

# [*Staying Places*]



## Sofitel Moorea la Ora Beach Resort



Overwater bungalow



Restaurant K

### SOUTH PACIFIC ISLAND CHIC

Bora Bora is the more glamorous sister but the heart-shaped island of Moorea – only a 30-minute catamaran ride from Tahiti, where international flights arrive – is more than worth visiting too when planning a trip to French Polynesia. One reason is the Sofitel Moorea la Ora Beach Resort (and it's about half the price of Bora Bora's posh hotels).

Scattered about a beautifully landscaped property with lily ponds, stone statues and bougainvillea are 114 thatched-roof bungalows. Each category of bungalow is charming in its own way. Honeymooners love the “overwater” bungalows perched on stilts over the turquoise lagoon. They have glass panels in the floor to view the tropical fish below. If you book a deluxe garden bungalow or one hugging the powdery white sand beach (Moorea's best), there's a small enclosed outdoor fern garden behind your bathroom shower. We stayed in a lagoon-view bungalow on a rocky bank, with steps leading directly into the crystal clear lagoon. Outside, there was a bamboo-framed rainshower for rinsing off the salt water after swimming – a particularly handy feature given that we couldn't get enough of the manta rays, baby eels and galaxies of colourful fish we saw while snorkeling the coral reef right off our bungalow.

The Sofitel's main restaurant serves up pleasant buffet dinners with fire dancing and Tahitian drumming. But for a romantic evening, its French “K” restaurant – one of the world's prettiest – can't be beat. In an intimate open-sided palapa by the sea, tables covered with white linens are set on the sand floor, screened by potted palm trees, while tall crystal candelabras add flickering golden light.

Nestled in a garden area, the spa too is lovely. Within breezy treatment rooms with gauze curtains, you can indulge in a cooling papaya body wrap and other spa specialties.

Snorkeling gear and outrigger canoes are complimentary for guests. Other activities that can be booked include scuba diving, dolphin-watching eco-tours, and a lagoon cruise with motu (tiny islet) picnic and petting silky soft stingrays in the wild.

— JANICE MUCALOV