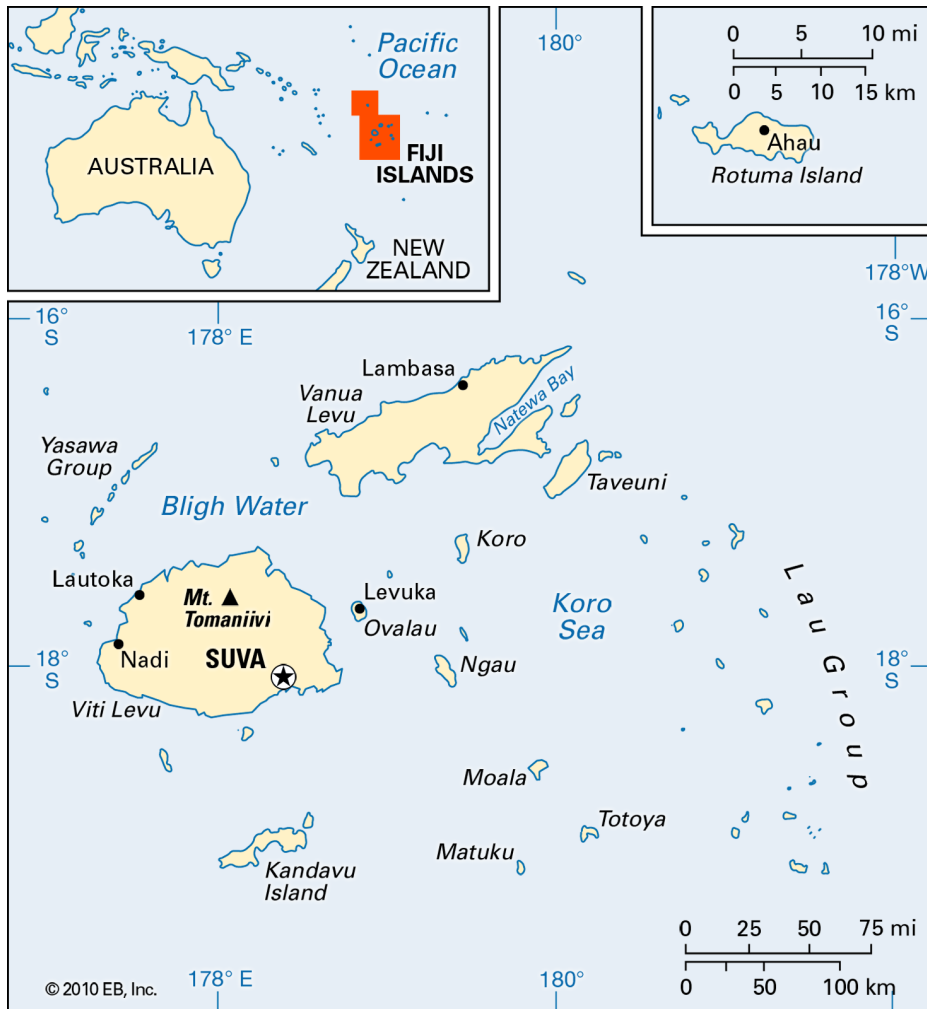


# FIJI



**Official name:** Republic of Fiji

**Form of government:** republic with one legislative house (Parliament [50])

**Head of state:** President Jioji Konrote

**Head of government:** Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama

**Capital:** Suva

**Official language:** English, iTaukei (Fijian), and Hindi

**Official religion:** none

**Monetary unit:** Fijian dollar (F\$)

**Population:** 874,000

**Total area (sq mi):** 7,055

**Urban-rural population**

Urban: 53.4%

Rural: 46.6%

**Life expectancy at birth:**

Male: 69.3 years

Female: 74.6 years

**Literacy:**

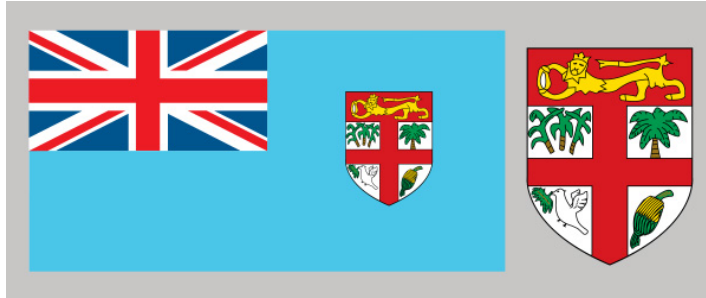
Male: 95.5%

Female: 91.9%

**GNI per capita (U.S.\$):** 4,800

## INTRO

The southwestern Pacific island nation of Fiji was a crown colony of Great Britain for 96 years until it won independence in 1970.



The archipelago consists of some 300 islands and 540 islets scattered over about 1,000,000 square miles (3,000,000 square km) surrounding the Koro Sea. Of the 300 islands, about 100 are inhabited.

## LAND and CLIMATE

The larger Fijian islands are of volcanic origin and are mountainous. The smaller ones are coral atolls. The two largest islands, which make up almost 90 percent of Fiji's land area, are Viti Levu, on which Suva is located, and Venua Levu.



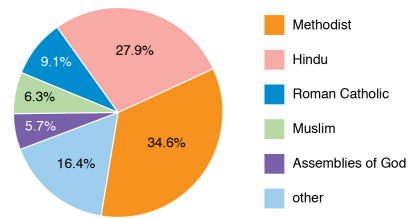
Rainfall is nearly twice and much, averaging 120 inches a year, on the windward side of the larger islands, whose rugged, thickly forested peaks, often rising to more than 3,000 feet (900 meters), block the moisture carried by the southeast trade winds. Fiji has two seasons—a hot, wet period lasting from November through April with the average temperature of 85F, and a relatively cooler, drier period from May through October, with an average temperature of 65 F.

Almost half of Fiji's total area remains forested, while dry grasslands are found in western areas of the large islands. Coconut palms are common in coastal areas, and most tropical fruits and vegetables can be grown. Much of the shoreline is composed of reefs and rocks, while mangrove swamps are found on eastern coasts. There are few white-sand swimming beaches. Most animals, like pigs, dogs, cattle, and a few horses, are domesticated. Mongooses, introduced to prey on snakes and rats, are often seen.

## PEOPLE

Indigenous Fijians make up more than half the population; about another 40 percent are people of Indian descent, most of whom are descendants of laborers brought to work in the sugar industry in the late 1800s.

Religious affiliation (2007)



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(Indians were the majority of the population until 1987 when native Fijians overthrew the government.) There is little intermarriage between ethnic communities. While Suva has a very mixed population, the sugar-producing regions of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu have predominantly Indian populations. On the smaller islands and in less-developed rural areas of the larger islands, indigenous Fijians live in traditional villages.

English, Fijian, and Fijian Hindi were given equal status as official languages by the 1997 constitution. The widely used Fijian language has many dialects; the one most commonly used is known as Bauan Fijian and comes from Bau (Mbau), an island that enjoyed political supremacy at the advent of colonial rule. Most people speak at least two languages, including English and the language of their own ethnic community. Almost all indigenous Fijians are Christian, mostly Methodist. Most Indians are Hindu, though a significant minority are Muslim.

## ECONOMY

Garment manufacture became an important export industry near the end of the 20th century. However, Fiji still exports large quantities of cane sugar and molasses, mostly through the government-owned Fiji Sugar Corporation. Also exported are coconut products fish, and gold.

Tourism is an important industry. Most of the vacationers are from Australia, New Zealand, and North America. The favorite resort area is the beach on the south coast of Viti Levu, between Suva and Nadi. Nadi is the principal international airport. The harbor at Suva is able to accommodate the largest passenger ships.

In rural areas Fijians traditionally live in a communal village society, and about 83 percent of the land is owned communally by about 6,600 landowning groups called mataqali. The Native Land Trust Board, which oversees all Fijian land matters, insures that Fijians have land to meet their own requirements and arranges leases and collects rent for the mataqali.



## **HISTORY**

Fiji's first settlers arrived from the islands of Melanesia at least 3,500 years ago. Traditional Fijian society was hierarchical. Leaders were chosen according to rank, which was based on descent as well as personal achievement.

The discovery of Fiji is usually credited to Abel Jansen Tasman, a Dutch navigator, who visited the island group in 1643. Captain James Cook of England sailed through the islands in 1774. Major credit for the discovery and charting of the islands goes to another Englishman, William Bligh, who navigated the islands after being set adrift in a small boat by the mutinous crew of his ship, the ill-fated *Bounty*. After 1830 Christian missionaries gained influence over natives who had practiced cannibalism. King Cakobau accepted the faith in 1854. European settlers took interest in Fiji as a place to grow cotton and sugar cane, and twenty years later the islands were ceded to the British.

In 1970 Fiji became independent from Britain but remained a member of the Commonwealth. Conflicts between ethnic Fijians and those of Indian

descent have preoccupied the nation in recent times. In 1987, ethnic Fijian, Sitiveni Rabuka and his soldiers led two coups against the Indian-dominated government. He suspended the constitution, proclaimed Fiji a republic, and withdrew the country from the Commonwealth. Constitutions successively adopted in 1990 and 1998 protected the position of ethnic Fijians.

Commonwealth ties were restored in 1997. However, trouble flared again in May 2000 when George Speight, an ethnic Fijian leader, briefly overthrew the government, led by its first prime minister of Indian descent. Speight was later arrested and the elected government returned to power.

**FUN FACT:** The Europeans called this group of island “Fiji” after the Tongan word. The native Fijians called their home “Viti”

**FUN FACT:** In Fijian villages, only the chief can wear hats and sunglasses. The top of the head is sacred, and is not meant to be touched.

**FUN FACT:** To celebrate the New Year, women in the villages join the traditional game called veicaqe moli or “kick the orange.”