

Discover Mauritius

The South-East of Mauritius is mostly untouched by man and still presents a gorgeous and picturesque green landscape, ideal for ecotourism. Development of infrastructure (cutting a road through the Valley of Ferney) was stopped in time by the PM's intervention and the area's natural beauty preserved.

BY JWALA KALLEE

Nature Nature, everywhere, Nature

Visitors, tourists, painters and photographers can continue to admire the magnificent scenery. The place is a configuration of mountains, hills and valleys, with the sea in the distance and roaming animals in the woods and forests an added bonus. Photographers and painters would have a field day in such a place.

A trek along the South East leads one to many natural beauty spots which have evocative names such as Le Domaine de l'Ylang Ylang. It lies on the same road leading to the Domaine du Chasseur (Domaine des Sept Vallées). Entrance is free but a fee is payable for a guided tour. Besides the lush green vegetation the most interesting thing about this 'domain' is the artisanal industry. Did you know that 50 kg of flowers can be used to produce a litre of essential oil? There is much to gain by visiting this industry. Continuing the way, the trekker reaches Anse Jonchée located 2 km from the coastal road in the hinterland. The trekker is indeed mesmerized by the breathtaking view. From Anse Jonchée the typical road bordered with sugar cane fields, banana plantations, and pineapple fields opens up leading to another domain, the Domaine du Chasseur.

This domain is perched on the hills, partially covered with forests and it extends till the summit of a crest from where one can enjoy the panoramic view. The area offers opportunities for several activities at reasonable prices. For instance, camping in bungalows for the weekend, a trip in the open, playing golf on

the mini pitch of 18 holes, hunting, kayaking, and the discovery of the mangrove along the coast are just some of the things that are possible. The Lion Mountain overlooking it represents one of the most charming sites of the island, right in the midst of luxuriant vegetation. It is also possible to stop and enjoy fantastic food while seated in wooden straw huts. This is a real treat and is highly recommended – the food consists of venison, fish and lobster. It's a recreational site propitious for strolling and breathing fresh air in the lap of nature. The domain attracts people of all cultures and backgrounds. Rustic chalets can be booked for the weekend and the delights of the woodland area can be enjoyed to the heart's content.

The trek passes through many varied places, with each one important in its own way, reflecting culture, history and economy to some extent. The Rault Biscuit Factory produces delicious cassava biscuits using old traditional recipes. The Dutch ruins cannot be missed at Vieux Grand Port, the oldest settlement in Mauritius. The Frederick Hendrik museum presents a site plan of the works that have been carried out along with various objects found during excavation and also illustrations of the island during the French period. Falaise Rouge is found opposite the Bay of Grand Port. It has been chosen to depict the historic battle of Grand Port. It was the sole naval victory of the French over the British.

Further south, one reaches Ferney which is where the Dutch first landed

when they came to Mauritius. In 1740, Labourdonnais in partnership with Didier de St Martin built a sugar factory there. At that time that locality was called l'Enfoncement des Hollandais. In 1758, Voltaire left France and settled in a village called Ferney near Geneva. Some admirers of Voltaire who came over here might have given the name of Ferney to that area, a name that has effectively been used from 1841. A decade ago the factory ceased to operate and the sugar cane from Ferney is now transported to Beau Champ sugar factory for processing. Ferney has recently been turned into an ecotourism sanctuary with the main objective of educating both the locals and tourists about the biodiversity of the island. The fauna and flora of the valley is there to be explored by the visitor. Ferney, facing the angry sea with waves sometimes very rough and rising high on the one hand and the green yellow Grand Port range on the other, commends itself to visitors. Activities galore include boating, fishing and swimming to some extent as it is not always safe because of the rising tide. The mountain side is aglow in the early morning with the rays of the rising sun. The whole mountainous panorama is indeed worth

beholding.

Another highlight is the Valley of Ferney. It offers the opportunity of a trail or a walk in the midst of nature. It allows locals and tourists to discover other enchanting sites, to blend nature and leisure while going out either with family or friends. The Ferney trail is also ideal for developing team spirit and enjoying fun and frolic with the birds and monkeys and stags that move around in groups. The trekkers may also show some measure of philanthropy by supporting the Ferney Valley and fighting for its preservation and protection. It also sensitises Mauritians to the need for preserving the fauna and flora which are constantly threatened by unscrupulous people bent on making money by all means. Financial support from lovers of nature may contribute to the protection and revaluation of the ecosystem.

There is a lot to do while visiting the area. Tailor-made excursions are proposed at a reasonable rate. They include spotting rare species of birds such as the kestrel, pink pigeon and echo parakeet and by chance hares or straying deer that seem to be indifferent to visitors. Streams with clean running water add to the charm of the Valley of Ferney.