

Arizona Foothills

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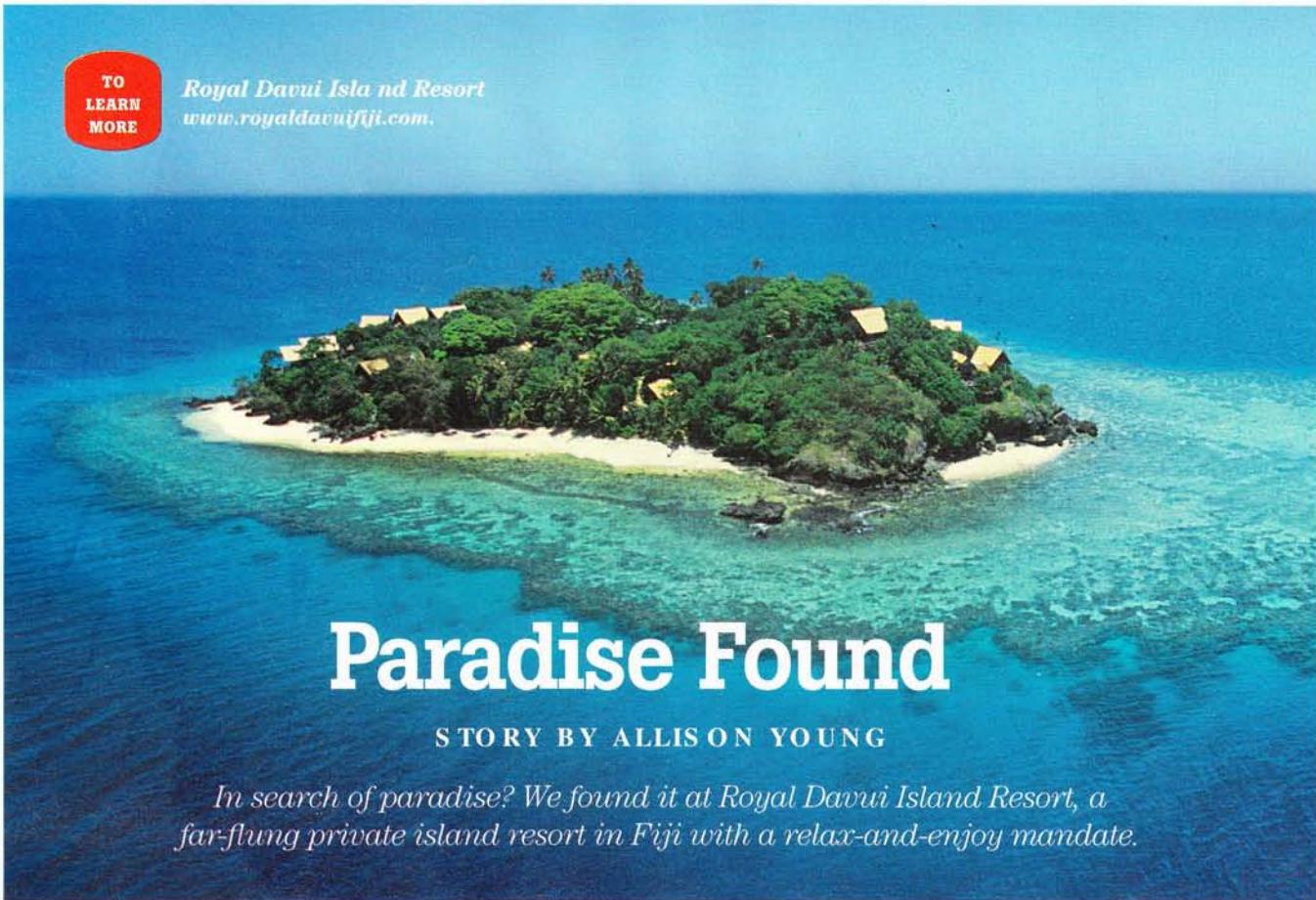
ARIZONA'S
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Paradise Found

STORY BY ALLISON YOUNG

In search of paradise? We found it at Royal Davui Island Resort, a far-flung private island resort in Fiji with a relax-and-enjoy mandate.

THE DEFINITION OF paradise has slackened somewhat. To some it might mean hitting the congested beaches of Hawaii or crashing on Catalina island; as long as there's a palm tree in sight and the sea breeze within reach, you've found "it." But once you breathe in the plumeria-infused vibe of Royal Davui Island Resort, an upscale all-inclusive resort in Fiji's Beqa lagoon, the paradise parameters significantly narrow. It may just spoil you for life.

Royal Davui opened in 2005. One of the few family-owned private island resorts in the world, even in its overgrown infancy, owner Grahame Southwick and his son Christopher, the resort's executive director, knew they had something special. The surrounding cerulean waters and ravishing reefs, not to mention the

regal remoteness, gave it away. They planned the dining area around the hypnotic branches of a giant Banyan tree and carefully staked 16 spots in what would become the private villas. The mission: to maintain the natural beauty of the island—to accent, not smother, the glorious green foliage and natural neon blooms. They succeeded. Only two trees were cut down in the making of the resort, one by accident, and one nautical mile around the reef is untouchable. Now, undulating paths wind past real-life Dr. Seuss vegetation and scampering geckos to deliver you to your room, a private crash pad replete with a plunge pool and floating deck, each cleverly situated so that every couple feels as if they're the only ones on the island.

There's an unofficial rule that it takes three days to totally succumb

to Royal Davui. Some do it in three minutes flat. Regardless, the Fijian staff will have you at the welcome song, a customary ukulele-fueled serenade that's as infectious as the famous Fijian smile. To call it genuine hospitality is an understatement because there's nothing disingenuous about Fijians. It's why guests have voluntarily turned in their computers and even hurled cell phones off the dock. And each time the staff greets you by name, which is often, you'll sink a little deeper into your paradise stupor, which, yes, seems to reach a crescendo by day three.

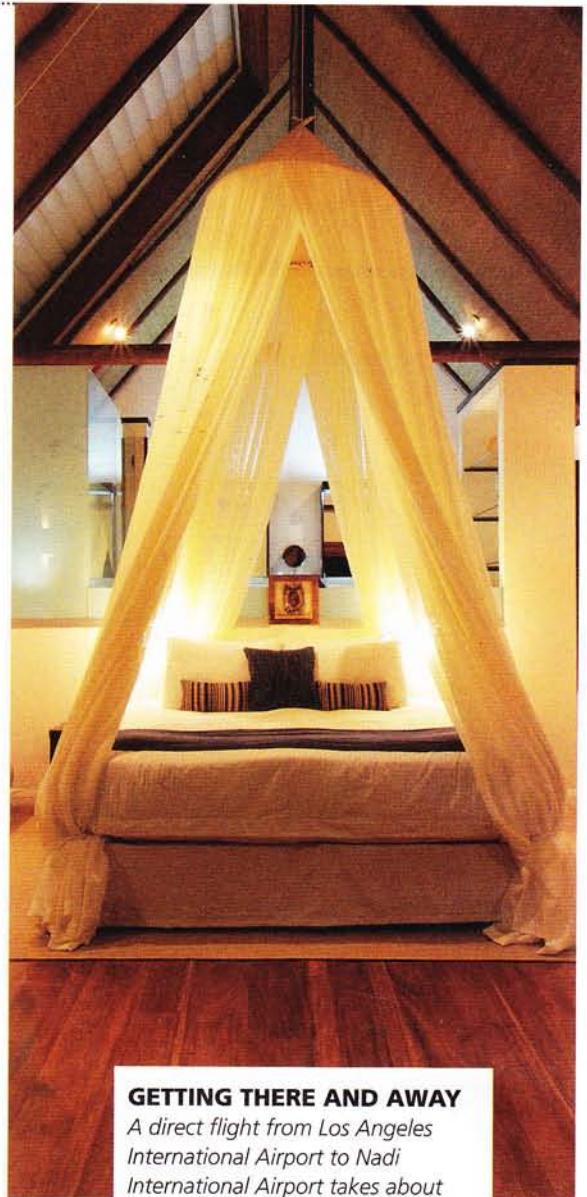
The room décor could be described as "primitive posh." Peaked thatched roofs, replicas of ancient weapons dotting the entranceway and wall-to-wall glass accordion doors that fold back for uninterrupted Pacific vistas pair seamlessly with

spoiled essentials. There's a mini fridge stocked with sipping pleasures and all the milk and homemade sugar cookies you can eat, an iPod docking station, a Wi-Fi signal that works surprisingly well and Pure Fiji bath amenities. Even the roof over the indoor shower opens on cue to expose the jungle canopy above. Local meets la-di-da!

Yes, there's a sense of blissful remoteness, but there's more to the island than ocean ogling and watching the palm trees sway, although both are valid pursuits. Snorkel around the island's perfectly preserved coral reefs and canoodle with angelfish and bluespot butterflyfish who seem to share the Fijian friendliness. Take a spin on the sea kayak, Hobie Cat or standup paddleboard and really revel in your remoteness. Go diving with turtles and dolphins in the place once christened "the mecca of Pacific diving." Or pamper already relaxed muscles in the on-property spa where exotic nut oils and flower extracts only enhance your state of bliss. There's also hammock time, pool lounging and beach frolicking on white sands you barely have to share with another soul. As if there isn't enough seclusion, venture out for a private Champagne brunch on a nearby sand cay and claim the sugar-fine circle as all yours. Boat trips to nearby islands offer zip lining, rafting, village visits and waterfall hikes. Even your room is an activity: make a date with your blissed-out bed, a pillowy paradise wrapped in mosquito netting, for a fairytale nap.

Dining is also an event. Guests often take breakfast on their private dining deck and lunch at their leisure, but dinner is the one time you become really aware you're not the only ones on the island. The occasional evening event, say a crab race or a communal kava ceremony, will have you bonding with your fellow marooners before you retire to your dinner for two, a four-course feast that caps with, say, creamy lobster Newburg with parsley fettuccine or grilled Yaqara beef fillet with miso butter and long beans and warm Fijian coconut pie à la mode.

The toughest part of the trip is bidding farewell. The staff sings you off the island with the same energetic enthusiasm, but the goodbye is bittersweet. Some guests have even been known to cling to a palm tree in protest. But at least you have a priceless Fijian souvenir to flaunt at home: your newly acquired Fijian smile. ■



GETTING THERE AND AWAY

A direct flight from Los Angeles International Airport to Nadi International Airport takes about 11 hours. From there, the Island Hoppers chopper takes you over the green canopy of Fiji's main Viti Levu Island to the resort's helipad.

KAVA, ANYONE?

Kava is Fiji's national drink, and quite possibly the reason the island nation is so chill. The muddy-tasting concoction, made from dried roots of the kava plant, is a psychotropic that can numb your tongue and stress levels.

