

# THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN

# Travel

## + LUXURY

November 4-5, 2023 / [theaustralian.com.au/travel](http://theaustralian.com.au/travel)

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OF THE BEST  
HOTEL POOLS  
IN OUR CITIES

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Skip Noosa and discover  
Peregian Beach

### IN THE TEA ZONE

Walking Sri Lanka's  
Pekoe Trail

# ON LOCATION

How the Golden Age of Hollywood inspires today's explorers

# Are we being served ...



SUSAN KUROSAWA  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**Y**ou don't have to look far to find a loyalty scheme. In fact it comes looking for you, burrowing into your emails, web searches and booking data, offering itself up with perks and privileges. Whether airline, hotel or corner store, all manner of businesses are at it. There's nothing wrong with such tactics but it does beg the notion of just how loyal any of us really are these days when it comes to purchases and decisions. The travel universe, in particular, is full of shiny baubles to tempt us away from the known and loved and into realms of whatever is new and exotic.

I've been contemplating this matter since our October 21-23 issue's cover story on how travel has evolved and changed our lives. Reader response was phenomenal (huge thanks to all who wrote and emailed) and brimming with

nostalgia for a time when things were simpler and more certain. There's no suggestion that holidays were necessarily better back then but there was less latitude for major stuff-ups ... and here's looking at you, technology. There were no sign-up programs, either, buzzing in our ears to gain our trust and business. We were, quite simply, loyal to the places and hotels we loved, and to have sidled off somewhere new would have appeared as a betrayal.

How to keep up? It's a question for both sides of the equation. We travellers have to wade through enormous amounts of information to make our choices. Providers must send out lures to rope us in. A small resort in my neck of the coast recently closed after many decades. Its once-loyal clientele had retired or moved into care. The owners could no longer turn a decent profit but they weren't angry. They said

it was the camaraderie and friendships they'd valued most. There was no need for a loyalty scheme as the guests had always been faithful and that's what had mattered.

Last week, I tried to use airline points to book a hotel room. On and on went the process, round in circles, detouring to dead-ends and then back to base camp. And all because I wouldn't accept the website's "performance" cookies and hand over every last skerrick of data. Well, not my blood group, but that'll be next. So I called the hotel and clearly startled the operator. "But ... you could do this online! Are you a member of our loyalty program?" And then, sotto voce, "Unless you would like to chat to someone? Let me see what I can do..."

## 📍 WISH WE WERE HERE

### EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND

It's been a while since Harry Potter fans had a dose of magic. The movie franchise drew to a close in 2011 with the release of the final instalment of the Deathly Hallows. A few well-received spin-offs have since been released, but nothing like the original eight films that began with the premiere of author J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone on this day 22 years ago. Many devotees of the tale of the orphaned wizard have found solace in visiting Edinburgh, Scotland, with its imposing castle, alleyways and churchyards. Victoria Street (pictured) is where Rowling wrote much of the story, and it inspired the fantastical Diagon Alley where her young wizards purchase brooms and wands. At Greyfriars Kirkyard, the gravestone of Thomas Riddell (Voldemort) can be found, along with that of one William McGonagall, not to be mistaken for Professor McGonagall (played by Maggie Smith). There's still plenty to be enchanted by.

[edinburgh.org](http://edinburgh.org)  
IMOGEN REID



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TO-DO LIST

SPA

Set in a high-roofed, open-sided burre with a satellite of five treatment rooms, Yaukuve Spa Sanctuary uses Australia's Sodashi products; try a body massage with long, wavelike strokes or warmed seashells. After a session, there are daybeds to relax upon and, quite possibly, sink into a siesta.

VIEW

Dive, snorkel, dip or cruise on a yacht or glass-bottom boat. The reef is practically on the doorstep. Manta rays and turtles can be spied; sports-fishing yields the likes of marlin, mackerel, wahoo and sailfish; the outer reef is home to schools of tuna.

INDULGE

Resort sommelier Stephen Swanepoel hosts cocktail (and mocktail) mixology classes at the sunken bar in the Beach Shack and 90-minute blind wine-tasting experiences in a smartly kitted-out new Wine Cellar room.

TOUR

Italian-born chef Enzo, a long-time Fiji resident, presides over a big pizza oven at Kokocabana Pool Club, with decor that harks to the blue-and-white Amalfi Coast. He turns out pasta and risotto just like Nonna used to make, plus delicious rosemary-sprinkled flatbread. Ask him for a tour of the vegetable and herb garden, a broad patch and arbour set amid cinnamon wood trellises draped with vines. One hundred free-range chickens are merrily laying; the beehive is abuzz; lettuces are springing to life in hydroponic tunnels.

ESSENTIALS

Kokomo Private Island, off the main Fijian island of Viti Levu, south of Suva, is reached in about 45 minutes by Twin Otter seaplane or helicopter from the property's dedicated terminal near Nadi airport. Rates for Residences vary according to group size and season; check website for details and all-inclusive rates for each category, including 20 per cent discount on Residences for selected dates in 2023-24. Stay six nights for complimentary return air transfers from Nadi and other extras. [kokomoislandfiji.com](http://kokomoislandfiji.com)

House on the hill

Private properties and exceptional staff take this Fiji island to another level

SUSAN KUROSAWA

**T**he usually serene Misi clearly is worried. Of all the teams of couples and families he's looked after in this huge abode known as Astrolabe, my husband and I just take the cake, which I don't mean in a literal sense. We haven't taken the cookies, the pastries, even the crisps of who knows how many varieties from the kitchen bench, which in itself could double as an ice rink. Misi quietly opens the siege-sized fridge and sighs gently. Only one bottle of Fiji Water is missing. Ah, he spots banana peels in the bin and evidence of cheese rind. And, yes, we did polish off the "travel recovery elixir" of cold-pressed ginger, lime and pineapple. Confidence is restored. This weird Aussie couple is not on a hunger strike. He catches me watching him and we both laugh.

But if ever this caring butler has been disappointed with guests, then it has to be us. Due to limited villa inventory available this holiday season at Kokomo Private Island, we are rattling about in a five-bedroom mansion on a hill with views that swoop out to sea as frigate birds circle high and butterflies bob over the garden beds. Misi is more used to a full house, kids tearing about, cocktail soirees, pool parties and relays of room service. But this resort is nothing if not flexible with its accommodation offerings. There are pitch-roofed seaside villas with pools and single or multiple bedrooms on the island's east and west shores, and these are the choice of most guests. The inventory of five Residences includes configurations of three, four, five and six bedrooms. Our Astrolabe spread is named for the Great Astrolabe Reef, the world's fourth largest, which girdles the Kadavu group of islands that includes 57ha Yaukuve Levu, home to Kokomo.

Some of the big houses that Misi and his fellow butlers attend are multi-level but Astrolabe is an easy single-storey dwelling with a long stretch of hallway and bedrooms off each side, all ensuite and with glass sliding doors opening to wide views. At night, with an absence of neon and pollution, the sky feels close enough to pull down the stars.

One is twin-bedded and all others have kings so there's ideal flexibility. The palette is pale caramel and oatmeal, brightened by abstract landscapes in marine and botanical colours by Australian artist Chris Kenyon, who



Interior of Astrolabe, one of the private residences at Kokomo Private Island, top; the sprawling home and its swimming pool, above; approaching Kokomo by speedboat, below



lived and painted on the island for about six months before the resort's 2017 opening. The Fijian context is heralded with woven cloth and carved pieces. Big clam shells (painted timber impostors; not plucked from the ocean) hold greenery and spiky strelitzia.

It's a place to drift about and choose where to curl up with a book or move position as the sun shifts, or take a bath in an ensuite with a rock-walled courtyard and outdoor shower. The 110sq m infinity-edge pool is worthy of a boutique resort and makes ours at home seem like a puddle. I ask Misi for Astrolabe's floor plan and he reports back with dimensions. The interior is 658sq m and, if we are to include the gardens and outdoor terraces, 1265sq m. On our last morning, I do a final check to ensure we've left no items behind and discover a full laundry and two guest powder rooms.

Astrolabe has its own electric buggy to get about but I sense it would be too much for Misi if I insisted on depriving him of chauffeur duties, so he conveys us "wherever we want to go". Each inclusion is delightful, even when just pootling along winding paths where not even a stray leaf escapes the attention of a team of 21 gardeners. The vegetation is dense but orderly, a bright green assembly of palms, banana trees and ferns with vivid splashes of cordyline, hibiscus and bougainvillea in the mix. Lava stone and timber statues loom from the bushes, some with warring faces, and all carved by islanders. When not immersed on a botanical journey, Misi whisks the buggy towards the jetty and off to Walker D' Plank, its name a cheeky nod to resort owner Lang Walker. This groovy shack-style joint, open-sided and kitted out with marine paraphernalia, is the domain of feted chef Caroline Oakley. We first met in 2017, at the resort's opening, and have stayed in touch.

So, next visit, we might just take our blended family of six adult children and five grandchildren and put Astrolabe, and its free nanny and kids' club inclusions, to the test. Misi, we're all yours.

Susan Kurosawa was a guest of Kokomo Private Island.