

SY Fiji Siren

A Liveboard Dive Adventure

By Scott Lee, Images provided by Volivoli Resort,
Aaron Wong, Matava Resort & Colin Gans

The two hour drive north from Nadi Airport to Raki Raki is known as one of the most picturesque in Fiji. The road undulates over lush green fields, through villages and small townships before emerging on the coast where it skirts the mangroves and crosses several shallow rivers as they meander to the sea.

Approaching Raki Raki the topography changes with large rock buttresses jutting out into the sea as if trying to get closer to the offshore islands that shimmer in the late afternoon sun.



The Siren at anchor.

Volivoli Resort, the departure point for Fiji Siren, sits on one such buttress surrounded on three sides by ocean. Built in 2005 it is a stylish modern resort with lush manicured gardens and excellent facilities.

After a relaxing morning enjoying the resort we were ferried out to the Fiji Siren to settle in before our departure.

Fiji Siren is the sixth superyacht built for the Siren Fleet, her sister yachts operate in the Phillipines, Palau, Indonesia and Truk Lagoon. Launched in December 2013, the 40 metre long Fiji Siren is a traditional gaff rigged Phinis design, purpose built for diving and is a result of the owners' vast experience in





operating liveboard destination dive charters. Comfortable cabins, well setup dive stations, good tenders, helpful staff, abundant hot water, great food, and excellent coffee deliver above the water while the diving can truly be described as sensational!

For six days we enjoyed three dives every day in what was a busy but thoroughly enjoyable schedule. We visited the Namena Marine Reserve, Wakaya (a playground of the rich and famous), and Vatu I Ra Passage enjoying water temperatures in the mid twenties and thirty metres visibility. We did wall dives and drift dives, swim-throughs and caves, we swam between reef structures over sandy bottoms and we dived bommies that disappeared thousands of metres below us. We saw sharks and rays, all manner of brightly coloured reef fish, schools of thousands of bait-fish and

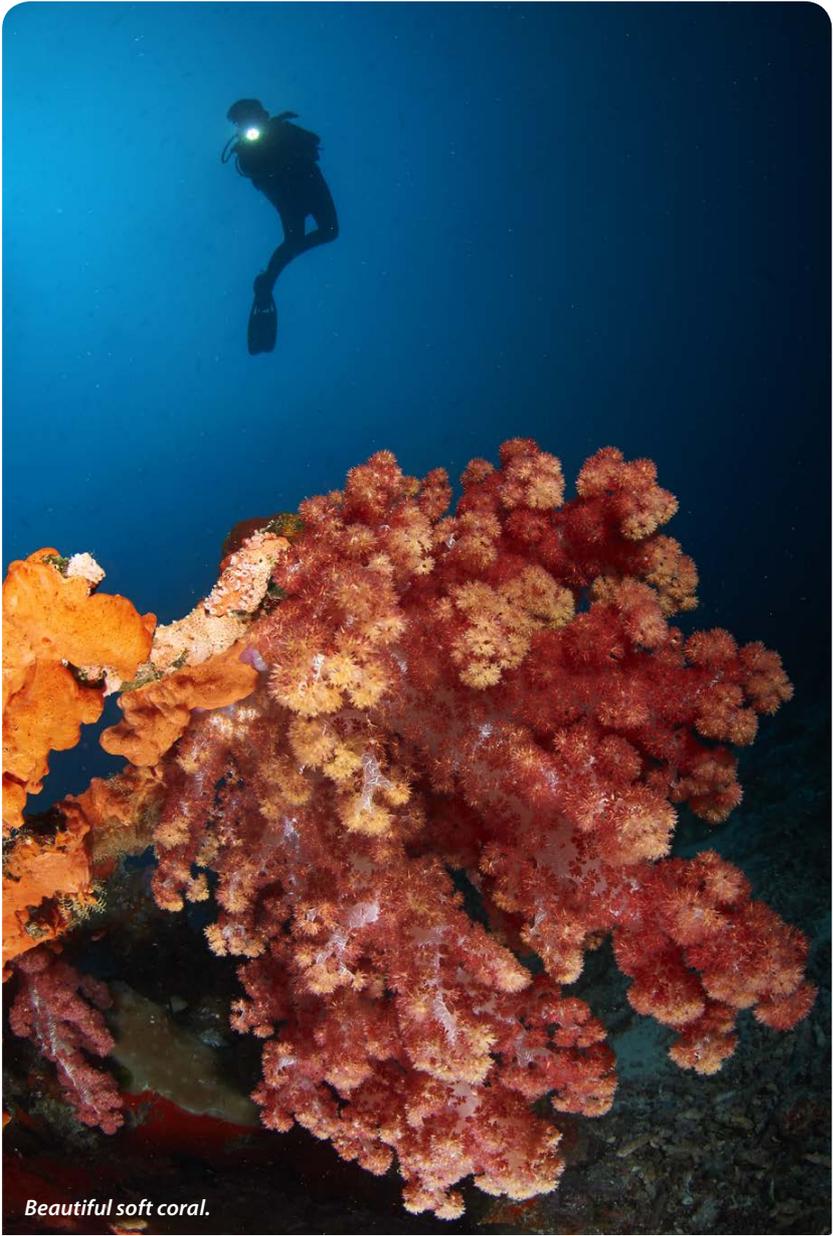
huge pelagics. We studied nudibranchs and marvelled at the hard and soft corals. The reefs were vibrant and healthy and the fish life prolific. In short we experienced some of Fiji's best diving, most of it well away from your typical tourist dive sites.

My most memorable dive was nearly a huge disappointment. It was supposed to be a manta ray dive, but the rays didn't show! It was a pleasant dive anyway, with water temperature of 26 degrees, schools of Spanish Mackerel and Tuna, a few reef sharks and beautiful hard and soft coral, but no rays. Despondent and nearly out of air I was hanging onto the side of a bommie at 5 metres completing my safety stop when my luck changed. A huge adult male manta cruised onto the top of the bommie from behind me, stopping only three metres to my left. Immediately, a dozen or so

Cleaner Wrasse left the safety of their coral hideouts and swarmed over the manta, picking off parasites and other tasty morsels. Oscillating the rear of his wings to maintain his position he hung otherwise motionless in the current beside me.

During our time together, 2 other rays came within 10 metres but seeing the 'cleaning station' was full, glided away to await their turn. A private viewing – fantastic.

My last dive was also a standout. E6 is a bommie in Vatu I Ra Passage that thrusts up from 1000 metres to the surface. E6 consists of two swim throughs that cut through the reef in a horseshoe pattern. The swim-through climbs from 25 metres to about 6 metres before dropping to 15 metres on the open end of the horseshoe and the huge drop below us. There are several small caves and caverns



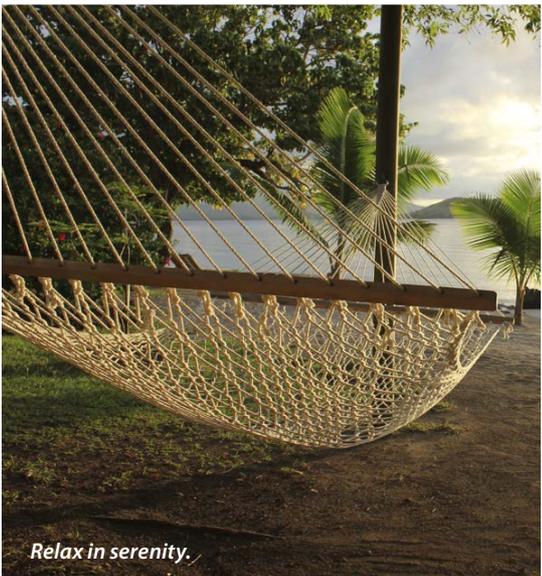
Beautiful soft coral.

around the entrance. While in one of the caves we could hear whale song from a group of whales in the passage about 500 metres away. It echoed and reverberated through the cavern system lasting about 10 minutes. It felt very humbling and quite emotional as we listened to these obviously intelligent creatures communicating. Back on the boat we surmised that the unique echo from this cave structure was used by the whales as a way-point as they negotiated the reef systems. A sort of 'turn here' in whale talk.

I love people with a passion, it doesn't matter what, as long as they are passionate about something and to be surrounded by a group of like-minded people who shared a passion for diving was an exciting and rewarding experience. Every aspect of each dive was relived, photos were compared, and the ever present "critter book" (Asia Pacific Reef Guide) was passed around. Species were compared and analysed and previous experiences discussed. The closest comparison I can think of is the après-ski scene at any ski resort



Clear waters.



Relax in serenity.



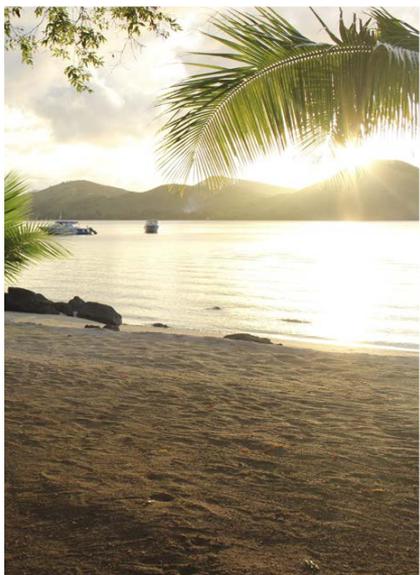
Swim through.

after a good day on the slopes. With hand movements and much arm waving, successes and failures were shared. At times it was noisy and excitable, sometimes it was serious and reflective. Passionate people doing what they most enjoy in life.

After sixteen dives in six days I am a far more confident and competent diver. I have a renewed interest in under water photography and I have also made some new friends. Live-aboards are fun and very social. Many guests go on to become live-aboard regulars, taking

friends or meeting up with others that they have met on previous trips - a sort of live-aboard fraternity that I am happy to be a member of.

This was my first live aboard experience and I can't recommend it enough.



The Siren at anchor.

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