

# PAS DE PROBLÈME

A new resort in Mauritius is challenging the stereotypical look of island-style luxury with its contemporary attitude. We found “no problem”.

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01 Modernist faces and figures commissioned by Bensley Design Studios pop up throughout the densely landscaped property.





It's true what they say about Mauritius: powder-white sand, translucent aquamarine water, towering palms, laze-inducing heat, invisible but ever-present waiters, and nothing to do but indulge in exotic cuisine and ice-cold liquids. The stuff dream holidays are made of.

Clichéd but there's no room for cynicism when you're being treated like a queen. The high quality of Mauritian service is legendary: "*Pas de problème*" (no problem) is the standard response to almost every request. Really, this slogan could apply to the island itself.

Still, with flashbacks of *Dirty Dancing* and *Cocktail* coming to mind every time "holiday resort" is mentioned, it remained for my inner snob to be appeased. Appeased and luxuriated it certainly was: Long Beach

Mauritius could not be further from the Eighties stereotype, and this was the explicit intention of its creators.

"We needed to design a hotel that was totally different to what could be seen everywhere else in Mauritius, while still maintaining the island's atmosphere and sense of place," explains general manager Nicolas Blandin de Chalais. Long Beach is Nicolas's baby; he's been with the project since before it existed. Over the past seven years he conceptualised it for four years, nursed it into life for two years and opened its doors just over a year ago.

Nicolas made some deliberate "mistakes". For one, he chose Stauch Vorster Architects from South Africa exactly because the firm had never done a resort before, nor anything in Mauritius. "I did not want to copy or cut-and-paste a place or style," he says as he shakes his head. Together with

the architects, Nicolas travelled the world, visiting Dubai, Ibiza and many other leisure destinations, taking lots of photos. Then the second "mistake", they dismissed all their findings as exactly what they didn't want.

"We aimed to create a new vibe, a Mauritian village by the sea with a bit of urban movement and buzz, while still retaining the breeze and freshness of the area," Nicolas explains.

Their point of departure was the centre of the resort: instead of a traditional main hotel building they started with an open-air piazza. Then the five restaurants and reception, each in separate buildings, as well as two pools and a bar, were arranged around it. The rooms radiate out in crescent clusters from the central huddle. Two smaller huddles of buildings comprise the spa and sports centre respectively. All hotel operations are neatly tucked underground.

The architectural forms are all based on juxtaposed and superimposed rectangular blocks. The interwoven, contrasting rectangles become a motif in the detailing, whether it is the Tetris-like rock walls, slatted wooden screens or room-height windows. Outside the effect is geometric, inside the effect is voluminous spaces, and it is here that Stauch Vorster's experience in building malls can be seen.

The extra-high ceilings are also an environmentally conscious decision as they improve ventilation. Environmental consciousness was a key motivator in the project. For one thing, the entire resort faces a specific direction that makes the most of the beach's cool breeze, meaning that there is no air-conditioning in the inside-outside public spaces. Adjustable windbreaks in the forms of shutters, screens and feature walls act as protection when the breeze turns to wind.

Other environmental features include 495-million rupees (around R146 million) worth of solar panels, waste recycling, rainwater harvesting, centrally regulated air-conditioning in the rooms, sensors in the rooms that detect human presence and readjust to save energy, a compost heap and ozone-treated pools.

The greenest part of all, though, is the garden, which is 60 000 square metres – almost three times the buildings' footprint of 21 000 square metres. Lush and varied, with full-grown palm trees too, this is not the garden of such a new resort. Instead, when they started building, they protected



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- 01 The main pool is designed as a living area, with islands and decks for retreats, and in-pool loungers and Jacuzzis for soaking.
- 02 The temple-like spa is the only building that breaks the rectangular architecture with its dome and octagonal hammam.





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**01** Rectangles within rectangles create an architectural seating solution in the double-volume reception area.

**02** A waterfall outside the spa blocks out all external sounds while you are being pampered inside.

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500 000 plants by removing and transplanting them to one area of the site that was turned into a nursery. Saving what they could in this manner, they further propagated another 600 000 plants using cuttings. Everything was replanted two months before the opening of the hotel and there are now about 1.7 million plants.

Of course the materials – volcanic rock from Mauritius and balau from Indonesia – also have their green credentials, but they were primarily chosen for their authenticity. For instance, the creamy brick walls were hand-plastered so that they look like part of the beach.

The neutral tone of the dark volcanic rock, grey balau, creamy walls

and brown thatches are extended into the interiors, done by Keith Interior Design of Cape Town. Bearing a contemporary beach house in mind, fresh whites and driftwood tones were accentuated with sparing pops of colour from one of the three colour schemes – aqua, chartreuse or coral. High-gloss finishes, crisp aluminium and fresh fabrics create further contrast to the textured natural materials.

“We had to do something that would make people go ‘wow’, not only for five years, but for the next 10 or 15 years,” Nicolas elaborates when he’s asked how he feels about the

outcome of his intentional “mistakes”. The result is no mistake, that’s for sure. There’s certainly no problem in Mauritius. Just don’t make the mistake of forgetting the sunblock. **V**

• **For reservations, information about Long Beach and flights, contact: World Leisure Holidays, 0860 954 954, [res@wlh.co.za](mailto:res@wlh.co.za), [wlh.co.za](http://wlh.co.za); Air Mauritius, 011 601 3900/ 087 151 1848, [airmauritius.com](http://airmauritius.com) and [smarttravel.co.za](http://smarttravel.co.za).**

• **Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, [mauritius@bairds.co.za](mailto:mauritius@bairds.co.za), [www.tourism-mauritius.mu](http://www.tourism-mauritius.mu)**

#### CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

**01** The facade of the reception area. **02** Inside the reception area. **03** Nighttime view from the reception area over the central piazza. **04** Artwork outside the spa. **05** Le Marché restaurant is where breakfast and buffets are served. **06** The rock-climbing wall near the sports centre. **07** The central piazza with reception in the background. **08** The contemporary Chinese restaurant, Chopsticks.



01 Shores Bar goes from peaceful high tea in the afternoon to jazzy live music at night with the flick of a light switch.

02 Beach bums can't do much better than these idyllic white sands and coral-rich waters.



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IT'S TRUE WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT MAURITIUS: POWDER-WHITE SAND, TRANSLUCENT AQUAMARINE WATER, TOWERING PALM TREES, LAZE-INDUCING HEAT...



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