

Mauritius Rising to the challenge

Recent trade setbacks threaten the sugar and textiles industries, but the island is determined to weather the storm

The beautiful island of Mauritius, with its tropical climate and the genuine hospitality of its 1.2 million people, has attracted discerning visitors for generations. As one of the strongest economies in Africa, with a bilingual workforce (French and English, plus Hindi or Cantonese) and a long tradition of private entrepreneurship, Mauritius is an attractive location for investors.

Sugar, textiles and tourism have long been the main drivers of the Mauritian economy, but recent setbacks – including a 36% drop in the price of sugar implemented from 2009, and the dismantling of an agreement offering preferential access to European textile markets – have forced the government to rethink its priorities. Prime Minister Dr. Navin Ramgoolam remains optimistic, however: “It is my personal ambition to minimize some of these shocks,” he says, “and I am looking to rebrand Mauritius as an investment destination.”

Rama Sithanen, Minister of Finance is equally pragmatic: “We need to consolidate the existing sectors and enhance our resilience to external forces. We also need to vertically integrate textiles, move up the value chain, and promote Mauritius as a duty-free island. We would like to see Mauritius as a credible financial services center, with a range of services available,” he says.

Minister of IT and Telecoms, Etienne Sinatambou is keen to make ICT the island’s fifth pillar, with a focus on call centers. “Our bilingual advantage means we can penetrate both French and English speaking countries,” he says, “and we also have the technology and manpower to perform the highest level of accounting operations.”

Within 100 days of being in government, the ministry negotiated a 15% reduction in the cost of international calls from Mauritius Telecom, who still have the monopoly on the island even though the industry was liberalized in January 2004.



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Rama Sithanen, Deputy PM
and Minister of Finance and
Economic Development



Sarat Dutt Lallah
CEO, Mauritius Telecom

Mauritius Telecom’s new CEO, Sarat Dutt Lallah says: “We are becoming the carrier for a multitude of services, especially Broadband, which is revolutionizing the country. We are also looking at regional expansion, possibly with our strategic partner, France Telecom. In sub-Saharan Africa, there is a market of 200 million people. If we can secure even a small percentage of that, we will be doing well.”

Meanwhile, in the tourism sector, a rebranding exercise is going on to promote Mauritius as “the best island destination in the world.” According to Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications, Xavier-Luc Duval, tourism grew by 5% this year, due to a mixture of “private sector genius and government vision.” Now the ministry is looking into liberalizing the airlines sector to make the island more accessible, while upgrading its present product and filling up hotels during the low season.

Two island establishments promising a warm welcome are the Labourdonnais Waterfront (5*) and Le Suffren Hotel and Marina (4*). Part of the Indigo Hotel and Resorts Group, both hotels feature exceptional facilities with a sophisticated business infrastructure. Rolph Schmid, GM, says: “We try to convince our business customers they should stay focused and encourage them to conduct their business here and then go and relax at our resort hotel, Le Telfair.”



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