Fiji Time!
By Dr. Richard Kelley

Last Saturday, February 1, I looked out the window of a United Airlines aircraft to watch the de-icing crew spray our wings and fuselage before we rolled down the snowy runways of Denver International Airport and took off. Some 18 hours later, I stepped out of the cockpit of a helicopter into the warm air of Castaway Island, Fiji, excited that I was about to welcome the staff there into our Outrigger ‘ohana. What a wonderful experience it was for me, and for Dr. Chuck Kelley, who flew in from Honolulu and joined me a few hours later!

The purchase of Castaway Island, Fiji and Outrigger on the Lagoon Fiji from Mr. Geoffrey Shaw had closed on January 31, 2014, and both resorts are now listed under the “owned and managed” section of our portfolio of properties. We have retained Geoffrey as a consultant.

Castaway Island is located on a 174-acre private island within the Mamanuca Island group a few miles west of Nadi, the location of Fiji’s international airport. White sand beaches, vibrant coral reefs and pristine, azure waters make it hugely popular.

The resort offers 66 traditional bure (bungalow) accommodations nestled in lush tropical gardens at the water's edge, two fresh-water swimming pools, four restaurants and bars, a kids’ club, a certified dive shop and a wide range of other sports activities. Add to that the genuine warmth and hospitality of the Castaway Island vuvale (family) and it is not surprising that the resort has an impressive 44 percent return guest rate.

Darren Edmonstone and Bill Visser from Outrigger’s Asia-Pacific office and former owner Geoffrey Shaw accompanied Dr. Chuck and me as we introduced ourselves to every staff member possible. At a general meeting of all staff, we focused on the fact that Outrigger is a family-owned and -operated company, based in the Pacific area. We hold dear the same values as the vuvale at both of our new Fiji properties – warmth, friendliness, hospitality and outstanding service.

The next day, after taking a 20-minute boat ride to Solevu, a village on neighboring Malolo Island, we met with Ratu Sevanaia Vatunitu, Na Tui Lawa (paramount chief) of the Mamanuca Islands. In a traditional kava ceremony, we were warmly welcomed to the area.

The photos that accompany this article on pages 2-3 tell the story much better than words can. It was a wonderful experience, and we want to extend our warmest vinaka (thanks) to every member of the staff at Castaway Island. We are really looking forward to our next visit.

(Due to press deadlines, the wonderful experience we had at Outrigger on the Lagoon Fiji a few days later cannot be included here and will be covered next week.)
Gathering outside vale levu (big house) at Solevu Village on Malolo Island for the kava ceremony. Castaway Island, Fiji Hotel Manager Steven Andrews, Darren Edmonstone, Dr. Chuck Kelley, Geoffrey Shaw, Ratu Sevanaia Vatunitu, Bill Visser and Merewai (Ratu’s spouse)

Dr. Richard Kelley drinking kava in a cultural ceremony of welcome as Geoffrey Shaw (sitting left) looks on

Geoffrey Shaw, Bill Visser, Darren Edmonstone and Steven Andrews

Dr. Chuck and Dr. Richard Kelley with vuvale gathering for a staff meeting

Dr. Chuck and Dr. Richard Kelley with department heads

A happy vuvale!

Photo credit: Chef Lance Seeto
Fiji Time! ... << From 2

Peter Hopgood, Darren Edmonstone, Geoffrey Shaw and Steven Andrews

A celebration - Fijian-style

Dr. Chuck Kelley and Dr. Richard Kelley (center) and Bill Visser (front right, green shirt) with our Fiji vuvale