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FIJI SUPER GT



» PEKAN DELIGHTS



» GHOST OF
MALDIVES

» TASIK SEPAYANG
WALKABOUT

» TRAVEL RODS



ISLAND PARADISE

Words by Chris Tan; Photos by the author, fellow anglers and Captain Adrian Watt.

FIJI

THE ULTIMATE SPORTFISHING PARADISE

BULA BULA BULA MEANS "WELCOME" IN FIJIAN. IT IS A COMMON GREETING YOU'LL RECEIVE ANYWHERE YOU GO IN FIJI. MOST PLACES WILL OFFER YOU JUST ONE "BULA" BUT WHEN YOU RECEIVE 3 "BULAS", YOU KNOW YOU'RE IN A VERY SPECIAL PLACE. MATAVA RESORT ON KADAVU ISLAND IS THIS SPECIAL PLACE.

On our way to Fiji! Our trip to Fiji began with a flight from Singapore to Sydney. After a 7-hour transit, we were on our way to Fiji on an Air Pacific flight. We stayed a night in Nadi, (pronounced as Nandi with the invisible "n") and then caught our domestic flight to Kadavu, (pronounced as Kandavu with the same mysteriously invisible "n") an island 45 nautical miles

south of the main island, Viti Levu.

The domestic flight operated by Pacific Sun was on a small and cosy twin propeller plane. It offered some amazing views of the beautiful Fijian coastline. Lush green mountains gave way to an amazing plethora of blues. From baby blue to azure, from electric to cobalt blue - almost every shade of blue was in that ocean, as the shallow reefs mingle with the deep blue sea.

We flew over many small islands and coral reef structures and it was easy to see why Fiji was one of the must visit destinations for divers and anglers alike. With 322 islands to choose from, it was difficult to decide where to visit in our short time there. But the decision was made easier when I came across the webpage of Bite Me Gamefishing Charters (<http://gamefishingfiji.com/home>). It provided all I wanted from



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sportfishing charter - a chance to cast stoppers at some nice giant trevallies (GTs) and drop jigs to hungry dogtooth tunas (doggies).

KADAVU

After an hour into flight, we began our descent to Kadavu. A small runway appeared and we landed with a bump and squeech. We got off our little plane with other passengers and were ushered to a waiting area called the "Arrival Gate" - some 10 meters from the tarmac.

The four in our group consisted of long time fishing buddies, Mark, Waverick, my wife Jac and yours truly. We wanted a rustic and alternative adventure and so far, our Fijian sojourn was looking pretty promising. We got on a sports utility vehicle ala Fijian style and headed to the port for our boat ride to the southeast side of Kadavu, where Matava Resort was located.

The 45-minute speedboat ride on the lagoon went over some amazingly clear waters. It looked as if we were gliding on a swimming pool. We would pass some shallow reefs and it looked like the whole cast of "Finding Nemo" were out playing.

One of the residents of the island followed us on the ride in said that whales

were often spotted in the lagoon. We did not see any but witnessed some dolphins play tag with the boat, showing off their speed and agility. The speedboat skirted near the Great Astrolabe Barrier Reef - 120km of barrier reef and our thoughts went to the GTs waiting for us. Tomorrow could not come sooner.

MATAVA RESORT

We finally reached the shores of Matava Resort. Bula bula bula was the greeting we heard!! Three "bulas" and we knew we were in a special place. Matava is an eco-resort with 9 traditional thatched bures or chalets set amidst the tropical rainforest. Each bure had a spacious bedroom, with louvered windows, attached bathroom and a private deck for sunbathing or resting those aching bodies after a hard day's

fishing.

Matava has no electricity and uses solar power for its basic needs. The bures come with lights for the bedroom and bathroom. Hot water is also supplied via solar energy. Hence the name eco resort. Being so close to the tropical rainforest also meant bugs and mosquitoes were your constant companion. Mosquito netting is provided but be warned, it can get hot and mucky at night, so a portable fan and a torch light are essential.

Upon our arrival, we rested at the main bure or the dining hall and had a scrumptious lunch. The meals we had during our stay ranged from pretty good to excellent - and we had some outstanding dinners to go with our Fijian beer. Some friendly guys who looked like they belonged to the Fijian rugby 7s team then lugged our heavy gears and luggage up

- 01. We were treated to some amazing aerial views of Fiji as we flew to Kadavu.
- 02. Our ride to Kadavu.
- 03. The "Arrival Gate" some 10m from the tarmac.
- 04. Bite Me the sportfishing machine.



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the hill to our bures. We all needed to shower, prep our gears for the next day's fishing and get ready for dinner - such is the hard life of a sportfishing angler.

We did not get to speak much to our skipper Adrian Watts that night but he promised to meet us at 6am for breakfast and start our 4 day fishing adventure. I always like an early start and by 6.30am the next morning, we were on board Bite Me, with Adrian on the fly bridge and our deckie Big Joe giving us a safety briefing.

BITE ME!

Bite Me is a 31 footer sportfishing machine, built by DeepV in Australia. It has state of the art electronics on board with plenty of room for 4 anglers to fish around. When we came aboard Bite Me, our feet met soft teak decking and it felt great. All we needed were some nice fish flapping on the soft deck.

The plan on the 1st day was to try some jigging on the seamount, located 35 miles out. We would then do some popping on the Great Astrolabe Reef on our way back. As the weather was going to be windy the following days, we would have to try our best to jig up something nice on day one. The rest of the days would be spent casting our poppers for GTs on the Astrolabe Reef and finding new jigging grounds.

DAY 1 - JIGGING AT THE SEAMOUNT

We steamed out of the calm lagoon, past the reef and headed out towards the seamount. The day was calm and the seas were flat. We stopped by a reef structure called the Sea Reef but could not entice any GTs to take our poppers. We then continued our journey to the seamount, in hope that some hungry

piscatorial monsters would like our meta jig offerings.

We were a tad worried about the effects on the fishing due to a huge undersea volcanic eruption near Tonga. As Tonga was a mere 800km south of Fiji we had a tsunami warning on the day we were taking our flight to Kadavu. Thankfully, the warning was cancelled as no tsunami came. But we have heard of fish being spooked during and after a major earthquake or volcanic eruption. The optimists in us hoped that Fijian fish stock were tougher than their cousins elsewhere in other oceans.

We arrived at the seamount and started jigging. We drifted along the spot

- 05. Matava Resort from the distance.
- 06. A spacious bedroom and mosquito netting to keep the bugs out.
- 07. Solar power energy at the eco resort.





and soon had the first fish on board. A long speedy wahoo came by and took Mark's jig. Wahoos are fun to catch but do not put up much fight on heavy gear. This wahoo fell on the soft teak deck in double quick time. The fish was dispatched for the resort's dinner for the next few nights.

FISH ON

My pink 380g Sevenseas hooker jig dropped to the seamount 150m down. I worked the jig up and soon started retrieving the line with several pauses in between, to see if anything took a fancy. Something did. A quick strike and I was in to a small fish. "Small one," I exclaimed to my buddies.

As I yanked the little fish up from the deep, my rod doubled over as something else took a liking to my quarry. I was now fighting a bigger brute. It then spat the fish out and I continued to reel up my sixteen little fish. The bigger fish then came back for round 2 and took it again. Line started to peel from my Stella 20000. After a few minutes, it spat the fish out again. By then the poor little fish was near the surface and up came a badly mutilated amberjack. It was then kept to feed some other big human guests in the resort - the cycle of life.

Ok, that was fun. I dropped my jig down again and after working the jig for some time, I decided to retrieve my line again. The jig must have been 50m from the boat when something big found my hooker "bling" so enticing that it engulfed the jig and went on a rampaging run. My PE3 line went singing as I doggedly hung on. It finally stopped running and it took me another 5 minutes before we saw my 200lb leader surface. A bright silver bullet shape appeared in the waters and after a

few more cranks, up came my best doggie so far.

I felt ecstatic that I landed a nice doggie the morning of day 1. The fish was quickly gaffed as it would feed more guests in the coming days. We drifted by a few more times and Mark hooks up another fish at the seamount. This time a

smaller doggie came up and it was released.

The boat made another pass and this time Jac called for help. A fish had stolen her 400g Smith nagamasa jig as she was dropping it and now she couldn't close her bail arm. Line spilled out rapidly and we could see that her spool was nearly empty. Joe and I tried to close the bail arm several times but it kept bouncing back open. I tried to hold the free spooling line but the fish was way too big to even slow down.

Whatever it was, it was big and in a hurry to go somewhere else. Joe finally closed the bail arm but as he did so, the line exploded even with a light drag on. We looked at each other and wondered what more we could have done. It would



- 1. Dinner with our new friends
- 2. Loading our gears for the speedboat ride to Matava Resort.
- 3. Fighting a doggie with a storm brewing in the background.



have been great to see Jac fight a massive fish, probably another large doggie.

We went over the spots without any more hits and Adrian decided to head back to the Sea Reef to get us some GTs. Big blooping poppers were used to make sure the Fijian GTs knew we were there. Hammerhead, Craftbait and Orion big jim and cono cono poppers were sent to the breaking surf. Jac and Mark were almost instantly on to a couple of nice fish. A jobfish and small GT came up after a few minutes.

Some minutes later, Mark's Craftbait popper was smashed by something bigger. It took some line as Mark huffed and puffed and hauled this GT to the boat. We soon had a nice looking GT at the back of Bite Me and it flapped helplessly on the soft teak deck - what a wonderful sound. Adrian took some measurements and it was estimated to be 35kgs.

The first day ended with the setting

sun. We headed back to Matava and a crowd of guests waited anxiously to see how we did. As the fish were being unloaded, the oohs and aahs rang out and everyone was pleased to see we were having fish for dinner that night - and for many nights after.

DAY 2 - TO ONO AND BEYOND

The winds on day 2 started to pick up as we headed to the north of the reef system - towards an island called Ono and beyond. The plan for the day was to raise some GTs and find new jigging spots.

We worked hard with our heavy poppers, casting into the wind. A few GTs and green jobfish were landed without much fuss. I decided to change to a heavy weight 220g Orion big jim popper. First cast and I was hooked up. A GT about the size of the popper came up in seconds and released in record time.

After a few more casts a bigger fish decimated my lure. It took some line and

we slugged it out for a while. But the fish began to tire under my heavy drag setting - PE10 braid (130lb rated), 150lb twisted leader and 400lb bite leader. It may sound extreme but you can never tell when the 50 or 60kg GT will come by.

A nice size GT soon surfaced and was estimated to be around 30kgs. We had problems removing the belly or mid hook, which was lodged deep in its throat. But with the aid of a saltwater hose in its mouth, Joe managed to remove the hook, revive the fish and send it back to its home, with a slight sore throat.

Mark then had a huge fish hooked up. It reared its huge head out of the water and smashed the popper. Line zipped out of Mark's spool at an alarming rate. It was big for sure. Then disaster

11. A fish-eye view of the first fish for the trip - a wahoo.
12. Jac poses with her green jobfish.
13. A quick photo of this small doggie and back home it went.



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I couldn't help but wonder if things would have been firing even hotter if we didn't encounter the undersea volcanic eruption in Tonga.

strangely shut down and we went back to our bure for a nice shower, deep heat rub, dinner and cold beer - essentials for hardcore anglers.

DAY 4 - THE FINAL DAY

As the mornings went by, our bodies began to ache in places hard to describe or imagine. Wake up calls were now slowly answered and breakfast took much longer to finish on day 4. Jac was a little

under the weather and stayed in the cabin for most of the day. It was left to Maverick and I to catch that elusive 40kg GT. We took out all the big guns and popped our arms off.

Maverick was the star of the day with numerous GTs landed on one hammerhead popper. Mark had left behind the popper for Maverick to use and that one popper must have caught 7 to 8 GTs. I had a massive bust off in the

truck. The line dug into the spool and before you could say bula, the braid exploded. Unfortunately the tackle shop assistant who spooled his line didn't pack the braid tightly and it dug in when the fish went on another mazy run.

Day 2 ended with fish for everyone. It was not as good as day 1 but we had our fair share of excitement and we still had another 2 days to look forward to.

DAY 3 - A QUIET DAY

We started the day with bad news that our buddy Mark had to head home to attend to some family matters. It turned out to be a tough day at sea with very few fish caught except for a few small GTs and several trout. We pleaded with Adrian to head back early as we were bushed but he wanted us to keep on trying. After a few more lame casts and tame chugs, we finally called it a day. The GTs were



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My biggest dogtooth tuna to date.
Now, this is what I call a giant trevally.
The only coral trout for the trip.



morning with my braid torn to shreds. I should have checked the braid as it was already frayed. Instead, I lost a good fish and my Craftbait popper. In my disgust, I fixed on my heavy-duty spool with PE12 braided line (rated 170lb) loaded on it. Unfortunately no big fish came.

We decided to do some jigging towards the afternoon. Adrian went around the drop offs and finally found a spot filled with baitfish. "Loads of baitfish,

150m deep" was all I heard. I dropped my trusty hooker jig again and started jigging. A few cranks later, I was on. The fish took some line and started to slow down. Then it came off. I hate it when that happens.

JIGGING EXTRAVAGANZA

Then Maverick got on to a fish. And dropped it. Then fish on again and dropped it again. What's going on? Finally he set the hook properly and up came a

jobfish. The skipper announced that there was still plenty of fish below. So down went my jig again. This time a big one struck and went for a run. I struggled to tame the fish as it started head shaking frantically.

- 17. Mav's biggest GT.
- 18. This magical Hammerhead popper accounted for many GTs on the last day.
- 19. A bluefin trevally managed to steal a popper from the GTs.





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Inch by inch I fought this crazed fish. In mid water, it was beaten and stopped fighting. As I reeled up this heavyweight, Joe said it was a shark. I hate tangling with angry sharks. After a few minutes, we saw a brown shape surface in the distance. It was upside down with its

mouth gaping wide. Grouper!! It was big and I could fit my head into its mouth (not that I wanted to). We dragged it on to the soft teak deck to find a bloated grouper clearly suffering from the bends. Joe started to massage the air out after using a needle to deflate the air bladder.

20. A nice white GT for the only lady onboard.

21. Who says GTs don't fly.

22. It's a big one.

23. Up comes a good 30kg GT which swallowed a pink 220g Orion big jim popper.

24. He ain't heavy, he's my GT - dripping fish slime and all.



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Astrolabe Reef and we made our way back for the last time.

As we sped back to Matava, I sat back and was pretty pleased with our catch over the last 4 days. On a personal note, I managed to land a nice doggie, grouper and a decent GT. I couldn't help but wonder if things would have been firing even hotter if we didn't encounter the undersea volcanic eruption in Tonga. I'm pretty sure that the Kadavu seamount will one day yield an extra large doggie and the Astrolabe Reef a monster GT to some lucky anglers.

Our Fijian adventure had come to an end but not before we say vinaka or thank you in Fijian, to fish that entertained us, to Captain Adrian Watts and Big Joe for their professional service; and to Matava Res and its wonderful staff for a trip of a lifetime. **RL**

We stuffed the saltwater pump into its mouth as Joe continued to work on the fish. When all the air was deflated, he tried to swim it but the fish overturned and floated away. After several minutes, the fish was dead and now the guests at Matava would have more fish for dinner.

Adrian tried to look for the baitfish again but they had disappeared. He did find another spot and Jac managed to gather enough strength to tame a nice GT on jig. The sun began to set at the Great



- 25. What a way to end the trip with a nice grouper.
- 26. A small doggie fell for the new Williamson vortex jig - squid skirt not included.
- 27. After our trip, the skipper informed us that they managed to land a 90kg dogtooth on a jig at the seamount.
- 28. Surprisingly this was the only red bass caught on the trip.