

## Club Fiji

Look at a map of the Pacific Ocean and you may miss Fiji even though it is located in the middle of the South Pacific. It's very close to the International Date Line, which gave it the distinction of being the first country to celebrate the new millennium. The Republic of Fiji consists of over 300 islands, but most of the population lives on Viti Levu Island, in the capital of Suva or in the city of Nadi.

Many people visit Fiji during a layover to Australia, New Zealand, of the Far East. As there may be as few as two flights a week to Australia, landing in Fiji late Saturday means a four-day layover in Fiji. This allows for a vacation in Fiji without extra airfare costs. Indeed, tourism is the top industry in Fiji followed by sugar, clothing and gold. Foreigners own 80% of the businesses in Fiji with Australians leading the pack. Despite the carefree atmosphere, many people work 48 hours a week not 40, as there is little government assistance.

Nadi has an international airport and is where 99% of foreigners arrive. It is the tourist center of Fiji as tourist agents meet visitors with a lei and a smile as they get off the airplane. The city is located on the western end of Viti Levu with a mountainous backdrop which makes the area attractive. There are not many tourist spots near Nadi, except for the Hindu temple of Sri Siva Subrahmanya Swahmi located outside of town. This temple has a bright exterior, with a mixture of blue, green, yellow and red colors.

The city of Nadi itself isn't the most attractive city due to a lot of litter and some stray dogs. The bus system is a bit confusing as riders just throw an undetermined amount of money into a box next to the bus driver. If the bus driver smiles and nods his head yes (he normally does despite not looking at the amount of money thrown in), then the passenger is allowed on. Despite this, Nadi is a relaxing place, with gracious people all to willing to climb a coconut tree and cut down a coconut with a machete for you at a small fee. Nadi is also a good place to organize excursions including a variety of water-related activities, day trips to the capital of Suva, visiting the remote villages of the Nausori Highlands or the more touristy trips that include locals walking on hot coals.



In addition to the mountains and coconut trees, the blue lagoons of Fiji make the country an idyllic place to visit. Although there are not a lot of areas around Nadi that could be termed beach area, walking along the water is possible. There are many opportunities for those who like the water including fishing, boating and snorkeling. For those who get sunburned, large aloe plants can be cut and the soothing goo placed on the burnt skin.

The bus from Nadi to Suva takes about four hours as it twists and turns though the island. This is a good way to see the countryside of the island however. Suva is an important city because it is the capital, and also because of its cultural attractions and it is

the chief port. The Government House is where the President lives and contains a large estate with a golf course. The city is also home to the University of the South Pacific and the Fiji Museum. The Suva Municipal Market has a large variety of foods, especially is a great place to try numerous exotic fruits and vegetables.

A visit to the villages in the Nausori Highlands usually requires an initial trek to reach the village. Generally, visitors will need to take a tour as independent travelers may get lost or may not be allowed into the villages. If on a tour, the guide may joke about stories of cannibalism. For instance, the guide will ask the nationality of all the tourists and then tell a scary story involving cannibalism while weaving the various nationalities into the story of the cannibal's victims. Cannibalism doesn't really happen here in the present-day, it's just an attempt at humor and a way to forget about your aching feet while on the hike.

The villages have a variety of small grass and bamboo huts. Some buildings such as the kitchen area are solid with wood and tin roofs. Houses with concrete blocks dominate in most regions outside the remote villages. The huts have woven bamboo rugs



to sleep on and also a pillow to make sleeping somewhat more comfortable. The roofs are shaped like a triangle and open on top to leave out smoke from the fire that is created inside the hut for warmth.

Visitors will usually meet with the village head and are expected to present a gift, called a sevusevu, of yaqona. The presentation is usually in the village head's house and is also attended

by some of the older men. Pounded into powder, the yaqona will be mixed with water and served. The chief will be as interested in your life as you are of his, so you may be asked many personal, somewhat intrusive questions. So if you're embarrassed just fudge the truth, he'll never know.

If visiting a village, dress modestly and follow the rules of the village. Women should have their shoulders covered and it is good idea not to wear shorts. Take your shoes off before walking inside one of the huts. Wearing a hat is an insult to the villagers as is touching someone's head.

Tourists staying in resort areas will get a different feel than those who stay at regular accommodations. The accommodations are relatively luxurious and there are additional services and activities. One is traditional dances, or walking on hot coals or twirling a stick with fire on both sides. This is interesting but also choreographed. A mixture of resort entertainment and independent entertainment would be best.

There is a good mix of people on the island for a population under one million. Melanesian, Polynesian, Micronesian, Indian, Chinese and European (mostly British due to colonization) influences prevail in Fiji. The people are friendly and will great many

tourists with a hearty "Bula" (Welcome) before asking a variety of other questions. The dress is very casual in the cities and many of the bushy-haired women wear sarongs or pareu, which is a seven-foot by five-foot piece of cloth that can be worn in a variety of ways.

Fiji is a country that can easily be lost in the vastness of the world. However, it is an exotic destination with attractive scenery. Those who enjoy the water will enjoy Fiji. There are many unique experiences including walking on hot coals and visiting remote villages. The people are very welcoming and inquisitive with a tolerable amount of hassle. The country is mysterious yet not frightening and, at a minimum, is worthy of an extended layover.

