

operation run by SeaSport is good and the accommodations were first rate.

CHILE

Easter Island

Orca Diving, Bed and Breakfast, January 2005, Harvey Monroe (CheMono@aol.com), Santa Fe, NM.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 Feet. Water: 73 F, calm, no currents. The Undercurrent report was accurate and still up to date. Definitely off the beaten track. Mostly, South Americans, European and Japanese come to see the archeological features. We spent more time underwater than above. Pensions are a much better deal than the 2-3 hotels, expect to spend between \$40-\$80 per night for high season, the Xmas holidays. The climate is subtropical and can be cool at night or when it rains. The Rapa Nui-Polynesian Culture has been preserved to a great extent though the island is Chilean. They have several dance performances. The Orongo Village is a memorable spot on the side of a volcanic crater overlooking the ocean and the two small islands or Motus.

Orca Diving, the more professional of two island dive operations, is owned by ex-Cousteau diver. Has three capable dive leaders who tend to be overly protective of the recent arrivals. They loosened up after the 2nd day. Cladio, Christian and Jose-Luis are personable. The Motu Nui and Motu Iti are not to be missed. Shear pinnacles that rise out of the south ocean coast. We did several dives there to over 150 ft. Other spots not to be missed are the Dos Cuevas, the Giant Coral Head and Hang Roa

Reef. Fish life is not profuse but unique, colorful and interesting. This is the far South Pacific that is all hard corals and volcanic formations cool crystal clear water. Fish life was not plentiful but unique to the area with 30%-50% endemic to the region. The visibility was the best I've ever seen. With some spectacular coral encrusted rock walls and formations. The boats where small panga type boats usually taking out no more than eight divers. Isla de Pascua or Rapa Nui is off the beaten track, five hours from Santiago, but for those that want something different I would recommend it for the adventurous.

FIJI

For West Coasters, it takes as many hours to get to Fiji as it does to most islands in the Caribbean: 10 hours nonstop from L.A. Prices are comparable and you can tailor air packages to include New Zealand/Australia extensions at little extra cost. Fijians are polite, friendly, modest, and religious. Wetsuits are staples year-round; currents add coolness and in some places they are vigorous, so carry surface signaling devices (tubes, strobes). In September 2004, American Dan Grenier, the operator of Crystal Divers at Bamboo Reef Resort, took several divers to a distant reef and disappeared with another diver in heavy currents. The weather can be stormy June through September. Short, heavy showers are possible any afternoon year-round, especially around Beqa Lagoon. The year-round average temperature

is 80 or above; nights average 69 degrees in winter.

Beqa Lagoon

Beqa Adventure Divers, Lagoon Resort, October 2004, Dale Johnson, Helena, MT. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. The dive operation emphasizes its "Big Fish Encounter" in which "fish scraps are reintroduced back in to the food chain to feed the fish and sharks of Shark Reef" (a marine reserve, \$10 daily entry fee). Several of us, who did not want to participate in the shark feeding for ethical reasons, dove an adjacent reef from the same boat and saw lots of large fish which I am sure were attracted to the area by the feeding. We saw many blacktip, whitetip, and gray reef sharks in all sizes as well as a huge magnificent silvertip with a few smaller ones plus several lemon sharks. There were many types of large jacks, including giant trevally, and some large snapper and bass, etc. The Fiji natives on the boat/dive crew were wonderful to dive with. A negative note: one of the Caucasian owners came along for the shark dives and insisted on smoking on the dive boat despite of being asked not to do so by the divers. He was rude to divers tending to give abrupt orders rather than instructions or requests. Since the boss smoked, one of the other crew members did too. The resort is situated on a river about a mile from the ocean. Nice pool but no beach. It was built in the 70s as a casino/bordello/golf course to cater to wealthy Asians and Arabs. The large rooms are therefore much nicer than the average dive destination with tile floors, marbled baths, A/C,

and the staff is wonderful. Free coaster bikes are available to ride to the village or around the golf course. This might be a nice place to spend a few days, perhaps to play some golf. Don't go to dive unless you want to support a shark feeding operation and tolerate a boat crew that smokes. UW Photography Comments: Small Bucket on boat, No table, etc.

Beqa Lagoon Resort, February 2005, Szilora Gogh (szgogh@hotmail.com), Burbank, CA. Experience: 5,000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm and flat, no currents. Beqa Lagoon is amazing! No cars, TV, phone. Best shore diving. Even snorkeling is fun. All our "macho" divers borrowed my snorkel for an hour or so. Diving in general is not that special, but the whole package is. Gourmet food, massage in rooms, friendly locals, waterfalls, kava ceremonies, fire walkers, always something to do or just hang out on the beach on a hammock and have a drink. Nobody asked to see our certification cards. They don't have much rental gear and nothing really to buy. But the divemasters are great.

Beqa Lagoon Resort, August 2005, Eric Multhaup (mullew@pacbell.net), Mill Valley, CA. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 74 to 75 F, calm. The island of Beqa ("Ben-ga"), a 45-minute boat ride from Pacific Harbor on the main island of Viti Levu, is the largest of several islands within the Beqa Lagoon, protected by a barrier reef many miles in circumference. The resort is on a small bay, with about 25 rooms spread among the grounds and palm trees, and a large central din-

ing and entertainment area, all in the Fijian bure style. There are no roads, no stores, and no TV at the resort. August is Fiji winter, with less rain and better visibility, always 100+ feet whether sunny or cloudy. The dive destinations are coral heads sprinkled throughout the many square miles of lagoon, all lavishly decorated with soft coral and sea fans. Side Street has the most prolific display of sea fans, and a stunning swim-through. The tropicals are prolific — at Circus Circus we were engulfed with what one diver later described as a “blizzard” of fish. We saw sharks almost every dive, white tips and black tips on the regular dives, and large bull sharks on the official “shark dive.” The dive guides were tireless in spotting the lionfish and scorpionfish, and blue ribbon eels, brilliant nudibranchs, Spanish Dancer flatworms. Plenty of free-swimming morays; schools of large barracuda; many colors of crinoids (feathered sea stars) attached to sea fans. This is all comfortable, and rewarding. The night dives were particularly enjoyable at Pearl Rock, with sharks, lots of crustaceans, sea pens, and unusual anemones. A separate dive operation in Pacific Harbor on the mainland puts on “shark dives” with the resorts, in which divers descend to 80 feet, line up behind a 10-foot “security rope,” and the shark guys chum the water with fish offal. Every pelagic fish in the zip code converges, and about half way through the dive the sharks arrive, mostly reef sharks and large bull sharks. A large tiger shark monopolized the feeding the day before we arrived. In charge of dive operations is 33-year-old Delana, a native Beqan, who runs an efficient and diver-friendly

operation. They issue each diver an identification number that is duct-taped to a dive bag containing mask, fins, snorkel, and regulator, and duct-taped to a BCD strap and to a weight belt. Each morning a panga carries the divers 50 yards to the dive boat, where all equipment has been assembled, with each person’s dive bag and weight belt under the seat below their equipment. At the site, you put on your wetsuit, etc., sit on the step at the stern, the crew puts your gear on your back and you giant stride in. When you get out, you sit on the same step, the crew takes your gear, changes the tank, and repositions it at your space. Catered diving. Groups of five or fewer are accompanied by one dive guide, and six or more by two guides up to a maximum of 12 on the boat. The dive shop has dive equipment to rent, but is primarily used for on-site dive classes. The rental regulators and BCDs were perfectly adequate, but the selection of wetsuits was spotty as far as size and age. During the Fijian summer, the water temperature reaches the mid to high 80’s. A generator provides electricity to the bures. There is a daily afternoon activity that usually involves the nearby Fijian villages. There is a healthy symbiotic relationship between the resort and the villages, with the resort providing the only steady source of income for the residents, who are otherwise self-sufficient through farming, fishing and hunting. The residents provide pleasant and helpful service, make some craft items for sale, and provide high quality musical entertainment at the resort. The Methodist church is the focus of village life, and the choir sings hymns in Fijian

with soaring harmonies never heard in the United States. The Bula Band that performs at the resort restaurant during dinner, and a truly remarkable proportion of the village participates in the music accompanying the children's dance performance. There is limited hiking, including a sacred waterfall and a challenging climb to the top of the island (only 400 meters elevation but super steep in parts) with spectacular views. The food is excellent, due to the good judgment of the new owners in promoting a local woman to head chef, after she had apprenticed to the fancy European chefs in residence under prior ownership. Lunch and dinner consist of a just caught fish dish prepared in a simple but well-conceived manner that would work in any upscale San Francisco seafood restaurant, or a meat alternative, both accompanied by some local vegetables and a rice concoction. Desserts were weighted heavily toward chocolate, and were sophisticated and delicious. Breakfast was a choice between a well-seasoned egg dish, or a pancake/French toast selection, all with fresh fruit. Bring books, I-Pods, board games, etc., as there are no shopping opportunities.

Lalati Resort, September 2004, Ron Jordan (optionsrj@yahoo.com), Tucson, AZ. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, choppy, currents, no currents. The trip from Tucson, AZ, took about 22 hours door to door. We arrived in Nadi at 3:00 am. We slept at the hotel airport for a couple of hours. The Lalati van picked us up at 6:30 am and we drove for 2.5 hours then a 20 minute boat ride to the resort. There are no streets or any

vehicles. The only way to get around is by boat or sea kayak. The resort is awesome. Large, individual bures with nice finishes. The landscaping is lush and beautiful. The food is gourmet and plentiful. Over all the diving was nice. Bottom times were 50-65 minutes. Most of the diving is on pinnacles at 10-30 feet deep. Many different types of tropical fish and beautiful soft corals and sea fans. They served banana bread and hot chocolate during the surface intervals. For those that didn't want to do a second dive, another boat would pick them up and take them back to the resort. flexible diving. At lower depths there was evidence of coral damage. There was large amount of dead coral below 40 feet. I asked about it but couldn't get an answer.

Lalati Resort, October 2004, Jennifer MacDonald (jennifermacdonald10@hotmail.com), Boulder, CO. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 90 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, choppy. Lalati is a special place. Beqa Island is remote and pristine and well worth the fun journey to get there. There are no cars or roads on the island, only footpaths connecting the Fijian villages. The staff was wonderful and felt like family. There is no tipping and you feel that people are being nice to you because they are sincerely kind and friendly. I mentioned to one of the staff the lovely smell coming from a blooming gardenia bush — the next day a gardenia flower in a vase appeared on my bedside table. At Lalati we were completely relaxed within a few hours of arriving. We have never experienced such "immediate relaxation" on a vacation before. It made the whole week seem longer. The owners are

warm, welcoming and attentive without imposing on your privacy. Manager Beato makes sure you are happy and looks after your every request. Beato is funny and personable. The spacious accommodations (bures) are beautiful, luxurious, private and well-maintained. Fresh flowers are kept in the bathroom and living areas. The chef Beato prepares amazing gourmet and plentiful meals. The kitchen is careful with any special dietary requests (one guest was a vegetarian and seemed happy with her meals). They serve meals at a large table, but guests are welcomed to eat privately at their own table. The resort offered hikes, trips to the village, spa treatments, kayaking, trips to a small island for a romantic lunch or dinner — Storm Island — and surfing. Our favorite activity was to kayak across the bay to a secluded cove and snorkel. It was a world class snorkeling spot. The pool/hot tub area is lovely. We spent most afternoons sitting by the pool in the shade with a good book and cold drink. The view across the bay is amazing. The dive boats left around 8:30 for a two-tank dive. The dive shop picks up your gear on arrival and you don't have to handle it again all week. Everything is set up for you and rinsed/stored after each dive. Hot chocolate and banana bread during the surface interval. The dive sites were within 10-20 minutes, most pinnacles in Beqa Lagoon swarming with life — we saw male ribbon eel, juvenile ribbon eel, lizard fish, lionfish, pipefish, Mertens' butterflyfish, ornate butterflyfish, regal angel fish, spine cheek anemone fish, fire dartfish, Moorish idol, clown triggerfish, sea turtles, knife razorfish, red-eye hovering

goby, scythe triggerfish, leaf scorpionfish, black spotted puffers, popcorn shrimp, humphead bannerfish, golden spadefish, orange spine unicornfish, Clark's anemonefish, longnose hawkfish, crinoid clingfish, octopus, emperor angelfish, white spotted puffer, bird wrasse, wedgetail triggerfish, longnose file fish, Picasso triggerfish, pyramid butterflyfish, bannerfish, mimic surgeon fish, bi-color flag blenny. We took one trip to Frigate's Passage (a boat ride around the island) where we did some neat swim throughs and saw several reef sharks. www.lalati-fiji.com/

Lalati, February 2005, Craig Condron (craigandlindaonthego@hotmail.com), Spokane, WA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 70 to 125 Feet. Water: 83 to 84F., calm. Made a DVD with the Divemaster and his wife, of sharks to blue-ribbons eels to nudibranch. Shore diving I found an ornate ghost pipefish (cool) and 2 leaf pipefish. Calmer weather at the beginning of our week allowed us to go outside the Beqa Lagoon Reef. I had 12 dives mostly 5 to 10 minutes from Resort. Discovered a full grown black spotted pufferfish with no tail section. No scars, but the body just ended at the anal and dorsal fin. It is doing just fine propelling itself using those fins. New species? The bures, food and Fiji people are excellent. We used a floatplane in and out of the resort and saved ourselves 2 days in travel time in Fiji.

Lalati, March 2005, Vic Bary (vbary@yahoo.com), Cranford, NJ. Experience: 175 dives. Vis: 20 to 60 feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, choppy. Exceptional high-end resort that emphasizes diving,

but is not exclusively visited by divers. The attention to detail, the staff service, and the overall ambience rivals Disney. You will come to know all the staff by name, and treasure them all. Our visit saw a combination of 3 days of torrential rain, followed by sun, so visibility was never optimal. Since it was our first trip to the South Pacific, we were enthralled by the soft coral and clouds of small fish on the bommies.

Lalati Resort, July 2005, Sylvia Seaberg (sseaberg@gmail.com), Mountain View, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 74 to 79 F, calm, no Currents. We 16 divers chose Lalati as an add-on after the Solomons. After a long but scenic drive from Nadi we boarded a ferry and 45 minutes later arrived at Lalati Resort on Beqa Island. Our luggage was waiting at our bures. The resort is beautiful, spacious, scenic, well-maintained, a true paradise. Bures are large and comfortable. The five beach bures have two bedrooms, each with separate doors leading onto the expansive porch and also into the luxurious bathroom. This helped maintain privacy since, due to our group size, some couples needed to share their bures with a single. Each bure has its own rain water tank and composting toilet, ecological. They request you to use the biodegradable toiletries that the resort provides — they are the highest quality, Pure Fiji. Comfy robes are hung in the bathroom. Weather was hot, sunny and dry until the last two days when it rained. We were told that overcast and rain were common and we were lucky to have so much sun. The staff is outstanding. Managers Clint and Jane are friendly and omnipresent

but not intrusive. The staff from Lalati village is beautiful, friendly and truly interested in our well-being. The food rivaled any 4-star restaurant. The staff did everything they could to satisfy us, including one or two extra beer runs to the main island after realizing we were a thirsty group. At night local musicians entertained us with their music and kava ceremony. One of our group is an accomplished guitarist and he jammed with them nightly. The bar is well-stocked including an impressive selection of wines. Dining is open air in the protected common area, absolutely lovely, but prepare for mosquitoes. They have an assortment of repellents. They try to keep the skeeters at bay but it's good to be prepared. Diving in Beqa Lagoon is spectacular. Water was cool after the Solomons but the visibility was superior. Our dives were current-free and surface conditions were calm. Dramatic pinnacles and swim-throughs with colorful soft corals, anemones, magnificent sea fans and a variety of creatures: ribbon eels, anemone-fish, nudibranchs, reef fish, shrimps, sharks and many others. Resort boats (2) are rustic but comfortable and take divers directly to the nearby sites. Resort crew totes gear to and from boat so divers do not lift a finger. Our dive master was preoccupied with keeping the group tightly together the first dive. We requested that he not be so militant and he did back off. He was more relaxed the second day and everybody, guide included, had a more enjoyable time. His assistant was one of the worst divers we have ever seen, up and down like a cork with arms waving wildly throughout, often tugging on our hoses

to get our attention; nothing we said could get him to stop. His antics have made a priceless addition to our trip video, however. Dive masters on both boats were excellent at finding critters and made sure that the photographers had every photo op possible. Dive shop is well-equipped with rental gear and those of us with skins or 3 mm wetsuits could rent thicker suits. Shore diving was pleasant and free, but visibility was 10-20 feet. Snorkeling was a better option. Superior snorkeling is across the bay at Clint's point. Kayak over, roam the beach and snorkel the reef. Don't wait until the last day. Another recommended kayak excursion is deep into Lalati lagoon past bat island and through the mangroves at high tide, a cool experience. We enjoyed hikes up the mountain, water skiing, and a day trip out to Frigates for surfing (costs extra). The resort also boasts a pool and hot tub, perfect after diving and snorkeling, and a day spa (costs extra). Lalati is a special place that far exceeded our expectations. When our ferry departed to take us home the entire staff stood on the beach and sang a farewell to us ... a moving experience. Resort has no camera facilities.

Kadavu

Dive Kadavu, Matana Resort, July 2004, Jacob Rosenstein (judyjake@pacbell.net), San Francisco, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 85 Feet. Water: 75 to 77 F, choppy. The Manta Experience is a must do 3 tank dive trip to the Astrolabe Reef. Saw about 4 manta Rays. The reef is in pristine condition- all kinds of coral, such as mantipora, table coral, flexible

soft coral. Lots of tropicals also. The rest of the diving was done on the Namalata Reef, a 15 minute boat ride. Lots of tropical fish as well as macro life, such as blue ribbon eel, nudibranch, flatworms, longnose hawkfish. The soft coral dendronephthya came in different colors of the rainbow, but in clumps on certain reef. Lots of anemonefish — Clark's, tomato, orange-finned, and lots of crinoids. The resort does a shark feed occasionally that attracts 8-10 Gray reef sharks. The meals were excellent, different ethnic dishes. The weekly Lovo was kept to Fijian tradition. Food was served on palm leaf and we all sat cross legged on the outdoor dining room floor sampling fish, chicken, taro, and a vegetarian palusari slow cooked by heated stones. The village children entertained us with song and dance on our last day village tour. Only negative was an intestinal virus that went around from divemaster and guests alike. Stay longer than a week since the weather/wind conditions can determine the dive sites to Astrolabe and/or Nambukalevu. The beach is lovely and swimmable. UW Photography Comments: Rinse buckets only. Area on top was used for U/W equipment not needing constant water rinse. Steel fast boat had storage area in front of boat.

Dive Kadavu, Matana Kadavu Resort, May 2005, Pam Rudy, San Jose, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 80F., calm, choppy, surge, currents. Power at the resort was turned off from midnight to 0630, and for a few hours in mid afternoon. Bring mosquito lotion. Pretty beach at the resort. Meals were good and are eaten either outside on the huge

veranda, or inside the spacious main lodge family style. We stayed in a two bedroom beachfront bure with ceiling fans. There's a dive locker in front of each bure, where divers must stow their gear (including weights). Hot tea or coffee and cookies served on the beach between dives. Diving was wonderful! Two covered dive boats both with ladders, dunk tank for cameras, giant stride into the water. Joelie, the dive master checked our C-cards when we arrived. He led us on some great dives, pointing out, with a "Yippee," some ghost pipe fish, sea snakes, eagle rays, bi-colored parrotfish, sharks, a blue ribbon eel. We saw mantas, schools of barracuda, lionfish, incredible soft coral. Charming Fijian people.

Tiliva Resort, December 2004, Cres Van Keulen, Tiburon, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 20 to 70 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F. We looked forward to diving the Great Astrolabe Reef but we were disappointed. Where were the fish? And the coral? Everything was gray and lifeless. It got to the point where we'd get excited at seeing a big sea cucumber. Felipe, the divemaster, admitted that a big cyclone knocked the socks off the area about two years ago. We did see a couple of green turtles when they told us we were unlikely to see any because they are a local food source; 2 small white tip sharks; good-sized Napoleon wrasse; a lionfish, and a giant green moray. The Lonely Planet book "Diving and Snorkeling Fiji" is seriously out-of-date. The resort owners, Kemu and Barbara Yabaki, are not divers. Pleasant as Barbara was to deal with via email (we only met briefly as they were on their way to England for Christmas), no

way should Tiliva Resort be promoted as a dive resort. I suspect they have been relying on Felipe, who reputedly has over 6,000 dives, mostly with Dive Kadavu. Our feeling was that he is burnt out and just going through the motions. He carelessly kicked live coral or otherwise violated what we thought to be common dive protocols. The first dive he changed the dive departure time but failed to tell us, leaving us waiting on the beach. After 45 minutes we tracked him down for a lame excuse. He short-tanked us the first three days until we complained. The excuse was the compressor gauge did not work properly but somehow the tanks were full the last day. Even then, he tried to surface after 45 minutes but I pointed to my gauge reading of 1000 PSI or more, and continued on. The new "dive" boat has no tank holders. Tanks are laid flat on the floor to roll around so we had to take extra care of our computers. There are no camera facilities. The bures are pretty new and nice. The "girls," as they call the cook and staff, could not be nicer. The village visit with kava ceremony was a great experience, not at all commercial as they get few visitors. Our gifts for the children — yo-yos, pens and candy canes — were well-received. We attended church on Sunday morning and it was a wonderful experience. The people live such a simple life without electricity or TV. One man I spoke with had never heard of 9-11. Tiliva breakfast was great, lunch was F. good, but dinner reflected Kemu's 40 years in the British Army — meat and potatoes. Fresh fruit and vegetables everywhere. On our way back to the airport — about 90 minutes

by boat — we stopped at Dive Kadavu Resort and spoke with the owner. They dive the Northeast side of the island, and have a boat on the Southeast side as well, where they only dive the southern tip of Astrolabe.

Savusavu

Cousteau Fiji Resort, July 2005, Vicki Singley (vsingley@hotmail.com), Houston, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 72 to 76 F, calm, surge. The Cousteau Resort is gorgeous and lush, and the accommodations and food are outstanding. The service from the Fijian staff is wonderful and warm. We had a one-year-old with us; they have a private nanny all day long for any child under five years, and an outstanding “Bula” camp for other kids. Adult areas, and adults with kids areas, are kept separate. We gave up something on the diving to stay at Cousteau — you would get much better diving on a live-aboard in Fiji, and better land-based diving at resorts like Wananavu. The diving on the farther sites at Cousteau (45-60 minutes) like Namena and Nosomisomi Passage was outstanding, but the boats are dependent on the weather, so if you ran into bad weather, they would be inaccessible. The diving in Savusavu Bay ranges from good to great, but the area is over fished. We saw few pelagics, and the number of fish was a lot less than Palau or PNG. But the coral was excellent. Cousteau had problems with their big boat, so we switched to their smaller boat, which is fast but not as comfortable. The dive staff was great and was accommodating about diving whenever we wanted. There were

probably about 10 divers at the resort, so the service was custom. We knew that the water would be colder than we were used to because it was Fiji’s winter, so we brought extra protection. The women wore from 6-8mm, and the men from 3-6mm, and we were OK. The air was warm, and the evenings were cool. Plenty to do for non-divers: snorkeling, sea kayaking, small sailboats, hiking through the rainforest, village visit, gorgeous pool and beach. We booked our trip through Kirsten Treias at Reef and Rainforest, who did her usual excellent job.

Namale, February 2005, Craig Condrion (craigandlindaonthego@hotmail.com), Spokane, WA. Experience: 501-1000 dives Vis: 75 to 75 Feet. Water: 83 to 84F., choppy. When I arrived, their large dive boat was out of the water, (gear box repair). They had a smaller dive boat which they made available and offered a morning and afternoon tank dive using small tanks. Because of the small boat and choppy seas they stayed close to the resort. The dives were shallow so the small tank lasted an hour plus. Not the greatest Fiji diving but, way above average for the rest of the world. Because of the large boat being on dry dock, there was unlimited diving at no charge! Did 8 dives and zero cost.

Taveuni

Aqua-Trek, Garden Island Resort, November 2004, Peter & Kathy Golitzen (golitzenp@hawaii.rr.com), Kailua-Kona, HI. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 F, calm, currents. Great Place — the

2004 Chapbook write-ups caused us to select it — fabulous choice (wanted land-based since people so friendly!). Wonderful place for recovering from plane travel. We loved 7 day package, but shorter available for warm up to live-aboard. Wish I had afternoon dived the small island nearby, just snorkeled it. Somosomo straight excellent — soft corals, lotsa fish, Giant clam (rare there) extremely impressive! Currents strong but easy diving at bottom, no downcurrents encountered. Did surface interval at beautiful beach cove — short boat rides (10-15 minutes). Shore snorkeling nice and easy (resort has silly draconian warnings to dodge liability but dive shop usually says no worries) one anemone, lots of hard coral. Good dive operation and fast boats. Suggest exchange \$100 or so when in Nadi at competitive rate. They take credit card at end (added dives, bar tab). Waiting for 2300 return flight from Nadi on Sunday was a drag since town shut down; otherwise near perfect trip.

Aqua Trek, Garden Island Resort, September 2005, Matthew D. Schultz (matt.schultz@tds.net), Madison, WI. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm, choppy. Garden Island Resort and Aqua Trek have teamed together to give you a memorable, pleasurable, and relaxing vacation. Aqua Trek's staff members are friendly, knowledgeable, and have some of the best divemasters we've seen. They like to have fun, which makes for a better dive for vacationers while ensuring diver safety. The dive shop is simple, yet well laid out, allowing ample drying racks inside for equipment. They also have great compressor facilities and

provide Nitrox 32. Aqua Trek's staff would carry all your equipment to and from the dive boat, thoroughly rinse your equipment, hang it up in their locked shop at night to have it all ready for you the next morning. After every dive, they do a roll call, while recording your depth and time on a chart that they file in their shop. At the end of every day, you must sign off on your dives. Nitrox fills are analyzed, logged, and signed-off before you even leave the shore. Dive sites are spectacular, with many healthy corals, ample fish life, and many other critters. Currents at the White Wall can be strong, so newer divers should watch their air consumption. Divemasters respect the coral and aquatic life, being certain not to disturb their surroundings with their group. They still find things in the coral heads that will amaze you. Surface intervals are on a beach where you can spend the time eating a snack either on the beach or in the shade of trees, or snorkeling in the shallows where lionfish, octopus, and eels can be found in as little as six feet of water. Night dives are offered, but they require a minimum of four divers and 24 hours notice to the staff. The resort's rooms are simple, yet they have to have quiet air conditioners, making sleeping at night restful. The gardens around the resort are beautiful and provide the fresh flowers you have every day in your room and at the dinner table. The food is spectacular, the staff friendly. There are several hikes in the surrounding area — but with some tropical rains can produce flash floods near streams and waterfalls. UW Photography Comments: Although the boat had ample

fresh water rinse tanks for the cameras, the camera table is nothing more than the life jackets on the deck of the boat. They do take great care in handling your equipment. They have a nice large rinse tank when you return from your day of diving. Garden Island Resort really lacks any camera facilities, so if shooting digital, pack your computer since you'll easily fill your memory card in no time.

Swiss Fiji Divers, Maravu Plantation Resort, August 2004, Shawn Fanshier (sfsprock@mindspring.com), Hollywood, FL. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm, surge. Small dive groups, 6-7 people max. Very accommodating for beginners to experienced. Excellent care and confidence provided for beginners. High level of service in setup, daily cleaning and storage of gear. We only had to bring it down to the shop on the first day. The compressor broke down so on the way back from diving daily, we had to stop at another shop. Gave us an opportunity to swim and see a tree full of fox face bats. The only other negative was at low tide wading to the boat and not stepping on sea snakes. The locals say they never bite, but stepping on them did not seem right. The reefs were chock-a-block with tropicals, nudibranch, banded shrimp, sea snakes, and soft corals. White tip reef shark on every dive. The famous ribbon eels are a more elusive, but beautiful. The rainbow wall is a highlight dive. The dive intervals are spent ashore on an island beach where other dive operations also go, so that you can compare notes and locations with other divers. We sighted most days a pod of bottle-

nose dolphins on the way to the sites. The resort was incredible for their level of service and accommodation. All food is fresh and organically grown. Breakfast could sometimes be on Fiji time, rushing us to the boat. Excursions for nondivers. Don't miss the blow holes, the natural water slides, the village tour and standing one foot in yesterday and today at the 180th meridian. Complete all money conversion prior to getting to Taveuni island (LAX or at Nadi airport). UW Photography Comments: No real accommodation for UWP. Storage on boat limited, though divemasters were accommodating.

Vita Levu

Kai Viti, November 2004, Tracey Bennett (Tdives@prodigy.net), Las Vegas, NV. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 77 to 80F, choppy. I was looking for land based accommodation but wanted to experience the sites where live-aboards take divers. Kai Viti Divers was a great solution. When the weather cooperated, we were taken out to the Bligh Waters to dive Black Magic Mountain, G-6, Garden of Eden, and many more. We saw schools of tuna and fusiliers, grey, whitetip, and blacktip reef sharks, numerous barracuda, hawkfish, peacock nudibranchs, lionfish, amazing soft corals, huge sea fans, caverns, swimthroughs, and millions of anthias. On rough days we dove inside the passage at surprisingly good sites where we saw bommies topped with soft corals and swirling anthias, crevices with soft corals lining entire walls, grey reef sharks, octopus, blennies, anemonefish and more. The owners, Julie and Mike Trussel, cater to

more experienced divers and were eager to get us to the outside sites. Mike was flexible with dive site choices and we dove our own profiles. The boat is fast and comfortable, with a head, camera table, plenty of dry storage areas, protected seating areas, and camera designated rinse buckets. The staff will rinse and dry your gear and then have it set up for you when you get to the boat the next morning. Wananavu is a two-hour drive north of Nadi and Kai Viti docks their boat in front of the resort. The staff was friendly and cheerful and the rooms were clean, well equipped and comfortable. The two bedroom villa has an enormous deck, washer and dryer, and kitchen. Meals were pretty good, however it was evident when the head chef had the day off. Breakfast is a continental buffet plus menu items. Lunch is a choice of various soups, sandwiches and burgers, and dinner is a choice of three entrées, starters, veggies and desserts. This was my sixth trip to Fiji and some of the best diving I've had.

Kai Viti, March 2005, Gary and Lynne Shukster, Barrie, Ont. Experience: 251-500 dives. is: 20 to 60 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F., calm, currents slight to moderate, and seas slight to choppy depending on the day. Mostly hot and sunny with a couple of rainy days. Diving was excellent with an abundance of healthy, soft coral. We were predominately diving on bommies with a tremendous number of fish on top- like swimming in an aquarium. Clown triggerfish, lionfish, scorpionfish, Napoleon fish, plus all the usual. This reminds me of diving 30 years ago before the reefs were so beaten up. Kai Viti Divers an excellent operation. Mike and Julie, the owners,

were helpful. The dive crew was attentive to our needs. Basically we just gave them our equipment and they would take care of it, wash it and have it ready for the next day's diving. Wananavu was undergoing heavy construction. The resort had nice bures and grounds but nowhere to escape from the noise of the jack hammers. However, the manager, Sarah, was helpful in arranging alternate accommodation. We stayed for 5 days at Bamboo Beach Resort off the mainland. We were unable to stay longer as it was closing down? This resort had pretty grounds although the steep climb (above the tree line) to our burs was a bit of a challenge in the heat. The burs had great views and interesting architecture. The food however, was marginal at best and not much of it. Divers at this resort, using Bamboo Divers complained about lack of care with their equipment and many wound up washing their gear in their rooms. The remainder of our stay was spent at a private residence on the same island. Jenny and David were extremely friendly and fed us until we burst.

Kai Viti Divers, Wananavu Beach Resort, May 2005, Barbara Petrecca (seagoddess@comcast.net), Perry Hall, MD. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm, no currents. The resort is wonderful (worth the two-hour bus ride after a 16-hour plane ride from the east coast.) Small with lots of personal attention. The food was excellent (buffet breakfast, lunch menu, three choices a night for dinner entree) — try their banana ice cream dessert. The chef and wait staff meet your every need. There was some local entertainment. The bures

are roomy (we had a garden views), modern and well kept with daily maid service. The grounds are nicely manicured (even with the construction). The resort is built into the base of a mountain so be prepared for steps and hilly walkways. Internet dial up is available. The dive sites are pristine — nice reefs with lots of swim-thrus. The divemasters are knowledgeable and constantly pointing out the small critters. Our experienced group was allowed to dive within our limits and abilities. Plenty to see from 100 - 20 feet. Two morning dives a day, but the dive operator owner was not interested in working with us to accommodate our group with additional dives — traveling that far, 12-14 dives are not enough. Forget developing 35 MM as the facilities are not available. The boat did have a small space for cameras but most of my set up and break down was done in my room. I took over 600 digital photos in 10 dives. Reef tops can be found at 15 - 20 feet making natural light available.

Kai Viti Divers, Wananavu, August 2005, Chrisanda Button, (rickandchris@altell.net), Elkins, AR. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to Feet. Water: 75 to F, calm, currents. After a week aboard the Fiji Aggressor, we repaired to Wananavu. We have done most of our diving from live-aboards, and we didn't know that land-based operations offered such comfortable boats, excellent diving, and high level of service. It was valet diving indeed. Put your gear in your net bag on the verandah of your bure, and, le voila, it magically appears set up on the dive boat next to that of your buddy. The boat was large comfortable and fast (twin jet

engines). Side curtains were lowered to keep us warm on long rides and during surface intervals. Between dives they offered us home-baked brownies and hot chocolate, welcome given the, uh, brisk, water temps. They gave us nice big towels and the boat carried several marine ID books. There was a marine head. While the dive area was covered, hearty divers could sun at the front of the boat. Entry was by giant stride from the swim platform, and we returned to the boat up a comfortable Christmas tree ladder. When we were on sites with significant current, a downline was rigged to the mooring line so divers could pull themselves down to the bommies. For groups of 10 divers, the boat carried owner/captain Mik, two DMs, and a deck assistant. Dives were loosely guided by the DMs. We chose to hang with Sethe and Enoch because they were showing up good little stuff, but other divers chose not to. The dive ended when we wanted it to end. When the boat returned to harbor, the staff took our gear to the shop and rinsed it. They even washed it at the end of the trip. The seas were glassy on our first day, and Mike made the hour-long trip to Vatu I Ra passage. Mellow Yellow and Black Magic Mountain were beautiful: rich lemon yellow soft coral, black coral. nudis, a tuna or two, chevron barracudas, several varieties of shrimps and crabs, and a humpback whale at the surface. But our favorite site was closer to the resort in the Bligh Waters: DreamMaker. We swam through narrow passages between pinnacles covered with soft corals and large sea fans with some healthy hard corals as the sunlight filtered down through clear

waters. We saw several types of nudis, cowries, shrimp, and sea cucumbers and a single white-tipped shark and the ubiquitous lionfish and anemonefishes. At the Pinnacles we were treated to more chevron barracudas, blood-red anemones, etc. Back at Wananavu we relaxed in beautiful, quiet bures. The term Spartan elegance comes to mind. We loved the large tropical showers, although the resort was having problems with its water system and the showers were saline. Each bure had a small fridge, a hot kettle, and a verandah with an ocean view. The pool and beach were lovely. Ah! those hammocks. We thought the food was quite good and certainly generous, although desserts were unpredictable. Everyone dined on a large deck overlooking the Bligh Waters. The grounds are beautifully landscaped, and the staff was friendly and caring. Our dive gear reappeared magically at our bures at trip's end, not even smelling like we'd been wearing it for two weeks.

Kai Viti Divers, Wananavu Beach Resort, September 2005, Stephanie Knott (knottsteph@yahoo.com), Portola Valley, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 45 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 80 F, calm. The best diving we have done in Fiji. The condition of the reefs, fish population, and dive operation combined to give us great dives. Mike Trussel has a dive staff of three experienced Fijian natives who provided excellent dive briefings, led the dives, and located hidden treasures. Mike is organized, easy going, and safety-conscious. He has two large boats; both have heads, and one (not the one we used) also has a shower. The one we used, the Adi Nunu, was

comfortable and could handle 18 divers, but there were only 4-12 divers. There was ample covered seating space, lots of places to stow gear, separate fresh water tubs for masks and cameras, and dry areas for sensitive gear. Snacks (fresh pineapple or chocolate cake) and drinks (water and hot chocolate) were served between dives. There was no hint of diesel fumes even when the boat went in reverse. Mike said it is just a matter of keeping the boat tuned up. Kai Viti divers picked up our gear from our bure, had it waiting on the boat, and rinsed and stored it between dive days. They returned our clean and dry gear the day before our departure. Mike made minor repairs to our regs and rented us (at a reasonable price) a dive computer when one of ours went out. His dive shop and boats are a three-minute walk from the resort. For two-tank dive days, the boat left at 8 AM and returned at either 12:30 or 1:30, depending on travel time. There are two general dive locations and both were good. The choice depends on tides and sea conditions. The inner reef is a 20 minute ride. The outer reef is about an hour out. We had great conditions in both, although the outer sites generally had better visibility. On one dive on the inner reef (Breathtaker), we had 100-foot visibility and saw six cruising sharks at once, along with schooling barracuda and corals (hard and soft) in wonderful condition among many fish. The outer reef had more current, not extreme, and a wider variety of sea life. Seas varied between lake-like conditions and <1-meter swells. We were there during the full moon, when the currents are stronger, but they were

not strong. Once we were dropped off on the up-current side of a bommie and picked up on the current-free, down-current side. Clouds of anthias at the safety stops almost obscured the reef. We saw a few turtles. On one dive, we requested ghost pipefish (which we'd never seen), and dive guide Bola found us one! Wananavu Resort has been renovated and expanded and a buildings were still being built. We stayed in an oceanfront bure that was clean, modern, and comfortable, though much smaller than rooms at three other Fijian resorts we have been to. It had good air conditioning and excellent lighting (tropical resorts usually have poor reading lights) but not much charm. The room had a small stocked refrigerator and the resort provided a bottle of drinking (rain) water, which we brought to the dining room to be refilled twice per day. The bathroom was large (3 the size of the room), double sinks, with a big shower that had a glass wall looking out to a small garden. The resort's beach was constructed by removing a mangrove swamp, building a retaining wall, and filling in sand. Beyond the mud flats, the snorkeling was okay but not great. The resort has free open-deck single and double kayaks. Slow Internet at a single computer at the gift shop. The food was disappointing and relatively expensive, and the service was patchy. Breakfasts were good, with eggs cooked to order and a buffet of fresh fruit, bacon, sausage, potatoes, etc. Lunches were like poor cafeteria food, e.g., pizza made with ketchup instead of tomato sauce, topped with tasteless cheese, or a "grilled ham, cheese, and

tomato sandwich" that consisted of two dried pieces of bread with one slice of ham, processed yellow cheese, and no tomato. The hamburger made one of us ill. However, the kokoda (Fijian ceviche with coconut milk) was good, and the salads were fresh (though the dressings weren't good). The dinner menus aspired to a bit more sophistication, with sporadic success. The meat was consistently overcooked, a couple of times inedible. The Fiji Night in which food was slowly prepared in a cooking pit, or lovo, was excellent, with many unusual Fijian and Indian dishes.

Kai Viti Divers, Wananavu Resort, September 2005, Matthew D. Schultz (matt.schultz@tds.net), Madison, WI. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm, choppy. Mike Trussell's 38-foot Hamilton inboard jet boat that can easily hold 16 divers. Most days we only had eight divers, giving plenty of room for all aboard. It's big enough and fast enough to motor out to the reefs that are a good 16 miles from the resort. These are some of the same reefs that the Fiji Aggressor will take you to. My wife and I have been diving over seven years, and this is the first time we felt simply astounded by the quantity and quality of sea life. I wish I could give Mike and his divemasters Seci and Bola credit for the beauty found here, especially for the humpback whale we saw diving. The crew will pick up your equipment from your bure, have it ready on the boat the morning of your dives, and then take it to their shop for rinsing and drying. We wish the operators would warn people not to damage the pristine coral while diving. There were many dives

where my wife and I observed other divers simply plowing through soft corals, breaking off pieces of hard coral, and breaking other reef features like sponges and anemone. As dive operator, you should protect the reef life you want to show. I don't know of any other dive location where I can blindly point my camera and click away and still get a great shot. Some of these coral heads were simply a photographer's dream. Although the boat had ample fresh water rinse tanks for the cameras, the camera table itself was a bit small, but considering there were as many as five cameras on board, I can understand this a little better. Wananavu Resort really lacks any camera facilities, so if shooting digital, pack your computer since you'll easily fill a gigabyte card after two dives.

Wananavu, February 2005, Craig C. Condrón (craigandlindaonthego@hotmail.com), Spokane, WA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 70 to 75 Feet. Water: 83 to 84F., choppy. The boat is small and crowded, but the divemasters tried hard to make each dive interesting by taking you through swim throughs, etc. The sites were a short distance away because of the choppy seas.

Wakaya Island

Wakaya Club, February 2005, Craig Condrón (craigandlindaonthego@hotmail.com), Spokane, WA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 83 to 84F., calm. I have been to a dozen resorts throughout Fiji and it doesn't get any better than this. You schedule your diving when it is convenient for you. If you wanted to

sleep in and have a late breakfast, then 10:00 was fine. You called the shots. The reef around the resort has been protected for many years and it shows. Even the Fiji live-aboards stopped by and anchored in the bay for a day to enjoy this tropical beauty. The sites are 2 minutes from the dock. Most sites are wall dives, with small stuff on the wall and big stuff in the blue. The Passage, which I dove on both sides is a fish magnet. You conclude the dive by hanging out on the edge of the reef wall as clouds of sharks, manta (1), fusiliers, snappers, barracuda, beamers, unicorn, surgeonfish, and more are viewed through a cloud of small topical fish. It reminded me of the Blue Corner in Palau. A hammerhead circled me but I was too busy watching a lionfish with his outstretched jaw. The best food and wine list in Fiji. Did I mention the 9 hole-par-3, a few par-4s, enjoyed several rounds with the local Fijians. Other activities include guided nature hikes, picnics at a private beach, boat trip to Lavuka, etc. For the nondiver the snorkeling is great 100 feet in front of our bure. Their private plane brings you in and out on your schedule. Everything is included in the price: wine, food, diving, golf, hikes, private picnics, airplane, wonderful bures.

FRENCH POLYNESIA

Tahiti and Moorea are everyone's dream of the South Pacific, and despite their pricey resorts and food, these French-speaking islands are attracting North American divers to join the plentiful reef shark action. There are a range of accommoda-