

Destination Fiji

Most who visit Fiji want little more than a white-sand beach, a cloudless sky and the opportunity to fall into a sun-induced coma under a palm tree. On this score, Fiji doesn't disappoint. The Mamanuca and Yasawa islands arc north like a stingray's tail from the body of Viti Levu and are Fiji's movie stars, dangled in front of the world as idyllic South Sea Edens – their reefs and cobalt blue waters providing cinematic eye candy for films such as Tom Hanks' *Cast Away* and Brooke Shields' vehicle to stardom, *The Blue Lagoon*.

Fiji has been in the tourism business for decades and the Nadi and Denarau island-hopping-escape itinerary has proven to be a winning formula. Those who arrive with notions of sipping cocktails on alabaster beaches are seldom disappointed. The underwater scenery is spectacular and some of the finest, and most accessible, dives in the Pacific can be found here. Its reputation as the 'soft coral capital of the world' is well justified and, with the opening of the country's first overwater bungalow resort on Malolo, Fiji remains flushed with sunburnt tourists despite the 2006 coup.

Northwest of Fiji's largest island, Viti Levu, is the Yasawa Group, a chain of volcanic islands set to rival the better-known Mamanucas in the popularity stakes. A daily catamaran threads its way from one bay to the next, dropping off and picking up travellers as it goes. The Yasawas are sparsely populated and the rainless dry spells that once made life so difficult for villagers is proving to be their greatest asset now. Local communities, inspired by the successes achieved further down the line, have opened budget 'resorts' and tout their coral gardens and laid-back charm as 'the real Fiji'.

But the Yasawas and Mamanucas – as lovely as they are – are only part of the equation and there's more to Fiji than can ever be seen from a beach towel.

To get to grips with the national psyche you have to spend some time on either of the two main islands, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. Two-thirds of the population live in urban centres and it is on Viti Levu that you'll find the country's two cities: Suva, the capital, and Lautoka, a port town reliant on the sugar-cane farms that surround it.

Fijians are politically savvy and their politics fascinates them. Newspaper editorials are choked with letters elaborating on the subtle ramifications of the latest government proposal or pouring scorn on surreptitious political manoeuvrings. And they have much to comment on: since 1987, Fiji has had four coups. The last was in 2006 when Commodore Frank Bainimarama staged a military takeover from the prime minister he himself had appointed after the 2000 coup. He alleged that corruption and systemic racism was his prime motivator and disbanded the Great Council of Chiefs, that (until then) had wielded considerable political clout.

The coups, and the underlying unrest they represent, barely make it across the radar of most travellers. They don't, as the locals are quick to point out, threaten tourist safety. The locals are just as likely to blame irresponsible scaremongering by overseas interests (particularly the New Zealand and Australian governments) as the primary reason for the downturn in their economy as they are their own country's political instability.

The 2006 coup and the proposed People's Charter underpin one of Fiji's most contentious issues – who qualifies to be a 'Fijian' and enjoy the rights that go with it? In the late 1870s, Britain brought indentured Indian labourers to work the sugar-cane fields. More than 130 years on, Indo-Fijians are yet to enjoy the civil liberties enjoyed by indigenous Fijians.

FIJI IN A COCONUT SHELL

Population: 861,000

GDP: \$4.6 billion

GDP growth: -6.6%

Number of international airports: 2

Largest export: sugar (18%)

Length of coastline: 1129km

Chiefs in the Great Council of Chiefs: 55

Number of coups since independence: 4 and counting

Percentage of Indo-Fijians in the population: 37% and falling

Number of people eaten by Ratu (Chief) Udreudre: 872

Today the tension between the ethnic Fijian landowners and the entrepreneurial Indo-Fijians is one of the key problems facing Fiji. The fallout from this couldn't have come at a worse time. Fearful of an Indian-led government, many Fijian landowners have refused to renew Indo-Fijian sugar-cane farmers' land leases. Farmers and their families have suddenly found themselves homeless, and have drifted into a cycle of poverty in squatters' camps around the main centres. Meanwhile, a declining sugar yield and the EU's decision to cut sugar subsidies is dealing a double blow of woe to Fiji's beleaguered main industry.

'Within minutes of landing at Nadi's airport the word *bula* (cheers! hello! welcome!) will be burnt into your vocabulary'

While this may sound all doom and gloom, Fijians themselves have a deep well of optimism, and it is their unfailing friendliness and unrestrained warmth that has so endeared them to travellers the world over. Within minutes of landing at Nadi's airport the word *bula* (cheers! hello! welcome!) will be burnt into your vocabulary. Fijians are also noteworthy for their elastic sense of time; for some travellers the transition between the fast-food, quick-fix West and the chilled-out, take-it-as-it-comes islands can be frustrating. This languid pace is called 'Fiji time' and it refers as much to a philosophy of *kerekere* (a concept that time and property is communal) as to anything that can be read off a clock.

'Fiji time' creeps even slower north of Viti Levu. The country's second largest island, Vanua Levu, is surprisingly undeveloped and its deeply indented coastline and rugged interior continue to challenge road builders and civil engineers. Daily flights from Nadi and Suva, however, have made this island fortress quite accessible. Few travellers make it beyond a handful of resorts; Savusavu, often the first port of call for visiting yachts, is the island's most visited area. Indeed, Fiji is a great maritime nation and has long been defined by the ocean it drifts in. When Captain Cook's crew first met the Fijians in Tonga they described them as 'formidable warriors and ferocious cannibals, builders of the finest vessels in the Pacific'. It was this vast stretch of water, which both protected and isolated the locals, that fostered the culture Cook's men described. Perhaps then, it is only fitting that Fiji today has become a permanent fixture for yachties on the 'Coconut Milk Run' between the US and New Zealand.

In Fiji's vast territorial waters, spinning on the periphery around the hub of Viti Levu, are 321 other islands. Taveuni, the Garden Island (so called because of its abundant tropical growth and beautifully weathered mountains), and further south, Kadavu, with its kaleidoscopic Great Astrolabe Reef, are but two. Life on these islands revolves around church, village etiquette and gardening. For the moment, locals here are happy to sit back and observe, with wry commentary, the political goings-on in Suva.

In March 2010, Fiji was hit by Cyclone Tomas, described by those who experienced it as the worst cyclone to have hit the country in living memory. Thankfully, Viti Levu missed the worst of the damage. However towards the east of the country – on the northern islands of Cikobia and Qelelevu, in parts of Vanua Levu and Taveuni, and on the more-sparsely populated islands of the Lomaiviti and Lau Groups – there was widespread damage. Storm surges completely inundated coastal towns and villages, and winds of over 200km/h flattened many more.

Getting Started

Fiji has it all – beautiful beaches, pristine reefs, welcoming faces, abundant sunshine, a rich culture and a genuine zest for tourism. Travelling around the mainland and to the Yasawa and Mamanuca islands couldn't be easier. The mainland is ringed by a road and well serviced by buses, and the Yasawa and Mamanuca Groups are serviced by a fleet of modern catamarans. Virtually everyone speaks English. There are dive centres, honeymoon retreats, backpacker camps, fishing charters and kayaking tours on offer all over the place. For those wishing to indulge in some serious R&R, five-star resorts can arrange everything from a helicopter shuttle to a champagne lunch on a deserted atoll. With only minimal planning, independent travellers to these areas can make use of a good transport network and numerous accommodation options.

Peak-season travel requires more thought, as will reaching the more remote areas such as Vanua Levu, Taveuni and Kadavu. Here roads deteriorate and infrastructure becomes less reliable. Factor in the cost of an internal flight and be prepared for small boats to transport you along the coast. These islands, however, are the place to head to if you want to get off the tourist trail and explore the archipelago independently.

Whatever your preferred approach to travel, bear in mind that Fiji is not a 'budget' destination per se and caters better to midrange wallets. That said, plenty of backpackers head here and travel comfortably enough without spending a ransom.

WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit is during the so-called 'Fijian winter' or 'dry season', from May to October. This time of year is more pleasant, with lower rainfall and humidity, milder temperatures and less risk of meteorological hazards such as cyclones. Consequently these six months make up the high season, when airfare and accommodation costs are at their highest. Expect costs to peak in June and July.

Fiji's 'wet season' is from November to April, with the heaviest rains falling from December to mid-April. This is when tropical cyclones, or hurricanes, are most likely to occur. Strong, destructive cyclones are, however, a fairly

See Climate Charts (p233) for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Insect repellent, which is sold only in city pharmacies but needed most elsewhere
- Plenty to read – bookshops are only found in the cities
- Reef shoes to protect yourself and the reefs that surround most of Fiji's islands
- A Zenlike patience to cope with 'Fiji time', which is more official here than GMT
- Wedding rings if you're here to get hitched (see p229)
- Your own snorkel and mask, because they'll probably get a daily workout
- Checking the current visa situation (p239)
- Keeping abreast of the current political climate – Fiji has experienced several coups
- A waterproof camera to capture your marine encounters and make your friends jealous
- Sunscreen and a raincoat to combat tropical climate conditions
- Seasickness tablets if you don't have sea legs – with over 300 islands, there are a lotta boats in Fiji!

rare phenomenon in Fiji. The country has been hit by an average of 10 to 12 cyclones per decade, with only two or three of these being very severe.

A once-in-a-generation spate of tropical storms wreaked havoc across western Viti Levu in January 2009, causing a declaration of a state of emergency there. At least 11 people died during the week of torrential rains and the resulting floods forced thousands of villagers from their homes and into shelters. Hundreds of tourists were left stranded and many roads and bridges were destroyed by floodwaters and mud.

If you're travelling during the wet season it's best to head to drier regions such as the Mamanuca and Yasawa island groups. That said, December and January are also busy months as they coincide with school holidays in both Australia and New Zealand, and with Fijians visiting relatives. In February, March and November, however, Fiji sees fewer tourists and you're more likely to get bargains on your accommodation. The temperature during these months is also fairly appealing, so you get the best of both worlds.

Fijian school holidays can have an impact on accommodation availability. They generally last for two weeks from late April to early to mid-May and mid-August to early September. Summer holidays run from early December to late January.

COSTS & MONEY

Although cheaper than many Pacific countries, Fiji doesn't provide travellers with the same value as, say, Southeast Asia. Many backpackers are surprised to discover that Fiji is not a US\$20-a-day destination.

Regardless of your budget, accommodation and food will easily be your greatest expense. Local transport and markets are extremely good value, particularly in more remote areas; however, anything geared for tourists is far more expensive. On average, budget travellers can expect to pay about \$100 to \$150 per day for food, transport and accommodation. If you stay in dorms and dine on corned beef, you can do it for a little less. Island-hopping is generally fairly pricey: if you're planning to move around a lot, it's a good idea to stay within one island chain.

Solo midrange travellers can expect to pay around \$190 per day, and couples can expect to pay around \$150 per person per day. These costs are based on transport, comfortable hotel (but not resort) accommodation and eating out three times a day. Abundant self-catering options enable travellers in this price bracket to reduce their overall costs significantly. Families benefit the most from self-contained units, because children are often charged either heavily discounted rates or nothing at all.

Resorts usually include all meals and plenty of activities in their tariffs, and hover around \$300 to \$600 per night for a room suitable for a couple or a family of four. Children often stay for free and sleep on divan-type beds that are left as couches when the room occupancy is only for two. Kids clubs are often free and some of the activities kids most enjoy, such as swimming and snorkelling, are also free.

Top-end options can cost anywhere up to \$3000 a night for accommodation, food, alcohol and activities.

Most budget and midrange accommodation includes Fiji's 12.5% VAT (value-added tax) and the new 5% hotel turnover tax in the advertised rates, but this is not always the case, so check before you book. Many will also charge an additional 3% if you settle by credit card. Again, you should check this before you book. All rates quoted in this book are peak season rates, which tend to be 10% to 20% higher than low season rates. See p226 for more information on accommodation and p58 for more information on eating costs.

HOW MUCH?

Taxi in Nadi or Suva \$5-12

Snorkel hire \$5-10

Local bus ride \$0.75

Coffee \$3

Cocktail \$8-15

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Because of its relative isolation in the middle of the earth's largest ocean, travelling to Fiji clocks up a lot of carbon emissions. Some airlines support charities aimed specifically at offsetting carbon credits and you can enquire about these when you book your flight. There is also a lot that can be done whilst in Fiji, such as travelling on public transport or hiring bicycles. Divers and snorkellers do a lot of damage standing on fragile corals, destroying decades of growth in a single misplaced step. See the boxed texts, p71 and p66, for advice on how to minimise your impact on the ecology.

A peculiarity to Fiji is that most land is owned by traditional *mataqali* (landowning groups) and they earn substantial rents from the land they lease to international resorts. You can rest easy knowing that no matter where you stay, chances are that at least some of the money you spend is going to nearby communities. However, by choosing to spend your money with locally owned operators, even more Fijians will directly benefit from your stay. Beyond this, the GreenDex (p279) lists environmentally sound hotels and socially responsible businesses.

Fiji is an archipelago of 322 islands and a further 500 smaller islets covering a total area of more than 1.3 million sq km, with a land area of 18,300 sq km.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

If there is one country that lends itself to whiling away the hours with a good book, it is Fiji. Consider packing something that offers a little local insight as well as the latest bestseller. Many of the books listed here can be ordered online through the **USP Book Centre** (Map p116; ☎ 323 2500; www.uspbookcentre.com; University of the South Pacific, Suva) or bought on the campus. Other books can be purchased at the Fiji Museum (p119) in Suva.

On Fiji Islands, by Ronald Wright, is an oldie but a goody. It's a great read to get your head around the history, culture and flavour of the country, complemented by personal anecdotes of the author's travels.

Getting Stoned with Savages, by J Maarten Troost, is a humorous personal account of the author's tireless devotion to *kava* (mildly narcotic, muddy and odd-tasting drink made from the aromatic roots of the Polynesian pepper shrub) and the Fijians and Vanuatans he drank it with.

Geoff Raymond's *Footprints in Fiji* is also good for a beautifully humanistic impression of the country. It is an endearing and humorous memoir of an Australian family that moved to Fiji in the mid-'80s to run a resort abandoned by its previous owners.

Yesterday's Child: Once Upon an Island in the Fijis, by Wesley Hall, is a light-hearted romance, set at the end of WWII, and follows the fortunes of a man's quest for fame, love and favour from a lesser god.

Kava in the Blood, by Peter Thomson, is a strong, evocative autobiography of a white Fijian who became a senior civil servant and was imprisoned by Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka during the 1987 coup.

There are two excellent photographic books: *Children of the Sun*, by Glen Craig, which gets under the skin of the country by capturing its diverse population; and *Fiji: The Uncharted Sea*, by Federico Busonero, which is a visual celebration of the archipelago's exquisite marine life and beaches.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The web is an absolute goldmine for travellers. Before leaving home you can research your trip, hunt down bargain airfares, book hotels, check on weather conditions or chat with locals and other travellers about where to go and where to steer clear of.

TOP 10


 FIJI

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Fijians love to celebrate, and barely need a reason to do so. The country's festivals calendar is enhanced by two distinct cultures and the following are 10 reasons to get stuck into it. See p234 for more details.

- 1 Hindu Holi (Festival of Colours; nationwide), February or March
- 2 Ram Naumi (Birth of Lord Rama; Suva), March or April
- 3 Bula Festival (Nadi), July
- 4 Hibiscus Festival (Suva), August
- 5 Hindu Ritual Fire Walking (nationwide), August
- 6 Fiji Regatta Week (Musket Cove), September
- 7 Lautoka's Sugar Festival (Lautoka), September
- 8 Ram Leela (Play of Rama; Labasa), October
- 9 Diwali (Festival of Lights; nationwide), late October or early to mid-November
- 10 South Pacific World Music Festival (Savusavu), November

MUST-SEE FLICKS

Stoke your enthusiasm for a trip by getting an eyeful of the scenery and a mindset of the culture. Although Fiji hasn't exactly been the subject of many films, the following were filmed, if not also set, here. They range from the outstanding, award-winning *The Land Has Eyes* to the swashbuckling, tacky, iconic and plain ridiculous. See p45 for reviews of some of them.

- 1 *The Land Has Eyes* (2004) directed by Vilsoni Hereniko
- 2 *Coral Reef Adventure* (2002) distributed by Macgillivray Freeman
- 3 *No 2* (2006) directed by Toa Fraser
- 4 *Flynn* (1993) directed by Frank Howson
- 5 *Cast Away* (2000) directed by Robert Zemeckis
- 6 *Mr Robinson Crusoe* (1932) directed by Edward Sutherland
- 7 *The Blue Lagoon* (1979) directed by Randal Kleiser
- 8 *The Dove* (1974) directed by Charles Jarrott
- 9 *His Majesty's O'Keefe* (1953) directed by Byron Haskin
- 10 *Anacondas: The Hunt for the Blood Orchid* (2004) directed by Dwight Little

DIY CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

Plenty of travellers come to Fiji on package holidays to avoid having to think too hard about how to enjoy what the country has to offer. But delving into the real Fiji on your own is so easy it requires minimal effort and brain cells. The following are some of the best cultural experiences to be had in this archipelago; all are unmissable.

- 1 Visiting a village (p231)
- 2 Watching a *meke* (dance performance that enacts stories and legends; p46)
- 3 Drinking *kava* (p57)
- 4 Witnessing fire-walking (p109)
- 5 Eating at a *lovo* (feast cooked in a pit oven; p57)
- 6 Rafting on a *bilibili* (bamboo raft; p231)
- 7 Offering *sevusevu* (presentation of a gift; p40)
- 8 Appreciating a Hindu temple (p80)
- 9 Catching a rugby match (p41)
- 10 Shopping for souvenirs and saris (p238)

Try the following websites for useful information on Fiji.

Fiji Times (www.fijitimes.com.fj) Fiji's daily newspaper online.

Fiji Village (www.fijivillage.com) Excellent site updated with daily news and links to local events, including music, movies and sport.

Fiji Visitors Bureau (www.bulafiji.com) Fiji's official tourist site, offering information on accommodation, activities and getting around, with links and an email directory.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Get started on your Fiji planning with snapshots of the country, travel links, postcards from other travellers, and the Thorn Tree travel forum.

South Pacific Tourism Organisation (www.spto.org) Useful travel directory with info on South Pacific countries.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

ISLAND FLING

10-14 Days / Mamanucas & Yasawas

Begin your fling in **Nadi** (p78), taking a day to acclimatise in the hot springs near the **Sabeto Mountains** (p90). Suitably relaxed, board the *Yasawa Flyer* to begin your island-hopping excursion through the **Yasawas** (p152). Spend the next few days on the sliver of sand that connects **Wayasewa** (p156) to **Waya** (p157) before drifting north to **Naviti** (p158) to snorkel with manta rays. Reboard the *Flyer* for a dash up to **Nacula** (p163), or **Nanuya Lailai** (p161), where you can paddle in the **Blue Lagoon** (p161). From here, leapfrog your way back down the chain stopping at **Matacawalevu** (p162), and Naviti once more. Spend a night or two partying at **Beachcomber Island** (p144), and then change boats and loop through the rest of the **Mamanucas** (p140). Here the resorts go upmarket and it's a difficult choice between the romantic **Tokoriki** (p147), versatile **Matamanoa** (p146) and the picture-perfect **Castaway Island** (p147). Before returning to Nadi, be sure to take a day trip to **Monuriki** (p147).

This 190km route is the ultimate beach fling – nothing but sun, sea and snorkelling – winding its way through the Yasawas' secluded beaches before visiting the Mamanucas' holiday hot spots. To make the most of Fiji, combine it with the Once Around the Block itinerary.



ONCE AROUND THE BLOCK

Two-Three Weeks / Viti Levu & A Yasawa
Or Mamanuca Island

Assuming you start in **Nadi** (p78) – although you could begin anywhere – follow the Coral Coast Hwy to the **Momi Guns** (p97), and **Natadola Beach** (p98) for some horse riding. Clug into the verdant interior on the **Coral Coast Scenic Railway** (p98) or don your sneakers and trek to the top of the **Sigatoka Sand Dunes** (p101). Kids will love feeding the wildlife at the **Kula Eco Park** (p104), while mum and dad might enjoy a few days poolside at a resort in **Korolevu** (p105). Amble into **Pacific Harbour** (p108) to go diving with sharks in **Beqa Lagoon** (p109) or take a boat trip out to surf the underrated **Frigate Passage** (p113). Don't miss the opportunity to raft the canyons of the **Navua River** (p112) before heading to **Suva** (p114). Check out the Fiji Museum and then spend a day swinging, Tarzan-style, into the refreshing pools at **Colo-i-Suva Forest Park** (p121). Complete the circuit via the northern Kings Road, wind-surfing at **Nananu-i-Ra** (p134) or scuba diving at **Rakiraki** (p133). From here, head back to sugar country and visit **Lautoka** (p92), the second largest city. This is a great base to explore the **Nausori Highlands** (p131), and to trek in the **Koroyanitu National Heritage Park** (p96). Wind the whole thing up with a well-deserved rest on one of the **Yasawa** (p152) or **Mamanuca** (p140) islands.

For those who can't sit still, this tour is easily combined with the other itineraries and could be run in either direction. It takes a bus 12 hours to run the circuit, but allow 14 to 21 days to see it all. All up, you'll cover 450km.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

THE NORTHERN LOOP

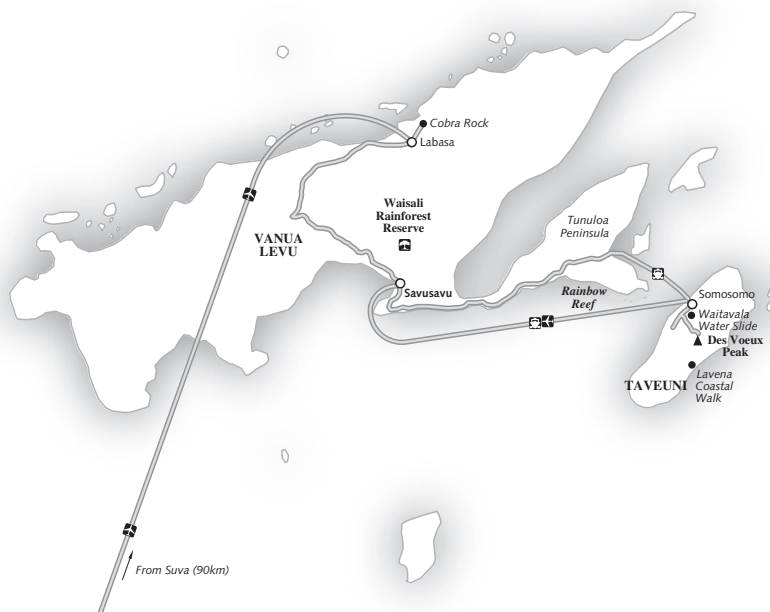
10 Days / Suva to Vanua Levu

Beginning in **Suva** (p114), spend a morning at the excellent Fiji Museum and then an afternoon stocking up on souvenirs at the craft market. After exhausting Suva's nightlife, hop on a flight to **Vanua Levu** (p178) and land yourself in **Labasa** (p190), a sugar town where you can smell the molasses in the air. Visit the Wasavula Ceremonial Site and take a side-trip to the mystifying **Cobra Rock** (p194) inside the Naag Mandir Temple.

Continue your Vanua Levu adventure by jumping on a bus and heading south to **Savusavu** (p179). Spend a day or two taking in the sights, and the evenings talking with visiting skippers over a beer at the Savusavu Yacht Club. Take a day trip to the rich and colourful **Waisali Rainforest Reserve** (p188), or rent a 4WD and brave the roads to the lesser-travelled **Tunuloa Peninsula** (p189).

Then it's time to head to gorgeous **Taveuni** (p197). If you've got sea legs, catch a ferry, if not, the flight provides some spectacular views. **Somosomo** (p201) is a good base from which to explore the surrounding area. First might be a day snorkelling or diving at the magnificent **Rainbow Reef** (p199). Satisfied with the quality of the undersea ecology, trek the **Lavena Coastal Walk** (p209) to see what's topside. Or, for a view of both, climb to the top of the world... well, to the top of **Des Voeux Peak** (p202), which is just as good. Before heading back to Suva scare yourself silly on the **Waitavala Water Slide** (p202).

This route takes in Fiji's other 'mainland' – Vanua Levu. Trek, shop, eat and drink here before hopping over to neighbouring Taveuni, which has spectacular snorkelling, diving, mountains and water slides. In total this trip covers about 480km.



MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

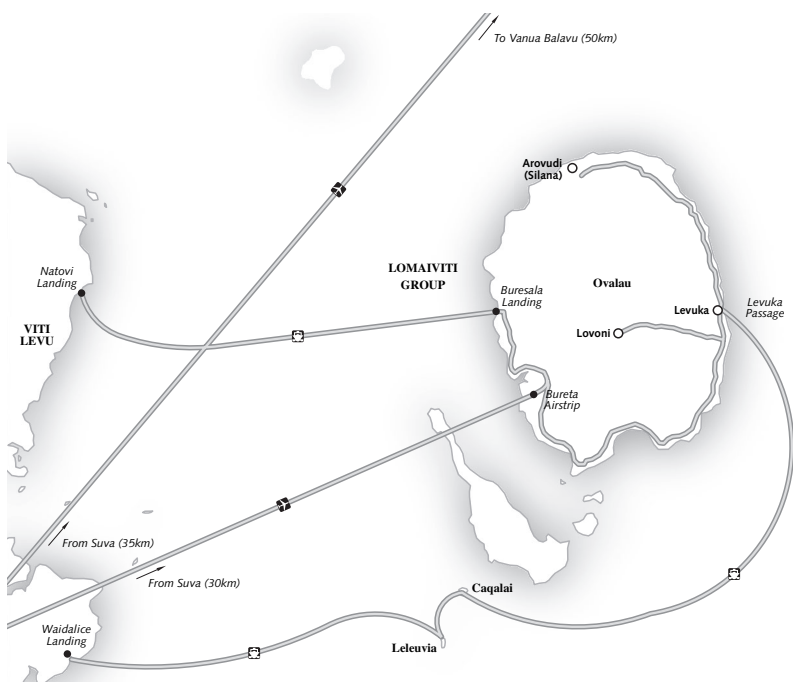
Two Weeks / Lomaiviti & Lau Groups

If you really want to get off the beaten track, head to the **Lomaiviti Group** (p165). The easiest way is to fly (via the Bureta Airstrip), but the adventurous can take the ferry from Natovi Landing (via Buresala Landing) to **Levuka** (p169), which was the original capital and is one of Fiji's most picturesque towns. Spend a few days making the most of the sights in this town littered with colonial buildings, and boasting a harmonious multicultural population. Since you have come so far, it would be criminal not to dive **Levuka Passage** (p166), or climb Gun Rock to take in the view. Spend one day in the village of **Lovoni** (p174), which is nestled in a crater in the centre of Ovalau, and another in **Arovudi** (Silana; p174), which has a remarkable church.

Once you've had your urban fix, book a passage to the coral island of **Caqalai** (p175) and leave consumer crutches – but not your mask and snorkel – behind. Take a day or two to explore this tiny island (it only takes 15 minutes to circumnavigate it), making the most of its dazzling beaches and beautiful offshore reefs. It's more of the same on **Leleuvia** (p176), the next island down. But don't linger too long; there's a plane to catch in Suva and you'll need to catch a boat from either Caqalai or Leleuvia to make it in time.

Before catching the once-weekly flight to the Lau Group – yes, you'll be there for a week – stock up on provisions to share with your soon-to-be new-found friends on **Vanua Balavu** (p219), where you might swim in the spectacular Bay of Islands or hike to the Meeting House of the Gods.

Reset your watch to 'Fijian time': take your time exploring the Lomaiviti islands and Levuka's colonial heritage; return to Suva by leapfrogging between two coral islands; and, if you are game, fly to the remote Lau group. Excluding the plane trip you travel 200km.



TAILORED TRIPS

IN PURSUIT OF THE PERFECT BEACH

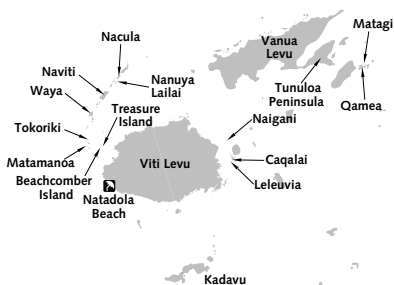
It's no accident that Fiji is synonymous with sun, sand and sea. Boasting over 300 islands, the archipelago offers copious versions of the perfect beach. The Mamanucas are a good place to start, with wide sandy beaches, populated by partygoing backpackers on **Beachcomber Island** (p144), or families indulging in innumerable water sports on **Treasure Island** (p144). If you're looking for something more exclusive, the intimate beaches at **Matamanoa** (p146) and **Tokoriki** (p147) should be just the ticket.

The Yasawa islands are home to two of Fiji's finest: Oarsman's Bay's sublime beach on **Nacula** (p163) and the exquisite beach of the Blue Lagoon on **Nanuya Lailai** (p161). On **Waya** (p157), the Sunset Beach Resort sits on a beautifully thick curve of beach; while Botaira Beach Resort on **Naviti** (p158) is planted on a long stretch of soft, white sand.

Glorious **Natadola Beach** (p98) is Viti Levu's best stretch of shoreline and the **Tunuloa Peninsula** (p189) on Vanua Levu boasts dramatic views and 5.5km of superb coast.

Minuscule **Caqalai** (p175) in the Lomaivitis is a coral island renowned for its perimeter of lovely beach. Prime beaches can also be found on nearby **Leleuvia** (p176) and **Naigani** (p177).

Matagi (p209) and **Qamea** (p210), on Taveuni, have world-class diving and divine beaches, and on **Kadavu** (p211) you'll find gorgeous swimming beaches at Dive Kadavu and Nagigia Island Resorts.



BACK TO NATURE

Here's a quick rundown on where to swim in, walk through, surf on, raft down or hike up some of the country's most spectacular natural attractions.

To work the pins you need look no further than Viti Levu's mountainous interior. Close to Nadi and Lautoka, **Koroyanitu National Heritage Park** (p96) is a must for hikers, who can take either a four-hour trail to the summit of Castle Rock or a full-day trek through the park; afterwards, soothe weary joints in the nearby Sabeto Hot Springs. Also on Viti Levu, you can raft through beautiful canyons in the steamy **Namosi Highlands** (p113) rainforest or ride a horse along **Natadola Beach** (p98).

On Vanua Levu, the **Waisali Rainforest Reserve** (p188) features a short but spectacular trek descending to a waterfall, while on **Taveuni** (p197) there's the stunning Lavena Coastal Walk – a 5km trail through forests, beaches and villages.

For those who believe that it's better wetter, suit up for a shark dive in the **Beqa Lagoon** (p109), or snorkel with the manta rays in the **Yasawas** (p158). Taveuni's **Rainbow Reef** (p199) and Kadavu's **Great Astrolabe Reef** (p213) have enough dive spots to keep most divers happy for several holidays. The Mamanucas' **Cloudbreak** and **Namotu Left** (p141) are surf breaks that attract the world's top surfers, while **Nanani-i-Ra** (p136) has Fiji's most reliable wind for windsurfing.



The Authors



DEAN STARNES

Coordinating Author, Viti Levu, Mamanuca Group, Yasawa Group, Lau & Moala Groups, Rotuma

Dean was an impressionable six when he first travelled to Fiji. The week he spent bobbing above the Mamanuca reefs in a leaky mask and a pair of floaties ignited a passion for travel that has since taken him to over 85 countries. With several visits to Fiji now under his weight belt, Dean knew it was time to come home when he started preferring *kava* to beer. He now lives in Auckland where he alternates between writing for Lonely Planet, freelancing as a graphic designer and shirking responsibilities. His book, *Roam; the Art of Travel*, and his website, www.deanstarnes.com, feature photography and stories about his wayfaring ways.



GEORGE DUNFORD

History, The Culture

A Melbourne-based writer, George Dunford has worked on travel guidebooks for Lonely Planet as well as *Micronations* and *The Big Trip*. He's also contributed to several publications including *Meanjin*, *Wanderlust*, the *Big Issue* and others. He wrote the first blog for Lonely Planet's website, produced podcasts (www.lonelyplanet.com/podcasts), acted as a commissioning editor for Northeast Asia and continues to blog about travel, tech and writing at hackpacker.blogspot.com.



NANA LUCKHAM

Lomaiviti Group, Vanua Levu, Taveuni, Kadavu Group

Nana's first visit to Fiji was a two-week stopover on the way to New Zealand, when she lived it up in the Yasawa islands and won a '*bula bula*' dance competition. This time around she was happy to see the quieter side of life in some of the country's less-visited regions. Nana has worked full-time as a travel writer for the past few years, after time spent as a UN Press Officer in New York and Geneva and an editor in London. She has contributed to several other guidebooks. When not on the road she lives in the exotic wilds of southwest London.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Clement Paligaru wrote the Indo-Fijian History & Culture chapter. An Indo-Fijian journalist, he has reported on Asia Pacific affairs for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation for over 15 years. Clement is a presenter on ABC Radio Australia's *In the Loop* program and the Australia Network's program *Pacific Pulse*, which profile the peoples and cultures of Oceania.

Jean-Bernard Carillet wrote the Diving chapter. Born with restless feet and fins, his journeys have led him to the best dive destinations in the world, including French Polynesia, New Caledonia, the Red Sea, the Caribbean and, lately, Fiji and Vanuatu. As a dive instructor and incorrigible traveller, Jean-Bernard has written widely for various French publications, including *Plongeurs International* magazine. He has also coordinated and coauthored two Lonely Planet diving guides: *Tahiti & French Polynesia* and the *Red Sea*.

Michael Sorokin wrote the Health chapter. Dr Sorokin has extensive experience as a physician and GP in South Africa, the UK, the Pacific Islands and rural South Australia. He has special interests in rheumatology, infectious diseases and preventative medicine. Dr Sorokin was awarded the Order of Fiji in recognition of his services to health care in Fiji. He is partly responsible for the maintenance of the Traveller's Medical & Vaccination Centre (TMVC) database and helps with reference material for the continuing education of TMVC medical staff.

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