



THIS PAGE (clockwise from left) Take a picnic to Little Vomo as part of your stay at Vomo Island Fiji. Dine on the floating pontoon at Dolphin Island. A bure at Matangi Private Island Resort, tucked into the rainforest.

OPPOSITE There'll be no fighting over the hammock at Dolphin Island as the resort only hosts eight guests at a time.

Yes we're blessed with a beautiful country and yes we've been lucky to

have escaped the long laborious lockdowns others around the world have experienced. But we've been gagging to escape from these shores and indulge in one of our biggest national pastimes - travel.

And when those international flights start up again, one of the best - and wisest - choices may be closer to home. Think Fiji.

Fiji holidays are like no other. Just a three-hour flight away, they are the ultimate in relaxation with superb weather, beaches and pools galore, and wide smiles and exuberant "bula" greetings from its friendly, welcoming people. Bliss in early post-Covid lockdown times.

Restrictions are also likely to ease between New Zealand and Fiji right at the best time to



visit - during our winter when the Fiji weather is mild, settled and dry.

Here are five Fijian resorts we've been dreaming about.

VOMO ISLAND FIJI

Vomo is a private island escape, home to long stretches of white sand beaches and crystal clear waters. This five-star, all-inclusive resort in the Mamanuca Islands group is understated, organic and genuine. There are 28 resort villas and four luxury holiday

residences to choose from. But it's the food that will win you over here, under the sure hand of head chef Michael Fosbender, who comes from Christchurch and also manages the resort's garden which is currently flourishing with herbs and produce. The island has a fruit orchard too, blossoming with pawpaw, banana, soursop, pomegranate, starfruit, dragon fruit and mango. Yum.

Michael works with Aggie Global, a new company that

connects resorts and restaurants with local growers to help source produce that would previously have been imported from New Zealand or Australia. And for parents, there's the Kid's Club Village while you escape across the channel to Little Vomo for a remote picnic in paradise.

If you want to spend all of that pent-up overseas travel budget in one go, you can hire the entire resort exclusively for you and your friends. vomofiji.com



THIS PAGE (clockwise from far left) There's more to Fiji than just great beaches and turquoise waters, with organic food now prevalent, as at Dolphin Island. Spas and wellness therapies are growing in popularity; this one is also at Dolphin Island. Relax with a seaside yoga session at Vomo Island Fiji.

Lessons to learn

Alter a difficult year, we can learn a few lessons from the Fijians:

- We've had to sweat the big stuff, so don't sweat the small stuff - humour is key, so embrace that bula spirit and find happiness wherever you can.
- Savouring life's small pleasures builds up your happiness over time - a beach, a sunset, serene vista, clear waters and don't forget the beer or cocktail.
- Live in the moment - stop dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.
- Disconnect from the world if only for a few days - it recharges your brain, relaxes your nervous system and reconnects you to what's meaningful in your life.
- When we try new things in life and allow ourselves moments of fun, it expands our horizons and offers up a new way to see ourselves and the world. Fiji is full of adventure, whether it's riding a wave at Cloudbreak, reeling in a big fish, diving among colourful coral or cheering on the Fijian rugby sevens team.

KOKOMO PRIVATE ISLAND

Kokomo intertwines traditional Fijian design with modern contemporary living; a concept that flows throughout the entire island. There are 21 beachfront villas and five luxury residences, all with private pools. Guests have access to resident health practitioner Kim Campbell who has expertise in various natural therapies, including nutrition, iridology, herbal medicine and flower essences.

That holistic approach extends to healthy cuisine using ingredients harvested from the resort's organic fruit, vegetable and herb gardens. This seasonal Kokomo cuisine is fresh, wholesome, organic and balanced. The resort also participates in Dock to Dish, an

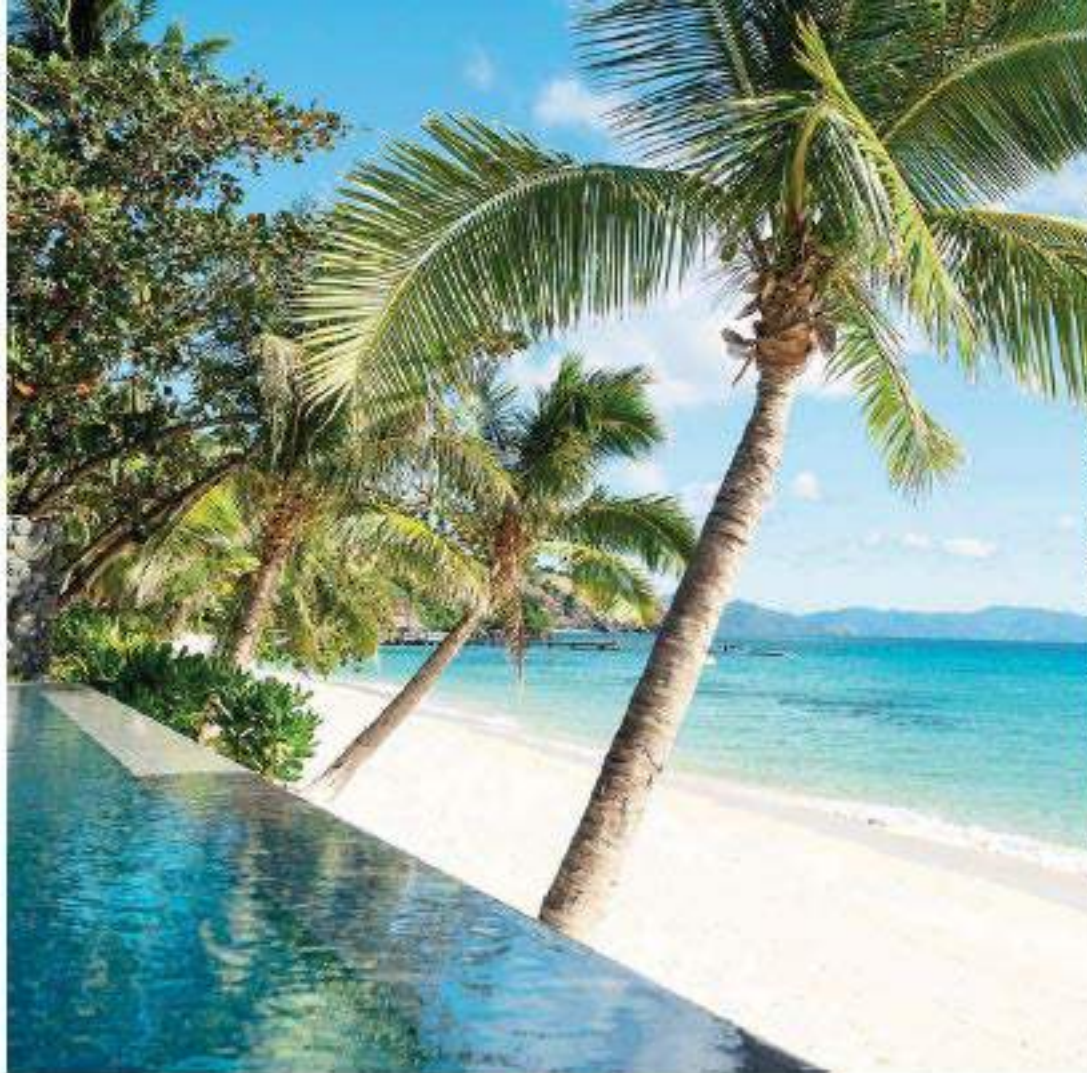
international network of small-scale fisherman, marine biologists and sustainable seafood advocates.

If you can tear yourself away from the spa and food, there's deep-sea fishing, kayaking, snorkelling, underwater caves to explore or you can hike to a secret waterfall. Kokomo is south of Fiji's mainland, near Kadavu Island. kokomoislandfiji.com

MATANGI PRIVATE ISLAND RESORT

This exclusive slice of paradise is a short hop north-east of Nadi and has just 12 luxury bures on its nearly 100ha, including three split-level tree houses nestled amongst the island's lush rainforest.

Matangi Island is best known



THIS PAGE (from left) A classic Komoko Private Island scene - infinity pool, sand, palms and sea. As you'd expect, Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort has access to some of Fiji's best snorkelling and diving spots.

for picturesque Horseshoe Bay, accessible only by boat, and the adults-only resort can organise a romantic picnic for you at the bay's private waterfront bure. The island's interior offers pretty waterfalls and great hiking, and you can join excursions to a nearby pearl farm and visit a local village.

On and in the water you can go fishing, diving, sailing, kayaking and stand-up paddle boarding. There are also daily guided snorkelling trips to the island's fringing coral reefs where you can experience Fiji's vibrant marine life.

Back on shore, dine by the pool at the resort's Vale-Ni-Kana restaurant and relax and rejuvenate with a treatment or two at the Ocean Spa which draws on traditional Fijian

techniques and rituals. matangiisland.com

JEAN-MICHEL COUSTEAU RESORT

The charmingly rustic town of Savusavu on Vanua Levu is home to this five-star resort which is known for its environmentally responsible ethos and proximity to some of the best spots to dive and snorkel in Fiji. Indeed, there is a marine biologist on staff and an on-site dive centre which caters for divers of all levels. The resort itself, which overlooks Savusavu Bay, is home to 25 bure including the Presidential Villa which has its own private infinity pool.

There are plenty of opportunities to get an understanding of the local

culture such as joining the Fijian Medicine Walk with traditional herbal medicine expert Billy Railala where you can learn which plants treat ailments such as burns or asthma. With deliberately limited wi-fi, Jean-Michel Cousteau is ideal for families who need a break from their devices, and also offers a complimentary kid's club, buddy service and a baby butler. fijiresort.com

DOLPHIN ISLAND

A stay on Dolphin Island may be as close as you get to pretending you own your own private island, as its 5.7ha caters for a maximum of just eight people. The inviting infinity pool at the main bure is surrounded by comfortable

seating, lounging and alfresco dining options; resort manager Dawn Simpson prepares the Fijian fusion cuisine herself depending on her guests' needs, the fresh seafood delivered to the island each day by local fishermen and whatever's in season at the local market.

It may be small in size but Dolphin Island has plenty of activities to offer, from snorkelling, diving and sailing to excursions to historical sites and nearby villages. If you fancy some self-care, try its papaya facial, which promotes more radiant skin, or a de-stress massage that uses essential oils from lavender, chamomile and geranium to soothe and nurture. dolphinislandfiji.com ■