



A luxury South Pacific escape with a chance to help out the local community thrown in for good measure. In the second of a three-part series KEVIN PAGE checks out a new take on tourism.

# COMMUNITY

## spirit

**F**or many a trip to a beach resort in Fiji entails what's known as 'fly and flop' — fly in, head to your chosen resort and flop on the beach or beside the pool.

But for a growing number of visitors to the Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort there's a bit of a twist to that tale.

Enjoyment of the resort and its many and varied attractions is being combined with some hard graft for the local community.

Intrinsic to the scheme is the infectious enthusiasm of general manager Peter Hopgood.

He saw immediate value in some form of community involvement shortly after his arrival in 2009.

In a nutshell, an overwhelming majority of his 650-strong team are locals.

Some staff have siblings, parents or relatives working with them at the resort. It made sense to look after them and their community so small fundraising initiatives were undertaken which grew into some slightly larger ones.

The resort's support for the community has since been repaid in spades with an obvious fondness

for "Bosso" and the community work each department at the resort undertook.

Over time guests began to pick up on the enthusiasm and enquire about what was happening and whether they could be involved.

The solution came to Hopwood in the middle of the night, and the

resort's direct-action community tourism initiative was born.

Currently the resort is building two new classrooms at Conua District School, perhaps an hour away up the Sigatoka Valley.

Previous work there has included construction of a kindergarten and new meeting hall.

Typically guests give up a couple of hours of their holiday and help out. They pay up to \$100 to help cover costs. The work is done under the guidance of the Outrigger engineering team and the classrooms are scheduled for opening later this year.

Recently visitors were employed tying the steelwork together for the foundations and mixing concrete, but any particular skills a participant may have are considered prior to the job placements.

Hopgood stresses the scheme is not a handout. The local community has fundraising targets to meet too.

He says the self-funding programme has been unbelievably successful and hugely gratifying.

On the day of our visit, Saturday, an adults' sevens rugby tournament was underway at the school with village teams from the surrounding area participating.

Hopgood, the resort's activities manager, Kini Sarai, a former Fijian rugby international, and ourselves were warmly welcomed by the crowd, the children excitedly calling out 'Bula.'

There can be no doubt the

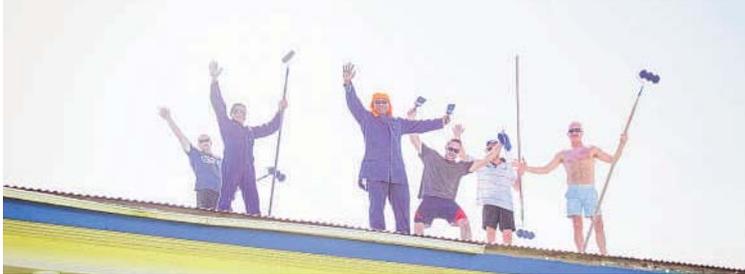
programme is proving of huge benefit to the community.

Government ministers have hailed it as the most successful they have seen. High praise indeed.

But perhaps the biggest indicator of its success is the fact that word has spread and school enrolments have increased more than 300 per cent since the partnership began six years ago.

■ *The writer was a guest of Outrigger Resorts Fiji*

■ *Next week: Luxury end to Fiji break.*



## DETAILS

- [reservations@outriggerfiji.com.fj](mailto:reservations@outriggerfiji.com.fj)
- [bebespafiji.com](http://bebespafiji.com)
- [www.ssc.com.fj/](http://www.ssc.com.fj/) South Sea Cruises is the most popular mode of transportation between the mainland and Castaway island. It has three return connections daily to Castaway from Denarau Marina.
- [castawayfiji.com/](http://castawayfiji.com/)
- [enquiries@castawayfiji.com.fj](mailto:enquiries@castawayfiji.com.fj)



**Resort guests give up a few hours of holiday time to contribute to the tourism initiative. Work can involve anything from painting to concreting with skills matched to the tasks.**