

COUNTRY PROFILE

- **Introduction**

Bula vinaka. Fiji is honoured and humbled by the confidence that the community of commonwealth nations has placed on us to host this Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers. This profile provides the geography, historical background and political brief on Fiji. The information presents the glimpse of the multi ethnic community in Fiji and how the country has developed to what it has become today. Fiji is also regarded as the hub of the South Pacific being the centre of travel destinations for most of the Pacific Island countries.

The Ministry of Education Profile is also included in this country brief, to provide information on the history and the development of the education sector in Fiji. Please browse through the country and education profile and know more about the country that is ready to host the 20th Conference of the Commonwealth Education Ministers.

- **Geography**

Fiji is a country imbued with natural beauty and lies in the heart of the Pacific Ocean, midway between the equator and the South Pole at longitudes 175° 53 East and 178° 12 West and latitudes 15° 42 and 20° 02 South. Located between Hawaii in the North and New Zealand in the South, its nearest neighbours are Vanuatu to the West and Tonga to the East. Fiji's Exclusive Economic Zone contains approximately 330 islands of which about one third are inhabited.



Fiji's total area is 18,333 square kilometres. There are two main islands which are home to 80% of Fiji's population: Viti Levu [10,429 square kilometres] and Vanua Levu [5,556 square kilometres]. Suva the Capital of Fiji is one of the two cities. The other city is Lautoka and both are located on the island of Viti Levu. Fiji has two international airports; one in Nadi and the second in Nausori.

Fiji's central location in the South Pacific makes it a regional transport hub and a focal point for regional affairs. Thus, the 22 member country Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the 16 member country Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, the main campus of the 12 country owned University of the South Pacific, and the 10 country coverage UN Sub-regional Office are all located in Suva.

The terrain consists mainly of mountains of volcanic origin with smaller islands based on coral reefs and atolls with 9.02% of the total land mass being arable. Indigenous Fijians own 83% of Fiji land while 10% is freehold land and 7% owned by the state. Fiji is one of the first countries to experience a new calendar day as the International Dateline curves around the flank of the country to the east.



Fiji's flora and fauna are relatively few but are of exceptional scientific interest because of the higher proportion of endemic forms.

10% of the 476 indigenous Fijian plant species cannot be found anywhere else in the world. Fiji also has a few rare reptiles and birds; the notable ones are the crested iguana and Fiji petrel.



Demography

The 2007 census counted the population of Fiji to be 837,271 with majority of the population are iTaukei (56.8%), 37.5% are Indo-Fijians and remaining 5.7% are classified as others. These others are made up of Chinese, Rotuman, European, Part European, other Pacific Islanders and nationalities. The intercensal period is ten years so the next census will be held in September 2017. Males comprise 51% of the total population while females 49% with children (0-14 years) make up 29% of the population, young adults (15-35yrs) 37% and older age groups 34%.



- **Climate**

Fiji enjoys a tropical South Sea maritime climate without great extremes of heat or cold. The islands lie in a zone which is prone to natural disasters, some related to climatic extremes. Tropical cyclones occur most

frequently between November and April every year. The predominant winds over Fiji are the trade winds from the east to south-east. Generally, the winds over Fiji are light or moderate. Temperature averages 22° (degree Celsius) for the cooler months (May to October) while from November to April, temperatures are usually higher with 30°-32° (degree Celsius) with heavy downpours.

- **Language**

The three widely spoken languages in Fiji are English, *Vosa-VakaViti* (Indigenous language) and Hindustani. English was introduced in early 19th Century and is the official language of Government, instruction and communication. *Vosa-VakaViti* is comprised of many dialects with Bauan the most widely spoken. Indigenous Fijians have their own dialects and you can know where one comes from, from the dialect spoken. The Hindustani came to Fiji with the girmityias beginning in 1879.



Indo-Fijians generally speak a distinct Fiji-Hindi language, which is not the same as the one spoken in India. *Vosa-VakaViti* and Hindi are taught in schools as part of the curriculum.

The other races present in the country also have their unique languages, like Mandarin, Cantonese, Rotuman, Banaban and others.



- **Historical Background –**

According to Fijian legend the great chief *Lutunasobasoba* led his people across the sea from Southeast Asia and settled in Fiji three and half thousand years ago.

The Europeans discovery of the Fiji group was accidental. The first of these discoveries was made in 1643 by the Dutch explorer, Abel Tasman. English navigators including Captain James Cook sailed through in 1774 made further explorations in the 18th Century. However the discovery and recording of the islands was by Captain William Bligh who sailed through Fiji after the mutiny on the *Bounty* in 1789.



Until the mid-1800s, the tribes of Fiji lived a life of faith under the tenets of a complex primitive religion based on oral tradition and incorporating human sacrifice and cannibalism. The Methodist missionaries arrived in 1835 followed by French priests in 1844 began the gradual indoctrination of world religions in Fiji which led to the conversion of the paramount chief of Fiji in 1854 soon after the abolishment of cannibalism and practice of primitive religion.

- **Government, Administration & Religion**

In 1874 chiefs of Fiji ceded Fiji to Great Britain and Fiji became a British colony. The administration then formed the Great Council of Chiefs to advise on how best to govern and preserve the *iTaukei* or indigenous population. The arrival of indentured labourers from India to work on sugar cane plantations in the late 1800s to early 1900s resulted in a multi-religious society where 64% of the population are

Christians, 27% are Hindu and majority of the remainder are Muslim and Sikh.

After nearly 100 years as a British colony including 36 years of immigration under the Indian indentured labour scheme known as *girmit* Fiji gained its independence in 1970 and adopted a constitutional democratic form of government based on Westminster model. In 1987 it was declared a Republic state.

The Constitution of the Republic of Fiji (2013), the fourth since 1970, establishes a single chamber, 51 member parliament with the President as the Head of State. The Prime Minister is appointed by the President soon after general election with the position automatically goes to the leader of the party or coalition controlling the parliament. The constitution allows for an executive, a legislature and a judiciary and the authority and power to make laws for the state are vested in the parliament.

Administratively Fiji consists of four divisions, central, eastern, western and northern. Divisions are further divided into provinces and each of these has a number of districts that are made up of village units. Central administration is undertaken by 20 or so ministries and 50 national agencies. Ministries are headed by ministers and permanent secretaries.

The country has a local Government system, cities and town councils fall under their general supervision. There are two cities, Suva the capital of Fiji in the central while Lautoka is in the Western side of Viti Levu. Ten towns have been established mainly in the two main islands, with Levuka town in the Ovalau Island was first established as the capital of Fiji when Fiji was ceded to

Great Britain. Because of its historical background Levuka town has been inscribed as a World Heritage site in 2013.



The Fiji Police Force is responsible for law enforcement and the prevention and detection of offences in the country. The Military Forces in Fiji is responsible for the internal security and defence of the country. Since 1978, the country has been actively involved in peacekeeping duties in the Middle East.

- **Economy**

Fiji is a middle-income country with a small open economy. Although it is one of the more advanced nations in the Pacific, it remains a developing country, with a sizeable and persistent trade and current account deficit, a large subsistence agricultural sector and 31% of its population below the national poverty line (ADB 2013).

In 2016, the annual rate of GDP was 10.2%. The GDP per head of population was \$8233. The GDP annual growth rate in Fiji is expected to be 3% by the end of 2017. In the long term, the Fiji GDP annual growth

rate is expected to trend around 2.4% in 2020

Fiji exports sugar, water, garments, timber, molasses, timber, fish, mineral water and gold with most foreign exchange earnings coming from tourism. Tourism is considered Fiji's star performer after its performance and quick recovery after the 2000 political and economic crisis.



In 2016, a total of 792,320 tourists visited the country. This was 5% more than the previous record of 754,835, which was set in 2015. The tourism industry is also the country's largest source of investment with the prospect of reaching the target of becoming a billion dollar industry with earnings estimated to reach \$917million in the years to come.

The Transport, Storage and Communication sector has experienced robust growth by riding on the wave of increase in tourism which has led to the increase airline and shipping services. The sector plays a major role in the economy contributing an average of 13.5% per year to GDP.

