

Luxe Fiji

with kids

IT'S NOT A TYPO. LUXE HOLIDAYS WITH KIDS ARE VERY POSSIBLE IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC'S MOST BEAUTIFUL, FAMILY-FRIENDLY ISLANDS.

BY RENAE LEITH-MANOS

We were sitting in the Nuku restaurant at The Fiji Beach Resort & Spa managed by Hilton Hotel dining on grilled tuna and sirloin, overlooking the sea, and we had to pinch ourselves. Our two-year-old twins were asleep in our hotel room and we were all enjoying a 'proper' holiday, in an adult-style but child-friendly five-star hotel with delightful nannies. And the price tag was pleasantly low.

But let's be honest. It didn't exactly start like that. During the flight to Fiji, we were seriously stressed out. Not only were we in need of a break, but like all parents of toddlers embarking on a 'special family trip', we were terrified Fiji might not live up to our expectations and we'd end up spending 10 days working harder than we did at home just to keep them fed, happy, entertained and clean.

The flight from Sydney was delayed an hour and the airline had us seated apart. My husband was sitting with Stella, next to a woman on her first-ever flight, and I was in the row in front with Mason sitting next to a man who didn't seem enamoured of children. Not ideal, but after taking several deep breaths we just

got on with it and focused on the fact the flight was under three hours. As it turned out, the flight mix-ups were the only negatives of the whole trip.

There's a secret to Fiji you won't find in the travel brochures. People who've been there murmur it on occasion, but it needs to be shouted from the rooftops of travel agents for all parents to hear. Fijians absolutely love children and are totally natural with them – and children love them back just as much. What that

Dinner for children at the Fiji Resort & Spa was a full-blown infant buffet at 5.00pm, lowered to children's height, complete with grown-up silver serving dishes

translates to is that from the minute you arrive in Fiji your children are completely taken care of and, as a couple, you can actually have a real holiday. Using a combination of nannies and kids' club, depending on the age of the children, you can enjoy time to yourselves and see your children as and when you want to (if they can fit you into their own extensive schedule of activities!). Now that is holiday bliss.

We arrived at the resort late, but our nannies were still waiting patiently to take our children from our arms, so we could go to the restaurant and grab a late-night bite. There are a vast array of different rooms at The Hilton (as we called it due to the Hilton standard of service and facilities), but ours was a ground-floor, two-bedroom apartment, complete with huge master bedroom and ensuite and a large separate bedroom for the children. Staff even moved a single

bed out to give the children's cots more room. The apartment had a modern kitchen with a full-sized fridge and I was stoked to discover a washing machine and dryer. Our lounge overlooked a lawn of palm trees, with a hammock strung between two of them, and the ocean beyond.

Breakfast the next day turned out to be an introduction into one of the highlights of the trip – the food. The restaurant staff were excited to meet the twins and Stella and Mason were overwhelmed by the breakfast buffet. From freshly cooked eggs to endless bowls of fruit, all kinds of juices, and cakes, it certainly was a sumptuous



Buffet time for little Mason, aged two



The twins relaxing in Fiji



Posing for a happy snap by the gorgeous beach

OUR PICK OF PLACES TO STAY WITH TODDLERS

The Fiji Beach Resort & Spa

Room styles for families: All rooms are apartment-style with one, two or three bedrooms.
Kids' club: 9.00am-5.30pm, Free.
Nannies: Yes, AUD\$3.50 an hour, book from Australia.
Great for parents: Child-free pool area.

Great for kids: Kids aged four and under eat free.
Biggest bonus: Kitchen and laundry facilities within your room.
Extra info: Prams are available for Fiji \$40 per day, subject to availability.
Website: www1.hilton.com

Intercontinental Fiji

Room styles for families:

Joining rooms are available.
Kids' club: Yes, separate sections for different ages.
Nannies: AUD\$4.50 an hour, but you must book in advance.
Great for parents: Adults-only infinity pool.
Great for kids: Kids eat free.
Biggest bonus: It's brand new.
Biggest negative: The rooms are not ideal for families. You either share one or pay

a lot more for joining rooms (although villas are now being built).
Extra info: The day spa is the best in Fiji.
Website: www.intercontinental.com/fiji
Sheraton Fiji
Room styles for families: Twin-bed room or interconnecting room options.

Fijians absolutely love children and are totally natural with them – and children love them back just as much.



Stella makes a new friend



Mason getting into the local groove



FIJI WITH KIDS

PACKING LIST:

Supermarket items (Many items below are available in Fiji, but there are limited ranges and prices are generally at least twice those in Australia.)

- Nappies
- Wipes
- Nappy bags
- Bath soap/moisturiser
- Wine for your room
- Hair oil/leave-in conditioner for mum (the sea and sun is very wearing on the hair)

buffet. The staff were happy to make anything on request. Nannies Danni and Sotti arrived to help and whisked the twins off to kids' club so we could relax by the pool and have our first much-needed cocktail!

We returned to the restaurant for lunch and afternoons were spent with the kids in the pool. (A range of activities from Fijian dancing to music and cooking lesson are available for older kids.)

Dinner for children at the Fiji Resort & Spa was a full-blown infant buffet at 5.00pm, lowered to children's height, complete with grown-up silver serving dishes. All of the children were ecstatic, as were we when we realised children aged four and under eat for free at the hotel! It was delightful watching them all seated on a long table overlooking the ocean.

Upmarket adult food magazines tend to be critical of the restaurant food and service in Fiji, and it's fair to say, at times, it's not exactly 'fine dining'. The expression 'Fiji time' encompasses a laidback attitude that's typical of the islands, so when the staff at many of the restaurants forgot an item, or brought something in the wrong order, we accepted it as an expression of the local culture. If you're fussy, the best menu choices are mainstream dishes, such as steaks, grilled fish, salads and pastas, as well as Indian where it's offered. The other tip for foodies is to sample the various hotel restaurant fare. There are some real gems: Salt at the Sofitel, which has its own tandoori oven; the shellfish at Flying Fish at Sheraton Fiji Resort; and the cocktails at the Radisson (plus they have a happy hour).

OUR PICK OF PLACES TO STAY WITH TODDLERS (CONT)

Kids' club: Free for four to 12-year-olds from 9.00am-5.00pm (2 children max per family). Children under four need a guardian.
Nannies: Yes, AUD\$11 for first three hours; then AUD\$3.50 per hour.
Great for parents: Adults-only swimming pool.
Great for kids: Kids Stay Play & Dine Free Program

(conditions apply), kids' club.
Biggest bonus: Complimentary use of swimming pools, restaurants and bars at the adjacent properties.
Extra info: Roll-away beds, prams, baby cots can be requested.
Website: www.sheraton.com/fiji

Sheraton Denarau Villas

Room styles for families: Self-contained villas.
Kids' club: See Sheraton notes.
Nannies: See Sheraton notes.
Great for kids: Kids Stay, Play and Dine Free Program.
Biggest Bonus: Self-contained (washing machine, dryer, kitchenette, dishwasher, microwave, dining area, Complimentary use of swimming pools, restaurants

and bars at adjacent properties.
Website: www.sheraton.com/denarauvillas
The Westin Denarau Island Resort & Spa
Room styles for families: Twin-bed rooms or interconnecting rooms are available.
Kids' club: AUD\$35 for duration of stay, children

Denarau Island, where our hotel was located, lies just off the coast of Viti Levu – about 20 minutes' drive from Nadi International airport. Developed 20 years ago, Denarau is a tourist precinct with eight hotels, a marina, an 18-hole golf course and racquet club. Port Denarau has a handful of shops and restaurants and there are charters you can take to nearby Mamanuca and Yasawa islands. The legendary and very reasonably priced 'Bula Bus' (a favourite with our two), circles the hotels, shops and golf course all day for drop-offs and pick-ups. All the hotels are child-friendly and none mind if you hop from one hotel to the other, using the restaurants and facilities of each one during your stay.

In Fiji, the majority of the inhabitants are Fijian or Indian. The Fijians are softly spoken, gentle, and appreciative of tourists and the money they bring in. The Indians are also happy to assist tourists, make great food, and are very friendly.

An article on Fiji wouldn't be complete without a mention of the new Intercontinental Hotel, which is a spectacular 15-hectare, five-star property packed with an 18-hole golf course, three restaurants, four pools, two bars and a gym. If you want to splash out, this is where to do it. Sleek furnishings and patios with day beds make it a true haven from the rest of the world and everything is new, fresh and luxe. With its huge kids' club, along with a team of local nannies and

endless activities, the Intercontinental caters to all ages. The day spa is one of the best I've seen anywhere (and I've seen a few!) and certainly the best in Fiji. The property overlooks the only golden sand beach on the main island, providing stunning ocean views. But on the other hand, the hotel is located some way from Denarau, so restaurant-hopping is not possible.

I felt it would be perfect for a short stay, but after seven days, you might be aching to see another resort, location or pool, and so might the kids. We went for a night, just to try it out, and it was incredible. However, the rooms were perhaps not as child-friendly for toddlers as they were at The Fiji Resort & Spa.

Dusk is a special time of day in Fiji. Fit, masculine locals dress in traditional grass skirts and walk around with a trail of children behind them lighting pathways of burners all over the resorts (so people can see when night falls), all to the sound of a deep, rhythmic drum beat and the squeals of excited children.

When my son hears a drum beat somewhere in Sydney and looks up in my eyes and says "Fiji island, yes please, mummy. Time to light the candles," our hearts all go back to the best, and definitely not the last, family holiday we've had in what is a truly beautiful place.

The writer paid for all food, expenses, accommodation and airfares.

also receive Westin Kids' Club goodie bag.
Nannies: AUD\$11 for first three hours; after that it's AUD\$3.50 per hour, but you must book in advance.
Great for parents: Heavenly Spa by Westin, WestinWORKOUT, daily activities schedule.
Great for kids: Playground, kids' pools and kids' club.

Biggest bonus: Complimentary use of swimming pools, restaurants and bars at the adjacent Sheraton Fiji Resorts & Sheraton Denarau Villas.
Extra info: Roll-away beds, prams, baby cots can be requested at reception or in advance.
Website: www.westin.com/fiji

PRICE LIST:
 Prices in Fiji vary considerably depending on the time of year. Deals with free flights for kids and free nights are often advertised. A 7 night stay in the Hilton for four with flights starts from \$4500 in the off season.

BLACK BOOK OF KID-FRIENDLY GOURMET IN DENARAU
 There are very few (if any) restaurants in Fiji which don't accommodate children.

Salt at The Sofitel
 Outdoor, casual, tandoori oven.
Wet Edge at The Sheraton Villas
 Lovely location overlooking the sea, basic Western-style menu with lots of choices and good food.

Flying Fish
 Sydney's sister restaurant. Dress up, but be ready to take your shoes off, as it has a sand floor. There are three separate dining areas to choose from and plenty of cuisine choices other than fish. They will provide high chairs, but this is also an ideal spot for dinner for two.

Saffron, Nadi
 Great Indian food in a low-key, tiled setting. Good cocktail list too.

Radisson
 Has great cocktails and a regular happy hour.
Average cost of dinner for two
 Approx AUD\$50-\$75.
Average nanny cost
 Approx AUD\$3 an hour.