

Fiji a ticket to paradise in South Pacific

Island chain is teeming with beauty and adventure

On a map, Fiji has the appearance of tiny droplets of land scattered in the South Pacific. Tiny jewels scatter some 1,300 miles from New Zealand to create a paradise travelers yearn to visit.

More than 300 islands – 106 are inhabited – comprise a country formed by volcanic activity around 150 million years ago. Beauty sprang from explosions and Fiji hasn't looked back since.

This sparse nation attracts nearly 700,000 guests annually. They come to celebrate their honeymoons, take a bucket list vacation, surf, seek adventure and appreciate the archipelago's toasty waves and coral reef.

Fiji affords you the delectable feeling of seclusion, keeping you as far away from reality as possible. Fiji Bitter beer whets your palate while watching the sun dip below the horizon. Birds chirp under a blanket of blue skies, dotted by pillowy clouds. The scent of saltwater wafts from the ocean. The experience leaves you awestruck.

Fiji lures visitors with its aquamarine waters and soft, warm sands that are found outside the doors of its myriad of resorts. Snorkel with manta rays in the Yasawas – a chain of 20 islands blessed with sparkling blue lagoons. Scuba dive near Taveuni – Fiji's third-largest island and home of the world renowned



TROPICAL BLISS – A colorful sunrise awakens a new day on Fiji Island.

Image: Martin. Adobe Stock.

Rainbow Reef. Party in the Mamanuca Islands that boast secluded resorts and served as the setting for Tom Hanks' film "Castaway". And don't forget about the surfing.

Fiji is an indelible destination that flaunts beauty in many ways. The depth of its character has no boundary.

The Garden of the Sleeping Giant

steals your attention away from the beach. Located in the foothills of Nausori Highlands, it's known for its vibrant collection of orchids once part of a private collection owned by TV actor Raymond Burr. Take a "jungle walk" past a lily pond and through a native forest. It's gorgeous, peaceful and a popular place to have a wedding

ceremony.

Coral Coast is centrally located on the southwest side of Viti Levu and is populated by resorts and hotels. Pearly white sands nibble against crystal-clear waters to create a perfect setting.

Visit the Sri Siva Subramaniya Temple – the largest Hindu temple in the Pacific. Masterful Dravidian architecture and lively colors bring the temple to life. Remove your shoes upon entering and witness sacred statues and inspiring surroundings.

Vilavilavevo is Fijian for "jumping in the oven" and describes the practice of firewalking, a local practice that originated with a man named Tunaivqalita of Beqa Island, who convinced a spirit god to allow him to have the ability to walk over scalding stones. Who can doubt it? Firewalking ceremonies take place at resorts throughout Fiji.

Port Denarau has a marina, shopping district, restaurants and a golf course. The Fiji Museum is filled with artifacts that span 3,700 years. Hop in a mud pool to absorb its healing properties – according to locals. Or zipline, hike, splash down water slides or admire the animals at Kula Wild Adventure Park in Sigatoka.

Fiji might seem like a world away, but it's a worldly experience you won't soon forget.

Honing teen driving habits a challenge

Monitoring, spotting reckless patterns lessen odds of crash

Parental anxiety escalates when their teenage children begin driving. It's a natural and expected reaction.

Operating a motor vehicle could be considered a child's first responsibility that puts the lives of others at risk. Taking a defensive approach behind the wheel rarely is more important.

The steps are simple: Buckle seatbelts, put away smartphones, honor the speed limit and reduce distractions. It's a map to a safe-driving experience.

Teenagers should be scrutinized. Their limited understanding of vehicles and the roads on which they are traveling could put them in precarious situations. Traffic serves as an added burden. Congested highways escalate the need for younger drivers to remain on the defensive.

This puts an added responsibility on parents to learn if their teenagers are prepared drivers. The more parents discover about their kids' habits, the less likely they are to suffer collisions.

Riding with them provides an opportunity to observe their patterns. Are they accelerating through yellow lights, not using turn signals, failing to check blind spots,



WHAT'S GOING ON – Teenage drivers not paying attention behind the wheel could cause an accident or lead to aggression. Image: pololia. Adobe Stock.

improperly merging into lanes or getting upset at other drivers? These are easily recognizable, but it's only the beginning.

Young drivers rarely should be traveling with a group of passengers. Traveling with friends encourages teens to take more risks. Peer pressure might force them to drive faster than

the speed limit or maneuver illegally on the roadways. Motorists, ages 16 to 17, increase their odds of being killed in an accident by 44% when traveling with an additional young passenger. That risk doubles with two passengers, and quadruples if three or more passengers are in the vehicle.

Technology makes cars more fun

to drive, but at the expense of drivers losing their focus. Drivers too often make phone calls, answer texts in moving vehicles or check social-media sites. More than one-third of teens admit they respond to text messages while driving, and more than half answer phone calls.

Cars overflowing with fast-food wrappers is another sign. The drivers likely are eating while driving and paying lesser attention to the road.

Teen drivers breaking curfew restrictions is a red flag. Some states enforce laws that forbid drivers 18 and younger from operating cars between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. Those pushing curfew could be more likely to break speed limits and run stop lights to make it home in time.

It is essential drivers hear what is happening around them as well as see it. Teens blasting loud music diminish their ability to hear audible cues from other drivers, particularly a horn or another vehicle accelerating nearby.

Car accidents are a leading cause of death for teenagers. It's impossible for parents to continuously monitor their children's driving habits but identifying aggressive patterns should lessen the odds of an accident occurring.