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FIJI GUIDE

wordtravels



Fiji is an exotic tropical paradise in the South Pacific made up of 322 islands, nearly two thousand miles (3,219km) east of Australia. Once feared as the haunt of cannibals and fierce warrior tribes, today Fijians are regarded as a supremely friendly and welcoming people who are so relaxed they consider it rude to rush.

The verdant islands of Fiji are famous for their eternal sunshine and their beauty is legendary, with orchids hanging over waterfalls in lush jungle, and palms lining long stretches of beach. Visitors can immerse themselves in offshore activities like swimming with manta rays, snorkelling over coral gardens, scuba diving on the famous Astrolabe Reef, or riding the 'Cloud Breakers', amazing 20ft (6m) waves off Tavarua, an island resort.

Suva is home to more than half of Fiji's population and it is not only the capital of the country, but an important regional centre of the South Pacific. In this city it is possible to eat on a floating fine dining restaurant, drink at vibrant and quirky bars, shop at the bustling municipal market or explore the Fiji Museum, one of the many historical and cultural sites in the city. During the day there is as much to do and see as there is at night down Victoria Parade, where the buzzing nightlife keeps the city alive when the sun dives below the horizon. Suva is also a good launching pad for venturing into the surrounding wild areas.

Most visitors will, however, arrive in Nadi, one of the largest towns in Fiji, and the main international port. Visit the Sri Siva Subramaniya Temple and the Garden of the Sleeping Giant inside Nadi, or travel to the Sabeto Mountains, Sugar-city Lautoka or Natadola Beach, one of the numerous special sites surrounding Nadi. Alternatively, rest and relax at the Wailoaloa and Newtown beaches and get ready to move onto the next island paradise.

The Fiji archipelago is the transport hub of the South Pacific, so domestic and international flights are continually stopping at Nadi airport, the main international airport. From there it is easy to access the offshore island resorts or the other large islands of Vanua Levu or Taveuni, as well as other destinations in the Pacific.

THE BASICS

TIME

Local time is GMT +12.

ELECTRICITY

Electrical current is 240 volts, 50Hz. Plugs have three oblique flat pins (Plug type I).

LANGUAGE

The official languages are English, Fijian and Fijian Hindi, with English as the lingua franca for official affairs and business in the main cities.

TRAVEL HEALTH

No vaccination certificates are required for entry to Fiji, except for a yellow fever vaccination certificate from travellers entering Fiji within 10 days of having stayed overnight or longer in infected areas. Although they are not required, vaccinations for hepatitis A and hepatitis B may be recommended by a doctor for travel to Fiji.

Visitors to Fiji should practice strict food, water and personal hygiene precautions to prevent typhoid as well as other diarrhoeal disease. A typhoid vaccine is recommended for all travellers to Fiji, except short-term visitors who dine only at major restaurants and hotels, such as cruise passengers. Visitors should drink only bottled water or boil water before drinking if none is available.

The mosquito-borne disease, dengue fever, is a serious risk between November and April. Preventive measures include wearing long-sleeved clothes and using insect repellent at all times. The medical facilities in Fiji are adequate for uncomplicated treatment, but travel insurance with provision for medical evacuation to Australia or New Zealand is advised.

TIPPING

Tipping is not encouraged in Fiji but small tips are appreciated for good service. Some resorts operate a staff Christmas fund where tips are shared, instead of tipping staff daily.

SAFETY INFORMATION

Fiji has had four coups in 20 years and visitors should avoid public demonstrations, political rallies and large gatherings of people. It is a good idea to stay aware of the political situation in Fiji and to avoid all political gatherings and protests, but the country is a very popular holiday destination in the Pacific and most visits are trouble-free.

There is a high crime rate due to the uncertain political situation, poor economic climate and unemployment rates. As in most places in the world, it is unwise to carry large amounts of cash or wear expensive clothes or jewellery when travelling. Pickpockets are active at bus stations and taxi ranks, and women on their own should be cautious. There has been an increase in the number of violent robberies, which have occurred against foreigners, particularly at night and in urban areas.

Take care when swimming because rip tides along the reefs and river estuaries, sharks and other dangerous wildlife may cause severe harm. Be careful on the roads, as reckless driving is common and animals pose a hazard as well, particularly after dark.

Finally, cyclone season is usually from November to April, so be sure to be up to date with weather warnings at this time of year and it may be best to avoid this season unless going for a specific activity or event.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Visitors to Fiji should be careful not to offend local sensitivities. Wearing bikinis and swimming costumes is acceptable at the resorts, but not when visiting villages or shopping in town. Modesty is a value of the island's cultures, so a *sulu* (a sarong that can be worn by men and women) is useful as a wrap-around in order to avoid offending locals when wearing shorts or sleeveless tops away from hotels or resorts. Topless bathing and nudity in public is forbidden.

A popular excursion for visitors to Fiji is a visit to one of the traditional villages. Guests in villages should show respect and avoid wearing hats, as they are a sign of disrespect, and remove shoes before entering a house. When visiting a village it is customary to present a gift of *kava* (the national drink). Avoid overly praising an object, as Fijians will feel obliged to give it as a gift. Pointing is considered rude and touching of another's head is a local taboo, often receiving some shocked stares from the locals.

Fiji is a predominately Christian nation and is typically conservative. Don't be surprised to find businesses closed on a Sunday. Homosexual acts conducted in private between consenting adults were legalised in 2010. However, radical shifts in leadership may change the status of LGBT rights in the country.

BUSINESS

Business is relatively casual in Fiji. Only for very formal meetings would suits need to be worn, otherwise a fairly casual, but neat approach to dress is taken. Fijians prefer using first names as opposed to titles. Patience is necessary as meetings rarely start at scheduled times, but as Western business influence has increased in Fiji this is not always the case anymore. Business hours are generally from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. *Kava* (the national drink) may be presented as a customary offering and alcohol is often consumed at business gatherings.

COMMUNICATIONS

The international country dialling code for Fiji is +679. The outgoing code is 00(or 05) followed by the relevant country code (e.g. 0044 for the UK). There are no area codes and all numbers are seven digits. Most hotels have direct dialling facilities. Vodaphone Fiji Ltd has active GSM roaming agreements with most international networks. There are a number of internet cafes, often attached to hotels, and connection speeds vary depending on location and data availability.

DUTY FREE

Travellers to Fiji over 18 years do not have to pay duty on 250g of cigars or 250 cigarettes or a combination of tobacco products not exceeding 250g. Travellers cannot exceed 2.25 litres of spirits, or 4.5 litres of wine or beer, nor any combination exceeding the prescribed limit for any one of these categories. Visitors may bring other permissible items, so long as these items do not exceed the value of F\$400 per person.

Bringing firearms and ammunition requires official police permission, as well as meat and dairy products from selected countries. Travellers who have been on a pilgrimage and return to Fiji with Holy Water may have to hand in their Holy Water for up to 21 days in order for it to be certified by health and safety authorities, before it can be returned.

CLIMATE

The weather in Fiji is one of the reasons it is such an attractive beach holiday destination. Fiji enjoys a typical tropical climate, with trade winds blowing across the islands to cool things down during most of the year. Maximum summer temperatures average 88°F (31°C), with the winter average not far different at 84°F (29°C). Fiji usually experiences its hottest weather between December and April, and its coolest temperatures between May and November.

Rain can be expected at any time of year but the wet season is technically from November to April. The rainy season in Fiji doesn't rule out travel though, as most of the rain comes in brief showers that can even be refreshing in the heat. Fiji does occasionally experience cyclones and these occur during the wet season. The weather in Fiji's smaller islands tends to be milder and they typically receive less rain than the main islands. The driest months are April, May, June and October.

The best time to visit Fiji is any time between late March and early December. June to October, the winter months, can also be a pleasant time to visit as it is still warm but there is less humidity. The average sea temperature in Fiji is pleasant year-round.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR SOUTH AFRICANS

South African citizens must have a passport that is valid for at least six months beyond the date of their arrival in Fiji. No visa is required for stays of up to four months; a visitor permit can be obtained on arrival.

PASSPORT/VISA

All foreign passengers to Fiji must have a passport that is valid for at least six months beyond the date of their arrival in the country. A return or onward ticket to a country to which passengers have right of entry is required, as are sufficient funds to cover the period of stay in Fiji and confirmed accommodation. Visitor permits are obtainable on arrival, and are valid for up to four months. Visitors can apply for two-month permit extensions (for an aggregate of six months). A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required, if arriving in Fiji within ten days of leaving or transiting through an infected area. NOTE: It is highly recommended that your passport has at least six months validity remaining after your intended date of departure from your travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

MONEY

The Fijian Dollar (FJD) is the unit of currency, with 100 cents to a dollar. Major credit cards are accepted at most hotels, restaurants, shops, rental car agencies and travel agents. The best currencies to carry are Australian, New Zealand or US dollars, which can be exchanged at all banks. Most ATMs accept the full range of international credit cards and travellers cheques and cash can be exchanged in banks and currency exchange bureaux throughout the islands.

AIRPORTS

NADI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (NAN)

LOCATION

The airport is situated on the west coast of Viti Levu, six miles (10km) from Nadi Town.

GETTING TO THE CITY

Local buses provide a service to Nadi centre and on to Suva. Many hotels and guesthouses also provide pre-arranged transport for their guests. Taxis are available outside the terminal.

TIME

Local time is GMT +12.

CONTACTS

Tel: +679 672 5777

CAR RENTAL

International car rental companies, such as Avis, Budget and Hertz, are situated at the airport.

FACILITIES

Facilities include cafes and restaurants, mobile phone rental, various shops and duty-free outlets, luggage storage, tour operators and visitor information. Banking and currency exchange services are also available.

DEPARTURE TAX

WEBSITE

www.afl.com.fj

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