Isles to Make You Smile

Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei & Fiji
Battle of the Humpbacks
Sabre-Toothed Blennies
Shooting Nature’s Mirror
FROM THE EDITOR

Way off the beaten track, seducing the underwater adventurer from afar, the islands of the Pacific occupy a place all their own in scuba lore. The largest of all oceans, with areas that are furthest from land as it's possible to be, the vast Pacific harbours subsea marvels that only the most committed and fortunate divers will ever experience.

Underwater photographers Scott Johnson and Tim Rock are among these lucky few. In this issue of Scuba Diver AustralAsia, Scott shares with us his stunning images from Palau (“Rocking Palau” on page 32), while Tim blows us away with his distant travels to Hawaii (“Bluewater Dreaming” on page 42). More of their photography is also featured in Sue Crowe’s rundown of other great destinations in “Window to the Pacific Isles” (page 66). All this plus Roger Munns’ amazing story from his BBC shoot with humpbacks (“Filming a Mega-Battle” on page 58).

After reading these stories, I can't stop dreaming of the day that I too might sail away, into the biggest of the Big Blues, and become a diver of the Pacific Islands at last.

Diego A. Garcia
Senior Editor
Fiji

The Land of Smiles
When people think “Pacific Islands”, Fiji is often the destination that first comes to mind. Frequently described as the Land of Smiles and the Soft Coral Capital of the World, its tropical reefs, warm clear water, white sands, smiling people and softly rustling palms, cast a spell most of us only dream of.

Despite over 50 Fiji resorts spread over more than 320 islands, if you are serious about scuba, diving is best accessed in four land-based areas – or you can enjoy unfettered access to this amazing underwater wonderland by live-aboard boat. What follows is just a snippet of the diving that is available across Fiji.

Taveuni Island
The Somosomo Strait is one of Fiji’s best-known dive destinations. Called “The Garden Island”, it was the magnificent soft corals that gave Fiji the Soft Coral Capital of the World title. The waters, fed by currents, are nutrient-filled, supporting large marine ecosystems, which in turn, creates wonderful diving.

THE GREAT WHITE WALL – A legendary dive site, the Great White Wall features a swim-through tunnel with two exits, one at 10 metres and another at 26 metres. Surrounded completely by stunning soft corals, divers meet the hundreds of colourful fish darting and weaving through the forest of fronds.

Kadavu Island
Kadavu is nicknamed “The Real Fiji” – away from the big resorts, life can be enjoyed at any pace you like. Eco-friendly resorts, local culture and plenty of breathtaking dive sites in and around the well-known Great Astrolabe Reef, the fourth largest barrier reef in the world.

EAGLE ROCK – Representing the very best of the Great Astrolabe Reef Eagle Rock’s highlights include pinnacles, fast-water passages, abundant and healthy hard corals, and fish life from pelagics and rays to swarms of colourful reef minnows. The coral growth on the outer edge is phenomenal; pale blue branching acropora, mustard green lettuce leaf corals, violet warty finger corals, pale grey sheet corals, brown table corals, lime bottlebrush corals. Amongst this divers may encounter reef sharks, Napoleon wrasse, and manta cleaning stations – a top spot!

Viti Levu
Not previously known for its diving, Rakiraki, at the top of the island is fast becoming one of Fiji’s worst-kept secrets. There are untouched reefs, dramatic pinnacles and an abundance of fish. But the area is most famous for the special shark feeding dives conducted in the waters off Pacific Harbour.
**BEST SHARK DIVE IN THE WORLD** – Shark Reef may not have pretty corals, but this reef is special because it has been protected from fishing boats within the Shark Reef Marine Reserve, and shark feeding has been taking place now for 10 years. Shark encounters are guaranteed. Eight different types of shark frequent this reef; the famous bull (or Zambezi) sharks, tawny nurse sharks, whitetip, blacktip and grey reef sharks, sicklefin lemon sharks, silvertips and, the biggest of them all, tiger sharks.

**Mamanucas and Yasawa**

With over 44 different sites to choose from, there is definitely something for everyone. The Malolo Barrier Reef has good channels and is rich in nutrients – expect great reefs, soft corals, plenty of fish, walls and bommies.

**GOTHAM CITY** – Named after the resident batfish, Gotham City is home to staghorn and elkhorn coral and curious moray eels; a wonderful reef in 24 metres with numerous gullies filled with fan corals and resident sweetlips. It’s common here to see whitetip reef sharks and turtles gliding amongst the other reef fish.

**Fiji Live-Aboard Diving**

Live-aboard diving brings you to remote areas in comfort and style. Live-aboards can also offer unique experiences with each boat having its own special dive sites, and being able to move with the currents, the wind and tides to take advantage of the best possible sites on any given day.

There are three dedicated diving live-aboards operating in Fiji:

- **NAI‘A** – Max 18 divers, perfect for diver-photographers, completely refitted. Nai‘a travels to the infamous ‘Nai‘a Triangle’.
- **FIJI AGGRESSOR – ISLAND DANCER II** – Max 10 divers. Appeals to those discriminating divers who prefer a smaller group.
- **TUI TAI** – For a more overall adventure - visit remote beaches, snorkel and dive.

**NORTH SAVE-A-TACK PASSAGE**

In the Namena Marine Reserve (Nai‘a), when the current is right, this site has it all: concentrated schools of big fish and unbelievably beautiful soft coral. On the plateau above the wall, giant schools of bigeye trevally, scad, and barracuda are watched over by several grey reef sharks. On the periphery, whitetip sharks lie napping. The sides and tops of the bommies are alive with colour: gorgonian fans, black coral, soft coral, and every reef fish imaginable.

*Opposite:* A huge grouper shows no sign of shyness | Aside from its sharks, Fiji is also known for being the “Soft Coral Capital of the World” | A huge grouper shows no sign of shyness.

*This page, from top:* In shallow waters, blacktip reef sharks can be seen, apart from the deeper water species.
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Fiji Map:
- Taveuni
- Matangi Island
- Matava Eco Resort
- Beqa Adventure Divers
- Subsurface Fiji
- Castaway Island Resort
- Malolo Island Resort
- Aqua Trek Diving

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