TOUR CODE

MR1

ADVENTURESABROAD

INDIAN OCEAN PARADISE

Reunion • Mayotte • Mauritius • Seychelles

13 days

Updated 18/12/2012

Day 1 *Arrival in Reunion*

This morning we fly into the French territory of Reunion.

Reunion is a ruggedly beautiful island of contrasts. Three cirques or amphitheatres dominate the topography and the climate is temperate in the mountains. The east coast is humid, with verdant, tropical vegetation and wild, black volcanic beaches, whereas the west coast is generally dry, hot and sunny. Reunion offers beaches, mountain scenery, hiking trails, and one of the world's most active volcanoes, the highest mountain in the Indian Ocean.

ATTENTION LAND ONLY PASSENGERS: In order to qualify for an Indian Ocean Air Pass on which this tour is based, all participants must have all or part of their international air booked with either Air Seychelles, Air Mauritius, or Air Austral. If you intended to secure your own air on a different carrier, then a surcharge will apply (+/- $600). Contact us for more information.

NOTE: This itinerary is based on flight schedules that can change without notice. Though accurate at the time of writing, this programme may require some adjustment or a re-ordering of islands prior to actual departure.

Overnight in St. Denis, Reunion. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *St. Denis - Cilaos*

After breakfast we have a tour of St Denis. Of interest are the Monument aux Morts, the tall victory monument; the Hotel de Ville (Town Hall), considered by many to be the city's most beautiful building; the Cathedrale de St-Denis; and the Prefecture, which was begun in 1735 and served as the Compagnie des Indes headquarters. The Grand Marche is the main handicraft market, featuring a mishmash of items for sale such as Malagasy wooden handicrafts, spices, baskets and furniture.

After the town tour we drive west along the coastal highway and then inland to the mountain town of Cilaos. This is a superb, scenic drive with views of the island's high mountains and steep gorges -- you will understand why Reunion has been called ‘the Nepal of the Indian Ocean'!

Overnight in Cilaos. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Cilaos Area*

The Cirque de Cilaos, is one of the most spectacular landscape experiences that can be offered by the island of Reunion. The bottom of the volcano is 100 square kilometers, 1200 m deep and offers a unique outline not to be found elsewhere on the island.

We have the day to enjoy the Cilaos area on foot. The Cilaos amphitheatre is the largest of the cirques, with a beauty

akin to the Alps in summer. There are wonderful hiking trails up into the mountain forests and among the ravines -- and gentle, shorter walks. For those who care not to walk, just outside town, the Irenee Accot health spa offers a wide range of treatments.

This evening be sure to try some special Cilaos red wine, as it is only made and sold up here and has a unique (and powerful) flavour.

Overnight in Cilaos. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Cilaos - St Denis, Reunion - Mamoudzou, Mayotte*

Today we transfer back to St Denis in time to connect with our flight to the French island of Mayotte. We will arrive in the main town of Mamoudzou and then take a leisurely drive through villages to our hotel.

Mayotte has inherited a very diverse culture, a richly-textured fabric of African, Persian, Oriental, Malagasy, European and Arab origins. Over the centuries, an indigenous form of Islam has developed on the island. Passed down from the early Arab arrivals, the religion is today omnipresent in daily life. Between tradition and modernity, the society of Mayotte maintains the customary rules under the guidance of cadis, judges with the role of civil servants. Muslim women play an important role in life on Mayotte. Owners of land and houses, responsible for household management, influential in local politics, women are the stabilisers of the island's economic life.

Based on oral tradition, the heritage of Mayotte is not displayed visibly. The history, tales, beliefs and know-how of Mayotte culture are transmitted by the fundis, teachers who possess and pass on knowledge. Thus, fishing, animal husbandry and crop-growing make use of techniques and know-how transmitted from generation to generation. As for the harvesting of the ylang-ylang, Mayotte has maintained the centuries-old methods and rhythms that are its pride and essential elements of its cultural identity.

Balance of the day at leisure to enjoy our beachside resort.

NOTE: Our flight to Mayotte has a strict 20 kg / 44 lb weight limit for luggage, per person. Excess baggage can be left in storage in Reunion.

Overnight on Mayotte. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Mayotte: Island Tour & Free Time*

After breakfast, we depart the Jardin Maore for a half-day tour. One interesting aspect of Mahorese culture are the bangas -- quaint and colourful little houses built by adolescent men when they move out of their parents' house. This is to make them mature and find their status in society without interference from their parents. When these men find a woman to marry, they move to their spouse's home. Most women also wear a yellow facial masks (m'sidzanou) made of ground sandalwood. It's a beauty mask that they wear all day long! We will travel to the west coast with a stop to the Ylang-Ylang & Vanilla Eco Museum in Jimaweni with the explanation about this flower. We will continue to Sada with an overview of its minaret and its islet before leaving the coast into the rain forest where we will see ylang-ylang plantations.

We will have stops at largest baobab tree in Mayotte at Musical Plage. Baobab trees are endemic to Mayotte, Madagascar and Africa. They are very interesting looking trees -- thick trunks, large fruit shaped gourds and remarkable branches that look like the roots are on the top of the tree, instead of underground. Some are estimated to be 1,000 years old. We also stop at the Chirongui Pass to have a wonderful overview of the bay of Boueni and Choungui peak.

Overnight on Mayotte. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Mamoudzou, Mayotte - St Denis, Reunion*

We have the morning at leisure before our departure from the south of the island to Mamoudzou from where we ferry Petite Terre and the airport. Arrival at the airport about 2:00 PM and check in for our afternoon flight to Reunion.

Overnight on Reunion. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 7 *Reunion - Mauritius*

We fly from Reunion to Mauritius.

Mauritius basks in splendid isolation in the warmest ocean of all, the Indian Ocean, just inside the Tropic of Capricorn, bounded by Africa, India and Australia. Surrounded by a tropical sea, enhanced by golden beaches, covered with swaying fields of sugar cane and fringed with exotic coconut palms and casuarinas -- Mauritius is truly a garden.

We have an afternoon tour of Port Louis, the capital city. We visit the harbour, sheltered in a semi circle of mountains; the Natural History Museum, famous for some very rare birds, now extinct; and La Citadelle, a stone fortress situated at the top of a hill from where one can see a view of Port Louis. We also explore the busiest place in the capital, the Port Louis market where you can shop at the local stalls.

Overnight in Mauritius. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *South Mauritius*

After breakfast we proceed on a full day tour to see some of Mauritius' most spectacular scenery with a visit to the extinct volcano, Trou aux Cerfs, The Black River Gorges, and Le Morne Brabant, an imposing cliff similar to the Rock of Gibraltar.

A twisting road leads from Case Noyal village to the coloured earth at Chamarel. It is one of the oldest sites on the island and is also known as the Seven Coloured Earth, a mound of undulating land stretching in contrasting layers of colour, and the patches of blue, green, red, purple and yellow earth are believed to be the result from the weathering of volcanic rocks. The nearby Chamarel waterfalls emerge from the moors and primeval vegetation.

The Black River Gorges, a 6,574 hectare park proclaimed in 1994, protects much of the remaining native forests of Mauritius and provides opportunities for the visitor to enjoy spectacular natural scenery and some of the unique endemic plants and bird life. A boardwalk provides access to the typical dwarf forest of the region and a fenced conservation management area (from which invasive non - native plants have been removed) protects a sample of the remaining healthland.

Overnight on Mauritius. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Mauritius - Mahe, Seychelles*

The morning is free to enjoy this beautiful island.

You may choose to take part in optional activities or excursions. You transfer from the hotel to the jetty of Pointe Maurice to board a boat for Ile Aux Cerfs. Spend the morning at leisure on the island, which has miles of beautiful beaches, wide choice of water sports, restaurant and snacks bars.

In the afternoon/evening we fly to Mahe, Seychelles.

Seemingly forgotten out in the middle of the Indian Ocean, a thousand miles from Africa, more than 115 islands comprise the Seychelles Archipelago, a group of sun-kissed isles fringed by swaying palms and deep, clear lagoons, where wildlife untouched for centuries abounds. Mahe is, by far, the largest island, and it is home to the capital, Victoria, the international airport, the fishing and commercial ports, and most of the population. Although it is the nation's economic hub, it has retained all of its natural beauty and charm.

Overnight in Mahe. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Mahe: Victoria & Free Afternoon*

Today we visit Victoria, the world's smallest capital city. We see such landmarks as the winged monument depicting the islands' ethnic origins and the famous clock tower that replicates one on Vauxhall Bridge Road in London. We also visit the National Museum dedicated to island history, folklore and music. There's time to explore Victoria with colourful markets and curio stalls. Mahe is the center for craft artisans as well as fine art painters, sculptors and woodworkers.

Enjoy a relaxing afternoon.

You may want to participate in some optional activities. There is an easy, incredibly scenic half-day hike to Copollia, led by an expert naturalist, through mountainous forest where you'll enjoy fabulous panoramic views of the Saint Anne Marine National Park and surrounding islands. You'll be introduced to a profusion of rare Seychellois insects, birds and fruits. This is one of Mahe's nicest nature walks (book in advance through your Tour Leader).

This evening you may wish to celebrate your last night in the Seychelles with an optional evening "STARLIGHT SERENADE," a romantic way to spend late afternoon and evening. Cruise from Victoria past Mahe's north coast towards Beau Vallon Beach serenaded by guitars and Creole songs. Drinks are served as the suns sets then cruise on to Round Island in the Marine National Park. On the island you'll have an evening of delicious Creole barbecue, music and dancing.

Your Tour Leader can help you plan your afternoon.

Overnight in Mahe. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Mahe - Praslin Island & La Digue - Mahe*

Today we have a full-day excursion by boat to nearby Praslin Island (pronounced "Prah-lin"). The island features legendary natural beauty and superb beaches. We visit the World Heritage Site of Vallee de Mai -- a unique forest adorned with granite boulders and home to both the black parrot and the amazing Coco de Mer palm.

We ferry across to La Digue, with its impressive perfect beaches sheltered by sculptured boulders, where bicycles and ox-carts ply the narrow roads. Small enough to explore on foot, coconut and vanilla plantations with tumble-down houses abound, along with lush tropical vegetation. At L'Union Estate you'll see coconuts made into copra, then oil,

vanilla cured in the sun, giant tortoises and a majestic Plantation House. There's plenty of time to follow your own interests, including spending time on L'Anse Source D'Argent, one of the world's prettiest beaches. Today's pace is leisurely (islanders would have it no other way!), with plenty of time to soak it in, enjoy a relaxing bbq lunch (included today) and a swim on some of the world's most stunning beaches.

Return to Mahe in the late afternoon.

Overnight on Mahe. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Mahe, Seychelles - St Denis, Reunion*

Today we fly from the Seychelles to Reunion.

Overnight in Reunion. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Departure from Reunion*

Departure from St Denis, Reunion.

BON VOYAGE!! Meal plan: Breakfast.