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How You Can Help Save The Ocean at Kokomo Private Island Fiji

WRITTEN BY SIANI ABRAHAMS

Waking up in Fijian paradise is a dream for many, but for one of [Kokomo Private Island](https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com) (<https://www.regenerativetravel.com/resorts/kokomo-private-island-fiji/>)’s resident marine biologists Cliona O’Flaherty, it’s reality. Last year, Women in Travel named Cliona the 2019 Sustainable Practices Champion. Her passion for protecting and regenerating marine life shines, as she explains the role of marine biologist to be an important one, “to educate, encourage and excite people of any age about the marine environment and explain why we need to protect it as best as we physically can. We want people to leave Kokomo enlightened and motivated to protect the marine world and share our knowledge and passion about these projects to others.” Although most don’t live with such picturesque seascape backdrops, Cliona insists that “no matter where you are located in the world, in the middle of the desert, up the mountains or right beside the beach, we all have the ability to protect our ocean and planet as best as possible.”

Kokomo Island has many [sustainability initiatives](https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/sustainability/) (<https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/sustainability/>), from the [Kokomo Manta Conservation Project](https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/sustainability/manta-conservation/) (<https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/sustainability/manta-conservation/>), the [No-take Fishing Zone](https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/sustainability/no-take-fishing-zone/) (<https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/sustainability/no-take-fishing-zone/>), to a [Sea Foraging Project](https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/sustainability/sea-foraging/) (<https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/sustainability/sea-foraging/>). Cliona tells us about Kokomo’s [Mangrove](#)

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Reforestation Project

(<https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/sustainability/mangrove-restoration/>) and Coral Restoration Project

(<https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/sustainability/coral-restoration/>), engagement of ocean-conscious youth, and what a typical day looks like right now.



What drew you to Kokomo Island's mission of sustainable luxury?

The owner's willingness to support sustainable initiatives and passion for the ocean, along with the abundant marine life surrounding Kokomo and the beauty of the property itself drew me to Kokomo Island. Sustainability is a key pillar of Kokomo's operation, from the 5.5 acre farm to the driftwood décor, there are so many sustainable initiatives tied into this establishment. The Kokomo Marine Biology Team consists of myself and Viviana Taubera (a local Marine Biologist) and it has been an absolute dream to work with such a passionate team.

What does a normal day look like for you right now?

Both Viviana and I are typically in the water every day. We are very lucky to have Green Turtles grazing on the seagrass beds; we offer intimate early morning snorkel experiences,

on occasions you can observe anything from 1 – 8 individuals feeding along our coastline. After that we jump in to check on our coral nurseries and see what maintenance guests can participate in that day. Right now, as part of our [Kokomo Manta Conservation Project](#)

(<https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/sustainability/manta-conservation/>) in collaboration with [The Manta Project Fiji](#) (<https://www.mantatrust.org/fiji>), we are running a manta satellite tagging project led by Luke Gordon, aiming to identify key areas mantas use so we can help best protect these areas. Every morning we log into the online portal to see the movements of the mantas. In turtle nesting season (November–February) we fly the drone to check for signs of turtle nesting on Kokomo and neighbouring islands, part of our collaborative work with the University of South Pacific to help identify and monitor turtle nesting sites in Fiji. Guests can help search for signs of turtle tracks, helping us protect the area from predators like feral cats and mongoose.

After lunch guests can join us on a tour of Kokomo [Clam Nursery](#)

(<https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/sustainability/clam-nursery/>). Later we check in on our mangrove nursery, generally involving the Kids Club and Teens Retreat who help us water and weed the mangroves, while learning about their vital ecosystem and coastal protection functions in Fiji. They love this activity as they get to get their hands dirty and sometimes it ends up in a water fight with everyone!

In the evenings, we fly the drone to check and survey the number of Baby Blacktip Reef Sharks along our shores. On occasions both Viviana and I will hold a presentation on our various sustainability initiatives at Kokomo for guests. We really enjoy doing this as it gives people a chance to ask enthusiastic questions about the work we love to do every day!

Can you tell us about Kokomo's sustainability initiatives?

Kokomo launched the [Mangrove Reforestation Project](https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/sustainability/mangrove-restoration/) (<https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/sustainability/mangrove-restoration/>) in May 2019, aiming to plant and restore mangroves naturally occurring in the Kadavu Region. We collect mangrove seeds grown in a nursery before being transplanted back into tidal areas. Guests have the opportunity to participate in planting and transplanting activities. By educating guests on the importance of mangroves, having them participate in planting activities, and helping protect local communities, this project is the epitome of sustainability as it raises environmental awareness while assisting community development.

Mangroves are vitally important for coastal protection against storms and tsunamis. Given mangroves are five times greater at sequestering carbon than rainforests, they are critical in combating climate change and the effects of excess carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere. One of our main mangrove transplanting sites is neighbouring Narikoso, enlisted as one of the main villages in Fiji greatly affected by climate change and rising sea levels. This low-

lying village had to relocate, and we are planting mangroves in this new location to help prevent further coastal damage from violent storms and tsunamis.

We launched the Kokomo Coral Restoration Project in March 2018. Guests are encouraged to take part in learning how to identify heat resilient corals, before planting them into a nursery and transplanting them back onto the Kokomo House Reef. As part of our World Ocean Day Pledge, Kokomo is committed to transplanting 3,000 corals back onto our House Reef by July 2021. We have expanded our nursery capacities from 1,500 corals to 3,500 corals.

Could such initiatives be adapted by others in the region?

We feel these sustainability initiatives could be adapted by others and other Pacific Island Nations. On a smaller scale, we try to engage our communities to encourage the long-term benefits of these sustainability initiatives. Our [Dock to Dish](https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/indulge/dock-to-dish/) (<https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/indulge/dock-to-dish/>) initiative, led by master fisherman Jaga Crossingham, aims to educate local communities on targeting sustainable fish and encourages sustainable fishing practices to ensure the long-term availability of marine resources. Next year we hope to set up coral nurseries on the nearby island of Buliya and Dravuni, to help develop community-driven coral restoration work in the global battle against rising sea temperatures. If it is possible for smaller communities to adapt these projects, initiatives and practices it is definitely possible for others and on a much larger scale Pacific Island Nations to adapt them as well.

Why is a strategy of diversity and inclusion important?

Including the local community is a vital step in ensuring the long-term sustainable success of Kokomo. Our owner, management and team values our local community of neighbouring islands and surrounding areas of Fiji with the utmost importance. 92% of our staff are employed locally and we try to involve our local community as much as we physically can. Guests have the opportunity to experience traditional Fijian customs in villages, which a lot of our staff come from.

We are based in the island group of Kadavu (pronounced Kan-da-vu) and work very closely with the Kadavu Provincial Office to help assist village communities with any development and conservation work. Right now, we are working with the Kadavu Provincial Office to help communities reach conservation and reforestation goals of their Individual Village Development Plans (IVDPs). Our [Kokomo Coral Restoration Project](https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/sustainability/coral-restoration/) (<https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/sustainability/coral-restoration/>), Kokomo Mangrove Reforestation Project, and [Dock to Dish](https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/indulge/dock-to-dish/) (<https://www.kokomoislandfiji.com/indulge/dock-to-dish/>)

initiatives are key aspects of this partnership. Additionally, Kokomo works very closely with the schools of Natusara and Naqare (pronounced Nang-gar-a) by providing school computers, art supplies, building materials, and educational workshops to help develop and enhance the educational experiences of their students.

How can we create ocean-conscious youth today?

Getting youths directly involved is one of the best ways to empower and encourage ocean-conscious minds. We see it all the time at Kokomo. Having the Kids Club and Teens Retreat hands-on involvement in our mangrove, coral, manta, clam, turtle and reef clean-up projects reminds them about how important and beautiful our marine environment is and why we need to protect it as best as we can. It has encouraged several past guests to participate in their local community conservation efforts, such as participating in beach cleanups in their home towns to avoid unwanted trash polluting our ocean - which is awesome!

Other ways to encourage ocean-conscious minds is to remind them of their physical impact on the world, and more importantly their carbon footprint. Encourage youths to ask environmental questions. It could be as small as asking your local coffee shop to use paper or metal straws instead of plastic, but the ocean will greatly appreciate it. Encourage youths to follow environmental issues on the news, and if using social media follow reliable ocean-conscious social media channels. The last thing we would recommend is to encourage youths to empower others. This is the ultimate end goal to have a chain reaction of ocean-conscious empowered people taking care of our planet for future generations to come.

How can those not engaged with nature in their daily lives engage with environmental challenges?

No matter where you are, always try to implement sustainable practices. Some tips: Use a reusable water bottle and coffee cup. Try to eat food that's in season around you. In general, support local products and reduce air miles from items being flown across the world. Where feasible, try growing some of your own produce at home. Always try to assist with any local clean ups; a park, beach or field, all of the rubbish has potential to pollute our planet.

One of the key things we remind guests that come to Kokomo is how CO2 emissions and energy usage are some of the biggest threats to our ocean right now. Excess CO2 emissions from fossil fuels, cars, industry, and energy consumption are some of the main contributors to the Enhanced Greenhouse Effect warming our planet. Seas are getting hotter, coral reefs are stressing out and causing mass bleaching events. Hotter ocean temperatures are causing more violent cyclone storms and polar ice caps are melting causing sea levels to rise. So you may not be right beside the ocean, but always remember you still have a direct impact on it.

Why is it important for travelers to be aware and conscious about the resorts/operators they support whilst traveling?

I think this is the new way to travel and think it is a key aspect of choosing the right destination and resort to stay at. Every resort/operation has to play their part to help protect the environment, be it at a small backpacker level to a 5-star luxury resort. No one has an excuse. Resorts like Kokomo that are very self-sustaining, employ locally and support a vast variety of sustainable initiatives are key examples of what a sustainably conscious establishment should look like.



Siani Abrahams

Siani is a globe traveller, whose work expresses through journalism, creative writing, or a camera lens. Having studied peace & conflict, she's passionate about positive impact and empowerment. Her storytelling nature is inspired by indigenous cultures, social & environmental causes, and intersectionality. Siani's heritage is rooted across the world in diverse communities, making her a natural explorer.

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