

Travel

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The itinerary

Compiled by Sandy Guerra-Cline

Explore the charms of historic Lynchburg

Historic Hotels of America is offering the perks-filled Explore Lynchburg Package. The deal starts at \$179 a night, plus taxes, and includes a deluxe or premium room at the Craddock Terry Hotel and Event Center, a turn-of-the-century shoe factory in Lynchburg, Va., that has been converted into a boutique hotel; a bottle of Virginia wine; and two tickets to the Lynchburg Museum and the Point of Honor historic home (value \$20). Two-night minimum stay required; two nights, with taxes, starts at \$398. Valid through Dec. 30. In addition, if you book the package at www.historichotels.org, you will get a free one-year family membership to the National Trust for Historic Preservation (a \$30 value). Membership includes a subscription to *Preservation* magazine, discounted admission to more than 600 historic places worldwide and 10 percent off future stays at participating Historic Hotels of America, when booked on the website. 800-678-8946.

— Carol Sottili and Andrea Sachs,
The Washington Post

Discover the N.M. roots of artist Agnes Martin



New Mexico Mountain Landscape, Taos AP

"Agnes Martin: Before the Grid" will run through June 17 at the Harwood Museum of Art in Taos, N.M. Martin, an abstract painter who died in 2004, would have celebrated her 100th birthday in March. She was a quiet fixture of the city's art community but was well-known in the art world for her muted grid paintings. The show is the first large posthumous exhibit of her work and the only one with extensive paintings and drawings that predate the grids that made her famous. Martin lived in Taos in the '50s and moved back in 1993. She liked drinking martinis at Doc Martin's Restaurant in Taos. For her centennial, it will offer a special martini in her honor. 575-758-9826; <http://harwoodmuseum.org>

— Susan Montoya Bryan, The Associated Press

Take a swing through Scottsdale



The W Scottsdale welcomes baseball fans. W Hotels

Are you a fan of spring training's Cactus League? Just down the road from Surprise, Ariz., and the Texas Rangers, the W Scottsdale is offering a spring training package with accommodations for two, starting at \$329 per night, through March 31. The package includes vouchers for two cocktails each night; buy-one-get-one-free ticket deals; and complimentary transportation to Scottsdale Stadium, pre-season home of the San Francisco Giants. Want to see the Rangers play while you're in Scottsdale? They play the Arizona Diamondbacks on Tuesday and the Colorado Rockies on March 30. Both games are at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick in Scottsdale. 877-782-0104; www.wscottsdalehotel.com/ArizonaSpring-Training

Fun fact



Hikers in Grand Canyon National Park AP

Bye, bye, bottles

You won't find disposable plastic water bottles being sold at the Grand Canyon National Park any longer. The National Park Service has banned them. They make up about 20 percent of the park's waste and 30 percent of recyclables. The park, which has water stations for refilling reusable containers, will not stop visitors from bringing in disposable bottles, however.

— The Associated Press



Duavata Villa has hosted Donna Karan, Meg Ryan and other celebrities, as well as serving as the Fantasy Suite on *The Bachelorette*. Namale Resort & Spa

Falling for Fiji

A traveler visits beautiful resorts featured on 'The Bachelorette,' and finds that there's plenty to love

By Debra Dunning Brouillette
Special to the Star-Telegram

FIJI — I'm lying on a giant banana leaf in the middle of the Fijian rain forest.

My masseuse at Koro Sun Resort's Rainforest Spa has scrubbed my body with natural botanical ingredients designed to help weary travelers like me recover from jet lag. Next, I am covered with another banana leaf and wrapped in soft cloths, allowing the minerals and nutrients to penetrate into my skin. Cocooned like a butterfly, I am soon ready to be reborn. I am in Fiji following in the footsteps of *The Bachelorette*. No, a fiancé with a diamond ring won't reward me in the end. But my trip to this tropical South Pacific paradise includes resorts chosen by ABC-TV as backdrops for the final episodes of the reality show's seventh season ("starring" still-engaged

Ashley Hebert and J.P. Rosenbaum).

Koro Sun, located on Fiji's second-largest island, Vanua Levu, is an all-inclusive tropical retreat with 31 bures (Fijian for house) and six private villas, set within 160 acres of a former coconut plantation at the edge of a private lagoon, opening onto the Koro Sea. Most bures and villas have ocean views; others are built over the water with ladders into the lagoon, or idyllically set streamside, surrounded by lotus flowers. A deluxe four-bedroom villa near a waterfall became the *Bachelorette*'s fantasy suite for one of her overnight dates.

The setting would make anyone fall in love — or, in the case of honeymooners Tyler and Sandra Roberts of Frisco, who are there the same time I am, celebrate their love.

Among the romantic of-

ferings is a Passion Under the Palms package — the chance to have a romantic dinner in the middle of the rain forest, as Ashley and J.P. did on the show.

Fiji is known as the soft coral capital of the world, and a stay at Koro Sun gives divers the opportunity to see for themselves. Upon descending, my group fins across a colorful reef to the deep blue, open ocean where schools of barracuda swim around and past us like impatient commuters on a superhighway. A more tranquil reef dive follows, where endangered hawksbill turtles swim among brightly colored soft corals and fish species unique to South Pacific waters.

The perfectly peaceful ending to the day's activities comes in the liquid form of kava (made from the root of a pepper tree), Fiji's national drink. One night after dinner,

we join several Fijian men — singing and playing guitar — in a traditional ritual in which a wooden cup filled with the brown drink is passed around. Later, I slip deeply into dreamland.

The dream continues at Namale

Namale Resort, located near the Koro Sun, is the next destination on the journey through the dreamy domain captured onscreen for *The Bachelorette*. Motivational guru Tony Robbins owns the all-inclusive resort, which has won accolades like *Modern Bride*'s "#1 Honeymoon Suite in Fiji" for its romantic appeal.

Want to snorkel, kayak, ride horses along the beach, hike to a waterfall or visit a nearby village? All you have to do is ask.

My luxury lodging at Na-

More on FIJI, 12E



Koro Sun's visitors can get a banana leaf body wrap. Koro Sun Resort



A giant clam rests on a colorful reef in the Koro Sea. Special to the Star-Telegram/Debra Dunning Brouillette

It takes great patience to farm Fiji pearls

❏ The process can take years and requires lots of careful tending.

By Debra Dunning Brouillette
Special to the Star-Telegram

Savusavu, Vanua Levu, FIJI — One of the first pieces of jewelry I recall wearing as a child was a cultured-pearl necklace — a strand of small, off-white pearls saved for special occasions.

Years later, I became fascinated with the black pearls of Polynesia, as I read about the pearl farms of Manihi, an atoll near Tahiti, and drooled over the jewelry made from these carefully cultivated creations. After many years, I was in another part of the South Pacific, about to take a behind-the-scenes tour of Fiji's only commercial pearl farm, J. Hunter Pearls, located on Savusavu Bay, on the island of Vanua Levu.

Throughout history, pearls had been precious treasures of great value, found only in nature as a rare gift bestowed by Mother Nature. But by the early 1900s, the pearl-culturing process began, with techniques developed by Japanese researchers. In the 1920s, cultured pearls were first introduced into the jewelry market.

Since the 1960s, the black pearl industry has been well established in French Polynesia, but it had never been successful in Fiji until 2000, when native Fijian Justin Hunter decided to follow his dream. After earning a marine biology degree in the U.S. and gaining experience in the cultivation and farming of shellfish with a U.S. company, he returned to his childhood home of Savusavu to begin culturing pearls in a



Fishing line is strung through the oysters and tied to ropes that are then lowered into the water. J. Hunter Pearls

pristine environment that is largely free of impurities and pollution.

A glass-bottom boat ride into the bay allowed us to see the oysters strung through fishing line and tied to ropes, which have been lowered into the water to feed and develop

for up to two years before harvesting.

But the process doesn't begin there. It can take as many as six years for an oyster to produce a pearl, sold either as a loose pearl or set into a piece of jewelry. While a

More on PEARLS, 13E

Fiji

Continued from 11E

male is a master suite in Tatadra House (Fijian for “the dream house”), the same one that had been occupied by Hebert on the show. The double doors from my bedroom open onto a large private deck with infinity-edge pool seamlessly blending into the Koro Sea below. An outdoor daybed at the edge of the volcanic rocks makes for a prime viewing area for Fiji’s breathtaking sunsets.

You don’t have to be Russell Crowe, Meg Ryan or Anthony Hopkins — all former guests — to feel special here. With a staff-guest ratio of 3-to-1, even at its full capacity of 44 guests, everyone is made to feel like a celebrity.

After mentioning to the

guest services manager that I’d like to try kokoda (a local fish), for example, it is added to the dinner menu one night in the form of an appetizer of raw fish cut into cubes, marinated in lemon juice, then combined with coconut cream and condiments.

As I enter the dream house on my last evening, petals are strewn on the floor leading to my four-poster bed. A message — “sweet dreams” — has been written in flower petals on the bed, a bath has been drawn in the Jacuzzi tub, and votive candles are lit. The scene has been set for romance . . . or, in my case, for a very good night’s sleep.

The morning of our departure from Namale, the Fijian staff gathers to sing *Isa Lei*, the traditional Fijian song of farewell. Those departing sign a stepping-stone in wet cement, a Na-

male tradition. The stones are placed throughout the grounds, leaving a permanent imprint from each guest to match what Hudson calls “the imprint that Namale leaves in the heart.”

Vomo’s private island paradise

The next morning I depart from Port Denarau Marina by catamaran for the hour-long ferry service to Vomo, a 225-acre private island resort in the Mamanucas chain. Tom Hanks fans will remember the movie *Castaway*, which was filmed on nearby Monuriki. As my group nears Vomo, we transfer to a small boat to make the approach to what would be our last slice of Fijian paradise, where we are greeted as if we were royalty. (I later found out we had barely missed a true royal visit, when just days before our arrival, Prince



Vomo Island Resort, a private getaway in the Mamanucas chain, is an hourlong boat ride away from Port Denarau Marina.
 Blackbox/Chris Williams

Albert of Monaco and his wife, Charlene, spent time on Vomo, eating, drinking and mingling with guests — their superyacht anchored offshore.)

Vomo Island long served as a retreat for the chiefs of Fiji’s western provinces before being developed as a resort in the late 1980s. In more modern times, it was chosen for the filming of the finale of *The Bachelorette*. With a maximum occupancy of 70, most of Vomo’s 28 double-occupancy villas front the island’s gorgeous white-sand beach; others are in lush garden or hillside settings.

A California couple recently rented the entire island at a cost of \$35,000 per night for themselves and 68 guests for their wedding.

On Vomo, I take getting away from it all to the next level, arranging a picnic and snorkeling trip with my pals to explore the vibrant, healthy reefs just off the private island resort’s even more private island — Vomo Lai Lai, a five-minute motorboat ride away. Another day, I go stand-up paddleboarding on the calm, nontidal waters surrounding Vomo. Vomo’s beautifully manicured nine-hole, par-3 golf course is just a walk-by for me, on the way to Senakai Spa, where I indulge in an anti-aging papaya facial. Those who are ready to slow things way down can stake claim to one of the strategically placed hammocks near each villa. I keep eyeing mine and fi-



Vomo was the setting of the season finale of *The Bachelorette*.
 ABC/Matt Klitscher

If You Go

Tourism Fiji: www.fijime.com; www.fijifriendly.com

Getting there

Air Pacific (through LAX in Los Angeles); www.airpacific.com, 800-227-4446
(American Airlines AAdvantage members earn AAdvantage Miles for travel on a published eligible fare ticket on Air Pacific.)

Where to stay

- Koro Sun Resort and Rainforest Spa; www.korosunresort.com, 877-KOROSUN
- Namale Resort & Spa; www.namalefiji.com, 800-727-FIJI
- Vomo Island Resort; www.vomofiji.com, 1-679-666-7955

Upcoming festivals

- South Pacific Food & Wine Festival, Denarau, Fiji; www.southpacificfoodandwine.com, March 14-17
- Fiji 2012 International Jazz and Blues Festival, Port Denarau, Fiji; www.fijijbfest.org, May 10-13

nally manage to put things on pause in paradise for a short nap in the shade of the palms.

A few hours later, just as the sun is about to slip below the horizon, I descend a staircase from The Rocks Bar, perched high above the beach, where a Fijian feast awaits my companions and me. It is movie-set perfection. And in fact,

it is here, below The Rocks, where the climactic beach-side proposal was shot, with sister island Vomo Lai Lai in the background.

As we toast with a New Zealand pinot noir and nibble on French goat’s milk brie and figs, I tell myself that this is the perfect real-life finale, too — just the right place for my wide-awake dream to end.

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Puzzle appears on 6E

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Nutrients found in the largely pollution-free waters of Savusavu Bay provide the ideal environment for culturing pearls. J. Hunter Pearls

Pearls

Continued from 11E

small number are purchased from the local people, the majority of the oysters used in pearl farming at J. Hunter are bred in a hatchery from the larval stage, or collected in the sea as "spat" during the oysters' reproductive months, from October to February, when they attach themselves to collector strips. Nine to 12 months later, the baby oysters are harvested by hand, then strung through fishing line onto knotted ropes and again lowered into the water. After six to nine months, they are transferred to knotted ropes spaced farther apart so they have room to feed and develop until harvesting.

When the size of the oysters and the time of year is right, usually after a growth period of 18

months to two years, they are implanted or seeded by highly trained technicians with a nucleus, serving as the irritant, which becomes the heart of the cultured pearl. Interestingly, oysters are seeded with beads made from the shell of the Mississippi mussel, found only in the Mississippi River, so Fiji pearls have within them a bit of the American South.

Unlike Tahitian black pearls, J. Hunter pearls aren't all black or shades of gray. The uniquely colored oyster shells that grow naturally in Savusavu Bay produce pearls in a rainbow of colors that Fiji pearls are becoming known for — gold, chocolate, cranberry, bamboo green and royal blue.

We watched as the recently harvested organic gems were sorted into specific grades by Justin's wife, Leanne, taking into consideration the luster, color, shape and surface qualities of the pearl. While I knew that saltwa-

ter cultured pearls were not a mass-produced, factorylike product, I had no idea the amount of technique, care and time that goes into cultivating the magnificent multicolored orbs spread out before us. When we learned that of all the oysters that are implanted, only 50 percent of them produce a pearl, and only 10-15 percent of those produce pearls of high quality, I gained a new appreciation of the risk versus reward taken by pearl farmers.

While I left J. Hunter Pearls without the turquoise pearl set into an octopus mounting that I'd eyed among the jewelry displays, I gained a new appreciation of what it takes to transform a tiny nucleus within the humble oyster into a thing of great beauty and value. I also left with a newly coined phrase in my head — to be as patient as a pearl farmer. If patience is a virtue, pearl farmers must be virtuous, indeed.



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Journey through Time and History in the British Isles

The British Isles offer an endless resource of historic sights. The number of well-preserved landmarks makes this destination especially attractive for those wishing to feel as if they have traveled back in time. If you are planning a trip through England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, consider including the following favorites in your itinerary.

The eye-pleasing village of Stratford-upon-Avon creates an old English scene of thatched-roof cottages and half-timbered houses, including the birthplace of William Shakespeare. Further north, York Minster is the largest Gothic church in England. York also showcases an extensive collection of armor and a reconstructed Viking City from the year 948. History lives on through London's steadfast symbols of Big Ben, the Parliament, Westminster Abbey and Buckingham Palace, just to name a few. Not far from London, the origins of mysterious Stonehenge date back to 1500 B.C., the Romans harnessed the natural hot springs 2000 years ago in Bath, and Henry II established Oxford as the first university of Britain in 1167.

The capital city of Scotland provides a variety of interesting sights such as Edinburgh Castle, the oldest surviving house in Edinburgh, the Brass Rubbing Centre, and the Palace of Holyroodhouse. The Scottish border town of Jedburgh is home to the Mary Queen of Scots House. This is also the town where tweed was invented by combining two colors for the first time. The Old Blacksmith's Shop tells the story of Gretna Green, where runaway couples from England were secretly married by the town blacksmith.

The untouched, rugged landscape of Wales compliments this journey back in time. In the North, stand the majestic towers of Caernafon, one of the castles built by Prince Edward I in 1283. In the South, a guided tour uncovers the 2000-year history of Cardiff Castle.

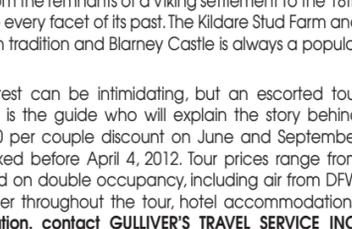
The oldest university of Ireland, Trinity College in Dublin, houses the illuminated Book of Kells. Around 800 AD, four Irish monks beautified this four-volume edition of the Gospels using ink from bugs and plants. From the remnants of a Viking settlement to the 18th century Georgian architecture, Dublin offers insights into every facet of its past. The Kildare Stud Farm and Waterford Crystal Factory are an impressive show of Irish tradition and Blarney Castle is always a popular stop.

Planning a trip to include all these points of interest can be intimidating, but an escorted tour eliminates the planning worries. An additional benefit is the guide who will explain the story behind the sights. Image Tours, Inc. is currently offering a \$300 per couple discount on June and September departures of their 16-day British Isles Tour when booked before April 4, 2012. Tour prices range from \$4040 in September to \$4440 in June, per person based on double occupancy, including air from DFW, air taxes, transportation in the British Isles, tour manager throughout the tour, hotel accommodations, 22 meals, and an afternoon tea. For more information, contact GULLIVER'S TRAVEL SERVICES INC. Ph: 817-924-7766.

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