

TRIED & TESTED



SHANTI MAURICE MAURITIUS

by Sue Ryan

I first visited this hotel four years ago in its days as Shanti Ananda. I loved its location on the southernmost tip of Mauritius on a pristine sandy horseshoe cove and the bedrooms with their stylish bathrooms. But there were contradictions.

The ethos, culture and spirituality of its sister hotel, Ananda in the Himalayas, did not translate easily to the holidaymaking haven of Mauritius. I ate ayurvedic food, eschewed alcohol and attended Verdanta classes; but I yearned to lie on the beach, chill out and have a glass of champagne as the sun sank into the Indian Ocean.

So when I heard owning company Nira had changed the hotel's name to Shanti Maurice and repositioned itself as one which would cater for families and honeymooners I was not surprised. And what a good decision by incoming general manager Paul van Frank - formerly of Como Shambhala in Bali. Rayawadee in Krabi and Shanti Ananda. After low occupancy, the staff are coming to terms with what it means to have near full occupancy in the resort's 61 suites and villas.

Second time around, you can still opt for wellness and ayurveda and, thanks to its original incarnation, it has one of the largest spas in the region. Built around a tea pavilion and with its own pool, I was still tempted to spend my days in Nira Spa, where indulgence is now the main game rather than the side show. As well as yoga, Tai Chi and meditation there are classes on mixology and cigars, and a kids club.

The new head chef Willibald Reinbacher has introduced contemporary Cape cuisine into his Stars restaurant, while a mix of international and excellent Asian food is offered in Pebbles, with most of the food sourced locally. We ate in Stars and dined on room service - we were babysitting our grand-daughter - and with the ocean just yards from our beachfront suite, both were equally romantic.

A child-friendly hotel with all the facilities of a destination spa and in a honeymoon setting is something of a rarity, but Shanti Maurice has achieved it.

HOW TO SELL IT

- Dining at the Fish and Rhum Shack is a fun twist - twice a week, a remote part of the beach is turned into this rustic restaurant offering barbecued fish and a choice of around 20 urns.
- Excursions such as an early morning swim with dolphins.

How to book it

Seven nights with Seasons costs from £2,850 per person, including accommodation in a junior suite, breakfast and economy flights and transfers. Tel: 01244 206 000, seasons.co.uk

Riviere des Galets, Chemin Grenier, Mauritius
T: 00 230 603 7200,
shantimaurice.com

THE LODGE VERBIER, SWITZERLAND

by April Hutchinson

Watching new Brit comedy *Chalet Girl*, I sniggered smugly along, having just returned from a "super chalet" myself.

But while the millionaire (played by Bill Nighy) who owns the chalet in the film may be fictitious, there's a real-life entrepreneur behind The Lodge - Sir Richard Branson.

True to his style of relaxed entertainment, the lodge features a "den" - with gigantic TV, entertainment library, bar and pool table. There's also an indoor pool, steam and sauna rooms, spa room and outdoor tub.

Seven rooms and two "master suites" are rounded off with a "bunkroom" where up to six children can sleep. The "adult" rooms are neutral and homely, with open-plan bathrooms with oodles of Cowshed amenities.

Taking care of guests are 13 staff and to even out the numbers, there's a completely daff dog called Barn Barn. The Lodge is mainly sold on a solus-use basis, but some weeks are sold hotel-style.

The Lodge has a dual personality too, with *Sound of Music*-type scenery in the summer and plenty of activities,

from golf to paragliding; rock climbing to mountain scooters; yoga to tennis. For hikers, there are 400km of trails around Verbier and across the Bagnes Valley.

HOW TO BOOK IT From £560 per night (summer); or £5,470 for exclusive use (incl meals, drinks and driver). Tel: 0208 600 0430, thelodge.virgin.com



TAJ BOSTON USA

by Olivia Hemmings

Located on the corner of Newbury and Arlington streets, and facing Boston Common, this 1927-built hotel is pretty much as central as it gets for the city's theatre district and fashionable shops.

In town for some Christmas shopping myself, I was also tempted by the display of culinary expertise in the hotel lobby - a large gingerbread and iced replica of the Taj Mahal, made for the festive season.

More permanent is the hotel's impressive £1.3 million collection of paintings, including, in the Churchill Suite, a portrait of Winston himself who spent many a night here.

My park-view suite wasn't quite as grand as Winston's, but there were plenty of special touches, like the bath menu with choice of scents and bubbles for celebrating different occasions. Anyone staying in these suites can also take advantage of the services of the "fireplace butler" who can be called upon to add a warming winter ambience to their room.

Despite no on-site spa, a massage room is available for guests wanting to indulge in further pampering after a Carrie Bradshaw-style blitz of the shops; but most guests seem to make use of Exhale Spa, one block away, which allows Taj customers to use its facilities, and charge back to their room.

Mod cons such as in-room Wi-Fi were noticeably absent, but what the hotel lacks in technology is made up for throughout the classic gilt-edged antique furniture, plush cream and gold threads of its 273 guestrooms (including 45 suites) and views over the park.

Breakfast in main restaurant The Cafe erred on the side of tradition, with a limited but tasty-looking menu rather than the modern-day buffet. Alternatively, a champagne Sunday brunch is served on the rooftop between April and November.

But for clients with £3,000 to spare per night, there's no need to dine in the restaurants, as the Presidential Suite comes complete with its own service kitchen and a separate bar.

Tel: 00 800 4588 1825, tajhotels.com

HOW TO BOOK IT

Kuoni offers a four-night stay at Taj Boston in a deluxe room, including flights with British Airways from Heathrow, from £690pp (room-only, March departures, based on two sharing). Tel: 01306 747 008, kuoni.co.uk

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