

A Tropical Palette of Wish Fulfillment Awaits at Fiji Forbes Laucala

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY JACK AND SUE DRAFAHL



*Time's passage is tempered
in comfortable burees.*



*Above: Fiji is known for its soft corals.
Below: Clownfish and the anemone
that shelters them.*

Slivers of light squeezed through the window shades and the sounds of chirping birds encouraged us to slip from the covers. As we entered the main room of our lodging, the aroma of freshly cooked food filled the air and our bure girl greeted us warmly. She had arrived earlier and had a hot breakfast ready and waiting. What a way to start another day in Laucala paradise!

After a casual breakfast, we prepared our camera gear. Our bure girl stayed to clean, make the beds and take care of our laundry. We waved goodbye as we boarded a truck headed for the dive shop. Although most everything is within walking distance, the folks at Laucala want to make sure guests are pampered to the utmost.

It is hard to believe that our trip to this tiny 3,000 acre island resort started only a couple of days ago in Los Angeles. There we boarded a 747 Air Pacific jet for the 10 hour flight to Nadi, Fiji. In Nadi we transferred to a smaller plane for the final leg of our journey to Fiji Forbes Laucala. This island paradise was originally a getaway for Malcolm Forbes, who bought it in



1972. Although it only has seven *bures*, Fiji Forbes has become one of the most desirable resort destinations in Fiji.

We arrived at our dive boat to find our dive gear already set up and waiting. With five boats, guests can dive in small groups anytime they choose. Today we were diving with four other divers and one divemaster.

We were given a wide choice of popular sites all within a short boat ride from the resort. The first site, **Frank's Place**, could have been called fish city, as we saw fish of all shapes and sizes. There were triggerfish, some really big wrasse and several fish cleaning stations. Of course, fish weren't the only attractions. Soft and hard corals were everywhere and colorful nudibranchs were hiding in the cracks and crevices while curious reef sharks cruised by for a quick look.

Besides the joy of an uncrowded boat, we were happy to be unconcerned about the whereabouts of the boat. When we had used about 80 percent of our air, we made a safety stop and then surfaced to find the boat just a few feet away. It was as if the boat had an invisible line attached to us. What a way to dive—go wherever you want and totally maximize your bottom time.

When all the divers were aboard, we moved to a quiet spot near shore for our surface interval. Drinks and

snacks were served and we had a choice of soaking up some sun or snorkeling the shallow reef. The crew changed our tank setups for the next dive while we reloaded our cameras.

After the proper surface interval, we moved to **Anemone Reef**, where there was an abundance of anemones. They were so thick they looked like a large, colorful carpet on the ocean floor. We found dozens of small crabs, nudibranchs, starfish and small critters hidden among the anemone colonies. As we slowly worked our way up to 15 feet, we used the last of our film photographing fish cleaning stations.

Laucala has an E-6 photo lab, run by Ric and Carol West, so you can quickly see the results of your day's escapades. They also have a video editing system that allows them to shoot pictures of your dive and edit it into a video. It's quite an impressive setup for such a remote location.

After the dive our gear would be washed in fresh water, dried and stored in the shop until our next trip. We had the choice of diving in the afternoon or evening but we opted to take the time

off. We had lunch on the beach, read for awhile and explored the resort.

The seven *bures* are in a row along the shore, each with a large amount of private space. The dive shop and boat dock are centrally located, allowing easy access from any *bure*. Meals are elegantly prepared and served in either the Plantation House or, when a barbeque is scheduled, down on the beach. Of course, you can always dine in your *bure* if you want total privacy.

We heard a truck approaching and realized it was our transportation for the island tour we had scheduled. Our first stop was

Malcolm Forbes' house on the top of the island. It is still furnished and has part of his miniature ship collection on display. From there we went to an adult sized treehouse on the beach. It's perfect for a romantic lunch, a Tarzan style reading room or just a great place to get away from it all.

As the tour continued we stopped at a special viewpoint. A platform and small *bure* make this a nice place for a quiet lunch and relaxation. The afternoon was slowly passing into evening, so we made our way back to the main resort for the evening's beach barbeque.

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SDM TRAVEL AT A GLANCE

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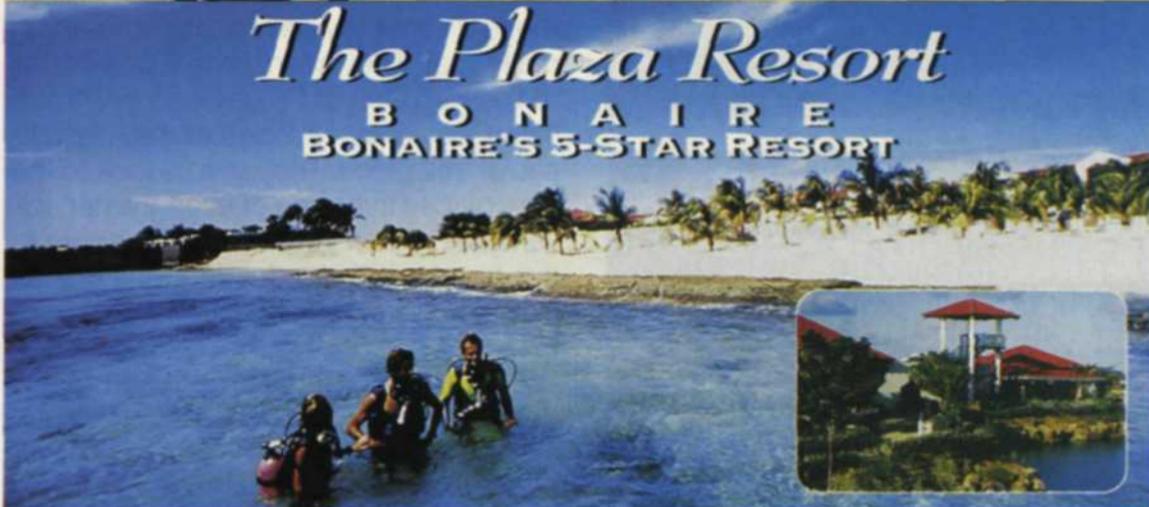
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FIJI FORBES LAUCALA

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We arrived at the barbecue area just as the local villagers were preparing for the *meke*. For the next half hour we were presented with traditional song, dance and Fijian fun. The barbecue featured traditional and Fijian foods cooked to perfection. Of course, the after dinner passing of the *kava* cup was something not to be missed.

Keep in mind that this was how we spent one day of our stay at Laucala. Here, every day can be totally different or exactly the same. You decide how you want it. Just let the staff know your every desire and they will pamper you beyond

FIJI BOUND

Flights to Fiji are available through Air Pacific and Qantas. The nonstop Air Pacific flight from Los Angeles to Fiji's International Airport in Nadi takes approximately 10 hours. The outer islands can be reached via the local carriers, Air Fiji and Sunflower.



Air Pacific
(800) 227-4446

Qantas Airways
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Air Fiji
(800) 677-4277 (in U.S.)

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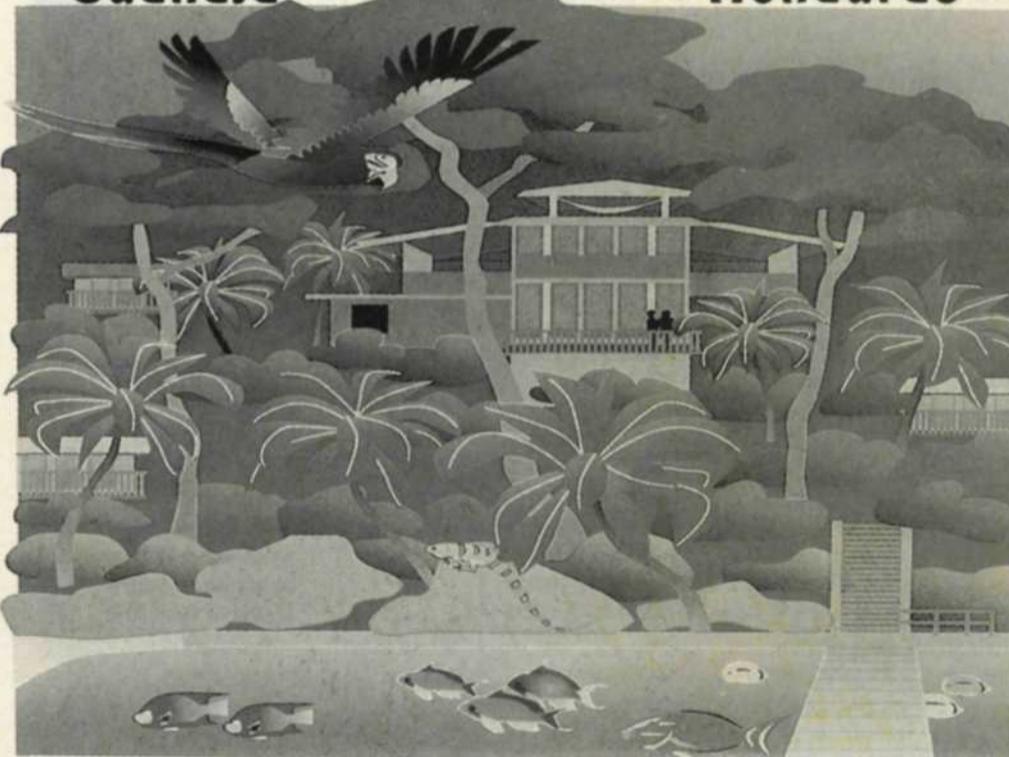
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