

Escape winter for the tropics

We've been through a lot in the past couple of years, so a perfect antidote is a stay in a plush tree house on a private Fiji island, writes Brook Sabin.

There is a magical little island in the Pacific I can almost guarantee you have never heard of. It has an idyllic resort, with tree houses in the jungle, overlooking sapphire waters.

It is also home to an enormous secret cove, Horseshoe Bay, which is so beautiful it has been named one of the top 1000 places to see in the world. If you are looking for a luxurious holiday away from the crowds, come with me on a journey to Fiji's remote Matangi Private Island Resort.

The place

Getting to this slice of paradise is quite the adventure. Most of us have heard of Fiji's main islands of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. But let me introduce you to the country's third-largest, Taveuni.

It is known as Fiji's Garden Island because of its Jurassic-like hinterland, and it is a spectacular 90-minute flight from Nadi. Once there, you will be whisked from the airport to a boat, where you will be taken to a 97-hectare private island sitting off Taveuni.

Fiji has 332 islands – and you know right away you have picked a pretty special one to visit.

The island has been in family ownership since 1878, and it was farmed as a coconut plantation until 1986. It was then transformed into a spectacular retreat.

The space

There are just 12 rooms, with three different types to pick from. But take it from me, if you don't book one of the tree houses, you will regret it when you arrive. These magnificent rooms are surrounded by lush forest, and have a grand four-poster bed, sun deck, Jacuzzi and outdoor "lava rock" shower.

You also have ocean views from your deck.

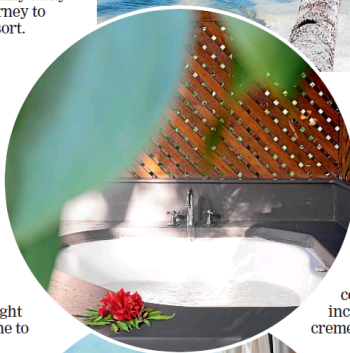
The facilities

The island has everything that you would expect from a luxury hotel, such as an impressive pool and luxury loungers dotted among the coconut trees.

You can kayak and paddleboard, but the standout highlight is the overwater spa, where you



With just 12 rooms, Matangi Private Island Resort is never crowded. PHOTOS: BROOK SABIN/STUFF



can indulge in a couple's massage before having a drink out on the deck.

The food

The hotel has an excellent Vale-Ni-Kana restaurant next to the beach, emphasising local delicacies, such as fresh fish, coconut and tapioca. Menus include lobster, tuna and Fijian creme brulee.

Worth stepping out for

The island is home to Horseshoe Bay, a magnificent cove named in the popular book, 1000 Places to See Before You Die. The bay is reached by boat, and a couple can book the entire place to themselves.

You will be dropped off with a picnic at the main beach, which is home to a hut and hammocks. From there explore and snorkel.

Fact file

Getting to Fiji:

Fiji Airways has regular flights from Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch to Nadi. Visit fijairways.com.

Getting to Matangi:

Fiji Airways has daily flights from Nadi to Taveuni, and several flights a week from Suva to Taveuni. Transfers from Taveuni Airport to the island cost NZ\$234 a person, plus taxes.

Staying there:

Oceanview Bures at Matangi Private Island Resort from \$1350 a couple a night, including all meals, non-motorised sports and cultural activities. Tree houses from about NZ\$1786. Visit matangiisland.com.

Border rules:

Travel rules change often, so check fiji.travel for the latest Fiji entry requirements, and covid19.govt.nz for the latest requirements when returning home.

one night. It is quite a trip to get there, so make sure to enjoy a few days.

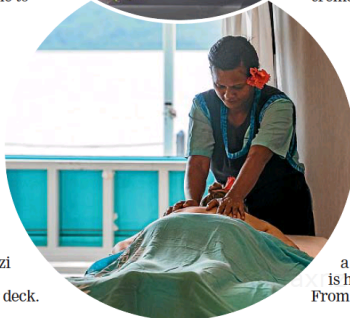
Tip

If your budget is under pressure, book one night in the tree house, and more in the cheaper bures. The resort offers a number of specials for longer stays.

The verdict

This is the perfect place to celebrate something significant such as a honeymoon or anniversary.

The writer travelled to Fiji before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, courtesy of Tourism Fiji and Fiji Airways. This story was produced as a part of an editorial partnership with Tourism Fiji.



Each tree house has a private Jacuzzi, top, or have a massage in an overwater spa.

The highlight

The tree houses and service. Both are some of the best you will find in the Pacific.

The lowlight

Don't make the mistake we did and only stay for



The tree house is the most luxurious option on the island.



The island is famous for Horseshoe Bay.