



# Offduty

journalists **at play**

## This place is truly the epitome of paradise for me

Famed for its dazzling turquoise waters and beautiful beaches, Mauritius has been on **Gayle Ritchie's** travel hit-list for years

I'm wondering if I'm in heaven as I float on my back in a gorgeous infinity pool and gaze up at a cloudless blue sky. Heck, this really is the stuff dreams are made of.

It's been a life ambition to visit Mauritius and here I am, at long last.

The tropical island is a favourite among honeymooners, renowned for its luxury hotels, perfect white sand beaches and mountain backdrops.

It's an island to be explored, but having planned a fortnight's trip there with my partner, we were adamant the first few days should be spent in one place – the sumptuous Angsana Balaclava.

On arrival, after a 16-hour flight from Edinburgh via Dubai, it became clear that Angsana was something very special.

Nestled in a secluded cove in Turtle Bay on the north west coast, it's a place where luxury blends with stylish rustic elegance.

We were greeted by general manager Paul van Frank and made to feel very welcome as we drank fresh fruit juice on a balcony with breathtaking views of the ocean.

This is where Angsana excels itself – staff are warm, courteous and friendly, and Paul (who later in the week met us for drinks) takes the time to personally meet each and every guest.

While on a mission to kick back and relax, the concept of "wellness" is at the heart of Angsana and so I signed up for one of the resort's wellness packages – the fitness and discovery programme.

This, Paul explained, was aimed at "nurturing the body" and would combine targeted spa treatments with personal training, yoga, hiking and a bespoke dietary plan.

I hung out in our deluxe pool suite

(just wow – the super king bed was SO comfy!) before having a private consultation with resident Ayurvedic doctor, Dr Sree. He deduced I exhibited traits of an "air" person (as in the elements) and planned a menu accordingly.

The point was that for the next few days I would eat healthily – and well.

Surprisingly, the wellness diet was far from dull. On the contrary – I was treated to full-on three courses which tasted absolutely amazing. The catch? There wasn't one!

Sure, while others may have had fried eggs for breakfast, I enjoyed egg white omelette with spinach, or for dessert, chocolate pudding was exchanged for berry tart, but I never felt I was missing out, and I felt full (and rather virtuous) at meal times.

I was "allowed" to choose from the hotel's mouthwatering menu of pan-Asian dishes, as well as indulging in the Indian buffet, so I was a happy bunny all round!

Over the next few days, I met with in-house fitness trainer Khalid Peeroo for a beach yoga session, a fantastic hike up into the foothills of the island's third highest mountain, Le Pouce, and for two thigh-burning gym sessions, the point of which, he said, was to "wake up my muscles" – they certainly did that!

I also indulged in three massages at the hotel's spa and can hand-on-heart say these were the best I've ever experienced. The first one, a blissful back massage enjoyed a few hours after I arrived, worked wonders to rejuvenate me and fend off jetlag.

Another highlight of my stay at Angsana, and there were many, was relaxing in the two pools – the refreshing seawater lagoon and the heated infinity pool.

I also loved the complimentary watersports. Snorkelling opened up a



Clockwise from opposite page: Gayle in the infinity pool of Angsana Balaclava; Angsana Balaclava; yoga on the beach; the view from the top of Le Morne Brabant; Mauritius beach; and Le Morne Brabant.

magic underwater world of fish all the colours of the rainbow and a glass-bottom boat trip took us out to coral reefs teeming with life.

The sunsets were unforgettable and we spent evenings watching the sky turn shades of orange, pink and purple while huge fruit bats ducked and dived for insects.

We were sad to leave Angsana but we'd booked a hire car to explore the island so we had to!

First, we headed north to Pereybere where we checked into Bleu de Toi Guesthouse. This was rather a letdown, on the outskirts of town and with iron bars on the windows of our poky little room. The breakfast, however, was superb, and the hammocks in the garden were a lovely place to sit and read.

We skirted the busy public beach and walked along the coast for spectacular views of humpbacked island, Gunner's Quoin and found an almost deserted patch of sand where we swam and sunbathed.

Another sight worth seeing is the beautiful little red church – and the island's most famous – at Cap Malheureux.

Le Morne Brabant, a peninsula at the extreme southwestern tip of the island, was next on our agenda. Our accommodation, Happy Days Guest

House in nearby La Gaulette, was, unfortunately, another disappointment, being very basic, rather rundown and not as advertised online, although the staff were friendly and the breakfast was good.

It didn't matter too much because we were here to explore Le Morne. The World Heritage Site's shining star is Le Morne Brabant, a rugged mountain that juts into the Indian Ocean, used as a shelter for runaway slaves in the 18th and 19th century.

Of course, we wanted to climb up the 556m monolith, which proved a sweaty, exhilarating and rather vertigo-inducing experience! It took two hours to reach the summit, with the last section requiring a shaky scramble using all four limbs. The views of the ocean, lagoon and coral reefs below were utterly stupendous.

Having expended vast amounts of calories, we more than deserved a lavish lunch at the coolest joint in the area – Wapalapam – followed by an afternoon of swimming and sunbathing.

The following day we visited Chamarel's Seven Coloured Earth – strange, undulating strips of multi-coloured sand in different layers. It's one of the most photographed sights on the island.

After lunch, we explored Black River Gorges National Park, a wild

expanse of rolling hills and thick forest brimming with wildlife. We walked for hours, passing waterfalls, stopping at breathtaking viewpoints and listening to the high-pitched courtship calls of echo parakeets.

Our final destination was Pointe d'Esny, on the east coast. Our hotel, Le Peninsula Bay, faced the gorgeous turquoise lagoon, and while the beach was rather rocky, a short stroll round the coast and we found miles of unpopulated white sand.

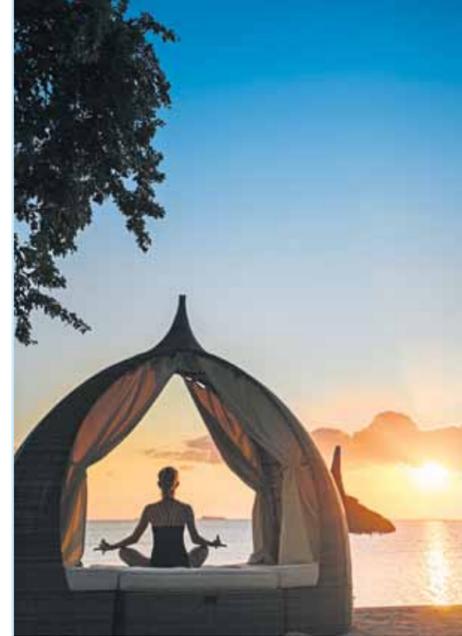
Three days were spent chilling out here before we headed to Trou d'Eau Douce and took a boat to Ile Aux Cerfs – a picture-postcard island home to an adventure park, golf course and untouched beaches.

The trick was to get there early. We spent the morning alone, lazing contentedly on a deserted beach fringed with pine and palm trees. And then the tour boats arrived!

Luckily, people didn't stray far from the main hub, so we were able to escape the hordes.

While the highlight of our Mauritian trip was indeed luscious Angsana Balaclava, we were genuinely gutted to leave the island.

I always dreamed of paradise and I'm telling the truth when I say that Mauritius is the epitome of that very word.



Gayle Ritchie is a features writer at The Courier. She spent a fortnight travelling round Mauritius. Gayle flew to Mauritius from Edinburgh via Dubai. Flights from around £750. [www.emirates.com](http://www.emirates.com) Suites at Angsana Balaclava Mauritius start from £595 per night for two people half board. Wellness programmes start at £500 for three nights which include all treatments and a bespoke wellness menu. Special rates may be available. [www.angsana.com](http://www.angsana.com)