

# Lomaiviti Group



Lomaiviti (Middle Fiji) is the heart of Fiji. It's the place where the Fijian nation came into being. The islands lie just off the east coast of Viti Levu, but they feel like another world in another time. They are rustic and peaceful, and travellers tend to stay here far longer than they intended.

Historic Ovalau is the closest island to Viti Levu. Its rugged volcanic landscape, sharp peaks and central crater have a prehistoric beauty. Picturesque Levuka, Ovalau's main town, was Fiji's earliest European settlement and the country's first capital. It is definitely worth a visit, as is Lovoni village, deep in the extinct caldera. There are plenty of opportunities for diving, snorkelling and island hopping – and even more for afternoon-napping, people-watching and drinking *kava* (a narcotic drink) – so you can easily spend a few days here.

The sea south of Ovalau is sprinkled with the tiny coral islands of Leleuvia, Yanuca Lailai and Caqalai. Each has beautiful white sandy beaches, good snorkelling and simple, budget resorts. Hawksbill turtles visit their beaches to lay eggs. To the north, wedge-shaped Koro rises abruptly from deep water. It has lush rainforest and great diving nearby. The resort island of Naigani is northwest of Ovalau.

The annual migration of a pod of humpback whales brings them along the east coast of Ovalau between May and September.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Eat the breakfast that goes on forever at **Levuka Homestay** (p177)
- Drink in the atmosphere – and the cheap Fiji Bitter – at the **Ovalau Club** (p179), Levuka
- Hike around **Lovoni** (p176), the village in a fractured volcanic crater
- Wander Levuka's **colonial streets** (p174), bumping into the ghosts of the first colonists
- Snorkel around **Caqalai** (p180), the almost-perfect budget resort
- Exchange *bula* (a greeting) and fall into conversation with the locals in **Levuka** (p174)
- Dive the **Levuka Passage** (opposite), just minutes from the shore, if you're an experienced diver
- Watch for **whales** (p176) in Levuka's harbour, from May to September



■ POPULATION: 15,000

■ AREA: 409 SQ KM

## History

The town of Levuka in the 19th century was a bolthole where embittered sailors jumped ship, escaped convicts hid out, polygamous drunks took strings of island brides, and disputes were settled with the musket.

As early as 1806, European sandalwood traders stopped at Levuka in search of supplies, but they did not begin to settle here until the 1830s. They built schooners, traded for *bêche-de-mer* (sea cucumber), turtle shells and coconut oil and settled down with several Fijian women, explaining to the local people this was the custom where they came from.

The Lovoni people, warriors of the caldera in the centre of Ovalau, saw the settlers as interlopers, and repeatedly burned down their timber town. The whites lived under the protection of the chief of Levuka, who was murdered by raiding Lovoni in 1846.

Levuka grew and by the 1850s it had reputation for drunkenness, violence and immorality. It attracted beachcombers and freebooters, comen and middlemen, dreamers and crooks. In the 1870s a flood of planters and other settlers came to Fiji, and the booming town reached a population of about 3000 Europeans, who drank in 52 hotels. The cotton boom was brief and its aftermath bitter. A short-lived Ku Klux Klan was formed in Levuka with the (quickly frustrated) aim of installing a white supremacist government.

In 1825 the coastal villagers ended their alliance with the chief of Verata (a village on Viti Levu's Rewa Delta), and gave allegiance to Ratu Seru Cakobau, the powerful chief of Bau (an island off the southeast coast of Viti Levu). Cakobau attempted unsuccessfully to form a national government in 1871, and in 1874 Great Britain acted on an earlier offer by Cakobau and Fiji was ceded to the Crown. Fiji thus became a British colony and Levuka was proclaimed its capital. (For more information see p29.) The government was officially moved to Suva in 1882. By the end of the 19th century, trade was also shifting to Suva, and with copra markets plummeting in the 1930s, Levuka declined further.

While the northern end of town was swept away in the hurricanes of 1888 and 1905, many of the boom-time buildings remain.

## Climate

The climate of these islands is sunnier and drier than the east coast of Viti Levu, al-

though Levukans say that if it doesn't rain for a week, it's almost a drought.

## Information

All facilities for tourists in the Lomaiviti Group are in Levuka, Ovalau. Fast, cheap Internet is available at Ovalau Watersports, and the Royal Hotel also has a computer in its office where you can get online.

Dial ☎ 911 for the ambulance or police.

**Colonial National Bank** (Beach St, Levuka) Exchanges travellers cheques and currency.

**Levuka Hospital** (☎ 344 0221; Beach St, Levuka; ☎ outpatient treatment 8am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat, emergencies only after hr) A good, new hospital at the northern end of town. Efficient doctors will treat tourists for \$5.

**Ovalau Tourist Information Centre** (☎ 330 0356; Community Centre, Morris Hedstrom Bldg, Levuka; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-4.30pm Mon-Fri, Sat till 1pm) Features friendly staff who will do their best to help you hunt down any information you're after, or they'll bat you to Ovalau Watersports.

**Ovalau Watersports** (☎ 344 0166; www.owfiji.com; Beach St, Levuka; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, till 1pm Sat) A dive shop cum information centre cum Internet provider cum tour-booking office.

**Police station** (☎ 344 0222; Totoga Lane, Levuka)

**Post office** (Beach St, Levuka) Near Queen's Wharf at the southern end of town; there's a cardphone outside.

**Westpac bank** (Beach St, Levuka) Has the only ATM in Lomaiviti; also exchanges travellers cheques and foreign currency, and gives cash advances on Visa or MasterCard.

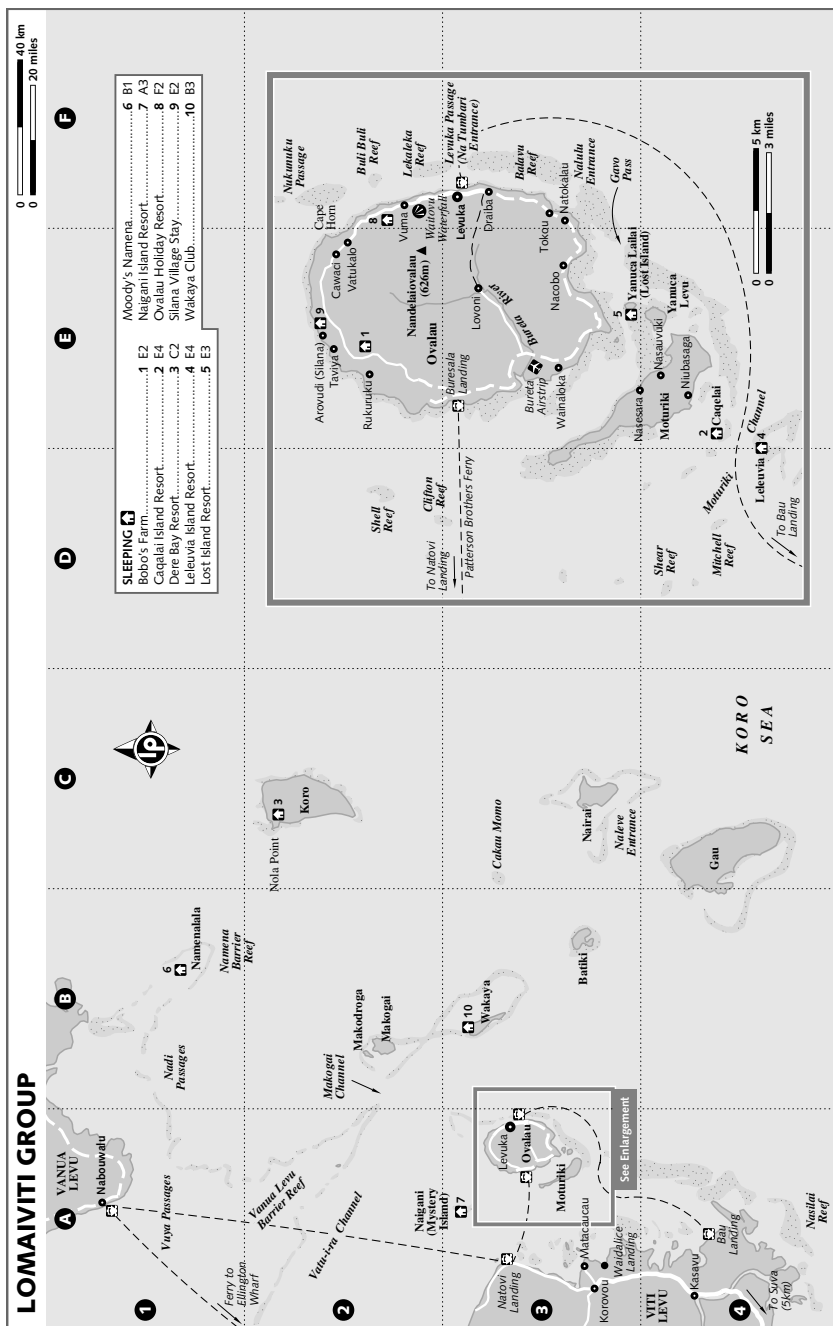
## Activities

### CYCLING

Cycling is a good way to explore Levuka and its surrounding area. The road to the south is fairly flat, and the north is OK until about Cawaci, after which it gets very hilly. It takes about a day to cycle around the island. Mountain bikes are available from **Levuka's Ovalau Watersports** (Beach St; half-/full day \$10/15).

### DIVING & SNORKELLING

The Lomaiviti waters offer some great dive sites where you can encounter manta rays, hammerheads, turtles, white-tip reef sharks and lion fish. There is stunning soft coral at Snake Island and Shark Reef in the Moturiki Channel, and excellent hard coral at Waitovu Passage (the best snorkelling spot – although most dives are suitable for snorkellers). The Pipeline, two minutes by boat from town at Levuka Passage, is for experienced divers only. Here, the fishy waste from



the Pafco tuna plant attracts giant groupers, eagle rays and bull sharks. **Ovalau Watersports** (☎ 344 0166; www.owlfiji.com; Beach St, Levuka) offers two-tank dives/PADI Open Water Course for \$150/460, including gear (minimum of two divers). Instruction can be in English or German. Reef snorkelling trips, accompanying divers, cost \$40 per person including equipment.

## Tours

As a general rule, phone ahead to arrange pick-ups from your hotel.

**Epi's Midland Tour** (☎ 602 1103, 923 6011; epitours@hotmail.com; full-day per person \$35, minimum 4; ☎ departs 10.30am-11.30am Mon-Sat) takes you into the crater of an extinct volcano, which sits in the centre of Ovalau like a giant, upturned, broken eggshell. This is the site of Lovoni village. The tour is run by Epi, a Lovoni married to an Englishwoman. It is very popular, because the scenery is stunning and Epi is a fantastic storyteller. Epi's version of the history of Fiji has the Lovoni as the prime movers in almost every epoch. He tells how they were the only Fijians undefeated in battle and the only Fijians sold as slaves. The one thing he says they didn't do is burn the Masonic Lodge in Levuka.

The tour is a combination of trekking and transport on local carrier. Epi will point out many medicinal plants during your trek. Once you've reached the village and presented your *sevusevu* (gift for the village chief) – assuming the chief is around – you can take a dip in the river. A delicious lunch is laid on in one of the village homes. You can book the tour through the Royal Hotel. Price includes transfers and lunch.

The next three are organised through **Ovalau Holiday Resort** (☎ 344 0329; ohrfiji@connect.com.fj).

**Fishing trips** (per hour \$40) leave Ovalau Holiday Resort in search of rock cod, trevally and Spanish mackerel in Levuka Passage, Waitovu Passage and Toki Passage. The resort will barbecue your catch for free.

**Round Island 4WD Tours** (per person \$35, minimum 4; ☎ departs 10am) takes in the entire island, including the major historical sites around Levuka, the village of Lovoni, and the Solomon Islanders' settlement at Wainaloka. You drop in for refreshments at Bobo's Farm in Rukuruku, hike out to a waterfall and swim in the Bureta River. The tour includes

a picnic lunch. You can also book through Ovalau Watersports.

A **Waitovu Tour** (per person \$15) is also offered from time to time. Travellers hike to the peak of Gun Rock, through pine forests and *kava* plantations, then swim in Waitovu waterfall. It takes about 3½ hours.

The following three can be booked through **Ovalau Watersports** (☎ 344 0166; www.owlfiji.com; Beach St, Levuka).

**Silana Village Tour** (per person \$30, minimum 6) runs every Wednesday and includes a *meke* (traditional dance), a *lovo* (feast cooked in a pit oven), and a chance to make your own handicrafts from coconut and pandanus leaves. Book at Ovalau Watersports or the Royal Hotel before 4pm Tuesday, but double check the situation by phone with Silana Village (see p178). The guide, Seru, will also take you around his village any time for \$15 (including lunch). Before you set out, ascertain whether you're getting the full package or just a look around the fairly ordinary village.

**Talanoa** means 'have a chat', and with **Tea & Talanoa Tours** (per person \$15) you can have a chat with Fijian grandmother Bubu Kara or long-term expat resident Duncan Chrichton ('Mr Duncan'). Bubu makes delicious scones, and Mr Duncan has a fabulous garden.

Town tours (per person \$10) of Levuka are available from Nox, the personable gardener at Levuka Homestay. Nox also runs a Waitovu tour, similar to that described earlier (\$15). There are also town tours (\$8) that leave from Ovalau Tourist Information Centre at 9am and 2pm weekdays.

**Wainaloka Tour** (per person \$30; ☎ departs 10.30am Sun) Attend an Anglican church service and tour this settlement of Solomon Islanders, the descendants of people blackbirded to work Ovalau's plantations. The tour can be booked with, and departs from, the Royal Hotel and includes transfers and lunch at Wainaloka.

Day trips to **Leleuvia** (p189) or **Caqalai** (p180), including lunch, cost \$50 per person.

## OVALAU

Ovalau is the largest island in the Lomaiviti Group. The capital, Levuka, is the only town, and the only place with significant shops and services.

The Bureta airstrip and Buresala ferry landing are on the western side of Ovalau,

while Levuka is on the eastern coast. A gravel road winds around the perimeter of the island and another follows the Bureta River inland to Lovoni village.

## LEVUKA & AROUND

pop 3750

Levuka is the most picturesque town in Fiji, and one of very few places in the South Pacific that still has a significant number of colonial buildings. Sandwiched between the sea and lush, green mountains, the timber pool halls, offices and stores downtown look like they've been lifted straight out of a John Ford western.

Indigenous Fijians, Indo-Fijians, Chinese Fijians, part-European Fijians and a smattering of sometimes eccentric expats live together in laid-back Levuka, but the racial tensions that run through the bigger islands are largely absent. Nearly everyone is welcoming to visitors, and if you stay for a week, you'll meet half the town.

The food is surprisingly good, Levuka is the only place on the island where you can buy a beer, and nobody is going to try to carve your name on a worthless piece of wood. When Levukans stop you in the street, they genuinely want to know who you are. Come and find out who they are. It's worth the effort.

Levuka has the Lomaiviti islands' only infrastructure (see p171). For details of tours around Levuka and Ovalau, see p173.

## Orientation

Beach St is Levuka's main drag. Don't bother looking for the 'beach', because there isn't one. The north of town is marked by one of two boulders going by the name of Gun Rock and you can follow your nose to the Pafco tuna cannery at the southern end; it's the source of sudden wafts of ferociously fishy smells.

## Sights

Start your walking tour at Nasova, about 10 minutes' stroll south of the Pafco cannery. The Deed of Cession, handing over Fiji to Britain, was signed here in 1874. **Cession Site**, a memorial commemorating the event, is a pair of anchors and a scattering of plaque-bearing stones.

Across the road is the nutritious-looking **Provincial Bure**, a bit like a loaf of wholemeal bread covered in straw, where Prince Charles

made his headquarters when he represented Her Majesty's Government during the transition to independence in 1970. Next door is faded **Nasova House**, once the governor's residence. The small building furthest south is where Prince Charles stayed.

The **tuna cannery** (Pafco), at the southern end of Levuka, employs about 800 people and gives the whole town its distinctive odour. It was occupied by Lovoni villagers during the 2000 coup, as part of a dispute about unloading cargo.

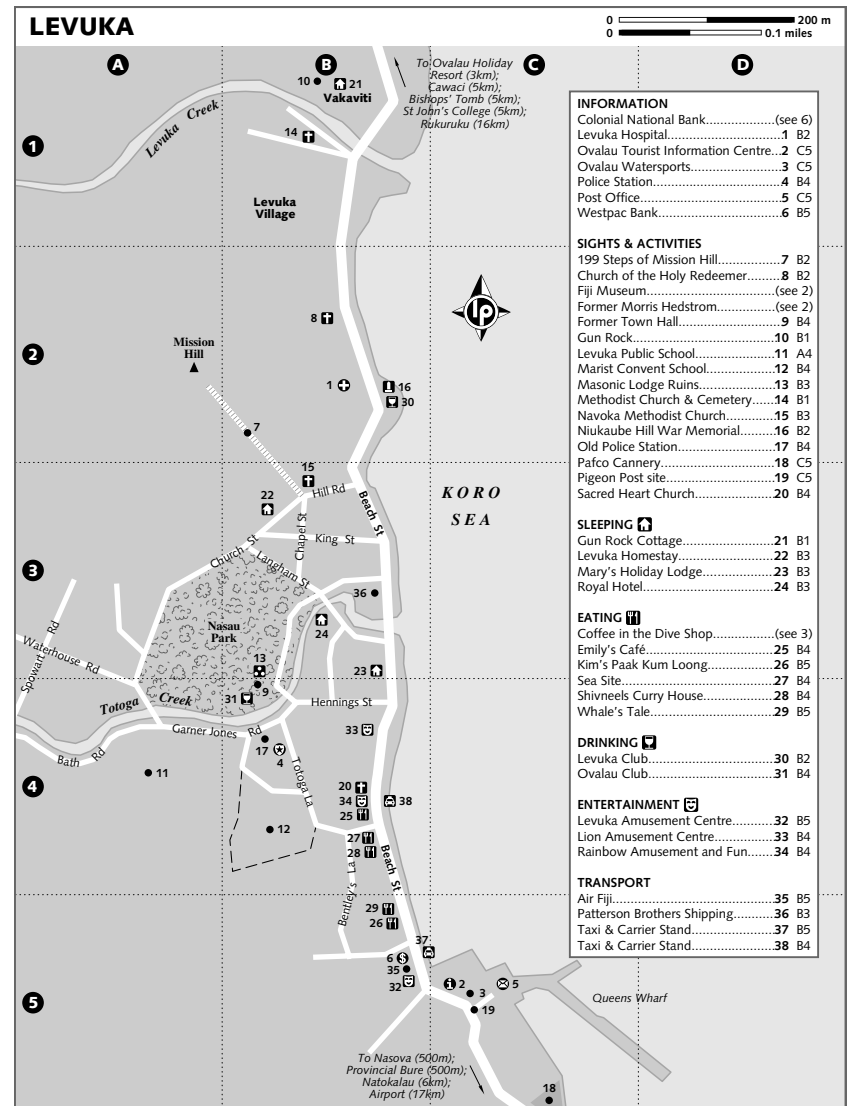
Head north along **Beach St** where the streetscape dates from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Just in front of the post office is the site of the original **Pigeon Post**, marked by a nondescript drinking fountain in the centre of the road. From the timber loft that stood here, pigeons provided the first postal link between Levuka and Suva. The birds flew the distance in less than 30 minutes, and were considerably faster and more reliable than Post Fiji.

A few doors away stands the **former Morris Hedstrom trading store** (1868), the original and first MH store in Fiji. Behind its restored façade is the Levuka Community Centre, library and a branch of the **Fiji Museum** (admission \$2; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), which offers a fascinating, if chaotically organised, glimpse of old Levuka, through its wonderfully atmospheric displays.

**Sacred Heart Church** (Beach St) dates from 1858. The clock strikes each hour twice, with a minute in between. Locals say the first strike is an alarm to warn people who are operating on 'Fiji time'. The light on the spire guides ships through Levuka Passage. From the church, head west along Totoga Lane to explore the backstreets.

The **Marist Convent School** (1882) was a girls' school opened by Catholic missionaries and run by Australian and French nuns. It is now a lively co-ed primary school. It was built largely of coral stone in an attempt to protect it from the hurricanes that have claimed so many buildings in town, and it remains an impressive monument against the mountain backdrop.

The little weatherboard building on the corner of Garner Jones Rd and Totoga Lane was Levuka's original **police station** (1874), and across Totoga Creek in Nasau Park you'll find Fiji's first private club – the colonial-style timber **Ovalau Club** (1904). It's well worth



stopping in for a beer, if it's open. See p179 for more on this club and its famous letter. Next door to the Ovalau Club is the **former town hall** (1898), built in typical British colonial style in honour of Queen Victoria's silver jubilee.

Alongside this place, you'll find the stone shell of the South Pacific's first **Masonic lodge**;

Lodge Polynesia (1875) was once Levuka's only Romanesque building, but it was burnt to a husk in the 2000 coup by villagers egged on by their church leaders. Local Methodists had long alleged that Masons were in league with the devil and that tunnels led from beneath the lodge to Nasova House, the Royal Hotel, and through the centre of the world to



Masonic headquarters in Scotland. Surprisingly, this turned out not to be the case.

Return across the creek and follow Garner Jones Rd west to the **Levuka Public School** (1879). This was Fiji's first formal school and many of Fiji's prominent citizens were educated here including Percy Morris and Maynard Hedstrom. If you continue up the steps behind the school you can join some locals for a chat at a popular resting spot. Walk back down to Garner Jones Rd, turn left into Church St and pass Nasau Park. There are many old colonial homes on the hillsides and the romantically named **199 Steps of Mission Hill** are worth climbing for the fantastic view – although, if you count them, you might find there are closer to 185 steps. The very simple coral and stone Gothic-style **Navoka Methodist Church** (1864), near the foot of the steps, is one of the oldest churches in Fiji.

Head down Chapel St then left along Langham St. The **Royal Hotel** (1860s) is Fiji's oldest hotel, rebuilt in 1903. It is the lone survivor of the once-numerous pubs of the era. Originally it had an open veranda with lace balustrading, but this was built in to increase the size of the rooms. Check out the fantastic old snooker room, and play a game of hunt-the-Royal-Hotel-staff.

Back on Beach St, continue north to **Niu-kaube Hill**, on a point near the water. This was once the site of Ratu Cakobau's Supreme Court and Parliament House. This is also where the first indentured Indian labourers landed in Fiji after being forced to anchor offshore for several weeks in an attempt to control an outbreak of cholera. The site now has a memorial to locals who fought and died in WWI and WWII.

North of here is the Anglican **Church of the Holy Redeemer** (1904), with its colourful stained glass and altar of *yaka* and *dakua* wood. Tidy little **Levuka village**, once the home of Tui (Chief) Cakobau, is about 200m further north. In the **cemetery** next to the village's Methodist Church, is the grave of American consul JB Williams. It was his claims for financial compensation that led Cakobau to hand over Fiji to Britain.

With the chief's permission you can climb one of two local sites known as **Gun Rock** for a great view over Levuka. In 1849 Commodore Wilkes, of the US Exploring Expedition, pounded this peak from his ship with canon fire in an attempt to impress the chief of

Levuka. Commodore Goodenough repeated the 'entertainment' in 1874. You can still find canon ball scars on the rock. (The other Gun Rock is much smaller, and named for the canon mounted upon it in the 1850s.) Gun Rock might be a good place to spot **whales**; about 10 humpback whales swim past between May and September. In 2005 they spent days around Levuka's harbour.

Walk, cycle or take a taxi the 7km north to Cawaci, where you'll find the Gothic-style **Bishops' Tomb** (1922), with Latin inscriptions and spooky acoustics, where Fiji's first two Roman Catholic bishops are entombed on a point overlooking the sea. From here you can see the limestone and coral **St John's College** (1894), where the sons of Fijian chiefs were educated in English. These days, girls are educated here, too. The boys' and girls' dormitories are separated by a bridge that no student is allowed to cross after 6pm.

## LOVONI

Lovoni village nestles among thick, prehistoric rainforest in a cracked but spectacular extinct volcano crater in the centre of Ovalau. It is the navel of the island and the heart of local indigenous culture. There's no accommodation for travellers here, but guided tours are available from Levuka (see p173). A hike around the caldera can be muddy and slippery – and the weather can change in an instant – so bring some hardy footwear. Your guide should provide a *sevusevu* for the chief (if he's around) and point out the **chief's burial site** opposite the church and **Korolevu hill fortification**, high on the crater rim, where villagers took refuge in times of war.

The villagers of Lovoni are extremely proud people. They believe that since Chief Cakobau was only able to defeat them with trickery, not by war, they are the strongest tribe in Fiji (see the boxed text, opposite). On 7 July each year, the enslavement of the Lovoni people is commemorated. People of all religions gather in the same church and the history is read out.

There is a Levuka-Lovoni truck leaving Levuka at 7am and 11am on Monday to Saturday, which returns at about 3pm.

## RUKURUKU

The village of Rukuruku is a bumpy 17km drive north of Levuka. There are fantastic views across the sea on the way. Near the

## WARRIORS IN CHAINS: FIJI'S ONLY SLAVES

The saddest exhibit in the Fiji Museum at Levuka is the photograph of a 'dwarf' priest and two Lovoni warriors who were sold by Tui Cakobau to the Barnum & Bailey circus in the USA. In 1870 and 1871 Cakobau fought battle after battle with the ferocious Lovoni highlanders, who regularly sacked the settlement of Levuka and did not accept Cakobau's claim to be king of all Fiji. After repeated attempts to penetrate their hill fort failed, Cakobau sent a Methodist missionary to subdue the people. The Lovoni put their trust in a 'dwarf priest' (actually just a short bloke) who had the ability to foresee the future. The priest was the first to notice the approaching missionary and, seeing a brightness emanating from him, believed he came in peace. The missionary read from the *Bible* in Bauan, referring to the Lovoni villagers as the lost sheep of Fiji. He then invited them to a reconciliation feast with Cakobau.

On 29 June 1871, the Lovoni people came down from the safety of their village to Levuka, and in good faith put aside their weapons. However, as they started their meal, Cakobau's warriors caught them off guard, quickly surrounding and capturing them.

Cakobau humiliated his captives horribly, then sold them as slaves for £3 a head. His takings helped him form his government. Families were separated as the villagers were dispersed as far as Kavala (in the Kadavu Group), Yavusania (near Nadi on Viti Levu), Lovoni-Ono (in the Lau Group) and Wailevu (on Vanua Levu). The Lovoni were the only Fijians ever to suffer this fate. When the British administration took over Fiji, it freed the Lovoni slaves, and the blackbirding of other Pacific Islanders began instead.

village is a black-sand beach with a view of Naigani island, and a small waterfall about 15 minutes' walk up the valley. It's best to arrange a day out there with Bobo (see p173) to avoid trespassing on village property. Schoolchildren might sing you a song and old people will share a bowl of *kava*. Tours are free to house guests at Bobo's Farm. There is a carrier to Rukuruku (\$3) at about 12.30pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday, it only goes as far as Taviya, but give an extra \$10 to the driver and he'll take you to Bobo's. A taxi will cost about \$30 each way.

## AROVUDI (SILANA)

There's a sweep of pretty pebble beach in Arovudi. About 70 people live in the village, but many houses are empty because the inhabitants, including the chief, are away working in Suva. The **Methodist village church** (1918) is made of coral cooked in a *lovo*. A *tabua* (whale's tooth) hangs by the side of the altar; it was presented to the village by the first missionaries who came here. A crypt of stones overlooking the beach was the grave site of a chief, but it frightened the children so the villagers moved the body to the hills where their other ancestors are buried. There is one place to stay, run by the enterprising Seru, who also organises regular tours from Levuka (see p173).

## SLEEPING Levuka

**Levuka Homestay** (☎ 344 0777; www.levukahomestay.com; Church St; s/d incl breakfast \$120/140, extra person \$40) Here you will stay at a lovely neocolonial-style house with great sea views from the deck, fantastic service, and four big, bright, tremendously clean rooms, each one set on its own level. The laid-back owners live on the highest level. You might want to ask for the room below theirs, which has a private deck. Breakfast never ends: delicious servings of fruit, cereal, toast, banana pancakes, muesli, and bacon and eggs keep flowing from the kitchen. There is a high chair and a cot here for babies.

**Royal Hotel** (☎ 344 0024; www.royallevuka.com; dm/s/d/tr \$10/18/28/35, cottages \$80; ♿ ♻️ 🚰) It's a place to stay, it's a thing to see, it's an institution, but Fiji's first hotel is no longer a place to eat. The staff has given up the daily struggle to serve meals, and the only food on offer is an all-day breakfast. This proud timber building has been in the hands of the Ashley family since 1927, and the ghosts of plantation days haunt the bar more frequently than living customers. There is a small swimming pool, a well-equipped weights gym, slow Internet service, twirling ceiling fans, great views from private verandas, and a unique colonial atmosphere you could cut with a cane knife. This place is the real thing. The

sometimes eccentric service may or may not be part of the charm, depending on whether you're hungry, thirsty, in a hurry etc.

**Gun Rock Cottage** (☎ 344 0166; d \$65) There is some controversy over which bit of Levuka rock is actually Gun Rock. The owners of this fan-cooled one-bedroom cottage – also the owners of Ovalau Watersports – have plumped for the big, black crag that looms over this cabin. They live next door to the cabin, and ensure the place is kept clean and well maintained. There's a full kitchen, a washing machine and a hot-water shower. You can swim out from the sea wall in high tide, and snorkel around the rock under the beacon. Dolphins occasionally pass this way. It's about 1.6km north of town, \$2 by taxi.

**Mary's Holiday Lodge** (☎ 344 0013; Beach St; dm/s/d with shared bathroom incl breakfast \$15/20/35) Once the Old Capital Inn, this basic, friendly, slightly shabby old hotel has sea views from the veranda. It is a noisy, timber building with small rooms, fans, cold-water showers, thin walls and sometimes threadbare bed linen, but you can't argue with the price.

## Around Ovalau

**Ovalau Holiday Resort** (☎ 344 0329; ohrfiji@connect.com.fj; camping per person \$10, dm/s/d \$12/15/\$28, s/d self-contained bungalow \$45/77, extra person \$25; 🚽) Ovalau is not really the spot to come for a resort holiday, but the landscaped gardens of this resort make for a quiet, relaxing place to get away from it all (insofar as Levuka can be described as 'it all'). There is a very good restaurant (see right), a small swimming pool, a little white-sand beach across the road, and a cluster of comfortable bungalows. The two cabins with private facilities have kitchens and hot water, and are Levuka's most suitable accommodation for families. A taxi from Levuka will cost \$5. A carrier (every half hour from town) costs \$0.50.

**Bobo's Farm** (☎ 993 3632, 344 0166; [www.owlfiji.com](http://www.owlfiji.com); Rukuruku; s/d \$35/50) This tranquil retreat is as far away from urban life as you can get while remaining in the 21st century. Accommodation is in a two-bedroom cabin with a small kitchen in the gorgeous garden of Bobo's own home. If you intend to cook for yourself, you'll need to bring your ingredients with you, but the food here is highly praised (breakfast/lunch/dinner \$7/8/12). You can use the fridge in the main house as well as the TV. The main house has a

large deck where local villagers often gather for singing and *kava* drinking.

There's a freshwater stream where you can catch prawns or bathe in small, natural pools. About 15 minutes upstream is a waterfall and 15 minutes downstream is a black-sand beach. The village of Rukuruku is 15 minutes away, too. Bobo will gladly escort you to all of them. He can also arrange island hopping, snorkelling and fishing trips. Book ahead through Ovalau Watersports in Levuka. Bobo can pick you up by boat from Bureta airstrip (\$13) or Buresala ferry landing (\$20).

**Silana Village** (☎ 344 0166; silana@owfiji.com; dm \$18, bure per person \$25) Close to the beach are two basic, wooden cabin *bure* (traditional thatched dwelling; sleeping four) with shared cold-water facilities, and one more traditional five-person dorm *bure*. The owners will cook lunch and dinner (\$5), or you can self-cater from the kitchen. The fishing here is spectacular, and Seru will take you out on a boat to catch trevally, wahoo and skipjack for the price of the fuel. The carrier from Levuka takes about 40 minutes and costs \$1.70.

## EATING

All these options, apart from the Ovalau Holiday Resort, are on Beach St, Levuka.

**Whale's Tale** (☎ 344 0235; breakfast \$6, lunch sandwiches \$5, mains \$9; 🍴 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The Whale's Tale offers Levuka's most tasteful dining experience, in a maritime-themed restaurant where the wine is blessedly reasonable (\$10 a carafe) and standard dishes such as pasta, burgers and fish are far better than they ought to be. The Whale's Tale serves breakfast all day except, curiously, at breakfast time, when it is closed. It's licensed only for people who eat here.

**Ovalau Holiday Resort** (☎ 344 0329; meals \$13; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) It is open all day, seven days, although it might be a good idea to ring ahead and warn them you are coming. The food here is a delicious take on the Indo-Fijian-Chinese-Western hybrid that has become local cuisine. Try it at least once when you are in Levuka.

**Shivneels Curry House** (☎ 344 0616; mains \$3; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner before 6pm Mon-Sat) Exhausted Chinese/Indian food lies collapsed all day in the *bain-marie*, but if you give the owners an hour's notice and \$10, they

will prepare you a delicious curry plate comprising a fish or chicken curry, *dahl* (lentil soup), vegetables, pappadums, rice and rotis, served with a cup of masala tea.

**Kim's Paak Kum Loong** (☎ 344 0059; mains \$8; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Pull up a chair on the balcony and watch Levuka go by (insofar as Levuka's somnambulant drift can be described as 'going by'). Kim's eclectic menu includes standard Chinese dishes, very hot Thai curries and tasty Fijian-style fish, all cooked with flair and care. The big, eclectic buffet (\$13.50) is the best option in town on Sunday night, but don't be afraid to ask them to heat up your plate.

**Emily's Café** (☎ 344 0382; lunch \$4, pizzas \$7; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun) By day, it's an ordinary greasy café fronted by an ordinary Chinese hot-bread shop. By night, it's the surprisingly professional Ovalau Pizza, offering good, crispy, none-too-cheesy pizzas and a bicycle delivery service to local hotels. Delivery is free, but the pizza box costs \$0.35!

**Coffee in the Dive Shop** (sandwiches \$3.50; 🍴 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) This is a Fijian-run café upstairs at Ovalau Watersports. Drop in for sandwiches or, er, a coffee at the dive shop.

**Sea Site** (☎ 344 0382; meals \$4.50; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Grab a tasty chicken curry roti from this otherwise unexciting locals' café.

## Self-Catering

On Thursday, local villagers come to sell fresh fruit and vegetables alongside the waterfront roughly opposite Shivneels on Beach St. You can get most everything else at the numerous general stores on Beach St.

## DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Levuka's clubs are worth a night out, but don't expect bacchanalia.

**Ovalau Club** (🍷 4pm-9.30pm Mon-Thu, 2pm-midnight Fri, 10am-midnight Sat, 10am-9.30pm Sun) This was Fiji's first gentleman's club, and it's a sight in its own right. It's no longer a colonial club in any respect, but expats and part-Europeans gather for a drink at 6pm every Tuesday. Ask the bar staff to show you a letter written by Count Felix von Luckner during WWI, just before his capture on nearby Wakaya. Von Luckner cruised the South Seas in a German raider disguised as a Norwegian merchant ship, sinking Allied supply boats. When he lost

his own ship, he tried to avoid arrest by disguising himself as an English writer on a sporting cruise. He signed the letter 'Max Pemberton'.

**Levuka Club** (🍷 5.30-9.30pm Mon-Thu, 5-11pm Fri, 10am-11pm Sat, 10am-9pm Sun) This place was founded by Indians who were excluded from the Ovalau Club, although now it is, of course, multiracial. Its busy night is Thursday, after payday at Pafco. The beer garden around the back looks out to the sea, Levuka town, and even Pafco.

There are a number of pool halls where locals pot balls to pop music. Those looking for amusement and fun can try **Rainbow Amusement & Fun** (Beach St; 🍷 10am-10pm Mon-Sat). Two similar places, the Lion Amusement Centre and Levuka Amusement Centre, offer amusement and the same opening hours without the fun.

## GETTING THERE & AROUND

For flights head to the office of **Air Fiji** (☎ 344 0139; fax 344 0252; Beach St, Levuka; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) next to Levuka Amusement Centre at the Pafco end of town. From Ovalau, Air Fiji flies to Suva (adult/child \$65/32 one way; 12 minutes; twice-daily Monday to Saturday, once only on Sunday) but will book onward flights throughout Fiji. Credit cards are accepted. The airstrip is about 40 minutes' drive to/from Levuka. Minibuses to the airstrip (\$5 per person) will pick you up from outside the Air Fiji office or from your hotel on request. A taxi costs about \$25.

**Patterson Brothers Shipping** (☎ 344 0125; Beach St; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) has a bus/ferry/bus service from Levuka to Suva via Natovi Landing (\$24, four hours, gather at 4.30am for 5am departure daily). You can also opt to stay on the boat at Natovi to Nabouwalu (on Vanua Levu) and then continue by bus to Labasa (\$55), daily except Tuesday.

Levuka is a port of entry into Fiji for yachters. Authorities don't always answer on radio Channel 16, so anchor near Queen's Wharf and make your way ashore. Formalities are usually simpler here than in Suva.

Levuka is tiny and easy to get around on foot. There is a taxi stand opposite the Westpac bank, where carriers depart for Lovoni. Carriers to Rukuruku leave from a second taxi stand opposite Emily's Café. Mountain bikes can be hired in town (see p171).

## OTHER LOMAIVITI ISLANDS

Lomaiviti's smaller islands are beautiful and welcoming, although some are looked after better than others.

### YANUCA LAILAI

Yanuca Lailai (Lost Island) is an island between Ovalau and Moturiki. It has a hill with a short, golden-sand beach, and the rest of the island is rocky. It is too shallow to swim at low tide but it is possible to snorkel.

**Lost Island Resort** ([www.owlfiji.com/lostisland.htm](http://www.owlfiji.com/lostisland.htm); dm/bure incl meals per person \$40/55) dropped off the map for a while, but luckily it has found itself again. The closest island resort to Levuka, only a short hop from the Bureta airstrip, this tiny place reopened in 2005 with three fine, new, soaring, breeze-cooled *bure*. An eight-bed dorm has been added, with boys (blue mosquito net) separated from girls (pink mosquito net), and a bar is on its way. All have cold-water shared facilities. There is a fantastic view of sunrise from the beach and sunset from 'The Rock', a five-minute scramble from the resort. Food is traditional Fijian with an emphasis on locally caught fish and seafood.

There is no telephone on the island. Book through either Ovalau Watersports or Ovalau Community Centre in Levuka. Transfers from the airstrip or Levuka are \$10 one way. Transfers from Waidalice on Viti Levu (southeast of Korovou) cost \$40.

### MOTURIKI

The hilly, lush island of Moturiki is just southwest of Ovalau and home to 10 villages. Although it has no accommodation for travellers, both Leleuvia and Caqalai resorts will take guests to the village of **Niubasaga** for typical a Sunday church service. Be prepared: one of your party will have to get up and introduce the group to the congregation.

### CAQALAI

The gorgeous coral island of Caqalai lies just south of Moturiki. It's only a 15-minute walk around the island's beautiful **white-sand beaches**, which are fringed with palms and other large trees. If you're lucky you may see **dolphins** and **baby turtles**.

### WHAT LIES BENEATH

Don't tempt the spirits of Gavo Passage. If you head out to the islands south from Ovalau, your boat will likely travel through a break in the reef. Many indigenous Fijians believe that beneath the waters of Gavo Passage lies a sunken village inhabited by ancestral spirits. Stories of fishermen hooking newly woven mats are whispered around Levuka. When passing over the *tabu* (sacred) site, Fijians remove their hats and sunglasses and talk in hushed tones. They believe the spirits will avenge any act of disrespect. Stay on the safe side, take off your baseball cap and give your sunnies a rest. Even if there are no spirits to annoy, irreverent behaviour might put the wind up your boatman.

**Caqalai Island Resort** ([☎](tel) 343 0366; [www.owlfiji.com/caqalai.htm](http://www.owlfiji.com/caqalai.htm); camping per person without/with all meals \$12/25, dm/bure incl meals per person \$35/45) proves that, surprisingly, the Methodist church knows how to run a resort (although it doesn't know how to run a bar: alcohol isn't served here, but you're welcome to bring your own). Caqalai comes close to being the best a backpacker island can get. It's rustic, with cold showers in shared bathrooms, but the food is delicious, the white-sand beach is scrumptious, snorkelling from the shore is spectacular, and the staff are enormously welcoming. At low tide it's possible to walk out to Snake Island (named after the many black-and-white-banded sea snakes here), for even better snorkelling. Diving is available, too. Also on offer are village trips to Moturiki for a Sunday church service and boat trips to tiny Honeymoon Island. At night, there is singing, dancing and *kava* drinking beside a bonfire on the beach. There is a once-a-week day trip to Leleuvia (\$10).

### Getting There & Away

If you're coming from Levuka, you can book transport and accommodation from Ovalau Watersports. One-way transfers cost \$20 per person in a group and \$30 for one person. Transfers from Caqalai to Bureta airstrip on Ovalau cost \$50 for one person, \$25 per person for two or more.

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From Suva, catch a bus heading down the Kings Road from the main bus terminal and get off at Waidalice. You need to call ahead for a boat from Caqalai to pick you up here (\$30 per person).

### LELEUVIA

Just south of Caqalai sits Leleuvia, another palm-fringed coral island with golden-sand beaches. At low tide a vast area of sand and rock is exposed – it's a good time to explore the island's tidal pools. It's also possible to swim off the western side or to do some OK snorkelling and great diving.

Things seem to be on the up and up at **Leleuvia Island Resort** ([☎](tel) 330 1584; [www.owlfiji.com/leleuvia.htm](http://www.owlfiji.com/leleuvia.htm); bungalows per person \$42, bungalows with kitchen per person \$60) after a muddle of managers had left the resort ramshackle and rundown. But Lena, who used to run the place in 1997, has been reappointed to clear things up. There are some pretty *bure*, but the scrubby resort still feels a bit unkempt, and the flush toilets are dingy. All rates include three meals, tea and coffee. Lena is a qualified pastry chef. Guests take breakfast and lunch in the dining *bure* and dinner on the sand. Cold beer is available from the restaurant; hot snorkelling from the beach.

### Getting There & Away

Boat transfers to/from Suva are \$30 each way (the boat ride is one hour from Korovou town, which is about a 1½-hour bus ride from Suva). Transfers to/from Levuka (one hour) cost \$20 each way. Book through Ovalau Watersports.

### WAKAYA

About 20km east of Ovalau, Wakaya is a privately owned island visible from Levuka. It has forests, cliffs, beautiful white-sand beaches, and archaeological sites, including a **stone fish trap**. In some areas you'll find feral horses, pigs and deer roaming freely; in others there are millionaires' houses.

**Wakaya Club** ([☎](tel) 344 8128, [www.wakaya.com](http://www.wakaya.com); garden/ocean view d \$2600-12,100) is one of Fiji's most exclusive resorts. Bill Gates honeymooned here with his first wife. Russell Crowe and Nicole Kidman stayed at Wakaya (together!) in 2001. Face it, it could be out of your league. There is a five-night minimum stay.

### Getting There & Away

The island is a 20-minute speedboat ride from Levuka; however, as it's private, you'll need an invite to visit. Call ahead to see if you'll be welcome.

### KORO

Many villages are nestled in the lush tropical forests of Koro, northwest of Ovalau. Roads over the mountainous interior provide for plenty of thrills and wonderful views. A portion of the island is freehold, so foreigners can build their second, third, fourth or fifth homes; their seasonal neighbours include Lauren Hutton.

At Dere Bay, a wharf allows you to walk out to good swimming and snorkelling; inland is a waterfall and natural pool.

**Dere Bay Resort** ([☎](tel) 331 1075; [fijimiller@connect.com.fj](mailto:fijimiller@connect.com.fj); dm/bure incl meals \$400; [www.derebayresort.com](http://www.derebayresort.com)) was previously occupied by people who had either bought or were looking to buy land on the island. It should now be operating as a regular resort. The well-designed *bure* have soaring ceilings, delightful furnishings, 360-degree outlooks, and spacious verandas. Sit and watch the sand crabs while you wait to be called for another gourmet meal. There are kayaks, scuba-diving equipment, game-fishing facilities and a resident diving instructor.

### Getting There & Away

Air Fiji flies Koro–Suva on Wednesday (adult/child \$125/62.50 each way), and **Turtle Airways** ([☎](tel) 672 1888; [reservations@turtleairways.com](mailto:reservations@turtleairways.com)) or **Pacific Island** ([☎](tel) 672 5644; [www.fijiseaplanes.com](http://www.fijiseaplanes.com)) sea planes will fly you in from Nadi. Ferries run by **Consort Shipping** (Map p122; [☎](tel) 330 2877; fax 330 3389; Thomson St, Suva) leave Suva twice weekly, stopping at Koro on their way to Savusavu (deck/air-conditioned cabin \$35/65, eight hours). You really need to take a cabin. This is not a wholly reliable service. There is a small chance the return boat from Koro might not pick you up. From Savusavu, the Dere Bay boat costs \$100 one-way. Enquire about transport when you book your accommodation. Pick-up from the ferry/airport is \$20/30.

**Terry Grey** ([☎](tel) 885 0674) of the yacht *Savusavu* in Savusavu, Vanua Levu, will take you to/from Koro for \$600 one-way if you're stuck. This isn't too bad if you have a small group. He'll also do a day trip for a similar price.

## NAIGANI

Naigani (Mystery Island) is a mountainous island about 10km offshore from Ovalau. The island has white-sand beaches, lagoons, a fringing coral reef, the remains of a **pre-colonial hillside fortification** and 'cannibal caves'. According to locals, 1800 villagers were slaughtered in this area by marauding tribes. The place is *tabu* (sacred) and locals keep away; out of respect, you should do the same. There is one village on the island, about 10 minutes' walk from the resort.

**Naigani Island Resort** (☎ 330 0925; www.naigani-resort.com; tw/studios/villas \$120/150/180; 🏠), a former copra plantation, is a friendly, unpretentious family resort popular with time-sharers, and Suva-based expats at weekends. The spacious cabin-style *bure* are a bit shabby but the white-sand beach is pretty enough and there is good snorkelling about 50m out from the shore. The day trip to Picnic Beach is highly recommended for snorkellers, too. There are good dive sites nearby. Kiwi foot fetishists might be interested to see a pair of slippers once worn by *Shortland Street* star Stephanie Teavehii (Donna) on display in the gift shop.

The food is good, and you can eat à la carte for less than the meal plan. There's a *lovo* every Saturday night, and a free kids' club during Australasian school holidays (and babysitting is always available at \$4.50 an hour).

The great mystery of Mystery Island is why the guard turns off the *bure*'s hot-water supply every night. Hint: the power switch is out the back.

Return boat transfers to/from Suva, via Natovi Landing, or to/from Taviya village, near Rukuruku on Ovalau, are \$50/25 per adult/child. Transfer to Ovalau takes 90 minutes or less, depending on weather conditions. A taxi from the landing at Taviya is another \$20, despite what you may be told at Naigani. Ovalau Watersports can arrange these transfers for only \$40 one-way.

## NAMENALALA

The volcanic island of Namenalala rests on the Namena Barrier Reef, 25km off the southeastern coast of Vanua Levu and about 40km from Savusavu. Namenalala has lovely **beaches** and the island is a natural sailors' refuge. There is an old **ring fortification**, but the villages disappeared long ago. Today there's just one small, upmarket resort.

**Moody's Namena** (☎ 881 3764; www.moodyснаmenafiji.com; all-inclusive packages for 5 nights, incl transfers from Savusavu, s/d \$3190/4570, extra night s/d \$570/770; 🚫 closed March & April) has six bamboo-and-timber *bure* on a forested ridge. Diving here is excellent and costs \$85 per tank. (Divers must be certified.) Other activities, which include windsurfing, fishing, snorkelling, reef excursions, barbecues, volleyball, and use of canoes and paddle boards, are included in the rate. The island has a nature reserve for bird-watching and trekking and is home to seabirds, red-footed boobies and a giant clam farm. From November to February, hawksbill and green turtles lay their eggs on Namenalala beaches. There is a five-night minimum stay; no children under 16 years old are allowed.