

An aerial photograph of a tropical resort. In the foreground, a speedboat leaves a white wake in the clear, turquoise water. To the left, a row of overwater bungalows with thatched roofs is connected by a wooden walkway. The background shows a lush, green island with a white sandy beach and a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

resort

FRESH FACED FIJI

ROMANTIC RESORTS HAVE A LOT TO LIVE UP TO,
AND LIKULIKU HITS THE RIGHT SPOT. STORY BY MERRY KIRKWOOD

There's a special sense of delight when the 'resort gods' and 'ol Mother Nature herself conspire to surprise, and Likuliku Resort does just that... with a ripe, round paw-paw delivered to the floor of my bathroom. There it sits – a little piece of Fijian magic – as I step into the sun-drenched outdoor shower. Framed by lashed bamboo and pebbled walls, the spacious shower 'room' has swaying palm and coconut trees overhead and, of course, the generous paw-paw nearby with its overhanging branches. Already warmed to the year-round average that hovers around 28-30 degrees, it's easy to linger over showering to mull over plans for a Likuliku Lagoon Resort day.

Not that there's reason to move far. This couples-only resort tricks guests into lazy indecision. 'Should we move from our bure at all?' we ponder.

Cocooned in our romantic hideaway, topped by a thatched roof and awash with richly hued internal timbers decorated with touches of Fijian 'magi-magi' handiwork, we are in danger of that most appealing of romantic resort 'afflictions': death-by-shared-relaxation. Each of the 45 individual bures at Likuliku offers a spacious, private environment perfect for honeymooners, or getaway romantics. Silky smooth-to-the-skin natural timber floorboards beg you to leave off your shoes, and high-pitched roofs and huge timber beams create an instant affection for the age-old talents of the local culture, while the array of five star accoutrements make for a 'touch-of-a-button' modern-world experience. Favourites include the sound system, the chocolate-chip cookie jar (perfect for 'munchie-raids' while you enjoy the delicious tea and coffee available in-room), and carefully placed lighting, desks and easy chairs designed to match your every mood and need. Roomy his-and-her bathroom/basin areas (complete with local Pure Fiji amenity products, and an indoor and outdoor shower) are flooded with natural light that enhances the close-to-nature experience.

The elevated king-sized bed has pride of place; draped in crisp white linen it is freshly made each morning with a near florist-shop-worth of colourful hibiscus, frangipani and simple impatiens blooms decorating its cover. 'Bula and welcome!' it spells on arrival, a simple greeting that embraces us as warmly as the smile on the face of each staff member giving permission for us to leave our cares behind.

Beachside, there are broad views of the pretty protected lagoon only a few steps away through the floor-to-ceiling glass doors, drawing us constantly to the great outdoors. Be prepared: once you step out from the cool of the bure (thanks to the ceiling fans and air conditioning) your pace may slow. Thankfully, each beachfront bure has a daybed retreat (a thatched-roofed space filled with a comfy double mattress and designer cushions) with roll-down screens on the two open sides, perfect for a morning read or afternoon nap. What's more, our deluxe beachfront bure also has a private plunge pool literally two steps from the doors, where we sit, cool off, and chat at all hours of the day and night while drinking in the sparkling location.

Likuliku heralds a fresh-faced approach to luxury romantic resorts in Fiji, the beautiful resort-laden holiday destination only a four-and-a half hour flight from Sydney. Top of the range accommodation at Likuliku, and a first for Fiji itself, are the ten over-water bures strung along a timber board-walk linked to a quiet corner of the lagoon, each of them a stand-out hideaway that give their much-feted over-water cousins in Tahiti and the Maldives a run for their money.

Spacious, well designed and beautifully fitted (with lagoon-revealing glass insets in the floor below the coffee table, and on a shelf in the bathroom), they encourage indoor/outdoor living with two sun lounges and a sleek metal stepladder plunging into the warm waters below. The *piece de resistance* is the freestanding bath, with views across the whole lagoon.



Overwater Bungalows



Outdoor Terrace Restaurant



Overwater Bungalow Bathroom

A simple greeting that embraces us as warmly as the smile on the face of each staff member





Not a coral fish or turtle can scamper past without guests taking pleasure in their watery journey.

When you tire of the thrills of nature, Likuliku's human talent steps up to the plate in two stand-out forms: the team in charge of surprisingly sophisticated cuisine led by Australian chef Shane Watson, and the delightful staff who mix their own brand of Fijian generosity and good humour with a savvy sense of well-trained professionalism. General Group Manager of the Fijian-owned resort, Steve Anstey (who has spent much of his time in Australia at resorts such as Sea Temple Palm Cove) agrees, "never before have I worked at a resort where such a great percentage of guest comments relates to delight with the staff". Although still in its first year of operation, Likuliku already has guests who are planning repeat visits.

Meal times are a great chance to chat with the staff, and some sing and play guitar each night. As all meals are included, it is tempting to over-indulge in the seafood and modern Asian-inspired gourmet selections. Centrally located 'Fijiana' serves all meals, and there are private platforms on the beachfront, and an outdoor terrace area for romantic privacy. Don't miss sunset drinks at Masima Bar.

Perhaps the greatest indulgence of a 'couples-only' resort is the chance to fill every available moment without the time-demands of family routine. Locally known as '*na siga e dromu I Malolo*' or 'where the sun comes to rest', Likuliku inspires plenty of rest-by-the-pool: make sure to bring a good book. A short stroll from sun lounge or bure, the turquoise lagoon is a compelling playground for snorkelling, and is full of colourful reef fish and coral. The varied menu of activities includes diving (with Sunsurface Fiji); fishing (beyond the recently-created area of Marine Reserve that extends around the island); sunset cruising; island hopping (to nearby Castaway and Mana Islands); as well as kayaking and windsurfing. Or take a walk to Jonas Lookout, or visit the local

village to observe local artisans at work. An inspired distraction – take a gourmet picnic for two to a private spot in the morning (the staff will help you get there), and follow up in the afternoon with a couple's treatment at the Tatadra spa.

For time-poor romantics, a helicopter transfer is the best way to arrive – and depart. Only a ten-minute flight from Nadi airport, the trip gives you a chance to get a feel for the location on Fijian-owned Malolo Island in the Mamanuca Archipelago west of Nadi. From the air you can spot various island sites (including Yadra Vulu, the sacred headland cave) and walking tracks that have made this location special to the local Fijians, many of whom now staff the resort. Likuliku makes it easy to depart your Australia city early one morning, and enjoy a cocktail by the spectacular horizon pool that same afternoon. Fast catamaran, seaplane and speedboat transfers are also a possibility.

An aside from this hopeless romantic: couples who marry young should grab the chance to have a honeymoon 'rerun' – to get it just 'so'. From where I sit, (despite a moment or two of inclement weather on my recent stay) Fiji's Likuliku is sure to hit the spot. ■

LUXE LIST

The 'Keys to the Ocean' package can be taken as either a three- or five-night option, and includes a welcome bottle of Veuve, and return helicopter transfers. Prices start from approx AUD\$1800* pp for three nights or approx AUD\$2700* pp for five nights – including all meals. (*Approx rates, check daily FOREX.) Bookings, www.likulikulagoon.com, +679 672 0978, or enquiries@ahuraresorts.com.

TOP TEN

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