

The Crème de la Crème

We sent *John Botha* off to paradise for his first look at the Langer-designed island course at Le Touessrok – here's what he thought...

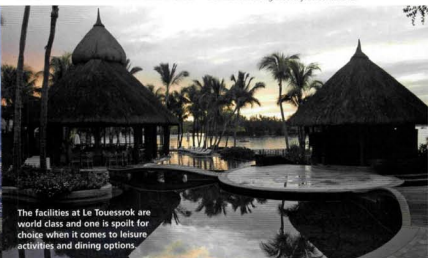
IF ONE WAS to compile a list of the very finest coastal golf experiences, Pebble Beach and Cypress Point on California's Monterey Peninsula would spring to mind, as would Turnberry on Scotland's west coast. Thailand's Blue Canyon on the island of Phuket would have to be included, as would the Coolool Resort in Queensland, Australia. In identifying the very best in terms of location, quality of accommodation and cuisine, and a seriously good golf course, I'd now have to include

Le Touessrok on that elite list, because this is as good as it gets.

A member of the prestigious Leading Hotels of the World, it comes as no surprise that Le Touessrok has collected an impressive array of awards, most recently, in November 2009, an important accolade for the resort's commitment to quality and service, rating it the finest in the Africa and Middle East sectors. From the moment one arrives at the resort, no secret is made of the fact the levels

of service here match the best to be found anywhere, and the well-trained, friendly staff treat guests as though they are royalty.

Nature has conspired to ensure that this resort can make the most of what has been Mauritius' claim to fame – pristine beaches and that impossibly turquoise sea, and every one of the rooms, which include 68 deluxe rooms, 125 'junior' suites, six suites and a royal suite, is perfectly appointed and offers magnificent sea views. Having recently celebrated its



The facilities at Le Touessrok are world class and one is spoilt for choice when it comes to leisure activities and dining options.

you believe that you are overdue for a spell of being spoilt rotten, this is the place to come. If, however, you want to shed a few pounds, forget about it – because the master chefs here seem to work around the clock whipping up gastronomical treats that cannot be resisted.

But what of the golf course, designed by Bernhard Langer? This was probably the biggest surprise of all, because with respect to the two-time Masters champion, he doesn't strike one as being the most imaginative of individuals. Safe, measured and honestly quite boring has been the hallmark of his play over the years, and if one looks at the work he did at the new Portmarnock course in Dublin, it would seem that the staid German carefully followed a 'Guide to Designing a Links Course', offering nothing that hadn't been done hundreds of times before. When designing this course, Langer certainly came out of his shell.

For starters, the only access to this layout is via a boat, as it is situated on an island. The trip along the channel is in itself a treat, which adds to the experience, and typically, as one arrives at the jetty on the Ile aux Cerfs, the staff are waiting to welcome you and your clubs are loaded onto a golf cart. You are transported to the clubhouse, where more staff give you the impression that they have been anxiously awaiting your arrival, and do everything barring rolling out a red carpet. The pro shop staff couldn't be more helpful, and one look at the practice facilities and you know that this place matches everything else at Le Touessrok – this is five star and then some. From the moment one steps onto the 1st tee, any idea that this is a typically soft 'resort-type' course that is meant to flatter the player is immediately dispelled – this is a flat-out, proper

course that requires thought and the ability to hit the ball out the middle of the club. As with most modern courses, there are at least four different tees from which to play, but from the 'Langer' or championship markers, the course is anything but a 'hit-and-giggle'.

Covering an area of 38 hectares, it is claimed that every hole offers a view of the sea, and while this is technically true (even if it means peering through stands of trees on some holes), this layout is a lot more than simply a collection of holes with pretty faces. This is a well-thought-out test of golf that makes the most of changes in elevation, fascinating outcrops of volcanic rock and clever bunkering. There is an array of lakes, mangroves and breathtaking backdrops, and no two holes are remotely the same. Throw in a gentle sea breeze or a stiffer wind, and you have a truly great test of golf. Needless to say, the course is manicured to perfection and the salt-tolerant Paspalum grass on the greens runs exceptionally true, if a little sluggishly. This is undoubtedly a course that could be played many times, and the player would never tire of its charms.

While on the boat trip back to the hotel, one could mull over different strategies that could be employed when playing the course again, decide whether a session in the opulent Giverny Spa is called for, or simply take in the spellbinding surroundings with one's mind in neutral. Mark Twain suggested that Mauritius was first created, then heaven, with the latter being modelled on this island. After a day or two at Le Touessrok, one realises that Twain was not exaggerating.

■ For more info on the resort, visit www.letouessrokreresort.com or go to World Leisure Holidays' website at www.wh.co.za to see what sort of travel deals are on offer.

30-year anniversary, Le Touessrok was recently completely refurbished, and as the flagship of the Sun Hotel Group (which owns four hotels on the island and one in the Maldives), it is clear that no expense was spared in ensuring that every detail is likely to exceed the expectations of the most discerning guest. The chic, modern feel to the place is combined with beautiful, mature gardens, and your personal butler will take care of your every whim – and some things you never even thought of. If