



THE GUEST YOU DIDN'T INVITE
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SATURDAY STAR

WEATHER HIGH 22 C | MOSTLY SUNNY | MAP S8

SATURDAY, JUNE 8, 2019

STONEWALL 50 YEARS ON

New York City marks a half-century since the LGBTQ movement-defining riots, T6



TRAVEL

Finding Fiji (and each other)



ANNE Z. COOKE AND STEVE HAGGERTY
TRAVEL NEWS SERVICE

MATAMANO, FIJI — "You're up early," said Dillon, joining us at the breakfast table at Matamano Island Resort, in Fiji, piling his wet suit and swim fins on the chair where we'd be sure to see them. "Did Dad tell you? Blue sky, no wind, a perfect day for a shark dive?" He paused, waiting for an answer. "I know, you guessed it. Ocean's razor, huh?" he said, grinning. "You don't mind being alone, do you?" We were glad he cared. But no, we could never be lonely on Matamano Island, in the Mamanuca Archipelago, in the central South Pacific. If we needed company, the resorts' other guests were on hand, not to mention our family, three generations of us on vacation together. And there was the island to explore, a poster-perfect South Pacific hideaway. A limestone cone sticking up out of the sea. It was an encyclopedia of nature, from birds and fish to an explosion of bright flowers and craggy shade trees. Walking barefoot along the shore, on the powdery soft sand, you'd see crabs digging holes, fish in the shallows, and a board of wave-tumbled sea shells and coral, washed up from deeper water. Did we feel left behind, now that the kids were growing up? For a nanosecond, maybe. But in truth, it was nice to be alone, no longer in charge of organizing these annual family trips, or planning the days. We could swim, climb to the summit, or read under an umbrella, as the moment dictated. Our first family trip, more than a decade ago, was a last-minute idea, patched together on a whim. But adventuring together proved such a rewarding way to stay connected that it gradually became a tradition. When the kids were toddlers, in St. Lucia, we built sand castles together while their parents slipped away for a sunset cruise. In Toronto, we played Marco Polo in the pool, while the moms and dads enjoyed a candlelit dinner. Six years later, we dinked the pyramids together, at Teotihuacan, in Mexico. But Dillon, now 20, was long past making sand castles. Like his cousins, he wanted to ski the moongs fish in Alaska and climb Colorado's "fourteens." While he studied the menu, we stepped outside, bending an ear for the chirps and twitters overhead, and catching our breath as the sun peeked over the horizon. Sending gold and amber rays across the water, it illuminated each nearby island, one after another.

Fiji continued on T7.

A poster-perfect South Pacific island hideaway, a limestone cone sticking up out of the sea



Top: West-facing deck chairs, near the pool, are designed for sunset viewing at Sheraton Tokoriki Island Resort in Fiji. **Bottom:** There's no charge for sit-on-top kayaks, sailboats and paddle boards at Castaway Island Resort.

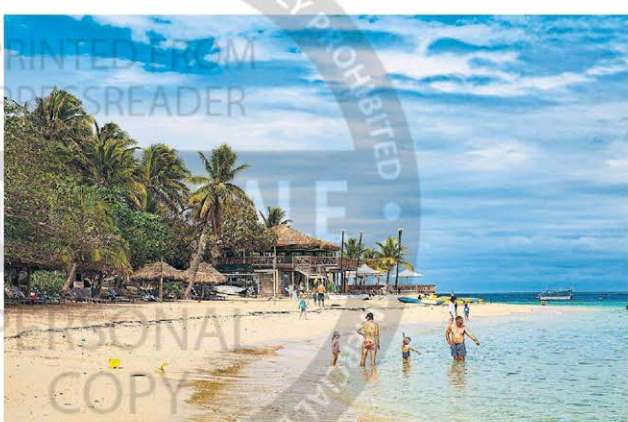
STEVE HAGGERTY PHOTOS

TRAVEL

Walking barefoot along the shore

Fiji from T7

Castaway Island Resort, our all-time family favourite, had space for three nights. But we'd never been to Matamano or to the Sheraton Tokoriki, which did have space. We decided to take a chance. The Fiji Airways overnight flight, 11 hours from LAX to Nadi, is painless. You have time to read, eat, watch a movie and then get a good night's sleep. Departing shortly before midnight, it lands at 5 a.m. the next morning, but two days later on the calendar you've crossed the International Dateline. Hailing a couple of cabs, we headed for Denarau and the South Seas Ferry dock, where we bought tickets and ate breakfast while waiting to board the ferry. Once on board, we hustled up to the top and found seats, the best place for views of the Mamanucas's green islands and the world's most beautiful peacock-blue water. After an hour out and hundreds of selfies, son Paul, carrying his out-of-date PADI diving certificate, spoke up. "You won't mind, will you, if we go diving?" he said. "I'll have to take a refresher course. And if Dillon wants to finish the course, we'll be diving every day. But you don't look a better place to do it. Look at this water, the visibility, it's like glass! And it's so calm!" Two hours later the ferry



Soft sand, slow swells and a gradual slope to deep water make a perfect children's beach at Castaway Island Resort.



Sun and coral reefs: a diver's dream at Castaway Island Resort.



Baby-minder Kelera Ratudoi has the perfect job at Castaway Island Resort. "I love these kids," she says.

reached Castaway. Climbing out on the sand, we were thrilled (for the 30th time, at least) to see that the staff was waiting gathered to sing Isi Levu, the Fiji welcome song. We melted with joy. If they'd tried to sell us

the island we would have written a check. Our son, meanwhile, made a beeline for the dive shop, 20 feet away on the beach. Fiji continued on T9

TRAVEL

Crabs digging holes, fish in the shallows

Fiji from T8

Just owning, when we gathered for our first candlelit dinner in Castaway's inviting, newly designed restaurant, overlooking the blue-green sea, Dillon, beaming with anticipation, announced that they'd all signed up for the dive course. If they weren't sure what we'd find at Matamano, next on our itinerary, but it proved as marvellous as Castaway, just different. Catering to guests ages 16 and older, people who come every year. Matamano reminded us of a private club, where everyone knows everyone else and we'd been invited to join. The cocktail hour began on time and was followed by a single dinner seating. The oceanview villas were inviting, and the elegant new hilltop suites were the latest in comfort, privacy and spectacular views. Meanwhile, Dillon and the cousins headed straight for the dive shop, for the next round of lessons. Our last island resort, the Sheraton Tokoriki, surprised us. We'd expected a hotel, but relieved to find a long, low modern building, with an office, gift shop, several dining rooms and a beautiful pool, all overlooking a long beach. The burs, some with plunge pools, formed a



Bar tender Sai Ratudora mixes a Bahama Mama at Matamano. The property, swept clean in 2016 by Cyclone Winston, looked bare, and recently planted bushes and trees were still small. But the dining areas were open all day and the pool deck, looking over the ocean, was our meeting place where everyone hung out, splashing and bobbing about, while waiting in that delicious warm water, like a giant bathtub. For an hour we bobbed up and down, talking, remembering each day what we'd seen and laughing over the funny things we'd done. When we close our eyes right now, we can feel it all over again.

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