

The Lau Group of Islands

Forbes Magazine has listed the Lau group of islands as one of the top 12 World's Most Beautiful Places. Forbes chose the Lau Archipelago for its "mind-blowing array of marine life and a gentle, carefree vibe."

The Lau Group of islands are the least visited islands in Fiji with no land based tourism. Culture and traditions have been preserved along with a fascinating history where the chiefs of Lau ruled most of Fiji. The Lau islands have a unique Geology made up lime stone that has been eroded by the elements into dramatic islets and arches.

The Lau Group will provide an adventure of discovery for the yachtsman. For some islands information is scarce due to lack of visitors. Not all the Lau islands are mentioned below as some have no anchorages and others I have not visited nor heard of any other vessels that was able too due to lack of navigational information. There may well be Navigable passes to some of these islands and they could certainly be explored by tender.

Vanua Balavu (Exploring Isles)

This very beautiful and unique island offers many great anchorages. The most spectacular of which is in the Bay of Islands. Located in NW part of the lagoon this area is covered with limestone islands and islets that have been carved by the elements into arches caves and overhangs all covered with thick vegetation. The geology is the same as the famous Palau Lagoon in Micronesia.



Bay of Islands Vanua Balavu

The North coast has some very well protected inlets that are so deep you can tie up to the trees ashore. Inland of one of these inlets is a sacred lake where every few years a ceremony performed by a *bete* (Fijian traditional priest) takes place that causes all the fish in the lake to float up to the surface where they are collected for food.

There is an old plantation on the island (Namavatu) this can be explored on foot and there are some great walks with good views in the area. The Southern western end of the island also offers a beautiful anchorage that provides a dramatic colour contrast between the lush forest of the island, the sandy bottom and the large reef flats that extend to the reef drop off. From this anchorage you can explore the Qaranilaca limestone sea cave at the southernmost tip of Vanuabalavu adjacent to Namalata Island. This cave was excavated and was shown to have been used by humans over 1000 years ago.

The village of Delaconi in the NW is the chiefly village of this island and should be visited first to present your Kava (Sevusevu) to the Chief.



Islands in Vanua Balavu

Yacata

This rarely visited island has a large cave where the bones of Tongan warriors and the remains of a war canoe were hidden after a failed Tongan raid.



Visit the nearby Vatu Vara Island know as Fiji's most idyllic island.



Lakeba

This is the island is where the Tui Nayan (Chief of all the Lau Islands) resides. Lakeba is the traditional political power base where invading Tongan warlords based themselves the most famous of which was Enele Ma'afu (1816-1881) - a Tongan-Fijian warlord who conquered much of Fiji in the 19th century and is buried on the island. Tongan influence is seen in many aspects of Lakeban culture.

There are 8 villages on Lakeba. Of particular interest is the village of Tubou which is considered the capital of the Lau Islands. Another village of interest is Nasaqalau on the North coast. A clan in this village is famous for their ability to call sharks from the sea. An annual ceremony, performed by a *bete* (Fijian traditional priest) is held every October or November. For several days, offerings of kava are made, and on the actual day, a caller wades neck-high in the water and chants. Within 30 minutes, a white shark leads a school of about 50 sharks, which encircle the caller, who then leads them out to shallow waters to be slaughtered, except for the white shark which is allowed to go free.

Nasaqalau is also known for 3 large caves in the vicinity. Each of these has it's own legend. One of these caves was once used as a place of banishment for tuberculosis patients, who were left there to die and human remains can still be seen.

The anchorage on the east side of the island in the Lagoon can be uncomfortably exposed to the trade winds although protected by reef from the swells. On the west side of the island opposite Wainiyabia Village is another anchorage that is well protected from the Trade winds.



Traditional Lauan Houses

Reid & Bukatatanoa Reefs

This group of reefs offers some of the best dives in the Lau Group. Reid Reef is the easiest to enter with a large deepwater pass on the western side. Anchorage can be found in the lee of the islet in the SE of the lagoon. Diving in the passes is good and in calm weather the outside walls of the reef provide bottomless drop-offs.

Bukatatanoa Reef or Argo Reef. These large reefs are the site of the shipwreck of the American Schooner the Argo in 1800. This marked first lasting contact with Europeans. The crew were rescued by the people of neighboring Oneata island. Unfortunately the Argos crew were infected with Cholera at the time and this caused a Fiji wide epidemic.

Oneata Island

This island is made up of Lime stone. There are two villages Waiqori and Dakuiloa. Waiqori is the Chiefly Village where you will need to present your Sevusevu (gift of Kava) to the Tui Oneata (Chief of Oneata).

Oneata has a deep water pass in the NW named Middle Passage that allows entry to the lagoon. Good anchorage is found in the uninhabited bays on the NW side of the island. From here it is tender ride to the villages on the South side of the island.

Oneata Island apart from being the first island to have lasting contact with Europeans was also the first place in 1830 that missionaries arrived. These were two Tahitian missionaries (members of London Missionary Society).

There is good snorkelling and diving in the passes and lagoon. A pleasant walk (30 mins) can be taken along the track that links both villages.



Beach at Oneata

Komo

Komo has an easily accessible lagoon which is entered through the “West Pass” on the NW side of the Lagoon. The lagoon is clear of Coral Heads once you are inside. There is a good anchorage sheltered from the trade winds on the North side of the island where the beaches are pristine. There is one village called Moce on the SE island. The land is flat and there are some nice walks across the island.



Komo Island

Yagasa Group

This uninhabited group of 4 islets provides some great exploring and beachcombing on beaches that rarely visited by people. The lagoon has good diving and snorkeling. The anchorage is good and the lagoon easy to access.



Endemic to Lau



Meke in Lau

Fulaga

This is the most unique and beautiful of the Southern Lau islands. Entry into the lagoon is through the pass in the NE side of the outer reef. This pass is 6-7m deep and narrows to 30m wide at the inside. Once inside the lagoon there is a spectacular array of Limestone islands and arches of all sizes are dotted throughout.

The People of Fulaga are known for excellent wood carvings and canoe building. They cave the best traditional Kava bowls “Tanoa” that the Kava drink is prepared in.



Fulaga Lagoon



Mushroom shaped Island



Islands in the lagoon

Ogea Levu

The people of Ogea are known for their happy and carefree approach to life. The lagoon is a rich fishing ground around both their islands which are surrounded by magnificent reefs. The village is located in the large bay at the south end of the island. This bay contains many small islets and is good to explore by tender.

Ogea Driki is a coral atoll that lays just South Ogea Levu this island is the farming and fishing ground for the Ogean villagers.

The lagoon can be entered through the pass in the SW of the island.

Moala

This is the highest island in Southern Lau and has the biggest population of 3000 people. The island was originally volcanic and is very fertile with the farming of Cassava, kumala (sweet Potato), and yams on the hillsides. Large dalo plantations are found in the waterlogged valleys. Moala has an airstrip which can be used by charter aircraft for guest transfers or provisioning.

There are some nice walks and great views from the top of the hill. In the interior there are 2 small crater lakes that can be hiked to. Diving and snorkeling is good on the outer reefs.

The chiefly village is Naroï at the NW end of the island and there is an anchorage in front of the village.



View from Hillside

Totoya

This very unique horse shoe shaped island has a lagoon within a lagoon. The island is an ancient volcano and the creator has sunk leaving a nearly land lock inner lagoon. Legend goes that when the first chief to discover the island saw it from afar he said that it is “Totoka” meaning beautiful which is how the name Totoya was derived.

There are 2 big well charted passes through the outer reef one in the north and the other in the West. Several good anchorages are available the best in the outer lagoon is on the west side Niavaka Gap. Alternatively yachts can then make their way round into Totoya Bay (the inner Lagoon) in the center of the horse shoe. This bay provides a deep water anchorage and protection from all wide directions. The Chiefly village of Tovo should be visited first to present your gift of Kava to the high chief. The island offers some great exploring and has many unspoiled and untouched white sandy beaches. There is good diving in the many small passes through the outer reefs.

A legend tells of a Taboo or curse was put on the pass into the lagoon to keep out intruders. When you enter this pass there must be no talking, smoking or wearing of hats or the sea will overwhelm the vessel with 3 large waves.

Matuku

This island is a high volcanic island and is known for its large deep water natural harbor which can be entered through the pass on the west cost of the island.

Matuku is the only island in Lau that was not invaded by the Tongans and the people of Matuku do not wear Masi (type of dress made from the bark of the Mulberry Tree) that is commonly worn elsewhere in the Lau Group. This island catches the Southern Ocean swells and is known for its great surfing.



Matuku Harbor



Matuku from the Sea



Undisturbed beaches



The Lau Group

Air Transfers

There are 4 serviceable airstrips in the Lau Group on islands Vanua Balavu, Cicia, Lakeba and Moala these can be accessed by Twin Otter and Bandeirante aircraft. Helicopter access is also possible.

For guests wishing to do the complete Lau itinerary domestic flights could be organized from Nadi International Airport to Vanua Balvau Island in the Northern Lau and returning from the Moala Island in the Southern Lau.

Village Etiquette

No hats, sunglasses or revealing clothing can be worn in the Villages. The best way to dress for both males and females is to wear the traditional Sulu (or Sarong) with a sleeved shirt or T-shirt. The villages own the fishing rights and it is their lively hood. Ask the village if you want to fish and they can assist you with this.

Kava

Present your gift of Kava roots (Sevusevu) to the village before engaging in other activities.

Gifts

Gifts are welcome and should be shared as much as possible within the village. Clothes, school books, pens/pencils, sweets for children etc are best. Any cash donations should be given to the village fund, school fund or other recognized community project.

Alcohol is strictly Taboo (forbidden) in all the Lau villages and should not be offered or landed ashore.



For additional information contact Captain David Jamieson

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