

Fiji review: Taveuni Island is a culinary hotspot

By *Fiona Harper* | 4 years ago

Fiji does many things exceptionally well. Gorgeous beaches? Tick. Dreamy tropical islands? Yep, about 300 of them. Diving and snorkelling sites? Oh yeah, there's a gazillion places to find Nemo. Plush tropical resorts that know how to show a traveller a good time? Puleeease, have you been living under a rock? Fiji's resorts are world class! Delicious cuisine? Err, not so much.

Beyond the standard fish, coconut and root vegetables like cassava and taro, food has never been a big attraction in Fiji. My least favourite Fijian food, taro has all the flavour and texture of unsalted cardboard.

So, I'm not overly optimistic when I check into the Beach Villa at Taveuni Palms Resort despite owner Colleen O'Neill's advice that Taveuni Palms offers 'first class food and personalised service'.

As it turns out, Colleen is right on the money. Every dining occasion is exceptional. Each meal is better than the previous and meal times become an absolute highlight of our stay.

With five different dining areas between the private beach, poolside, on one of two decks cantilevered over tropical gardens or indoors, choosing a location is almost as challenging as the menu itself.

Papaya and prawn salad for lunch is a winner, as are coconut banana flapjacks for breakfast. Unexpectedly, hot papaya soup, the first of four dinner courses is exceptional.

Making regular red carpet appearances and collecting gongs for their bulging trophy cabinet, Taveuni Palms has just two villas, the Beach Villa and Horizon Spa Villa. Each comes with seven exceptional staff. You do the math.

Taveuni's moniker as the garden island comes with a big reputation. Home to the rare Tagimoucia flower which grows on a ridge, elongated Taveuni Island is dominated by its rainforest-clad highland spine.

On a long boat tour of the east coast we motor south from Lavena to visit a couple of the 300 waterfalls our guide Simone says exist within Bouma Heritage National Park.

Our longboat noses up to Savulevea Waterfall tumbling into the South Pacific Ocean. The falls were once an important water source for island trader sailing ships replenishing their supplies.

We nose up to more falls after motoring down a mangrove-lined creek. Disembarking from the boat we take a short walk inland takes us to more falls where we swim under a cascade that pummels our heads.

But Taveuni's real waterfall star is undisputedly Waitavala Waterslide on the west coast where a culvert has been carved into the rock by fast-flowing water

over eons.

The result is a natural waterslide that snakes and twists down a gully shaded by the forest canopy. Launching into the stream midway, I'm laughing so much by the time I plop ungraciously into the pool at the bottom I take in so much water I almost drown. After catching my breath, I go again. And again.

Stretch your legs on the Lavena Coastal Walk, starting on the powder-like sand of Lavena Beach shaded by coconut palms. The trail follows the coast for a few km before heading inland to a small waterfall. From here it gets a bit more tricky, climbing along a river bank and winding through thick forest vegetation dripping with vines. Keep an eye out overhead for the striking orange dove, whose plume is the colour of a ripe mandarin.

Beyond Taveuni's shore lies the Somosomo Strait, home to some of Fiji's best dive and snorkel sites. Warm currents funnel through the channel, providing essential nutrients for corals, fish and other marine life.

Rainbow Reef serves up an extraordinary kaleidoscope of floral gardens. But it's not just the corals that impress, the reef attracts plenty of pelagics and leopard sharks, moray eels and manta rays who are lured to these waters by the abundance of tasty food.

They're not a whole different to the humans visiting Taveuni as it turns out.

For more information head to [Taveuni Palms Resort](#)