

Mauritius



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1968
Population:	1,240,000 (2012)
GDP p.c. growth:	3.5% p.a. 1990–2012
UN HDI 2012:	world ranking 80
Official language:	English
Time:	GMT plus 4hr
Currency:	Mauritian rupee (MRs)

Geography

Area:	2,040 sq km
Coastline:	177 km
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.

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 34 km 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 80 mm in October to 310 mm in February. Heavy rains fall mainly from late December to the beginning of April. Cyclones, occurring in the summer, occasionally cause severe damage.

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

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 17 per cent of the land area, having declined at 0.5 per cent p.a. 1990–2010.

Did you know?

The 18th triennial Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers was held in Port Louis during 28–31 August 2012 and was attended by delegations from 39 countries.

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 (73 years).

Arable land comprises 38 per cent and permanent cropland two per cent 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.

Main towns: Port Louis (capital, pop. 156,700 in 2010), Beau Bassin–Rose Hill (111,000), Vacoas–Phoenix (106,900), Curepipe (84,300), Quatre Bornes (81,100), Triolet (23,800), Goodlands (21,300), Central Flacq (18,100), Bel Air (18,000), Mahébourg (17,300), St Pierre (16,500), Le Hochet (15,500) and Grand Baie (11,700).

Transport: There are 2,070 km of roads, 98 per cent paved, including at least 30 km of motorways and 940 km 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 50 km from Port Louis. There is an airstrip at Plaine Corail on Rodrigues receiving a daily service from Mauritius.

Society

KEY FACTS 2012

Population per sq km: 608

Life expectancy: 73 years

Net primary enrolment: 98%

Population: 1,240,000 (2012); 42 per cent of people live in urban areas; growth 0.7 per cent p.a. 1990–2012; birth rate 12 per 1,000 people (28 in 1970); life expectancy 73 years (62 in 1970).

About 68 per cent of the population is of Indian descent, 27 per cent 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 per cent and French three per cent (2000 census).

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

Health: Public spending on health was two per cent of GDP in 2011. 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. The entire population uses an improved drinking water source and 91 per cent have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2011). Infant mortality was 13 per 1,000 live births in

2012 (67 in 1960). Malaria was substantially eradicated in the 1950s. A national AIDS prevention and control programme has been running since 1987. In 2012, 1.2 per cent of people aged 15–49 were HIV positive.

Education: Public spending on education was four per cent of GDP in 2012. There are 12 years of compulsory education starting at the age of five. Primary school comprises six years and secondary seven, with cycles of three and four years. Some 97 per cent of pupils complete primary school (2010). 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.

A review of tertiary education in 2009/2010 found a rapidly expanding sector with some 42,260 students attending 61 institutions, 11 publicly funded. The sector centres on the University of Mauritius, which comprises faculties of agriculture; engineering; law; management; science (including the Department of Medicine); and social studies and humanities. Other institutions include the University of Technology (operational from September 2001); Mauritius Institute of Education (training teachers); Mahatma Gandhi Institute (courses in Asian culture); Open University of Mauritius (higher and continuing professional education; established in July 2012, incorporating Mauritius College of the Air); and Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Medical College (established at Belle Rive in 1999). The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 1.30:1 (2011). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 97 per cent (2010).

Mauritius hosted the 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Port Louis in August 2012. Commonwealth Education Ministers meet every three years to discuss issues of mutual concern and interest.

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), and *Mauritius Times* is a weekly.

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

Some 96 per cent of households have TV sets (2008). There are 174 personal computers per 1,000 people (2006).

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

There are 282 main telephone lines, 1,199 mobile phone subscriptions and 414 internet users per 1,000 people (2012).

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, Thaipoosam Cavadee (January/February), Maha Shivaratri (February/March), Ougadi (March/April), Ganesh Chathurthi (August/September), Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan, three days) and Diwali (October/November).

Economy

KEY FACTS 2012

GNI: US\$11.1bn

GNI p.c.: US\$8,570

GDP growth: 3.9% p.a. 2008–12

Inflation: 5.1% p.a. 2008–12

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, horticulture and, latterly, financial services and ICT. Manufacturing, especially of clothing and textiles (centred on the early established export processing zones, or EPZs), and tourism have developed rapidly, providing jobs and income. Manufacturing output grew by more than ten per cent p.a. during 1980–90 and more than five per cent p.a. 1990–2000, but it grew very little at all in the following decade.

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 per cent 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 well during the 2000s, and the impact of the world economic downturn and fall in world demand in 2008–09 was relatively weak. Thus after a period of strong growth in the mid-2000s, the economy continued to grow by at least three per cent p.a. during 2009–14.

Constitution

Status: Republic

Legislature: Parliament of Mauritius

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: 5 May 2010

Next elections: 2015

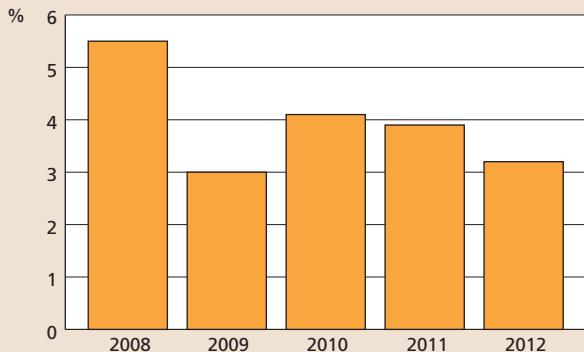
Head of state: President Rajkewur Purryag (2012–)

Head of government: Prime Minister Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam

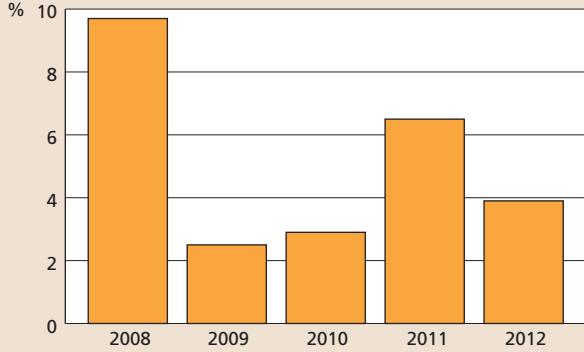
Ruling party: Alliance of the Future

Women MPs: 19%

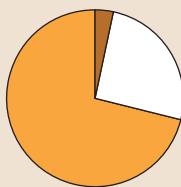
Real Growth in GDP



Inflation



GDP by Sector (2012)



Agriculture	3.5%
Industry	25.4%
Services	71.1%

The elections in September 2000 were won by an alliance of the two main opposition parties, the Mouvement Socialiste Mauricien (MSM) and the Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM), taking 54 seats while the alliance led by the Labour Party won only six, and MSM–MMM alliance leader Sir Anerood Jugnauth formed a new government, with MMM leader Paul 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 Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam became Prime Minister. Turnout was over 80 per cent.

The general election in May 2010 was won by Ramgoolam's newly formed Alliance of the Future, with 45 seats (including four best losers), while the opposition Alliance of the Heart – led by

Paul Bérenger – won 20 (including two best losers). Turnout was 78 per cent.

At the end of March 2012 Jugnauth resigned the presidency to return to party politics. Vice-President Monique Ohsan-Bellepeau became acting President. On 20 July 2012 Rajkeswur Purryag was elected President by a majority of the members of the National Assembly.

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, Non-Aligned Movement, Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, Southern African Development Community, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

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 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.

The alliance of MSM and MMM were returned to power in 1991; it 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 Navinchandra Ramgoolam became Prime Minister and Bérenger Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. The government introduced privatisation policies, despite strong opposition from the MMM and unions. Bérenger and other MMM members resigned from the coalition to rejoin the opposition in June 1997.

Mauritius hosts the headquarters of the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

Traveller information

Immigration and customs: Passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of arrival. Visas are required by all Commonwealth nationals and are generally issued on arrival. Prohibited imports include some fresh food, soil, plants and plant material.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left. Visitors wishing to hire a car must be aged at least 23 and be in possession of a foreign driving licence. The wearing of seatbelts is mandatory.

Daily air services and a weekly ferry link Mauritius and Rodrigues. Taxis are regulated and metered.

Travel health: Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include dengue fever, hepatitis A, hepatitis B and schistosomiasis (bilharzia).

There were 965,000 tourist arrivals in 2012.

Further information

Government of Mauritius: www.gov.mu

Electoral Commissioner's Office: electoral.gov.mu

Parliament of Mauritius: mauritiusassembly.gov.mu

Statistics Mauritius: statsmauritius.gov.mu

Bank of Mauritius: bom.intnet.mu

Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority: www.tourism-mauritius.mu

Indian Ocean Rim Association: www.iora.net

Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org

Commonwealth of Nations:
www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Mauritius

Media

Le Matinal: www.lematinal.com

Le Mauricien: www.lemauricien.com

L'Express: www.lexpress.mu

Mauritius Times: mauritiustimes.com

Mauritius Broadcasting Company: mbc.intnet.mu

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