

Beautiful Pacific

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Mamanuca Islands

Clearly visible from Nadi Airport, the Mamanuca Islands is a stunning collection of 23 small islands with stunning beaches. Situated in the lee of the main island of Viti Levu, the Mamanuca Islands boasts the finest holiday weather in Fiji - year-round sunshine, calm seas and gentle breezes. This is Fiji's tourism gem. With a choice of 18 resorts - 9 of which are on uninhabited islands - and as many day cruises from Nadi, a visit to the Mamanuca Islands is a must on any travel itinerary. Nowhere else in the South Pacific will you find such easy access to so many beautiful islands, all with perfect white sandy beaches and lots of water activities.

Although commercial tourism thrives, the physical make-up of the Mamanuca Group has enabled it to retain its laid-back unspoiled atmosphere. Most of the 18 island resorts are just that one island, one resort with no neighbours or overcrowding. The inner Mamanucas are made up of tiny flat coral islands, often taking just ten minutes to walk around. The outer Mamanuca Islands are volcanic in nature, including the largest island, Malolo, at just over 2400 acres. The volcanic islands are a better choice for those who like the freedom to explore, trekking to summits for sunset views and finding beaches with no-one on them.

Scuba diving and game-fishing are both excellent along the many outer reef passages, notably the 10-mile Malolo Barrier Reef, with all major resorts having their own dive operators base and game-fishing charters. The modern marina at Musket Cove offers skippered and bareback sailing charters and hosts several International Regattas during the sailing season between May and October. There are many other water activities on offer including para-sailing, jet-ski adventures, banana boat rides, wind-surfing, knee-boarding and kite-surfing, with most resorts providing complimentary sea kayaks, reef snorkelling trips and hobbie cats.

Staying on a small island also means you have no choice of dining except the resort restaurant, with inflated prices for both meals and drinks. Those looking to save money on their accommodation should consider staying in Nadi where rooms are far more competitively priced and independent restaurants are at hand, and instead take day cruises to various islands. There are many day trip options available in Nadi, from spending a day

at an island resort starting at F\$69 per person including hotel pick-up, transfers and lunch, or taking a sightseeing trip by sail boat or sea-plane starting at F\$129.

Yasawa Islands

The Yasawa Islands is a chain of 16 gorgeous sun drenched and rather barren volcanic islands with a scattering of smaller islands within its lagoons. The islands are renowned for their gorgeous beaches, tranquil lagoons, backpacker resorts and a handful of exclusive resorts and luxury overnight cruises. This is Fiji's tourism at its best - but its popularity in recent years has seen a gradual shift from a backpackers undiscovered paradise to a commercial well trodden tourist route with inflated prices. Nevertheless, the stunning coastal beauty remains and there are enough small hideaways to keep crowds to a minimum.

The 16 islands that make up the Yasawas extend in a line north of the Mamanucas. They are reached by fast catamaran in 2 to 4 hours, or by seaplane in 30-minutes. The islands can roughly be divided into three groups: The majestic panoramas of Kuata, Wayasewa and Waya Island offer some of the finest coastal walks and beach scenery in Fiji. The fine white sand beaches and snorkelling with Manta Rays on Naviti Island and the myriad of islands, bays and secluded beaches of the popular Tavewa Region which boasts Blue Lagoon Beach, several luxury resorts and lots of budget beach resorts.

The northern cluster of islands around Tavewa offers a protected bay for sailing yachts and is the anchorage for luxury overnight cruises. The hills have good walking tracks and there's some great scuba diving. Snorkelling is generally good right off the beach. There are lots of backpacker resorts in this region as well as the delightful Navutu Stars, an upmarket resort with Mediterranean style villas and Italian dining. Fishing and diving are superb.

Off the east tip of Tavewa Island is Nacula Island. At ten kilometres long, Nacula is the third largest island in the Yasawas and there are several high peaks over 200 metres. The southern coast has some excellent walking tracks, several remote beaches and two excellent budget resorts. Safe Landing Resort fronts a gorgeous white sandy beach protected either side by rocky outcrops - snorkelling is superb a few hundred metres offshore along one of the walls. On the west coast is the delightful setting of Oarsman's Bay Resort. Apart from the fine white sand backed by palm trees and the turquoise swimming lagoon, there are lots of organised activities.