

Kadavu Group



Unspoiled and with positively prehistoric landscapes, this group of islands sits some 100km below Viti Levu's southern coast in a flourish of emerald green. Steep verdant banks rise from the rugged shoreline hinting at an untamed interior. It's more than a hint; a dearth of roads and infrastructure largely confines transport to small boats and maintains the islands' flawless complexion. For visitors, the effort of traversing the perimeter is offset by the promise of a truly secluded stay.

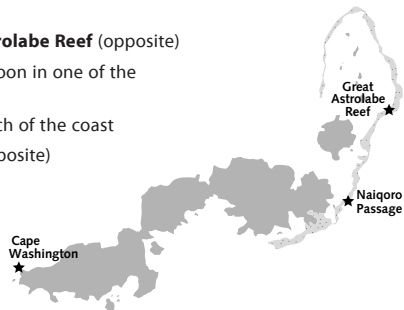
Prevailing southeasterly winds batter the exposed southeastern side of the main island and the group can fall prey to unforgiving weather. But when the sun shines and the seas are calm visitors are rewarded with secluded swimming coves and spectacular trekking. The lush, pristine rainforests, especially on the eastern side, support a rich and diverse birdlife that includes the colourful Kadavu musk parrot. The Great Astrolabe Reef skirts the group and hooks its way around the uppermost islands, providing some of the finest diving in the Pacific.

The group comprises of Kadavu (Fiji's fourth-largest island), oval-shaped Ono, Galoa and a number of smaller islands. The main island is irregular in shape and so deeply indented that it is almost cut in three by deep bays. The impressive Nabukelevu (Mt Washington) is the highest peak at 838m.

Kadavu's 72 villages or settlements rely largely on subsistence agriculture and the export of local produce to the mainland. Each village has its own fishing grounds, and resorts negotiate to use the areas for diving, surfing or fishing.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Dive or snorkel the kaleidoscopic **Great Astrolabe Reef** (opposite)
- **Meet the locals** (opposite); spend an afternoon in one of the 72 villages
- Wait for low tide and **trek** (opposite) a stretch of the coast
- Ignore the tide and take an **inland hike** (opposite)
- Indulge at a **top-end lodge** (p227)
- Surf the breaks off **Cape Washington** (p226)
- Dive with the manta rays and sharks at **Naiqoro Passage** (opposite)
- Get offshore and tour the islands by **kayak** (p226)



■ POPULATION: 12,000

■ AREA: 411 SQ KM

ORIENTATION

The small town of Vunisea is Kadavu's administrative centre, with the island's police station, post office, hospital (all on the top of the hill) and airstrip. It is on an isthmus with Namalata Bay to the west and North Bay to the east. Vunisea is easy to get around on foot, but of little interest to travellers.

INFORMATION

Emergency

Fiji Recompression Chamber Facility (☎ 885 0630; recompression@connect.com.fj; cnr Amy & Brewster Sts, Suva) Divers suffering from the bends can be transferred to Suva by Medivac helicopter service.

Police (☎ 333 6007)

Medical Services

Vunisea's **hospital** (☎ 333 6008) was opened in 1996, with the help of Australian aid, as part of a \$7 million project to improve Kadavu's health services. Services are fairly limited though, so if you really feel unwell escape Kadavu.

Money

Most of the resorts in Kadavu are distant from Vunisea. Some resorts accept credit cards but bring cash with you especially if you are staying at the budget resorts.

Post & Telephone

The Vunisea post and telephone offices are on top of the hill, a short walk from the airstrip. This **branch** (🕒 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) also sells some groceries, clothes and stationery. Kavala Bay, at the northeastern end of the island, also has a post office.

Dangers & Annoyances

The ferry trip to Kadavu from Suva can be rough and the timetable is erratic; fly instead. The small boats used by budget resorts for transfers to/from the airstrip often don't have covers, life jackets or radios. The weather can be rough from April to August.

ACTIVITIES

Remote and rugged Kadavu is a great place for nature lovers, divers, hikers and bird-watchers.

Hiking

The mountains have rainforests, numerous waterfalls and hiking trails used mainly by

school children. There are good treks into the interior from Tiliva Resort, Papageno Eco-Resort and Nagigia Resort. Staff there often act as guides or you can head off on your own but ask locals if a track is clear beforehand. The strip of coast between Waisalima Beach Resort and Tiliva village makes for a scenic walk at low tide. The isolated villagers are very traditional so when visiting a village, ask to speak to the *turaga-ni-koro* (hereditary chief) first, remove your hat and don't carry things on your shoulders (see p36 for more information on village etiquette).

Diving

Most travellers are attracted to Kadavu for its famous **Great Astrolabe Reef**, which skirts the eastern side of the group, and the nearby Naiqoro Passage. Expect brilliantly coloured soft and hard corals, vertical drop-offs and a wonderful array of marine life, including lots of reef sharks. However, diving on the reef is variable, ranging from disappointing to terrific. The weather quite often dictates which sites are suitable to dive, and visibility can range from 15m to 70m. For more information on Kadavu's diving sites, see p62.

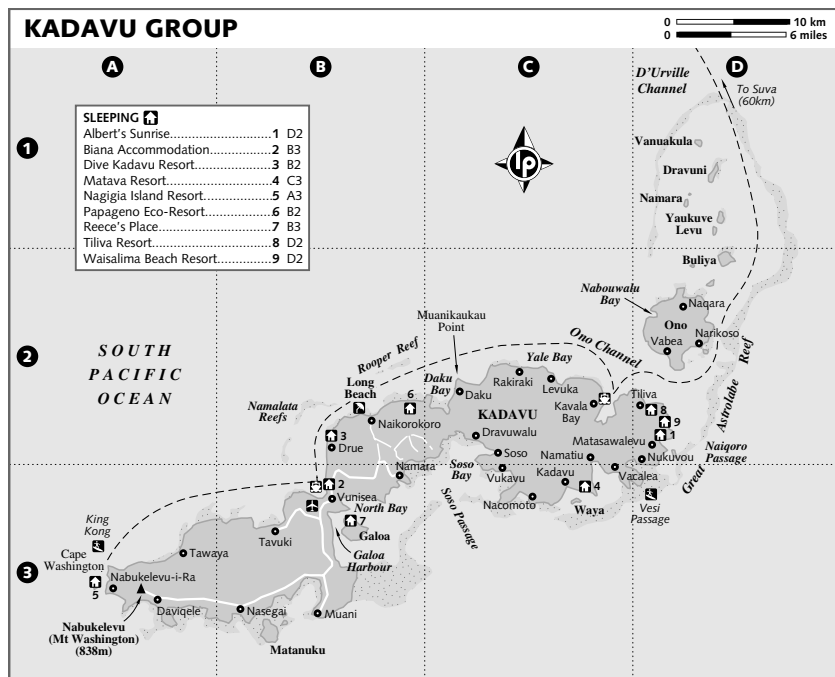
The following three outfits have excellent equipment and instructors:

Matava Resort (☎ 330 5222) offers dives from the Soso Passage to Naiqoro Passage, featuring excellent manta ray, cave and shark dives. One-/two-tank dives cost \$105/165 and a PADI Open Water Course costs \$590.

Papageno Eco-Resort (☎ 330 3355) has knowledgeable instructors, who will take you to the best sites, taking into account weather conditions and what you want to see. Shark feeding in the Naiqoro Passage is a favourite excursion. A two-tank dive/PADI Open Water Course costs \$130/600.

Dive Kadavu (☎ 331 7780; www.divekadavu.com) has fast boats with up to four dives per day. A favourite haunt is the Namalata reefs, which are about 5km from the west coast of the island and more sheltered from the prevailing winds than the Astrolabe Reef. A two-tank dive/PADI Open Water Course costs \$170/600.

Two budget resorts that offer diving are **Waisalima Beach Resort** (☎ 331 7281), which charges \$155 for a two-tank dive, and **Albert's Sunrise** (☎ 333 7555). The latter runs dives to



the Naigoro Passage and, during rough weather, sites on the sheltered side of Ono island. A two-tank dive costs \$145 but you should check your equipment thoroughly beforehand.

Surfing

The best surfing in Kadavu is found around **Cape Washington**, at the southernmost end of Kadavu. It gets plenty of swell activity year-round. **Vesi Passage**, off Matava, also has powerful surf, but the waves often get blown out.

Sea Kayaking

The season for organised kayaking trips is from May to September – contact **Tamarillo Sea Kayaking** (☎ in New Zealand 04-239 9885; www.tamarillo.co.nz/index.html), which offers interesting and well-organised kayak tours around Kadavu. The seven-day tours cost around \$2600 per person. All tours include meals and accommodation in the budget resorts as well as a village stay. It also offers a seven-day family-friendly expedition, which requires less exertion and is designed

with kids in mind. It costs \$2600/2100 per adult/child.

All the resorts have two-person ocean kayaks for hire.

Bird-watching

The lush rainforests, especially on Kadavu's eastern side, are home to a wide variety of birdlife, including the indigenous Kadavu honeyeater, Kadavu fantail, velvet fruit dove and the colourful Kadavu musk parrot.

SLEEPING

In Kadavu most of the places to stay are distant from the airport, and the only way to get there is by boat. Consider transportation time and cost when choosing your accommodation.

Budget

Matava Resort (☎ 330 5222; www.matava.com; dm \$20, d without/bathroom \$60/110-170; ☒) The most popular of the budget resorts, Matava has charming traditional thatched *bure* (Fijian dwellings) with timber floors, modest furniture, verandas and plenty of sunlight.

THE BATTLE OF THE SHARK & OCTOPUS GODS

Dakuwaqa the Shark God once cruised the Fiji islands challenging other reef guardians. On hearing rumours of a rival monster in Kadavu waters, he sped down to the island to prove his superior strength. Adopting his usual battle strategy he charged at the giant octopus with his mouth wide open and sharp teeth prepared. The octopus, however, anchored itself to the coral reef and swiftly clasped the shark in a death lock. In return for mercy the octopus demanded that the people of Kadavu be forever protected from shark attack. In Kadavu the people now fish without fear and regard the shark as their protector. Most won't eat shark or octopus out of respect for their gods.

The honeymoon and oceanview *bure* are the most expensive and come with wonderful views. The grounds are neat and lush and the eco-friendly owners make the most of solar electricity and water heating. Excellent meals (per adult/child per day \$55/20) include vegetables from the organic garden and are served on the veranda of the big restaurant-bar *bure*.

The beach out the front is tidal; a reef links it to a picturesque offshore island, which makes a great snorkelling or kayaking trip. Aside from diving (p225), there is also hiking, village and waterfall visits, kayaking, snorkelling and game fishing. Boat transfers from Vunisea airstrip cost \$40 per person one way and take around an hour.

Albert's Sunrise (☎ 333 7555; camping per person \$6, dm/s/d \$16/37/50) On a beach on the north-eastern corner of Kadavu, close to Naigoro Passage, Albert's is a small, family-run resort offering travellers the flavour of a village visit. Everything's fairly laid-back and more flexible than other resorts – fresh meals (per person per day \$37) are served whenever they're cooked and activities are organised if there's interest. Self-caterers can pay \$5 to use the kitchen. There is no electricity or hot water, and the rustic *bure* have mosquito nets and woven floor mats. Snorkelling is OK in front of the resort at high tide and gear hire costs \$5 per day. One-way transfers to/from Vunisea airstrip

cost \$100 for one person and \$50 per person for two or more people. The trip takes around 1½ to two hours.

Waisalima Beach Resort (☎ 331 7281; www.waisalimafiji.com; camping per site \$8, dm \$12, d without/bathroom \$65/130) This rough-hewn budget retreat consists of ageing, thatched *bure*, rudimentary bathrooms, hammocks on the beach and ocean vistas. It's a no-pretensions, no-frills spot but what you're paying for is a backpackers' slice of the island. There's a long stretch of sandy, tidal beach, which is OK for swimming at high tide. The best snorkelling requires a short boat trip (\$25 per person). Also on offer are waterfall or village visits (\$25 per person) and kayaking. The food (meal plan additional \$50 per day) is carb loaded. Return boat transfers from Vunisea airstrip cost \$100 per person.

Reece's Place (☎ 333 6097; www.reecesresort.com) One of Kadavu's oldest resorts, Reece's has been operating for more than 30 years as a family-run property, but was bought by new owners in 2005. A major overhaul was in action during research with five new *bure*, a new kitchen/dining area, a dive centre and a bar promised. The resort is based in a nice spot on the northern point of Galoa island, just southeast of Vunisea. Snorkelling right off the island is poor but you can be taken to Soso Passage, which isn't far away.

Staying in Vunisea really defeats the purpose of coming to Kadavu but if you get stuck here **Biana Accommodation** (☎ 333 6010; s/d \$40/60), about 2km north of the airport near the wharf, has basic rooms with mosquito nets. Rates include breakfast, and lunch or dinner is \$5. There is also a new budget lodge being established virtually outside the airport gates.

Top End

Papageno Eco-Resort (☎ 330 3355; www.papagenoecoresort.com; s from \$275, d \$400-600; ☒) Papageno is the quintessential island sanctuary and the stuff of comfy castaway dreams. Ecologically friendly, the resort uses solar and micro-hydro energy to complement its generator and the vegetables you eat at dinner will be from the organic garden. The resort itself is small and embedded in a thick tropical garden popular with shining parrots. The connected 'Garden Rooms' include futon-style beds, furniture made from local materials and bark wall hangings. The

larger *bure* have a wide berth of space and privacy around them. All digs have plush bathrooms with indulgent products and fluffy beach towels. The food is excellent – a three-course dinner often features catch of the day (which might be lobster). *Kava* (narcotic drink) ceremonies, sea kayaking and hiking are all free; snorkelling, fishing and surfing are extra. Papageno is ideal for couples but singles and families will feel just as welcome.

Tiliva Resort (☎ 333 7127; www.tilivaresortfiji.com; r \$400-500; 📍) Spread widely over a soft incline rising from the beach, this tranquil and refined resort has six elevated *bure* with cavernous interiors, high roofs, four-poster beds and lounge chairs to sink into. Each also has a 270-degree timber balcony with just enough high foliage to provide privacy without restricting the view. Hot water and electricity run 24/7. Delicious meals are included in the tariff and served on a fabulous sweeping deck in the central bar/dining area. Tiliva is owned and run by Kim, a retired British Forces Officer who grew up in the village next door, and his wife Barbara. They are exceedingly gracious and Kim cooks a mean fillet of fish.

Dive Kadavu Resort (☎ 331 7780; www.divekadavu.com; s/d/t/f \$320/560/780/980; 📍) This appealing resort has 10 modest *bure* with comfortable beds, verandas, hot water and tidy bathrooms. Many visitors come here to dive but it's a nice place to just hang out for a few days. Sheltered from the prevailing southeasterly winds, it boasts an excellent beach, where the snorkelling and swimming is wonderful regardless of the tide. There's also a sociable, ocean-fronted bar and the management is extremely hospitable. Rates include meals and airport transfers.

Nagigia Island Resort (☎ 333 7774, 600 3051; www.fijisurf.com; dm \$115, d from \$250; 📍) On the far western side of the island group, this remote resort sits on an unfathomably beautiful island near Cape Washington. Proprietors have made the most of the exquisite landscape, with *bure* and dorms hanging over plots of translucent blue sea and boasting reef, surf and mountain views. Surfing is the main activity, with a choice of five breaks including King Kong lefts just offshore. The surf-breaks produce rideable waves all year-round with bigger swells during midyear. Boat transfers to the breaks are

\$35 per person per day, but you can also paddle out to the main break. There are also nice walks nearby, including to Cape Washington lighthouse for a swim in the Nasoso Beach caves. A visit to the village of Nabukelevu-i-Ra, just across the water on Kadavu, is also a must. This is also a great spot for snorkelling and diving, with great cave formations to explore and pristine coral; the resort can arrange trips with Dive Kadavu (p225).

Meal plans are an additional \$60 per person. Return boat transfers from Vunisea airstrip are \$115 per person.

EATING

The airport has a kiosk selling a few snacks, and there are small stores in Vunisea and Kavala Bay. Most of the resorts are very remote, so even if all your meals are provided it may be an idea to take along snacks, especially to the budget resorts.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Air Fiji has daily return flights from Suva to Kadavu (\$260, 30 minutes). You can sometimes get a discount if you book directly through the Suva office of **Air Fiji** (Map p122; ☎ 331 3666; suvasales@airfiji.com.fj; 185 Victoria Pde).

Sun Air (☎ 0800 672 5725, 572 3016; www.fiji.to) has daily flights to Kadavu from Nadi (\$330, 45 minutes). It is advisable to check timetables and always confirm flights the day before departure.

It is a beautiful flight (sometimes turbulent) over stunning reefs to Kadavu from either Nadi or Suva. The approach to Vunisea's Namalata airstrip over Namalata Bay has a spectacular view of Nabukelevu, which rises steeply at the southwestern point of Kadavu. There is talk of another airport being constructed at the eastern end of Kadavu, which would reduce transfer times to nearby resorts considerably. Ideally, have your accommodation and transfers booked in advance, otherwise you could be stranded in Vunisea.

Boat

Suva to Kadavu on the ferry MV *Bulou-ni-Ceva* is \$45 per person one way. This service is mostly for cargo and local use, and it is irregular and unreliable, taking anything from four hours to two days! It visits Kavala Bay,

Vunisea and also Nabukelevu-i-Ra. The trip can be bearable or terrible, depending on the weather you strike. Contact **Kadavu Shipping** (Map p119; ☎ 331 1766, 339 5000, 339 5788; Rona St, Walu Bay) in Suva for bookings.

GETTING AROUND

Kadavu's few roads are restricted to the Vunisea area, except for one rough, unsealed road to Nabukelevu-i-Ra around the south-

ern end of Kadavu. It's easy to walk around Vunisea or to hitch a ride. Small boats are the island group's principal mode of transport. Each resort has its own boat and will pick up guests from Vunisea airstrip; make sure you make arrangements in advance. Boat trips are expensive due to fuel costs and mark-ups. Most boats don't have life jackets or radios. In rough weather it can be a wet and bone-crunching trip to the more remote resorts.

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Lau & Moala Groups



Strewn across the southwest corner of Fiji's vast archipelago, the Lau Group is a brew of deserted atolls and sparsely populated islands surrounded by thick rims of reef. Within the 57 isles are countless bays, beaches, hilly ascents and seemingly unexplored territory. Although the climate is drier than most parts of Fiji, storms can be fierce and some of the bays are used as hurricane shelters by visiting yachts. Tourism is virtually nonexistent, which is precisely why these islands appeal to hardened and patient explorers.

Lau is subdivided into northern and southern Lau, and the Moala Group lies to the west of southern Lau. Although much closer to the mainland, the Moala Group is even further removed from the reaches of tourists and has no facilities whatsoever.

The group sits about halfway between Viti Levu and Tonga and its proximity to this Pacific neighbour has had a significant influence on the group's cultural development. Historically the southeast trade winds made it easy to sail from Tonga to Fiji, but more difficult to return. Tongan and Samoan canoe builders began settling in these islands in the late 1700s, bringing with them their innovative canoe designs. They intermarried with Fijians, and the Tongan influence is expressed in names, language, food, decoration, architecture and physical features. The islanders of southern Lau are well known for their crafts.

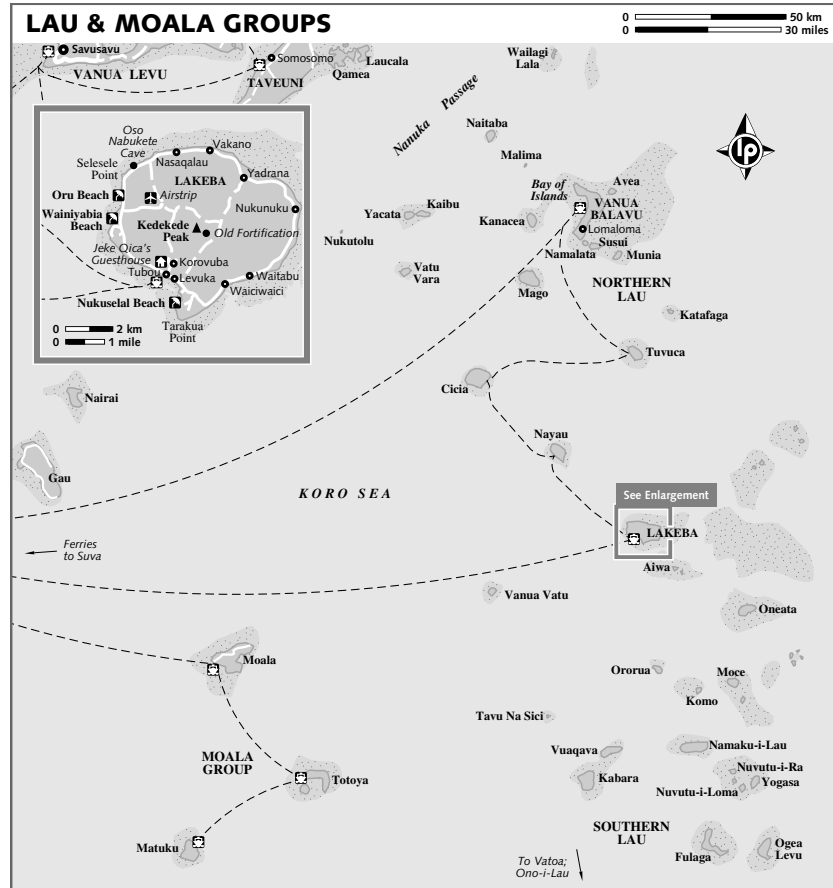
HIGHLIGHTS

- Weigh anchor in a kayak, dingy or yacht in the spectacular **Bay of Islands** (p232)
- Dose up on a fusion of Tongan and Fijian culture in the villages of **Vanua Balavu** (p233)
- **Snorkel** (p232) or **kayak** (p232) the smorgasbord of coral reefs and atolls
- Marvel at the limestone walls of **Oso Nabukete** (p234) and **Vale Ni Bose** (p233)



■ POPULATION: 11,500

■ AREA: 114,000 SQ KM



History

Lau first came into contact with Europeans in 1800 when the American schooner *Argo* was wrecked on Bukatatanoa Reef east of Lakeba. Fijians from Oneata island looted the wreck for muskets and gunpowder and the sailors lived with the islanders until being killed in disputes.

The greatest visiting influence, though, came from Lau's eastern Pacific neighbour, and by the mid-19th century the whole region was dominated by Tonga. In 1847 Tongan nobleman Enele Ma'afu, cousin of King Taufa'ahau of Tonga, led an armada of war canoes to Vanua Balavu to investigate the killing of a preacher. Six years later the king appointed Ma'afu governor of the

Tongans in Fiji. After the later murder of 17 Wesleyans, Ma'afu took Vanua Balavu by force and subjugated its inhabitants. He then established Sawana village near Lomaloma as his base. The Tongans assisted in local Fijian wars in return for protection by Chief Cakobau of Bau. By 1855 Ma'afu had become a powerful force in the region and influential throughout much of Fiji. He was one of the signatories to the Deed of Cession to Britain and became officially recognised as Roko Tui Lau (Protector of the Tongans of Vanua Balavu). After his death in 1881, Tongan power weakened, the title passed to the Tui Nayau (Traditional Fijian Chief of Lau) and many Tongans returned to their home country.

The chiefs of the Lau Group have always been surprisingly influential; those with the title Tui Nayau include the late Ratu Sukuna and Ratu Mara.

Geography & Geology

Most islands of the Lau Group are made of composite materials; some are pure limestone and a few are volcanic. The group is scattered amid 400km of ocean in which interrupted periods of uplift have permitted coral to grow over the limestone, creating great masses of reefs. Relatively recent volcanic activity is evident by the lava domes on top of the limestone bases of some of the smaller islands.

Information

There is little infrastructure for travellers and there are no banks and no credit card facilities so travellers will need to take sufficient cash for their entire stay. On Lau there is a **Lomaloma post office** (☎ 889 5000) on Vanua Balavu, and a **Tubou post office** (☎ 882 3001) on Lakeba. Tabou also has a **police station** (☎ 882 3043), telephone exchange and **hospital** (☎ 882 3153).

Activities & Tours

The remote Lau Group is still relatively unexplored in terms of diving. The Lau waters are protected by the Fijian Government and commercial fishing is prohibited in the area.

Diving, kayaking and swimming are possible in the Bay of Islands on Vanua Balavu (see right). Diving off Waillagi Lala is for experienced divers only.

Although there are no dive companies based in Lau, there are commercial divers working in the *bêche-de-mer* (sea cucumber) trade who can provide experienced divers

A LOCAL DELICACY

One week after the full moon in November, the people of Vanua Balavu witness the annual rising of the *baloto* (tiny green and brown sea worms). At sunrise the Susui villagers collect worms by the thousands. The catch is first soaked in fresh water, then packed into baskets and cooked overnight in a *lovo* (pit oven). The fishy-tasting baked worms are considered a delicacy.

with equipment. Ask for advice and details at Moana's Guesthouse and Nawanawa Estate on Vanua Balavu (see opposite).

In the absence of diving companies, **snorkelling** is the next best way to experience the sizeable reefs and their marine life. Both Moana's Guesthouse and Nawanawa Estate can provide snorkelling equipment but it's also a good idea to bring your own.

Earth River (☎ in the USA 1800-643-2784, 845-626-2665; www.earthriver.com) is an adventure company offering 10-day kayaking expeditions that encompass Pacific Harbour, Beqa and four days of kayaking around Vanua Balavu. There are only about three or four trips a year but they are a fantastic opportunity to snorkel and swim in areas that would be difficult for independent travellers to get to. Accommodation on Viti Levu is in hotels but around Vanua Balavu it's village stays and beach camping. Rates (per person US\$2900) include all meals and accommodation.

Getting There & Away

Air Fiji flies Suva–Vanua Balavu (see opposite), Suva–Lakeba (p234) and Suva–Moala (p235).

If you have plenty of time you can also reach the Lau Group by cargo/passenger boats (see p262) and Moala Group (p262).

Yachties wishing to visit Lau need to clear customs and immigration first (see p253) and apply for permission from the Ministry for Fijian Affairs.

NORTHERN LAU

Northern Lau's largest island is Vanua Balavu. It has an airstrip, as does Kaibu. The islands of Naitauba, Kanacea, Mago and Cicia are important for copra production.

VANUA BALAVU

Arguably the most scenic of Lau's islands, Vanua Balavu is enigmatic in shape and substance. Averaging about 2km wide, it resides with eight other smaller islands inside a barrier reef. The islands curl their way around the surrounding water like an inverted S, creating sheltered bays and corridors of calm sea. The interior of Vanua Balavu is scattered with rugged hills and the group's perimeter is ringed by pristine sandy beaches. The celebrated **Bay of Islands**, also known as Qilaqila, sits in the northwest

pocket and is a spectacular site for diving, kayaking and swimming. It's also a lovely place for yachties to draw anchor. Within the rugged limestone hills is **Vale Ni Bose** (literally the Meeting House of the Gods), a gaping cave with limestone walls and a pool of crystalline water. On clear days the hazy green shape of Taveuni is visible across a 115km stretch of open sea.

Vanua Balavu's largest village is **Lomaloma** on the southeast coast. In the mid-19th century Tonga conquered the island and the village of Sawana was built next to Lomaloma. Fifth-generation Tongan descendants still live in **Sawana**, and the houses with rounded ends show the influence of Tongan architecture. The first of Fiji's ports, Lomaloma was regularly visited by ships trading in the Pacific. In its heyday Lomaloma had many hotels and shops as well as Fiji's first botanical gardens, though little remains of its past grandeur. The Fijian inhabitants of Vanua Balavu trace their ancestry to Tailevu (southeastern Viti Levu) and Cakaudrove (eastern Vanua Levu and Taveuni). Today the people of Vanua Balavu rely largely on copra and *bêches-de-mer* for their income.

Curious visitors exploring the island on their own will be welcomed in villages but ask for directions before you head out, and respect village etiquette (see p36).

Sleeping

Moana's Guesthouse (☎ 889 5006; r per person without/bathroom incl meals \$65/85; ☒) Accommodation options may not be rife in Sawana, but Moana's covers all bases, offering beach and village accommodation. Sitting right on the shore about 1km from the village are three unfussy *bure* (traditional dwellings). Two are thatched and share facilities and one has a private bathroom. There is also a Tongan-style cottage within the village with a small dorm, one double room and communal living area. Moana's can arrange boat, snorkelling and fishing trips, but immersing yourself in the village is just as rewarding.

Nawanawa Estate (☎ 889 5144; helenetuwai@hotmail.com; camping per person \$10, s/d \$40/70; ☒) Less than 5km from the airport, this comfortable homestay is run by the extremely friendly Ratu Joe Tuwai, a Daliconi local, and his New Zealand wife Helene. Accommodation is in their colonial-style home,

FATAL ATTRACTION

There is a freshwater lake near the village of Mavana, on the northeast corner of Vanua Balavu, which is considered sacred. The people of Mavana gather here annually for a fun ceremony authorised by their traditional priest. Naked except for a leaf skirt, they jump around in the lake to stir up the muddy waters. This provokes the large fish known as *yawa* (a type of mullet usually only found in the sea) to spring into the air. It is believed that the male fish are attracted to the female villagers and thus easily trapped in the nets. Legend has it that the fish were dropped into the lake by a Tongan princess while flying over the island on her way to visit her lover on Taveuni.

which Ratu Joe built. The meals here are an added treat (breakfast/lunch/dinner \$5/10/12) and include freshly baked bread and catch of the day bought from local fishermen. Ratu Joe and Helene provide excellent insight into the island's geography and history and can also arrange visits to Vale Ni Bose.

Getting There & Away

Vanua Balavu is 355km east of Nadi, about halfway to Tonga. **Air Fiji** (☎ 331 3666; www.airfiji.com.fj) flies between Suva and Vanua Balavu on Thursday and Sunday (\$195 one way, 1½ hours).

Saliabasaga Shipping has fortnightly trips from Suva to the Lau Group, including Vanua Balavu. Expect to spend about a week on board to travel to the far reaches of the southern Lau Group. See p262 for details.

KAIBU

Kaibu (3.5 sq km) is a privately owned island in the northern Lau Group, 55km west of Vanua Balavu. It shares a fringing reef with the larger island of Yacata. The extremely exclusive **Kaimbu Island Resort** (☎ 888 0333; www.fiji-islands.com/kaimbu.html) has been in a state of renovation and sale for several years and rumours of its imminent operation or demise abound. Either way it has been closed indefinitely but if it does reopen, it promises to rival Turtle Island Resort (in the Yasawas) in the opulence stakes.

SOUTHERN LAU

Lakeba, being the hereditary seat of the Tui Nayau (Chief of Lau), is the most important island in southern Lau. There are 16 other islands, mostly within a radius of 100km southeast of Lakeba. Vatoa and Ono-i-Lau are more isolated and much further south.

The islanders of southern Lau are well known for their crafts: Moce, Vatoa, Ono-i-Lau and Namuka produce *masi* (bark cloth) and the artisans of Fulaga are excellent woodcarvers. You may be able purchase crafts from villages on the islands or from handicrafts shops in Suva.

LAKEBA

Lakeba is a roughly circular volcanic island, approximately 9km in diameter, with a small peninsula at its southern end. Its 54-sq-km area is home to about 2000 people. There is a road around its perimeter and several roads across the interior. To the east is a wide lagoon enclosed by a barrier reef.

The island has nine villages. Yams, coconuts and *kumala* (sweet potatoes) grow well along the fertile coast and the interior is covered with grasslands, pandanus and pine plantations.

Lakeba was historically a meeting place for Fijians and Tongans; it was also the place where Christian missionaries first entered Fiji via Tonga and Tahiti. Two missionaries, Cross and Cargill, developed a system for written Fijian here and produced the first book in that language. Lakeba was frequently visited by Europeans before the trading settlement was established at Levuka in the Lomaiviti.

The provincial office (☎ 882 3164) for the Lau Group is in Tubou at the southern end of Lakeba. There is also a guesthouse, post office, police station and hospital here, and some of the nearby beaches are good for snorkelling and swimming. Enele Ma'afu, the once-powerful Tongan chief, is buried here, as is Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, formerly an influential Tui Lau who established the Native Lands Trust Board in 1940.

The island has caves worth visiting, especially **Oso Nabukete**, which translates as 'too narrow for pregnant women'. Adorned with huge pillars of limestone stalactites and inhabited by bats, it's an awesome ex-

SHARK CALLING

Traditionally, the villagers of Nasaqalau performed a shark-calling ritual in October or November each year. About a month prior to the ceremony, the spot was marked by a post and a flag of *masi* (bark cloth) and a traditional priest ensured no-one went near the post or fished in the nearby area. On the designated day the caller, standing neck-high in the water, would chant for up to an hour. A school of sharks, led by a white shark, would be drawn to the place. All of the sharks except the white shark would be killed and eaten by the villagers.

Reports on whether shark calling is still performed here vary from village to village, like a wild rural myth. However, the general consensus seems to be that the ritual has not been enacted in earnest for some 100 years.

ample of nature's might. Take some *kava* (a narcotic drink pepper shrub) as a *sevusevu* (gift for the chief) to Nasaqalau village, where you can arrange a guide (bring your own torch). There is also an **old fortification** in the middle of the island at Kekekede Peak where the people retreated to during times of war.

Sleeping

Call the **Lau provincial office** (☎ 882 3164) to check if you can visit the island and to book accommodation.

Small **Jeke Qica's Guesthouse** (☎ 882 3035; rind meals \$40) in Tubou offers rooms with a shared bathroom inside 'Jack's house'. Meals are simple but filling and Jack can provide interesting commentary on the area's culture and history.

Getting There & Away

Air Fiji flies between Suva and Lakeba on Monday and Wednesday (\$200, 1½ hours). Carriers and buses circle the island.

Saliabasaga Shipping and Kabua Development Corporation each have slow fortnightly trips from Suva to the southern Lau Group, including Lakeba. One-way fares including meals start at \$75. See p262 for details.

MOALA GROUP

The three islands of this Group – Moala, Totoya and Matuku – are geographically removed from Lau but administered as part of the Eastern Division. They are about half-way between Kadavu and the southern Lau Group. The islands are the eroded tops of previously submerged volcanic cones that have lifted more than 3km to the sea surface. Totoya's horseshoe shape is the result of a sunken volcano crater forming a landlocked lagoon. The volcano was active 4.9 million years ago. Matuku has rich volcanic soil, steep wooded peaks and a submerged crater on its western side. However, this beautiful island is generally inaccessible to visitors. Each of the islands has villages.

MOALA

Moala (65 sq km) is the largest and most northerly of the group. It is about 160km from Suva. The island is roughly triangular in shape, with a deeply indented coast.

The highest peak reaches 460m and has two small **crater lakes**. It has extremely fertile soil and supports nine villages. The villagers produce copra and bananas, which they send to Suva, a night's sail away. The ancestors of Moala's inhabitants came from Viti Levu.

Moala has no tourist infrastructure, and although you don't need to be formally invited as such, your only option for accommodation is with a local family. Consequently, you will need to organise this with a friend or member of the family before you arrive. Additionally you should ask beforehand what kind of *sevusevu* to take with you.

Getting There & Away

Air Fiji (☎ 331 3666; www.airfiji.com.fj) flies between Suva and Moala on Tuesday only (\$180, 45 minutes).

Khans Shipping operates cargo/passenger boats that travel to Moala, Matuku and Totoya in the Moala Group once a month. See p262 for details.

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