

Turtle time

Turtle Island ... once discovered, never forgotten.



Grand Bure



Rhonda & Derek on Devil Beach

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LET ME just preface this story by saying that my words can never do justice to the beauty of Turtle Island.

However, as my partner Derek and I have just spent a wonderful week at this exclusive Fijian resort, I will attempt to do so.

Located just a 30-minute flight from Nadi International Airport, Turtle Island is like a tropical treasure chest which has been dropped into the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

On the surface, you notice the obvious beauty ... the warm golden sand, the clear blue water and the lush green vegetation ...

Dig a little deeper and you discover another layer of gems ... the luxurious accommodation, the private beaches and the fresh island produce.

Finally, you uncover the most precious jewel of them all ... the 'Turtle family', the Fijian men and women whose graciousness and pure enjoyment of life ensure every moment of your stay is truly memorable.

The magic began the moment we were carried, like a warrior king and queen, from the seaplane to the shore, where a group of locals welcomed us with a song and a smile.

This warm, friendly greeting set the tone for the entire week and was the catalyst for our love affair with the island and its people.

One of the main things that sets Turtle Island apart from its competitors is the welcoming village atmosphere. Unlike some high-end resorts, which can be quite impersonal, this is a real community, where everyone knows your name and you are immediately made to feel at home.

Another big difference is the lack of technology ... there are no flat screen tvs, no hot and cold running wifi, no emails, faxes or facebook, nothing to disturb the natural beauty and tranquillity (although if you really must keep in contact, you can access the internet in the gift shop).

But don't for one minute think this is some primitive outpost ... Turtle Island not only offers award-winning luxury, complete with day spa, water activities and first-class service, it is also one of the world's leading sustainable tourism destinations with its own solar power station, fresh water reservoir and recycling plant.

Within 24 hours of our arrival Derek and I had embraced the laidback lifestyle and reached a state of complete relaxation.

Our spacious, well-appointed bure was a quiet haven where we could rest and recuperate and our personal bure valet, the wonderful Papa Tommy, took care of our every need, from early morning wake up calls so we could witness the glorious sunrise to ensuring the cookie jar was always full of my favourite chocolate brownies.

Most days the biggest decision we had to make was whether to unwind on the day bed or the sun lounge; whether to order a Pina Colada or a Mojito; whether to join in the beach volleyball or just watch from the sidelines.

We also quickly discovered that Turtle Island's reputation as 'the ultimate romantic hideaway' is very well deserved.

Our day on Devil Beach, a long, secluded stretch of sand, with nothing but palm trees, a gourmet picnic and each other for company was truly magical.

During our stay Derek also tried his hand at some of the more physical activities – mountain biking, horse riding, deep sea fishing – while I was happy to spend my time lazing in a hammock with a good book, occasionally venturing into the crystal clear ocean to cool down. >>



Beach Dining



Turtle Beach

With only 28 adult guests on the island at any given time you can spend as much or as little time with other people as you choose.

We were mostly content with our own company during the day, however, we also enjoyed meeting up with our fellow guests for pre-dinner cocktails. They were an eclectic group, from all corners of the world and all walks of life, making for some very lively and interesting conversation, especially after a few of the aforementioned Pina Colodas.

Which brings me to the food ...

Dining on Turtle Island is amazing, with freshly-caught seafood and hand-grown produce on the menu. (Derek was particularly fond of the 'lobster eggs'... an exotic take on traditional eggs Benedict.)

The island has its own vegetable gardens, bee hives and orchards, as well as a host of highly trained chefs, ensuring every meal is a delicious occasion.

The glorious island setting leant itself to romantic dining and Derek and I enjoyed everything from a private candle-lit meal on the floating pontoon to a cliff-top dinner party under the stars.

We also joined the rest of the 'family' at the communal table, which was placed in different locations each evening depending on the weather and the planned entertainment.

Fijian night, with its passionate dancing and soulful harmonies, was a real highlight, while the traditional kava ceremonies, which took place nightly, allowed us to try one of the popular local customs (although I must admit I much preferred the taste of the cocktails).

As the week unfolded, it was the friendly staff who made our stay extra special ... the workman who climbed a nearby tree and presented us with two freshly picked coconuts; the maintenance crew who invited us to join in their Christmas celebrations; the kitchen staff who staged an impromptu concert as we ate our breakfast; and the ever-smiling Tommy who, at the end of our stay, presented us with a personalised compendium of photos that captured our time on the island perfectly.

Now I don't want to give away too many secrets about this tropical paradise (such as where you can find the ruins of the Stone God that appeared in *The Blue Lagoon* movie or what ingredients go into their signature Bahama Mama cocktail), after all, one of the nicest things about Turtle Island is the little, unexpected details that set it apart from other resorts.

However, I will say that being a member of the Turtle family is a real honour and we are very much looking forward to going 'home' again as soon as possible. ●

TURTLE ISLAND FACTS

- ▶ Turtle Island, is part of Fiji's Yasawa Islands. It is approximately 500 acres in size and is just a 30-minute flight from Nadi International Airport.
 - ▶ The island was first discovered by Europeans in the 1800s, however, it wasn't until the current owner, American entrepreneur Richard Evanson, purchased the property in 1972 that development began.
 - ▶ Some of the first visitors were the cast and crew of the remake of *The Blue Lagoon* movie starring Brooke Shields. When the project finished filming, Richard realised how much he enjoyed having people on the island, so he decided to open the property to guests.
 - ▶ Since opening in 1980, the development of the facilities has been continuous, however, in order to keep the integrity of the island only 14 couples are welcomed at any given time (although children are allowed at specific times).
 - ▶ In addition to employing over 120 local Fijians, Richard's strong commitment to putting something back into the local communities has seen Turtle Island become one of the world's leading sustainable tourism destinations.
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