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# Mauritius: Breaking New Ground

Posted by Kevin Brass in [Eye Candy](#), [Q&A](#), [News](#), [General](#)

Although well-established as a high-end tourist destination, the Indian Ocean nation of Mauritius is a relative newcomer to international residential development.

For Anton de Waal, C.E.O. of Villas Valriche, a resort project under construction on the island, that means developing training programs for local workers, as well as marketing and sales initiatives. “Our challenge is really to move the local community from agriculture and fisheries to one of leisure and tourism,” de Waal said.

[Mauritius](#) is a media darling these days. The New York Times named it one of the “[53 Places to Go in 2008](#).” Time Magazine praised its [economic strength](#). And the Daily Telegraph recently asked, “[Who needs the Caribbean when you can buy in Mauritius?](#)”

Scheduled for completion in 2009, the 106-hectare [Villas Valriche](#) will include 288 “plantation-style” villas, priced between \$800,000 and \$2.2 million (€555,000 to €1.5 million).

In an interview, de Waal discusses the challenges of building on Mauritius and the potential market.

**How might doing a development on Mauritius differ from, say, South Africa, in terms of permits and that sort of thing?**

I think all projects have problems with permits. You just have different

issues in different countries. Here we have what we call the Sugar Efficiency Act, which essentially regulates the conversion of land used for sugar cane to other property development, which is reasonably constraining. And we also have quite high demand for beachfront property obviously, so there are quite a few stakeholders interested in beachfront property and it's quite difficult to find beachfront property.

**Is it difficult to get beachfront land because the government is restricting development? Or is it just because it's not available for sale?**

It's all leasehold land on the beachfront. And essentially you've got to get a lease for the development for 60 year lease. And it's obviously quite difficult to get a 60-year lease on beachfront property because there is a lot of demand on the island. And I think the government is quite careful about how to use that resource efficiently.

**Looking at the market, what have you learned from the initial projects on the island and how they've been marketed?**

Well, our resort and the other resorts on the island are targeting South Africa, U.K. and France primarily, as well as Dubai. I'd say those are the major markets that all of us have experienced. ... U.K. and France from the leisure perspective and South Africa from an opportunity to expand out of South Africa. And then Dubai is very much more of an investment driven market.

Villa rendering for Villas Valriche

**When do you expect to have your first homes available?**

We're looking at Jan. 2009. **Have you broken ground?**

We're busy with infrastructure at the moment. We'll start the villa construction end of Jan., beginning of Feb., next year.

**How is your market different from other destinations?**

I think Mauritius itself has a very good name in terms of its tourism offering, right up at the high end... The other area of course is the economic stability. Mauritius has been independent since the Sixties, had its own government, the economy is stable, there are no exchange controls, the currency is convertible, the financial sector is booming as well. As a leisure destination Mauritius stands out, but also as a stable economy.

## **What's going to be your biggest challenge?**

I would say, we have a lot of variety [in designs] and that presents a challenge for us. We have set the bar quite high in terms of meeting the variety, so the construction will be challenging over the next year and a half. Apart from that, the big challenges are pretty much behind us now. Really now it's making sure we deliver on the product. In this environment it is sometimes quite difficult and that will be quite a challenge.

## **What do you mean by "this environment?"**

In the Mauritius construction environment. There are not that many construction companies and at the moment construction industry is booming. The tourism industry is booming. There are a lot of new hotels going up as well. So we've had difficulty finding construction. We've now found a contractor. And that's why I said it was quite a challenge last year.

The other challenge is making sure we have a sustainable development in the area. As you know, the sugar industry is declining because the European price has dropped and we have to reskill the people in the area.

## **Let's say I'm a luxury buyer looking at different destinations, why am I going to choose Mauritius?**

I think you're going to get a secure property, a secure freehold, on a fantastic site. Fantastic views of the seaside, great beach, wonderful beach club, first class golf course—in a region that has been properly planned in terms of urban development. There is a larger master plan for the entire region. So when you buy in the region, you know that not only will you be getting a fantastic place with a spectacular view, but also the greater area has been designed for sustainability of community.