

# DISCOVER A DIFFERENT SIDE TO FIJI

There's so much more to Fiji than we know and it's just waiting to be discovered. At only a short hop from Australia it makes the perfect getaway. **WORDS BY CHRISTINE SALINS**

That our *drua*, the Fijian double-hulled canoe taking us for a leisurely sail around Suva harbour, was nowhere near as big or as fast as the one described by American Commander John Wilkes in 1845, merely highlighted what an amazing sight the original canoes must have been.

The original *waqa tabu* (sacred canoes) were built to carry over 300 people with provisions to last two months or more as they traversed the Pacific. Most often used for war, the sight of one appearing on the horizon was said to strike dread and fear into even the bravest heart.

The Tabu Tabu Soro ('never give up') is an accurate replica of the double-hulled canoes of old (in everything but size and a few unobtrusive concessions to modern technology). It offers a unique sailing experience on the clear, blue waters Fiji is famous for.

With the Suva skyline in the distance, it set sail from the Tradewinds marina as two agile Fijians cleverly changed direction by moving the sail from one end to the other.

This fascinating insight into Fiji's maritime heritage provides a different experience for the visitor who doesn't want to sit around all day on a beach, sipping a cocktail, as tempting as that might be. For a taste of a different culture, Fiji has much to offer. Just three to four hours flying time from Australia, it consists of more than 300 sun-drenched tropical islands in the Pacific.

Most visitors fly into Nadi on the dry northwestern



Hugging palm trees

side of Viti Levu. The capital city, Suva, is on the wetter, lush southern coast. The two main roads between them, Queens Road and Kings Road, form a complete circle of the island. Since a considerable part of the Kings Road is unsealed, most visitors take the Queens Road that follows the Coral Coast, a scenic route with some of the island's loveliest beaches.

A short drive from Nadi is Sigatoka. It would be easy to drive straight past the incredible sand dunes that are only partially visible from the road, concealing their enormous size and imposing beauty. We stopped to ask directions from one of the locals and were immediately given a guided tour to the top of the dunes. Accompanying our guide was a lad of six or seven who slid down one of the dunes, the height of a three-storey building, as though it was a slippery slide.

Skeletons and pottery fragments are sometimes found here remnants of a people who inhabited the

*It had a magnificent appearance with its immense sail of white mats; the pennants streaming from its yard denoted it, at once, as belonging to some great chief ... its velocity was almost inconceivable.*