

Bula!

* Your own private island

What's your Fiji fantasy?

LUXURY ACCOMMODATION IN FIJI RUNS THE FULL SPECTRUM FROM ULTRA EXCLUSIVE PRIVATE ISLANDS TO MORE AFFORDABLE FAMILY FRIENDLY FIVE-STAR RESORTS. *Luxury Travel* MAGAZINE TAKES YOU THROUGH THE BEST OPTIONS FOR A FIJI BREAK, WHATEVER YOUR BUDGET.



Hotspot_Fiji / **STAY HERE.**



Resorts: Over A\$1,500 per night

Wadigi Island

WORDS BY CAROLINE GLADSTONE

Wadigi Island!" announces a crew member on the Tiger IV ferry and my friend and I are the only passengers to disembark. We don't berth at the island, but are collected by Tia who hauls our bags into a dinghy and whisks us to our little sanctuary. Wadigi, a tiny volcanic isle in the Mamanuca group, is a private island in every sense. We have it all to ourselves for a few days and no-one bar the nine staff and the

Brisbane-based owners, is sharing this patch of paradise. From the beach we walk through tropical gardens to our accommodation at the summit – I have the huge honeymoon suite that has a double-double bed and my companion seems a long way off in her sunset suite. These rooms, together with a third sunrise suite, are connected by timber boardwalks dotted with sun lounges and day beds, and lead to a separate lounge area where we can have a drink and watch videos if we ever tire of the views. From our terraces there are vistas across the blue to Castaway

and Monuriki islands a few kilometres away; my balcony has a private shower and the sunset suite also has a sensational view from the bathtub. Our personal attendant asks what time we'd like dinner and that's about as taxing as it gets. They are no schedules and co-owner Tracey Johnston has been in touch prior to our arrival to ascertain our food preferences. Chefs Lai and Saimoni, who've been with Wadigi since its opening 10 years ago, use the freshest produce from the reef and mainland gardens to create culinary wonders. Dishes are uncomplicated but superb – prawn and coconut

soup, coral trout drizzled with dill mustard cream and a classic dessert of chocolate crepes, flambéed bananas and Lai's own ice-cream. Drinks are unlimited from a list of French champagnes and renowned Australian and New Zealand wines. The visit is short but time enough for ocean swims, dips in the infinity pool, a morning kayak, and boat trip with Tia to check out our neighbouring – but not at all private - islands! **Stay there:** Exclusive use of the island is priced from US\$2,459 (about A\$2,610) per night for two people all-inclusive. wadigi.com



Resorts: Over A\$1,500 per night

Tadrai Island Resort

WORDS BY CRAIG TANSLEY

The secret to Tadrai Island Resort is that somehow nothing here feels over the top, like somehow having a personal butler to attend to every holiday need feels entirely normal, and private dinners out underneath starry south sea skies with no-one else around for miles is just what everyone should expect on a Fijian holiday. One glorious afternoon I even have a masseur accompany me from the resort to a tiny sandy cay where I lay sprawled out under the late afternoon sunshine as I'm massaged to the sound of the sea swishing all around me. When it's done, I'm taken by boat – with a chilled bottle of champagne, of course – to an empty beach just around the corner from the resort for an uninterrupted view of yet another cloudless Fijian sunset.

Located on Mana Island, 20 kilometres from Denarau Wharf and 30 kilometres from Nadi International Airport, Tadrai is a five-star resort catering for couples, with a no children policy. It has just five private thatched beachside villas tucked away from the outside world in a secluded



coconut-tree fringed cove – in four days I barely see another guest.

Each of the five villas is enormous, measuring 100 square metres, with interiors created by international award-winning designers Hare + Klein and Kenneth Cobonque. Every room comes with a plunge pool on its deck – though the ocean is barely 20 metres away – and outdoor showers.

Meals come fresh from the sea (that's if you wish, meal choices

are up to you), served in the resort's open-plan Na Vatu Rock Pool Restaurant which looks out across Fiji's Mamanuca Island Group and across to the first of the Yasawa Islands. Or, if that's not private enough for you already, romantic meals can be prepared in your room.

Each day I choose from a list of activities, taking private snorkelling tours around the resort's barrier reef as pods of dolphins swim by, dropping a

fishing line to catch a lunch of fresh trevally, or taking private picnics on nearby uninhabited islands. There's also inter-island excursions, Tadrai's Wai Silva Alfresco day spa, kayaking, sailing and surfing charters on hand – some of the Pacific's best surf breaks are only a short boat ride away.

Stay there: Villas are priced from FJ\$2,700 (about A\$1,560) per night all-inclusive.

tadrai.com

Laucala Island

The personal playground of Red Bull billionaire Dietrich Mateschitz, Laucala added a bespoke submarine to its extensive list of water toys this year. Each residence has a private pool and comes with a full staff including butler (known as a tao), nanny, chauffeur and housekeeping. The property operates its own 240-acre farm on the island, ensuring that the five restaurants always have fresh produce.

Rates: One-bedroom villas are priced from US\$4,200 (about A\$4,468) per night, two-bedrooms villas from US\$6,000 (about A\$6,383) per night and three-bedroom villas from US\$8,800 (about A\$9,362) per night plus taxes all-inclusive. laucala.com

Wakaya Club & Spa

The 10 bures on the private Wakaya Island are more than twice the size of an average two-bedroom apartment in Sydney, starting at an enormous 153 square metres. The island, off the east coast of Viti Levu, is surrounded by a protected coral reef for some of the best snorkelling and diving in Fiji. If you need even more space, book Vale-O – a three-bedroom villa set on a private 16-acre hilltop estate.

Rates: Bures are priced from US\$1,900 (about A\$2,017) per night and Vale-O from US\$7,600 (about A\$8,068) per night plus taxes all-inclusive. wakaya.com



Resorts: Over A\$1,500 per night

Dolphin Island

WORDS BY SHERIDEN RHODES

If you long to play castaway on your own slice of Pacific Ocean paradise, Dolphin Island is your place under the sun. The lush 13-acre atoll is owned by Dutch multimillionaire Alex van Heeren, who made his money from shipping and banking, and is where rock star Pink chose to honeymoon. Van Heeren operates Huka Retreats, which includes New Zealand's iconic Huka Lodge and Grande Provence in South Africa. And while Huka has recently given its Fijian island a makeover – adding additional bures to accommodate eight guests at a time, increasing the bathroom size, contracting

renowned interior whizz Virgina Fisher to swish up the décor and adding an infinity pool – thankfully it's retained its unpretentious style.

As you enter the four thatched bures, freshly picked hibiscus and fragrant frangipanis have been strewn across the beds, dressed in the finest cotton linen. Come dusk, staff discreetly light hundreds of glowing lanterns as guests toast their good fortune with a chilled bottle of Sauvignon Blanc.

Guests dine al fresco on the deck, or wherever they choose, on Fijian specialties such as Kokoda (fish marinated in lemon or lime juice and coconut cream) or a traditional lovo cooked in the ground. The warm, friendly staff headed up by affable host Dawn Simpson will happily mix you up a

sundowner from a well-thumbed book of classic cocktails. There are outdoor showers, fashioned out of driftwood and rope, and inviting daybeds to laze by the pool. At the private swimming beach a couple of inviting hammocks await, while on the other side of the island an open air pavilion with a day bed draped in muslin provides the perfect spot for an afternoon snooze, or relaxing massage.

The island itself is easily circumnavigated by kayak or on foot at low tide and is dotted with frangipani, hibiscus, bougainvillea, coconut palms and mango trees dripping with the plump ripe fruit. The discreet staff will even organise your own personal performance of traditional Fijian dancing and

singing by members of a local village by a roaring bonfire on the island's main beach.

If guests do get itchy feet, a multitude of aquatic adventures await in the surrounding crystal waters and coral reefs providing the perfect habitat to snorkel, tank dive, swim and fish with hand selected local operators. Cultural visits to local villages and areas of historical interest can be arranged, as can massages and facials. But chances are the furthest you'll get is one of the hammocks, tossing itineraries, schedules and good intentions aside.

Stay there: Exclusive use of the island is priced from NZ\$1,595 (about A\$1,415) per person per night for two people all-inclusive. dolphinislandfiji.com





Resorts: A\$500 - A\$1,500 per night

Likuliku Lagoon Resort

WORDS BY GARY ALLEN

Only five and a half hours after take off from Sydney I was sitting under the stars on a warm South Pacific evening with a Fiji Bitter in my hand and beginning the first course of my five-course dinner at Likuliku Lagoon Resort. Just recently reopened after four months of repairs from the December cyclone that devastated so much of the Fijian Islands,

the resort is incredibly calm and peaceful at night – the word “likuliku” even means calm water in Fijian. Quiet and serene with tiki torches for light, it’s hard to believe we were in Sydney only hours ago. The resort is nestled into a beautiful cove and has the only overwater bungalows in all of Fiji. There are many beautiful luxury resorts in the Fijian Islands and all will have the tranquil blue green water, the warm and smiling Fijian people and the tropical climate, but what Likuliku has that is outstanding is

incredible food. Chef Ihaka served up some of the best meals that I have ever had certainly in Fiji but possibly in the world.

Fiji is not known for its food and most don’t travel there expecting to have an epicurean experience. At only 26 years old and trained by his mother in New Zealand and some of the most famous chefs of the world, Chef Ihaka creates incredibly sophisticated dishes consistently throughout our stay: that’s breakfast, lunch and dinner for four nights and four days. I had to

force myself to exercise each day so that I wouldn’t feel so full.

While the food was a highlight of the stay, the service from the Fijian staff was amazing. The resort manager, Tulia, embodies the warmth of the Fijian people. The staff remembered my name from the moment I arrived and were always happy and welcoming with a big friendly “bula!!!”

With great food and service taken care of, what’s next? Something to do with your time if you’re hoping for more than a sunlounge, a book and a view.

Surrounding the resort’s cove there are plenty of reefs to explore with a mask and a snorkel. The water bungalows have ladders that drop right to the reef edge where there’s an abundance of coral and fish and plenty of rock formations to explore. If you want to venture further, the resort has an Island Hopping boat trip. In a small boat, guests are taken to see where other resorts are located and hear about them. You also get to go to Monuriki Island, made famous by the film Castaway as the island where Tom

Hanks was stranded. On the boat trip there’s a chance to snorkel at a sand island that’s only visible at lower tides.

If you want some peace and privacy on your very own island for a few hours, book for a picnic lunch on Honeymoon Island. Dropped off with your picnic lunch, the island is yours with only the fish for company. The local tribe owns the island and the resort will organise a quick trip to see their village and way of life. You’ll see the small community go about their day. Souvenirs can be

bought if you choose and it’s a nice way to support the families.

Along with all of this excitement, the resort also has a spa for you to get some body care. Overlooking the lagoon and using Pure Fiji products, you can have all of your stress rubbed and scrubbed away (if it’s not already). We had the Twilight Tadra couples massage, complete with a bottle of Veuve Clicquot champagne on arrival to sip while our feet were scrubbed, then on to a full body scrub and massage and warm coconut milk bath

with the rest of our champagne and canapés from the chef. Fresh and relaxed, we are ready for our private dinner on the beach with another fantastic meal prepared by Chef Ihaka under a full moon with a warm Fijian breeze. So far from home, but yet so close.

Stay there: Garden bures are priced from FJ\$1,648 (about A\$953) per night and overwater bures from FJ\$2,884 (about A\$1,667) per night including all meals, non-motorised activities and Wi-Fi. likulikulagoon.com



** Fiji's only overwater bures*



Resorts: A\$500 - A\$1,500 per night

Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort

WORDS BY SHERIDEN RHODES

The son of the late oceanographer Jacques Cousteau, Jean-Michel, was so enamored by this five-star eco resort built like a traditional Fijian village called Na Koro (which translates as "my village") he agreed to put his name to it. Built completely out of local materials on a former coconut plantation, the 25 traditional thatched bures sit on a beautiful curve of beach on the island of Vanua Levu – a world away from the main resort-rich island.

Interiors are spacious with high vaulted ceilings, colourful bedspreads, polished wooden floors and louvers to catch the tropical breeze. Vibrant orange day beds cooled by ceiling fans contrast with the ever changing hues of the Coral Sea beyond the adults only serenity pool. I kicked back in the beachy bar with a book and the bar's signature cucumber chill. Hammocks are strung invitingly between swaying



** Famous for family fun*

palms and Fijian masseurs will lull you into a blissful slumber to the soothing sound of lapping waves in rustic beachfront spa huts.

Guests can dine in the open air adults only dining area, with inviting views of the ocean, or with family on the opposite side of the infinity pool, beneath a fragrant frangipani tree. Chef Raymond Lee's appealing Fijian, South Pacific and Asian inspired menu has a strong focus on fresh, locally caught seafood, New Zealand lamb and organic produce grown onsite.

The Bula Club, considered the South Pacific's best kids' club, will keep children entertained from morning to night with crab hunts, beach picnics, sandcastle building, basket weaving and more. The multi award-winning resort has recently unveiled a fabulous new Treehouse adventure playground built around a huge Raintree, and introduced a new teenager's program in addition to its excellent Bula Club program for children 0-12. With nannies for every child five and under, and

buddies for older kids, the resort delivers one of the best family holidays going.

Complimentary daily activities like yoga, market visits, snorkelling expeditions and waterfall hikes will keep even the most energetic guest entertained, while optional paid excursions include decadent picnics on the resort's own private island and daily trips to renowned dive sites including Grand Central Station and Alice in Wonderland led by the resort's excellent dive team, and occasionally joined by Cousteau himself. A full time, onsite, marine biologist is on hand to teach guests of all ages about the area's unique underwater world.

This quintessential South Seas resort will reset your body clock with leisurely days spent snorkelling, kicking back on a day bed or snoozing in a hammock. Before you know it, you'll lose all track of time.

Stay there: Bures are priced from A\$1,074 per night and suites from A\$1,720 per night including all meals, resort activities, some excursions, kids' club and Wi-Fi. fijiresort.com

Yasawa Island Resort & Spa

At Yasawa you can be as secluded or involved as you like. The resort, on the largest island of the Yasawa group, can deliver you (along with some champagne) to a deserted beach for the day. Or you can visit one of the local villages to meet the children and hear the church choir sing. At the end of the day you can return to your thatched bure to relax in the hammock or in your private beachfront cabana. **Rates:** Bures are priced from FJ\$1,800 (about A\$1,055) per night including all meals and most activities. yasawa.com

Nanuku Resort & Spa

Set on the Coral Coast in the south of Fiji's main island Viti Levu, Nanuku Resort & Spa is set to open in early 2014. There are 12 one- to five-bedroom villas, each with a private pool and a meditation pergola for some early morning yoga. All villas have a private butler, nanny service for families, kitchen and barbecue, and a golf buggy to get around. It's the only all-villa resort on the main land and will offer some competition to the outer island resorts. **Rates:** Suites are priced from US\$990 (about A\$1,061) per night and villas from US\$1,500 (about A\$1,608) per night including all meals, staff, Wi-Fi and most activities. nanukufiji.com/

Namale

Owned by motivational guru Anthony Robbins, Namale is in Savusavu on the south coast of Fiji's second island Vanua Levu. A staff of 140 serve residents of just 14 bures and it's long been a celebrity favourite – Russell Crowe, Meg Ryan, Donna Karen and Quincy Jones are among past guests. Don't miss a treatment at the spa, set on a volcanic cliff with sweeping views over the ocean. **Rates:** Bures are priced from US\$475 per person per night plus taxes all-inclusive. namalefiji.com



Resorts: A\$500 - A\$1,500 per night

Vomo

WORDS BY CRAIG TANSLEY

It only takes 15 minutes, by seaplane or helicopter, from Fiji's main international airport at Nadi to feel this shipwrecked. When I arrive I'm taken to my private beachfront villa on Vomo Island and as soon as the back doors are opened I can't resist leaving my bags behind for a long, luxurious soak in the ocean, just a few metres away across a deserted, white sandy beach.

Vomo Island was once the private retreat of Fijian Royal

Chiefs and there's something regal still about the place. It's the kind of island made for South Seas layabouts – with plenty of secret, tiny coves fringing clear, tropical waters teeming with fish and bright coral. These days, there are also features the ancient chiefs couldn't imagine, like a day spa and a nine-hole par-three golf course, but I find it's Vomo's simplest features that I like the most. Like climbing the island's highest point, Mt Vomo, for a 360-degree view of just how protected the island is, while one morning I snorkel just a few metres out from the beach beside my villa and come face to face with a Hawksbill sea turtle (the island

runs a turtle protection program which can be observed by guests).

And if your own 87 hectare island with just 28 villas and two private residences isn't private enough, you can always go to Vomo Lailai – the honeymoon islet – where you'll be dropped off with nothing but your partner, a two-way radio and a picnic hamper on a tiny clump of sand in Fiji's famed blue sea.

Most days on Vomo I do as little as possible, arranging my day between meals in the resort's Reef Restaurant and time in the sea. At sunset each evening I sip cocktails at the Rocks Bar on Vomo's western tip as the sun dips

down into the sea across from Vomo Lailai.

But there is plenty to do for guests who prefer to have options. There's everything from paddle boarding, kayaking, sailing, tennis and croquet to deep sea fishing charters and inter-island village tours. There's also a range of accommodation options – from beachside villas with huge decks looking out across the ocean, to three and four bedroom private residences.

Stay there: Villas are priced from FJ\$1,850 (about A\$1,070) per night including all meals, non-motorised activities and golf. vomofiji.com

** Visit a program for critically endangered turtles*





Resorts: A\$500 - A\$1,500 per night

** One of Kelly Slater's favourite places to surf*

Tavarua Island Resort

WORDS BY JANE O'SULLIVAN

While the bures aren't as new or luxurious as other resorts in the area, Tavarua Island Resort in the Mamanuca Islands is hard to pass by if you're a surfer – and it's almost impossible to get into. For years Tavarua Island Resort was solidly booked out, to mostly American travellers, and Australians never got much of a look in. Travel agents still treat you a bit like a game show contestant (“Your application is in! Fingers crossed! Good luck!”) but there are now opportunities to jump the queue by taking advantage of cancellations. The

best time to enquire is after these have been finalised in December and January.

It's the closest resort to Cloudbreak, a world famous surf break and the reason why pro surfers like Kelly Slater come to visit. The 11-time world champ comes for annual surf competitions at Cloudbreak and loves the place so much he also visits Tavarua for regular holidays, posting gloat pics on his Instagram with the tag #BestPlaceOnEarth.

Cloudbreak has fans like this for a reason. It's big, fast and the sort of tropical blue that has paint shades named after it. And although surfers dream about breaks like this, it's surprisingly uncrowded – pure luxury for surfers used to

battling the hordes back home. This is because the resort, a five-minute boat ride away, takes just 36 guests and visitors from other islands are generally few and far between.

While Cloudbreak is the main draw, there are also several other surf breaks around the island, each working in different conditions. This is another plus for surfers because it means there's almost always a wave, no matter which way the wind is blowing or where the swell is coming from, though the best surf is from April to October. There's also snorkelling, stand up paddle boarding, fishing and the option of daytrips to sandbars and other islands. Unlike some other surf spots in Fiji, Tavarua Island Resort is definitely set up

to cater to all comers, not just the hardcore surfers.

One afternoon during my stay, even some of the staff grab boards and pile in the water when a fun, baby-sized wave starts breaking out the front of the restaurant. And once you've seen a dignified and less than athletic Fijian lady squealing her way down a wave on her hands and knees, you get a taste of what Tavarua is all about and why so many people, from pros to greenhorns, find it so much fun.

Stay there: Seven-night packages through the Surf Travel Company are priced from US\$2,723 (about A\$2,892) per person including all meals and boat transfers to surf breaks. surftravel.com/tavarua.com



Resorts: Under A\$500 per night

Denarau Island

Just 10 kilometres from Nadi Airport, Denarau Island is an option if you don't want undertake any long transfers with children or you're looking for a base to explore different islands. There are great facilities on the island including an 18-hole golf course, marina with shops and restaurants and high-end resorts.

Fiji Beach Resort & Spa managed by Hilton

The Fiji Beach Resort is one of the newer resorts on Denarau and has seven swimming pools (including one for adults only), a 1.5 kilometre strip of beach, fantastic kids' club and three restaurants. Family friendly room facilities include a kitchen and laundry, and the beachfront villas offer private pools.

Rates: Rooms are priced from FJ\$439 (about A\$257) per night, suites from FJ\$549 (about A\$322) per night and private pool villas from FJ\$2,059 (about A\$1,206) per night. fiji-beachresortbyhilton.com

Radisson BLU Resort Fiji Denarau Island

This huge resort is spread across 10 acres on the western side of Denarau Island. The property's entry level rooms are the most spacious on Denarau and the huge lagoon swimming pool has Fiji's only white water tunnel water slide. There are four restaurants to choose from or you can dine in the water of one of the lagoon pools at Lomani Wai.

Rates: Rooms are priced from FJ\$253 (about A\$147) per night and suites from FJ\$346 (about A\$202) per night. radissonblu.com/resort-fiji



FIJI BEACH RESORT & SPA



RADISSON BLU RESORT

GETTING THERE
Fiji Airways flies direct from Sydney and Brisbane to Nadi, Fiji daily and five times a week from Melbourne. Return economy fares are priced from A\$607 and business class fares from A\$1,819. Flight time is between three and a half and five hours depending on departure point. fijiairways.com

WHEN TO GO
Temperatures stay around the high 20s and low 30s year round in Fiji. The wet seasons runs from November to April and can bring heavy showers, though the outlying islands tend to be drier than the mainland. This is also cyclone season and, though they are rare, they can sometimes be severe.