

## AUSTRALIA

Cairns, the jumping-off spot for the Great Barrier Reef, is a youth-oriented, tropical city with plenty of hotels and restaurants as well as day boats going to the Reef and overnight trips to Cod Hole. Cairns' "beach" is a mud flat dotted with roseate spoonbills and other tropical birds, and you can visit the reptile farm to gawk at saltwater crocodiles eating chickens or take the Kuranda Railway for a look at a magnificent waterfall. ... The best diving, with pristine reefs and oodles of fish, is to the north, reachable only by live-aboards during their summer, roughly November to March. The Ribbon Reefs are known for big sharks — lots of them, including bronze whalers. ... Pack safety sausages, whistles, strobes, mirrors, and any other safety devices that would make you noticeable if a current carries you too far from the boat. ... Pricy Lizard Island is the northernmost land-based operation; they have day trips to Cod Hole to pet friendly, refrigerator-sized potato cod. To the south, the wreck of the Yongala out from Townsville may be the best fish-covered wreck in the world. ... Summer is sultry and oppressive, with tropical showers. ... Water temperature is below 80 and colder in their winter, so bring rubber. ... Moving from Queensland south, you'll pass from full-on tropics, through temperate water, to chilly water

in Sydney, and finally into the really cold stuff when you reach Tasmania. ... Don't worry about the Great White in the GBR; they hang around south of Sydney.

### **Divers Den, June 2004, Edward Leibowitz, Jersey City, NJ.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 70 to 75 F, calm, no currents. Trip home was delayed fourteen hours in Cairns; Continental was good about providing accommodations and food while being delayed. Dove with Divers Den aboard the Seaquest. Saw turtles and neat coral formations. Dove with Wally the friendly Maiori Wrasse. There was a group of novice divers and snorkelers. Diving was rather shallow. Max depth was 40 ft, average depth was 20-25 feet. I suppose since the tragedy in Cairns depicted in the film *Open Water*, boat personnel were very careful about recording the times you entered and returned to the boat from diving. This is an excellent operation for beginner and novice divers. I would not recommend it for experienced divers. The lunch server on board was excellent. There is a video photographer that records your dive. This video can be purchased for \$66 AUD. I also visited the Rain Forest. The views are spectacular. You can go there by railroad or cable car. ([www.divers-den.com](http://www.divers-den.com))

**Lady Elliot, March 2004, Richard Lorne Eedy (lorneedy@hotmail.com) St Marys, Ontario, Canada.** Experience: 100+ dives. Vis: 40 to 60 feet. Water: 29 C. Three islands are the total of "coral" islands

in the Great Barrier Reef; Heron, Green, and Lady Elliot. Lady Elliot is the southern most of the reef. It is a "mash" set up as compared to P & O's Heron Island — half the price, too, and better scuba diving. Large manta in three tone, leopard, wobbegong, whaler and black tip sharks; heaps of mantas and turtles; lion fish back grounded by a flurry of small fish. Coral reef is storm damaged. Great diving for the beginner and experienced diver. ([www.ladyelliot.net](http://www.ladyelliot.net))

## COOK ISLANDS

Tucked between French Polynesia and Tonga, the Cook Islands have a breezy South Pacific atmosphere and the main island of Rarotonga has good food and a variety of places to stay. There's a decent dive through a cut into the lagoon that has good sharks and strong current, but overall the diving falls short of other South Pacific locations. Even most New Zealanders, their closest neighbors, pass on the diving.

**Aitutaki Scuba Ltd, Pacific Resort, March 2004, Stephanie Knott Portola Valley, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives, Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 84 to Fahrenheit, calm. The Pacific Resort is beautiful and fairly new. The "bures" were in good shape and had marble bathrooms, excellent interior lighting, AC, TV, and verandas overlooking a lovely white sand beach and turquoise lagoon. Resort staff, although good-natured, did not understand how to provide the level of service to match

the resort (for example, it shouldn't take 10 minutes to get water on the table, and when we ordered room service, something was always forgotten). Food was good, especially the tuna sushi. Most menus offered parrotfish (this seemed like going to the zoo and having zebra for lunch). Aitutaki is a beautiful island, clean topside and with the cleanest beaches we've seen in the tropics. The only dive operation is Aitutaki Scuba Ltd. We dove from a boat 20 feet long, uncovered, with no tank racks (so tanks rolled around in the bottom), no seating (except the sides of the boat), no water or refreshments, no rinse bucket, no life jackets, no first aid kit, and no oxygen (there was ship-to-shore communication). The surface interval was spent at the town dock, where there was a restaurant and a few souvenir shops. The sole dive guide was responsible for putting the boat in and out of the water, driving the boat, and leading dives. He sometimes finned into currents when there was nothing special to see or swam so far ahead we could hardly see him (in 100-foot plus visibility). He also stood on the (admittedly mostly dead) reef. When I mentioned this to the dive operation owner, the response was "well, it's his reef." We saw a moderate variety of tropicals, no pelagics (except one shark), and few nudibranchs or other invertebrates. The coral was mostly dead above 60 feet and sparse below. Although the visibility was generally excellent, we have never seen so few fish on a dive trip! Aitutaki, however, is a lovely tropical island. ([scuba@aitutaki.net.ck](mailto:scuba@aitutaki.net.ck))

## Fiji

For Left Coasters, it's easier to get to Fiji than to the Caribbean: 10 hours nonstop from L.A. Airfare and an all-inclusive week at many excellent resorts can be had for under \$2,500 per person; air packages can be tailored to include New Zealand/Australia extensions at little extra cost ... Fijians are polite, friendly, delightful, modest, and religious, so watch your language, and wear nonrevealing clothes to town ... Wetsuits are staples year-round; currents add coolness, just like the wind chill factor ... Depending upon your destination, the diving can have stiff currents, so carry surface signaling devices (tubes, strobes). In September 2004, Dan Grenier, the former operator of Crystal Divers, disappeared with another diver, while diving from Bamboo Reef Resort boat on Nananu-I-Ra. ... The weather can be stormy June through September; short, heavy showers are possible any afternoon year-round, especially around the Beqa Lagoon area. The year-round average temperature is 80 or above; nights average 68-69 degrees in winter; bring a sweater.

## Beqa Lagoon

**Beqa Lagoon Resort, August 2004, Karen Guthrie (karen@adventure101.com), Laguna Beach, CA.**

Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 50 to 150 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 Fahrenheit,

calm, choppy, currents, no currents. Great food, service, warm people, neat critters like blue ribbon eels on most dives, clown trigger fish, titan, scythe, and red toothed triggers. Sleeping white tip reef sharks, nudibranchs, loads of anemone fish and baby fish. Healthy beautiful coral, great viz, lion fish etc. Great live local music at dinner every night. Local dancers entertained one night. Firewalkers did their thing. All the shore diving you can eat and two night dives a week. (Take your own cylum sticks); don't expect to buy anything because there is nowhere to go. Kayaking fun and sheltered. Internet access expensive. The food was so good that it compared well with good restaurants at home. Water 100% safe from a spring. Watch out for the Kava bowl as everyone drinks from it and some people got a throat infection a couple of days after the kava ceremony and had to go back to the mainland to get to a doctor. Joe's Best; it can have a little current but it is breathtaking. If Fiji had a coral bleaching problem in 11 dives here and 12 in the Bligh waters I never saw it. Just counting the critters in a cubic yard of space would be maddening. Laundry service nice because of the humidity. (nothing dried) \$3-5/ person/day. The grounds are right out of a postcard and the trip from the airport is through lush beautiful jungle that is probably what the best parts of Hawaii used to look like. No camera table but big rinse tanks. Could put camera on benches. ([www.beqalagoonresort.com](http://www.beqalagoonresort.com))

**Beqa Lagoon Resort, September 2004, Aaron Wiltfong, Hayden, CO.**

Vis: 60-110 feet. Water: 78-80 F. Dives logged: 500. incredible place! The Chef is five star+ and the service is great! New ownership — Alex and Anna, a nice couple with the right persona to do well at Beqa. The people of Ravi Ravi and Rakua are accommodating as long as you follow the customs that they have. The diving is amazing. Soft corals of all colors are abundant, leopard shark, white tip reef sharks, small schools of jacks, barracuda and tons of tropicals, 2 or 3 humpback in the lagoon and we saw one breach. Nudibranch and flat worms, octos — excellent night diving. Cleaner shrimp gave me a dental cleaning! Hire an instructor please! E.T. is overdived by mainland operators and kicked to crap to the point that Beqa Lagoon Resort does not dive it! Beqa Lagoon Resort has installed mooring buoys at 90% of the dive sites. We pulled into Fantasy and the mooring was broken by a mainland dive operator. The Captain and mate fixed it and by the end of the dive we had a new tie-up, the mooring buoy, diver in and out excellent

**Beqa Lagoon Resort, September 2004, William Hollister, Petaluma, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: to Feet. Water: 77 to 79 Fahrenheit, choppy. I want to compare my recent dive trip to Beqa Island (pronounced "Benga") in Fiji to Matana Beach Resort/Dive Kadavu on Kadavu island, and Wananavu Resort/Crystal Divers on NaniNui-Ra at the northern tip of Vita Levu. The Beqa Lagoon Resort (formally Marlin Bay Resort) is a lovely and tranquil facility. The bures are large, air conditioned, and well

appointed with an outside hammock and lounge chairs. The water from the tap is drinkable. The showers: it is difficult to control the water temperature, which seems to change from too cold or too hot, regardless of the setting. The bures at Matana Beach were comfortable, but not as large and well appointed, with no hammocks; and the water is not drinkable (they have a small refrigerator in the bure with bottled water). The rooms at Wananavu are more modern (it is more of a western resort than a traditional bure-style Fijian place) and they are very nice. The food at Beqa is excellent, with two choices for each meal. Matana Beach's food is certainly wholesome, but not at all gourmet; it is a weakness of the resort. Wananavu has its own restaurant that serves quite good food. Both Beqa and Matana Beach provide the feeling of a real Fijian experience, where you get to know the (wonderful) local villagers. The beach at Beqa was small, with a lot of coral rubble with few areas of nice sand. There are a couple of other nearby beaches accessible by walking or kayaking, but they are no better. We are shellers, and were disappointed with the availability and quality of shells on the beaches. Matana Beach has a nice, large sandy beach in front of it, full of lovely shells. Even better, a nearby beach (by kayak, also visited between dives), Monduli beach, is two miles of gorgeous beauty, where you can be the only footprints on the sand and find world-class shells. Wananavu has no real beach. The snorkeling at Beqa is decent, with a long reef about 50 yards out over the flats with the bottom at around 20-30 feet

and the top at 0-3 feet depending on the tide. I saw several pairs of longnose filefish, clownfish, lots of small tropicals, some small tridacnas, lots of Christmas tree worms. The water is typically cloudy. Matana Beach has decent snorkeling, with a few bommies in close offshore, but not as good or extensive as Beqa. Wananavu has no real snorkeling areas. I was disappointed with the diving in Beqa. About half were "ho-hum", and half "that was nice". The dive sites are typically 20-30 minutes by boat. They have three boats, and all are quite nice for diving. Several dives have a lot of current. The bommies have only patches of healthy coral, the locals have overfished so there are almost no large fish and fewer numbers of smaller tropicals than I have seen elsewhere in Fiji. There is some good soft coral. I saw leaffish and blue ribbon eels on almost every dive. The divemasters do not provide any graphic overview of the dive site in their brief briefings, and they are only mildly attentive to the status of the divers in the water. They let you dive as you want. They are quite good at finding and pointing out interesting critters. The between-dive interval is spent on the boat, with water, koolaid, and cookies. The diving at Matana Beach with their house dive operation, Dive Kadavu, is about the same quality as Beqa. The dive sites are 5-15 minutes, the between-dive interval is spent on a fantastic beach. Diving with Crystal Divers out of Wananavu Resort is utterly fantastic. As good as anywhere in the world. Great expanses of healthy coral of countless varieties, with loads of tropical fish, and good

amount of larger fish. The recent tragic loss at sea of Dan Grenier, the founder and lead divemaster will certainly have an impact on this operation, so check to see their status. But if they are operating, this is the place to dive in Fiji.

**Lalati Resort, June 2004, Wayne & Geri Joseph, San Mateo, CA.** Clint & Jayne Carlson have owned Lalati for 2 yrs and have made some nice upgrades. They've added a small swimming pool, a hot tub, small exercise room, media room with videos & DVDs, and a spa where you can get massages, facials, nail grooming, etc. The bures are beautiful with 2 bedrooms and can sleep 5. The grounds are beautifully maintained & designed well so that water drains back into the ocean during the many periods of rain. The food is fantastic as the kitchen was set up by Cristian Gruden (who previously worked at Marlin Bay), but no longer works there. Biato & staff have been able to maintain a high level of excellence. Breakfast is a buffet of cereal, fruit, toast, juices, & coffee; but there are also 2 choices for a hot entree. Lunch and dinner have just one main entree, but they will easily accommodate those with special dietary requests. I have never seen 2 resort owners work so hard to make sure everyone is happy. During our stay, there was a group of about 10 surfers who were taken out every day with lunches and boards to Frigate Pass to spend the entire day surfing. This area is at the opposite end of the lagoon and the boat stayed with them the entire time. They also continued to take 3 or 5 of us diving, even though their smaller boat was having

engine trouble. (They have ordered 2 new outboard motors, they say). My camera case arrived late and they sent a boat to Pacific Harbor to retrieve it. There were also guests who were neither divers nor surfers, but were kept busy visiting other islands, kayaking, or being dropped off in Suva to go shopping. We always enjoy the diving in Beqa Lagoon. There are lots of soft corals, nudibranchs, blue ribbon eels, lion fish, sharks, schools of barracuda and even a wreck. The visibility can be poor on some days due to rain or current. If you're into macro, they have a great "muck" dive in front of the resort. Their dive shop seems to be well equipped and is run by Joeli, the dive instructor, & 3 divemasters who accompanied us. They worked hard to show us as much as possible and helped us get back on the boats when the water was rough. ([www.lalati-fiji.com](http://www.lalati-fiji.com))

**Marlin Bay Resort, July 2004, Barry Zigas (barryzigas@earthlink.net) Washington, DC.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 70 to 72 F, calm, choppy, currents. Marlin Bay has changed hands and will soon be known as Beqa Lagoon Resort. New owners are about to expand facilities. One destination that lives up to the hype and poster views. Gorgeous location on Beqa Lagoon. Beautiful grounds, luxury bures (Fiji for cabins) with marble baths, lovely 4-poster king beds, hammocks, chaise lounges in front. Both ocean view and views overlooking a koi pond. Appetizer and 2 main course choices for dinner, menu changes daily with fish every dinner and chicken and other "turf" options

rotating. All prepared with flair from fresh ingredients. Desserts to die for. No TV at resort. Phone and internet connection only at office. Excellent service, warm and friendly local staff. Daily 2-tank dives leave 8 am, all equipment handled by staff after arrival. Divers only look after wetsuits and cameras. Night dives 2x weekly if at least 4 divers sign up. Shark dive Fridays for extra \$FJ140. Many dive sites to choose from. Most days included 10-12 divers per boat; additional boat added if more. Snorkelers welcome on boats. 60 minute surface intervals. Very plentiful smaller tropicals. Good stands of healthy hard and soft corals. Divemasters will point out critters and unusual fish, will help photographers find stuff if asked. Spare but good briefings. Light supervision, but all divers checked in on depth and time after every dive. Dives 40-60 minutes. Many lionfish, stonefish, several leaf fish, white tipped reef sharks on about half the dives cruising by. Unlimited shore diving, but no one availed during our visit. Afternoon local outings with Fijian staff are free, engaging and fun. Kayaks available all day for touring the lagoon, as is snorkeling equipment for nondivers. Full and half day fishing trips. Decent massages in rooms for charge. Lovely entertainment by local acoustic bands most nights. No programs for children. Boat trips to dives generally took at least 40 minutes, one day more than one hour. Conditions for 2 of 4 days were chilly, breezy to windy, intermittent rain. Boats are well equipped, but rocky in chop. Vis less than expected, partly because of weather-related churn, but still better than 40

feet most days. Many sites had moderate to strong current, staff sometimes tried multiple sites before finding a diveable location. Surprised by amounts of dead coral. Many fewer schooling fish, large fish, pelagics than on Great Barrier Reef. Very rich in smaller tropicals. It's a 2-hour drive from Nadi Int'l airport, followed by a 40 minute boat ride to island. Transfer included, drivers helpful and courteous, but it's a long additional trip after a long flight. Rinse bucket on board. No dry table on dive deck, but space in cabin if needed. Cameras handed to divers after entry, handed up on exit. No photo processing available at resort, no video or computer viewing facility. I used a digital and it was very easy. Others had film cameras and video and seemed comfortable. Resort has 240V outlets in rooms for recharging. ([www.marlinbay.com](http://www.marlinbay.com))

## Kadavu

**Matava Resort, February 2004, Karen Gordon ([kgordon@mosquitonet.com](mailto:kgordon@mosquitonet.com)), Fairbanks, Alaska.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, no currents. Getting to Matava requires an open boat ride of 45 minutes. Take your windbreaker. If the wind is blowing, the splashing of the boat across the swells can give you a shower. The setting is lovely, in a jungle-like hillside along a shallow sandy shoreline on an offshore island. There is no air conditioning. Individual bures are scattered along the waterfront and up the hill. This is a rustic resort, with simplicity, personality, charm, and service. The management (Richard, Jeanne, and Adrian) and staff are atten-

tive and helpful. The food, buffet style for dinner, and family style for breakfast and lunch, is plentiful and a tasty combination of western and Fijian. The diving was varied, no more than 20 minutes away. One site delivered several mantas, which they say is dependable. The coral has taken a beating from cyclones but still plenty to see. One site was an absolute fairyland which was mesmerizing with variety and critters at every turn. We were told that we needed to come up at 750 psi, which caused some grief, since management only filled tanks to 2700 pounds. So, we had less than 2000 psi of usable air for each dive we'd traveled 6,000 miles to enjoy. When we asked for more air, we were told that they fill the tanks to 3000 psi hot, according to PSI standards, and when they cool, they have "less" air. Two of our group are PSI-certified cylinder inspector and knew that the standards being imposed were more conservative than PSI standards. To be fair, one reason Matava short filled tanks was that they are at such a remote site, they don't want to stress their tanks and have to replace them because it is so expensive to get to the resort. As it turned out, management was most responsive to our request for more air and increased bottom time. They filled tanks after the day's diving, and in the morning they topped them off to 3000 when cool so we all had full tanks the rest of the time. Matava is a wonderful, remote getaway where the people will make you feel welcome like family. The food will more than satisfy. ([www.matava.net](http://www.matava.net))

**Tiliva Resort, July 2004, Jan Arabas ([jarabas@comcast.net](mailto:jarabas@comcast.net)), Melrose, MA.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 74 to 78 F, calm. A short flight from Viti Levu. Emerald green mountains rise out of the sea — there are no roads and at night no artificial lights on neighboring hills. Everyone gets around by boat and lives in sync with the rhythm of sunrise and sunset and the tides. The Tiliva Resort is on the far eastern tip of Kadavu — a 15 minute boat ride from the Astrolabe Reef. Luxurious, healthy coral encrusts every surface as far as the eye can see. A beautiful mix of soft and hard corals, sea squirts, crinoids, anemones and sponges and tons of fish made for a dizzying experience on every dive. White tip, and gray reef sharks on every dive, turtles almost every time, a curious 3 foot long Remora that followed us for an entire dive and the largest moray eel we have ever seen — it's head was as big as mine and it must have been at least 6 feet long. Blue ribbon eels, lionfish, enormous groupers — one at least 5 feet tail to tip, schools of barracuda and trevally, and pretty blue and gold fusiliers, giant clams everywhere, lots of unusual, brightly colored nudibranchs, and clouds of purple and gold anthias. Some other unusual fish (for us) included blackfin dartfish, the many lovely butterfly and banner fish (I loved the pennant and regal varieties), bumphead parrotfish, and tobies — a variety of pufferfish. Many different anemone fish cuddled coyly amongst the anemone tentacles or charged bravely out to confront us if we hovered close by. There were also many wrasses, damsels, angels, sur-

geons, trout, snappers, parrotfish, filefish, groupers and hinds, cleaning stations, picasso and triggerfish, six kinds of star fish, brittle stars, cowries, scallops, oysters. The dive sites are so pristine that many don't have names. Our favorite places were the north and south side of Naigoro Pass and Alacrity Rocks. The pass is a drift dive and exactly where we began and ended depended on the current. Alacrity Rocks offers many beautiful swim throughs encrusted with delicate lace corals in soft, glowing blues, purples, yellows and whites. Tiliva's divemaster, Filipe O'Connor tailored each dive to meet our wishes, and at the same time gave us a very safe and enjoyable experience. For our first three days we were the only divers and enjoyed complete freedom to dive when and where we wished (given tides and currents). Most of the time we just followed Filipe because he knows how to find the good stuff — like a hole in the rock with two fairy and three bumblebee shrimp or a coral head with eight different colors of soft coral. At the end of our week two other divers joined us on the well-equipped boat (oxygen, first aid kit, radio phones, etc.). We never saw another dive boat the entire week. Surface intervals were on a lovely, pristine beach with fresh tropical fruit. I found two large and undamaged chambered nautilus shells washed up on the beach. While the boat we used was comfortable and safe — entry by back roll — the resort is about to take delivery of a brand new, custom designed boat with platforms. The resort owners, Kemu and Barbara, will do anything to make you comfortable. The 5 bures are

airy and comfortable, with queen beds, giant showers, lovely tile floors and breezy covered porches offering comfortable chairs perched in the tree tops. Meals are taken in the main house on a lovely porch for breakfast and lunch and inside for dinner. Plentiful food ranged from very good to outstanding. Breakfast always included fresh fruit and juice, cereal, a hot entree (eggs, sausages, crepes, Johnny Cakes) coffee, tea and toast. Lunch featured a lovely fresh mixed salad and hot dish. Dinner included steak, seafood and one night a whole roast pig and stuffed roasted chickens. My favorites included a kind of Fijian ceviche — out of this world — fresh red snapper, a fantastic stir fry and amazing chocolate cake. Besides diving you can relax on the beautiful beach with a view to majestic Ono island, paddle the kayaks to visit deserted neighboring beaches, hire a boatman to take you out snorkeling, take a guided walk to a waterfall or to see the iridescent red, green and blue Kadavu Monk Parrot or have a guided tour of medicinal plants with the local medicine man. In the evenings, there are games in the main house or Kemu will mix you a drink or serve you a cold Fiji bitter and talk about life. We made fast friends with the New Zealanders who were also staying at the resort and enjoyed long talks about life, many hands of cards and lots of joke trading sessions. A highlight was a visit to the neighboring village. First Filipe escorted us to the school where the young students shared stories and songs with us. Later Kemu, who was born in the village, accompanied us to a traditional Kava

ceremony with wonderful singing. There are no TV's, telephones in the rooms. ([www.tilivaresortfiji.com](http://www.tilivaresortfiji.com))

## Matagi

**Matagi Island Vacation Resort, February 2004, Don Rorschach, Irving, TX.** The natives had eaten the turtles, stingrays, fish larger than your hand, and apparently caught or ran off just about all the colorful fish. The few small fish were spooked. It was all but impossible to get close enough to video them. Not like the Caribbean where you can approach within a couple of feet of the fish. Saw one peacock grouper that was about 18 inches long. Many of the reefs had been decimated by the cyclone last year. Visibility was 20-50 feet. The boat captains didn't know where to drop the divers so we had many up-current swims. When the boat captains dropped anchor they dragged the anchors across the reefs doing even more damage. The dive boat had one outboard motor. Always thought dive boats were to have two motors in the event something went wrong with one of the motors. At what the dive shop employee referred to the Matangi Island Vacation Resort, we had a built-in alarm clock. Between 3:30 and 4:00 am each morning, two roosters had a contest to determine which one could make the most noise. The islands were beautiful and the natives were very nice to people but abusive to the animals. Two of the owner's dogs had to be restrained when the native workers walked by because they had so abused the dogs. We spent umpteen hours at the Nadi airport where the

bathrooms were past being filthy. The wiring went out on the Air Pacific 747 so we could not summon a flight attendant, read a book, or watch a movie the entire 10 plus hours on the return flight. For the light-plane flight from Nadi to Taveuni, we were charged for overweight bags and were told that was for both trips, but were charged a second time on the return flight to Nadi. If Matagi Island, Fiji had been my first dive trip, I would no longer be a scuba diver. It was absolutely a disaster so far as I am concerned. It sure makes me appreciate the Caribbean. My wife and I go on 3-4 dive trips a year and we have had wonderful dive experiences everywhere but Fiji.

([www.matangi-island-fiji-resort.com](http://www.matangi-island-fiji-resort.com))

## Namena

**Moody's Namena Resort, June 2004, Tom Millington (atrarescue@aol.com), Somis, CA.** Vis: 70-80 feet. Water: 78-80 F. Dives logged: 1,200+. Even though we had some rain every day, we dove every day. Resort has six bures, so maximum of 12 people. Only one other couple dove, so no crowds. Two boat dives a day and night dive if wished. Barrier reef around island with incredible soft and hard coral, and turtles, and reef and white tip sharks, ribbon eels, clown fish galore. Wonderful diving and staff! ([www.moodyshnamenafiji.com](http://www.moodyshnamenafiji.com))

## Savusavu

**Cousteau Fiji Islands Resort, November 2003, John S Wilson, Boulder, CO.** Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to

82 Fahrenheit, calm. One of the finest resorts I've visited in my diving travels. Not having dived in the South Pacific before, the corals and critters were a wonderful surprise. Dive boats were in perfect shape, the crews helpful in dive planning, and videos were taken of all divers for later (optional, of course) purchase. Temps were in the mid-80s during the day, and sleeping was comfortable with overhead fans after about 9:30 PM. Afternoon showers usually came, after the day's dives. I had my own tastefully-furnished bure, with daily maid service, and food service and laundry on call. The food was fresh daily, with wonderful vegetables out of the garden and meat flown in from Australia and New Zealand. Breads and desserts were fresh and the waitstaff learned my name and greeted me with a smile. I did the five-day, two-tank dive package, with a day off in mid-week to visit town and look for souvenirs at the smallish local marketplace and to buy fresh lobsters, which our cook/chef cooked up for us upon our return. The resort was absolutely clean, and the dive shop was fully equipped, in case you might have forgotten something or in case something broke! They also had fast Web access in the office area. There was entertainment, including making handicrafts (not as corny as it sounds) singers and dancers, and programs for kids and nondivers. And you couldn't beat the massages available, post-dive. a five-star resort; expensive, but worth each cent, if you want top-notch service, great diving, and wonderful, unique food and service at each and every meal, and for each and every dive. No TV and no room phone avail-

able. Take a portable radio; "Fiji Radio" plays old-time faves, and the news is largely local. ([fjiresort.com](http://fjiresort.com))

**Cousteau Fiji Islands Resort, November 2003, Mike Hurney, Beltsville, MD.** Water: 79 F. Resort is beautiful; coconut palms everywhere. There was some construction next to our bure and when we complained management moved us to a higher priced room, beach view, at no additional cost. The food is great! The chocolate desserts are extremely addictive. Fijians are very friendly people. Went to a village to see the king and attend a wonderful kava ceremony with singing and dancing. Every afternoon the resort had something going for you when you're not diving or snorkeling. Snorkeling was pretty good. Wife and I like Split Rock the best and it was very close to the resort. Diving: We had two big problems. We are both slim and didn't have enough rubber. By the second dive of the day I was very cold. Also, the big boat had a dysfunctional motor so we never went to the southern area like Nsonisoni Pass where most of the good diving is supposedly located. We went to closer reefs; some in bad shape. I can hardly believe I went half way around the world to dive reefs that aren't as good as many in the closer and cheaper Caribbean. I'll be getting a warmer wet suit and will not go anywhere without reading good review from Undercurrent. Nadi botanical garden (4 miles north of airport) very good. Went to Sydney for 3 days; if you haven't been, definitely go.

## Taveuni

**Aqua Trek, Garden Island Resort, September 2004, Rita May, Oak View, CA.** Vis: 100-200 feet. Water: 79-81 F. Dives logged: 1,000+. Atmosphere, safety, excitement, wonderful staff. We have done live-aboards (which are great), expensive resorts (also nice), but every time we go back to Garden Island it's like coming home. We've been there every year and it's always the highlight of the year. ([www.aquatrek.com](http://www.aquatrek.com))

**Aquaventure, Maravu Plantation Resort, September 2004, Richard Haines (haines2430@msn.com), Colorado Springs, CO.** 51-100 dives, Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 Fahrenheit, calm, currents. Air Pacific meals were good (no really they were) and everyone had a TV in the headrest in front with 10 movie channels and radio channels. Service was excellent. Land in Nadi at 5:00 AM Going through customs was a breeze. We got our bags, and had plenty of time to have a cup of coffee and make our 7:30 flight to Taveuni on Air Fiji. Because we arrived at 9:00 AM and our room (Bure) wasn't ready, they introduced us to many of the staff, handed a fruit drink and fed breakfast. The staff was wonderful. Once they were introduced to you, they would call you by your first name, each time they met you. If you needed anything, they were there to help. Bure was very nice, had a sitting area and a desk, mini fridge fully stocked, a CD player, and a large shower with plenty of hot water. (no TV or Phone thanks good-

ness) Water you can drink out of the tap. Private Jacuzzi hot tub outside that got plenty of use. The maid service was outstanding, they must have visited the room several times a day to make sure our towels were clean and the bed was made or turned down for the night. Aquaventure a short walk across the street. Jim and Tania picked us up every morning @ 7:45 at the resort. We had to show our C-cards. Resort doesn't put breakfast out until 7:30, but we could get some coffee and juice and a quick omelet, but worked it out later. Lunch and dinner are 3 course meals, so they provide two or three choices including a veggie choice. I had arranged a candle light dinner on our anniversary by the pool. My wife was not going to sit by the pool with frogs, so the staff set up dinner in our bure. Tracy carried each part of our meal to us at the appropriate time and after dinner she and several others, along with the band came in to sing to us and bring a cake. Aquaventure has plenty of rental stuff if you need anything. They take your stuff and load it on the boat and hook every thing up. They have a small boat that will hold 6 divers comfortably. It has a canvas roof. It took 30 or so minutes to get to each dive spot on "Rainbow Reef." The DM gave a good dive brief on currents, the reef, the critters, and the flow of the dive with techniques on how to avoid the strong currents, depth and time limits, and how we were going to execute the safety stop. After each dive they would check your max depth and air remaining. They provided cookies, coconut, and fruit. With juice, hot chocolate,

and tea. All the dives were fabulous and the DMs accommodating.

**Garden Island Resort, January 2004, Tony Egan (tonydona@wcvvt.com) Fayston, VT.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, choppy, currents. Wonderful resort. Not fancy but very user friendly. Terrific staff. Knew our whole group by name within a day. Strong tides determined dive sites to find slack current areas. Super beach site for shore interval between two morning dives. Taveuni interesting island with waterfalls, hiking, international dateline, etc.

**Garden Island Resort, June 2004, R.E. Culton (reculton@yahoo.com) El Paso, TX.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 25 to 40 Ft. Water: 80 to 81 F, choppy, currents. delays on return trip were extended (unnecessarily) due to timing of flights. Beautiful island, crummy weather (suspect just bad luck.) Divemasters very knowledgeable and helpful without being excessively "controlling." Island people very friendly, lots of hiking available but limited by weather. Resort nice but isolated and certainly not anything "fancy."

## Vita Levu

**Bamboo Beach Resort, March 2004, Mary Burry (mburryhog@yahoo.com) Portland, OR.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm. Bamboo Beach on the main Island of Fiji is about a 2 hour drive by taxi (included in our package) from the Nadi Airport, then a 10 minute boat

ride to the small Island. This is a new resort, or rather an older resort which has been completely recreated. The setting and the views are beautiful. Our air conditioned bure was spacious with a fantastic view through a large picture window which one could see from the bed. There was a wonderful granite outdoor shower in a nicely landscaped private courtyard with a fruit bearing guava tree. Double sinks were in the bathroom, and a king and queen sized bed and overstuffed chairs in the room. Meals were truly spectacular. This is no place to diet. The diving was great, for the most part pristine reefs and lots of fish. No evidence of bleaching and very mild currents. We did some drift dives, but usually returned to the boat. There were few short swims against strong currents. The crew was always on time, knowledgeable, and very eager to be helpful with information and with your gear. The boats were built for diving with very easy exit and entry and had heads and fresh water for showers. The maximum was 12 people, but we usually had less. The rental BCs were new. The level of service and the friendliness of the staff were excellent.

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

**Bamboo Beach Resort, April 2004, Thom Wells (thom@journeyofdiscovery.com) Crested Butte, CO.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, surge. Bamboo Beach is a good resort. The local help is wonderful. The management was not as accommodating as could be, and many of the advertised improvements were not in. The marketing people were not as

upfront about the condition of the improvements. I would suggest that visitors make sure that all the improvements of this new resort are in, and that the on site manager be more attentive. The dive operation was great! I would give the dive staff an A plus. Great safe operation, worked hard to please us, and have a great boat.

**Bamboo Beach Resort, July 2004, Jill Rain (jrain@lopez.k12.wa.us) Lopez Island, WA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 25 to 75 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy, surge, currents, no currents. Expected a 5-star experience, but found it was not entirely as advertised, particularly the diving opportunities. Bamboo Beach is brand-new, located in the narrow middle of Nananu-I-Ra Island, with the dining hall and bures strung out along the crest of the ridge. Spectacular views of the sea, sunrises, sunsets, a wonderful beach on the windward side of the island. The food is generally very good and well presented. You check off what you want the day before. The Fijian serving staff were always wonderfully warm, helpful and friendly, as were the housekeeping and dive staff (and the Filipino office staff). While the bures are spacious and attractive, with big picture windows, an outdoor shower and a deck with a great view, there are no windows that can be opened. Once the mosquitoes come out in the late afternoon, you have to go inside, close the doors and listen to the air conditioning, rather than hearing and smelling the tropical breezes, birds and ocean down below. The bures are duplexes, with thin walls so you can

hear conversation and people walking around next door. Bamboo Reef is the new incarnation of Crystal Divers, and from what I saw, compared to past years, it has taken a giant leap backward. The owner, Dan Grenier, was out of Fiji. His replacement was new, not around much, and knew little about the dive sites and the local scene. Bamboo Reef caters primarily to big Saturday-Saturday groups. As an independent traveler, my dive choices were limited by the whim of whatever big group happened to be there at the time. Two independent couples and I had to tag along to mostly fringe reef sites, in spite of the BR information flyer which advertises trips to the outer reef sites on request, because that's what the "big groups" wanted to do. Based on the 2 big groups I saw when I was there, BR is designed for casual occasional divers. Some people hadn't dived in years, none were very experienced, most were freaked out by mild currents and few had dives longer than 40 minutes (many were shorter, or skipped prepaid dives altogether). BR requires 6 divers (and an extra \$40 US) to go to the outer reef (8 to E-6), where the really spectacular diving Fiji is known for is to be found. We "non-group" divers got shut out of that option (except 1 day out of 6) because the group divers weren't interested in the longer boat ride, and BR doesn't find it worthwhile to take less than the minimum number even for passionate divers who had traveled a great distance expecting the old Crystal Divers experience. The bottom line of the current operation can also be seen in cramming as many as 13 divers (+ dive

staff) onto one boat. If you are a serious diver wanting to dive the best of the Bligh Water, either do a live-aboard, or book with Kai Viti Diving, which is based in Raki Raki (on mainland Viti Levu opposite Nananu-I-Ra) which is the only dive operation in this area that routinely goes to the outer sites (they were closed when I was there). Ra Divers, serving Wananevu clients, is mainly a fringe reef operation like Bamboo Reef Divers. Note: If you do happen to find yourself diving the fringe reef, be sure to request the dive site BR calls "Breath-taker" which has, at the right tide, lots of schooling sharks, barracuda, trevallies, and rays. And as always at any site, head to the side of the bommie where the current is strongest: that's where the best soft corals and most numerous fish are.

**Bamboo Beach Resort, August 2004, Ronald Gillespie (gillesprn2@msn.com), Huntington Beach, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 120 Feet. Water: 74 to 76 Fahrenheit, calm, choppy, currents. Resort is situated on a little island off Raki Raki, nice bures with outside shower, beautiful landscaping, great view, and staff is absolutely wonderful! They treat you well, names remembered after first meeting, genuinely warm and friendly people. 8 days of 2 tank dive. If you want to dive Vatu-I-Ra, it's \$40 additional and if you want a third dive, it's a total \$85 per diver. We did 4 days at Vatu-I-Ra, 2 of them 3 tank dives. It's a pricey, but worth it. Better visibility and a lot more to see. Black Magic Mountain and Vatu Express are my favorites. Saw a lot of large Spanish

mackerel and every reef was covered with fishes in all colors and sizes. Water was chilly, my wife was diving with 5mm full, with hooded 4mm vest. Diving at fringing reef was good, but depends on the tide and current. Same dive site can look totally different if the soft corals are not feeding and all closed up. Breathtaker is a great site to see gray and whitetip sharks. We did shore diving twice, pretty good if the visibility is decent. Large school of feeding long-jawed mackerel! Food was almost "gourmet", excellent soup and great dessert every night. Va and Wilma who waited on us and tended the bar were super. Band that plays at the resort 3 times a week is fabulous. Make sure to buy their CD. We had a wonderful time except for the missing divers from our boat, Dan and Danielle on our third day of diving off Vatu-I-Ra. Dan drove our boat 19 miles out to the "Bligh waters" and they went missing after their second dive. Although this tragic accident happened while we were on the same boat, we always felt safe diving with Sammy, our divemaster, safe enough that we skipped a day but resumed diving for 5 more days, twice back to Vatu-I-Ra.

**Dive Connections in Pacific Harbor, Outrigger Reef, February 2004, Toni Rose (tonirose@boiseoffice.com) Rowlett, TX.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, choppy, currents. *Scuba Queen*, 40+', good shape, well equipped with First Aid, O2, GPS, depth, shower, toilet, galley, plenty of drinking water juice. Weighted line at 15' for safety stops and current line. Chamber in

nearby Suva. Atu and Marika 10 years of divemaster experience, examined our equipment to understand releases for BC's, integrated weights and our computers. Atu is especially conscientious. Lush feathery bright soft corals, starfish and swim thrus at Caesars Rock, a tasty and beautiful lunch served in black lacquered boxes with snorkeling at picture perfect Yanutha Island, Side Street had bright yellow fluted vase and black rubbery sponges, foreye butterfly, rock beauty's, puffers, bright soft corals and more. Hard corals are mostly dead, much in part to lots of touching by other divers. Soft corals are healthy and beautiful from strong currents and this isn't a drift dive so be in good shape and comfortable handling yourself and gear in them. Currents threatened to rip my mask off and 4' swells yanked me up and down at Side Street while hanging on to the safety stop line. A reef hook might come in handy for photos or at the top of the reef for your safety stop. Fresh water rinse, no table, handled camera equipment with respect, handed to you in water.  
([diveconn@connect.com.fj](mailto:diveconn@connect.com.fj))

**Kai Viti Divers, Wananavu, April 2004, John Kontnik, Lakewood, CO.** Wananavu is a wonderful resort on the northern side of Viti Levu. After flying into Nadi it is about a 2.5 hour drive by car, but the trip is worth it. The resort is beautiful and the staff superb. Dinning on the dinning room patio with a full view of the Pacific is a treat. My wife and I upgraded to a two-bedroom villa and wound up with a cottage that was probably 1400 sq. ft. with 2 bedrooms one bath and a huge liv-

ing/dinning area with a full kitchen and a private patio (it was really worth it). The grounds are beautiful and well kept and once again the staff was superb. Being greeted for each meal by Ma, Soni or Tito made one feel very much at home. The only thing that did disappoint a little was there was fresh fish offered only one night out of eight for dinner. We used Kai Viti and were disappointed. Mike, the owner operator, was not well organized and seemed disinterested and did not communicate with his customers worth a darn. We had five days of rough weather and were unable to get to some of the best dive sites and all the divers were asking for long range weather reports and a dive plan (we had no TV or radio) and Mike was evasive at best. On our last day of diving the weather had calmed and we were able get to some better dive sites. Mike was unable or unwilling to step up to the plate, we the customers, forced the issue and ordered take out lunches from the resort and basically demanded a three tank dive day. At \$40.00/tank and ten divers one would have thought he would have been thrilled, not the case. On the day we left it happened again, the four remaining divers thought they were doing a three-tank dive day and Mike was prepared for a two-tank day. The man needs to work on his communication skills. Dive briefings were weak as were his critter spotting skills. His boat crew was good and worked hard but after five days of asking questions and receiving no answers I was fed up. Mike's wife, Julie, is the PR/organized one but we did not meet her until day 5, a little to late. Basically

loved Wananavu, but would explore the other operation Ra Divers.  
([www.kaivitidivers.com](http://www.kaivitidivers.com))

**Kai Viti Divers, Wananavu Beach Resort, June 2004, Simone Di Tomasso, (Simone@pkidd.com), Montreal, Quebec.** Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: 75 to 95 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 Fahrenheit, calm. Kai Viti advertise that they offer "Personalized diving with Outstanding Service". They stack up to their claim 100%. Diving in Bligh water (Nanu-I-Rau Passage) is fabulous. The soft corals are plentiful, healthy and extremely colorful. Mike & Julie really have their dive operation running smoothly. Starting at a meeting in the hotel dining room where they establish contact and determine your dive experience and needs. They pick up your gear at your bure and everything flows effortlessly. We were consulted on dive locations that we would enjoy. Julie even baked homemade goodies and included fruit for snacks. Sethe, the divemaster, is experienced in these waters and exudes the wonderful personality of the Fijian people. The boat has a head and is comfortable. They even took us out when we were the only two divers. All with a smile and interest in making our holiday memorable. the highlight of our 25-day Fiji dive holiday. Wananavu Resort is very nice, Bure #8 is spectacular with a beautiful view and great washroom facilities.

**Kai Viti Divers, Wananavu, August 2004, Jim Bullitt, Paso Robles, CA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives Vis: 60 to 150 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 Fahrenheit,

choppy. Kai Viti Divers is owned by Mike & Julie Trussell who have considerable experience in Fiji and particularly the Bligh Waters. The diving in the Vat-Tui-Rah Passage is outstanding with more fish per square foot than we have seen anywhere. Great fast Jet Boat set-up for 16 divers that gets to the sites very comfortably and protects the divers in case of wind and rain with a complete enclosure of the rear deck that can be lowered when needed. We should have left about half of the clothes we took home and traveled with only shorts & shirts. Soft coral capitol of the world. Boat & crew is top notch with adequate camera table and rinse tanks. Crew very careful with camera gear and both rinsed and placed on camera table after each dive.

**Kai Viti Divers, Wananavu Beach Resort, August 2004, Karen Guthrie (karen@adventure101.com), Laguna Beach, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 50 to 180 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 Fahrenheit, choppy. Watched 8 bull sharks circling in the current. Although about 8 feet or less and totally disinterested in us, it was quite a thrill. Sites he calls Mellow Yellow and Purple Haze with dramatic walls and loads of hard and soft coral. Very colorful. Hi 8 is like diving the Grand Canyon. Schools of barracuda, anthias and other small colorful additions. Like a walk through a beautiful garden. Sheltered dives on bad weather days yielded cool swim throughs and nudibranchs. I thanked God for every hour I put in on my treadmill. Even the drift dive involved a stiff swim to get away from the reef so that we could get picked up.

Currents sometimes would change in the middle of the dive or go in an unexpected direction. The resort needs to take care of the flies at the restaurant as we got quite a bit of exercise trying to keep them out of our food. All dining is open air or in a room with open double doors. Mosquitos are an annoyance. (About 2-5 bites/person/day) Food is expensive and really not that good but you don't have much choice as the town is impractical unless you have a car. Ra Divers on the premises is reportedly cheaper but has no sun shade on the boat and does not go to the spectacular outer sights like Hi8. If the weather permits Mike is totally up for going all the way out there but it is about 1.25 hours to get there and there is no place to hide if the weather gets rough. We made it more often than not to sites in that area. The divemasters needed to slow down a little more and enjoy. Get the 2 bedroom as you get a washing machine and clothes line, kitchen and fridge. Meal service is at tables sized to your party not at big group tables Evening entertainment needs to be better. The singers are not very good and I think their kava bill must be huge. Camera tables were small and also housed the snack. Fresh water rinse available. Did not see any charging or other facilities like that.

**Ra Divers, Wananavu, November 2003, Steve Nelson (gone2tahoe@earthlink.net) Danville, CA.** Experience: 250+ dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 79 to 81 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 500 lbs on return. Resort upgrade (free) to beachfront villa, wonderful privacy. Easy diving. Vibrant,

robust reefs. Gorgeous hard and soft corals and huge sea fans top to bottom. Overwhelming variety, color and vibrant — visual overload. Tridacna clams and anemones throughout. Incredible small tropicals at tops. Color, color, color!! North Fiji diving superior to South Fiji. ([www.radivers.com](http://www.radivers.com))

## FRENCH POLYNESIA

Tahiti and Moorea are everyone's dream of the South Pacific, and despite their pricey resorts and food, these French-speaking islands have just begun attracting American divers since there is plenty of reef shark action. ... There are a range of accommodations, though generally it's expensive. ... The once snotty French attitude toward others has lessened considerably.

## Huahine

**Annie Brunet, Pension Mauarii, May 2004, David Dornbusch, Oakland, CA.** Experience 251-500 dives. Vis. 50 – 75 ft. Water: 84 F, Air: 83 F, clear and dry, small chop, slight current and surge. Annie operates alone, driving her own six-passenger Zodiac and also guiding the dives. She provides gear at no charge, but her gauges indicate only tank pressure, not depth. She does not provide computers. The disadvantage of her operating alone is that the best diving is through passes, and you need to work your way back to the boat against a current, which was not especially strong during our dives, but can be stronger. She picked us up promptly

at our Pension's beach and we traveled about 20 minutes to what she felt were the best dive sites at the Avapahi Pass one day and Fa'a Miti the other. We moored to her underwater buoy. Back roll in. At the end of the dive, Annie would board first to help with gear. Many sharks at the pass (mainly white tips), an eagle ray, large morays, many nesting triggers, and large numbers of angels, wrasses, and many other reef fish. Hard corals in fair condition and not plentiful. Safety stop every dive. Reasonably good diving, but not worth a special trip unless you've already come for the diving in the Tuamotus. Pension Mauraii is very charming, comfortable, with excellent and congenial staff, serving very good food, and reasonably priced. Free bananas were available anytime, hanging in the dining room all day. Large breakfast, with fresh fruit and eggs. Huge dinner menu. The best mahi-mahi I've ever had. Lunch sandwiches are big enough for two. Live local music Friday and Saturday night. Other restaurants nearby, but never felt a desire to go elsewhere. Owner-operator is Vetea Breyse, very charming, very attentive, who developed the property on his family's home site. Email communication and direct booking was easy and fast. Hobie cat, windsurfers, kite boarding, and free kayaks. Reasonably good snorkeling from their beach, where we saw lion fish and stingrays. No air-conditioning, but not necessary. Provide mosquito netting, but it too was not necessary. Rent a car for at least one day to see this beautiful undeveloped island. Airport pickup/dropoff is only \$15 per person, round trip. Highly rec-