



Beachcomber Island Resort.

Western Fiji

Fabulous Diving & Fun For All

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACK AND SUE DRAFAHL

Believe it or not, there is more to do in this world than dive. Not all the divers we have met would agree with this but it's true. There is life beyond diving, especially in Western Fiji. Here you will find some of the most diverse outdoor activities you can encounter in one vacation.

The western side of Fiji is the driest part of the 300 plus islands and the best spot to find sun and fun. This area consists of islands known as the Mamanuca (Ma-ma-new-thuh) and Yasawa (Ya-sow-wa) Groups. The western waters are protected by the Malolo Barrier Reef, which shelters most of the western side of Viti Levu. Scattered throughout this protected area is a variety of small islands, featuring resorts that cater to family vacations by of-

fering watersport activities galore.

Getting to Western Fiji is easy. The ten hour flight from Los Angeles International Airport to Nadi will be the longest part of your journey. Once you reach the small, friendly airport on the main island of Viti Levu, you can stay in Nadi or take a boat taxi, helicopter or a short flight on a small plane to the western resorts. Most of the dive sites in the western region are only a short distance apart, so the prolific fish life and abundant corals are shared by several resorts.

To get an idea of the diversity found in these western resorts, we recently visited two of the most popular, just off the coast of Nadi.

We grabbed a boat taxi over to Mana Island, the largest resort found in the



Top: Forster's Hawkfish (*Paracirrhites forsteri*) in hard corals. Above: Eerie swirls of fire are frozen mid-motion during a display of Fijian style dancing.

Mamanucas. This 300 acre island paradise features 70 beachfront *bures* (Fijian inspired cottages) and 90 tropical garden *bures* designed to fit all budgets. There are several restaurants with traditional and Fijian meals guaranteed to tantalize your taste buds.

Special activities are available to help your kids enjoy their vacation, too. The leeward side of Mana is where you will find all the watersport activities. This sheltered area is perfect for a wide variety of sporting activities, such as windsurfing, Hobie Cats, canoes, waterskiing, paraflying, waterscooters, deep sea fishing or even riding in a yellow submarine.

Of course, the most important watersport—scuba diving—is a main activity at Mana Resort. The full service dive op-



Gray Reef Sharks (*Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*) are frequently seen roaming the coral reef at Supermarket.



home to Fiji's Batfish. They all swarm around as soon as you enter the water and are your constant buddies throughout the dive.

Another dive spot, billed as a world-class shark dive, is the **Supermarket**. Aqua-Trek's divemaster, Api Bati, handfeeds sharks on a regular basis. Gray Reef Sharks, Whitetips, Blacktips and Bronze Whalers circle around and welcome the divers as soon as the boat's engines shut down.

For a slightly different perspective, we headed to a very small island resort called Beachcomber. This is an island

for the young and young at heart. As we approached the island, we watched several guests, strapped into parasails, being pulled over the ocean on the rides of their lives. Others were trying their luck at windsurfing. A volleyball challenge was in full force as we checked in. Activities were going on everywhere we looked.

Beachcomber offers *bures* to fit every budget and lifestyle. You can have your own *bure* with bath or you can have a private *bure* with shared bathroom. It also offers a

dormitory style *Grand Bure*.

During the five minute walk around the island (we told you it was small), we noted the resort had additional sporting equipment for waterskiing, personal watercrafts, canoes, sailing, fishing and even a giant toboggan. As our island tour continued, we noted a party-size hottub, a miniature golf course and even an exercise gym. Night life includes delicious drinks, dancing and live bands to rock the night away.

The dive shop on Beachcomber is operated by Subsurface Fiji, Limited. It offers rental dive gear and PADI certifications. It is the only nitrox facility in Fiji and offers nitrox training as well as nitrox support for those already qualified.

Their proximity to Nadi International Airport makes the Western Islands a great vacation getaway. Warm weather, friendly people, good diving and water-sports galore are all the elements necessary for Fijian fun in the sun. 🐠

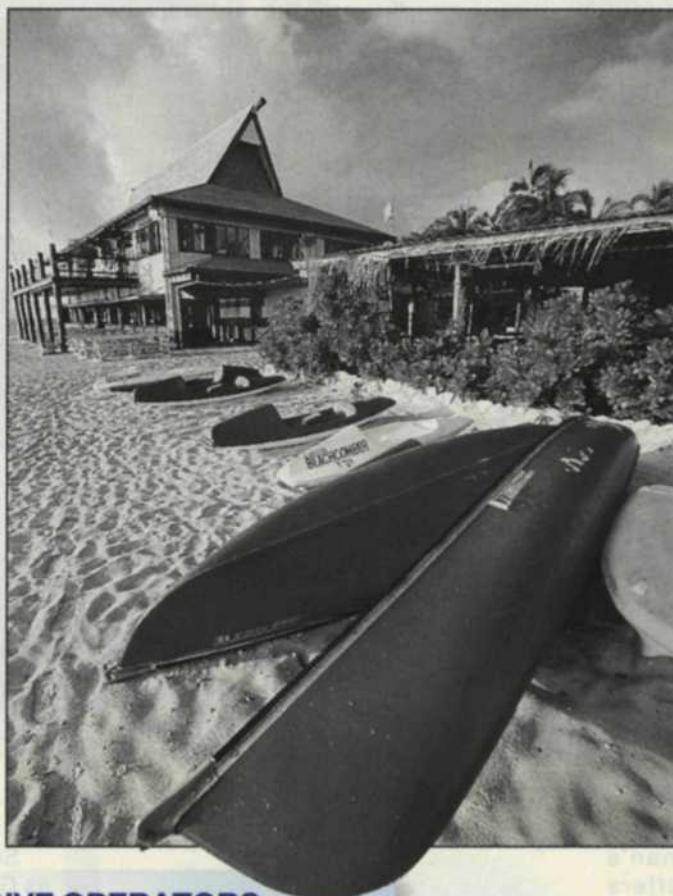


Above: A Fijian influenced *bure* at Mana Island Resort. Above right: With canoes and other watertoys there is always plenty to do at Beachcomber Island Resort.

eration is run by Aqua-Trek, a PADI Five Star Facility, well known in the industry. The dive shop is right on the beach, making it easy to load and unload the dive boats. Aqua-Trek offers rental gear; scheduled diving throughout the day; dawn and dusk dives on request; certification programs; and discover scuba sessions.

Because there is little or no current in the western islands, divers find diving easy. Most of the best dive spots are relatively close to the resort, so single tank dives are the norm. That way you can return to the resort between dives and relax. Remember, you are on vacation!

The dive sites range from 20 feet to beyond sport diving depths and usually feature coral bommies or pinnacles as the main attraction for marine life. One of the favorite dive spots, **Gotham City**, is



DIVE OPERATORS

For more information on diving Western Fiji, call:

Aqua-Trek (800) 541-4334

Beachcomber Island Resort (800) 521-7242

GETTING THERE

Flights to Fiji are available through Air Pacific and Qantas. The nonstop Air



Pacific flight from Los Angeles to Fiji's International Airport in Nadi is approximately 10 hours. The outer islands can be reached via the local carriers, Air Fiji and Sunflower.

Air Pacific
(800) 227-4446

Qantas
(800) 227-4500