

FIJI REVISITED

We dock at the port of Suva at 7 am, and we are looking forward to getting to know this, the main Fijian island called Viti Levu. The last time we were here was around 3 months ago, and we were very tired after our long trip from Cairns.

This time, we are able to take a free shuttle bus into the main town of Suva to look at the shops, before taking a taxi ride with some friends to a 5 star beach resort.



The town of Suva is busy with pedestrians and traffic, and there are lots of old buses with roll up blinds instead of windows. They all seem well used, and the occupants are carrying all sorts of goods, including chickens, strange looking vegetables and large sacks of rice. Owain spends some time photographing the buses in the bus station, much to the amusement of the passengers.



The Fijian people seem very friendly, and many shake our hands, and call out "Bula Bula" (Welcome) as we pass them in the busy streets. The shop keepers try to tempt us into their shops, but are not too insistent, and are not upset when we decline. Alvina does buy a sarong however, before realising it would have been cheaper in the next shop! Still, you can't win them all!



The buildings in the town are shabby, with peeling and dirty paintwork, and as we travel by taxi out of the town towards the beach, the buildings become even shabbier. The houses are little more than tiny sheds, made out of a variety of materials, including corrugated tin, odd sheets of metal, concrete, wood and thatch.



As we pass through the many villages, our driver slows down in order to negotiate the speed humps on the poorly surfaced roads. There are lots of people about, some are selling vegetables on the side of the road, or waiting for the frequent buses. There are cows tethered on the grass verge by the roadside, and chickens suddenly dart across the road in front of the cars.

After 1 hour we arrive at the 5 star hotel called "The Pearl", which is in the resort area of Pacific Harbour. Here we eat a leisurely lunch of Fijian curry washed down with a glass of Fijian Bitter.



The afternoon is hot and sultry, and we cool off in the Pacific Ocean, alongside the hotel. Alvina tries the snorkel mask once more, but sees no fish - probably because there is no coral here, just sand.

We then relax near the hotel pool, and take in the distant views of another of the Fijian islands - Vanua Levu.

Back on board the *Van Gogh*, we are treated to a performance of traditional Fijian dance and song by a local group. They are very good indeed, and have some impressive, colourful costumes made of Tapa (beaten bark). Soon after the show the *Van Gogh* leaves Fiji bound for Auckland. Our second visit to this country has left a much more favourable impression on us, and we would certainly like to return one day.

