

SPAS



Massage practitioners practise in the morning before guests arrive in exclusive spa rooms which feature a fish-viewing window in the floor.

A Bounty of delights awaits in Tahiti

Opportunities for dangerous liaisons and blissful experiences abound

BY SHANNON MELNYK

It wasn't until flying over Tahiti and her islands Moorea and Bora Bora — channels of multi-hued indigos staggering to the naked eye — that I finally understood the gravity of *The Mutiny on the Bounty*.

It's a hard place to fathom and an even harder place to leave.

One of my missions in paradise was to review the internationally feted spa scene; spa reviews, in my experience, can be dubious. My last excursion on the Riviera Nayarit landed me in a wheelchair in Dallas during a freak ice storm. It seems six back-to-back massages triggered a sciatic nerve. Laugh all you like, but I didn't walk for two months. Nevertheless, give up a gig like that? Who needs legs, I reasoned.

Opportunities for dangerous liaisons are everywhere on the Pacific Islands. Polynesians are gentle souls but have the strength of gods. It took an education in Taumuri at Pearl Beach's Mania Spa — traditional Polynesian massage, sometimes without the use of hands — to appreciate the depths of hardcore bliss. During my stay I had the unsettling good fortune to swim among the sharks, but it wasn't until mid-swoon at the palatial worship-worthy spa at the Four Seasons Bora Bora that severe bleeding emerged out of an attempt at a smooth shave using the posh complementary toiletries. But if I could survive the 200-pound woman hanging from a rafter over my naked body while she applied deep tropic pressure with her feet, I could survive my own relaxation-induced clumsiness with a razor.

For a travel writer, jet lag is not to be underestimated. French Polynesia is truly in the middle of nowhere, requiring beaucoup, beaucoup, beaucoup de travel hours to reach this pristine destination. But luckily supernatural heavens like Intercontinental's world renowned marine-based Thalasso Spa are a constant of weary, sun-stroke-prone pretzels seeking rejuvenation; in an outdoor lagoon lounge complete with icy plunge pools and a jetted deep-chiller water designed for jet-lagged legs, a danger sign sits innocently in the garden on a slight cliff. Either they'd seen me coming, or I'm not the only one that has succumbed to the hazards of South Pacific rapture.

After you're prepared for its inherent dangers, however, you'll be hard-pressed to find something to complain

about in the spa utopia that is French Polynesia. Offerings are unique here and treatments are not services but rather experiences to treasure.

Predictably, prestige lines from France are used for facials but the art of massage and hydrotherapies is all about the pure organic monoi oil and natural island exfoliants and plants Tahitians have used to knead their babies from the beginning of time.

Lushly wafting from every sanctuary and steam room is monoi infused with tropical tiare, frangipani, Tahitian vanilla, grapefruit or coconut. True, unforgettable tranquility surrounds you in lagoon settings or on the edge of crashing waves as you take in the smells and sights of paradise while you're busy sipping an iced ginger tea and thanking your lucky pineapples.

Spa experiences not to be missed:

Bora Bora

Spa is the new religion upon entering the cathedral-like 72-foot ceiling sanctuary of the Spa at Four Seasons Resort Bora Bora. Amidst kahaia blossoms and suspended above a plantation of pandanus trees, opt for the signature two-hour Kahaia Haven Ritual: a head to toe apricot kernel and parau (pearl dust) body polish and massage inspired by the taumuri tradition.

The Mania Spa at the Pearl Resort and Spa offers the ultimate expression of Polynesian bodywork with the Aave Taurumi massage. Inquire as to the availability of native islander Djelma, whose fancy footwork makes for a unique deep tissue delight. For a more permanent impression, traditional Marquesian tattooing is offered by native artist Jean-Yves "Matatiki" Tamarii. Opt for a Kava-Java anti-jet-lag treatment and partial proceeds will go to offsetting your travelling carbon emissions through Sustainable Travel International. Unique to the planet is Hotel Intercontinental Bora Bora Resort and Thalasso Spa's Deep Ocean Spa by Algotherm. H2O drawn from the Pacific Ocean at depths of over three thousand feet offers treatments infusing deep sea water to replenish the body's minerals. With the volcanic submarine life-enriched composition closer to that of blood plasma, the marine water is heated and active marine ingredients are absorbed for perfect remineralization. If your pearl-shimmered silken



Moorea offers splendid views and a host of luxurious spas.

skin isn't enough to memorize, you'll want to keep your eyes open for the first time in massage history — the glass floor below your bed gives way to soothing views of needle fish and octopus while their days away in the coral sea garden.

Moorea

Polynesian-sprinkled international fare caters especially to honeymooners at the Hilton Moorea Lagoon Spa. International Spa maven Estelle Latapie-St. John brings her unique approach to wellness ambience by way of France, Barbados and Dubai to offer Moorean spa delicacies for two in the Royal Couple Suite. Lush gardens surround the Moorea Pearl Resort and Spa, where treatments echo its location in Bora Bora. Be sure to ask for Tahitian therapist Jo-Jo, who unlike North American practitioners gives due diligence to

the tummy. Luxury property Sofitel provides the French touch with tranquil candlelit treatment rooms and panoramic views across the lagoon; try a volcanic hot stone massage enhanced by ylang ylang butter. On your way out, have Pearl Romance's Agatha enrapture you with the true love story that inspired the multi-hued diamonds of the sea that grace her body.

Tahiti

Taurumi —tinged balneotherapy offers massage treatments while fully immersed in water at Le Spa at the Radisson Plaza Resort Tahiti. Exclusive homemade preparations are based on ancestral recipes using indigenous fruit and flowers, Tahitian vanilla and the mineral-rich Orohena black sand of Matavai Bay.

Special to The Sun

TRAVEL TEMPTATIONS

BY RICK CROPP AND BARBARA BRAIDWOOD

Camp Inside Out

The Royal BC Museum (1-250-387-2163, www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca) offers weeklong day camps for kids (aged 8 to 10) for selected weeks in July and August at \$224 per week. Highlights include meeting curators and special effects crews, dissecting owl pellets for rodent bones, exploring the museum's hidden collections and more.

Birdwatching Fair

The Aug. 20 to 22 Birdwatching Fair (www.birdfair.org.uk, £10 (\$16)), supporting global bird conservation takes place in Rutland Water (east midlands), one of England's most important osprey breeding sites. It offers lectures, book launches, entertainment plus stands selling everything from binoculars to sculptures.

Peachy Pentiction

The 63rd annual Pentiction Peachfest Festival (www.peachfest.com) is free entertainment from Aug. 4 to 8 with bands, dancers, parades, martial arts demonstrations, hypnotist shows, various competitions — including one for sandcastles — a square dance festival and more. There are also loads of food and merchandise vendors.

Spaah

Spa lovers check out SpaFinder's (www.spafinder.com/iPhone) new free iPhone app to find spas and treatment deals. You can search SpaFinder's database (with overviews, treatment menus and customer reviews) of 5,000 day and destination spas around the world by price, deals, treatments, and online booking availability.

Sleep offers

Bellingham's Hotel Bellwether (www.hotelbellwether.com) has a no sales tax offer (an 8.5-per-cent savings) for B.C. residents through September. Or mid-week, you can purchase one night at the regular rate and get the second at 50 per cent off.

Desert heat

If you like the desert's dry heat, check the Thunderbird Lodge (www.thirdlodge.com, nightly from US\$114) in Arizona's Canyon de Chelly National Monument (www.nps.gov/coch). Built as a trading post in 1896, it offers an authorized canyon day tour with Navajo guides explaining about the canyon.

Orca adventure

Sea Kayak Adventures (1-800-616-1943, www.seakayakadventures.com) has a new four-day Orca Quick Adventure guided paddling trip, Aug. 16 to 19, through Johnstone Strait off northern Vancouver Island. Priced from US\$1,095, trips depart from Port McNeill and include camping and kayaking equipment, meals, kayaking instruction and guide.

Free flight

Your companion flies for free on Indus Travels' (604-279-8794, www.industravel.ca) 12-day Mystical India tour when booked by July 30 for travel by March 31. The tour includes accommodation with breakfast, entrance fees and more. From Vancouver, it's from \$5,700 (plus airfare taxes) for 2 people, regularly \$6,700.

Hawaii sleeps

Waikiki's Ala Moana Hotel is celebrating turning 40 by offering 40 rooms at US\$40 per night. Book online (www.alamoanahotel.com/40) and stay from three to five nights between Aug. 1 and 31. If you were born on Aug. 3, 1970 — the hotel's opening day — get a free three-night stay in August.

Barbara Braidwood and Rick Cropp (RickandBarbara@telus.net) are Vancouver-based writers.