

# People in Fiji are just like family



STEVE HAGGERTY/Color World/MCT

Solitude on the estuary at Navua town, near Nanuku Resort, Pacific Harbour, Fiji.



Manasa Ragigia, elder statesman and bartender at Yasawa Island Resort, with the night's lobster, asks who's better looking?

BY ANNE Z. COOKE AND  
STEVE HAGGERTY  
MCLATCHY 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 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 snorkeling gear and went out with the dive boat, floating over the coral reefs while the divers deep below shadowy but visible — snaked their way 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. "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



Children at Bukama Village School, assemble to greet visitors from afar.

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

But the truth is that 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. Think humming when you're happy; whistling while you work.

But a single song doesn't mean that Fiji's beach resorts are alike. Far from it, in fact. Each has a unique personality, shaped by location, climate, the topography and the owner's vision of what Fiji is all about.

*Boscov's Travel*  
makes it  
easy to...

Show Your  
**DISNEY  
SIDE**

**SOUTHWEST** fly out of LOCAL AIRPORTS to Orlando, FL on  
Boscov's Travel Exclusive Disney Charter

..... WILKES-BARRE/SCRANTON March 8, 29 • April 5, 26 • May 3, 24 • June 21, 28  
..... HARRISBURG April 19 • June 14  
..... READING February 22 • March 15, 22 • April 12 • May 10, 17, 31 • June 7

BOSCOV'S TRAVEL

AUTHORIZED DISNEY  
VACATION PLANNER

call for  
PACKAGE  
RATES

Call Boscov's Travel for more information  
Fairlane Village Mall | (570) 628-5790  
Susquehanna Valley Mall | (570) 374-0121  
As to Disney artwork/properties ©Disney