

# The Best of Fiji

**T**he best thing about Fiji isn't its palm-draped beaches, blue lagoons, or rugged mountains. I think it's the enormous friendliness of the Fijian people.

Picking the best of everything else in Fiji is no easy task, for this is a diverse tropical country with many choices. In this chapter, I point out the best of the best—not necessarily to pass qualitative judgment, but to help you choose among many options. I list them here in the order in which they appear in the book.

Your choice of where you go and what you do will depend on why you are coming to Fiji, and how much money you have to spend while you're here. You can scuba dive to exhaustion over some of the world's most beautiful reefs or just laze on the beach with a trashy novel. You can share a 300-room hotel with package tourists, or get away from it all on a tiny islet. Even out there, you can be left alone with your lover or join your fellow guests at lively dinner parties. You can totally ignore the islanders around you or enrich your own life by learning about theirs. You can listen to the day's events on CNN International or get out and see what Fiji was like a century ago. Those decisions are all yours.

Regardless of where you stay and what you do, you are in for a memorable time. The friendly Fijians will see to that.

## 1 The Most Beautiful Islands

"In the South Seas," Rupert Brooke wrote in 1914, "the Creator seems to have laid himself out to show what He can do." How right the poet was, for all across the South Pacific lie some of the world's most dramatically beautiful islands. In my opinion, the best of the lot have jagged mountain peaks plunging into aquamarine lagoons. All these islands are beautiful, but I think the following stand out from the pack.

- **Monuriki:** Tom Hanks spent a lot of time filming *Castaway* on lovely Monuriki, one of the westernmost of the Mamanuca Islands. A rocky central mountain drops down to the beach where Hanks figured out how to pry open a coconut. See chapter 6.
- **Yasawa:** This long, narrow island off the northwest coast of Viti Levu has several of Fiji's best beaches scattered among its rolling hills. It's also home to Yasawa Island Resort and Spa, one of Fiji's best offshore hotels. See chapter 6.
- **Waya:** Near the southern end of the Yasawa chain, Waya Island is one of the few in Fiji with the combination of cliffs and sheer basaltic peaks I find so appealing in the Pacific islands. See chapter 6.
- **Beqa:** Off Viti Levu's southern coast, Beqa has no roads cutting through its hills. Lovely Malumu Bay, one of Fiji's more scenic spots, nearly bisects Beqa, and it's all surrounded by the magnificent Beqa Lagoon. See chapter 8.

- **Kadavu:** About 60km (37 miles) long and just 14km (8½ miles) across at its widest point, Kadavu is Fiji's unspoiled nature preserve. Native birds and other wildlife live in abundance on Kadavu, given the absence of mongooses, iguanas, myna birds, and other introduced predators. The Great Astrolabe Reef provides great diving off the eastern and southern shores. See chapter 9.
- **Ovalau:** The sheer cliffs of Ovalau kept the town of Levuka from becoming Fiji's modern capital, but they create a dramatic backdrop to an old South Seas town little changed in the past century. Ovalau has no good

beaches, which means no resorts alter its landscape. See chapter 12.

- **Savusavu:** Savusavu isn't an island but almost seems like it, since it sits on a peninsula separated from the main part of Vanua Levu by spectacular, mountain-surrounded Savusavu Bay, which is so large the U.S. Navy considered hiding the Pacific fleet there during World War II. See chapter 13.
- **Qamea and Matagi:** These little jewels off the northern coast of Taveuni are lushly beautiful, with their shorelines either dropping precipitously into the calm surrounding waters or forming little bays with idyllic beaches. See chapter 14.

## 2 The Best Beaches

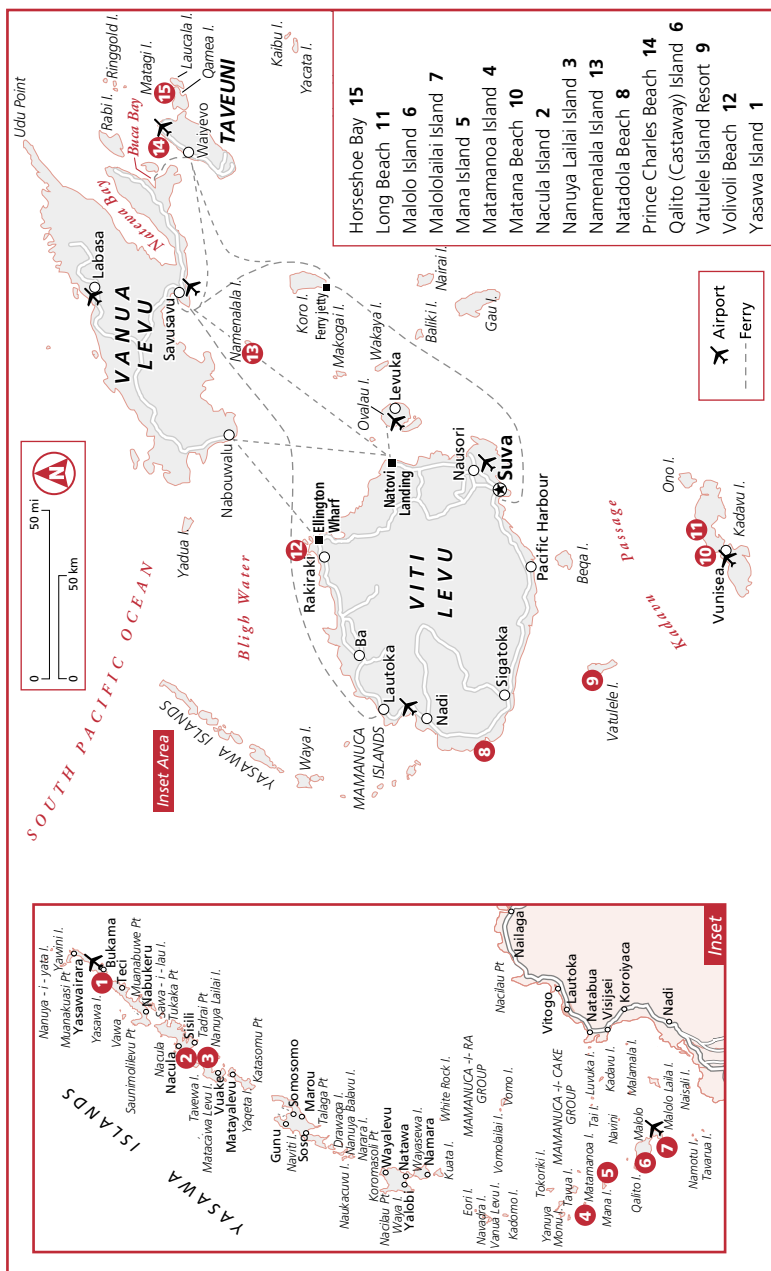
Because all but a few islands in Fiji are surrounded by coral reefs, it has no real surf beaches like those so common in, say, Hawaii and Florida. Most islands (and all but a few resorts) have bathtublike lagoons lapping on coral sands draped by coconut palms. Unfortunately, most lagoons in Fiji are shallow at low tide, thus limiting watersports for half the day. This is especially true on the Coral Coast. Fortunately for the environmentalists among us, some of the most spectacular beaches are on remote islands and are protected from development by the islanders' devotion to their cultures and villages' land rights. Needless to say, resort developers have placed their establishments on most of the best. These stand out from the many.

- **Qalito (Castaway) Island** (the Mamanucas): Better known as the home of **Castaway Island Resort** (p. 138), hilly Qalito Island ends at a point flanked on both sides by beaches of deep white sand, which helps make Castaway one of Fiji's most popular resorts.
- **Malolo Island** (the Mamanucas): The beach fronting **Malolo Island**

**Fiji** resort (p. 137) has deep sand, and the lagoon here is deep enough for swimming and snorkeling at most tides. The resort has one of Fiji's best beach bars.

- **Mana Island** (the Mamanucas): Mana Island has beaches on both its sides, but the one on the south coast is worth writing home about. It's so long that it's shared by both **Mana Island Resort** (p. 137) and bottom-end backpacker hostels.
- **Matamanoa Island** (the Mamanucas): Just enough room exists between Matamanoa's rocky central hill and its beach to shoe-horn in **Matamanoa Island Resort** (p. 138). Both the sands and the lagoon here are deep enough to enjoy all the time.
- **Malololailai Island** (the Mamanucas): Connected to the larger Malolo Island by a marshy isthmus, Malololailai is home to three resorts: **Musket Cove Island Resort** (p. 134), **Lomani Island Resort** (p. 134), and **Plantation Island Resort** (p. 135). Although the lagoon is shallow, the beach in front of Lomani and Plantation Island resorts is one of Fiji's most

## Fiji's Best Beaches



picturesque, with coconut palms hanging over it in places.

- **Yasawa Island** (the Yasawas): Several of Fiji's best beaches are on Yasawa, the northernmost island in the Yasawa chain. One long stretch of sand near the north end is divided by big black rocks flanked by two Fijian villages. Another in front of **Yasawa Island Resort and Spa** (p. 148) also has rocks plus waves, a rarity among Fijian beaches.
- **Nanuyalilai Island** (the Yasawas): About midway along the Yasawa chain, Nanuya is skirted on its south side by a long beach that wraps around a coconut palm-studded peninsula and keeps on going. **Nanuya Island Resort** (p. 146) sits on the western end, while **Blue Lagoon Cruises** (p. 131) uses the sands on the other side of the peninsula.
- **Nacula Island** (the Yasawas): The inexpensive **Oarsmans Bay Lodge** (p. 147), on Nacula Island, sits beside one of the top beaches in Fiji, a glorious strip of sand emptying into a lagoon that is deep at all tides.
- **Natadola Beach** (the Coral Coast): Fiji's main island of Viti Levu doesn't have the high-quality beaches found on the country's small islands, but Natadola is the exception (p. 152). Until recently this long stretch was spared development, but a big resort is coming.
- **Vatulele Island Resort** (Vatulele): The luxury resort on Vatulele Island has new owners and has been undergoing significant changes, but the 1km (½ mile) of sand in front of it remains one of the most brilliantly white beaches in Fiji. See p. 163.
- **Long Beach** (Kadavu): Fiji's longest beach runs for several kilometers along the north shore of Kadavu Island, where one resort is under development. In the meantime, visitors have it all to themselves but will have to stay at nearby **Papageno Resort** (p. 176) or **Dive Kadavu/Matana Beach Resort** (p. 175).
- **Matana Beach** (Kadavu): Also on Kadavu's north shore, Matana Beach combines deep white sand with a deep lagoon. Bordered by a Fijian village and **Dive Kadavu/Matana Beach Resort** (p. 175), Matana has a fine view westward along Kadavu's shore.
- **Volivoli Beach** (Rakiraki): At the very northern tip of Viti Levu a few kilometers from Rakiraki, lovely Volivoli also has soft white sand, a deep lagoon, and a spectacular view southwestward toward Viti Levu's mountains. You don't have to pay a fortune either, with inexpensive **Volivoli Beach Resort** (p. 201) just around the corner.
- **Namenalala Island** (off Savusavu): The main beach at the remote little resort known as **Moody's Namena** is one of the finest I've seen in Fiji, but owners Tom and Joan Moody have marked four other private beaches with OCCUPIED/UNOCCUPIED signs. See p. 226.
- **Prince Charles Beach** (Taveuni): The northern coast of Taveuni has three great beaches within walking distance of each other, the best being Prince Charles Beach, so named because said prince once took a dip in its warm lagoon. See p. 236.
- **Horseshoe Bay** (Matagi Island): Matagi is an extinct volcano whose crater fell away on one side and formed picturesque Horseshoe Bay. The half-moon-shape beach at its head is one of the finest in the islands, but you have to be on a yacht or a guest at **Matangi Island Resort** to enjoy it (p. 242).

### 3 The Most Romantic Resorts

Fiji is a marvelous place for honeymoons and other romantic escapes. I've never stayed anywhere as love-enhancing as a thatched-roof bungalow on the beach. You'll find lots of these in Fiji. A few are built on stilts out over the lagoon, while others have their own swimming pools and hot tubs.

Fiji's numerous small, relatively remote offshore resorts offer as much privacy as you are likely to desire. Many of these establishments have less than 20 bungalows each, instead of the 40 or more found in French Polynesia and elsewhere, which means they are usually widely spaced. Many are even on islands all by themselves.

They are so romantic that a friend of mine says her ideal wedding would be to rent an entire small resort, take her wedding party with her, get married in Fijian costume beside the beach, and make the rest of her honeymoon a diving vacation.

Every offshore resort in Fiji qualifies as a very good romantic retreat, but I'm headed to one of the following when Cupid strikes. Most have full-service spas for your pampering pleasure.

- **Likuliku Lagoon Resort** (Malolo Island, the Mamanucas; ☎ 672 4275 or 666 3344; [www.likulikulagoon.com](http://www.likulikulagoon.com)). This exquisitely designed resort is tops in the Mamanuca Islands, primarily because it's the first in Fiji with overwater bungalows. See p. 136.
- **Tokoriki Island Resort** (Tokoriki Island, the Mamanucas; ☎ 666 1999; [www.tokoriki.com](http://www.tokoriki.com)): The beach at Tokoriki has erosion problems, but it has five bungalows with their own plunge pools (p. 140).
- **Matamanoa Island Resort** (Matamanoa Island, the Mamanucas; ☎ 666 0511; [www.matamanoa.com](http://www.matamanoa.com)): It's less luxurious than Tokoriki, but Matamanoa is a good choice for

cost-conscious honeymooners, and it has one of Fiji's best beaches. See p. 138.

- **Turtle Island** (Nanuya Levu Island, the Yasawas; ☎ 877/288-7853 or 672 2921; [www.turtlefiji.com](http://www.turtlefiji.com)): Fiji's first top-end resort continues to offer romance beside its seemingly landlocked "Blue Lagoon." Its most private bungalow lacks a whirlpool but has a 360-degree view of the lagoon and surrounding islands. See p. 146.
- **Yasawa Island Resort and Spa** (Yasawa Island, the Yasawas; ☎ 672 2266; [www.yasawa.com](http://www.yasawa.com)): Sitting on one of the prettiest beaches in Fiji, Yasawa Island Resort and Spa has a very low-key, friendly ambience to go with its very large bungalows, the choicest being the secluded honeymoon unit with its own beach (it even has a private pool). See p. 148.
- **Navutu Stars Resort** (Yaqueta Island, the Yasawas; ☎ 664 0553; [www.navutustarsfiji.com](http://www.navutustarsfiji.com)): Also in the Yasawa Islands, Navutu Stars Resort has a spa and yoga sessions in addition to fine food brought to you by its Italian owners. See p. 142.
- **The Wakaya Club** (Wakaya Island; ☎ 344 0128; [www.wakaya.com](http://www.wakaya.com)): In central Fiji near Ovalau Island, the Wakaya Club is generally considered Fiji's top resort. It has some of the country's largest bungalows, plus a palatial mansion with its own pool, perched high atop a ridge. The staff leaves the guests to their own devices, and you might see a movie star or two relaxing here. See p. 213.
- **Jean-Michel Cousteau Fiji Islands Resort** (Savusavu; ☎ 800/246-3454 or 885 0188; [www.fijioresort.com](http://www.fijioresort.com)): "Cousteau" is Fiji's best family hotel. It expertly herds the kids away in the award-winning Bula Club, and young

### **Fun Fact Getting Hitched in Fiji**

These romantic islands are marvelous places to get married, and becoming officially hitched is relatively easy in Fiji. You do not have to be a resident, and obtaining the necessary licenses and permits requires only a few days. Most resorts will take care of the formalities and organize traditional ceremonies (which can take place on the beach if you like). Their wedding coordinators will tell you what documents you will need to bring (or send in advance) and what local formalities you will need to execute. Do not even think of making the arrangements yourself.

ones are seldom if ever seen in a beautiful honeymoon villa with its own swimming pool. See p. 222.

- **Namale – The Fiji Islands Resort & Spa** (Savusavu; ☎ 800/727-3454 or 885 0435; [www.namalefiji.com](http://www.namalefiji.com)): Motivational speaker Anthony Robbins's luxurious resort also has private, pool-equipped villas plus a bowling alley, golf simulator, and a ton of other toys. See p. 223.

- **Coconut Grove Beachfront Cottages** (Taveuni; ☎/fax 888 0328; [www.coconutgrovefiji.com](http://www.coconutgrovefiji.com)): Ronna Goldstein's charming three-unit, bed-and-breakfast-like hotel is one of Fiji's best bargains for anyone, including honeymooners on a budget. See p. 237.

- **Maravu Plantation Beach Resort & Spa** (Taveuni; ☎ 866/528-3864 or 888 0555; [www.maravu.net](http://www.maravu.net)): Maravu is not directly on the beach (a picturesque one is just across the road); but bungalows come equipped

with hot tubs, and the honeymoon unit is built up in a tree. See p. 238.

- **Matangi Island Resort** (Matangi Island, off Taveuni; ☎ 888/628-2644 or 888 0260; [www.matangiisland.com](http://www.matangiisland.com)): One of the widely spaced bungalows at Matangi Island Resort is built up in a Pacific almond tree, while two others are carved in the side of a cliff. They all have outdoor bathrooms. See p. 242.

- **Qamea Resort and Spa** (Qamea Island, off Taveuni; ☎ 866/867-2632 or 888 0220; [www.qamea.com](http://www.qamea.com)): Among my favorite places to stay are the charming, old South Seas-style bungalows at Qamea Island Resort and Spa. More luxurious still are the two units specifically designed for honeymooners and two more with their own plunge pools. Kerosene lanterns romantically light the 16m-high (52-ft.) thatched roof of Qamea's main building at night. See p. 243.

## **4 The Best Places to Get Away from It All**

Some of Fiji's offshore resorts are better at getting away from it all than others. The ones I list below are small enough that you won't have a lot of company, and—since they are on islands all by themselves—you won't have people from

another property walking along your stretch of private beach.

- **Wadigi Island Resort** (Wadigi Island, the Mamanucas; ☎ 672 0901; [www.wadigi.com](http://www.wadigi.com)): On a tiny islet, Wadigi Island Resort has just three

units, all on top of a peak with a glorious view of nearby Malolo Island and the surrounding Mamanucas. It's expensive and very private, so no one will care if you run around naked. See p. 141.

- **Matamanoa Island Resort** (Matamanoa Island, the Mamanucas; ☎ 666 0511; [www.matamanoa.com](http://www.matamanoa.com)): In the westernmost of the Mamanucas, this remote little resort is one of Fiji's most reasonably priced romantic resorts, and its beach is superb. See p. 138.
- **Yasawa Island Resort and Spa** (Yasawa Island, the Yasawas; ☎ 672 2266; [www.yasawa.com](http://www.yasawa.com)): Another great honeymoon choice, Yasawa Island Resort and Spa has no neighbors and is therefore very private. Its secluded honeymoon *bure* (bungalow) has its own private beach and pool. See p. 148.
- **Lalati Resort & Spa** (Beqa Island; ☎ 347 2033; [www.lalati-fiji.com](http://www.lalati-fiji.com)): Beside picturesque Malumu Bay and enjoying a fine view of the Beqa Lagoon and Viti Levu's southern shore, Lalati appeals to couples looking to dive, or to just get away. The full-service spa is augmented by an air-conditioned lounge with TV and DVD player, and the outdoor pool helps compensate for a poor beach. See p. 170.
- **Royal Davui Island Fiji** (in Beqa Lagoon; ☎ 330 7090; [www.royal-davui.com](http://www.royal-davui.com)): On a tiny, rocky islet in Beqa Lagoon, this luxury resort is set above a small beach. Bungalows are built in an old-growth hillside, but guests are compensated by marvelous views from each unit's plunge pool-equipped veranda. See p. 170.
- **Dive Kadavu/Matana Beach Resort** (Kadavu Island; ☎ 368 3502; [www.divekadavu.com](http://www.divekadavu.com)): Only a 10-minute boat ride from Kadavu's airstrip, this

little resort has been a top dive base since 1983, but it has begun using the name Matana Beach Resort to take advantage of its location on one of Fiji's most beautiful beaches. See p. 175.

- **Matava—The Astrolabe Hideaway** (Kadavu Island; ☎ 333 6222; [www.matava.com](http://www.matava.com)): Much farther than Dive Kadavu from the airstrip—at least 45 minutes by small boat—Matava is so eco-friendly it has no air-conditioners and turns on the solar-powered lights only at night. Made primarily of thatch and other natural materials, its bungalows are both basic and charming. It's close to many Great Astrolabe Reef dive sights, but it also specializes in kayaking trips and bird-watching. See p. 176.
- **The Wakaya Club** (Wakaya Island; ☎ 344 0128; [www.wakaya.com](http://www.wakaya.com)): Except for a few private villas owned by Hollywooders and other well-heeled types, Fiji's top resort has all of Wakaya Island to itself. Nicole Kidman, Russell Crowe, and other Aussie celebs have been known to take a break at Wakaya on their way home. See p. 213.
- **Moody's Namena** (Namenalala Island, off Savusavu; ☎ 881 3764; [www.moody'snamenafiji.com](http://www.moody'snamenafiji.com)): You either take a seaplane or ride a boat for more than an hour to reach Joan and Tom Moody's little resort. Not only is Namenalala surrounded by the fabulous Namea Reef, but the island also has five beaches, four of them so private the pathways leading to them have OCCUPIED/UNOCCUPIED signs to prevent your fellow guests from disturbing you. See p. 227.
- **Matangi Island Resort** (Matangi Island, off Taveuni; ☎ 888/628-2644 or 888 0260; [www.matangi-island.com](http://www.matangi-island.com)): This couples-only resort's

honeymoon bungalow up in a Pacific almond tree is both charming and private, and you can walk over the hill and have the gorgeous beach in Horseshoe Bay all to yourselves. See p. 242.

- **Qamea Resort and Spa** (Qamea Island, off Taveuni; ☎ 866/867-2632

or 888 0220; [www.qamea.com](http://www.qamea.com)): Qamea's two luxurious honeymoon bungalows are situated on one end of the resort, although I prefer the two other villas with their own plunge pools. See p. 243.

## 5 The Best Family Resorts

There are no Disney Worlds or other such attractions in Fiji. That's not to say that children won't have a fine time here, for Fiji draws many Australians and New Zealanders on family holidays. It has one of the South Pacific's finest family resorts, and others make provisions for families as well as honeymooners. Kids who like being around and in the water will enjoy themselves most.

With their innate love of children, Fijians are very good at babysitting and staffing the kids' programs at the major resorts.

On the other hand, many of Fiji's small resorts do not accept young children. I point these out in my hotel reviews.

Obvious family choices are the large hotels on Denarau Island. The **Fiji Beach Resort & Spa Managed by Hilton**, the **Sheraton Fiji Resort**, the **Sheraton Denarau Villas**, the **Sofitel Fiji Resort & Spa**, the **Radisson Resort Fiji Denarau Island**, and the **Westin Denarau Island Resort & Spa** are all equipped for families with children. Of them, the Radisson, has Fiji's best swimming-pool complex. See chapter 5.

Likewise, the **Outrigger on the Lagoon Fiji**, the **Warwick Fiji Resort & Spa**, and the **Naviti Resort** on the Coral Coast all have plenty to keep the kids occupied. See chapter 7.

Here are my recommendations among the smaller resorts.

- **Treasure Island Resort** (Luvuka Island, the Mamanucas; ☎ 666 6999; [www.fiji-treasure.com](http://www.fiji-treasure.com)): Modest but

comfortable Treasure Island occupies a tiny, beach-fringed islet, the middle of which has a children's program, a miniature golf course, and baby sea turtles swimming in a breeding pool. See p. 132.

- **Castaway Island Resort** (Qalito Island, the Mamanucas; ☎ 800/888-0120 or 666 1233; [www.castawayfiji.com](http://www.castawayfiji.com)): One of Fiji's oldest resorts but thoroughly refurbished, Castaway has plenty to keep both adults and children occupied, from a wide array of watersports to a kids' playroom and a nursery. See p. 138.
- **Malolo Island Fiji** (Malolo Island, the Mamanucas; ☎ 666 9192; [www.maloloisland.com](http://www.maloloisland.com)): This sister of the adults-only Likuliku Lagoon Resort has a fine beach, as well as a shaded swimming pool designed with children in mind. See p. 137.
- **Mana Island Resort** (Mana Island, the Mamanucas; ☎ 665 0423; [www.manafiji.com](http://www.manafiji.com)): Relatively large Mana Island Resort caters to everyone and gets many day-trippers from Nadi; but the beach is safe, and it has one of the better children's programs in the Mamanuca Islands. See p. 137.
- **Plantation Island Resort** (Malololailai Island, the Mamanucas; ☎ 666 9333; [www.plantationisland.com](http://www.plantationisland.com)): The largest resort in the Mamanucas has long appealed to Australian families, offering a wide range of accommodations and activities, including a



children's program with a full-time babysitter. See p. 135.

- **Outrigger on the Lagoon Fiji** (Coral Coast; ☎ 800/688-7444 or 650 0044; [www.outrigger.com](http://www.outrigger.com)): The beach and shallow lagoon at the Outrigger leave much to be desired, but it has an exceptional swimming pool. See p. 156.
- **Shangri-La's Fijian Resort & Spa** (Yanuca Island, the Coral Coast; ☎ 866/565-5050 or 652 0155; [www.shangri-la.com](http://www.shangri-la.com)): The country's largest resort with 442 units, "The Fijian" has a better beach and lagoon than its big rivals on Denarau Island

and the Coral Coast. You may exhaust yourself chasing the youngsters around its sprawling grounds, but the hotel has plenty of activities for all ages. See p. 155.

- **Jean-Michel Cousteau Fiji Islands Resort** (Savusavu; ☎ 800/246-3454 or 885 0188; [www.fijioresort.com](http://www.fijioresort.com)): Although it appeals equally to couples, Fiji's finest family resort encourages parents to enroll their kids in its exceptional Bula Club, thus keeping the youngsters educated, entertained, and out of sight from breakfast to bedtime. See p. 222.

## 6 The Best Cultural & Environmental Experiences

The Fijians are justly proud of their ancient culture, and they eagerly inform anyone who asks about both their ancient and modern ways. Here are some of the best ways to learn about their lifestyle and explore the environment of their islands.

- **Fijian Village Visits** (nationwide): Many tours from Nadi, the Coral Coast, and most offshore resorts include visits to traditional Fijian villages, whose residents stage welcoming ceremonies (featuring the slightly narcotic drink kava, or *yagona* as it's known in Fiji). The hosts then show visitors around and explain how the old and the new combine in today's villages. See "Exploring the Nadi Area," p. 100.
- **Kalevu South Pacific Cultural Centre** (the Coral Coast; ☎ 652 0200; [www.fijiculturalcentre.com](http://www.fijiculturalcentre.com)): Opposite Shangri-La's Fijian Resort & Spa, this cultural center exhibits handicraft making, cooking, and skills of Fiji, Samoa, and other Pacific islands. See p. 153.
- **Sigatoka Sand Dunes National Park** (near Sigatoka, the Coral Coast; ☎ 652 0243): Ancient Fijian burial grounds and pieces of pottery dating

from 5 B.C. to A.D. 240 have been found among these dunes, which stretch for several miles along Viti Levu's southern coast. See p. 153.

- **Tavuni Hill Fort** (near Sigatoka, the Coral Coast; ☎ 650 0818): This best example of a traditional Fijian fort stands atop a hill east of Sigatoka. It renders both a glimpse of what war was like in the old days and a splendid view over the Sigatoka River Valley. See p. 154.
- **Kula Eco Park** (Korotogo, the Coral Coast; ☎ 650 0505; [www.fijiwild.com](http://www.fijiwild.com)): Opposite the Outrigger on the Lagoon Fiji, this nature park exhibits most of Fiji's endemic species of birds, reptiles, and mammals. Children are given a chance to handle some of the creatures in a petting zoo. See p. 154.
- **Waterfall and Cave Tours** (the Coral Coast): On walking tours offered by **Adventures in Paradise Fiji** (☎ 652 0833; [www.adventuresinparadisefiji.com](http://www.adventuresinparadisefiji.com)), you will be welcomed into a Fijian village plus see a cave and one of the country's many waterfalls. See p. 154.

- **Arts Village Cultural Centre** (Pacific Harbour; ☎ 345 0065; [www.arts.village.com](http://www.arts.village.com)): A reconstructed traditional Fijian village built of thatch and other local materials is the centerpiece of this cultural center, which has fire-walking shows in addition to demonstrations of old-time Fijian skills. See p. 165.
- **Rafting on the Navua River** (Pacific Harbour): The Navua River begins in the highlands and ends on the southern coast of Viti Levu, on the way cutting two gorges, one of them dubbed the “Grand Canyon of Fiji.” Rafting on the river—either by inflatable raft through the white-water gorge with **Rivers Fiji** (☎ 800/446-2411 in the U.S., or 345 0147; [www.riversfiji.com](http://www.riversfiji.com)) or while riding lashed-together bamboo poles (a bilibili raft) through the lazy lowlands with **Discover Fiji Tours** (☎ 345 0180; [www.discoverfijitours.com](http://www.discoverfijitours.com))—is one of Fiji’s top outdoor experiences. See p. 166.
- **Fiji Museum** (Thurston Park, Suva; ☎ 331 5944; [www.fijimuseum.org.fj](http://www.fijimuseum.org.fj)): The small but very good Fiji Museum has a terrific collection of war clubs, cannibal forks, and other ancient artifacts, plus the rudder of HMS *Bounty*. See p. 182.
- **Suva Municipal Market** (Usher St. at Rodwell Rd., Suva; no phone):

You’ll see an enormous amount of tropical produce for sale at Suva’s main supplier of food. The market is especially active on Saturday morning. See p. 182.

- **Rainforest Walks** (Savusavu): No wires are in place to allow exploration of the canopy, but earthy gravel pathways lead to a waterfall in **Waisali Rainforest Reserve** (no phone), a 116-hectare (290-acre) national forest up in the central mountains of Vanua Levu. See p. 219.
- **Adventure Cruises on the Tui Tai** (Savusavu; ☎ 885 3032; [www.tuitai.com](http://www.tuitai.com)): Passengers on the small but luxurious sailing ship *Tui Tai* spend much of their time snorkeling, diving, and mountain biking, but they also get to visit Fijian villages on remote islands such as Kioa. See p. 220.
- **Bouma Falls and Lavena Coastal Walk** (Taveuni): Although Taveuni is best known for world-class scuba diving, it’s also one of the best places in Fiji to explore the mountainous interior. **Bouma Falls National Heritage Park** (☎ 888 0390) has three waterfalls, and the **Lavena Coastal Walk** (☎ 923 9080) leads along the island’s nearly deserted east coast to yet another falls—though you’ll need to swim to reach it. See p. 233.

## 7 The Best of the Old South Seas

Fiji is developing rapidly, with modern, fast-paced towns replacing what were once small villages and sleepy backwater ports. However, a few places still harken back to the old South Sea days of coconut planters, beach bums, and missionaries.

- **Lautoka:** Fiji’s second-largest city is still small enough to walk around, and it’s genteel citizens normally won’t hassle you to “come in, take a

look” at their shops. The town was laid out by the British, with broad streets, shady sidewalks, and pleasant parks. See “Lautoka,” in chapter 5.

- **Sigatoka:** The riverfront town of Sigatoka, on the Coral Coast, isn’t as pleasing to the eye as Lautoka, but it still makes its living not from tourists but from trading with the farmers in the picturesque Sigatoka River Valley.

It's the only place in Fiji where I've seen Muslim women wearing head-to-toe *burkas*. See chapter 7.

- **Kadavu:** The long, skinny island of Kadavu, some 100km (60 miles) south of Viti Levu, has a road on one end, but you must take a boat to reach all its best spots. That's one bit of evidence of how little Kadavu has changed. Unlike Fiji's other large islands, it has no sugar-cane farms, no mongooses, no iguanas, no myna birds, and few if any Fiji Indians. The result: It's like the rest of Fiji used to be. See chapter 9.
- **Suva:** The British are long gone, and Suva today is the largest, most vibrant city in the South Pacific islands. But among its new high-rise office towers are grand colonial buildings, orderly parks, and a mixed population that dates back to the days of the Raj. See chapter 10.
- **Rakiraki:** On the northern tip of Viti Levu, the Fijian village of Rakiraki and its surrounding countryside seem caught in a time warp, provided you don't notice the few small real-estate developments creeping into the hills (will we Westerners ever stop wanting to buy our own piece of paradise?). See chapter 11.

- **Levuka** (Ovalau Island): No other town has remained the same after a century as much as has Levuka, Fiji's first European-style town and its original colonial capital in the 1870s. The dramatic cliffs of Ovalau Island hemmed in the town and prevented growth, so the government moved to Suva in 1882. Levuka looks very much as it did then, with a row of clapboard general stores along picturesque Beach Street. See chapter 12.
- **Savusavu:** You're apt to see more Americans strolling the streets of picturesque Savusavu than anywhere else in Fiji, since so many of them have purchased land near there, but the town still has the feel of the days when schooners would pick up cargo at places like the Copra Shed. See chapter 13.
- **Taveuni:** Fiji's lush "Garden Island" has changed little since Europeans bought land holdings and started coconut plantations in the 19th century. You can stay with descendants of one of those early planters at **Vatuwiri Farm Resort** (☎ 888 0316; www.vatuwirifiji.com; p. 240). With a large population of indigenous plants and animals, Taveuni is a nature lover's delight and the best place to go hiking in Fiji. See chapter 14.

## 8 The Best Dining Experiences

You won't be stuck eating only island-style food cooked in an earth oven (see "Eating & Drinking in Fiji," in chapter 2), nor will you be limited by New Zealanders' and Australians' traditionally bland tastes, which until recently predominated at many restaurants in Fiji. The Indians brought curries to Fiji, and exciting new restaurants are offering cuisine from around the world.

Here are some of my favorites.

- **Indigo** (Denarau Island; ☎ 675 0026): In the Port Denarau shopping

and dining complex, Indigo is the second-best Indian restaurant in Fiji, behind Saffron (see below), but it also pulls from Southeast Asian culinary tradition with Thai-style crab and Rendang curry. Most dining is alfresco. See p. 122.

- **Bullacino** (Nadi Town; ☎ 672 8638): I've had terrific breakfasts and lunches at this sophisticated coffee shop beside the Nadi River. Unfortunately, it is not open for dinner. See p. 122.

- **Chefs The Restaurant** (Nadi Town; ☎ 670 3131): Along with Indigo, this formal restaurant is the creation of Chef Eugene Gomes, who came here from Goa, India. The service is attentive, and the international fare is very good. See p. 123.
- **Saffron** (Nadi Town; ☎ 670 1233): Another Eugene Gomes creation, Saffron consistently serves Fiji's best northern Indian cuisine, and it's tops for vegetarians, too. See p. 123.
- **Nadina Authentic Fijian Restaurant** (Queen's Rd., Martintar, Nadi; ☎ 672 7313): While most resorts serve native food only on the buffets at their nighttime island feasts, this little restaurant serves great Fijian fare—such as the luscious *ota miti*, the tender young shoots of the wood fern served with coconut milk—round-the-clock. See p. 124.
- **The Outer Reef Seafood Café/Sandbar Restaurant** (Queen's Rd., Martintar, Nadi; ☎ 672 7201): No other restaurant has as wide an array of seafood as this stylish outdoor café. Much of it is flown in fresh from Australia. See p. 124.
- **Vilisite's Seafood Restaurant** (The Coral Coast; ☎ 653 0054): This seaside restaurant, owned and operated by a friendly Fijian woman named Vilisite, doesn't look like much from the outside, but it offers a handful of excellent seafood meals to augment a terrific view along the Coral Coast. See p. 162.
- **Hare Krishna Restaurant** (16 Pratt St., Suva; ☎ 331 4154): I always have at least one lunch at this clean, casual vegetarian restaurant. Choosing is easy, since everything is presented cafeteria-style. See p. 193.
- **Maya Dhaba** (281 Victoria Parade, Suva; ☎ 331 0045): Although inexpensive, Maya Dhaba is Suva's most sophisticated restaurant, offering authentic Indian cuisine at extraordinarily reasonable prices in a hip, urbane environment. Both meat and vegetarian dishes appear here. See p. 194.
- **Old Mill Cottage** (47–49 Carnavon St., Suva; ☎ 331 2134): Diplomats and government workers pack this old colonial cottage at breakfast and lunch for some of the region's best and least expensive local fare. Offerings range from English-style roast chicken with mashed potatoes and peas to Fijian-style *palusami* (fresh fish wrapped in taro leaves and steamed in coconut milk). See p. 194.
- **Surf 'n' Turf** (Copra Shed, Savusavu; ☎ 881 0966): A veteran of Jean-Michel Cousteau Fiji Islands Resort, Chef Vijendra Kumar is very good with tropical lobsters, and he often accompanies them with *ota miti*, my favorite Fijian vegetable. See p. 227.
- **Coconut Grove Restaurant** (Matei, Taveuni; ☎ 888 0328): I love the fresh banana bread and the Thai fish at Ronna Goldstein's little hotel on Taveuni. Adding to the enjoyment is the view from her veranda of the rocky islets off Taveuni. See p. 241.
- **Tramontu Bar & Grill** (Matei, Taveuni; ☎ 888 2224): The pizzas and other fare at this local restaurant aren't that great, but it has a million-dollar view of the Somosomo Strait from its cliff-top perch. See p. 242.
- **Vunibokoi Restaurant** (Matei, Taveuni; ☎ 888 0560): This plain restaurant on the front porch of the inexpensive Tovu Tovu Resort has one of the best Friday night buffets of Fijian *lovo* food (cooked in an underground oven). See p. 242.

## 9 The Best Buys

Take some extra money along to spend on handicrafts, black pearls, and tropical clothing. For the locations of the best shops, see the shopping sections in chapters 5, 10, and 13.

- **Black Pearls:** Long the specialty of French Polynesia and the Cook Islands, black pearls are now being produced in Fiji, and they are reasonably high-quality. The top farm is **J. Hunter Pearls** (☎ 885 0821; [www.pearlsfiji.com](http://www.pearlsfiji.com); p. 221) in Savusavu. The peculiarities of the seawater in Savusavu Bay result in unique yellow pearls known as Fiji Gold. The farm shop is the best place to buy them, but they are available in some hotel boutiques and in the Tappoo department stores in Nadi Town and elsewhere.
- **Handicrafts:** Although many of the items you will see in souvenir shops are actually made in Asia, locally produced handicrafts are some of Fiji's best souvenir buys. The most widespread are hats, mats, and baskets woven of *pandanus* or other fibers, usually by women who have maintained this ancient art. Before the European traders brought printed

cotton, Fijians used *tapa*, the beaten bark of the paper mulberry tree, known here as *masi*. The resulting cloth is painted with dyes made from natural substances, usually in geometric designs that have ancestries dating back thousands of years. Tapa is an excellent souvenir because it can be folded and brought back in a suitcase. Woodcarvings are also popular. Spears, war clubs, knives made from sharks' teeth, canoe prows, and cannibal forks are some examples. Many carvings, however, tend to be produced for the tourist trade and often lack the imagery of bygone days, and some are now machine-produced.

- **Tropical Clothing:** Colorful hand-screened, hand-blocked, and hand-dyed fabrics are very popular in the islands for making dresses or the wraparound skirt known as a *sulu* in Fiji. Heat-sensitive dyes are applied by hand to cotton, which is then laid in the sun for several hours. Flowers, leaves, and other designs are placed on the fabric, and, as the heat of the sun darkens and sets the dyes, the shadows from these objects leave their images behind on the finished product.

## 10 The Best Diving & Snorkeling

With nutrient-rich waters welling up from the Tonga Trench offshore and being carried by strong currents funneling through narrow passages, Fiji is famous for some of the world's most colorful soft corals.

All the islands have excellent scuba diving and snorkeling, and all but a few of the resorts either have their own dive operations or can easily make arrangements with a local company. Many dive operators will take snorkelers along; that's my favorite way to go snorkeling in Fiji.

The best areas to dive are listed here. See "Diving & Snorkeling" under "The Active Traveler," in chapter 3, for additional advice and information.

- **Shark Diving** (Pacific Harbour): The dive masters lure tiger, bull, and other sharks by feeding them in these exciting dives off southern Viti Levu. It's not for novices. See chapter 8.
- **Beqa Lagoon** (off Beqa Island): Beqa Lagoon has soft corals, especially at Frigate Passage, where they seem to fall over one another. See chapter 8.

- **Great Astrolabe Reef** (off Kadavu): Skirting the eastern and southern sides of Kadavu, the Great Astrolabe Reef has lost much of its reef-top soft corals but still has plenty over the sides. It also attracts Fiji's largest concentration of manta rays. See chapter 9.
- **Namena Marine Protected Reserve** (off Savusavu): This magnificent barrier reef that nearly surrounds Moody's Namena resort (p. 227) is

now a protected marine reserve populated by both soft and hard corals. See chapter 13.

- **Somosomo Strait** (off Taveuni): The narrow passage between Vanua Levu and Taveuni is Fiji's most famous site for soft corals, especially its Great White Wall and Rainbow Reef. The snorkeling is very good here, too, but watch out for strong currents and sharks. See chapter 14.

## 11 The Best Offbeat Travel Experiences

Some cynics might say that a visit to Fiji itself is an offbeat experience, but these five really are.

- **Getting Asked to Dance** (nationwide): I've seen so many traditional Fijian *meke* dance shows that I now stand by the rear door, ready to beat a quick escape before those lovely young women can grab my hand and force me to make a fool of myself by joining them on stage. It's part of the tourist experience at all resorts, and it's all in good fun.
- **Rise of the *Balolo*** (nationwide): Dawn after the full moon in October sees thousands of Fijians out on the reefs with buckets to snare the wiggling *balolo*, a coral worm that comes out to mate only then. Actually, the rear ends of the worms break off and swim to the surface, spewing eggs and sperm in a reproductive frenzy lasting only a few hours. Fijians consider the slimy *balolo* to be their caviar.
- **Sliding Through a Jungle Canopy** (Pacific Harbour): Those of you who have been to Costa Rica or the Amazon may think it's an ordinary thing

to do, but sliding along cables strung across a rainforest canopy in Fiji strikes me as offbeat. You can do just that with **ZIP Fiji** (☎ 930 0545; [www.zip-fiji.com](http://www.zip-fiji.com)) in Pacific Harbour. See p. 166.

- **Jet-Skiing to Your Hotel** (Taveuni): You can get to your Fiji hotel by taxi, ferry, boat, plane, seaplane, helicopter, even on foot, but only at **Paradise Taveuni** (☎/fax 888 0125; [www.paradisefinfiji.com](http://www.paradisefinfiji.com)) will you have the option of riding a jet ski. See p. 235.
- **Living on a Copra Plantation** (Taveuni): The first successful industry in Fiji was extracting the meat from coconuts and drying it into *copra*, from which the oil is extracted for cooking, cosmetics, and other products. In the 19th century, Europeans created large copra plantations, many of which are still operational. You can actually share one of them with the descendants of the original English planter at **Vatuwiri Farm Resort** (☎ 888 0316; [www.vatuwiri.fiji.com](http://www.vatuwiri.fiji.com)). See p. 240.