



BED OF ROSES: Vomo Island's deluxe rooms offer a whole new level of plush comfort... one of the many reasons it's become the ideal couples' retreat.



Do not disturb

A seductive drawcard for honeymooners, Fiji's Vomo Island Resort can make even singletons fall under its romantic spell.

STORY Rachael Oakes-Ash

LET'S ADMIT IT, many girls start fantasising about their wedding day long before they meet a potential life partner. Women's romantic ideals are big business, as Vera Wang or Tiffany's can attest. In an admirable display of forward planning, many a single girl can tell you exactly what shade of ivory she'll wear on the big day, the type of bouquet she'll carry down the aisle and even the special tune to which she and Mr X will step out for the bridal waltz. Such a girl may have firm opinions on honeymoon destinations, the ideal resortwear for lounging by the pool and even the best cocktail to suit her newlywed persona.

For me, it's Fiji, sarongs and lychee martinis. The only problem is, for the past 13 months and 12 days I have been single. Not that I'm counting. (If I were, I'd know I have 187 days until I turn 38 and a one-in-three chance of remaining single for the rest of my life.) As for the honeymoon, you can't have one without a man – or can you?

After all, why should the smug marrieds have all the fun, I thought as I touched down at Fiji's Nadi Airport, ready for a honeymoon with myself on romantic Vomo Island. OK, so I had to pay the same price as a couple for the privilege, but who said crystal-clear waters, white sandy beaches and balmy sunsets were strictly reserved for couples?

It's often said that tourists go to Fiji for the tropical setting and return for the warmth of the islanders. My first taste of this warmth comes in the strong arms of Vomo staffers Wise and Siru, as they lift me bodily from the transfer boat. As my feet hit the sand, I allow myself to fall into their manly chests, until I notice their wedding rings. I realise I'm destined to be the only unattached person on the entire island, but Vomo itself is such a knockout, nothing can dent my spirits. ▶



LOVE IS IN THE AIR: the ambience on Vomo Island is all palm-tree silhouettes and French champagne.

PHOTO Getty Images

Sofitel's Vomo Island Resort is an hour's boat ride or 15 minutes by chopper or seaplane from Nadi Airport. With no more than 29 villas for two, this private island is purpose-built for romance. Each *buvé*, or villa, is set facing the ocean, providing the perfect setting for mellow afternoon cocktails on your own deck.

The high chiefs of Western Fiji traditionally chose Vomo for their annual retreats. It's easy to see why the island would appeal to royalty. Each of its 91 hectares offers something special, from the coral reefs that lap at the shore to the jaw-dropping views from the top of Mt Vomo. At 135 metres, it's more hill than mountain, but the scenery's no less stunning for that.

Yes, this is an island for lovers, but that includes lovers of relaxation, which suits me just fine. And where there are lovers, there will be music. The food of love plays a key role on Vomo Island; it seems that everyone who works here has a talent for singing, playing the ukulele or strumming a guitar. When the

Vomo band harmonises local songs, you can practically see the frozen hearts of city slickers defrosting. The Vomo soundtrack gets under your skin and in your soul, and has you sniffing when you leave, especially as they insist on singing to you as you step into the departure boat.

Of course, this woman cannot live on music alone, and it seems newlyweds can't either. Dinner is served by firelight around the central bure's resort pool. The ambience is all palm-tree silhouettes and French champagne. Like Noah's menagerie, the guests come in two by two... and then there's me. Thankful to the chef, James Garden, has taken it upon himself to personally talk me through each course. I long to think it's because of my ravishing beauty, but I suspect he's simply not had time out for a while. Meals are included as part of the resort price, which is just as well, as a bride who has been starving herself for six months to fit into her frock can develop a hell of an appetite come honeymoon time.



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FACT FILE

LOCATION

Right in the heart of the South Pacific, Vomo Island lies 25km north-west of the capital city and international airport of Nadi, on Fiji's main island of Viti Levu.

WHAT TO DO

Feeling active? Try snorkelling, diving, kayaking, sailing or windsurfing, just for starters. Need to relax? Let the staff pamper you in the Senikai day spa. You can have a nearby tropical island all to yourself for a private picnic. Or get a taste of local life by taking part in a kava ceremony or attending a traditional Fijian church service.

WEDDED BLISS

Vomo Island Resort can put together an unforgettable wedding package, including a minister or celebrant, traditional costumes and flowers, a Fijian warrior escort, island choir and celebration dinner. They'll even organise a transfer to Nadi to complete the licence requirements (don't forget to bring birth certificates). Already married? It's a great place to renew your vows!

WHEN TO GO

Fiji basks in tropical temperatures and cool trade winds year-round; the driest season is from May to October.

MORE INFO

Check out www.vomofiji.com and www.bulaifiji.com



Breakfast is a hearty affair – pancakes, eggs benedict, bircher muesli and fresh omelettes – no doubt to replenish the energy expelled in the private bures the night before. Lunch is served by the pool, on your personal deck or beachside on one of the platforms overlooking the ocean. The local specialty of kokoda, featuring fresh fish marinated in coconut cream with peppers and lime, is a favourite for its light freshness.

But it's the dinner menu that really excels, presenting the likes of sea scallops, fresh potato gnocchi, prawns, lamb racks and reef fish followed by vanilla poached pears. On selected nights guests can dine at The Rocks restaurant, an open-air terrace of exposed wood perched atop a sandy bar and overlooking the uninhabited island of Vomo Lailai. The band provides a soundtrack for lovers who choose an intimate table right on the sand.

Moi? I opted for the terrace setting, where I proceeded to devour barbecued crayfish and apple crumble with butterscotch sauce. If no-one's going to admire my figure, I may as well feed it. I need not have worried about dining alone, as it seemed the general manager was also in need of some conversation and chose to fill me in on his travels over a rather fancy drop of Wither Hills Sauvignon Blanc.

After the second day, I forgot to notice the couples. The women had sussed me out, determined that I wasn't a femme fatale with designs on their partners, and sought me out for some girlic conversation. As a result, I was never short of kayaking partners for the snorkelling trip to Vomo Lailai. Wise and Situ were more than happy to take me sailing or accompany me on a trek to the top of the hill for sunrise photo opportunities.

Pretty soon, I was actually begging for time alone. I staked my claim to a comfy hammock, where bottles of bubbly mysteriously appeared. Hours were spent hanging around under the palm trees, with a light breeze running over my sun-kissed skin. All this relaxation in a romantic setting had finally got to me. Gosh, I was beginning to fall in love with myself again. ■