

# Escape

## Pearls of BY PAUL RUBIO Polynesia

*Polynesia encompasses some of the world's most treasured islands, with Hawaii in its northernmost reaches and French Polynesia at its core. Two lavish resorts capture the essence of this subregion of Oceania and deliver the full package of Pacific exotica.*

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ST. REGIS PRINCEVILLE, CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: THE ST. REGIS BAR; A BEACHFRONT CABANA FACING HANA-LEI BAY; A TREATMENT ROOM AT THE HALELE'A SPA; MAIN LOBBY; THE VIEW-HEAVY MAKANA TERRACE (ALSO OPENING PAGE); THE RESORT'S GRAND ENTRANCE.



## ALOHA, KAUAI

Few would dispute Kauai as the crown jewel of Hawaii. With its multihued mountains, skyscraping waterfalls and rugged canyons, the lush "Garden Island" is the Hawaii of legends.

Kauai's exotic environs have landed starring roles in blockbuster films, as the imaginary Isla Nublar in 1993's *Jurassic Park* and the ethereal jungle arena in 2013's *Hunger Games: Catching Fire*. But the island's fantasy landscapes are indeed reality, the subject of countless "Wishing You Were Here" missives detailing a faraway land synonymous with such terms as "heaven" and "Shangri-La."

Nestled on Kauai's northern shore, the St. Regis Princeville Resort proves "heaven" is a five-hour direct plane ride from California. By way of tiered, outward-facing design, the rooms and suites at the St. Regis Princeville dole out postcard-perfect views of Hanalei Bay—and all its oceanic and mountainous

excess—through expansive glass walls in the bedroom and bathroom. Soft earth tones and light-wood furnishings frame this natural splendor in marble vanities and oversized Jacuzzi tubs (with a privacy switch that turns the glass wall from translucent to opaque).

These nature panoramas have branded the St. Regis Princeville Hawaii's most coveted address (and the fact that it's located within the prestigious 9,000-acre resort community doesn't hurt). So it should come as no surprise the resort capitalizes on the million-dollar views whenever possible, far beyond the rooms and suites. Gawk at Hanalei Bay from the glass-enclosed lobby lounge; soak in the scene from the 5,000-square-foot infinity-edged swimming pool; toast to the Aloha state from a beachfront cabana; paddleboard into the horizon with an expert instructor; tee off at the waterfront Robert Trent Jones Jr.-designed Makai Golf Club; and watch the sun descend over the mountains from signature restaurant Kauai Grill, helmed by celebrity chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten.

Like all St. Regis properties, top-notch service enhances and often consummates the resort experience. At the St. Regis Princeville, the addition of Hawaii's warm and welcoming Aloha spirit elevates the already-exalted St. Regis hospitality.

While some find it difficult to break away from the resort, a rental vehicle is ideal for island pursuits (though a house car does provide complimentary pickup and drop-off within the Princeville vicinity, including Hanalei). If only to explore for a single afternoon, venture to Kilauea and browse the Asian art and collectibles at Kong Lung, a funky gallery store housed in a former sugar plantation. Frolic with the nene



PARADISE FOUND AT THE HILTON MOOREA LAGOON RESORT AND SPA, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: INTERIORS OF AN OVER-WATER BUNGALOW; THE PRINCIPAL SWIMMING POOL; A SUBLIME ALFRESCO DECK OF AN OVER-WATER BUNGALOW; THE SCENE AT SUNSET; THE FAVORITE LOCAL DISH, POISSON CRU.

(endemic Hawaiian geese) and watch the red-footed boobies take flight at the Kilauea Lighthouse. In Hanalei, pop into Yellowfish Trading Co. to pick up a few vintage and modern Hawaiian souvenirs for friends and family back at home. Oh, and don't forget those "Wishing You Were Here" postcards. ([stregisprinceville.com](http://stregisprinceville.com))

## MOOREA TO LOVE

It's just one of French Polynesia's 118 islands, but little Moorea makes a big impression. Often overshadowed by her illustrious sister Bora Bora, Moorea emerges from the Pacific a high-rising mountain chain engulfed by crystal-clear waters robust with marine life.

Like Bora Bora, Moorea masters the over-water bungalow experience—an immersion into foreign seascapes of turquoise and emerald via immaculate private suites straddling the ocean floor. However, unlike tourist-centric Bora Bora, at Moorea, Polynesian culture and local island life remain authentic—and undiscovered by the masses.

Moorea's premier accommodations are found within the 106-room Hilton Moorea Lagoon Resort and Spa. At this location, the brand enters a new echelon of luxury. While the resort houses garden suites and guest rooms with private plunge pools, it's the panoramic over-water bungalows that impress the most. There's nothing quite like jumping from your private balcony into crystalline waters, blinded by the colorful kaleidoscope of biodiversity swimming around, and looking up to see the foothills of towering mountains plunging into the bay.

The bungalows reflect a modern French Polynesian design, with handcrafted dark wood

furnishings, glass floor panels that stare over the lagoon reef, contemporary technological necessities and regal bathrooms, including colossal bathtubs (often filled with flower petals).

When hunger calls, delight in the four food and beverage outlets on property. The breakfast buffet at Aarii Vahine is an idyllic opportunity to sample local delicacies like *poisson cru* (raw tuna marinated in coconut milk and lime), fresh fruit breads and diverse homemade preserves blended with coconut and pineapple compotes. On Saturday nights, Aarii Vahine combines a traditional dinner feast with an authentic extravaganza of fire twirling, booty shaking and coconut pounding. Feast on homemade crepes at the floating Toatea Bar and Creperie, and be sure to stop by in the early evening to watch the baby black-tip reef sharks congregate.

Moorea is easily explored by car or organized tour, allowing visitors to summit interior and peripheral mountains for jaw-dropping vistas of the land, sea and sky and to discover island intricacies like remote juice stands and roadside fish markets. Though the luxury on this island is not as over-the-top as on Bora Bora, discerning jet-setters will revel in this alternate, and less-known, incarnation of paradise. ([hilton.com](http://hilton.com)) ◀◀

