

## Fiji beyond Viti Levu: Find a private paradise beyond the main island

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The view from the villas at Kokomo Private Island. Photo: Supplied

While Fiji is an archipelago of more than 300 islands, its major holiday destination has traditionally been the main island, Viti Levu. No surprise, given that about three-quarters of Fijians live on Viti Levu and it's home to both the capital, Suva, and the international airport in Nadi. But there are options on other islands not to be missed.

For evidence, look no further than the Wakaya Club & Spa. Signs of the indulgence to come begin at Nadi Airport, where the resort's private plane waits to take you on the 35-minute flight over the Koro Sea to the island's airstrip.

The first glimpse of Wakaya island, which is about eight kilometres long and 1500 metres wide, confirms that you are about to touch down in paradise. It's everything you'd expect of a reef-enclosed Pacific island: white sand beaches, turquoise lagoon, deep-blue sea beyond the reef and palm trees swaying along the waterfront.

Nestled on the north-west corner of the island are 10 discreet bures and the resort's dining pavilion. More prominent is the three-bedroom hilltop luxury villa known as Vale'O, set on a hilltop with spectacular views. This has been joined by an even more luxurious neighbour, Sega Na Leqa. The name translates from Fijian as "no worries" – and nothing less would be expected from this vast home with its private 38-metre infinity pool.

Being in the middle of a marine reserve makes snorkelling a must and learning to scuba-dive very tempting, even if you've never done it before.

After some training, I put on tanks and weight belts and take the plunge. What I discover is an underwater world filled with marine life and spectacular corals. More accessible activities involve catamarans, kayaks and stand-up paddle boards.

Encompassing 890 hectares, the island also has plenty of options to keep you occupied on land, including a nine-hole golf course. And you should definitely rouse yourself for a beach picnic given the excellence of the resort's food, 80 per cent of which is locally sourced.

Kokomo Private Island, which is part of the Kadavu Group and located off Vitu Levu's southern tip, is another resort offering transfers from Nadi Airport on its own private plane.

A 45-minute flight delivers my wife and me to our beachfront villa, one of 21 on this glorious 57-hectare island. All have private infinity pools and are supplemented by five "residences" of up to six bedrooms for larger groups (or the publicity-shy).

Yaukuve is the island's traditional name and the resort's Yaukuve Spa Sanctuary is the ultimate in soothing, sensory indulgence. Other activities centre around the Great Astrolabe Reef, the world's fourth-largest barrier reef that is famous for its sea life.

But the main attraction, even for novices, is big-game fishing. We set off in the resort's Riviera 4000 fishing boat, captained by renowned expert Jaga Crossingham. Under his guidance, two people who have never fished before manage to provide the resort's Beach Shack restaurant with a 30-kilogram dogtooth tuna and a seven-kilo Spanish mackerel. These are transformed first into sashimi and then, a couple of hours later, into pan-fried fillets served with lemon butter and a fennel salad.

Unsurprisingly, Kokomo is a difficult place to leave, as it doesn't take long to become accustomed to the lifestyle of the rich and famous. In fact, the private island experience should come with its own travel advisory: Warning – may be habit forming!

**What to read:** *Private Islands* magazine ("for the independent adventurous personality") features exclusive getaways around the globe, from Canada to the Caymans, Fiji to the Philippines, starting at a mere \$US500,000.

**This article appears in *Sunday Life* magazine within the *Sun-Herald* and the *Sunday Age* on sale July 26.**

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