

# Family-Friendly Fiji

COURTESY PHOTOGRAPHY



Bures at Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort are surrounded by tropical gardens

“It’s the first real holiday we’ve had since the kids were born,” an Australian woman said to me as she watched her daughter run into the outstretched arms of a smiling Fijian woman.

We were sitting on adjacent day beds around the Serenity Pool at Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort in Fiji. Nearby, stately palms swayed above the beach and sunlight sparkled on clear blue water.

From our vantage point, we could see other kids jumping onto Hobie Cats and donning snorkel gear — each with a nanny or “buddy” supervising.

“It’s our second time here,” she continued. “We can’t find anyplace else like this. It’s just the best system.”

The system? The resort’s Bula Club, staffed by a team of experienced Fijian nannies and buddies, provides free childcare for youngsters ages 0-12 and teens 13-19. Yes, I said free — up to three kids per family, from 8am to 9pm. Club facilities include a family swimming pool, a separate pool for younger kids, and a large treehouse.

My husband and I shared a van from the Savusavu Airport to the resort with a young couple, their toddler, and an infant. As soon as we approached the reception desk, two nannies appeared, shared a few words with the mom, and walked off with the kids.

So is the Cousteau Resort just for families? Not at all. Richard and I were sans kiddos and we had a wonderful time snorkeling, sailing, hiking, kayaking, and test-driving various spa treatments. We also



These daybeds, like the ones facing the serenity pool, are reserved for adults



The resort's friendly staff helps guests choose the right sports gear



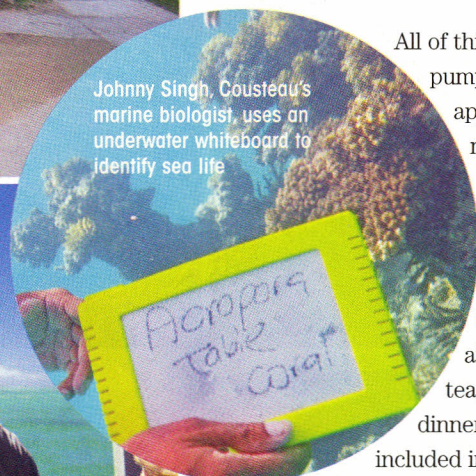
Buddies teach young guests about protecting marine environments

enjoyed the adults-only dining room and serenity pool.

([www.fijiresort.com](http://www.fijiresort.com))

In lieu of a buddy, we snorkeled in a small group once or twice a day with Johnny Singh, the resident marine biologist. He led us to dive spots called Lighthouse, Golden Nuggets, and Split Rock where he used an underwater Etch-a-Sketch to write the names of fish, corals, and other sea life we encountered. Because of wind conditions, we didn't get to Namena Marine Reserve — one of the top ten dive sites in the world — but that just gives us an excuse to return.

While I loved our daytime excursions, it was the night snorkel that really took my breath away. At first the dark water was a bit spooky, but before long I watched transfixed as the stone-like corals bloomed into colorful feather dusters to feed on nutrients in the water. And the bioluminescence? Just try to imagine a dark sky lit up with millions of bright stars — but in the water. It was magical.



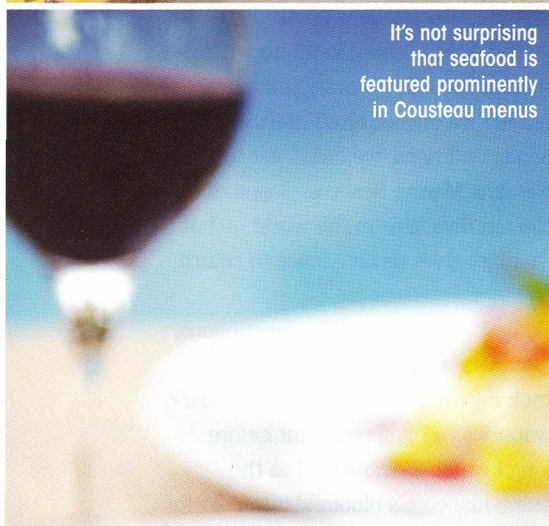
Johnny Singh, Cousteau's marine biologist, uses an underwater whiteboard to identify sea life

All of this exercise pumped up our appetites and made us grateful that breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, and dinner are included in the rate.

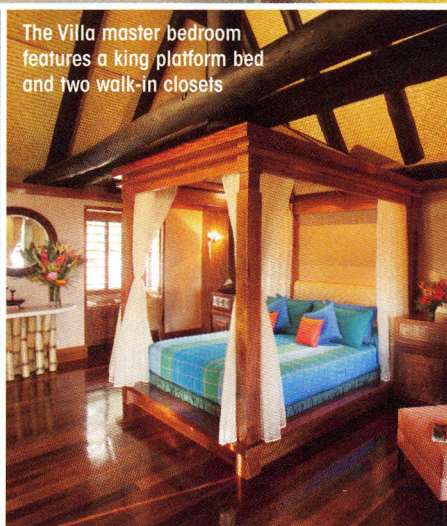
One of my favorite dinner starters was spinach soup with coconut and I thought the best entree was the grilled tuna on stir-fried Mongolian veggies and eggless noodles. Everyone enjoyed the traditional Fijian feast with meat and vegetables cooked in an underground oven (think luau). >>



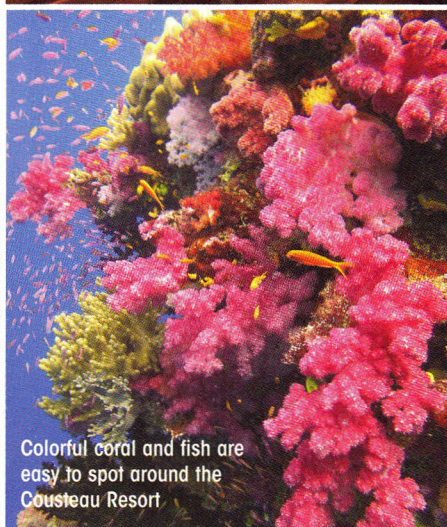
The luxurious bathroom at the Villa includes a sunken Jacuzzi and both indoor and outdoor showers



It's not surprising that seafood is featured prominently in Cousteau menus



The Villa master bedroom features a king platform bed and two walk-in closets



Colorful coral and fish are easy to spot around the Cousteau Resort



The Cousteau Resort creates special occasions for adults as well as kids

« In keeping with the principles of Jean-Michel Cousteau (Jacque's son), the resort places a high value on eco-education, supporting the Fijian culture and economy, and preserving the environment. The 17-acre property was once a coconut plantation, but has gradually been returned to its natural state — including an ongoing mangrove restoration project. Many former and repeat guests support the villages in the area through the Savasavu Community Foundation, a nonprofit organization based in Orange County. ([www.savasavucommunityfoundation.org](http://www.savasavucommunityfoundation.org))

Trips into the surrounding area give guests a chance to experience a Fijian village, hike to a waterfall, and wander through Savasavu. Picnics on a private island can also be arranged.

Accommodation is in 25 spacious one- and two-bedroom bures (Fijian bungalows) that feature hardwood floors, rattan furnishings, and thatch roofs. Some have water views and all have a deck and at least one hammock. Colorful tropical gardens sprawl across the resorts and between the bures. The Honeymoon Point Reef Bure has a private spa pool overlooking the ocean. This lodging is only outdone by the super-luxe Villa, which includes a private infinity swimming pool, daybed pavilion, Jacuzzi tub for two, and indoor and outdoor showers.

On our last night at the resort, we watched as a sleepy child was carried to bed by his buddy. The parents, seated next to us in the dining room, said, "He's had the best day ever. He built a shelter. He's been fishing and he went sailing. He just loves that guy."

And I thought, I've had a great day, too — and I just love this place.

ELIZABETH HANSEN