



A torch lighting ceremony takes place at Nanuku Resort. Fiji is known for its stunning white beaches and lush tropical landscapes.

AN ISLAND OF FAMILY ADVENTURE

Fiji's Nanuku Resort offers rich culture and barefoot luxury, **Mark Sissons** writes.

Bula!

When visiting Fiji, you can expect to hear this lively greeting almost everywhere you go. It reflects the warm and hospitable nature of the Fijian people, their strong sense of community, devotion to family and love for children. Renowned for its stunning white beaches, coral reefs and lush tropical landscapes, the Fijian archipelago of more than 330 islands is not only a popular honeymoon destination but also offers a wealth of culture-driven, nature-oriented, family-friendly adventures at destinations like Nanuku Resort.

Located on the southern coast of Viti Levu, Fiji's main island, this barefoot luxury escape seamlessly blends with the local tradition and heritage. Situated within a private 200-hectare coastal area, Nanuku encompasses a gently curving sandy beach fringed with palm trees, surrounded by vegetable gardens and mangrove nurseries. Despite its secluded and serene ambience, it's conveniently less than a three-hour drive from Nadi International Airport, making it easily accessible. Moreover, Nanuku caters to guests of all ages, making it an ideal choice for families.

Accompanied by the beat of a wooden drum called a lali, a Fijian village chief greeted me upon arrival at Nanuku with a freshly picked young coconut and adorned my ear with a flower (tekiteki). A warrior simultaneously blew a conch shell to bid

me welcome. Throughout my stay in one of Nanuku's waterfront villas, the staff enthusiastically shared local traditions.

Saturday evenings at Nanuku Resort are particularly festive, with guests treated to lively Fijian singing and dancing (Meke), followed by a traditional Lovo dinner. This homestyle feast consists of delicacies such as kokoda, roasted meats, stuffed smoked pumpkin and fish wrapped in banana leaves, all slow-cooked underground with hot rocks.

I watched a fire-walking ceremony, where members of the Sawau tribe fearlessly walked barefoot across a bed of white-hot river stones. I also took part in a private Kava ceremony led by a village priest (Bete). Kava, made from the root of the kava plant, has been used for centuries in ceremonies and social gatherings throughout the South Pacific. As we clapped three times, we eagerly drank kava from coconut shells, experiencing its mildly intoxicating effects.

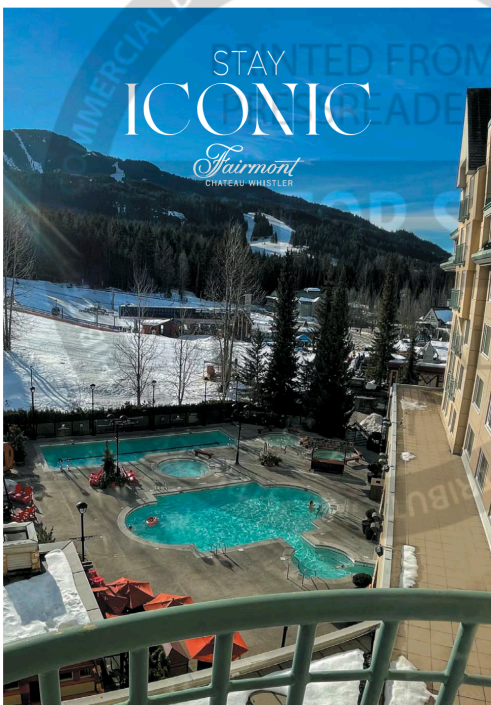
FAMILY FOCUS

Fijian culture places great importance on nurturing and protecting children, and Nanuku embraces this tradition. At the complimentary Lalai Kids Adventure Club, children can explore nature, learn about Fijian culture and enjoy outdoor activities like zip-lining, bench combing and rock climbing under supervision.

SEE FIJI ON E4



Nanuku is a five-star resort located on the southern coast of Viti Levu, Fiji's main island. NANUKU RESORT FIJI



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A boat trip takes Nanuku guests to a nearby island. NANUKU RESORT FIJI



Guests can camp out at Nanuku Resort in Fiji, which offers an array of activities.

Parents can snorkel or hike while children embark on own adventure

FIJI FROM E2

Each child under eight is assigned a babysitter, while older kids are paired with "buddies" who can accompany them from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. if desired. This arrangement, also complimentary, allows parents to have a break while their children make new friends and have a fantastic time with their Fijian hosts. Joel and Serina Arnold from Orange County, Calif., chose Nanuku for their holiday precisely because of this child-friendly focus.

"Lina, our kids club nanny, has been amazing," Joel explained over pre-dinner cocktails in the lounge. "By 8 a.m., our son Ashton was down on the beach with her digging up hermit crabs, playing and having a great time, which allowed us to do our own thing, like snorkelling, hiking, taking excursions or just relaxing."

While some guests prefer to relax and unwind, Nanuku Resort offers a wide range of activities for those seeking adventure. During my stay, I participated in several of the more than 20 activities includ-

ed in my package, such as yoga, cooking classes, cultural performances and various water activities. I embarked on a scenic cruise up the Navua River to a secluded jungle waterfall, went snorkelling at a popular coral reef spot and kayaked down a jungle stream, surrounded by mangroves and cassava fields, while faint sounds of a Sunday morning church choir filled the misty air.

Well-integrated into the surrounding communities, Nanuku Resort is also committed to sustainability. Its Batiwai Project, named after a local tribe, supports the local economy, community and natural environment. Guests are invited to join the on-site marine biologist in conservation activities, such as propagating and planting new coral at Nanuku reef and planting mangrove trees.

Fiji's breathtaking beauty welcomed me, along with a vibrant and diverse island culture deeply rooted in family and tradition. And of course, an abundance of cheerful Bulas!

The writer was hosted by Nanuku Resorts. This article was not vetted before publication.

IF YOU GO

The villa at Nanuku Resort features a media room, kitchenette, a patio with comfortable seating and a plunge pool with the words "BULA MARK" spelled out in stones at the bottom. Bicycles are used to get to and from the modest thatched-roof central lobby, bar and dining area. Kanavata Restaurant and Lounge serves seafood and local ingredients, such as taro, yams, breadfruit and coconuts. The menu also includes international dishes, including delicious curries influenced by Fiji's South Asian community. Guests can even participate in a

food safari to the nearby town of Navua, to select ingredients for a Fijian ceviche with spiced coconut milk (kokoda), part of a bamboo-grass cooking class. Fiji Airways has a non-stop overnight service between Vancouver and Fiji. I departed Vancouver at 10 p.m. and arrived at dawn two days later, taking into account the international date line. Low-season rates for a Nanuku suite start at about \$355 per night including taxes and breakfast. All-day child care at the Lalai Kids Adventure Club is included. You can pre-purchase meal plans.



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