



UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

“Give my love to Dawn.” It’s the usual response from anyone who has stayed at the luxurious Dolphin Island resort and who has heard that you have the great fortune of travelling there. The recipient of all this love and affection is the wonderful Dawn Simpson who manages this private island resort as if it were her own home and you are the most welcome guest on the planet. Dolphin Island is part of the salubrious Huka Retreats group, which has upscale properties in New Zealand and South Africa, and the Fijian resort has the same pristine philosophy and chi-chi colonial/Pacific charm.

The resort consists of four guest bureas that flank the main burea, and a rather wonderful, castaway-style hilltop burea (the five-star version, with fresh linen, Champagne and mosquito netting) on the other side of the island, for honeymooners and misanthropes to escape to if luxury solitude is your thing. The main action apart from endless kayaking, swimming and lounging in hammocks, is centred in the lovely main burea, where world-class food is sent out three times a day; freshly baked pastries in the morning, mud crab and ceviche for lunch, seasonal asparagus, sweet and sour baked fish and taro leaves for dinner, washed down with fine wines and cocktails.

Bring on the rain, and there is a wall full of Penguin Classics, music, dance performances from the local village, cooking classes and the general mayhem a guest can get up to after a long idyllic day of doing little to nothing.

Interior designer Virginia Fisher (of Huka Lodge fame) was behind Dolphin Island’s cosy glamour. Each burea is reached by a flight of timber steps, dotted with conch shells; white-washed walls are hung with straw baskets, or hats; red hibiscus flowers add a dash of tropical colour; mirrors and light shades are adorned with seashells; bamboo joinery is lashed with twine; posts are covered in plaited palm leaves. It’s island chic, next level.

“I love the bright papaya towels,” commented a decorator friend in NYC after I posted a poolside photo on Instagram. As designed as it is, the sheer natural beauty of the island, and the staff, creates a warm ambience that is easy, relaxed and spontaneous. It’s a tiny island that can be circumnavigated by foot in 20 minutes, but one dinner with Dawn and you will think it goes on forever.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Everyone dreaming of a tropical getaway will usually envisage a bungalow over the water and the chance to dive straight into a crystal blue ocean lagoon from the comfort of your own private sun deck. The Fiji Marriott Resort Momi Bay offers just that: 22 large and luxurious bureas fringe a long jetty, offering breathtaking views of the hotel’s lagoon and the Coral Sea beyond.

One of the real drawcards of this newly built, 250-room resort (apart from the obvious sun, sea and sand) is that it is a short 35-minute drive from Nadi airport, on Viti Levu’s south-west coast. Families who are travelling with children, or those who just want to relax, and fast, will appreciate the proximity – you can be poolside with a cocktail in hand and some fresh lobster sashimi within reach within an hour or two of disembarking. Momi Bay offers all that is expected of

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: *Nourishing cuisine at Dolphin Island; Spend idyllic days doing not much at all. OPPOSITE: Dawn casts its light on Dolphin Island’s hilltop burea.*



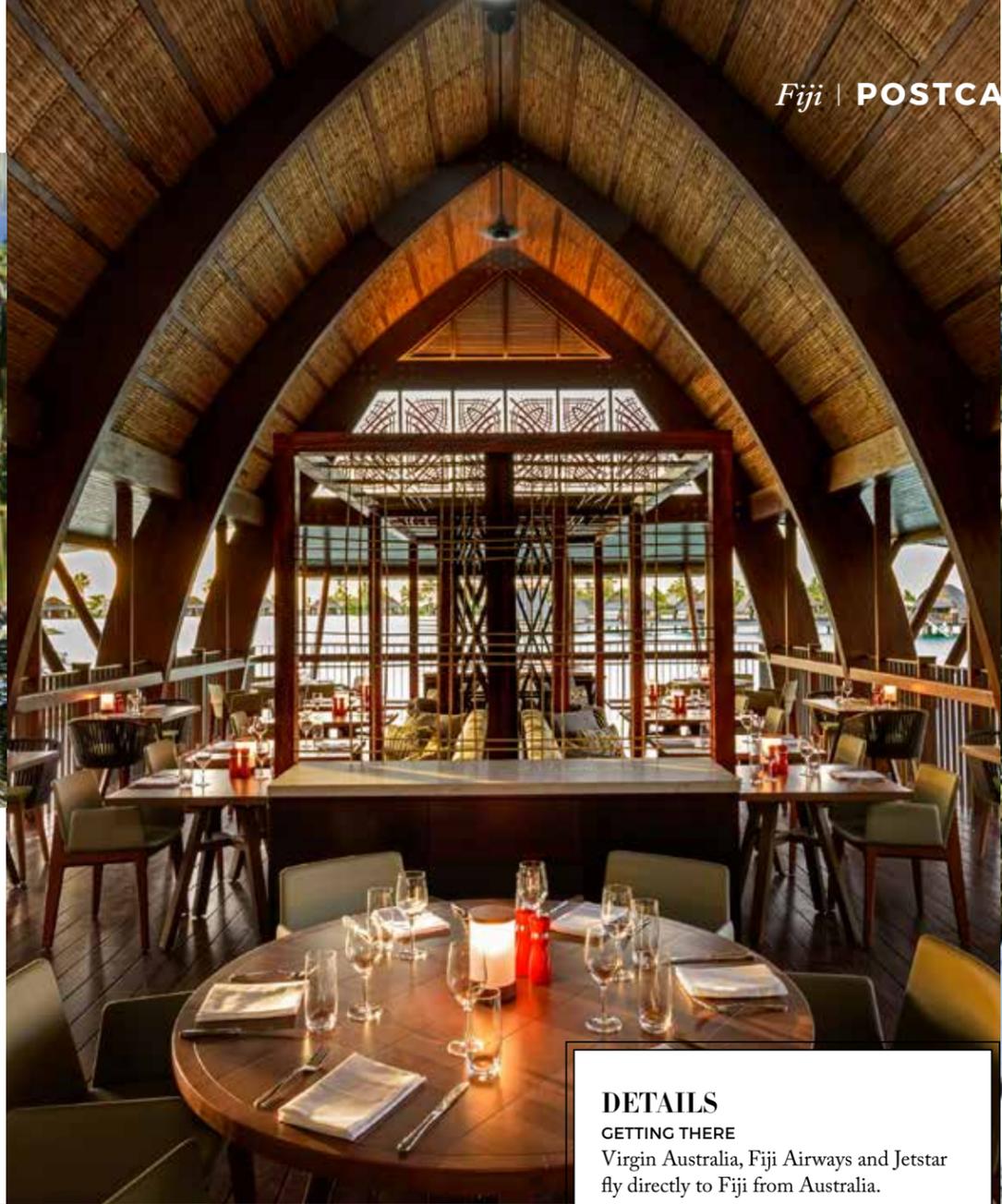
**I S L A N D
I D Y L L S**

Fiji offers up a something-for-everyone experience of relaxation and luxury. Kirstie Clements checks the latest and the greatest on offer in this Pacific paradise.

PHOTOGRAPHY KIRSTIE CLEMENTS (HILLTOP BUREA)

a Marriott property, including a grand entry, three swimming pools (one with a swim-up bar), tennis courts, the lavish Quan day spa and a kids’ club. The stunning sunset infinity pool and bar looking out over the ocean is a highlight, bringing a whole new level of sensory pleasure to a pre-dinner drink.

In fact, the whole place feels like two resorts in one: the rooms that flank the pool and restaurant area are extremely busy and child-friendly, giving it the overall feeling of a top-class family hotel. But for those who prefer a more five-star feel and a lot more seclusion, an overwater burea is a better choice, set away from the main action with their high-vaulted ceilings and fresh tropical décor, lit spectacularly at night. Visits can be arranged to nearby historic sites, golf courses and surf breaks for the more adventurous, or you can just make the most of doing as little as possible. >>



CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Dine in style at the Fiji Marriott Resort Momi Bay; Sleep lagoon-side at Momi Bay. OPPOSITE: Home from home: the communal main bure at Dolphin Island.

HOME FROM HOME

Fiji is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful places on the globe and it is such a simple, pure joy to discover different islands, regions and coasts, each with their own natural majesty. Volivoli Beach Resort is set among the Nakauvadra Range on the Sun Coast, on the island of Viti Levu at the northernmost point of Fiji. This friendly, casual, family-run resort is primarily a top-rated dive resort, with access to approximately 100 soft coral dive sites nearby.

During my visit, the staff and owners were still recovering from the terror of Cyclone Winston, the category five monster that flattened this area of Fiji, felling trees, destroying buildings and hurling people through the air like dolls. "I thought it was the end of the world," said my driver, on our way to the local Rakiraki market to shop for fresh produce and spices.

A stay at Volivoli feels like a lovely weekend with friends, lolling on the lounge chairs with a cocktail outside the cute little beach bar, which is more *Gilligan's Island* than glitzy resort. There is one central restaurant, which again feels like an extended

family kitchen rather than stitched-up formal dining, with the most delicious menu featuring local seafood such as coral trout, wahu and the sublime Kokoda, a raw fish salad made with lime, coriander, chilli and coconut milk. A standout was the New Zealand lamb curry, and an extraordinary dhal, which was so good I was tempted to order it at every meal. The food in Fiji has come a long, long way – Fijians of Indian descent have fused their traditional culinary traditions and flavours into the indigenous Fijian foods to produce a startling new cuisine that is fresh and intensely tasty; lightyears away from the bland buffet staples of the past that used to characterise a stay here.

The outlook across the sea from each of Volivoli's spacious rooms is astonishing, lashings of sky and jungle and shimmering ocean. A snorkel in the open ocean, as purple jellyfish and neon blue clownfish glide by; a piña colada with Sacha the barman, who may just happily belt out a Whitney Houston number; a delicious fish curry under the whirring ceiling fans while fellow guests talk about the day's dive. It doesn't really get more relaxing. *IT*



DETAILS

GETTING THERE

Virgin Australia, Fiji Airways and Jetstar fly directly to Fiji from Australia.

STAYING THERE

Dolphin Island

From Fiji's main airport, Nadi International, travel for 2.5 hours by private car (included within rate), or choose to transfer by float plane or helicopter to Dolphin Island. The island's own private boat will then transfer guests to the private island retreat. dolphinislandfiji.com

Fiji Marriott Resort Momi Bay

Momi Bay is located a short 35-minute drive from Nadi airport. marriott.com.au

Volivoli Beach Resort

You'll find this resort close to the town of Rakiraki, or a 2.5- to three-hour scenic drive from Nadi airport. volivoli.com