

Yasawa Islands



Sunrise at Nukubati Island Resort.

January 3rd 2021
Its really crappy weather at the moment and we've stayed anchored at the Nukubati Resort for way longer than expected.

Yesterday it rained all day so the proposed dive outside the pass here did not happen.

The weather forecast shows NW winds, very light for the next week so getting to Yasawa is again proving to be a challenge unless we choose to motor all the way.

These days it seems that no matter what direction we choose to go, the wind is against us.

We lifted anchor at 0930 and headed out between numerous coral reefs towards Ravi Ravi Passage. At the beginning we had a pretty steady NE breeze blowing but that was just to suck us into departing for Yasawa and as soon as we were cleared of the pass it turned NW on us. (!?@\$%&“ an un-publishable naughty word”)

We did however catch a nice fish on the way through the passage and for a short time a school of 13 dolphin accompanied us on our merry way.



Not the biggest fish we have ever caught but theres a fine meal for us here.

Blue Spirit is joining us on this unhurried return to civilization through the Yasawa Islands but he's a bit slower so for this crossing at least we will lose sight of him for a day or so.

We are hard on the nose but managing to sail which is much better than using up all our fuel motoring.

Theres a very short sharp sea running against us that is making life a little uncomfortable.

The bottles in our little bar are clinking together melodiously tempting me into a little nip of "Captain Morgans Spiced Rum" but nooo I'm much stronger than that and ignore their siren like call, "at least for now".

At 1345 we were hit by a pretty strong squall from the north which meant we were now on a lee shore.

Somewhere not far down wind of us was a nasty reef and 40 knots of wind was trying to drive us right over top of it.

Funny how reefs are nasty when they're in your way but friends to us when we want to dive.

We furled in the genoa to just a slither of sail, dropped our dagger boards and pointed the O2 as high as would go through driving rain as the squall past over us.

Rain stings as it slams into your body at 40 knots. Did you know that?

It was all over in 15 minutes and we came out the other side unscathed. In about 10 miles we can fall off the wind and make a more comfortable reach down to Yasawa.

Well as it turns out we had squall after squall on this crossing and the last one lasted for 3 hours.

Because we were sailing directly into the wind we dropped all sail and motored into building seas.

Finally well after dark we came through the other side of the big front and now we had passed all the reefs blocking us from turning south allowing us to fall off the wind and finally sail.

Now the dilemma was, we only had 29 miles to go and all night to do it so I set our genoa with a heavy reef and we let the O2 drift down to the southern end of Yasawa Island at a leisurely 3 knots.

January 24th

At 0730 now with enough light we entered the anchorage at Nabukaru.

16° 50 554 S 177° 27,881 E.

We anchored at about 0830 and not long after I was sound asleep, snoring like the last bugle call to the pearly gates. I'm getting too old for these all nighters.

A good day for sleeping it turns out as it rained and squalled all day.

Rene sailed in at about 1pm and anchored beside us.

We had a little lunch together and compared notes on the miserable crossing, then we relaxed the rest of this very rainy day.

January 5th 2021

We awoke to much nicer weather “Hallelujah”
The report still showed heavy cloud coverage for our area. The clouds were here but we also had a big patch of blue sky. Maybe some fun can be had at last.

We went into the village of Tamusua to do our Sevusevu and I wanted to organize a guide for the caves on Sawa-I-Lau Island, I'd heard that they are definitely worth a visit.



We found the chief sitting in the door of his home.
A rather jolly robust fella It was clear that the children loved him as they entered in droves after our arrival.



A welcome thumbs up on the island as we did our Sevusevu



If smiles are money, Fiji is the richest nation on earth.

After Sevusevu we met the young lad “Luke” that is to be our guide and off we went in our dingy to [Sawa-I-Lau Island](#).

Climbing a short set off cement stairs that rose about 8 meters from the sea you come to a steel door which Luke, proudly presenting his key quickly unlocked.

We entered into a dark chamber and descend down a damp cement path into the gloom, crouching low to avoid banging our noggin on the roof of the cave.

Once down at sea level again I looked into the gloom. Slowly as my eyes adjusted I saw a blue light coming from further within the cave, daylight was penetrating somewhere back there. I set my shutter speed on the camera to very slow and turned on my 2 underwater strobes. Holding my breath I used my knee’s as a tripod and popped off a couple of time exposures with fill flash.



From the entrance of the



Rene follows me into the first chamber.



Ofelia, noooo she doesn't like dark enclosed spaces.

To enter the second chamber you have to dive down into dark water and come up on the other side. It's a short distance but it can be quite a daunting prospect for anyone who is a little claustrophobic.

Also you don't want to come up fast gasping for air on the other side as there are parts the ceiling that are very low to the water with sharp pointed ends that could spoil your day. Ouch.



Rene shows a stout heart as he dives further into the dark

Well it was a nice little adventure but over in less than an hour and we set off back to our respective boats.

Rene to Blue Spirit, Ofelia and myself to O2.

After lunch Ofelia and I decided to try our first dive in the Yasawa Group we took off in the dingy for the eastern side of the islands which due to the westerly winds was now in the lee.



The visibility was very poor due to all the rain but we found a nice little reef with very healthy corals and its soooo good to be diving again. Actually come to think of it, this is the first dive of the new year.



Soft corals, Fan corals, and colorful sponges decorate this coral head..

January 6th
Only 300 shopping days left to Christmas. How time flies.

With our adventure prospects diminished in Nabukaru we agree'd to follow Blue Spirit down to another spot that Rene assures us is quite the place to be.

Up anchors and with Rene leading us out through the coral bommies we proceeded down the west side of the Yasawa Group.

Surprise surprise it starts raining again and I found myself once more looking like a drowned rat as I navigated from our exposed helm.

A couple of hours later we were anchored in front of the Nanuya resort.



The Island of Nanuya Lailai in Fiji Lau Group, O2 and Blue Spirit, tiny dots below the island.



A beautiful Fijian smile from Esthner in Nanuya Lailai.



A rustic bar in the Nanuya Island Resort. I loved the colors and textures.

Theres a little store here and they have Ice cream.

Yeeeeehaaaaaaw!!!!

Rene, Ofelia and your truly did a little hike here over the top of the hill and got pretty nice views of the surrounding islands and the resorts pineapple plantation.



A panorama from the top of Nanuya Lailai looking towards Nacula Island.



The O2 at anchor in front of The Nanuya Lailai Resort

January 7th
We decided to do a little dive on a reef about ¼ mile north of the anchorage. I had great hopes for some spectacular diving here in the Yasawa Group but it didn't happen here. I took my macro lens however there were no nudibranchs to be found.



A juvenile angelfish.



Anthias

January 8th

Well the big event of the day, our friends on Olena and Vava-u arrived in the anchorage.

Other than that it was another wet squally crappy kind of day here in paradise.

January 9th

Last night in desperation I did some research on dive spots around our little anchorage and came up with a good plan for today.

At 0930 we were joined by Stephane and Laurie from S/V Olena, Martin from Vava-u, and our old mate Rene "Blue Spirit" (who now knows where I hide my cookies and beer Grrrrr)

We set off in 3 dinghies to the southern end of Turtle Island about 2 miles away.

On my chart plotter, out from the coast of Turtle Island I could see what looks like a potential good dive spot. A long reef with 15 meters of water on the outer side.

I hope I'm right and not leading everyone to a fizzer.

16° 59.38 S 177° 22.49 E

It turns out it was a very nice dive and I think this entire reef deserves to be explored. Not deep at maximum 12 to 13 meters but lots of corals and the clearest water for some time.

I took my macro lens but this place is better suited for wide angle.

I shall indeed returned armed with the correct equipment "pronto".



I guess its mating time on the reef.



A small Toby, shy but super inquisitive.

Back to the boat for equipment clean up, then we all went into the resort for a pizza.

Not our usual lunch I must say but it gave all of us yachty divers types a little together time without a dive regulator jammed into our mouth which severely hampers conversation (except for Rene of course who can talk through a cement wall).

After lunch and with suitable time to digest, Ofelia, Rene and I took off to another dive spot.

This spot was on the north of the island at the end of a reef we were told would be "The Cathedral". I think we were miss directed here some how as the reef was very mediocre.

16°56.995 S. 177° 23.724 E. Don't bother.

Here the visibility was very low and the reef not so nice Ofelia however immediately found a beautiful nudibranch. What lens did I have on? (Of course I did didn't I) I had on a wide angle. No good for little critters.

With water conditions as they were I decided to do some very close focus wide angle shots and with my Sigma 15mm fish eye lens fitted inside a mini dome I can focus into as close as a couple of inches and still with a depth of field that is amazing.

Positioning of the strobes is super important here and with such dirty water I am going to need to do a lot of cleanup in photoshop.

The light will bounce off every single suspended particle in the sea, all the little fishy poops and other nasty matter.



Rene swims over the reef while down lower a sea slug searches for food.



Brain Coral.



Linckia Laevigata, and you thought it was just a starfish.



A nice little section of reef with sponges and feather stars.

Over the next days we dove several times with our friends on the nice reef to the south of Turtle Island.

16° 59.415 S 177° 22.457 E



A pretty section of reef at Turtle Island.

A few of the crusty old sailors I've mentioned in the past.



Rene



Martin



Stephane



Finally a photo of me taken by Ofelia and I get to have the biggest picture on this page as I am the most handsome, rugged, sophisticated diver anywhere and besides,
It's my blog.



Like crazy, yellow headed punk rockers.



A big surprise today was the manta.



Healthy hard corals.



Nice brain corals.



Stephane swims behind a large brain coral.



A solitary chrinoid decorates its section of reef.

January 12th

I've been a little delinquent from my blog the last few days because I was way to busy doing other stuff.

Well here I am again and its the AM on a sunny January day picking up our anchor as we're heading down to Drawaqa Island further south in the Yasawa Group.

The famous Manta Ray pass.

Drawaqa sounds like something out of Transylvania to me, I hope it turns out a little less scary.

I read that the mantas are more likely to be seen from May to October so I hold no real hope of seeing any although you never can tell, we did see one at Turtle Island yesterday, straight out of the blue.

There is another dive I'm interested in here also and its called the Caves of Babylon. Now if that name doesn't get those pirate whiskers curled up nothing will. I cant wait to see what that dive turns up.

We arrive at the Manta Passage at about 1300.

17°9.770 S. 177°11.566 E but don't try going through this pass. Navionics has it marked as a deep passage but Nooooo, its shallow with a hard bottom. Do yourself a favor and go through the next pass at Salakolo Point just ½ mile away to the south, 17° 10.422 S and 177° 11.171 E.

This passage is easy and once through to the East side of the islands you can head up to a delightful anchorage at 17°09.559 S and 177°12.219.

When we got here we found the whole fleet sitting idly about doing silly things like Stephane getting a haircut from Laurie on the back of Olena and Rene trying to fix the computer of Vava-u. It was at once clear they needed motivation and direction to go dive..

I immediately shot off in our tender over to some local fishermen and tried to find out where Caves of Babylon are thinking that if they live here they should know "right". Nope, no idea but they did refer me to the dive guide in the small "now very empty" back packers resort near by.

Here I met Rob, an english marine biologist / dive guide, he was a strapping young fella with the knowledge we needed. Rob agreed to take us all out to the Caves of Babylon dive sight tomorrow.

He also explained that the reef right here in front of the beach is one of the best hard coral reefs in the Yasawas.

Well after learning this little tidbit of information I high tailed it straight back over to our fleet of idle sailors and gave them the good news. Soon we were all zooming back across the bay to the afore mentioned reef all kitted out for a submersion.

Well what a beautiful reef top it was. We started out sinking down a small wall into about 8 meters of murky silt filled water and I'm thinking, What the hell was Rob talking about. Soon I heard Ofelia banging away on her tank from above. This usually means she has found something so I headed back up. She had found the top of the reef and in only 2 meters of water gorgeous hard corals stretched out in all directions.



Ofelia and Laure on the edge off the small wall.

There were corals of every shape size and color laid out before us.

Spiky ones, flat ones, round ones, pink corals, blue corals, red, green orange and yellow jammed so close together you put your finger on the bottom.

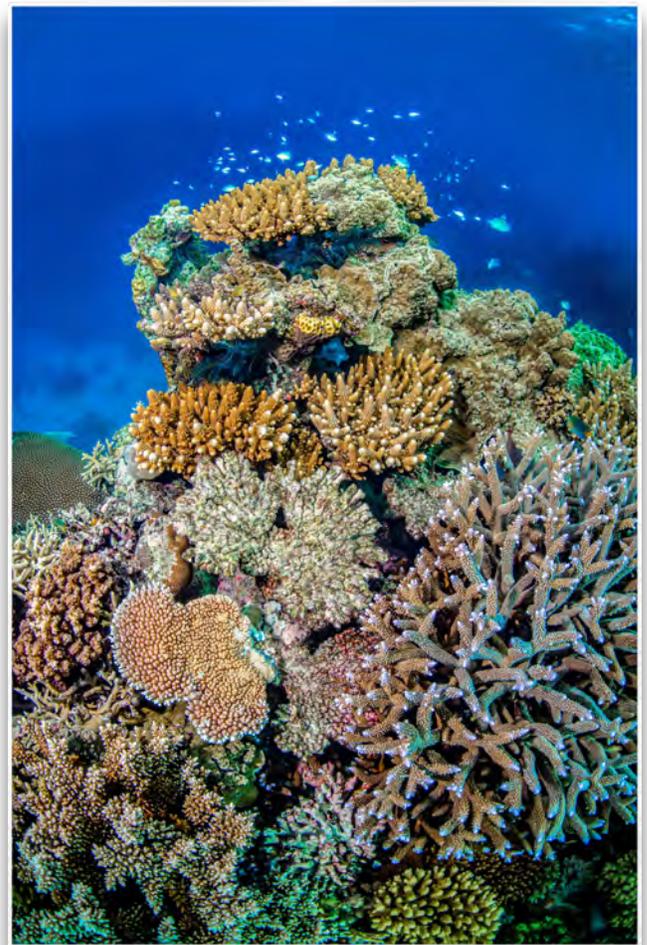
There were large plate corals mixed with magenta elk horn corals, round brain corals and beige rod corals with bright blue tips.

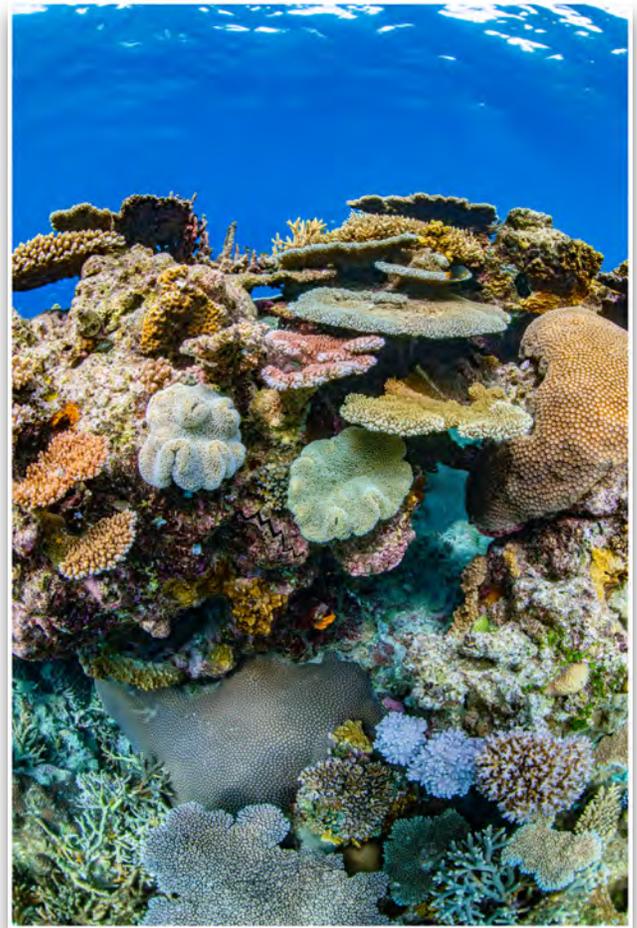
Thrown into this pot of kaleidoscopic mayhem green/blue parrotfish, yellow butterflyfish, striped goatfish, pink anthias, iridescent blue chromis and a 100 other types of fish too numerous to name.

In a tiny hole in the reef a blenny sits within the safety of his little home and with his counter rotating eyes sockets checks me out suspiciously.



From his little home a tiny Blenny surveys the reef.





January 13th
At 9am I went into Drawaqa Island and picked up Rob our dive guide for the trip to The Caves of Babylon. From what I've read the dive sight was just around the corner from the anchorage but the guides had it all wrong. It is in fact well south and out from the coast of another island called Narara and while its only a 4 mile run in our dingy its 4 mile in open ocean "with bunches of dive gear".

Well there's no turning back now so Martin with the bigger tender of S/V Vava-U loaded up Rene and Rob and I took Ofelia with 4 sets of dive gear. Of we roared, banging and bouncing our way down to the dive sight.

On the south west fringing reef of Narara Island, Rob “the dive guide” and that’s the last time I’m going to tell you that. Anyway Rob “the dive guide” jumped into the water and started searching for the entrance to the caves, within 10 minutes he had them located and our anchor set into the reef top where it would do no coral damage.

We descend down a 20 meter wall and enter a canyon where the water quality deteriorated rapidly to the point where taking photo’s would have been a complete waste of time so I resided myself to just just swimming.

Finally we came out the other side and onto the wall again which had some nice gorgonian corals but not much else. This is not a dive I would recommend, there are better cave systems with cleaner water in other parts of Fiji.



A nice gorgonian coral on the wall beside Caves of Babylon





Our dive guide, Rob.



Heading to the surface.

Back on the boat Ofelia prepared a pasta for the entire dive team and we sat and talked about nudibranchs, manta rays and coral restoration projects world wide. Really intellectual stuff considering we are a bunch of ragged old sailors.

We spent the last dive of the day back on the shallow reef at Drawaqa Island admiring the beautiful corals and little critters.

Rob has lived on Drawaqa island for 3 years and is doing some great coral restoration projects there. He's also involved in the Fiji Manta data base with Luke Gordon who we have been sending our images to for ID. Rob recognized Vee, the Manta from our turtle island dive. Now thats a small world.

January 14th

Sadly, we are leaving here today. I was hoping for a few more days diving on top of the house reef however we are heading back to Denerau for a dinner being organized by Sea Mercy for all the volunteers in the recent mission. Olena left yesterday, Rene and Martin are leaving early this morning so I guess we will up anchor and mosey on down to the big smoke ourselves a little later.

At 9am we set the main and lifted the anchor. The hope of sailing of the anchor was dispelled as the breeze died and we sort of just drifted in the general direction of south.

A little later a breeze from the north set in allowing us 4.5 to 5.5.knots on a very flat sea.

Soon we caught up to Martin and slowly coasted past with a wave and a few photo's.



Kenny at the helm as we slide by Vava-u on the downwind sail to Denarau

Way ahead we could see Rene cruising along very nicely thank you. We'll catch him in an hour or so.

As we approached Blue Spirit from the stern I found myself wishing for a water balloon canon too sling a couple of liquid filled projectiles in his direction. While I was contemplating my attack an apparition appeared on his deck which confused me completely and put all thoughts of an assault at bay.



The breeze continued and even increased a little into the afternoon and our speed picked up to a nice 7 knots. What a pleasant sail for our return to the big smoke.

By the end of the day we were all secure in our docks in the marina and another social event was planned for the evening meal.

Martin bought over a big pan of lasagna, Laure a salad, and Ofelia did her thing in the galley again coming up with all sorts of goodies.

Present, our friends from S/V Olena, Vava-U, Blue Spirit and of course us from the O2.

Well this is as good a time as any to finish of this burble I call a blog.

I hope you enjoy the photo's and our little ditty about the adventures in the life of the sailing vessel O2.

Keep on giving our planet love Soldiers.



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