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BABY ON BOARD + WIN A FIJI CRUISE + ALASKA FOR BEGINNERS





*Mud,  
mud,*

In the words of the famous hippopotamus song, there is nothing quite like it for cooling the blood...

Words Fiona Harper

**A**s I wallow in a mud pool carved from chocolate-brown earth, Kily Lewaninarewa challenges me to guess his age. His dark, youthful eyes twinkle above a sparkling, wide-mouthed grin; his clear skin is unlined and glowing. He looks barely past his teens. But it's a loaded question.

We had just come ashore on one of Captain Cook Cruises' most bizarre optional shore excursions.

Shadowed by mountainous peaks known as the Sleeping Giant, we're soaking in one of five pools at Sabeto Valley Mud Pool and Thermal Spring. The water here is said to have therapeutic qualities, and Fijians have been coming to soak in the spring for eons to

heal their ailments. Kily tells me that if you drink the clear water of the original spring, which bubbles from the earth at 72 degrees, it will cure stomach problems. As well, coating oneself with mud before soaking in the pool is said to help the skin retain a youthful glow.

The spring, which is about a metre deep, gives off a slight sulphuric odour through steam that rises gently above the surrounding gardens. Water from the spring is piped to four other pools, cooling in the process to a temperature that's comfortable for soaking.

Therapeutic bathing is a three-step process. First, after we have stripped down to our bathers, Kily presents us with a bucket

**glorious**  
*mud*

filled with rich, gooey mud. Plunging my hand in, I scoop up a handful of warm goo the texture of clotted cream and lather it all over my body and face. Helpfully, Kily points out places that I've missed as well as coating my back. Soon the rims around my eyes are the only areas of skin that remain uncovered. Then we "bake" in the sun. I can feel my skin tightening while the mud changes to a lighter khaki shade. It's not a pretty look. But not many beauty treatments are.

It is, however, very social. We stand around chatting while ladies in colourful Bula dresses perform massages nearby and other bathers move between pools. Once the





Opposite page, one of the Sabeto Valley mud pools. This page (clockwise from left), the writer and friend mid-beauty treatment; the rustic massage room; the youthful Kily; and the team of masseuses



‘Soon the rims around my eyes are the only areas of skin that remain uncovered... it’s not a pretty look.’

mud dries, we step into a murky pool. The water turns darker still as we rub our skin while mud squelches through our toes. It’s not unpleasant but it does feel weird. If you’re the princess type, this probably isn’t for you.

The best pool is the last one, which at a rather balmy 32 degrees is a little below normal body temperature. Lined with river stones and surrounded by a garden, this pool was opened in late 2013 to cope with increasing numbers. There are up to 500 visitors a day during peak times, but only a handful pop in while I’m there.

Bathed in sunshine, the warm water is soothing and relaxing. The warmth entices us to linger as we remove any remaining mud from creases and crevices. My skin feels cleansed and exfoliated. Somewhat fixated on youthful appearances, Kily cheekily announces that my companions and I looked

like “nanas” on arrival but now look more like mothers than grandmothers. Childless, I take it as a compliment, assuming there’s some improvement in my almost 50-year-old complexion.

The pools came to prominence after Allied soldiers discovered them during World War II. Subsequently, until 1995 sick people flocked to the springs in search of cures for ailments ranging from stomach ache to lung cancer. However, locals have known about the pools’ therapeutic qualities for centuries and Sabeto Villagers (the traditional landowners) opened the centre to the public in 2002.

Kily, who has been guiding guests through the ritual for almost three years, never quite gets around to revealing his real age. Instead, he attributes his youthful appearance and infectious zest for life to multiple daily dunkings. It’s hard to argue with him.

## Fact file

**COST:** \$10 (Package price from \$91 with Captain Cook Cruises or hotel pick-up).

**ATTIRE:** Don’t wear your best swimmers (although the mud does wash out).

**FACILITIES:** Changing rooms, massage, handicrafts and souvenir stall.

**LOCATION:** Halfway between the major cities of Nadi and Lautoka on Fiji’s main island of Viti Levu.

**OPEN:** 7 days, 9am–5pm.

**WEBSITE:** [fiji.travel/activity/aqua-tours-mud-pool-tour](http://fiji.travel/activity/aqua-tours-mud-pool-tour).