

## ADVENTURE, HISTORY AND A FLOWER FESTIVAL

Fiji's Pacific Harbour, once the playground of a privileged few, is quickly becoming the South Pacific's adventure and excitement capital.

Developed on the main island, Viti Levu, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a complete visitor destination, with man-made canals dotted with spacious villas weaving through an 18-hole championship golf course, Pacific Harbour has long been a Fiji secret, waiting to be exposed.

The golf course, The Greens, has finished a major makeover and re-emerged as one of the best in the South Pacific (72 par, 6,317m), and there is excellent accommodation.

*The Pearl South Pacific*, which began life as one of an Australian-owned chain of Fiji quality hotels, is Pacific Harbour's centrepiece.

It and *Lagoon Resort*, a favourite with international film production companies, offer excellent facilities for those who plan to test the region's adventurous reputation or simply want to stay put.

The award-winning *Hot Stones Villas* offers something a little different and for long-term stays the time-share *Fiji Palms* is enticing.

If you're on a budget the *Arts Village's Tsulu Village* single or twin or dormitory accommodation might be what you're looking for.

*What's the most exciting thing you can do from Pacific Harbour?*

You can raft white water, take a kayak, a canoe or a traditional bamboo raft, and have some tea with local villagers.

You can swim with sharks in the fabled Beqa Lagoon and tell tall stories that night around the bar at the boutique *Royal Davui* (no children under 16), or exclusive *Lalalati* or *Beqa Lagoon Resort* or the unusual *Kulu Bay Resort*.

You can snorkel or scuba dive from any of these resorts over and among some of the world's most beautiful corals.

Beqa Island, overlooking the lagoon, is one of Fiji's most famous.

It is also one of Fiji's most mysterious because it is the traditional home of the Fijian firewalkers.

Like many mysteries of Fiji and other islands of the South Pacific there is no valid explanation why members of one Fijian tribe have the power to walk on white hot stones without injury.

No one knows why they walk on hot stones; moreover, no one knows how they can do it without having their flesh seared to the bone.

This unique skill is possessed only by the Sawau tribesmen who live in four villages on the southern side of Beqa Island.

You might get to see them while you're there.

But you can also see the Beqa firewalkers at Pacific Harbour's Arts Village where you can explore a village by boat or on foot, shop in 45 stores and watch Fijian warriors in an ancient mock battle.

It's not obligatory to be active and adventurous just because you're in Fiji's "adventure" capital.

You might just want to sit and listen to a Fijian.

Fijians laugh a lot.

They are natural performers who pause, gesture and make dramatic faces.

They best display their joy of life in the *meke*, a traditional performance of songs and dances.

A *meke* is just one of many things to see and do in Fiji.



Arts Village crafts



Hot feet in Pacific Harbour



A meke is a good show

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It is simply a good show and afterwards you can tippy-toe off to bed, nicely relaxed.

There will be plenty of time for dancing tomorrow night.

Or the next, when you visit Suva, Fiji's capital, eastwards down the road.

Suva is a fairly typical South Seas seaport, blessed with traditional colonial architecture slightly overshadowed by high-rise offices.

It is a collage of sights and sounds with a spirit all its own.

Established as the capital in 1882, when the seat of power was transferred from the colonial seat, Levuka, Suva still resembles something from the pages of a South Seas novel.

Cumming Street, for example, is lined with British colonial architecture, every portion of which is packed with shops offering duty-free goods, jewellery, souvenirs, clothing and even hot bread.

The city is surrounded by glistening green mountains and jagged volcanic formations.

There are massive shade trees and tropical flowers among its quaint buildings.

The harbour is one of the biggest and best in the South Pacific.

On the seawall, opposite old Parliament House, is the *Grand Pacific Hotel*, Fiji's modest response to Singapore's Raffles and remnants of an era long gone.

The building known as the "GPH" is closed but will soon re-emerge as a *Crowne Plaza*.

Suva's museum of artifacts and oddities includes some interesting remnants of Fiji's cannibal past – and it would be reasonable to assume that not much was left – among them the boot of the late Reverend Thomas Baker, a missionary who went to dinner and became it.

Albert Park, alongside Thurston Gardens where the museum sits, was the landing strip for Australians Charles Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm and their Southern Cross, on the first trans-Pacific flight between the United States and Australia in 1928.

The colonists also introduced golf and lawn bowls and the Suva course and greens are welcoming and not-too challenging.

Fifteen minutes by air from Suva's Nausori Airport is Ovalau Island and Levuka, Fiji's old colonial capital.

In a day in Levuka you can walk the 199 steps up to Mission Hill, have a gin and tonic at *The Royal Hotel*, Fiji's oldest, and, if your sins worry you, visit the Methodist Church, consecrated in 1862, and the Catholic Church, consecrated in 1858.

Suva's cosmopolitan flavour is a blend of many ingredients. It has, for example, its own "smell" of heat and moisture, tropical flowers and the inevitable flavour of curries, the legacy of an Indian population landed by the British to cut sugar cane.

Developments to make the harbour city more amenable to tourists have finished on the foreshore and Suva is a good place for interesting walks, including the central Sukuna Park.

For the tourist visitor, Suva is simple and uncomplicated and a good time to see it is during its Hibiscus Festival from August 18-26. Or anytime.

There is good accommodation at *JJ's on the Park*, *Holiday Inn*, *Tanoa Plaza* or the colonial-style *Suva Homestay*.

Useful links are [www.bulafiji.com](http://www.bulafiji.com), [www.pacificharbour-fiji.com](http://www.pacificharbour-fiji.com) and [www.hibiscus.com.fj](http://www.hibiscus.com.fj).



Suva, South Seas cocktail



Sleepy Levuka



Multicultural surprises

DESTINATION REPORT - FIJI

For further information, contact the Fiji Islands Visitors Bureau in Sydney on (02) 9264 3399 or view its website [www.bulafiji.com](http://www.bulafiji.com)