

Divers are all different, each has unique wants, needs and desires. One loves strong currents with large animals; another prefers still waters with tiny creatures to study. The problem is finding one destination that pleases everyone. We think we have found it, it's called Fiji!

With more than 300 islands Fiji offers a diversity sure to fulfill your dream dive vacation. So, how do you find out which places best fit your dive needs? You've already taken the first step by reading SKIN DIVER Magazine. Each month photojournalists are sent to various locations and our lucky assignment was Fiji; the following details our discoveries.

Our trip started with a ten hour flight from Los Angeles to Nadi (pronounced Nan-de) aboard Air Pacific. Flights to Nadi also originate from Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii and Japan aboard Qantas and Air New Zealand. Fiji's outer islands are reached on smaller planes via Sunflower and Air Fiji.

Nadi is sort of a hub, with most Fiji dive trips starting and ending at this airport. It is probably one of the easiest international airports to get around. Customs is quick and pleasant. Everyone offers a smile and is eager to welcome you. If your plans require an overnight stay, don't fret, Nadi hotels are close by, offering reasonable accommodations and day rates for those long layovers. If you love shopping, you can catch a taxi downtown and explore shops offering a wide variety of souvenirs.

Which direction do you head from Nadi if you want to go diving? The answer is any direction but each island offers slightly different conditions.

On our trip, we flew northeast to Savusavu to visit three resorts. Each dives the same sites but offers quite different accommodations, depending on budget, location and preferences.

Cousteau Fiji Island Resort is home to Jean-Michel Cousteau's Project Ocean Search. The resort has recently been renovated and features 20 *bures* (Fijian cottages), a dive shop with a 37 foot dive boat, freshwater pool, E-6 photo lab and classroom. Afternoon activities include trips to mangroves, kayaking, snorkeling, tidepooling or local village visits.

Eco Divers, at the edge of Savusavu, is for the diver who wants great dives but is on a budget. It visits most of the same sites as the Cousteau Fiji Island Resort but uses two fast inflatables modified for diving with 12 built-in tank dive racks. Eco Divers features a retail dive shop with changing rooms and showers. Affordable accommodations can be made at hotels

Discovering

Fiji

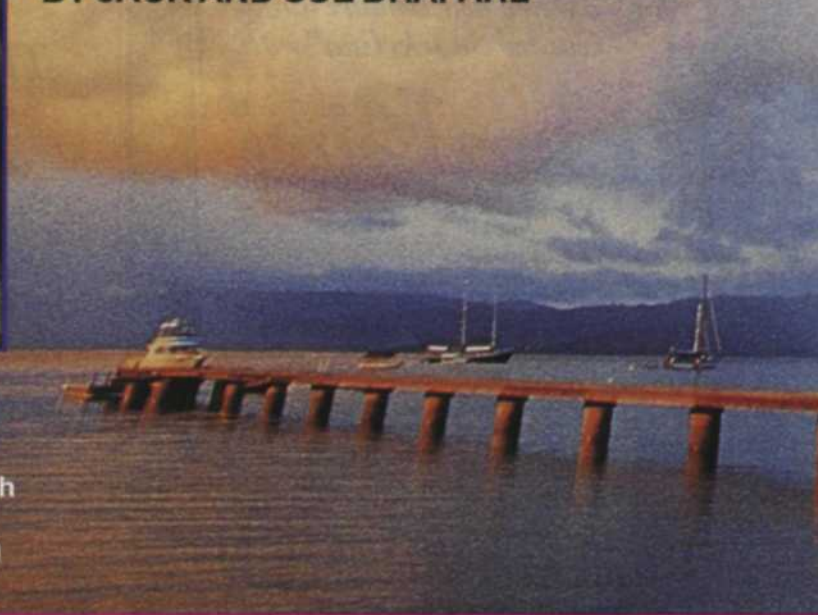


A Diver's Dreamland

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY JACK AND SUE DRAFAHL



Luring divers onto the reefs surrounding Savusavu's idyllic Cousteau Fiji Island Resort (background) are such captivating creatures as Clark's Anemonefish (above) and Leaf fish (top right).



in or near Savusavu. Eco Divers offers expeditions to an historic fortified village, ancient hot springs and an old town site via a special four wheel drive vehicle.

At Namale Resort, diving is not the primary focus. It has eight *bures* designed for divers on a honeymoon, celebrating an anniversary or just needing a romantic weekend away. There is a honeymoon *bure* high on a rock overlooking the ocean and accessed only via a small bridge. Activities other than romance include diving, tennis, kayaking, waterskiing, windsurfing, local tours or relaxing by the freshwater swimming pool.

Savusavu is at the lower portion of Vanua Levu. It has calm diving inside the bay and current diving on the outside. Inside the bay you will see lots of nudibranchs, lionfish, anemonefish, sea-snakes, Lizardfish and fish cleaning stations. Most of the animal life is on coral bommies that rise from the seafloor. Sites include **Nuggets** and **Split Rock**.

When the weather cooperates, dives on the outside of the bay can be made on several moored spots. There is a slight current here so the potential for larger animals is great. Sharks, turtles and much larger fish all pose for the underwater pho-

tographer. **Namenalala**, one of the best dive spots in the world, is 20 miles to the south and can be accessed by some of the larger dive boats in two to three hours from Savusavu. This is one of the best current dives you will ever experience. There is so much animal life here that listing it would exceed our word limitation for this article!

Taveuni, Fiji's third largest island, is called the Garden Island. It offers the perfect climate for lush greenery on land and the richest gardens of soft coral below water.

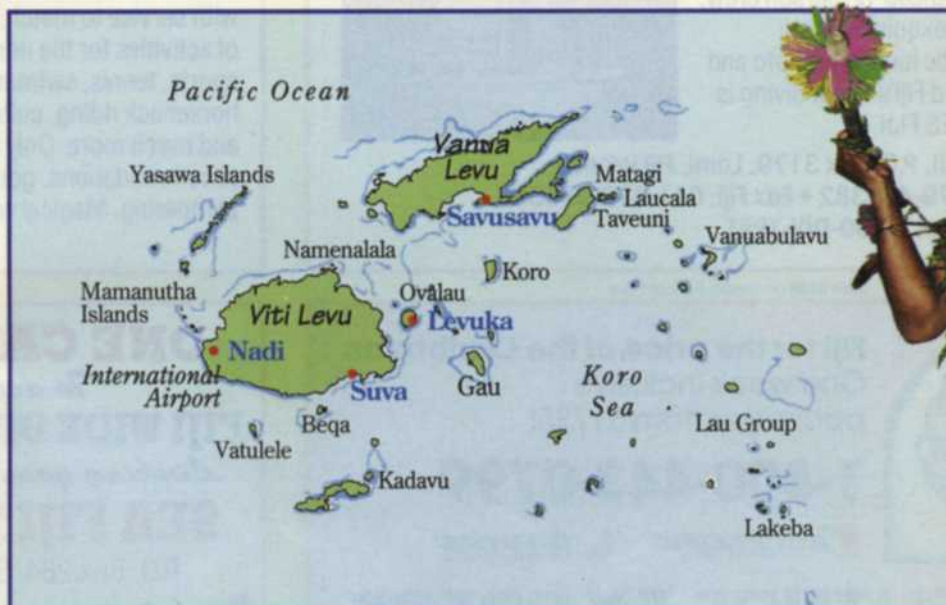
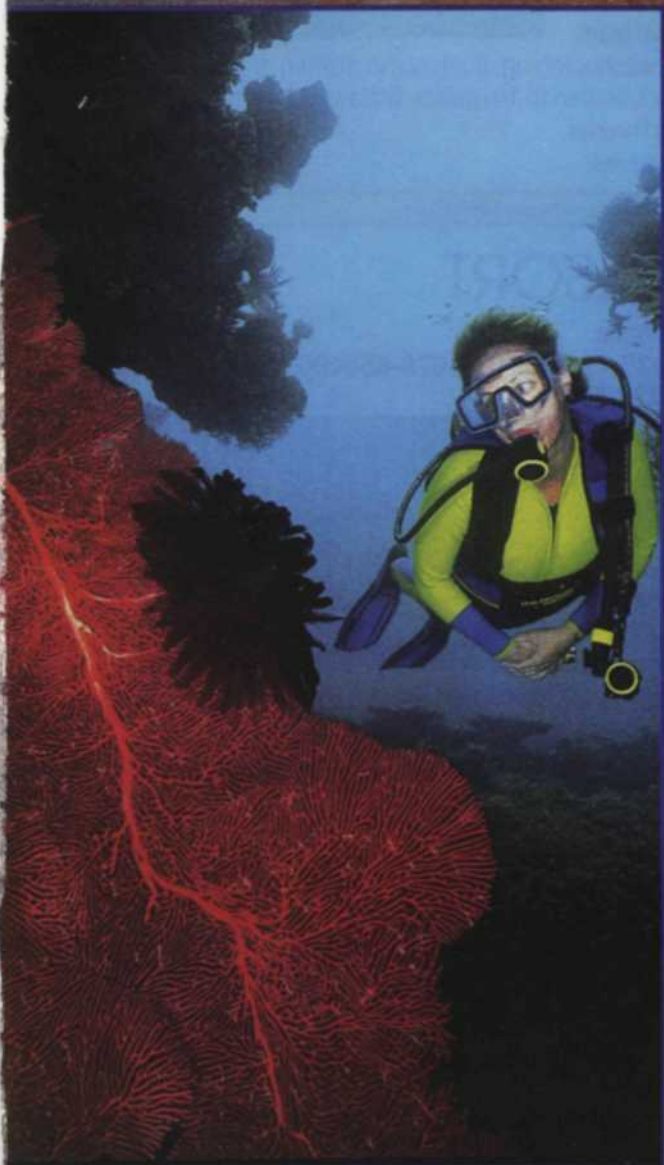
The Garden Island Resort is a 33 room hotel overlooking the Somosomo Strait. It offers a restaurant, freshwater pool and dive shop. On your first day you take your dive gear down to the dive shop, a few yards from the main hotel. Your gear will be checked and loaded on the dive boat. Each day after that it will be washed and dried in the shop, then readied for the next day.

Dive Taveuni has eight *bures* on a grassy bluff overlooking the Somosomo Strait in a flower garden wonderland. Each *bure* is quite private, with glamorous interiors and a unique outdoor shower system you have to see to appreciate. A covered outdoor dining table allows you to eat your meals in comfort overlooking

A delicate Seahorse suspended in a deep violet expanse of water off Savusavu.



Divers exploring the waters surrounding Laucala are mesmerized by pulsating jellyfish (above) and pristine reefs adorned by crimson seafans and feathery crinoids (left). A Fijian dancer (below) reenacts the steps of his ancestors for Dive Kadavu's visitors.



Discovering Fiji

the Fijian reefs you dived that morning.

Additional activities at both resorts include village visits, hikes to magnificent waterfalls, horseback riding, birdwatching and numerous other watersports.

Dive Taveuni dives the same spots as

the Garden Island Resort. Diving in the Somosomo Strait requires a little current experience. If you don't have the experience, this is the best place to learn, as the divemasters are very experienced.

If you are a photographer, bring plenty of film. The animal life is quite varied and presents great photo opportunities. On one dive we saw leaf fish, seasnakes, nudibranchs, clownfish, Clown Triggerfish, fish cleaning stations, sharks, turtles and more.

Some of the more famous dive spots in Fiji are here. The **Great White Wall** is a massive wall covered with white soft coral that offers great wide angle photo opportunities. We're sure you can guess what you'll see at **Blue Ribbon Eel Reef** and the **Fish Factory**.

The 3,000 acre Forbes Laucala Island is just east of Taveuni. It houses seven *bures*, each separated by acres of grassy space for total privacy. Meals are unique. Breakfast is prepared in your *bure* by your "bure girl," who also cleans the room and replenishes any of the food or drinks used during the day. Lunch can be served just about anywhere you want—the Tree House, your *bure*, the old Forbes house, the beach, an overlook or even the dive boat. Evening meals are served at the main plantation house or in the barbecue area.

Island tours on the 12 mile Perimeter Road take you through spectacular foliage featuring a prolific bird population.

Transportation to any of the numerous dive spots is aboard one of the four boats. Here, you dive when you feel like it, not at specific times. Diving depths range from 15 to 130 feet, with visibility as good as 150 plus on some days.

It's pretty obvious that, with so many sites, you will not be able to dive them all. The best solution is to give your hosts a

wish list of sights and critters and let them pick the spots to match. If you want a lot of big fish, you might try **The Wall**. It plunges from near the surface to 2,000 feet. If current diving is your wish, then **The Passage** will give you a great view of large fish at depths of 0 to 60 feet in very swift waters. Close-up photo buffs will enjoy **Starfish Alley**, **Closeluff**, **Coral Gardens** and **Anemone Reef**. With so much variety, you can have it your way.

From Laucala we returned to Nadi, then took a one-half hour boat ride from the big island of Viti Levu to Beachcomber. This tiny island is only 12 kilometers west of the Nadi International Airport.

Three types of lodging are possible in 19 *bures* spread out over the entire island. Budget and the degree of privacy dictate your choice. You can have your own *bure* with private bath or you can have a private *bure* with shared bathrooms. If you don't mind dormitory style, you can stay in the Grand *Bure*.

Of course, with so much going on, you will spend little time in the *bure*. Daily activities include windsurfing, fishing, canoeing, sailing, jetskiing, parasailing and, oh yes, diving! If you are a party animal, this is your island. Nightlife includes bands, dancing, something to quench your thirst, hottubbing or beach walking.

The dive shop has two boats and caters to divers ranging from beginners to those using nitrox. If you want to make a wreck dive, you can visit a **B-26 Bomber** or the **Salamanda**. The **Big Ws** is a dive on the outside of the barrier reef that offers the potential of seeing much larger open ocean animals. **Gotham City** is three pinnacles in the outer barrier reef, where we saw several Batfish and other large schooling fish. **The Supermarket** may provide the opportunity to see a shark feeding.

Moving farther west by boat, we reached Mana Resort. Air transport from the Nadi airport is also possible. This island is much larger than Beachcomber and can accommodate large groups of divers with its 128 *bures* and 32 hotel rooms. The resort has several restaurants, a gift shop,

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Divers will find the dive shop, operated by Aqua Trek, well equipped with rental gear, classroom and equipment drying and storage areas. Two boats transport divers to a variety of surrounding islands. Many of the sites are the same ones visited by guests of Beachcomber. When we did our dive at The Supermarket, our divemaster performed a shark encounter. The **Circus** offers clownfish galore.

The next stop was Kadavu, southeast of Viti Levu. We visited two resorts here and both were so remote the only access was a short boat ride from the beach.

Dive Kadavu is spread out on the side of a hill; you can barely see the resort for the lush foliage. The resort has only five *bures* but plans to add more. Four of the five *bures* are private rooms but for the budget diver, the large *bure* has several smaller rooms with a shared bathroom.

Meals are taken in a large *bure* higher up on the hill. On our short trip there we were able to experience a true Fijian *lovo*. The food is cooked in a pit and then served on a table made of leaves. One large leaf serves as your plate. We later visited a local village and mingled with friendly villagers, danced, drank *kava* and listened to the locals sing. Oh, what a night!

Two dive boats are used to get you to the numerous dive sites inside and on the

edge of the Namalata reef. Photographers will thrill with the colors—fish, soft corals, gorgonian seafans, clownfish and larger pelagic fish all frequent the

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
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Air Fiji (800) 677-4277 (310) 670-7302	Sunflower Airlines (800) 224-0220
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large bommies. On the last dive at **Blue Tang**, we were told to save film for the tangs. As the film counter increased to 30, the divemaster motioned and there before us were two Blue Ribbon Eels. We were out of film in less than a minute!

Malawi, the second resort, has only three white plantation-style *bures* but is surrounded by more than 300 acres that

are a birdwatcher's paradise.

The resort has a fleet of five boats that dive and fish the same waters as Dive Kadavu. Malawai offers **Robert's Wreck**, a 210 foot, 675 ton freighter that sank in 1993 in 80 to 110 feet of water. **Crossroads** is another favorite dive, where soft corals of every color mix with gorgonians and large schools of fish.

A short hop northwest of Kadavu brought us to Vatulele. If you are looking for the very best accommodations and maximum privacy, this is the resort. Each *bure* is completely surrounded by foliage and has its own pathway to the beach.

If you are on a honeymoon, celebrating an anniversary or just have romance in mind, this is the place. For total seclusion, the resort will take you to a tiny island off the coast with food, water and shelter and leave you for one-half day.

The resort offers a variety of outdoor activities, including tennis, sailing, volleyball, snorkeling, cave exploring and diving. Most of the diving takes place at the north end of the island, where 12 dive sites have been located. The **Wreck** is a sunken 500 ton island trader and **Cathedral**, **Outer Limits**, **Dave's Cavern** and **The Tomb** offer underwater caves, steep walls and deep dives.

In this article, we have only scratched the surface of what Fiji has to offer. Come meet the friendliest people on earth. 🐟

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