



The Main Bure at Dolphin Island at Night

The traditional thatched architecture of the bures looks even more dramatic lit by candles at night.

Photo courtesy of Dolphin Island

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I cover singular, luxury travel and food experiences around the world
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Fiji has a distinct appeal as a South Pacific retreat for its multicolored soft coral diving, its turquoise water and powdery beaches and its preserved traditional culture—it's not hard to meet a tribal chief and receive a traditional welcome, even if it means politely sipping a cup of their somewhat narcotic drink kava. (Try and avoid it.) Since the country is composed of 333 islands, it's also not that uncommon to buy one of them and turn it into a resort. [David Gilmour's Wayaka Club & Spa](#) and [Red Bull owner Dietrich Mateschitz's Laucala](#), previously owned by Malcolm Forbes, have each succeeded as a private island resort. When it opens on September 15, a new one will be entering the game, just across the lagoon from Laucala in the Northern Lau group: [Vatuvara Resort](#), Oakley founder [James Jannard's](#) island, one of the four neighboring islands he bought in 2010. (But, somewhat confusingly, the resort isn't actually on Vatuvara, it's on another of the four, the 800 acre island Kaibu, the resort's original name, changed because most people mispronounce it. In Fijian, it's pronounced Kaimbu.)



Jannard was apparently drawn to the idea of having a Fijian island as a frequent guest at Wakaya, where he met general managers Rob and Lynda Miller who jumped aboard his project and have spent the last five years building Vatuvara from the ground up. That it's built to Jannard's specifications as a personal retreat was obvious when I visited last month. The main villa, Delana, is massive—over 4000 square feet—cool, dark and imposing, composed of the grey stone that Jannard apparently favors with state of the art electronics, kitchen, a spa room, office, infinity pool with lagoon views. Two smaller villas are also available to rent, along with an octagonal holdover from a previous resort on the island, for a nanny/assistant/bodyguard. The three main villas can be rented individually or all together as a private island buyout. (Since the website is still in formation, all inquiries go to Rob@kaibu.com).

The location is as idyllic as it should be: totally private, surrounded by a 14 mile long, different shades of turquoise lagoon for snorkeling, fishing, cruising over to the beach of one of the other islands for a picnic. The staff has the characteristic Fijian warmth; some are also multi-talented such as Leba who is as adept at deep tissue massage as she is as a mixologist. And the Pacific rim cuisine is aided by the freshest and most delicious fruits and vegetables you'll find anywhere in Fiji, the result of Lynda Miller's extensive organic gardens.

Just north of the main island of Viti Levu, and a half hour by helicopter from the international airport in Nadi, [Dolphin Island](#), a member of Relais & Chateaux, may be even more of an intimate experience due to its size—just 14 acres—and exclusivity: it's only available as a total island rental. Recently, the four rooms in two thatched pavilions were given a redo by noted New Zealand designer [Virginia Fisher](#), whose work is on view in many of the best lodges in New Zealand including [Kauri Cliffs](#) and [Huka Lodge](#), the latter a sister property to Dolphin Island, and that sharp but cozy, detailed style is very much in evidence here.



The overall tone, though, is homey, as you're looked after and cooked for by island manager Dawn Simpson who hugs you as soon as you arrive and can't do enough for you, whether it's organizing fishing or diving trips—the snorkeling is fine right off the island— or summoning therapist/native healer Elizabeth over from the next island to fix whatever ails. She's a nurturing mother figure in a luxury cocoon; it's hard to imagine a more relaxing setting than this.

On the other side of Viti Levu, a 40 minute launch trip from Pacific Harbor across often choppy waters (take a helicopter instead), [Royal Davui Island Resort](#) is located on 10 acre Ugaga Island and contains 16 sizable villas with recently renovated interiors of polished wood and fourposter beds with gauzy mosquito nets plus private pools on the deck positioned to take in the Beqa Lagoon views. Honeymooners love it here. The island is filled with lush jungle foliage and the reef is right off the island for easy snorkeling.

[Nanuku Auberge Resort Fiji](#), a member of [Auberge Resorts](#), opened last year a few minutes from [Pacific Harbor](#) on the southwestern coast of Viti Levu in a prime position for the soft adventure activities for which this area is known. This is the place for people who have greater ambitions than lying in a hammock by the beach—zip lining, hikes down steep paths to waterfalls, surfing, river rafting—they're all available through the activities desk. Families are also especially taken care of here since there are children's programs and dedicated nannies on staff. Guests drawn to the sophisticated Auberge design style will also find a special appeal here, as will those with a specific interest in food—the food was the best I had anywhere in the islands even if the description on the menu sounded simple. And although I enjoyed every performance I heard of Isa Lei, the traditional Fijian farewell song that is sung to all guests upon departure—Fijians love to sing and they have uniformly exceptional voices—the version here by the in house group, the Nanuku Serenaders, was the best. And so was the fact that even though we were the last diners in the open air dining room on our final night, the Serenaders stayed late to sing to us, in the Fijian spirit.



The best time to go: For the best weather: Fiji's spring: September, October and early November before the rainy season starts.

How to get there: [Fiji Airways](#) operates the only nonstop from the U.S.: daily flights from Los Angeles and twice weekly from Honolulu with recently upgraded service. The flights are on new A330s with white leather lie flat business class seats. And the friendly Fijian crews give a premier view of the warm country you'll get on the islands. But they don't sing Isa Lei when you leave.

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