

Vanua Levu & Taveuni

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Best Dive Sites

- ➔ Namena Marine Reserve (p154)
- ➔ Great White Wall (p167)
- ➔ Nasonisoni Passage (p154)
- ➔ Rainbow Reef (p167)
- ➔ Dreamhouse (p154)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Namena Island Resort (p162)
- ➔ Maqai Resort (p178)
- ➔ Dolphin Bay Divers Retreat (p173)
- ➔ Salt Lake Lodge (p158)
- ➔ Gecko Lodge (p157)
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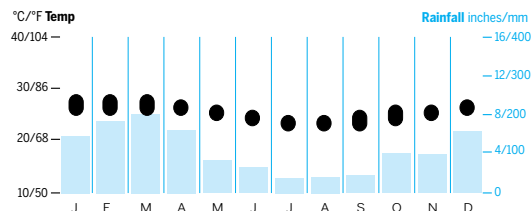
Why Go?

With welcoming settlements, year-round warmth and genuine local hospitality, it's not for nothing that Vanua Levu and Taveuni are billed as Fiji's 'friendly north'. The country's second- and third-biggest islands, respectively, are clean, green havens languidly trapped in a time before 'hectic' was invented: even their epithets – Vanua Levu was once called Sandalwood Island and Taveuni's nickname is the Garden Island – evoke the scents and sights of a land left wild.

Though dusty Labasa is Vanua Levu's largest town, it's in beautiful, stay-a-little-longer Savusavu where most visitors drop their bags. Across the Somosomo Strait, Taveuni's 9000 residents spread themselves between jungle villages and microscopic hamlets along the coast. Everyone on both islands, from the locals to the numerous expats, smile and act as if they've just awoken from a long nap – and they probably have.

When to Go

Savusavu



Apr–Dec Sailing season, when Savusavu Bay is thick with sailboats from around the world.

Jul & Sep Usually the months with the best dive visibility.

Nov–Mar Rainy season; Taveuni is the wettest Fijian island so expect daily showers (and insane greenery).



Vanua Levu & Taveuni Highlights

1 Making bubbles around the pristine **Namena Marine Reserve** (p154).

2 Exploring the lush beauty of the **Lavena Coastal Walk** (p176).

3 Diving the soft-coral wonderland of the **Rainbow Reef** (p167).

4 Getting goosebumps at the powerful Sunday services at **Wairiki Catholic Mission** (p171).

5 Finding the rare, delicate, red-and-white *tagimaucia* flower high on the slopes of **Des Voeux Peak** (p171).

6 Swimming in all three

glorious pools of the **Tavoro Waterfalls** (p177).

7 Lounging on white sands, snorkelling and surfing at **Qamea** (p178).

8 Having a waterside sunset cocktail with yachties in **Savusavu** (p160).

VANUA LEVU

POP 130,000

Though it's Fiji's second-largest island, Vanua Levu (Big Island) is one of the tropics' best-kept secrets. It's another world from the bustle of Viti Levu and the more-touristed islands: many roads are little more than rutted dirt tracks, and Labasa, the island's largest 'city', is a one-street strip of shops. To the south, Savusavu entices yachties, divers and dreamers looking for a tropical idyll. The rest of 'Big Island' is given over to sugarcane and copra plantations, hideaway villages, mountain passes streaming with waterfalls, endless swaths of forest and an ever-changing coastline forgotten by the world. Take it slow, keep a smile on your face and savour rural Fiji on its grandest scale.

i Getting There & Away

AIR

Flying is the easiest way to get to Vanua Levu. **Fiji Airways** (☎330 4388, 672 0888; www.fijiairways.com) – billed as Fiji Link for domestic services – runs regular flights to/from Labasa, Nadi, Suva and Taveuni; for the brave (landings are notoriously bumpy), there are also flights in and out of Savusavu. The smaller **Northern Air** (p231) flies to Labasa and Savusavu from Suva.

The Labasa airport is about 11km southwest of Labasa. There's a bus that passes the airport about every hour, but it doesn't link up with flights and you'll have to go out to the main road to flag it down. A taxi from Labasa costs about \$15.

Savusavu's airstrip is 3km south of town.

BOAT

To/from Suva

The **Lomaiviti Princess**, run by **Goundar Shipping** (☎330 1035; www.goundarshipping.com; Kong's Shop, Main St, Savusavu), departs Suva every Monday and Friday at 6pm, arriving in Savusavu at 6am. Tickets for this route start at \$55/25 for adults/kids, and go up to \$400 for a 1st-class cabin. Goundar expects to put a second boat on the route in 2016: check the website for updates.

Bligh Water Shipping (☎999 2536; www.blighwatershipping.com.fj) goes to Savusavu