

Being downgraded at the last minute from Business to Economy for a 12-hour red-eye flight was not the most auspicious start to my inaugural trip to exotic Mauritius, but it made Le Telfair's luxurious welcome all the sweeter: As if the gods were smiling on our crumpled group, two spa therapists and a waiter welcomed us aboard our air-conditioned airport transfer, proffering a refreshing hand towel, cool tropical juices, breakfast canapés, and a jetlag-melting hand massage to finish. Bliss on a bus.

Checking in 45 minutes later, it immediately became clear that this five-star grand dame in the Domaine de Bel Ombre region of Mauritius is the south coast's answer to well-established rivals Le Saint Geran and Le Touessrok to the other side of the island. We were greeted with warm smiles, another cooling towel and a traditional Mauritian sugar-cane cocktail, which we drank up along with the delectable pool and sea view from reception.

Accommodation is staggered in handsome two-storey white French plantation-style 'villas' nestling in acres of lush landscaped gardens. My gargantuan first floor room had a balcony with brochure-picture views of the aqua-blue Indian Ocean shimmering beyond the pool below. A set of white wooden blinds dividing my airy room from the chic ensuite was a nod to former colonial times, enabling me to ogle the sea from the comfort of my bath.



Having unpacked, I blew away some cobwebs with a walk along the beachfront, which is flanked by half a dozen resorts. Le Telfair was easily the most elegant hotel on this relatively newly developed white sand coastline, a few kilometres from the rugged Morne mountainscape. Next door, the Awali, the resort's slightly more laidback sister hotel – with its photogenic infinity pools – felt authentically exotic and even tribal, but not as high-end as Le Telfair.