

Mauritius: A Picture Perfect Beach Destination

In this report we look at Mauritius. Mauritius has successfully managed to position itself as an exotic beach destination. With beach destinations so plentiful, this has been sustained not by mere hype, but by the substance there is to this claim...



Sunset at Mauritius

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1. Mauritius: A Picture Perfect Destination

Mauritius has successfully managed to position itself as an exotic beach destination. With beach destinations so plentiful, this has been sustained not by mere hype, but by the substance there is to this claim. Visitors are drawn to Mauritius by the reputation of its 140 km of white sand beaches, and the superb opportunities for water sports. Swimming, beach combing, sailing, surfing, kayaking, diving and deep-sea fishing – there is a sport for almost everyone.

Arab traders discovered the then uninhabited island in the 10th century. But they were not charmed sufficiently to consider permanent settlement. The Portuguese early in the sixteenth century landed, but they too passed over the chance to lay claim for their king. But in 1598 the Dutch finally seized the opportunity. The island was grabbed for and named after Maurice, Prince of Orange and Count of Nassau –then ruler of the Netherlands.

In the century that followed, the Dutch established settlements and devised means to live off the land. They introduced sugar and tobacco, which they farmed using African slave labour. Sugar is today still an important part of the economy. The Dutch were insensitive to the extremely fragile ecosystem that makes up an isolated island such as Mauritius. On their watch, most of the islands' indigenous forests were felled, and lost. The bird known as dodo was also shot to extinction. Thus did the trigger-happy Dutch give life to the expression "as dead as a dodo".

The Dutch courage that had made them pioneers was however not to last. They were subjected to many trials by the forces of nature - cyclones, droughts and floods. And also by the forces of man, for pirates were a constant headache. In 1710, they fled to the more hospitable Cape of Good Hope, at Africa's southern tip. A short five years after the Dutch left, the French claimed the island, and renamed it Isle de France.

The French were much more successful than the Dutch in harnessing the potential of the island. They maintained law and order and laid the foundations for administration of society. Under the celebrated French Governor, Mahé de Labourdonnais, real nation building began. The French brought in more African slaves and expanded further sugar farming. They also laid out some social and economic infrastructure to support the settlers. Port Louis, named after King Louis XV, and today the capital of Mauritius, dates back to this period.

Though the French had introduced systems of law and order, Port Louis turned out to be a favourite of corsairs. Corsairs were mercenary marine who specialised in the plunder of ships on behalf of a client country. The British, a great sea power at the time, had a vested interest in terminating the power of

these mercenaries. And that is how Mauritius, so far away from Europe, got involved in the Napoleonic wars. In 1810, the British backed by superior force of arms, persuaded the French to leave the island.

In the 1814 Treaty of Paris, the British – magnanimous victors indeed, allowed the French settlers to remain in Mauritius. They too were allowed to retain their property, language, religion and legal system. The British reverted to the name the Dutch had given the island, but Port Louis retained its name. But in the century and a half that the British ruled, they were never really as grounded as the French had been.

Franco-Mauritians prospered on an agrarian economy based on slave labour. But in 1835, they felt the capricious hand of a great power when slavery was abolished. This is perhaps the single most important measure carried out under British rule, and the consequences had a far-reaching effect on the evolving demographics of the nation. India, a British colony greatly abundant in human resources was the answer to the labour problem that arose. In the years that followed, the descendants of the Indian labourers who came to work the sugar fields greatly multiplied. The Chinese also came -as labourers and traders.

Today, Indo-Mauritians constitute close to 70% of the population. As in other colonies in that historic period, and upto the 1930's in Mauritius, non-whites had very limited say in the running of the country. And that is why Gandhi - that great liberator of men's minds, came to Mauritius in 1901, in particular to give heart to Indo-Mauritians. After years of protracted concessions to democratic rule, the British finally bowed out in 1968, when finally granted independence.

The events we talk about above are however very recent. About eight million years ago, the island emerged from the depths of the sea as result of volcanic activity. Occupying 1860 sq km, it is situated just above the Tropic of Capricorn, 890 km to the east of Madagascar. Rising from the sea, the central plateau formation is about 400 m above sea level. There are mountains scattered in the island, and a few peaks, the highest of which reaches 820 m.

As a country, Mauritius includes the islands of Rodrigues and Agalega, the Cargados Carajos Shoals and a few smaller mostly uninhabited islands. Mauritius is almost wholly ringed by a coral reef that is reputed to be the worlds third largest. Both the Dutch and the French were extremely reckless in allowing the uncontrolled invasion of indigenous forests. Today, less than 2% of these forests remain. Many of the nearly 700 species of indigenous plants are threatened with extinction. Starting from the late 1970's, a belated but systematic effort has been underway to conserve the unique flora of the island.

The wildlife faces similar dangers. In the first place, animal migration to this isolated island was by air or sea only, greatly limiting the diversity of species. The animals the Dutch found included out-of-size reptiles and flightless birds. But except for bats, there were no mammals and no amphibians at all. The animals brought aboard ships by man include monkeys and rats - thanks to the Portuguese, while the Dutch take credit for deer and wild boar. Some of these animals threaten to choke the life out of indigenous species – they eat their eggs, and even their young.

Mauritius is not all bad news for nature lovers' –there are plenty of birds and marine life is abundant. However, some of the endemic bird species, such as Mauritius kestrel, echo parakeet and pink pigeon number not more than a few hundred. Such are now under some form of captive breeding program, with the hope of raising their numbers.

The island's maritime zone boasts more than 1,000 species of marine life- fishes, shells and mollusks, in numbers beyond count. The spectacular way to explore the spectacular underwater world is onboard a submarine. The sub also allows you to see some ship wrecks dating back to the Dutch period.

You can swim at various places at beaches, lagoons and inlets. Swimming beaches are best to the north, though there are other good sites to the southwest and to the west near Flic en Flac. The west coast offers good sites for surfing at Tamarin, and diving at Flic en Flac. At Grand Bay beach, you get good shopping, nightclubs, bars, and restaurants and the chance to interact with locals. In addition, the swimming, surfing, sailing and angling is good. From here, you can also make a boat excursion of the islands to the north.

In the islands' interior, there are good opportunities for hiking and trekking. Black River Gorges National Park has excellent walks, and at the same time you can see some endemic plants and birds. The Réserve Forrestière Macchabée and Rivière Noire National Park are also good for hiking. In addition, captive breeding to raise the numbers of Mauritius endangered endemic birds is underway here. For trekkers, you will do well at the plateau at Curepipe and at the island of Rodrigues.

The Royal Botanical Gardens of Pamplemousses are very popular with visitors. The gardens date back to 1735, during the French period. Here you will see a large collection of exotic and indigenous plants in excellent surroundings. Among the most peculiar specimens are the giant Victoria regia water lilies, whose origins are in the Amazon, and the talipot palm- known to bloom once every 60 years before dying. At the Casela Bird Park, you can see some of its 140 bird species, including the rare Mauritian pink pigeon. Some of these excursions are included in the [Mauritius tour packages](#) offered by the various vendors.

Mauritius offers some excellent golf courses, and visitors are increasingly aware of it. There are at least three hotels with 18-hole courses and another five with 9-hole courses. The Ile aux Cerfs course, which sits on its own tiny island is the most spectacular. For honeymooners, the island is very welcoming. Almost all hotels offer a special honeymoon package. As a non-resident, you can easily tie the knot here. But a few formalities must be completed with officialdom; make sure you comply before arrival.

Mauritius is at the cultural cross roads of Europe, Africa and Asia. The Dutch, French, Africans, Indians, Chinese and British came under one guise or another and have today influenced the character and cultural life of the island. Though the island is closest to Africa geographically, culturally it is much closer to Asia.

The biggest racial groups are Indo-Mauritians who constitute about two thirds of the nations 1.2 million peoples, followed by Creoles – Afro- Mauritians who are just over a quarter of the population. Franco- Mauritians and peoples of Chinese origin combined make up about 5% of the population. While English is the official language, French, Creole, Bhojpuri and Urdu are widely spoken. Religion is the other factor defining the people of the island, with Hinduism (51%), Christianity (30%) and Islam (17%) leading.

The cuisine of the island reflects the diversity of its people. French, Creole, Chinese and Indian foods – with local variations are all found here. Wherever you stay, you will most likely be able to watch or even dance the Sega. This energetic and erotic Creole dance has origins in the sugar fields, in the days when African labour was captive. You may also be fortunate to encounter any of the various festivals celebrated in this multicultural country. Only the most widely traveled however, will be prepared for the Cavadi. On this Tamil festival, penitents pierce their bodies, tongues, and cheeks while some march on shoes of nails.

Tourism is one of the main pillars of the economy of Mauritius. The bulk of visitors come from South Africa, Germany, France, Australia and UK. [Hotels in Mauritius](#) are plenty, and they range from 5-star luxury to those with just basic amenities. Budget stay comes in the form of bungalows, guesthouses and self-catering apartments. The period June to September and around Christmas is the busy season and if you plan to travel then, you are advised to book your accommodation in advance. Mauritius is still relatively affordable, though there has been talk of turning it into an up market beach destination.

Mauritius is a year-round destination. The best times to visit however, are the periods April-June and September- November. These are the months when it rains least and the temperatures are moderate. January to April is hottest, and

daytime temperatures can reach 35°C. Temperatures tend to be lower inland, away from the coast. The main rains come between December and April, though there are light rains year round. November to February is when cyclones are most likely to occur. But do not be deterred; chances of meeting cyclones are not very high, and it is estimated that they hit the island about once every 15 years.

If you are keen on water sports, beware that diving is best December to March, and surfing between June and August. For big game fishing, come between October and April. You should be comfortable with light clothing suitable for the tropical climate. But you need warmer clothing for evenings and the southern winter months between July and September. Whatever time of year you travel, do carry some rainwear. In the summer months between November and April, you are advised to bring along sunglasses, sun hats and sunscreen.

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2. Destination Facts: Mauritius

Full Country Name: Republic of Mauritius

Area: 2040 sq Km

Population: 1,233,699 (2004)

Capital City: Port Louis

Other Major Towns: Curepipe, Quatre Bornes, Rose Hill and Mahébourg

Peoples: Indian (more than two thirds), Creole (25%), Chinese, French, African.

Language: English (official language), Creole (36%), French, Hindi and Bhojpuri (32%), Urdu and Chinese.

Religion: 51% Hindu, 30% Christian, 17% Muslim and followers of old Chinese customs.

Government: Parliamentary Democracy

Time: GMT + 4

Currency: Mauritius Rupee (MUR)

Electricity: 220 volts AC, 50 Hz

Weights and Measures: Metric

Economy: Tourism, Agriculture (sugarcane, cattle rearing, fishing), textiles.

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3. Travel Basics: Mauritius

Health

Mauritius barely experiences common diseases such as malaria, cholera and yellow fever. Quite a feat for a tropical country! However, a yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from travelers above one year of age, coming from yellow fever endemic zones. This certificate is only valid ten days after the vaccination. Malarial outbreaks have not been reported in over five years. Though visitors traveling to rural areas, especially Rodrigues Islands, may require vaccination to be on the safe side. Of course, mosquitoes do exist, and in case you catch malaria, it will be the benign type. To prevent bites, sleep under bed nets and use mosquito repellent creams.

Prevalence of diseases such as Hepatitis A and B, typhoid and rabies (for those who may come into contact with animals) is low; therefore vaccination is not necessary though not pointless either. It is prudent to ensure that you are up to date on routine immunizations such as measles, tetanus, polio, diphtheria and chicken pox especially for the young ones who succumb to such diseases easily. Swimming or wading in fresh water should be avoided due to risk of bilharzia, which though rare, may yet occur. Appropriate measures should be taken to guard against HIV/Aids.

Tap water in Mauritius is clean, and the locals drink it. Nevertheless, visitors are advised to boil drinking water or better yet, stick to bottled water. Visitors should also avoid unpasteurised milk and its derivatives products, commonly sold by street vendors. In other words, avoid buying foodstuffs from street vendors; there are plenty of licensed shops and restaurants. Meals should be consumed whilst hot. In particular, ensure your veggies are cooked and fruits washed and peeled. Raw or undercooked meat or fish should be avoided.

Care should be exercised especially when it comes to fish as some species such as red snapper, barracuda, sea bass, grouper amberjack and tropical reef fish may contain toxins even when well cooked. As is common when one eats foreign food, you may experience what is referred to as travelers' diarrhea. No need to panic as this is usually mild; drink plenty of fluids and it will recede. You should carry any appropriate medication prescribed by your physician in case it becomes severe.

Common sense precautions such as wearing a medical alert bracelet for allergies or chronic medical problems should be exercised. In such cases you should also carry your own medication. You may also alert personnel where you lodge of any personal medical problems. This will enable them to handle any emergencies better. Medical facilities in Mauritius are widely available and of high standards, though emergency assistance is limited. Public hospitals provide free treatment.

Visitors who choose to go to private clinics -which are also numerous, and more efficient should know that they will be charged for treatment. You should therefore ensure they have the appropriate medical insurance before travel.

Visas

Visitors must hold a passport valid for at least 6 months, valid travel documents and return or onward tickets to their country of residence. Visitors must also show that they have sufficient funds to meet the cost of their stay and have a confirmed booking for accommodation in Mauritius. Visitors are permitted to stay in the country for a period not exceeding 3 months at a time and 6 months in a calendar year (up to 90 days for those on business).

Visas are not required by those holding American passports, members of the EU, nationals of Commonwealth countries (except nationals of Cameroon, Nigeria, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Fiji, and Swaziland), holders of diplomatic passports except those issued by governments of Algeria, Iran, Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria and Libya (who require a visa even if on transit), nationals of Zimbabwe, Israel, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Norway, Qatar, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Switzerland, Bahrain, Tunisia, Turkey, Oman, United Arab Emirates and Vatican City and holders of re-entry permits.

Passengers on transit require a transit visa and if the transit exceeds 24 hours, will require a visa before traveling to Mauritius. Application for visas should be made to Mauritius consulates, diplomatic representatives of Mauritius or in absence of the two, to an Air Mauritius office. Applications may also be made to the Passport and Emigration office at Port Louis. Such applications take a month to process and are issued free of charge.

The government of Mauritius does not recognize passports issued by governments of Taiwan and Turkish republic of Northern Cyprus. However, do note that visa requirements vary from time to time and you are advised to check on prevailing status well ahead of travel.

People and Culture

Mauritius has a very broad-based culture, due to the different origins of the people. The Indians, who are descendants of Indian laborers brought to the Island by the British to work the cane fields, Chinese (Sino-Mauritians) brought for the same purpose and also as entrepreneurs, Creoles, who were a result of inter-marriage between the Africans, the French and Franco-Mauritians, who chose not to inter-marry and were the original settlers of the land and of course descendants of African slaves all make up the assorted culture.

An essential part of this most interesting blend of cultures is the Sega dance, a most intriguing performance of African roots. This thoroughly exotic dance is performed on any occasion, mostly on the beach and to the beat of the ravane, a circular drum and other rhythmic instruments. It has also been influenced by Latino and Caribbean music. Recently, a mixture of sega and reggae music has formed the new sound of conventional Mauritian local music and is known as Seggae. Indian and Chinese dances are not to be left out. The well-refined and elegant Indian dances, where each posture depicts a certain meaning bring out the magical oriental culture of the Hindu. The ancestral lion and dragon dances are the best known of the Chinese dances. Western music is also present in Mauritius with hip-hop, rap, rock, jazz and other time-honored types such as the waltz being most popular.

A large variety of cuisine reflects the different cultures of Mauritius. French, Creole, Indian, Chinese and English dishes are widely available. Seafood is most common with delights such as sounouk (salted fish), octopus stew, oysters, lobster, crabs, prawns and crayfish being most popular. Muslim biryani, Indian chicken curry, French style veggies, Creole roast beef and Chinese pork are a must-try. Other specialties include rougaille- a dish of tomatoes, venison (when in season), wild boar and bredes- a vegetable soup. Dhol purri- a type of wheat pancake stuffed with dhol and samosas are popular snacks.

Fruits such as bananas, pineapples and papaya are always in season, whereas mangoes, watermelon and litchis are seasonal. Citrus fruits are imported into the country. Local beverages include alooda- a sweet brew of agar, milk and other flavors, lassi- which is yogurt and ice water. Amongst the alcoholic drinks are Blue marlin, white rum and phoenix brands - which are the local brews, and a variety of wines imported from South Africa and France.

European architecture is in evidence within the towns and is a colonial contribution to Mauritius. Creole houses, which are adapted to the sunny and humid climate, show off the traditional architecture. Another aspect of Mauritian culture is the colorful festivals; Christmas for Christians, the Spring festival by the Chinese, Diwali for the Hindu and Idd-UI-Fitr for the Muslims are amongst the celebrations carried out each year.

Communications

Communication facilities such as telephone, fax, Internet, telegram, mobile phones and post are widely available through out Mauritius. The country telephone code is 230 and there are no area codes. Public telephone booths can be found widely in the airport, hotels and in the major towns. A Mauritius telecom phone card will come in handy and can be purchased in shops or supermarkets. Mobile phones are based on GSM 900 network. The network operators include Entel and Cellplus and there is coverage throughout the island.

Roaming contracts now exist with operators of various countries you may thus not need to leave your phone at home. Most hotels have fax facilities.

ISPs within the island include Mauritius Network (MNS), Maurinet, and Telecom Plus amongst others. Internet facilities are available in most hotels and most towns have Internet cafes. Postal services are relatively efficient and airmail to Europe takes about 5 days. Mail by sea however takes quite long, about 4 to 6 weeks. There are two television broadcast stations and newspapers are published in French, English and Chinese. VOA and BBC world service can be received on radio; up-to-date frequencies are available online.

Accommodation

Mauritius has a wide range of accommodation to suit all budgets. Right from high-class world renown resorts such as Le St Geran (which was once voted the worlds best resort hotel) to self-catering hotels, boarding houses and family bungalows. In the high season (June-September) and over Christmas, hotel reservations should be made duly in advance; this is a popular vacation spot after all, and hotels tend to get full. Immigration officials at the airport also expect you to indicate where you will abode during your visit, making this, another prudent reason why you need to book in advance.

Money

The currency used in Mauritius is the Mauritian Rupee (MUR). Well known currencies such as US dollars, Euro and Great Britain Pound in cash or travelers cheques can be exchanged within the island. These can be exchanged at a bureau de change and in banks. There are three banks at the airport and many more in the major towns. Travelers' cheques attract better rates than cash. Major credit cards such as Diners Club, Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted in major hotels and restaurants and in some shops and supermarkets. There are ATM facilities in the major towns. Tipping is optional in restaurants; about 10% should suffice.

Climate

Mauritius has a tropical (Summer) and sub-tropical (Winter) type of climate. Summer months are between October and May. During these months, the weather is hot, wet and humid. Temperatures are about 27 degrees celsius at the coast and about 5 degrees less inland, but they can sky rocket to 35 degrees celsius. This is also the rainy season and cyclones are likely to hit at this time. Not to worry though; these tropical cyclones pass near enough to Mauritius only about four days in a year. Heavy rains are experienced during the months of January to March. Light rains are experienced year round and these serve to cool you down in the sweltering heat. Another blessing is the ever-blowing sea breeze.

The winter months are between June and September; these are the best months to visit, as temperatures are cooler. The weather then is warm and dry. Temperatures vary between 13 degrees celsius and 19 degrees celsius. During the night, temperatures can drop to between 16 and 18 degrees celsius at the coast. Hours of daylight are longer during the summer and shorter in winter.

International Travel

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam is the International airport of Mauritius. It is near Mahebourg and about an hours' drive from Port Louis. The national airline is Air Mauritius. Other airlines, which fly in and out of Mauritius, are British Airways, Condor, Singapore Airlines, South African Airways, Emirates, Air France and many more. Flying is the most popular and easiest way of getting here. A departure tax payable in rupees is charged at the airport.

You can also get there by sea. However, this may take a while and there is limited passenger service; most ships to Mauritius go for commercial purposes. Port Louis is the main port. There are also private yachts that occasionally make their way to the island.

Local Travel

Air Mauritius provides daily flights to Rodrigues Island. There are also ship services available to Reunion and Rodrigues Islands, several times a month. The MV Mauritius Pride is one of the cruise liners that provide these services. This is however a long trip, about 27 hours. The road network in Mauritius is good, all 1800 Km of it. Three main companies provide bus services, each serving a different region.

Taxis are also widely available and offer reasonable rates; it is however best to agree on the price before you jump in. There are a number of car hire companies, starting with those available at the airport. Driving is on the left and an International driving license is required. Drivers are required to be above 23 years of age. There are no railway services in the island, but the good roads more than make up for this.

Travel Insurance

Health insurance is essential. Ensure your cover extends to medical expenses abroad including possible evacuation to your country. Carry all your relevant insurance documents and keep them safe. Before travel, clarify whether your insurance plan will pay directly for your health expenses or will reimburse you later. It is advisable to insure personal effects and luggage, as well as take out cancellation and curtailment insurance.

What To Wear

The sun in Mauritius is quite strong; sunscreen should be used generously even

on cloudy days to avoid sunburn. Sunglasses and hats are not a bad idea either. The dress code is mostly casual; shorts and t-shirts plus light cotton dresses for women. However some hotels and restaurants frown upon such attire in the evenings; long trousers for the men will do. Of course, beachwear is popular too- but only on the beach!

If you decide to venture into a place of worship, for example a mosque or temple, do keep in mind that conservative dress is required. Also, don't forget to take off your shoes before you enter these places of worship: put simpler, do what the locals do. A jacket or sweater will come in handy during the winter months of June to September and a raincoat or umbrella is a must-carry because light rains occur year round

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4. About Africa Point

Africapoint.com is an Africa specialist travel agent, offering travel services through the company website -Africapoint.com and also offline. This pioneering Africa travel website has been assisting travelers make bookings online since early 1999.

The company was started in 1997 has its central reservations office strategically located in Nairobi, Kenya. The company is supported by a network of partner offices in the leading destinations in Africa. This includes Cape Town (South Africa), Arusha, Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Cairo (Egypt), Kampala (Uganda), Victoria (Seychelles), Harare (Zimbabwe). We are members of the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA).

What services do we offer?

We provide reservation services for hotels, airline tickets, rental cars, tours and safaris to the top destinations in Africa. Among the countries we are currently covering are Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, Tanzania, Seychelles, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Mauritius.

We have special discounts for most of the services we offer and some of our prices are upto 50% off standard rates. Please visit our website to view the links of all the services we offer.

How do we make your Africa travel planning easier?

Ours is one of very few websites offering one-stop travel booking and information service to a number of different African countries. In addition:

- We know our destinations and our products **very well**. We are in a position to give you good advice on the best hotel, rental car, tour or safari to suit your particular requirements.
- We are committed to working to the highest industry standards. We have many our past clients who are happy to share their experiences with you. Please visit the [Client Profile & Testimonials](#) page and see what some of our clients have to say.
- Our patience is the stuff of legend! We will patiently seek to answer all your queries until you are ready to pick what is most suitable for your needs. For high value items such as safaris we have communicated with our clients for 6 months and even longer before they are ready to buy.

Others have come back to and said: "Do you remember that tour we discussed 2 years ago? I am now ready to travel." And of course we remember. We always remember!

- Together with our partners, we are based in the African destination whose travel services we are selling. For this reason we are usually able to get you very good prices. For some products our prices are **40-50%** below standard rates.
- As members of **ASTA (American Society of Travel Agents)** we are committed to upholding **ASTA's** motto of " Integrity in Travel" and operate to those same standards you would expect from an ASTA member anywhere in the world.

One of our North American clients for whose 36 person missionary group we provided an air charter, hotel booking, safari and road transport to 2 African countries had this to say.

"My experience with Africapoint.com was good as any service that I've received any where in the USA. Not only were they helpful before and during, but they went out of their way to also be helpful afterwards.

I'm using them again for an upcoming trip in November and will look forward to using them for years to come."

In addition our membership of ASTA assures you of a **neutral and trusted** arbitrator in the event that a disagreement occurs between us.

What is the experience of other travelers with us?

We continue to serve the many needs of travelers who seek our services. From straight forward single night hotel bookings to short and long term **car rental, tours and safaris** for individuals and groups, international conferences.

5. Forward This Report

If you've found this report to be informative and useful please forward it to your family and friends. We're sure they will like it as much as you did!