

# Understand Fiji

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# Fiji Today

Fiji's image as a tourist paradise was tempered for a decade while the army stuck its nose (and guns) into politics. But in 2014 the country finally returned to democracy. Fiji was looking more stable than it had for years, even as it was facing the challenges of globalisation, climate change and – of course – a struggle for international rugby glory. Just as Fiji's fortunes turned, the Category 5 Cyclone Winston arrived causing widespread destruction. Visitors may notice residual damage to smaller villages, especially on remote islands.

## Best on Film

**Cast Away (2000)** Tom Hanks is all washed up on a desert island. Shot in Fiji.

**The Blue Lagoon (1979)** Tropical teen romance that made Brooke Shields – and Fiji – a movie star.

**His Majesty O'Keefe (1954)**

Adventure film in which Yankee seadog Burt Lancaster swashbuckles his way through Fiji.

## Best in Print

**Kava in the Blood: A Personal & Political Memoir from the Heart of Fiji** (Peter Thomson; 2008) Engaging memoir of Fiji's cultures and coups.

**Getting Stoned with Savages**

(J Maarten Troost; 2006) Humorous travelogue centred on Fiji.

**Worlds Apart: A History of the Pacific Islands** (Ian C Campbell; 2003) Excellent guide to Fiji's place in the Pacific.

## Back to the Ballot Box

In September 2014, Fiji finally held the elections that brought it back into the fold of democratic nations. A few months earlier, coup leader Commodore Voreqe (Frank) Bainimarama stepped down from the military to contest the election. His Fiji First party swept the board, winning 32 of the 50 seats in the national parliament. Although the opposition parties called foul on certain aspects of the election, international observers certified the process – for which 84% of the electorate turned out – to be free and fair.

The election came on the back of a new constitution published in 2013. It enacted new rules to protect indigenous Fijian land, and the compulsory teaching of Fijian and Fiji-Hindi languages at primary school level, alongside English. While critics also noted that it gave the prime minister broad powers to impose a state of emergency, it also mandated the setting up of the Fiji Human Rights Commission – one of the few such bodies in the Pacific Region.

After the elections, Fiji was returned to the Commonwealth, from which it had been expelled after the 2006 coup. But Bainimarama was equally quick to show his willingness to reorient Fiji's international relations to suit the changing 21st century. Within two months of his election, he hosted the Indian prime minister and Chinese president in Fiji and looked to strengthen Fiji's ties with their countries, as well as Asian powerhouses such as Indonesia. This went hand in hand with a cooling in relations with Australia and New Zealand. Bainimarama threatened to boycott future meetings of the regional Pacific Islands Forum unless the antipodean