Vanua Levu (Big Island) may be second in size to Viti Levu, but the languid pace of life, dreamy, peaceful landscapes and lack of tourist infrastructure give it a very different feel. The only pocket of tourist activity here is pretty Savusavu – a small town set in a sweeping bay on the island’s south coast, and a haven for expats and yachtsies.

What it lacks in tourist conveniences, Vanua Levu makes up for with seclusion and unspoilt beauty. Here you’ll find peaceful countryside, traditional villages and calm, relaxing resorts. A mountainous spine cuts across the island. To the north are sunny hillsides, native forest and sugar-cane and pine plantations. Many Indo-Fijians live here, concentrated around hot, hard-working Labasa. In the mainly indigenous Fijian south are coconut plantations, ocean views and the majority of the island’s tourist lodges and facilities. The north and west hardly see any tourists and much of the western coast is accessible only by boat.

The island has a reputation for poor beaches, which is a little unfair. Whilst they may not match up to the glittering stars of the Yasawas, you’ll still find kilometre after kilometre of wild, deserted, palm-lined sands. It’s under the water, though, that Vanua Levu really shines. Diving is terrific and Jean-Michel Cousteau set up a resort here. Savusavu Bay has great sites for snorkelling and diving, and nearby Rainbow Reef has some of the best dive sites in the South Pacific. Vanua Levu’s many deep bays are fantastic for kayaking, and Natewa Bay, the longest in the South Pacific, is frequented by spinner dolphins. Those who aren’t water babies can head into the lush, rugged interior for hiking and birdwatching.

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- Explore the rough roads of the **Tunuloa Peninsula** (p189) by 4WD
- Gaze out at yachts anchored in the bay as you enjoy a sunset drink at the **Savusavu Yacht Club** (p187)
- Look for spinner dolphins in **Natewa Bay** (p186)
- Brave rough roads to visit remote and beautiful **Wainunu Bay** (p195)
- Redefine your image of cruises with a trip on the elegant **Tui Tai** (opposite) departing from Savusavu
- Soak up the colonial atmosphere on the deck of Savusavu’s **Planters’ Club** (p187)
- Explore Savusavu Bay by **kayak** (p183)
- Snorkel with heaps of colourful fish at **Split Rock** (p183) in Savusavu Bay

**POPULATION:** 139,510  
**AREA:** 5587 SQ KM
Getting There & Around

AIR
Flying is the best way to get to Vanua Levu and both Air Fiji and Pacific Sun have regular flights from Nadi or Suva to either Labasa or Savusavu. You can also fly between Savusavu and Taveuni. See p245 for details.

BOAT
There are several boat services to and from Vanua Levu but unless you’ve got plenty of time on your hands it’s not really worth it – you won’t save much money and the trip is significantly longer. Bligh Water Shipping, Consort Shipping and Patterson Brothers Shipping all service Vanua Levu from Viti Levu, Ovalau, Koro and Taveuni. Grace Ferry operates a bus and boat service from Labasa and Savusavu via Buca Bay to Taveuni. See p248 for schedules and ticket prices.

Charters & Cruises
For those looking to charter their own boat, Seahawk Yacht Charters (☎ 885 0787; www.seahawkfiji.com) rents out a beautiful 16m yacht with captain and a cook/crew from $250 to $420 per person per day depending on the season and level of service required. You can go practically anywhere in Fiji and the crew can help you arrange activities such as diving.

A trip with Tui Tai Adventure Cruises (Map p182; ☎ 885 3032; www.tuitai.com) combines the comfort, relaxation, fantastic food and luxury of an intimate, upscale resort with an ever-changing South Pacific backdrop. If you’re put off the idea of cruising by visions of a cheesy behemoth, never fear: the Tui Tai, an elegant, motorised sailboat, is sexy as hell, and the small number of guests keeps the mood friendly and relaxed. You can lounge about in stylish, curved rattan chairs or day beds and spot dolphins from the deck; relax in the on-board spa and eat delicious meals by lantern light or under the stars on a nearby beach. And then there are the activities – including snorkelling, kayaking, biking, diving, fishing and meeting local villagers. Setting off from Savusavu, a typical itinerary includes Taveuni, Kioa and Rabi islands, and provides the only way of reaching the Ringgold Isles (a beautiful, mostly uninhabited group of islands northeast of Vanua Levu), although your itinerary may vary according to the weather. All accommodation is in cabins with private bathroom and air-con. A five-night cruise costs from $5608/3738 per person single/double up to $12,476/8317 for the Oversea Veranda Suite, including all meals and activities except diving. Cheaper rates are available for singles willing to share a cabin. There’s also a seven-night option. Tui Tai also funds several community projects, has regular ‘humanitarian’ tours and uses ecofriendly practices.

ROAD
Vanua Levu’s remote, tropical roads are crying out to be explored by 4WD. Hire cars are available in Labasa (see p194) and Savusavu (see p188). Given the bumpy terrain, though, the available vehicles won’t always be in top condition. There are unsealed roads around most of the island’s perimeter. The road from Labasa to Savusavu is sealed but showing plenty of wear and you’ll have to do a fair amount of pothole dodging. The first 20km of the Hibiscus Hwy from Savusavu along the scenic coast is similarly paved. Unfortunately, the rest of the highway is much rougher. Avoid driving at night as there are lots of wandering animals and there is often fog in the mountains. Petrol stations are scarce and usually closed on Sundays, so plan to fill up in Labasa, Savusavu or Seaqaqa. It’s also a good idea to take some food with you on the road.

Just remember, you cannot wander on foot through the countryside without permission from the landowners.

It’s also possible to navigate the island by bus but timetables can be erratic and it takes far longer.

SAVUSAVU & AROUND

Savusavu (population 4970) is Vanua Levu’s liveliest and prettiest settlement, nestled against a sweeping bay, backed by sloping green hills and strung out along a main street dotted with decorative plant pots and flowers. There are several good restaurants, bars, stores and internet cafes catering to a significant expat community. Many foreigners have snapped up land here in recent years in order to build second homes and lodges in the hills and surrounding coast.

Savusavu is also the sole port of entry on Vanua Levu for yachts, and one of the most popular places in Fiji for visiting yachts to put down anchor. There are two excellent marinas here and Savusavu Bay fills up with vessels during the high season. A new marina complex (see www.marinavillagefiji.com) is planned on the waterfront east of town. It will