

Vanua Levu



Vanua Levu (Big Island) is lively and exciting – and peaceful and relaxing. The frantic gringo colonisation of Savusavu coexists alongside traditional villages, unspoiled countryside, and a handful of calm, relaxing resorts.

The predominantly indigenous-Fijian southeast of the island has gorgeous landscape brimming with rainforests, coconut plantations and fantastic views of the ocean. The area is popular with yachties and divers. Savusavu, a small town that is growing by the day, is the main tourist destination. The north and the west are virtually untouristed. Indo-Fijians are concentrated around hot, hard-working Labasa in the north, Vanua Levu's largest town. As well as native forest, there are lots of sugar-cane and commercial pine plantations in this area. Much of the western coast is remote and accessible only by boat.

The island has an unfair reputation for poor beaches, and a well-deserved name for diving and snorkelling (Jean-Michel Cousteau himself set up a resort here). Its nearby Rainbow Reef has some of the best dive sites in the South Pacific. The many deep bays are fantastic for kayaking and the lush, rugged interior rainforest provides good bird-watching.

The coastline of Vanua Levu is irregular and deeply indented; the large Tunuloa Peninsula forms the huge Natewa Bay, the longest bay in the South Pacific. It is edged by steep, green mountains and frequented by spinner dolphins.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Rent a 4WD and explore the island, especially the **Tunuloa Peninsula** (p202)
- Drink through happy hour at **Savusavu Yacht Club** (p201)
- Trek the pristine rainforest around **Waisali Rainforest Reserve** (p202)
- Be among the first travellers for decades to visit **Wainunu Bay** (p209)
- Take an adventure cruise with **Tui Tai** (p196)
- Sit on the deck of the **Planters' Club** (p201) in Savusavu, soaking up history
- Kayak **Savusavu Bay** (p195)
- Snorkel **Split Rock** (p195) in Savusavu Bay



■ POPULATION: 139,510

■ AREA: 5587 SQ KM

own the big plantations are subdividing small portions of their inheritance, cutting 10 hectares here and there off their huge holdings, and selling them to strangers with dreams of developing resorts.

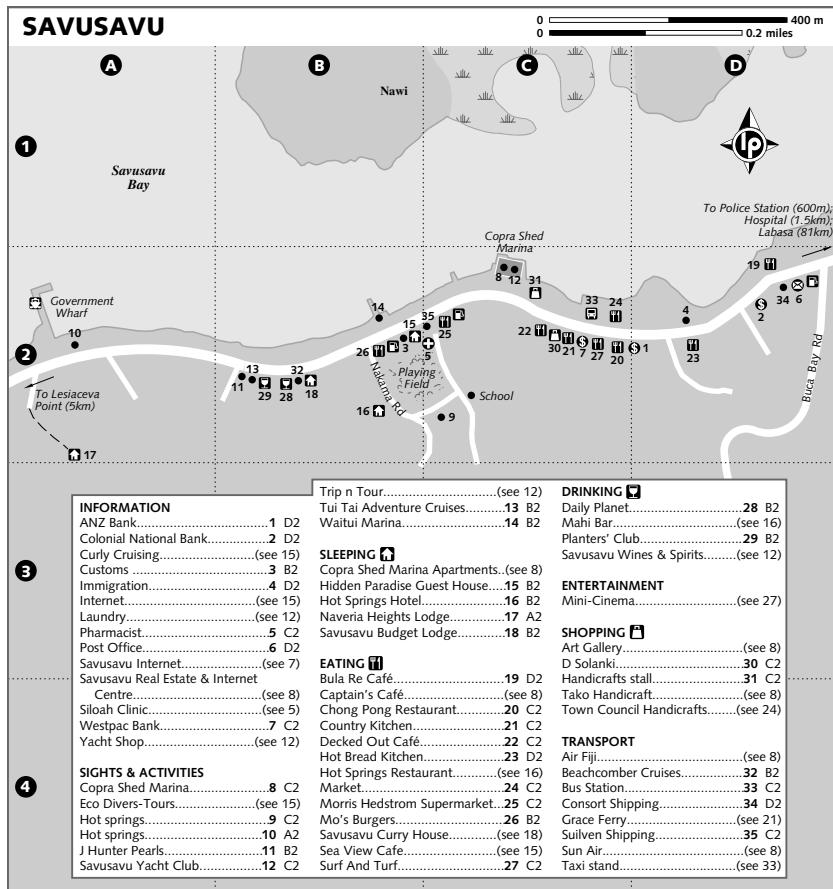
More yachties arrive here every year. There are 40 to 60 boats in the harbour at any given time. Things have expanded so quickly, there is little room for any new moorings. Some traditional landowners are refusing to renew the leases on Indian sugar-cane farms, hoping the land can be developed for tourism. They have seen prices of freehold land go through the clouds, and have the same hopes for leasehold properties – but anyone who builds on leasehold land in Fiji is taking a wild risk. Just ask the Indo-Fijians.

Orientation & Information

Built along one main road, it's pretty difficult to get lost in Savusavu despite the lack of street names. Maps of the area are available from the **Yacht Shop** (☎ 885 0040; Copra Shed Marina; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri).

Savusavu is an official point of entry for yachts, with customs, immigration, health and quarantine services all located here. **Customs** (☎ 885 0727; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Fri) is located west of the marinas.

The ANZ, Colonial National and Westpac banks have branches in the main street. They all change currency and travellers cheques and give cash advances on major credit cards, as well as have ATMs that accept all major debit and credit cards.



Other places of interest:

Curly Cruising & Internet (☎ 885 0122; Internet per hr \$10; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, till noon Sat) A yachting information centre, tour office that also has a few computers for surfing the Net.

Hospital or ambulance (☎ 885 0444) The hospital is 1.5km east of town on the road to Labasa.

Laundry service (Copra Shed Marina; wash & dry 6/10kg \$7/10; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, till 1pm Sat)

Pharmacist (☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, till noon Sun) Next door to the Siloah Clinic, the staff in this pharmacy are very helpful.

Police (☎ 885 0222) The police station is 600m past the Buca Bay Rd turn-off.

Post office At the eastern end of town near Buca Bay Rd.

Savusavu Internet (☎ 885 3250; Westpac Building; per hr \$9; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat)

Savusavu Real Estate & Internet Centre (☎ 885 0929; Copra Shed Marina; per hr \$12; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, till noon Sat)

Siloah Clinic (☎ 885 0721; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) This new private health centre is behind Suilven Shipping on the main road.

Sights & Activities

MARINAS

Dating back to 1880 and originally one of Fiji's first copra mills, the **Copra Shed Marina** (☎ 885 0457; coprashed@connect.com.fj) has been rebuilt into Savusavu's service hub for tourists and expats. In one visit you can book a flight or a boat, check your email, buy postcards, pick up your laundry, swig a beer and devour a pizza. Toilets and hot showers are available for yachties. There is even a small historical display, and a couple of units for rent upstairs. Moorings in the pretty harbour between Savusavu and Nawi Islet cost \$10/220 for a day/month in high season, and \$7/150 for a day/month in low season.

Close by is **Waitui Marina** (☎ 885 0536; fax 885 0344), based in a beautiful, restored boatshed with showers (\$3/free for guests/yachties), laundry (\$8 a load) and a private club (see p201). Moorings cost \$10 a day. Use channel 16 for assistance in locating moorings on arrival. The marina is closed on Sunday.

HOT SPRINGS

Savusavu Bay once saw a great deal of bubbling volcanic activity; those vents of steam you see along the water's edge are evidence of the geothermal activity that remains. You'll find hot springs near the wharf and behind the playing field. Don't even think

about bathing in them as they're literally boiling hot.

DIVING & SNORKELLING

With excellent dive sites in and around Savusavu Bay as well as along the coast towards Taveuni, Savusavu is a diver's dream.

KoroSun Dive (☎ 885 2452; www.korosundive.com; Hibiscus Hwy) is on the jetty opposite Koro Sun Resort. Two-tank dives/PADI Open Water Course, including all gear, cost \$208/750; night dives are \$130. There are special rates for multiday diving and it also offers day trips to the Somosomo Strait or the Namena Marine Park near Namenalala in the Lomaiviti Group.

L'Aventure Jean-Michel Cousteau (☎ 885 0188; laventurefiji@connect.com.fj; Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort; see p199) has excellent daily dives. Two-tank dives/PADI Open Water Course cost \$250/1000 (not including gear).

Split Rock has a deep crevice containing some gorgeous soft coral, which attracts hordes of equally colourful fish. You can easily swim out from the road and snorkel. Ask the locals how to find it.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

A popular kayaking area is Savusavu Bay. **Eco Divers-Tours** (☎ 885 0122) rents kayaks (per hour/day from \$15/55), mountain bikes (per hour/day \$15/25) and catamarans (per hour \$15). See also Tours, following, for details of other activities.

Tours

Eco Divers-Tours (☎ 885 0122) advertises a variety of individually tailored village and hiking tours in the area. Eco Divers also organises guided kayaking tours around Savusavu Bay, ranging from three to 14 nights and staying in Fijian villages. Activities along the way include snorkelling, fishing and swimming.

With **J Hunter Pearls** (☎ 885 0821; www.pearlsfiji.com) you can snorkel among black pearls at 9.30am and 1.30pm weekdays on this working farm (\$25). Staff members give talks on how pearls are made and afterwards you can head to the shop to buy pearls and shell jewellery. Bring your own snorkel.

Naveria Heights Lodge (☎ 851 0157; justnaveria@connect.com.fj) runs half-/full-day tours hiking (\$35/65) or mountain biking (\$45/75), including snacks, lunch and rum punch.

For those looking to charter their own boat, **SeaHawk Yacht Charters** (☎ 885 0787; www.seahawkfiji.com) rents out a beautiful 16m yacht with captain and a cook/crew for \$250 to \$420 per person per day depending on the season and level of service required. You can go practically anywhere in Fiji and the crew can help you arrange activities such as diving. SeaHawk also offers cruises around Savusavu Bay, including full-day picnic cruises (\$85), half-day sail and snorkel trips (\$55), sunset cruises (\$50) and overnight cruises (\$720 per couple).

Trip n Tour (☎ 885 3154; tripntour@connect.com.fj; Copra Shed Marina) offers a range of tours, including the Red Prawn Tour to Naweni village (adult/child \$55/22.50) where locals call the unusual prawns, which are so red they look cooked, to the surface by chanting and slapping the water. There are also tours of the copra plantation of Nukutoso, Savusavu and surrounds, Waivunia village and Waisali Waterfall (adult/child \$35/17.50 each). Full-day Labasa tours cost \$90. Diving, fishing and snorkelling trips can be arranged, as can overnight trips.

A voyage with **Tui Tai Adventure Cruises** (☎ 885 3032; www.tuitai.com) is a fantastic way to see and do a lot in a short time. Sailing between Vanua Levu, Taveuni and the more remote islands of Kioa, Koro and the Ringolds, you'll get to snorkel, kayak, bike, trek, swim, fish, dive or just lounge on deck to your heart's content. Captivating dolphins and – if you're lucky – majestic whales swimming alongside the boat, star-lit dinners on deck, and welcoming villagers you meet on out-of-the-way islands all make it a great experience. The snorkelling and diving sites are some of the world's best, and the newly refitted sailboat itself is gorgeous. All accommodation is in cabins with private bathroom and air-con. A five-night cruise costs from \$2622/3450 for singles/doubles up to \$3908/5143 for the Grand Staterooms, including all meals and activities except diving. Cheaper rates are available for singles willing to share a cabin. There are also three- and four-night options. Your itinerary may vary according to the weather. Don't count on going to Koro in rough seas, for instance. Tui Tai is the only way to reach the Ringolds.

Tui Tai also runs a Nasekawa River kayak day tour (\$140 including lunch and snacks)

once a week, which combines cruising, snorkelling and kayaking around Savusavu Bay.

Sleeping

Most options are out of town, either on Lesiaceva Point to the southwest or on the Hibiscus Hwy to the east. Buses service both these locations (see p201).

BUDGET

In Town

Hidden Paradise Guest House (☎ 885 0106; s/d \$25/50, with air-con \$30/60; ♿) This extremely clean hotel, run by the very helpful Elenoa, offers some of the cheapest double rooms in Fiji – and negotiation may bring the prices down even further. The rooms are basic but liveable, breeze-cooled with shared kitchen, bathroom and cold-water showers. There's one room with air-con. Avoid the windowless chamber Elenoa rents out if everything else is full. Breakfast is included in the price. The Sea View Café is here (see p200).

Savusavu Budget Lodge (☎ 885 3127; fax 885 3157; s/d \$30/50, s/d/tr with air-con \$55/80/105, extra person \$20; ♿) The lodge's enterprising Indian owner seems to be trying to turn this place into an unlikely urban resort. Downstairs there's a good curry restaurant (see p200) and a separate, cramped, air-conditioned bar, neither of which has any outside windows. The cheaper rooms are small, but guests can take their restaurant meals on the balcony and watch the street life go by. This is just as well, since the view from your private porch might well be a concrete wall next door. Breakfast is included in the price.

Out of Town

Bayside Backpacker Cottage (☎ 885 3154; tripn@connect.com.fj; Lesiaceva Rd; s/d \$40/50) A great bargain; travel agent Eddie Bower has a granny *bure* in the grounds of his home. The *bure* (traditional dwelling) has two single beds and a decent kitchen with a gas stove. It's not luxurious, but it's stocked with luxury items including a microwave, TV and DVD. The beach across the road is pebble, but the snorkelling is wonderful at high tide. The cottage is 3km from town, and the friendly Bowers will let you use their mountain bikes to make the journey. Otherwise, it's a \$3 taxi ride. There's a minimum two-night stay.

Yau Kolo (☎ 885 3089; yaukolo@yahoo.com; Hibiscus Hwy; tent sites per person \$12, s/d onsite tent \$20/30) About 13km from Savusavu is this lush, welcoming campground, café and 'beer garden'. You have to walk along a 'bulavard' – one of the many bad *bula* (welcome!) jokes in Fiji – to get to the two excellent, spacious furnished tents, with decent mattresses and bedding. Showers are cold and the toilets compost. There is a lagoon for snorkelling, and a freshwater creek on the property, which backs onto the friendly village of Waivunia. The beer garden is really just a bar in the garden. Breakfast is included. Recommended. Bring mosquito repellent. It's a \$12 taxi ride from town or \$1 by bus.

Vatukalavi Holiday House (☎ 885 0561; r \$80) This is a fantastic deal if you're looking for a secluded and self-contained place. The Vatukalavi is 15-minute taxi ride from town on a rocky point overlooking the Koro Sea and a few desert islands. You can snorkel from the small beach, windsurf or visit nearby hot springs. The house is fully furnished, has hot-water showers, Sky TV, and sleeps a maximum of seven people. The owner can arrange for a cook and cleaner (\$2.50 an hour). It's best to book ahead; enquiries can be made through the Copra Shed Marina. From town, the journey costs \$4 in a taxi.

Mumu's Resort (☎ 885 0416; Hibiscus Hwy, dm \$25, bure \$60-\$150) Balanced on ruggedly beautiful Maravu Point, about 17km east of Savusavu, Mumu's is a bit rundown, but each building is unique, like a typical, ramshackle Fijian village. Ask to see a *bure* before you choose. There's no guarantee you'll be shown the best first, even if they are all empty. Most have cooking facilities and all have bathrooms. The Dream House (recommended) has the best views, a cold-water shower and toilet. It houses a double room, but you have to walk through the dorm to get there. Many people love it but there have been some complaints about animals at Mumu's.

Simple meals cost \$8/\$15 for breakfast/dinner. Local buses (\$1 to Savusavu) pass Mumu's five times a day, Monday to Saturday, and a taxi to/from Savusavu is \$15.

Olivia's Homestay (☎ 885 3099; silina@connect.com.fj; Nagigi; per person \$13) Guests at Olivia's live the village life at Nagigi. They have to, really, because there's nothing else around. Olivia, who has lived in California, tries to educate her guests in the Fijian way of doing

everything from cooking to massage. No activity costs more than a few dollars, and both Olivia and the villagers are extremely welcoming. The no-frills homestay is a single cabin with four simple bedrooms and a cold-water shower. Do not expect luxury. Children are adored. Buses from Savusavu to Nagigi (\$1.60, 40 minutes) leave about every two hours, or take a taxi (about \$20).

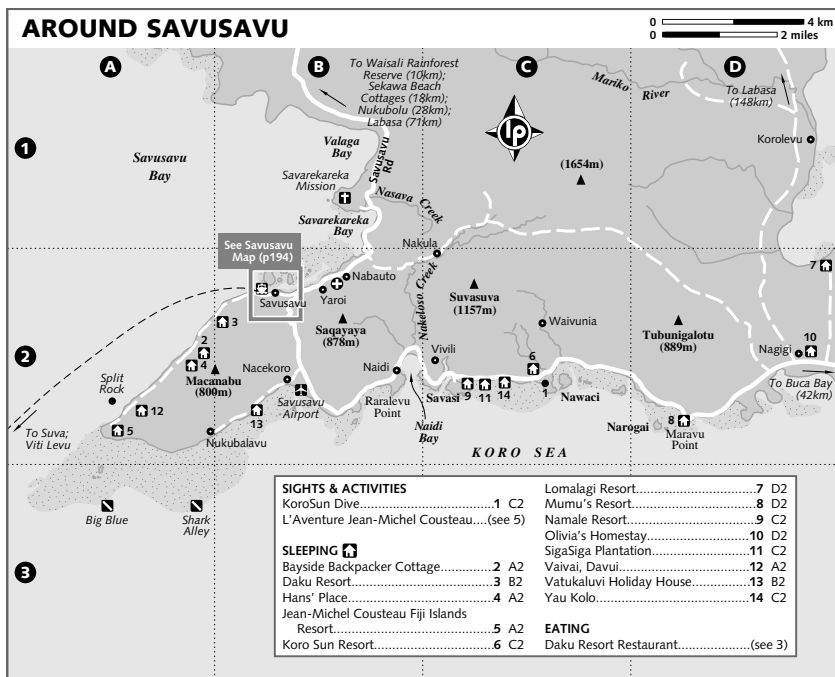
MIDRANGE

In Town

Naveria Heights Lodge (☎ 851 0157; justnaveria@connect.com.fj; Naveria Pde; r incl breakfast \$140; ♿) Mountain biking is the speciality at Naveria Heights. The owners, a fitness instructor and a massage therapist, will take you up and down moderate-to-difficult trails for a whole week, if you're up to it. Pedestrians can work out on the punching bag, do fitness classes on the deck, eat healthy food from the low-fat, low-carb menu, and go hiking in the hills. The house is lovely, the views are unbeatable and bread is baked daily. The lodge runs speciality programmes including 'activity week' (seven nights, five tours, all meals and transfers from Savusevu for \$1380 per person) and 'weight loss' week (seven nights, six-day fitness programme, all meals and transfers for \$1630 per person). Call for a pick up as it is hard to find.

Copra Shed Marina Apartments (☎ 885 0457; coprashed@connect.com.fj; Copra Shed Marina; r \$165; ♿ ♿) The marina has two luxury units with good views in the most convenient location in town. They are a bit overpriced, but worth it if you plan to spend a lot of time in the Yacht Club – which you might well end up doing anyway.

Hot Springs Hotel (☎ 885 0195; hot springs@connect.com.fj; Nakama Rd; r with fan/air-con incl breakfast \$80/125; ♿ ♿) Unkind competitors call the Hot Springs 'Fawltly Towers', which is unfair, since it has no towers. All rooms have a great, landscape painter's view of the harbour. The 1st- and 2nd-floor rooms are fan-cooled with run-down hot-water bathrooms that include a bath as well as a shower (good for a baby if you can secure the hotel's precious plug); 3rd- and 4th-floor rooms have air-con (good if you can secure the hotel's precious remote control). Enjoy the most panoramic sundowner in town from the Hot Springs' broad, majestic decking. The pool is great, too. It has a restaurant (see p200).



Out of Town

Hans' Place (☎ 885 0621; www.fiji-holiday.com; Lesiaceva Rd; Yasiyasi studio day/week \$80/400; Yaka cottage day/week \$100/500) Located about 3km south of town on Lesiaceva Point, Hans' two pretty, self-contained cottages are nestled among lush, beautiful gardens 250m from the ocean. Yasiyasi is a studio built using native hardwoods. Yaka is a one-bedroom cottage, with the bed partitioned off from the room. Each has a kitchenette with a gas stove and fridge, TV and DVD player. They are fan-cooled with hot showers. Long-term guests are preferred. This is great choice for couples, or people looking for a quiet time. Local meals are available on request. It's a \$4 taxi ride from town.

Daku Resort (☎ 885 0046; www.dakuresort.com; Lesiaceva Rd; oceanview bure s/d \$95/130, 2-bedroom bure \$110-195; 4-bedroom pool house \$200, 3-bedroom beach house \$225; ☎) The Daku is a quiet resort with sweeping views of the sea, and smart, well-kept rooms. The beach across the street is mainly pebbles, but there is great snorkelling from the jetty. There's also a beautiful pool, and a decent restaurant and bar.

The Daku runs an intriguing programme of courses, from creative writing to Fijian politics. Breakfast is included in the price. It has a restaurant (see p200). A taxi from town will cost about \$3.

Sekawa Beach Cottages (☎ 851 0154; nasekawa@hotmail.com; d day/week \$95/650, extra person per night \$20; ☎) Accommodation is in a pretty one-bedroom plantation-style house, about a five-minute walk from a beach and 18km north of Savusavu town. There is everything a family could possibly need here, from a microwave to a DVD player, twin beds in the lounge for the kids, and 2 hectares for them to run amuck in. There's a fishing boat for hire, too and free kayaks. A four-night minimum stay applies.

SigaSiga Plantation (☎ 885 0413; www.theultimateparadise.com; Hibiscus Hwy; d bure \$95; 2-bedroom villa \$250) This fine oceanfront home, 11km from Savusavu and set back from a 1.6km white-sand beach, sleeps up to six guests. In the grounds are two better-than-basic bure with excellent bathrooms and spacious, modern kitchens. It's a \$10 taxi ride from town and the bus passes by as well.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Vaivai & Davui (☎ 885 3154; triptour@connect.com.fj; Vaivai per week Nov-Apr/May-Oct \$1320/1495, Davui per week Nov-Apr/May-Oct \$1150/1320; ☎) These are two magnificent two-bedroom, two-bathroom homes with huge decks and extraordinary views over Savusavu Bay. Both have air-con in the master bedroom. The reef here is as good for snorkelling as the Cousteau resort a little further down the road – that is to say, it's fantastic. Ask the locals how to find 'Split Rock'. Vaivai is the larger and the pick of the two, with a lush garden rich in ginger, haliconias, bananas and golden palms. You could tug on a frond and pick a pawpaw from the balcony. Vaivai could comfortably sleep six: there is another small bedroom around the back, and a cot for a baby. The kitchen is amazingly well equipped, including stuff you don't even have at home such as cheese parers. Extras include a telescope!

Next door, Davui is much smaller – but still luxurious – and the bedroom walls don't quite reach the ceilings.

TOP END

All of Savusavu's top-end accommodation is a taxi ride from the town centre.

Jean-Michel Cousteau Fiji Islands Resort (☎ 885 0188; www.fijiresort.com; garden-view/oceanview bure d \$915/1140, 2-bedroom bure \$1360; ☎) This is a great boutique resort with a fabulous, educational kids' club. Meals are gourmet and are included in the rate; bure are lavish with large decks and private screened gardens. About half the guests are divers, and the snorkelling is as good as you would expect in a place associated with the family that brought the undersea world into a million living rooms, without even wetting the carpet. All activities (except diving) are included in the rate. Cousteau would have to be the first choice in Vanua Levu for parents with children. Kids *have to* check into the Bula Camp. There is no choice. Heh heh. Parents can spend time with them, but they are kept away from the lovers' pool and the rest of the guests. The resort is on Lesiaceva Point, where Savusavu Bay meets the Koro Sea. It's a \$5 taxi ride from town.

Koro Sun Resort (☎ 885 0262; www.korosunresort.com; Hibiscus Hwy; s/d bure \$500/620, 2-bedroom bure from \$910; ☎) The Koro Sun is a pretty resort facing a beautiful lagoon. There are clusters of plush bure, some with bamboo beds and rock showers. Those on the hillside feel like tree houses, with sea views and birds singing outside. The pool, tennis courts, a nine-hole golf course, kayaks, bikes and snorkelling gear are all free to guests, plus all meals are included. The resort has an excellent children's programme and a rainforest spa, where you can make like a Fijian meal and get wrapped in banana leaf, among other treatments. Diving is available through KoroSun Dive (see p195), which operates from a jetty across the road. The resort is 13km east of Savusavu. A taxi from Savusavu costs about \$12.

Namale Resort (☎ 885 0435; www.namalefiji.com; Hibiscus Hwy; s/d bure from \$1350/1640, grand villas from \$3765; ☎) This is an exclusive, amazingly expensive resort on the water, 9km east of Savusavu. Casual callers are not welcome, day-trippers are not accepted. The price includes all meals and activities except diving. Dive Namale operates here. Owned by Anthony Robbins, the American self-help guru, the resort has several bure set aside for workshop attendees to unleash their giants within.

Lomalagi Resort (☎ 851 0585; www.lomalagi.com; Salt Lake Rd; d incl meals \$750; ☎) Lomalagi (Heaven) has views to die for. It is the only resort at the base of Natewa Bay, the largest deep-water bay in the South Pacific. The area has barely been touched. The beach is grey coral but the snorkelling is great. You can take a two-person ocean-going kayak to a 10m drop-off 100m out, tie the kayak onto the reef marker and swim among sea horses. There is a 1km white-sand beach about 3km up the coastline, with four Fijian homes at one end. Guests have permission to picnic there. You can visit two resident pods of dolphins that are a 25-minute trip away in the snorkel boat. Whales have been sighted December to February. The villas are spacious with large kitchens and decks, but some of the décor is a bit naff. Lomalagi takes infants as long as they're not mobile – but no other children under 12 – and can organise a nanny. There's a swimming pool, a good library, a video library and a reasonably priced wine list. This is perhaps the only resort in Fiji to encourage midnight skinny dipping. The walk-in rate

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Bula Re Café (☎ 885 0377; meals from \$12; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun; ☑) The nouveau Fijian dishes served at Bula Re are probably the best food in town. Linger over seafood, pastas, crepes and curries at an outdoor table overlooking the bay. There are a number of vegetarian dishes available and the daily specials (\$10/17 for lunch/dinner) are good value. Bookings are recommended for the Wednesday night *lovo* (feast cooked in a pit oven; \$15).

is fantastic value. If you're driving, turn off at the Salt Lake Rd sign, about 24km east of Savusavu, not far from where the Hibiscus Hwy turns south.

About 24km offshore, southwest of Savusavu, is Moody's Namena, on the island of Namenalala (see p190).

Eating

Surf And Turf (☎ 851 0966; lunch/dinner meals from \$8/20; ☺ lunch & dinner) The signs on the window still proclaim Charan's Dinning Room (sic), but Surf And Turf is an altogether more upmarket affair. The manager's husband is a chef at the Cousteau resort, and he trained the chef here. He did a great job; this place is highly recommended. Surf and turf (lobster tail and fillet mignon) is \$50 at dinner, by the way.

Captain's Café (☎ 885 0511; Copra Shed Marina; pizza from \$10, lunch/dinner \$8/16; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The food here is usually good – but forget about Sunday (when the chef takes the day off) – and the views of the harbour are fantastic. There are pizzas, fish and chips and sandwiches, and the daily specials are always worth trying. You can buy drinks – including cheap draught beer – from the Yacht Club next door (see opposite).

Hot Springs Hotel (☎ 885 0195; meals \$19; ☺ breakfast & dinner) The breakfast buffet is limp and dull, and dining in this big, often empty room can be a lonely and comparatively expensive experience – but the evening meals are great. There is a choice of two mains every night, generally including an excellent fish dish. Turn up at dusk for sunset drinks at the Mahi Bar (opposite) and play hunt-the-barstaff while you wait.

Mo's Burgers (☎ 885 3231; burgers \$6, with chips & drink \$8; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☑) The fajitas here are made with baked rotis, and the quesadillas are made with fried rotis, but everything is tasty and fresh in this mutant Tex-Mex joint so very far from home. As well as burgers, Mo's offers pizza, fish and chips, and chicken and chips.

Decked Out Café (☎ 885 2929; mains \$6.50; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A fine place to watch the world go by on a sunny day, this café is a big, open deck on the main street, offering filling breakfasts and a limited menu of tasty and filling burgers and sandwiches. The daily specials are large and cheap. The fresh fruit smoothies (\$3) are excellent.

Country Kitchen (☎ 927 1372; breakfast \$2, meals \$5; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) One step up from a hole in the wall, and popular with local Indians for its sweets, Country Kitchen also does Chinese standards and fresh, tasty, boneless (if you request them) curries in dilapidated surrounds. Worth a try.

Sea View Café (☎ 885 0106; Hidden Paradise Guest House; meals \$8; ☺ breakfast daily, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Here you'll get cheap, cheerful travellers' food, served by the endlessly helpful Elenoa.

Savusavu Curry House (☎ 885 3127; Savusavu Budget Lodge; meals \$5; ☺ lunch & dinner) Unsurprisingly, Savusavu's only real Indian restaurant cooks pretty good curries – albeit in a gloomy backroom. Order one hour before for speciality dishes such as goat and duck.

Daku Resort (☎ 885 0334; lunch/dinner \$7/15; ☺ lunch & dinner) Take a taxi out of town (\$3) and eat poolside in the dining *bure* at the Daku. Sandwiches, steaks and salads are served for lunch. At night, you can chuck your own prawn (or chicken, meat or fish) on the barbie, or have the chef chuck it on for you. Daku's regular curry night is popular, as is the Sunday evening barbecue.

Chong Pong Restaurant (☎ 885 0588; mains \$5; ☺ lunch & dinner) Serves your standard Chinese food such as chow mein, sweet-and-sour pork and noodle soup. Up a long flight of stairs, it's simple but has nice views across the main road to the market and sea beyond.

Savusavu has a few grocery stores including a well-stocked Morris Hedstrom Supermarket. The market has fruit and veggies as well as lots and lots of *kava* (*yaqona*) root, used to make the narcotic drink of the same name. The **Hot Bread Kitchen** (☺ 6am-8pm Mon-Sat, 6am-1pm Sun) has fresh loaves daily.

Drinking

Savusavu Yacht Club (☎ 885 0685; Copra Shed Marina; ☺ 10am-10pm Sun-Thu, till midnight Fri & Sat) It has a friendly pub feel about it, although it gets a bit rough around the edges on a Saturday night. With picnic tables by the waterside, the Yacht Club is a good place for a drink and to meet local expats. There's cold beer on tap and bar snacks (\$5.50) and meals can be ordered from the next-door Captain's Café. Happy hour is 5.30pm to 6.30pm. Tourists are considered temporary members.

Waitui Marina (☎ 885 0536; ☺ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat) There are classic South Pacific views from the balcony bar here: palm trees, yachts, an island beach and ethereal hot springs. The décor is suitably nautical, and merry yachties might find it hard to tell if they're at sea or on land. The club is friendly and comfortable, the bar is well stocked, and you are a temporary member if you are a foreigner on holiday.

Planters' Club (☎ 885 0233; ☺ 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, till 1am Sat, till 8pm Sun) This was traditionally a place for planters to come and drink when they brought in the copra, and some of their descendants can still be found clustered around the bar today. You can taste the history in the air as you taste the beer in your glass. Happy hour is 5.30pm to 6.30pm. Once a month, the club holds a Sunday lunch *lovo*. The bar staff will sign in a tourist.

Mahi Bar (☺ 10am-11pm Mon-Sun) Drink prices at the bar at the Hot Springs Hotel are a little steeper than in the clubs. Fijians seem to get around that by bringing their own *kava*. Still, the views are great.

Daily Planet (☺ 7pm-1am Fri & Sat) Surrounded by barbed wire fortifications, the Daily Planet looks as if it has been built to defend itself from attack, or to keep everyone inside. It's probably best not to stay until closing time, when fights occasionally roll down the main street.

Savusavu Wines & Spirits (☎ 885 3888; ☺ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, till 1pm-Sat) It's a popular, absurdly well-stocked bottle shop in the Copra Shed Marina. The place to come for imported wines and beers.

Entertainment

Mini-Cinema (admission \$2; ☺ noon-10pm) Upstairs next to Surf And Turf restaurant, this cinema plays recent DVDs on a big screen; you can go in halfway through for \$1.

Shopping

Art Gallery (☎ 885 3054; Copra Shed Marina) This gallery has paintings, cards, freshwater pearl jewellery, sculptures and other work by local artists.

Tako Handicraft (☎ 885 3956; Copra Shed Marina) Also has local handicrafts and postcards.

D Solanki (☎ 885 0025) Head to this drapers for bargain-priced, beautifully made double-stitched lined saris tailor-made. It also sells traditional Fijian dress and Western clothes.

Next door to the Copra Shed is a handicrafts stall where a local man sells his wooden carvings. At the back of the market is the Town Council Handicrafts, devoted to local woven and wooden handicrafts.

Getting There & Around

For flights, head to the office of **Air Fiji** (☎ 885 0173) or **Sun Air** (☎ 885 0141) in the Copra Shed. Savusavu airstrip is 3km south of town. Local buses pass the airport every so often; however, a taxi there from Savusavu only costs \$2. See p259 for more flight information.

For boat travel **Beachcomber Cruises** (☎ 885 0266; fax 885 0499), **Suilven Shipping** (☎ 885 3191; fax 885 3193), **Consort Shipping** (☎ 885 0443; fax 885 0442) and the agent for Grace Ferry, the **Country Kitchen** (☎ 927 1372; ☺ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) restaurant, are all in the main street. See p261 for more details on boats.

The Savusavu bus station and taxi stand are both located in the centre of the town, near the market. Buses travelling the scenic sealed highway from Savusavu over the mountains to Labasa (\$6, three hours, five times daily) depart from 7.30am to 3.30pm. Some buses take the longer, scenic route from Savusavu to Labasa along Natewa Bay, and these depart at 9am (\$11.50, six hours).

Buses from Savusavu to Napuca (\$6.30, 4½ hours), at the tip of the Tunuloa Peninsula, depart at 10.30am, 1pm and 2.30pm daily. The afternoon bus stays there overnight and returns at 7am. A 4pm bus only goes as far as Naweni (\$2.25). There is no bus from Savusavu to Nabouwalu; you have to catch a morning bus to Labasa and change buses there.

From Monday to Saturday there are five bus services from Savusavu to Lesiaceva Point (\$0.70, 15 minutes) between 6am and 5pm. For confirmation of bus timetables in the south, ring **Vishnu Holdings** (☎ 885 0276).

BÊCHE-DE-MER

European traders flocked to Fiji in the early 19th century to hunt the lucrative *bêche-de-mer* (sea cucumber). It fetched huge profits in Asia, where it's still considered a delicacy and aphrodisiac.

You are likely to see some of these ugly sluglike creatures while snorkelling or diving. They feed on organic matter in the sand and serve an important role as cleaners in the lagoon ecosystem. There are various types: some are smooth and sticky, some prickly, some black and some multicoloured. After being cut open and cleaned, they are boiled to remove the salt, then sun-dried or smoked. Many find the taste revolting, but they are highly nutritious, with 50% to 60% protein.

Bêches-de-mer are depleted in Asian waters but still prevalent in the South Pacific. They make for a lucrative commodity, both for local use and for export, and unscrupulous traders are delivering dive equipment to remote areas and promising high rewards. Villagers of the Bua region are renowned for harvesting the creature. Usually untrained and unaware of the risks, they are encouraged by the traders to dive in deep waters, risking their lives by using dodgy scuba equipment. Many end up with the bends and a stint in the Fiji Recompression Chamber and several have died.

There is an abundance of taxis. They can be hailed on the street or booked. You can also hire small carriers from the bus station; they're really reasonable if you're travelling in a group.

Carpenters Rental Cars can be booked through **Trip n Tour** (☎ 885 3154; tripntour@connect.com.fj; Copra Shed Marina) and prices start at \$55 a day for a tiny sedan and \$100 a day for a 4WD. Bula Re Café is an agent for **Budget Rent a Car** (☎ 885 0377) where prices start at about \$100 a day for a sedan, and \$120 for a 4WD.

NORTH OF SAVUSAVU Waisali Rainforest Reserve

In the verdant mountains north of Savusavu, lies the beautiful, protected **Waisali Rainforest** (☎ 851 0939; Savusavu Rd; adult/child \$5/0.50; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat). While it doesn't offer much of a trek (it's about a 30-minute slow walk each way), the foliage is beautiful, as is the waterfall at the bottom. Take care if it has been raining – the rocks at the foot of the waterfall can be treacherously slippery. You can enter the park 20km north of Savusavu, directly off the road to Labasa. Bus drivers should know where to drop you (ask before you board) as should most carrier and taxi drivers. If you are driving it's at kilometre/culvert 14.4, which is also a good viewpoint at which to stop.

Nukubolu

The remains of the ancient village of Nukubolu are in the mountains north of Savusavu

on the banks of a creek, in a fertile volcanic crater with hot springs steaming nearby. There are well-preserved stone building foundations, terraces and carefully constructed thermal pools. Locals dry *kava* roots on corrugated-iron sheets laid over the pools and bathe in the hot springs when sick.

You can visit the ruins by 4WD. They are on the property of the village of Biauqunu, so take a *sevusevu* (gift) for the chief and ask permission first. The turn-off is about 20km northwest of Savusavu. Continue about 8km inland and over a couple of river crossings. You can also rent a carrier from town to take you there and combine it with a trip to Waisali Rainforest Reserve.

TUNULOVA PENINSULA

Tunuloa Peninsula, also known as Natewa or Cakaudrove Peninsula, makes up the south-eastern section of Vanua Levu. Lush and scenic, it's an excellent area for exploring by 4WD. If you can arrange a guide in Savusavu or from your resort, the area can also offer some great bird-watching and hiking. The bumpy, mostly dirt Hibiscus Hwy runs from Savusavu to the road's end at Napuka, passing copra plantations, old homesteads, waving villagers and thriving forests. The road becomes extremely slippery in the rain; if you've rented a vehicle, check the tyres are good before you set out. There are no restaurants or shops along this route; pack a lunch and bring water.

About 20km east of Savusavu, the Hibiscus Hwy veers right (south); the turn-off to

the left (north) follows the western side of Natewa Bay, an alternative 4WD route to Labasa. About 35km further along the highway from this intersection is the turn-off into the village of **Drekeniwai**, where former prime minister Sitiveni Rabuka was born.

Once you hit Buca Bay, the highway turns left (north), becoming more potholed as it heads through the habitat of the rare **silktailed bird**. There's a small reserve here. Found only on this peninsula and on Taveuni, the silktailed has sadly made it onto the world's endangered-species list with logging being its major threat. The bird is about 8cm high and is black with a white patch on its tail.

If you turn right (south) at Buca Bay, you'll head through Natuva village and then up over the mountain to the next village of **Dakuniba**. The road is one big pothole and the going is slow but you'll be rewarded with dazzling views over the forest and out to sea. In a beautiful forest setting, just outside Dakuniba, **petroglyphs** are inscribed on large boulders. They are thought to be of ceremonial or mystical significance. Be sure to bring a *sevusevu* for the village chief and read up about village etiquette (see p36); the people of Dakuniba are very friendly and may offer to take you to a nearby beach to swim, fish or snorkel. The famous Rainbow Reef (see p61) is offshore from Dakuniba, but is more easily accessible from the island of Taveuni.

Sleeping

Levukalailai (☎ 888 0888; levukalailai@connect.com.fj; Hibiscus Hwy; bure \$210, lodges \$250; 📶) This lovely new resort promises to be fantastic when it finally opens. The central lodge (suitable for adults only) has four rooms with bathroom and is made of Australian woods such as western red cedar, and tastefully decorated traditional motifs and *mangi mangi* (traditional weavings). The beach here is incredible: 5.5km of white sand, the best in Vanua Levu. Fishing and snorkelling are great, but vegetarians might be disturbed that the owners slaughter their own beef, and honeymooners should be aware of Cathedral ceilings in the lodge bedrooms; so sound carries. It's highly recommended for everyone else. There's a swimming pool as well as Sky TV, and Levukalailai is run on solar power.

La Dolce Vita Holiday Villas (☎ 851 8023; ladolcevita@connect.com.fj; Hibiscus Hwy; bure \$515-600, dhouse \$345) La Dolce has spanking new bunga-

lows with great decking, large, modern bathrooms and fabulous sea views. Rates include all meals. There is a bar and dining room. Compulsive golfers can play six holes, ordinary people can snorkel, or follow horse trails and bush walks through the hills. This place is owned by an Italo-Australian called Lui, and Lui's Italian pizza-oven-in-a-bure might be unique in the South Pacific. The resort beach is a little grey but Lui's private island – known as 'Lui's Island' – is fringed with white sand, and La Dolce Vita guests are welcome to take the walkway over. You can also rent out a big, comfortable three-bedroom house, with cane lounges and a huge freezer. A taxi from Savusavu costs about \$25.

There are two other accommodation options on the western edge of the Tunuloa Peninsula; budget Olivia's Homestay (see p197) and the top-end Lomalagi Resort (see p199).

Dolphin Bay Divers Retreat is southeast of Buca Bay. Accessible only by boat, it's most easily reached from Taveuni. See p217 for more information.

OFFSHORE ISLANDS

Kioa

The island of Kioa (25 sq km) is inhabited by Polynesians originally from the tiny coral reef island of Vaitupu in Tuvalu. As their home island suffered from poor soils and overcrowding, the community decided to purchase another more fertile island and relocate some families. Kioa was purchased in 1947 for \$15,000; the people of Vaitupu had earned the money working for the Americans who had occupied their islands during WWII. When they began to move to Kioa, they knew nothing about the climate or lifestyle and were concerned the Fijians might still be cannibals. About 600 people now live here, in a colourful and immaculately kept village. The people are very warm and friendly; one of the first things you can see from the sea is a giant sign saying '*Talofa*' (the equivalent of Fijian *bula*). The women are known for their woven crafts and fishing is done from small, traditional *drua* (double-hulled canoes). The people of Kioa have a traditional drink called toddy. Made of fermented coconut sap, it's got something more of a kick than *kava*.

You cannot show up at Kioa without an invitation. You can travel there and back on

outboards owned by the Island Council (\$50 from/to Taveuni, about \$35 from/to Buca Bay). If you can find a boatman, that constitutes an invitation. There is no accommodation or facilities for tourists; however, Tui Tai Adventure Cruises (p196) does make a stop here and Taveuni Estate Dive (see p212) does day trips. For snorkellers and divers, the **Farm**, off the most easterly point of the island, has fantastic corals.

Rabi

Rabi (66 sq km), east of the northern tip of the Tunuloa peninsula, is populated by Micronesians originally from Banaba, in Kiribati. At the turn of the 20th century the naive islanders were first tricked and then pressed into selling the phosphate mining rights of Banaba in return for an annual payment, and their tiny island was slowly ruined. WWII brought these people another blow when the Japanese invaded Banaba and massacred many villagers. Following the war, Rabi was purchased for the Banabans by the British Government – with money from the islanders' own Provident Fund – and 2000 survivors were resettled here. Scandalously, they were dropped in the middle of the cyclone season with only army tents and two months rations. They had never been so cold (Banaba is on the equator) and many died. Today the island has four Banaban villages, with a total population of 4500.

If you're interested in visiting Rabi, you must first ask permission from the **Island Council** (☎ 881 2913). If you're extended an invitation, catch a bus from Savusavu to Karoko where small boats wait for passengers to Rabi (\$50 one way). The **Rabi Island Council Guesthouse** (☎ 881 2913 ext 30; dm \$50; ☎ Mon, Wed & Fri) has beds in basic, four-bed rooms. You'll eat with the villagers.

LABASA

pop 24,100

Labasa is a sugar town, with crushed cane husks fallen from trucks lying like roadkill on the road, and snakes of trucks banked up at the sugar mill. The air smells of molasses, as if the clouds were candy floss, and a sugar train runs up a sugar railway. It is also India town. Labasa's population is predominantly Indo-Fijian, many of whom are descendants of indentured labourers brought to work on the plantations. There are beggars

in the doorways here, some flashing their stumps. The stores sell trinkets, bangles and saris, and blast out Bollywood music. Dozens of shop assistants do nothing identifiable in the shadow of mosques and Sikh and Hindu temples. You're in luck if your watch breaks here, because there are a lot of watchmakers.

Labasa is Vanua Levu's largest town, about 5km inland on the banks of the meandering Labasa River. The fertile riverbanks and reclaimed mangrove swamps have made this area a centre for the sugar industry since colonial days. Sadly, in early 2003, Cyclone Ami all but obliterated the surrounding cane fields. Also, farmers are struggling to restore their livelihoods against fallen world sugar prices. In addition, many Fijian landowners are terminating Fijian-Indian leases, leaving people who have lived on the land for generations without a living or a home.

While hot, serious Labasa is a bustling trade, service and administrative centre for northern Vanua Levu, the town itself doesn't have a lot to offer tourists. If you hire a 4WD, however, the surrounding area is great for exploring.

Information

Labasa's main drag is Nasekula Rd; this is where you'll find the majority of shops and services.

The ANZ, Colonial National and Westpac banks have branches in the main street. They all change currency and travellers cheques and have 24-hour ATMs that accept all major debit and credit cards.

Govinda Internet Café (☎ 881 1364; Nasekula Rd; login \$1, per min \$0.10; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 5pm-8pm Sun) This air-conditioned café has five computers with cheap Net access.

Hospital/ambulance (☎ 881 1444; Butinikama-Siberia Rd) The hospital is southeast of the river.

Library (Jaduram St; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) At the Civic Centre, it has a limited collection of books.

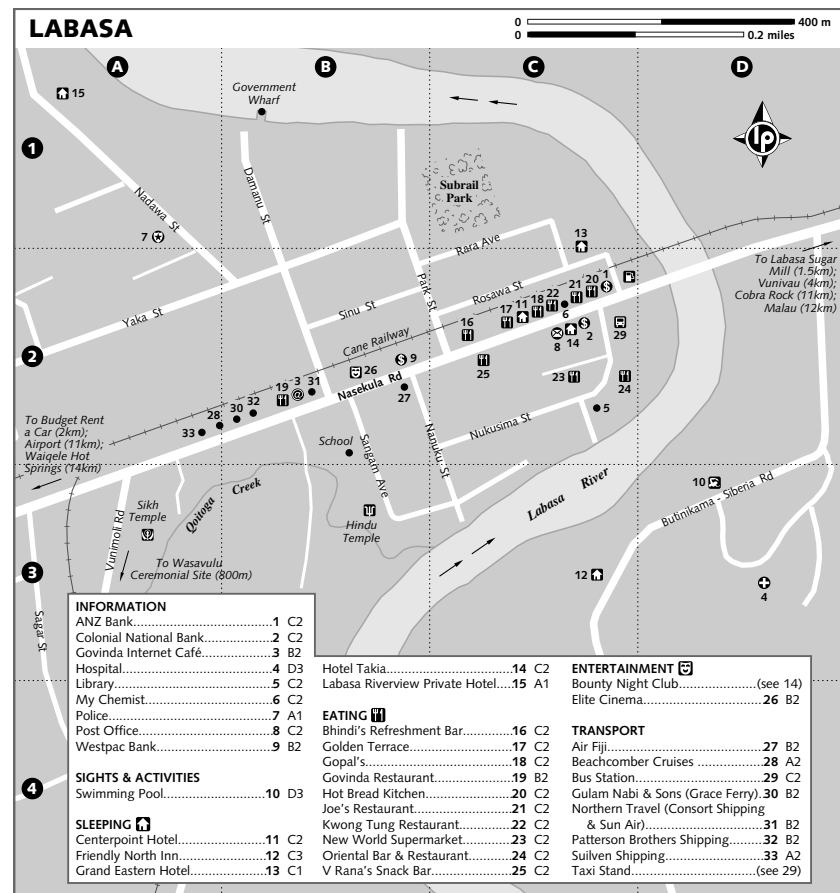
My Chemist (☎ 881 4611; Nasekula Rd; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Thu, 8am-7pm Fri, 8am-3pm Sat) Fairly well stocked with medicines and vitamins.

Police (☎ 881 1222; Nadawa St)

Post office (Nasekula Rd) Has a row of cardphones outside.

Sights & Activities

Just south of town is the **Wasavula Ceremonial Site** (Vunimoli Rd). At the entrance to the site



is a sacred monolith that villagers believe grew from the ground. Behind the standing stone is the village cemetery, surrounded by a small garden. Beyond is the area used during cannibalistic ceremonies – a flat *vatu ni bokola* or head-chopping stone, another rock where the severed head was placed, and a bowl-like stone in which the brain was placed for the chief. Unless you are given a guided tour, you could probably walk right past most of these stones without noticing. Tourists have complained about being charged \$10 (as well as the obligatory *sevusevu*) to look at nothing much. The site is on the left, about 2km south off Nasekula Rd. For more on the rituals conducted on this site, see the boxed text, p206.

Waiquele hot springs is about 3km beyond the airport; take the Waiquele bus (\$0.75). You might like to go there if, for instance, you are on a mission to visit every hot springs in the world.

To cool off from the heat, head to the Grand Eastern Hotel where nonguests can use the pool if they buy lunch in the hotel's restaurant. There is also a public **swimming pool** (☎ 881 6387; Butinikama-Siberia Rd; \$1.10; ☎ noon-5pm Mon-Thu, 9am-6pm Fri-Sun) southeast of town.

Sleeping

Labasa Riverview Private Hotel (☎ 881 1367; fax 881 4337; Nadawa St; dm \$15, s/d with shared bathroom \$20/\$30, s/d with bathroom \$30/\$45, s/d with air-con & bathroom \$50/\$60;

MONOLITHIC GODS

Although the Wasavula Ceremonial Site (p206) is shrouded in mystery, it is thought to be related to similar sites of the *naga* (snake) cult found in Viti Levu's Sigatoka Valley. In the old religion, those who betrayed ceremonial secrets would face insanity and death by the ancestral spirits and gods, so what is known about such places is mostly based on hearsay and vague memories.

Before the arrival of Christianity, ceremonial sites were venues for communicating with ancestral gods. Rituals performed at the sites provided a spiritual link between the people and the earth, time, crops and fertility. It is believed that this was where chiefs and priests were installed, where male initiation rites took place and where a *bokola*, the dead body of an enemy, was offered to the gods.

Stone monoliths at the sites were seen as actual gods or as the shrines of gods. These stones were often used for refuge; if someone who had committed a crime made it to the monolith before being caught, their life would be spared.

While the rituals of long ago are no longer practiced at Wasavula Ceremonial Site, the ancestral gods haven't been evicted so easily. It is still revered as a sacred place by the village people and is now where they bury their dead. Some people continue to see the monolith as supernatural; it is said that in photos of villagers with the monolith, the villagers have often vanished from the developed pictures.

☎) Rooms are cosy and comfortable and the five-bed dorm has a clean, well-equipped kitchen. The hotel's bar and veranda overlook the river, and the hotel is probably the best place for a cold beer in Labasa. A five-minute walk north of town, this place is peaceful, relaxed and has a very friendly proprietor.

Grand Eastern Hotel (☎ 881 1022; grest@connect.com.fj; Rosawa St; standard/deluxe/executive \$77/103/128; ☎) Labasa's most upmarket hotel has a pleasant colonial atmosphere, a swimming pool and a decent restaurant. Rooms have views of the river, small porches, air-con and private facilities. It's worth paying the extra for the newer deluxe rooms for their river-facing porches. The renovated Grand Eastern was reopened by Sitiveni Rabuka in 1997, which would have been the last time Rabuka did anything for an Indo-Fijian town. It has a restaurant (see opposite).

Friendly North Inn (☎ 881 1555; fni@connect.com.fj; Butinikama-Siberia Rd; s/d with fan \$35/45, s/d with air-con \$45/55, apt with air-con \$65, extra mattress/bed \$10/15; ☎) Opposite the hospital, an easy 15-minute walk from town, the Friendly North is utterly quiet. Follow the rose-lined paths to the motel-like rooms in duplex villas. All come with bathroom and are clean but cramped, and the beds are a bit lumpy. The hotel's large, open *bure* has a TV and beer on tap; meals are available if ordered in advance. A taxi into town will cost \$2.

Hotel Takia (☎ 881 1655; hoteltakia@connect.com.fj; Nasekula Rd; s/d with fan \$45/55, s/d with air-con

\$80/90, s/d ste \$108/118, extra person \$10; ☎) There is a slightly desperate air to the Takia, although the rooms are large and clean with TV, fridge and kettle. It's \$5 extra per night if you pay by credit card. The Tapa Restaurant offers big meals for \$13. The bar is open 6pm to 9pm daily, and the drinkers here look pretty serious. The Bounty Night Club operates here (see opposite).

Centerpoint Hotel (☎ 881 1057; cenhotel@connect.com.fj; Nasekula Rd; s/d with fan \$45/62, with air-con \$55/77, extra person \$10; ☎) At the centre point of town, the rooms at this hotel are big and clean and come with bathrooms. Rates include one free meal.

Eating

Labasa is teeming with hole-in-the-wall places dishing up Indian or Chinese food. Note: most restaurants, although open for dinner, close by 7pm.

Gopal's (Nasekula Rd; thali \$9; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) It serves great Indian vegetarian food: thalis, samosas and sweets.

Oriental Bar & Restaurant (☎ 881 7321; Jaduram St; meals \$7; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun; ☎) Definitely Labasa's most atmospheric restaurant, with a strong Chinese twist to its Fijian décor. Although it feels slightly upmarket, the prices are reasonable. The bar is fairly well stocked and the menu has a good variety of tasty Chinese dishes, including lots of veggie and a few Fijian options. No caps or vests allowed.

Grand Eastern Hotel (☎ 881 1022; Rosawa St; lunch/dinner \$15/25; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The Grand Eastern serves Western-style food. Decorated with historical photos of Labasa and spilling out onto the deck, it's a pleasant place to dine.

Govinda Restaurant (☎ 881 1364; Nasekula Rd; meals \$4, thali \$7; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Like Gopal's, this is a Hare Krishna vegetarian restaurant. It serves fantastic thalis, samosas and sweets. Its \$4 deal is a delicious, healthy combo of curry, dahl, chutney and rice or rotis.

V Rana's Snack Bar (☎ 881 4351; Nasekula Rd; snacks \$0.50; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, till 4pm Sat) This place is friendly and has comfortable booths where you can snack on bhajis, samosas and Indian sweets. Ask for the tamarind dipping sauce with your samosa.

Bhindi's Refreshment Bar (☎ 881 3007; Nasekula Rd; snacks \$1.40, meals \$3.20; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Bhindi's serves good homemade Indian snacks and sandwiches.

Kwong Tung Restaurant (☎ 881 1980; Nasekula Rd; mains \$5; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, lunch Sat) It has a huge dining hall with a range of very good Chinese meals, but no beer.

Golden Terrace Restaurant (☎ 881 8378; Nasekula Rd; meals \$3.50; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Serves dishes taken from Labasa's three main cuisines: Chinese, Indian and Greasy.

Joe's Restaurant (☎ 881 1766; Nasekula Rd; meals \$6, pizza \$10; ☎ lunch & dinner) Joe's is a Chinese restaurant with a large menu including dishes not normally associated with China such as pizza and fish and chips.

Hot Bread Kitchen (Nasekula Rd; ☎ 5am-8pm Mon-Thu & Sun, till 8.30pm Fri & Sat) Has fresh bread.

For supplies there are several supermarkets near the bus station, including the **New World Supermarket** (☎ 881 2586; Jaduram St; ☎ 7.45am-6pm Mon-Thu, till 6pm Fri, till 4pm Sat).

Entertainment

There's not much going on in town.

Elite Cinema (☎ 881 1260; Nasekula Rd; adult/child \$3/1) It shows older films, the majority of which are in Hindi.

You might try the bar at the Grand Eastern Hotel for a poolside drink, or brave the **Bounty Night Club** (☎ 8pm-1am Wed-Sat) at the Takia Hotel. The owners assure us it's safe, but not only is the bar in a cage, the disco mirror ball is in a cage of its own! A night out at the Labasa Club or the Farmers Club is definitely *not* a good idea.

Getting There & Around

For flights head to the office of **Air Fiji** (☎ 881 1188; Nasekula Rd) or **Sun Air** (☎ 881 1454; Northern Travel Service office, Nasekula Rd). The airport is about 11km southwest of Labasa. The turn-off is 4km west of Labasa, just past the Wailevu River. To reach the airport, catch the Waiqele bus from Labasa bus station; it departs between 6am and 4.15pm (\$0.55, four services daily Monday to Saturday; as per flight schedule Sunday). A taxi from Labasa costs \$8.

For boat tickets **Beachcomber Cruises** (☎ 881 7788), **Consort Shipping** (☎ 881 1454; Northern Travel Service office), **Patterson Brothers Shipping** (☎ 881 2444), **Suilven Shipping** (☎ 881 8471), and the agent for Grace Ferry, **Gulam Nabi & Sons** (☎ 881 1152) are all along Nasekula Rd. It is possible to buy tickets in Labasa for bus/boat combinations to Suva and Lautoka. See p261 for more information on reaching Vanua Levu via boat or plane.

There are regular buses between Labasa and Savusavu (\$6, three hours, five times Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday) departing between 7am and 4.15pm. There is also a 9am bus that takes the long route (\$11.50, six hours) to Savusavu around the northeast, following Natewa Bay. Buses to Nabouwalu depart three times Monday to Saturday (\$8, six hours).

The majority of shops, businesses and hotels in Labasa are within walking distance of the centre. If you are going further afield, there is no shortage of taxis. You'll find the majority of them at the main stand near the bus station. **Budget Rent a Car** (☎ 881 1999; Vakamaisuasua) has an office a little way west of town where you can rent sedans/4WD from \$100/120 per day.

AROUND LABASA

The area around Labasa is a great place to explore by 4WD. There are a few points of interest; however, it's definitely the adventure of finding them rather than the sights themselves that make it worthwhile. For all of these sights, you'll need to turn left onto Wainikoro Rd, just past the sugar mill and across from a secondary school. This is the main road out of town to the east.

Cobra Rock

The area's most intriguing attraction is the sacred Cobra Rock inside the **Naag Mandir**

Temple. The 3m-high rock looks (a bit) like a huge cobra poised to strike. Draped with colourful flower and tinsel garlands, the rock looms over offerings of fruit, fire and *lolo* (coconut cream) from people who believe the rock can cure sickness and infertility. Devotees swear that the rock grows and that the roof has had to be raised several times over the years. Remove your shoes outside the beautifully tiled temple; then circle the rock clockwise three or five times, ringing the bell after each round. Several buses pass the temple, including those to Natewa Bay. A taxi costs about \$10. If you're driving, the temple is 10km from the turning for Wainikoro Rd; you'll pass two smaller temples before you reach Naag Mandir. The temple is packed on Sunday mornings. On the hill above the temple, there is another growing stone, which might be worth seeking out if you were planning to visit every growing stone in the world.

If you're going to Cobra Rock, you may wish to take a short detour to the **Mariamman Temple** in Vunivau (just east of Labasa), where the Ram Leela festival is held around October.

Korovatu Beach

Down through dense coconut trees and past the lounging cows lies **Korovatu Beach** (admission per car \$5). Again, you might want to visit if you were trying to go to every beach in the world. Bring your own water and snacks.

Floating Island

This is definitely to be done for the journey rather than the final spectacle. You'll pass rugged scenery and maybe get lost in a cane field. The Floating Island, 50km northeast of Labasa, is land with trees that bobs on a pond and gets blown around with the wind. As the pond is only about three times the size of the island, it's easy for the island to reach an edge and disguise itself as attached land. If this happens you might not realise you have seen the Floating Island at all.

To reach the island by 4WD, follow the directions to Cobra Rock and continue following Wainikoro Rd. At the roundabout, this road turns left; follow it through the village. Continue on for 19km and take the turning on the right for Nakelikoso. After 6km, take a left onto Lagalaga Rd. Ask permission at

the first house on your right and then follow the track up behind it. When you reach a creek, park and trek right through the long grass to the pond. By this point, you will hopefully have been accosted by the children from the village who will gladly show you the way. Be sure to head out on a full tank of fuel and some food and water. The dirt road can be rather treacherous; probably not the best trip to make in the rain.

There is a bus to Lagalaga that departs Labasa at 1.30pm for the 2½ hour journey. This bus returns, often almost immediately, leaving you little hope of finding the island and much hope of getting stranded.

Nukubati

This privately owned island is just off the northern coast of Vanua Levu, about 40km west of Labasa. Actually two small islands linked by mangroves, it's about a 30-minute walk around at low tide. Once occupied by Fijian villagers, in the 19th century a local chief gave the island to a German gunsmith who settled here with his Fijian wife.

Nukubati Island Resort (☎ 881 3901; www.nukubati.com; bure beachfront/honeymoon \$1310/1600) is a secluded place far from the usual tourist spots. *Bure* face a white-sand beach. The steep prices include gourmet meals, all drinks (including alcohol) and activities, except game fishing, diving and massages. Included activities are tennis, sailing, windsurfing and fishing. The 4WD/speedboat return transfer from Labasa airport is \$290 per couple. There is a maximum of 14 guests and only adult couples are accepted. You can book the whole island for a mere \$8100 per night. A minimum five-night stay is required. Two-tank dives are \$175, plus equipment hire (one-off \$60 fee). Guided surf trips to the Great Sea Reef are possible from November to March.

NABOUWALU & AROUND

Nabouwalu is a small settlement on the island's southwestern point. Early in the 19th century, European traders flocked to nearby **Bua Bay** to exploit *yasi dina* (sandalwood), which grew in the hills. Today, the ferry landing is about the only draw for travellers.

Nabouwalu has administrative offices, a post office, a small market and a store. Off-shore to the northwest, the island of **Yadua Tabu** is home to the last sizeable population of the rare and spectacular crested iguana.

It became Fiji's first wildlife reserve in 1980. It might be possible to visit the iguanas with a local guide, weather permitting, but there are no organised tours. Rumour has it that the last time a film crew came over to make a documentary, they were unable to land on Yadua Tabu, and had to make do with a 'stunt iguana' filmed at the Fijian Resort instead.

Sleeping

Boats that arrive here are met by buses heading for Labasa but if you want to stay in Nabouwalu, there is a basic, clean government **guesthouse** (☎ 883 6027; rper person \$20). It's an old timber cottage on a steep hill and the view is beautiful. It's often booked out with government workers so be sure to call ahead to the district officer. There is a kitchen but no food and it's a good idea to bring along some of your own supplies as there are no eateries nearby.

Getting There & Away

For ferries, see p261. Nabouwalu can only be reached by bus from Labasa, not from Savusavu. The ferry bus is much quicker than the local bus.

The road from Nabouwalu around the southern coast to Savusavu (127km) is barely passable by 4WD or carrier.

WAINUNU BAY

This is the forgotten Fiji, a place few travellers have ever visited. It's difficult to get here, and the land has never been commercially logged, so the beautiful rainforest, replete with waterfalls, is largely untouched. Wainunu River, the third-largest river in Fiji, flows into Wainunu Bay, the spot where pioneer David Whippy led the whites of Levuka when they were briefly expelled by Cakobau in the mid-19th century. Tea was grown here until the 1920s, on Wainunu Tea Estate, owned by Captain David Robbie, a prominent citizen of Levuka. Robbie kept 200 acres of tea gardens within 1000 acres of volcanic tablelands, managed by George Chapman Barratt, who had experience growing tea in India. This was the longest surviving tea estate in Fiji, worked, predictably, by Indians. After it closed, there were attempts to grow cocoa, vanilla and

other crops in the area, but all eventually failed. Today, the factories and plantations lie in ruins, and the locals are mostly Fijian subsistence farmers who make money selling timber and *kava*.

Sleeping

Tiny **Blue Parrot Adventure Lodge** (blueparrotbures@yahoo.com; s/d/tr \$145/190/235) It's the first new business to open in Wainunu for a very long time. It is owned and run by Joe Whippy, a third-generation member of the Whippy families. The property is actually an island at the point where two rivers meet to form a creek. Joe and his wife Robin have built two traditional thatched *bure* with bamboo walls, bathrooms, cold-water showers and flush toilets. Each *bure* has its own jetty onto the river. There are also four beds in the dorm-style loft in the main building. Rates include all meals and nonmotorised tours; book via email but be aware that emails are only answered about every two weeks. You could rent the whole island – two *bure* and the Whippy house – for \$3500 a week, including a cleaner and a boat, but you would have to bring your own supplies and cook your own food. Local shops are poorly stocked except for the ubiquitous tinned fish. The reefs, though, are teeming with live fish, and Joe will take you out game fishing for \$60 an hour. Credit cards are not accepted. Children are accepted only if you book the entire resort.

Getting There & Away

Wainunu is three hours by very, very bad road from Savusavu, and about an hour from Nabouwalu. (It's actually closer to Viti Levu than Savusavu.) You can hire a carrier for \$100 in Savusavu, and arrange to have them pick you up again at the end of your stay. A carrier from Nabouwalu is \$15. The very slow local bus from Savusavu (\$8) stops 10km short of Wainunu, but you could arrange transport from there, or perhaps have Joe pick you up. Explore your options with the Whippys by email before you set out or contact **Trip n Tour** (☎ 885 3154; Copra Shed Marina, Savusavu; triptour@connect.com.fj), which offers two-/three-/four-night tours to the lodge.

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