Stop at Ambre

By Rod Baker

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Feel like a family getaway with the kids? What a silly question - and if you want a reasonably priced holiday for yourselves as a couple, for your honeymoon, or for the family (and maybe even the family *and* your honeymoon), checking out Ambre, Mauritius, would be one of your better moves.



Ambre, just the place to stop for a relaxing holiday at a reasonable price.

It's a tough life, but someone has to do it - review hotels, that is - and the latest on my bucket list was Ambre, just refurbished, and reopened - on 1 October, in fact.

First, however, you have to get to Mauritius, and we (my financial director - i.e., my wife Heather) flew Air Mauritius from Cape Town direct. It's about 5-6 hours, depending on which way the wind is blowing, and as always, very attentive staff and some of the best airline food around made the trip that much more enjoyable than some might have expected - viewing the flights there and back merely as a means to an end. I, on the other hand, begin my holidays the moment the pick-up arrives at our gate. So a big thanks to the Air Mauritius flight crew. The aircraft was the baby of the Airbus series - the 319 - so the airline entertainment was a "one size fits all" sort, with drop-down screens, and consisted of *Men in Black 3*, and since I had managed to avoid *MiB 2*, having watched the first in the series, I read a book.

All in all, a very good flight - punctual takeoff, and one of the best landings I have ever had - as a former pilot, I thought I might be able to give a reasoned opinion.

The shuttle - we had a chauffeured Mercedes no less - is about an hour or so. And for that, many thanks to SummerTimes.

Booking in was quick and efficient, and Isabelle Permal, sales manager for the hotel and Clyde Vacher, communications & public affairs manager for Sun Resorts, were there to greet us.

As always, the service at the Sun Resorts group hotels is way up at the top, with attentive staff at your beck and call 24/7.



The beach is great, but there's also plenty of fresh-water bathing for you as well.

Living and loving

The hotel's accommodation comprises 100 standard rooms (30m²), 178 superior (42m²) - which is where we were, 17 family rooms (72m² and 80m²) - these have two rooms, one for Mom and Dad, and one for the kids, and two rooms (80m²). 450 staff is on call to ensure guests enjoy the service they expect.

The hotel was an existing one, before being bought by Sun Resorts and refurbished.

Hence it has been around for a while, having been built back in the days when 'loo time' was 'MY time '- so rather than the (very) open plan bathroom that is typical of some of today's homes and bathrooms, our room had a separate loo. This is great news for those who like Ingrid Bergman is reputed to have said (but actually didn't) 'Ah vant to be alurn.'

For Heather, my long-suffering wife of about 38 years (not her age - that's the time we have been married) - knowing I would be using a separate loo was a welcome blessing and a high point - one of many - of the entire trip.

Eating and meeting



The main dining area. The meals are excellent and there's something for everyone.

The chef at Ambre was previously at Long Beach and has been with the company for 37 years - so he's sort of married to Sun Resorts as Heather is to me - and brings his great experience to Ambre.

There are three main restaurants - Indigo, the principle one, plus Dolce Vita - where you can get on the outside of some great Italian fare - and, if you are brave enough, a traditional Mauritian chilli sauce that is for the brave only. It tastes great, but my eyeballs were bleeding by the time I had tried just a tiny portion of it. Then there is La Plage, down on the beach, where the sun sinks in the west, over the island (Ambre is on the east coast), or in Heather's case, the chair sinks into the sand. Again, excellent food - to satisfy just about any taste.

Sun, sand, swimming ... and safety

There are enough pools for everyone, with a good mix of a kiddie's pool and a couple of others for the bigger kids - i.e. moms, dads and others.



After a hard day of slaving away at one of the bars, or lazing by the pool, this is a welcome sight - and very, very comfortable.

The total seating capacity of all the eateries combined is 750 - just in case everyone reads this and decides in a lemming-like suicide pact - to all try the chilli sauce I mentioned above, at exactly the same time.

The beach is 700m and must be one of the best as regards swimming frontage; thanks to the reef a few hundred metres out, the sea is calm, and the seafloor slopes gently and is sandy - so it's a very safe beach.

Naturally, as always where children and water are concerned, safety is always paramount so parents need to keep an eye on the youngsters as always, but the hotel has two lifeguards on duty in the pool area and another two guarding the beach.



The gently sloping beach makes for ideal swimming... That's my better half on her way to Australia... or somewhere.

Isabelle Permal, sales executive at Ambre, told me that in addition to the lifeguards, staff is trained in first aid, so they will be able to cope with most if not all of the minor accidents guests might encounter. In passing, the hotel is very wheelchair-friendly.

'Do you take...?'

Ambre could be your choice for your wedding and if so, yours will be the only one on the day, and it will be where you want it and when you want it. Because the hotel will host only one a day, so it really will be your special day. All Sun Resorts hotels have this policy, by the way, so you're spoilt for choice as to where to have your special day.

Kids and other handicaps

Other than Ambre having an excellent Sun Kids Club (open from 1000-2200 daily) for up to 60 children between the ages of 4 and 11 years, or 2-3 years if nappy trained, there is a full range of activities for young and old, from snorkelling to tennis, peddle boats to catamarans and for the golf addict a great range of courses and free shuttles to the course of your choice.

Visit the website - address at the end of this article - for the full range of activities and services available at Ambre.

Feeling tense?

It's difficult to think of anyone feeling tense at Ambre, but if you are, or you just feel like being pampered, the spa offers a full range of treatments guaranteed to have you so laid back at the end of any of them that you will be horizontal -

figuratively and literally.



Feeling any stress? you won't after this. (Image: Ambre Hotel)

Of balconies, beds and bathrooms

Not all of the first-floor superior rooms have balconies, so it's a bit of the luck of the draw, and if you want one, ask.

We found the beds very comfortable and the pillows just great. I mentioned the loo earlier, the other area of importance is, of course, the bathroom. Ours was spacious, but with just one basin, and the shower was good, but with an energy-saving head, not exactly Vic Falls, but there is plenty of hot water.

The shower has a low sill and no door - but a large glass wall that is very effective. Just an aside... I've been to some establishments that take great pride in telling you that your room boasts a 'step-in-shower.' What other kind is there? A 'slide-in'? A 'leap-in'? I have this vision of some intrepid bather running flat out at the shower, doing a triple somersault with a half-twist followed by a death-defying rush to the hospital and a rapid but yet graceful glide on a gurney into the operating theatre.

Well, now that you have had my views, what about a few from Johann Strydom, managing director at World Leisure Holidays. He and Ambre go back some way and he says that when he first visited the hotel back in the late '90s, he saw its potential - and realised at once that that potential had not been unlocked.



"Off to Australia?" "Naah, Madagascar." (Image: Ambre Hotel)

"It was on one of the best beaches (arguably the best) on the East Coast, with fine white sea sand caressing your feet as you stroll. Secondly, this beach is on a natural bay-like area affording it more protection from the East Coast wind than other hotels along that coast. Yes, there were food, restaurants, a swimming pools and rooms then too. But something important was missing. The "feel" of the hotel was not optimised. The ambiance restrained, somehow limited.

"Perhaps it had something to do with the fact that the hotel appeared to be quite dark, even the main restaurant was gloomy, definitely not cheerful. Perhaps it was the double vaulted roof over the dining room that somehow projected more factory than hotel. Yet, there were lots of people there then too. I just felt that so much more could be done to give them a much greater experience, given Ambre's exquisite location. Since then I have been there a number of times. Each time this sense of the angel trapped in the stone remained with me.

"And then, I saw it on 1 October, when we opened it to the public after it became part of the Sun Resorts portfolio. Suddenly I understood why I thought it was understated before! When you come through the entrance you see through over the pools, right into the Indian Ocean. It just opens up and put you right there on this beautiful stretch of beach. A joy comes up inside that affirms that this hotel will justify itself to its guests, rendering a memorable vacation there.

"Sun Resorts has succeeded in unlocking Ambre's full potential. It displays its beach that is still more protected and sheltered. Now the hotel is open, spacey, light and airy. The double vaulted roof has made space for a modern structure, sky-lighted to let in lots of light. The new pools are inviting and the vistas exotic. In addition it has a new gym, the Sun Kids Club and internationally branded Germaine de Cappuccini products in its spa (these products are also used at Sugar Beach's Aura Spa). The 297 rooms continue to reflect this spacious style, decorated in rustic pastel coral colour schemes. For me, in a sense, La Plage finally unleashes this hotel's potential. La Plage is the restaurant on the beach, where even in the evenings the dress code allows one to dine bare feet on that silky sand.

"It is still Ambre, but it is so much more," says Johann.

I couldn't have said it better myself.

Ambre - all the facts

For more information go to the official Ambre website and/or email info@ambre.mu.

For Reservations or more information call World Leisure Holidays on +27 (0)860 954 954 or email res@wlh.co.za, or log onto the website www.wlh.co.za.

So what are you waiting for?

All about Ambre.

ABOUT ROD BAKER

Rod Baker is Content Director at Bizcommunity.com. A journalist since before computers, he worked on a wide range of magazines and, in his youth, rose through the ranks from being a lowly and abused sub-editor, to a high and still abused editor and publisher. He has been editor and publisher of a number of magazines, as well as a newspaper. He has edited many books, and written a number too. Email him at rod@bizcommunity.com.

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