

Fiji's Dive Kadavu Matana Resort

South Pacific Hideaway with World Class Diving

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACK AND SUE DRAFAHL

We love heavy rain forests, powder white beaches, great diving and resorts that offer privacy and a friendly atmosphere. We found it all at Dive Kadavu Matana Resort on Kadavu. Pronounced Kan-da-voo, this is the fourth largest island in Fiji, 60 miles south of the country's largest island, Viti Levu.

We flew from the U.S. West Coast to Nadi on Viti Levu. From there we took a 45 minute inter-island flight to Kadavu. We knew we were in for something different when we got off the plane and were greeted by so many smiling faces. The final leg of our journey was a ten minute boat ride to Dive Kadavu Matana Resort. Kadavu has little or no road access. When we approached the resort, we could barely see it. The rain forest is so thick, you only get a glimpse of the buildings lining the hillside.

Dive Kadavu Matana Resort is next to a village, thus guests have an opportunity to visit it and experience the *bula chello* spirit that embodies the Fijian culture.

Dive Kadavu's *bures* (Fijian cottages) accommodate up to 20 guests (16 divers) and come in three levels of comfort and budget. One special beachfront *bure* has four bedrooms for budget-minded couples or those who do not require total privacy. The *bure* has a common lounge, deck and two bathrooms,

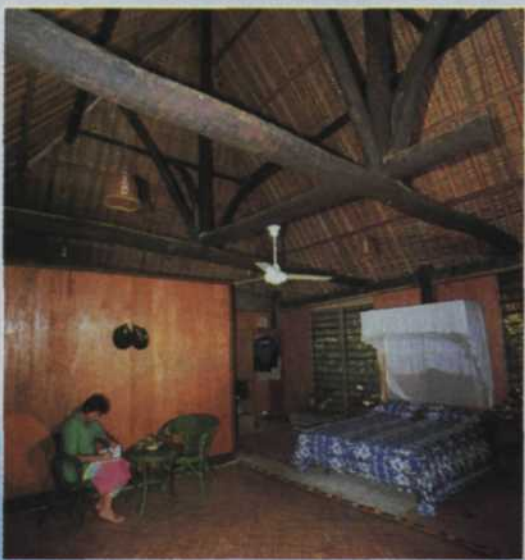
making it ideal for groups.

The oceanview *bures* are on the side of the hill, providing a panoramic view of the dive sites. These *bures* have their own bedroom, bathroom, bar refrigerator, tea and coffee making facilities but share a common deck. The deluxe accommodations are on the beachfront. These have queen sized beds, separate bathroom, private deck, bar and a large lounge area in the middle. We especially like these *bures* because there's plenty of space on the deck or inside to hang dive gear to dry.

The lounge or meeting area is on the upper level of the resort, providing a spectacular panoramic ocean view as you enjoy your meals. The meals include both international and local dishes sure to satisfy your



Left: A pair of fanciful dragons of undersea legend—Blue Ribbon Eels peer from their crevice at Blue Tang.



Top: Dive boats are boarded at the shore, mere steps from the resort. Above: A pre-dive briefing. Left: Accommodations are in *bures* of a simple elegance.

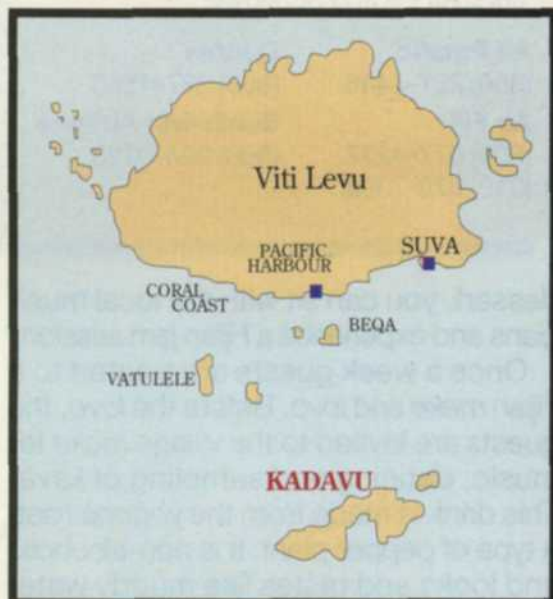


This photo: While hovering over Staghorn Corals, a diver admires a large sea fan.

taste buds. Off to the side of the dining room you'll find a friendly bartender offering a local brew. The lounge is also where guests swap dive stories, read books, watch videos or play games. If you enjoy reading, you'll find the latest titles in the swap library. Bob and Rena Forster, the resort's owners, are avid readers who encourage guests to bring the latest reading material.

Divers love the short trips aboard the 25 foot boats to varied locations just in front of the resort. The divemaster plans your week so no one has to dive the same spot twice. One morning and one mid-afternoon dive are planned but more dives per day or night are easy to do. One of Dive Kadavu's friendly Fijian dive guides makes sure guests see the best spots each day. There is a full service dive shop if you find you are missing a piece of gear or want to rent it all and travel light.

Namalata Reef forms a half circle in front of the resort and is the main diving



area. More than 30 dive sites are on this reef; most are 15 to 20 minutes by boat from the resort. A detailed map of each site is on the boat for each dive briefing, so you get a first hand look at the site before you enter the water.

The **Yellow Wall**, one of Kadavu's most famous sites, is between two large bommies in about 90 feet of water. It is carpeted with yellow soft corals and offers spectacular caves and swim-throughs. One dive we really liked was **Blue Tang**, named for the powder blue and yellow Surgeonfish around the bommies in 15 to 60 feet. Near the end of this dive, our divemaster found a pair of Blue Ribbon Eels!

For more experienced divers, **Evil Trench** is a dive to more than 100 feet. Divers fin through a downward angle swim-through and come out along a wall, where larger fish cruise. If you are looking for butterflyfish, you can try **Butterfly Bommie** or, if colorful soft coral is your preference, **Rainbow Tango** might be a good bet. Most of the

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sites include caves and swim-throughs that make great backdrops for wide angle photography. If you love to take pictures of fish or just enjoy fishwatching, you can visit **Tessa's Aquarium** and see Longnosed Hawkfish, Emperor Angels, Sweetlips and Bannerfish.

Watersports for the diver or nondiver include snorkeling, sea kayaks, windsurfing, paddleboards, parasailing and wa-

terskiing. Dive Kadavu has a fabulous beachfront for lounging or playing a game of volleyball with other guests. If you want time to dry out, you can hike into the jungle and enjoy the flora and fauna. There is a vast bird population on the island and the resort offers reference materials to help you identify them. One species indigenous to the island is the Kadavu parrot. If you have an opportunity to go hiking, invite a local guide to come along and help you spot one.

A typical day starts with an early breakfast, gear preparation and the first dive.

After the dive, the boat moves to a secluded beach so you can enjoy a box lunch, snorkel or take a walk. Some sunny solitude and shell collecting completes the surface interval before the mid-afternoon dive. You then return to the resort, where you can read, walk on the beach, hike in the rain forest or take a nap before dinner. After a delicious dinner and

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.

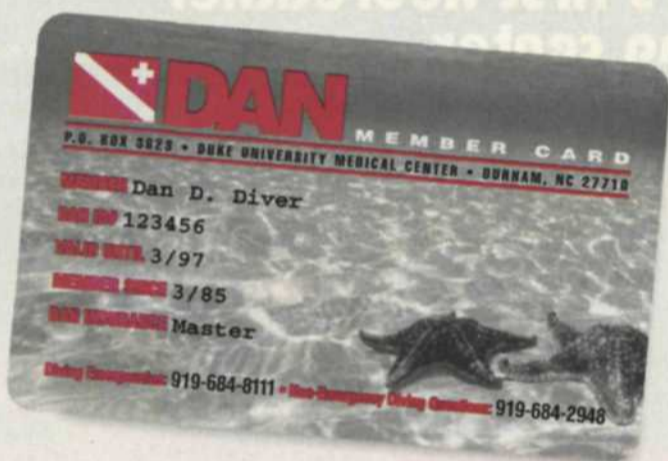
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dessert, you can sit with the local musicians and experience a Fijian jam session.

Once a week guests are treated to a Fijian *meke* and *lovo*. Before the *lovo*, the guests are invited to the village *meke* for music, dancing and sampling of *kava*. This drink is made from the *yogona* root, a type of pepper plant. It is non-alcoholic and looks and tastes like muddy water but it's all part of the Fijian experience.

The food for a *lovo* is prepared in leaves and cooked all day in an underground fire pit. The food is dug up and served at an authentic Fijian "table" made of large palm leaves. The guests form two rows along this table and the food is placed on a large leaf in front of them. Table manners include the use of fingers. The table is on the ground, allowing guests to lie down and relax after this wonderful meal. Many Dive Kadavu guests enjoy one of Bob's fabulous alcoholic beverage concoctions after the *lovo* and talking about diving, diving and more diving!

We were only able to spend a few days at Dive Kadavu but fell in love with the place. The excellent diving, the seclusion of the rain forest and comfortable accommodations make Dive Kadavu Matana Resort a definite destination to explore the true Fijian experience.

For more information, contact Tropical Adventures Travel at (800) 247-3483, (206) 441-3483, fax (206) 441-5431 or e-mail 103520.2014@compuserve.com.