

DIVE INTO *Fiji*

This beautiful island nation is home to some of the best diving and snorkelling in the world

By Suzanne Morphet





Kokomo Island Resort

“Five turtles and a big, velvety, purple octopus!”

Those words are scribbled in my Diver’s Log book from December 1992. My husband and I were in Hawaii and had just completed our sixth dive.

I didn’t know it then, but it would be our last dive for decades. As much as we loved it, life and family got in the way.

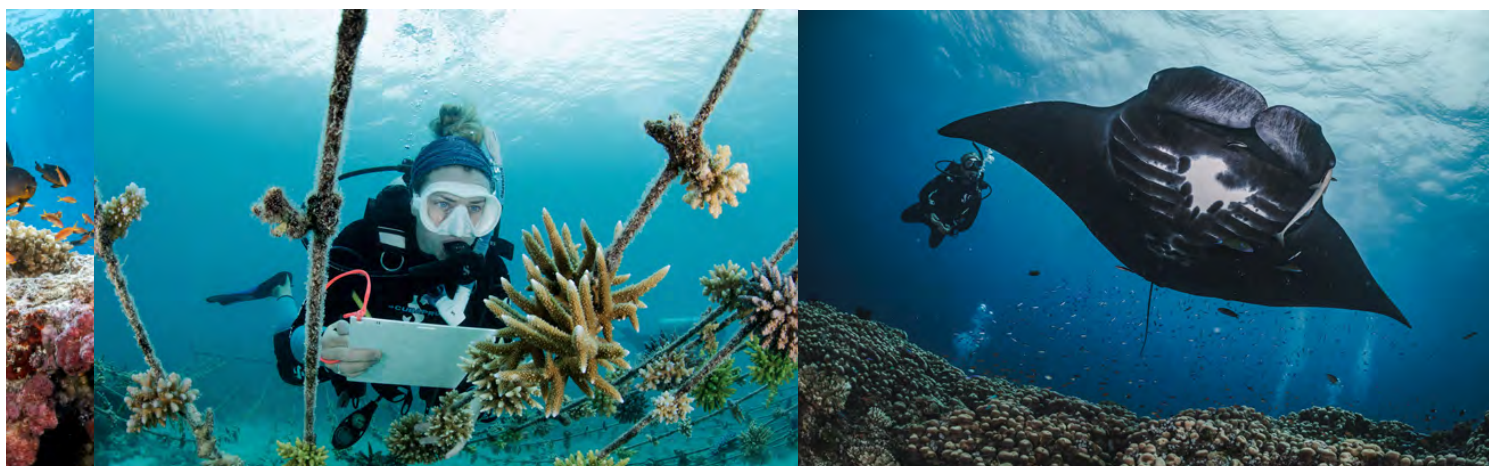
But when I came across my log book earlier this year, along with a photo of my 34-year old self looking elated after being certified to dive, I longed to do it again.

This time it would be in Fiji. With its warm water, abundant marine life, profusion of colourful coral and a selection of luxury resorts with PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) facilities, this island nation checks all the boxes for both snorkelling and diving.

In fact, Fiji is known as the Soft Coral Capital of the World for the variety of species that grow alongside hard coral reefs. And even though coral bleaching and overfishing are problems everywhere, Fijians are making mighty strides to conserve their ocean resources.

Near Likuliku Lagoon Resort, we pull on our masks and snorkels for our first underwater adventure after a direct flight from Vancouver to Nadi, Fiji’s gateway city.

“It’s our best site,” says our guide, “follow me.” A short but exhilarating boat ride from the resort has brought us to this spot that could be in the middle of the ocean, but when we look down, the reef is right there, less than a metre underwater.



Kokomo Island Resort



Jumping in, we enter another world. Fish nibble from what look like giant upturned platters that shimmer under the sun's rays. Striped fish, dotted fish, pooping fish! I can't help but laugh into my snorkel when a rainbow coloured parrotfish leaves a cloudy deposit in the clear water, then speeds jerkily away as if to say, 'I didn't do it!'

No wonder there are so many well-fed fish. The reef is vibrantly alive, like a garden at peak harvest, chockablock with colourful produce for the owners, in this case, the fish and other marine life.

A few days later, we're at Kokomo Private Island, a resort that boasts a fleet of boats for every possible adventure. One morning we simply walk a few metres from our villa to the fringing reef offshore. Kicking our fins, we snorkel to the resort's coral nursery where several man-made structures are anchored to the ocean floor with coral fragments attached. Growing climate-resilient coral is

just one of half a dozen conservation programs run by the resort's four marine biologists. Coral is foundational here, as Kokomo lies alongside the Great Astrolabe Reef, one of the world's largest barrier reefs.

"Big stride" says Viviana, our diving instructor, as I put my regulator in my mouth and tighten the straps on my buoyancy control device for my first dive in 32 years.

It's scary at first, but soon we're 12 metres under. Sea fans wave in the current and tropical fish look me in the eye. A green turtle glides by. And look! Over there—a manta ray!

When Viviana snaps her fingers above a

tapestry of feathery crowns, the creatures recoil in unison and disappear into the coral. I learn later they're Christmas tree worms and their 'crowns' catch their food.

By the end of our fourth dive, I realize how much I like diving. The ability to move up, down, sideways or simply hang weightless is unmatched on land.

My Diver's Log now has some new entries. The last one reads 'March 2, 2024, Stick Bommie, Fiji's Great Astrolabe Reef. Amazing!'

