



SPOTLIGHT

Outrigger outdoes itself

If you've ever questioned the importance of your holiday dollars to the places in which you spend them, consider the flow-ons for Fiji, where, thanks in large part to Australians, visitor arrivals and occupancy rates are exceeding 2019 levels, a year ahead of the Fijian government's post-pandemic recovery projections.

At the recent Fiji Tourism Expo, Tourism Fiji chief executive Brent Hill said this remarkable bounceback had led the Reserve Bank of Fiji to boost its growth targets, which basically means there will be more money available for things like roads and other projects.

If there's one place that encapsulates this success, it's Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort, Fiji's first five-star resort when it opened in 2000.

It's a place that is much loved by

Australians, who have voted it their favourite family resort in polls in the past.

But far from resting on its laurels, the property at Sigatoka on the Coral Coast of Viti Levu (Fiji's main island), is undergoing a major refurbishment which began in October last year, the first phase of which has just been revealed.

Designed to maintain the traditional Fijian style in which the 253-room, 16-hectare resort was devised, the renovations comprise 16 premium bures and add a new "Premium Ocean View" category which will cover 46 rooms.

Located in the heart of the resort, the newly transformed Premium Ocean View rooms feature a contemporary design, ocean views, and Talai Butler service.

Phase two of the refurbishment is under way and will be completed in stages. It

involves upgrades in the main accommodation wings, remaining bures and some public areas, including the main buffet restaurant and lobby.

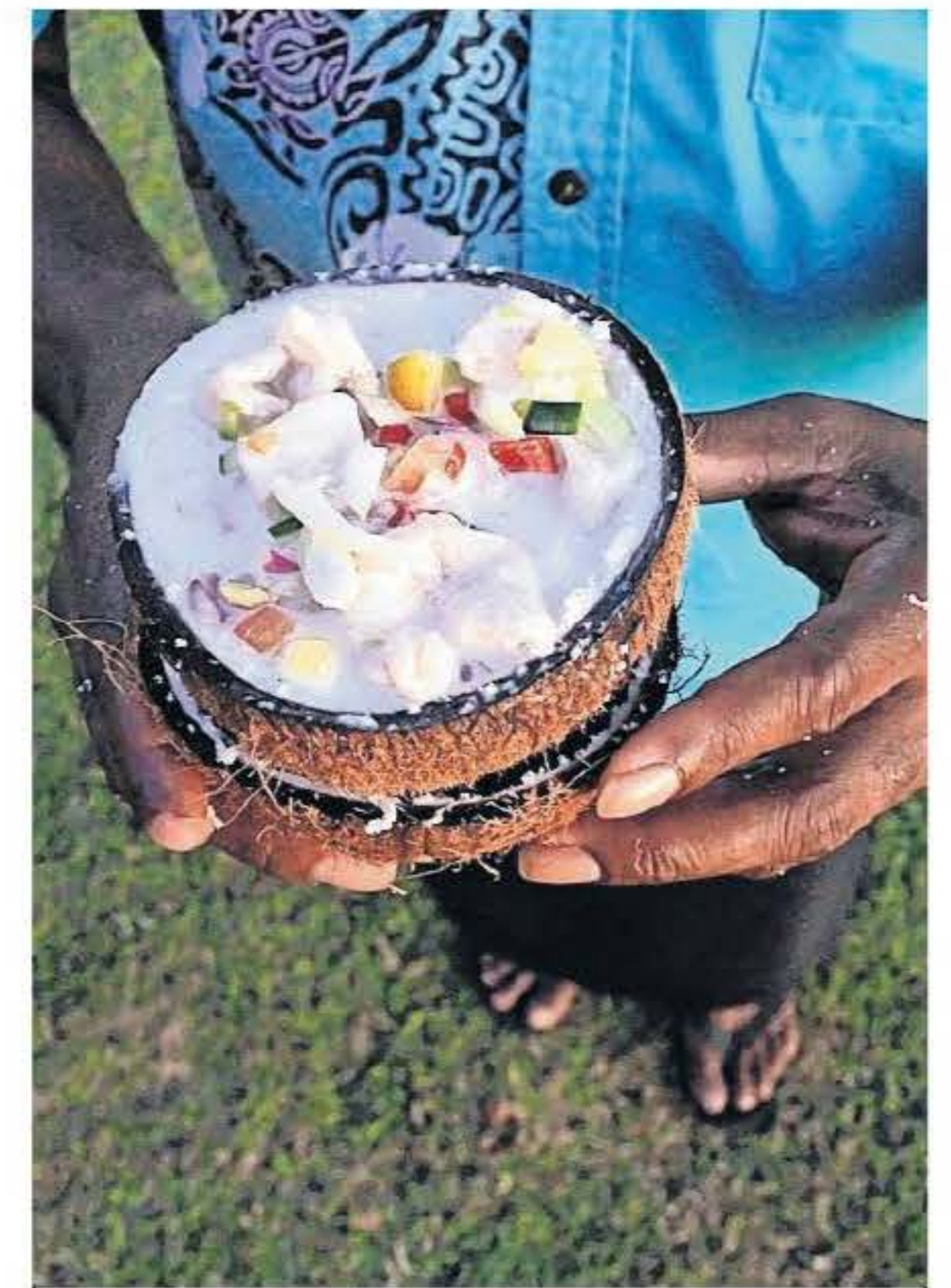
Renovations are due to be completed by November, in time for Australian school holidays.

Meanwhile Fiji Airways has announced a new direct route between Canberra and Nadi in July.

It will operate twice a week on Tuesdays and Fridays from July 21 to the end of September, and three times a week from October.

The airline has just been ranked 15th out of 100 - two ahead of Qantas - in the SKYTRAX World Airlines Awards. See outrigger.com

Julietta Jameson



WISH DISH Ota ika Tonga

Plate up
With all due respect to the cuisine of the Pacific: it's ota ika first, and daylight second. If we're talking about the tastiest, most enjoyable dishes to eat by the side of a white-sand beach under the shade of a swaying palm, ota ika is so far ahead of its culinary competitors that it deserves its own category. This is a classic dish of Tonga, though you will find a similar preparation across the Pacific, in Fiji and Vanuatu, the Cook Islands and Samoa. Essentially, it's Pacific-style ceviche. White fish such as snapper or mahi-mahi is cut into chunks and cured in citrus juice (lemon or lime), before being mixed with fresh coconut milk and served with diced red onion, sometimes tomato, sometimes chilli and coriander, sometimes a vegetable such as taro or cassava. In Fiji it's called kokoda, in the Cooks it's ika mata, in New Caledonia it's poisson cru. We just call it delicious.

First serve
Humans have been curing meats using citric acid for thousands of years, so it's no surprise to find that Polynesians use the technique to preserve their catch. It's not entirely clear who first added coconut milk, which is a key component and the best way to differentiate ota ika from Peruvian ceviche: some claim a Fijian restaurant owner hit on the idea in the 1930s, though the truth of that would be argued from Tonga to Tahiti. For their part, Tongans make no claim to an exact timeline.

Order there
As soon as you arrive in the Tongan capital of Nuku'alofa, head over to Friends Cafe for an excellent ota ika (friendstonga.com).

Order here
For the full Tongan experience in Sydney, grab a takeaway pack from Lola's Island Shop in Heckenberg (no website). In Melbourne, get your Polynesian cuisine from Kiwi Pacific Store in Laverton North (no website).

One more thing
Most Polynesians will tell you the secret to a good ota ika is to use a fresh coconut, rather than tinned coconut milk. The white coconut flesh needs to be grated and then squeezed to extract the liquid.

Ben Groundwater