

Dive Taveuni

Fiji's Answer
to the Exotic
and Sublime

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY JACK AND SUE DRAFAHL



Almost 25 years ago, Ric Cammick discovered the underwater world of Fiji's Somosomo Strait, between the islands of Vanua Levu and Taveuni. A tremendous amount of nutrient rich water flows through this strait during the tidal exchange. The reefs come alive and the soft corals display their true colors for divers to witness.

Ric and his wife Do decided this was definitely the place to set up a diving operation. Together they built a seven acre wonderland perched on the grassy knoll overlooking the Somosomo Strait. Dive Taveuni features six *bures*, traditional Fijian cottages, nestled into beautifully landscaped tropical gardens.

There are three styles of *bures*. Most have unique outdoor showers, some have rock interior walls, while others have courtyards walled with river stones. Each has its own private deck so you can relax and enjoy the breathtaking Fijian sunsets.

The Cammicks' resort makes you feel like an invited guest sharing their warm hospitality rather than just a visitor to Dive Taveuni. Before dinner, drinks are served in the spacious living room of the mainhouse. Here you can relax in an overstuffed chair and recap the diving events of the day.

All meals are served on the outside patio (weather permitting) so everyone can enjoy a panoramic view of the strait. Tables are set with fine china in the shape of sea shells, with highly polished silver place settings and crystal wine



glasses. Of course, there are always beautiful flower arrangements to add that touch of color. A variety of foods is offered, ranging from traditional local dishes made with curry or coconut milk to fish, chicken, vegetables, pastas and salads. Of course, the desserts are delicacies not to be missed!

A freshwater swimming pool was re-

Left: A Banded Seasnake heads through the nutrient rich waters of the Somosomo Strait to breathe at the surface. **Inset top:** Fiji's reefs are riotous with colorful corals, sponges, crinoids and fish. **Inset middle:** A *Chromodoris kunei nudibranch*. **Above:** Dive Taveuni is nestled within the dense flora that adorns the island of Taveuni.

cently added to the property. It sits right at the edge of the cliff, giving the illusion of swimming at the edge of the world. There are several sundecks with umbrellas to allow you to relax, read or just sit back and take in the view.

So far everything sounds great, right? Well, it gets even better. Let's talk about the diving. Dive Taveuni offers visits to more than 30 sites in the Rainbow Reef area of the Somosomo Strait. Ric, his son, Doug, and the competent dive crew led by Tyrone Valentine, have spent years figuring out the best time to dive these site. They time it so the soft corals are open yet the currents are minimal. They make current diving a positive experience that rates a definite 10 in your log book.

Dive Taveuni's *Lelewai* is a 40 foot aluminum catamaran with plenty of room for divers and all their gear. It has a covered deck, spacious cabins and a place to re-



SDM TRAVEL AT A GLANCE

Dive Taveuni is best known for:

- Diving the Somosomo Strait
- Intense concentrations of soft corals
- Drift diving
- Privacy and serenity

lax in the sun. Travel time to the sites from the resort is less than one hour. After your first dive the boat anchors near a secluded beach so

you can snorkel or relax in the sand during your surface interval. Lunch is prepared onboard, served in the main cabin and then you are off for another thrilling dive. Once your dive gear is stored onboard you can forget about it, the crew washes it and has it dry and ready for the next day. Life doesn't get much easier.

The most sought after dive in the strait is the **Great White Wall**. This is a dive of a lifetime, although most of the thrill only takes seconds because of the current. When you enter the water, you quickly make your way to the bottom at 40 feet. You battle the current head on until you come to a tunnel, which allows you to view the Great White Wall when you exit at about 120 feet. Here you will see a massive wall carpeted with white soft corals waving in the current.

There are other magnificent dive sites
(Continued on Page 126)

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DIVE TAVEUNI

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to explore throughout the **Rainbow Reef** area. **Blue Ribbon Eel Reef** offers a healthy reef teeming with life, especially the elusive Blue Ribbon Eel. The dive-masters know just where to find them for anxious photographers.

Besides the beautiful soft corals, there are prolific stands of hard corals. **Cabbage Patch** is a site where fish of every color make their homes in the Cabbage Coral.

The Ledge is home to lionfish that seek asylum beneath the bommie overhangs. **Yellow Grotto**, aptly named for its dense yellow soft coral, features prolific critters, large and small, who seek protection in the grotto. You may occasionally see pelagic creatures off in the blue, but mainly Rainbow Reef is about coral bommies, colorful fish and animals that contribute to this colorful ecosystem.

When your day's dives are memories, what else is there to see and do on this island? The third largest island in Fiji, Taveuni is nicknamed the Garden Isle because of its wet climate. The advantage to lots of water is beautiful foliage; you can find flowers of every color of the rainbow throughout the island.



Above: The bures at Dive Taveuni are spacious, airy and brightly lit. Below: The Lelewai II transports divers to Fiji's magical reefs.



Taveuni offers sightseeing and adventure for everyone. Waterfalls flow from the 4,000 foot mountain peaks, providing a perfect afternoon hike. Bouma Falls consists of three falls that range from a gentle 10 minute hike to steeper climbs with spectacular lookout points.

Fijians are some of the friendliest people on earth. They will gladly welcome you into their village and share a *bilo* (half a coconut shell) of *kava*, the local grog.

Do Cammick can arrange for a visit to one of the local villages so you can share in the memorable experience of discovering new friends.

Come visit Ric and Do at Dive Taveuni. They invite you to experience nature in all its splendor. This is paradise found—both above and below the water!

FIJI BOUND

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 takes approximately 10 hours. The outer islands are reached via either Air Fiji or Sunflower Airlines.



Air Pacific
(800) 227-4446

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For further information, contact Dive Taveuni at 011 (679) 880-441 or fax 011 (679) 880-466 or write to them c/o Matei Post Office, Taveuni, Fiji Islands. 🐟

Dive Notes

SEA FEVER TO CAY SAL BANK: Once again Sea Fever Diving Cruises is offering seven day live-aboard trips to the remote Cay Sal Bank of The Bahamas. Lying just north of Cuba, Cay Sal Bank offers spectacular diving in one of the most remote areas of The Bahamas. Unique features of the bank include seven ocean blue holes, ranging in size from 100 feet to one-quarter mile in diameter, with depths ranging from 90 feet to in excess of 300. These formations are not caves but rather sinkholes starting in only 25 feet of water.



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Sea Fever accommodates 14 guests in double occupancy cabins and features E-6 film processing.

For a unique adventure to the remote Cay Sal Bank or other Bahamas destinations, contact Sea Fever Diving Cruises, P.O. Box 21725, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33335 or call (800) 443-3837, (954) 202-5608 or e-mail seafever@seafever.com. The Web site is at <http://www.seafever.com>. 🐟