



DAY TWO

I awoke at the top of a hill, in a thatched hut of surprising luxury. Rising from my four-poster bed, I flexed shoulder muscles that I knew would be put to good use. Day two is to be spent paddling along Ono's coastline with Astrolabe Reef Outrigger Adventures. My weapon of choice was the OC1, a fairly easy vessel to navigate after a few lessons from our competent guide. I wasn't quite sure what to expect but whatever I did imagine was by far surpassed. Stunning cliffs, gentle bays and saltwater caves punctuated our ocean paddling tour. Around each corner was a spot worth stopping at, making slow progress for my fellow paddlers. But it couldn't be helped. Below the canoe, I spotted colourful coral reef, sharply contrasted with the black volcanic rock outcroppings above water. To ensure your focus is on Ono's enchanting landscape and not on any physical exhaustion, Astrolabe Reef Outrigger Adventures directs all your paddling downwind,

following along with a support boat ready to pick up you and your canoe and transport you to calmer seas if necessary.

As a local Fijian, I pride myself in the beauty of this country. However, even I was struck speechless as we paddled around an island I had never previously considered visiting. Yes, it is difficult to get to, but that is part of its allure. I saw no other paddlers or fishing boats during our leisurely tour and while Kadavu Tourism works to build the tourism industry, one can't help hoping not too many find out about this southern spot.

We wrapped up our paddle when the wind started to pick up and Tom proceeded to stun us further with lunch on a beach where our footprints were the first to mark the sand. Rejuvenated by the physical nature of our paddling tour, we were just as excited to explore this beach plucked straight from a postcard. In the Kadavu group, there are many like this.

After a long day of oohing and aahing over Ono's overwhelming coastline, we got dropped off at our next destination and home for the next few days, Mai Dive Resort. Here we were greeted by landowner, Joe Nalewabau. His is a story of incredibly hard work and a love for the land; with his son Jason Nalewabau founding Mai Dive Resort on beachfront property that Joe himself toiled and cleared.

Mai Dive is simple and functional, championing the concept of 'Fiji Time', with flexibility being the feature most praised by guests. Resort manager, Joana Talili handles the office while her daughter and dive master, Dee runs the dive operation. It is fully Fijian owned and run and after spending a couple hours here, it definitely shows. A night of kava and storytelling makes Mai Dive feel like home as we sit around the Tanoa and listen to dive tales, making us eager to get in the water the next day.