Fiji properties recovering rapidly

By Dr. Richard Kelley

I am happy to report that our two Fiji properties are recovering rapidly from the devastating effects of Cyclone Winston, the Category 5 (maximum strength!) storm that roared across that island nation over the weekend of February 20–21. The dedication of our vuvale (family) at both locations has been impressive and heartwarming.

As reported by Darren Edmonstone, managing director, Asia Pacific, “Both Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort (FOR) and Castaway Island, Fiji (FCI), were affected, with FCI unfortunately bearing the brunt of the storm. Both resorts implemented their emergency procedures at the appropriate time. FOR went into ‘lock down’ mode and FCI evacuated guests and non-essential staff to Nadi, on the main island of Viti Levu, where suitable accommodations were arranged. The logistics of this were handled flawlessly.”

FOR suffered relatively minor damage that was mostly confined to landscaping. It was cleaned up pretty quickly and the team had the resort fully operational the next afternoon under the leadership of Resort Manager Russell Blaik and General Manager Peter Hopgood.

FCI did not get off so lightly. It will require a three-month shutdown until the wind and water damage to the bures (thatch-roof cabins) and other areas is repaired so it can again operate at the high standard for which it is famous.

I spoke with Neal Nakashima, corporate director, risk management, who recently inspected FCI with insurance adjusters. He said the resort is buzzing with repair activity. The hosts have set aside their normal duties and are enthusiastically assisting in the repair effort. Under the direction of General Manager Steven Andrews and Chief Engineer Eric Thomas, construction and thatching crews were on island just days after the cyclone to assist with the cleanup, evaluate the damage, order materials and schedule repairs. A good percentage of the bures’...
thatching was blown away by Winston’s 150+ mile per hour winds, so its replacement, the cleanup of fallen trees and damaged landscape, repairs to structural components and the repainting of all facilities will be the focus of everyone’s efforts.

Geoffrey Shaw, the developer and former owner of FOR and FCI, showed his care for the vuvale and resorts as one of the first to walk the properties after the cyclone.

Many, many others are playing important roles in getting FCI fully operational by the June 1 target date:

• In our Australia offices, Andrew Gee, Ben Johnson, Maria Alaveras, Donna Parkin and others are redirecting FCI sales to FOR.

• Our social media team, including Catie Hughes, Lisa Tojo and Marisa Guerrero, is doing a terrific job monitoring and responding to all comments and queries on Facebook, Twitter, the website, etc.

A number of guests, including several wedding parties, who were scheduled to stay at Castaway over the next couple of months have not canceled, but rather rebooked their trips for a later date. The resort’s loyal, repeat guests are looking forward to its reopening.

What a great team we have! Once again, from the bottom of my heart, VINAKA VAKALEVU (thank you very much) for your Bula spirit!

Winston’s winds blew away much of the thatching from the roofs of the bures but structures are still standing. Work is underway and a beautifully refurbished Castaway Island, Fiji, plans to reopen by June 1, 2016!

The Bula spirit alive and well at Castaway