

FIJI: YASAWA ISLANDS TRAVEL GUIDE

CASTAWAY in paradise

Blockbuster movie *Cast Away*, starring Tom Hanks as a FedEx employee who is stranded on a deserted island after a plane crash, was shot in *Fiji*. It is a fact that the guide aboard cruise ship *Yasawa Flyer* does not miss to point out, as we board the vessel at the harbor of *Nadi, Fiji*. The *Flyer* is the shuttle ferry that covers the *Yasawa Islands* northwest of *Fiji's* main island.

YASAWA ISLANDS, FIJI. Some say that only the *Cook Islands* might compete with *Fiji* in terms of access to paradise settings. If you long for internet-free, lazy days in the sun, with corral reefs, palms and stunning views all around, this is the place for you. If you are in *Sydney*, you should consider setting aside a week or two in *Fiji*, a few hours east from *Australia*. Flights are plenty, as *Fiji* keeps its own airline.

Here are the basics that you need to consider when planning your *Fiji* adventure.

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REPORTER**

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What to expect in the Yasawas

The Yasawas is an archipelago of about 20 or so islands (see map on next page), many of which have resorts and lodging possibilities. It's possibly *Fiji's* most touristy destination, but the number of visitors are kept down, as you are not allowed to set foot on an island if you haven't pre-arranged lodging (more about that below). The *Traveling Reporter* visited in January, when there are usually lots of tourists around, but we never felt there were too many people.

Boats depart from *Fiji's* chief travel hub *Nadi* on the

main island. The journey aboard our boat of choice, the *Yasawa Flyer*, through the archipelago was absolutely fantastic, with postcard-views everywhere.

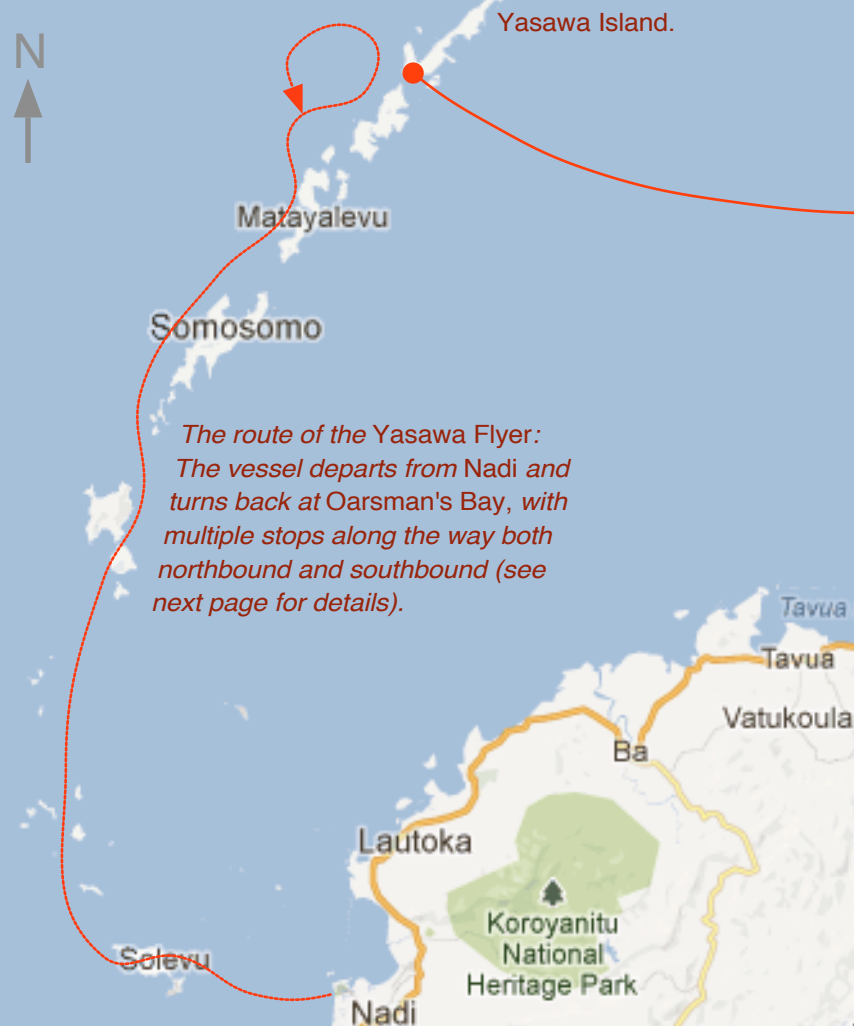
At the resorts, you have a range of activities to indulge in, from partying, snorkling, going fishing, diving and such. Or you can just stay in the hammock with a good book.

Meals are prepared by the resort's staff and normally included in the price. There are no real restaurants on the islands, beside those at the



Hanks.

The sailboat Moonduster above stranded in bad weather 2009 at Oarsman's Bay, northern Fiji. Photo: TravelingReporter.com



resorts, and almost no stores either, so you are pretty much left with what the chefs there can come up with. The food is generally OK, if not superb, but it is a good idea to keep a small stash with basics, like candy, water and fruit, in your pack. And don't forget your medicines, or whatever else you might need, like batteries for your flashlight or radio. Make sure to buy supplies in *Nadi*.

The quality of the resorts differs wildly, ranging from luxury suites with swimming pools to dorms with trash lying around. At the time of our visit, in 2010, the *Sunset Resort* turned out to be one such disappointment. The place sure looks idyllic from a distance, but on shore we found the main building where dinners were served only half finished, and timber, planks and trash were kept in piles on the beach. Conditions might very well have changed there since then. But it's generally a good idea to ask around among people you meet on the ferry before you decide where to go.

Internet connections are scarce on the islands and you shouldn't count on any reliable mobile coverage. Charging of electronics can usually be arranged. If you're not heavily into snorkeling or related sports activities, bring a good book or two and load your phone with your best music, as there isn't much else to do here than relax, have a beer or go for a walk. ➡

The Yasawa Flyer.
Photo: TravelingReporter.com



How to get around

The Yasawa Flyer departs in the morning from a jetty in *Nadi* and arrives at *Oarsman's Bay* resort in the northern part of the archipelago by noon. There it turns south again and arrives in *Nadi* in the evening (see map on previous page). En route the boat stops at various islands, where passengers depart and are rushed ashore in a dinghy. The dinghy then picks up people on the island who want to leave and brings them onboard the ferry.

Using this schedule, it is possible to hop back and forth between islands by catching a northbound ride in the morning or a southbound in the afternoon.

However, you will need to arrange lodging before you depart from the ferry. This is done at a booking desk on the boat, where crew members take reservations and call ahead by radio to check if there are rooms available at the destination you aim for. Every now and then you might find that the place you aimed for is fully booked, and you will then have to quickly change your plans and find another destination.

The procedure can be a little stressful at times if your visit coincides with a visitor's peak. A good advice is to head to the booking desk as soon as you set foot on the boat. But having said that, it's still perfectly possible to go about exploring this great archipelago without much planning and advance booking, as there are lots of islands and resorts to choose from.

How to get there

Fiji's international airline *Air Pacific* covers just about every major airport in the region, as well as multiple destinations in *Asia*, the *United States* and one in *Canada*. But as *Fiji* is often included in a journey covering *Australia* and *New Zealand*, many visitors only use the airline to make the jump to *Nadi* from places like *Sydney*.

At the time of writing (November 2012), a round trip ticket with *Air Pacific* from *Sydney* to *Nadi* in mid-September 2013 would set you back about 330 Australian dollars (≈ \$345, €270, £217).



PARADISE View from the summit of a low mountain above Oarsman's Bay.



LUXURY AND BUDGET A fancy pool area at one resort, a backpacker's budget dorm with mosquito nets at another. Whatever you're after, the very efficient booking desk on the ferry will probably find it for you Photo: *TravelingReporter.com*