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Castaway in Fiji *Jennifer Johnston finds barefoot bliss at a luxury island resort.*



Looking out over so many variations of blue water, the colours teal, cerulean, sapphire, azure and turquoise come to mind to describe them. I'm at the highest point on Castaway Island, a private island resort in the heart of Fiji's Mamanuca Islands, 30 kilometres from the main island of Viti Levu.

I've ascended a dirt track, winding its way upwards through dense tropical rainforest, finishing at a lookout.

The 20-minute trek has been worth the exertion, despite the humidity.

For my efforts I'm rewarded with spectacular views to the

north. Tree-covered volcanic islands break up the vast hues of blue. Squinting, I can just make out Monuriki Island, famous as the location for the filming of Tom Hanks' movie *Cast Away*.

On this Castaway Island, though, there's no need to invent an imaginary friend like Tom Hanks did with Wilson. Walking about the resort, which occupies a small pocket of the island's 70 hectares, there's a greeting of *bula* and a warm smile at every turn from the resort staff.

Their friendliness is infectious from the moment you step off the boat onto the island's white sand. You're greeted by a bunch

of barefooted Fijian people welcoming you with an uplifting song and wide smiles.

One of our welcoming songsters on the beach, Meli Titoko, guides us to the Sundowner bar for a refreshing drink before we check into one of the resort's 64 burees.

At Castaway you choose how to spend your time. If chillaxing is your preference, the resort has two freshwater pools (one is for family with a poolside café, the other adults only with a swim-up-bar). Lying in a hammock tied between two palm trees conveniently located outside my air-conditioned buree is one of my favourite 'chill' activities, followed

by a relaxing Fiji-style massage in one of the massage burees.

For more active pursuits, head to the water sports kiosk and grab a kayak and paddle around the north beach area (or the entire island if you're feeling energetic).

Provided there's enough wind, catamarans and windsurfers are ready for sailing. There's always an option to snorkel over coral beds in the translucent water, a step off from either south or north beach. The resort offers PADI scuba diving and if you're an early riser and love surfing, a 45-minute speedboat ride delivers you to some of the best surfing waves in the ➤



Castaway in Fiji



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Castaway pleasures ... cool drinks, friendly service and luxury interiors.

world, including the renowned Fiji surf spot, Cloudbreak.

The resort caters for many appetites with four restaurants and bars. The Sundowner bar offers pizza and cocktails. The Water's Edge restaurant has buffet breakfast and a la carte dinners (there's a Fijian lovo buffet on Wednesday nights). The Nuku Marau bar and grill next to the family pool has an extensive a la carte menu.

The adults-only 1808 restaurant offers outdoor dining under the stars, tables perched on the white sand, and a culinary fusion of Fijian, Indian and Chinese cuisines. ■

 **Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Nadi, Fiji, twice weekly. See airniugini.com.pg.**

NEED TO KNOW

GETTING THERE Reaching the Mamanuca Islands from Viti Levu takes 60 to 90 minutes by ferry or water taxi. See ssc.com.fj.

STAYING THERE Castaway Island has four types of accommodation, including beach burees. All are air conditioned. Prices from about PGK1420 a night.

MORE INFORMATION See castawayfiji.com.



IVI RESTAURANT FIJI INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

This restaurant at the Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort on Fiji's largest island, Viti Levu, provides food lovers with a five-star dining experience. Over the years, the adults-only Ivi has received numerous awards, the most recent being best restaurant in Fiji at the 2017 Fiji Tourism Awards.

Executive chef Shailesh Naidu's focus on sourcing the finest local ingredients, as well as the best from overseas, has paid off with a mouth-watering selection of creative dishes.

Greeted by friendly staff, we're led inside the beautifully designed Fijian interior and seated at our table. A white tablecloth, warm candles and the sweet serenading of Jale (pronounced Charlie) on guitar creates a special ambience.

For entrée, a few of my dining companions select the Fijian *ika kokoda* (a popular national dish) prepared at our table by Leni. The fish is marinated with lime juice and coconut cream, a touch of chilli adding a nice kick. It's served in halved coconut shells.

My main dish of cinnamon and sage braised pork belly melts in my mouth.

Watching Leni at our table expertly peel the orange and then flambé it for a chocolate frangelico crepes suzette dessert is a theatrical and perfect way to end a night of sumptuous dining. ■



WHERE:

Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort

PHONE:

+679 650 0044

WEB:

outrigger.com

STYLE:

Pacific continental

TYPICAL PRICES:

FJD29-72 (desserts FJD19)

OUR FAVOURITE DISH:

Crepes suzette

IN A WORD OR TWO:

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