ♿) This recently renovated hotel offers slightly boxy rooms with bathroom, TV and minibar. There's a restaurant-bar and a tiny pool squeezed in at the back. It's a friendly place in the town's backstreets.

**Escalé Vacances** (☎ 831 2555; escal.vac@intnet.mu; Rue Johnston; s/d incl breakfast from Rs 2750/4500, with half board Rs 3140/5250; ♿) Just outside the centre, but a very short walk from everything nonetheless, this charming conversion of a colonial mansion into a friendly hotel is very successful. The rooms are spacious, well furnished and come with local charm. It's a favourite with groups and is the best standard hotel in town.

### Eating

For quick eats, outlets on Rue de la Solidarité sell *pain fouré* (filled rolls), noodles and the like for a handful of rupees. There's also a clutch of restaurants offering traditional local cuisine. Specialities are octopus (in curries and salads), succulent ham and chicken, and dishes featuring the famous Rodrigues chillies, lemons and honey.

**Dragon d'Or** (☎ 831 0541; Rue François Leguat; mains Rs 75-100; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed dinner Wed)



A friendly place serving cheap and cheerful Chinese and Creole fare. Portions are small, but the food is tasty.

**Restaurant du Quai** (☎ 831 2840; Rue Wolfert Harmensz; mains Rs 100-200; 🍽️ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun; ♿) This friendly place by the harbour is always full in the evenings with local families and visitors enjoying its fine seafood and lobster dishes. The charming staff are very keen to please and make a damn fine punch cocktail as an aperitif.

**Le Capitaine** (☎ 831 1581; Rue Johnstone; mains Rs 150; 🍽️ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) In the centre of town, Le Capitaine isn't the most romantic place in the world – on our last visit the staff were simultaneously listening to the radio and watching a film that blared out from the TV, seeming uninterested in either – but the food here is good, with an excellent selection of, yes, you've guessed it, seafood.

**Restaurant Paille-en-Queue** (☎ 831 0561; Rue François Leguat; mains Rs 85-300; 🍽️ dinner) This rather drably presented place is worth trying for its broad menu of hearty local as well as Chinese fare, including such Rodriguan classics as honey chicken and octopus curry.

Self-caterers will find several small grocery stores on Rue de la Solidarité and Rue Mamzelle Julia. You can buy fresh fruit from stalls near the post office (mornings only from Monday to Saturday). On Saturday there is an excellent **street market** (Rue Wolfert Harmensz) down by the ferry terminal, with a smaller version on Wednesday.

## Entertainment

Port Mathurin is no Las Vegas, though occasionally the open-air disco **Les Cocotiers** (☎ 831 1877; Camp du Roi) has something organised on the weekends. Look out for adverts posted around town.

## Shopping

Rue de la Solidarité and Rue Mamzelle Julia are the main shopping streets. Here you'll find a number of outlets selling handicrafts, especially baskets and hats made from dried *vacoa* leaves. Items made from coconut fibres and coconut-shell jewellery are also popular souvenirs. Look out, too, for local foodstuffs such as preserved lemons, chillies and honey. The Saturday market is reasonably cheap and a pleasantly relaxed place to shop for fresh produce and some souvenirs. The rest of the week there's a **daily market** (🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Sat)

next to the bridge near the post office which is well worth a visit.

Other recommendations:

**Artisanat La Colombe** (☎ 831 0430; Rue Max Lucchesi) Specialises in preserved foodstuffs and basketware.

**Care-Co** (Rue de la Solidarité) Sells coconut-shell items, honey and model boats made by people with disabilities (p127).

**Ebony** (Rue de la Solidarité) A good range of *vacoa* hats and bags.

## Getting There & Away

For information about getting to and from the airport, see p124.

For information about travelling by boat, see p125.

You can rent bikes and motorbikes from **Hébergement Fatehmamode** (☎ 831 1551; mahmood@intnet.mu; Rue Max Lucchesi). Tour agent **Rotourco** (☎ 831 0747; www.rotourco.com; Rue François Leguat) also has a few motorbikes for rent, as does the nearby **Patricio souvenir shop** (☎ 831 2044; Rue François Leguat). Count on Rs 200 per day for a bike and at least Rs 650 for a 125cc motorbike.

Ask your hotel or guesthouse about car hire, or contact a local tour agent. Rates start at around Rs 1200 per day.

Port Mathurin's well-organised bus station (p125) is across the river on the east side of town.

## AROUND RODRIGUES

Rodrigues' varied and beautiful landscape demands exploration. Hiring a car is the best way to see the island (although do stop and walk as much as possible). The main attractions are the east-coast beaches and some wonderful home-stays run by local tourism pioneers scattered throughout the island.

The finest beaches are on the east coast from Pointe Coton around to Port Sud-Est. Top of the list is the immaculate beach at **Trou d'Argent**, only accessible by boat or on foot. **St François** and the small cove at **Gravier** are also magical spots. **Anse aux Anglais**, where the first British troops landed, has a decent beach – albeit with grey sand – and is a popular place to stay.

One of the most dramatic roads on the island descends from Mont Lubin to Port Sud-Est, offering great views of the island-spattered lagoon. This south coast is also where you'll find Rodrigues' very own cave system.

While the west of the island has the least to offer tourists, the Île aux Cocos, a nature reserve providing a habitat for a large number of rare birds, is a stand-out attraction and the most popular excursion in Rodrigues.

Last but not least, it's in the beautiful mountainous interior that you'll find Rodrigues at its most traditional.

## Sights & Activities

### WALKING & RIDING

Rodrigues is perfect for rambling around at your leisure. There are few signposts and the less popular trails are pretty ill-defined, but the landscape is fairly open so it's hard to get too lost.

You can begin the classic coastal walk at Pointe Coton or St François, which takes you south to the gorgeous beach at Trou d'Argent and then around the coast to Gravier. Allow about three hours for the walk, not counting swimming and picnic stops. Both Pointe Coton and Gravier are accessible by bus from Port Mathurin; check the time of the last bus back before you set off.

The walk from Port Mathurin or Anse aux Anglais to Pointe Coton is another good half-day's excursion.

The uplands around Mt Limon and Mt Malartic, which represent the island's highest points, offer great all-round views. The easy way up **Mt Limon** (398m) is to take a bus to the village of Mont Lubin. Then walk east along the road to Grande Montagne for 400m to find the path signposted up to the right; it takes just five minutes to reach the top.

Rodrigues provides some great landscapes for riding in. The island's best stables are **Les Ecuries de Pointe Coton** (Map p123; ☎ 831 8537, 875 5540; Pointe Coton), located adjacent to the Cotton Bay Hotel and whose friendly team can cater to all levels.

### WATER SPORTS & FISHING

There are many excellent dive locations around Rodrigues. In general, the marine environment is still remarkably well preserved and there's a tremendous variety of dives on offer. The best sites lie off the east and south coasts (see p29). Rodrigues is also one of the world's best-kept secrets as a place to kitesurf. Devotees have been coming for years and there's a tiny but loyal following in evidence.

The three main dive centres are **Cotton Dive** (Map p123; ☎ 831 8001; diverod@intnet.mu; 🕒 8am-4pm Sun-Fri, closed Jul & Aug) at the Cotton Bay Hotel, **Bouba Diving** (Map p123; ☎ 832 3063; ebony@intnet.mu; 🕒 7am-5pm) at the Mourouk Ebony Hotel and **Rodriguez Diving** (Map p123; ☎ 831 0957; http://rodriguez-diving.tripod.com; 🕒 8am-4pm) at the Pointe Venus Hotel & Spa. In all cases, nonguests should ring ahead to make an appointment. A dive costs from around Rs 1200.

Water sports are available through **Osmosis** (Map p123; ☎ 832 3051; osmosis-rodrigues.com; 🕒 7am-5pm), which is also based at the Mourouk Ebony Hotel. An hour's windsurfing costs Rs 550 or so with all the equipment; kite surfing, Rs 1500 for one descent.

The island's leading deep-sea fishing experts are the **Rod Fishing Club** (Map p123; ☎ 875 0616; www.rodffishingclub.com; Terre Rouge) run by Yann Colas, skipper of the Black Marlin, which makes frequent jiggling sorties from Port Mathurin.

### CAVERNE PATATE

Caverne Patate, in the southwest corner of the island, is an impressive cave system with a few stalagmite and stalactite formations. The guide points out formations with uncanny resemblances to a dodo, Buckingham Palace and even Winston Churchill!

The requisite permit is issued in the **Administration Office** (Map p126; ☎ 831 2058; Rodrigues Regional Assembly, Rue Morrison, Port Mathurin; 🕒 8am-noon Mon-Fri). It costs Rs 200 for up to 30 people.

There are four guided tours daily, usually at 9.30am, 11.30am, 1.30pm and 3.30pm. You should arrive at the cave entrance on the day and time specified on your permit. The 600m tunnel is an easy walk, but gets slippery in wet weather; wear shoes with a good grip and take a light jacket or pullover.

The track to the caves is signposted off the road from La Ferme to Petite Butte. Buses en route between La Ferme and Rivière Cocos will drop you off at the turn; coming from Port Mathurin, you'll have to change buses at one of these two towns.

### Tours

Local tour agents (p126) offer a variety of excursions; the efficient Ecotourisme and Rodrigues 2000 Tours have reliable reputations. Most hotels and guesthouses can also help.

The most popular outing is a day trip to Île aux Cocos (from Rs 800 per person including

picnic lunch), followed by various minibus tours of Rodrigues itself (from around Rs 500/1200 for a half/full day). Other options include a boat trip to Île aux Chats (Rs 800 including barbecue lunch) and a variety of guided walks and bike rides.

## Sleeping

The main concentration of hotels and guesthouses is found 2km east of Port Mathurin at Anse aux Anglais, although this isn't the best place to truly get away from it all. Other options are scattered along the east and south coasts and in the interior. There are a couple of upmarket hotels, but the nicest choice is a *chambres d'hôte*; as they usually only have a handful of rooms and the best fill up quickly, be sure to book ahead.

Camping is possible just about anywhere on the island. The beaches around Pointe Coton and Grand Baie are good places to start.

## NORTH COAST

**Le Récif** (Map p123; ☎ 831 1804; fax 831 0760; Anse aux Anglais; s/d Rs 600/850, with half board Rs 900/150; 🍷) This unusually stylish place has lots of character in its big, airy rooms decorated in Mauritian style and is looking good after a recent renovation. Perched on the cliff above Anse aux Anglais with access to the small beach below, this is a popular spot. There's a raucous disco on Saturday night in the restaurant.

**Hotel Les Filaos** (Map p123; ☎ 831 1644; www.filaos-travenel-rodrigues.com; Anse aux Anglais; s/d incl breakfast from Rs 1000/1500; 🍷) Smart management has improved this place enormously, making it a great option. There's a large pool and simple, spotless rooms in small blocks arranged around it, next to a small river that runs into the sea.

**Auberge Anse aux Anglais** (Map p123; ☎ 831 2179; aubergehung@intnet.mu; Anse aux Anglais; s/d with half board from Rs 1150/1840; 🍷 🍷) Tucked off the road in Anse aux Anglais, with a pretty garden, this is a popular choice. Clean, simple rooms come with private bathroom, phone and either fan or, for Rs 300 extra per night, air-con (they're currently in the process of putting air-con in each room). The beach is just a short walk away.

**Pointe Vénus Hotel & Spa** (Map p123; ☎ 832 0104; resa@otentik.intnet.mu; s/d Rs 7000/10,000; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Definitely Rodrigues' most talked-about recent development, the Pointe Vénus is now

considered by most to be the island's most luxurious hotel since it opened in 2004. In fact it's a fairly standard four-star hotel, albeit tastefully designed with a great pool, friendly staff and excellent facilities including a spa, diving centre, two restaurants and a kids club set in extensive grounds. Sadly it's set back from the coast, which makes it less attractive than the other two smart hotels on the island, although another sign that developers now have their sights trained on Rodrigues.

## CENTRAL RODRIGUES

**Les Rosiers** (Map p123; ☎ 831 4703; Grande Montagne; s/d with breakfast Rs 500/1000) If the Auberge de la Montagne is full, you can try this place up the road. Its rather basic rooms and shoddy plumbing make it far less appealing, but the welcome is warm and genuine and you can still organise a *table d'hôte* meal at Auberge de la Montagne.

**ourpick Auberge de la Montagne** (Map p123; ☎ 831 4607; www.aubergedelamontagne.net.tc; Grande Montagne; s/d with half board from Rs 800/1600) Right at the island's mountainous heart, this long-established, much-loved *chambre d'hôte* is one of our favourites, run by the charming Baptiste family and set overlooking a wonderful fruit orchard. The meals are a real highlight here (see opposite) – Françoise Baptiste is an expert of Rodriguan cookery. The rooms are beautiful, clean and have some excellent views. Book well in advance.

## EAST COAST

**Chez Claudine** (Map p123; ☎ 831 8242; cbmoner@intnet.mu; St François; s/d with half board Rs 1200/2400) The wonderful Claudine welcomes everyone to her brilliant *chambre d'hôte* overlooking one of Rodrigues' best beaches. Her charmingly furnished white chalet-style house offers a selection of rooms, each with a view of the mountains or the sea. Meals are also delicious and you're well placed for walks along the east coast.

**Cotton Bay Hotel** (Map p123; ☎ 831 8001; cottonb@intnet.mu; Pointe Coton; s/d with half board from Rs 7600/10,200; 🍷 🍷) This has long been considered Rodrigues' most luxurious hotel and has a blissfully isolated location on the island's east coast. Rooms are comfortable – if a tad dated – but with the fantastic yellow-sand bay, a great pool and plenty to see and do nearby including the island's best beaches and riding

school a short walk away, it's easy to see why it's so enduringly popular.

## SOUTH COAST

**Mourouk Ebony Hotel** (Map p123; ☎ 832 3350; www.mouroukebonnyhotel.com; Port Sud-Est; s/d with half board from Rs 5800/8500; 🍷 🍷) This is the other long-established upmarket hotel on Rodrigues, totally isolated at the end of a wiggling mountain road from the mountains and easily recognised from afar by its bright-red roofing. There's a great beach and pool here and a very well-run water-sports and diving centre (it's known for the best kitesurfing on the island), and the staff are extremely friendly.

## Eating

It would be a waste to come to Rodrigues and not eat traditional island cuisine at a *table d'hôte*. Outside Port Mathurin these are your best options for a meal out, although there are quite a few other good restaurants scattered about. For self-caterers, most villages have some sort of grocers or general store.

**Chez Ram** (Map p123; ☎ 832 0736; chezram@intnet.mu; Baie Lascars; mains from Rs 120; 🍷) lunch & dinner Thu-Tue) Just outside Port Mathurin, this pleasant roadside restaurant has a great terrace, sea views and good, reliable local cuisine. It's owned by Jayeswar Ramloll, the owner of Port Mathurin's excellent Restaurant du Quai, so you know you're in safe hands.

**John's Resto** (Map p123; ☎ 831 6306; Mangue; meals Rs 100-450; 🍷) lunch, dinner by reservation) Rodrigues' best seafood restaurant is up in the hills in the village of Mangue; follow signs for La Ferme. It's a friendly place where they're fanatical about seafood. This is the place to treat yourself to fresh lobster (a bargain at Rs 450 for 500g) or crab.

**Auberge de la Montagne** (Map p123; ☎ 831 4607; meals Rs 250; 🍷) lunch & dinner by reservation) Françoise Baptiste, the delightful owner of this *chambre d'hôte* and author of a book on Rodriguan cooking, prepares lip-smacking local specialities. You should reserve at least a day in advance.

**Chez Claudine** (Map p123; ☎ 831 8242; cbmoner@intnet.mu; St François; meals from Rs 300; 🍷) lunch & dinner by reservation) If you're walking to Trou d'Argent, phone in advance to reserve lunch at this *chambre d'hôte* at St François. The speciality is seafood grilled on an open wood fire.

## Entertainment

Apart from a couple of places in Port Mathurin, nightlife on the island is virtually non-existent. The exception is live folk-music performances. Rodriguans are known as skilled accordionists, who play versions of old colonial ballroom and country dances such as the 'Scottish', the waltz and the mazurka. They also play a distinctive version of the *séga*, known as *séga tambour*, where the drum is unusually prominent. Popular groups include Racines, Cardinal Blanc, Cascavelles and Ambience Tropicale. They often perform at the big hotels, all of which have folk evenings to which non-guests are welcome (it's a good idea to phone ahead).

**Le Récif** (☎ 831 1804; 🍷) 10pm-2am Fri & Sat) In Anse aux Anglais, this is a good place to hear local music. There's often folk music on Friday evenings while Saturday night is all disco, though they play a fair number of local hits.

## OFFSHORE ISLANDS

There are many small islands dotted around Rodrigues. Commonly visited islands include Île aux Cocos, to the west, and Île aux Chats and Île Hermitage off the south coast.

**Île aux Cocos nature reserve**, barely 1km in length, is a nature reserve and bird sanctuary populated by small colonies of noddies and lesser noddies. It is only possible to visit Île aux Cocos on a guided tour (from Rs 600 per person including picnic lunch), which can be arranged through hotels and tour agents. The boat trip takes at least an hour each way; take a jacket as it can be very windy. The birds themselves are interesting, although not spectacular. While birders will love it, the main attraction for non-birdwatchers is the chance to travel to a tiny desert island and to indulge in some good *Lost* fantasies.

**Île Hermitage**, a tiny island renowned for its beauty (and for its possible hidden treasure), and **Île aux Chats** are both accessible by boat from Port Sud-Est. The latter is an unremarkable island, but is surrounded by a healthy coral reef, which makes it a popular destination for snorkelling and diving.

You can arrange excursions to all these islands through hotels and tour agents. Another option is to try asking local fishermen in Port Sud-Est, who are usually willing to ferry people out to one of the nearby islands and pick them up later.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'