

THE HAPPY LIFE

You don't need a fairy godmother to make life on the Tahitian island of Moorea magical. You just have to let go and dream big.

PHOTOS BY CEDRIC ANGELES





Fairy Tale Come True

“WE MET UNDERWATER AND ... *voilà*.” She was on a diving vacation; he was spearfishing for dinner. Laurel Samuela fell in love with her future husband, a Tahitian tattoo artist named James, at the same time she fell in love with her future island home. After that, it took her only six months to trade her house in California for a life on Moorea. “Our romance blossomed quickly. And my move here went smoothly. I called my real-estate broker and asked him to sell my house. He called me back the next day and said, ‘Sold.’ It was as if it was all just meant to be.” In 2000, Laurel and James got married at the island city hall. Today they share a bungalow on Moorea’s undeveloped west coast. Their children, Fiona and Dushan, are 9 and 6.



Just Another Day

RUGBY PRACTICE, SCENIC BIKE RIDES, SWIMS in Opunohu Bay, early morning hikes to Belvedere Overlook: On Moorea, even the most routine days are filled with fancy. And yet, the island is replete with practicalities — grocery stores, schools, paved roads, banks, post offices. The balance between fantasy and convenience makes it possible for James and Laurel to savor their family's day-to-day life, as well as run their businesses, Moorea Tattoo and True Tahiti Vacation. "I love the simplicity of life here, the immense beauty," Laurel says. "I love introducing people to Moorea and the rest of Tahiti. I love raising my kids here: I love that they're trilingual (French, English and Tahitian); I love that they're so connected to nature; I love how easygoing they are."



Happily Ever After

MOOREA IS A SMALL ISLAND, just 51 square miles and about 15,000 people. But it's far from remote. The island is only a 30-minute ferry ride from the busy capital, Papeete, and all its modern cityscapes. It's a 50-minute flight from the vibrant lagoons of Bora Bora, home to the most indulgent resorts in the world. And countless other Tahitian gems are within easy reach of Moorea's marina and airport. Still, even with all of this so accessible to them, for the Samuelas — James, Laurel, Fiona, Dushan and their dog, Tupai — life is on Moorea. "I am surrounded by beauty — from the turquoise lagoon to the velvet green mountains," Laurel says. "The best part: I'm here with my family. Every day, I wake up, walk outside and see I'm living the dream life."

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MOOREA

GREAT FOR

People persons. Most of the jobs available to foreigners can be found in the tourism sector. So a knack for hospitality will go a long way.

THE FIRST STEP

Find a job. Your employer should submit a work permit to the government before a visa can be issued.

REAL ESTATE

Clearing a sale with all the owners of a parcel can be difficult. If your investment creates new employment opportunities for locals, the complicated process is much easier.

