



A slice of paradise

Unwinding in the Yasawa Islands

By Matt Taylor

“Which is the best island to go to?” When you publish a South Pacific travel magazine, you get asked this quite a lot. My reply is always the same. It just depends on what sort of experience you’re looking for. With school holidays looming, we took our own advice. The brief was chilled out, family-friendly, great food, great beaches and somewhere far enough off the beaten track to feel like an adventure. Our pick, Fiji’s Yasawa Islands. Our resort of choice. Paradise Cove.

Paradise Cove © Mark Snyder



Untouched boutique beauty

The Yasawa islands are rugged, remote, and still very authentic. In fact, land-based tourism only began in 1987, which means the Yasawa Islands offer an unplugged holiday in the most picture-postcard of surroundings.

Paradise Cove fits perfectly into this scenario

When you first approach the resort, you can't help but feel very fortunate. The stretch of perfect white sand, layers of clear blue sparkling waters, the string of swaying palms – it's picture postcard stuff and we get to stay here!

Being a boutique resort (there are 45 rooms ranging from cosy garden bungalows to expansive private beach houses), there's none of the mad rush you'll find in the large mainland resorts. Instead, Paradise Cove has a lovely, laid-back feel. Sure the resort sits at the five-star end of the luxury scale, but the people who come here do so because they love getting back to basics. And because they do, Paradise Cove is thankfully missing the pretentious edge you get at some high-end properties.

Water, water everywhere

As you might expect, the water sports on offer are fabulous. The channel in front of the resort is perfect for snorkelling, kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding. In keeping with the relaxed nature of the resort, they've also decided to do without motorised activities like jet-skiing. A wise decision. The Yasawas are well-known for their fantastic diving and the resort has an excellent diving shop with PADI qualified diving professionals on hand. There are 35 diving sites in the local area including reefs, drop-offs, pinnacles, dive-throughs and two wreck dives – ie, divers are spoiled for choice. There is also some excellent game fishing on offer. You can even try hand fishing local style, too. The manta ray snorkelling is a must do, plus there are some excellent snorkelling excursions on offer as well.

Fresh off the boat

Maintaining a high standard of cuisine can be a challenge when you're sitting 50 kilometres from the mainland. But with some expert juggling, the kitchen, led by Executive Chef, Rainal Sahai manages superbly. In fact, they do it so well, we would easily rate Paradise Cove's food offer as one of Fiji's finest. Rainal incorporates local produce as much as possible and he ships in imported lamb, beef and salmon to add variety. The result is fresh, fragrant meals, all expertly cooked and carefully presented. It's hard to single out a certain dish, but a couple of standouts were the eggs benedict for breakfast – what a way to start the day. The schnitzel sandwich on

ciabatta was a popular lunchtime pick and my personal favourite was the super-tasty beef curry which came with a delectable tropical chutney, dahl, naan bread and poppadoms! The resort also has a compulsory food plan, which makes life easy. You simply pick and choose what your heart desires, without having to worry about scanning the price list.

Manta ray magic

If you do one thing during your stay at Paradise Cove, it's swimming with the manta rays that frequent the waters of the nearby "Manta Ray Channel" between May and October. The Paradise Cove snorkelling guides fill in the 10-minute boat ride to the channel with stories about the local area. But when we reach the channel, it's all action. Spotters keep a look for the manta rays and on this excursion they pick them out virtually straight away. With the safety briefing done, four guides dive into the clear blue waters, to lead resort guests in the right direction. In a word, the experience is quite magical. These gentle giants are driven along by wide fins that look more like wings. Being in the water as they slowly "fly" over, under and around you is an amazing sensation. I was lucky enough to have one large manta swim straight for me, mouth wide open, gulping the tiny plankton they need to survive. All up we spend about 30 minutes in the water and the manta rays are with us the whole time. As a bonus, we get to see vast schools of small silver fish following each other in random patterns. And apparently, small reef sharks swim these waters, too! Afterwards, there is a boat full of big smiles – swimming with the manta rays in the Yasawa Islands – one of those things you'll never forget.

Privacy for the grown-ups

While Paradise Cove opened in mid-2013, The Cove adults-only section has only been open since July 2017. The new addition has been a great success and added a whole new dimension to the resort. While family guests can splash and yahoo to their heart's content in the original pool area, grown-ups seeking quiet time can mosey down the path to The Cove. There they'll find two swimming pools, numerous lounge areas, a sunset fire pit and a funky bar in the shape of a boat. And if you get a bit peckish, you simply order off the main resort menu and your dish will be delivered.

Need your space? Go to the other side

There very few resorts that can say they're spread over two different islands. But Paradise Cove is one of them. Sitting across the deep blue channel from the main resort area is another picture postcard island where Paradise Cove has four spacious two-bedroom luxury beach houses. Going backward and forwards is easy – simply call up a boatman and they'll be there in a few minutes. In the morning a private butler will fix your breakfast. Otherwise, the beach houses provide true Robinson Crusoe-style tranquillity, with the all the resort facilities a two-minute boat ride away.

Get pampered in paradise

When in paradise, why not pamper! Here the Nauka Spa is the place to do just that. Tucked away in a quiet, leafy corner of the resort, the spa has enough on the menu to keep anyone happy. Choose from pedicures, manicures, wraps, facials and a variety of delicious massages, including the 90-minute Paradise Signature massage that will have you floating back to your sun lounger in a state of bliss. The treatments are also very well-priced for a luxury resort spa – for example, the Paradise Massage will set you back FJ\$130 (about NZ\$90) – which is excellent value for money.

We'll be back

As a family, we're lucky enough to explore the South Pacific on a regular basis. We get to stay in and compare a lot of different places. Some are good. Some are not so good. But every now and again we come across a gem. A place we will definitely come back to. Paradise Cove is one of those places.

How do you reach paradise?

From Nadi, there are a few different ways to get to Paradise Cove. The quickest options helicopter or seaplane. You'll be up and down in a tick over 20 minutes and you'll enjoy some amazing views of the Yasawa Islands and the neighbouring Mamanuca Islands that sit further south. If your budget is a little tighter, you can travel by sea on the Yasawa Flyer. The big yellow catamaran leaves Denarau at 8.30am each day, stopping at a handful of Mamanuca Islands, before making its way north to the Yasawas. **LI**



L-R: Ben with Alfie, Assistant General Manager

Service like only locals can offer

There's no doubt that Paradise Cove is blessed with a stunning landscape. But like any resort, great service sits at the heart of a great experience. At Paradise Cove, Food and Beverage Manager Ben works hard to make sure high service standards are maintained day-in-day-out. Ben is a hospitality veteran. He spent five years with the Tanoa Group, nine years with Blue Lagoon Cruises and has been at Paradise Cove for four years.

"At Paradise Cove, we have a unique set-up because out of 40 or so staff. Around 30 are from the local Soso village. So in a sense, they are the true resort owners. And guests can see and feel that in the way they connect. It's a strong guest relationship that can't be taught or managed – because it comes from the heart," says Ben.

We certainly couldn't fault the service during our stay. It was friendly, relaxed, polished and professional. And you did feel like you were being welcomed into one big family.



Paradise Cove © Mark Snyder

Taine's Kids Tips - Paradise Cove

Swimming in the pool
The pool at Paradise Cove is an amazing experience for all water babies. It has a deep end for awesome swimmers and a shallow end for the not so good swimmers.

Joining Kid's Club
The Kids Club is a paradise for kids who love to play. The Kids Club will entertain your kids for hours with fun and games. Every night all the kids have dinner together, so you have lots of good friends.

Teens Tent
Teens Tent is a cool tent that has table tennis, air hockey, foosball and XBOX 360. Teens Tent is a place where kids 10+ can hang out and be themselves.

Spotlight on the beach
At Paradise Cove, your kids will meet lots of kids and become mates because it is a smaller resort and everyone gets to know each other. I definitely recommend playing spotlight on the beach, it was one of the funniest games we played.

Taine McDermott, 11 years old.

