



## Phenomenal Fiji: Yasawa

The twin-prop plane dips toward the grass runway, deep in the South Pacific. Figures emerge from a thatched waiting area, already waving and smiling with the warm welcome that makes Fiji world famous.

I flew to the Yasawa Islands — 75 miles north of the capital, Nadi — in search of *Blue Lagoon* vistas. Brooke Shields and Christopher Atkins filmed much of their 1980 classic among these turquoise coves fringed in coconut palms and sugar-white sand. Like many Gen Xers, I long to run through that surf with a hibiscus tucked behind my ear.

But for decades, the government restricted access to this idyll. Cruisers couldn't land until the '50s and tourism on *terra firma* only opened up in 1987. Even now, the islands have no shops, banks or medical services. Sun and sea — pure and simple — anchor vacations here, along with the laid-back locals, who seem to never forget a name, no matter how many years have passed.

One drapes a *salusalu* around my neck: a garland of frangipani, leaves and rosettes. Then I'm whisked off to Yasawa Island Resort,

a perennial favorite on lists of the world's best beaches and finest hotels.

Eighteen *bures* (bungalows) cluster around an open-air lounge and infinity pool. Each has ocean views and a private beach hut. Freed from the distractions of TV and in-room wifi, I breathe deep, lingering over the sunset.

Yasawa keeps the non-digital distractions flowing. Snorkeling. Stand up paddleboarding. Fiji's first oceanfront spa. Visits to the school in Bukama village, where the resort donates medical and educational supplies (e-mail [erin@yasawa.com](mailto:erin@yasawa.com)). And, of course, the boat trip to the Sawa i lau Caves and their flooded, limestone grotto, pierced by shafts of light, where the tawny teens cavorted on-screen. Legends say it's the resting place of the god Ulutini with his nine snake heads and one human face of angelic beauty.

More often locals call this the "heart of Fiji." As I float amid the unspoiled, staggering beauty — where ancient myths and modern fantasies mix — I start to understand what a vast and glorious thing that is.

— Amanda Castleman

[www.yasawa.com](http://www.yasawa.com)

PHOTO COURTESY OF: YASAWA ISLAND RESORT & SPA, FIJI



PHOTO BY: KEVIN MCCULLOUGH

## SAY OUI TO BARDOT

Foodies will be enchanted with Chef Michael Mina's new BARDOT Brasserie located on the second floor of ARIA in Las Vegas. Featuring extraordinary French cuisine, this brasserie will have you thinking you're dining in a seductive award-winning restaurant near the Champs-Élysées. To create BARDOT's menu, Chef Mina and Executive Chef Joshua Smith imparted their travel experiences in Paris to develop an array of imaginative dishes with a French twist.

Begin the evening with Bardot's Onion Soup Gratinée, a tour de force that includes options of adding Périgord truffle, braised oxtail and a soft-poached egg. Escargots Bardot are served with warm hazelnuts, chartreuse butter and enveloped in delectable puff pastry. The Chickpea Frites served with roasted eggplant dip, marinated peppers and basil pistou are just sublime.

Entrees include Steak Frites with a choice of an assortment of prime beef. Be sure to complement your dish with dreamy Béarnaise sauce, a divine bordelaise or foie gras butter. The sinfully decadent beef fat fries complete the dish; it's French food so why not indulge? Other entrees include Sautéed Skate Wing, Carlsbad Mussels Marinieres and Parisian Gnocchi.

Take note of the seafood tower, which includes lobster, king crab, oysters, clams and shrimp. Tantalizing plates for two include a succulent Côte de Boeuf, scrumptious Lobster Thermidor, Loup de Mer and a fantastic Lamb Crown Roast.

Libations include half bottles of Alsace, Burgundy, Bordeaux and the Rhone and Loire Valleys in France. You will be tantalized by the cocktail list, which includes drinks such as Lost Generation, Voltaire, the Ritz and Charlemagne. Every travelgirl should enjoy a bit of Paris now and then! Reservations are a must for dinner served nightly and weekend brunch.

—Renee Werbin

[www.aria.com](http://www.aria.com)

“Once the travel bug bites there is no known antidote, and I know that I shall be happily infected until the end of my life.” —Michael Palin

## Highlights of Hamburg



PHOTO BY: ROBERTO KAI HEGELER

Considered by many Germans to be the most beautiful city in Germany, Hamburg is called the "Venice of the North" for its many waterways. It has over 2,300 bridges, more than any other city in the world.



PHOTOS BY: CHRISTIAN SPAHRBIER

Just a 1.5-hour train ride from Berlin, it's worth a visit to see this charming city that has rebuilt itself beautifully after suffering mass destruction in WWII.

### Here are just a few highlights:

- Take a free guided bicycle tour with HafenCity Hamburg GmbH. Europe's largest inner-city

development, HafenCity is located on the Elbe River and is being transformed into a live, work, play community. Check out the progress on the long-delayed \$1 billion concert hall for the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, now scheduled to open in 2017.

- Sail or cruise on Alster Lake. This scenic lake is right in downtown Hamburg, with beautiful views of the city from the water.

- Take a Beatles tour. Hamburg is where the Beatles honed their musical skills by playing in clubs here from 1960 to 1962. See where they first appeared as The Beatles as you stroll around the Reeperbahn, a center of Hamburg's infamous red light district, where I was shocked to see elderly women shakin' their stuff from 2nd-story windows.

- Stroll down its streets and through its shopping arcades. Named a 2011 European Green Capital, Hamburg has more than 100 parks, beautiful tree-lined streets and plans to link 27 square miles of green space around the city. Don't miss the Alsterarkaden, arched shopping arcades built in the 1840s along the Alsterfleet canal.

See related article on Berlin on page 46.

—Jan Schroder

[www.hamburg-travel.com](http://www.hamburg-travel.com)

