

## A platform for business in Africa

### Island nation poised to act as Asia's gateway to Africa

Small and exclusive vacation islands sometimes struggle to be known in the world for anything more than their beauty, but with Mauritius, things are different.

Thanks to a highly successful diversification program, steadily implemented since it became independent in 1968, the country holds its own as middle-income economy that has performed well in the face of the global crisis.

Boasting a top financial services industry, a growing manufacturing base, and excellent communications, Mauritius is an envied trade and investment hub, as well as an ICT hotbed for the region.

Its political stability, rule of law and sophisticated regulatory and investment structure have allowed it to grow in stature as a platform for companies wishing to break into Africa.

Opportunities abound in the agro-industries, creative industries, financial services, healthcare and medical travel, hospitality and property development, information technology and business process outsourcing, knowledge, logistics and distribution services, manufacturing and light engineering, renewable energies and environment, and seafood and aquaculture sectors.

Internationally acclaimed for its ease of doing business, governance and quality of life—according to the World Bank report “Investing Access Borders”, Mauritius has one of the world's most open economies to foreign ownership and receives some of the highest FDI per capita—the country is looking to attract further investment from China, a nation it has enjoyed diplomatic relations since 1972.

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NAVINCHANDRA RAMGOOLAM  
PRIME MINISTER OF MAURITIUS

In 1995, the Republic of Mauritius set up its embassy and sent its resident ambassador to China. Since 1982, the mutually beneficial partnership has gone from strength to strength, with a number of Chinese firms now present on the Indian Ocean island in a range of sectors.

The erection of the Jinfei Economic Trade and Cooperation special economic zone is expected to feature a logistical center, international conference centers, information towers, medical centers, wholesale and retail shopping centers and a bilingual Chinese-English boarding school,

is the latest example of Chinese confidence.

As Mauritius Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam said, “Mauritius and China have supported each other on many regional and international issues, such as UN reform, we appreciate China's support for the country's desire to maintain its territorial sovereignty and boost its economy.”

#### A beacon for air travel

For an island situated 2,000 kilometers from the nearest continent, Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam International Airport, or SSR, is a critical component of the Mauritian transport system, ensuring links between the country and the rest of the world.

The airport stands among the five best in Africa and is recognized by the International Airport Council as a leader in the 2 to 5 million passenger category.

As well as supporting output, it is also a significant revenue generator. Last year, it made up 15 percent of GDP, a sum equivalent to \$3 billion.

As the island grows in importance as a hub for business and finance, the airport will be more important than ever.

Tourism arrivals remain steady, the recent drop in crisis-affected European visitors being offset by an increased influx from the island of Reunion, India and China.

Thanks to substantial funding from China, a new terminal that can handle around 4.5 million passengers a year is close to completion, and the Prime Minister is pleased at what this will mean for his country.

“The new passenger terminal is

expected to be one of the largest and most modern of its kind in the Indian Ocean,” he said.

“It is absolutely important that the quality of service and the security standards comply with international requirements.

“It will change many things for the country's image and for the Mauritians, and increase the connectivity of the country.”

Terminal 2 will cover an area of 57,000 square meters, and feature 52 check-in desks, six baggage claim carousels and nine telescopic air bridges.

It is part of an ambitious master plan that will also see the develop-

ment of a cargo and freeport zone. Airports of Mauritius Co Ltd, or AML, which owns SSR Airport, has already launched an expression of interest for phase one, that will cater for the development of the first segment of 20 hectares.

Serge Petit, CEO of AML and Duty Free Paradise, said: “The airport business is dynamic and often at the forefront of economic development.”

“To make this possible we integrate the latest technologies and gear our businesses towards exceeding standards.

“We also anticipate and plan for future developments in the sector.

“For instance, aircraft size is expected to increase by about 30 percent over the next 20 years and the world aircraft fleet is expected to double by 2030, with the creation and opening of new markets, such as in the BRICS countries.

“At the current time, 13 scheduled airlines serve more than 35 destinations throughout SSR.

“We welcome viable and innovative business proposals that would add value to our services and be beneficial to our passengers.

“For instance, three private groups owning land close to the airport are moving forward with commercial developments, such as the construction of hotels, office blocks, leisure and convenience facilities, and accommodations amongst other things.

“Duty-free shopping is one of the promising avenues. Space dedicated to this activity in the new terminal has doubled from about 1,000 to 2,200 square meters,” he said.

“The new shops have been designed by our partner DUFREY, one of the world's largest suppliers of duty free products.

“Food, drink and retail are critical revenue generators for modern airports because they are among the most important passenger needs.

“We are therefore planning for a modern food court offering a vast choice to passengers and all airport users.”

#### World-class connections

Since the country became independent 45 years ago, Air Mauritius has served as the national carrier, opening new routes and gateways for travel and trade.

Because it is still primarily a leisure destination, around 80 percent of the passenger traffic is made up of tourists.

Two thirds of visitors coming to the island are traditionally Europeans.

However with the economic crisis, that has impacted on demand for air travel, both the country and the airline embarked on a diversification strategy to rebalance growth to emerging markets.

Its operations to China is a pil-



PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Former Chinese President Hu Jintao (right), accompanied by Mauritian Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam, walks through the honor guard upon his arrival in Port Louis for a state visit in February 2009.

lar of this strategy. Air Mauritius CEO Andre Viljoen said: “Traffic between Mauritius and China is growing fast for a number of reasons.

“It is generated from the growing commercial activities between the two countries, as well as ethnic travel given the strong cultural ties.

“Also, China is becoming the leading tourism market for the world. Since we started operations to Shanghai via Kuala Lumpur in July 2011, Air Mauritius has registered double-digit growth rates.

“In January we introduced two direct flights to Shanghai and have just launched a direct flight to Beijing.

“This adds up to a total of nine

weekly flights to destinations in China, including three flights to Hong Kong and three connecting via our hub in Kuala Lumpur.

“The growth of tourist arrivals for the first five months of this year was around 70 percent.

“Since February 2011, the company has been implementing a set of measures aimed at restoring profitability and long-term economic sustainability.

“Arrivals and departures are now scheduled in such a way as to provide optimum connecting possibilities.

“Our hub in Europe remains Charles De Gaulle and the network has been concentrated around destinations like Kuala Lumpur,

Johannesburg, Nairobi and Perth. We are serving them through reinforced collaborations with partners.

“Other key measures aimed at boosting sales and revenue management have yielded robust results.”

Unit revenue improved by more than 14 percent for the financial year ended on March 31.

During that period the company also registered efficiency gains of around 35 million euros (\$46 million), and plans to phase in more efficient new generation aircraft.

Despite industry challenges, Air Mauritius remains a resilient and profitable company.

InFocus provided the story

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