

La Réunion ~ Walking on a Rainbow Island in the Indian Ocean

<http://www.kudutravel.com/tours/la-reunion-walking-tour>

3 – 16 November 2019

This tropical *département*, set in the Indian Ocean between Madagascar and Mauritius, is one of France's best kept secrets. Within the mother country, Réunion is acknowledged as a destination of outstanding natural beauty with a rich network of walking trails, but outside France little is known of the island. During our two-week tour, we discover many aspects of this uniquely hospitable and multicultural society.

We walk in tropical forest; explore the moonscape of La Réunion's active volcano, Piton de la Fournaise; swim and snorkel from a sand beach protected by offshore coral reefs and visit historic coffee and sugar estates, botanical gardens and museums depicting the island's fascinating history.

We enjoy Creole and French cuisine accompanied by (perfectly stored) French and South African wines while based in hotels ranging from an African style lodge in the hills on the east coast to beachfront Creole villas on the Lagoon, set in gardens shaded by palm trees, and a former East India Company palace in the centre of Réunion's appealing capital, St. Denis.

HIGHLIGHTS of the tour include:

- Escaping November weather to a French jewel in the tropics
- Walks in spectacular scenery of the island's interior surrounded by forested peaks and cascading waterfalls
- A day exploring the active volcano, Piton de la Fournaise, on foot
- Visits to tropical gardens, historic estates and museums depicting the island's history
- Relaxing in stylish hotels across this fascinating island, enjoying Créole and French cuisine with great French and South African wines

Itinerary

DAY 1

L, D included

After meeting in the late morning at St Denis airport, we have an hour's transfer along the coast to Ste Anne where we pause to admire the striking naïve Baroque church reminiscent of early South American churches. Our base for the next three nights is an African style lodge with excellent service and views stretching east over the ocean in the direction of Australia. There is an option of an hour's walk on the property. We may see the endemic Réunion stonechat, one of the exotic species such as Red-whiskered bulbul or Red Fody or some of the deer left from the hunting estate days.

DAY 2

B, L, D included

Our goal today is Grand Étang, a volcanic lake at an altitude of 500 m ringed by forested mountains. We strike out from the circular trail to reach the River Anette waterfalls and have good chances of seeing the endemic Réunion Harrier, the island's only raptor, gliding over the lake. We return to the lodge mid-afternoon to enjoy the infinity swimming pool, indulge in a spa treatment or to relax with a book on the terrace. At dinner, we may try the typical island dish of duck with vanilla.

DAY 3

B, L, D included

An hour's drive takes us to Hell-Bourg, one of the prettiest Creole villages on Réunion, set on the slopes of Piton des Neiges (3071 m, the highest mountain on the island and in the Indian Ocean). As we approach, we have stunning views of the surrounding mountains forming the circle of Salazie. Our walk starts at the atmospheric site of the old Thermal Resort, Hell-Bourg's original source of fame during colonial times, destroyed by the 1948 cyclone. Later we follow the route of the 'Maisons Créoles' (Creole Houses) discovering the history and architecture of this former spa town.

DAY 4

B, L, D included

We head for La Plaine des Palmistes, using the only road which crosses the interior of the island. In the Bebour forest reserve, preserving large areas of primary tropical forest, we explore for 2.5 hours, looking for native orchids such as *Calanthe Sylvatica* or *Cynorkis Squamosa*. Our simple family-run hotel (2 nights) is in a rural setting and at dinner, we may sample Réunionnais cari, a locally adapted version of the subcontinental dish, accompanied by chou chou (christophine) gratin.

DAY 5

B, L, D included

We have an hour's drive across several microclimates and vegetation zones until we are traversing bare volcanic landscape on a dirt road. Once we reach Pas de Bellecombe at 2354 m, the highest point on the Volcano accessible by vehicle, we continue on foot to descend into the outer crater (Enclos Fouqué). Weather-permitting, we walk within the crater to explore its geological features, witnesses of (relatively) recent volcanic activity. Back in the comfort of our lodge and with a *rhum arrangé* (flavoured rum) in hand, we may contemplate tectonic plate movement theory.

DAY 6

B, L, D included

We continue south, crossing the Grand Brulé and other descriptively named lava flows. It's easy to understand why any development in this area of the east coast is forbidden. As we round the south coast, we turn our attention to botany and head for the Jardin des Parfums et des Épices in St Phillippe to learn how plants like vacoa (*Pandanus utilis*), vanilla and lychee have influenced local history, economy, culture and cuisine. After lunch and a stroll along the coastal path on Cap Méchant, we have a short drive to our luxury hotel for 2 nights. It is set in landscaped gardens on a cliff above the Grande Anse beach and features spacious designer rooms, a gourmet restaurant and swimming pools with ocean views.

DAY 7

B, L, D included

The first part of the morning is dedicated to visiting a garden with an outstanding collection of tropical orchids. Moving on to another important island product, we visit the Saga du Rhum museum. Nearby St Pierre is the biggest town on the south coast and it is well worth spending some time exploring its sights on foot. The Hôtel de Ville, built as a warehouse for the French East India Company in 18th century, and the adjacent historic Creole mansions are in contrast with the early 20th century Mosque and the richly decorated Hindu temples.

DAY 8

B, L, D included

We head inland once again, following the 37 km road with 427 mind-boggling hairpins! The setting of Cilaos couldn't be more spectacular and we orientate ourselves at a viewpoint before walking (2 hrs) to lunch. There is time to visit the Embroidery museum and workshop and to explore the town centre. Our 3-star hotel (2 nights) offers rooms with balconies overlooking Piton des Neiges.

DAY 9

B, L, D included

We set off from the hotel on foot and, passing the present-day thermal baths, climb gently onto the forested slopes of the Cirque. We make the most of numerous points of view to appreciate the extraordinary setting of Cilaos – surrounded by pitons and ramparts of volcanic rock. We return past the original site of the thermal baths (an altogether more rudimentary affair!) following a section of the old porters' trail. This was the only way to transport goods and, indeed, people into the cirque from the coast, until the road was built in the 1930s. Once back in Cilaos, we make a stop in a teashop serving the best *Crêpes Flambées* in the world.

DAY 10

B, L, D included

We retrace our steps to the coast following the Bras de Cilaos ravine and recover from the experience on an easy 1.5 hr walk with panoramic views of the west coast. A relaxed seafood lunch on a sandy beach precedes a visit to Kelonia, the marine turtle research and observation centre, where we have the opportunity to see and learn about the five species of marine turtles native to the Indian Ocean. We base ourselves for 3 nights in Creole style villas set in a garden shaded by coconut palms and casuarina trees, just steps away from a beach protected by a coral reef.

DAY 11

B, L, D included

Our walk starts from one of the most impressive viewpoints on Réunion, le Maïdo, situated on top of a mountain peak (2200 m) with stunning views into the Cirque de Mafate below. This high-altitude area is also known for producing valuable geranium oil, using traditional wood fired stills to extract the essential oil from the plants' minute 'hair'. At Villèle, we stop at the Chapelle Pointue, a fine example of Neo-Gothic architecture, built by a notoriously cruel baroness in the 19th century.

DAY 12

B, L, D included

We enjoy a free morning by the pool or on the beach. For indefatigable garden lovers, there is an option to visit the nearby Jardin d'Eden, with sections dedicated to medicinal and edible plants, water gardens and palm trees. We walk along the beach looking out for the elegant white-tailed tropicbird, the national bird of Réunion, and at a *paillote* (beach restaurant), popular with locals and visitors alike, we have a light lunch. A sunset boat trip followed by dinner at a fish restaurant in the port of St Gilles les Bains, is a fitting finale to our time on the west coast.

DAY 13

B, L, D included

Following a leisurely start, we have a guided tour of the excellent National Botanic Conservatory of the Mascarene Islands, set on the historic estate of the Marquis of Chateaufvieux. En route to St Denis, known as the Paris of the Indian Ocean, and our 3-star hotel in a former East India Company palace, we visit the picturesque market of fresh produce in St. Paul.

DAY 14

B, L included

St. Denis preserves the graceful atmosphere of a colonial capital. We start our exploration on the iconic Rue de Paris, lined with historic public administration buildings and private mansions, trendy cafés and chic boutique shops. At the Barachois, a popular park on the seafront, we pause at the statue of Roland Garros, the daring aviator born on the island. Our journey concludes with an afternoon transfer to the airport.

Activity Level

Standard

9 walking days (1 – 4 hours daily), optional swimming and snorkelling on the west coast. Lightweight waterproof boots are recommended.

Temperatures

November is at the end of the dry winter season with the average daily high temperature around 27°C on the coast. In the interior, the low temperatures can drop to 18°C. The sea temperature is 25°C.

Accommodation

- 3 nights on the east coast, in an African style lodge with excellent service and views stretching over the ocean in the direction of Australia
- 2 nights in La Plaine des Palmistes, in a simple family-run hotel in a rural setting
- 2 nights on the south coast, in a luxury hotel set in landscaped gardens on a cliff above the Grande Anse beach, featuring spacious designer rooms, a gourmet restaurant and swimming pools with ocean views
- 2 nights in Cilaos, in a central 3-star hotel, in rooms with balconies overlooking Piton des Neiges
- 3 nights in La Saline les Bains, in Creole style villas set in a garden shaded by coconut palms and casuarina trees, just steps away from a beach protected by a coral reef
- 1 night in St. Denis, in a 3-star hotel in a former East India Company Palace

Trip Price, per person sharing

£5,263.25 until 2nd February 2019

£5,405.50 until 2nd May 2019

£5,547.75 until 2nd August 2019

£5,690 after 2nd August 2019

<https://www.kudutravel.com/faq#discounts>

£1,000 deposit per person

£1,130 double for single supplement

Please note that the single use room supplement is imposed by the hotels and not by Kudu Travel. If you are willing to share but no other suitable guest books on the trip, we regret that the supplement will be payable.

Price includes

- all accommodation for Days 1 through 14, on a twin shared basis
- all meals (with wine at dinners and restaurant lunches) as listed in the daily notation
- all land transportation in a private vehicle as described
- all entrance, sightseeing and guiding fees as described
- a sunset boat trip as described
- services of Kudu Travel tour leader
- gratuities for hotel and restaurant staff and drivers (appreciation for tour leader is entirely at your discretion)

Price does not include

- flights to and from Réunion
- trip cancellation, medical or other insurance
- immunisations, prescriptions or other medical requirements
- passport, visa and health documentation
- personal expenses (laundry, alcohol other than wine with group lunches and dinners, free time activities, etc.)
- meals noted as excepted in the daily notation
- transport and transfer of excess baggage

VALUE FOR MONEY - SO MUCH IS INCLUDED

On Kudu trips, you will only need money for postcards, presents to take home, the odd G & T or an irresistible ice cream. Festival and opera tickets, museum and gallery entrances, National Park fees, all meals (with a very few exceptions specified in individual itineraries), wine with lunch and dinner, access to specialist books carried by the guides, gratuities for porters and hotel and restaurant staff, boat rides, train trips, internal flights, wine tastings, 4WDs with drivers, the services of skilled local guides and trackers etc. are ALL INCLUDED in the cost of your holiday.

We are confident that, like previous very satisfied guests, you will discover that our tours give you excellent value for money.

Visa and Health Requirements

Visitors from the EU, USA, Australia and Canada currently require a valid passport, but not a visa, for entry to France. If you are a national of any other country, please check visa regulations with your nearest Embassy of France.

Residents of countries in the EU can only claim free (emergency) medical treatment in France by presenting their European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), which is issued in the UK by the Department of Health.

At present, there are no specific and compulsory health requirements for entry to France. You may also wish to check the advice given to travellers by the Department of Health (www.dh.gov.uk/travellers) and the FCO (www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice).

Insurance

It is essential, and a condition of booking, that you protect yourself with a suitable travel insurance policy as soon as you book a trip. We can arrange comprehensive cover for UK residents. For further details, please see our website or ask our office.

Size of Party

This trip will run with a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 14 guests.