

Welcome to Fiji

*Set your internal clock to 'Fiji time':
exploring the archipelago's exquisite
beaches, undersea marvels, lush
interiors and fascinating culture
shouldn't be rushed.*

Beachy Keen

Dazzling sands, perfect palm trees and waters so blue they glow – Fiji's beaches look airbrushed. While stunning stretches abound, it's on the islands of the Mamanucas and Yasawas that you'll find heavenly heavyweights. These beaches are the poster-child for paradise, luring thousands of visitors keen to discover their own South Sea idyll. The appeal of the islands stretches beyond holiday snaps; the reefs, bays and sublime sands have provided cinematic eye candy to films including *Cast Away* with Tom Hanks and 1980 teen-dream classic *The Blue Lagoon*.

Subsurface Showstoppers

Fiji's calm seas belie the riot of life going on within. With seemingly endless stretches of intensely coloured reefs and more than 1500 species of fish and colossal creatures Fiji's underwater world is worth the plunge. Seasoned divers and snorkellers will find plenty to thrill them, while first-timers will be bubbling excited exclamations into their mouthpieces. Anywhere a fin flashes or coral waves, you'll find a diving or snorkel day trip, and there are excellent live-aboard journeys for those after a truly immersive experience.

Dry-Land Drawcards

While it's easy to spend your holiday in, on or under the water, those who take the time to towel off will be rewarded by treasures on dry land. Fiji offers ample opportunities for hikers, birdwatchers, ambblers and forest-fanciers, particularly on the islands of Taveuni – known as the Garden Island for its ludicrously lush interiors – and Kadavu, a less-travelled slice of prehistoric paradise with almost no roads to speak of. If urban wildlife is your thing, Suva boasts a surprising nightlife scene, while towns such as Savusavu entice with rollicking taverns and meet-the-locals haunts.

A Warm Welcome

Fijian life revolves around the church, the village, the rugby field and the garden. While this may sound insular, you'd be hard-pressed to find a more open and welcoming population. Though the realities of local life are less sunny than the country's skies – many regions are poor and lack basic services – Fijians are famous for their hospitality and warmth, which makes it easy to make friends or immerse yourself in Fijian culture on a village homestay.



Why I Love Fiji

By Tamara Sheward, Writer

What makes Fiji exceptional isn't any must-see sights or unforgettable experiences (though those are pretty thick on the ground): for me, it's the people. Whether I'm visiting a village, dodging coconuts on the beach or walking the big cities, nary a moment goes by without being dazzled by genuine smiles, greetings of *bula* or having a shower of smooches land on my baby daughter. I get goosebumps recalling traditional, eerily beautiful songs of welcome and farewell. Even though we're just passing through, I always come away feeling like a member of a big family. Fijians greet guests with a rousing 'Welcome home!'...and they mean it.

For more about our writers, see page 256