

## Fashionable Tourism in Mauritius: A Case Study of Cultural Attraction Atmospherics

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### Abstract

*Atmospherics is a term previously used in retailing, hospitality, marketing and psychology research. Others have shown that the use of atmospherics increase tourist and customer patronage. Mauritius is known as a destination vacation island primarily because of its beaches. Tourists stay in hotels and visit tourist attractions perhaps unaware of the interior environment and its portrayal of the heritage and culture of Mauritians. This study bridges fashion to interior furnishings and furniture as it is seen in hotels, museums, and cultural attractions on the island of Mauritius. This study investigates sixteen tourist venues that used atmospherics to enhance tourism venues inducing visitors to appreciate their stay and return for more visits. Research identifies the elements of furnishings, reflecting heritage, that have represented in fashion, reflecting the culture of Mauritians, as seen in hotels, museums, and cultural attractions.*

**Keywords:** *Atmospherics, cultural tourism, fashion, heritage tourism, interior furnishings, Mauritius*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In a competitive global marketplace tourist destinations strive for differentiation. Travel destinations have moved beyond the traditional sun, sea and sand to a wider and more diverse market offering (**Boyd, 2002**). Travelers have evolved into sophisticated consumers interested in more than just the beach. Unique, exotic, and different environments fuel the growth of the ecotourism market (**Ayala, 1996**).

In the Indian Ocean, the island of Mauritius offers tourists an exotic, safe and contained vacation destination. Tourist options include large resort hotels stays, visits to plantation houses, sugar museums, and fashion shows, as well as shopping, gastronomy and beach time.

In some countries tourism may focus on the nature and surrounding beauty (ex: Australia's Outback;), other countries' focus might include museums (ex: France's Louvre), religious attractions (ex: Italy's Duomo), or even fashion (ex: New York's Fashion Avenue). All of these events or venues define the country's cultural and heritage tourism products.

Mauritius is unique in positioning itself as a beach destination, yet offering heritage and culture mixtures from nearby continents. The pervasiveness of fashion reflecting furnishings reflecting the mixed cultures of the island provide an ideal study of cultural attractions atmospherics providing the right environment for a heritage/cultural visitor.

## **2. SUPPORTING LITERATURE**

As the 21<sup>st</sup> century emerged, there was a renewed interest in travelers to rediscover the past (**Boyd, 2002**). Travelers of the new century have an interest in cultural and heritage attractions supporting the premise that heritage tourism is one of the fastest growing tourism sectors (**Capstick, 1985; Mooney-Melvin, 1991; Poria, et. al. 2004**). Heritage tourism focuses on a destination's historic, natural, and cultural value (**Boyd, 2002**) and moves beyond just an interest in the past encompassing the cultural and natural heritages of people.

Visitors look for attributes and characteristics in an attraction that appeal to their emotions and that emotional uniqueness can serve as a form of competitive differentiation for that specific attraction (**Bonn, et. al. 2007**). A tourist attraction seeks an emotional uniqueness through its "atmospherics." Atmospherics is defined by **Kotler (1973)** as the effort to design buying environments that enhance consumer purchase probability.

Color has been related to consumer liking and the positive perception of product (**Bellizzi, et.al. 1983**). When travelers are attracted to an environment a good experience positively affects evaluations of the product and leads to positive attitudes to the facility and to re-patronage (**Obermiller and Bitner, 1984**).

Previous research suggests that interior design and atmospheric elements provided the perceptions and mental images customers took with them that would affect their intent to recommend or revisit a tourist attraction. Managers should use atmospherics to convey image, manipulate attitudes and assist in the recall of existing positive attitudes. Professionals can manipulate interior design and overall atmospherics, using them as differentiating tools in the marketing and promotion of the attraction. Ultimately, the interior design of an attraction becomes fundamental in shaping the attraction's identity as well as its patronage (**Bonn, et.al.**

2007). Tourism research indicates a direct correlation between physical renovations and higher patronage figures (Barbieri, 2004; Sirefman, 1999).

Wilkins' research (2010) proposes that people want to purchase souvenirs reflective of the region, rather than general items. This indicates a regional connection is evident and encourages tourist professionals to focus on authenticity. Regional *aide memoirs* include photographs, paintings, arts, crafts, and local specialty products. Shopping is a major tourist activity (Fairhurst, et. al. 2007; Kim and Littrell 2001). Women tend to purchase souvenirs more frequently than men (Littrell, et. al. 1993) and souvenirs are more important to women tourists (Anderson and Littrell 1996).

The existing research literature supports that the island of Mauritius could position itself as a cultural tourist attraction extending beyond the three S's of sand, sea and sun. What else is unique to this island that would place it as cultural/heritage attraction? Mauritian history, culture, fashion, and interior furnishings all impact tourism and help to position the third world country as a cultural and heritage attraction.

### 3. RESEARCH PURPOSES

The purposes of this research study were multifold. First this study sought to explore the influence of the East Indies Trading Companies on the island of Mauritius, understanding the influx of interior furnishings and culture. Secondly, the research studies the linkage between interior furnishings and culture and fashion design. Finally, the study examines the relationships between the two major economies in the country of Mauritius, its textiles and apparel economy and its tourism economy.

### 4. METHOD

Over a four month period of time in 2011 data were collected at six resort hotels (Belle Mare Plage, Intercontinental, Maritim, Prince Maurice, Telfair, 20° Sud), 10 cultural attraction venues (Aubineaux, Bel Ombre Sugar Plantation, Bois Cheri Tea Plantation, Eureka, La Adventure Sucre, Labourdonnais, Moulin Casse, Reduit Chateau, St. Aubin, Lakaz Chamaryl), multiple fashion shows, magazines and brochures.

The case study was conducted following practices recommended by Yin (2012). This explanatory case study proposes how and why events happened that result in defining Mauritius as a cultural tourist attraction incorporating an atmospheric environment in its hotels and tourist venues. The sources used in this case study were: 1) direct observations [of cultural attractions, hotels and fashion shows]; 2) interviews [with cultural attractions, hotel, and fashion show management]; 3) document review [newspaper articles, printed brochures]; and, 4) participants observation [authors]. Notes and a photographic journal were used.

The formation of theoretical propositions that suggest a set of relationships as to why acts, events, structures, and thoughts occur aid in case study development. This study proposes the following hypothetical theories: (1) the unique location of the island of Mauritius and its background/history regarding trading companies impacted the culture, fashion, interior furnishings and tourism of the country; (2) the components of interior furnishings in hotels and attraction venues are replicated in fashion; (3) fashion (textiles and apparel) and tourism are the

top economic sectors for the country comprising a direct relationship; 4) cultural atmospheric are positively related to favorable consumer patronage.

#### **4.1 Statement of the Problem**

There is uniqueness to Mauritius which draws tourists from the world. What are the marketing components that are observed in hotels and tourist attractions that induce visitors to tour and return?

#### **4.2 Mauritius Background**

Mauritius is a small country of 1.3 million people on a small island (2,030 sq km) in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Mauritius lies 500 miles east of Madagascar and 1,200 miles from the nearest continent of Africa ([www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mp.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mp.html) 2012). About 68% of the population is Indo-Mauritian. Mauritius gained its independence from Great Britain in 1968. The country's official language is English, yet many people speak French as well as Creole. The islands' fashion and interior designers are a melting pot of cultural, educational, societal, and economic backgrounds.

Gross domestic product (GDP) is the market value of all officially recognized final goods and services produced within a country in a given period of time. Mauritius' current economy rests primarily on textiles and apparel; manufacturing is 18% of GDP. The two major markets for manufacturing export are Europe and the United States. A second major contributor to the economy is tourism which comprises 7% of GDP. The major markets for tourism are France, and west European countries ([www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov) 2012).

#### **4.3 The Influence of the East Indies Trading Companies**

The Dutch East India Company founded the uninhabited island of Mauritius in 1602 and used the island as a stop in their "spice route." The Dutch brought goods from Indonesia and articles of Dutch heritage and Dutch brought convicts from Java and slaves from Madagascar to work the sugar cane fields. At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Dutch left the island leaving people from Indonesia and Madagascar, their languages, culture and clothing practices.

In the 1700's the French inhabited the island. The French East India Company oversaw French commerce with India, eastern Africa, and other territories of the Indian Ocean and the East Indies ([www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com) 2012). East African, Indian, and Chinese slaves were brought to the island melding with French culture, food, language, fashion and customs, furniture and textiles.

When the British claimed the island in 1810, French customs and language stayed and became amicably integrated with the British customs and language. Mauritius had already been an important stop for the British East Indies Trading Company.

The British East India Trading traded in cotton and silk piece goods, indigo, and spices from South India. Its activities encompassed the Persian Gulf, Southeast Asia, and East Asia ([www.victorianweb.org](http://www.victorianweb.org) 2012). Influence in the household arts of textiles, clothing, furniture and housing design was now apparent from many cultures.

#### **4.4 Interior Furnishings and Fashion**

The only influence on furnishings and fashion from 1600 forward was from articles brought to the island by the Indies Trading Companies. All of the East Indies Trading Companies brought their language, their customs, and their furniture and designs ([www.furniturestyles.net](http://www.furniturestyles.net) 2012). The British culture merged with Asian culture producing the British Colonial, Colonial India, Campaign, and Chinese styles of furniture and décor in interiors.

The British Colonial Style is usually designed in solid teak and mahogany wood with Asian and African motifs. It is sturdy, fanciful, and incorporates rattan, leather, and animal prints. Figure 1 illustrates teak and mahogany African motif furnishings found at tourist attraction (left) and Mauritian fashion with similar motif.



**Figure 1. African Teak and Mahogany Artifact Replicated in Mauritian Fashion**

Colonial India Style furniture reflects Hindu architecture and design and is known for details such as inlaid ivory, gilt mirrors, ornate scrolled legs found in tables, chests, and dressers. Inlaid woods and marquetry are prevalent. Intricate designs in cloth, draperies, rugs, pillows, throws are prevalent. Exotic, practical, cheerful, bright, animal prints, Indian sari fabrics, and detailed prints that portrayed the British adopted lands are evident in colonial décor and colors. Figure 2 illustrates marquetry in furniture found in a tourist attraction (left) and Mauritian fashion with similar motif.



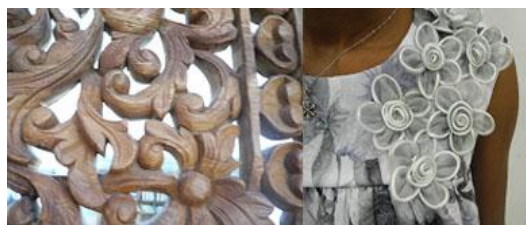
**Figure 2. Marquetry Chest Replicated in Mauritian Fashion**

Campaign Furniture is mobile, lighter weight, usually collapsible, and often has ingenious hidden compartments. Leather suitcase tables, animal skins, sisal and reed rugs were practical, transportable, and common. The furniture is easily transported from one place to another, hence the name "campaign" or "camp" ([www.home-decorating-reviews.com](http://www.home-decorating-reviews.com) 2012). Figure 3 illustrates a suitcase stand furnishing found in a tourist attraction (left) and Mauritian fashion with similar motif.



**Figure 3. Campaign Suitcase Chest Replicated in Mauritian Fashion**

Furniture hand carved by Chinese artisans in rosewood represents the Asian/Chinese influence found in Mauritius. Figure 4 illustrates a carved furnishing found in a tourist attraction (left) and Mauritian fashion with similar motif.



**Figure 4. Hand-carved Grill Replicated in Mauritian Fashion**

As people moved to Mauritius bringing their culture and furniture/furnishings they brought their clothing. When the country gained its independence from Great Britain in 1997 one of its major economies was clothing exports (Lim Fat, 2010). Mauritius' production of clothing for the global market advanced its fashion design. Schools, colleges, and universities promoted the study of textiles and fashion. Fashion became a visible and respected business venture.

Fashion shows were held demonstrating the talent of designers in the country at the local level. Hotels, museums and firms used fashion shows to further their business. Antwerp, Belgium became a fashion capital using the logic of organized tourism and cultural events (Martinez, 2007). Similarly, Mauritius intertwined public (fashion institutions, trade and tourist organizations) and private networks (fashion and interior designers, manufacturers, hotels, museums) to create a characteristic atmosphere for their prime economies of apparel and tourism. Researcher Julier (2000) stated that affordable and buyable objects displayed in exhibition rooms achieve "museum status." Bonn et. al. (2007) confirms the validity of investing resources in the creation of high-quality interior design to form the right attraction atmospheric environment for heritage/cultural visitors. Ambiance, design, color scheme, layout, and social factors play a critical role in visitation numbers, perceptions, and word-of-mouth recommendations.

Designers in Mauritius incorporate design motifs and colors in their clothing, taking inspiration from the British Colonial, Colonial India, Campaign, and Asian/Chinese home furnishings. Examples of transcendence of clothing to furniture or furniture to clothing are apparent in these

examples found in Mauritius museums and resort hotels. The furnishings to fashion relationship is apparent in style, composition/fabrication, color, and artistic/design details.

The most predominant correlation between past furniture and present fashion was identifiable artistic design. Three design elements were evident: Marquetry/inlay, Rondels and Embellishments. Figure 5 illustrates rondels in a furnishing found in a tourist attraction (left) and Mauritian fashion with similar motif.



**Figure 5. Rondels on a Chest Replicated in Mauritian Fashion**

East Indies furniture had swirled carvings of leaves, flowers, or geometric lines often inlaid with pearl or painting. These highly ornamental and decorative embellishments were often repeated design elements in women's fashions. Mauritian garments, whether they were evening or day wear, were heavily embellished creating the inlay effect in fabric. Figure 6 illustrates a decorative embellishment furnishing found in a tourist attraction (left) and Mauritian fashion with similar motif.



**Figure 6. Embellished Table Replicated in Mauritian Fashion**

Rosettes or rondels were apparent in door frames, chair backs, table legs, bed frames and other furniture designs of East Indies influence. This same rosette concept was apparent in circular embellishments or part of the overall textile design. Figure 7 illustrates a decorative rosette furnishing found in a tourist attraction (left) and Mauritian fashion with similar motif.



**Figure 7. Rondel Artifact Replicated in Mauritian Fashion**

#### **4.5 Fashion and Tourism**

Mauritius National Tourism Policy emphasizes low impact on high spending tourism. Selective, up-market, quality tourism is favored, and constitutes the major segment of the tourists who stay in high class hotels ([www.tradechakra.com](http://www.tradechakra.com), 2013). One-third of Mauritius tourists are repeating customers and 80% of tourists stay at hotels. Mauritius is known for its friendly, welcoming, hospitality atmosphere multi-ethnic, cultural population. The multiplier effect of tourism leads to various cycles of other income ([www.gov.mu](http://www.gov.mu), 2013).

A recent study reveals that Mauritius tourist market share has declined in the past couple of years and that diversification and new marketing techniques are needed to reform the sector as has been done in the textiles sector ([www.axys-group.com](http://www.axys-group.com) 2013). A recent study by Pravag et al. (2010) concludes that Mauritius tourism industry needed to embrace principles of environmental, economic and social sustainability for continued success.

Management of Mauritius hotels, museums, and tourist attractions attested to the inclusion of interior furnishings and artifacts in their places of business that reflect the multi-ethnicity of Mauritians and their culture. These reforms are the unique experiences tourists reported to management that contribute to overall positive consumer response, which manifests itself in positive purchase behavior as researched by Dietsch (1997). These are the examples of atmospherics that created the right environment for tourists.

#### **5. CONCLUSIONS**

In Mauritius, the business of tourism, the second largest economic sector, aware of its multiple ethnicities' heritage and culture, translated furnishings and fashion elements into the known marketing strategy of atmospherics. The research done by Bonn et. al. (2007) suggests that interior design and atmospheric elements provide the perceptions and mental images customers take with them that would affect their intent to recommend or revisit Mauritius. One third of Mauritius' tourists are repeating visitors. Simultaneously, just as Belgium made *avant-garde* fashion a part of its urban identity, Mauritius tourism embraced island fashion by replicating and reinforcing cultural design elements in its hotels and tourist attractions' furnishings.

Atmospherics was not a term used by those interviewed in this case study; however, discussion often revolved around the use of interior design, furniture, furnishings, and color to assure the tourist of the Mauritian culture.

This study confirmed that Mauritius is unique in its heritage. The island was a blank canvas in 1600 and is now an amicable blend of African, British, Chinese, French, Indian, and Indonesian people. The East Indies trading companies brought the furniture and furnishings to the island from their trading lands.

Secondly, a direct correlation was observed between components of interior furnishings and Mauritian fashion. Replication of design patterns found in furniture was found in women's fashions. Clothing represents the culture of the people and bridging that clothing with interior furnishings reiterates the heritage of the people.



Textiles and apparel and tourism are the second and third economic sectors of the country (sugar is number one). As strong sectors they worked together to better define their marketing potential. A direct relationship was formed.

This study offers a unique investigation of merchandising fashionable furnishings in hotels and cultural attractions as an effort to provide environments that encourage tourists to purchase and to revisit the island of Mauritius. Heritage tourism professionals can create fashion images and perceptions through direct manipulation of atmospherics. Mauritian furniture and fashions were atmospherics found in use by the firms researched in this study.

This case study approached heritage and cultural atmospherics of Mauritius tourism through the eyes of fashion and merchandising a fashionable interior space in hotels and other tourist venues. Questions emerged-How have other tourist locations positioned themselves in their markets knowingly using atmospherics? How often are fashion clothing elements found in furnishings found in tourist venues? Many cities are known for their fashion, such as Paris, Milan and New York. How has fashion bridged interior furnishings representing the heritage atmospherics of the city with regards to tourist venues? Further research needs to look at a measurable means of linking fashion and furnishings as atmospherics to successful and financially rewarding tourism.

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