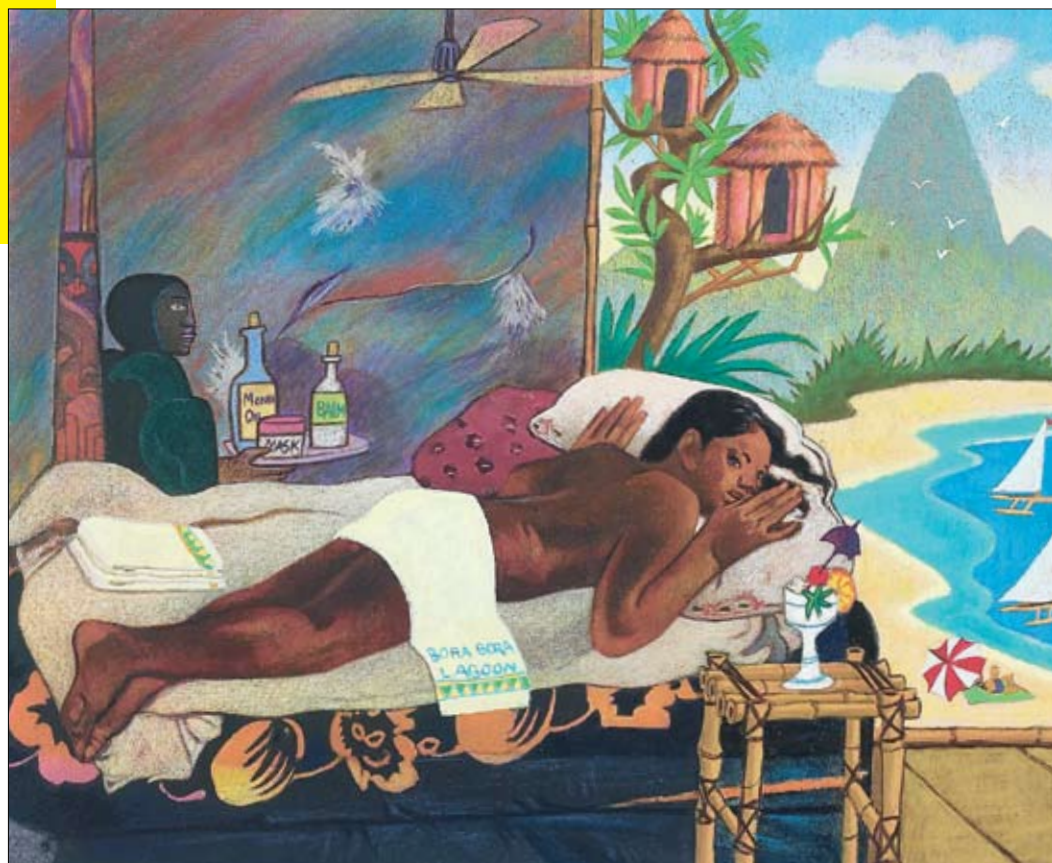


The *CLEANSING* Aura of *Bora Bora*

SPA HOUND

Easing into the PERFECT, skin-nourishing water—candles flickering, a fresh coconut drink and pineapple slices alongside, hibiscus blossoms floating—I hear birds singing, waves lapping.



SPAHOUND FINDS HERSELF up a tree, staring at a mountain. Not any tree, mind you, and not any mountain: She is 12 feet above a sandy beach in a fragrant, 40-foot-tall caoutchouc (rubber) tree, staring at Otemanu, the mystical peak of Bora Bora that inspired James Michener's fictional Bali H'ai. The very island where *South Pacific*, a cinematic touchstone of her youth, was filmed. Seeking tenderness rather than trouble in Tahiti, humming the tune from the movie, she is preparing to have the exotic massage of her life.

After experiencing enormous spas of late, I'm ready to go native in a more intimate venue. At the Bora Bora Lagoon Resort, 77 thatched bungalows surrounded by gardens and over the bluest waters on Earth—drenched in so much romance that I can't resist the urge to kiss my own hand—I find it. The new Maru Spa has but five treatment rooms, two of them nestled in the treetops. Lost at first, I go from large tree to tree demanding a massage until one answers.

Aside from being the only treetop spa in French Polynesia, Maru is distinctive for its

use of Tahitian techniques, rituals and local ingredients used in its exclusive line of soothing products. **The Sacred Tamanu Treatment**, a 90-minute, \$200 extravaganza incorporating tamanu, an herb used for centuries as a tropical aid for burns and dry skin, beckons. Happily installed in my caoutchouc aerie—replete with shower, ceiling fan and aforementioned view—I am slathered with tamanu balm to hydrate and detox, cocooned in warm towels, and given a hydrating face mask by the amiable Ann. Then, as I'm cooled by tropical breezes from the lagoon, my neglected scalp is invigoratingly massaged with warm Monoï, sacred local oil combining coconut, plants and fresh tiare, the national flower of Tahiti.

After a half-hour, it's time for a brief shower, then back to the table for a gentle body massage with Monoï oil because of sunburn—yes, Spahound's sunblock has failed her, and she's lobster-red from chin to toes. My muscles, already legume-like from the very fact that I am—let's face it—in paradise, veritably whisper "merci" to me. (Spa tip: Save the brutality for Budapest. By custom, Tahitian massage is meant to relax the body, not reconfigure it. →

AN EARLY STUDY FOR MANAO TUPAPAU, BY PAUL GAUGUIN (1848-1903). COULD THE RICHNESS OF THE EVENTUAL MASTERPIECE (CIRCA 1893-4), WHICH HANGS IN THE RIJKSMUSEUM IN THE NETHERLANDS, HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH MASSAGE OILS?

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MORE Bora Bora

“Maru,” in Tahitian, means “kind, soft of sound and touch.”) This could have been the happy finale, but the advantage of an intimate spa, where I feel like the only client, is the chance to customize. Longing to prolong contentment, I float downstairs for a decadent coconut-milk drink and a flower bath in a private beachside room. (Part of a three-hour **“Honeymoon Bliss”** treatment—and this is the place for a honeymoon—the tub is fortunately available.) Easing into the perfect, skin-nourishing water—

candles flickering, a fresh coconut drink and pineapple slices alongside, hibiscus blossoms floating—I hear birds singing, waves lapping. Even solo, la vie is indeed belle.

After this, one could wade into the surf, à la Norman Maine in *A Star Is Born* (another cinematic touchstone), and die happy. I waft instead to my over-the-water bungalow to watch Tahitian Television: impossible-colored tropical fish swimming beneath my glass-topped coffee table. They seem happy... but I'm happier.—*Mary Alice Kellogg*



Splendor!

STYLE + TRAVEL NOVEMBER 2005

It all worked for us in October. So much so that we're re-upping for another consultation with Splendor, Authority on Fabulous.

WHERE TO ROMANCE The Carneros Inn, Napa, California

WHERE TO SPA NEXT The Fairmont Banff Springs Willow Stream Spa, Alberta, Canada

WHERE TO PEOPLE-WATCH La Palette in Paris

HAUTE SHOPPING CITY Philadelphia

WHAT TO SPORT the annual Harvard-Yale game

WHAT TO BAG Goyard Majordome bag

WHAT TO ACCESSORY Dior's houndstooth toothpaste cover

WHAT TO FRAGRANCE Royall Lyme

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SECRET WEAPON Hearos earplugs

TRAVEL ESSENTIAL Brooks Brothers' Non-Iron shirts

WHAT TO GADGET Sony PSP's Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee

iPOD REDISCOVERY Tommy James and The Shondells, "Crimson and Clover"

WHAT TO READ Haruki Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle: A Novel*

WHAT TO AUDIOBOOK *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart Presents America (The Audiobook): A Citizen's Guide to Democracy*

WHAT TO EAT zucchini-stuffed pork chop

WHAT TO DRINK Rebutito (Manzanilla sherry & Sprite)

WHERE TO DRINK IT Tia Pol in New York

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