



Lolling poolside at Fiji Beach Resort & Spa can prove stiff competition to more active pursuits.

islands in the sun

From brilliant beaches to romantic sunsets, Fiji has it all, but, as David Orkin discovers, it's not palm trees that make this a tropical paradise - it's the people



Tropical gem: a bird's-eye view of Treasure Island. Right: a scarlet sunset can be soaked up poolside at the Fiji Beach Resort & Spa.



Stunning ocean views greet guests from private sun decks at Tokoriki Island Resort. Below left: a local in traditional dress takes in the picturesque surrounds by raft. Below right: jet skiing is a popular pastime.



Cruises catamaran that skimmed us across the sea to Tokoriki, the northernmost island in the Mamanuca group. Just 35 kilometres from Nadi and 75 minutes by boat, Tokoriki is surrounded by a spectacular coral reef and lagoon and is home to the 34-room Tokoriki Island Resort.

This was the Fiji of postcards: the welcoming smiles, the singing, the azure sea and palm-fringed beach dotted with lolly-coloured kayaks and windsurfing boards, traditional thatched buildings set against the backdrop of a verdant forested hillside, and the intoxicating scent of tropical flowers. Our *bure* (deluxe thatched bungalow) was a stunning fusion of Fijian architecture and contemporary style. We loved the tranquillity, space and privacy, particularly our private outdoor shower (there was another inside). What a joy to relax on our sundeck and gaze out across the sea to the majestic, fiery display of the sky at dusk.

At dinner – candlelit tables under a blanket of stars, the gentle, warm breeze rustling the palm fronds – I noticed I wasn't the only male guest to “go native”: I did, however, decide that my black and purple *sulu* (worn with a loose long-sleeved cotton shirt) and tanned bare feet looked more native than the guy a couple of tables away. His bright pink floral *sulu* looked a bit incongruous ▶

DO:

- Jet ski across the ocean, jumping the waves to Beqa Island. Departs from Pacific Harbour, about three hours drive from Nadi. Jet Ski Safari, visit www.jetski-safari.com. Cost is \$130 per person, based on two people.
- Experience a free-fall skydive from up to 4200 metres over Denarau Island. Skydive Fiji, visit www.skydivefiji.com.fj. Cost is from \$230.
- Remove your shoes if you are invited into a village building.

DON'T:

- Wear skimpy clothes in cities, towns, and especially villages and churches, where knees and shoulders should always be covered.
- Wear headgear, or even sunglasses, when visiting villages.

FIRST RESPONSE
Early Result IN-STREAM PREGNANCY TEST

All Pregnancy Tests are not the same...



First Response® can detect small amounts of the pregnancy hormone, so you can know sooner.

First Response... let us tell you first.

firstresponsepregnancy.com.au

Available from supermarkets, pharmacies and selected stores nationally. Always read the label. Use only as directed. First Response® and the Human Figure Design are registered trademarks of Church & Dwight Co., Inc.

Ask some travellers what springs to mind when they think of Fiji and chances are they will evoke palm-fringed white sand beaches, the turquoise sea, or the hammock outside their thatched hut gently swaying in the trade winds. For me, it's a modest coconut stall in the unremarkable centre of Nadi (pronounced “Nandi”), the third largest town in this republic of 300-plus islands.

It was day two of our sojourn on Viti Levu, the largest and most densely populated of the islands, and we'd decided to take the 10-minute ride into town from the Hilton-run Fiji Beach Resort & Spa we'd checked into the day before. While my companion explored the town's department store, I decided to buy a coconut. The jovial vendor slapped a few different specimens before selecting one. With a few expert slashes of a machete-like implement, he opened a small hole into which he inserted a plastic straw through which I eagerly imbibed the cool, refreshing water.

He asked me my name.

“David,” I replied.

“Like King David,” he boomed, laughing and clapping.

“What is your name?” I asked.

“Solomon, sir,” was his proud reply.

“Like King Solomon,” I said.

This, for some reason, almost stopped the traffic. It appeared to be the funniest thing that he had ever heard, and his laughter caused a small crowd

to gather. I imagine that he repeated our exchange to them in Fijian (I caught the words “David” and “Solomon”) and there was much laughter, hand shaking and backslapping.

This is Fiji, a place where smiles are as plentiful as coconut palms and the stressful exchanges of city life are replaced by constant – and genuine – cries of “*bula!*” (“hello”, “welcome”).

From the moment our plane landed at Nadi International Airport – in the west of Viti Levu – any troubles we may have taken to the islands were swept away in a cheery chorus of welcome songs and strumming guitars.

Our taxi driver, Joni, was a big man with a big, black moustache wearing a white T-shirt and a bright red, turtle-motif *sulu* (the wraparound sarong that is part of the Fijian national dress). He drove us past emerald fields of sugar cane, and fertile, reddish-brown paddocks where cows lazily flicked their tails at the

birds perched on their backs. The taxi crossed a short causeway on to Denarau Island and, less than 20 minutes after leaving the airport, Joni swung his taxi into the Fiji Beach Resort & Spa.

Typically, our Fijian hosts had distilled “welcome” into a cool drink we savoured at reception, before a cheery porter showed us to our room. Part of me was expecting thatched roofed and rustic, but the space was cool and contemporary; its nod to the tropics, palm trees and sparkling seas, playing like a dream sequence through the floor-to-ceiling windows.

This is Fiji, a place where smiles are as plentiful as coconut palms.

GETTY IMAGES; PHOTOLIBRARY



ALL UNDER CONTROL

“One of the main concerns people have with styling products is trying to work out which one to use first. Mousse is one of the staples of the styling world. It is a foundation product that can be used for any style to create lift or volume and to separate curls.”



Grant Withnell

Grant Withnell, national technical educator for Schwarzkopf

DEFINED CURLS WITH FULL ELASTICITY

For 60 per cent longer-lasting, bouncy curls and extra-strong hold, use Extra Care Curl Flex Mousse.



BODY AND MAXIMUM HOLD

Boost your volume and style definition with Extra Care Strong Styling Mousse.



ANTI-FRIZZ FOR MORE THAN 24 HOURS

Extra Care Straight & Glossy Mousse with micro oils gives you super-straight hair with a gloss effect.



UP TO 100% MORE BODY AND VOLUME

Use Extra Care Volume Power Mousse with 24-hour Push-Up Lift Effect for natural-looking volume.



Schwarzkopf Professional HairCare for you.



Fiji is celebrated as “the soft coral capital of the world”.

over bare white legs, short white socks, and sandals. Give him time.

Of the European, Asian, international and Fijian dishes on offer, we particularly liked *kokoda* – cubed raw fish marinated overnight in lemon juice, combined with coconut cream and garnished with onions, chillies and tomatoes. And seafood – often cooked in *lolo* (coconut milk) – was almost always first class. Did someone say coconut? The fruit is such a big part of Fijian cuisine that locals call the coconut palm the “tree of life”. One evening, dinner was a *lovo* (the Fijian version of a Maori *hangi*) where food is prepared over hot stones in an earth oven. We tucked in to a feast of succulent meat, fish and seasonal vegetables, while beautifully serenaded by the resort staff.

Our four days at Tokoriki were a heavenly mix of kayaking, swimming in the crystal clear sea (snorkelling direct from the beach took us over stunning coral) and siestas in a shaded, gently swaying hammock. One morning, we rose early and took a short (but quite steep) hike to the top of the island’s hill from which there was a stunning view over Tokoriki and its neighbouring islands.

Fiji is known as “the soft coral capital of the world” and the resort is home to Dive Tropex, one of the country’s top PADI dive facilities. There are some excellent dive sites less than five minutes away, and many guests do as I did and take the opportunity to try scuba diving for the first time, or go the whole hog and do a full Open Water Certification Course.

But even Fiji time runs out. When our four days were up, the resort staff sang us a haunting farewell song, “*Isa Lei*”.

We had come to Fiji with expectations of beautiful beaches, water sports, palm trees, turquoise lagoons, pristine coral reefs and romantic resorts, and we weren’t disappointed. But for us, the jewels in Fiji’s crown are the people – their unaffected warmth, broad smiles and genuine friendliness. Coconut, anyone? ■

101 IDEAS

SEE: SRI SIVA SUBRAMANIYA SWAMI TEMPLE
The largest Hindu temple in the Southern Hemisphere, on the Main Street out of Nadi. Free.



GARDEN OF THE SLEEPING GIANT
These gardens, a short drive north of Nadi, have more than 2000 different kinds of orchids. Cost is \$8.

BUY: PATTERNED SULU (SARONGS) and brightly coloured “bula” shirts (can’t say I’ve worn mine since I got back, though).



MASI CLOTH
Made from the bark of the paper mulberry tree, this makes an interesting souvenir.

TRY: YAQONA (KAVA)
Looking (and tasting) like muddy water, this is Fiji’s most important ceremonial drink.



A RIDE ON A LOCAL BUS
No glass in the windows, but blinds keep the sun out.

EAT: SAFFRON RESTAURANT
In Nadi (in Jack’s Handicrafts building). Superb North Indian cuisine. Mains from \$15.

CROSS: A RIVER on a bilibili (bamboo raft).



SHOP: SUVA MUNICIPAL MARKET
(junction of Usher St and Rodwell Rd) is the most lively. Monday–Saturday.

GETTY IMAGES; PICTURE LIBRARY; PICTURE MEDIA