Mana Island

Our second summer in Fiji.

A bunch of unruly sailors defy the odds and stay in Fiji for cyclone season

Well its been a few weeks since my last blog post and its because, well, frankly, Ive been having too much fun diving.

We are anchored in our old favorite hang out of Mana Island but this time we're not alone. We're accompanied by "Rene" from Blue Spirit, the crew from Catamaran Olena Laure, Stephan with their 3 beautiful kids. Robby and Sumi from Coral Trekker, and now Martin from Vavu-U.

What a dive team we make and every morning for the last 8 days now 2 inflatable dingy's can be seen zooming out through the lagoon entrance on the way to another bubble blowing and critter chasing session.

I'm used to diving alone and boy it sure is noisy with a bunch of divers around even for a deaf old bugger like me but now at least I have a lot more eyes searching for the little stuff for me to photograph.

Its Cyclone season in Fiji and we all start the day looking at the weather report keeping a very close eye on whats going on out there in the Pacific.

We all have our designated cyclone hole where we will run should the need occur. Some are going to Denarau where we sat out 2 storms last year, some to Vuda Marina and ourselves to a well protected spot just north of Denarau.

Keep your fingers crossed.

The crews from

Filizi,

Coral Trekker,

Olena,

Blue Spirit,

S/V O2.

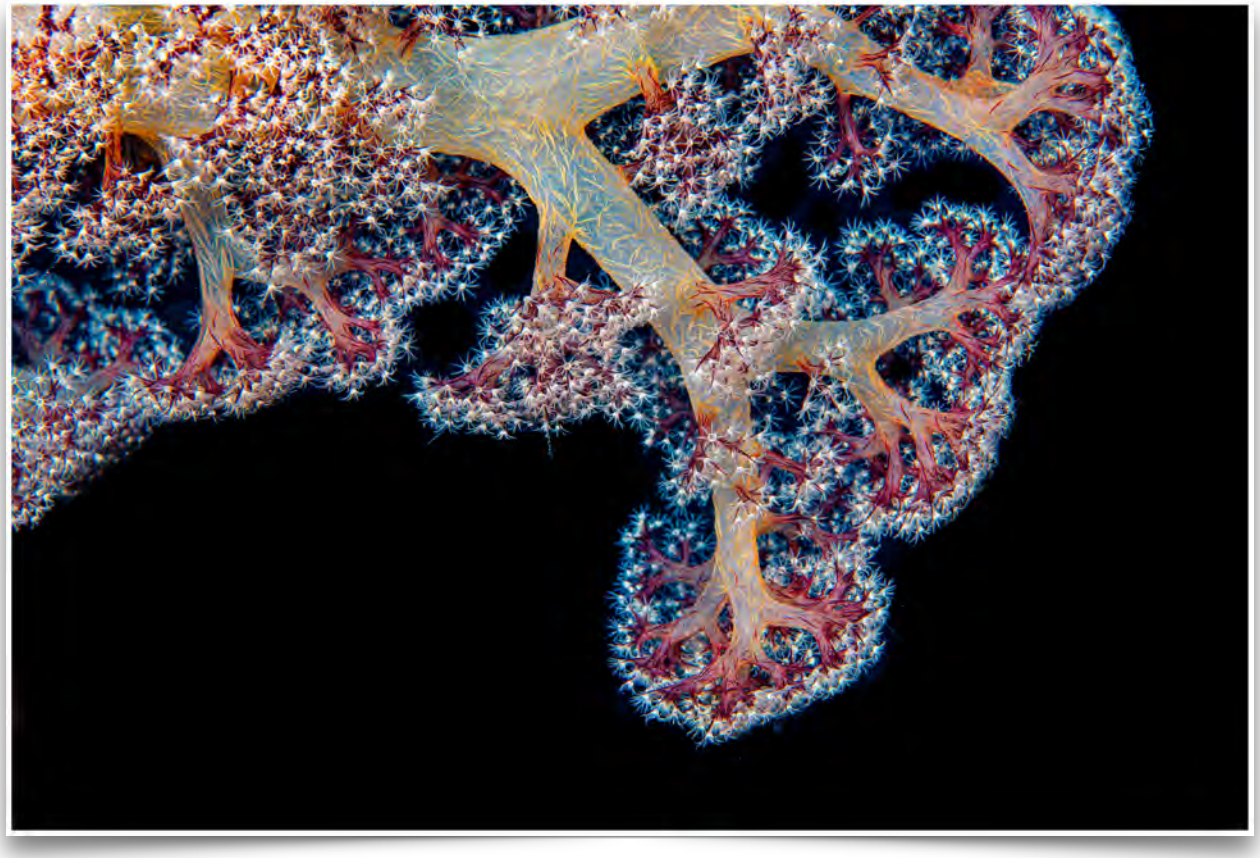
all misbehaving during sundowners on the foredeck of the O2

With not much else to do here I guess this blog is going to be about diving, I personally can't think of a much better subject.

We have dove the barrier reef here at Mana from east to west last time we sheltered here at the beginning of the Covid-19 lockdown so this underwater terrain is familia territory for Ofelia and myself.
One thing different we are seeing is a lot of brown algae building up on the reef and I believe it's due to rising sea water temperatures. Yesterday I removed my dive computer and took a photo of it, at 17.5 meters the water temperature is 29˚. Thats way too hot for ocean temperatures and summer is just beginning.

17.5 meters deep and still 29˚ water temp. Global warming is real my friends

These corals below however seem to be dealing very well with the temperatures for now



And so the diving goes on and you can see below the results of some of our adventures.

Many spotted blenny

Rene starting to get his buoyancy down

A nudibranch disappearing over a rock. Chromodoris

Phyllidia ocellata

Phyllidia guamensis

Nudibranch eggs

Macro, a very pretty hard coral

A juvenile Long nosed filefish

So cute a tiny blenny perched on the reef

Every now and then on a very calm day we managed to run out in our tenders to Cakaunilolo Reef
Lat 17˚ 39,449 S long 177˚ 6.624 E and the Seven Sisters which are 7 coral pinnacles on the west side of the reef. On a good viz day underwater you can see the pinnacles from the main reef as huge dark shadows out in the blue.

Out here you have a chance to see a couple of reef sharks and the occasional turtle, if you're really lucky a leopard shark can be spotted. Theres also some beautiful anemone walls, always camera fodder for me no matter how many times I see them.

Tomato anemone or Magnificent anemone

Anemone colony on Cakaunilolo Reef

Stephan and Laure blowing bubbles at Seven Sisters.

Sweetlip at cleaning station

A very shy turtle swims past at the 7 Sisters

Chromadoris Nudibranch

Be careful where you put your hands though as a sting from this amazingly camouflaged scorpionfish can leave you in a world of pain.

Dartfish

Then there are the days after our deeper dives that I go for a dip in the lagoon. Finding a solitary coral head or anemone in just 2 meters of water I sit and wait. Pretty soon all manner of critters start appearing and I get some of my best results right here.

Broken backed anemone shrimp

Broken Back anemone shrimp

Tiny transparent shrimp

One afternoon Ofelia, Rene and myself went across to the shallows inside the lagoon.
Ofelia found her favorite anemone and she yells across the water, “its all closing up and spewing some kind white liquid”. After a quick lesson on the birds and bee’s and anemones I began to photograph an anemone spawning.

You can just make out the transparent anemone shrimp on the mouth.

I ended up watching and photographing this anemone and its resident shrimp for over 2 hours and was quite envious as it continued propagating for the whole time and was still going when I left at sundown.

The transparent anemone shrimp are easier to see on the underside of the anemone

On another coral head inside the lagoon.

Lemon Goby

Moray eels

Back out on Mana barrier reef I descended to about 20 meters and found another beautiful anemone. As I sat and watched ocean surge lifted its mantel exposing the animals underside. A beautiful deep magenta when lit with my flashes.

A male clownfish was fanning his eggs. It's the males that generally take care of the eggs once laid and he will care for them until hatching in anywhere from 6 to 10 days.

A mail clownfish fans his eggs under the mantel of a beautiful anemone. The eggs will hatch between 6 and 10 days

Like a beautiful curtain the magenta mantel of this magnificent anemone plays backdrop to a clownfish and his eggs

The tentacles of an orange bubble tipped anemone

Sunday December 13th

We woke to a calm anchorage and cloudless sky which meant a very hot day. All my crew staggered out on deck pretty early today and the first thing out of Ofelia's mouth was "Are we diving today" . What a silly question and we are going early as theres a pot luck lunch this afternoon where all the other boats are going to bring a plate over to the O2 for a late lunch.

Thats story is for later but now we need to get ready to dive.

Kenny is going with us today and he has the best eyes for spotting nudibranchs so I'm hopeful of a few good macro shots. Let's see how it goes.

Nembrotha lineolata

Nudibranch, Flabellina

Nudibranch Halgerda carlsoni

Back on board the O2, Ofelia starts cooking a lasagna for the pot luck this afternoon and I begin to process the photo's from this mornings dive.
My team worked great in the water today and we found several Nudi's. Stephane "S/V Olena" was particularly proud of himself as he found an absolute beauty.
Ofelia found 2 other nudibranchs and at the end of the dive a scorpionfish. plenty of camera fodder for me and I think we all felt elated when we came out of the water.
Simple minds are easily amused.
At 3pm all the boats started arriving with foooooooood.

2 beautiful teenagers.
Ofelia and Sumi on board the O2 for the pot luck

Rene “Blue Spirit” looking relaxed after a great pot luck lunch on the O2.

Robby “Coral Trekker”

Man of the hour after finding the best nudibranch of the day. Stephane “Olena”
Below his lovely wife Laure. What a great crew.

Martin “Vavu-u”

left to right. Cyliane, Timeo, Kenny, Stephane, Elina.

Monday December 14th.
With cyclone Yasa on the way here for a visit there is a great exodus from Mana Island today and very early I see Blue Spirit and Coral Trekker navigating the pass on the way to their respective cyclone holes.

We decided to follow suit and we were soon cranked up and heading out closely followed by S/V Olena.
Like rats from a sinking ship we deserted poor old Mana Island to her own devises as the storm approaches.

First stop Port Denarau where we filled up with fuel and Ofelia went off to do some last minute shopping.

As the day progressed the cyclone becomes more threatening and we will head up to our cyclone position early tomorrow morning.

We’ve removed our genoa and Kenny wrapped the mainsail with a long line. Strapped in the Kayaks and prepared for the worst all the time hoping for the best.

Tomorrow Kenny will go up the mast and remove the wind instruments that have a hard time dealing with cyclone force winds.

Ooh the irony of it. Cyclone warning flags hanging limp due to lack of a breeze. Countdown 3 days.

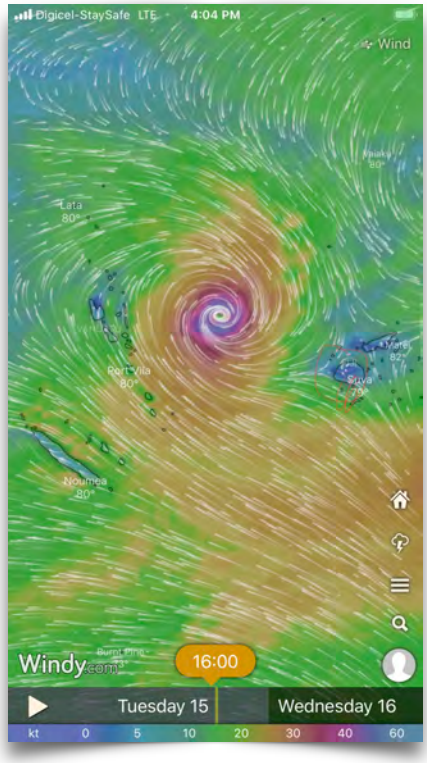
No escape now as several vessels are now blocking our exit so here we stay until after the storm

December 15th.

I awoke early this morning in Port Denarau as we stayed last night in the marina. At 6am Kenny had topped up the water tanks and we were heading out on a high tide to our cyclone hole. By about 10 am we had set 3 anchors. 2 Deep inside the mangroves on our port side and the main anchor out at about 40 meters, offset a little to Starboard

We found good heavy anchor points for our lines ashore to starboard and we doubled up on all of them. We removed head sails and all excess canvas and will stow the kayaks in our cockpit.

Nothing much else to do here now but wait and hope this little breeze decides to head somewhere else. Thinking about all my cruiser friends and hope they all found safe haven although all bets are off if this turns into a cat 5.



What we see at the moment on Windy.

There's no scenario now that will completely miss us here and some poor region of Fiji is going to receive a world of hurt. keeping our fingers crossed that it dissipates.

December 16th

What a lazy start to the day. With nowhere to go and nothing to do I stayed in my bunk under my fan until quite late.

Todays storm projections are indicating that this thing may go to the north of us which will be great for all us cruisers hiding out in mangroves. Still with about 40 hours to go anything could happen.

December 17th

It's been a damp night with light rain falling since yesterday. I woke at 04.30 to a heavy dark grey sky and drizzle but at this point there just a gentle breeze.

At 5.30 we got a little gust but nothing to speak of. The breeze we have seems to be coming from north of east but I believe there is some mountain deflection.

6 am and the breeze sound like it is slowly building, not much though and it sounds like a far of airplane as it hums through the rigging.

Predictions this morning have Yasa making landfall on the north of the island.

All day the situation for us here in Nadi improved as the cyclone travelled well north of us.

We barely got more than a breeze today and then at sunset a weird light set the sky on fire with a strange orange glow that seemed to emanate from within the clouds. It cast a strange glow through the interior of O2 and when I went up on deck I saw the perfect semi circles of a vibrant double rainbow .

The rainbows seemed to be projected from both ends by glowing orange light. What a finish to the day, It was as if the universe needed to use up all the color it had saved over the previous grey days and it was going to use it all up in one sunset.
Our thoughts now turn to the poor Fijians that are still in the

A weird glow penetrates the cabin of O2 at sunset.

December 18th
The storm is basically gone from here this morning with just a few sprinkles of rain and the occasional gust of wind.
Kenny and I are starting to re assemble the boat and when we can we will start shortening up on lines.

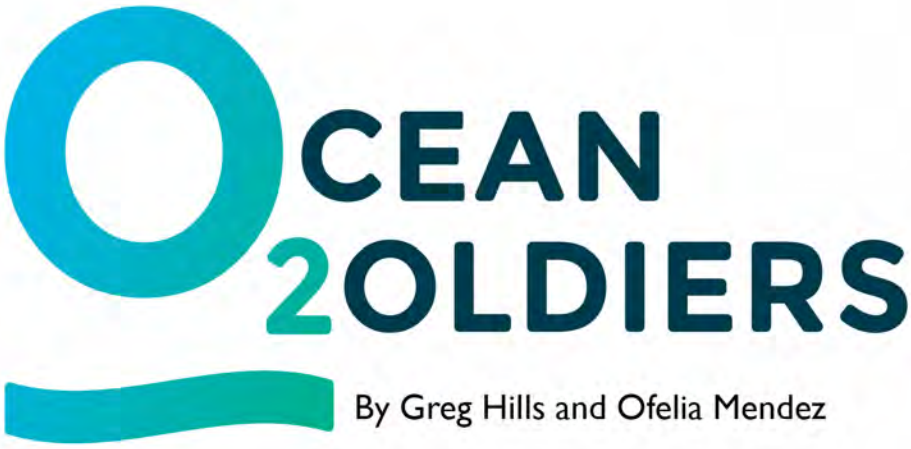
It seems we will not get out of here until Monday as boats are tied across the entrance.
We're seeing reports of damages in some of the other regions that received a direct hit and it's not pretty at all.

DECEMBER THE 20TH
Storm gone we are the last boat to leave the hurricane hole today and we returned to Denerau Marina. Along with many other cruising sailors here we are standing by to find out if there is any way we can help some of the remote areas devastated by the cyclone.

Apparently tomorrow there will be a meeting between Sea Mercy and government officials to devise a plan where we can help bye delivering goods and helping set up vital services like water makers, Solar power etc in remote areas. Hopefully we can help.

I guess this is as good a time to finish off this blog and get ready for the next adventure.

Hasta pronto Soldiers.



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