

Meet The Woman Spearheading Conservation Efforts At Kokomo Private Island Fiji



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Travel



Since joining Kokomo Private Island Fiji, Cliona has created new and enhanced existing conservation efforts. KOKOMO PRIVATE ISLAND FIJI

In a matter of only two years, marine biologist Cliona O’Flaherty has made quite an impact in Fiji. From launching a coral restoration project to improving an existing manta identifying project, Cliona has brought her passion for the environment, ocean and sustainability as a whole to [Kokomo Private Island Fiji](#).

She didn’t expect to end up in the South Pacific. With a zoologist father who took her on frequent trips to Africa and a degree in zoology herself from [Trinity College Dublin](#), she figured her own work would eventually lead her to Africa as well. But when she finished her undergraduate degree, she arrived in Fiji for the first time on Beqa Island to volunteer with with [Frontier’s](#) conservation efforts.

“I basically just fell in love with diving,” she said. “After that, I went home to become a dive instructor because if you want to teach people about the marine environment, and if you can teach them how to dive and also how to respect the environment then it’s two birds, one stone. You’re already getting in the mindset of these fragile places that we need to respect.”

The connection between the people of Fiji and the environment also made an impact on her. For centuries, the country has had designated protected areas and networks, and many of the villages take responsibility to protect the reefs and wildlife. She added, “They have such a strong value to the people, and I really respected that.”

So when Cliona saw an ad for a female dive instructor at Kokomo Private Island Fiji, she knew it was an amazing opportunity and wanted to apply—even though on paper she wasn’t exactly what they were looking for.



Although she lacked the resort experience, she brought big ideas to the table and proved she was willing to learn for a job at Kokomo Private Island Fiji. KOKOMO PRIVATE ISLAND FIJI

“They wanted someone who had a lot of high-end resort experience,” explained Cliona. “And basically I said to them that I do not have that experience and I’ve only worked in conservation projects, but I’m a new instructor and very malleable.”

Not only did she possess an eager willingness to learn and in-depth knowledge of the marine life in Fiji, but she suggested jumpstarting marine conservation initiatives on site—something the owner Lang Walker had already started brainstorming. The timing was perfect.

Since joining the team at Kokomo Private Island Fiji in 2017, Cliona has worked on multiple conservation efforts, some of which are interactive for visitors. The [Kokomo Coral Restoration Project](#) focuses on the advancement of methods that will help to protect the island’s surrounding reefs. Currently in their nursery, they have a little over 1300 corals growing and they’ve transplanted 400 back onto the reef with an 86% success rate. Guests get involved with the transplanting process and also receive update photos of the corals they planted, reminding them of their own positive mark on Fiji’s environment.



Among the many conservation efforts at Kokomo Private Island Fiji, Cliona has furthered the Mantra Conservation and Tagging Projects. KOKOMO PRIVATE ISLAND FIJI

Other efforts include the [Seabin Project](#) to help reduce plastics in the waters and furthering the resort's [Dock to Dish](#) sustainable community-supported fishery program (which benefits the tribe of fisherwomen from the neighboring Buliya Island). Cliona also enhanced the Kokomo Private Island's existing [Manta Conservation Project](#), incorporating an acoustic tagging process which is the first of its kind in Fiji. "It helps give us an idea of hotspot areas around our island and key corridors and channel areas the mantas use," she mentioned. "We want to use this information to help protect the mantas as best we can." She also hopes that next year this program may grow to be a satellite tagging to further these efforts.

With a passion for conservation, Cliona is right at home. Kokomo Private Island Fiji, just like the rest of the country, prioritizes preserving the environment, and it's especially evident in the support she has received since starting there.

"One of the biggest challenges for any conservation work that anyone does, anywhere, is not just funding," said Cliona, "but also logistics and services. It takes a very long time for things to get off the ground. But take, for example, the people who donated to the manta conservation research. Within the space of three months, a whole tagging project was created.

"Kokomo provides a platform and wants to help not just in the next few years. They want to help now, which is amazing," she gushed. "I definitely think we're going to have amazing projects coming up."

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