Fiji Time

By Dr. Richard Kelley and Anne Marie Kelley

We spent the past two weeks on a father-daughter trip visiting the fascinating islands of Fiji. It was a special time in many ways and allowed us the opportunity to find out what is going on in the Fiji Visitor Industry.

Our first stop was at Outrigger on the Lagoon • Fiji, located just a little west of the International Date Line, making it 22 hours ahead of our company headquarters in Hawaii. It is literally where Outrigger’s day begins.

General Manager Paul Hughes, majority owner Geoff Shaw, and members of his staff warmly welcomed us with music when we arrived at the porte-cochere. After resting from our all-night flight from Los Angeles, we were honored by the presentation of lei and kava at a staff meeting and reception.

There are many exciting things going on at Outrigger on the Lagoon • Fiji.

- One wing of the main building is being totally renovated. The rooms have been stripped down to bare walls and concrete. The electrical system, air conditioning, communications, and plumbing have been upgraded. The new furniture package is quite attractive, offering local art and a sleeker feel. High-speed Internet access will be standard in all rooms. The rest of the rooms will follow as rapidly as the crew can complete them.

- By November, there will be a new spa on a hill overlooking the hotel grounds. Each treatment room will feature an outdoor deck with a hot tub and outdoor shower, and a private view of the shoreline below and the sparkling blue Pacific Ocean.

- The hotel has started an International College (based on an agreement with an Australian University) to provide top education for staff members. There is also a small primary school for some of the children of staff members. Among its students is Paul and Catie Hughes’ son, Hunter.

- The chefs at Outrigger on the Lagoon • Fiji continue to win awards for their unique Pacific cuisine. Any meal—breakfast, lunch, or dinner—is outstanding.

- The new helicopter landing pad, dubbed “Outrigger International Heliport,” is quite busy, as visitors are splitting their vacations between Outrigger on the Lagoon • Fiji and the companion resort on Castaway Island near Nadi. The helicopter ride takes guests between the resorts in about 18 minutes, as compared to a three- to four-hour ride via boat and car.

Later on in the week, Geoff Shaw invited us to sample his resort on Castaway Island. Located on a small island with some 66 bures, it is a very casual tropical experience. Everyone lives in his/her bathing suit and slippers most of the day. The guests included a large number of families from Australia and New Zealand. There are lots of activities for all ages, including tennis, snorkeling, SCUBA diving, sail boating, parasailing, etc. At night, a musical combo plays on the dining patio behind a huge bowl of kava, which they sample all evening and share with the guests as well.

The most memorable part of our Fiji trip was the people. They are truly hospitable, open, and friendly. Wherever we went, we were greeted with a sincere “Bula!” By the second day, everyone seemed to know our names and the greeting became “Bula, Richard,” or “Bula, Anne Marie.”

Some question if this level of hospitality will change as the number of visitor arrivals climbs from its current level of slightly more than 500,000 annually. There is a great deal of hotel construction going on right now not far from Nadi, with a new Hilton, Marriott, and Intercontinental underway. We also had dinner at the newly-opened five-Star Sofitel property. All of these hotels will bring many jobs and lots of economic opportunity to Fiji in
the near future. The number of visitors will rise, but we feel the Fijian people will take this in stride and will continue to offer some of the finest hospitality in the Pacific.

All in all, we had a great time in Fiji. As for our friends at Outrigger on the Lagoon • Fiji and Castaway Island Resort—*vinaka vaka levu* (thank you very much).