

# TRAVEL

Editor: Paul Smith > Telephone: 250-380-5240 > Email: features@timescolonist.com ■ RICK STEVES, D8



It's all smiles as the guests share the kava, at Nanuku Resort in Fiji's Pacific Harbour.

STEVE HAGGERTY, McCLATCHY-TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

## FIJI

# Just like family

It's hard to leave to easy-going, do-what-you-want ambience at South Pacific resorts

ANNE Z. COOKE  
and STEVE HAGGERTY  
Tribune News Service

SAVUSAVU, Fiji

As the departing guests gathered under the coconut palms to wait for the airport shuttle, Jane began to snifle and tears ran down her cheeks.

The rest of us, startled, exchanged looks. Knowing her, a once-upon-a-time debutante with manners to match, we thought she'd been put off by Koro Sun Resort, the most family-friendly — and the noisiest — of the three beach resorts we'd visited in Fiji, southwest of Samoa in the tropical South Pacific.

"I hate to leave," she said, mopping her eyes as the Fijian staff assembled to say goodbye. Turning from one smiling face to the next, she hugged the housekeeper, high-fived the kayaking guide and gave a thumbs-up to the guitar player who'd invited her to share in a late-night bowl of "kava," the pungent drink the locals call "grog."

"I'll never see them again," she lamented, blowing her nose as she climbed into the bus. "It feels like losing the family I didn't know I had."

Compared with dreamy Yasawa Island Resort, on a pristine sand beach in the remote northwest Yasawa Archipelago, or with Nanuku Resort, a group of villas in Pacific Harbour, on Viti Levu, Fiji's main island, Koro Sun on the island of Vanua Levu did feel a bit like summer camp in Minnesota.

Each day started with a bang and didn't slow down until the



Splashing in Tauwalu falls, near Vuadoma Village; near Koro Sun Resort, Savusavu, Fiji.

STEVE HAGGERTY, McCLATCHY-TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

Southern Cross appeared in the sky. We were welcomed with a fruit drink served in a coconut and steered to a chair for a 10-minute foot massage. Shouting kids ran through the lobby on their way to the pool and water slide, passing a group of cyclists geared up for a ride.

A three-generation family partied at the adjacent dinner table and all 108 of the resort's guests packed into the Clubhouse to

watch pounding drums and a floor-thumping "meke" (traditional Fijian dance). We donned snorkelling gear and went out with the dive boat, floating over the coral reefs while the divers deep below — shadowy but visible — snaked through the "Dungeons and Dragons" canyon.

Meanwhile, Jane made her own plans, quietly slipping away to kayak through the cave at Bat Island with Manu, the guide,

indulging in a meditative massage in the secluded Rainforest Spa, exploring the town of Savusavu alone and identifying indigenous flowers with Leba, the florist.

We'd been anticipating that last morning, too, but for a different reason. As seasoned Fiji fans we knew the staff would assemble to sing *Isa Lei*, the national "love song," the lyrics in Fijian.

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## TRAVEL NOTES

### Flying to U.S.? Get ready for big crowds

If you're flying somewhere for the American Thanksgiving, expect planes and airports to be very crowded this year.

U.S. airlines expect to carry 24.6 million passengers over the 12 days surrounding Thanksgiving, up 1.5 per cent from last year.

The worst day: The Sunday after Thanksgiving, Nov. 30, with 2.6 million hopping aboard planes.

The forecast comes from Airlines for America, a trade group representing the biggest U.S. carriers. It covers Friday, Nov. 21 through Tuesday, Dec. 2. The group's chief economist said Thursday that rising personal incomes and job growth are helping to boost demand for travel.

Last year's high-flying expectations were a washout when bad weather caused widespread flight cancellations.

— The Associated Press

### Dali Museum to show works by Picasso

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — The Salvador Dali Museum in Florida is opening a Pablo Picasso exhibit that includes paintings, drawings, prints and sculpture.

Called Picasso/Dali, Dali/Picasso, it explores the rivalry and inspiration between the two famous Spanish artists.

Dali was a young, adoring fan when he met Picasso in Paris in 1926, by which time the older artist had claimed his fame.

The exhibit opens Saturday and runs through Feb. 15, 2015.

The exhibit then will travel to the Museu Picasso in Barcelona, for exhibition March 19-June 28, 2015.

— AP



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# Quantum passengers leap into future

GENE SLOAN

Tribune News Service

If you like big ships that are chock full of activities, you'll love Quantum of the Seas, the new floating mega-resort from Royal Caribbean.

Packed full of gee-whiz attractions such as a giant mechanical arm that takes passengers into the sky, it's a big, bold vessel that breaks new ground on several levels.

The third largest cruise ship ever built boasts an array of lounges, bars and restaurants to rival the biggest resorts of Las Vegas and Orlando. There are first-ever-at-sea options such as a sky-diving simulator and innovative technology that makes checking in, reserving shows or even surfing the Internet a breeze. Here are five highlights about the vessel:

- **Two70.** Prepare to be dazzled in this two-deck-high, multi-purpose entertainment and lounge space at the back of the ship. Featuring cozy seating areas, an attached café and floor-to-ceiling windows



HANDOUT

Quantum of the Seas is on its maiden voyage.

that offer stunning, 270-degree views (hence the name Two70), it serves as giant family room during the day. But it is at night when it really shines, transforming into a high-tech showroom.

The panoramic windows morph into a giant wraparound screen filled with visual delights, while periodic performances bring aeri-

alists who descend from the ceiling, images projected on moving robotic screens and more.

- **Michael's Genuine Pub.** Finally, there's a bar on a cruise ship serving real craft beers — and with quality food to boot. Created by James Beard Award-winning chef Michael Schwartz and billed as the first gastropub at sea,

Michael's stocks an all-star list of eclectic American brews from the likes of Dogfish Head, Bear Republic, Stone and Rogue as well as an impressive clutch of artisanal whiskeys and other spirits.

- **SeaPlex.** This giant, multi-use activity area at the top of the vessel offers everything from bumper cars and roller skating (both cruise-ship firsts) to basketball and even trapeze lessons. Two levels high, it also has upstairs nooks for playing Xbox, ping pong and foosball. The space has what is billed as the first food truck at sea, an outlet called the SeaPlex Dog House that serves up hot dogs, bratwurst and sausages.

- **Bionic Bar.** It sounds gimmicky, but the first bar with robot bartenders at sea (or almost anywhere, for that matter) is a hoot.

The high-tech venue features two drink-slinging robotic arms that take orders from passengers via tablets around the bar. They then mix up the drinks by drawing liquor from dozens of bottles hanging from above and adding just the right amount of mixers

and ice. Will they get it right? Will they spill? Who can resist sticking around to find out?

- **New flexible dining.** The days of being herded into a cavernous dining room for a banquet-style dinner (often at a giant table with strangers) are coming to an end at Royal Caribbean, and not too soon.

On Quantum, the traditional main dining room has been replaced by four smaller, no-extra-charge restaurants that passengers can visit when and with whom they choose. Each offers a different cuisine, from contemporary American to pan-Asian. A fifth no-extra-charge restaurant is reserved for passengers in suites. There's also a wide array of extra-charge eateries on board, from a steakhouse to a sushi outlet.

At 168,666 tons, Quantum is only eclipsed in size by Royal Caribbean's 225,282-ton Oasis of the Seas and sister Allure of the Seas. It has 16 public decks and room for nearly 5,000 passengers.

Quantum's maiden voyage from Southampton, England, to New York, began Sunday.

## > FROM PAGE D7

# Each resort has own personality

"Must you leave me," sing the sopranos, their voices rising over the altos, each lingering phrase echoed an octave lower by the men's deep notes. "Every moment my heart for you is yearning; those happy hours are fleeting," they sing, the last refrain fading away.

It's enough to put a lump in any cynic's throat, even skeptics convinced that *Isa Lei* is the boss's way of ensuring guest satisfaction.

Most Fijians, wherever they live on this 322-island paradise, would sing it voluntarily. Raised in traditional villages where choir-singing is the soul of the church and children learn harmony at their mother's knee, music is part of the culture.

Each of Fiji's beach resorts has a unique personality, shaped by location, climate, the topography and the owner's vision of what Fiji is all about. This endless variety is why so many travellers come back, staying at two or three resorts on any one trip.

Yasawa Island Resort is a deluxe hideaway on a blue lagoon, accessible only by helicopter, small plane or boat. The experience, with 18 traditionally thatched and furnished burees (bungalows), candle-lit dinners, chef's menus and no-pressure days, is a dream come true for self-motivated explorers, A-list luminaries and honeymooners needing space.

"We're on Fiji time here," said Manasa Ragigia, Yasawa's resident elder and the "spokesman" at Bukama, the neighboring Fijian village. "You want to fish all day? Fish," he told us, mixing drinks at the sunset cocktail party. "You want to kayak or snorkel? Whatever you like, it's your choice."

Mornings were filled with boat dives on nearby reefs and coral mounts, snorkelling off the beach, windsurfing, fishing for marlin or sailing the catamaran. Laid-back afternoons offered meet-the-



TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

Landing on uninhabited Yawini Island's perfect beach near Yasawa Island Resort, Fiji.

people tours in Bukama, lolling in the infinity pool, reading, joining the cultural and basket-weaving demonstrations and beach combing. On Tuesday, Ragigia and Chef Talala Tupou prepared a lovo (underground oven) feast, a chance to taste most of Fiji's favourite dishes.

Our bure, tucked among ferns, hibiscus and palms, had a private deck, plantation shutters, hammock, a cookie jar that was never empty, indoor and outdoor showers, piles of towels and air conditioning.

A honeymooning couple were escorted to a distant beach and left for the afternoon. Asked about the experience, they said that it took only a long look west across the passage now called Bligh Water to understand why HMS Bounty Commander William Bligh and a dozen loyal tars, put adrift in a launch and chased by cannibals, felt "they were at world's end."

A signature outing was the boat ride south to the Blue Lagoon, flooded limestone caverns where the eponymous movie, featuring a 14-year-old Brooke Shields, was filmed.

Depositing us on a narrow beach, Yasawa's guides waited while the cave guide, Aku Nacoba escorted us up the cliff and down a tunnel into the eerie, water-sculpted caves, where we swam through

the half-lit chamber.

Back on Viti Levu, Fiji's main island, we headed for Nanuku Resort, a gated group of new and remodelled villas on the lagoon in Pacific Harbour. The villas are grouped around the pool and pool deck, where the torch-lighting ceremony is held at sunset. Depending upon how the space is shared, Nanuku has lodging for up to 80 guests, from couples and families to reunions and small meetings.

According to Karen Taylor, the manager, Nanuku's location at the east end of the Coral Coast is why it succeeds as a Fijian-style safari lodge. "With the ocean in front of us and the mountains behind, there's everything from hiking and river rafting to sailing," she said.

One couple played golf at the country club, another took a daylong trek across the Namosi Highlands. We saw fire walkers, toured a hillside village and explored the vegetable market in the town of Navua.

A family with teenagers signed up for surfing at "world famous" Yanuca Island. The next day, they headed south across the channel to Beqa Island Lagoon, to dive with the sharks. The dive sounded so fascinating we added it to our list for next time. In Fiji, said Taylor, "even the sharks think you're family."

### IF YOU GO

**GETTING THERE:** Fiji Airways' nonstop flight from Los Angeles to Nadi International Airport takes 10 hours.

(With time zone changes and the International Dateline, you lose a day but gain it back on your return.) Some travellers going on from Nadi have reported that delayed departures and late arrivals have forced them to miss connections and that ticket agents have been less than helpful in booking new flights or arranging refunds. [fijairways.com](http://fijairways.com).

**LODGING:** Tipping is not required or expected. Most resorts include meals and use of the pool, beach, lounge chairs, hot tubs, tennis courts, snorkel gear, Internet access, in-room safes and television.

**RESORTS:** At Yasawa Island Resort, all-inclusive rates for two in a beach-front bure start at US \$850 per night. [yasawa.com](http://yasawa.com).

At Nanuku Resort, in Pacific Harbour, a typical low-season, five-night lodging package for two starts at \$755 per night. [nanukufiji.com](http://nanukufiji.com).

At Koro Sun Resort, lodging for two starts at \$430 a night for a garden bure. In the off-season the Edgewater bure, normally \$750 per night, are priced at \$525. [korosunresort.com](http://korosunresort.com).

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