

## Reunion Island, for the curious traveller

By Cari Coetzee

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Reunion Island - known for its crisp coral reefs and beaches, rainforested interior, not to mention it's active volcano *Piton de la Fournaise* - recently exhibited at WTM Africa 2017 as one of the top island destinations, not just for African travellers but for all globetrotters. While covering a mere 2,512 square kilometres, it offers a diverse landscape with many an activity to indulge in. We asked H  l  ne Bezuidenhout, Atout France representing Reunion Island Tourism Board in SA, to let us in on this tropical island's secrets.



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**■ Tell us about Reunion Island and what sets it apart from other island destinations close to Africa**

Reunion Island offers the perfect retreat away from the mundane and allows for the curious traveller to venture into the unknown, with a promise of adventure on the horizon. Nestled within the Indian Ocean, Reunion Island presents the ultimate experience for those looking to explore a tropical paradise with a twist. Unlike other destinations in close proximity to Africa, Reunion Island has a unique geographical setting, which ranges from an active basaltic volcano, the *Piton de la Fournaise*, to the cirques and forests which span across the rugged terrain and alongside the pristine coastlines of the island. The active volcano is one of the island's main attractions, as it allows travellers to experience the majesty of such a natural occurrence while safely trekking across the landscapes.

■ **What kind of travellers does the island attract and why?**

Reunion Island attracts every kind of traveller and caters for those looking to live life on the edge, with the option of enjoying a cocktail on the beach. From adrenaline sports such as paragliding, skydiving, and mountain biking, to cultural excursions and historical explorations, you can find it all on this tropical gem. For the traveller looking to test the waters and try new delicacies and cuisines, the gastronomy on the island is sure to excite and entice taste buds, due to a mixing pot of cultural lineages which have resulted in a tantalising culinary experience. Reunion Island, thus, makes for the ultimate destination for those who love to travel with options.

**■ With 40% of Reunion Island's territory classified as World Heritage by UNESCO, tell us about the island's efforts regarding conservation and responsible, sustainable tourism**

Reunion Island is a nature-lovers paradise, travellers can enjoy the tropical settings while still embarking on eco-friendly endeavours during their stay, ultimately assisting in sustaining the island's diverse ecological and microclimate systems.

Ecotourism here has gained international consecration since the island has been named as one of the 30 or so world biodiversity hotspots. The island's pitons, cirques, and ramparts, as mentioned, are listed as a World Heritage site by UNESCO, and are protected within the Reunion National Park, which accounts for 40% of the island's surface area.

Reunion Island continues its ventures in conservation through initiatives, which not only aim to educate locals but also visitors on the importance of sustaining the fragile ecosystems on the island. Conservation efforts regarding our marine life can be seen when exploring the marine reserve which spans across 40km of coastline, 20k of which is a coral reef.

■ ***What is Reunion's key African source market? Does the island have a strategy in growing inbound travel from Africa?***

With three direct flights weekly from Johannesburg to Reunion, we are seeing some significant increases in visitors and participating in initiatives such as WTM Africa is important in order to keep the momentum going. Reunion Island offers some very unique experiences and we are committed to strengthening our relationships in the region to ensure we keep all stakeholders informed on what our island has to offer.

■ ***What did Reunion Island hope to achieve by participating in WTM Africa 2017? What was the response from buyers and fellow exhibitors like?***

It is important for us to engage and be active participants in initiatives such as WTM Africa which allows us to begin conversations with the aim of harnessing strategic trade relationships and raise the profile for our unique destination. South Africa is a very important source market for us and we are keen to do what we can to encourage more people to visit our beautiful island.

## ABOUT CARI COETZEE

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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