

Subject/ Area: Fiji Islands

After an easy 4-day passage from Vava'u, Tonga we landed in Levuka, Ovalau. Watch out ... longitude is now East! Fiji is on the same day as Tonga but 1 hour later. Plan accordingly to arrive and being able to clear in. If you arrive after hours or on WE, you will have to pay overtime. We recommend the following cruising guides for more info: 1> Calder's Yachtsman guide; 2> Migrant cruising notes (old, less elaborate and not as complete as above guide) As usual, we'll try to give practical information so you can plan your visit better. More details are posted on www.noonsite.com <<http://www.noonsite.com>>

Levuka, Ovalau

Easy entrance thru the marked channel (large 2-story White light beacon on the South side) and a fairly well protected anchorage just South of the tuna cannery (in front of the white pier of the park with the white picket fence, and at least 200 yds from shore to avoid 3-4 dangerous coral heads) or in front of the cathedral of the town (open to swell from the pass in E wind). As Jimmy Cornell wrote, check-in procedure here is relaxed and easier than in Suva or Savusavu. Since nobody answered Luc's radio calls, he went ashore and cleared in with Customs & Immigration (who called the Health officer) and the Harbor office next door.

What a pleasant surprise, after Tonga, to be greeted by passing people and see lots of smiles! Contrary to what we had read, it is now widely accepted in cities (not traditional villages) to wear hats, glasses, men's shorts, and carry any bags on your shoulders!

We spent a week here enjoying different activities:

- Scuba diving with the German couple, Noby & Andrea, who run the Lomaiviti Dive. Visibility wasn't the best but we enjoyed 4 dives none-the-less on the very healthy coral reefs and saw sharks, rays, napoleon and other pelagic. They have many dive sites around Ovalau and other islands eastwards.
- Walking with guides to 2 different waterfalls. Tatoga Creek, just below the town's water reservoir, a 25-min walk and Waitovu is a 5-min ride + 15-min walk. Small falls, but in beautiful settings. We still enjoyed bathing; jumping in and watching local kids play a kind of water-dare-tag like a band of screaming simians.
- Epi's tours: Went with Epi on his day-tour in Lovoni, the original settlement on the island, in the middle of the volcanic crater. We learned all about Fijian history with tales vivid with emotions. We missed the kava ceremony to the chief as he was off island. The wx was rainy so we had only a short walk to look around and learn about medicinal plants and food crops but a 3-hour or 6-hour hike can be included. Fine local lunch included. Epi will only tour for groups of 4 min and the sign up book is at the reception of the Hotel Royal, the oldest hotel in Fiji!

We had also a chance to get our first taste of local food at Kim's (do not miss their Sunday buffet dinners) and at the Ovalau Holiday Resort (lovo when sufficient tourists around).

A great friend to cruisers is found here: Jean-Claude (F) the manager of Pafco (the cannery) is a sailor himself and has many times helped sailors with mechanical problems. He is soon going to open a club that will be open to sailors. Check it out!

You have to check out with Customs before leaving for any other port's jurisdiction, such as Suva or Savusavu.

VITI LEVU:

Suva. We decided to break the trip from Levuka in 3. After a 15nm-leg, our first overnight stop was at the tiny Nasautabu bird's islands (17d49'48S-178d45'25E) in 25ft, good sand bottom with isolated

coral heads. Our second leg (20nm) led us to Nasalai Mouth where we anchored behind the reef (18d05'76S-178d41'34E) in 15ft, coral rubble.

Officialdom: Coming from another Fijian port, we had to check in only with Customs at the town wharf. Quick & free. Went to the Fijian Affairs to obtain a cruising permit: you can ask for "all islands except Lau" without having to detail itinerary like in the past! Went to the Lau Council to find out how to obtain a cruising permit for all Lau islands. It took me 4 visits to find the whole story! First you have to obtain a police clearance for each crew onboard (takes 2 weeks, cost 25F\$/person, at the Suva police administration building). Second you have to write a letter to the council explaining why you want to visit the Lau and give precise dates. Third, they will let you know the cost of the permit. Since I didn't want to go thru steps 1 and 2 without knowing the cost, I had to go several times to get the full story. They still want a cruising permit of F\$1,000 (negotiable to a minimum of F\$500). The reason: get money to develop the islands! When asked about giving money or goods to the villages themselves ... "those people are not educated and would spend it on alcohol instead! But WE know what they need and take care of it! " Alas, I suspect that with bureaucracies everywhere, the money will go anywhere but to the people who need it. So, we decided to perhaps visit only 1 or 2 islands by getting an invitation via Curly in Savu Savu instead!

Tradewinds Hotel anchorage: we picked up a free mooring after asking Tony, the owner of the beautiful ketch & villa ashore (owner of many marine businesses here and former owner of the Tradewinds Hotel). Well protected in all but the worse cyclones! While Jackie went to California to visit family, I stayed there for 2 months doing boat projects. No theft, not as much rain as I had heard, convenient, free dinghy dock at the Tradewinds hotel if one patronizes the restaurant and bar once in a while. Not a bad arrangement! Jackie took the Coral Sun a/c bus to Nadi (F\$19) and we hired one of their limousines to return together to Suva when she returned. I spent the previous night at the very nice Tanoa airport hotel (anchorage@connect.com.fj) .

Royal Suva Yacht Club: the anchorage is not the cleanest but has the merit to be a dinghy ride from downtown Suva! You can ride in the canal and tie your dinghy right under the eyes of a small police station on the bridge.

The Yacht Club is very nicely furnished, plush carpet, nice garden, modern bar & restaurant (not at all run down as we had heard!).

Duty-free yacht parts and shopping: the only real duty-free electronics, liquors and luxury goods like in St Maarten in the Caribbean are at the airport when leaving or returning by air! No duty-free for any goods purchased in Fiji by boats in transit. Local merchants cannot get back the duties already paid to the gvt and thus cannot sell you any boat parts duty-free! But you can order yourself directly outside of Fiji and get things shipped in especially for you ... with no duties of any kind. You will probably still need to pay a moderate Customs Fee. We found the Post Office to be very reliable and pretty quick to send and receive packages.

Provisioning:

In the past, we remember many folks raving at how cheap it was to provision in Fiji. We found that for the items that we normally use (not really exotic or out of the ordinary) Fiji was not as cheap as we had expected, nor was there the selection that we hoped. American Samoa had much better prices for most all the same items at Cost U Less, and better selection and prices for many non-refrigerated items, and especially for things like toothpaste, laundry soap, and sanitary paper products. One thing of note is that even tho Suva is the biggest city in the tropical South Pacific, consistent availability,

quality, and service is still not there. A lot of stores are filled with cheap Asian junk. Suppliers that we bought from lamented that they were not able to get things on time or get consistent quality even from New Zealand. Like elsewhere in the S. Pacific islands, IF YOU SEE IT, GET IT NOW!

For us Americans, many of the things not easily found elsewhere (tortilla chips, trail mix snacks, brand name items, dry yogurt-making kits, espresso coffee) were available at the **Cost U Less** out across from the University of the S.Pacific. (\$0.65 bus from Mkt). The folks there were very accommodating, and will deliver free for \$500 Fiji, or more purchases, and will often give about 5% discount if you ask. Other yachties were told that CUL will even deliver as far as Nadi and Lautoka because they have trucks delivering there regularly.

New World supermarket's (near the bus station) manager and assistant, Asinate, were also very accommodating and when we gave them a list of the products in which we were interested, gave us discounted quotes, free delivery, and option of payment COD.

One of the most delightful persons we dealt with was Mark, manager of **UNO Limited**, a vendor of Indian spices, beans, grains, fresh produce, and wines. Tho a very busy man, this former New Zealander was always smiling and welcoming and answered our numerous questions, spent time with us even though he knew our order would be small. (Even gave me tips on how to pressure-cook beans for Dahl!) Probably of greatest interest to most of us yachties, is Uno's wine list. Mark has Australian vintner friends, one who have the biggest vineyard in Australia. When these winemakers have odd lots, Mark gets them at deep discounted prices so that even with the high duty in Fiji, he can sell nice wines at \$10-\$20 dollar Fijian. Uno will also do soup-to-nuts provisioning for yachts, using other suppliers to supplement their own inventory. Delivery can be arranged.

(uno@connect.com.fj)

Fresh'et Grocers is a supplier of local and imported meats and produce. Located in Walu Bay area across the road from the Brewery. Their prices are quite interesting, tho the local beef may not be the tenderness that you would like; lamb, pork, and chicken are imported frozen. Where possible, they can vacuum seal meats in small packages. We had boneless lamb pieces, and mince (ground meat) and bacon cubes packaged in 1/2 kg packs to go into our small freezer. The local beef is butchered fresh and you can get it packaged or order and cut it yourself for freezing. The only problem again is availability of products. If you can give a week's notice, you will probably get most of what you want, but our 2-day notice left us without the produce we ordered. Fresh'et also delivered COD.

Boat Services:

Locksmith: decided to replace our 25yr old door locks. Were quite surprised to get parts and service with a smile at Elite Locksmith (331 8973 or e_lockserve@hotmail.com). Got an excellent and quick upholstery job by Anton in Lami.

Refrigeration, AC and metal fabrication, contact Jo at Cooke's United (33 03 845)

Hydraulic jobs: see Shane at Seamech or Fluid Power Services Ltd , both located between the RSYC and town.

We found a great place for any SS fabrication, also electrical repairs and more at Mechanical Services Ltd (also between RSYC and town).

Activities:

Whitewater rafting: a great activity to discover wild inland Fiji! Went with Rivers Fiji (www.riversfiji.com) on their Upper Navua river trip. Full day from Pacific Harbor with a 45 min bus ride to/from Suva. Who would imagine white water in Fiji, and kilometers of steep-sided narrow canyons?? Rivers Fiji is not only letting folks discover this hidden treasure in the tropics, but they are actively involved in preserving the natural integrity of the upper Navua watershed from the extensive

logging being done in that region (Fiji's only privately held lease used for conservation, chosen by the gvt to represent Fiji in RAMSAR, an international wetlands conservation convention). It's a beautiful, entire day's worth of safe, fun rafting with a sandwich bar lunch set up right at the swimming hole! Nice to know that this company funded a new school in Namosi Valley, support two villages, and 15 different landowning clans.

Discover Fiji Tours (679) 3450180 www.discoverfijitours.com

What a great way to discover inland Fiji! This tour combines river canoeing on the beautiful lower Navua river + a Fijian village tour including kava ceremony, lovo lunch, dancing, arts & crafts) + Magic Waterfalls + leisurely bamboo rafting (Bili bili). An international award winner professionally organized from A to Z with a smile! Not to be missed. Lionel, the creator of this company, is not only introducing visitors to the Fijian culture and inland beauty, but uses the proceeds to rebuild and repopulate abandoned villages, bringing people back from the cities to their heritage. We visited the 4th village to be rebuilt. Direct booking and arranging your own transport, affords a great price. Several cruisers went to the tour after we recommended it to them ... they all thanked us for the great tour they got! Don't miss it!

The Cave Tour with Adventures In Paradise (679) 652 0833. Nice day trip too (10am-4pm) from the Coral Coast. That cave is really impressive. The kava ceremony was the usual thing and the bamboo rafting was a bit short. They also have a waterfall tour.

Kadavu Island and the Great Astrolabe Reef

We found that there is not much info in our cruising guides or even Lonely Planet about Kadavu. Jason's Guide and tourist maps show some resorts but give little detail. Even our CM93 electronic charts left out some details, such as small rock islands, and a second deep water pass into Naigoro bay, but they are quite accurate to the GPS and show accurately major shoal and reef areas. Don't be scared away by the areas marked as "shallows" with isolated +'s marked within. These areas are usually plenty deep for pleasure craft, and even with fair light conditions, an attentive eye can spot potential dangers. One inconvenience in many places is that large expanses uncover at the lower tides making access to the shore impossible or a lot of paddling, wading and dragging the dink. The 6ft tidal range can uncover up to ¼ mile of "flats" at ebb. The chiefs in the villages usually ask to see your cruising permit papers from Fijian Affairs when you bring the kava for *sevu sevu*.

Made a day-sail from the Tradewinds Hotel area to Usborne Pass in the Astrolabe Reef arriving late afternoon. We had just enough time to check out Vanuakula Island and rule it out as a possible anchorage and get over to **Dravuni** and get anchored in good sand in about 20 ft of water as the sun was setting and the passing squalls thickened all around us. Dravuni village is fairly well-to-do because of the visiting cruise ships and the University marine research center. They have generator power in the evenings. Some cruiser comments indicate that the villagers are blasé about us because of the cruise ship business, but we found the young chief and his wife to be very nice. The first thing after *sevu sevu*, they invited us to a *tevu tevu*, which is a ceremony honoring a woman that is given by her side of the family after around 10 years of marriage. Many mats and pillows and an armoire were presented to the woman and husband and family members and the village. The husband's family kills a cow and pigs and presents it to the village. There was much speech making and kava drinking. We were invited to the community house and were presented many kava cups, which strengthened in potency as the evening progressed. (we were told that it is okay to decline the cup if it becomes too many). Later, in the Community House, all the family members came for the ceremony in which older men (I think, the woman's father and perhaps her 2 grandfathers, and the village Chief) made speeches while holding the traditional Fijian talisman: a whale's tooth on a fiber

woven necklace. Supposedly, they were praising her for all her achievements and performance of womanly duties. Surprisingly, the woman was not presented or placed in any kind of place of honor and we had to ask to find out who she was. After wards, we were invited to the meal that the woman's family had prepared: pork stew, fish cooked in coconut milk, curry fish, cucumbers and cassava. The villagers were quick to recruit Luc's services to look at their village launch's motor that wouldn't start. The motor looked like it hadn't seen maintenance since it was installed! The villagers definitely DO welcome cruisers because, unlike tourists, we have skills to offer! (and tools to go with 'em).

After 2 days, the weather was due to deteriorate and really start to blow hard from the SE. We decided to head to **Ono Island** to **Nabouwalu Bay**. The cruising guides we had didn't show it as an anchorage, but it looked to be the best-protected area. We were lucky to have good light, and the sailing was easy. The bay is well protected and there is good anchoring depth (about 25-30ft) before you get too close to the shallows fringing the 3 sides of the bay. The villagers were the nicest people! We made *sevu sevu*, and the chief's son and friend showed us a hot gas vent in the stream and the trail that goes up a valley and eventually goes to the village on the north side. The next day, 3 young men came out with a punctured volleyball and asked if we could patch it. They took us on a hike on the south side of the bay up over the ridge to a small, deep valley with a small stream that enters the ocean through a cave naturally carved through the rocks bringing you to out on the west coast a short way from the bay entrance. We were there at low tide and were able to walk thru the cave out to the uncovered rocks along the coast and they showed us an area of more caves at water level which according to legend were entrances to other caves that could only be reached by diving down, swimming underwater, then coming up inside. We love these kinds of mysterious stories, and arranged to come back via the dinghy with a small scuba tank, and seek out the truth. Out of 3 caves, none gave access to dry land inside, but one did go back a fair distance, perhaps 100ft, and on a low tide, there would be air pockets just large enough for one to get his head out of the water and grab a breath, but it would be very scary without a light and a dive mask. The young men also showed us an area on the north side of the bay entrance with a grotto swim-through and another 100ft cave that one could do on a shallow scuba dive.

We had our first taste of mud crab at this village! Very yummy. The grandfather of one of our young guides caught them for us and showed us the proper way to kill and cook them. In exchange, we gave him some paint that he needed to paint a repair that he had done to his boat bottom. It's so nice that yachties and villagers can have this kind of symbiotic relationship where each one benefits. We're not just useless tourists throwing money.

South point of Ono Island: On an unusual day of light NW wind, we took the opportunity to stop in at the beautiful, 24 hr (all tides) beach in front of the small resort that is marked as Jonas Paradise in Lonely Planet. (18 56.3S, 178 28.9E). This "resort" is being renovated by a jolly Senegalese man, Ali, and his Fijian wife. As of now there are a few thatched buraes w/ coral rubble floors, and basic beds. The best thing about the place is the nice white beach that is not incumbered by shallows or blocked off by reef. There is a walk you can take up to the ridge overlooking the resort that affords great vistas to the W,S, and E looking out over the Great Astrolabe, east Kadavu island, and east Ono. Great! We could see our route to follow for our sail up the East side of Ono.

Yaukuvelevu Island: Missed this island on the way down because of weather. Most would visit here after Dravuni, as this is under their village's control. In a 15kt SE, it is fairly protected, better in E winds. The anchoring is good in sand with occasional heads in 20-30ft of water. Unfortunately, this place will probably not welcome yachts after the exclusive Ultra 5 Star resort, that will cater to the

entertainment industry's rich (>\$2000/nite). The Yaukuve Resort is under heavy construction and people are not allowed on the grounds. Should be opening in 2 yrs or so. Save your pennies!

Namara Island: Just west of Yaukuvelevu, this is a small uninhabited island with protection from the E, (tolerable in a light ESE), and same good sand bottom. Very attractive beach and black volcanic rock outcroppings. We walked all the way around the island during the low tide. On the S side, there is a great mystery. At the base of the rocky cliff were 2 large rusted bullet heads, about 18" long, 6" in diameter. But most intriguing of all, is that there are at least 2 other shells embedded in the cliff, intact! They do not look like they were shot into the hillside, because they are solidly in the undamaged rock, and they do not look deformed. It looks almost as if they were embedded when the rock cliff was formed....but how could that be?? Unsolved mysteries!

Kadavu Island: (Kan-DA-voo)

Naigoro Bay: We anchored towards the head of the bay in 15ft of water at low tide in a black sand/mud bottom. The holding is good and in 15kt E-SE was not too choppy despite the E orientation. Our Warwick cruising guide showed an anchorage in the southern corner, which is more protected from wind, but it is over 70ft deep! We anchored here to check out Waisalima Resort (2 miles north) and dive some sites with them that we would never find or dive on our own. See below for detail on the dive. The dive operation has a clean, well-organized dive shack, and compressor and dive gear appear in good condition. The Fijian instructors and dive masters were friendly and knew the sites well. The resort itself is very basic, Backpackers-type. The dive operators will come out to Naigoro bay to pick you up, but you should arrange this ahead by e-mail (info@waisalimafiji.com), as they do not monitor VHF. Otherwise, there is not much to do at this bay. Access to the village is very difficult unless it's the highest tide, and we saw nothing to do other than trading for fruit and taro.

Inside Route between Vesi Pass and Naigoro Pass: On our CM93 electronic charts, even the most detailed did not show this route, and in fact made it look like it crossed a very wide, very shallow reef. There is a deep-water channel through here with only a small section that might be a worry for a deep draft vessel at low tide. Traveling East to West, at around 19 01.5'S, 178 28.5' E, is a channel marker on the reef of a rock island with a lighthouse. Keep it to stbd, and then head to the next marker, which will be somewhat in line with 2 rounded rock islets with distinctly black and gray coloring ahead to the right. You will leave this marker to your port and do a U shaped turn around it until the islets are on your stbd and you are following the deep water channel to the next marker which is only the stump of a broken one. The shallowest water is next to this broken marker, which you will leave to stbd, but keep fairly close to it. On a dropping tide, you'll have a current running against you. For safety, the best time to negotiate this pass is mid to high tide. You should have at least 12-15 ft of water then. After that marker, you're home free into spacious deep water again. There are channel markers on reefs all the way to Kandavu village anchorage, but you will need to have the charts or eyeball nav. to know which side to pass them.

Kadavu Village: At the head of this unattractive bay is the unassuming village of Kadavu, accessible only at mid-to-high tide. But it is the guardian of one of the most intriguing and gorgeous waterfall settings that we have seen in our many years of traveling. Located right at the edge of the village, is a canyon and cascade right out of a Romancing the Stone movie. Your first view is water pouring 10-12 ft. out of a cleft in the red, brown, black, amber and ochre colored cliffs into a deep pool. The biggest surprise comes when you climb up and get a view into this cleft in the rocks and see an incredibly sculpted chamber in which cliffs, overhangs, and cut-backs all hang impossibly over a large pool that reveals, half hidden by these fantastic structures, a large cascade of water plunging over a

black and reddish cliff into the pool. It's worth timing the tides to get to shore, walking to the village, and doing *sevu sevu* just to see this wonder of nature. (Note: this village, as many on Kadavu, is strict about women wearing *sulus* and covered shoulders, no packs or anything carried on the shoulders, and no hats in the village proper) When you sail into the bay of Kadavu, you will see reef markers that will help you avoid shallow reefs. Just after you pass the last marker on your port, you will see in the bay, a large white mooring with the words "Nazerene" painted on it. Plan on anchoring immediately after or next to this mooring or you will be stuck in the mud at low tide. The water is brown and gives no clue to how quickly it shoals from 20-30ft to less than 10ft. We anchored at (19 02.678'S, 178 23.139'E).

There is a good shore access close by. Look for a cut in the mangroves in line with the wooden building on the hill (the Nazerene Church). You need mid-tide or higher to get to the cut without walking, but once in the mangrove channel, you can make your way to a small pier and a trail. Go left and you get to the school and then farther along, the village. Go right, you get to the pastor's house, and eventually, the "store" which sells canned goods, eggs, potatoes, onions, some frozen goods, gasoline, and kerosene. At high tide you can get to the store by dinghy. Just opposite Waya Island, is the Matava Resort. This is a 2- 3 star resort with clean, well-maintained simple thatched *bures*, groomed grounds, and a very nice, airy, raised bar/dining/community *bure* with terrace. Adrian, one of 3 partner-owners is a prize-winning deep-sea fisherman. He and his staff were very welcoming. The evening meal was delicious with fresh fish dishes and produce grown on site. There is a serious dive center, the main activity of the clientele being diving Astrolabe Reef and it's passes. Unfortunately, we did not have a chance to dive with them so cannot comment on the operation or the dives. (matava@connect.com.fj)

At Matava Resort, we met Epeli, a gregarious Fijian who does free-lance airport transport for the resort, and others. He invited us to his village to see the waterfall there, and to see a Fijian church wedding that just happened to be held the next day. We took the dinghy with Epeli guiding us thru the tricky parts at low tide, went west passed Lion Rock, a formation that looks like a lion standing, passed a couple headlands to Nagamoto village. We made *sevu sevu* with the elders, who were already well into the *tanoa* bowl with all the festivities and visitors from other villages. Their kava mixture was much stronger than that at the Dravuni celebration. My tongue and throat felt numb immediately! The waterfall was about a 15-20 minute easy rock hopping up the stream. Cute, idyllic, 2-level falls with nice pool for swimming. We took some photos of the wedding, with the couple and their attendants in elaborate *tapa* cloth costumes. We couldn't stay for the whole celebration, as we had to get back thru the reefs well before dark, but were given "take-away" plates from the feast fare. Luc edited a DVD video for the wedding couple with some special effects from his editing program and presented it to the couple and the village as a thank-you.

Kavala Bay and Tiliva Resort: Kavala Bay is a deeply inset bay on the N side of Kadavu, and offers great protection from all winds except N-NW. And even with a moderate N, the anchorage is protected by a shallow reef. The anchorage is shown on the Calder Guide: 7m of water, right next to the concrete wall, (dinghy landing) of the village store. From here, you can walk to the store, (basics, bread, frozen meat, ice cream, gas, diesel, kerosene), the village to do *sevu sevu* with the Elders, or to a beautiful 40 meter waterfall with pool. (\$3-5 entry or give a gift or service to the family). **The Tiliva Resort** will pick up divers and/or diners from this bay and take you to their very lovely resort on the NE side. Barbara and Kim, owner-managers have created a fine quality hide-away that offers amenities not found in any other resort on the S or E side of Kadavu. They have gone great lengths to create an atmosphere of quiet nature, balmy breezes and lapping waves, with pleasing touches of Fijian art and history, natural woods and fibers. Each of the 6 large *bures* has ensuite baths

beautifully crafted furniture of local wood, and wide decks and terraces that are placed to catch the sea breezes. There's a British Colonial feeling of bringing civilization to the wild; high tea with china service in a jungle setting. Having worked in the hospitality field ourselves for many years, we could see the eye for detail, and the huge effort they make to provide what most visiting metropolitans would take for granted (salads with variety lettuce, carrots and tomatoes grown organically on site, freely pouring salt from an open salt dish, 24 hr electricity, and hot, unlimited showers). We think it would make a wonderful day for a party of buddy boaters to do some morning dives on the Great Astrolabe Reef, have a fresh, delicious lunch, (We enjoyed Mahi Mahi, home-made fries and salad) and a walk up to the overlook for great views of the reef and islands and lagoon colors. They can be contacted by e-mail enquiries@tilivaresortfiji.com

Papageno Resort: on the N coast, just W of Daku Bay. We anchored (18 57.72S, 178 14.24E) in good sand w/ few heads in 25ft. Keep an eye for the reefs shown on the electronic charts. With good visibility, we could easily see isolated bommies, and a long reef extending out from the resort. You could find anchoring on either side of that reef, protected from SE winds. The resort monitors Ch 16 most of the time and can guide you. When we got round-the-clock-winds, we went into the beautifully protected Daku Bay. On the charts, the route looks like a mine-field of reefs, but there is a quite straightforward route in deep water. Staff from Papageno guided us in, and came to pick us, and Ted (s/v Anna Louise) up for diving each day. They have a dive operation that dives the wreck of the Pacific Voyager (just off the reefs out from the resort), and also all of the same sites as Dive Kadavu. See below for details. The reefs and bommies around the resort are very healthy and the snorkeling is close and colorful. The resort staff are all very welcoming. Epi, operations manager and Isaac, manager of the Dive Center were especially nice. Until us, only SSCAers "Key of D", had stopped here.

Daku Bay: We anchored (18 58.349'S, 178 16.442'E) in the area of the bay belonging to Daku Village. After *sevu sevu*, met Epi and his wife Kata, who have welcomed yachts for over 15 yrs, including Jimmy Cornell and Jim and Sue Corenman. He has urged his and 2 neighboring villages to agree to marine reserve areas and preservation of native birds and an endemic forest found only here. The village has started a giant Clam reserve, bee keeping, coffee making, and sandalwood tree reforestation with the help of Peace Corp volunteers. Epi offers tours and cultural activities to try to raise money for the village to prove that protecting their lands can also bring income. Buying some of his organic garden vegetables or ginger will feed both you and his cause. Visionaries in a shortsighted world are rare.

Snorkeling and Diving, Kadavu:

As noted, most resorts have a dive center. All of them were clean, neat, had good, recent gear. The dives are usually done from the ubiquitous long, open, fiberglass runabouts that abound in Fiji. Rates for dives were about the same at all resort: \$70/dive (tanks and wts only), \$130-140 for 2-tank AM dive, extra to rent any gear or suits. Best deals for multiple dives packages. As noted, some will pick up at nearest anchorages. For drift dives or dives long distances away, or especially good sites, dive centers are the best way to go. Note: all resorts have accords with the corresponding villages to dive their waters. Yachties wishing to dive on their own should go to the village chief of each site and make the *sevu sevu* and request permission to dive. You may or may not have to pay a fee to dive. We dislike the idea of locals thinking of us as a new source to make a buck off of, so whenever fees

are requested, we prefer to offer a gift of something we have that would be useful to them or the village.

One calm, sunny day, the folks from "Manu Kai", a California boat, took their dinghy and we took ours, the 1 mile out to the **Alacrity Rocks**, which, according to the Lonely Planet Dive and Snorkel Guide had good diving, with swim-thrus and grottos. Of course, these guides never give the exact location, so we just went to a likely area on the outer side of the reef and "winged-it". By swimming out in the blue a little, we could barely discern the silhouette of a huge bommie, which led us to others, and finally found an area of 3-4 bommies with areas to swim through, and grottos and interesting topography. Later, we went with the GPS to the place we thought we had swum to underwater. The tops of the bommies are about 20-25ft deep, and the bottom is about 50-60ft. The GPS location we got is: 18 52.340' S, 178 26.616 E.

Korolevu Pass: We anchored on the east side of the entrance of Vagaloa Bay on a coral and sand patch (19 02.3'S, 178 26.1E). Took the dinghy out to the pass and Drift snorkeled the NE side on the incoming tide, from the outside corner and along the wall. The drop-off is very dramatic, and the wall is velvety with masses of purple soft coral. All the color and vibrant life looked to be within the first 50ft-60ft of depth. The most fish life and action was on the outside corner where the fish wait for food coming in on the current. **Naigoro Pass:** We anchored on the bank behind the barrier reef near the pass (19 00.8', 178 29.4'). Snorkeled both sides of the pass on the ingoing current. The N side has the most life, and the outside corners of both sides had lots of fish action. Like Korolevu, the best color and life was less than 60ft. There were patches of beautiful soft corals, gorgonians and living hard corals, but overall, there was less density of marine life.

Astrolabe Reef East of Ono: Don't attempt this in your own dingy! We went with Waisalima Resort's dive operation. They know a way over the reef on the higher tides during mild wind conditions. First dive was on a dramatic drop-off with spectacular panoramas of the vibrant reef and interesting topography. About half way through, we swam through the site's namesake: **The Arch**. Here, the reef is alive with very healthy corals even at 40 meters depth. The second dive was at a site called **Turtles Lair**. The turtles were away, but the reef, again was quite healthy and visibility again great.

Papageno Dive Center: in Aug 05, the manager, Isaac, a New Zealand born, had been here about a year. He ran Dive Kadavu for 3 years and has dived extensively all around Kadavu. He's a young man full of smiles and open to new ideas and ways to work with people. He will go to far away dive sites for only a few people, can arrange special trips to see manta rays and Cape Washington, and offers special rates to yachties. Beautiful resort with good food, great diving offered by a veteran team, peaceful anchorage close by, and special prices for yacht folks, all these make Papageno a must-stop. **Pacific Voyager** is a wreck dive (110'-80'deep) on a 230ft fuel carrier that was cleaned up and sunk 7 yrs ago, 5 mins from the resort. It's just starting to get marine growth, but is a good wreck dive anyway. Sharkfeeding, Manta rays, soft coral heaven, swim-thrus, overhangs, tours with Disney-World-fantasy-land colors and scenes, haven't seen diving approaching this since our Red Sea diving days!

Islands on the way from Suva/Levuka towards Savusavu:

Wakaya Island: This entire island is the property of a very exclusive resort for the rich and famous. The accommodations appear to be private villas built into the landscape and scattered all over the island. No one is allowed ashore, but yachts are allowed to anchor in the lagoon and even in the bay (Nuku Tubu) on the northern tip of Wakaya, although this anchorage always has a side swell. There is not much to recommend a stop except perhaps the scuba diving. The Aggressor dive boat, "Sereni

Wai” moors at the Daveta Ni-kavu pass and dives the sheer drop-offs on the outside. We snorkeled over the area, but due to mechanical problems to be solved aboard, left without diving it or exploring the other passes.

Makogai: Within the same reef system as Wakaya, Makogai, a former Leper Colony, is easy to approach thru the western pass (17 26.911S, 178 53.816E), which had a channel marker on the S side. We left for Savusavu thru the N pass, which has no markers and could be dangerous on an approach from seaward in cloudy, overcast wx, as it has no clear-cut breaking reefs for reference. We anchored in a nice little bay with good sand and few coral heads in 25’ (17 26.016S, 178 57.922E) fairly close to the N pass. Snorkeling and spear fishing was good around the big bommies in the pass and outside, but be sure to ask permission and check your catch with the villagers because there IS ciguatera in some of the fish. Also, the waters inside the lagoon are a marine reserve. The “village” is actually a turtle and giant clam breeding station. It’s worth a visit to see their efforts to repopulate these endangered species. We took a 5K, easy, shaded walk on the old road to the settlement on the other side. If you have the time, this is an interesting walk to see the ruins of the former Leper colony, and to marvel at the engineering efforts of the French Catholics which are now being overgrown and lost back to the jungle (not the missionaries :); as extinct as the leprosy for which the efforts were made. The best reward of the walk is the view at the end overlooking the settlement, the valleys, the lagoon and reef, and the neighboring island of Wakaya. The live-aboard dive boat mentioned above, dives the passes and outside the northern reef. We were treated to a few seconds of snorkeling with pilot whales outside the pass (mid-Sept), as they happened to pass all around the dinghy as we drifted.

Save-a-Tack Pass, Namena Reef: there is one channel marker at the S entrance on the E side of the pass (17 07.512S, 179 04.310E). Saw yachts anchored in 30ft of water next to Namena Island. There is also an upscale resort there. The N entrance had no channel markers and seemed to be more a wide area with no breaking reefs rather than a “pass”. We passed over a 20ft spot, but the rest was at least 60-70ft. (17 04.117S, 179 06.185E) Waypoints listed are our references for entering/exiting the pass. Supposed to be some great diving on this reef, sadly we did not get to experience it.

VANUA LEVU

CM93 Charts are inaccurate on the Eastern Regions of Vanua Levu and Taveuni. While the CM93 Charts were quite accurate in Kadavu, they are not in this region. The features are pretty true relative to each other, but they are offset relative to position on the charts, and the offset varies depending on where you are. DO NOT depend solely on GPS waypoints taken from your chart program to navigate through tricky reefs. And, as many others before us have stated, Fiji has some of the most difficult waters to read with eyeball navigation. We have had a few near misses, and a couple of light no-damage touches! If you have to travel in cloudy weather, (too common in most of Fiji) take the route with the most margin for error, and keep a very attentive bow watch (or in the spreaders). Traveling when the tide is mid to low can help you see those very shallow reefs, as they will be exposed or perhaps breaking, whereas with a 6 ft tide difference they may be just lurking where you can’t see them in the murky water.

Savusavu: The bay of Savusavu is a huge bay on the central south side of the island of Vanua Levu, but the town, Port of Entry, and marinas (Copra Shed and Waitui Marina) and cruisers’ hub is tucked into the southeast corner in a very narrow and protected area called the Nakama Creek area. This has probably become the most popular check-in port for yachts since it was granted this status about 5 yrs ago, and it has developed into a cruiser’s hub with all kinds of support, activities, and info

especially for those new to Fiji. This is partly due to the efforts of Curly Carswell that you probably met well before you even arrive in Fiji on the SSB radio net, The Rag of the Air (hosted by Jim on "Also II" Freq: 8173 at 1900 Z.). Curly also runs an SSB net on Freq: 4030 at 0630 local, and VHF net on ch 14 at 0830 local. This port is SO popular, and the Nakama Creek area is so narrow, that anchoring and mooring space becomes very limited at the height of the season when yachts are arriving from Tonga or other points to the N and E. Both Copra Shed and Watui Marina offer moorings for rent and some dock spaces (stern to). Both marinas have renovations and extension projects underway. Curley also has some moorings for rent. The Savusavu Marina Village, a big condo/shopping mall/marina project of Robin Irwin is finally starting construction after 20 yrs of waiting! So there may be more changes soon in the area. Locals are amazed at how Savusavu area has changed in the last 10 years! The officials here are the most "by-the-book" so far. (An alternate, never-crowded and painless Port of entry is Levuka, previously described. It is easy to go from Levuka to Savusavu or Suva, and you can break up the trip into day sails.) If you like plenty of cruiser activities, happy hours, inexpensive theme meals, help with things like getting fuel, butane, laundry services, organized seminars and tours, Savusavu is the place! Curly's Bosun's Locker is an information, internet, and help center that can assist you in many areas such as getting your cruising permit for Fiji waters, and an invitation to visit one of the islands in the Lau Group. Bebi Electronics is situated in Curly's bosun locker. Cruisers, Mike and Kendra and their local partner Joe Prasad (that we didn't meet) are the producers of powerful small white LED lights that use so little energy. We bought 2 anchor lights (1 masthead + 1 deck), 1 cockpit light and 2 spotlights. Mike also repairs all kinds of electronics such as radios, autopilots and wind generators. See Kendra for details. The Sea View Café has Cruiser Special Dinners for really great prices. The Aussie BBQ nite is a great value for money at \$8 Fiji for a 3-course meal! The sausage was flavorful, and the steak was tender and tasty. They also put on theme meals such as Mexican and Indian for "yachtie prices", and they provide a venue for the seminars and cooking class put on by Curly and his staff. Lots of fun and socializing! The Wai Tui Marina started Friday BBQ nites for an incredible \$6 Fiji. The friendly staff manned the meat and fish grill and served up salads and side dishes family-potluck style. The Copra Shed marina has now a new Japanese/seafood restaurant called Cruiser's. Tomo, the owner is a very nice fellow whose hope is to give a new option in food to the area. The Copra Shed complex has also a café and the Savusavu Yacht Club bar. On a more up-scale level, the 'Surf and Turf' restaurant in town, upstairs across from the bus station, is owned by Atesh, the Executive Chef of the Cousteau Resort. The clean, contemporary décor, air conditioning, and thickly cushioned chairs are a treat, as is the cuisine. Artfully presented selections such as BBQ Baby Octopus and salad dressed with sweet chili and balsamic vinegar, and Fillet Mignon and Garlic Prawns with Siraz demi-glaze and plantain chips reflect Atesh's influence. Prices range from \$12 to \$50 for dinner mains or as little as \$4 – \$6 for lunch specials. The Bula-Re owner is a Trans-Ocean cruising station, her restaurant and art shop is opposite the post office, and she rents cars too.

Savusavu was great for renewing friendships with folks we hadn't seen in a while, and to meet new cruisers.

Naveria Heights Lodge and Activities: This young couple, Sharon and Beat specialize in fitness and health, and have activities ranging from easy walks to an isolated village, to rigorous hikes and bush walks to hot springs and waterfalls, mountain biking, and aqua-activities. Meals emphasize health and well being.

Labasa: (Lam-ba-sa) When there are many yachts in Savusavu harbor, Curly can arrange a bus trip for Cruisers to the largest city on Vanua Levu, Labasa. The 2-½ hr ride includes commentary on the

way, and if the planets align correctly, and the season is right, there could be a tour of the sugar mill, (we missed out). The scenery changes as you traverse the island, and there are some nice views. Labasa is the largest town on the island, (tho still only medium-sized) having a better produce market, larger supermarkets, and more hardware and industrial supplies than Savusavu. You could also rent a car, or take the local bus to Labasa if there is no trip offered, but we heard stories from other cruisers about very bad roads and deplorable cars, or crowds and limited return buses, and even an incident of a bag being lifted by young boys (who were later caught and punished).

Natewa Bay: Lomalagi Resort: Jackie had a treat for her birthday: a night, a lobster dinner, and breakfast at this up-scale hideaway resort known for its isolation and pristine views of the bay of Natewa! A young American couple was married that afternoon, the bride arriving for her vows on a *bilibili*, a Fijian bamboo raft, paddled by 2 Fijian warriors and 2 boy-warriors. The outdoor sunset wedding at the edge of the bay with misty clouds obscuring the far shores as mere silhouettes was beautiful as the rain lifted. Collin and Terry, owner and manager, were the most gracious of hosts, making sure the wedding was a uniquely memorable time for the young couple. We felt special ourselves to be included in the ceremony and the scrumptious dinner of slipper lobster, and wedding cake for dessert!

Cousteau Resort: on the SE point of Savusavu Bay; just inside of the lagoon, after you pass the light marking the pass. You can find reasonable depth to anchor just north of the resort's boat moorings on a shelf of sand interspersed among large coral heads. It was protected from strong SE. The resort is not especially cruiser friendly or unfriendly. You can land the dinghy at the pier, but please don't leave it blocking access for the dive boats. The prices for drinks and meals reflect the more upscale clientele that is preferred. Expect to pay well over \$100 Fiji for a dinner. There were cruisers who said it was worth the price for a fine meal. There were those shocked to pay over a \$100 for 3 people for a lunch of sandwiches. Forewarned! We tried several times to go diving with the resort's dive center but it never worked out! Yachts have tried stopping here before checking in at Savusavu, and some were fined when they later saw the officials.

Fawn Harbour: Straightforward entrance with good light but we decided to wait outside when a wall of rain overtook us, and the island, the reef and the pass disappeared in the mist. The first marker is well inside the entrance so give it a wide berth to starboard. In fairly good light it is easy to see which side of the markers is the deep channel. Calder's guide gives details. The CM93 Charts were actually pretty accurate for this bay. The mangrove anchorage in the West of the bay is well protected and has reasonable anchoring depth (<30ft). Another anchorage is found off the conspicuous blue-roofed house of the welcoming family with 2 kids (US/French). (The Pickering Plantation anchorage in the guide). The only access to shore is from here. There are Fijian homes here too. On the hillside is the home of Lima, who has hot spring pools beside a cool river on her land. You will need someone to guide you there. It is not a tourist attraction, and she wants to keep it pristine as a heritage for her offspring. Several yachts elect to base themselves here during the cyclone season.

Dakuniba/Sosobu Bay: Well-protected anchorage in the mangrove (we would take our chances with a coming cyclone here!). David, Margaret, Dicky and their extended family are so welcoming to cruisers as their Gold visitor's books attest. The family has a boat-building heritage and has a Fijian-made sailboat moored in front. We went night spear fishing with Dicky, did great hikes around with amazing views to other bays, went swimming in the pools at the village in the next bay West (also

filled our water jugs), had kava ceremonies, Sunday lunch and lots of fun! A nice place: not to miss! The CM 93 Charts are quite far off for this pass and bay, even tho it is only 10 miles east of Fawn Harbor. Luckily, the pass is straight and deep and marked by sticks. One of the places where cruisers feel the most welcome (genuinely!)

Viani Bay: We had heard about Jack and Sophie Fisher welcoming yachts here. This bay's anchorage is close to the world-famous diving at Rainbow Reef. Great soft corals and very interesting dives are found all along the reefs on the West side of the Somo somo channel! If you have your own diving equipment (incl. tanks and compressor) for only F\$10, Jack will accompany you to the famous dive sites. He will man your dinghy while you dive. Most dives are drift dives so you need someone to pick you up. The choice of which site to dive is very tide dependent; there can be strong currents. Without a knowledgeable guide, you could end up in a very dangerous situation, or won't find the dive spots either! The other option, we took, is to dive with Roland from Dolphin Bay Divers. They are the only dive center on this side of the straits and the least expensive for Rainbow Reef area (all other operators are based in Taveuni > where the resorts are). So instead of 40 min boat rides from Taveuni, from Viani Bay you only have 10 min boat rides. J. Viola & Roland operate a small friendly basic resort off Vanaira beach, a couple of bays north of Viani. We had an excellent dinner (~\$15F) there and came back by dinghy to our boat after dark without problems (check where the reefs extend from the points of land). The dive boat will pick you up in Viani bay anchorage as their captain (Apex) lives there. It's also possible to anchor in their bay. This super friendly couple (German/Swiss) will soon have their own place right next to Jack in Viani Bay so it will be even more convenient in the future. They plan to have Internet and laundry services too ... anything we cruisers need J You can take dive courses too and prices are reasonable! Roland is a 9 yr veteran of Rainbow Reef diving. Genuinely nice people, with whom to dive those top dive spots (info@dolphinbaydivers.com). The White Wall was great, but we liked some of the other sites better for fish action and marine life.

Island of Taveuni:

Our first anchorage was off Somosomo village. After sevusevu with the paramount chief's spokesman, we were welcome around all of Taveuni. Grocery stores, bread and more are nearby. From here, we took our scooters to explore the South part of the island. After a few miles of paved road, we had difficulties in muddy road ... so we ended up hitchhiking to the South and coming back with the public bus (more sightseeing). A \$4 taxi ride of 10 min got us to the water slides of Waitavala. The water zooms through a narrow channel frothing and boiling for about 50 meters, including a rooster tail bank in the curve, and spits the rider out in a deep pool at the end. The children were unafraid, some even sliding down standing skateboard style! We just enjoyed the series of deep pools and the bubbly natural Jacuzzis.

Our second anchorage was further north, in front of Taveuni Island Resort. Can have swell here, so it is a little tricky to secure the dinghy safely (unless you roll or lift it passed the high water mark). The upscale Maravu Plantation Resort and Spa welcomes visitors who wish to dine on the open-air terrace overlooking the pool and it's murmuring landscaped cascade. Thursday is Island Night buffet. We had a sumptuous Sunday breakfast buffet, where the chef cooked eggs to order in addition to the myriad of other hot and cold choices. The spa has many ways to pamper the tired body. For a real escape from the roly anchorage, a stay in one of the spacious, air-conditioned, spa pool, Bures would be heaven! It's worth at least having drinks or a meal there to enjoy the tropical garden ambiance.

Our third anchorage was inside the reef on the very north end in front of two forested islands closest to the Matei area. This is the area with the most concentration of restaurants and beachfront accommodations, a couple grocery stores, and even a pastry shop!! It's not entirely calm here, but the movement was less than on the open coast. The chart doesn't show it, but there are many deep openings in the barrier reef, and deep water up to the little islands where we anchored in good sand in 25ft. Just stay outside the breakers going north until you see a wide opening giving you a straight shot at the space between the two islands. When we were there, there was a cabin cruiser moored in front of the southernmost island, and a blue roofed pearl farm building and pier on the other. On the northeast side of Taveuni, we hiked to all 3 Tavoro falls at the Bouma Park. Only 2 hours of walking up and back to see all 3 falls. Each one can be swum at and they are all different and worth it! Take your lunch with you and enjoy the day! You can go there by public bus but be aware that the last one leaves from Bouma at 2pm. We love island night buffets, and discovered 2 nice ones: Tovu Tovu resort's on Friday, and Coconut Grove's on Saturday. Fijian owned Tovu tovu's buffet had a nice varied selection of dishes from the underground oven, and other local fare. Many resident ex-pats were there which speaks well for the quality and value for the \$20 price. They have Internet services, and a dive center too. Coconut Grove is owned by Rhona, a vibrant American woman who grabbed the nicest beach in the area over 10 years ago and has made a success of her cozy, clean, resort, restaurant and craft shop. Now she gives back to the island by being in the Rotary Club doing altruistic volunteer projects with the local and international Rotary Clubs. We enjoyed the local music, kava, and buffet dishes on the terrace, sitting with Rhona and a Veterinarian/ ER Physician couple who came, with her help, to give medicines and services on the island. Rhona welcomes visitors for meals, and drinks overlooking her great beach and the anchorage. She has some beautiful selections of crafts and jewelry in her boutique.

Buca Bay (BOO-theh): This bay made a convenient anchorage for us to return to Savusavu by bus to pick-up 8 Trojan golf cart batteries that didn't make it before we left for Also Island for Christmas. Instead of sulking and waiting in Savusavu, we continued to cruise. Buda Bay is protected from all but northerly winds, and has good holding in dense mud. At the head of the bay, it shallows out gradually, and you can pick your depth. We chose to anchor close to the old rickety pier at the school grounds, because you could tie there at any tide, and the bus stops at the school. The bus ride on the regular bus was \$4.30 ea way, and took about 2 1/2 hrs. There is an express bus from the village at 7AM, but it's a long walk from the school or a long slog through mud at low tide. The regular bus passes the school twice, around 10 min to 8AM, and 10-15 min after. It leaves Savusavu around 2PM, giving enough time to do some shopping and some errands. The chief of the village and his family were nice and took us with them to the river. Having lived in NZ for 10 yrs, he was recalled to his village to succeed to his father. Interesting conversations with this modern Fijian chief!

Rabi Island: We were disappointed to find out that we missed the Rabi (RAM-bee) Days Celebration, a weeklong affair starting December 15. This year was a special one too, as it was the 60th Anniversary of their relocation from their heritage island of Banaba, (aka Ocean Island) near Kiribati. They had traditional Dances and music on the opening day. The 4 villages of the island had sports competitions and social events during the week, and more dancing and music the last day. We anchored at 2 different anchorages, one, on the south west side looking at "picnic" beach, a pretty, white sand beach (marked Georgia's Cove on the chart) (16 31.89S/179 58.17E) on plateau of about 12 –14 meters. This is a protected anchorage in E winds with an open approach. The second anchorage was in Katherine's Bay, on the south side, protected from all sides except the SW, in 8

meters over mud surrounded by mangroves. There is an all-tide dinghy landing at the old copra shed of the village. The old church and the flamboyant trees on the hill, make a beautiful sight on entering the bay. Note: the channel marker marking the end of the reef extending out from the southern point of Rabi was no longer there. The people of Rabi are ethnologically very different from the Fijians, as they are from Micronesia, a very handsome people with smooth bronze skin, bright white teeth, and jet-black hair. The women are like Polynesians, as they tie back their long wavy hair and adorn it with flowers. The people we encountered were not as spontaneously friendly as the Fijians, but if you say "Mauri", their greeting, they will smile and respond. Their best ambassadors were Wanati, and his wife Angie, the village's brewers of Banaban's favorite alcoholic drink, "toddy". Wanati showed us how to prepare and cut the coconut tree flower, to collect the nectar, which is naturally sweet and pleasant to drink fresh. But, once they discovered the fermented version, "toddy" became the preferred form! We didn't see the exact process, but it is naturally fermented pure nectar, no water or yeast added. The flowers are cut morning and afternoon (some also cut at noon) to keep the nectar flowing. When it's "young" it's pretty pleasant, when it's "old" it's almost undrinkable! This young couple also took us to their waterfall on a Sunday afternoon. We took the dinghy across the head of the bay, and then walked and scrambled up the river about 30 minutes to a 2-tiered fall. The upper tier cascaded into a deep (over 10 ft) pool carved into the composite rock. We ate lunch sitting on the lip of the pool looking over the edge at the pool below.

Every week-day, three times a day, a truck transports people and school children to the village on the south side (the one you see from Georgia Cove anchorage), then a bus leaves this village, and takes folks to the next two villages, the last being Nuku, the administrative center. There is only one other car on the island. It's 50 cents for the truck and another 50 cents for the bus each way. A bargain price to see the 4 villages of the island and some of the west coast!

One of the nicest sights around Rabi is the people still sailing small outrigger canoes to go fishing! Their sails are made from the ubiquitous blue plastic tarps you see all over the South Pacific. If any of you have old sails on board, you'll make someone happy if you stop at Rabi!!

Also Island, Vanua Levu: For years we have known Commodores Jim and Kyoko Bandy through Jim's radio net on frequency 8173, The Rag of the Air. It's an irreverent, low-key net that keeps track of boats on passage, gives weather bulletins for relevant areas, health and welfare traffic, and is spiced with bantering and wit stimulated by Jim, who likes to keep the pot stirred up. They have established a base on a small island christened Also Island, near the village of Cawaro (tha-WARH-o), 20 miles west of Udu Point on the north side of Vanua Levu. (See their story in previous SSCA Bulletins). During the cyclone season, nary a sailboat ventures to that side. We met Jim in Savusavu in late November, and promised we'd be there to spend Christmas and New Year's with them. Jim was skeptical, because we've been promising to come visit ever since we left Tonga for Fiji 7 months ago!! But this time we made good on our word! We were impressed with what has been accomplished at Also Island, and the really pretty setting they have made by blending the buildings, landscaping, and the unique geology of the island together. They are dedicated to providing services and provisions to the surrounding villages, trying to teach them ways to make income to buy those things that cannot be grown or made, and bringing cruisers and villagers together in a mutually beneficial exchange of cultures and skills. Great place to get a cheap lunch! Jim and Kyoko put on a really nice Christmas party for their staff and the children of their associated village. Plenty of food, balloons, "grog" for the adults, and prizes for the children. On Christmas day we went to mass in Cawaro village and had the Christmas midday meal with the extended family of the Chief, with whom we had made the *sevu sevu* ceremony shortly after arriving in the anchorage. New Year's Eve was

celebrated on Also Island with Jim and Kyoko providing the roast Turkey and fish, and us the dessert, sparkling wine, and old signal flares. All was finished by 9:00 PM, because the village staff members had finished up all the grog, thus it was time to go home!!

On the rest of the days, activities included taking our dinghy up the nearby river 10-15 km, on the way we found a great little niche in the mangroves protected from wind and seas in case of cyclone (could make it into the river with our 5 ft draft at high tide). To the west, around another point or two, we went with the Also V, Jim's run-about, 10 miles up an even larger river to take Kyoko to a bridge where she could catch a bus into Labasa. Went to a fund-raising event at Nukusa village where we saw our first meke, traditional village dancing. Swam at the waterfall of Cawaro village, and snorkeled at the pass north of Bekana island. We participated in hauling out a 40ft wooden motor vessel, the "traditional" way with logs serving as the railway and men from 3 different villages serving as the "winch", by pulling and pushing. Amazing what manpower can do! Jim will be very busy repairing this boat with its seized up engine, and the wood full of worms and rot! The village on the isolated island of Cikombia depends on this vessel, as it's only means of contacting the outside.

Yadua Island (yan-DOO-ah): We took the route along the south coast of Vanua Levu, from Savusavu, through Nasonisoni Channel to Yadua. This route is discussed in the guides, and can be broken up into day-sails. After a great sail from our last anchorage in Vanua Levu, with successful fishing, we rounded to the south of Yadua's reefs and anchored in the bay on the west side. With good light, it's easy to see the entrance between two long arms of reef, and to avoid the one head that's inside on the way to the anchorage. We anchored in front of the beach that has the little thatched shelters near the shore. There's good sand between the coral heads. The waters around Yadua are beautiful clear blue, a rarity in Fiji. There are no rivers on this side. It's a 2 hour hike each way to the village on the east side, mostly unshaded, but with rewarding views of the bays and reefs. We saw that the eastern bay, which guides describe as an anchorage, has a very narrow tricky opening and is a minefield of reefs inside. We looked for the Chief to present him the Kava, but he was watching the Rugby tournament on TV (Fiji was in the finals!). The Park Warden accepted our sevusevu gift on behalf of the chief. Yadua's small island on the SW side is designated a natural park and reserve for the rare indigenous iguana found only here. The waters around the area are also a marine preserve. The Warden comes very often to the bay, and will undoubtedly stop by to greet you and tell you about the Park and Reserve. You will probably be able to present your kava for the Chief to him. If you want to see the iguanas, a Park guide must accompany you. We snorkeled on the reef extending out from the point on the south end of the bay. The hard and soft corals were prolific and vibrantly healthy, there were many swim-thrus and grottos cut into the coral giving that cathedral effect as the sunrays beamed down through fissures and holes in the reef. We planned to scuba the next day with the park warden, who said there were many great dive sites on the South side, but the perfect wind came up to take us south to Nanu-I-Ra, and Volivoli Point on Viti Levu, so, we hoisted sail instead.

General changes Fiji-wide: Since a few years, pending laws are negotiated to have the waters, reefs and lagoons returned from government control to control by the villages to which they were traditionally accorded ownership rights. What this means to us yachts is that technically we may have soon to request permission from each village to anchor or do any activity in their waters or reefs. We believe that doing the traditional *sevusevu* presentation of Kava roots to the highest chief, and having your cruising permit in order, should fulfill the requirements. But we have heard that some Fijians now see this proposed change as a way to already cash in on users. Some villages still charge extra

fees to dive, surf, fish, or visit landmarks. If locals approach you asking for money for this reason, be sure that you are giving fees to those who have the authority to give you permission. Only time will tell how each village will handle this new power if received.

Viti Levu, clockwise from SE to NW:

Beqa (Beng-gah) Lagoon: We anchored on the west side between Rukua village and the resort, between two long arms of reef, in 25-30ft, mostly sand with isolated coral heads. The village is very neat, with concrete walkways lined with flowers and ornamentals. Rukua is more traditional in custom: women should wear sulus (long skirts); hats and backpacks should be hand carried, not worn. Sunglasses are ok, but it is polite to remove when talking to someone. Made *sevusevu* with the Chief and family. The son guided us to the small waterfall (40 min walk with some nice views of the sea). Small pool for bathing, but it's refreshing to stand under the falling water. Delicious mandarins and oranges were in season. Simon, from Rukua village, is a PADI Divemaster, who can go with you in your dinghy to show you the sites and serve as dive guide (\$25 F), or can take you and your equipment to the sites with his small boat (\$50). Simon's brother, Manasa, is one of the veteran shark feeders for Adventure Divers. We did not dive with Simon, but he seems serious and responsible.

Beqa Lagoon Resort: an older resort, it is constantly being renovated. There are many, many moss-covered stone sculptures throughout the grounds, especially around the Lily Pond bungalows, which have individual ornately inlaid doors and talisman stone carvings. Added with the lush vegetation, they give a feeling as if you have discovered a lost archeological village. There is a new tastefully designed swimming/reflection pool and patio; the perfect ambiance to enjoy a sunset cocktail, and fine dining in the covered restaurant. The dessert, *Poire Belle Helene*- exquisite! Mark, the new manager has many great stories from his years in the hotel business in Bali, PNG, and Indonesia. He graciously took a sponsorship on www.noonsite.com, to encourage yachties to enjoy what the resort has to offer. <gm@beqalagoonresort.com>

The dive center on site is run by the resort, and has built a reputation as a center for serious divers. Many dive clubs and shops from the US book group dive/accommodation packages, here, and many are repeats. They have 3 large and comfortable dive boats that take divers, morning and sometimes afternoons. We dove 2 sites out by the pass next to Yanuca island: Japanese Fishing Wreck and Three Sisters. The wreck had some good life, especially on the mast and railings. Both sites feature coral bommies rising from 18-24m of water to within 5-8m from the surface. We circled round and round them and at each level closer to the surface, it got more and more vibrant and colorful. There are giant sea fans and soft corals of pastel and earthy colors, and on top, it glitters with hundreds of impossibly brilliant petite tropical fish. There are also more than 25 dive sites on the reefs around Beqa lagoon with abundant soft and hard corals, gorgonians, and exotic reef fish.

Pacific Harbor/ Beqa

The bay in front of the Pearl Resort next to the breakwater entrance to Pacific Harbor, while having good holding in black sand at 20-30 ft depths, is totally exposed to all but North winds. We were lucky to meet Charlie, who owns Tropical Expeditions, a charter motor vessel docked just at the bridge, up the river about 500meters. After spending a rough night outside as the winds kicked up to 25 kts, and later 30 kts, we were happy to accept his gracious offer of a place to tie up in the quiet waters of the river, which has limited possibilities for a visiting boat to find a place along the banks. Originally from Savusavu, Charlie has been here over 30 years and pioneered the tourism and diving in the area. He does custom charters to anywhere around Fiji, and is set up for diving, fishing, surfing, or whatever activity the clients desire.

Beqa is famous for dives where BIG sharks are fed. The dive centers that make these shark feeding dives are located in Pacific Harbor on Viti Levu, which is within the same barrier reef system, thus fairly protected waters, and a reasonable boat ride to the dive sites. We ourselves fed reef sharks in the Maldives, and have seen a number of reef shark feedings, but to date, we have never seen such large sharks fed, especially Bull sharks. Each center that feeds does so at its specific reef, as sharks are creatures of habit, and have established a rapport with the divers they know and trust. (and vice versa!) A \$10 Park fee pp/trip goes to the Beqa villages with rights to these sites (charged by the Dive Center when you pay). We dived with two operations on their shark dive, and found the format to be slightly different at each. Each has roomy, well-equipped, covered, high-speed dive boats, and many safety divers for the feeding. This is one of the best places in the world to see big sharks, do not miss the opportunity!

Beqa Adventure Divers is perhaps the most well known for their Big Fish Encounter. The Fijian divers have been nourishing these sharks for 7 yrs; Manasa and buddies each have their "pet" Bulls that feed directly from their hands only. This exhilarating dive is very well thought out and organized from both safety, and theatrical, standpoints. The first dive was a multi-level: Bulls at 30m, white-tip lagoon and gray sharks at 10m, and black -tips at the safety stop! And, at all levels, big crazy trevallies, snappers, and dozens of other schooling opportunists. Maximum excitement the dive minute! The 2nd dive is done entirely at 18m, up-close-and-personal with the Bulls! If you are very lucky, Scarface, 6 m tiger shark will show up!! They also work closely with the scientific community doing shark research, providing behavioral studies about these illusive creatures. We also did two reef dives with Andrew, the manager, and David, dive guide on some beautiful bommies rising like seamounts festooned with soft corals and gorgonians. An added bonus at the second site was a wreck at 30m.

Aqua Trek-Beqa is located in the Pearl Resort. The first feeding dive starts at 24m. The sharks are not hand fed, but feed on their own from the copious amounts of fish parts that are doled out. Sometimes sharks are less timid to eat if the food is not held and you can see more competitive ripping and tearing. On the other hand, visibility can diminish from all the fish stirring up the bottom. The second half of the dive, you ascend the reef and can circle around viewing the coral and the deep drop-off. The second dive was 18m and the sharks came much, much closer. We could see the small yellow pilot fish leading the bull, and the pimples on his nose!! There were also some huge nurse sharks, which are less inhibited to chow down. As we ascended to the safety line at the end of the dive, one bag of fish had slipped into the danger zone and was left. We got a bird's eye view of 3 awesomely huge bull sharks shredding it to pieces, uninhibited now that the annoying bubble-makers had gone.

Robinson Crusoe Island: This yacht-friendly island makes a great stopover anchorage when making the trip from Suva to Nadi or Lautoka. The entrance through the barrier reef is wide and position is quite accurate on the electronic CM93 charts. The route to the anchorage near the moorings of the resort boats is pretty evident on a low tide, as the shoals are uncovered; not so at higher tides. There are a couple of markers, but the best is to radio the resort on ch 10 VHF for directions or a guide boat. There is plenty of water inside, contrary to what is marked on the charts. We anchored just outside the resort boat moorings in <20ft of water at mid-tide. One caveat, there are very strong tidal currents in the anchorage, so make sure to dig the anchor in, allow swinging room, and make sure the dinghy motor is running well before you cast off from the big boat! Not only does it provide great protection from the prevailing trades in reasonable depths and good holding, but Yacht Club Membership costs only \$1 F plus a bottle of beer at the bar, and entitles you

to inexpensive meals, 10% discount on drinks and other purchases, free dance shows, use of facilities, (except showers and laundry), and yachtie's price on the shuttle boat to Viti Levu. Partner couples, Ann and Ron, Wayne and Kaz have turned this island into a proto-type Eco-conscious resort and a rising star in the Island Dance and Fire Show entertainment arena. We attended two of the 6 performances of the week, and were very impressed with the quality, energy and enthusiasm of the dance troupe. Each performance vibrated with their dedication to making every show seem like opening night; no indication that it was dead season, the hottest time of the year, or the 6th show of the week! The troupe is striving to become the most re-known Fire and Knife Dance performers in all of Fiji. The strength and stamina required for these dances is phenomenal.

Aboard-a-Dream Nautilus Dive Center: located on the RC resort grounds, this center is run by a very nice German couple, Tommy and Nadine. The dives are conducted on the long barrier reef that runs the length of the southwest coast of Viti Levu. They do one and two tank dives and Padi Certification courses. On our dive with them, there was a dramatic drop-off with swarms of snappers; we also saw a turtle, blacktip reef shark, napoleon wrasse, and clown trigger. Their project is to run their own mini live-aboard dive boat all around Fiji later!

Momi bay: We decided to stop at the Seashell Cove Resort (South side of the bay) to break our trip. Luckily for us, On Saturdays, they have their lovo/meke night. Had an interesting chat with Virginia, the mgr who started the resort 20 yrs ago! Beware of the shallow plateau that extends far from shore and that you may not see at high tide (charts are accurate). Follow the dinghy channel marked by sticks, to get to the resort. Next morning, we met Sean & Michele, the Scuba Bula dive operators. Went for a 2-tank dive with them outside of Navula pass. Nice overhangs and tunnels. June-Sept is the best time to spot big pelagics, mantas, maybe even a whale shark! Best spot for surfing here too! (they had a big contest last week!). Just North of the Seashell, we saw the new Marriott Hotel in construction. They reclaimed the whole shallow reef area in front of their property. The plan is to have the top hotel of the chain here! Complete with marina and Disney World! Does the world change!!!

Port Denarau

This may be the new "in" spot for yachts, depending on what happens with future developments. Right now it is the area with the greatest concentration of "Chic" Hotels (Sheraton, Sofitel), golf courses, and time-share type villas. The marina is also the "Gateway to the Yasawas and Mamanucas, as the majority of charter cruise boats and shuttles depart from here. You can anchor behind the protection of the breakwaters or dock. Port Denarau is out on a point, about 5 km from the main highway, 7km from Nadi, and about 20km from the airport. Public bus service is intermittent, but mini-vans frequently transport workers (\$0.50 to the main rd), or there are taxis (\$10), and hotel shuttles (\$5) to Nadi. One of the biggest cruise operators is Captain Cook's Cruises, which offers every kind of formula, from luxury cruises to the Yasawas, 2-3 day sail cruises, day-long picnic and sailing, to the 2-4 hr cocktail and dinner cruise. For fun, and nostalgia, we went on a dinner cruise. (We used to run them in the Caymans). It was quite well done, the delicious, Amero/Euro cuisine, 3-course dinner was served formally in a dining salon as a Fijian group sang. After dinner, there was a presentation of Fijian traditional costumes, a refreshingly different change from the classic making-the-tourists-try-to-do-local-dancing. Actually, that was done earlier in the evening!

Nadi Airport/Newton Bay

This is the nearest anchorage to the airport. Convenient if you are dropping off, or picking up people, this is not an area to leave the boat long-term. It is an open roadstead, but fine in easterlies. As you enter the wide bay, head for the tall white tower with the round, bulbous top. We anchored in <20ft of

water quite a ways offshore between the Turtle Airways floatplane pier, and the Backpacker's Resort with the small boats, and a charter cat moored in front. Taxi fare is about \$12 F. It is not close to the main road, so catching a bus is quite difficult.

Lautoka:

Check-in at Cruise Ship/Container Ship wharf, offices are on the Quay. Put out a stern anchor if you put the dink at the stairs near the Blue Lagoon Cruises berths (a friend almost had his crushed under the pier by the rising tide.) Trash bins are across the roadway from the steps, and the gate is guarded at all times. \$0.45 bus ride, \$3 taxi, or 15 min walk to town. The Fruit and Veggie Market has good choice and the best prices of all others visited in Fiji. Go to the back corner, or outside vendors on Fri-Sat for best deals. \$1F/hr (!!) internet in the Village 4 Cinema building. Newly opened, clean and quiet. We hope that it survives and thrives. Every major chain of Supermarket has at least TWO stores in town. For refrigeration and electrical repair, we went to Kumar Electrical, on Namoli Ave further than the market; the personnel was nice and did their best. Cyclone season has it's advantages, as the notorious black smoke-belching sugar mill is CLOSED until JUNE.

Bekana Island: Just in front of Lautoka, Bekana's 6-7 yacht moorings are a reasonable dinghy ride away in relatively mild conditions, if you have an RIB and 10-15HP motor. It was much more pleasant here with a view of the resort and beach, than near the noise and traffic of the port area. Pick a mooring, then go in to ask, as they do not monitor VHF. Andrew, Fijian Chinese, born and raised in this area, has become a successful entrepreneur in Auz, and a few years ago, bought the mismanaged resort, which employs many of his childhood friends and buddies. He visits the island about once a month from Sydney and he welcomed us as warmly as any native Fijian, singing with his staff and sharing a bowl of kava. Sala, the full-time manager, was graciously warm and welcomed us to use the mooring, and come for the Friday Lovo/Meke (underground oven/Fijian dance) night, with the regular staff members providing the entertainment. While in the upper price range, the dining here is higher quality in terms of ambiance, attentive service, and presentation of gourmet cuisine when dining ala carte, and a beautiful buffet on Lovo night. Watson is a Fijian version of the proper "butler" with his grave and serious attention to the guests, making sure you are greeted by name each time he sees you. His side-kicks on the activities staff contrast well with their open "Bula"-ness, and when they all get together to sing, Watson is right in there offering Kava, and making you part of the family.

Voli Voli Point /Nanau-I-Ra Island

The route to Voli Voli is well marked, and reefs are as indicated relative to each other on CM93, though maybe off from actual position. There are places to anchor to break up the trip. On the northern-most point of Viti Levu, and a day-sail from Yadua Island, this area makes a nice stop over. One big caveat: the entrance to the Nananu Passage is NOT accurately placed on the CM93 electronic charts, and there are NO permanent channel markers as indicated! On approach from the north, we saw only a giant orange buoy; could not see the reef because of clouds and high tide. Only at the last minute did we see that the GPS put us about 100 m too far to the EAST and we had to do a abrupt 90 degree turn to strb to avoid the reef and pass WEST of the orange buoy, which marks the east side of the pass. WHEW! Be aware for the rest of the trip in. Safest is to arrive at low tide when all the dangers are exposed. Described, in the Guides, the area has really developed since then. The dive center that used to be on Nananu-I-Ra, has now opened it's own resort/dive center on Voli Voli Point, which is actually on the island of Viti Levu. Owned by Australians, Steve and Gail,

and managed by their son, Steve and his wife, the resort is planning to put in moorings for yachts (??) on the west side of the point with the hopes of attracting cruisers here for diving and a friendly ambiance for knocking back a beer, having a reasonably priced meal or snack, and spinning tales, as well as offering internet and other services of interest to cruisers. Already, the large, open-air, thatch-covered, bar/restaurant/socializing area serves an honest, nutritious, pleasing dinner. Value without the "chi-chi". And not only ice cream, but sundaes, as well! The Walu was fresh, cooked just right, and the fries (chips) won the heart of the Belgian Capt.!

Having opening the original dive center in the Nananu-I-Ra area, "Ra Divers", Steve and his dive crew, who have worked with him from the beginning, know intimately the best diving in the area, and when to go where for greatest safety and enjoyment. Their 2 dive boats are comfortable and set up well. We dived 2 very colorful sites on some of the Bommies, northwest of Voli Voli, offering a lot of changing scenery and far and near attractions: swim-thrus and look-thrus lined with soft corals and gorgonians, narrow canyons, schooling snappers and jacks, nudibranchs and close-up goodies, and we were fortunate to glimpse a bronze whaler shark, a new one for our list. Better value and better diving than the Mamanucas and Yasawas.

Yasawas:

General info: The electronic charts lack many details of this group. In addition to the cruising guides, there are some paper charts more detailed than the electronic ones. This set of 7 charts, known as the Pickmere Charts, have good detail of shorelines and reefs and some good notes, although they do not have soundings of the depths. Ours came as part of a chart package, perhaps inquire at the Fiji Hydrographic Office how to get them. We decided to sail from Lautoka up the coast a bit before heading out to Sawa-I-Lau and work our way down with the wind more favorable.

Sawa-I-Lau Island: Cave, dinghy Pass, and beaches. We anchored here late in the day, and the light was limited. Without depths on the charts, we carefully approached and discovered that the reef rises abruptly from 14m (45ft) to the surface. In the morning we awoke to a beautiful view of tall black peaks of basalt, sculpted rocks on the shoreline, beautiful blues of every hue from the deep of the bay to the aqua and green of the shallow sandy dinghy pass fringed with white sand, and the village spotted with a splash of painted building here or there. A hybrid of the Marquesas, Tuamotus, and Tonga.

The big attraction here is THE CAVE. Controlled by the village, by a locked gate, this unique geological feature can be visited M-Sat. From the anchorage, you can see the gate and stairway, dinghy there and a local will probably be there to greet you and take \$5 entrance fee from each of you. Take snorkel gear and an underwater light to get your money's worth. It really is an impressive natural cave. Shear walls 30m high form a cylinder of light beaming in from the opening at the top, reflecting images of the gray-green walls on the surface of the 5-6m deep, clear, pool. On the side opposite the stairs, a shallow breath-hold dive of about 10 seconds will take you into the "black" chamber. You are in total darkness with the ceiling of the cave far above and resonating sound of the water lapping. With a light, you can explore quite an extensive chamber and see light coming in from other "windows" in the rock. If you are a good breath holder, at the end of the cave, is another underwater tunnel that requires about 20-30 seconds to swim with fins. Just about the time you have passed the point of no return, you see a sharp turn to your left and further, a bubble of air. As you burst into this, you'll find yourself in another large chamber visited by very few people, because at the end, in the open air are the most delicate, white crystallized stalactites hanging from the walls totally intact!

Nanuya Lailai Island: Consult Guides for the approach. There are red and green markers that appear to be “red-right-returning “ with the anchorage as the return point. In other words, whatever direction you come in from, the markers will be the opposite to go out (green on the rt.). We anchored in 50ft. Not much room for more than 4-5 yachts, as South side is reserved for Lagoon Cruises.

Nanuya Island Resort dive center: This center services about 5 resorts in the immediate area. They have 2 large, stable rigid-bottom inflatable dive boats, nicely set up for ease of the divers. They offer 1-tank dives, morn. and aftn. \$95/ dive. At one of the reefs on the east side, Bonsai reef, we dived on the reef drop-off, max 20meters, and saw typical marine life for this area. Not many soft corals or gorgonians, but the hard corals were healthy and colorful in the first 14m. This time of year, the waters are warm, but vis is lower due to plankton blooms. This was a good site for less experienced divers or divers new to tropical waters.

Nanuya Balavu: We took the free mooring from the Manta Ray Island Resort, located in a pass between this island and Drawaqa. Between Drawaqa and Naviti, is another pass that at certain times, hosts manta rays which cruise back and forth in the currents feeding. Unfortunately, they hadn't been seen for a while when we were there end of March. Went for a reef dive with the center there on the patch reef on the west side. This reef had some nice swim-thrus and narrow canyons, some gorgonians, and some nice soft corals, as well as healthy hard corals. The richest color and life, like many sites in Fiji, are 15m or less, most vibrant right on the top of the drop-off. This was a relaxing drift dive. They accommodated us four 20 yr Instructor veterans, by letting us have free reign while the dive guide showed us the best attractions. Another guide took the less experienced. We appreciated this.

Wayu Island: The southern-most major island of the group, Wayu's silhouette made me think of “The Hobbit” and the evil land of Mordor. The peaks look like horns of the devil! We anchored in calm conditions in the north bay, Nalauwaki, in front of the village in about 14m (45ft) of water. The dark areas on the bottom turned out to be sea grass patches over sand, rather than hard corals. Our bugle anchor bit in well. The northern swells did not bother Sloepmouche. After *sevusevu* with the chief, we visited the “waterfall”. On the eastern-most corner of the beach, you can take your dinghy at mid-tide or better right up to where the river drains into the bay. Scramble up the river about 100yds and you'll come upon a small fall with small pool. This used to be the water catchment area described in the guide, but the dam is now broken, and they have a new cistern in another area, so you can stand under the falls and sit in the pool anytime.

We took a well-beaten path over the ridge to the Octopus Resort. Formerly a Backpackers Resort, it has been nicely upgraded with bungalows, a cool, shady pool terrace, and bar and restaurant of 3 Star quality. This is a bonus for those paying for the dorm accommodation, as they get the “ambiance” and meal packages of a higher quality resort. There is a PADI dive center on site. We moved the boat around and anchored off the resort in ~30ft over sand and weed. Polly & Ross, the Scottish manager couple, make cruisers feel very welcome! We're speaking about genuine pleasure to have you visiting, not the false smile that often only see \$ signs in your eyes! We enjoyed several quality meals, relaxing in the pool after a guided walk across the island (you go by boat and hike back), did some scuba and enjoyed the meke on Friday night. If the wind turns more SW or W, it's only 2 miles to go anchor back in the North bay. Nice to be in a resort where everyone is having a great time! Don't miss this stop in the Yasawas!

Mamanucas

General Info: According to the Guides and other local sailors, there are only 2 good areas to anchor in the Mamanucas, unless the weather is exceptionally calm, as in the cyclone season. As popular and talked-about as the Mamanucas (and the Yasawas) are, it is surprising how little detail there is on the electronic charts. These were never well charted by any surveyors from whom all the official international charts are drawn, such as British Admiralty, therefore, there was little info when charts were amassed to create the electronic charts. Fortunately, the cruising guides have chartlets and good info to get you to the 2 anchorages. There are also at least sticks marking most major hazards, and good markers into these 2 places. Fiji Hydrographic Unit has some good charts of the area, published by the Fiji Govt.

Mana Island: Air strip, various boat services to Viti Levu, narrow pass with 90 degree turn and some tidal current, but well-marked, and easy to see in good light. Good-sized lagoon with good holding and protection from waves, some swell at high tide. Description of the pass in Calder's guide.

Mana Island Resort: Upgraded to a 4 Star resort, it's an older, but renovated, resort located North of the pier. If yacht people register at Reception and dine in one of the two restaurants, they are welcome to use the resort facilities, which include 2 beautiful fresh water pools, 3 bars, and several beaches. They operate on a Tab only system, people set up an account with them so that all purchases can be paid at the end. There are nightly live entertainment and theme nights with show. They have a Kid's Club, and Kid meals. Water sports activities and PADI Dive center are on the premises. We really enjoyed dinner on the large outdoor terrace on Mongolian Buffet night, where you pick the ingredients, which are then stir-fried to order right before your eyes. We had a lovely chat with Ravesi, who graciously gave us information about the resort and what they offer to yachts.

Ratu Kine Resort: On the budget end of the scale, is this Backpackers, one of 4 other backpacker formulas on the island, all of which are found on the South side of the pier. The draw for yachties here is the cheap beer (\$5 F for a liter) and the free dance shows. We had the dinner that the guests receive in the meal package; a Fijian home-cooked meal of fish, local spinach and cassava fries, and then attended the Polynesian Dance show, which we dance-show-enthusiasts found to be surprisingly good for such a facility. Many of the entertainment staff is of Polynesian heritage from Samoa and Rotuma. Patrick's skills at fire dancing were as good as the Samoans we saw, and all members were energetic, well rehearsed, and smiling. Joji (JJ) the MC, told us that there is also a Fijian Lovo night, and an Island Dance Show on other nights. For the moment, these nights are M, W, and F.

Dive Connections: This satellite dive center, located on the Ratu Kine premises, offers 1-tank dive for F\$90, (average price in Mamanucas and Yasawas, but higher than Kadavu or Viani Bay). At the time we dived, the center had just moved into a new "shack", which may have explained the technical difficulties that delayed the departure for the dive by 2 hrs. We dove "Supermarket" which dive centers here and at Musket Cove rave about, as the premier dive site. Perhaps this is a seasonal or tidal sensitive sensation, because we, and other instructor friends who dived a week earlier, found it to be a "right place at the right time" site. Its greatness is related to shark and fish action not the color and life on the reef. To be fair, we did see a number of sharks, and if the visibility had been good, some great action with 2 gray sharks, herding and stalking a large school of shimmering silver bait fish. We did not dive other Mamanuca sites, but friends preferred "Pinnacles" and "Wilkes Passage." The dive staff was friendly and loves the diving here. Winter season is colder, but has better viz.

Musket Cove: (Malolo Lai Lai Island): So much has been written and said about this traditionally yacht-friendly resort, that we will only mention recent changes. Musket Cove's founder, Dick Smith loves yachts and yacht's people, and established the famous Musket Cove Yacht Club with it's \$1 membership for Captains of foreign vessels, cheap drinks Bar, and BBQ pits for yachties to get together and spin yarns. Meanwhile, Musket Cove Resort has turned into an up-market, 4 Star Resort. There's good news and bad news. Good news is that there are plans to develop a full service yard on the island, with the hope to provide first-world class workmanship. Bad news is that, due to circumstances beyond the control of Musket Cove, one of Fiji's most famous yachting events, the Musket Cove to Port Villa, Vanuatu Race will no longer be held. Instead, they will continue to have a week of Regattas and fun activities for yachts, which can then get acquainted and travel together to Vanuatu, without any official organization. It is unclear whether or not Musket Cove will still arrange for officials to be available for exceptional official clearing-out from Musket Cove. Rumor has it that, as Dick Smith gradually retires, those inheriting the helm may not continue his advocacy for yachts. For the moment, members of the Yacht Club still have full use of the resort facilities, and a generous discount on the Malolo Cat ferry service to the Big Island.

We spent a full year in Fiji and we are glad we did! It gave us the time to explore many areas in depth! For us, the fun or cruising is the time spent ashore visiting, sharing local life and doing all kinds of activities! So much time is devoted to the boat that you need to allow plenty of time in each area. Several of our friends regretted going to NZ for cyclone season ... we were glad we stayed in the tropical islands! Got to enjoy uncrowded cruising, mild winds, and warm water!

April 05-Jan 06

Luc & Jackie on s/v Sloepmouche