

July 21: Buca Bay, Taveuni, Fiji. We were up at 3:30 am to catch a plane to the northern tip of Taveuni, Fiji's third largest island, just east of Vanua Levu. The plane was a fourteen seater and flew low allowing a good view of the coral reefs between islands. There are a great many reefs that would not be visible any other way. They are beautiful to see, surrounded by the dark blue, deep waters, and seen in lighter blues and azure. Once Lynn got used to the plane she took many pictures of the reefs below. We met a couple from Australia who were headed for the same ship we were. The four of us got there earlier than the rest and had nearly an extra half day of adventure. A short van ride from the airport got us to the cruise ship Tui Tai. This is a small ship with 12 cabins and during our stay there were at most 13 passengers.



Lynn and I were in one of two staterooms on the upper deck. It was cramped and we appreciated the extra space in the the two grand staterooms. This ship likes to cruise the Northeastern part of Fiji that is more remote from civilization. A short cruise took us to a site from which we bicycled to the International Date Line.



We could hop from Sunday to Monday and back again. I could not discern any real difference. Then we snorkeled in a beautiful reef (“the farm”) of mixed soft and hard corals. Our guide for the trip aboard the Tui Tai was Lagi (pronounced “Langi”), a Melanesian from the islands. He is very well informed, scholarly and a very good snorkeler at the same time. That evening, we celebrated our arrival by sharing a kava ceremony with the crew.



Taveuni is east of Vanua Levu. Our Tui Tai trip took place in the squarish region to the east of Vanua Levu comprised of Kioa, Rabi, The Ringgolds Atoll and Qamea. This is a remote area, far from developed tourism and big cities. It remains largely pristine. There is the threat of great danger from the intrusion of a 7 star, yes 7, hotel complex. I heard that opening daily room rates were to be \$15-20 K ! I also heard that the developers are trying hard to be *green* and eco-friendly.

July 22: Snorkeled at 9 am and 11 am off Koro Levu, an uninhabited small islet that is counted as one of 322 Fijian islands.



These snorkels were spectacular in very clear and calm water. There were many fish and corals in great variety. In the afternoon we went to a village on the island of Kioa. This is a *Polynesian* village, not *Melanesian* (recently *out of Africa*) like almost all of the rest of Fiji. Kioa Island was purchased for £3015 in 1947 by the people of Vaitupu in Tuvalu (formerly the Ellice Islands). Their native island was sinking below sea level and they had to move.

The villagers performed a Kioa island village *fatele* (song and dance) and we visited their school.





I noticed that no one had eyeglasses, no one ! Later Lynn noticed that here and in other villages that we visited there is no evidence of dentistry either. The people subsist on coconuts and fish, but also sell some coconut oil from their own plantations, as well as handmade curios. We all joined the natives in dancing. Lynn was surprised when I was the first to join. Apparently I was the only one listening closely enough to hear the invitation to join.

July 23: I am noticing that there are almost no sea birds in Fiji. Not a single gull, tern, snipe, willet, albatross, whimbrel, pelican, cormorant, tropicbird, avocet, skimmer or booby !! Later in the trip I did see a few frigate birds (man-o-war birds). I have seen many more gulls in Salt Lake City ! I am wondering if there is a magnetic anomaly in the Earth's field here and that disturbs the bird's ability to navigate. No one I ask seems to know.

It rains lightly today. We go on a trek to Bouma Falls on Taveuni. Some of our number bicycle. I had bicycled earlier in the week but the bicycles were too small for me so I rode in the van with Lynn. One of our party, Ross, had a bad fall from his bike and was scraped up in several places. The roads are gravelly and rutted. Bouma Falls is three falls. The first is easy to get to from the van by following a footpath through a small village plantation. This falls has a large pool and I snorkeled in it. It was freezing but full of fish. The biggest were right under the falls. There were also lizard fish that clung to rocks and walked on their ventral fins. Lynn had her first massage by the waterfall.



We then hiked up to the second falls, at least some of us did. Below you see Liga at the second falls.





This was a steep climb over basalt, roots and wet clay so that one had to be careful. This falls too had a pool, although smaller in size and a bit warmer. In the rocks at the pool's edge I found freshwater shrimp and quite large prawns. Some of these no doubt wash down the stream and over the first falls, explaining the large fish found there. There is a third falls even higher up but nearly an hour's hike one way. We did not have time for that one. Remember that Fiji is of volcanic origin and has many steep mountains, albeit small ones. Many streams and rivers emanate from the highlands. Later in the day we snorkel off of Qamea. To do this we take a zodiac from the Tui Tai to the reef. We then experienced dancing by the Bouma villagers, a Togo village *meke*.

When looking at Melanesian adults, I am reminded of Garrison Keilor's remark about folks in Minnesota, where "the men are handsome and the women are strong." Nevertheless, one of the younger dancers, seen below, is strikingly beautiful. The children are very attractive and appear mostly happy. No one wore shoes unless it was part of a school uniform required for the boarding schools.



In the evening we joined the Tui Tai crew for a kava ceremony. On first arrival to the boat we were offered kava but this time it was stronger and I had 4 cups. It was very mellow and I slept very well that night. Kava is technically listed as a *hypnotic*. The famous German pharmacologist, Louis Lewin, categorized natural drugs as: *inebriantia*, *excitantia*, *hypnotica*, *euphorica* and *phantastica*. An example of each would be, respectively, alcohol, amphetamine, kava, mescaline and psilocybin. After drinking strong kava, the lips and tongue tingle. In about half an hour a calm comes over one that lasts several hours. The local men do kava every night, as did our crew, and the growing of yaqona (q is pronounced like “ng”) to make it is a thriving business in small villages. The roots and stems are used. The roots make the best kava.

July 24: Today the Tui Tai went to the island of Cobia (pronounced “Thombia” of course). This is a privately owned, uninhabited, horseshoe shaped crater in the Ringgold Atoll island group. We climbed the side of the Cobia crater through basalt and tree roots. When at the top of the rim, a beautiful crater pool could be seen.



It is deep and open to the ocean on one side but only over a coral reef at high tide. As we hiked along the rim we disturbed sleeping flying foxes, the very large fruit eating bats.





We also saw many goats.

The hike went down the razor's edge of the crater.



We kayaked inside the crater. Along the shore is a mangrove forest and just inside that is a coral reef followed by a sharp drop-off into deep water.



This island had been used by the natives of a nearby island to hide women and children when enemy tribes attacked in days gone by. The goats provided food to supplement the coconuts, fruit and fish. Those attacks involved cannibalism. Liga (“Linga”) one evening gave us a detailed, frank and horrid account of cannibalistic practices right down to the best parts to eat and recipes for proper cooking. Victims were cooked alive (at least alive for awhile). I asked if they were drugged or was there lots of screaming. Lots of screaming was the answer. One was thought to acquire the powers of a captured warrior if one ate him. I wonder how this practice got started (over-population ?). We travel to Rabi and snorkel late in the day.

Fijians have cattle. They call them *bullmacows*. It is said that they don’t distinguish males from females, hence *bullmacow*. I thought this was uddermabull.

July 25: Today we are off the shore of Rabi (“Rambi”). We do a Dolphin Bay snorkel. No dolphins are seen today. We walk to a school and visit a science class (biology). In Fiji all classes are taught in English. All kids go to “elementary” and “secondary” school in their villages. “High school” is done at boarding schools in a few locales throughout the island system. The government pays for this if the students do well enough. The families usually can’t afford high school otherwise. The better high school students go to college, even in foreign countries, at government expense. We met many very well educated Fijians, including Lagi. We were entertained by dancing children from Tabiang Primary School sporting delightful costumes and elaborate choreography.





We then had a loco dinner on the beach (in the dark). This was a great meal.

On our trip on the Tui Tai there were 13 guests. Us, two Tasmanians, two Australians, a family of three from Albuquerque with a son about to enter Emory in Atlanta !, and a family of four from Santa Barbara whose elder son is about to enter Georgia Tech ! Small world. We enjoyed everyone very much. The crew was excellent. Ben, from Australia, and Kouri, from Japan, were very helpful in many ways (smoothies, snorkeling, diving, videography...). They are off to Japan now so Ben can meet Kouri's parents. From the first day on the boat I suspected they were a couple, and a lovely couple indeed they are.

I will recount one exciting event aboard the Tui Tai. Seth, who is entering Emory, did scuba diving daily with his father. After his father's bike crash, Seth did a dive with the guide only, early in the morning. The rest of us were having breakfast on deck when it finally dawned on us that the divers were gone too long. With binoculars, Greg and I could see the dive zodiac looking for the divers, but as it happened, in the wrong part of the ocean. Seth's parents began to become quietly alarmed as did we all. Eventually the divers orange safety floats were seen, rather far from the dive boat and a second zodiac was dispatched to fetch them. They had run out of air but were floating and swimming to the shore of a nearby, uninhabited island. Seth later said his main concern was that he would miss breakfast.

