

FIJI

ISLAND time – that no-need-for-clocks, laid-back, all-in-good-time attitude that pervades in the Pacific, takes on a whole new meaning when I arrive in Nadi during what is supposed to be the first week of Fiji's daylight saving time.

My flight itinerary, booked only a couple of weeks earlier, specifies arrival time as 12.25pm, the time I've given the hotel for my transfer.

But as we land, the aircrew advise the local time is 11.25am.

Apparently, less than a week before DST was to be introduced, the government decided to postpone it by another week – yep, all in good time.

Expecting to wait an hour for my transfer I'm a little grumpy on disembarking, but the broad-grinned Bula greetings, the friendly handshake from the immigration officer and the dulcet tones of the guitar-playing airport welcome band soothes rumpled nerves.

And as I enter the arrivals hall I'm overjoyed to see The Warwick Fiji sign with my name on it. The private driver is as surprised as I am – he's just turned up super early for the original scheduled time.

On Viti Levu's Coral Coast, The Warwick Fiji is about a 1½-hour drive from the airport (the speed limit being 80km/h).



SEA AND SUN: (clockwise from main) The adults-only pool at The Warwick Fiji; the beach; a wood carving show; hair braiding is among the options at the local craft stalls; and friendly staff. Pictures: Briar Jensen

An island of



G02
CORAL COAST,
FIJI

As I chat to the driver a montage of local life glides by outside – goats up to their ears in grass, scorched sugarcane fields, brightly painted houses, scrappy pine trees, rambling bougainvillea and immaculately uniformed schoolchildren.

The Warwick Fiji is testament that resorts don't have to be new and avant-garde to attract guests.

The complex, which opened in 1980, continues to cater to a loyal clientele (one couple I meet are on their sixth visit) that includes singles, couples, families, wedding parties and business guests (Deputy Prime Minister Julie Bishop is calling in for afternoon tea the day I leave).

That's due to the friendly staff and a beachfront layout that encompasses family areas and adults-only zones within 11ha of gardens.

Although the sun is shining when I arrive, waves surge against the fringing reef and palm fronds bend in the wind, but the lagoon is protected so I don't snorkel and goggles and swim straight off the beach over squishy-looking sea cucumbers and vibrant blue sea stars.

Despite some sediment churned up by the weather, the water is surprisingly clear.

charm and relaxation

Family areas and adults-only zones make The Warwick Fiji a perennially popular resort for all-comers. Even Julie Bishop makes a cameo, writes **Briar Jensen**

While the coral close to shore is not spectacular, the fish certainly are. Yellow and black butterfly fish glide among the sea grass and I spend ages stalking a Picasso triggerfish trying to capture it on camera.

After rinsing sand and salt I slip into the main pool and swim up to the bar where fellow guests have Aussie and Kiwi accents. A shell horn heralds the arrival of a bride, so we all hop out of the water to watch her float across the lagoon on a raft of greenery.

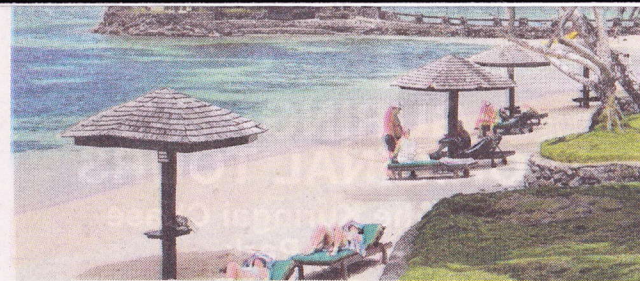
The aptly named Sunset Terrace, overlooking the beach, is the ideal spot for a sundowner. Here happy hour lasts from 5pm-7pm (now that's "island time" I

like) and each beverage comes with 30 minutes free Wi-Fi.

As I sip a cocktail and Instagram images the lali drum punctuates the warm evening air.

There are five dining options, including Italian, Japanese, nightly themed buffets and private romantic meals in a lagoon bure festooned with white chiffon and fairy lights. I opt for Wicked Walu, the small seafood restaurant on the palm fringed lagoon "island". Sitting on the timber deck under the stars I tuck into seared scallops and a seafood platter as a sea snake swims past.

Next morning, fragrant



frangipanis waft on the breeze on the stroll to the family fish feeding session, where kids toss bread into the water. Schools of sizeable fish troll the rocks below waiting for crumbs.

There's so much to do here. The kids program includes

scavenger hunts, spear throwing, sandcastle competitions, snorkelling lessons and crab racing. Adult activities range from coconut bowls and carving demonstrations to touch footy and bingo. River rafting, caving and zip-lining are within an hour's radius.

I feel a bit guilty not taking one of the local village or school tours, but I'm here for some downtime and choose a walk on the beach instead. After fossicking among the coral at low tide the beachfront handicraft shacks beckon.

Seduced by yet another hand-printed sarong it joins my collection, along with a black and white shell necklace, crafted by a local girl now making her mark as a jeweller in New York.

Henna tattoos and hair braiding happen on the sand

GETTING THERE

Fiji Airways flies to Nadi from Sydney.
fiji Airways.com

STAYING THERE

The Warwick Fiji is on the Coral Coast of Viti Levu about a 1.5-hour drive from Nadi International Airport. Four room categories cater to singles, couples, families and business guests. Children 12 and under eat free.

The hotel's new executive chef, Martin Glutz, whose international experience includes 11 years at Palazzo Versace, has added "dining under the stars" on the pool deck.

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under a shady tree. Manicures, pedicures and massages are on offer too, but I have an appointment at the Warwick Spa where I surrender to a (gentle) beating with what looks like a calico poi, but is actually a warm herbal poultice, part of the Vakacegu signature massage.

My room, with timber balcony overlooking the adults-only pool, includes use of the Warwick Lounge.

On the last morning I join another solo traveller for a horse ride along the beach.

There's no chance of cantering these steeds, but sloshing through the shallows on the walk back along the beach is peaceful and relaxing – a pleasant way to end a stay.

The writer was a guest of The Warwick Fiji.

