

# BUCKET LIST TRAILS

The must-do off-road events you might never have heard of



## 1 XTREME DODO TRAIL MAURITIUS, 13 JULY

► Claire Maxted tackles the island's highest mountain

What looked like a wall of soft, muddy mountainside reared up ahead. Chinks of sunlight broke through dense vegetation and danced over the gently fermenting guava underfoot, hinting at excitement above. Quick as my sluggish legs would allow, I Indiana-Jonesed (yes, that's a verb) up the bristly ropes and tree-trunk banisters of this natural staircase. Step after carefully-placed step, using the branches like rock climbing holds, my whole body and brain

was engaged in the act of getting to the top. Must get to the top. The cool, clay-like mud and the shade of the trees suddenly gave way to sun-warmed lava rocks and blinding daylight as my head poked out above the tree-line, squinting at two race marshals silhouetted against the bright Mauritian sun. The summit! Black River Peak, highest mountain on the island at 828m. Yesss! A high-five with the marshals and a quick 360 revealed a treasure island view: jade-blue ocean, white crests crashing on coral-pale ➔







## 'A quick 360 revealed a treasure island view: jade-blue ocean, white crests crashing'

beaches and the Black River Forest Park with its triangular mountains completely covered in broccoli green. Two summits down, three left to climb as the sun rose yet higher in the sky. Sweat dripped from my nose and face. The Dodo Trail was going to be tough.

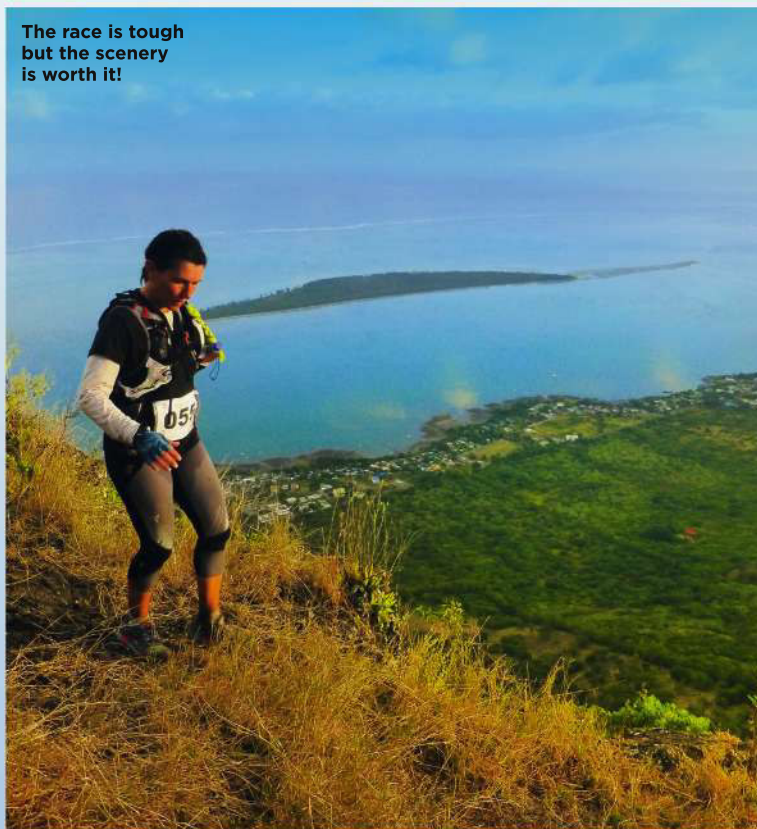
I was on the 50km Xtreme route with 3500m ascent, a south-westerly traverse of this beautiful island deep in the Indian Ocean, east of Madagascar. On an island more famous for relaxing beaches, honeymoons and sunbathing, the heart-pounding Dodo Trail is unexpected, little known and spectacular so, for trail runners surely the best way to see the island? Of course, creator and organiser Yan de Maroussem agrees. "This is your chance to explore and discover a new landscape," he says. "You can see everything. Running a flat marathon and doing the Dodo Trail is totally different. At some point you will feel really knackered. Just take it as a journey, don't rush it."

This was sound advice. Even the locals were finding the Mauritian mountainscape tough. As sunrise and birdsong crept through the trees on our first switchback climb, Piton du Fougé, Jérôme Desiré from sister island La Réunion said between breaths, "It's much steeper here. Where I come from there are more runnable hills."

Perhaps it's to do with the fact that chunks of the trail were hacked out by machete by Yan and his team. "The Xtreme Dodo passes through seven private estates," he explains, "We had permission to cut through, giving racers unique access to land not accessible at any other time." This also meant that you couldn't get lost, with dense vegetation either side of the path and meticulous red and yellow tape tied to branches along the way. Occasionally I'd hear chirrups and flurries from within this smooth, thick-leaved undergrowth, but saw nothing more exotic than white butterflies and a small brown lizard. "Maybe you will see a Dodo," Yan had joked at the race briefing. "Or maybe just be as dead as one at the end," we racers had flung back at him!

Determined not to become extinct, on hill after hill I perfected my Mauritian downhill technique of abseiling using the fixed ropes

The race is tough but the scenery is worth it!



50k

Race distance

3500

Metres of ascent

7

Peaks to climb

150

Number of runners

£66

Entry price

and chains (Yan recommends a sharp, safety-check tug first) whilst simultaneously revelling in the stupendous ocean-to-mountain views, or falling forwards through the trees, swinging through and clinging to their slim trunks to slow myself down. I passed a South African lady this way, who then caught me up on the next uphill and we yoyo-ed for the rest of the course. At Black River Gorge the paths were wider and sometimes lined with sugar cane, a large part of Mauritian history as well as its present. After the gorge, the route to Matala opened up to the most beautiful savannah of yellow grass, like silken blonde hair smoothed by a hairdryer-hot breeze. Now 10 hours in, my soles hurt, my legs ached, my ITB (see roundel above right) had been killing me since an hour into the race, there was no shade and I was slow-cooking in suncream and lycra. One last mountain, Tourelle Du Tamarin, stood between me and lying down. One foot in front of the other; finish the Xtreme Dodo Trail 50k. Joyfully, this final climb was an engaging rocky scramble to the top with a sweet reward – every single summit we'd climbed was in view.

Stunning beach and sea views are your reward on this tough Mauritian trail





Helicopter-like  
views from each  
summit await

## WHAT'S ITB?

The Iliotibial band (ITB) runs down the outside of your thigh. When tight it pulls agonisingly on your knee. Avoid this with advice from athlete Lizzy Hawker p72

As I rock-hopped steeply off the final peak, it was like looking down on the finish field from a helicopter. I could hear loud rousing music and tannoy at Riverland Sports Club, I was passing more cautious downhillers on the 25k half-course Le Ti Dodo Trail, my knee was agony, marshals were clapping and cheering and suddenly I was sprinting down the finishing straight. My 11 hours 20 mins of exploring Mauritius was over. Frenchman René-Paul Vitry smashed the course record in 5 hours 39 mins, closely followed by Vishal Ittoo who hopes to win this year's race, while first lady Cecile Ciman from La Reunion ran 7 hours 15 mins. However long your Dodo Trail journey, it is one that will stay with you forever. **TR**



Winner René-Paul Vitry said, "The course was tough but brilliantly enjoyable!"

**Watch it!** Watch editor Claire in the official DSTV Super Sport video [bit.ly/LNBcZM](http://bit.ly/LNBcZM) And watch our unofficial video at [trailrunningmag.co.uk/tr](http://trailrunningmag.co.uk/tr)

## INSIDER KNOWLEDGE



- 1 Race entry:** This year's 10k, 25k and 50k Dodo Trails and 5k family fun run will showcase the best of the island's scenery. Entries are open now! [dodo-trail.com](http://dodo-trail.com)
- 2 Getting there:** Air France flies from Manchester, Birmingham and more, from £723 per person this July. [skyscanner.net](http://skyscanner.net)
- 3 Sleep & eat:** The Dodo Trail is sponsored by luxury, green hotel and villa accommodation, Heritage Resorts. We stayed in the superb, friendly Heritage Le Telfair Golf and Spa Resort with beautiful views of the beach and sea, and 11 great places to eat and drink. This July, 2-person pool villa prices start from £288. [heritageresorts.mu](http://heritageresorts.mu)



## MAKE IT A HOLIDAY!

- 1 Watersports:** Try kite globing, surfing and Stand-Up-Paddling at C Beach Club. [kiteglobing.com](http://kiteglobing.com)
- 2 Seven Colours Spa:** Choose the colour and treatment to suit your mood and have the lactic in your legs massaged away. [heritageresorts.mu](http://heritageresorts.mu)
- 3 Adventure sports:** Explore the Frederica Nature Reserve by quad bike, mountain bike and trek through historic cane fields and factory ruins. [domaindebelombre.mu](http://domaindebelombre.mu)

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