

welcome to Fiji



Throwing Down the (Beach) Towel

Fiji has been in the tourism business for decades, drawing vacationers like pilgrims to a holy land with its promise of white-sand beaches, cloudless skies and the opportunity to fall into a sun-induced coma under a palm tree.

The perennial favourites are the Mamanuca and Yasawa islands, which arc north like a stingray's tail from the body of Fiji's main island, Viti Levu. These are Fiji's movie stars, dangled in front of the world as idyllic South Sea Edens, their reefs and cobalt-blue waters providing cinematic eye candy for films such as Tom Hanks' *Cast Away* and Brooke Shields' vehicle to star-

dom *The Blue Lagoon*. It is therefore little wonder that, despite a coup in 2006, Fiji's beaches remain flushed with sunburnt tourists.

Wetter is Better

Fiji's underwater scenery is spectacular and some of the finest, and most accessible dives in the Pacific can be found here. Its reputation as the 'soft coral capital of the world' is well justified and its countless reefs, drop-offs, walls and channels will have even experienced divers and snorkellers 'ohhhing' and 'ahhing' into their mouthpieces.

Fiji is also a great surfing destination and now that its surf breaks are open to



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Fiji is surely every beach bum's vision of nirvana. Palm-fringed beaches, fish-packed reefs and smiling locals: pack your swimsuit and sunscreen, these sunny isles are so warm they sizzle.

(left) Horse riding on the Coral Coast, Viti Levu
(below) Local life, Yasawa island



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all, the legendary waves of Cloudbreak, Swimming Pools and Frigates are free to be enjoyed by anyone experienced and brave enough to take them on.

Beyond the Beach

But the beaches – as lovely as they are – are only part of what Fiji has to offer. To get to grips with the national psyche you have to spend some time on the mainland. Two-thirds of the population live in urban centres and it is on Viti Levu that you'll find the country's two cities: Suva, the capital, and Lautoka, a port town reliant on the sugar-cane farms that surround it. Suva's nightlife and large student population give it a youthful if unexpected vibe.

Those who take their time will discover that there are ample opportunities to stretch the legs and climb a mountain, visit an orchid garden, raft down a river, soak in a hot spring or visit a village. Two islands begging for exploration are Taveuni – known as the Garden Island because of its abundant tropical growth and beautifully weathered mountains – and further south, Kadavu. Life here revolves around the church, the village, the rugby field and the garden. Explorers in these parts are rewarded with meeting some of the warmest and most hospitable people in the Pacific.