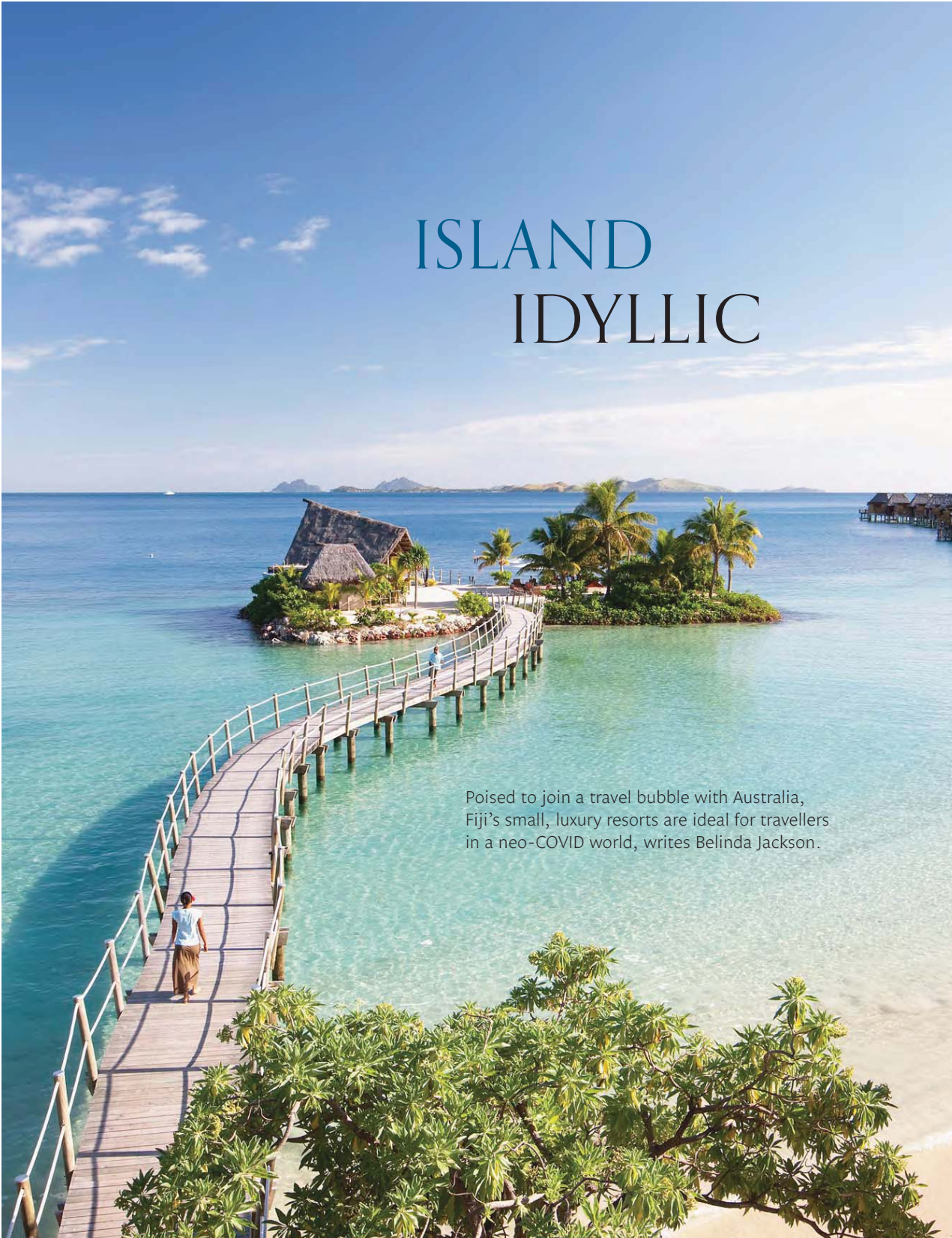


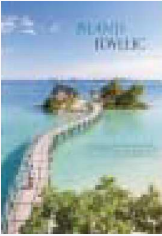


01 MAR, 2021

# ISLAND IDYLLIC

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DESTINATION / FIJI

If 2020 has taught us anything, it's to think outside the box. For example – why not have palm trees and a plunge pool in your self-isolation bubble?

Fiji is primed to be one of the first countries in the world to form a two-way travel bubble with Australia, and with 333 sparsely populated islands, it's well placed to satisfy our desire for luxury and also our need for a safe, healthy environment.

For those who recall the Fiji of their youth – package holidays with a one-size-fits-all approach – the country's tourism offerings have grown up along with us. Those family-friendly beach holidays still exist, but now share the space with a brace of intimate, ultra-luxe resorts with a level of sophistication to rival anything found in the Maldives, Tahiti or the Caribbean.

The catchphrases here are authenticity and individuality, and if you put an ear to the ground, all the talk is of private residences, bespoke experiences and a yes-we-can approach to luxurious and exclusive experiences that bend and flex in the new COVID-normal world.

The art of isolation

The island nation has always had a relationship with the ultra-wealthy, who come here, rather than the Maldives or French Polynesia, for privacy to do their own thing.

"Privacy is our biggest luxury," says Christopher Southwick, owner of the Royal Davui Island Resort. With just 16 private plunge pool villas, on a four-hectare island off Viti Levu's southern coastline, Southwick says single-island resorts such as Royal Davui are perfect

for the neo-COVID world. Likewise, picturesque Dolphin Island, off the north coast of Viti Levu, has been offering its private island for families and groups since 1984. It caters for a maximum of just eight guests, who must book the entire island for exclusive use. The manager, Dawn, welcomes you with open arms and a massive smile, looking after guests like family.

The rise of the private residence

Resorts such as Laucala and Vatuvara, which lure princes, talk-show hosts and Clooneys, focus on opulent villas, a trend embraced right across Fiji's luxury sector.

"We have seen an absolute surge in bookings for private residences," says Karen Marvell of Vomo Island, a 103-hectare island between the Mamanuca and Yasawa island groups in Fiji's west. "People want to travel on their own or with extended family or a group of friends in their own little bubble, and more than ever, we're grateful for our extended family. There's also a pent-up demand for private residences to celebrate milestones that have been delayed by COVID – significant birthdays, anniversaries and other major milestones that occurred while we were in lockdown."

The single-resort island has added to its existing stock of 28 villas and four residences the luxurious new Talei Taki, a four-bedroom house, and the five-bedroom Reef House, which Vomo promises will be one of the country's most luxurious private residences, with 100 metres of beach frontage and views to the Yasawa Islands. Both will be ready for booking on 1 April, with Australian



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school holiday periods already solidly subscribed to, no doubt encouraged by the resort’s new adults-only Rocks Bar and Restaurant beach sanctuary. With an infinity pool, restaurant and cocktail bar, it’s the site for show-stopping sundowners, counterbalanced by a kids’ club... at the other end of the island.

Similarly, Six Senses Fiji on Malolo Island is working to meet demand for private residences, opening a third, four-bedroom villa in early 2020, with another two in the pipeline.

Meanwhile, the elite resort of Laucala is one of a handful now approved by Fiji’s Ministry of Health under its VIP Lane program as a luxury quarantine bubble, allowing guests to bypass the commercial airline ban and touch down on the resort’s airstrip – which has its own international airport – for exclusive use of the island for 12 nights, at roughly US\$725,000 for up to 20 guests.

**The new frontier of tourism**

In a bid to increase sustainability and minimise environmental impact, Kokomo Private Island, owned by real estate visionary and environmentalist Lang Walker, has joined Regenerative Resorts – a consortium of eco-luxury hotels seeking to advance crowd-free, conscious travel habits. These strategies include incorporating local culture and building materials into hotel design, following organic and sustainable practices in hotel kitchens, and creating authentic experiences so guests can enjoy and engage with the local culture.

“The opportunity to align ourselves with Regenerative Resorts and other likeminded properties around the world is a natural fit as we continue laying the groundwork for how we promote travel in this new age, which calls for both respecting and regenerating the planet,” says Kokomo’s founder Lang Walker.





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01 Blissful moments at Likuliku Lagoon Resort 02 Stylish suites at Laucala 03 Royal Davui dazzles  
04 Paradise awaits at Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort 05 Vomo offers holiday exclusivity



The rewards of loyalty

Fiji’s most decorated eco-focused, child-friendly resort, Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort on Savusavu, has enabled contactless check-in and personal transfers from Savusavu Airport to its 25-*bure* resort. During lockdown, the bures were rethatched and refurbished, a new 2.5-hectare farm was planted with sustainable hardwoods as well as fruit and vegetables, and additional reef generation took place.

The resort’s staff is drawn from the local village, and long-time general manager Bart Simpson, who has lived on the island for 12 years, says the permanent staff have been employed for up to three days a week, to maintain people’s livelihoods. “The social responsibility has been amazing,” he says. “We’re so lucky the owners were able to do that, and our loyal staff’s attitudes really resonate with the guests. I think we will open in very good stead.”

Flexing with the new normal

At the time of writing, Fiji has enjoyed a run of no local transmissions since June 2020, making it one of the safest destinations in the world. “We’re poised and ready to go, with on-site wellness

ambassadors trained, COVID compliance and PPE orders ready,” says Samantha Muspratt of Likuliku Lagoon Resort. This luxuriously-appointed retreat on Malolo Island, the largest of the Mamanuca Islands, is one of the very few high-end adults-only resorts, perfect for honeymoons or those wanting privacy. It offers a choice of beachfront villas, and Fiji’s only overwater bures in a natural ocean lagoon surrounded by a protected marine sanctuary.

While Fiji’s luxury resorts may have evolved, the sparkling water, pristine beaches and genuine warmth of welcome remain true to our memories of holidays past. ♦

Travel file

**Accommodation**  
likulikulagoon.com  
royaldavui.fiji.com  
laucala.com  
kakomoisland.fiji.com  
dolphinsland.fiji.com  
fjiresort.com  
sixsenses.com  
vomofiji.com

**Information**  
fiji.travel.carefijicommitment



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# MAKING WAVES

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# MAKING WAVES

At a time when our oceans are under threat more than ever, Deborah Dickson-Smith looks at some of the world’s leading resorts fighting for a healthy marine future – with help from guests.

The ocean is something many of us take for granted. It seems so vast we often think of it as indestructible, a never-ending source of seafood and underwater adventures. But the ocean is under threat, along with its coral reefs and marine life. Climate change has seen ocean temperatures rise, causing increased cyclones and coral bleaching. Coastal development and agriculture have reduced water quality, removed habitat for juvenile marine life and increased pollutants entering the sea. Overfishing has devastated at least 50 per cent of the world’s marine life over the

past 40 years, not to mention the damage done by discarded fishing line and ‘ghost nets’ to sea turtles and other large pelagic creatures. As if that wasn’t enough, plastic pollution has become such a serious issue in the last decade – endangering marine life from the top to the bottom of the food chain – it is thought there may now be more microplastic in some oceans than zooplankton. But there is hope, as we become more aware of the issues, and – through our travels – seek out those resorts, destinations and operators that are leading the charge to save our oceans. Here’s how to make a difference.



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The Great Barrier Reef

The mass bleaching events and cyclones of 2016 and 2017 triggered a change in our approach to conservation on the Great Barrier Reef; since then, several coral conservation programs have been developed, assisted and enabled by tourism operators.

Luxury reef tour company *Sailaway Port Douglas* is one of five marine tourism operators participating in the Coral Nurture Program, a partnership with scientists to introduce coral planting into these operators’ reef stewardship. [How guests can help](#) The Eye on the Reef is a citizen science monitoring program that enables anyone to contribute to the reef’s protection by reporting what they see using a simple app. [sailawayportdouglas.com](#)

*The Crystalbrook Collection’s* stylish Flynn, Bailey and Riley hotels in Cairns are founding members and ongoing partners with Citizens of the Great Barrier Reef, a social movement designed to change consumer

understanding of how everyday actions have an impact on the world’s largest reef and overall environment. [How guests can help](#) Become a ‘Citizen’ and make a pledge to reduce your impact on the environment, whether that’s switching to renewable energy or saying no to plastic straws. [crystalbrookcollection.com](#)

Sculptor Jason DeCaires Taylor has several underwater installations around the world, from Mexico to Indonesia. His latest, off the coast of Townsville, is the *Museum of Underwater Art* (MOUA), which aims to highlight the plight of coral reefs, especially the one it calls home. [How guests can help](#) In December 2020, MOUA started inviting divers to plant coral at the John Brewer Reef site, accompanied by a marine scientist. Orpheus Island Lodge offers day trips to MOUA, with a portion of the price going towards the research project. [orpheus.com.au](#)



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Southeast Asia

In Thailand, *Four Seasons Koh Samui* established its Coral Conservation Project in 2017. The program combines education with coral rehabilitation, which has so far seen more than 16,000 coral fragments replanted on the fringing reef, with a 70 per cent survival rate.

*How guests can help* Book a guided snorkel tour with the resort’s resident marine biologist to learn how to protect and conserve coral reefs. [fourseasons.com](http://fourseasons.com)

In Sabah in Malaysian Borneo, *Gaya Island Resort*’s Turtle Rescue program saves turtles – injured by ghost fishing nets, plastic pollution or boat strikes – then rehabilitates and releases them back into the ocean. Meanwhile, the resort’s Coral Reef Restoration work nurtures the fringing reef, with biologists collecting broken or non-viable coral fragments, monitoring them in a coral nursery and then replanting.

*How guests can help* The resort encourages guests to become involved in outreach programs as volunteers or sponsors. [gayaislandresort.com](http://gayaislandresort.com)

Malaysia’s *Tanjong Jara Resort* manages a turtle hatchery in partnership with Lang Tengah Turtle Watch. The poaching of turtle eggs is another issue this species has to cope with, so protected hatcheries give these creatures a better chance for survival.

*How guests can help* A nest adoption program allows guests to make a pledge to save a nest from poachers and receive regular email updates from the resort. [tanjongjararesort.com](http://tanjongjararesort.com)



*“Threats to marine ecosystems include overfishing, habitat loss, pollution, unregulated tourism and climate change.”*





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02



05



04

The South Pacific

The *Conflict Islands Resort* in Papua New Guinea, and the archipelago it is located on, is owned by Australian entrepreneur Ian Gowrie-Smith, who purchased the drops of land to preserve them for future generations. The Conflict Island's Conservation Initiative (CICI) manages several marine initiatives, with three main research programs: sharks and rays, sea turtles and coral reef and fish health.

**How guests can help** CICI runs a volunteer abroad program, inviting interns to stay for a couple of weeks (for a fee) and contribute to the foundation's research. [cici.org.au](http://cici.org.au)

Africa and the Indian Ocean

Luxury tour operator *andBeyond* partnered with the Africa Foundation to form Oceans Without Borders, an initiative aimed at addressing the threats to marine ecosystems, including overfishing, habitat loss, pollution, unregulated tourism and climate change. **How guests can help** *andBeyond* encourages guests to take the 'Oceans Without Borders Pledge' to be more mindful of our waters, tread lightly, monitor consumption of single-use plastics, purchase sustainably and educate others. [andbeyond.com](http://andbeyond.com)

Aware of a mass coral bleaching event in the Maldives in 1998 (and others in the years following), *Anantara's Dhigu and Veli resorts* started looking at ways to better conserve their fringing reefs. They have since partnered with Coral Reef CPR to create a new regeneration program called Holistic Approach to Reef Protection (HARP). The resorts now boast among the healthiest corals in the archipelago. **How guests can help** Guests can sponsor and transplant a 'coral rope' with help from a resident marine biologist, and perhaps make a return trip to see how much it has grown. [anantara.com](http://anantara.com)

Stay at any of the high-end resorts on the island of Moorea in French Polynesia and you can contribute to the *Coral Gardeners* initiative. A team of surfers, free divers and fishermen are actively working to restore coral cover and invite eco-warriors from across the globe to get involved.

**How guests can help** For 39 euros you can adopt and name your own piece of coral, which will be cultivated then planted on a reef in Tahiti. [coralgardeners.org](http://coralgardeners.org)

Fiji's *Kokomo Private Island* has established the Kokomo Coral Restoration project to ensure the surrounding reef continues to thrive. To date, the resort, with help from guests, has transplanted more than 300 corals back onto the house reef, and currently protects some 1,300 corals in their nursery.

**How guests can help** With leadership from the resort's marine biology team, guests can learn how to identify heat-resilient corals, before planting them into a nursery and transplanting them back onto the Kokomo house reef. The resort has also introduced an Adopt a Manta Initiative, with funds contributing to the protection of mantas in surrounding waters. [kokomoislandfiji.com](http://kokomoislandfiji.com) ♦

01 Exploring the reef surrounding Anantara resorts in the Maldives  
02 Diving Australia's Museum of Underwater Art © Gemma Molinaro, Reef Ecologic  
03 Pristine seas around the Conflict Islands  
04 Watching over turtle hatchlings at Tanjong Jarrah  
05 Planting coral in Tahiti © Uli Kunz