

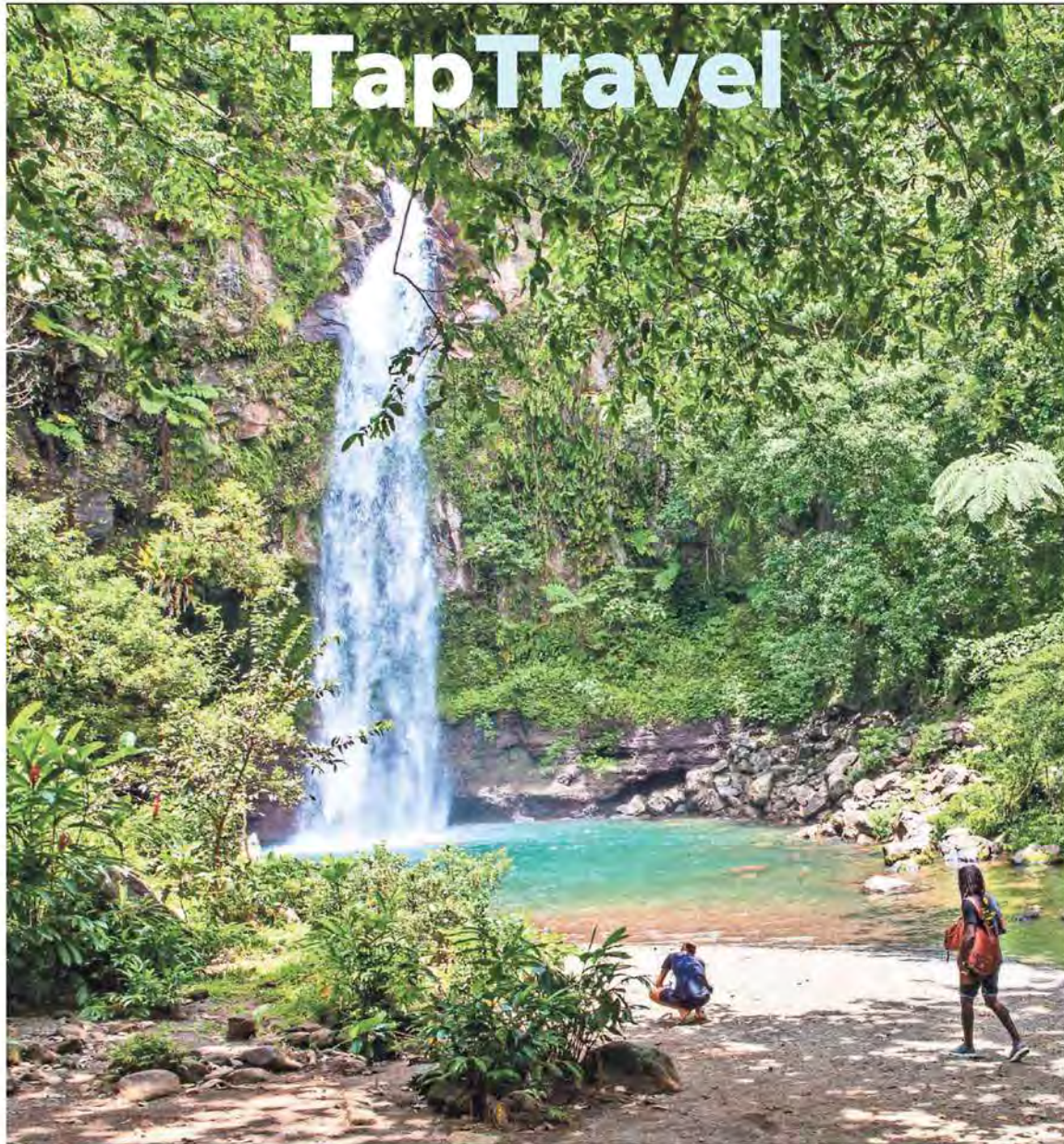


**Eccentric CEO drives growth at Acuity Insurance**

BUSINESS

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10E ■ SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2018 ■ MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL



## TapTravel

Tavoro Waterfalls, in Bouma National Heritage Park, is one of Taveuni's top attractions. A \$15 U.S. entrance fee pays the adjacent village for upkeep and services. The site is a half-mile walk from through gardens from the island shore road. TNS

DAY OUT CHELSEY LEWIS

### Northwoods site ensures serene skiing

I expected to find a warming shelter on the McNaughton Lake trails in the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest — I saw it on the map before I set out. I didn't expect to be so delighted by it.

Maybe it was the combination of near-perfect skiing weather — bright sunshine in an azure sky, temperatures near 20 degrees with little wind — a well-groomed trail perfect for beginners like me and the thrill of finally getting out on skis for the first time this winter. Maybe it was the firewood neatly stacked and waiting to be used, matches and kindling tucked safely inside the shelter.

Whatever it was, it brought a big smile to my face as I rounded a corner about two-thirds of the way through the 4-mile blue loop and saw the little shelter.

It was one of those moments, however, that I wished I wasn't alone and thought about who I would bring back to this secret little bonfire spot. Sitting around a fire is one

See NORTHWOODS, Page 7E



Skiers can take in views of Helen Lake along the McNaughton Lake trails in the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest. CHELSEY LEWIS/MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

# Fiji pride

Where paradise is more than sand and sea

Anne Z. Cooke TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**Tavenui, Fiji** — If Fiji was nothing more than sand and sea, palm fronds and flowers, it wouldn't matter which South Pacific beach resort you visited. Every vacation would be just another ho-hum adventure. ■ But after 15 years and as many visits to this 333-island nation, I've got a pretty good idea why each destination promises a unique experience. What's the secret? It's the Fijians themselves, proud to be Fijian and proud to show you their country. ■ Sau Bay Fiji Retreat, on Vanua Levu, the second largest island, was the first stop on my most recent trip to Fiji. Still jet-lagged, I was sitting on the deck of the lodge, gazing over the bay, when the bushes below me suddenly stirred and two hands and a pair of clippers appeared, followed by a head. ■ Then the head looked up, saw my feet and without missing a beat asked me what I thought of the umbrella-like trees towering over the lodge. Thus was my introduction to the owner, Nigel Douglas, a Scotsman by ancestry and a fifth-generation Fijian. See FIJI, Page 7E



On Taveuni Island, Tides Reach guests are greeted with Fiji's signature drink: fresh coconut water. TNS

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Sun pushes away wispy clouds above Beach Bungalov No. 1, at Tides Reach Resort, on Taveuni, Fiji's Garden Isle. THE



The half-mile walk to Tavoro Falls suggests why Taveuni is called the Garden Isle. THE



Papayas fringe the beach, with Tides Reach's lodge and bungalow at rear, on Taveuni Island, Fiji. THE

**Fiji**

Continued from Page 10E

"These are rain trees," he said, affectionately patting a gnarled trunk. "I took one look and I knew this was the place for me. You don't often see them so close to the shore — saltwater, you know — but they're thriving. And look at these tiny white flowers. These bushes are rare, but native." He paused, scanning the hillside. "This was bare when we bought it. Carol and I planted everything you see."

"How did you ever find this spot?" I asked. "Coming across the bay, you can't see it."

"That's easy," he said. "Fiji is home. I've been to most of these islands, found every reef. Anything you want to know, people, politics, gardens, just ask. Do you drink wine? Maybe later."

I'd already met Carol, who emerged from her garden to show me Sau Bay's

four ocean-view bures (BOOR-ays, i.e. cottages), each equipped with big beds, mosquito netting, private baths, coffee makers, a cookie jar and air conditioning.

Casual but courteous, the Douglasses know how to make travelers feel at home. On most mornings Carol worked at her desk while Divermaster Nigel suited up to guide the resort's six other guests to Rainbow Reef and the Great White Wall, 10 minutes away by dive boat.

That left precious private time, to kayak across the bay, hike uphill and (with assistant manager Sarah as guide) visit nearby Kioa Island, the adopted home of Polynesian immigrants from Tuvalu; rising oceans are washing away their villages.

Four days later it was time to leave Sau Bay, this time to go to Tides Reach Resort, on Taveuni, Fiji's Garden Isle.

Expecting a clerk and a check-in desk, I was welcomed like royalty as the staff — 10 handsome Fijians — lined up with hearty "bulas" and firm hand-

shakes. "You must be thirsty," said bartender William Celua, eyes twinkling, big smile, handing me Fiji's traditional welcome drink, fresh coconut water topped with a flower.

Just four years old, Tides Reach is still growing, adding two bures and a dive shop later this year. The bures are sleek and simple, uncluttered white with minimalist furnishings and bold Asian and Fijian art. The main lodge, airy and spacious with two open-air sides, looks out over a sandy beach and the bluest of blue water.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" said guest relations manager Paul Gonebeci, motioning me to a plump white sofa. "Let's sit for a minute, then I'll show you around," he said, handing me a list of possible activities.

"Some people don't want to do anything but relax," he added, nodding toward a guest on the beach, reading a book under an umbrella. "But you might want to see the waterfalls or the hiking trails, so we should pick a time you like."

With a free afternoon ahead, Gonebeci suggested snorkeling around Honemymoon Island, at the end of the bay. Following sports guide Niu Lebaivalu into water as clear as glass, I had my first look at the coral damaged when Cyclone Winston roared over Fiji, in February 2016.

Clumps of newly grown coral, yellow, beige and red, looked healthy. But you couldn't miss the piles of dead coral ripped out by wind and waves. "It was a Category 5 storm, the worst one ever" said Lebaivalu. "The Pacific Ocean is warmer than it used to be."

On my last day at Tides Reach he invited me to his village, Wiwi. A dozen small houses built in a circle, on 800 grassy acres, it's fringed by vegetable gardens and a coconut palm grove. Fetching a sulu (a wrap-around skirt) from the car, he handed it to me, blushing.

Shorts are OK other places, but the chief is inviting us to his house to share

a bowl of kava. It's traditional," he said. Prepared, I'd also brought kava for the chief, a gift bought an hour earlier at the corner market.

Back at Tides Reach, a farewell dinner waited — grilled lobster with roasted garden vegetables and a green salad — served by the chef, who came to the table to wish me safe travels.

Yasawa Island Resort, in northwest Fiji, seemed a long way from Taveuni Island, in the east. But it was the last stop on my itinerary, and one of Fiji's top 10 luxury retreats. That made it worth the two short flights it took to get there.

And it was my second visit, so I knew what to expect: Total privacy among tall palms and landscaped gardens; luxurious thatched bures that feel Fijian but offer the latest in luxury; miles of clean white sand, sloping gently out into deep water, with ocean views to the horizon.

Less obvious but more important is that Yasawa Resort is, in its own way, both western resort and Fijian village. Blending two cultures, it enchants and enlightens travelers and reminds the staff — maids, waiters, guides, gardeners and handy men — that they aren't just employees, but hosts.

Why does this matter? Because Yasawa Island Resort, like most Fijian beach resorts, occupies leased land, owned and controlled by the local chief and the clan. A warm partnership and shared traditions benefit both resort and village.

I did what I always do at Yasawa: I swam, organized a beach picnic up the coast, toured Bukama and visited the famous Blue Lagoon Caves, where you take a deep breath, swim under water through a narrow channel (guided by a strong, kindly Fijian man) and pop up in a mysterious, sunlit pool.

And each evening, as the sun set over the yardarm, I joined my fellow travelers — kindred spirits all — at my favorite pool-side bar, toasting our adventure amid palm fronds and flowers, and rehashing another day in paradise.

**Northwoods**

Continued from Page 10E

of the most communal of outdoor activities, best enjoyed with family, friends and a little something to warm the belly.

So I mentally noted to come back to this shelter with friends and picnic provisions and continued on down the trail.

I leisurely slid my skis along the recently set track, barely working up a sweat as I soaked in the crisp winter air. The McNaughton trails are ideal for beginners. The few hills I encountered on the system's longest loop were small, enough for a small thrill but not too difficult to cause frustration. The system has four loops: three groomed for classic skiing, ranging from 1 to 4 miles; and a 4.5-mile loop groomed for skate skiing, one of the few in the forest groomed for that form of skiing.

They all wind through classic Northwoods scenery; dense stands of hard-



A warming shelter along the McNaughton Lake trails in the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest is stocked with wood and fire-starting materials. CHELSEY LEWIS/MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

woods, pines and three small, undeveloped lakes. With the leaves down in winter, it's easier to catch views of some of those lakes, especially on the east side of Helen Lake where a short trail leads to a bench along the water.

But the best thing about the McNaughton Lake trails is simple: snow.

The past few winters have provided everything but reliable snow in southern Wisconsin, but the good old Northwoods deliver the white goods.

Of course, it comes at the price of a four-hour drive from Milwaukee. But with 232,000 forest acres to explore, there are plenty of delights to fill a winter day, weekend or more.

**More ski trails in the forest:** The DNR grooms four trail systems in the winter: the McNaughton Lake trails, between McNaughton and Lake Tomahawk; the Raven trails, north of Lake Tomahawk; the Madeline trails, east of Woodruff; and the Escanaba trails, southeast of Boulder Junction.

All of the trails are rated as intermediate, except for an expert loop in the Raven system. The Madeline trails are another good system for beginners, while the Escanaba trails have some steep, challenging hills.

Pets, hiking and snowshoeing are not allowed on groomed ski trails. The state forest has ungroomed trails that are

open to all of those, including the Lumberjack and Powell trails. Skiers do still use those trails, however, so if you see a track somebody has set, be courteous and walk alongside it.

The Raven trail system also has a few loops open to snowshoeing, hiking, pets and fat-tire bikes. Access the shorter loops from the Clear Lake boat launch parking lot off Highway J; a long loop can be accessed from the main Raven trailhead off Woodruff Road.

**More information:** Skiers age 16 and older also need a state trail pass for the groomed ski trails (\$25/year, \$5/day).

Find ski rentals at BJ's Sportshop (\$20/day) and Chequamegon Adventure Company (\$25/day) in Minocqua and Coonall in Arbor Vitae, Boulder Junction and Manitowish Waters (\$25/day, \$19/half-day).

**Getting there:** The trailhead for the McNaughton Lake trails is on Kidare Road off Highway 47 between McNaughton and Lake Tomahawk, about 250 miles north of Milwaukee.

**ALL OVER THE MAP EVENTS NEAR AND FAR**

**Bayfield: Winter Festival.** Celebrate winter in Bayfield March 3 with a race on the ice road to Madeline Island, an obstacle course run, a polar plunge, a chili cook-off, live music and more. See [bayfield.org](http://bayfield.org).

**Cable: World's Longest Weenie Roast.** This event holds the world record for the longest line of hot dog cookers over an open fire. This year's hot dogs will be cooked up at Lakewoods Resort on Lake

Namagagon March 3. There also will be ice drags, speed runs, live music and fireworks. See [lakewoodsresort.com](http://lakewoodsresort.com).

**Ferrysville: Bald Eagle Watching Day.** Scan the sky around the Mississippi River for bald eagles, plus take part in raptor programs and kids' activities at the Ferrysville Community Center March 3. See [visitsferrysville.com](http://visitsferrysville.com).

**Ogema: Timm's Hill Trudge.** Snowshoe or walk a 3- or 7-mile route around

Timm's Hill, the highest point in Wisconsin, on March 3. See [highpointvillage.com](http://highpointvillage.com).

**Oshkosh: Hops and Props.** Sample craft beers from 75 breweries and enjoy food and live music at the FAA Aviation Museum from 7 to 10 p.m. March 3. Tickets are \$75 for nonmembers in advance and \$85 at the door. See [eoo.org](http://eoo.org).

**Wausau: Candlelight Hike.** Snowshoe or hike by candlelight at Rib Mountain

State Park from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. March 3. Some snowshoes will be available to borrow and there also will be hot beverages and marshmallows for roasting around a campfire. See [wiparks.net](http://wiparks.net).

Please send notice of events three weeks in advance to [jsfeat@journal-sentinel.com](mailto:jsfeat@journal-sentinel.com), with All Over the Map as the subject.

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