

TRAVEL

TIME TO GET AWAY

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Tahitian elders will talk of the tentacles of a giant octopus reaching out to make sure of the visitor's return to their island. — SHANNON MELNYK PHOTO

Let Moorea's magic embrace you

FRENCH POLYNESIA: Just a hop from Tahiti to this oasis of velvety green in a sea of blue

BY SHANNON MELNYK
FOR THE PROVINCE

Once you've ventured to the two-million-year-old volcanic triangle that is Moorea, Tahitian elders may talk of the tentacular pull of a giant octopus in the French Polynesian

island's aqua seas that will ensure a return. It may not so much be a myth, but an all-encompassing metaphor that speaks to Moorea's compelling charm.

Just a quick flight or a 30-minute scenic catamaran from Tahiti's capital city of Papeete, Moorea enjoys

all the lagoon splendour of its more touted island sister, Bora Bora, but with less of the saturated branding one experiences with the discovery of a pearl in the rough. Moorea is no secret, but perhaps that octopus' arms are being put to work in holding onto the indigenous Polyne-

sian authenticity that leaves passers-by greeted with a melodious "Ia Orana!" by locals and castaways alike.

Hotels are international, managed mostly by French converts who openly voice their preference to favouring Pacific Islanders over continental staff, resulting in conversa-

tions that dance between English, French and Tahitian expressions. The Polynesian philosophy: "if you like me, I like you" is never more evident than on this island; the Vahine, or Tahitian women, are surely

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Finding the gentler way

From Page A17

best described with "eyes of a tawny black full of exotic langour and coaxing softness", as French novelist Pierre Loti's prose suggests. Though Moorea is a modern hub, the simplicity of what's materially available here together with the gentle way of the people are somehow a reminder of days past, before the invasion of the Blackberry ring tones.

Quirky galleries dotted along the main road are subtle clues as to the types Moorea attract: Artists who follow the footsteps of painter Paul Gauguin and author James Michener before them are easily inspired. This dot on the map is triumphed by towering emerald peaks with craggy shapes such as the formidable shark's tooth-shaped Mount Matauroa, best enjoyed in the periphery of water lust, or aboard a saucy quad making your way up to the peak of what locals call Magic Mountain. It's a virtual Garden of Eden with panoramic rewards. The guided trek includes fol-



The view from Magic Mountain sets out panoramic rewards that are beyond priceless. — HANDOUT PHOTO

icking in the range and rivers amid pineapple plantations, content and muddied pigs, fragrant tiare, sprawling banyans, hibiscus, and an all-out tropical fruit extravaganza.

You'll find yourself on nature's campus otherwise known as Lycee Agricole d'Opunohu, an agricultural high school of sorts for all of French Polynesia, where taste buds trip out to samples of tiare-tinged marmalade and star fruit smoothies.

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE GOOD LIFE.



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This danger sign seems out of place on an island of gentle charms. — SHANNON MELNYK PHOTO

Ascend to the Belvédère Look-out for sweeping views of the valley and the bays on either side of imposing Mount Rotui, unmatched in the South Pacific — unless, of course you head up to the top of this majestic range for the sparkling sight of Opunoha Bay.

You'll be let in on the unexplained and quaint fact that it was here Captain Cook anchored and may never have even seen "Cooks Bay" located on the other side.

Moorea is easily discovered in its entirety; it's 62 kilometre-

tres round and takes only a half day to cycle; taking to the Pacific if you are a diver is not to be missed, as Moorea is an oasis of sharks, turtles, tropical fish and sunken carved tiki stones.

Land and sea are also best covered with eco-friendly Tahiti Expeditions, which hosts unique excursions by way of traditional outrigger canoes.

In a variety of tours, you can paddle, snorkel and hike your way to a new understanding of coral reef ecology, ancient village exploration or the cultural history of the island.

The magic continues come nightfall, but you'll be hard pressed to find any serious action.

It's all about the over-water accommodations — glass bottomed bungalows where you can wake up and realize it wasn't all just a dream as you roll out of bed, off your deck and into the life-size aquarium filled with technicolour marine life that await their starring role in your vacation.

Just remember what they say about the giant octopus.

If you go

Getting there: Take an eight-hour flight to Tahiti's capital Papeete on Air Tahiti Nui via Los Angeles. Reach Moorea by way of a 5-minute air transfer or high speed catamaran ferry.

Language: French, English, Tahitian. Over-water bungalow accommodations: The Hilton Moorea Lagoon and Spa (www.hilton.com), The Moorea Pearl Resort and Spa (www.pearlresorts.com) or the Sofitel Moorea la Ora Beach Resort (www.sofitel.com).

Tours: Magic Mountain excursions via ATV Moorea Tours (www.atvmoorea.com) Eco-tours with Tahiti Expeditions (www.tahitiexpeditions.com). Diving at la Ora Diving Club via the Sofitel Beach Resort (www.sofitel.com).



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Disney lands on Hawaiian shores

In a move that sends either shivers of delight or shudders of loathing among fans of Hawaii, Disney is set to open its first resort in Oahu next year.

The 800-plus-unit property, dubbed "Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa," is designed as a Polynesian village (albeit one with highrise towers) that will include hotel rooms and two-bedroom Disney Vacation Club Villas.

The resort is being built in Ko Olina,

a golf and vacation development that already has a Marriott resort and a man-made beach.

Aulani is a different kind of development for Disney, the first that isn't linked to a theme park or its cruise line. The hotel will be far from famous tourist areas and is the kind of self-contained environment Disney likes for many of its developments.

-MCT

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