

colorful corals. One compensation was excellent, professional, well run, personable, experienced and customer-oriented operation. They pick you up and deliver to resort. For an experienced diver, I do not recommend the Cooks, because of lack of diversity and marine life. It is good for beginners. The Pacific Resort is excellent.

Fiji

For Left Coasters, it's easier to get to Fiji than to the Caribbean: ten hours nonstop from L.A. Airfare and an all-inclusive week at many excellent resorts can be had for under \$2500 per person; air packages can be tailored to include New Zealand/Australia extensions at little extra cost. Sunflower Air is more squared-away than Fiji Air for local flights. . . . Fijians are polite, friendly, delightful, modest, and religious, so watch your language, and wear non-revealing clothes to town. Guys, have someone teach you how to tie a sulu so you, too, can go home in a skirt. . . . Wetsuits are a staple year-round; currents add coolness, just like the wind chill factor. . . . Taveuni has great diving but it's terrible for beginners with difficult currents; bring a compass, and carry both day and night emergency surface signaling devices (tubes, strobes). . . . The weather can be stormy June through September; short, heavy showers are possible any afternoon year-round. The

year-round average temperature is 80 or above; nights average 68–69 degrees in winter; bring a sweater. . . .

Beqa Lagoon

Centra Pacific Resort, March 2001, James McMeins, Carnation, WA.

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 25 to 50 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, choppy currents. Diving in Beqa Lagoon. Cyclone had just left the area and water never cleared up. Probably due to amount of muddy run off from several rivers. Very rough seas every day near end of second dive everyday. 2nd dive on first day, went down and into very strong current that divemaster took us against most of dive. Lot of crawling along the bottom to make headway. At the end of dive the 6 of us agreed we're there to relax not exercise and made it plain we didn't want anymore dives like that. Very agreeable and rest of week was fine. If current in area was too strong, went to another site. (Full moon and big tides at the time). All sites were moored, which is nice and of course the surface intervals always done on secluded remote beaches which are great. Centra Pacific Resort just reopened in Pacific Harbor after being closed for several years. The setting is beautiful but the buildings need major repair/upgrades. Have a large pond system on the grounds with huge resident sea turtles. Staff is great, very attentive and knew our names within the day. Very good food. (Ph: (679) 450 022; fax (679) 450 262; e-mail centrapacharb@is.com.fj; website www.sphc.com.au)

Lalati Resort, April 2001, Curt and Nancy Koch, La Jolla, CA. Vis: 50 to 70 feet. Water: 82 F, calm and flat, choppy, occasional currents. Dives logged: Curt-226/Nancy-213. Dive sites all pretty shallow; 86 feet was deepest we got. A small, exquisite resort — currently 5 2-bedroom burees. Top notch food; staff friendly and very competent, especially Divemaster Seth. Diving was relaxed and colorful. Lionfish, scorpionfish and eels (Green Moray, Blue Ribbon, etc.) on most dives. Rainy season extended itself into April this year. Resort also features surfing. (Ph: 877-2-LALATI or US 303-417-0557 or Fiji (679) 472 033; fax (679) 472 034; e-mail Lalati@is.com.fj or reservations@lalati-fiji.com; website www.Lalati-Fiji.com)

Lalati Resort, June 2001, Joyce Mutz (joysea@aol.com) Wilmette, IL. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 79-81 F. Diving restrictions: Sensible ones. Logged dives: 621 hours. Lindsay Kwasny, the owner, was tops. Every effort was made to accommodate. I took 10 grandchildren. We had the resort to ourselves. My family were 19 years to 25 years of age and I am 77. They each learned to scuba at age 12. John, the divemaster, was perfect. Christian, the chef, is from Salzburg, Austria. His meals were dreams — his Viennese chocolate desserts were to die for!

Lalati Resort, August 2001, Jay & Karen Reiner, (jaycpa@mindspring.com) Cold Spring, NY. All activities included in price paid (only additional charges were for bar drinks, massages, and souvenirs, all of which could be

charged to your room. The owner, Linda Kwasny, is always available to make sure you aren't wanting and your day is as planned (or unplanned) as you desire. Our spacious well-appointed bure included a king-sized bed, and an extra "bedroom" with queen bed, a sitting area with a "day bed"/couch, fresh flowers, kettle and supplies for coffee, tea, and hot chocolate, and chocolate chip cookies, plenty of closet and shelf space. The large verandah overlooked Beqa Lagoon, and included a padded chaise lounge, a table, and four chairs. 5 burees in the resort (a sixth in the works, and a seventh planned). If we wanted seconds on anything, it was always provided. The breakfasts included various fruits, dry cereals, juices, and homemade breads, and there was a daily choice of an egg dish or pancakes/French toast. Lunches included freshly made pizzas (with various toppings) cooked in a real outdoor brick pizza oven, foccaccia as with chicken and pesto sauce, fresh fish burritos, and different salads/pasta salads. Dinners: grilled sesame seed encrusted ahi with wasabi sauce, baby lamb chops. Dinners usually started with soup (such as fresh leek & potato) or salad. Chocolate silk pie (to die for). One night was "lovo" night. The food is wrapped in banana leaf "packages" and cooked in a lovo pit, where a fire is built and lined with rocks and banana leaves. You can have as much pork, chicken, taro, potatoes, etc as you can muster and traditional Fijian offerings, such as baked bananas, taro leaves cooked in coconut milk, whipped sweet potatoes.

We sat on woven mats. The head chef Christian was not at there. A native Fijian named Biato has done a terrific job. The entire staff at Lalati smiling, greeting you with a friendly “Bula”. We took a tour of the village (named Lalati) with one staff member who lives in the village. We were given tea and a plate of food, which included taro leaves and fish cooked in coconut milk, cabbage, and taro root. Guests were treated to a “meke” — native songs and dancing. You are offered “high tide” or “low tide” depending on how much kava you want. There’s no real beach, but there is a small swath of sand near the office and dive shop, where you can drop a lounge chair between low tide and high tide. There are a couple of hammocks and a few lounge chairs in the midst of the beautifully landscaped grounds of the resort. Surfers exceeded the number of divers diving, and divers were relegated to the smaller boat, which was a small, single engine, fiberglass fishing boat. The real dive boat returned the last day. Divemaster extraordinaire Seta knows his way around the dive sites well. He was quick to point out interesting things. I had 4 dives with just Seta and me and averaged about an hour each. I spotted lion fish, ribbon eels, barracudas, crinoids of varying colors, sea cucumbers and sizes, trumpetfish, nurse and white tip reef sharks, goatfish, unicorn fish, cleaner shrimp, anemones of various types and colors, and spectacularly colored nudibranchs. Almost all the sites had permanent moorings, so the dives were around different pinnacles and

coral heads. The deepest dive was about 90', and averaged about 40-50'. There is so much life between 5 and 15 feet, that there isn't much need to do very deep dives. During any given dive it's possible to go from calm water to fighting a current to get back to the boat; the currents are that quick to start and to stop. The air ranged from low 80s during the day to the mid 60s in the evening. Water was low 70s.

Marlin Bay Resort, October 2000,
Kathy O'Dowd, (kodiver@msn.com)
Littleton, CO. Vis: 30-50 ft. Water: 70-75 F. Dives logged: 60. Sunny in the morning and rainy in the pm. Visibility was murky during the first part of the trip. The water was extremely choppy and I opted to not take my camera. We had to remove all dive gear on the line before approaching the boat. But the fish! First time I dove the South Pacific and I was truly not disappointed. The resort was awesome. (Ph: 800 542 3454 or +679 304042; fax +679 304028; e-mail reservations@marlinbay.com or marlinbay-reservation@att.net; website www.marlinbay.com)

Marlin Bay Resort, October 2000,
Richard Hill, Central Point, OR.
Vis: 60-120 ft. Water: 77-78 F. Dives logged: 200. The resort is nicely done and the people friendly enough. The cultural experience of Fiji is presented well. The dive operation is marginal. The coral and marine life was disappointing.

Marlin Bay Resort, July, Ronald L. Bailey (rlbailey@rbnet.com)
Roanoke, VA. Dives logged: over

1,100. Dive restrictions enforced: 110 ft. My fifth trip to Marlin Bay. There are now 25 bures, almost doubled from a couple of years ago. All bures are excellent, well maintained, and gorgeous! Food is excellent. Service and friendliness of staff is second to none. Three large boats can handle 50 divers. Although I traveled with 20 divers, the dive boat did not have the feeling of being overcrowded, only that it took some time for everyone to get geared up and into the water. A couple of days of diving were directed to sites that were not the best coral/fish sites to better monitor the newer divers before going to the sites were current can sometimes be a factor. We did see whales and dolphins!

Marlin Bay Resort, August 2001, Jerry Gherardi, Bayonne, NJ. Flew into Suva 25 kilos of luggage over the limit and paid for it! At Pacific Harbor, the launch awaits and a quick 30 minutes to Marlin Bay. Our Garden View bure #25 was well appointed, had a/c, fans and much lighting, and was plush (Ramada like). The room had a sitting area as well as a large bedroom with wall closets, table tops, and adequate storage nooks. The large bath was marble and linens were first class. Walk to meals and dive boats less than two minutes. Garden views have a porch with seating and are bure's surrounded moat-like by fountains. Many places to recharge and plug in — bring wall plug adapters and or transformers. The brochure said "Gourmet" my palate said very good! Dinner was complete with desert(lovely), and meals are

always a choice of two items. Those on night dives did have food which was cool and rushed. Still good but tacky. Divers are grouped by boats. Group meets on beach, launch to boat, check gear, go diving. Boat crew will set up your gear and help you to the stern. Boats are modern, platform and ladder equipped. All have O2, and are safe. Post dive, hot towels, drinks and snacks. The boats and crew are first class. Two tank dive in the morning. Beqa Lagoon has fish, soft corals, hard corals, perhaps not world class, but good diving with only small patches of dead areas of hard coral. Afternoon one and two tank dives at extra cost. Night dives are usually twice a week, after dark hour long single tank dives at \$45. A recent offering of a "Special" dive thru a vendor dive operation is a two tank event. For \$90.00 they pick you up, give a briefing, and lead you to an underwater amphitheater (coral dead zone/sloping wall). In 90+ feet of water with at least four safety divers and two "feeders" what they refer to as a "nearly natural feeding event." Show time starts after all divers are perched looking at the two large barrels of fish carcass. Thousands of blue & yellow fish circle waiting, while half dozen large trevally and two huge groupers join the party. The "feeders" dump the barrels and the sharks come in. Small white and black tips troll by and chomp at will. This goes on for five minutes then the big boys drop by. On my dive a nine foot well fed bull shark kept circling, but did not partake. It's over in twenty minutes, you ascend looking over your

shoulder and go to the second shallow reef.

Kadavu

Dive Kadavu, Matana Beach Resort, October/November 2000, Susan and Patrick Howarth, (zundapp250@aol.com) Captain Cook, HI. Water: 80-84 F. Dives logged: 500+. Dive restrictions: 50 minute. It was a welcome sight to view soft corals and color after diving here at home (HI). Resort charming. Very laid back. Friendly staff and locals friendly and accommodating. Bob (owner) went out of his way to make sure everyone was enjoying themselves. Great weather and sea conditions, we managed to dive south by the surfing area. Great and unusual topography. Went north to Ono. What a treat! Lunch at Jona's resort (huge crabs in garlic/curry sauce, pumpkin puree, papaya, rice). Warm, friendly people. Lots of fish life: mantas, schools of large fish. Seahorses and pipe fish also. Great trip, though more bottom time would be appreciated. Perhaps something Bob should consider. **(Ph: (888) 234-5447 or + 679-311780; fax + 679-303860; e-mail divekadavu@is.com.fj; website www.divekadavu.com)**

Dive Kadavu, January 2001, John Williams, Ocate, NM. Vis: 2-60 ft. Water: 82-84 F. Logged dives: 350+, 44 years, 63 yrs. old. Dive restrictions: 30 M - 50 bar safe stop. Smooth operation, Terry — Kiwi — dive manager superb, Monica — extra helpful with airlines. Bommies in Marove Lagoon 70-90% dead of

hexa corals, handful of octo corals left. Saw cyanide cans and unblown dynamite on Cotton! Op throws anchors on reef! Village uses soap and bleach in sea and river (ARRGH).

Dive Kadavu, Matana Beach Resort, February 2001, Nick Ferris, (nick.ferris@juno.com) Arvada, CO. Vis: 40-90 ft. Water: 82 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 775. Dive restrictions: time and depth recommended.. Weather cloudy 60%. Sunny 40%. Seas calm. Good viz. But a cyclone hit the following week. The resort and dive operation are run by Bob and Rena ("The Barracuda") Forster. The divemaster is the very knowledgeable Terry Wooldridge. He's a dive instructor from New Zealand. Diving is mainly on beautiful coral bommies that rise from more than 100 ft. nearly to the surface. Currents mild. Good coral, many kinds of tropical fish, several species of nudibranch. Shore diving — visibility generally not good, but lots of anemone, fish, shells, etc. — even baby octopus — in only 10-12 ft. Food and lodging fine. Watch out for falling coconuts and you'll be all right, mate.

Dive Kadavu, August 2001, Jerry Gherardi, Bayonne, NJ. Winter in Fiji. Water: 77 F. The air temps were in the upper seventies. A 3mm wetsuit with light weight cap kept us warm during the 50 minute + dives. Responded to "Special/Buddy dives free offer" but were disappointed with the caliber of diving at Namalata Reef 5 km's off the resort. The reef is about

80% damaged hard corals with little fish life, drab and desolate. Full 80 c.f. alu. tanks, on a decent boat were the rule, but expect no help gearing up or getting back aboard. "I drive the boat" was the reply when asked for help! "Useless" is the word to describe the boatman (son of the local Chief). Dive guide. On two clear days, Thava (Director/Chief's #1 son) said "Good day to go Astrolabe" and twice he was sternly corrected by the owner's wife, Rena Forster, "No the weather is bad up there." Both days the smaller, lighter launch from Jona's Dive Resort from Ona braved the waves. The trip to Astrolabe is over 80 minutes and gasoline is over \$5 a gallon. The "Special Astrolabe Trip" is at extra cost or you can trade two 2 tank dive days for a single 3 tank trip. Dive Kadavu cannot guarantee long trips up to the reef. The bures were light, open and airy, with plenty of shelves and table tops, especially #5. There are many plug-ins to recharge batteries. You will need adapters for the wall sockets and multi voltage chargers (or voltage converters for the chargers). Hot water for showers available 24 hrs. Rooms all have mini bar refers and a decent amount of lighting. Fans only, no a/c. Evenings were cool, blankets supplied and needed. No flying or crawling insect problems. Fijian staff were friendly and helpful. Flights to Kadavu are weight restricted and luggage gets weighed and or left behind to be delivered later. We bought ours a seat on another flight as we over packed. The meals started off good but the size of portion and variety fell off. We felt we were being

rationed. Three out dinner was some sort of chicken, and little of that. Unlimited tea or instant coffee, as well as filtered water, or buy soft drinks or mixed drinks at the bar. Sun Air or Air Fiji Nadi to Kadavu (45 mins) then short drive to beach, calf height wade to launch, 20 minute boat ride to resort. Divers on a one week no Nadi layover trip were extremely jet lagged.

Malolo Island, the Mamanucas

Malolo Island Resort, Ted Shieh, Chicago, IL. Vis: 20-90 ft. Water: 80-84 F. Sunny, calm and flat. 3mm suit. Dive own profile most of the time, restriction somewhat enforced. Our 20 divers bought the "unlimited" dive package (\$250) over 5 days, which included 3 dives/day, plus 3 night dives. Diving: Some are very dead, others fairly healthy. Little in soft corals, saw a zebra shark, and white tip reef sharks. Good number of butterflies and reef fishes; few invertebrates, occasional larger fish (area is populated with people). Shark feeding dive at the Supermarket was artificial, but the site is great for corals and other fishes. Outer wall on the Malolo Barrier Reef — vis is better. Dives are shallow. Vis can be 15' to 80' depending on site. Divemasters repeated the following on every dive it seemed. "40 min bottom time, 5 min 5 m safety stop," though most of us stayed down much longer anyway. DM rarely briefed at the dive site. DM usually in a hurry to go through site, despite group insisting on going slower. Most of us moved slowly anyway, but with poor vis — many stayed close to DM and felt rushed. No GPS on boat, therefore night dives were

conducted near resort where reefs were dead. No rinse bucket or table/counter for cameras on boat. Gear were not well cared for — lots of broken gear over the 5 days. DM sometimes grabbed corals, harassed fishes, and in one rare sighting of a zebra shark — scared it away so we couldn't get a good look at it. Boats picked you up where you surface. Can leave gear on boat; no schlepping. DM's tried to cater to our needs when we demanded it; Dive operator seemed intent on making improvements, and tried to please us and meet our needs when requested; DMs were generally pleasant, and allowed us to conduct an underwater wedding rehearsal. Diving: A bargain for beginners on a first South Pacific trip. Resort is beautiful, but not set up for divers. Food very good. Service is pleasant, friendly, staff eager to please, and will do anything to make you happy, but on island time — which make a group of 20 divers tough to meet the diving schedule. (Ph: (679) 668031; fax (679) 669197; e-mail malolo@is.com.fj; website www.maloloisland.com)

Nanau-I-Ra

Crystal Divers, April 2001, Dan Brimhall (dbrimhall@earthlink.net)
East Helena, MT. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, no currents. All we expected and more from UC write-ups. The diving is definitely world-class, pristine. The operators were the best, and made every effort to accommodate all needs. Wide range of conditions from strong current (on one dive) to no current most dives. Vis was 140 ft. on close in dives, and very

good (120 ft.) on dives off shore. Crystal Explorer is a well designed fast all aluminum jet with plenty of room for 5 to nine divers plus 3 dive masters, including Julie (owner) on most dives and crew. Crew was knowledgeable, friendly, and great at pointing things out. Very protective of the reef. They run on time. Perfect balance of letting you do your own thing and keeping track of everyone. Very safety conscious. If you didn't bring a safety sausage, they provided them. Boat had great food, homemade snacks and lunch, oxygen, head, fresh water shower, clean towels, GPS, radar, sonar and great music. Fills were max, and they use neutrally buoyant aluminum 80's, so most of us were diving with no weight or 2 pounds even with 3 mm. I alternated between 3 mm and a Lycra skin. They know the sites well, and only missed the current call one time. Usually dive on slack tide. Most sites are accessed only by Crystal, and are pristine. Except the well-known E-6, a truly incredible dive, with a resident hammerhead. Stayed at the beach house owned by Crystal on the island. Beautiful setting, great beach and views, very clean, but no air — only fans, and it was hot! Good shower, and they make every effort to meet your needs. They pick up items in town with a one day notice. Twice during the week they had a party for all divers, including the people at Wannanavu, providing transportation, tons of food (big barbecue and local dishes), entertainment by the crew and staff — local music, singing, dancing, and lots of Kava. BYOB. Beach house

has one bedroom, and sleeper in the LR. Breakfast items are provided, kept well-stocked, and lots of great fresh local fruit. Lunch usually served on board, as we did lots of three-tank days, which was out at 8 am and back at around 4:30 PM. Dinner can be served by Alicia (owner Dan's wife — a fantastic cook) at the beach house, or you can eat with the owners at the shop (which we did every night). Food quantity and quality was outstanding. Others stay on the main island 5 minutes away at the Wannanavu resort. We ate there once, and it was superb. Our group was mostly experienced divers who had been all over, and they agreed it was the best. Most were drift dives, and some would be challenging for a novice. We did lots of shallow dives, with max bottom time, which suited everyone. You could do whatever you wanted, though. The proliferation of soft corals was mind boggling. Wide variety of fish, from clouds of anthers, and small tropicals to sharks on nearly every dive, Napoleons, groupers, snappers, mackerel, schooling barracuda, sweetlips, on and on. Hard corals like you have never seen before, especially at G-6, which we dove twice. Lots of huge sea fans. Memorable dives: E-6, G-6, Shark Pit, Purple Haze, Instant Replay, Neptune. The micro stuff is equally awesome, nudibranchs, pipefish, shrimp, and the crew is very adept at pointing it out. Lots of anemone fish. One night dive was incredible — lots of huge basket stars, as usual fantastic soft corals, and the usual night sleeping groupers, puffers. Weather was mostly sunny, with some

dead-calm days, some with chop, and it rained 2-3 times per day — torrential, but short. Helped to cool things off. Usually about one hour boat ride to most sites, but we would do 2 tanks once we got offshore. Smooth dive boat even in rough seas. Easy entry and return to the boat. Good layout for gear, and plenty of dry storage overhead, under the aluminum canopy. You could lie in the sun between dives on the canopy or up on the bow. Fly into Nadi on Air Pacific (business class was superb service) leave LAX at 11:30 PM and arrive 6 AM, then 3 hour ride to Wannanavu where they shuttle you to the island (5 min). Dan and Mike were in the States, but Julie and Alicia ran the operation flawlessly and tirelessly. The only downside - I gained weight on the cuisine. **(Ph: (679) 694-747; fax (679) 694-877; e-mail info@crystaldivers.com; website www.crystaldivers.com)**

Crystal Divers, Private beach home, April 2001, Brian (bwillison1@compuserve.com) Littleton, CO. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F. Diving was fantastic. The soft coral was beautiful and came in many bright colors. The fish life was impressive. I remember looking up and seeing clouds of colorful fish. Saw white tip sharks and or gray reef sharks on a majority of the dives. Lion fish, eels, scorpion fish, turtles, feather worms, nudibranchs. Crystal Divers was very service oriented and made everyone's diving experience a real pleasure. They have a large aluminum jet dive boat that was fast. Julie limits

it to 10 divers. The most divers we had all week was 8. This boat gets you to sites that only Crystal dives or are only accessible by live-aboards. We saw one live-aboard 5 miles away and 2 other dive boats all week! Some sites require an hour to 1-1/2 hour boat ride so if you are prone to sea sickness be prepared. On the days we visited these sites, we left at 8 am and did not return until between 1:30 pm and 2:30 pm. We rented a private beach home from Julie on Nananu-I Ra which included a meal package. The food was excellent. We fixed our own breakfast and we were served wonderful hot lunches and dinners. No TV or phone we had the beach mostly to ourselves.

Crystal Divers, Wananavu Beach Resort, May 2001, Kurt Schwarz, (kgs7259@aol.com) Potomac, MD.

Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 84 F, calm and flat. Logged Dives: 400. Dive restrictions: 130 ft., 60 minutes. The Wananavu Beach Resort has beautifully designed grounds. We had an ocean front bure with a nice view of the beach. The regular bures are duplexes. The separating wall is very thin and you can hear normal level conversation in the adjoining bure. Next time we would upgrade to one of the individual villas. The staff were all wonderful. Emmanuel, the chef, cooked some special dishes for my wife, who is vegetarian (veggie casserole, veggie lasagna, samosas). This is a place to just relax, dive, eat and sleep. The resort is pretty isolated. Viti Levu is still very undeveloped. We took the 2-1/2 hour taxi ride into

Nadi the first day. It was interesting to check out the handicraft shops and the Hindu temple. Dan Grenier was away in the States and the dive crew was led by Georgi, a native Fijian with personality to spare. The first 2 days when there was only 4 divers, the large boat was having engine problems so we had to use the small boat which had no protection from the sun. When more divers came for 2 days, the large boat was okay. The next day when there was just four of us again we were told we would have to use the small boat again due to problems with the large boat. One of our group spoke privately with Georgi about this and then we had the large boat the rest of the time. They also gave us 2 extra free dives for the inconvenience. Some of the dive sites are the best I have ever seen. Other more sharks and some large Napoleon wrasse, the diving is better than the land based diving in Palau. These sites are pristine, little or no bleaching and have unbelievable soft coral. We did not go to E-6. We were told by Geogie that E-6 has been bleached. I saw 6 grey and white tip reef sharks, an eagle ray, a large school of chevron barracuda, 11 lion fish, stone fish, various scorpion fish, 3 varieties of clown fish, porcelain crabs and various anemone shrimp.

Crystal Divers, Wananavu Beach Resort, August 2001, Leo W. Buss, Durham, CT. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. I brought my 14-year-old son diving to capture that special pleasure that comes with showing your kid something you love

and finding that they however — momentarily — love it themselves. As a marine biologist(I teach the subject at Yale University), seeing reefs as healthy as vibrant as the Crystal Divers sites proved to be an unexpected bonus. My son could well have been put off by diving far offshore in noticeable current. Crystal Divers put him at ease. Georgi, a Fijian divemaster and boat operator, gave clear dive briefings and hovered near my son through his first dive until content, as Evan himself was, that all was well. Crystal Divers is a class act. The boat is immaculate, fast and cleverly laid out. The stern and ladder work much better than those on more conventional craft. Dan and Georgi are talented captains, the control of the boat is always pinpoint. The boat appears on time without anyone feel rushed. Most sites can only be dived at particular points in the lunar and diurnal cycle and Dan got people in the water at the right time without most divers even noticing the calculations required. The atmosphere is friendly, relaxed, and fun. Their divemasters love to dive. As someone who works underwater, I can attest that this is all too rarely the case. But Dan's enthusiasm for diving is evident. One a day after he had to stay onshore, he got in a pleasure dive during everyone else's surface interval. Georgi is a very pleasant guy, Bola has an uncanny ability to spot nudibranchs, and Mary's smile is infectious. They are assisted by Linda onshore. Dan and his wife host a fantastic dinner at their home once a week to which the divers are invited.

The sites are pristine. Most are pinnacles rising from deeper water within comfortable sport diving depths. Black Magic Mountain is a beautiful pinnacle festooned with *Dendronephthya* (soft coral) of striking colors, interspersed with huge antipatharian colonies. *Tubipora* (organ pipe corals), *Xenia* (the soft coral whose polyps pulsate), large colonies of *Tubastraea*, to mention but a few. Half a dozen different crinoids here in an abundance that are absurd. Nudibranchs common, *Phyllidia*, *Chromodoris annae*, *Tamja morosa* and *Pteraeolidia ianthina* seen on one dive alone. A gray reef shark hovered in the distance and an occasional blacktip, whitetip, and silvertip can be seen nearer in. Lionfish common, as are clowns, including those harbored by fluorescent orange anemone, *Eutacmea*. Little will match the delight I got from watching my son immersed in a school of what seemed a 1000 or more blue and gold fusiliers (*Caesio teres*). And this but my notes on the first dive. A biologist's dream come true. Bigger dryer towels would be nice, as would fruit as an option to the sweets offered between dives. In other words, it is a stretch to find something negative to stay. Wananavu Beach Resort is great — the cottages cozy and well equipped, the staff is friendly and the food is great.

Navini Island

Subsurface Fiji, July 2001, Dr. Kent Smith (drsmith@onramp.net) Irving, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 20 to 80 Feet. Water: 77 to 81 F, choppy. I was told I needed no

passport for our small children until the day of our trip, and then I had to acquire 3 passports between 10:30 and 5 which included 2 plane flights and 3 taxi rides. We had done all of our diving in the Caribbean, so this was a real treat for my wife, 16-year old daughter and myself. Vz was a bit worse than the worst the Caribbean offers. It was time to pull out my macro lenses and worry about the stuff that wouldn't be bothered by particulate scatter. Many species of nudibranch, saw sharks on almost every dive, rays on a few, a jewfish in a cave, crustaceans I have yet to identify and more starfish than I had ever seen. On the night dive, when the nocturnal ones (are they really?) came out to play, I counted 9 species, not including the brittle stars. The "soft coral capitol" was just that. The colors were amazing, ranging from the bright yellow sponges to red sea fans to multicolored mushrooms to translucent grapes. The Fijians are incredibly sincere, happy, and more than willing to be a servant to their guests. We were on a small island and were picked up for diving. (Ph: (679) 666 738; fax (679) 669 955; e-mail subsurface@is.com.fj; website www.fijidiving.com)

Ono Island, Astrolabe Reef

Jona's Paradise Resort, December 2000, John Williams, Ocate, NM.

Vis: 2-65 ft. Water: 82-84 F. Logged dives: 350+. Dive restrictions enforced: 30 M - 50 bar safe stop. Plus: Friendly staff, clean native food, 7 bures, good value, soft corals. Negative: One very "Ugly American"

made month misery, hexa corals at Astrolabe Reef 95% dead and down. We gathered 67 crown of thorns (now garden compost), 40 hp. 23' skiffs, no ladders, bone crushing ride. Owner scuba spears in new marine park (ARRGH!) (Ph: (679) 307058; fax (679) 303860; e-mail Divekadavu@is.com.fj)

Tavenuni

Garden Island Resort, January 2001, Stanislaw Zuk III

(stanislaw@scubadiving.com) New York, NY. Vis: 70-100 ft. Water: 80-84 F. Dives logged: 20. Excellent divemasters Leone and Wani. Great care for guests. Good operation. Soft corals magnificent and many white tip sharks every dive. Plenty of wonderful fusiliers, leaf fish on great white wall in Rainbow Reef. Turkey and lionfish everywhere. Delightful water falls, good organization. If you call Aqua Trek ask for Sita. Remember diving there is fantastic, but the best for experienced divers. Extremely strong currents. (Ph: (679) 880 286; fax (679) 880 288; e-mail garden@is.com.fj)

Garden Island Resort, March 2001, Toni Hulbert, Redlands, CA.

Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 84-86 F. Dives logged: 400+. Dive restrictions: varied by dive. What you get for your money is unsurpassed. It's a 3-for-1 deal: Fantastic diving; beautiful island with hikes to waterfalls, waterslides, the 180E meridian; a cultural experience with wonderful people who go above and beyond the norm to welcome you. Resort is tops, from the location to the staff to the incredible food.

Garden Island Resort, March 2001, Cameron Hall, Carmel, CA.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 70 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, currents. Sunny for most of my stay. The resort is well run, the food is ok, (some dishes are excellent; stay away from the beef). The rooms are excellent and the staff friendly. Keep in mind that this is a converted Travel Lodge. Good value. A band plays island music every night and they are very good. You can drink Kava with the band and socialize. The dive operation is well run. Two dives a day in the morning. They ran 1 boat with one to 11 divers. During the high season they run 3 boats. Night dives can be arranged 2 nights a week. The dive sites are in the Somo Somo straight 5 minutes from the resort. Almost all day dives are drift dives and are a blast. I was there during the full moon so the current was up to 3 knots at the end of the second dive. The hard corals are all dead from El Niño but the soft corals more than make up for this. They open from the current and there are lots of tropical fish feeding. I saw reef sharks on almost every dive and turtles once. During the surface interval the boat heads over to a beach on Vana Levu for snacks and snorkeling. In the afternoon you can hang beside the pool (There is no beach at the resort), rent a Kayak and paddle around a small island offshore (with beaches), hike up to the water slide, or take a taxi to the other end of the island to the Bula National Park to swim in the waterfall. There are also beaches on the other side of the island. There is no commercial center worth visiting.

Jean-Michel Cousteau Fiji Islands Resort, Matangi Island Resort, Matava Resort, August 2000, Paul Crawford, Guerneville, CA.

Dive restrictions enforced: 100 ft. The first problem was the cancellation of our reservations aboard the Princess II, one week before we left. This was fully paid for 6 months ahead of time, and after e-mail reassurances from South Sea Adventures that: "Of course the trip is still on, why wouldn't it be?" We would not get our money back for four months, and only after we made threats. All the other passengers on the Princess were booked onto the Aggressor, except for my group. We started out in SavuSavu, where upon arrival in our rented house, we had a message from the Cousteau Resort. We were the only tourists on the island, and I have never experienced such royal treatment. From the charm of the people, to the dive boat, to the equipment. The service was excellent. Pricey, but you got what you paid for. The weather was unseasonably rough, so our dive sites were limited, but they made the most out of what was available. We had one beginning diver who needed to complete her certification, and was uneasy about the whole thing. By the end of three days, she was ecstatic. They took her by the hand and got her through it. After SavuSavu we went to Matangi Island. There were 4 rain soaked honeymoon couples, desperately wanting to leave. We were the only divers. Our dive guide was inexperienced, but easygoing, and we had an entire dive boat to ourselves. The weather was rough, so we

couldn't go to the premier oceanic reefs often. The fringing reef hard corals are dead, but alive and spectacular on the oceanic reefs. The fish life was alive and well. The best diving was off of Forbes" Laucala island. Spectacular! Our final location was Matava Resort on Kadavu. The resort was primitive, and the dive boats even more so. To get to the resort was an hour and a half by rain soaked motor boat. The dive boats were Boston whaler style, and getting back in was an athletic proposition. I bruised myself good getting back in heavy seas. Astrolabe reef: huge rays, sharks, grouper and schools of big fish. There was even some hard table corals in good condition. Because of how far south Kadavu is, the weather there is cooler than the rest of Fiji. The Resort owners said that their summer — "Nov.-Dec. — their best weather. The Fijians could not have been nicer. Even in the middle of a coup, they were gracious, and accommodating. (Ph: 800-246-3454 or US 415-788-5794 or Fiji + 679 850188; fax US 415-788-0150 OR Fiji + 679 850340; e-mail info@fijiresort.com; website www.fijiresort.com)

Matangi Island Resort, November 2000, Tracey Bennett, Las Vegas, NV. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Dive restrictions: max depth, buddy mandatory. Matangi is out of a fairy tale. Beautiful accommodations, service and people. New dive boat; large, comfortable and fast. Dove Yellow Wall to Great White Wall and much more. Jack's Place and Blue Ribbon Eel dives on Rainbow Reef,

the best 30-60 ft. dives I've had. The wall diving takes more experience. One day, Great White Wall had moderate current. The next day it was ripping. Shallow dives around Matangi were not what they should be. Huge amount of coral damaged. Also stayed at Castaway which was a lot of fun but no wall dives. Three nights at Maravu Plantation were a disappointment. A little rain every day around Matangi affected vis somewhat on shallow dives. (Ph: 888 628-2644 or (679) 880 699 or (679) – 880 260; fax (679) – 725 220 or (679) – 880 274; e-mail usres@MatangiIsland.com or fijires@MatangiIsland.com or matangiisland@is.com.fj; website www.matangiisland.com)

Matangi Island Resort, March 2001, James McMeins, Carnation, WA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm currents. Fantastic diving, second visit. They have the new jet boat so trips to Koro Sea were very fast. Usually back for lunch by 1 or 1:30 pm. Diving is the best that I've seen, your so far from the big islands that there is little if any runoff or rivers flowing into the water. Visibility was great and the corals, both hard and soft are vibrant. Lots of small tropicals and critters. Whitetips on every dive including one school of 5 baby whitetips (1-2' long), several Bronze whalers spotted in the blue. Wall diving was great, like flying along the cliffs. Divemaster would always check the currents first to see which way the dive would go, all drift dives and the use of the jet boat makes this safe. If 4

or more people sign up, will go on all day, 3 tank dive. Went on two trips, one 20 miles north of Matangi to the Ringolds atoll group and 2nd trip over to Soma Soma straits to the Rainbow Reef. Both trip excellent and returned to resort by 4:30-5. Unlimited shore diving but the reef is recovering from cyclone 3 years ago. The staff has worked hard at reestablishing it, they've brought in 12-14 giant clams and placed them around one patch reef. Lots of hard and soft corals and the deeper reef us showing signs of new growth and little spots of color but will be years before this is a decent dive site again. Matangi resort is very nice, love the bure's and the small numbers of guest. We were there for 10 days, two of which, we were the only ones there! All the staff and people are friendly. Don't order the lunch the day you leave; US 12.50 for one tuna sandwich and a small salad! UW Photography comments: No camera bucket until I mentioned it then they put a 10 gal. bucket on board but they didn't mark it cameras only, so other divers kept dumping masks and wetsuits in it. No table or good open space to work on.

Matangi Island Resort, April 2001, Ed and Joyce Lyttle, (nevadaej@comnett.net) Overton, NV. Vis: 60-90 ft. Water: 80-82 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 181. Dive restrictions: 120 ft. 500 psi. Our third trip to Fiji. The people at Matangi as usual were super nice. Very good boats and divemasters. Lots to do when not diving or snorkeling.

Matangi Island Resort, August 2001, Jeffrey R. Johnson (jrj72113@aol.com) Maumelle, AR. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F, choppy currents. A small paradise. Tiny family owned resort, about 14 "bures," some set in trees. Accommodations were more than comfortable, staff very friendly and charming, food very good. Dive operation was adequate, staff accommodating it. Several showers, usually brief, and lots of clouds every day. General routine was to leave at 8:30 am for two boat dives, back by 12 or 12:30pm. Could use afternoons snorkeling or shore diving, kayaking, sailing, picnicking on secluded beach, touring native village or waterfall, visiting Forbes family island (can be yours for \$10.5M) or just relaxing. Saw sea snake, lots of white tip reef sharks, a few turtles and giant eels. All in all diving was very good, but not hugely memorable, but the Great White Wall is a dive not to be missed. The charm of the trip was the total package — the beauty of the surroundings, the lovely people, the outstanding resort, and good diving. My wife and I almost cried when we left. We felt like we were leaving family.

Matangi Island Resort, August 2001, Jerry Gherardi, Bayonne, NJ. Lush grounds landscaped with well kept thatched traditional bure's. Guests are met beach front by a native Fijian offering a coconut drink. The staff is 99% Fijian and cannot do enough for you. Bure #5 is a "standard" and is a very large two room

affair. Ceiling and standing fans and a slew of open windows adorn the rooms. There is no a/c. Wall sockets abound but adapters as well as multi voltage chargers or converters are needed. Beds are good and changed frequently. The bath is showing age and the hot water is slow but steady. Power is generator provided. Tap water cannot be drunk but small carafes of water as well as tea and coffee and mini bar are in the room. As best as we could tell the difference between "standard" vs. "deluxe" is exterior shape with "deluxe" having a few cubic feet more of space. Hold your ground. "Standard" works just fine. "Tree houses" are usually honeymoon suites, but rules are broken to accommodate guests, all at extra cost! Day trips to Taveuni falls and local beach/snorkel trips as well as romantic dinners are free. Unlimited beach diving but little to see. Meals very good to nothing special. Breakfast is all you can order. Want more ask for it. Lunch is adequate, some buffets. Dinner is choice of two, or buffet, or weekly "Lovo" feast. Meals adequate and filling. Package includes 5 two tank dives. These are morning dives and do not include the "Somosomo Straits." They offer afternoon dives and night dives at extra cost with a minimum number of divers but this can be problematic. The dive boats can vary from six packs up to 18 divers (jet boat). Some have ladders, some do not, most have swim platforms. The jet boat (staff boat of choice) has no ladder, and the engine runs most times making for interesting entries and retrievals. Out of shape

divers can find the reentry procedure daunting but help is available for those asking! Merely raise your arms and the muscular boat captains lift you up and onto the platform. Tanks are 72 & 80 filled to capacity. Towels as well as hot drinks and cookies are offered during hour + surface intervals. Divers geared up but staff assisted prior to and post dive. Gear taken off in water and left by your spot. Staff will rinse and hang your gear and replace it next day on the boat. Staff is helpful. Diving off Matangi is drift/wall diving. Reefs are full of soft corals and small fish with some sites having large schools of medium sized fish. During the 20 or so dives we saw one turtle and a few dozen five foot sharks. Yellow and Purple Wall are lovely dive sites. Sites maybe repeated. Diving here was much better than Kandavu/Beqa Lagoon but had no bommies, its drift/wall or nothing. Package divers get a break on Somosomo Straight dives. For \$95F based on six divers minimum, all day, lunch provided. The trip takes about 90 minutes and depending on tide and current can be zero current to 2 knots +. One week we had seven minutes on the Great White Wall for a bottom time of 22 minutes, and a horrible second dive of only 32 minutes due to severe current (full moon). Exactly seven days later we had fifteen minutes of pleasurable wall diving followed by another thirty minutes of reef exploration thru swim thrus and small tunnels with lots of fish. Luck of the draw or better planning? If resort has only 30 or so slots, and divers are outnumbered 4/5 to 1 by non diving

honeymooners then “minimum divers needed special day trips” do not operate! It’s a long trip from the East Coast to Matangi and to not dive the Somosomo Straits/Great White Wall because six divers cannot be found is crazy. The second week at Matangi the honeymooners got special treatment (unlimited boats) and the divers were treated as second class and all were on dive packages. The honeymooners paid less for their vacations. After the coup and the South Fijian coral die offs, travel agents are filling the void left by divers with honeymooners.

Matangi Island Resort, September 2001, Jay & Karen Reiner (jaycpa@mindspring.com) Cold Spring, NY. We felt like we were being “nickel and dimed.” We were under the impression from South Seas Adventures, the exclusive US booking agent for Matangi, that because of some scheduling snafu during the week we wanted to go, the only bures available were the deluxe ones. After arguing, we were told that we would get a deluxe bure for the price of the standard. Resort staff people had difficulty explaining what the difference was. We don’t think there was any difference. When we received our final itinerary and we found out there would be a \$US 20 per person “fuel surcharge,” due to the higher cost of fuel. The release that Matangi wanted us to sign was worded in such a way that we would be waiving all rights to sue them, even in cases of their negligence! So if they miscounted the number of people getting back on the boat after a dive, and you’re stranded

in the water overnight (or longer) you could not sue them. We were instructed to not drink the water from the bure tap, but should drink the bottled water in the mini-bar refrigerator, \$FJ 3 per bottle. There are carafes of water supplied for making coffee, so we used that for drinking. There were additional charges for a day boat trip to the best dive site offered by Matangi, night dives, a trip to a waterfall, and the trip to the village (a “small kava charge”). Additional dive shop charges were payable by cash only, so if you want to take the PADI Advanced course, take \$375 in cash. The spa, for massages, only accepts cash! We don’t travel half way around the world with wads of cash, so we had to arrange a “deal” with the office, where they would pay the spa cash, and charge the massage to our room — except that they were going to charge our card a 3.5% surcharge. We got them to waive that charge. The different operations (and the resort) are all owned by the Douglas family. On the day of the village trip we had to make it clear that we didn’t want to be assessed the “kava charge” because we brought our own kava — we had been to Beqa the prior week, and had learned some of the local customs. The local people had handicrafts for sale — cash only. Most of us were caught without any dough. This could have been averted if the Matangi staff informed the guests ahead of time. The tour was heavily orchestrated,” complete with tour guides, and one of the locals acting as M.C. of the “show.” The best dive site is an optional excursion, with a charge of

\$FJ95/person. It's an all day trip, and you still only get two dives. We opted out and had another dive boat (and dive master) to ourselves that day. Two private dives at no additional charge! On most dives there were 8-10 divers, a manageable group, except the divemasters were only concerned with shepherding the group along, and sticking to the 40 minute bottom time, 3 minute safety stop plan. They didn't spend much time pointing out interesting things. The crew was helpful, lugging your gear on and off the boat, and changing tanks between dives. The main dive boat had a fresh water tank for cameras, and a dry table for changing film. It also had a head. Since there was no ladder, you had to boost yourself back up on the platform (with not too reliable assistance from the crew). While some people might find sleeping under a mosquito net "romantic," it's hot and uncomfortable, and useless when there are holes in the net (as ours had)! The rooms have a couple of ceiling fans, and one oscillating fan on the night stand, which didn't provide enough cooling. The noisy generator which (if you're unlucky) is near some of the guest bures. The age of the resort is apparent in the bathroom, where you can see moldy grout being covered with clear caulk in the shower. When the tap in the bathroom was turned on at the same time as the shower, the shower drain backed up. Since you're spending every meal with other people, there's no need for "romantic" low light. Everybody holding the table candles over their plates, so they could figure out what they were being

served! There's never any shortage of food, except that most dishes are heavy, greasy, and not at all health conscious. There was a lack of fresh vegetables, and some dishes were obviously packaged convenience foods, such as one lunch of "crumped Fish," which appeared to be Mrs. Paul's Fish filets. Two dinners consisted of Lobster Thermidor and Lobster Mornay, which seemed to be the same (both were very creamy and heavy). Breakfast menu, which consisted of various egg dishes, French toast, hash brown potatoes, and ham, bacon, or sausage. There was also a selection of dry cereal, fresh fruits, and juices. Fiji Bitter — \$FJ4 per bottle. The bartender John makes drinks with exactly one jigger of liquor. No heavy hands here! They did have complimentary laundry service and Karen's birthday, which included a birthday cake and singing by the staff. While Matangi Island, and the surrounding islands of Qamea and Laucala, is a beautiful location, we don't think the trip was worth it.

Viti Levu

Castaway Island Resort, February 2001, John Williams, Ocate, NM.

Vis; 25-70 ft. Water: 82-84 F. Logged dives: 350±, 44 yrs, 63 yrs old. Big smooth operation, store, nurse, huge lovo feast, great mini-meke, 300 HP 30 ft., cat. to sites, WHOOSH!. House reef on south total dead, north side 40-60% alive, wonder of wonders! Too much fish feeding gives false impression of fish population. (Ph: (800) 888-0120 or US (310) 568-0009 or Fiji (679) 723 433; fax (310) 338-0708; e-mail castaway@itr-aps.com)

or enquiries@castawayfiji.com.fj;
website www.castawayisland.com)

Waya

Octopus Resort, March 2001, John Williams, Ocate, NM. Vis: 30-70 ft. Water: 83-86 F. Logged dives: 350 ±, 44 yrs, 63 yrs. old. Dive restrictions enforced: 30 M. 50 bar safe stp. Positive: 10 bures.. Most incredible in Fiji. Island very wonderful eyeful of green with black basalt and boulder and cliffs. Negative: Reefs of spur and grooves, completely devastated covered in red-brown algae, eutroficating bubbles rising, walking on reefs, netting last 4-6 fishies, beating water with 2-3 meter sticks to drive fish. (ARRGH)! Had bad experience with "Great Expeditions" We paid \$13,700 for 3 mos. of idyllic snorkeling and diving. Great Astrolabe Reef is completely dead and down (there 1 month), Dive Kandavu Reefs sad; Castaway reefs south dead and down, Castaway north 50% gone, something smashing green pocillipora hexacorals in middle We asked for 28 days of refund! Paid \$600 to leave early. \$800 trip, cancel insurance; void. No apologies! No refunds. (Ph: (679) 666 337; fax (679) 666 210; e-mail octopus_resort@yahoo.com; website www.octopusresort.com)

FRENCH POLYNESIA

Tahiti and Moorea are everyone's dream of the South Pacific, and despite their pricey resorts and food, these French-speaking islands are developing as a destination for American divers

since there is plenty of reef shark action. Some areas have not seen many divers . . . There are a range of accommodations, though generally it's expensive....the once snotty French attitude toward others seems to have lessened considerably.

Bora Bora

Ben Heriteau, Bora Bora Parkroyal Resort, June 2001, Bob & Dorothy McDonald, Strongsville, OH.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 150 to 200 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Although the island is pricey, the resort and the over-water bungalows are lovely, the food is good, and the staff friendly. Lots of local restaurants will pick you up at the resort and drive you to the restaurant. Ben Heriteau only takes 2 divers out at a time. He has a small boat with some shade. He wore a full face mask and put receivers on our masks so we could hear him. Before the first dive we wondered if he would be talking nonstop. No he only talked to tell us something about the underwater sea life that we did not know. He asked what we wanted to see and do. Most dive sites were a 15 minute ride. He gets to sites earlier than other boats — often we were finishing a dive as another boat showed up. No shore diving or night dives. One day he did take us to the other end of the island (a 50 minute ride) to see gray sharks. There was a fairly strong current and plenty of shark action. We even saw a gray shark being cleaned by a wrasse, lemon sharks, black tip sharks, gray sharks, permits, a squadron of 6 eagle