

“HOLD ME!”  
I SQUEALED.  
HE COULD  
SENSE MY  
FEAR...

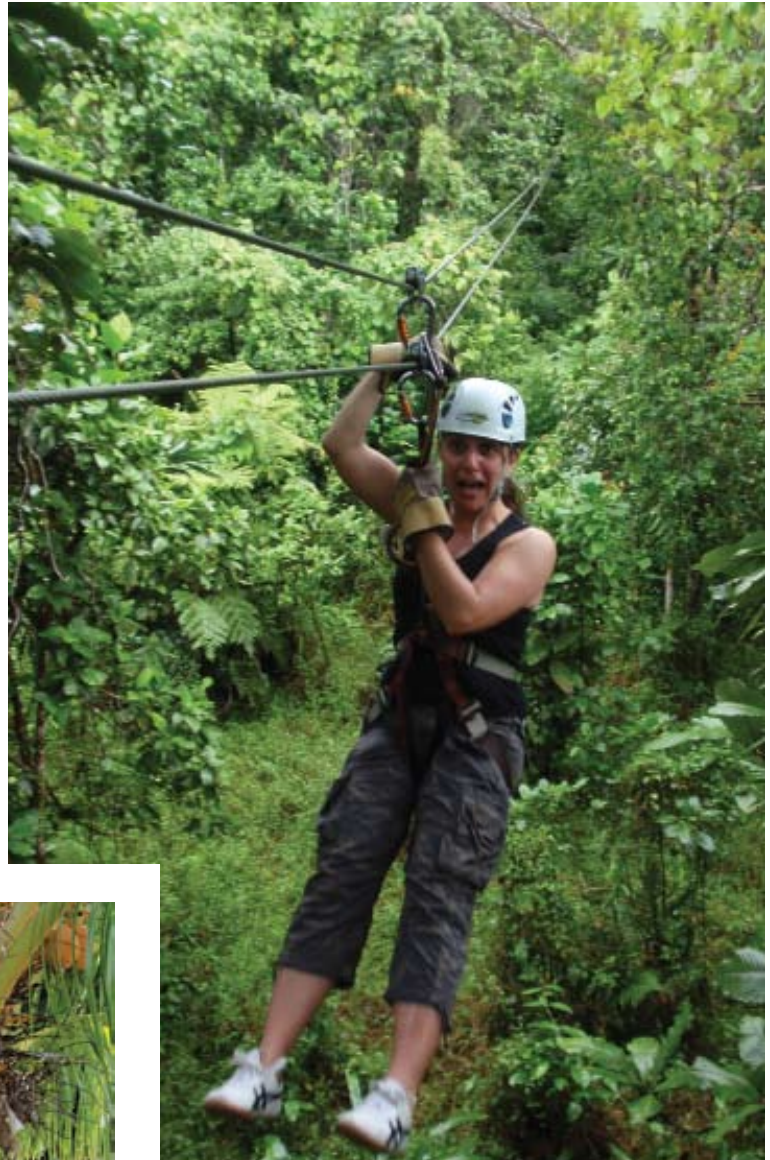


HER TREMBLING FRAME WAS PRESSED AGAINST HIS HULKING BODY. SWEAT WAS TRICKLING DOWN HER SPINE. SHE LEANT CLOSER, WHISPERING “PLEASE, HOLD ME.”

Did our intrepid writer, **Donna Demaio**, throw caution to the wind on her recent trip to Fiji? To discover the shocking truth, read on.

It was a moment of terror and he was all I had. It's now or never...then I launched myself along the zip-line in the forest of the Wainadoi region of Viti Levu, the main island of Fiji.





I latched on to my guide who had trekked me along a tricky walking trail to a floating tree platform. Along the way I was educated.

“This plant will stop the bleeding if you cut yourself,” he said with a certainty I found reassuring. “And this plant will temporarily blind fish and this plant is for making skirts.”

My pleas for a ‘wimp-out” were going unheeded, so I flung myself off the platform, squealing as I travelled about 150 metres along the wire. If I held on too tight, I would get “stuck” mid air I was told. After the first thrill ride, there were seven more zip-lines and no turning back.



Fiji has something for everyone, which is one reason why it's regarded as the jewel in the crown of the Pacific. I was given a week to explore this most fascinating of cultures, and despite my trepidation I was up for most things. Fiji will do that to you, such is the allure of this beautiful and exotic country.

Having survived the high wire, I decided to try my hand at the water sports. After a bumpy ride on unmade roads from The Pearl South Pacific, a luxurious hotel on the Coral Coast, I arrived at Sigatoka River.

Our van passed the pretty pottery village of Nakabuea and rugby star Lote Tuqiri's village of Namatukula. (You can't miss the massive billboard erected on the village outskirts which tells you so).

The Sigatoka River Safari was led by Josh, who insisted on being called ‘Captain Jack Sparrow”. My group was tightly wedged into the large speed boat careering, mostly in control, down the longest river in Fiji. And what is a river safari without at least a couple of drenching 360 degree spins on the water?

Then there was basket weaving, an art-form that is rather more sedate than the other activities I experienced during my stay. Folding delicate fronds into an exquisitely patterned capsule was rewarding but paled against a snorkeling adventure. I admitted to Ratu, one of the boat crew that had taken me out to Moses reef that I was feeling a little intimidated by the developing ocean swell. He held my hand as I paddled out to the soft-coral reef, and thoughts of my zip-line guide had all but disappeared.



Bright yellow kayaks were begging for a spin, so I squeezed in yet another action packed hour before heading back to the Sheraton Fiji Resort on Denarau Island



The following morning I set off on an island-hopping day trip through the Mamanuca Islands on the 83-foot schooner 'Seaspray'. The crew sang traditional songs as we cruised towards Modriki Island where Tom Hanks filmed his masterpiece, 'Castaway'. I posed for photos with fallen coconuts, went snorkeling off the beach and reveled in the island's uninhabited beauty.

We stopped at Yanuya Island for a traditional Kava welcome ceremony. Back on board a crew member dragged up a massive Walu on a fine fishing line, heralding the catch of the day which took pride of place on the following day's menu.

Being a guest at the Sheraton Fiji or the Westin Denarau Island Resort gives you exclusive privileges, including the chance to visit the tiny island of Aquilou (it takes 40 minutes to walk its perimeter). Litia Teresia, who lives on the island with her young family, offered me a freshly opened coconut, an act of hospitality that is so typically Fijian. The next day I decided to visit again. Litia must have seen me step on to the boat on the opposite shore because within minutes of me arriving she had grilled a fish as a welcome gift.





I squeezed in a morning at the bustling Nadi fresh food market, where over-sized and meticulously arranged fruit and vegetables threatened to topple over. Soft rain greeted me at the Garden of the Sleeping Giant, a 20 hectare orchid range established by actor Raymond Burr in the foothills of the Nausori Highlands, north of Nadi.

I stood under a humble thatched structure in Visei Sei, the oldest village in Fiji, where Prince Charles sipped on Kava. I had a few hits at the Denarau Golf and Racquet Club and I fine-dined at the island's leading restaurant, Ports O' Call. Then there was para-sailing, hot-air ballooning and hot springs. Literally something for everyone, but all I really want to do is eat at Litia's again.

Donna Demaio travelled to Fiji courtesy of Pacific Blue Airlines.

Photography by Donna Demaio



**FACT FILE:**

Getting There: Pacific Blue offers direct flights from Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane to Nadi with connections from other Australian cities via Virgin Blue. For best prices, packages and specials go to [www.flypacificblue.com.au](http://www.flypacificblue.com.au)

Staying There: The Pearl South Pacific Resort, Spa and Championship Golf Course [www.thepearlsouthpacific.com](http://www.thepearlsouthpacific.com); Sheraton Fiji Resort and The Westin Denarau Island [www.sheraton.com/fiji](http://www.sheraton.com/fiji)

Once You're There: Zip Fiji: [www.zip-fiji.com](http://www.zip-fiji.com); Sigatoka River Safari: [www.sigatokariver.com](http://www.sigatokariver.com); South Sea Cruises: [www.ssc.com.fj](http://www.ssc.com.fj); Adrenalin Water Sports: [www.adrenalinfiji.com](http://www.adrenalinfiji.com); Coral Sun Fiji: [www.coralsunfiji.com](http://www.coralsunfiji.com) ■