

but rinse tank and assistance was available. (Ph: 07 4051 4777 (Intl: 61 7 4051 4777); fax 07 4051 4888 (Intl: 61 7 4051 4888); e-mail [reservations@adventures.com.au](mailto:reservations@adventures.com.au); website [www.adventures.com.au](http://www.adventures.com.au))

## Fiji

***MV Princess II*, December 2000, Michael N. Hofman** ([mhofman@jmoyerlandscaping.com](mailto:mhofman@jmoyerlandscaping.com))  
**San Francisco, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, choppy no currents. The kitchen and boat staff went out of their way to make us comfortable and enjoy our stay. Dive operations were laid back, especially since there were only four guests. Also owner invited a number of people out for day trips, including several folks completing a research trip. The dive master was terrible. He was young, this was his first trip and he had little idea what it meant to be a good dm. As a result the diving was mediocre. Several times the captain went in on exploratory dives (which I joined) to identify new sites. This was interesting. Accommodations were okay, but not great. The boat is somewhat beamy and several nights we spent rocking more than I care to. Also my wife (who is a snorkeler) had almost no opportunity to get into the water, even though we had specifically inquired into opportunities for snorkeling. Good setup for camera equipment; no Processing. (Ph: (800) 576 7327 or 303-417-0557 (US) or (679) 923 182 (Fiji); fax (303) 417 0557 (US); e-mail

[info@princessii.com](mailto:info@princessii.com); website [www.princessii.com](http://www.princessii.com))

***Nai'a*, June 2000, Andrew Kochan, Northridge, CA.** Vis: 30-70 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Logged dives: 85. Should have told us that we were going to visit a village and we could have brought things to give to the villagers (shirts, shoes, pens, paper, toothpaste, etc.). (Ph: 800-903-0272 (US) or (+679)-450-382 (Fiji); fax (+679)-450-566 (Fiji); e-mail [explore@naia.com.fj](mailto:explore@naia.com.fj); website [www.naia.com.fj](http://www.naia.com.fj))

***Nai'a*, October 2000, Zygmunt Dembek.** Cloudy, overcast skies for the entire 2 weeks under sail, with 20-30 knot winds, 4-6 foot swells, and stirred-up seas in many locations. Two-week charter with Stan Waterman to the remote Lau Island group in Fiji. The Nai'a is among the best of vessels to conduct oceanic explorations, having carried divers throughout Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu, along with special trips to Kiribati to search for the remains of Amelia Earhart's lost plane, and has hosted Howard Hall's IMAX filming (website [www.naia.com.fj](http://www.naia.com.fj)). Chef Manasa's fabled cuisine kept guests and crew smiling! We dived sites off of Taveuni, Vanau Levu, and Viti Levu rather than press on to the Southern Lau, in part because of the rough weather conditions. Due to political problems, the Nai'a (and everyone else) lost permission to visit Vanau Balavu, but could still visit some other dive sites within the Lau group. We did dive in the Northern Lau, including Motua Levu and Cobia bordering

the Lau, and Qele Levu and Nanuku in the far Northeast. It was a shock to see 70% of the hard corals wiped out at Qele Levu and Nanuku. Dived alongside a large school (4-5 foot size) of Queensland groupers, and close to eagle rays, whitetip sharks, turtles, and those colorful blue-spotted rays. Rob Barrel has been collecting water temperatures by placing recording probes at various sites throughout the Fiji reefs since September 1996. Rob pulled up a temperature probe from the Mount Mutiny dive site off of Viti Levu and the temperatures during January through April 2000 were the highest sustained temperatures he'd recorded in Fijian waters, often above 85 F. The other sites throughout central Fiji had the famous spectacular soft corals and marine life in abundance, with only about a 10% or less hard coral die-off. Giant Tridacna clams, found anemonefish, lionfish, pipefish, nudibranchs and other colorful critters in abundance; huge schools of barracuda, jacks, pinnate batfish, fusiliers; turtles, hammerhead and gray reef sharks at many sites. The upgrade price to business class on Air Pacific was \$500 from LA to Nadi, and \$300 for the return flight, if available.

**Nai'a, November 2000, Patrick Rapp, Washington, DC.** Vis: 60 to 150 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. The divemasters were Helen Sykes and Stuart Gow, filling in for Cat and Rob Barrel. They were the most engaged and informed divemasters I have ever encountered, usually going on every dive. Helen is working on a project to measure the recovery rate of

bleached coral. Stuart the engineer on the boat is amazingly knowledgeable about life on the reefs. They impressed on all of us that safety was our responsibility. If any of us had any problem, with equipment or whatever, they were always pleased to help. If a diver wanted to see some particular thing, say, porcelain crabs, Helen or Stuart would dive with them. They were patient, and gracious energetic. Diving was better than what I had seen in the Coral Sea diving with Mike Ball. Though some areas were suffering from dead coral, it didn't seem to affect the reef life too much. E-6 etc., were fine. The blue ribbon eels were noteworthy. I also saw two courting octopi. In the Nigali Pass there were more sharks than you could count. Visited a small village on a small island. The welcoming ceremony, and the open friendliness of the local villagers has to be experienced to be believed.

**Nai'a, February 2001, Walt & Angie Redmond, Austin, TX.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 80 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm currents. Our third trip aboard the Nai'a. Excellent diving, staff, food, service, boat! We missed having Rob (owner) & Cat (dive supervisor) on board but Stuart & Helen filled in admirably as "cruise directors." Four dives offered per day; nitrox available. Brilliant hard & soft corals. An amazing abundance of fish life — nudibranchs, scorpionfish, blue ribbon eels, barracuda, bigeye trevally, triggerfish. Favorite dive sites included Nagali Pass — sharks and moray eel, Wakaya — manta shrimp,

Jim's Alley — banded sea snake and tomato anemonefish and Mt. Mutiny — lionfish, eels and stonefish.

Knowledgeable divemasters. Friendly and helpful native Fijian crew. Food is excellent and plentiful. When you weren't diving, you were either eating or sleeping. Crew entertainment night with kava drinking and a village visit on the island of Gau. At the village, the Nai'a passengers were treated to a kava ceremony complete with leis, kava drinking, singing, native dancing and an exchange of gifts. Camera room on board with tables, outlets, rinse tank. E-6 processing available.

***Nai'a, April 2001, Sandra Falen***  
(sfalen@kscable.com) **Topeka, KS.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, calm currents. First-class, professional operation. Cruise Director Helen Sykes was extremely knowledgeable about the marine environment, providing wonderful educational opportunities on coral and Fish identification, as well as insight on Fijian culture. The boat is roomy, with outstanding service (the crew outnumbered the 11 guests). The large dive deck made suiting up for your dive easy and quick. When the announcement came that the "skiffs are ready!", you only had to walk to the rear platform carrying your mask, fins, and camera. There, you hopped onto one of the two waiting skiffs, for the 1 to 2 minute trip to the site. A crew member would help you into your BC, and when everyone was ready, a count of "1,2,3" would cue your easy backroll. Crew members were always helpful in

handing down cameras, or assisting you. Skiffdriver Bale would lift BCs and tanks out of the water at the end of the dive. The use of two skiffs allowed one to be nearby when you finished your dive, and you were immediately whisked back to the "mother ship." Once the skiff had deposited a load of divers on the rear deck, it would zoom back to the site, to wait for others. Chef Manasa and stewards Sereanna and Sulianna presented an amazing variety of outstanding meals. A continental breakfast of coffee, juice, toast, and cereal would be available at 6:00am, with your choice of a full, cooked breakfast following the 7:30 am, first dive. Lunch followed the 10:30 am dive, and a generous snack would follow the 2:30 pm dive. Two fabulous dinner entrees, and a gourmet dessert, would follow the night dive. Cold water and other beverages were always available from the self-service refrigerator. Currents are strong at many dive sites, which are frequently towering coral heads or "bommies" that rise out of the ocean floor. Always an opportunity to escape the current by ducking around to the "other side" of the bommie. At the surface, the water was usually calm and flat. Coral bleaching on some sites, while others are pristine. The profusion of fish life and the variety of corals is overwhelming. Hammerhead, gray reef, white tip, and nurse sharks were seen with regularity. Mantas were frequently sighted, and one swooped right over my head, as she cruised in circles through a manta cleaning station. Shrimps, nudibranchs,

pipefish were abundant and fascinating. Cabins were comfortable, with daily maid service and turndown service at night. The camera room was very spacious, and the salon has a TV/VCR, where we frequently viewed fellow guests' daily video footage. The atmosphere is extremely casual. Swimsuits, shorts, t-shirts, bare feet, and sunscreen (if you plan to visit the upper deck) are about all you need. A visit to a Fijian village, for a kava ceremony and interaction with the natives, provided a delightful cultural experience. Several divers received their Nitrox certification, while others earned their Advanced Diver certification, or received photographic/video instruction. The Fiji Mocambo Hotel in Nadi provided a pleasant, inexpensive place to rest and freshen up upon our 6:00 am arrival in Nadi. A large, comfortable motorcoach picked us up at 1pm for the 25-minute ride to Lautoka, where we boarded the *Nai'a*. The same motorcoach was waiting when we disembarked at 8:00 am, returning us to the Mocambo, to await the 10:00 pm, Air Pacific departure. The camera room, located adjacent to the dive deck, is large, with roomy shelving, electrical outlets, fans to keep the air circulating and help equipment dry out, and a handy towel supply. It worked well for either the casual picture-taker, or serious photographer, and there was plenty of room to accommodate everyone on board.

***Sere-Ni-Wai, 2000, Lee Jones, San Jose, CA.*** Extraordinary boat designed for diving. The crew is superb, starting with the cook/chef, Ram, who

has been with Captain Greg Lawlor for 16 years, and the mate/engineer, Sam, who has been with Greg for at least 11 years. Perfect mix of beautiful reef diving with clouds of anthias and soft corals and the big current/big animal adventures in the lagoon passes. Whitetip reef, gray reef, nurse, scalloped hammerhead, great hammerhead, many mantas, turtles, stingrays, octopuses, fire dartfish, an angel that's not in any of our critter books, and 4-5 brands of nudibranchs. We ran the dinghy to a deserted island and spent an hour shelling. No head on the main deck so you didn't have to get dry and go back to your room to pee after the dive. Moses is a fine divemaster but has islander's sensibilities about the environment. He grabbed a turtle and held it in place until one of our group went completely berserk and swam at him like she was going to cut his second stage hose. He also cut up any crown-of-thorns stars he came across, which made my 13-year old son go nuts. I explained that some people think the stars are responsible for reefs dying. A full meal at the Hideaway costs \$7, a huge curry lunch in town costs \$4 with a beer. Having a 747 nonstop from LAX to Nadi is especially nice when there are literally 30 people in coach, and they turn the back half of the airplane into a sleeping car/silent theater. (Ph: (800) 956-0485 (US) or (679) 361 171 (Fiji); fax (679) 361 137 (Fiji); e-mail [sere@is.com.fj](mailto:sere@is.com.fj); website [www.sere.com.fj](http://www.sere.com.fj))

***Sere-Ni-Wai, March 2001, Wapen, Foster City, CA.*** Vis: 60-80 ft.

Water: 78-82 F. Dives logged: 300. Best crew and meals ever. Good A/C and bath and shower in each stateroom — great boat. Bad time of year — lots of particulate matter in the water limiting visibility. Definitely a “macro” photo trip.

**Sere-Ni-Wai, May 2001, Harry A. Kreigh, Sacramento, CA.** Vis: 50-75 ft. Nine-day trip (eight days of diving) starting and ending in Suva with diving primarily in the Bligh Waters (Gau, Wakaya and Namena), Somosomo Straits and Northern Lau Group. The boat was full (10 passengers). Service, food and divemaster were all above average. Some outstanding dive sites with beautiful, lush soft corals and a variety of reef fish, but several uninteresting, colorless sites with sparse marine life. The trip was disappointing due to marginal weather conditions, limited visibility, absence of current and widespread damage to the hard corals. Mostly cloudy (80-85 F) and very windy (10-20 mph) with a few scattered showers; light or choppy seas depending on winds (1-4' seas); water 80-82 F and visibility generally 50-75'. Usually little or no current, except for a few drift dives with steady currents (0.5-2 knots). Most dives were relatively easy. Large, steel-hulled vessel; stable boat with comfortable ride, but considerable engine noise; spacious salon (modest library, CD and VCR); indoor/outdoor work areas for cameras and multiple outlets for recharging batteries. Four double cabins on the lower deck and a larger suite on the main deck. Cabins are large enough

with bunk beds, adequate storage space (including a small closet), reading lights, en-suite bathroom with shower, individual/adjustable air-conditioning unit, and portholes for natural light. Outstanding service from a friendly staff (5 crew members); daily maid service. There is sufficient space and furniture for relaxing or socializing in the sun or shade on either the bow or dive deck. Water available from a cooler on the dive deck; complimentary lemonade and iced tea (provided at our request) at meals; guests were charged for soft drinks and beer. Meals were served in the dining room; a pre-dive breakfast (coffee, juice, cereal and toast) was followed by a breakfast after the first dive that included a standard menu of eggs, French toast, and bacon. Abundant and tasty lunch and dinner usually with salads, vegetables and multiple chicken/lamb/veal/fish entrees (the Indian chef treated us to several curry meals) and included soup de jour at dinner; the chef reviewed the next-day's menu with us each night and prepared alternate choices (vegetarian) as requested; the crew caught two yellow-fin tuna and the chef prepared sashimi and grilled tunas; fresh fruit was served with breakfast/lunch and was available throughout the day; desserts consisted of pie or custard always accompanied by ice cream; snacks were somewhat lacking, usually consisting of cookies, peanuts and occasionally popcorn. Dives were generally 7:30, 10:30, 1:30 and 4:30 (twilight) daily with night dives (7:00-8:00) offered 4-5 times during the trip. Tanks were

stored/filled in a numbered rack on the dive platform, and personal gear was stored in bins above/below each tank. The crew returned the tanks and gear to the same positions after each dive. There was a rack with hangars for wetsuits on the dive deck. Tanks were filled to 3000 psi. The dive platform was slightly crowded when everyone was gearing up. Most dive entries were directly from the dive platform (some were live-boat dives); probably 25% of the dives were made from one tender. Divers usually returned directly to the boat at the completion of the dive, but the tender was always available for pickups and the driver was usually prompt. Two camera rinse buckets, a fresh water shower on the dive platform, and fresh towels for each dive. At the end of the trip, the crew washed and dried our dive gear (BCDs, diveskins, wetsuits, booties and gloves). Divemaster Moses, a Fijian, has been the divemaster since 1996. He led 90% of the dives (Greg Lawlor, the boat owner and Captain, made the remaining dives) and found interesting marine life. Dive briefings were basic but usually accurate concerning water conditions/current direction (which were checked upon arrival at each site). We generally dove at submerged pinnacles (bommies) within lagoons, outer walls and lagoon passages. Night dives were usually around bommies beneath the boat. Either Moses or Greg led guided tours of new dive sites to point out known resident critters, then divers dispersed to seek individual interests; most dives started at 70-90' and the optimum depth range was around 20-

40'. Divers could usually off gas in the shallow portions of the bommies. Solo diving was permitted. No diving depth or time limits were imposed. The most exciting pelagic encounters occurred at Nigali Passage (Gau Island). Twice, Moses hand fed red bass and groupers while 7-10 gray reef sharks circled the divers and occasionally darted in to snatch pieces of fish large schools of barracuda and jack were ever present and once a manta slowly proceeded past us on the far side of the channel; several white-tipped sharks rested on the sandy bottom oblivious to the action. Other outstanding divesites include Keenan's Reef, North Save-Ack, Wakaya Wall and Magic Mountain, which all featured profuse soft corals in a variety of colors, had healthy populations of anthias and other colorful reef fish and provided opportunities for other pelagic encounters. Found leaf scorpionfish, blue ribbon eel, napoleon wrasse, goby/shrimp pairs, long-nosed hawkfish, pipefish, banded sea krait, flashlight fish, fire dart fish, various nudibranchs, flatworms and mollusks, including huge Triton's trumpets (seen devouring a Crown-of-Thorns starfish). Schools of jacks and barracuda, dog-toothed tuna, Spanish mackerel, solitary or small packs of gray reef and whitetip sharks, several turtles, a single manta ray and a large group of eagle rays, various anemonefish, lionfish, tridacna clams, sweetlips, anthias, unicorn fish, batfish. Except for a night dive, the entire first day in Fiji was spent traveling. Even though we arrived at Nadi at 5:30 AM, it was necessary to

drive to Suva (approximately 4 hours) to meet the boat, and we then cruised for 6 hours to the first dive site. After disembarking at Suva, we had another long drive back to Nadi. Although the boat returned on Tuesday evening, our flight from Nadi did not leave until 10:00 PM on Thursday. I was unprepared for the extra day on land. No explanation was given for omitting E-6 from our dive itinerary. The extent of bleached and dead hard corals (mostly at Gau Island and the Lau Group) was disheartening. Some sites were colorless with few fish, and the hard corals were covered with algae. However, this did not affect the soft corals in the Bligh Waters and Somosomo Straits. I stayed in cabin #4, next to the engine room. On most nights the boat cruised for several hours, and the engine noise was excessively loud. Underwater the boat noise was also unusually loud. 2 scheduled island visits during our trip. We spent one night at Vanuabalavu Island (Northern Lau Group) and several guests went to Greg's coconut plantation for a kava ceremony with the locals; the tribal chief welcomed divers for a tour of his village on Gau Island. We stayed at the Tanoa International Hotel in Nadi, which is conveniently located near the airport and downtown shopping area, comfortable and quiet, but I don't recommend the hotel restaurant. Mama's Pizza Inn was surprisingly good.

**Sere-Ni-Wai, June 2001, Patty Shales (aquating@aol.com) Los Angeles, CA.** Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 78-80 F, calm and flat, choppy. Diving restrictions: 130 ft. Logged dives: 1,500.

Terrific live-aboard. The crew of 4 men took care of all our needs. E-6 process. Every night. The boat caters to divers and photographers making the entry and exit safe and easy. The shack dive and Nagoli Passage was awesome. We saw barracudas schooling on 3 separate dive sites. A good variety of tropicals – flame hawkfish, 2 varieties of leaf fish, blue ribbon eels by the half dozen. Mantas on 4 different sites.

## **FRENCH POLYNESIA**

### **Tahiti**

**MS Paul Gauguin, May 2001, Arthur F. Graf Jr., San Antonio, TX.** Top of the line small cruise ship, with plenty of excellent food. The dive program offered by Radisson is expensive and offers only five dives for the trip at \$70 per dive. The equipment furnished by Radisson is first class. I dove Raiatea which has only one good dive site, with Radisson. We dove Moorea with Radisson and their program was timed so that we could fly out the following day. Moorea has two good dive sites that can be easily reached from the harbors. These consist of the usual hard corals (in very good condition) with numerous reef fish and some sharks, an occasional eagle ray. (Ph: 800-477-7500 (US); e-mail mmantia@radisson.com; website www.rssc.com)

**Orava, April 2001, Alan D. Hutchison, Reno, NV.** Seven-day dive cruise. Great diving area, but we were less than happy with the attitude of the French crew. Spent some time