

## ***Pacific Paradise...for every taste***

The name Fiji is synonymous with paradise. This beautiful South Pacific group consists of some 300 islands and atolls dotted across 200 000 square miles of sea.

The Fiji archipelago is composed of 333 islands, located at the crossroads of the South Pacific. The main island is Viti Levu, the next largest is Vanua Levu, and together they make up 85 percent of the country's total land area. Approximately 100 of the islands are inhabited. All the islands are picturesque coastlines, tall coconut palms nodding over still waters of brilliant turquoise, lagoons fringed by coral reefs, and soft white sandy beaches.

In days gone by, Fiji had a reputation among mariners for treacherous waters and extremely fierce warriors. Today, Fiji is an exotic, friendly place where the people wear flowers in their hair and smiles on their faces.

### **Capital**

The capital of Fiji is Suva located on the southeast corner of Viti Levu, although most visitors have their first taste of Fiji via the international airport at Nadi, one of the other major towns on the main island. More than 85 flights land at Nadi every week. From there it is only a quick seven minute hop to one of the offshore island resorts, or less than an hour of flying time to Vanua Levu or Taveuni, the second and third largest islands. Nearby are the Mamanuca and Yasawa Islands which offer picture postcard beautiful lagoons and beaches. The old capital of Levuka on Ovalau Island has been preserved as a historical monument.

### **The People**

Fiji is the 'hub' of the South Pacific, a melting pot of both the Polynesian and Melanesian races. The nation comprises many different races and people, predominantly native Fijians. From 1879 to 1916 Indians came as indentured labourers to work on the sugar plantations. After the indentured system was abolished, many Indians stayed on as independent farmers and businessman. Today their descendants comprise 44 per cent of the population of approximately 800 000. Indigenous Fijians comprise half the population with South Pacific Islanders, Europeans and Chinese comprising the remainder.

Fiji people are renowned for their friendly natures however it is worth noting that if invited into a village, wearing a hat is considered an insult to the chief and modest clothing is appreciated. The principal language is English, however Fijian is spoken by Fijians, Hindustani by most Indians, and Chinese and other Pacific islands languages are spoken. Most of the population is bilingual.

### **History**

Fiji was probably first settled 3500 years ago. It is not known who the first settlers were. According to Fijian legend, a great Chief called Lutunasobasoba led his people across the seas

to the new land. In this way the Melanesians and Polynesians intermingled and produced a highly developed society long before the arrival of Europeans in Fiji.

The Europeans discovered Fiji by accident rather than design. Dutch explorers were the first Europeans to arrive, beginning with Abel Tasman in 1643. Further exploration was made by the English, in the form of Captain James Cook in 1774, and by Captain William Bligh who sailed through the group after the mutiny on the Bounty in 1789. Captain Bligh was afforded major credit for the discovery and recording of the islands.

Shipwrecked sailors and runaway convicts from Australian penal settlements were the first Europeans to land and live among the Fijians. In 1835 the missionaries arrived, introducing Christianity and ending cannibalism. Sandalwood traders also began operating in the mid 19th century. In 1874 Fiji was ceded to Great Britain and Indian indentured labourers were introduced. Fiji finally gained independence in 1970 and declared itself a Republic on 7th October 1987. A draft constitution was introduced for a single chamber parliament with 71 seats.

## **Nature**

Fiji's larger islands are generally of volcanic origin and the smaller islands are coral, limestone, or sand cays. Coral reefs and lagoons abound. Vegetation is mainly tropical coconut palms and pandanus interspersed with hibiscus, frangipani and other exotic flowers. Unique fauna includes the fruit bat, mongoose and Fijian crested iguana.

Fiji is free for all the serious plant and animal pests and diseases that plague other countries and endeavors to remain that way. Preserving the beautiful environment is an exercise that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests takes very seriously, strictly regulating the importation of any matter that may affect the country's plant and animal life.

## **Climate**

Tropical with only slight seasonal variations and occasional heavy rainfall.

## **Time Zone**

GMT + 12 hours or AEST + 2 hours.

## **Currency**

Fijian Dollar.

## **Visas & Health**

Visitors need an onward ticket and adequate funds for their support. Visas are not required for citizens of Commonwealth countries or nationals of major Western countries. Departure tax \$ 20 FJD.

## **Air Travel**

Air Pacific, Air New Zealand, Air Caledonie International, Polynesian Airlines, Qantas, Air Marshalls, Air Nauru, Air Vanuatu, Royal Tongal Airlines, Solomon Airlines, Samoa Airlines. Domestic services are provided by Air Fiji and Sun Air.