

TRAVEL Thursday

TEXARKANA GAZETTE ★ FEBRUARY 15, 2018

1C

Jazzed for New Orleans

By MARLISE KASE-MYERS
The San Diego Union-Tribune

There are close to 100 stations on my Pandora playlist, ranging from classical and folk to rock and hip hop. Despite the selection of artists and songs at my fingertips, I always seem to find myself choosing jazz. It's comfort music, soothing my soul at the end of a long day, beckoning a liberal pour of red with a side of couch collapse and longneck candles.

My "go-to's" are always the same: Miles Davis, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Frank Sinatra, and maybe Norah Jones or Michael Buble to remind me that good music is not just a thing of the past.

With a weekend on my hands, music on my mind, and a city on the verge of celebrating its tricentennial, I couldn't think of a better time to visit the birthplace of jazz.

"Honey, pack your bags. We're going to New Orleans!"

It was January, the month NOLA turned the big 300—and just weeks before Mardi Gras on Tuesday—presenting the perfect opportunity for my husband, Benjamin, and me to check this vibrant city off our bucket list. Despite thunderstorms in the forecast, our goals were to get lost in the French Quarter; drink Pimm's Cup before noon; dance in the streets; lose track of time at Cafe de Monde; peel crawfish like a local; eat oysters and maybe alligator, and above all, soak in the jazz.

We purposely chose to visit "New Orleans" (not "New Orleans") close enough to Carnival to feel the energy, yet far enough to avoid the chaos. We're crazy and all, but err on the side of 40-something caution. What little we knew about our destination was from word-of-mouth tales of debauchery, feathered costumes, and flash-for-beds. We set out to break all preconceived notions and simply discover the old, the new, and the whatever that came our way.

Our lodging for the weekend was Old No. 77 Hotel & Chandlery. Located three blocks from the French Quarter, it once served as an 1890s warehouse in the port. A major renovation in 2015 resurrected the building into a swanky, boutique hotel with suites curated by local artists. Hardwood floors and exposed-brick walls lead to a rotating art gallery. On the ground floor is Comptre Lapis—one of New Orleans' top restaurants (not to mention our favorite of the trip) serving Caribbean- and European-takes on local cuisine.

Like most curious travelers who visit this magical city, we wasted no time on our first night, grabbing our coats and heading straight into the darkness.

Within the French Quarter is where beauty lies, boasting buildings dating back to the 18th century when the Spanish ruled. Tucked away on Chartres Street sat the charming Angeline by Chef Alex Harrel. The intimate dining room looked out onto the rain-soaked pavement where reflections of horse-drawn

See JAZZED on Page 2C



TRAVEL GUIDE | SOUTH PACIFIC

FIJI PRIDE

Where paradise is more than sand and sea

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

Tribune News Service

By ANNE Z. COOKE
Tribune News Service

TAVEUNI, 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 Fiji and proud to show you their country.

Sau Bay Resort, 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. This was my introduction to the owner, Nigel Douglas, a Scotsman by ancestry and a fifth-generation Fijian. "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 here when we bought it. Carroll 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, dived every reef. Anything you want to know, people, politics, gardens, just ask. Do you drink wine? Maybe later."

I'd already met Carroll, who emerged from her garden to show me Sau Bay's four ocean-view burees (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 Douglases know how to make travelers feel at home. On most mornings Carroll worked at her desk while Dyeemaster Nigel suited up to guide the resort's six other guests to



Tribune News Service

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

THE NITTY GRITTY

Sau Bay hosts small weddings, honeymooners, families and scuba divers. A la carte rates keep prices lower than its competitors. Cottages for two or more start at \$225 per night; add \$60 per day per person for meals; kids are welcome. Bottled drinks and guided outings cost extra. At www.saubay.com.

Tides Reach has been discovered by multi-family travelers. Villas for two start at \$375 per night; the deluxe villa (for four) is \$1,275. Prices available for the entire resort. Rates include airport transfers, all meals, child care, kayaks, paddle boards, snorkel gear and on-site events. Guided tours and bottled drinks are extra. www.tidesreachresort.com.

Yasawa Island Resort's rates per night are all-inclusive, except for alcoholic beverages. Listed rates start at \$1,053 for two in a buree; frequent discounts list \$800. Included are kayaks, paddle boards, other sports gear, tennis courts, Wi-Fi in public areas, non-alcoholic beverages, and most guided outings: snorkeling, catamarans, sailing, half-day Blue Lagoon Cave trips, village tours and private beach picnics. www.yasawa.com.

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 Kisa Island, the adopted home of Polynesian immigrants from Tavalu; 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 handshakes. "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 4 years old, Tides Reach is still growing, adding two burees and a dive shop later this year. The burees 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.

See FIJI on Page 2C

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.

BELOW: Inside-outside living at Sau Bay's beach-side burees—with front porches, air conditioning, mini-bars and coffee makers—at Vanua Levu, Fiji.

Tribune News Service



Disneyland resort raises prices up to 18 percent

By HUGO MARTIN
Los Angeles Times

The Disneyland resort raised prices over the weekend, several months before the park plans to unveil a remake of its boardwalk-themed area at the California Adventure Park.

The prices rose the highest for annual pass holders, up as much as 18 percent. Daily tickets rose nearly 9 percent. By comparison, the consumer price index rose 2.5 percent in the 12 months ending January 2017.

Daily tickets for the Anaheim, Calif., theme parks vary in price, depending on daily demand.

A one-day, one-park adult ticket for Disneyland or California Adventure remains \$97 for low-demand days, such as weekdays in May.

A ticket for regular-demand days is \$117, up from \$110. The price of a ticket on peak-demand days is \$135, up from \$124.

The price of a one-day park hopper for low-demand days, which lets visitors hop between the two parks, goes down, from \$127 to \$147.

As for annual passes, the least-expensive pass costs \$729, up from \$699. Customers pay \$999 for the Signature pass, which includes free parking, up from \$849; the cost of the Signature Plus pass, with free parking and an online app to board rides faster, is now \$1,149, up from \$1,049.

Southern California residents can buy a "select passport" for \$360 but that pass blocks out all weekends and almost the entire summer and Christmas season. That price did not change.

Disneyland does not disclose attendance numbers for individual parks, but the most recent study by the Los Angeles consulting firm Arcyon estimated that Disneyland's visitor count dropped 18 percent in 2016 over the previous year.

GEOQUIZ

Vietnam has land borders with three countries. Name them.

— CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Answer: China, Laos and Cambodia. Vietnam is bordered west at its narrow point.

Health, travel, food and lifestyle news
Copyright © 2018 by the Texarkana Gazette

Fiji

Continued from Page 1C

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" said guest relations manager Paul Gonebeck, 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, Gonebeck suggested snorkeling around Honeymoon Island, at the end of the bay. Following sports guide Nia 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, Wivi. 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 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 handymen—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 Bakama 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 relishing another day in paradise.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF YASAWA ISLAND RESORT
PRESSREADER.COM • 1-800-275-4646
COPYRIGHT © 2018 BY PRESSREADER.COM

