

Far-flung Treasures of the South Pacific

Fiji's Matana Beach Resort and Dive Kadavu

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY JACK AND SUE DRAFAHL

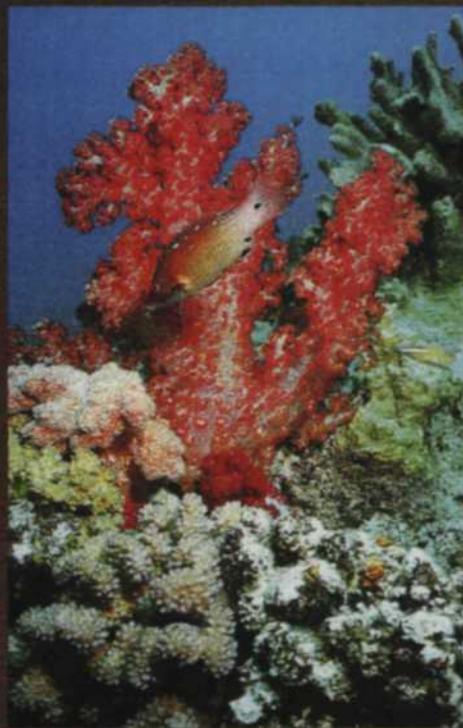


When divers look for that perfect getaway they often look to really get away from it all. They want to explore new horizons, away from the mad-

ding crowds and dive sites listed in every diver's logbook. We recently discovered remote Matana Beach Resort and Dive Kadavu. The best part of its tropical isolation is that it offers some of the finest diving in Fiji.

When you arrive at Matana you will be met by owners Bob and Rena Forster, who will give you the grand tour. The accommodations are comfortable Fijian style thatched cottages called *bures*. Right on the beach, the *bures* have queen sized beds, private bathrooms and their own verandas. They are best suited for couples or families. Construction of four additional *bures* has begun, two should be finished by the middle of this month.

Kadavu, pronounced "Kanda-voo," is the fourth largest of the more than 300 Fijian islands. Sixty miles south of Viti Levu, it is 37 miles long, with elevations up to 2,953 feet. Kadavu's terrain is so rugged it is virtually undeveloped. A huge virgin coral reef forms a ring around the island, which has a popula-



The reefs off Kadavu present some of Fiji's finest diving, with a colorful array of soft and hard corals. Inset: A welcoming Fijian smile.



Background:
Dive Kadavu's
boat in silhouette
on a tranquil sea.

MATANA BEACH RESORT/DIVE KADAVU

cursions are also made to **Ono Island** and **Astrolabe Reef**. Dives are made from one of several 28 foot aluminum catamarans that leave from the beach right in front of the resort. There is such a wide variety of diving available that the divemasters never visit the same spot twice unless it's requested. You can make up to four dives a day and, if that isn't enough, there is unlimited shore diving.

Dive Kadavu operates a PADI dive shop well stocked with rental gear for those who wish to travel light or might have forgotten something. The staff members take charge of guests' gear upon arrival and set it up on the boat. They wash the gear after each trip and set it up for subsequent dives.

DIVE KADAVU DIVE PROGRAM

Daily (regardless of number of divers): Two tank excursion to Namalata/Rooper Reefs, departing at 8:30 am, returning by 12:30 pm.

Monday - Saturday (minimum 4 divers): One tank excursion to Namalata/Rooper Reefs, departing at 2:30 pm, returning by 4:30 pm.

Monday - Saturday (minimum 4 divers): One tank night dive, departing at 7:30 pm, returning by 9:30 pm.

Monday - Saturday (minimum 4 divers): Three tank excursion to Rooper Reef/Astrolabe Reef/Ono Island, departing at 8:30 am, returning by 5:30 pm. The first dive is usually on the 210 foot freighter wreck on Rooper Reef. During the surface interval the boat moves to Astrolabe Reef for the second dive. Lunch is served at a village on Ono Island. The third dive is also on Astrolabe Reef.

Unlimited shore diving.

Dive Kadavu has recently added a high pressure line that runs all the way to the dive boats, making it easy to fill tanks without taking them off the boats.

Once you reach the dive site, you are given a briefing that gives you a thorough understanding of the reef you will be exploring. We found the divemasters at Dive Kadavu well qualified, friendly and very helpful. They were really great at finding animals for us to capture on film.

Although the diving here is virtually free of currents, there are wide expanses of soft corals in yellows, reds and pinks, all fully open and feeding, ready for you to photograph. Dive sites such as **Yellow Wall** offer hues that challenge even the finest color films.

Muai Cake was our first dive site. As we swam along a series of small bommies (coral heads) loaded with seafans, we came upon a hard coral that measured several feet across. And there was a small swim-though that seemed adorned with every color of the rainbow.

Once we hit the water at our next site, **Blue Tang**, we were surrounded by schools of the fish. There were also some

MATANA BEACH RESORT/DIVE KADAVU

tion of about 12,000 people in some 70 villages. There aren't very many roads, so most transportation is by boat.

This remote wonderland is reached via a 10 hour flight from Los Angeles to Nadi International airport on Viti Levu, then a 45 minute flight to Kadavu. As you approach Kadavu's airport, you will be impressed by the steep hillsides covered with heavy vegetation. There is so much growth on this side of the island that the resort is almost obscured from view.

Guests are met at Kadavu Airport and transported to the resort by boat. Since you may need to wade to the boat at low tide, you should wear thongs or reef shoes. The adventure begins!



Sunlight streams into a Matana Resort bure.

SDM TRAVEL AT A GLANCE

Kadavu, Fiji is best known for:

- Tropical isolation
- Abundant dive sites within a 15 to 25 minute boat ride
- Beautiful soft corals
- Massive schools of fish

in the elevated dining area with a panoramic overlook. Meals consist of a nice cross section of international and local dishes and fresh fruit. A *lovo*, where Fijian food is cooked underground, is a special dinner treat. The bar stocks a large variety of soft drinks, spirits, wines, beer and snacks. The outside deck is a great spot to sit and trade dive stories over a Fijian beer at sunset. The library is one of the finest we have seen at any dive resort. There are so many books the owners have grouped them according to subject.

There are more than 30 moored sites on **Namalata Reef**, famous for its soft corals, and **Rooper Reef**, with its 210 foot freighter wreck, all within a 15 to 25 minute boat ride of the resort. Full day ex-

The common area next to the duplex consists of the dining room, outside deck, lounge, bar, library with books to swap and video facilities. Guests eat meals together

bommies carpeted with anemones and anemonefish. We never seem to get enough pictures of these characters.

At **Susa Ika** we had a very friendly encounter with a large Green Moray Eel. Soft corals covered the bommies and massive schools of fish swam among the coral heads. What a great way to spend a day!

Our final dive was at a site known as **Mellow Reef**. We thought the name meant it would be unexciting but underwater things were really buzzing. We spent part of the dive mesmerized by the pair of Jawfish that kept moving rocks from one place to the next. Nudibranchs were out in great numbers and everywhere we looked we encountered lionfish strutting their stuff.

OTHER ACTIVITIES: Matana Resort also offers excellent swimming, snorkeling or unlimited diving just off the beach. A large shallow reef projects out from the shore to the left and ranges in depth from a couple of feet to more than 25. During the first few minutes we snorkeled it we found several anemonefish, starfish and a variety of other fish swimming among the healthy hard corals.

Other activities include paddleboards, volleyball, kayaking, waterskiing or just relaxing on the soft sand in the shade of the coconut trees. The rain forest behind the resort offers hiking trails with breathtaking vantage points.

Matana is a budget dive resort with personalized service. Nestled in a tropical hillside garden it caters to small groups of guests who have come to Kadavu to discover Fiji's friendly charm and fine diving. To us, Dive Kadavu, in almost any language, means come back soon!

FIJI BOUND

Flights to Fiji are available through Air Pacific/Qantas. The nonstop Air Pacific flight from Los Angeles to Fiji's International Airport in Nadi takes approximately 10 hours. Namale Resort, in Savusavu on Vanua Levu, is an hour's flight from Nadi via either Air Fiji or Sunflower Airlines.



Air Pacific/Qantas Airways
(800) 227-4446

For more information or reservations, please contact Matana Beach Resort/Dive Kadavu direct at 011 (679) 311-780 or fax 011 (679) 303-860. You can also contact Tropical Adventures Travel at (800) 247-3483, (206) 441-3483, fax (206) 441-5431, e-mail 103520.2014@compuserve.com or write to 111 Second North, Seattle, WA 98109. 🐟