



By ANN MOONEY

MEMORIES are made from special moments and our arrival on our very own desert island during a stay “deep” in Mauritius was such a moment.

Our first encounter on this Indian Ocean island was being greeted swirling ladies in traditional garb, dancing the Sega for us.

This is the native dance and it involves a lot of hip and arm movement along with colourful costumes – a glorious welcome to our resort, Veranda Pointe-Aux-Biches on the north end.

That theme continued into the night on the hotel's beautiful private beach, where patient experts tried to teach our group the dance.

The Sunset Vibes experience also included a tasting of a wide variety of the cane rum made on the island, and

exotic cocktails including my favourite, the baby coconut one.

This all happened against a backdrop of a stunning, vibrant sunset, and walking barefoot on soft, white sands.

It's not surprising that Mark Twain wrote: “Mauritius was first made and then Heaven.”

We stayed in the Privilege rooms at Sandy Lane Village, an adults only part of the hotel which was cosy and had sea and pool views.

The rooms were spacious and comfortable and every evening housekeeping staff left surprises for us, in the

form of towel art depicting different animals and flower petals on the bed. The resort has a variety of rooms including 24 family rooms with interconnecting

children's rooms. It's a unique place as there is sand everywhere within the main hotel buildings, so you can go barefoot and experience the feel of the outdoors indoors.

After a swim to the man-made islands in front of the hotel next morning, breakfast was a large array of dishes reflecting the diversity of foods on the island, including fresh fruit and juices.

For our next experience, we decided on the 'Deep Into The Blue' Catamaran tour.

This was wonderful, although the weather changed – we were in cyclone season – as the sunny disposition of our 'Captain Jack Sparrow', real name Jose, more than compensated for the clouds.

The Reggae music blasted out, the rum and wine flowed freely, and the barbecue on board was flaming, with delicious offerings of fresh fish and other goodies.

We anchored in a blue sea lagoon where we swam in the warm water. We also visited the Ilot Bernaches Mangroves and next was when we moved on to our own desert island, Bernache Island, where we sat on the white sandy beach and drank wine. The catamaran sails from a pier at Verande Paul et Virginie, another hotel and was without a doubt one of the highlights of our holiday.

Next, a visit to the capital city of Port Louis proved an interesting experience as it was like no other city I've visited.

It's a busy spot with rambling streets full of bazaar type shops with bargains galore. There is a modern shopping centre but don't expect a typical main shopping area.



We were there for a street food tasting experience, accompanied by our knowledgeable guide Adrien from Taste Buddies – a company which takes groups to visit the food markets to enjoy local delicacies.

Along the way we had stops for cultural and historical talks in the old quarters, before tasting typical Mauritian food like roti, napolitans, dhal puri and pani pourri.

We visited the Jumma Mosque, which was an enlightening experience. Everyone was very welcoming and keen to speak about its history and other nearby attractions.

The mosque itself dates back to the 1850s and is reflective of the many cultures on the island, with Indian, Creole and Islamic influences. It is regarded as one of the most beautiful religious buildings in the country.

Keen cyclists in our group enjoyed the bike tour from our resort to the Temple de Triolet, the oldest Hindu temple on the island.

And at the Mont Choisy beach they saw a beachside Hindu Shrine, where a Bollywood flick was being filmed nearby.

I had an equally fun time being driven around by our hotel manager, who showed me all the sights without the saddle sores!

Later we walked to the town market and down to the beach where local fishermen landed their daily catch.

I wouldn't describe myself as a great cook but I do believe the cooking class we had on the beachfront at Pointe-Aux-Biches brought out the best in me.

Using freshly caught large

prawns, and the freshest of ingredients, I even managed to cook up a traditional Mauritian prawn curry which tasted delicious.

Before concluding my holiday I paid a visit to the hotel's Seven Colours Wellness Lounge, whose treatment cabins open out to the sea and where the range of services were very reasonably priced.

My massage with just the sound of the sea for background music was beyond relaxing.

Families are very welcome at the resort and the Timomo kids club will keep the rugrats occupied while parents chill out.

There's also a free shuttle to the beautiful Trou-àux-Biches beach as well as complimentary water sports and beach activities.

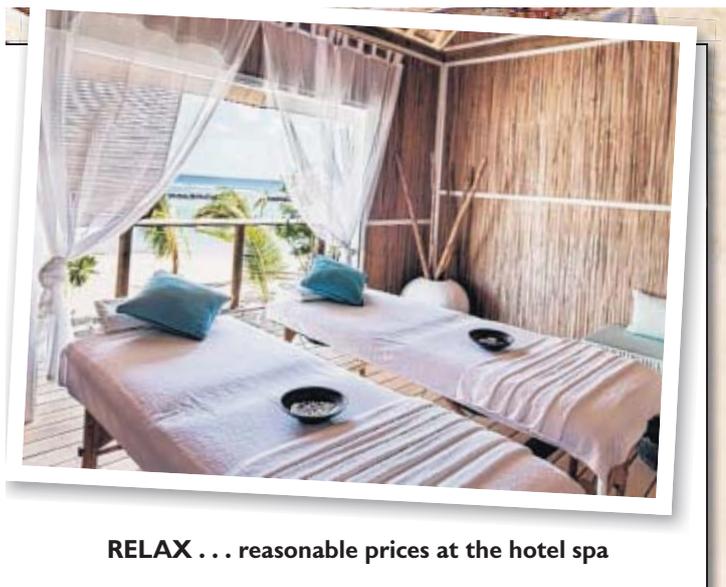
We departed with a spectacular and colourful display of local dance and music, including a performance from our entertaining hotel manager – it summed up Mauritius in a nutshell.



LIVELY
.. trad
dancers



Memories . . . at sea



RELAX . . . reasonable prices at the hotel spa

GO: HEAD TO HEAVEN RIGHT HERE ON EARTH

AIR France operates four flights weekly to Mauritius, from Cork via Paris. Economy fares start from €893, with premium economy from €1,493. See airfrance.com.

STAY: Rooms at 4-star Pointe-aux-Biches Hotel start from €95pp B&B. For this and its sister hotels see veranda-resorts.com.

DO: Tours and experiences can be organised through the hotel which uses mautourco.com/transfers for transport needs.

The cooking class costs 600MUR (Mauritian rupees), approx €15.

The bike excursion is approx €6 and the Port Louis street food tour cost around €35 per person.