

MAURITIAN

tourism takes off

TOURISTS BOUND FOR MAURITIUS IN THE FIRST SEMESTER OF 2016 HAVE INCREASED BY 9,9% COMPARED WITH THE SAME PERIOD IN 2015. BUSINESS IS BUOYANT! BY DEBBIE HATHWAY

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auritius notched up a higher-than-anticipated number of tourists during the first semester of 2016, according to a Statistics Mauritius

report released in August, causing the Bank of Mauritius to revise its projected tourism earnings for the year to Rs56 billion. That's an 11,6% increase over the Rs50,2 billion achieved last year.

A comparison of international air and sea passenger traffic during the first semesters of 2015 and 2016 shows an overall 9,5% increase in arrivals, against a 9% increase in departures. This result is no doubt boosted by the fact that there are more direct flights to the island. The

top five markets are France (with a growth of 6,5%), Réunion, the UK, Germany and SA. The number of arrivals from China has decreased by 5,9%, a decline attributed to fewer available seats.

Charles de Foucault, General Manager of the One&Only Le Saint Géran in the north-eastern village of Pointe de Flacq, notes that Mauritius has become adept at adjusting to fluctuations in world currencies. "Sometimes a shift takes place simply because of economics – the euro falling apart, the exchange rate making it difficult – but the money's only changing hands," he says. "In hospitality, you've got to follow the trail because economics affect the demographic ►





Left and below: Paradis Beachcomber Golf Resort & Spa.



Above and right: The One&Only Le Saint Géran.

in Mauritius in general. Why? Because they drive everything else – length of stay, choice of three- or five-star hotel, selection of exclusive or all-inclusive resort, with golf course or without. The numbers of arrival are up, but I can't say that only the five-star hotels are seeing an increase in their business. I think some of that's going to the real estate industry."

Cedric Marin, a Mauritian-born Director of Park Lane Properties, agrees. "Executives visiting Mauritius for annual board meetings bring their families and stay for a week to a month, while others come to explore investment opportunities."

In recent years, Mauritius has become "hot property, thanks to its government's wise decision to invest time, resources and money into innovating the way it attracts and conducts business, both locally and internationally". James Bowling, CEO of Monarch&Co International, specialist in residency and citizenship investment programmes globally, references the success of its decisions published in the World Bank's *Ease of Doing Business Report 2016*, where Mauritius ranks first among African countries

and 32nd in the world. As a result, an abundance of new facilities are being developed all over the island, from shopping malls, restaurants, offices and factories to private schools and state-of-the-art medical centres.

Another World Bank report, *Investing Across Borders*, puts Mauritius as one of the highest recipients of foreign direct investment per capita in the world. "Its Residency by Investment Programme is one example of successfully attracting foreign capital by offering investors numerous advantages, including tax incentives," says Bowling. "In order to apply for residency, investors are required to purchase property for a minimum of US\$500 000 in a Property Development Scheme [PDS]. This is the new official scheme that facilitates foreign investment in Mauritian property, having replaced the previous Integrated Resort Scheme [IRS] and Real Estate Scheme [RES] options, although there are still a number of active IRS and RES developments offering property for sale. Foreigners are unable to purchase outside of these zones."

HOT PROPERTY

Currently selling off plan, the St Antoine Private Residence PDS by ENL Property and Red4 near Grand Baie will be one of the first luxury property projects to be realised within the government's new scheme. Comprising 100 luxury apartments and penthouses, as well as 30 plots earmarked for Mauritian investors, the developers expect to break ground in February 2017. By July this year, 15 units had already been sold, according to Mauritius Sotheby's International Realty Real Estate Manager Jacques Nell.

Patrice Legris, CEO of Alteo Properties Ltd (APL), developer of the Anahita Mauritius IRS on the east coast, has seen marked growth in value since the project launched in 2006. "Many of our residents reinvest in the estate after they sell, with some owning six or seven units here. Capital appreciation has been quite impressive recently, with four homes having resold with an average of 32% net capital gain over one year. In another extreme case, an owner realised 133% net capital gain after four years for his villa."

Having sold and completed most of the

223 plots on the southern part of the 213ha "tropical garden", just in front of the must-see island attraction Île aux Cerfs, APL is currently launching the remaining 102 plots in the northern part of the development. Its third phase will incorporate eight prestigious private villas of 900-1 200m² on plots of 4 000-5 000m² to be built on the unique IRS which offers freehold land with direct access to the sea. The plans have been designed by renowned French architect Jean-Michel Wimotte and the price range reflects the exclusive finishes recommended by him, as well as the location and size of the plot of land (price on application).

"A few potential buyers, who are mostly European, have expressed a strong desire for large inside and outside living areas to fully experience the Mauritian lifestyle and climate, as well as entertain their families and friends," says Legris. All the villas will have two swimming pools, one inside and one outside.

From a tourism perspective, Anahita has much to offer. While short-term visitors can revel in the luxury afforded by the Four Seasons Resort on the estate, residents can also utilise its main services, from in-home catering by a private chef to the customary tennis, golf, boathouse and concierge facilities associated with a five-star hotel.



A suite at the St Antoine Private Residence PDS.

WORLD-CLASS GREENS

Golf is a big attraction, with green fees complimentary at resorts. Among the award-winning facilities are the two 18-hole courses designed by Ernie Els and Bernhard Langer: Anahita and Île aux Cerfs, as well as the Peter Matkovich-designed course at the Villas Valriche IRS in the south-west, which hosts the AfrAsia Bank Mauritius Open every second year.

Matkovich is extending his influence to Le Parc de Mont Choisy Golf & Beach Resort in Grand Baie. The development is an IRS, with sales being managed by Pam Golding International and incorporates a new 18-hole course due to open at the end of 2017. "We've sold 190 units to date, with the top price for a Signature Island villa being \$4 million. The remaining units range from \$760 000-1,2 million. The planning for phase three is now well underway, which will include a mix of villas and apartments," says Pam Golding Properties Mauritius Director Richard Haller.



Villas Valriche, which boasts an award-winning golf course.

Meanwhile, the Association of Hoteliers & Restaurants in Mauritius has facilitated the introduction by the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority of a Mauritius Golf Pass this year to provide access for tourists staying outside the resorts to the finest courses on the island. This is a low-season incentive accompanied by a significantly discounted rate on green fees.

"Since the recession last year, more and more people are seeking value for money. They don't mind spending, but they're looking at the returns they get," says LUX* Belle Mare General Manager Ashish Modak. "Mauritius, as a destination, has that value-for-money aspect."



Île aux Cerfs, a famous tourist attraction is an island opposite the Anahita mainland. Le Touessrok Golf Course, located on the island, is loved by enthusiasts far and wide.



An aerial view of Anahita The Resort.



Above and left: LUX* Belle Mare.



HOLIDAY DESTINATION

The appetite of South African buyers for Mauritian property has always been “healthy”. It’s not only a place South Africans have known for decades as a fabulous holiday destination, but is also an ambitious country that’s made huge progress across the board in a short time.

Marin credits the late Mauritian politician Sir Gaëtan Duval for raising the tourism profile of the island in the Eighties. “Celebrities from Brigitte Bardot to Princess Stéphanie of Monaco have come here for decades, while the mid-year European holiday tradition has been passed down through generations. These families have stayed at hotels from Paradis Beachcomber Golf Resort & Spa (on the Le Morne Peninsula) to Saint Géran, they’ve grown up with the locals and they have an attachment to the island,” he says. “Now they might be flying in with their private jets, renting a beach bungalow or villa serviced by a butler and boatman, or staying close to facilities with access to a beach club, hiring a car and making a point of seeing more of the island.”

Since its rebranding four years ago, LUX* Belle Mare has developed its own following among guests who enjoy its vibrant holiday

experience, designed to celebrate the authentic energy of island life.

Modak says the LUX* Group is seeing “fantastic returns in terms of increasing occupancies... and this hotel, in particular, has been outstanding. The feedback I get is that

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guests love the simplicity of island life and the people, and when it comes to the hotel here at Belle Mare, we offer unique experiences you’ll remember for a long time, from rum-tasting at Mari Kontan to finding a message in a bottle.”

Meanwhile, the iconic One&Only Le Saint Géran has seen guests return as many as 28 times. “These are world travellers who are tired of looking [for accommodation] and want to connect right away. They know the staff and the staff, in turn, know their likes and dislikes. It’s like coming home,” says De Foucault. The reality of the hospitality

industry is that demands for renewal are inevitable. “Half the people tell you not to touch a thing, because there’s so much memory engraved everywhere. Then we’ve got the generation who refuse to come because we’re not new. Some guests will try another hotel, but they miss the soul of Saint Géran and soon book with us again.”

Those who love live entertainment return purely for the Famous 9. The band is an institution at this resort, as well known for their immense talent and repertoire as their annual accompaniment to pop star Chris de Burgh when he visits during

the festive season. SA’s late iconic President, Nelson Mandela, was a great fan.

The recent announcement of the resort’s planned refurbishment from February 2017, with a view to reopening by the end of that year, holds the promise of enhancements that will amplify the property’s USPs – a sense of exclusivity on its own private peninsula, with a beachfront and calm lagoon unlike any other resort in Mauritius. Moreover, the One&Only Le Saint Géran will be unveiling secluded villas for those who want to make the resort home. 🌴