

Fiji



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1970 (rejoined in 1997 after ten-year lapse)
Population:	875,000 (2012)
GDP p.c. growth:	1.0% p.a. 1990–2012
UN HDI 2012:	world ranking 96
Official language:	English
Time:	GMT plus 12
Currency:	Fiji dollar (F\$)

Geography

Area:	18,333 sq km
Coastline:	1,130 km
Capital:	Suva



The Republic of Fiji lies 1,850 km north of Auckland, New Zealand, and 2,800 km north-east of Sydney, Australia. It consists of about 300 islands (100 inhabited) and 540 islets, spread over three million sq km. It is surrounded by the island groups of (clockwise from north) Tuvalu, Wallis and Futuna, Tonga, New Caledonia, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. The largest islands are Viti Levu ('Great Fiji'), Vanua Levu, Taveuni and Kadavu.

Area: Total land area is 18,333 sq km: Viti Levu 10,429 sq km; Vanua Levu 5,556 sq km.

Topography: Much of Fiji is volcanic in origin, with the larger islands featuring heavily populated coastal plains and uninhabited mountainous interiors. Many of the smaller islands have coral reefs. The highest point is Mt Tomanivi on Viti Levu (1,323 metres). The main rivers are the Sigatoka, Rewa and Ba on Viti Levu and the Dreketi on Vanua Levu; their deltas contain most of the country's arable land.

Climate: The climate is tropical and oceanic. South-east trade winds prevail; day temperatures range from 20 to 29°C and humidity is high. The rainy season is November to March throughout the country, though there is rain during June–September. On average, the country is affected by a hurricane every other year, for example Cyclone Ami in January 2003.

Environment: The most significant environmental issues are deforestation and soil erosion.

Vegetation: The distribution of the rainfall is the determining factor in the country's vegetation. Dense forests and coastal mangrove swamps are found in the east and grasslands, with coconut palms on the coasts, in the west. Forest covers 56 per cent of the land area. Indigenous sandalwood resources were exhausted in the 19th century.

Wildlife: Fiji is home to six species of bat, including four fruit bats (flying-foxes), and the Polynesian rat. All other mammals have been introduced, mainly during the 19th and 20th centuries. There are more than 100 species of birds, 14 of which are endangered (2012), and several snakes and lizards, including the recently discovered crested iguana. Fiji's waters contain turtles, sharks, eels and prawns.

Did you know?

The Commonwealth Local Government Forum has its Pacific regional office in Suva, where it works to promote and strengthen democratic local government and encourage the exchange of good practice in the Pacific region.

The country is an archipelago of about 300 islands (100 inhabited) and 540 islets, spread over three million sq km, and has some 1,130 km of coastline.

Main towns: Suva (capital, pop. 194,900 in 2010, comprising Nasinu 88,600 and Lami 20,600), Nausori (55,500), Lautoka (55,200), Nadi (47,000) and Ba (16,200) on Viti Levu; and Labasa (28,400) on Vanua Levu.

Transport: 3,440 km of roads, 49 per cent paved. The network is vulnerable to flooding and hurricane damage. A coastal road encircles Viti Levu, linked by smaller roads to the villages of the interior.

Lautoka, in the north-west of Viti Levu, is the main port; others are Suva, Levuka and Savusavu. Ferry services operate between the larger islands.

The main international airport is in western Viti Levu, at Nadi. Nausori, near Suva, is the hub for inter-island flights, and receives some international services. Most islands have airports or landing strips.

Society

KEY FACTS 2012

Population per sq km:	48
Life expectancy:	70 years
Net primary enrolment:	96% (2011)

Population: 875,000 (2012); 53 per cent of people live in urban areas; growth 0.8 per cent p.a. 1990–2012; birth rate 21 per 1,000 people (34 in 1970); life expectancy 70 years (60 in 1970).

More than 50 per cent of the people are ethnic Fijians, who are of mixed Melanesian–Polynesian origin, and most of the rest are of Indian origin. There are small populations of Europeans, Banabans, Tuvaluans and Chinese.

Language: The official language is English, but Fijian, of which there are more than 300 dialects, is widely spoken. A single dialect, Bauan, is used in the media. Hindi is the main language of the Indian population, although it is now distinct from that spoken in mainland India. English, Fijian and Hindi are all taught in schools and most of the population is at least bilingual.

Religion: Christians 65 per cent (Methodists 35 per cent, Roman Catholics nine per cent, Assembly of God six per cent, Seventh Day Adventists four per cent), Hindus 28 per cent, Muslims six per cent, small number of Sikhs (2007 census).

Health: Public spending on health was three per cent of GDP in 2011. There is a comprehensive system providing universal health and dental services for nominal fees. There are 25 hospitals. The country is free of malaria. Some 96 per cent of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 87 per cent have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2011). Infant mortality was 19 per 1,000 live births in 2012 (71 in 1960).

Education: Public spending on education was four per cent of GDP in 2011. There are ten years of compulsory education starting at the age of six. Primary school comprises six years and secondary seven, with cycles of four and three years. Some 91 per cent of pupils complete primary school (2008). The school year starts in January.

The main campuses of the regional University of the South Pacific (founded 1968) and the Fiji National University are located in Suva. The University of the South Pacific has further campuses in Fiji, at Labasa and Lautoka. The Fiji National University, formally established

in 2010, was formed by the merger of seven tertiary institutions: the College of Advanced Education; College of Agriculture (Koronivia campus); Institute of Technology (Samabula campus, Suva); Lautoka Teachers College (Lautoka campus); School of Medicine (Suva); School of Nursing (Suva); and Training and Productivity Authority, and has many campuses across the country. The oldest of these institutions, the School of Medicine (established in 1885) and the School of Nursing (1893), were merged in 2010 to become the Fiji National University College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences.

Media: Daily English-language newspapers are *Daily Post* (founded 1989), *Fiji Sun* and *Fiji Times* (1869), and there are a number of Fijian and Hindi weeklies.

Radio is a major source of information for most people, particularly on the outer islands. The Fiji Broadcasting Corporation provides national Fijian and Hindi services and there are a number of private radio stations. Fiji TV provides a national free-to-air channel and a pay-TV channel.

There are 60 personal computers per 1,000 people (2005).

Communications: Country code 679; internet domain '.fj'. Mobile phone coverage in the outer islands is patchy. There are internet cafés in Suva, Nadi, Lautoka and most resorts.

There are 101 main telephone lines, 982 mobile phone subscriptions and 337 internet users per 1,000 people (2012).

Public holidays: New Year's Day, National Youth Day (Friday in March), Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna Day (late May), Queen's Official Birthday (Monday in June), Fiji Day (Monday around 10 October), Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Prophet's Birthday, Good Friday, Easter Monday and Diwali (October/November).

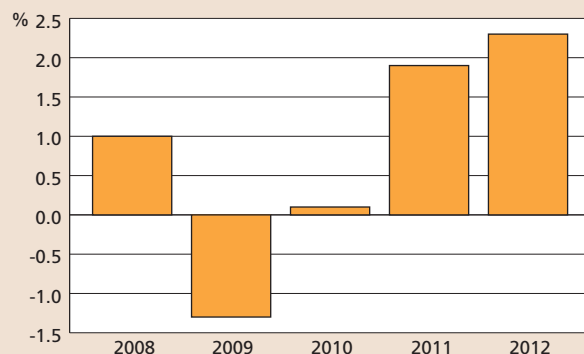
Economy

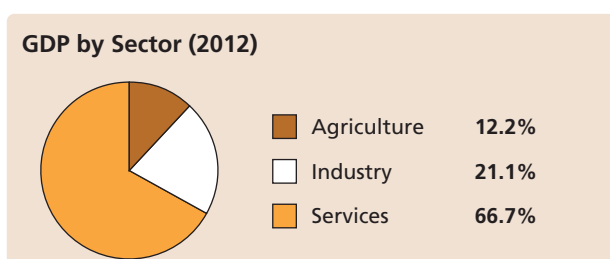
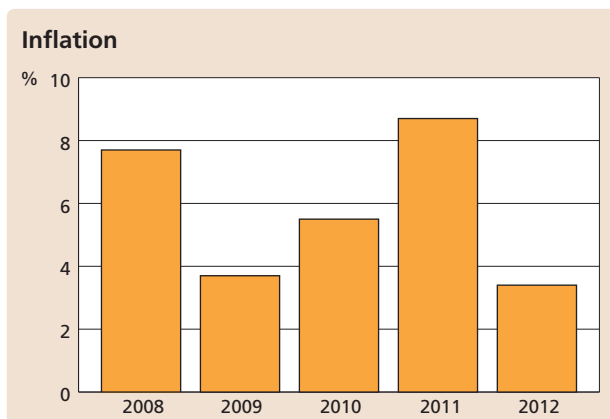
KEY FACTS 2012

GNI:	US\$3.6bn
GNI p.c.:	US\$4,110
GDP growth:	0.8% p.a. 2008–12
Inflation:	5.8% p.a. 2008–12

The Fijian economy is largely agricultural, and the main cash crop and export is sugar cane. Tourism is the largest foreign-exchange earner and clothing exports grew rapidly from the late 1980s. Other significant activities are gold-mining, fishing and timber production.

Real Growth in GDP





More than 80 per cent of land is owned by ethnic Fijians, mainly by the local clans, or *mataqali*, and ownership by outsiders was prohibited from the late 19th century. Indo-Fijians were able to farm sugar cane under land lease arrangements. However, from the late 1990s, as leases came up for renewal, many landlords would only offer short leases at higher rents and many Indo-Fijian farmers have had to return the farms they have worked for many years to the owners.

Both sugar and tourism are vulnerable to the climate; hurricanes are relatively frequent and droughts can also cause problems, for example severe drought in 1997–98 was followed by cyclones and extensive flooding, and the islands were again devastated by Cyclone Ami in January 2003. Moreover, tourists can be deterred by political instability.

Thus, economic growth has been uneven, with strong growth in years such as 1999 when the harvest is good and negative growth in years such as 2000 when the government was overthrown, some hotels were closed and tourist numbers fell sharply.

After 2000, however, there were several years of good growth, before a decline in clothing exports (due to the ending of US market quotas at the end of 2004) caused slower growth from 2005. Then, following the coup of December 2006, which caused tourist numbers to fall by 70 per cent, and the subsequent global recession, the economy stagnated in 2007–10, recovering in 2011, with a growth rate of two to three per cent p.a. during 2011–2014.

Constitution

Status:	Republic
Legislature:	Parliament
Independence:	10 October 1970

Until 2013, Fiji's constitution reflected the multiracial nature of its society. It provided for a parliamentary democracy with a bicameral parliament comprising an elected House of Representatives and appointed Senate. Some seats in the House of Representatives

were reserved for ethnic Fijians, some for Indo-Fijians and some for other ethnic groups. Following the 1987 coups, Fiji became a republic, with a President appointed by the Great Council of Chiefs (Bose Levu Vakaturaga, a body comprising the heads of the ethnic Fijian clans), for a five-year term as head of state. The President appointed as Prime Minister the member of the House of Representatives who commanded the support of the majority. Constitutional amendments required a 75 per cent majority in both houses.

Under the 1997 constitution, the number of seats in the House of Representatives was increased to 71, 25 of which were opened to all ethnic groups (elected by universal suffrage), while the remainder were to be elected by separate communal electoral rolls in the following proportions: ethnic Fijians 23; Indo-Fijians 19; other ethnic groups three; and Rotuman Islanders one. The Senate had 32 members, 14 appointed by the Great Council of Chiefs, nine by the Prime Minister, eight by the Leader of the Opposition and one by the Council of Rotuma. The prime ministership, but not the presidency, was opened to all Fijians. In addition, the first-past-the-post electoral system was replaced by an alternative preference system and voting became mandatory. Parties taking more than ten per cent of the votes in a general election had the right to a number of cabinet posts in proportion to the numbers of votes received.

A new constitution was promulgated on 6 September 2013. It includes a bill of rights and provides for a single-chamber legislature, Parliament, with 50 members directly elected by universal adult suffrage for a term of no more than four years from its first session. All Fijian citizens from the age of 18 are entitled to vote in a single national constituency and under a system of proportional representation. Parliament elects a non-executive President from a field of two candidates, one nominated by the Prime Minister and one by the Leader of the Opposition. The presidential term is three years and a President can serve no more than two terms. After an election, the leader of the party with the most seats in Parliament becomes Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is head of government.

Politics

Last elections:	17 September 2014
Next elections:	2018
Head of state:	President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau
Head of government:	Prime Minister Rear-Admiral Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama

In October 2000, President Ratu Josefa Iloilo appointed a constitutional review commission to recommend a new constitutional arrangement for Fiji. In December 2000, Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon appointed Justice Pius N Langa, Deputy President of the Constitutional Court of South Africa, as his special envoy to help accelerate the restoration of democracy and promote national unity.

A general election was held under the new constitution from 25 August to 5 September 2001 when 26 political parties participated (ten more than in 1999). In a poll that was judged by international including Commonwealth observers to reflect the will of the people, Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) took 32 seats, pushing the Fiji Labour Party (FLP – 27 seats) into second place, followed by Matanitu Vanua (six). SDL leader and head of the

History



Archaeological evidence suggests that Fiji has been inhabited, initially by Melanesian peoples, for more than 3,500 years. The first known contact with Europeans occurred in 1643, when the islands of Vanua Levu and Taveuni were explored by Abel Tasman. British explorers including Captains James Cook and William Bligh passed through in the late 18th century. By this time, the population was mixed, with Melanesians occupying the eastern areas and Polynesians the islands' interiors, organised into a complex hierarchical society.

The first American ships arrived in the 19th century, bringing adventurers attracted by the resources of sandalwood (which were exhausted within ten years) and subsequently traders and Christian missionaries. Later, Europeans began establishing cotton plantations but came into conflict with the Fijians over land, political power and the use of imported labour. The increasing availability of guns caused inter-tribal conflicts to escalate but by the mid-19th century, a single clan dominated, led first by Nauvilou and subsequently by his son Cakobau, and based on the small island of Bau to the south-east of Viti Levu. The Bauan dialect of Fijian consequently became the predominant Fijian language, and an important factor in unifying the clans. Cakobau converted to Methodist Christianity in 1854; in 1874, following British concerns over the interests of the settlers, Cakobau agreed that Fiji should become a Crown colony. In 1881, Rotuma Island in northern Fiji, inhabited by Polynesian people, was added to the territory.

The first governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, collaborated with the local chiefs to protect the traditional ways of life. He forbade the sale of land to non-Fijians, levied taxes in kind and retained the existing political structures. He also encouraged the growth of the sugar industry, and its use of Indian labour. From the 1920s, Indians began to call for more commercial and political influence and, by 1943, despite the restrictions on land ownership, they were in the majority.

The country progressed towards independence through the 1960s, largely in response to international and British pressure, while internally there were divisions over the appropriate forms of government able to provide democracy while protecting the rights of the ethnic Fijians. The resulting constitution offered universal suffrage, with guarantees for Fijian land rights, and the Fijian chiefs, through their dominance of the Senate, had in effect a veto on constitutional change. Fiji became independent on 10 October 1970.

Until 1987, the government was formed by the Alliance Party led by Ratu (Chief) Sir Kamisese Mara which followed policies of moderate multiracialism. The largest Indo-Fijian party, the National Federation Party (NFP), formed the main opposition for most of the period and calls from Indo-Fijians for greater political and property rights increased.

Elections in April 1987 resulted in victory for a coalition consisting of the NFP and the Fiji Labour Party (FLP), led by Dr Timoci Bavadra and supported by both ethnic Fijian and Indo-Fijian trades unions. Bavadra, an ethnic Fijian, became Prime Minister, but there were Indo-Fijian majorities in both the House of

Representatives and the cabinet. In May 1987 the government was overthrown in a coup led by Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, who called for the ethnic Fijian dominance of all future governments.

The May 1987 coup was followed by a period of racial unrest, during which the Great Council of Chiefs attempted to introduce constitutional reforms. Mediated by the Governor-General, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, negotiations between Mara and Bavadra resulted in the formation of an interim government of unity.

However, Rabuka led a second coup in September 1987 and in October he declared Fiji a republic. Having become a republic, it was then required to reapply for membership of the Commonwealth and, at their summit in Vancouver in October 1987, Commonwealth Heads of Government decided to allow its membership to lapse, primarily on the grounds that Fiji had adopted a form of government at variance with the democratically expressed wish of the people and so with Commonwealth principles. In December 1987 Rabuka appointed a new civilian government with Mara as Prime Minister and Ganilau as President.

Between 1988 and 1990, a new constitution was drawn up and approved by the Great Council of Chiefs, but the National Federation Party–Fiji Labour Party coalition announced it would boycott any elections held under its provisions. The constitution was also the subject of international criticism, especially from the Commonwealth led by India, Australia and New Zealand.

Fiji resumed its membership of the Commonwealth in October 1997. Its new 1997 constitution came into force in July 1998. At elections in May 1999 the incumbent Fijian Political Party (SVT, with only eight of the 71 seats in the lower house) and the NFP (no seats) were ousted by a coalition led by the FLP (37 seats) that included the Fijian Association Party (ten), the Party of National Unity (four) and the recently formed Christian Democratic Alliance (three). The turnout was high at these elections where voting was compulsory.

Following his victory, FLP leader Mahendra Chaudhry became the first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister and, despite his party's overall majority in the House of Representatives, he formed a cabinet representing all four of the coalition partners. His priorities were to defuse ethnic tensions and restore economic growth after the sharp contractions of 1997–99. Soon after the elections, Rabuka resigned from the leadership of the SVT.

In May 2000, armed ethnic Fijians, led by George Speight, overthrew the government, occupying the parliament building and taking about 40 hostages – including the Prime Minister. There then ensued continuous negotiations between the army and the rebels until the deadlock was finally broken in July, when the hostages were released, a new civilian President and 'emergency' government were appointed and backed by the military. In June the country was suspended from the councils of the Commonwealth pending the restoration of democracy. In July Speight and some of his supporters were arrested and charged with treason.

interim government Laisenia Qarase was sworn in as Prime Minister. Following the country's return to democratic government, the suspension from Commonwealth councils (which had been in force since June 2000) was lifted in December 2001.

A row soon erupted, however, when Qarase failed to appoint any FLP members to his cabinet or the Senate. An impasse continued, with Qarase only prepared to appoint ministers he felt he could work with, and FLP leader Mahendra Chaudhry insisting on his constitutional rights. In February 2002 the High Court ruled Qarase had failed to comply with the constitution when he appointed his cabinet and in July 2003 the Supreme Court upheld this judgment. But the impasse endured, with the two parties unable to agree on a list of cabinet appointments, the key issues being the number of FLP members (14 or 17) and whether Chaudhry himself should be included.

The May 2006 general election was won by SDL with 36 seats, while FLP took 31 seats and the United People's Party (UPP) two. Commonwealth observers present reported that the result reflected the wishes of the people. Qarase continued as Prime Minister and, in accordance with the constitution, appointed a cabinet in which nine posts were filled by FLP. FLP leader Chaudhry declined a position for himself.

In December 2006 the army took control of government dismissing the Prime Minister and President; and head of the army Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama assumed the presidency. This coup was immediately condemned by the international community and at a meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) on 8 December Fiji's military regime was suspended from the councils of the Commonwealth pending restoration of democracy and the rule of law in the country. In January 2007 Bainimarama reinstated the President and became interim Prime Minister.

Fiji's Court of Appeal ruled in April 2009 that the military coup, which ousted the elected government in 2006, and the interim government that followed it were illegal. The ruling requested that the President appoint an interim Prime Minister and call a general election. In response, President Iloilo announced that he had abrogated the constitution and dismissed all the judges. He appointed himself as head of government and subsequently reinstated Bainimarama as Prime Minister.

In July 2009 Bainimarama announced the retirement of Iloilo from the presidency; Vice-President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau assumed the role of acting President and in November 2009 was confirmed as President.

Following Fiji's suspension from the councils of the Commonwealth in December 2006, sustained efforts were made by the Commonwealth to engage the interim government to promote a return to constitutional democracy and to encourage a national dialogue aimed at tackling the underlying issues that led to military coups. On 1 September 2009, having failed to satisfy CMAG that it was committed to a timetable for restoring democracy, Fiji was fully suspended from the Commonwealth. In announcing this, Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma said that the Commonwealth remained open to engaging with the interim government towards the restoration of constitutional democracy.

At their biennial meeting in Perth, Australia, in October 2011, Commonwealth Heads of Government urged the interim government of Fiji to restore democracy without further delay, to respect human rights and to uphold the rule of law, and reaffirmed that the Commonwealth should continue to remain engaged with Fiji and support efforts towards that end.

On 14 March 2014, at CMAG's 43rd meeting, ministers recognised progress made to hold elections by September 2014 and decided that Fiji's full suspension from the Commonwealth should be changed to suspension from the councils of the Commonwealth, thus permitting it once again to participate in a range of Commonwealth activities, including the Commonwealth Games.

The general election held on 17 September 2014 – the first under the 2013 constitution – was won by the FijiFirst Party with 59 per cent of votes (32 seats); turnout was 84 per cent. The Social Democratic Liberal Party secured 28 per cent of votes (15 seats); the National Federation Party five per cent (three seats); the People's Democratic Party three per cent (no seats) and the FLP 2 per cent (no seats). A multinational observer group said that the elections were credible and broadly represented the will of the Fijian people.

Fiji was reinstated as a full member of the Commonwealth on 26 September 2014, following a decision by CMAG, at its 44th meeting in New York, when Ministers recognised the credible elections held on 17 September 2014 and the assumption of office by a democratically elected government.

International relations

Fiji is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, Non-Aligned Movement, Pacific Community, Pacific Islands Forum, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Traveller information

Immigration and customs: Passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of departure. Visas are required by most Commonwealth nationals. Prohibited imports include some fresh food.

Travel within the country: Driving is on the left. The minimum age for car hire is 21 and seatbelts in the front seats are compulsory. A national or international driving permit and third-party insurance are required.

There are regular bus services around the islands. Taxis and minibuses bearing yellow registration plates are authorised by the Land Transport Authority.

Air shuttle services operate around the islands. Ferries serve the larger islands.

Travel health: Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include dengue fever, diphtheria, hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid.

There were 661,000 tourist arrivals in 2012.

Further information

Fijian Government: www.fiji.gov.fj

Elections Office: www.elections.gov.fj

Fiji Bureau of Statistics: www.statsfiji.gov.fj

Reserve Bank of Fiji: www.reservebank.gov.fj

Tourism Fiji: www.fiji.travel

Pacific Islands Forum: www.forumsec.org

Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org

Commonwealth of Nations:
www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Fiji

Media

Fiji Sun: www.fijisun.com.fj

Fiji Times: www.fijitimes.com

Fiji Broadcasting Corporation: www.fbc.com.fj

Fiji TV: www.fijitv.info

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