

# Sparkle returning to Mauritius, thanks to holiday special offers

**Audrey D'Angelo**

MAURITIUS, a long-time favourite holiday and conference destination for South Africans, priced itself out of the market for many local families in recent years as it attracted more European tourists and charged euro-related prices.

But the recession has hit its market from the UK and Germany, although South African tourism company World Leisure Holidays, which markets Mauritian hotel group Sun Resorts and Kerzner International's One and Only hotels to the French market, as well as in this country, has succeeded in encouraging French tourism to continue this year and last.

Despite this – and efforts to attract South Africans back again – island hotels suffered a drop in occupation levels in the past season. Now the tourism industry is picking up again, with hotel and airline bookings for next month “promising”, according to Tommy Wong, the financial director of Sun Resorts, and executives of Air Mauritius.

The Mauritian national airline had to be bailed out by its government last year as it suffered a drastic drop in passenger numbers and tied itself into a hedging agreement to protect it from rising fuel costs, only to find itself paying more than the going rate as the oil price plunged.

But Samantha Marshall, the airline's sales executive in Johannesburg, and Theo James, its general sales agent in Cape Town, said the

numbers were rising as a result of special offers and passenger loads would average 90 percent in the December holiday period.

Wong said although the super-rich were slow in returning to the island's hotels, middle-income customers were already booking.

Senior staff at Sun Resorts' flagship development Le Touessrok said occupation levels last week were only 60 percent, but would rise to 90 percent early next month.

Wong said: “We were scared when the first reports of the recession came through, but we took the opportunity to retrain staff and we are ready now for the upturn.”

Although the island's hotel industry has suffered from the downturn its property industry is booming. South African buyers are the biggest investors in villas in resorts now being developed on land formerly occupied by sugar cane fields, and in new housing developments, according to Chris Immelman, the managing director of the international and projects division of Pam Golding Properties.

Meanwhile, two South African firms in the hospitality industry are investing in Mauritius. Peermont was the successful bidder for 51 percent of its gaming industry. And Queensgate Hotels and Leisure, in partnership with the Dale group of companies, is developing a new resort on the island.

*Audrey D'Angelo visited Mauritius as the guest of Sun Resorts, which owns 100 percent of Johannesburg-based World Leisure Holidays*

