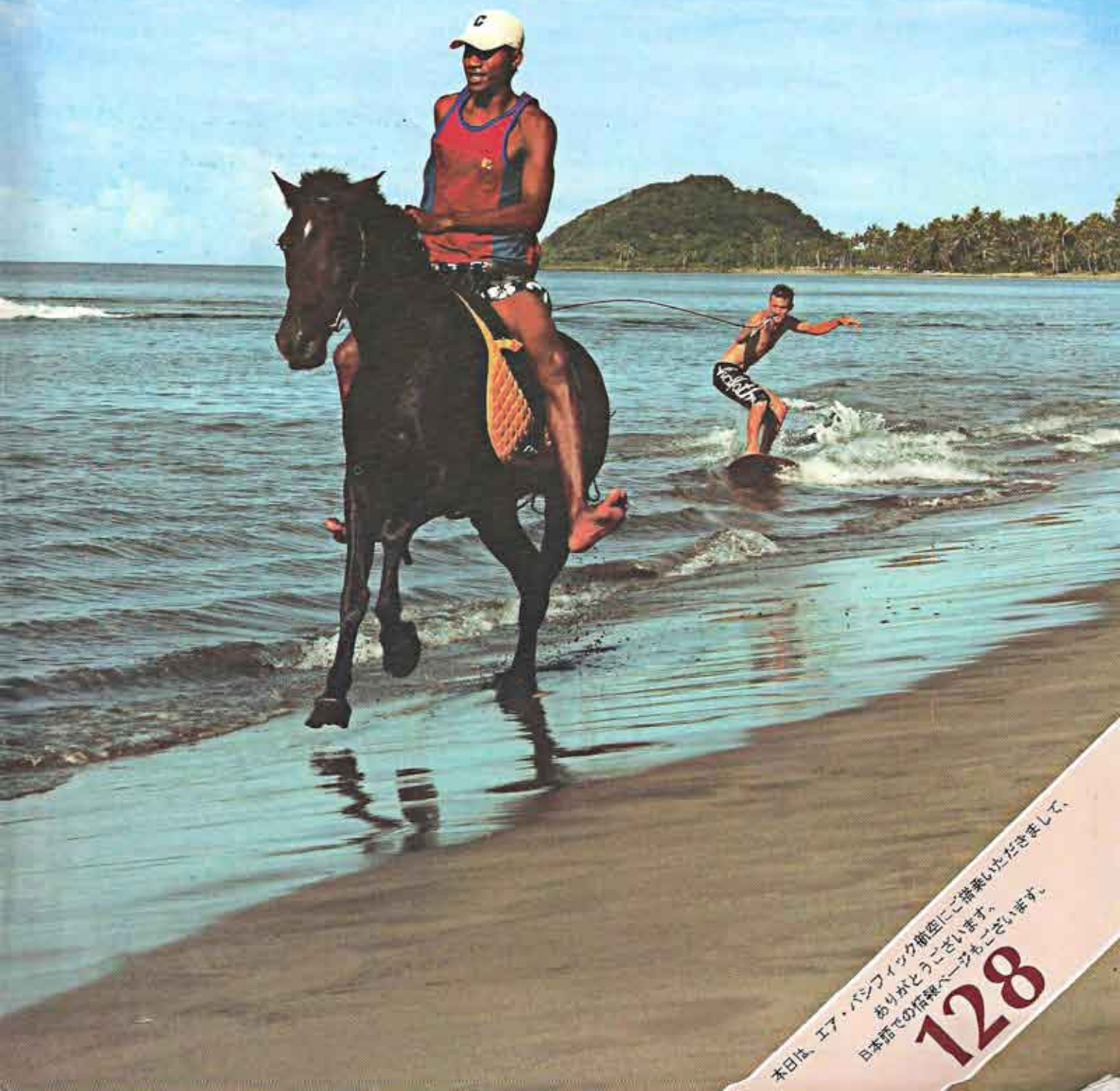




AIR PACIFIC

Islands

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ありがとうございます。
日本語での情報ページもご用意です。

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Utopia Found at NAVUTU STARS

BY RAJAN SAMI

A baby Buddha sits serenely among lush green leaves. His palms are pressed together in prayer. His gorgeous dome of a head slightly bowed, as if to beckon guests to Yaqeta Island. It's this Eastern symbol of peace that reaffirms I'm in the right place.

My friend Tanya and I have journeyed some four hours onboard the Yasawa Flyer from Port Denarau in Nadi. Along the way we passed through the Mamanuca group of islands with names like South Sea, Beachcomber and Bounty that evoke seafaring adventurers of yesteryear.

The Yasawas are further still a trove of islands to the north west of Fiji. The waters here are crystal clear. They remind us of jewel tones: turquoise, azure, aquamarine. The islands are little gems. Some of them big rocks. Most are blessed with long stretches of gold powdery beaches.



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Our destination is Navutu Stars Resort, an Italian-run resort in the northern Yasawas. I've been wanting to come here ever since reading a glowing endorsement in American Vogue some years back. The writer called it "rustic chic", which made me curious to see how Italy has fused with Fiji.

The backstory of Navutu Stars is that of a young Italian couple, who relocated to Fiji from the United Kingdom via Australia. And by chance. After 10 years in fast-paced London, Manfredi De Lucia (Fredi) and Maddalena Morandi (Maddy) are in search of a gentler lifestyle. So, the couple originally goes to Sydney to explore their options.

Two weeks of non-stop rain in Sydney prompts them to book a cheap flight to Fiji. On the boat to the Yasawas, the couple meets the chief from Yaqeta Island, who invites them to stay in his village and the rest as they say is history. Maddalena's younger sister, Giovanna, joins the partnership later and now manages the resort.

At Navutu Stars, Fredi and Maddy, as they are known, have combined their Italian heritage with the local setting. This is most evident in the bures or villas, where the Mediterranean meets Fiji. White adobe walls meet with high thatched ceilings, while Balinese accents add to the mix. We stay in a grand bure, which comes with a giant sunken bath in the living room floor and wide outer decking.

The Italians know a thing or two about "the good life". After all, they coined the phrase "La Dolce Vita". Navutu Stars celebrates the simple luxuries that life has to offer. An early evening soak in your private bath, replete with candles and flower petals. The best pesto made with fresh basil from the resort's organic garden. A gentler, quieter pace that owes itself as much to the resort's secluded setting as it does to its small size - nine bures in all.





Nature flourishes at Navutu Stars. The air is fresh and clean. So is the surrounding sea. Often the only sounds you hear are of birds, if nothing at all. It's a great place to have quiet contemplative moments; to check in with oneself as is often said in yoga practise; to silence the chatter in one's mind that's borne of city dwelling and its endless distractions.

I get up early to catch the sunrise from the resort's lookout point. Later, Tanya and I do yoga here. As we're flat on our backs in corpse pose on borrowed yoga mats from the resort, we look up and see the sky - clear, beautiful and blue. It's a refreshing change from staring up at the ceiling when doing yoga at home. The natural setting makes for a transcendental yoga experience. Navutu Stars has previously run week-long yoga retreats. It is working towards making them a regular feature.

During the day, we swim, snorkel and troll the tidal beach for seashells: getting the best barefoot pedicures as we do, rubbing the soles of our feet with volcanic pumice stones found along the beach and rinsing them off in the sea.

The beach is a great place to work up an





appetite. And Navutu Stars does gorgeous Italian food with generous serves to boot.

Fredi and Maddy are staunch traditionalists when it comes to food at least, preferring not to mess with Italian classics. So there's no fusion or nouvelle cuisine to be found here. Instead, they let the taste of fresh ingredients shine through.

That same focus on quality ingredients extends to the spa, where luxury organic products from holistic brands are used in treatments. A gorgeous metal Ganesha, the Hindu deity with an elephant head, sits majestically outside, in the spa garden.

In Hindu mythology, Ganesha is known as the "remover of obstacles". We ask that he clear any obstacles in the way of revealing our "true beauty" as we head inside for a makeover.



It often takes trips like this, away from the information overload that has become our lives, to reconnect to the essence of being. A friend recently remarked that utopia didn't exist. I'd like to think he is wrong. My trip to Navutu Stars made me

realise that one's own utopia can exist within. Back home in the city, all I had to do was look at the blue sky or a plant to transport me to that place of quiet, of perfection, of bliss.

Back on Navutu, on our first night, we discover the provenance of the resort's name. The night sky has become a blanket of stars, each twinkling and bright. It's as if they see the wide smiles and wonderment on our faces and are grinning right back.



FACT FILE

WHERE

Navutu Stars Resort is located on Yaqeta Island in the Yasawas, north west of Viti Levu, the main island in the Fiji group.

HOW TO GET THERE

Either by catamaran from Port Denarau in Nadi, which takes four hours one way. The alternative is to travel by seaplane or helicopter from Nadi, which takes approximately 30 minutes.

WHERE TO STAY

Navutu Stars is a small boutique resort with nine bure. There are seven beachfront bure and the remaining two are grand bure, which feature sunken oversized bathtubs set within the living room floor, ensuites and wide outside decking. Meals can be ordered a la carte or a meal plan can be purchased. The resort caters specifically to the romance, wedding and honeymoon market and is an adults only resort. Rates per night are \$660 for the beachfront bure to \$800 for the grand bure, plus taxes. Private charters of the resort also available.

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