

The background of the top half of the image is a green door with a decorative frame. The door has a central panel with a square design. Above the door is a red banner with white text. The banner is part of a larger decorative structure that includes a green door and a red banner. The banner is part of a larger decorative structure that includes a green door and a red banner.

the essential guide to
customs & culture

CULTURE SMART!

MAURITIUS

The bottom half of the image shows a colorful doorway. The door is made of wood and has a decorative frame. The frame is painted in various colors, including red, green, and yellow. The door is set against a yellow wall. The doorway is decorated with a colorful frame that includes a green door and a red banner. The doorway is decorated with a colorful frame that includes a green door and a red banner.

CULTURE SMART!

guides will help you to deal confidently with unfamiliar situations abroad. They tell you about the beliefs, attitudes, and behavior of people in different countries, so that when you arrive you are aware of local manners and sensitive issues, and are well equipped to make friends and enter into successful business relationships. Practical advice on what to expect and how to behave enables you to avoid embarrassing gaffes, establish a rapport with your hosts, and make the very best of your visit.

Countries in the Series

- Argentina
- Armenia
- Australia
- Austria
- Azerbaijan
- Belarus
- Belgium
- Bolivia
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Botswana
- Brazil
- Britain
- Cambodia
- Canada
- Chile
- China
- Colombia
- Costa Rica
- Croatia
- Cuba
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Dominican Republic
- Egypt
- Estonia
- Ethiopia
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Ghana
- Greece
- Guatemala
- Hong Kong
- Hungary
- India
- Indonesia
- Iran
- Ireland
- Israel
- Italy
- Jamaica
- Japan
- Kenya
- Korea
- Libya
- Lithuania
- Malaysia
- Mauritius
- Mexico
- Morocco
- Namibia
- Nepal
- Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Norway
- Oman
- Panama
- Peru
- Philippines
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- Russia
- Saudi Arabia
- Scotland
- Singapore
- South Africa
- Spain
- Sri Lanka
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Syria
- Tanzania
- Thailand
- Trinidad and Tobago
- Tunisia
- Turkey
- Ukraine
- UAE
- USA
- Vietnam

Books are regularly updated, and the publishers welcome readers' comments and suggestions.

CULTURE SMART!

MAURITIUS

Tim Cleary

•K•U•P•E•R•A•R•D•

This book is available for special discounts for bulk purchases for sales promotions or premiums. Special editions, including personalized covers, excerpts of existing books, and corporate imprints, can be created in large quantities for special needs.

For more information in the USA write to Special Markets/Premium Sales, 1745 Broadway, MD 6-2, New York, NY 10019, or e-mail specialmarkets@randomhouse.com.

In the United Kingdom contact Kuperard publishers at the address below.

ISBN 978 1 85733 542 2

This book is also available as an e-book: eISBN 978 1 85733 546 0

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2011 Kuperard

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

Culture Smart!® is a registered trademark of Bravo Ltd

First published in Great Britain 2011

by Kuperard, an imprint of Bravo Ltd

59 Hutton Grove, London N12 8DS

Tel: +44 (0) 20 8446 2440 Fax: +44 (0) 20 8446 2441

www.culturesmart.co.uk

Inquiries: sales@kuperard.co.uk

Distributed in the United States and Canada

by Random House Distribution Services

1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019

Tel: +1 (212) 572-2844 Fax: +1 (212) 572-4961

Inquiries: csorders@randomhouse.com

Series Editor Geoffrey Chesler

Design Bobby Birchall

Printed in Malaysia

Cover image: *Architectural detail of a Hindu temple, Mauritius* ©iStockphoto.com

The photographs on pages 20, 60, 66, 93, 97, 101, 108, and 132 are reproduced by permission of the author.

Images on the following pages reproduced under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license: 13 © Shardan; 14, 44, 118 (above), and 127 © Simisa; 16, 62, and 63 © B.navez; 51 and 65 © Sblaval at fr. Wikipedia; 97 © Pancrat; 118 (below) © HallvardLid; 124 (no name given); 131 (above) © Virtualage; and 138 © Thierry

Images on these pages reproduced under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license: 37 © Tim Parkinson and 91 © Avinash Meetoo. On page 110, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Germany © LonelyPlanet on the German Wikipedia; and on page 104, Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivatives 2.0 Generic © bengal*foam

On pages 74 © Dhondusaxena; 89 © Tejal Patel; and 131 (below) © Jean Andy

About the Author

TIM CLEARY has a BA in French from the University of Leeds, where he specialized in Creole languages and the Francophone world, and an MA in Linguistics from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He has worked as a translator (French to English), has lived in Mauritius, and in 2010 married a Mauritian, with whom he is learning to speak Kreol. Tim currently lives in London and works at the famous Stanfords map and travel bookshop in Covent Garden, but he visits Mauritius regularly. He enjoys listening to Mauritian sega music and drinking the occasional can of Phoenix lager.

**The Culture Smart! series is continuing to expand.
For further information and latest titles visit
www.culturesmart.co.uk**

The publishers would like to thank **CultureSmart!**Consulting for its help in researching and developing the concept for this series.

CultureSmart!Consulting creates tailor-made seminars and consultancy programs to meet a wide range of corporate, public-sector, and individual needs. Whether delivering courses on multicultural team building in the USA, preparing Chinese engineers for a posting in Europe, training call-center staff in India, or raising the awareness of police forces to the needs of diverse ethnic communities, it provides essential, practical, and powerful skills worldwide to an increasingly international workforce.

For details, visit www.culturesmartconsulting.com

CultureSmart!Consulting and **CultureSmart!** guides have both contributed to and featured regularly in the weekly travel program "Fast Track" on BBC World TV.

contents

Map of Mauritius	7
Introduction	8
Key Facts	10
Chapter 1: LAND AND PEOPLE	12
• The Indian Ocean Islands	12
• Geography	13
• Climate and Weather	19
• The People	21
• A Brief History	28
• Government and Politics	38
• Trade and International Relations	44
Chapter 2: VALUES AND ATTITUDES	48
• Tolerance and Diversity	48
• Hospitality and Meeting Foreigners	49
• Being Mauritian	49
• The Importance of Family	50
• The Impact of Religion	51
• Racism and Communalism	52
• The Gender Divide	54
• Closeness, Gossip, and Rumors	55
• Attitudes to Time	56
• Work Ethic	57
Chapter 3: BELIEFS, TRADITIONS, AND CELEBRATIONS	58
• Religion in Mauritius	58
• Shrines and Pilgrimages	64
• Births, Naming Ceremonies, and Birthdays	66
• Weddings	67
• Funerals	70
• Holidays and Festivals	71
• Remembering Slavery and Indenture	76
• Folklore and Superstitions	78
Chapter 4: MAKING FRIENDS	80
• Friendship Between Mauritians	80
• Meeting People	81

• Topics of Conversation and Taboo Subjects	83
• Invitations Home	85
• Courtship and Dating	86

Chapter 5: THE MAURITIANS AT HOME	88
--	-----------

• The Family	88
• Education	92
• Daily Life	94
• Meals of the Day	95
• Shopping	96
• Pets	97
• Dress and Clothing	98

Chapter 6: TIME OUT	100
----------------------------	------------

• The Beach, Bungalow, and Picnic	100
• Nature and the Outdoors	101
• Mauritian Cuisine	102
• Local Drinks	106
• Restaurants	108
• The Music of Mauritius	109
• Arts and Culture	113
• Shopping for Pleasure	117
• Sports	119

Chapter 7: TRAVEL, HEALTH, AND SAFETY	122
--	------------

• Red Tape	122
• Flights	123
• Travel to Réunion, Rodrigues, and the Outer Islands	124
• Public Transportation	125
• Taxis	126
• Driving	127
• Solo	130
• Where to Stay	130
• Places to Visit	131
• Health	133
• Safety	134
• Natural Disasters	136
• Emergency Services	136

contents

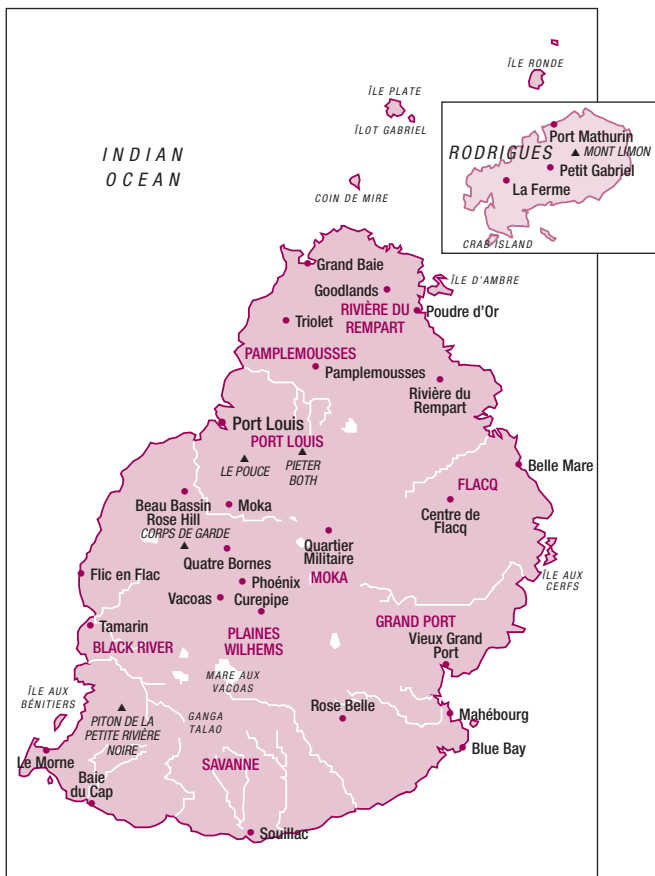
Chapter 8: BUSINESS BRIEFING	138
• The Business Classes	139
• Work Culture	140
• Setting Up a Meeting	141
• Business Dress	142
• Presentations	143
• Negotiations	143
• Contracts and Fulfillment	144
• Business Entertainment	145
• Women in Business	146
• Bureaucracy	146
• Corruption and Nepotism	147
 Chapter 9: COMMUNICATING	 148
• The Languages of Mauritius	148
• Conversation and Choosing the Right Language	154
• Humor	157
• Greetings	158
• Body Language	159
• The Media	160
• Services	162
• Conclusion	163
 Further Reading	 165
Index	166
Acknowledgments	168

NOTE ON SPELLING

Throughout the text, you will find many Kreol words and others derived from Asian, African, and Malagasy languages. Many of these words are often only spoken, and others have variable spellings. In the case of Kreol words, we try to follow the spelling adopted in the *Diksioner Morisien* (the first monolingual Kreol dictionary) by Arnaud Carpooran.

When referring to the creole language spoken in Mauritius, we have used the spelling “Kreol” to distinguish it from “Creole,” a term used to refer to Mauritians of predominantly African and Malagasy ancestry.

Map of Mauritius



introduction

A small, exotic, multicultural island nation in the middle of the Indian Ocean, Mauritius gives the impression of a paradise on earth. Graceful palm trees, fine sandy beaches, blissful lagoons, and endless fields of lush, green sugarcane help to reinforce its romantic image.

This island nation is a very new society, forged over the past three centuries. Although similar in many ways to neighboring Réunion and the Seychelles, and to Caribbean cultures such as Trinidad and Tobago where there is also a mixed population of African and Indian ancestry, Mauritius actually has a much greater South and East Asian influence than these islands. But that is not the whole story: a strong French cultural and linguistic heritage persists, even though the island was taken over and ruled by Britain for a hundred and fifty-eight years, and you only have to scratch the surface of many a Mauritian custom to find its African and Malagasy roots.

Although it would be difficult to claim a single overarching identity for the Mauritian people, certain traits recur in the accounts of foreign visitors: hospitality, warmth, and friendliness, albeit with an unexpected element of reserve. Above all, the most defining characteristic of the Mauritians is their multiculturalism. The island's rich cultural diversity reflects the origins of the people who settled there, and Mauritian language, food, and religion form an intoxicating medley.

Other customs have been created locally and have become part of an authentic native culture that is shared by all—such as sega, the distinctive, lively, and popular music of Mauritius.

Mauritius is not always, however, the haven of peace, love, and understanding that it may at first sight seem, and the reality is more complex and nuanced. Although today many Western and European-style customs are encroaching on both private and public life, Mauritians are ambivalent about this, and ancestral traditions are still firmly established in the daily lives of the population. On the downside, the Mauritians have a tendency to fight among themselves and to create communal stereotypes of their compatriots—Creoles are characterized as lazy and fun-loving, Indo- and Sino-Mauritians as clannish and nepotistic, and Franco-Mauritians as insular and racist, for example. However, the march of modernization and globalization means that many young, socially mobile Mauritians now share a common culture and outlook on life, where the sense of being Mauritian far outweighs ancestral ties and divisive communalism.

This book aims to make sense of the modern and the traditional, of the complex legacy of shared and ancestral cultures. It will help you to navigate your way through the contradictions of Mauritian society and to enrich your experience of this fascinating and beautiful island.

Key Facts

Official Name	République de Maurice (Republic of Mauritius)	
Capital City	Port Louis (pop. 150,000)	
Main Towns	Beau Bassin, Rose Hill, Quatre Bornes, Vacoas, Phœnix, Curepipe, Mahébourg, Port Mathurin (Rodrigues)	
Area	788 sq. miles (2,040 sq. km), incl. dependencies of Rodrigues, Saint Brandon, and Agalega	
Climate	Tropical maritime, with southeast trade winds. Hot, wet, humid summer, November–April; dry, cooler winter, May–October	Risk of heavy rain and cyclones during summer
Population	1.3 million (2010 estimate)	
Ethnic Makeup	Indo-Mauritian: 68% Creole: 27% Sino-Mauritian: 3% Franco-Mauritian: 2%	
Languages	English (de facto official language), French (business and media), Kreol (lingua franca), Bhojpuri, and other South and East Asian languages	
Religion	Hindu 48%; Roman Catholic 24%; other Christian 8%; Muslim 17%; other (including Buddhist) 3%	

Government	Parliamentary multiparty democracy based on Westminster model. Coalitions common. The president is head of state.	Nine mainland administrative districts and three dependencies (Rodrigues, Saint Brandon, and Agalega)
Currency	Mauritian rupee (Rs or MUR)	The exchange rate in 2010 was roughly Rs30 to US\$1.
Media	MBC broadcasts national TV and radio. Also, local and international commercial channels	Free and democratic press, including <i>L'Express</i> , <i>Le Mauricien</i> , and <i>Week-End</i> (mostly in French)
Media: English-Language	<i>Mauritius Times</i> (weekly)	
Electricity	220 volts, 50 Hz	Both European two-prong (type C) and British three-prong (type G) plugs used. Power outages occur, especially during cyclones.
Weights and Measures	Generally metric, with some old French measurements still in use	Kilograms (kg) used in Western shops and supermarkets. Pounds (lb) often used at fruit and vegetable markets
Internet Domain	.mu	
Telephone	The country code for Mauritius is 230.	
Time Zone	GMT + 4 hours (+ 3 hours during British Summer Time)	

LAND & PEOPLE

THE INDIAN OCEAN ISLANDS

Mauritius is a sovereign island nation in the southwest Indian Ocean, which—together with Réunion, Rodrigues, and the Cargados Carajos Shoals—is one of the Mascarene Islands. Rodrigues is a smaller island under Mauritian rule, approximately 350 miles (560 km) east of its larger neighbor. The Cargados Carajos Shoals (also Mauritian) are located some 267 miles (430 km) to the northeast of the mainland. Réunion is a slightly larger but less populous island ruled by France as a *département d'outre-mer* (overseas department), and lies approximately 135 miles (220 km) west of Mauritius.

The Mascarenes share a common geological origin and natural history. They were formed by a volcanic ridge that emerged some 8 to 10 million years ago, which explains the strange rocks and craters one finds on Mauritius, and the active volcano on Réunion.

Alongside their Indian Ocean neighbors Madagascar, the Seychelles, and the Comoros, these islands have a shared history of slavery, colonialism (under France or Britain), and maritime trade. Looking further back and further afield, the islands of the western Indian Ocean have been linked, historically, to places as far-flung as East Africa, the

Arabian Peninsula, South and Southeast Asia, and beyond. As such, movements of people, goods, languages, and cultures have created a shared sense of belonging among the peoples of this part of the world. These days, many of the islands in the southwest Indian Ocean share a common bond in the French language.

GEOGRAPHY

The Republic of Mauritius (République de Maurice in French, Repiblik Moris in Kreol) comprises the main island of Mauritius and three dependencies: Rodrigues, the Cargados Carajos Shoals (or Saint Brandon), and the Agalega Islands. The country also holds territorial claims to Tromelin Island and the Chagos Archipelago, which are ruled, respectively, by France and the United Kingdom. The capital, Port Louis, is found in the northwest of



Mauritius. Administratively, the country is divided into nine mainland districts and three dependencies, which are subdivided into smaller municipalities.

Mauritius

The main island of Mauritius (Île Maurice), almost oval in shape and surrounded by coral reef, lies approximately 530 miles (855 km) east of

Madagascar in the southwest Indian Ocean. It is just north of the Tropic of Capricorn at 20° S, 57° E. A dot in the ocean measuring just 720 square miles (1,865 sq. km), it is about half the size of Rhode Island, or comparable to the English county of Buckinghamshire. Mauritius is renowned for its natural beauty, which led Mark Twain, who visited in 1896, to remark: “What there is of Mauritius is beautiful.”

A coastline fringed with palms and casuarina trees, and measuring around 110 miles (177 km), rises sometimes steadily, sometimes steeply toward a central plateau at more than 1,300 feet (400 m). Though not nearly as rugged as neighboring Réunion, Mauritius is mountainous, with oddly shaped volcanic peaks dotting the interior of the island (Twain called them “quaint and picturesque groups of toy peaks”). The highest peak is Piton de la Petite Rivière Noire (2,717 feet, 828 m), followed closely by Pieter Both (2,690 feet, 820 m), Le Pouce (2,661 feet, 811 m), and Corps de Garde (2,362 feet, 720 m). Rivers, waterfalls, lakes, and reservoirs also occupy the interior, and the little



that remains of the once-pristine forest is now called the Black River Gorges National Park. The non-mountainous parts of the landscape are now dominated by endless fields of sugarcane.

The capital and main port, Port Louis (pronounced “por-looe” or “port-looiss”), is located in the northwest of Mauritius. Around 150,000 people (Port-Louisiens) live here, and many more travel to work here from other places on the island. Slightly further south, several towns have almost merged into one vast urban area within the Plaines Wilhems district (the central plateau towns, population approximately 400,000). These comprise, from northwest to southeast, Beau Bassin, Rose Hill (pronounced “roz-eel”), Quatre Bornes (“cat-born”), Vacoas (“vak-wa”), Phœnix (“fen-ees”), and Curepipe (“cure-peep”), and are fast becoming the residential heartland of an urban middle class. Nowadays, they are popular among many expats who find Port Louis and other coastal areas to be too hot and humid. Mahébourg (pronounced “my-bor” or “my-burg,” population 30,000) feels somewhat provincial in comparison, but has a popular market and historic sites related to Dutch settlement.

Rodrigues

At 40 square miles (104 sq. km), the younger island of Rodrigues is much smaller than Mauritius. Although hilly, its highest point, Mont Limon, reaches only 1,305 feet (398 m). Like Mauritius, Rodrigues (usually pronounced “rod-reeg” or “rod-reegs”) is surrounded by lagoon and coral reef.

It was initially visited by the Arabs, the Portuguese,



and the Dutch before being settled by the French and their African slaves in the eighteenth century, and then eventually seized by the British in 1809. Since October 2002, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly has enjoyed limited autonomy from Mauritius. The mostly Creole population stands at approximately 38,000 (2010), living mainly in the sleepy capital Port Mathurin and some other small settlements. Life is quieter than on Mauritius, and Rodrigues has yet to feel the effects of mass tourism. Employment is mainly in fishing and small-scale farming. With an early-to-bed, early-to-rise culture, many businesses close before 4:00 p.m.

Cargados Carajos Shoals (Saint Brandon)

The Cargados Carajos Shoals (commonly known as Saint Brandon) lie some 267 miles (430 km) northeast of Mauritius. They consist of a few dozen scattered sandbanks, shoals, rocks, and islets within 73 square miles (190 sq. km) of reef, protecting important flora and marine life. A small, non-permanent community of Mauritians works mainly in the fishing industry.