An aerial photograph of a beach with a red flower on the sand. The water is a deep teal color, and the sand is a light, pale pinkish-beige. The flower is a small, bright red, multi-petaled flower, possibly a hibiscus, lying on the sand. The overall scene is serene and tropical.

# JOIN *the* DOTS

Le Saint G eran is the original beach pin-up on Mauritius, where the pedicurist is as famous as many of its guests and the manager rides a Harley. So how does it look after its recent  40 million costume change?

Preetham Halkory, a receptionist, has worked at Le Saint Géran since it opened in 1975, when it was practically the only hotel on Mauritius. (It was not until 2002 that it was rebranded as the One&Only Le Saint Géran, by which time its claim to uniqueness was a matter of wishful thinking rather than of straightforward description.)

Preetham has welcomed countless young couples who, between visits, became parents, and whose children grew up and became parents themselves, and who now come to stay with their own children. He has watched the hotel grow up too. It recently reopened after a nine-month renovation that has introduced a lovely new sense of lightness, brightness and uncluttered space. 'Very nice', in Preetham's opinion.

I suggested to Preetham that he must have seen quite a bit of, you know, stuff in his time. Antics. Escapades. Capers. Shenanigans. Wild nights with the hotel's former owner Sol Kerzner, the pint-sized, party-loving and much-married tycoon from South Africa who built Sun City and the One&Only empire, and for a while enjoyed a reputation as the most extravagant hotelier in the world. 'Oh, Mr Kerzner, yes,' said Preetham fondly. 'Very nice! His friends also.' In the back of my mind were stories I had heard about starry One&Only jamborees, certain colourful details of which it would not be wholly appropriate, or legally prudent, to repeat. In any case hijinks of this kind appear to have made little impression on Preetham. Catherine Deneuve in a bikini, perhaps? Princess Caroline of Monaco in a punch bowl? Nelson Mandela on a windsurfer? Preetham just smiled at me in a kind, solicitous way, as if worried

that I might have been slightly touched by the sun. When pressed, however, he did admit to having particularly enjoyed a visit by the Spanish flamenco troupe the Gipsy Kings. 'They were here for five nights. Every night they played their guitars and did wonderful things with their feet. Clickety-clack, clickety-clack, clickety-clack! All the guests got up and danced with them. Oh, yes, very nice!'

Such natural sweetness and impeccable discretion are the reasons why Preetham is a VIP to his VIP guests, a rock star among rock stars. When the renovation was nearing completion, his phone started ringing. 'You're still there?' the regulars wanted to know. 'Fine. Then we're coming back.'

Le Saint Géran has long inspired an almost cultish loyalty. More than half of its guests have stayed before; the current record holders are a Belgian couple who have returned 86 times. 'They don't have "Le Saint Géran" tattooed on their arms,' says the Harley Davidson-riding general manager, Charles de Foucault. 'But they're pretty close.'

What is it – apart from the charm of old-timers such as Preetham – that accounts for such fanaticism? True, the location is excellent. The beach is gorgeous. The hotel has always looked the palm-fringed part, in a fairly unassuming, whitewashed way, and post-renovation this is truer than ever. It has been freshened up and some of its proportions pleasingly manipulated. There are fewer rooms and more restaurants. There will be sighs of delight over the roasted sea bass with pomegranate at the pan-Asian Tapasake, guaranteed, though I suspect the ambitious redesign of La Terrasse, ostensibly in the manner of plantation-house

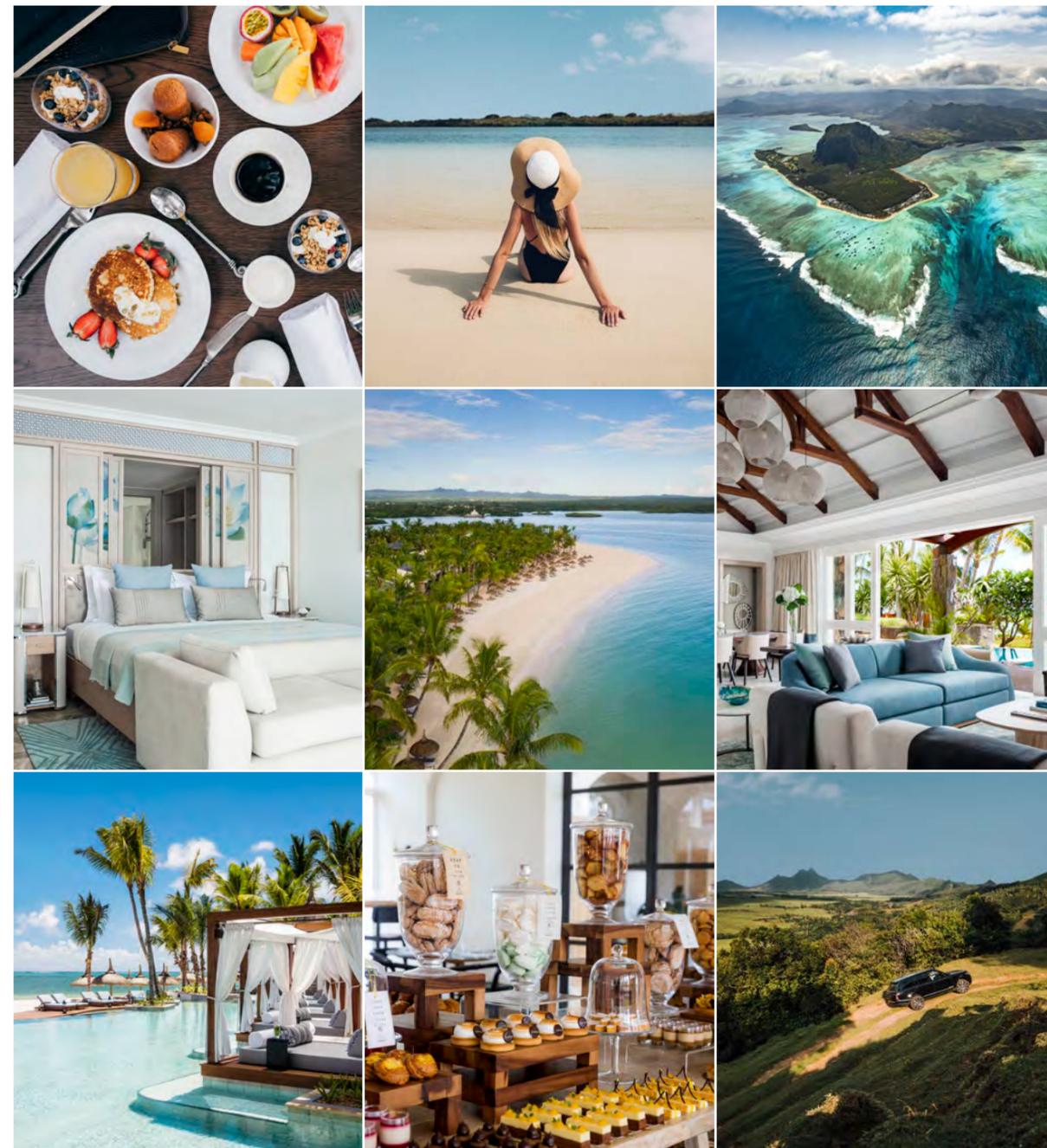
pergolas and somewhat at the expense of its ocean view, may be more divisive. The spa has expanded. The hotel was always fantastic for kids – endless distractions on land and water; vigilant supervision – and is now even better. Many of the fun flourishes remain, such as the spangled teepee by Alice Temperley and the quaint, teak-decked Princess Lisbeth, which once served as Her Majesty's tender on Mauritius and is now deployed for Champagne-and-snorkelling expeditions on the lagoon.

But it is also true that, these days, much the same, give or take, could be said of half a dozen other hotels on Mauritius, which apparently has the highest concentration of five-star joints of any island in the seven seas.

And yet, and yet. Like all great hotels, Le Saint Géran is more than the sum of its parts. I was amused to hear that the interior designers had been tasked with making the hotel resemble a Hermès bag. I failed to see any obvious similarity between my bedroom – a study in crisp, spare, white, cream and blue-grey neutrality – and the inside of a lady's holdall.

But the more I thought about it, the more the comparison came to make a kind of sense, if it was understood to signify something that is durable, practical, perennially fashionable and not merely admired and enjoyed but obsessively, passionately, devotedly loved.

*Steve King / Traveller © The Condé Nast Publications Ltd.*



*Top from left to right:*  
Breakfast dining; beach relaxation; ariel view of Mauritius  
*Middle from left to right:*  
Beach Front Junior Suite Bedroom, Beach, Villa One Living Room  
*Bottom from left to right:*  
La Pointe Cabanas and swimming pool, Interior at L'Artisan, Offroading in Land Rover Private Transfer