

Exploring parts of paradise on land and sea

► **Fiji**
Continued from Page M1

coast. Recently joined by co-owner Stuart Gow, they set a gold standard on the island for blending with the local ethos while building a full-service adventure outfit.

Almost invisible from the water, nine grass-and-wood “bures,” or bungalows, keep alive a natural construction method that Fijians are forsaking for concrete. Solar-powered hot showers and ocean breezes for air conditioning make guests feel virtuously green. One of Akhtar’s first acts on arriving was to negotiate a no-take agreement with his Kadavu Koro village neighbors who own the fishing rights in the area. The result is a flourishing marine preserve around little Waya Island, a short swim from the resort’s dock.

Mailliard’s first project was an organic garden that supplies her gourmet menu, considered the island’s best. Dinners under the tall, open-air “bure-levu,” communal meeting space, bring guests together at lantern-lighted tables where the highlight could be a coconut-infused curry, or Fijian “kakoda,” citrus-cooked raw fish, made with your own deep sea catch of the day.

As Matava’s guests, we were welcomed not only to Kadavu Koro’s waterfall, at 80 feet the island’s tallest, but also to the village.

Akhtar instructed me in making my first “sevusevu” there to Ratu (chief) Menassah. Sevusevu is the ritual presentation of kava by which newcomers are formally accepted into a community. Kava, from the dried yagona plant, dates back thousands of years in Fiji, and is made by pounding the root into powder, infusing it with water, and straining it through a cloth into the “tanoa,” a large wooden bowl. Guests sit cross-legged with the elders as each person claps and drains a “bilo,” a cup made from calabash or coconut, of kava in one gulp.

Although visitors often leave Fiji without making sevusevu, it opens doors. On my first trip I would not have been offered food, welcomed to spend the night, or invited into an inner circle of elders to record a traditional “meke,” a story told in dance and chant, had I not honored that tradition. The medical supplies were my repayment for that generosity.

Being 37 miles long and roadless, Kadavu is explored mainly by boat. (A hotel transfer from the airport is an adrenalin-charged event planing over the coral heads.) With no restaurant or dive shop anywhere, each resort is a self-contained world.

To see more of the island, I moved to Waisalima Beach Resort, an economical base at the east end. Here grass bures sit directly on spectacular Naiqoro Passage, facing Ono Island, about 2 miles distant. Along with a location minutes from the Astrolabe’s best diving, the resort’s great charm lies with the local couple who manage it, Rogo and Tulala Lalakonakoro, and their staff. The Lalakonakoros make it easy to visit their village, Tiliva, and nearby Lagalevu. Waisalima’s chef, Moli, who cooks Fijian home-style meals, spent a morn-



PHOTOS BY PATRICIA BORN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The Great Astrolabe Reef is one of the world’s largest and kayakers can see its soft coral heads just under the water’s surface.

A PARADISE OF ISLANDS
Would you return, as the author did to her paradise? See Fiji at www.boston.com/travel.com.

ing teaching me her traditional techniques for making fresh coconut milk and stuffed taro leaves.

Other than the kava and music sessions at your resort, ferry day on Kadavu — when the ship Sinu-I-Wasa arrives from Suva loaded with building supplies, canned goods, livestock, and people — is as lively as it gets. With my Waisalima hosts and some of their village friends, I took the short boat ride north to the ferry dock in Kavala Bay. Milling around the scene were my friends from Matava, and tucked deeper into the bay was the second most exciting thing on Kadavu: a store.

Tevita Kawa not only stocks everything from stick bread to generator fuel in his Vuniivaivai store, he has turned the surrounding property into a model of agriculture with 37,000 yagona plants, fruit orchards, and hogs. As a Waisalima guest, this will be your starting point for the one-hour hike to Waidababa, the island’s second-tallest waterfall. That is, unless you take the 9-mile route from the government dock, as I did.

“It’s up to you,” said Ben Sorensen from Utah, whom I met at Waisalima with his local friends Simi O’Connor and Joe Delana. From the surprised looks on their faces, I could tell they had expected me to choose the short cut.

Much of the longer route follows a scenic red clay road that is not too strenuous, until it diverges onto a jungle path. Once in the rain forest, underground springs make for the most slippery hiking you are likely to experience short of a swamp walk.

You know your goal is near when the temperature drops 10 degrees and the water’s roar urges you up the last tangled hill. Be prepared to spend the day. The falls are hard to leave.

The warmth and hospitality of Fijians are hard to leave as well. Visiting a Kadavu dive resort two



Tevita Kawa, here with his son, runs a store on Kadavu that stocks everything from bread to fuel. He also has 37,000 yagona plants (for making kava), fruit orchards, and hogs. Waisalima Beach Resort on Kadavu has traditional grass-and-wood bures to house its guests.



SOURCE: The New York Times, Google Maps

years ago, Sorensen made friends in a neighboring village who invited him to stay. Today he uses his contracting skills to bring fresh water from the natural springs to island communities.

In the end, Ratu Joseva Bose delivered the medical supplies to Nacomoto, the village where I had promised them. Bose, who co-owns kayak outfitter Tamarillo Expeditions, had suggested we paddle there with the supplies in



tow, but on the appointed day, it poured rain. In my few remaining days, the chance of organizing another visit was unlikely.

Bose and I met in Korolevu, the bay east of Matava, where he lives on a coconut plantation with his wife, Aliti, and their children. According to an old meke, Kadavu’s first inhabitants came ashore on Bose’s land. He offers a guest bure on the property and bases his business there. While

the kids kicked a rugby ball and the rooster occasionally wandered inside, I unpacked the medical supplies and wrote a note for the village spokesman. Then we loaded the Tamarillo chase boat with kayaks and gunned it for Mai Dive Astrolabe Reef Resort — along with Oneta Resort, one of two excellent hideaways on Ono Island.

Tall and thumbprint-shaped, Ono rises from a glass-clear la-

If you go . . .

How to get there

Continental and Air Pacific fly from Los Angeles to Nadi International Airport. Pacific Sun offers connecting flights to Kadavu from Nadi and Nausori.

When to go

June to August is Fiji’s busiest season; shoulder months are quieter and still reasonably dry.

Where to stay

Matava Resort
Kadavu Island
011-679-603-0685
matava.com
Beautifully executed eco-lodge blends nature and nurture. Water sports exceptionally equipped and staffed. Seven nights with meals, boat transfer, and activities start at \$1,126.
Waisalima Beach Resort
Kadavu
www.waisalima.com
Traditional home-style accommodations with dive shop and great local staff. Three-night minimum stays with meals and boat transfer start at \$92 a night.
Mai Dive Astrolabe Reef Resort
Ono Island
011-612-8011-4145
www.maidive.com
Sweet spot on Ono’s south face with only four accommodations. Seven nights with meals, boat transfers, and domestic air transfer start at \$1,513.

What to do

Diving, deep-sea fishing, surfing, guided village visits, and hikes are available through the resorts at reasonable prices.
Tamarillo Expeditions
800-554-9059
www.tamarillo.co.nz
Spend a day sea kayaking around Ono Island (\$144) or Vesi Beach (\$87), or circumnavigate Kadavu in nine days, overnighting at villages and resorts. There are custom itineraries, too.

Information

www.fijime.com

goon formed by the Astrolabe’s east-by-north arc with a scatter of islets at its skirt. With four others and our guides, we set off on an island circumnavigation by kayak. With each dip of the paddle, colonies of giant brain corals swirled beneath us. Around each turn, an empty beach waited, some the color of cream, others oxide-tinted a bright orange. Through perfect calm, a side wind, a head wind, and downwind, we paddled and played until the sun tipped the treetops.

All this time, we had seen no one. The people of Ono’s seven villages have lived there so lightly that it appeared almost uninhabited. With my promise fulfilled, I dashed across the sand to make the day’s first footprints, feeling lighter, too.

Patricia Borns can be reached at patriciaborns@gmail.com.



NETTALK

Call off hotel phone charges

With the netTALK DUO, you can call any landline or mobile phone in the United States and Canada for free from anywhere in the world. Hook the device up to your laptop, modem, or router with Ethernet cable, or to your hotel room’s broadband cable, and then plug it into the phone using a traditional telephone cord with an RJ-11 connector. Once you register your device, you will be given your own phone number and can then

make and receive direct calls through your phone and Internet connection. You will receive free emergency (911), directory assistance (411), voice mail, and call-waiting services.

The device and first year of service cost \$69.95, each additional year \$29.95, and you will pay a small charge for making international calls from the United States and Canada. Available through netTALK at 800-987-2262, or www.nettalk.com.

KARI BODNARCHUK

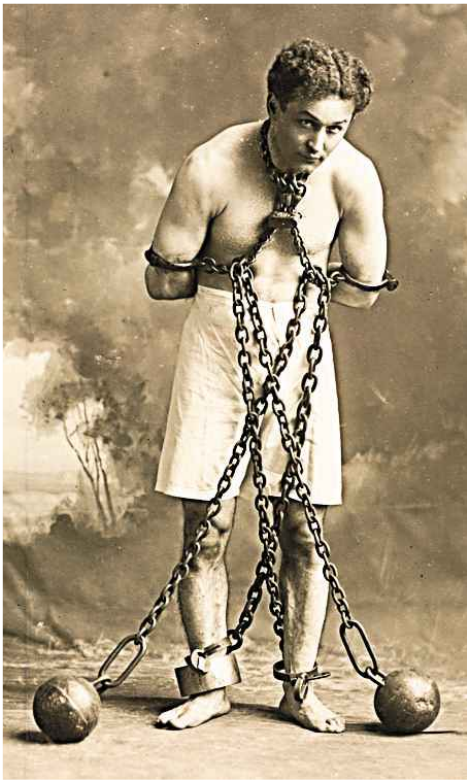
Houdini’s artful magic on exhibit in LA

LOS ANGELES — The name Harry Houdini evokes images of his straitjackets, handcuffs, and torture chambers, all of which are on display at the Skirball Cultural Center’s current exhibit, “Houdini: Art and Magic.” This illuminating show illustrates his brilliance and voracious appetite for success while demystifying the psyche of the magician and escape artist.

Through artifacts and vintage photographs — including a postcard Houdini wrote to his mother when he was 12, telling her he was running away to join the circus — we see the origins of his self-confidence and audacity. Other photos record Houdini (1874-1926), often naked, in chains and handcuffs, about to attempt an escape, dramatic visuals of how he pushed his body to the limit.

His death-defying escapes come alive through wall-sized video footage. Perhaps the most dramatic is Houdini’s straitjacket escapade, when he dangles upside down by his feet, up as high as a skyscraper, with hundreds of spectators below. We see firsthand how he could spellbind an audience.

There are interpretative paintings, illustrations, and posters of Houdini at work. Two surreal paintings by Jane Hammond stand out: one of an anxious Houdini locked inside a container with only his head visible



HARVARD THEATRE COLLECTION, HOUGHTON LIBRARY

A circa-1905 studio photograph shows Harry Houdini in a familiar pose.

while concentric circles ensnare peaceful doves in flight; another of the magician demonstrating his needle swallowing trick while balancing precariously on a tightrope.

“Houdini: Art and Magic” comes to the Skirball from the Jewish Museum in New York.

A companion exhibit, “Masters of Illusion: Jewish Magicians of the Golden Age,” (1875-1948), created by Skirball curator Erin Clancey, spotlights performers who, as gifted and innovative as they were, have largely been forgotten.

Automata machines mimic human ability and movements. The best were created by the French magician Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin (1805-71). “Antonio Diavolo” is an eerily lifelike trapeze artist performing somersaults on a swing with disproportionate precision. “The Orange Tree” blooms to reveal two butterflies raising the corner of an audience member’s handkerchief.

Throughout his life his namesake Houdini always remembered Houdin’s words: “Never forget I am not a magician. I am an actor playing a magician.”

BEVERLY LEVITT

Skirball Cultural Center, 2701 North Sepulveda Blvd., through Sept. 4. \$5-\$10. 310-440-4500, www.skirball.org.