

# Chasing rainbows

From its food to its beaches, Mauritius is awash with colour, writes Jenni Doggett

**I**t's not every day you find yourself searching for a Chinese biscuit shop in Mauritius. The tiny store I'm looking for is so hidden away I think most of the capital's residents would be hard pushed to point it out.

Between the extraordinary street art, one of the oldest horse-racing tracks in the world and the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site, it's easy to become both distracted and lost in Port Louis. However, I soon hunt down the store using Mauritian hotel brand Attitude's tour app Otentik Discovery. The geolocation tool offers seven thoughtfully designed itineraries, the themes of two of which are the eclectic street food of Port Louis and a driving tour of Trou d'Eau Douce.

Download the app for free at reception and you're good to go – it's loaded with invaluable local insights and pointers that encourage guests to step outside the resort and explore.

Discovery is part of a broader commitment by Attitude to integrate local culture into its guests' experience as part of its Otentik programme, picking up on the Creole word for authentic.

But is it just a neat marketing tool? "Hoteliers often dilute local culture to make it more tourist-friendly," says Celina Hardy, who works in customer care for Attitude Hotels. "But we want to keep it pure and encourage guests to spend in the local economy."

That sentiment is borne out by the weekly Otentik 'Bazar', where local traders and craftspeople sell their products in the resorts. The most popular of all the Otentik experiences by some distance, though, is the opportunity for guests to dine with a local member of staff at their home.

## HOME COOKING

We'd been booked into Rani's house for the evening. Still a little stuffed on Chinese biscuits, we were whisked away on a 40-minute drive from The Ravenala Attitude hotel on the northwest coast of the island.

We zipped past fiery scarlet trees, which signal the beginning of the festive season, and branches heavy with plump lychees. Flying foxes (bats) dangled stoically from the sinews of a Banyan tree. We glimpsed golden Tamil temples and

Port Louis,  
Mauritius





**LEFT:** Champ de Mars Racecourse

**RIGHT:** The Ravenala Attitude hotel

**BELOW:** Cooking class



this white-sand island has buckets of charm, and a gentle amble was rewarded with plenty of secluded spots. Clear turquoise water curves round a couple of small restaurants and craft shops selling dodo-themed goods.

Here you can spot bright parachutes mushrooming behind parasailers on the horizon, families dancing to plinking home-made

instruments, dusty red hammocks fluttering between pine trunks and people cooking freshly caught fish on smoky pyres.

Whether you're mellowing under a tree, enjoying a slow round of golf or snorkelling in search of ghost fish, this wonderful little island off an island has an awful lot going for it and rewards its visitors. **tw**

## Where to stay



### FAMILY Zilwa

Zilwa's not the only family-friendly Attitude hotel, but it's the only one with an actual boat on dry land for little pirates to play in. There are also treasure hunts, glass-bottomed boat trips and games galore. The miniclub cares for kids aged three to 12 during the day, with extra babysitting services available on request.

**Book it:** Rooms from £111 per person per night all-inclusive. [hotels-attitude.com](http://hotels-attitude.com)



### ROMANCE Paradise Cove

The sole five-star offering from the Attitude Group, this adult-only Eden is inspired. A dramatic cliff-top infinity pool overlooking the northern islands, a well-stocked private club members' room and private thatched love nests lend the resort a sense of privacy and exclusivity.

**Book it:** Rooms from £127 per person per night half-board. [paradisecovehotel.com](http://paradisecovehotel.com)



### ACTIVITY Coin de Mare

With pedal boats, paddleboards and a nearby Padi centre, Coin de Mare caters for every level of activity – a breezy, broad beach for sun bunnies and bikers, kayaks and big-game fishing for adventurers. Coin de Mare is also well located for exploring the island because of its proximity to bus routes.

**Book it:** Rooms from £46 per person per night half-board. [hotels-attitude.com](http://hotels-attitude.com)

Zilwa's tabagies offers sorbet rapé, deliciously refreshing crushed-ice lollies drizzled with tamarind, pineapple and grenadine syrup.

There is obviously more to Mauritius than food, but it's a great way in which to explore the island's culture and history, with its many international influences – primarily French, Indian, Chinese and Creole.

The diverse population rubs along quite nicely, until they broach the subject of British

football teams. I overheard people discussing Man Utd, Arsenal, Liverpool and Chelsea considerably more than you might expect on a trip to a subtropical island in the Indian Ocean.

### HIT THE BEACH

Less surprising but of way more interest to most Brits on holiday here are the heavenly pine-lined beaches.

Ile Aux Cerfs, off the east coast, is easily the prettiest. Sitting in the largest lagoon in Mauritius,



PICTURES: SHUTTERSTOCK; VIRGINIE TENNANT; TRAVIS MCNEILL/WELOVEPICTURES



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joy to spend time with Rani and her family and a real change from the usual all-inclusive experience.

The Otentik dinners can and should be booked in advance; they are highly subscribed and, for a unique insight into the local culture, really not to be missed. It's the only Otentik experience with a fee attached (£13), but the money goes directly to the family.

### GO FURTHER

It's possible to explore the food theme further with cooking classes on offer at many of the hotels. There are also vivid-roofed tabagies (food carts) at most of the resorts, offering free local snacks throughout the day. Based on traditional tobacco stalls, they house all manner of comforting treats, including deep golden dhol puri and soft, floury roti.

Each Attitude hotel has its own take on these stalls. One of

serrated mountain tops through the sugar cane.

Our group of nine was warmly welcomed into the family's home and introduced to Rani's husband Tulsi and son Ryan, who gingerly decorated us with bright red bindis. Rani, dressed in an exquisitely beaded sari, explained the menu – a scaled-down version of the classic meal served at a Hindu wedding – while her young son smiled shyly behind her, pivoting on his toes.

We sipped rum and watched transfixed as Tulsi fried samosas until crisp in bubbling oil.

As we sat down to eat, Rani grinned broadly and announced: "If it is good, you say something; if it is bad, you eat quietly!"

Bowl after bowl of fragrant curries and chutneys were passed around. We scooped up sticky stacks of pickled green mango and bringelles frites (fried aubergine) from banana leaf plates with our hands.

Most of these dishes are typically Indian-Mauritian, but eaten by the entire population. Banana cake followed, then we played dress-up in Rani's glittering saris.

The next-door neighbour happily decorated hands with henna while some of us danced off our dinner. It was an absolute

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