



# Time to switch off

**Hannah Stephenson and her son take a digital detox in Mauritius, where they ditch their smartphones and switch on to sports and nature trails**

**A** CHINESE tourist positions herself on the front of the wide-beamed catamaran before raising a sci-fi stick like a conductor's baton.

But try as she might, she can't quite capture the pod of dolphins in the sparkling Indian Ocean, that she was trying to feature as a backdrop. Eventually, she settles for a picture just of herself. It's a sharp reminder of how easy it is to miss really amazing things when your sights are on social media.

It's a fitting example for my 17-year-old son Will, too, as we embark on a digital detox on the island, 1,200 miles off the south-east coast of Africa, for a week devoid of the ping of smartphones, the lure of Pokemon GO and the interruptions of Instagram.

We decide on our detox strategy – no phones when we're out during the day, no phones at mealtimes, no phones or tablets in the bar. FaceTime allows for contacting relatives at night, to save on hotel phone calls, as the hotel has free wi-fi.

We head for the Heritage Awali Golf and Spa Resort, one of the top all-inclusives, offering a plethora of sporting distractions and an impressive

nature reserve on its doorstep, in the wilder, less commercial south of the island.

Set on the former sugar estate of Domaine de Bel Ombre, the African-themed hotel, featuring a decor of tribal art, drums and masks, is one of two neighbouring five-star golf and spa resorts in the same group – the other is Le Telfair – which share each other's facilities.

We head for the O Beach Club, a hangout for sports lovers and sun worshippers, where sports on offer include kite surfing, paddle boarding and water skiing. After initial twitches to reach for the phone, we gradually begin

to switch off. Boredom doesn't feature – we scale the beach on Segways, practise our swings on the driving range, snorkel and detox further in the spa, resulting in sighs and smiles in equal measure. The shallow lagoons and steady winds of



Hannah and Will on Segways. Above, the Heritage Awali Golf and Spa Resort

the south-west coast make Bel Ombre a terrific kite surf location. We discover, though, that you have to master flying a kite the size of a small tent on land before taking to the water, so anyone expecting to be kite surfing like a pro after one lesson should think again.

Without a phone, mealtimes become a pleasure. Will peruses the menus with more interest, taking in the dishes which reflect the different cultures and the Indian, Chinese, Creole and French influences of the island. Later, we sit in the open air with our all-inclusive drinks, a pack of cards and laugh, talk like we haven't talked for a while.

Mauritius isn't just a fly-and-flop destination with paradise beaches, though. It also has mountains, volcanoes, waterfalls and nature reserves. The Domaine de Bel Ombre

is home to the Frederica Nature Reserve, a former sugar cane estate which has been transformed into a conservation area. It's home to Java deer, wild boar, long-tailed macaque monkeys and a plethora of birds, although we're centuries too late to spot the long-extinct flightless dodo, endemic to Mauritius, whose last confirmed sighting was in 1662. Will and I embark on a 4x4 buggy trail – the more adventurous can do it on quad bikes, in the hope of spotting some real wildlife.

Along the way we spot deer, nearly run over numerous pheasants, examine great

termite nests on thick black ebony trees and seek out the common grazing spots of wild boar. On the journey back, we stop to sample the sweet sap from sugar cane – still the main industry of Mauritius. Leave the

luxury tourist resorts and you enter a different world. Colonial-style houses sit on the mountain slopes, while on the southern coastal road to Souillac, long fronds of banyan trees sway in the breeze and tall, slender conifer-like filao trees provide shade along the beaches.

Markets are peppered along the coast, while locals sell coconuts, pineapples, bananas and mangoes at stalls. Most choose to stay on the island, working in agriculture or tourism.

As we leave the island, Will's phone starts pinging with messages and I feel my burgeoning email box beckoning – but it was great to look up from our phones for a while.

Hannah Stephenson stayed at the Heritage Awali ([www.heritageresorts.mu/en](http://www.heritageresorts.mu/en)). Rooms cost from £276 per night (two sharing) on an all-inclusive basis