

# the luxe league

Pop up treats, a 21st century attitude toward luxury and a cast of industry leaders are all part of this forward thinking resort group's game plan

TEXT MILA CREWE-BROWN PHOTOGRAPHS SUPPLIED



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Old warehouses flanking the Hudson; expertly crafted coffee in Williamsburg; spotted on Bedford Avenue; the Pulley Collective's moody interior; a sidewalk scene; Hometown Bar-B-Que plates up yummy food without a smile; behind the scenes at Four & Twenty Blackbirds bakery; Reynard restaurant at Wythe Hotel; fresh from the oven at Four & Twenty Blackbirds; tending the bar at Hometown; street art; Biblio's retro shopfront; Stumptown Cold Brew coffee in an apothecary-style bottle; classic signage at Sunny's.

Among piles of documents, to-do lists and sticky notes that have been propagating over the surface of my desk I pick up the press folder entitled LUX\*. Inside, a neat stack of papers awaits, together with the impressive quarterly LUX\* magazine, and the brand's CD of ambient tunes, all of which transports me instantly from my desk to a place where the only deadlines are the ones that dictate pool use. It's my point of departure and the first taste of what LUX is all about. I relish in it.

Paging through the magazine I'm poring over evocative images of mercurial sea waters, abundant coconut palms and beguiling stories from the exotic destinations under LUX\*'s ownership, captured and penned by some of the world's best. In just moments, the magazine has got my attention... and that's only the beginning.

Having whiled away the day in a state of torpor at Ile des Deux Cocos, a LUX\* owned private island off the South East of Mauritius no bigger than a postage stamp, a one hour minibus journey sees me wending through narrow and serpentine coastal roads along the island's Eastern shores. Flanked by encroaching rows of sugarcane I whizz past ramshackle homes with backyards choc full of cultivated veg. Further on, men are gathering up high on the ocean's banks to chew the fat in the late afternoon sun. Occasionally we pass through dense sections of tropical jungle straight out of Tarzan's back yard. We're headed northeast toward LUX\* Belle Mare, the latest in a string of hotels to be updated by the luxury resort group following a cash injection of \$20 000 000.

By the time we arrive, my predisposition for motion sickness has caught up with me, and yet somehow I'm able to inhale an ice lolly and Italian Kiss with nut filled centre offered to me upon arrival. Funny how the important things like ice cream and chocolate supersede any kind of ill.

I'm lead through the foyer, which is open on all sides to the salted Indian Ocean air. A ceiling of thatch and painted timber beams towers overhead. Beneath it, a cluster of colossal woven pendant lights stops me in my tracks, while elaborate black >

## LEISURE TRAVEL

peacock chairs and splashes of yellow and violet break the resort rulebook. As I descend to the bar, my eyes scan the vast swimming pool (vast as in 2 000sqm) and pristine beachfront just beyond it. I glimpse a row of wooly grasses emblazoned by the dusk light, which casts a golden glow on what surely must be paradise. I stop to take a seat at K Bar, with its central microbrewery and stacked blonde beer barrels filled with Belle Mare's very own unfiltered Flying Dodo brews. Why? Because when you're LUX\*, you make your own.



## 'US DEREPED UTES DOLUPTATECTO TECEA CONSEQUIANT VOLORRO VOLUPTATAE NONET RIBUSDAE. NAM, IUNT

An integral part of what makes LUX\* the brand it is, are its Reasons to Go, a unique set of initiatives that separates it from the rest. One of my favourites is Phone Home (by way of a rotary dial VOIP telephone in a red London phone booth while someone other than you foots the bill). And the Secret Bar, a mini bar on wheels, stocked up and hidden on the grounds each day, awaiting thirsty (and surprised) guests. 'It's about experiences,' Ashish Modak, the resorts General Manager sums up, as he whisks me off on a mini tour of the property, stopping in the back of the ICI ice cream kitchen and out of the heat to sample their celebrated iced delights.

So who better to bring their look up to speed with current trends and introduce her brand of magic to its aesthetic than Kelly Hoppen, one of the globe's foremost interior designers? Celebrated for her subtle take on comfort Kelly's treatment of Belle Mare is fresh and contemporary, steering clear of outdated notions. 'Often luxury hotels can be guilty of over cluttering, I wanted to strip that all back,' she explains. Her aim is echoed in the hotel's light infused beach-centric design, which carefully walks the line between laid-back and luxe.

You'll sense her signature harmonious colour palette grounded by taupe and crisp white, but it's enlivened by vibrant shots of pink and orange. Even the materials used suggest a more understated approach – thatched roofs, lime washed pine panelling, sun-silvered balau decking and Egyptian cotton. And then there are the beds... specially designed for the group by a Pretoria based aeronautical engineer. Trust me – you've never had a night's sleep as sublime as this.

The element of surprise is reinforced when lunch is delivered on the deck by head chef Walter Lanfranchi who rides in on one of the hotel's hot pink Montrose bikes (available to hire), his basket spilling over with freshly baked bread she he's followed by the rest of his pedaling team. I later stumble upon an intriguing pop-up café among the palm trees. Come lunchtime the El Jefe



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Old warehouses flanking the Hudson; expertly crafted coffee in Williamsburg; spotted on Bedford Avenue; the Pulley Collective's moody interior; a sidewalk scene; Hometown Bar-B-Que plates up yummy food without a smile; behind the scenes at Four & Twenty Blackbirds bakery; Reynard restaurant at Wythe Hotel; fresh from the oven at Four & Twenty Blackbirds; tending the bar at Hometown; street art; Biblio's retro shopfront; Stumptown Cold Brew coffee in an apothecary-style bottle; classic signage at Sunny's.

## LEISURE TRAVEL

food. The majestic Rolls Royce that it's hitched to once belonged to The Queen of England, naturally. But don't expect to see these concepts stagnating over time. The LUX\* team meets every six months to re-evaluate their Reasons to Go, hashing out the latest global trends and ensuring that LUX\* remains ahead of the pack.

The on point food and drink offering doesn't stop there. You've a choice of more restaurants and bars than you could wish for. Most notably, the quirky Duck Laundry doing authentic Asian fare and the very chic Amari by Vineet – the domain of Michelin starred Chef Vineet Bhatia, whose focus is on contemporary Indian.

Perhaps most impressive of all is their dedication to great coffee. I found myself stationed at Café LUX\* (another of their Reasons to Go) most days. It's their café where the coffee is so on the money you'll be hard pressed to leave. Roasting their own organic Island blend on site, conceived for them by Deluxe Coffee's Judd Francis, you'll find everything from the perfect flat white to ahead of the curve brews like nitro coffee, cold drip and iced coffee poured from a beer tap.

Ranking high as one of the Reasons to Go is ICI. That's Mecca for those who yen for a little of the icy stuff. Picture a retro ice cream truck, that churns out the works, from homemade ice lollies and ice cream sandwiches to authentic sorbets and gelatos, all of them made on site from Island sourced ingredients and served in waffle cones made fresh while you wait. Vanilla and chocolate? Think again. ICI takes it up a notch with flavour combinations such as pineapple and chilli, or tamarind with coconut, curry leaves, coriander and lemon grass. Merely calling it ice cream is an insult. With innovation like that, it's not a box ticking resort. It's far more than that, it's a collective of experiences designed to stay with you long after you've left.



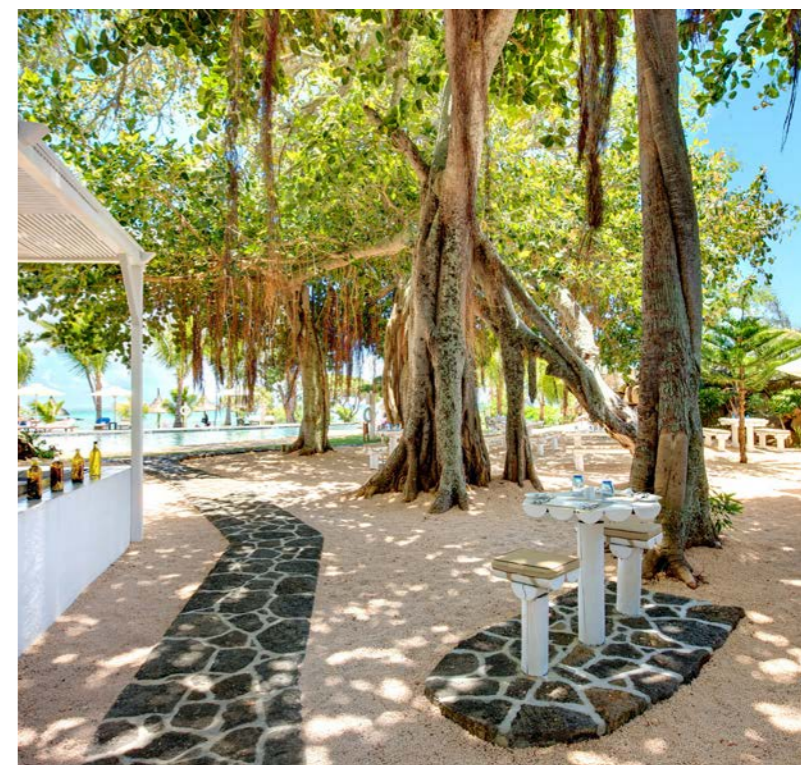
CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Old warehouses flanking the Hudson; expertly crafted coffee in Williamsburg; spotted on Bedford Avenue; the Pulley Collective's moody interior; a sidewalk scene; Hometown Bar-B-Que plates up yummy food without a smile; behind the scenes at Four & Twenty Blackbirds bakery; Reynard restaurant at Wythe

## GRAND GAUBE

Less than an hour up the coast in the island's north, LUX\* Grand Gaube is Belle Mare's more secluded sister. Nestled into a peninsula, it offers three smaller, more private beaches (rather than Belle Mare's public one) to choose from, making it a popular choice for those seeking a romantic getaway.

My favourite spot has to be their Banyan Tree restaurant. It's easily one of the most sublime places to linger over a meal, especially when you're seated in the shade of one of a 200 plus year old banyan tree, being lulled by a guitar-playing musician.

But it's Mr Bhasker Desai, the group's astronomer who leaves the biggest impression as he's giving me a guided tour of the galaxy. Through the lens of his telescope I'm spying a constellation that's 2600 light years away, and for the first time (thanks to Mr Desai) I'm able to fully comprehend what that means. I'm gazing at a cluster of stars between 190 and 240 million years old. When was the last time a resort offered you that kind of experience? ☺



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Old warehouses flanking the Hudson; expertly crafted coffee in Williamsburg; spotted on Bedford Avenue; the Pulley Collective's moody interior; a sidewalk scene; Hometown Bar-B-Que plates up yummy food without a smile; behind the

## GETTING THERE

Air Mauritius flies daily out of Johannesburg (except on Wednesdays), three times a week from Cape Town and twice a week from Durban.