

# Taveuni



It's easy to see why Taveuni is called the Garden Island. Hot, steamy and often wet, this luscious strip of land is a carpet of green palms and tropical wildflowers, and its dense, prehistoric rainforest is a magnet for colourful bird life. Taveuni is proud of its natural heritage. A massive swathe of the island's eastern side is a protected national park and here you can get sweaty on hillside hikes, cool off under waterfalls, enjoy a coastal walk along an impossibly beautiful beach trail or glide through clear waters on a traditional *bilibili* (bamboo raft). Dotted around the island's perimeter are black-sand beaches, evidence of the island's volcanic past. If it's sheer indulgence you're after, the nearby islands of Laucala, Matagi and Qamea have stunning white beaches and luxury resorts.

It's not just on dry land that Taveuni makes an impression, though. The island's beauty descends below the water's surface, attracting divers from across the globe – all of them eager to explore the dazzling corals and diverse marine life of the world-famous Somosomo Strait.

Taveuni is also politically important, as it is the chiefly island for the northern part of the country. The Tui Cakau (King of the Reef), the third-highest chiefly title in Fiji, is based in Somosomo.

Taveuni doesn't have any major towns. The island's main income comes from agriculture: mostly copra and to a lesser extent *dalo* (taro plant) and *kava* (Polynesian pepper shrub, the aromatic roots of which are used to make a mildly narcotic, muddy and odd-tasting drink) crops. The land here was once a single copra plantation, since subdivided and sold off.

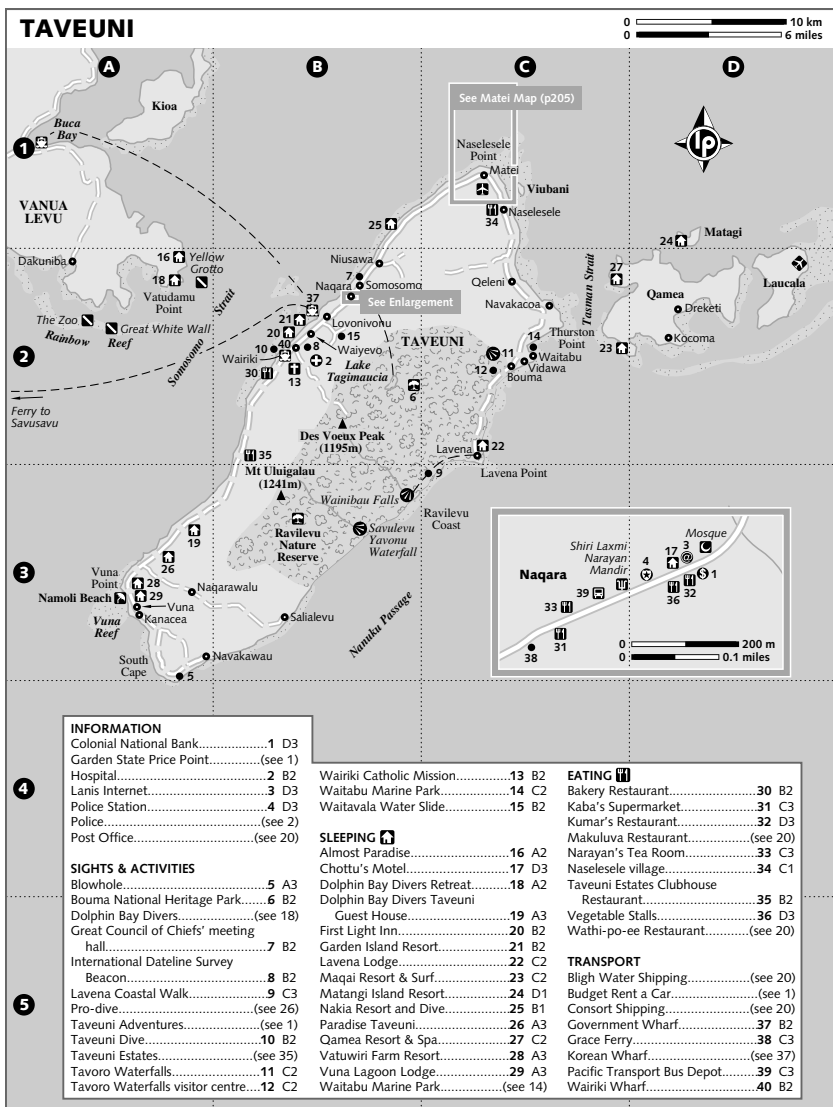
## HIGHLIGHTS

- Experience phenomenal marine life around the world-famous **Rainbow Reef** (p199)
- Snorkel sublime **Vuna Reef** (p199)
- Belt out a song with the locals at Sunday Mass at **Wairiki Catholic Mission** (p201)
- Trek where the forest meets the beach on the **Lavena Coastal Walk** (p209)
- Work up a sweat hiking to the **Tavoro Waterfalls** (p208), then wash it all off under the pounding waters
- Hop on a traditional *bilibili* and snorkel in crystal waters at **Waitabu Marine Park** (p208)
- Experience an adrenalin rush and gain a few bruises at the **Waitavala Water Slide** (p202)
- Soak up the laid-back atmosphere and excellent food of expat-magnet **Matei** (p205)



■ POPULATION: 12,000

■ AREA: 442 SQ KM



## Geography & Geology

Much of Taveuni's coastline is rugged, set against some of Fiji's highest peaks. Des Voeux Peak reaches up 1195m and the cloud-shrouded Mt Uluigalau, at 1241m, is the country's second-highest summit. The volcanic soil and abundant rainfall make Taveuni one of Fiji's most fertile areas. While the northeast

of Taveuni is fringed by reefs, the southwest has deep water close to shore.

## Orientation

The majority of visitors fly into Matei airport at the island's northernmost point, where most of the island's hotels, restaurants and dive shops are based. Head southeast