

Journal Summary of Nai'a Rotuma route

Studying coral reefs to science has always been a job for me until recently, when I was invited by Rob Barrel (owner) to go on a *Naia* trip an offer I couldn't refuse. On the 28th of October, I joined the *Naia* a live-aboard (scuba diving) ship, on one of its exploratory diving expeditions with an interest on outlying islands to the west of Rotuma. This was another adventure for me worth 14 days of diving with a great group of enthusiastic divers, excellent crew with the friendliest manner and all that encapsulates what I could imagine for an expensive diving holiday. And the sea passage to Rotuma didn't take as long (about 26hours) and uncomfortable, as my memory serves the last time I returned home.

The first Rotuma dive was an afternoon one. As I went ashore to seek permission for anchorage with the Oinafa chief, the rest of the group went diving along the rocky ledges of *Haua* island, a haven for frigate birds and a place where tobacco leaves flourish.



Haua Island, Oinafa

Traveling to Rotuma by sea has always been challenging, even the fishermen are cautious when venturing further off Rotuma, particularly to the seas west where we planned to do most of the diving at.

The second day of diving plans included diving Uea, Haf haveaglolo (a volcanic rock outcrop located midway at the seas between Uea and Split Island). Split Island (locally known as Hofliua) never ceases to grip my imagination of the story about the crab and the swordfish which was responsible for splitting the island in two with a rock stuck in the middle between the split of island. Therefore, to be as close to Hofliua that one could see the split clearly is incredible for most of us onboard as I retold of the local legend about the island. This set of 4 islands featured prominently in Rotuma's myth and legends that each time I visit, there is a mystery about how the islands were formed and what past lives must have been, so far removed from mainland Rotuma.

The uncompromising weather finally led to aborting the dive at the split of Hofliua and the *Nai'a* sought anchorage alongside the fringing reef at Roupure, Hapmak village for the night before setting sail back to Fiji. Once again, the underwater world of Rotuma remains elusive but there is warmth in the long stretch of white beach sand capped in places by black volcanic rock despite how the seas spit white caps as the current flows against the wind blowing.

Nai'a leaves the shores of Rotuma for the Vatu-i-ra and Bligh waters where the diving continues.



After an eventful day of diving, the ladies pose for a picture.

This diving expedition was an experience once again of a lifetime where new friendships are fostered. Being onboard the *Nai'a* with a bunch of good people and the friendly crew made the trip memorable. Many times I would seek the company of the crew at the stern where the dive tanks are filled. There are 2 Rotuman crew, Charles and Richard onboard who was a source of entertainment and I would share my Rotuma stories.

My *Naia* journey ended and I return to work refreshed and charged to carry on the work I do, protecting coral reefs for the people who live off it as well as continue the work of LäjeRotuma more committed than ever with the thought that what we have in terms of the rich land and sea resources which surrounds us is a blessing thus, its protection is vital to our future.

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Monifa (28th Oct-11th Nov 2006)



Richard with divers



Split island on a windy stormy day



Naia at Vatu-i-ra Island.



Joji and I taking a pose. Vatu-i-ra island (at the background) is a national heritage site for protection of seabird colonies.