

## FIJI - NEW ZEALAND COMBO

(Note: for three years, we made a Fiji stop before our annual New Zealand trek. This report is from one of those Fiji stops at a small beachfront resort we came to love – returned three times. I spent three years trying to make Fiji into a good fly fishing destination with very limited success.)

Arrived in Nadi at 2:45am (6:45 our time) – took a nap at Tanoa International Hotel near the airport, like a Holiday Inn. Rate: 120fj per night

Brought NZ bags to “LEFT LUGGAGE” – open 24 hours, have to pay in advance. Should have 100-200 Fiji dollars for cab, tips, left luggage, and baggage overages on way to Tavenui.

Nadi to Tavenui on Sun Air (1hr 20min).. 20kg of baggage free per person (2.2# to KG). We paid 116fj for 170 total # of checked baggage (carried my camera bag on or it would have been more). 270fj pp for flight (one way??).

Qamea - We had one of the new deluxe bures, Babale – only 2 deluxe bure's with private pool built into the front deck - \$850 apprx vs \$600 apprx for regular bure per night per couple. All the bure's are comfortable bungalows with good A/C.

1<sup>st</sup> day - Couple in Oct fishing with Eric hooked 6 GT's across bay on left side where waves rolled up on reef – first 3 broke off on coral during the low tide, the landed 3 – 30# GT's, all on poppers on the high tide. Spent 3 hours first morning casting to schooling baitfish with Sierra Mackerel – no takes. Tried casting poppers to same reef as above – no takes. Worked another reef/shoreline and did get a spectacularly colored small coral grouper to eat. Had tried a clouser before – only eat 1 got all morning.

2<sup>nd</sup> day – left for the beautiful flat in front of Forbes Island at 8:00, a 45 minute boat ride. Tide was full so we waded the flat near shore that would be out of the water on the outgoing tide. Twice saw fish that could have been bonefish, but were spooked and never got a cast off. Found the black tip shark nursery – 15 – 20 black tips up to 2 ft long milling around on a hard packed sand flat less than a foot deep. Many followed the fly but wouldn't eat. Unlike last year when my passion to find a bonefish didn't allow me to appreciate the black tip opportunity, I vowed we would come back with some chum and get a black tip later. The rest of the day we spent drifting across this beautiful flat and did not see the school of bones (??) we had found last year. We did take 5 black spotted snappers off two of the rock piles on the flat on bonefish flies and had three close encounters with trevally. Had a big GT (25-30 #) follow my chartreuse and white clouser to the boat while casting a sink-tip on the edge of the flat – the drop-off. Also, on the flat, had a 10# blue fin trevally chase my bonefish fly – think the fly was too small for him. On one drift with the incoming tide in the mid-afternoon, Eric had a GT chase his popper but spooked off near the boat. I had a great shot at a cruising GT right on the surface and threw the fly over his back and spooked him. Also, had a 3 ft cuda eat the fly, but I yanked it out of his mouth as I didn't want to lose that popper. Activity level seemed to pick up with the incoming. Wish we had an incoming in the AM when the water was cooler – very warm on the flat with the bright sun baking it. Cut up one of our snappers for chum and finished the day looking for the Black tips but couldn't find them – maybe too warm in the shallows late in the day???

3<sup>rd</sup> day: Just fished a few hours on reef across bay. I cast my popper on 10 wt looking for that big GT for about an hour while Eric drove boat and kept it close to reef. After tiring, I took over driving and Eric casted a spin outfit with popper. Five minutes later, big GT was visible 30 ft behind popper and engulfed it with head and shoulders out of water – very good stuff. Fish took off, drag screaming as I began to back boat further from reef. Turned out Eric only had about 80 yards of line on reel and fish took it all. We both had clear view of fish and guessed him to be 60-70#. Eric has caught GT's that big on handling, but it would have been his biggest fish on rod – different world. Remember that last year there were no rods and reels here. I

switched to sink tip and took three groupers – two small coral and 1 peacock that was bigger than others I caught – they liked that 2/0 chartreuse/white clouser.

Marte rested for day and hid from the sun as she forgot that snorkeling for four hours in bright sun was not a good idea. Basically low key day.

4<sup>th</sup> day: 7:30 went to Forbes Island flat – wish I had an incoming tide in the am. Tide was full when we got there and the flat along the shoreline was in flood. Eric pointed out that the flat was hard, but riddled with holes and bubbles were produced with every step. He thought there were many sand worms and crabs and that's what held the small black tip sharks there. The school of baby black tips was there and the chum got them going and one grabbed my popper. Lots of photos – cool looking fish. After that one, we couldn't find them - the school had vacated the flat – all of them????? Did see two fish that swam between us and I'm about 70% sure they were bones.

More casting lessons for Eric and turned him loose on a rocky island where he got a nice black spotted snapper on about his tenth cast – both of us very excited!!!

Had 4 or 5 GT shots up to 10 pounds but most came with bonefish fly and they would follow but just not eat the little fly – had wrong rod in my hand – would be interesting to fish this flat for only sight cast trevally shots. Did get a small black marbled grouper off a rock pile – very pretty little fish.

Got back to Qamea about 2:00 and spent an hour casting for big GT's on reef, but Marte did two long snorkeling sessions fully clothed. Had a wonderful time..."I hope heaven is like this."

5<sup>th</sup> day: bad weather – couldn't even find black tip shark

Bad weather day of departure and Air Fiji flight was late. Made connection to Auckland in Nadi for the 3 hour flight.

In Auckland – easy to store bags at place right outside of customs – max wt per bag for ANZ (for sure for inter-island flights) is 32 KG – 2.2# per KG = 70#

Began another New Zealand adventure.

Don Muelrath

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