

## TOP TIP

Sign up for Fiji's  
online travel training  
programme at  
[matai.fiji.travel](http://matai.fiji.travel)

# South terrific

Fiji captures the very  
best of the South Pacific,  
finds Meera Dattani

There's something special about the island nation of Fiji. It's not just the beaches, magnificent as they are, scattered across 300-plus islands, with aquamarine water, pristine coral reefs and white-sand shores. It's not the scenery either, at times dramatic and volcanic, at others lush and green. It's the people – the joyous, welcoming, rugby-loving Fijians.

As Suzy Higgs, product manager at Turquoise Holidays, puts it: "They make this nation

stand out. You'll hear cries of 'bula' (hello) everywhere and locals have a ready smile that's genuine, heartfelt and infectious."

Add to this a living, breathing culture – meke dance and music performances, drinking kava (from the roots of a local plant) and dishes cooked in an underground lovo oven remain part of Fijian life – mixing with fragments of British colonial rule, a thriving Indian population and a leisurely approach to life known as 'Fiji time', and you'll

find these islands as fascinating as they are beautiful.

#### ▶ SEE: ISLAND LIFE

Viti Levu, the 'mainland', is Fiji's largest island. On its west coast is Nadi (pronounced 'Nandi') international airport and nearby Port Denarau, from where day trips, transfers and cruises depart for Fiji's most easily accessible archipelagos, the beautiful Mamanucas and Yasawas. The former is known for its private island resorts and

spectacular Malolo Barrier Reef, the latter for its craggy peaks, hiking and cave lagoons.

On Viti Levu, Nadi and Denarau may seem uninspiring by comparison with Fiji's other beauty spots, but downtown Nadi is a compact and bustling town with a colourful Hindu temple, while Port Denarau maintains a fun holiday vibe.

To the north lies Lautoka, Fiji's second-largest town, with a vibrant market, fabric shops and excellent Indian restaurants. →

→ Highly recommended are day trips to Navala village in the highlands, Fiji's finest example of traditional village life.

Viti Levu's most popular spot is the southern Coral Coast and Pacific Harbour, perfect for beach stays and easy access to rural Fiji, such as the Sigatoka Sand Dunes or a jetboat safari on the Sigatoka River through lovely scenery and villages. To see Fijian urban life, factor in a couple of nights in the east coast capital Suva, with its interesting Fiji Museum, colonial architecture, wonderful market and excellent restaurants and bars. Just off Viti Levu's east coast is Ovalau Island in the Lomaiviti Archipelago, home to Fiji's former capital Levuka, a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Many of Fiji's charms lie further afield. Northwards is Fiji's second-largest island, Vanua Levu, ideal for hiking and quieter beach stays. The nearby 'garden island' of Taveuni is similarly peaceful, with 80% of its land made up of Bouma National Heritage Park, which is home to waterfalls, hikes, flowers, birdwatching and beaches, plus the international dateline and exhilarating Waitavala natural waterslide.

As you'd expect of a South Pacific paradise, there's exceptional snorkelling and diving everywhere. You can dive with bull and tiger sharks off Beqa Lagoon off the Coral Coast, while Somosomo Strait and Great White Wall, part of Rainbow Reef around Taveuni,



rank among Fiji's best dives. Even more remote are the unspoilt Kadavu islands, known for their 'turtle-calling' traditions, the remote Lau group in southern Fiji and Rotuma in the north.

► **STAY: HOTEL HEAVEN**

Fiji caters to all budgets, offering exclusive retreats with private pools, and traditional thatched-roof 'bure' rooms in tropical gardens.

Spas - mostly outdoor, beautifully designed and using organic island-made products - can be found at many a resort, alongside Padi dive and water sports centres.

New to Viti Levu is Fiji Marriott

Resort Momi Bay with overwater bures set in a man-made lagoon. Along the Coral Coast, the Shangri-La remains a favourite, while the activity-focused Outrigger is excellent for families, offering snorkelling, paddleboarding and tennis.

Over at Pacific Harbour is the uber-luxurious Nanuku Auberge Resort Fiji, with beachfront villas, gourmet meals and cultural experiences. In the capital Suva, the best option is Grand Pacific Hotel, a rare grande-dame hotel in the South Pacific where afternoon tea retains a sense of occasion.

There's no shortage of hotels in Nadi or Denarau, but more interesting properties lie further up the coast, such as the beachfront First Landing, with its lively bar, or The Fiji Orchid, the former home of *Perry Mason* actor Raymond Burr.

In the Mamanucas, Sheraton Resort & Spa, Tokoriki Island, has reopened following a multimillion-dollar refurbishment, and now offers an adult-only 'retreat' and Fijian cultural centre. Established favourites include Castaway Island, one of several private-island resorts, alongside adult-only boutique resort Matamanoa with its free-diving school, and romantic Likuliku Lagoon Resort, with overwater bures in a protected marine reserve. Another stand-out option is Yasawa Island Resort, an intimate property that can accommodate only 38 guests.

Newcomers include the ultra-luxurious Kokomo in the Kadavu islands, a prime spot for diving and snorkelling on the Great Astrolabe



**Travel 2** features five nights' B&B in a beachfront bure at Matamanoa Island Resort, and three nights' room-only at Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort, plus return transfers, a Sigatoka River Safari and return flights. The price starts at £2,899 in November. [travel2.com](http://travel2.com)

**Jacada Travel** offers a 14-night full-board holiday from £7,640. The price includes three nights in an overwater bure at Likuliku Lagoon Resort, a one-way seaplane transfer, seven nights on *Fiji Princess* and four nights in an oceanfront bure at Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort. Includes domestic flights, international flights are extra. [jacadatravel.com](http://jacadatravel.com)



**ABOVE:** Sigatoka River safari

**LEFT:** Sheraton Resort & Spa, Tokoriki Island



**LEFT:** Tides Reach Resort, Taveuni Island

**RIGHT:** Blue Lagoon Cruises' *Fiji Princess*

**BELOW:** Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort



➔ Reef. The first Six Senses resort in the Pacific also opens later this year in the Mamanucas, with its trademark focus on high-end wellness.

In northern Fiji, Taveuni Island's Tides Reach Resort has four spacious, luxury beachfront bungalows, beautifully designed and east-facing, making it one of the first places to see sunrise. Just off Taveuni, the private-island retreats of Qamea (over-12s only) and Matangi (over-16s) are deservedly popular for their luxury bures and spa, while intimate Sau Bay off Taveuni has a lovely relaxed vibe.

On Fiji's second-largest island, Vanua Levu, the enduring appeal of Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort in Savusavu Bay continues. Named after the environmentalist and son of ocean explorer Jacques Cousteau, the five-star resort is much loved for its 25 TV-free

## “ Fiji is a guaranteed crowd-pleaser with its private beaches, exclusive hideaways and overwater bures

bures, dive centre, organic garden and private-island access.

Another engaging way to explore Fiji is on a small-ship cruise. The *Reef Endeavour*, part of family-run Captain Cook Cruises, operates short cruises to the Yasawas and Mamanucas, to the remote northern islands, and down to Lau and Kadavu, combining beach and snorkel trips with village visits and kava drinking with the Fijian crew. Blue

Lagoon Cruises and Awesome Adventures Fiji offer itineraries around the Yasawas, while Paul Gauguin Cruises visits Lautoka, Suva and Savusavu on its 12-night Fiji, Tonga, Cook Islands and Society Islands sailing.

### ▶ SELL: A LITTLE LUXURY

For clients familiar with the Maldives, Seychelles and Mauritius who are now seeking a new 'paradise', Fiji is a guaranteed crowd-pleaser with its private beaches, exclusive hideaways and overwater bures. Extra touches include seaplanes or private helicopter transfers between resorts.

Suggest flying via Hong Kong or Singapore with a stopover, or via Los Angeles; there's a codeshare from London to Fiji with American Airlines and Fiji Airways.

There are other ways to upsell

a stay. Rachel McMurdo, Travel 2's assistant product manager for Oceania, says: "I'd suggest clients stay at more than one island resort. For example, combine the remote, tropical island atmosphere of Matamanoa's beachfront bures with the activities at Outrigger on Viti Levu."

Easy access to local culture is another plus, whether it's listening to choirs at Sunday church services, hopping onto a local bus or snacking at street-side restaurants. The food is excellent too, with Fijian, Polynesian, Chinese, Indian and modern European influences, giving rise to tasty curries, fresh seafood and Fijian raw-fish dish kokoda.

It's this mishmash of cultures that makes Fiji more than just a beach destination. And that long flight is yesterday's news once people set foot on this South Pacific paradise. **TW**