

FINDING OVALAU

> JUST EAST OF FIJI'S MAIN ISLAND VITI LEVU, IS A PLACE STEEPED IN HISTORY AND OLD-WORLD CHARM. THE MAIN TOWN LEVUKA, WAS CAPITAL OF FIJI BRIEFLY IN THE 1870'S BEFORE THE ADMINISTRATION WAS MOVED TO THE MORE CENTRALLY LOCATED SUVA. BACKED BY RUGGED, JUNGLE-COVERED MOUNTAINS, LEVUKA IS BECOMING A FAVOURITE WITH TRAVELLERS WANTING TO DISCOVER THE REAL FIJI. BUT WHAT'S NOT GENERALLY KNOWN YET IS THAT THE DIVING HERE IS WORLD CLASS!

The range of dive sites here has something for divers of all experience levels. The area has some of the best hard coral, as well as some excellent soft corals. There are shallow dives with a plethora of colourful marine life, and deep ones to see larger creatures resident or moving through the region. From vertical dropoffs to shallow seagrass lagoons, this place has it all.

One of my favourite sites was Goldfish Block, where two bommies reach up from a 20 metre sandy bottom to within a few metres of the surface. The variety of life here is fantastic. The top of the bommies are covered with clownfish, colourful anthias, and many other fantastically patterned fish. Further down could be found moray eels being cleaned by shrimp, fantastic crustaceans hiding in the feather stars, and the occasional small octopus hunting around the edge of the reef. And then there's those magnificently coloured blue ribbon eels raising their heads out of crevasses to see where their next meal may be coming from. Looking down the sandy slope, hundreds of small garden eels poked their heads up out of their holes, plucking plankton out of the water as it drifted slowly past their swaying heads. Occasionally a turtle would pass by, or a harmless whitetip reef shark. All of this is in clear water where even snorkellers on the surface could observe everything.

: KEN HOPPEN

Orange-fin Anemonefish: Everyone has a shot of an anemonefish; they are not hard to spot, it is harder to find a new way of photographing them.

Golden Damsel: Found on the steep outer reef slopes with gorgonians and black coral.

Sunset: Wakaya Passage, Lomaiviti Group, Fiji.

Yellow Fangblennie: These little fish are often overlooked in favour of larger, more spectacularly coloured fish, but give them a little time and they will win you over.

Transparent Commensal Shrimp: Normally found along the external reef and deep reef.