



Marsha Steeves & Darryl Stretch

October 2, 2008

Fiji Island

Lomani Yanuyan

Photographed by Judith Ragg

in Fiji means 'Island of Love'

Plans had been in the works for months! Being a Destination Wedding Planner meant my dream wedding had to be perfect, and it was. Kudos to Hudson Mitchell, the Namale Resort's on-site wedding coordinator, who orchestrated this most extraordinary event without a hitch. His passion and attention to detail was instrumental in helping to create a ceremony second to none. We had locked down the location, legal documentation, hair and makeup appointments, the photographer, I decided on 'orchids' and the list goes on.

The stage was set for that perfect day. I could now rest assured that we were in the best hands and finally I could just bask in my anticipation.

The plan began with an evening at the award-winning Spa. We indulged in the signature "Midnight Magic" treatment, an exotic couple's spa experience, to help us unwind and prepare for the day ahead!

The beating of the Lali drums signaled that the ceremony was underway. Fijian warriors in traditional dress accompa-

nied my groom to his place on the beach to await the arrival of his bride. Taking a few sentimental moments in my bridal bure I promised myself "easy on the tears" as I picked up my bouquet of white Dendrobium Orchids. With one last glimpse into the mirror I could only hope the groom would see a beautiful bride.

The time had come. Six Fijian warriors arrived to carry me to the beach on a throne festooned with tropical flowers. I was a princess being delivered to my prince and I will forever savor that moment!

Winding our way through the coconut grove I could see my husband-to-be standing on the waters edge looking proud and anxiously awaiting my arrival. As I stepped onto the sand beside him we kicked off our shoes to walk barefoot down a path marked by floral petals, red gingers and palm leaves. The altar was a beautifully decorated arch of bougainvillea's with green croton leaves. The Koro Sea, framed by a magnificent coconut tree curved out over the water, was the backdrop for the village choir assembled there to sing a cappella of hymns.



Fijian Warriors escorting bride



Feeling the sand beneath our feet gave a real grounding sensation for delivering the vows we had prepared. The minister added the final touch by endorsing our marriage with his blessings. After exchanging rings and the obligatory signatures we were announced as “Mr. and Mrs.”

A celebration in our honor was initiated with a “Kava Ceremony”. Kava is a sacred root of pepper used throughout the Fijian Islands. It is consumed at all gatherings of importance and a must in a matrimonial ceremony. We sat crossed legged on the floor in a circle watching the chief mix the powdered root with water in a large hardwood bowl called a Tanoa. After straining the root through a cloth, it was then ready for consumption. The chief then claps his hands and we were offered the Kava in a half coconut shell. Etiquette dictates one must clap once before receiving the offering and once after.

Next we were entertained by the “Meke Dance, a ceremony performed by a group from the village of Naidi (nai-in-dee). Historically, Fiji had no written language and as such, stories and legends were told in the form of traditional song and dance. The men sang about their heroics, the women danced in celebration and the children told their stories with humor.

The evening ended with a private dinner on the beach in the exact spot where we said our nuptials earlier in the day.

The flowered arch was still standing, and beside it a romantic table for two. Torches were lit across the beach and an exquisite four-course meal was served while two waiters stood ready at our beck and call.

Incredibly, a full moon lit the way back to our luxuriously appointed honeymoon bure. The dream of a Perfect Wedding, now our sweetest memory!

Upon Reflection, the islands hold wonderful memories of swaying coconut palms and turquoise waters, but the hearty Bula welcome and the warm smiles of the Fijian people will take us there again. ☺

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