

<http://www.globalgayz.com/g-mauritius.html>



Worldwide Gay Life, Sites and Insights
Stories + Photographs + News + Reports + Links

Gay Mauritius

“If someone is gay here, he may be regarded as a freak, and made fun of, no matter how straight he may look!” Blending in seems to be the only way to get through the day, “You may not care what others think, but many gay people in Mauritius are afraid someone may recognise them as a gay. The island is too small.”

Many gay guys want to leave the island at some point, and many go to South Africa or Europe as soon as they can afford the journey. There’s little appetite for fighting public attitudes. Coming out as gay brings shame on the family, which most Mauritian gay men aren’t willing to do.

Also see:

Gay Mauritius News & Reports

From: Gay Times

<http://www.gaytimestravel.co.uk/gtt/article.asp?a=136>

2005

By Richard Collier

You could do much worse than explore the island of Mauritius. It’s a pretty, remote place, 500 miles off the east coast of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. It’s nearest neighbour is Réunion, 135 miles away and it takes a gruelling 12 hour flight to get there from London.

Waves of colonisation over the centuries have left a rich and complex cultural mix on the lush, tropical once-volcanic island which is primarily famous for being a fairly accessible luxury sun and sand destination. On my recent visit my first surprise was seeing the majority Hindu Indian population.

Brought to the island as labourers during the recent British colonial period more than half the population of 1.2 million are Hindus, with another quarter being Créole, descendants of African sugar plantation slaves brought over during French colonial rule.

The rest of the population is made up of Arabian muslim traders, well-heeled Catholic Europeans and a smattering of new economic migrants from China. After a complex series of invasions, conflicts and power-sharing Mauritius was given full independence from Britain in 1968. The new prime minister, the heroic Sir Ramgoolam, declared the island a sovereign nation and began plotting a course of its own, with tourism as the major earning pot.

But for all the variety of peoples and cultures, gay life on the island is hard to find. The locals are a conservative bunch and traditional values are tightly held. Spikey hair, graffiti, pop music and general youth culture is thought to be from “off the island” – anything even slightly subversive is relegated to belonging “somewhere else”. Tradition takes priority over personal expression, and the relatively small population means everyone knows everyone else’s business. A delicate balance in the status quo between cultures and races means that homosexuality is not accepted among the locals.

I met a couple of young gay Mauritian men, and asked them about their lives in this tropical paradise, “If someone is gay here, he may be regarded as a freak, and made fun of, no matter how straight he may look!” Blending in seems to be the only way to get through the day, “You may not care what others think, but many gay people in Mauritius are afraid someone may recognise them as a gay. The island is too small.” Most of the gay guys I met admitted that they were planning to leave the island at some point, and many go to South Africa or Europe as soon as they can afford the journey. There’s little appetite for fighting public attitudes. It’s an unfortunate belief that coming out as gay brings shame on the family, which too many Mauritian gay men aren’t willing to do.

However, there are a few discreet gay beaches, Trou aux Biches, Mont Choisy, Grand Baie and Pereybere, on the north coast, though check local news groups on the internet as the exact locations shift monthly. In fact, the whole gay community use the internet to arrange meetings and get-togethers. Rendezvous are very discreet, which can make attending them adventurous affairs. Most guys who make it onto the tiny scene are under 25. I was told, “Older guys either leave, or settle down with a wife and kids. There’s so much pressure to study, marry and have a family. I’ve known many young gays who “enjoy” a gay life until it’s time to marry!”

In spite of the lack of a scene however, a gay tourist will have no problems on vacation in this idyllic corner of the globe. The locals are friendly and courteous to visitors, and the ambience of the island is of gentle relaxation and tranquillity. Don’t go to Mauritius expecting to find a party island.

The Hindu tradition of transvestite-ism, Hirjas, is well known on the island, although I asked one of our tour guides about this and he claimed to know nothing about it. But our

bus driver, a previously mute fellow, became very animated about the topic. He told me about the exploits of these “normal guys who like to have fun dressing up in their bedrooms, when their parents are out of the house”.

The Heritage Resort, in the south of the island, where I stayed, already has a special deal for French gay tourists. There were loved-up, well-heeled French guys canoodling subtly on the beach. Special deals for same-sex couples celebrating nuptials offer big discounts if you show your official registration papers on booking.

The island is best visited on a package tour. Independent travel is possible, but flights are not cheap and hotels can be expensive if you book them off the street. All-inclusive packages, on the other hand, can be great value, and make for a perfect holiday if you can avoid the temptation to over-indulge on the ‘inclusive’ food and drink! The Heritage is a glorious 5-star complex with golf course, Spa Centre, water sports, more bars and restaurants than you could wish for and three members of staff per guest. Each Villa is decorated in rich earth tones while turquoise lagoon pools are scattered everywhere. The mill-pond flat sea gently laps against the beach thanks to a wall of coral reef that surrounds the island, and forces ocean waves to break on the other side of a stunning lagoon.

Inland there are a number of natural wonders best seen as part of a tour. My favourite was called ‘The Romance of the South’, taking one full day to explore the south of the island. Although I didn’t get any romance, we were taken to the remarkable Grand Bassin Lake, location of the famous Maha Shivaratri, the most important Hindu festival outside of India. Held over three days in February and March, this nondescript, high-altitude volcanic lake attracts most of the island’s Hindu population, (some 400,000 people), who make an annual pilgrimage in honour of Lord Shiva to make food sacrifices and gather holy water. The lake was visited in 1901 by Mahatma Gandhi who declared it spiritually linked with the Ganges, and so it became the holiest place on the island.

The capital, Port Louis, in the north west of the island is surrounded by spectacular mountains. On the waterfront you’ll find a bustling city with tourist shops and local markets as well as numerous bars and restaurants. Most of the original colonial period buildings have been removed to make way for new developments, much to the chagrin of the locals and the tourist-industry, so it’s not the prettiest or most atmospheric part of the island, but the Cathedral is fascinating if you’re interested in the insatiable spread of Catholicism.

Trips into the interior show off the lush vegetation and the remains of the once mighty forests. Most of the huge tropical forests were stripped during the colonial period, and it's a pity that the island is most famous for what it's now lost. It would have been an awesome sight to see huge Mahogany forests full of the dumb, metre-high, flightless Dodo, as well as other long-lost species.

To this day the island is fighting hard not to lose any other bird species, some of which are on the endangered species list including the Mauritius kestrel, the echo parakeet and the pink pigeon.

Climate is a complicated affair here. Different coasts have different weather patterns, and the capital is shielded by the mountains from the prevailing winds so is always a little hotter than the rest of the island, but you'll usually find a welcoming breeze. There is no monsoon season, though the cyclone season is best avoided between November and May. Expect daytime temperatures from January to April of around 35C (95F). The coolest period is from July to September, when temperatures average 24C (75F) during the day and 16C (60F) at night. Humidity is generally highest between October and June.

Back at the resort you'll find that the island isn't just famous for relaxation - there are other, more physical exploits to challenge your lethargy. Most all-inclusive resorts offer free activities. The Heritage keeps water-lovers happy with scuba-diving, wind-surfing, sailing, water-skiing, snorkelling, pedaloes and even a glass-bottom boat. There's a new 18-hole golf course and off-resort excursions like deep-sea fishing, catamaran cruises, 4x4 quad bike trips and mountain bike hire.

Alternatively, you can go hiking or trekking in the interior on day-long adventures, or hire camping equipment and spend a few days in the hills. Remember, however, that the heat and humidity won't allow for much over-exertion, and the lure of the beach will soon have you returning to your favourite sun-lounger. The Réserve Forrestière Macchabée and Black River Gorges National Park make for great excursions, and the views at the latter are truly stunning – with the added bonus of the altitude making for a welcome escape from the heat.

One thing you won't want to miss is the traditional dance of the island Créole Sèga, a sexually provocative, body-gyrating, rumpy-pumpy dance that's regularly performed by locals on the beach to the music of Latin America and the Caribbean. Men play the music – generally pounding drum rhythms and singing – while the women shake their booties. Sometimes, when the passions takes them, the guys will join in the thrusting, animalistic fun. It's great to watch and completely out of place in culturally conservative Mauritius.

One great joy about a trip to Mauritius is the superb food. There's a huge variety of cuisines, and fusion between dishes can make for exciting discoveries. French food merges with spicy Créole elements and can be served with Muslim and Hindu curries and Créole roast meats. Seafood is a speciality, although not as prevalent as you'd expect from such a remote island, and my favourite was daube, an octopus stew. Mauritian rum is as potent as you might expect, is cheap and available everywhere.

You'll also find French wines, which are expensive and locally brewed beers. The diversity of cultures on the island can be dizzying. They've integrated in fascinating ways. Where else could you eat superb Indian food with an East African twist in a

French colonial mansion looking over a lush tropical island vista, served by waiters who speak Créole?

So, if you're planning to celebrate your special day together, or you just fancy pampering yourselves in world-class style - you'll find a stay on Mauritius makes a truly welcome holiday. A relaxed, laid-back vacation being treated in a manner I'm sure you'd like to become accustomed to. Plus the lack of visible gay guys on your trip might be perfect for your honeymoon mood – you really will believe that he's the only man in the world for you!