

Mamanuca Group



Grab your favourite boardies or bikini – this is it. Fiji’s crown jewels. The much-trumpeted, widely promoted, photographed and romanticised Mamanuca isles. A series of picture-perfect coral atolls and small volcanic islands, the Mamanucas are valued more for their natural beauty than any contribution they make to the national culture.

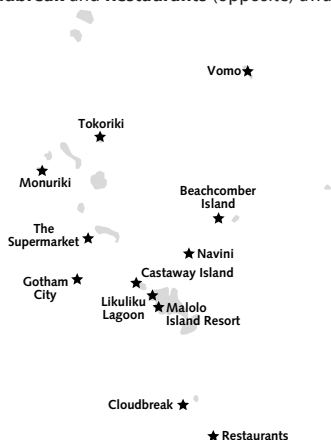
Like a string of pearls, the 20 or so islands arc west through the large lagoon formed by the Malolo Barrier Reef and Viti Levu. Pacific currents sweep nutrients through the passages around tiny Namotu and with them come turtles, reef sharks and vast schools of multicoloured tropical fish. With more dive operators, world-class surf, five-star retreats and family-oriented resorts than any other group, the Mamanucas are anything but a well-kept secret.

Each morning a small army of day trippers, fortified with beach towels and factor 15, fan out from the mainland to conquer the white-sand beaches. They meet with no resistance. Most of the habitable islands (and many others that rely on desalination plants or freshwater deliveries) support resorts; this small string of islands forms the backbone of the Fijian tourist industry.

Perhaps because they box so far above their weight when it comes to hauling in the cash, life here bears little resemblance to the harsh realities experienced by most Fijians. Only two resort islands, Mana and Malolo, support Fijian villages but even here tourists outnumber locals. Not that they mind – almost all resorts lease their land from local communities and so, while heavy rain clouds hang over the mainland (both physically and metaphorically), the sun always shines on the magical Mamanucas.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Wax up your board – the mighty surf breaks of **Cloudbreak** and **Restaurants** (opposite) await
- Dive among big fish and harmless sharks at amazing sites such as **Gotham City** and **The Supermarket** (p68)
- Reenact your favourite scene from Tom Hanks’ *Cast Away* on **Monuriki** (p147), the island where the film was shot
- Kick up your heels, and the sand on the dance floor, at **Beachcomber Island** (p144)
- Enjoy an intimate break with your partner at stunning **Likuliku Lagoon** (p149), peaceful **Navini** (p145), romantic **Tokoriki** (p147) or beautiful **Vomo** (p144)
- Treat the kids to a holiday they’ll never forget at **Malolo Island Resort** (p148) or **Castaway Island** (p147)



Activities

The Mamanucas are all about water sports and extreme relaxation. Whether you are staying for a week or visiting for a day, nonmotorised water sports (like snorkelling, windsurfing, kayaking and sailing in catamarans) are nearly always provided free of charge. However, the moment an engine is fired you can expect to be billed. Waterskiing, parasailing and wakeboarding cost about \$80 for 15 minutes. Village trips or snorkelling on the outer reef cost between \$20 and \$40 per person, and reef-fishing trips average around \$150 per hour for four people. Island-hopping tours cost anywhere between \$78 and \$165 per person, depending on how many islands are visited and whether lunch is included. But, whatever you do, don't forget your book – hammocks just aren't the same without one.

DIVING

Mamanuca dive sites teem with fantastically gaudy fish circling psychedelic corals. The visibility here astounds first-time divers and you can see for 30m to 40m through the water much of the year. Turn to p67 for general information on diving and p68 for a brief description of some of the local spots. The companies in the following list are the big fish in the diving pond, with multiple dive shops on multiple islands.

Aqua-Trek (Vitu Water Sports; ☎ 670 2413; www.vituwatersports.com) Based at Mana and Matamanoa Island Resorts. A two-tank dive costs \$215 and a PADI Open Water Course \$780.

Reef Safari (☎ 675 0566; www.reefsafari.com.fj) Has dive shops at South Sea, Bounty and Amunua Island Resorts. A two-tank dive costs \$200 and a PADI Open Water Course \$575.

Subsurface Fiji (☎ 666 6738; www.subsurfacefiji.com) Runs the dive shops at Malolo and Beachcomber, Musket Cove and Treasure Islands. It also offers diving with free pickups for guests at Namotu, Navini and Tavarua Island Resorts, Wadigi Island Lodge, Resort Walu Beach, Funky Fish Beach Resort and Likuliku Lagoon. A two-tank dive costs \$230 (except for those staying at Beachcomber Island Resort, who pay \$195), and a PADI Open Water Course is \$740.

SURFING

The reefs off the southern Mamanuca islands have some of the world's most formidable breaks, but you'll need big bucks (and a lion's share of courage) to gain access. Locals hold that the Fisheries Act (which provides for the maintenance of traditional fishing grounds)

extends to the surf breaks and they are not above using threats and violence to protect their exclusivity. Currently, two American-owned resorts – Namotu (p150) and Tavarua Island Resorts (p151) – lease these rights and it is with them that you must stay in order to test your mettle against legendary **Cloudbreak** and **Restaurants** (Tavarua) or **Namotu Left** and **Swimming Pools** (Namotu). Failing this, your only opportunity is to surf the Saturday timeslot during the resort changeover period. Put your name down well in advance and pray on your little surfbooties that you will be allocated one of the 17 Saturday spots.

The public-access breaks of **Wilkes Passage**, **Mini Clouds** and **Desperations** should not be underestimated. They are easily reached by boat from Funky Fish Beach Resort (p148) and any resort on Malololailai (p150) for around \$40 per person (Cloudbreak \$70 per lucky person with a Saturday spot). In brief, the breaks are as follows:

Cloudbreak World famous and for experienced riders only. Hollow left breaking on a reef. Best with southwest offshore winds when tubes of up to 250m form.

Restaurants A powerful, superfast, left-hander over shallow coral. Up to 200m long for advanced surfers.

Namotu Left A hollow, carving left-hander up to 150m long.

Swimming Pools A fun, easy right. Good for longboarders.

Wilkes Passage Short, fast, down the line, right. Swell magnet and can get as mean as Cloudbreak on some days. Crowded.

Mini Clouds High-tide break. Best on a south to southwest swell.

Desperations Ideal in small swell conditions. Right and left.

Tours & Cruises

Many, but not all, of the island resorts accept day trippers and every morning a whole armada of launches and yachts leave Port Denarau with boat-loads of people keen to spread their beach towels on some of that glorious white sand.

Captain Cook Cruises (Map p88; ☎ 670 1823; www.captaincook.com.au) Offers a day cruise from Denarau island to Tivua, a tiny coral island, on board the sailing ship *Ra Marama* (a 33m former governor's brigantine) for \$139 for adults and \$69.50 for children. The sunset romance dinner cruise (\$99 per adult and \$49.50 per child for three hours) includes a three-course meal. Captain Cook Cruises also has popular three-day, two-night cruise/camping trips to the Mamanucas and southern Yasawas.