

First Mauritian eco-hotel Salt of Palmar will win your heart



By [Debbie Hathway](#)

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Flying direct from Cape Town to Mauritius is one of my favourite things in the world. The faster I get there, the better. It's not unusual to be greeted by light rain - it's a tropical island after all - but it passes quickly and doesn't affect my visit. This time, however, it was early February, cyclone season, and the rain was torrential. My driver was forced to cut across the island, taking the motorway to my east-coast destination to avoid the flooded coastal road and I arrived at Salt of Palmar more than a little grumpy. I hadn't slept on the flight and the driver had been chatty. The staff awaiting my arrival took one look at me and showed me to my room. Immediately.



The Air Mauritius flight is not long (just over four hours), but what a pleasure to skip check-in formalities and be invited to refresh and recharge before breakfast. Not yet recovered from a gruelling assignment in Geneva, Switzerland, the week before, I was tempted to collapse into bed but I headed first to the coral shower. And so my Salt initiation began.

As a travel journalist, I have been privileged to experience a level of luxury that has to be seen to be believed but I have never encountered a range of bath and body products quite like this one. Custom-made of salt – naturally – they were equally moisturising and refreshing.



And don't get me started on the hair mask! My hair frizzes in a humid climate and this incredible solution kept my hair falling softly to my shoulders without the need for any additional treatment. I didn't fall asleep after my shower (that was all it took to make me feel excited and rejuvenated), but the way I felt after an hour's rest I may as well have. The Swedish bed, positioned to make the most of the sea view, is something I still dream about.

The uppermost layer is a "mattress" that can only be described as about 10cm of heaven on top of what looks like a double base set. Whichever buyer sourced this make deserves an award. Talk about being wrapped in cotton wool. It's a Salt of Palmar USP, that's for sure.



Championing all things local

That level of comfort could very well scupper hotel management's intention to encourage guests to explore authentic Mauritius, but I guess after a day out at least you know what you're coming back to! I was given an electric bike to test

along the coastal road from Palmar to the nearby village of Belle Mare and inland past some sugar-cane fields to Trou d'eau Douce. From here, tourists catch a ferry to the privately owned Île aux Cerfs, an island located on the largest lagoon of Mauritius renowned for its water-sports offering.

En route, we stopped to admire a fair-sized herd of deer browsing on a private estate – an unusual sight according to my guide because they are, understandably, wary of humans. Hunting is permitted in designated areas of Mauritius. A lever on my bike made all the difference when I needed a little help on the hills but, otherwise, I focused on the exercise aspect of the ride.



Salt of Palmar is all about sustainability. Its crockery is handmade by a local potter, beach bags are made from recycled materials by a 74-year-old basket weaver and the rattan ware is handmade in a family workshop situated in a small village. Fruit and vegetables come from local farmers including a community initiative called Island Bio in which organic produce is grown by ex-offenders, recovering drug abusers and others needing a second chance in life. Fish-of-the-day comes straight off the boat and artisanal bread is made on-site to a recipe that has absolutely no ill-effects. Don't expect beef on the menu as that would have to be imported. There are no single-use plastics anywhere and even the clingwrap is biodegradable.

At home, I have little time for culinary preparations beyond the most basic and have a sensitive constitution to boot, so the description of my kitchen and fridge contents left Chef Rehad Khader feeling mildly alarmed in advance of our cooking session. I assured him that if he gave me a simple recipe with limited ingredients I would make every effort to try making it myself. Chicken curry it was – the way his mother makes it. He says he still refers to her often for those age-old Mauritian

recipes that he likes to introduce to the Salt menu, which is based on seasonal ingredients and what is available on the island. Chef Rehad cooks with flair and passion, bringing the flavours out with such subtle spicing that he's elevated the seafood options here to the best on the island. For me, anyway.



Giving back

Underpinned by a philosophy of sustainability, support of island communities and sharing of local treasures, this visit was a reminder of just how much more I could be doing at home with a more conscious effort.

While some guests will be attracted to the eco-hotel (the first-of-its-kind in Mauritius) for that concept and others may arrive not knowing what to expect, having been booked by travel agencies, all of them leave with an indelible impression of what life could and should be like if we want to sustain life on Planet Earth. It's not just for the guests' benefit though. General manager Raj Reedoy says the practices are finding their way into staff members' homes too. It's become a way of life.



On departure, Melanie Lebrasse wishes me well with a variation on the welcome meditation. The final ritual involves some emotive words inspiring a safe onward journey, relaxed and in alignment with the universe. Standing with my feet in the Indian Ocean, taking deep breaths with eyes closed, I hold the salt she has given me and visualise its representation of all my joy and happiness as instructed.

“When you are ready you can open your eyes. I now invite you to give back to the universe the joy and happiness that you have by dissolving it away for it to be sent back to you in abundance.” I tossed the salt into the sea and walked slowly to my waiting car, already planning my return visit.

Visit saltresorts.com for more information.

ABOUT DEBBIE HATHWAY

Debbie Hathway is an award-winning writer, with a special interest in luxury lifestyle (watches, jewellery, travel, property investment) and the arts.

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