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# *Fiji*

## FIJI, YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO A COUNTRY OF SMILES

By Fiona Harper







Once known ominously as the Cannibal Isles thanks to a tendency for warring tribes to consume their rivals, such antisocial behaviour disappeared around the same time that Christian missionaries descended on Pacific islands.

These days Fijians are known more for their friendliness than their fearsomeness. The ubiquitous greeting of Bula, meaning hello, is almost always accompanied by a relaxed smile and a casual wave whether the greeter is a young child or a village elder. Fiji's most treasured asset, and the one that lingers in most visitors' memories long after their tan has faded, are genuinely friendly locals furnished with smiling faces.

A horseshoe shaped archipelago rising from the South Pacific seabed, around one third of Fiji's 320 islands are inhabited. Straddling latitudes between 12 and 21 degrees South, Fiji basks in a tropical climate that rarely dips below daily maximums of 26 degrees (Celsius). It's a country that does hospitality well, providing an alluring mix of holiday activities and accommodation in a drop-dead gorgeous land and seascape.



**Clockwise from Top** Beach side view, Island's arial View, Traditional Fijian Village. **Opposite** Local Street shopping.





*The ubiquitous greeting of Bula, meaning hello, is almost always accompanied by a relaxed smile.*





**From Top Left** Diver over Hard Coral Reef, Laucala Island Golf Course weaving through coconut plantation.

*Surf, sail, swim, dive or snorkel in gin-clear waters, swing a golf club, indulge in fresh tropical fruits and seafood or...*

No matter whether you prefer to relax in a hammock beneath a coconut palm-studded beach, surf, sail, swim, dive or snorkel in gin-clear waters, swing a golf club, indulge in fresh tropical fruits and seafood or be massaged into oblivion, Fiji can probably cover it. Island resorts range from budget to ultimate luxury and everything in between.

For a start, Fiji has some of the best international standard golf courses in the South Pacific. Like the 18 hole championship course at Denarau Island, the similarly impressive greens at Pacific Harbour or the stunning course on Laucala Island that weaves through a coconut plantation. The South Pacific Ocean lures scuba divers, snorkelers, surfers and fishing folk. Plus, it's a terrific sailing destination, from fully crewed yachts with a finely honed crew trimming the sails to colourful Hobie cats, sea

kayaks or paddle boats propelled by leg power.

Indeed sailing is an integral part of Fijian history dating back to the 1500's when an armada of giant war canoes set sail north of Egypt, allegedly carrying treasures from the King of Solomon. Sailing through Indonesia and into the South Pacific a double hulled canoe called 'Kaunitoni' with a great warrior chief aboard finally landed at Vuda Point on Viti Levu. Fijians today acknowledge Vuda Point, which lies between Nadi (pronounced Nan-di) and Lautoka, as the landing site of their Melanesian ancestors.

The main island of Viti Levu is likely to be your arrival point, as airports are located at Nadi and Suva on the 'big island'. Denarau Island is far away enough from Nadi to avoid aircraft disturbance yet close enough so that within an hour of touching down you could be sipping cocktails beside your hotel pool. An island by name, Denarau is





PHOTOGRAPH: Cat Holloway

**Clockwise from Top** Diver and Pufferfish, Bilibili Rafting.

connected to Viti Levu by a short bridge over a tidal stream and is home to international luxury resorts, a golf course and marina. Sheraton, Westin and SonaiSali Resorts are located on the (black sand) beach with prime sunset viewing positions.

If you're travelling by boat to the Yasawa or Mamanuca (pronounced Ma-man-ooth-a) Islands, it's likely you'll depart from Port Denarau Marina.

Other areas popular on Viti Levu are the Coral Coast and Pacific Harbour on the south coast and the Sunshine Coast on the north side of the island, which overlooks Bligh Water. A road rims the entire island, skirting volcanic peaks that dominate the central landscape.





Vanua Levu is the second largest island, and it's likely you'll find the 'real Fiji' in this north eastern region. Savu Savu and Labasa are bustling centres of trade and commerce where produce markets are a central point where you can see what the locals are buying and selling. Further afield, Taveuni Island, known as the garden island, is this writer's favourite place to hang out, attracted to waterfalls and lush national park forests. Divers and snorkelers are well catered for as Somo Somo Strait is an immensely fertile waterway that attracts prolific fish amongst kaleidoscopic coral gardens and coral reef. Jean-Michel Cousteau, Namale and Koru Sun Resorts are well located for access to Somo Somo Strait

Further east, Laucala and Qamea Islands are both home to extraordinarily luxurious resorts that attract the well-heeled seeking privacy and exceptional hospitality.

If you're looking for the quintessential Fijian holiday straight out of the brochure – you know those pictures that show dazzling white beaches kissed by turquoise water shaded by coconut palms struck with a hammock – look no further than the Mamanuca or Yasawa Islands.

The Mamanuca's are a volcanic archipelago of 20 islands west of Viti Levu and south of the Yasawa Islands. Mostly islets rather than full sized islands, some of these are so small they disappear below the Pacific Ocean at high tide. Easily accessible by boat from Port Denarau Marina, it's also a short seaplane flight to Mamanuca Island resorts. Protected from ocean swells by the Malolo Barrier Reef, which lures divers and snorkelers, islands worth checking into are Likuliku Lagoon and Tokoriki Resorts, while sailors should head straight to Musket Cove Resort with its lively marina and yacht club vibe.



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PHOTOGRAPH: Qamea Resort, Laucala Island



**From Top** Laucala Island  
Luxury Resort Hilltop Villa,  
Qamea Luxury Resort  
Honeymoon Day Bed





**Top** Cultural Village - Music Band & Meke Wau Dance Performance

*If you can't find a Fijian holiday experience to suit your style, well, you're really not trying...*

Surfers are not forgotten. The Mamanucas have some of Fiji's greatest (and most challenging) surf breaks, a couple of which are world famous. Cloudbreak is home to an annual Pro Competition that attracts the best in the world. It's a short boat ride from Tavarua Island, so too is Restaurants break while Wilkes Passage is accessible from Plantation Island.

Further north the Yasawa Islands are strung like a pearl necklace across a turquoise sea: precious gems in Fiji's much-bejewelled crown. The 20 or so islands and islets of the Yasawas reach northward into the South Pacific Ocean. Here you'll find plenty of 'postcard perfect' tropical islands requiring little more than a swimsuit and sulu (sarong) or board-shorts and floral shirt as you while away balmy frangipani-infused days. With no shortage of white sand beaches shaded by coconut palms on a backdrop of turquoise water, the Yasawas far-flung location make them all the more attractive.

Cruise operators depart for the Yasawas from Port Denarau Marina or Lautoka, the two major centres of Fiji's cruise and boating industry. Though you could also take a seaplane to the Yasawas if boating is not your thing. A water taxi service, the Yasawa Flyer, also hops between the islands on a regular schedule, a

particularly useful method of getting around if you want to bed down on a few different islands. Turtle Island (or Nanuya Levu is the islands Fijian name) is the home to a small luxury resort favoured by honeymooners and celebrities seeking tropical-infused privacy.

The largest island in the Yasawas is Naviti Island, which is home to the group's highest chief. The church at Soso village is worth a visit for its fine wood carvings. Visit on a Sunday and you'll also be blessed with harmonic hymns ringing out across the village green. Don't forget to seek permission though before visiting a village. It's customary, as well as respectful, to request formal permission and present an offering of yaqona (also known as kava) root to the chief before entering a village.

If you can't find a Fijian holiday experience to suit your style, well, you're really not trying. Though there are a plethora of resorts packed with activities to fill your days and fine dining to take care of the evenings, take the time to get to know Fiji's people. You'll likely find yourself laughing, or at the very least smiling, within minutes of striking up a conversation. Fijian's must surely be the happiest people on the planet. Cast your gaze around and it's easy to understand why.