

# Yasawa Group



Lacing their way up the west coast of Fiji, the Yasawas are a chain of 20 ancient islands famous for crystal blue lagoons, rugged volcanic landscapes, abundant sunshine and some of the Pacific's most ethereal beaches. They're the big sister of the Mamanucas; grander in size and stature, sparsely populated and just what the doctor ordered for leaving civilisation and its consternations behind. Most of the people live in small isolated villages and have their own distinct dialect, which is known as Vuda. Technology is an enigma and any stay will nudge you surreptitiously into the true meaning of 'Fiji time'.

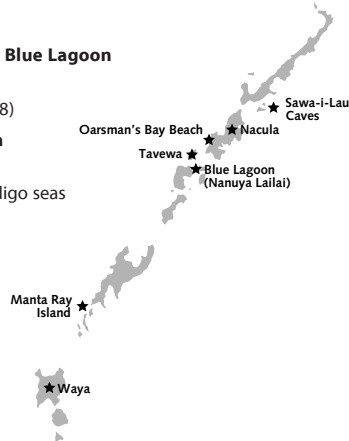
Snorkelling, swimming and diving are avidly pursued owing to wide banks of coral around most of the islands. Ample peaks ranging from grassy hills to jungle climbs also provide spectacular hiking and views from some of the summits take in the whole chain from north to south.

After the famous mutiny on the *Bounty* in 1789, Captain William Bligh paddled through the island group on his way to Timor. His longboat was chased along by Fijian canoes.

Backpacker lodges have dominated accommodation options in the Yasawas for many years but a new wave of midrange and top-end options are making appearances, so families and couples looking for creature comforts and pampering are now well-catered for. You can prebook packages to the Yasawas but unless you're travelling in peak season or with kids in need of facilities it's not essential to have all your accommodation tied up before you head out. Many of the backpacker resorts go through ebbs and flows of quality and you'll get your best advice from travellers on the *Yasawa Flyer*.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Cool the skin and the senses – dip the bod into the **Blue Lagoon** (p167) on Nanuya Lailai
- Simmer on sun-soaked **Oarsman's Bay beach** (p168)
- Work the pins and hike across **Waya** (p163), **Nacula** (p168) and **Tavewa** (p166) for dramatic vistas
- **Cruise** (opposite), **kayak** (p160) or **sail** (p160) the indigo seas
- Meet the manta rays off **Manta Ray Island** (p165)
- Don a snorkel or tank and cavort with turtles, reef sharks and other vivid marine life around **Tavewa** (p166), **Nacula** (p168) or **Nanuya Lailai** (p167).
- Explore the dark chambers of **Sawa-i-Lau's caves** (p169)
- Suit up in the Sunday best for a **village church service** (p168) on Nacula



■ POPULATION: 5000

■ AREA: 135 SQ KM

## Geography & Geology

The Yasawas stretch for around 90km, beginning about 40km northwest of Viti Levu. The group forms a roughly straight line within the Great Sea Reef. The land is mostly hilly; four of the larger islands have summits close to 600m above sea level. While the relatively dry climate is a plus for visitors, the land is prone to drought, and Hurricane Gavin wrought havoc in early 1997.

## Information

The Yasawas are still remote and there are no shops, banks, postal, medical or phone services. Radio-phones are not always reliable.

A dozen or so resorts in the Nacula Tikina (ie on Nacula, Tavewa, Nanuya Lailai

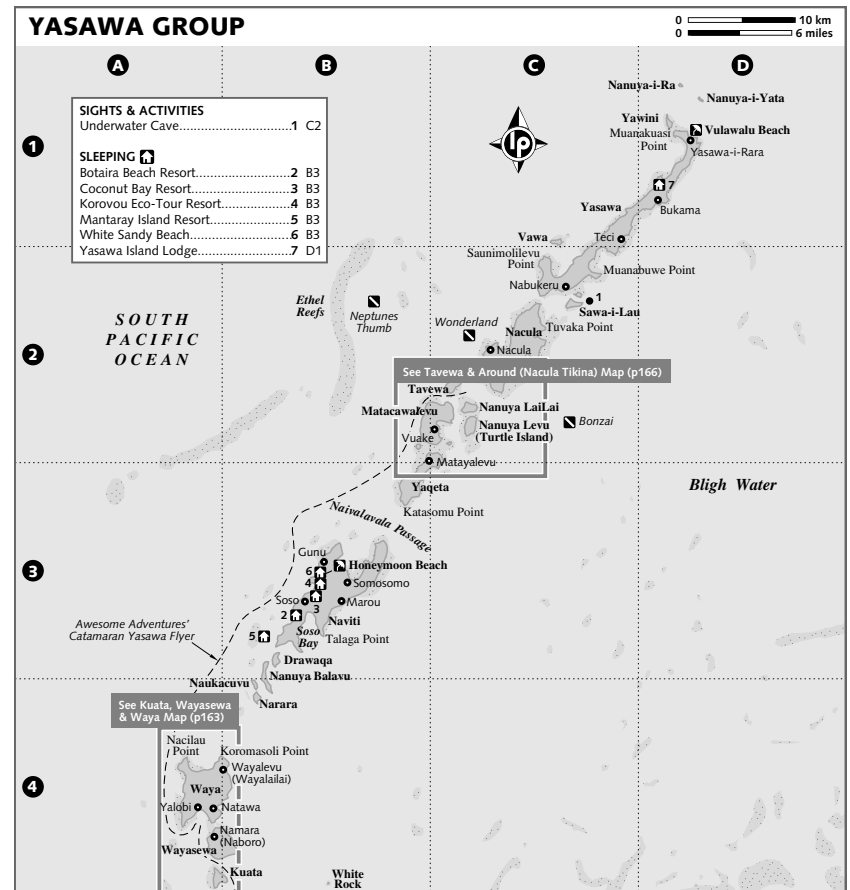
and Matacawalevu islands) have banded together and, with the help of Turtle Island Resort management, have formed the **NTTA** (Nacula Tikina Tourist Association; www.fijibudget.com) to promote their area. The website provides current and reliable information on accommodation, transport and activities for budget travellers.

Unless otherwise stated, all accommodation tariffs listed below include meals. For detailed information on diving in the Yasawas, see p60.

## Tours

### CRUISES

The floating hotel/cruise ships are an excellent mid- to top-range option for visiting



YASAWA GROUP

YASAWA GROUP

the Yasawas. With good food and comfortable accommodation laid on, you can take it easy aboard your luxury vessel, pop overboard for excellent snorkelling and diving, drop in on beautiful white-sand beaches and stop to visit local villagers.

**Captain Cook Cruises** (☎ 670 1823; www.captaincook.com.au; 15 Narewa Rd, Nadi) offers a three-night Mamanuca and southern Yasawa cruise, a four-night Yasawa cruise, and a seven-night combination cruise onboard the MV *Reef Escape*. The 68m cruise boat has a swimming pool, bars, lounges and air-conditioned accommodation spread over three decks. Accommodation options include cabins with bunk beds, staterooms and deluxe staterooms. Prices per person, twin-share, for cabin/stateroom including all meals and activities (except diving) are \$1260/1570 (three nights) or \$2640/3310 (seven nights). Children under two years travel free of charge; those up to 15 years pay \$350/770 for a three-/seven-day trip, regardless of the type of accommodation. Cruises depart from Denarau Marina on Denarau island, west of Nadi.

**Blue Lagoon Cruises** (☎ 666 1662; www.blue.lagooncruises.com; 183 Vitogo Pde, Lautoka) offers three-, four-, or seven-day Club Cruises to the Yasawas aboard huge motor-yachts. Club Cruises cost from \$1130/2480 for two-/four nights per twin-share cabin. Seven-day Gold Club Cruises aboard the luxury MV *Mystique Princess* start at \$4950 for a twin share cabin on saloon deck. Children under 15 pay 11% to 15% depending on the cruise and those aged under two are free. Transfers, cruise activities and food are included but drinks, snorkelling and diving are extra. Cruises depart from Lautoka's Queens Wharf on Viti Levu.

Blue Lagoon Cruises also has a seven-day Luxury Dive Cruise aboard the *Fijian Princess*. It includes all the activities (village visits, *kava* ceremonies, shore excursions, walks etc) and the comforts of a luxury cruise in addition to 15 dives. The dive sites are scattered from the south to the northernmost tip of the island group and take in some of the most pristine areas. Prices start at \$5040 per person.

**Awesome Adventures** (☎ 675 0499; www.awesomefiji.com) offers three-night cruises on board their sister catamaran, the 27m *Wanna Taki*, for \$330 per person in either a dorm or dou-

ble room. Rates include all meals, transfers and activities. Berths are tight but clean and fresh seafood is sometimes on the menu. Although the boat looks snug, these trips are fun and relaxed – travellers rave about the opportunity to snorkel and swim offshore.

**South Sea Cruises** (☎ 675 0500; www.ssc.com.fj) also runs day tours from Denarau island to Botaira Beach Resort on Naviti island (\$125/65 per adult/child) and Sunset Beach Resort on Waya island (\$120/60 per adult/child).

### SAILING

**Captain Cook Cruises** (☎ 670 1823; www.captaincook.com.au; 15 Narewa Rd, Nadi) has sailing trips to the southern Yasawas aboard the tall ship *Spirit of the Pacific*. Swimming, snorkelling, fishing, island treks, village visits, campfire barbecues and *lovo* (feasts cooked in a pit oven) are all part of the deal. Accommodation is in simple *bure* (traditional thatched dwellings) ashore, or aboard in fold-up canvas beds below the deck cabins. Prices per person, twin share, are \$510/680 for a three-/four-day trip.

Yachts can also be chartered from Musket Cove Marina (p155), located on Malololailai in the Mamanucas.

### KAYAKING

Australian-operated **Southern Sea Ventures** (☎ in Australia 02-8901 3287; www.southernseaventures.com) offers nine-day kayaking safaris along the Yasawa chain. The trips (May to October) cost A\$1965 per person, for a maximum of 10 people per group. The price includes all meals, two-person fibreglass kayaks, safety and camping gear. The pace of the tour is dictated by the weather and the fitness of the group. There are six days of kayaking – you'll follow in Bligh's oar strokes, stopping along the way for snorkelling and village visits. Expect to paddle for three to four hours daily.

A Canadian company offering similar tours is **Ecomarine Ocean Kayak Centre** (☎ in Canada 604-689-5926; www.ecomarine.com). Tours cost around A\$1920 and run from May to October. Accommodation is a combination of village stays and camping.

### HIKING

Many resorts offer guided hiking trips, some of which visit local villages. Good places to hike include Waya, Nacula and Tavewa.

### CORAL'S TRUE COLOUR

The Yasawa islands are home to some of the most vivid coral in the world and excellent visibility provides snorkellers and divers with plenty of opportunity to appreciate it. Although its flowery exterior appears plantlike, coral is actually an animal, and a hungry, carnivorous one at that.

Corals belong to the same class of animals as sea anemones and jellyfish. The true reef-building corals or *Scleractinia* are distinguished by their lime skeletons. This skeleton forms the reef and as new coral continually builds on old, dead coral the reef gradually builds up.

All coral formations are made up of polyps, the tiny tubelike, fleshy cylinders that look very like their close relation, the anemone. The top of the cylinder is open and ringed by waving tentacles, which sting and draw any passing prey into the polyp's stomach. This is why 'coral cuts' can be quite painful – when you graze your skin on coral you're actually receiving a sting. Although this is reason enough to avoid touching coral, it's more important to remember that coral is quite fragile, so if you break it you're essentially killing decades of growth and life.

Each polyp is an individual creature, but each can reproduce by splitting to form a coral colony of separate but closely related polyps. Although each polyp catches and digests its own food, the nutrition passes between the polyps to the whole colony. Most coral polyps only feed at night: during the daytime they withdraw into their hard limestone skeleton, so it is only at night that a coral reef can be seen in its full colourful glory.

Hard corals take many forms. One of the most common and easiest to recognise is the staghorn coral, which grows by budding off new branches from the tips. Brain corals are huge and round with a surface looking very much like a human brain. They grow by adding new base levels of skeletal matter and expanding outwards. Flat or sheet corals, such as plate coral, expand at their outer edges.

Like their reef-building relatives, soft coral is made up of individual polyps, but does not form a hard limestone skeleton. Without the skeleton that protects hard coral, it would seem likely that soft coral would fall prey to fish, but it seems to remain relatively immune either due to toxic substances in its tissues or to the presence of sharp limestone needles, which protect the polyps. Soft corals can move around and will sometimes engulf and kill hard coral.

When diving or snorkelling be careful to respect the underwater environment; admire but don't touch. If your expedition takes you to the ocean floor, look what's beneath you before touching the bottom. Corals may appear resilient and hardy but they are extremely vulnerable and preserving them ensures a healthy ecological balance for all marine life in the area.

### Getting There & Around

**Turtle Airways** (☎ 672 1888; reservations@turtleairways.com) has seaplanes flying daily from Nadi (from Turtle Airways Base in New Town, 20 minutes drive west from Nadi International Airport) to Tavewa island. The flight takes about 35 minutes and costs \$300 one way (a fraction of what the upmarket resort guests pay). It is a spectacular scenic flight and well worth it for at least one leg. The flight, on small vintage planes (Cessnas or the less noisy de Havilland Beaver), is a great experience itself.

Most people travelling to the Yasawas choose to go by the *Yasawa Flyer* (also called the 'Yellow Boat') operated by **Awesome Adventures Fiji** (☎ 675 0499; www.awesomefiji.com). The comfortable 25m high-speed catamaran has toilets, air-con and snack bar and departs 9.15am daily from Denarau Marina on Viti

Levu. It takes about 1¼ hours to Kuata or Wayalailai (\$75), two hours to Waya (\$75), three hours to Naviti (\$80) and 4½ hours to Tavewa (\$95). Interisland fares are around \$60, even for short distances.

If you want to linger in the islands without a prebooked itinerary then a 'Bula Pass' (seven/14/21 days \$250/370/400) can be a good deal. The pass enables unlimited island-hopping within the time period but only one return trip to Denarau. Awesome Adventures also offers three-/seven-night stays (from \$300/800 per person) on up to four islands including transport, accommodation, meals and activities. Be warned, however, your choice of accommodation is limited, usually to the lower end of the quality scale. So if you've got a firm idea of what you want from your holiday you're better off booking your own accommodation separately.





### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Octopus Resort** (☎ 666 6337; www.octopusresort.com; sites per tent \$90, dm \$80, d \$145-200; ☒ ☑) Sweet mercy, this chic resort is a far cry from the Yasawas' trademark thatched walls and cold showers. Although it's one of the oldest properties in the island group, meticulous maintenance and constant evolution have fashioned a Shangri-la façade. Visitors are greeted with the oasis-like vision of a swanky bar-restaurant, which dishes up chilled tunes and fabulous food. The stylish *bure* are tiled and fan cooled and some have two bunks to accommodate families. The spotless bathrooms have roofless showers so you can stargaze while you wash. Prices escalate as you get closer to the water, but all *bure* have plenty of garden and space surrounding them for privacy. The dorm is the best in the Yasawas (if not all of Fiji!) and each solid bed comes with its bedside table, fan and electricity outlet. Camping is in large domed tents provided by the resort. All guests are treated to bath towels and generous beach towels, and the water's edge is peppered with padded timber sun lounges.

The beach is wide at low tide and has good snorkelling and a secluded atmosphere. It's unnervingly easy to spend your entire day on the soft sandy bank but there are plenty of activities on offer and nightly entertainment. Snorkelling gear costs \$5 per person to rent, babysitting is available and the one-hour massage at \$15 a pop is the best value in the country. It also has a good dive outfit that charges \$150/480 for a two-tank dive/PADI Open Water Course.

more preparation as it is 10km each way over the hills. It's best done with a guide but if you want to head out on your own take plenty of water. It's also advisable to avoid going after heavy rains; the tracks are steep in parts and navigating their slushy ascent varies from difficult to impossible. At low tide it's possible to walk from Wayasewa to Waya on a sandbank so avid trekkers can avoid transfers altogether.

A thick rim of coral follows the shoreline and provides great **snorkelling** just off the beaches, particularly near Sunset Beach Resort and Octopus Resort.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Sunset Beach Resort** (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 6383; dm/d \$55/140) In an exposed but beautiful setting, this place welcomes guests with a wide curve of beach and a semilandscaped frontage. There's a basic, five-bed dorm and five double *bure* with private bathroom. Accommodation is all thatched, as is the dining room, which has a sand floor and long communal tables. It's small and quiet and perfect for low-maintenance travellers in search of no-frills serenity. The swimming here is lovely and the tidal sandbar that connects Waya and Wayasewa is on the resort's doorstep. You can walk across at low tide, and the snorkelling on the eastern side of the point is good. Transfers from the *Yasawa Flyer* are an additional \$10.

There are two additional budget options with more basic setups tucked into the ma-

jestic Yalobi Bay – the family-owned **Adi's Place** (☎ 665 0573, 9926 377; sites per person \$25, dm/d \$35/80) and the teeny **Bayside Budget Resort** (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 6383; dm/d \$40/100). Both are rudimentary but utterly friendly. The snorkelling at Adi's and Bayside is not as good as that at Octopus Resort or Sunset Beach Resort and you'll need to take a boat to a nearby reef or walk to the eastern side of Nativaga Point for the best spots.

### Getting There & Away

The *Yasawa Flyer* comes past Yalobi Bay daily (\$75 per person each way). Octopus Resort also operates its own transfers from Lautoka and Nadi in a solid, covered boat for \$65/35 per adult/child one way.

### NAVITI & AROUND

Roughly midway along the Yasawas, and one of the largest (33 sq km) and highest of the group, Naviti has a rugged volcanic profile, up to 380m high. The island's main attraction is an amazing snorkelling site where you can swim with manta rays. It's near the aptly named **Manta Ray Island**. Korovou, Coconut Bay and White Sandy Beach Resorts all share a protected, long stretch of white sand, about halfway up the west coast of the island. Unfortunately the swimming is only just possible at high tide here – low tide exposes a wide bank of dead and ugly reef. Fortunately a short track (around a 10-minute walk) next to White Sandy Beach Resort crosses over a hill to

the pretty and secluded Honeymoon Beach. Visitors need to make a \$1 donation to the village to visit this little cove but the pay off is calm and tranquil swimming waters and great snorkelling.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Botaira Beach Resort** (☎ 675 0499; www.botaira.com; dm \$70, d from \$275) Definitely catering to the more discerning traveller, Botaira extends over a long patch of secluded beach thick with palm trees, offering guests plenty of privacy in spacious and stylish timber *bure*. High roofs, bright bathrooms and crisp white sheets are the order of the day here. The swimming and snorkelling are lovely and activities include guided walks and swimming with manta rays. Botaira has couples stamped all over it but it's devoid of pretension and caters to all age groups.

**Coconut Bay Resort** (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 1300; dm/d \$45/120) The gracious staff at this warm and friendly resort are drawcards unto themselves. Dorms are roomy 12-bed affairs with sturdy timber bunks. Doubles are in spotless and simple duplex buildings and although the walls are thin, the clientele is generally quiet. Little touches such as couches on the veranda give the place a homely air. The food is excellent and if you're here for a curry night you've hit the jackpot. Coconut Bay is a good option for couples or travellers seeking a chilled-out retreat.

**Mantaray Island Resort** (☎ 664 0520; www.mantarayisland.com; sites per person \$25, dm \$35, d \$100-150) One of the newest of the Yasawa resorts, Mantaray occupies its own wee island and has a lovely beach with wide ocean views. Its proximity to the manta rays' favoured stomping grounds is a huge plus, but the classy wooden dorm and beachfront *bure* are also a notch better than its average budget counterparts. The resort also has an eco-bent and uses compost toilets. Meal plans are an additional \$40 per person.

**Korovou Eco-Tour Resort** (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 2244; korovoultk@connect.com.fj; sites per person \$35, dm \$55, d \$130-160) In stark contrast to its neighbour (Coconut Bay), Korovou can accommodate a small army and is frequently packed with young and social troops. The 32-bed dorms are a tad on the cramped side and can get stuffy in the heat. Cheaper

### BEACH BUSINESS

All the resorts in the Yasawas are on the waterfront but not all can claim idyllic beaches. If white sand, turquoise depths and simmering in a sun-coma are what you came for then the following resorts should be just the ticket.

**Oarsman's Bay Lodge** (p168) It's on the best of the Yasawas' resort-based beaches. Protected from the trade winds, the water is still, clear and deep. A large bank of coral provides excellent snorkelling.

**Nanuya Island Resort** (p167) The resort occupies an enviable and isolated position on a quiet beach in front of the renowned Blue Lagoon.

**Sunset Beach Resort** (opposite) At the southern hook of Waya Island, Sunset Beach has a 270-degree bend of beach with plenty of sand. There's great snorkelling in the small passage between Waya and Wayasewa.

**Octopus Resort** (opposite) The beach in this protected cove is beautiful for swimming at high tide and great for sunbaking and wandering at low tide.

**Botaira Beach Resort** (left) Botaira's beach is a length of soft white sand with ample room to park a towel. The calm water has a good stretch of shallows before it drops into the deep.

doubles are in thatched *bure* or duplex-style rooms; the latter are much better value so ask to see your digs before you check in. There are also solid timber cabins with clean and cool interiors. Meals are served on a large open deck overlooking the water and there's a bar with Sky TV. Snorkelling is OK off the beach (only at high tide). Gear hire is \$10 per day and a snorkelling trip costs \$20 per person. A two-tank dive/PADI Open Water Dive Course costs \$170/530.

**White Sandy Beach** (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 1360; dm/d \$55/130) The sand somehow seems softer and the pace significantly slower at this personable budget resort. There are two comfortable *bure* (with two more in the making) and a clean and cosy dorm. Dining is a communal affair at picnic tables and the dive centre here offers two-tank dives for \$170.

### Getting There & Away

Boat transfers to all the resorts listed here are with the *Yasawa Flyer* (\$80 each way).

## TAVEWA

Tavewa is a small (3 sq km), low island right in the middle of the Yasawa Group but it houses some of the group's northern-most resorts. A pleasant beach unfurls itself on the southeastern coast of the island but it's often plagued by buffeting trade winds. You need to head west to the beach around the bend of Savutu Point to find relief from the gales and you're best off doing so at low tide. The snorkelling just offshore here is excellent. An ambling ascent to the top of the central crest affords photogenic views of the Yasawa chain and is particularly spectacular at sunset. The track joins the path connecting Coral View Resort and the southeastern beach.

All the resorts listed here offer boat trips to the Blue Lagoon and trips to Sawa-i-Lau caves (p169) for \$10 and \$25 per person, respectively. Volleyball, nightly music and *kava* sessions are also standard.

Based on the island, **Westside Watersports** (☎ 666 1462, 998 862; westside@divefiji.com) is an excellent, experienced dive operation. It caters to guests at resorts on nearby islands including the upmarket Turtle Island Resort,

as well as Blue Lagoon Cruise passengers. A two-tank dive/PADI Open Water Course costs \$160/580 and the instructors and equipment are outstanding.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Otto & Fanny's** (☎ 666 6481; dm/d \$45/90) On a sprawling property, this homely place has just five *bure* with private bathrooms and a 12-bed dorm. The flat, grassy grounds are inundated with palm trees and offer plenty of wide open space. *Bure* nearest the beach catch more of the sea breeze. Two of the *bure* can fit three to four people, with one in a more secluded spot in the jungle and near the beach. Travellers talk up the meals here (meal packages per person \$50) and the afternoon tea of banana cake, chocolate cake or scones (for only \$1.50!) is legendary. This place has a real family feel to it and lures travellers of all ages. Otto and Fanny's is also closest to Tavewa's best patch of beach.

**David's Place** (☎ 672 1820, 665 2820; davidspacereort@yahoo.com; sites per person \$35, dm \$60, d with/without bathroom \$180/120) Also occupying capacious grounds but with a more structured feel and

fewer trees than Otto and Fanny's, this resort has an abundance of simple *bure* with double beds, lights and mosquito nets. The more expensive deluxe *bure* have private bathrooms and are a huge increase in style but there's only two so you'll need to book. The dorm contains a whopping 26 beds.

**Coral View Resort** (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 8876; coral@connect.com.fj; sites per person \$35, dm \$55, d \$130-180) Nestled beneath a dense hilly backdrop, this ever-expanding resort is furnished with a constant buzz thanks to sparky staff and a range of accommodation options to suit everyone. The 16-bed concrete-floored dorm is comfortable with decent chunks of space and light. Standard *bure* are Spartan and a tad on the pricey side, but the swish new deluxe versions are the best on the island with classy bathrooms, mezzanines, bar fridges and private verandas. The dining room is like a big beachy dance hall with long communal tables and although the food is unadventurous, it's filling and you can get fresh coffee! Coral View's beach is virtually nonexistent and you'll need to cover the short distance to the southeast beach for a dose of sea and sand, but the resort offers plenty of activities.

**Kingfisher Lodge** (☎ 665 2830; s/d bure \$130/160) Best suited to couples after a quiet time, Kingfisher Lodge has just one comfortable fan-cooled cottage in a jungle-like garden. You can order meals in advance or duck down the beach to Otto & Fanny's. This place is so quiet it sometimes has an abandoned air about it, which may be a plus or a minus depending on what you're looking for.

### Getting There & Away

The *Yasawa Flyer* costs \$95 per person each way and the seaplane \$300 (see p161). Coral View has its own transfer boat to Lautoka (3¼ hours, organised on demand) costing \$70/120 one way/return. Guests of other resorts can be included for a little extra.

### NANUYA LILAI

This is it folks, home to that celebrity of all the Yasawas' beaches – the Blue Lagoon. Crystalline and glossy, it doesn't disappoint the bevy of swimmers, snorkellers, divers, and people on cruise boats or yachts who dabble in its gorgeous depths. Actually it's not dissimilar to many of the lagoons scattered around the Yasawas, but the protected

beach is lovely and the water is achingly lucid. A narrow channel separates it from the larger Nanuya Levu (Turtle Island) to the south. Travellers are advised (by signs and enforced at times by security staff) to stay clear of Nanuya Levu as well as the section of Blue Lagoon beach used by Blue Lagoon Cruises. The settlement of **Enadala** and several budget resorts reside on the eastern side of Nanuya Lailai, where the beach is deep and choppy. Inland, the island is a mass of gently sloping hills and mangroves.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Nanuya Island Resort** (☎ 666 7633; www.nanuyafiji.com; d \$210-350) Swish and understated, this resort is the kind of place you picture when you dream of indulgence, cocktails and exquisite vistas. The *bure* are Fiji-nouveau; the roofs may be thatched but the interiors are chic and elegant. All are fan cooled and have their own bathroom. Your tariff includes breakfast, and the à-la-carte lunch and dinner menus are reasonable (\$12 to \$25) and inventive. And it's *right* on the Blue Lagoon.

**Gold Coast Resort** (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 7777; dm \$40, d with/without bathroom \$120/90) The private timber *bure* here have sand floors and simple surrounds but are the nicest along this beach. This resort is also a smallish affair and consequently a good place to escape the masses. Meals often feature catch of the day and are a refreshing departure from the starchy carb feasts at other budget resorts.

**Sunrise Lagoon Resort** (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 9484; dm/d \$55/150) Something like a 'South Seas school camp' (particularly the food), this budget resort swarms with 18 to 25 year olds who delve into 'hi, my name is...' intro sessions, nightly *meke* and industrious socialising. The accommodation and bathrooms are a little on the sloppy side but the crowd is chatty and there's a warm atmosphere pervading the whole place.

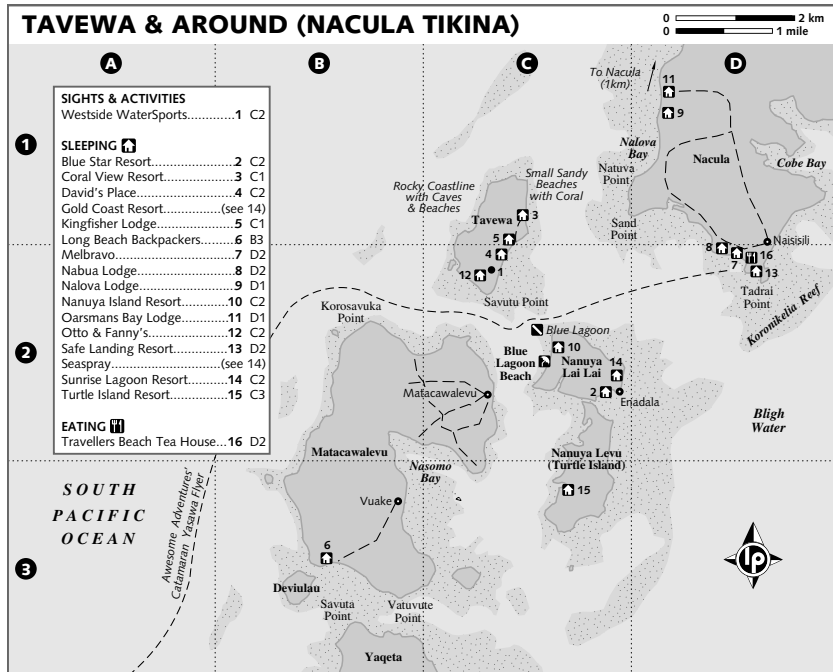
More budget options:

**Seaspray** (☎ 666 8962; dm/d \$45/95) Budget and basic with decent dorms.

**Blue Star Resort** (☎ 992 5825; info@bluestar.fiji.com; s \$80-120, d \$90-150) Quiet option with lovely *bure*. Recommended by readers.

### Getting There & Away

Transfers to Nanuya Lailai are with the *Yasawa Flyer* (\$95). Turtle Airways (p161) has flights for \$300 per person one way.



## MATACAWALEVU

Matacawalevu is a 4km-long hilly volcanic island protected by the large Nasomo Bay on its eastern side. Nanuya Levu (Turtle Island) is to the east and to the south, across a protected lagoon which is used for seaweed farming, is Yaqeta. The island has two villages, Matacawalevu on its northeast end and Vuake in Nasomo Bay.

On a lovely long curved beach with a protected lagoon, **Long Beach Backpackers** (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 3032; dm/d \$55/\$90) has a stunning location. There is good snorkelling nearby, including an excellent reef drop off on the western side of the island. It has easy access to the small rocky island of Deviulau, home to local seabirds. Accommodation and facilities are pretty basic in Fijian style *bure*. It charges \$10 per person for pick-ups from the *Yasawa Flyer* or \$20 per person to meet the seaplane at Tavewa.

## NACULA

Nacula, a hilly volcanic island, is the third-largest in the Yasawas. Blanketed with rugged hills and soft peaks, its interior is laced with well-trodden paths begging for mooching to villages and small coves. There are four villages here, including Nacula, home of Ratu Epeli Vuetibau, the high chief of Nacula Tikina. The *tikina* (group of villages) includes the islands of Nacula, Tavewa, Nanuya Levu, Nanuya Lailai and Matacawalevu, and is home to about 3500 people. Catching a church service in one of the villages is a real treat. Beach devotees will be ecstatic to know that Nacula also has some of the finest swimming and snorkelling in Fiji, particularly at Oarsman's Bay. A new, intimate resort is on its way to being built on the tiny island just north of Oarsman's Bay. It promises to be flash.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Oarsman's Bay Lodge** (☎ 672 2921; [nacula@hotmail.com](mailto:nacula@hotmail.com); sites per person \$22.50, dm/d/f \$50/140/240; ☒) You'll hear murmurs about the beach at Oarsman's Bay much further afield than the *Yasawa Flyer* and for good reason. Its long swathe of powdery sand eases gently into a glassy, cerulean sea, offering impossibly clear views to the bottom well past wading height. The classy digs at the lodge do the beach justice and this is deservedly one of the most popular resorts in the Yasa-

was. Clean and crisp *bure* with bright hues, modern bathrooms and private verandas are strung out on either side of the resort. Several have interconnecting rooms for families. Above the central, open-air dining room is a 13-bed dorm, which has fairly close but atmospheric quarters and a lovely landing with views across the bay. The food here (additional compulsory meal plan per adult/child six to 16/child under six \$50/25/11) is very good, particularly on buffet nights which occur at least twice a week. Activities include island-hopping, reef-hopping, village visits and hand-fishing (all \$10), but the big attraction is the spectacular snorkelling right off the beach. Oarsman's has remained relatively small; even at full capacity there's enough space to make you feel like you're at an exclusive resort. Payment is by credit card only.

**Safe Landing Resort** (☎ 672 2921; [nacula@hotmail.com](mailto:nacula@hotmail.com); sites per person \$12, dm \$17-35, d without bathroom \$45-85, d with bathroom \$125-135) Although this neat little resort doesn't have quite the same style (or beach) as Oarsman's Bay, it's still one of the most comfortable resorts in the Yasawas. Timber *bure* are fan-cooled, tiled and compact with plenty of windows for sunlight. The more expensive deluxe dorms are housed in similar units and are quite a treat with only six beds and a private bathroom. Standard dorms are simpler affairs and the cheaper Fijian *bure* are thatched, basic huts. Both share rudimentary facilities. There's an ocean of flat grassy space behind the resort for camping (or just mucking around) and although the beach isn't huge, it's calm and private. The food (additional compulsory meal plan per adult/child six to 16/child under six \$41/21/11) is quite good but drinks and snacks from the bar are expensive. Boat transfers from the *Yasawa Flyer* or the seaplane 'airport' in Tavewa cost \$10 per person. The resort has free village visits, a couple of small paddleboats, snorkelling gear (\$5 per day, snorkel trips \$10 per person), island-hopping (\$10 per person each way) and underwater cave trips (\$25 per person). Payment is by credit card only.

**Nalova Lodge** (☎ 666 9055; d \$195) Right next door to Oarsman's Bay Lodge this teeny resort has been in the making for years. There are three spacious and homey *bure* with a modicum of furniture, wallpapered floors and simple bathrooms. Breakfast and lunch

are served on your own *bure* porch and dinner is served in the small dining room. It enjoys *that* fabulous beach, the food is fresh and good and the staff are lovely.

**Nabua Lodge** (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 6369; dm \$50, d with/without bathroom \$150/95) Just west of Safe Landing on a nicely landscaped plot of grass, this lodge has generous timber cottages facing the ocean. Rooms have ceiling fans, wooden furniture and endearing porches. They're not the Ritz but are great value for the price. Standard *bure* are also roomy but the lack of fans may produce stuffy summer nights. Dorms are plain and simple. Hammocks are placed strategically between shady trees throughout the property and right out front is a tidal white-sand beach fringed by reefs. Nabua is a great place to switch to 'Fiji time' and adopt the local lifestyle.

**Melbravo** (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 7472; dm \$50, d with/without shower \$150/100) Also spread out on a patch of lawn, Melbravo's accommodation could do with a touch of TLC. *Bure* with private bathrooms, fans, electric lights and a decent splash of space are the best buy, but the standard *bure* and dorms are a little on the dark and stuffy side.

**Travellers Beach Tea House** (☎ 8am-6pm) Based in and out of a wee shack, this beachy tea house serves tea, coffee and cake (all \$1.50). It's a lovely spot to survey the ocean and chat with the friendly owners.

## Getting There & Away

Transfers to all the resorts on Nacula are by *Yasawa Flyer* (\$95). Resorts charge an additional \$10 transfer fee.

## NANUYA LEVU (TURTLE ISLAND)

Nanuya Levu is a privately owned island (2 sq km) with protected sandy beaches and rugged volcanic cliffs. The 1980 film *The Blue Lagoon*, starring Brooke Shields, was partly filmed here, as was the original 1949 version starring Jean Simmons.

One of the world's finest and most famous resorts, **Turtle Island Resort** (☎ 672 2921; [www.turtlefiji.com](http://www.turtlefiji.com); d \$3400-4100) lures the celebrities, romantics and flush from around the

world to its exclusive shores. The resort is owned by American Richard Evanson, who, after making his fortune in cable TV, bought the island in 1972 for his own personal hideaway. The 14 two-room *bure* are spaced along the beach. Rates include all food, drinks and most activities and there is a six-night minimum stay. Children are allowed only during July and Christmas holidays. Transfers are by Turtle Airways seaplane charter (\$1400 return per couple), a 30-minute flight from Nadi.

## SAWA-I-LAU

Sawa-i-Lau is the odd limestone island amid a string of high volcanic islands. The underwater limestone is thought to have formed a few hundred metres below the surface and then were uplifted over time. Shafts of daylight enter the great dome-shaped cave (15m tall above the water surface) where you can swim in the natural pool. With a guide, a torch and a bit of courage, you can also swim through an underwater passage into an adjoining chamber. The limestone walls have carvings, paintings and inscriptions of unknown meaning. Similar inscriptions also occur on Vanua Levu in the hills near Vuinadi, Natewa Bay and near Dakuniba on the Tunuloa (Cakaudrove) Peninsula.

Most Yasawa budget resorts offer trips to the caves and the cruise ships call here.

## YASAWA

Yasawa, the northernmost island of the group, has six small villages and a fabulous, five-star resort.

Remote **Yasawa Island Resort** (☎ 672 2266; [www.yasawa.com](http://www.yasawa.com); s/d from \$1490/1580; ☒ ☒) is set on a gorgeous beach. The 16 air-conditioned *bure* are spacious with separate living and bedroom areas. Rates include lobster omelettes for breakfast and all à-la-carte meals (drinks extra) and activities (except for diving, game fishing and massage). The resort has its own dive shop and activities include 4WD safaris and picnics to deserted beaches. Transfers are by charter flight from Nadi (\$320 per person one way, 30 minutes).

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'