



Take your time and relax in Fiji

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IF you're looking to slow down your thoughts, unwind and settle into a blissful coma of relaxation, pay a visit to Fiji.

Just a four-hour flight from most Australian cities, this destination delivers the ultimate in R and R.

We flew into Nadi and a warm welcome from the locals, with plenty of "bula's" — a local greeting — at the airport.

It was then an hour and 20-minute drive to the Outrigger Resort on the Coral Coast on good roads.

My first impressions were of sugar cane, cows and baby goats on the side of the road, as well as plenty of green space.

The terrain is lush and reminded me so much of the south coast of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa, where I was born, so it was hard not to feel nostalgic.

The Outrigger met all our expectations and more.

It's a huge resort with its own beach and is really geared towards families. It has beautiful pools, comfortable rooms and lovely restaurants and bars, all set in lovely gardens where a stunning array of plants thrive.

Waterways and ponds complete the tropical picture and it really would be impossible not to relax in this place.

I love food, so I was thrilled with the impressive selection - restaurants offer Thai, fine dining and theme nights to name a few options.

However, the breakfast buffet was our favourite and included in our tariff, which was great.

My husband Athol has had breakfast in most hotel chains in Australia and he rates this as one of the best and most enjoyable he's experienced.

There's a huge selection and the standard is very high with plenty of

fresh, local fruit, hot and cold food, as well as homemade waffles and tiny doughnuts, locally-made jams and so

on. His favourite was the plentiful papayas, which he ate by the plateful.

Amazing staff are on hand to help wherever they can — with a smile —

and they've obviously been really well-trained in customer service, putting most of their Australian counterparts to shame.

We were very moved by their singing and in particular, their birthday and anniversary songs for guests, which reduced many to tears. The sweetness and spontaneity of the Fijian people definitively tugs at the heartstrings.

The hotel caters really well for families, kids eat free, a major plus for parents. There are heaps of kids' activities and a well-run kids club.

Our little nieces and nephews especially enjoyed dressing up in tribal gear and lighting the resort lamps, tie-dyeing T-shirts, having their hair braided, spending hours in the pools and of course, the warmth of the staff.

And if you need a break from the kids, you can chill at an adults-only pool area where it's very, very quiet.

We all spent most of our time re-

laxing on the beach and next to the pools but there are also many island excursions and cruises to sign up for. Transport is easy to arrange and inexpensive, and gives one a good perspective of this lovely country, which seems to run mainly on 'Fiji Time'.

The only negative of our stay was the blustery Tradewinds but I can't blame the resort for that! The main thing is the sun shone every day.

As far as excursions go, our family took a day trip to the lesser known, rustic Waidroka resort, which is famous for its impressive diving and surfing charters. It's a scenic, 45-minute drive from the Outrigger.

A highlight was spinner dolphins surfing off the bow of the boat during a 30-minute trip to a secluded island and they said the snorkelling just metres off the beach was breathtaking.

Unfortunately, I was somewhat

limited by a back injury, so my husband and I opted for a really pleasant

trip to the town of Sigatoka.

It was a ridiculously cheap outing — only \$1 each way on a bus with no seat belts, a few holes in the floor and an 'automatic' door that definitely wasn't and never closed!

At Sigatoka, we did some shopping, wandered through the fresh food market and enjoyed an icy Fiji Gold beer for only A\$2.50 at a corner 'cafe' called Coffee Brake. It was a great glimpse into life in Fiji.

I have many lovely memories of our holiday, including eating dinner at a restaurant overlooking the sea, snorkelling right in front of the resort and spending special times with my brothers and their young families in a peaceful, warm setting.

Fiji is a special place and I'll definitely go back.



The welcoming friendly staff add to the appeal of the Outrigger Resort, Fiji.

Pictures: LAURA NELSON



Young Matt Brennan enjoys a drink from a fresh coconut while on holiday in Fiji.



Relax in the beautiful lagoon pools at the Outrigger Resort in Fiji. Picture: Laura Nelson



Crystal clear waters in front of The Outrigger Resort on the Coral Coast await holidaymakers just a four hour flight from Australia.