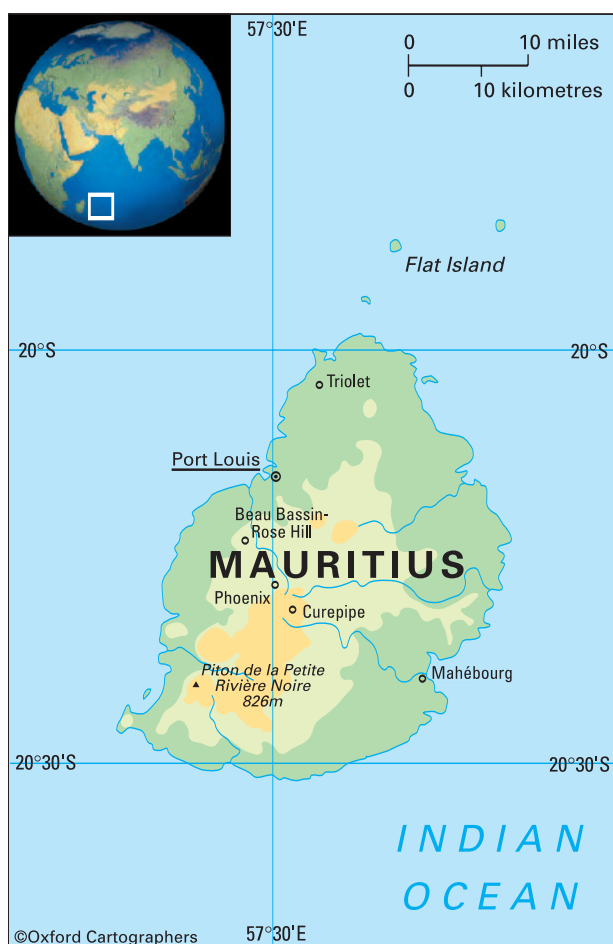


# Mauritius



## KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1968
Population:	1,288,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	3.5% p.a. 1990–2009
UN HDI 2010:	world ranking 72
Official language:	English
Time:	GMT plus 4hr
Currency:	Mauritian rupee (MRs)

## Geography

Area:	2,040 sq km
Coastline:	177km
Capital:	Port Louis

The Republic of Mauritius, an island country in the Indian Ocean, lies east of Madagascar and the south-east African coast. Its nearest neighbour is the French island of Réunion. The Constitution of Mauritius provides that Mauritius includes the islands of Mauritius, Rodrigues, Agalega, Tromelin, Cargados Carajos and the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia and any other island comprised in the State of Mauritius. Mauritius has always maintained that it has sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago but has not been able so far to exercise its sovereignty.

**Area:** Island of Mauritius 1,864 sq km; Rodrigues 104 sq km; total area, including other islands 2,040 sq km.

**Main towns:** Port Louis (capital, pop. 155,600 in 2009), Beau Bassin–Rose Hill (110,400), Vacoas–Phoenix (106,300), Curepipe (83,800), Quatre Bornes (80,600), Triolet (23,600), Goodlands (21,100), Central Flacq (17,900), Bel Air (17,900), Mahébourg (17,100), St Pierre (16,400), Le Hochet (15,400) and Grand Baie (11,600).

**Topography:** The island of Mauritius is almost entirely surrounded by coral reefs, with lagoons and coral-sand beaches. Mountains, with rocky peaks, rise abruptly from the broad fertile plains; within lies the central plateau. The rivers flow fast through deep ravines, with frequent waterfalls. They are not navigable, but fill eight reservoirs. The longest is the 34km Grand River South-East. There are two natural lakes, Grand Bassin and Bassin Blanc, both craters of extinct volcanoes.

**Climate:** The climate is maritime subtropical, with south-east trade winds blowing for much of the year. Summer, the rainy season, is from November to April, winter from June to September. Rainfall ranges from 80mm in October to 310mm in February. Heavy rains fall mainly from late December to the beginning of April. Cyclones, occurring in the summer, occasionally do severe damage.

**Environment:** The most significant issues are water pollution, and degradation of coral reefs.

## did you know?

Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio, a Frenchman whose parents originated from Mauritius, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2008.

Mauritius has one of the highest life expectancies in Africa (72 years).

**Vegetation:** The mountain foothills are densely vegetated, many planted with sugar cane and tea. Some 4,600 hectares of forest land have been set aside as nature reserves. Remains of the original ebony forests, felled by the early settlers, have survived here. The uplands have been extensively replanted with conifers and eucalyptus. Trees include coastal casuarina trees (called filaos), the Indian almond tree (badamier), ficus (multipliant), flametree (flamboyant), African tulip, bauhinia and jacaranda. Mangroves grow along the east and south-east coasts. Many indigenous trees and tree orchids have vanished, but over 10,000 plant-species remain, of which more than 150 are indigenous to Mauritius and 40 to Rodrigues. Forest covers 18% of the land area, having declined at 0.5% p.a. 2000–07.

Arable land comprises 44% and permanent cropland 2% of the total land area.

**Wildlife:** Mauritius was the home of the dodo, an extinct species of flightless large turkey. Conservation systems are now well enforced, but only nine of a known 25 species of indigenous birds remain, including the Mauritius kestrel and the pink pigeon. The Rodrigues fruit bat or golden bat was in danger of becoming extinct until recently; the Mauritius fruit bat is more common. Javanese deer, introduced by the Dutch for food, are found mainly in the uplands and the ravines, and protected by hunting restrictions. There are 12 species of lizards, four of non-poisonous snakes and 2,000 of insects and butterflies. Three of the butterflies – the citrus, ficus and sailor – are unique to the islands. Marine fauna is very rich.

**Transport:** There are 2,020km of roads, 100% paved, including at least 30km of motorways and 940km of main roads. There is no railway.

Port Louis is the main harbour and only commercial port. Facilities include a container terminal and terminals for the bulk handling of sugar, oil, wheat and cement.

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport at Plaisance is in the south-east of the island, some 50km from Port Louis. There is an airstrip at Plaine Corail on Rodrigues receiving a daily service from Mauritius.

## Society

### KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 631

Life expectancy: 72 years

Net primary enrolment: 94%

**Population:** 1,288,000 (2009); 42% lives in urban areas; growth 0.9% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 14 per 1,000 people (28 in 1970); life expectancy 72 years (62 in 1970).

About 68% of the population is of Indian descent, 27% Creole, and the remainder largely of Chinese or French descent.

**Language:** The official language is English; French-based Creole is the mother tongue of many Mauritians and the most widely spoken language. Other languages include Bhojpuri 12% and French 3% (2000 census).

**Religion:** Hindus 48%, Christians 32% (Roman Catholics 24%), Muslims 17% (2000 census).

**Media:** Daily newspapers and periodicals reflect the country's wide cultural mix and are published in French, English, Hindi, Urdu and Chinese. The leading dailies are *L'Express*, *Le Matinal* and *Le Mauricien* (afternoon).

The Mauritius Broadcasting Company provides public TV and radio and is funded by advertising and licence fees. There are several other private TV channels and radio stations.

Some 96% of households have TV sets (2007). There are 174 personal computers (2006) and 225 internet users (2009) per 1,000 people.

**Education:** Public spending on education was 3.2% of GDP in 2009. There are seven years of compulsory education starting at age five. Primary school comprises six years and secondary seven, with cycles of three and four years. Some 98% of pupils complete primary school (2008). The school year starts in January. Education is free at the primary and secondary levels, partly subsidised at the pre-primary level and heavily subsidised at the tertiary level.

Tertiary education centres on the University of Mauritius, which comprises faculties of Agriculture, Engineering, Law and Management, Science (including the Department of Medicine), and Social Studies and Humanities. Other institutions include University of Technology (operational from September 2001), Mauritius Institute of Education (training teachers), Mahatma Gandhi Institute (courses in Asian culture), the Mauritius College of the Air (distance education for adults and primary and secondary students) and the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Medical College (established at Belle Rive in 1999, offers degrees in medicine and dentistry). The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 117:100 (2008). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 96% (2008).

**Health:** Overall, the health profile is similar to that of developed countries. Health care in the public sector is free to all Mauritians. As well as some 13 hospitals, there are area and community health centres. 99% of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 91% have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2009). Infant mortality was 15 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (67 in 1960). Malaria was substantially eradicated in the 1950s. A national AIDS prevention and control programme has been running since 1987. In 2009, 1.0% of people aged 15–49 were HIV positive.

**Communications:** Country code 230; internet domain '.mu'. There are some public telephones. Mobile phone coverage is good. Internet cafes can be found in the main towns. There is a good postal service.

There are 294 main telephone lines and 844 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

**Public holidays:** New Year (two days), Abolition of Slavery (1 February), National Day (12 March), Labour Day (1 May), All Saints' Day (1 November), Arrival of the Indentured Labourers (2 November) and Christmas Day.

Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Chinese New Year, Thaipooam Cavadee (January/February), Maha Shivaratri (February/March), Ougadi (March/April), Ganesh Chaturthi (August/September), Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan, three days) and Diwali (October/November).

## Economy

### KEY FACTS 2009

GNI:	US\$9.2bn
GNI p.c.:	US\$7,250
GDP growth:	3.6% p.a. 2005–09
Inflation:	5.6% p.a. 2005–09

**Overview:** Mauritius has a very good record of growth. Despite the country's isolation from major world markets, it is among the most successful of small developing countries in diversifying its economy out of dependence on one agricultural commodity (sugar) into manufacturing, tourism and, latterly, financial services and ICT. Manufacturing (centred on the early established export processing zones, or EPZs) and tourism have developed rapidly, providing jobs and income. Manufacturing output grew by 10.4% p.a. 1980–90 and 5.0% p.a. 1990–2004.

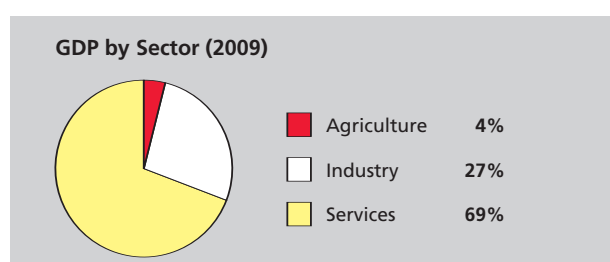
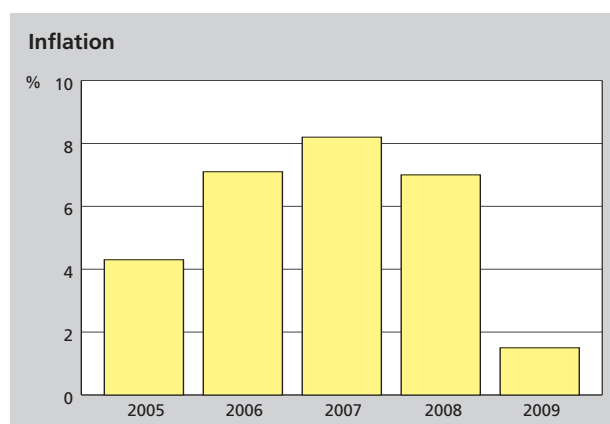
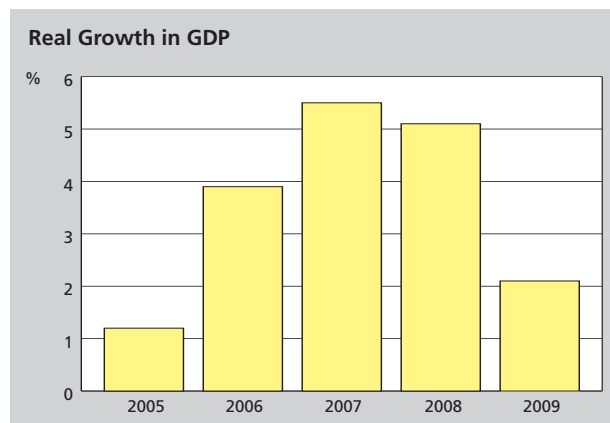
By the late 1990s the textile industry was facing stiffer competition from new low-cost producers as well as the erosion of preferential tariff agreements. The government embarked on a programme of

privatisation, financial market liberalisation and development of offshore activities, with the aim of turning the island into an international financial and business services centre. By 2005 financial and business services contributed 20% of GDP.

Sugar continued to contribute significantly to export earnings and the economy remained vulnerable to fluctuations in world commodity prices and bad weather. It is difficult to reduce imports in lean years since both the manufacturing and tourism industries are import-intensive.

With relatively high levels of foreign investment, the economy grew steadily during the 2000s – by 3.9% in 2006, 5.5% in 2007 and 5.1% in 2008. Despite the world economic downturn and fall in world demand in 2008–09, growth was sustained in 2009 (2.1%) and 2010 (3.6%).

Trade: Exports of goods and services account for 53% of GDP (2008). Main exports are EPZ manufactures (especially clothing and textiles), sugar, molasses, tea, cut flowers and foliage.



## Constitution

Status:	Republic
Legislature:	National Assembly
Independence:	12 March 1968

The independence constitution established a multiparty democracy, and the country became a republic in 1992. The presidency is non-executive; political power lies with the prime minister and the cabinet. The president is appointed for a five-year term by the National Assembly on a motion made by the prime minister and supported by the vote of the majority of all the members of the Assembly. The single-chamber National Assembly comprises up to 70 members, 62 of whom are elected (60 from 20 three-member constituencies on the island of Mauritius plus two from the single constituency of Rodrigues). Up to eight additional seats are allocated to 'best losers', to ensure representation of a variety of ethnic groups.

The constitution provides for the appointment of president, vice-president, speaker, deputy speaker, prime minister, deputy prime minister, a cabinet of ministers, and up to ten parliamentary secretaries. Provision is further made for an attorney-general, a secretary to the cabinet, a commissioner of police, a director of public prosecutions and a leader of the opposition.

General elections take place every five years, based on universal adult suffrage for citizens over the age of 18. The constitution establishes the separation of powers between the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. It guarantees the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual: freedom of conscience, freedom of association, movement and opinion, freedom of expression, freedom of creed and religious belief, and the right to private property.

## Politics

Last elections:	May 2010
Next elections:	2015
Head of state:	President Sir Anerood Jugnauth (2003–)
Head of government:	Prime Minister Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam
Ruling party:	Alliance of the Future

The alliance of Mouvement Socialiste Mauricien (MSM) and Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM), returned to power in 1991, held firm until 1993 when MMM leader Paul Bérenger was dismissed from the cabinet and took part of the MMM with him to form an alliance with the Labour Party. Meanwhile, the constitution was amended to make Mauritius a republic on 12 March 1992.

The Labour Party–MMM alliance won a sweeping victory at elections held in December 1995, leaving the country with only a token parliamentary opposition. Labour Party leader Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam became prime minister and Bérenger deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs.

Like its predecessors, Ramgoolam's government experienced internal divisions. The government also introduced privatisation policies, despite strong opposition from the MMM and unions. Bérenger resigned from the coalition to rejoin the opposition in June 1997.

The elections in September 2000 were won by an alliance of the two main opposition parties, the MSM and the MMM, taking 54 seats while the Labour Party won only six, and alliance leader Sir Anerood Jugnauth formed a new government, with Bérenger as his deputy until September 2003 when, by agreement, Bérenger

became prime minister and caretaker president Karl Offmann made way for Jugnauth to become president.

In the July 2005 general election, the opposition Social Alliance (with 38 seats) defeated the governing alliance (22 seats) and Labour Party leader Ramgoolam became prime minister. Turnout was over 80%.

The general election in May 2010 was won by Ramgoolam's Alliance of the Future, with 41 of the 62 National Assembly seats, while the opposition Alliance of the Heart won 18.

## International relations

Mauritius is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, African Union, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation, Non-Aligned Movement, Southern African Development Community, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Mauritius hosts the headquarters of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation.

## History

Mauritius was uninhabited until 1598, and had much unique wildlife and plant life. There were Dutch settlers from 1638 until 1710. The French took formal possession in 1715 and sent settlers from 1721; the French East India Company governed the island, called Île de France, from about 1767. Slaves were brought in from Madagascar, Mozambique and other parts of Africa.

The island was captured by the British in 1810, during the Anglo–French war, and renamed Mauritius. Together with its dependencies, including Seychelles and Rodrigues, the island was formally ceded to Britain under the Treaty of Paris (1814). At the time slavery was abolished, in 1834, there were 68,616 registered slaves in the country. After abolition, indentured labourers were recruited, mainly from India, to work in the expanding sugar industry. More than 200,000 Indian labourers arrived between 1840 and 1870. They were later joined by a small number of Chinese traders. The population swelled from 100,000 in 1835 to 371,000 by the end of the century.

From 1810 until they were separated in 1903, Mauritius and Seychelles were administered as a single British colony by a governor and British officials.

The independence movement had its roots in the labour movement which, in the late 1940s, campaigned for the transfer of political power to Mauritians. In 1947 the franchise was extended to every literate adult. A measure of democratic self-government followed, with a general election in 1948 and the first legislative council. Universal adult suffrage was introduced in 1959.

Negotiations for political autonomy in the 1960s were led by Seewoosagur Ramgoolam. Elections were held in 1967, which were won by a pro-independence alliance of Ramgoolam's Labour

Party and two smaller groups, the Independent Forward Bloc and the Muslim Action Committee. A new constitution granting internal self-government was then introduced. Mauritius became an independent state and joined the Commonwealth on 12 March 1968.

Alarmed by the growing strength of the socialist Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM), led by Paul Bérenger, and union strikes, the government of Ramgoolam refused to allow the general election due in 1972. A state of emergency was declared and MMM and union leaders imprisoned.

In the 1976 general election, Labour retained power by forming an alliance with the Parti Mauricien Social Démocrate (PMSD). But in 1982 the MMM, in alliance with Labour breakaway group the Parti Socialiste Mauricien (PSM), won all the elected seats in the National Assembly. In government, the MMM was less radical than it had been in the early 1970s, but the MMM/PSM alliance broke up within a year. Anerood Jugnauth, prime minister and MMM president, then broke away from the MMM to form a new party, the Mouvement Socialiste Mauricien (MSM), which formed an alliance with Labour and the PMSD. The new alliance won the elections of 1983, leaving the old MMM in opposition. The Organisation du Peuple Rodriguais (OPR) again won the two Rodrigues seats and joined the new government.

In 1984, Jugnauth dismissed a number of ministers, most of them members of the Labour Party, and the coalition government split. Those Labour MPs who continued to support the government formed the Rassemblement des Travailleurs Mauriciens (RTM). In an early general election called in June 1987, the MSM/PMSD/RTM coalition unexpectedly won a comfortable majority. The PMSD left the alliance in 1988, and the MMM came into the alliance in its place.

## Traveller information

**Local laws and conventions:** Dress should be modest when visiting religious shrines and footwear removed before entering temples and mosques.

Drug smuggling is a serious offence with severe penalties. The importation of 12 grams of cannabis can lead to a one-year sentence. Cigarette papers are illegal.

Handshaking is the usual form of greeting. Dress is normally informal.

Suits are usually worn in business circles. Mauritius has a newly built conference centre with a capacity of 2,500. Office hours are Mon–Fri 0900–1600.

**Immigration and customs:** A three-month visa will be issued on arrival to those in possession of a passport valid for at least six months and a return ticket. Visa requirements are subject to change and should be checked well before travel. Foreigners are sometimes asked for ID so it is advisable for all visitors to keep a copy of the photopage of their passport and their visa on them at all times.

Scheduled drugs like narcotics and strong painkillers need authorisation before import.

Prohibited imports include sugar cane, and related parts thereof, soil micro-organisms and invertebrates. Vegetables, fruits, flowers and seeds must all be declared. Firearms require a permit. All imported animal products require a permit and a health certificate.

A yellow fever certificate is required from anyone travelling from infected countries and those travelling from a malarial area may be asked to take a blood test.

Lone parents travelling with children need documentation showing parental responsibility.

**Travel within the country:** Traffic drives on the left. There are a number of car-hire firms and drivers must be over 23 years of age. A national driving licence is sufficient and visitors should keep their driving licences on them at all times. There is a good road network around the country. There is an 80kph speed limit on the motorway and 50kph in built-up areas. The wearing of seatbelts is mandatory.

Air Mauritius operates daily flights from Plaisance Airport to Rodrigues and there are also helicopter transfers. Coraline sails from Port Louis to Rodrigues once a week.

There are good and efficient bus services and taxis are available at reasonable rates; all taxis are regulated and metered.

**Travel health:** Medical care standards are high and there are several private clinics. Foreign visitors have to pay at state-run clinics and hospitals so should ensure they have comprehensive health insurance. Hepatitis A and tetanus are the only required vaccinations at present but inoculations can change at short notice and should be checked before travel.

Chikungunya, a viral infection spread by mosquitoes, can be a problem from October to May and dengue fever also occurs. Visitors should exercise adequate precautions to avoid being bitten and should take insect repellent and suitable loose-fitting clothing.

Water for drinking or cleaning teeth must be boiled, though bottled water is widely available.

Prescription medicines should be kept in their original containers and be clearly labelled to avoid confusion.

**Money:** Banks and bureaux de change tend to give a better rate on travellers cheques than cash. Mastercard and Visa are the most widely accepted and there are ATMs all over the country. Banking hours are Mon–Thur 0915–1515, Fri 0915–1530 and Sat 0915–1115. (Some banks also open to coincide with airport arrivals and departures.)

There were 871,000 tourist arrivals in 2009.

## Further information

Mauritius Government Web Portal: [www.gov.mu](http://www.gov.mu)

Commonwealth Secretariat: [www.thecommonwealth.org](http://www.thecommonwealth.org)

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