

Mauritius Beyond the Postcard

By Sophie Baker

Mauritius might first appear to be nothing more than a watercolour of blues and greens, a seemingly typical portrait of an island retreat. And it's true; Mauritius is the home of pristine beaches and luxury resorts. It's a veritable paradise for sun-seekers from around the globe. But during a recent trip with Attitude Hotels, I was nudged gently into a world far richer, as they peeled back the glossy exterior of sun-soaked beaches to reveal the heart of the island beyond its touristy allure.

But downplaying Mauritius as merely resort holiday destination sells short everything the island has to offer. Joining in Attitude Hotels' 'Like a Local' programme, I was gently nudged towards discovering the essence of Mauritius beyond its scenic landscapes. The hotel's 'Otentik' concept, which is a clever play on the Creole word for 'authentic' is one of the standout initiatives which helps them to provide authentic and genuine Mauritian hospitality to guests. To truly appreciate Mauritius, I had to venture off the palm-lined shores. What I found was a nation with a profound connection to its environment and heritage, inhabited by people with compelling stories of resilience to share.

Takamaka: The Sweet Taste of Innovation

It started with a visit to Takamaka, a boutique winery run by a French-trained viticulturalist. A





downpour had hit, and we huddled under a sprawling marquee tent from the downpour. Luckily, Mauritian sprits can't be quelled by some damp weather – especially when there's boutique wine to be tasted.

Mauritius doesn't have the right climate for grapes, but that hasn't dampened their entrepreneurial spirit. Instead, the romance of winemaking is reimagined with litchi. A fruit you'd more likely enjoy fresh off the tree has been creatively harvested into boutique wines, including one which is surprisingly crisp and invigorating on the palate, reminiscent of a good Sauvignon Blanc. Takamaka isn't about wine; it's a bold statement on sustainable agriculture, and a showcase of innovative use of the island's natural resources.

The Heart of Mauritian Life

Trundling across the breadth and width of the island by car, bicycle, and boat, scattered remnants of colonial estates and old sugar mills told a story of a nation of adaptation and transformation. Initially an econo-



my reliant on sugar cane – a legacy of the colonial era – Mauritius diversified their economy when global sugar prices plummeted in the 20th century and pivoted to textile manufacturing. But as the global economy changed, Mauritius was forced to evolve once again, this time turning to tourism and financial services. Yet, amid these shifts, Mauritius has clung to its unique heritage. Initially reliant on sugarcane,

Each community, from the bustling streets of Port Louis to the quiet fishing villages along the coast, has its own story. The island's history is a complex blend of colonial legacies and vibrant local resistance, where every wave that touches its shores brings a new layer of influence and adaptation. Despite the global pressures of tourism, the island maintains a strong sense of identity and pride. This is evident in how the locals cherish their public spaces, celebrate their festivals, and preserve their culinary traditions. From street food vendors in the central market selling *gato piment* (chili cakes) to fishermen in Mahébourg discussing their daily catch, the real Mauritius thrives in its everyday interactions and communal spaces.

A venture into the heart of Port Louis was further evidence of the undercurrent of local personality that the casual tourist so often misses. Setting foot in the central market dispelled any preconceived notions of a sleepy island capital. Clad in the aromas of curried street food, and the cacophony of market haggling, there's a clear rhythm of local life that the city beats to. Each alley and street corner of Port Louis narrates tales of yore—echoes of Dutch, French, and British influences merging with the local Creole, Indian, and Chinese heritage.

It was here, in the capital city, where Attitude Hotels would fling open the doors to a three-storey workshop where local artists have the space to paint, sculpt, and transform to their hearts content, transforming ideas into expression. This space remains largely invisible to the casual tourist but buzzes with activity, each floor dedicated to artists painting, sculpting, and transforming ideas into tangible expressions. Here, art is more than decoration; it's a vibrant dialogue with the island's cultural iden-



tity. Attitude Hotels champions these local talents, integrating their works into their chain of hotels - from entrance hall statues to wall art and even hotel logos - shunning the generic in favour of a palpable Mauritian personality.

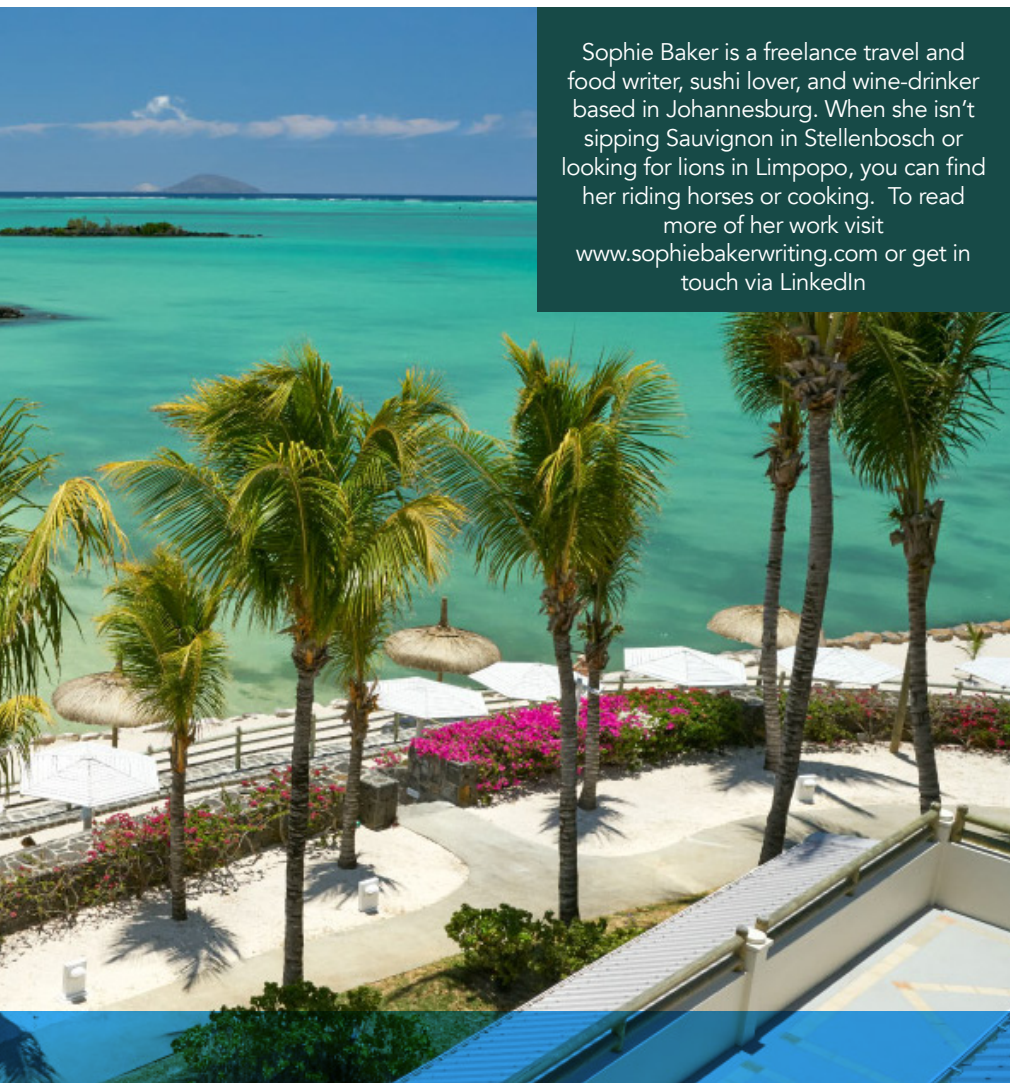
Indika, another local small business, are found in an understated workshop off a bumpy road in the verdant heart of the island. It's here that the botanical riches of Mauritius are meticulously crafted face creams, room sprays, and essential oils. It's artisan work at its finest. Each creation is steeped in local tradition yet tailored for contemporary use, making Indika a sanctuary of both heritage and innovation. The products also grace the rooms, bathrooms, and spas of Attitude Hotels.

Indika's commitment to eco-friendly practices is evident in their use of sustainable, locally sourced materials, reflecting a broader Mauritian ethos of environmental respect and conservation.

A Taste of Mauritius

For many travellers, wanderlust and food are so intertwined they may as well be one idea. This is another area where Mauritius shines, should you be bold enough to step away from breakfast buffets. Eating local meals isn't just about tasting food; it's about experiencing the soul of Mauritius through its flavours. And where better to do it than the 'tabagie,' which serves as a cornerstone of daily life in Mauritius. These humble eateries, found across the island from bustling urban streets to quiet coastal corners, offer a genuine taste of Mauritian life. They are where locals gather to pick up groceries and enjoy a quick, delicious meal or a beer. Here, the air is thick with

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the aroma of spices. Turmeric, cumin, and coriander meld with the sizzling sounds of frying and chatter in Creole, Chinese, and English punctuates the sound of chewing.

Recognizing the importance of these culinary traditions, Attitude Hotels has masterfully integrated the tabagie experience into its offerings through an initiative known as "Taba-J." Taba-J isn't just a dining option; it's an authentic immersion into Mauritian street food culture, designed to replicate the vibrant atmosphere of a local tabagie. Situated within the hotels themselves, Taba-J offers guests a chance to taste various local dishes in an environment that echoes the informal, communal vibe of traditional tabagies. Food is prepared with passion and authenticity, utilizing local ingredients and traditional methods. It's not only about serving local dishes but also about offering a slice of Mauritian life.

Ultimately, Mauritius offers much more than just a picturesque getaway; it is a dynamic, multi-layered island full of life, history, and beauty waiting to be explored. Visitors who choose to step beyond the postcard-perfect images of white sandy beaches and turquoise waters will find a Mauritius that is not only welcoming but also immensely enriching.

My 'Like a Local' journey with Attitude Hotels wasn't just a trip to Mauritius. Every moment was a step closer to the heart of this island, not through its scenic spots, but through its people, its streets, and its stories. From the simple pleasure of a morning dhol puri to tales of local botany changing lives, or something as simple as the tranquil beauty of a Mauritian beach at dusk, Attitude Hotels curated experiences that felt less like tourism and more like a genuine slice of island life. 