



The Oberoi Hotels & Resorts - Mauritius
By Thorsten Buehrman

We flew first class with Air Mauritius from Paris and landed after a relaxing 11-and-a-half hour flight at the Sir Sewoosagar Ramgoolam International Airport on the enchanted island of Mauritius, where we were welcomed by the rising sun. The airplane door opened and I felt a blast of warm air sweep through the cabin. Huge palm trees, the powerful, sweet smell of tropical flowers and the incredibly green hills – the perfect paradise of my mind – was here for all to see.

We met Raj Ramsurrun, our friendly, uniformed chauffeur. He turned out to be a gem of a travel host, easy to understand and very knowledgeable. He opened the doors to the BMW 730 IL, handed us cold towels and we were on our way. During the one-hour ride from the airport to the Oberoi Mauritius through sugar fields, clean little villages and subtropical forests, we sipped fresh, cool water and enjoyed the mesmerizing scenery.

The island nation of Mauritius is located in the Indian Ocean, about 500 miles east of Madagascar. The Oberoi Mauritius is found along the Baie aux Tortues (Turtle Bay), along the meandering northwest coast, set in over 20 acres of enchanting, subtropical gardens with 2,000 feet of white, wide, sandy Indian Ocean beach. It is less than 10 miles from the capital city of Port Louis and relatively close to the small but growing town of Grand Baie. While traditionally envisioned as a couple's destination, a place to go and get away for romance, in the past few years Mauritius has

become more than that; it is a dream destination for family vacations and business conventions.

Within minutes of reaching the resort, we arrived at our accommodations, a luxurious villa with a natural palm thatched roof, private swimming pool and pavilion, and panoramic views of unspoiled beach and azure blue waters of the calm tropical ocean. Our romantic villa was the perfect honeymoon accommodation, or, as the Oberoi Mauritius brochure states, a place "for couples who just need to get away and recharge or rekindle the spark that brought them together." Relaxing wood tones for furnishings, ceilings and fabrics convey the closeness of nature; however, the accommodations do not lack state-of-the-art technology.

The dining pavilion offered breathtaking views of the lagoon and the ocean. This destination resort offers two gourmet restaurants, three leisure bars, a stylish tea pavilion and a wine cellar (ideally located in old ruins). There is also a top-of-the-line health and beauty spa, two endless ocean-view swimming pools, a modern conference center, nightlit tennis courts and a couple of exquisite shops. Sunset dinner cruises on a private yacht and scuba diving excursions are available through the concierge desk.

We were ready to experience one of the world's finest spas. The Oberoi Spa by Banyan Tree is elite. We were especially impressed with the individual spa suites that offered us private plunge pools that are also available for people who prefer a

couple's treatment. The indoor and outdoor Thai spa facilities include a chic beauty parlor, an authentic rock sauna, an invigorating steam bath, a swimming pool, a state-of-the-art workout facility and more. Traditional 'body and soul' treatments – Mauritian style – use natural, locally produced essential oils and home-grown fruits, in addition to conventional therapies.

We enjoyed the coconut husk body brush, followed by a deep tissue massage with freshly ground coconut. After losing track of time, we heard a softly whispering voice ask us to get up from the treatment tables and step over a narrow stone bridge into a hot whirlpool. Here we were given a cool, refreshing, exotic fruit cup that brought us back to reality.

We were then ready for dinner. Back at our villa, the room attendant had freshened up and left us little gifts of freshly picked flower blossoms, which scented the towels with the smell of delight.

As we entered the main restaurant with its palm-thatched roof and amazing views of the ocean, we knew we were in for an unforgettable evening. Our table was set between two pillars, giving us the feeling that we were dining alfresco under the stars. The cuisine was a medley of delicious, creative dishes reflecting the multicultural flavors of land and sea, touched by Asian and European herbs and spices.

The romantic flicker of the candles was mirror-imaged in the water and we followed its path to the ocean, where it converged somewhere on the horizon with the setting sun. It left us breathless and looked to be the path to heaven.

When we awoke the next morning, we could have been in heaven. The room attendant had filled the bathtub with warm water and floating flowers, and the pale red orchids that had been placed on our pillows the night before were sitting on our champagne flutes on the nightstands, looking a little tipsy, perhaps.

Since we did not need to close the curtains due to the villa's complete privacy, we looked right into the ocean from our beds, without even raising our heads. The presidential accommodations are especially designed for and designated to royalty, heads of state and other VIPs. While we were tempted to dawdle, we excitedly jumped out of bed, as a much-anticipated diving excursion was on our agenda. The Oberoi Mauritius, with mountains as backdrop, opens its ocean sidedoors onto a natural maritime park with a vibrant coral reef that supports an abundance of fascinating sea life.

The resort offers a wide range of water sports, such as water-skiing, windsurfing, sailing, boating, snorkeling in the lagoon as well as exclusive destination boat trips along the coast. After a luscious breakfast served by Mr. Baboo, a master champagne saberer, and a glass of Veuve Clicquot, we were ready to conquer the coral reefs. While 'sabrage,' the art of opening a bottle with a sword is not necessarily a tradition at the resort, it is available and

performed to precision by Mr. Baboo, who beheads a champagne bottle with a single strike of his sword.

We went down to the beach on a winding path through subtropical vegetation to meet our divemaster, Stéphane de Sennerville, on the beach. We experienced a wondrous, colorful and healthy water world while scuba diving within a 20-minute boat ride off the Oberoi Mauritius beach. Between crystal clear waters and exotic fish and creatures around us, we could barely believe our eyes. We are certified divers, but our two expert instructors and guides would have made the scuba adventure an unforgettable and safe experience even for first-time divers. This is a one-of-a-kind underwater paradise, rich in beautiful corals and exotic species of fish and other sea life. The crystal clear water allowed us to see everything in the most vibrant colors and allowed Stéphane to shoot amazing pictures with his underwater camera.

After our exhilarating dive, we dropped into two picture-perfect beach chairs under a postcard palm tree. The wooden beach chairs were covered with a soft, absorbent fabric and were placed in twos along the wide beach to offer a measure of privacy. A friendly beach boy inquired after our wishes in regard to drinks, ice cream, cool towels and body lotions and offered us a neat little beach bar menu. He then suggested an alcohol-free fruit drink that we received within minutes. Later we walked into the alluring, shallow, warm turquoise waters for a swim and a little snorkeling.

The next day we were scheduled for a two-hour sunset sailing cruise. We left the beach at 6 p.m. on a small transfer boat and boarded the Oberoi Mauritius' private luxury yacht within a few minutes. We slowly pulled away from the anchorage and as the yacht picked up speed, sails were set and filled with the winds of the ocean. Hors d'oeuvres were served on silver trays with well-paired wines. Picking up speed, we got a look at the island and the mountains from a different perspective while the sun turned the turquoise waters into bright orange-red.

General manager and world traveler Sjefke Jansen is a multicultural hospitality pro, fluent in English, Dutch and German. He worked in Australia, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Singapore, and in the Maldives before he accepted the position as GM at the Oberoi Mauritius. The married father of three is charming, approachable and very hands-on; Sjefke does a fabulous job.

The Oberoi Group has been led to its present global status by the vision of Mr. P.R.S. Oberoi. Educated in India and Europe, his multicultural vision is apparent, and under his leadership, personalized service dominates his resorts' focus. Worldwide, there are precious few privately owned luxury hotel groups that can compare to the Oberoi Group.●