

Fiji »

CASTAWAY PARADISE

It's almost impossible these days to guarantee good weather for your family holiday but there's one place where there's a pretty good chance of sunshine and fun for all, writes **Jenni Mortimer**



Castaway Island, in the Mamanuca island group; below, the kids' club is one of the resort's bures. Photos / Supplied

When you are travelling with children, there are a few key boxes your destination needs to tick in order to truly meet the criteria of "holiday".

Activities galore, plenty of food options for fussy tummies, a kids club or alluring childcare facilities, and most of all, something for Mum and Dad who are footing the bill.

Nestled among Fiji's Mamanuca Islands, Castaway Resort offers all of the above and so much more.

Home to 65 spacious freestanding Fijian-style bures, it's not your traditional resort experience. Everything is an easy stroll away, either along the beach or through the gardens, and bare feet are the best bet to get you there.

Those in beachfront rooms will have one of the best ocean views in the world to wake up to, though the beach in front of your bure is accessible to all guests, so don't be alarmed if you find someone sitting in that relaxing hammock out front — this island is all about community.

Its white sand beaches, coral reefs and clear waters make the ultimate backdrop to fun for all ages. Travelling alone with my 4-year-old quickly turned from a potentially stress-inducing task to one of relaxation and joy, seeing him thrive in all this special island has to offer.

Unlike some of the kids club offerings I've encountered, the Castaway Coral Club is all about the excursions. Your little ones will be decked out in tiny life jackets and whisked off for coral viewing and fish spotting, or other fun adventures.

Crab hunting, an evening disco and bonfire, and watermelon smashing were some of the top picks for my boisterous boy, while others dabbled in flax weaving and sandcastle competitions.

Mum could fit in a leisurely walk around some of the island's 70ha of pure seclusion, before relaxing with a good book on the beach, knowing that my little one was only a short walk away.

While the first drop off at the kids club can be a testing task for pre-schoolers, the staff make it seamless, giving themselves kids club names like "Shrek" and "Cinderella", and kids are made to feel not only welcome but as if this is their space and their holiday.

There are also babysitters and you can make use of them at all times of day — whether it's after hours, during the day, or even just for an extra set of hands if you want to swim in the ocean while your kids play. Or so you can sneak off to the adults-only pool area to enjoy a refreshing beverage at the swim-up bar.

I highly recommend the kids' lunch box by the pool, meaning you don't have to pry your little one far away from their pool toy hoard and new pals in order to fill their bellies. Then indulge in a pina colada poolside once they are back in the kid-friendly depths of the swimming facilities.

It truly feels like every single staff member on the island



is there to help. Serving up and carrying multiple buffet plates proved challenging for a parent travelling alone, so the staff took daily turns sitting with my son and his kid-friendly meal, so I could take time to dish up my own dinner.

The buffet was always impressively stocked and expertly curated, with the kids' dinner perfectly timed at 5.30pm and an a la carte menu being a delicious variety of local and international offerings.

We were there for Mongolian barbecue night, which was an impressive sight. Guests choose their own ingredients and the flames rise high in front of them as meals are prepared. However, the kokoda (chunks of fresh fish marinated in lemon juice and served in coconut cream) station was my favourite, with the option to customise a version of the traditional Fijian dish.

And as for the famous beach to which you are delivered via a pleasingly scenic 60-90 minute cruise from the mainland, it's as picturesque as it is action-packed. From volleyball net to kayaks and water activities, the beachfront is a hub of activity where families join and friendships are made.

I highly recommend getting a two-person kayak heading out into the shallows to see the thriving sea life. Spotting a few stingrays, some sunbathing sea snakes and schools of brightly coloured fish and sea life was an absolute highlight for my son, who was in awe of the nature surrounding him.

There's something special about the outer islands of Fiji. At Castaway Island the pace is slower, the relaxation is deeper and time goes both really slowly and much too fast.

Checklist

Fiji

GETTING THERE

Air New Zealand and Fiji Airways fly direct from Auckland to Fiji. Castaway Island is then reached by private helicopter or a short 60-90 minute ride on South Sea Cruises catamaran if departing from Port Denarau. Daily rates start at F\$1305 (NZ\$968) per room, per night

DETAILS

For more information, go to outrigger.com

