

Fish Rock. Occasionally they may go to another site if the weather is bad. We encountered heavy rain showers every day but not enough to keep us inside, nor enough to stop diving, at least on the first day. The ride to the site is about ½ hour in a fairly small boat. The boat has room for about 8 divers; on my day there were only 4 customers. One dive master went with the 3 certified divers, the other was busy with a student. The crew was helpful but an appreciation of Australian humor would be useful. Fish Rock sits alone about ½ mile offshore. The rock is only about 200 yards or so in diameter. A tunnel opens at 80 ft below the surface and runs through the island, via a vertical chimney in one part, to exit at 40 ft. Before we entered, we spent 20 minutes watching the grey nurse sharks that congregate at Fish Rock in the late summer. There were about a dozen 6 to 10 ft sharks. On the first dive, they kept their distance. On the second dive they approached to within a few feet. The tunnel is completely dark so this was a sort of a night dive. A large wobbegong shark was in the dark recess of the tunnel and did not budge. Near the exit of the tunnel, we moved through a sea of fish. It was a beautiful sight to see the enormous schools of fish silhouetted against the open blue ocean.

## CHILE

### Easter Island

**Orca, March 2006, Edwin L. Granite (egranite@aol.com), Chaddsford, PA.** Experience: 1000+ dives. Vis: 100+ feet. Water: 73 F, calm and flat, no currents. One dive with guide – as requested – just guide and me – no other divers. Only had one day here before moving on – good dive operation and guide.

## FIJI

For left coasters, it takes about the same amount of time to get to Fiji as it does to the Caribbean: 10 hours nonstop from L.A. Prices are comparable and air packages can include New Zealand/Australia extensions at little extra cost. Fijians are polite, friendly, modest, and religious, so watch your language, and wear nonrevealing clothes to town. Wetsuits are staples year-round; currents add coolness and in some places they're vigorous, so carry surface signaling devices. In September 2004, American Dan Grenier, the former operator of Crystal Divers, disappeared with another diver while leading divers from Bamboo Reef Resort on Nananu-I-Ra. 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

**AquaTrek, The Pearl South Pacific, June 2006, Sherwood and Judith Smith (sierradeux@comcast.net), Olympia, WA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, choppy. Pearl South Pacific was the venue of the 2006 SPUMS (South Pacific Underwater Medicine Society) meeting. AquaTrek Divers manager, Derrek, was helpful and well organized. (He even attended our airway/resuscitation workshop.) Our group of some 50 divers was split among four boats, and things went pretty well. We did two tank dives every morning in Beqa

Lagoon. After the first dive, a skiff made the rounds of the various dive boats, picking up empty tanks to begin the refilling process for the next day. Dive boats varied from fast aluminum hulls with twin Yamaha's, to our vessel, the Scuba Queen, a slow comfortable wooden craft with an inboard diesel, which gave us more leisurely voyages across the lagoon. We really liked the large stern swim platform. We also made up for the lack of speed with power and seaworthiness, when we towed in a disabled fishing vessel, with a good sea running, on our last dive day. Boatmen and divemasters did a good job with dive briefings and diver retrieval. We had three Fijian divers on every dive, ready and willing to point out small critters. Or we dived in our own teams, seeking our own discoveries. The crew accommodated us in lengthening the surface intervals to keep our computers happy. Most dive sites consisted of single or clustered bommies in 75 ft. or less of water, and topping out at 15-30 ft. Most action was on the sides or tops of the coral, with occasional views of pelagics at depth. Marine life was varied, but little was new or fascinating, other than the octopus with a 24+ inch span, who put on a 15 minute color-and-shape changing show. One day was occupied with a two-tank shark dive. I am not generally in favor of feeding sharks, but I went. The action was unbelievable! Taking photographs of that melée of fish, in water quite turbid from food particulate, was difficult; my best photographs were taken by turning my back on the action, and getting "up close and personal" with a pair of large silvertip sharks, cruising just behind and above the group of spectators, as they circled back toward the food. As we were ascending a medium-sized

tiger shark cruised through the site. We had dived many of these sites early in a 1990 live-aboard trip on the Pacific Nomad; we remember being underwhelmed by the topography of Beqa Lagoon, and that the diving among the outer islands was better. We had the same reaction this time around The Pearl South Pacific Resort is at Pacific Harbor, an almost three-hour drive from Nadi. It is a three-storey hotel, imaginatively appointed in the public areas, with some rooms recently refurbished. Rooms were large, well air conditioned, with comfortable beds. Breakfasts were a cold buffet of fruit, cereals, breads, rolls, toast, and yogurt, and we even ventured to try Vegemite on our toast. Staff were most accommodating. Dinners for the conference group were served either buffet-style around the pool, or indoors in the formal dining room with white tablecloths, and were generally of good quality. We ate post-dive lunches every day at Kumaran's Indian Restaurant, across the road from the resort, next door to the Shell Station – a market and liquor store. Cultural Center is a 10-minute walk.

**Dive Connection, May 2005, Joe Sindorf (jsindorf@gmail.com), Rockford, MI.** Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. I rented almost everything from the shop. The gear was basic. I only brought my own mask, snorkel and spare air. The gear all worked well — it was just basic (full foot snorkel type fins, an assortment of med-grade rental regs) and the wetsuit and BC.. They were nice, both on the phone and on the boat. Knowledgeable and worked with those on the boat who had gear problems and fine-tuned dives based on experience of divers. The prices were cheap and included a nice

lunch during the surface interval that took place at a beautiful beach with great snorkeling.

**Kula Bay Resort, April 2006, Gwen Ringgold (gringgold@earthlink.net), Fresno, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 84 F, calm. The plane held 450 passengers and was full both directions. There is no electricity on Beqa island — run by batteries — limits fans, lights, etc. The guests were abandoned at night; after dinner guests could watch the torches go through the jungle as the staff went home and in the early am guests could watch them return to care for us. No one on staff stayed at the resort. Good thing there is no violence or theft on the island. There were only 6 bures and there was only one other couple and they were honeymooners. That made me the only diver and I loved having a brand-new boat under my direction. We did only dive 2 dives a day but that took about 4 hrs due to 45 minutes to dive sites and back and surface interval, and dives over 60 minutes. Back in time for a late lunch, then out snorkeling in front of resort, clear water and all the beauty in 20-30 feet. A lot of blue eels, blue coral, blue star fish and large local fish. The school visit and the village visit . . . too hot and humid and away from the shore — no breeze. You have to donate to the chief to enter the village, then donate to the school, then donate to the Women's Club. All the money goes to good and needy places, but I would have paid the money just to avoid the heat. To go to the firewalker was \$150 and leave after the dives and spend the day in another village . . . which means repetitive chief, school, Women's Club donations, which again means spending the entire afternoon and evening in the heat. There is no theft on outlying islands due to the

chief is the ruler and he will banish the thief to the mainland if caught stealing. Nothing will be stolen — money, pens, batteries . . . On the mainland of Fiji, nothing is safe. These people are poor and appreciate anything you do to help. School must be paid for by parents, so take school supplies for the resort staff. Shoes and flashlights were requested by staff when I returned home. My divemaster was given his BC and could not get the battery so his computer would work . . . there is no rental gear, or little but I went into the gear room and most gear was left by previous guests.

**Lalati Resort, March 2006, Renata Gasperi (4donata@sbcglobal.net), San Francisco, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm, currents. Scenic direct flight from Taveuni to Suva on a tiny plane, then a one-hour drive to Pacific Harbor and a bumpy 40-minute boat ride to the resort, a veritable oasis in the wilderness. We received a warm welcome from the owners, Clint and Jayne Carlson, and their charming staff from Lalati village. The resort is beautiful, with lush well-tended gardens bursting with exotic flowers, a great new dock, and lovely views of forested hills and the lagoon. The bures overlooking the bay are spacious, comfortable and nicely decorated - flowers everywhere! No air conditioning, but the overhead fans and good cross ventilation kept us quite cool. Electricity is 110 volts, so you will need an adaptor if you are not from the US. First-class cuisine, thanks to talented chef Beato, and a good selection of wines, mostly from Australia. Meals are served in an imposing open pavilion overlooking the garden and bay. Frequent entertainment by local musicians and the resort staff, plus the

famous Beqa firewalkers, kava ceremonies, and lovo lovo where the food is cooked in a pit full of hot stones covered with banana leaves. There are no roads, only footpaths linking the villages. We went on a moderately strenuous hike to the top of the hill above the resort and were rewarded by spectacular views of bays and lagoon - our guide, a feisty old guy, had to clear the path through the rain forest with a machete, then climbed a palm tree and dropped a few young coconuts so we could quench our thirst. The best snorkeling is right in front of the resort or around the point across the bay — there is always somebody available to give you a lift by boat or you can kayak over. A 5-minute boat ride will take you to a pretty small island (Storm Island) with a nice beach and a palm tree grove with a thatched-roof shelter. Well equipped, full service dive shop. Comfortable covered boat, but no rinse bucket for cameras. Most dive sites are 10 to 20 minutes from the resort. Divemasters Seru and Joe have a real talent for spotting the tiniest critters and make sure you have great photo opportunities. Some shallower bommies show extensive coral damage caused by a combination of surge from passing cyclones and the ubiquitous water warming phenomenon, but most of the dive sites boast a wonderful variety of soft and hard corals, anemones, colorful fans crowned by crinoids, and clouds of brilliantly colored fish. Lots of lionfish, bright blue ribbon eel (often two to a crevice as it was mating season), ghost pipefish, nudibranchs of all sizes and colors, black and white banded sea snakes. We encountered some current, but it only added to the fun. A few swim throughs, some of them festooned with soft coral, few turtles and white tip sharks. At Sot

Coral Plateau we saw schools of yellowtail barracudas and jacks swirling around us.

## Kadavu

**Dive Kadavu, Mantana Beach Resort, February 2006, Keith Davies (topdiver1969@yahoo.co.uk), Englewood, CO.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 85 F, calm, currents, no currents. Travel time is boring, long layovers, especially in Nadi, you arrive from LAX at 5.30 am, the flight out is midday, you cannot check your bags until 11 am, but Sun Air will allow you to leave them behind the desk. Book a day room at the TokaToka resort, nice place or grab a taxi to go into the town — there's nothing at the airport to do. You can only take one checked bag for each person in the group and one piece of hand luggage for the group, the rest will be charged for, tell them you have dive gear, the normal weight limit is 15 kilos, 20 for divers, saves you a few dollars. Put all the heavy gear in one piece of carry on, their scales aren't set the same, Nadi weighed less for less weight in Kadavu to come back, the scales aren't calibrated and it also depends on the person doing the weighing. The flight to Kadavu is noisy, small plane, the runway is short and the airport is just a shack, looks like someone's house. You will have to look for the resort staff at the airport, they don't make themselves noticeable, the boat ride is about 10 min. The resort makes you feel welcome, the rooms are large, nice steel cage outside for the dive gear, but are a bit small for 2 sets of gear, don't leave anything outside your room unattended as it will go missing. There are showers outside each room to rinse off and a rinse tub. The rooms have ceiling

fans, hot water, they also have Australian 3 pin sockets, different to the British 3 pin sockets, also a nice safe for the valuables. The resort staff are friendly, remember your names as soon as you arrive, food is excellent, especially the Lovo, the traditional Fijian feast, cooked under ground and served on a bed of bread fruit tree leaves that you also use as plates. The briefings are sub standard, a few dives against the current, we were taken to sites that weren't that good, they want a lot more money to go to the best sites; no soda or water on the boat, only hot tea and coffee to have at the surface interval on a local beach. The tanks look out of date for visual and hydro testing, they are filled on the boat not in any water to cool them down, its extra for afternoon dives and night dives, but they won't take you to the best site even for night dives. You have to pay extra to snorkel off the dive boat, even when there are divers on it, water and sodas are extra, nothing is free except the kayaks. Shore diving sucks, basically there isn't any, unless you take a kayak and dive off that, shore snorkeling is great. The owners Bob and Rena make you feel like family, managers Scott and Leslie make you feel like little children, especially when diving. They are new to this game, they even make the dive masters look small and embarrass them in front of the guests. Extra charges can add an extra 5-700 dollars to your bill. It's a nice place otherwise.

**Dive Kadavu, Mantana Beach Resort, March 2006, Carl and Gail Weckel (weck250@sbcglobal.net), Carol Stream, IL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F. Kadavu was nice, but rustic, with power for only 6 or 7 hours per day and filtered rain water (cloudy) for drinking unless you bought bottled water. Diving

was mostly bommie with little current on most dives. The 3 tank trip to Astrolabe Reef was awesome, although our group didn't see mantas. The other half our group who went the day before swam with 5 mantas. The reef is pristine with all kinds of hard and flexible corals fighting for space. Lots of tropicals and giant clams as well. I did a second 3-tank trip to this reef looking for mantas (got skunked again) and enjoyed diving this incredible reef. Most diving was done on the Namalata reef, a 15 minute boat ride from shore with surface intervals on a beach where tea and crackers were served. The bommies and mini walls were covered with colorful soft corals and loaded with small tropicals. We saw lion fish, blue ribbon eels, bright yellow trumpets, ghost pipe fish, bumphead parrots, sweetlips, batfish, sea snakes, reindeer wrasse, nudibranchs, etc. They did a shark feed that drew a dozen or so good sized reef sharks but , we saw sharks on most every dive. Comfortable boats and a laid-back atmosphere coupled with some excellent diving made this a great destination.

**Dive Kadavu, Matana Beach Resort, May 2006, Heidi Watkins (heidi@scubarews.com), Phoenix, AZ.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, choppy. Get a day room across the street to pass the time during the 7-hour layover in Nadi. MBR on the island of Kadavu is a 45-minute flight and 10-minute boat ride. Wear shorts and sandals so you can wade through the water to get to the boat in case of low tide. The small, rustic resort is on a nice sandy beach between two Fijian villages. The food was good with two choices for each meal. The Australian hosts were present at every meal. Their criticism of Americans was nonstop and difficult to

take, so go with a thick skin and eat fast. Snorkeling and kayaking off the beach is good. The reef and fish life is quite healthy — anemonefish, popcorn shrimp, blue ribbon eels, peacock mantis shrimp, nudibranchs, lionfish and soft coral. The highlight is the 3-tank manta ray drift dive at famous Astrolabe Reef. The dive is dependent upon good weather. The hard coral reef is beautiful. MBR also offers a shark feed dive with a friendly green moray eel in shallow water. There are no facilities for cameras and you'll need to carry your gear back to your room each day. The electricity is only on part-time so bring extra batteries just in case. The diving is worth the tradeoffs.

**Tiliva Resort, June 2006, Mike Binnard, Belmont, CA.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. F. Landing on Kadavu and then walking down the beach to the waiting boat is fun. The whole island is really unspoiled. Tiliva resort is so well landscaped and arranged that you can never see all the buildings from one place. Our kids had a blast running around on all the little paths between bures and "the big house" where we ate. The kids could run around the beach unsupervised. Kemu and Barbara were clearly unused to hosting small children (our kids are 4 and 2.5), but they tried hard to accommodate. They are both friendly, and try hard to make everyone happy. The food was good and plentiful, although every breakfast is the same, and most of the other meals included beef and potatoes. Fish dinner one night was excellent. We dove three days at Tiliva. The divemaster, Siwa, doesn't use a computer, doesn't talk much, and doesn't point stuff out underwater. He set a max depth and bottom time for each dive. Most of the time he stayed deeper than we were,

and spent more time at depth than our computers would have allowed. We mostly set our own profiles. Siwa told us when to start ascending. Many dives we finished with 800 psi. Most of the rental equipment was OK, although one of us had a BCD with a sticky power inflator. Most dives had no current, although one drift dive with Siwa + 8 divers got pretty disorganized. The first day we went diving the boat handling was poor. We surfaced after both dives several hundred yards from the boat. Siwa had a safety sausage, but no whistle. I used my Dive Alert air horn to signal the boat. After the second dive, the boat driver drove right through the group of divers, hitting one woman on the head. They were careless about having the propeller in gear with divers in the water. Several divers complained to Barbara. On all the following days they had the right person driving the boat, and everything was much safer and better organized. The boat is covered, has a big cabin forward, and one rinse bucket for cameras. They carry a second outboard motor as backup. Diving inside the reef is OK, but 90% of the coral is dead. Some fish, and usually something interesting to see, but pretty disappointing. Outside the reef, it's completely different. Tons of hard coral, and it's all alive. Fun and interesting coral formations in many places. Some soft coral. Some dives had lots of medium-sized fish. Some dives had few fish. It seemed like there aren't known and charted dive sites; it's just a matter of driving the boat out to the reef and picking a spot. Compared with the wall dives in Palau, this was way better hard coral, fewer and smaller fish, less soft coral, essentially no current, and much less "Ohmigod" excitement. Whether the dive boat can go outside the reef

depends on weather and tides. You want to be there when high tide is between noon and 4PM, and when the winds are calm. We had only 1 bummer day inside the reef. The other 4 guests at the resort had about 5 disappointing days. The hike to the waterfall was fun. Two 8 year old local boys took charge of our kids. One carried Wyatt (age 2.5) down all the steep and slippery stuff. It was fun to watch, but it makes Mom nervous. On our departure day, the day-room at Tokatoka was perfect. For an afternoon before the big plane trip, though, it had everything we needed: showers, a great pool, froofy drinks with umbrellas, a massage spa, and a bed to take a nap. We had a good dinner at Ed's bar with lots of interesting locals to watch.

## Matagi

**Matagi Island Resort, April 2006, Jack Gullo Jr. (jgullo@carr.org), New Windsor, MD.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 80 F, calm. The resort is 1st class. The staff, the rooms, the food were excellent. The shore diving is hassle-free. Gear stored right by the beach — it is a private island so theft is not a problem. The marine life right off the beach has everything — lionfish, clownfish, frogfish — allows for easy and awesome night dives. Treehouses are unbelievable — outside showers, tubs, etc. Boat dives were great, with a professional staff that accompanied the divers. The resort doesn't focus on divers, so that makes the boats uncrowded and the sites all to yourself. No provisions for photographers — the rinse tank on shore will get used for wetsuits — even if your cameras are in it! Nothing on the boat to hold camera — bring extra towels for cushioning.

## Namena

**Moody's Namena, December 2005, Jane Schmitt, Princeville, HI.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Namena Barrier reef was designated a marine preserve 2 years ago and it is a spectacular underwater ecosystem. The hard and soft corals were extremely healthy and life on the beautiful bommies in the lagoon and drop-offs on the outside was incredibly diverse and plentiful. Large pelagics (sharks, dolphins, giant gropers) could regularly be seen on the wall dives, while on the bommies there was a plethora of fish and critters including: several species of anemonefish, lionfish, many species of anthias, triggerfishes, many angelfish species (notably, Emperor angel) and oddballs such as leaf scorpion fish and ribbon eels. The visibility was generally good to excellent, with only one day of plankton bloom and there was normally a light current. Although Moody's does have 6 bures, we were the only guests. The 125 acre Namena island is quite remote, being 25 miles south of Vanua Levu. If there was more than one UWP, recharging digital cameras it would have been a problem. The bures are rustic, but with great sea/ jungle views-but windows and doors have no screens and mosquito net on bed is a must! Food was plentiful and varied, but not gourmet. Boat is not set up for photographers; however since it was just 2 of us, the divemasters made sure there was fresh water for rinsing and handled camera with care.

## Qamea

**Qamea Resort, October 2005, Scott and Laura George, Hermosa Beach, CA (scottgeo@earthlink.net),**

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, calm, currents. Qamea Island Resort is a first-rate operation. The bures are spacious, beautiful, and immaculate. All of the bures site just a few yards from the ocean and have fabulous views. The resort is private and the service is friendly and attentive. The food is excellent and fresh and creative — much of featured fresh seafood. After flying for 11+ hours from Los Angeles we were much looking forward to the Jet Lag Massage only to find out that the massages were booked for three days. We would have made reservations before arriving but we were told there was no need. After complaining several times, somehow the staff was able to squeeze us in. We only dived one day, but found those dives to be lackluster in comparison to the diving we would do in the Somosomo strait the following week. It could be that Qamea dives better sites, but the two sites we dived had some coral bleaching and were not nearly as spectacular as we expected. Qamea has limited capacity for the number of divers so make sure you book your diving in advance. Had we arrived the previous week, we would not have been able to dive due to a dive group having booked them to capacity. Qamea is an amazing resort. If diving is your major planned activity, you might be better off at one of the resorts on Taveuni where you are closer to the best dive sites but staying at Qamea is definitely a special experience .

## Savusavu

**Cousteau Resort, June 2006, Peter Joseph (pjmd@well.com), San Anselmo, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: good. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm. Bula! Lovely place with great value, and

the dive operation is excellent. Their boat is comfortable, guides are knowledgeable, helpful and safety conscious. At the end of low season, we dove with a divemaster and marine biologist and just the three of us, including our 13-year-old son. Shore time involves relaxing and eating the gourmet food. Hotel staff all knew our names and made us feel welcome and at home. Vinaka!

## Taveuni

**Garden Isle Resort, March 2006, Jack Gullo, Jr. (jgullo@carr.org), New Windsor, MD.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 80 F, calm. Somasoma straights had beautiful coral and great marine life. The current was tough, even for the experienced. Wetsuit needed to protect from scrapes on the coral. Dive guides wore gloves to hold onto rocks in the current — imagine how the inexperienced handled it! Boats were adequate, surface interval on shore so no sea sickness. Short boat rides to sites. Great White Wall is worth doing even in the current. Shore dives off the resort lackluster — but makes an easy night dive. UW Photography Comments: No accommodations for cameras — rinse tank on shore — but get there before divers rinsing gear!

**Jewel Bubble Divers, Taveuni Island Resort, August 2005, Renata Gasperi (adonata@sbcglobal.net), San Francisco, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm, currents. The resort is gorgeous. Jewel Bubble Divers is a fairly new dive operation run by a charming couple, Qio and Eunice Morisio, just a few minutes walk from the resort. It was named after their 3-year-old daughter Jewel, who kept us company

as we were gearing up. Good selection of rental equipment. Qio and took us to great sites in the Somosomo Strait, including the famous Great White Wall and Rainbow Reef. He is attentive and quick to point out the tiniest critters. His boat can handle up to six divers and is basic. No cover, and that can be a drag in the fierce Fijian sun, although most sites can be reached in 10 to 20 minutes. Fortunately, the surface interval is often on a beautiful shaded beach shared by other dive operators.

**Jewel Bubble Divers, Maravu Plantation Resort, October 2005, Scott and Laura George (scottgeo@earthlink.net), Hermosa Beach, CA.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, currents. While at Maravu booked our diving through Swiss Fiji Divers across the street and decided to add another day. Since Swiss Fiji couldn't accommodate us we went down the beach a few hundred yards to dive with Jewel Bubble Divers, a new operation started by the divemasters from Aquaventure, which had recently ceased operations. The staff was friendly, accommodating, and knowledgeable of the local diving conditions. We told them we were hoping to dive the Great White Wall and they ensured we got there early enough to dive that site before the currents became too strong. Their boat was small and would be a pretty rough ride if the waves are choppy as they often are in the Somosomo Strait. We did have the luxury of being the only divers.

**Jewel Bubbles Divers, Matei Pointe, May 2006, Mike Binnard, Belmont, CA.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, choppy, no currents. Flying on Sun Air was an adventure, with last minute changes to schedule. Matei Pointe was a perfect

place to stay. The house was the right size, the grounds are beautiful, and the location is perfect. It was a wonderful place for our kids (ages 4 and 2.5) to play around. Snorkeling from the beach was good once you got far enough out. The water was calm enough at the beach for our kids to play around in with no problems. Lo and her helpers were friendly, cheerful, and helpful. Some things were funny, like the salt that would randomly appear and disappear from day to day. The dog Marmalade who treated us like he was our pet. We did 3 days of diving. Very laid-back and easy to deal with. Rental equipment is OK. Boat is new, single engine with no shade. No provisions for photographers. We four were the only divers. For groups of 5-8 they take 2 divemasters. For the first day, Qio took us to Matei Pointe reef for two easy dives. He wanted to check out our ability and comfort level before going to the Rainbow Reef. On the 2nd day it was too windy to go to the best spots, but we had two good dives at Fish Factory and Annie's Bommie. On the third day we dove the Great White Wall and Jerry's Jellies. Qio was ill, so the divemaster was Mike. His intentions are good, but he needs more experience. The White Wall is awesome. The hard coral was healthier than I expected; Qio said it's recovering well from the 99 El Nino. Soft corals were nice, but not "the soft coral capital of the world" other than at the White Wall. Lots of small colorful fish, but no big stuff. One brief trip to Swiss Fiji Divers to send email corroborated what we heard from some sources: rigid rules, grumpy staff, and none of the relaxed, friendly service of local Fijians. The Bouma waterfall hike and the Natural waterslide were both great fun. Beautiful scenery, fun hiking, and excellent swimming. Both are

must-do activities on Taveuni. We also had many day trips to Prince Charles Beach: a beautiful beach with great snorkeling, fun sand for the kids, and no other people. Our taxi driver, Nan, took great care of us for all the activities, shopping, and transportation. We had one great dinner cooked for us by Chef Dan at Matei Pointe. His papaya soup is the best. We also had good food from Lal's Curry House and at Ronna's Coconut Grove. Coconut Grove has much better coffee than Audrey's. Also, Audrey doesn't like kids.

**Pro Dive, Susie's Plantation, November 2005, Gerald Meral, Inverness, CA. (bmeral@horizoncable.com)** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 120 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, calm. Diving right off Susie's Plantation in Taveuni is terrific. We only did shore dives, because weather prevented us from taking the 20 minute small boat trip to Rainbow Reef. Reef healthy, lots of fish, and excellent visibility. Snorkeling was also good. The accommodations were pretty much one-star. Shower was somewhat funky, and the bures were basic, although some had nice views. Lots of low budget divers stay in the dorm, which is cheap. The Bures were around \$60 US. This is the only place in Taveuni that you can shore dive right into deep water. The food was nothing to write home about, but adequate. Laid back and a great setting. \$30 US each way from the airport. The rental gear seemed good.

**Swiss Fiji Divers, Maravu Plantation Resort, August 2004, Bill Dobrin (bdobrin@earthlink.net), Libertyville, IL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 90 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, currents. Swiss Fiji Divers is a well-run dive operation. They advertise nitrox on their website and at their shop but

didn't have it. Their Fijian divemasters were excellent and made every effort to try to make each dive memorable. Maravu Plantation Resort is across the road from Swiss Fiji Divers and shares the same beach, but seems ignorant about the needs of divers. Breakfast, lunch and dinner were served at fixed times but the 5 divers out of our group of 6 had to be at the boat at the same time breakfast appeared and returned from our 2 tank dive as lunch was ending. The restaurant staff was unconcerned about our dilemma until we complained to the resort manager. Finally, the meal schedule was altered and we were able to eat and dive. The staff was similarly indifferent to other needs of anyone in our group. My wife and I have been to several different resorts in Fiji but, sadly, Maravu Plantation Resort does not live up to the standards of their competition. UW Photography Comments: boat carried a fresh water bucket for cameras only when requested. However, once requested, the bucket was on the boat.

**Swiss Fiji Divers, Taveuni Island Resort, March 2006, Renata Gasperi (4donata@sbcglobal.net), San Francisco, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm, currents. Arrived at Nadi airport at 5:15 am and sat around for over five hours as our Sun Air connection to Taveuni kept getting delayed. Our 6-passenger plane took us to tiny Matei Airport on the northern tip of Taveuni Island. A five minute car ride delivered us to Taveuni Island Resort, and we were in paradise. The resort, extensively remodeling, is spread over a cliff covered with lush lawns and gardens with great views of the strait and the island of Vanua Levu. A gorgeous infinity pool sits at the edge of the cliff and spectacular sunsets are

virtually guaranteed. The Fijian staff coddled us. They installed rows of white banners Balinese style on the lawn for the wedding of a young couple and decorated their dinner bure with a profusion of flowers and fronds. The food is first rate and features many local specialties, and the bures are spacious and beautifully appointed. Taveuni is the third largest island in Fiji and remote enough to retain an unspoiled quality. Do not miss the hike to the Tavoro Falls in Bouma National Park, a good example of the lush vegetation that covers Taveuni. The resort also offers an interesting boat tour that allowed us to visit the three islets off the northeast coast of Taveuni: Qamea, Laucala and Matagi. We had a picnic lunch on a beautiful sheltered beach on Matagi, where we enjoyed some fine snorkeling. We also had a chance to tour the resorts on Qamea and Matagi and especially admired the Qamea resort, a cluster of thatched bures in spectacular gardens along the beach. Swiss Fiji Divers is near the beach below the resort and can be reached in a few minutes via a paved trail that zigzags down. It is a well-run operation with comfortable boats (covered unlike the boats run by other operators in the area!) and a good selection of rental equipment with built-in computers. Excellent service in setup, cleaning and storage of your equipment. A divemaster every three divers, so you receive special attention. Great dive sites 10 to 30 minutes from shore are chosen every day based on the direction and strength of the prevailing currents in the strait. Spectacular variety of soft corals, gorgonians, anemones, schools of jacks, barracudas and blue and yellow fusiliers, as well as the occasional white tip shark and leatherback turtle. Lots of lionfish, blue ribbon eels, and quite a

few nudibranchs. The safety stop always offered an endless parade of colorful fish. A pleasant surface interval on a lovely shaded beach shared by the various dive operators. The most famous dive is the Great White Wall on Rainbow Reef: the deeper of two tunnels deposits you at 85 feet on the face of the wall, which is covered by light lavender soft coral that gives off a ghostly white glow, a really special spot. Rainbow City is a riot of soft and hard coral, sponges, anemones, and a smaller version of the white wall on the other side of the reef. You can transfer your digital photos to CD in dive shop's Internet café.

**Swiss Fiji Divers, Maravu Plantation Resort, March-April 2006, Dean Lippert** ([deanlippert@aol.com](mailto:deanlippert@aol.com)), **Breckenridge, CO.** Experience: 80 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm and flat, strong currents. Resort first class, dive operation first class. Be sure to make reservation for diving ahead of time (limited space). Weight restrictions on luggage between Nadi and Taveuni – costs a lot for extra weight.

## Vanau Levu

**Nukubati Resort, August 2006, Tom and Cindy Casey, Martinez, CA.** ([caseytravel@sbcglobal.net](mailto:caseytravel@sbcglobal.net)) Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 25 to 200 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, choppy, no currents. The Great Sea Reef isn't so great! We were surprised at the lack of currents, almost none at all; therefore no soft corals! We've dove 8 weeks total in Fiji and were expecting the lovely soft corals we've had at other locations; not there. The visibility outside on the walls was great, inside poor. The upscale resort was not a dive resort, it was a resort with diving. The resort

catered to honeymooners and to those wishing seclusion. We thought it may be an undiscovered treasure . . . not so for diving.

## Vita Levu

**Kai Viti, Wananavu Beach Resort, January 2006, Jeanne and Bill Downey (downdiver@comcast.net), Baden, PA.**

Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to F, calm, currents. Fiji is a 10-hour flight from LAX.

Wananavu Beach Resort is about a two-hour drive from the Nadi airport, so we arrived in time for a late breakfast.

Wananavu means “beautiful” in Fijian and it is just that. About ten years old, the resort looks newer, as it is kept up well. There are 31 garden-view and ocean-view cottages and villas, several right on the beach, the others set on a hillside with winding concrete paths.

The garden-view rooms are dark inside, but fine otherwise—the ocean view is a minute walk away. Upgrade if you crave light and ocean views. All rooms have AC and secure screens with louvered windows. The rest of the resort is also multi-level, from the reception/dining areas down to the pool, then down to the beach and jetty. The pool is warm and lovely with large rocks for sitting and shady areas to escape the sun. It is surrounded by foliage and a manmade wall with a cascading waterfall. As for mosquitoes, I used light-duty repellent during the day (like Skin-So-Soft) and heavy-duty repellent with DEET in the evening and only got a few bites. The key is consistency. Meals were good to excellent, served in the outdoor dining area by friendly staff. Breakfast consisted of a buffet of fruit, freshly made rolls and muffins, juice, toast and cereal. We could also order eggs and pancakes off the menu. When large

groups are present, the buffet includes cold and hot food. Lunch from the menu and included lighter dishes such as Thai chicken salad and a regular menu that included soup, hamburgers, sandwiches, a variety of fish choices, and a daily “special.” Happy hour was observed each day with specially priced cocktails and half-price beer, followed by dinner, a bit more formal with linens on the tables and a local band playing. Guests were invited to partake of the kava bowl. Along with the daily dinner special were a variety of fish, vegetarian, and meat choices. Many guest activities are available, some at no charge, such as snorkeling off the beach, kayaking, village tour, horseback riding, cooking demonstrations, bush medicine, river boating, and beach picnic. There is also a weekly meke, a buffet of local foods, and singing and dancing performed by the resort’s staff. We did a tour that included horseback riding, waterfall slide, and an intimate meke at the village where the mother of one of the staff was raised. While we rode the horses, several villagers walked along to make sure we were well-taken care of, or maybe we were just the entertainment for the day! Some of our group sampled the services of the new spa on site and were satisfied. Our group was on the smaller of two sturdy aluminum boats that are set up nicely for divers. There were two buckets of fresh water for the three cameras in our group. We had plenty of room for five to seven divers plus the friendly staff of three. The water was 84 degrees, but that also meant less visibility. Our first day of diving had 50-75 foot visibility, but we had 75-100 foot visibility after that, as we were able to get out to the better dive sites. The hour long rides were smooth and the between dive snacks were the best we’ve ever had from a

land-based operation, consisting of hot Milo (similar to hot cocoa), deliciously fresh pineapple, and freshly made cakes (banana was our favorite). One day we did three dives and the hotel provided a delicious lunch that we selected the day before. Underwater, we saw a few sharks, beautiful soft corals, and tons of fish. We also hunted for and found pipe fish, various types of nudibranchs, and other critters, enough to stay entertained for hours. We encountered a couple dives with strong current, but we did mostly drift diving or hid on the lee side of pinnacles.

**Kai Viti Divers, Wananavu Resort, March 2006, Carl and Gail Weckel (weck250@sbcglobal.net), Carol Stream, IL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F. Although a two hour drive from the Nadi airport after the flight from LA wasn't exactly welcome, the resort was comfortable, nicely done, and a great staff. Did the Bligh Waters most days (dove inside the passage on bommies on the rough days). A bit more current and a lot more drift diving than at Kadavu but pristine reefs, lots and lots of colorful soft corals, huge anemones with clownfish of all different varieties, pipefish, ghost pipefish, lionfish, hawkfish, schools of barracuda, tuna, and fusiliers and again, lots of shark sightings. Nudibranchs of every description and clouds of fish we couldn't name were everywhere. Large, fast, comfortable boat, experienced Fijian divemasters, pristine sites, and lots of fish combined to give us some great diving.

**Kai Viti Divers, Wananavu, May 2006, Heidi Watkins (heidi@scubarews.com), Phoenix, AZ.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, choppy. Beautiful 2 ¼ hour ride

through farmlands north of Nadi. There are refrigerators in the rooms so ask the driver to stop to pick up beverages and snacks. Wananavu (wonderful in Fijian) is a luxurious place perched on a hilltop overlooking the water where you will be pampered. The room was well equipped with A/C, fans, 24 hour power, a great shower that overlooks a garden, French press coffee maker and a refrigerator. The garden rooms are a great value. The meal plan is well worth it as ala carte prices add up fast. The staff prepares an extravagant barbeque and entertains the guests with festive dancing and singing one night. Gentle massages on site. Kai Viti Divers treated us well. They picked up our bags at the room, set up our gear on the boat, cleaned our gear and stored it each night. The boats were well equipped and organized. Dive staff is friendly and service-oriented. The reef and fish life are healthy. The hour-long ride out to the farther reef can be choppy when windy but is well worth it. The closer reef is good with a strong current dive with sharks. The dive masters are happy to point out special creatures. Camera water bucket on boat. No camera facilities on shore.

**Kai Viti Divers, Wananavu Beach Resort, June 2006, Sherwood and Judith Smith (sierradeux@comcast.net), Olympia, WA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Water: 82 to 82 F, choppy. Mike and Julie have put together a first class show. Our dive gear was picked up from the door of our bure, and when we next saw it on the dive deck of the Adi Nunu, it was set up on a tank, rigged and ready to go. Tanks are compact alu 80's. We didn't see a fill less than 3150 psi all week. All we had to do was add weights, and jump. Each morning, our gear was spread out on the boat, having been washed in fresh water

and hung out to dry. At the end of the trip the gear was washed and dried by the crew, and after we gathered it at the dive shop, it was transported back to our bures. The Adi Nunu is aluminum, immaculately maintained, with O2, a shower, and full nav. instruments, including a mapping GPS, powered by an inboard turbo diesel with jet drive, which allowed us to get to “live-aboard country” in the Bligh Water in about an hour’s travel. Even the upwind ride was comfortable, with passengers kept dry and out of the wind by spray curtains. Entry was by giant stride from the stern, and exit via Christmas tree ladders. One could climb directly from the water onto the dive deck without even removing fins, if desired. Dive sites were easily located via the mapping GPS. The anchor was never used. At each site a divemaster free dived from the bow, passing the mooring line either through a tire shackled to the reef, or tying it off around a coral head. A buoyed drift line and a weighted down line were deployed on each dive. In current, a traverse line was rigged from the mooring line to the down line at the stern at a 15’ depth, to facilitate our return to the boat from our deco stop. The Fijian crew of four rotated easily among all positions. Two divemasters led our group of 10. On many days we had the boat to ourselves, and on one rainy day, when only five of us dived, the full crew went out, a regular dive day. Divemasters were eager to show us critters large and small, though as the week progressed, they hung back more, leaving us to do our own thing. Guidelines for depth and time were given at briefings, but each of us dived to his own computer, no problem. Most dives were in the 55-65 minute range. Deepest was 100ft. Average was 70ft. In the more distant

Bligh Water, viz. was an honest 100+ ft. Nearby reefs had viz. more in the 60 ft. range, with occasional sudden drops as the tide turned. We saw the full spectrum of reef life, including sharks, turtles, eagle rays, titan and clown triggerfish, jacks and mackerel, nudibranchs and crustaceans. At Black Magic Mountain, a harlequin ghost pipefish hung out in the Gorgonia at 80 ft. At most sites there were several tunnels or swim-throughs, filled with gorgeous soft corals. The profusion of fish life on the reef tops almost defied photography. The hard corals were superb, especially at the more distant sites, with no signs of bleaching. Wananavu Beach Resort, a 2-3 hour drive north from Nadi Airport, occupies a beautiful hillside setting, overlooking the Bligh Water, with both sunrise and sunset views. The fresh water pool is immaculately landscaped and maintained. Four of us shared a two-bedroom, two bathroom villa, with a washer and small laundry tub, convenient for soaking gear and cameras. The late afternoon spa/massage service was welcomed by our wives, and was inexpensive. Staff was friendly and eager to please. The breakfast buffet, including custom omelets, was more than adequate. Despite the extensive menus at lunch and dinner, it was often difficult to find palatable food, as the fish, pork, and chicken was usually overcooked and dry, unless specifically ordered rare. Steaks were better. Management did not seem to appreciate that our plates were often returned to the kitchen at the end of the meal, virtually untouched. The service was inordinately slow, despite the resort being 50% occupied.

**Kai Viti, Wananavu, June 2006, Bill Ehler (wehler@satx.rr.com), Helotes, Texas.** Experience: Over 1000 dives.

Vis: 40 to 70 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F. Only restriction was that we did not exceed 130 ft. We were permitted to dive our own computers. Kai Viti Divers were excellent. They dive the same areas as the liveboard boats. The dive jet boat is sea worthy, fast, comfortable, well maintained, equipped with GPS (they found their underwater buoys with no difficulty) and has a potty. The dive guides gave excellent briefings and guided underwater tours. If you wanted to do your own thing that was OK with them. During high current encounters the crew put out a long bow to stern safety (Jesus) line. This prevented many divers from having to be retrieved. Wananavu Resort had changed ownership and management prior to our trip. The accommodations are good but the food and service has deteriorated dramatically from two years prior. Repeated complaints to management regarding food and service during our stay did not result in any improvements.

**Kai Viti Divers, Wananavu Resort, August 2006, Julian Lamborn (lamboj@earthlink.net), Houston, TX.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm, choppy. Our dive party did eight days of boat diving with up to seventeen dives each. The two jet dive boats of Kai Viti Divers were clean, fast and spacious and have real heads. The dive support staff (typically four per boat, including the captain, for 6 - 10 divers) were helpful. Giant stride in and wide rear ladder or rear steps for exit. Journey time to the dive sites varied from 20 minutes to an hour and between dives hot chocolate and cake were served. Dive sites were pristine with beautiful soft and hard coral surrounded by myriads of reef fish. Not a lot of pelagics, a white-tip shark or two on most dives, a 5 ft. ray, bumphead parrot

fish, many morays and barracudas were observed. No turtles seen. Many nudibranchs, crinoids and other less mobile species were found including a ghost pipe fish that was almost indistinguishable from the soft coral around it. Water temperature was cool, occasional heavy currents were encountered on swim throughs but the diving was suitable for moderately experienced folk and was a great and colorful dive experience. Kai Viti Divers provided a high level of service, picking up the dive gear from the living accommodation (bures) in the Wananavu Resort on the first day, setting it up on the tanks each day, washing and drying it daily and returning it to the accommodation on the last day: All tank switches during the dives were done by the boat staff. One three-tank dive expedition was undertaken, with packed lunch provided by the Resort, and we also did one late afternoon dive followed by a rather disappointing night dive (in the rain). The weather was good with plenty of sun. There was one wet day and a couple of windy days, but all in all it made a pleasant change from Houston in August! The Resort is near Rakiraki (at the north of the main Fijian island of Viti Levu) and is two and a half hours away from Nadi airport at the end of a four-kilometer dirt road. If one stays a week, the round trip (organized by the resort) is free, otherwise the trip costs 66 US per vehicle each way. The accommodation was of a high standard and clean. For non-divers (or on dive rest days) the Resort had many trips or activities in which to take part. One could kayak round the shore, fish, play tennis, visit the local communities or go river rafting. For those in beachfront bures there was an easy five minute walk up

the cliff-side to the reception/dining area. The food was tasty and plentiful and ranged from local delicacies through Indian, Chinese and Western cuisines. Breakfast was served buffet style whereas both lunch and dinner were menu driven with different “specials” each day. When checking out from Wananavu allow at least an hour to fully review the bill since bookkeeping inaccuracies and lost signed drink vouchers tend to confuse the numbers.

## 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 are now attracting North American divers to join in the plentiful reef shark action. There are a range of accommodations and restaurants, some reef diving, and plenty of great scenery. The once-snotty French attitude toward others has lessened considerably.

### Bora Bora

**Bora Dive Center, Sofitel Motu, October 2005, Ken Davis (kjdm@aol.com), Scotch Plains, NJ.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, choppy. Bora Bora is a truly beautiful island — lush, with photogenic mountain looking like Bali Hai. Nice people, but remember for most English is a 3rd language, so when you ask a question, the answer you get may have little to do with what you asked. Sofitel Motu was gorgeous — small, private and romantic, on its own little island with frequent boat service to Novotel on mainland. Decent snorkeling at resort. Food only OK and

expensive, but good restaurants on Bora Bora. Food was better at the Novotel. Bora Bora’s famous mantas were only seen in the distance on one dive. Apparently hotel construction has driven them from some popular sites. However, I never saw so many sharks — black tips on every dive but one, lemons several times. Also saw: school of eagle rays, morays, turtles (friendly), anemone clown fish, lion fish, amazing variety of reef fish. Dive operation had its pluses and minuses. You have to wade to the boat, which is small and has no head. Boat can accommodate up to 10 divers, but the one day we had 10 it was crowded. Back roll entry, easy ladder climb to get back on boat. They help you back on boat, set up your gear on second tank. I was able to keep my gear at the shop and had my BC and regulator set up boat for first dive of the day. Coconut pieces and drinks between dives. The general approach to not touching stuff is more casual than at most Caribbean operations — at one point a divemaster picked up a large sea cucumber for us to handle. Another broke off pieces of sponge on dead coral to feed turtles. On the second dive of my 8-dive week the divemaster had me too far from the boat and too low on air, and the boat had to come get me. After I complained, I got personal service the rest of the week. On the good side, divemasters Patrick and Luiqe were excellent at finding and pointing out critters and were attentive. Luiqe saw that two of us used a little more air than the rest and shared air with us during the dives, not because we were that low, but to prolong our bottom time. He also had a plastic baby manta hidden in his wet suit — pretty good gag. The coral is not quite as good as the best in the Caribbean. Well worth the 12 hour flight from NY.