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Heaven for Betsy: Denise van Outen visits Mauritius with her lively toddler in tow

By [Denise Van Outen](#)

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Mauritius has been at the top of my holiday wish list for years. Lots of friends had told me it's such a wonderful place, and as the Indian Ocean is my favourite part of the world I couldn't wait to go. But as I would be travelling with an 18-month-old, the one doubt I had was the 12-hour flight. It's always hard work flying with a toddler, but my husband Lee and I decided the long trek would be worth it when we finally got there.

Actually, flying out never seems such an ordeal because you're excited to be going somewhere nice - the difficult part is the flight home: as I was to discover, that is when you can start to feel pretty tired, despite the blissful tropical relaxation.



Beach chic: Denise covers up against the tropical sun during her five days in Mauritius

We had a night flight to Mauritius, which was great because Betsy slept for more than two-thirds of the journey, making things a lot easier. I kept her awake for a while after take-off and she went to sleep once they'd turned down the lights.

Fortunately, the place where we stayed was only 40 minutes from the airport. Heritage the Villas is a collection of beautiful luxury villas situated in landscaped gardens, with a lovely lagoon on one side and the

mountains of south-western Mauritius in the background.

It is a gated community, part of the 6,000-acre Domaine de Bel Ombre, a historic plantation estate where sugar cane is still grown. The resort also offers the imposing 200-year-old Chateau de Bel Ombre, an 18-hole championship golf course, blindingly white sandy beaches and, everywhere you look, gorgeous views of the Indian Ocean.

At our first, breathtaking sight of the resort, we knew we had made the right decision in coming here.

Domaine de Bel Ombre gave us the best of both worlds - we had the space and privacy of a villa, yet we were able to take our pick of the resort's 11 restaurants, as well as enjoying all the facilities of a five-star hotel, such as the beach club and the swimming pool. Everything we needed for a perfect holiday was right on our doorstep.

I know not everyone likes the idea of spending an entire holiday in a resort, but Domaine de Bel Ombre is so huge you can relax in the knowledge that absolutely everything you may want is at hand.

In fact, the place is so big, there are quite long distances to cover and guests are thoughtfully given their own golf buggy to drive around during their stay. But we often left our buggy where it was parked - I quite liked the chance to stretch my legs on a 15-minute walk to breakfast.



Beach babe: Little Betsy and her mum Denise relax on the beach

The weather was lovely, really lovely. I've been to tropical places often enough to understand that conditions can be changeable and rain is far from rare. In fact, when we arrived, there was a rumour that rain was on the way. In the event, we had just one day during our entire five-day stay when it rained - and

that was only for about three hours.

But even in the wet, there's plenty to do. Betsy still made her daily visit to the amazing kids' club, which is huge, with its own children's swimming pool and play area, making this a perfect destination for parents with young children. They have put a lot of thought into making sure children are well looked after. For example, most of the play area is under cover, sheltering youngsters from sun and rain alike.

While the kids' club was a regular for Betsy, we also tried lots of activities as a family. Because it's such a big place, we went to different sections of the beach and sampled various restaurants for lunch.

Such a busy agenda, coupled with the warm tropical weather, meant that Betsy would often fall asleep under a beach umbrella - what bliss!



Spaced out: Domaine de Bel Ombre resort is so huge, guests are given a golf buggy to get around

The quality of the cuisine is definitely one of the strengths of Domaine de Bel Ombre. We tried five of the resort's restaurants and they were all very good. As you might expect, the dining experiences on offer are a complete mix. You can have fine cuisine in the chateau, where you will be served a fabulous five-course meal with great wines, or you can go to the beach club and enjoy amazing salads.

One of my favourite places was Gin'ja, a fantastic Asian restaurant right on the beach. Their speciality is fresh seafood, with black cod as good as anything you can have at Nobu in London - it was wonderful.

The restaurants are also great for healthy eating. At the buffets, for example, you will find plenty of sensible options. Even though Betsy is quite young, I'm trying to teach her to eat healthily so I make sure I have lots of fruit and vegetables and colour on my plate.

For breakfast at Domaine de Bel Ombre, we'd always have a plate of fresh fruit to share (we showed great fortitude in avoiding all the lovely pastries). And to maintain our energy levels, poached eggs have become a holiday favourite.

Service in the restaurants was brilliant. I've been to the Maldives and the Seychelles, which are all lovely, but I would say the Mauritian people are exceptionally helpful. They're also very efficient - service was incredibly fast. Sometimes in Indian Ocean destinations you find the attitude can be very laid-back. Lovely, but things can take a long time. Here, I enjoyed ordering lunch in the knowledge it would arrive pretty promptly.



Family favourite: Denise, husband Lee Mead and Betsy enjoy the Domaine de Bel Ombre resort

As a couple both working in showbusiness, we are always asked what we think about the entertainment on offer at our holiday destination.

Unfortunately, with Betsy in tow, it was difficult for us to get out in the evenings. A pianist and singers performed in the hotel's lounge bar, and we would have loved to see them, but when you have a toddler you can't keep her out in her pram until all hours while you sit in a piano cocktail bar.

Instead, after dinner, we would just go back to the villa, put Betsy to bed and watch a movie before going to sleep.

There were a few Britons staying at the resort who I think were wondering whether Lee and I might get up in the bar and do a bit of a song one evening. But no - we were definitely there for a quiet, relaxing holiday.

The Mauritius trip proved to us that we could go quite a long way for a short holiday and still have a fantastic time. But for things to work really well, you need to plan your flights with care.

If we'd had a night flight coming home, Betsy would have slept during the homeward journey too. But she didn't really sleep on the flight back and, although we had come prepared with all sorts of things to keep her busy, it became a bit of a struggle on such a long flight - quite hard work, really, and by the time we arrived home I was worn out, which was a shame after we had had such a relaxing time.

Before our holiday in Mauritius, I had always been a big Maldives fan. In fact, I've been lucky enough to visit quite a few islands in the Maldives. We were actually married in the Seychelles, at a place called Labriz on the stunning, mountainous island of Silhouette - for that reason the Seychelles will always be special to me - and then we journeyed on to honeymoon in the Maldives.

As you can tell, I love the Indian Ocean - I just think you can't beat it. In my experience, the Maldives is much more of a romantic destination for couples - the places I've stayed at there are not really that well geared up for families.

I'm sure there are hotels there with fantastic kids' clubs, but I've only ever stayed in places where you don't really see any children. As for other tropical destinations, I am not a big fan of the Caribbean, having never had a particularly great holiday there. I love the USA, though.



Child's play: Daddy Lee helps little Betsy enjoy the children's club at the Domaine de Bel Ombre

Back to Mauritius, and yes I would definitely return with Betsy when she's a little older.

Alternatively, I can't help thinking it would be nice to go back just with Lee, leave Betsy with the grandparents and have a romantic little holiday there.

As lovely as it was to be with Betsy, it would be great actually to be able to do all the things on offer there, such as spending time in the piano bars.

We saw plenty of couples having a romantic time and we couldn't help thinking how wonderful it would be to go there as a couple.

But putting romantic daydreams to one side, we went with the specific intention of enjoying pure relaxation as a family, and that's exactly how our short holiday worked out.

Betsy had the time of her life splashing around in the sea - the water in Mauritius is clear and really warm. What's more, the sand is so soft, it's like dust.

So as a family destination, Mauritius really does tick all the right boxes. I just wish it just wasn't quite so far away.

Denise van Outen stars in the film version of Run For Your Wife, to be released in spring 2012.

Getting there

Family specialist Tots Too (020 7284 3344, TotsToo.com) offers seven nights at Heritage the Villas (heritagethevillas.mu) from £6,699 for a family of four, including return Air Mauritius flights, B&B accommodation in a two-bedroom villa with pool and golf buggy, private transfers, unlimited green fees at the Heritage Golf Club, plus £100 credit towards babysitting.

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