

Destination Guide: Fiji

What to know before you go Essential preparation and planning tips Accommodation and transport

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Who is CHOICE? Set up by consumers for consumers, CHOICE is the consumer advocate that provides Australians with information and advice, free from commercial bias.





Travel-size tips

- > Australians can fly to Fiji in as little as four hours.
- The high season lasts from June to September, and then coincides with the Australian school holiday period in December-January.
- > The dry season runs from May to October.
- Visas for Australian passport holders are issued on arrival in the country.
- You can <u>drive</u> on your Australian licence, but <u>car hire</u> may be expensive and hard to find outside of the two main islands, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu.

Know before you go

- Always check the latest safety advice on the region you're travelling to at smartraveller.gov.au.
- Mosquito-borne illnesses, particularly dengue fever, are common in Fiji. Pack repellent and do what you can to minimise mozzie bites.

You may need <u>vaccinations</u>. Check with your doctor as early as possible before you go. Some vaccinations need to be given four to six weeks before departure.

Best time to go

Dry season: May-October **Wet season:** November-April

While the cooler dry season is generally considered the best time to go, the rain in the hotter wet season is only sporadic, so Fiji is open for tourism all year round.

- Average temperatures range from about 26°C in June to about 30°C in January.
- Climates vary across Fiji, the smaller islands generally get less rainfall than the main island, Viti Levu.
- > Cyclones sometimes hit in the wet season.
- > The water temperature can get a little 'chilly' (24–27°C) between June and September. During the warmer months it rises to about 30°C.



- > Fiji has two distinct surf seasons, with consistent 8–12ft (2.4–3.7m) swells between March and October, and shorter swells in the summer between November and March.
- The cooler months bring the best scuba diving visibility, along with cooler water temperatures and stronger winds. The seas are generally calmer and warmer in the summer wet season (cyclones permitting), but the visibility isn't as clear. Plankton blooms can attract whales and manta rays in the summer months.
- If you want to avoid the crowds and higher prices, aim for the shoulder seasons in October or May, avoiding the Australian school holiday period from December to January.
- Australians make up the majority of Fiji's visitors so expect larger crowds during our school holidays.
- Culture

Fijians are extremely friendly, welcoming and easygoing. The country operates on a relaxed 'Fiji time' –

meaning you should leave your stress at home and try not to get annoyed when your meal takes a while to reach your table!

- Family and religion (mainly Christianity and Hinduism) are at the centre of Fijian culture.
- You should dress conservatively and remove your hat when visiting villages, and remember to remove your shoes if invited to enter people's houses.

- Public displays of affection (i.e. more than holding hands) are considered inappropriate.
- Same-sex couples are unlikely to face discrimination, but like heterosexual couples they should avoid making public displays of affection.
- It's insulting to touch a person's head, even a child's.
- Xava is the national drink. It's an 'acquired taste' but locals may be disappointed if you refuse to drink it.
- > Tipping is not customary, however it is appreciated.

Language

Fiji has three official languages: Fijian, English and Hindi.

You may have trouble understanding the Fijian variant of English, nicknamed 'Finglish', however 'our' English is spoken perfectly by people working in the tourism industry.





Fijian is written in the same alphabet as English, so street signs and place names are easy to read, but the pronunciation of some letters is quite different:

- **)** b is pronounced 'mb', as in member
- > d is pronounced 'nd', as in Monday
- > q is pronounced 'ng', as in 'g' in finger
- > g is pronounced 'ng', as in singer
- > c is pronounced 'th', as in father.

Via fijiguide.com.



Health and safety

- The tap water in Fiji is considered unsafe. Drink bottled or boiled water, and if you're particularly concerned about stomach upsets, ask for no ice in drinks and avoid salads that may have been rinsed in tap water.
- To minimise the risk of food poisoning, opt for fresh, fully cooked foods. Unless you're an adventurous eater, think twice about buying fish and meat from roadside markets.
- Water-borne, food-borne and other infectious diseases such as typhoid and hepatitis are a risk in Fiji. Speak to your doctor about vaccinations.
- Mosquito-borne illnesses, particularly dengue fever, are prevalent in Fiji. There's no vaccination against dengue fever. Pack <u>repellent</u> and try to minimise mozzie bites.
- Medical facilities in Fiji are generally not as well equipped as in Australia, particularly on the outlying islands. Hospitals and health clinics may insist on payment of a deposit or proof of travel insurance before agreeing to treat foreigners.

- There is a <u>private hospital</u> in Suva but tourists who become very sick will likely be medevaced to Australia at their own expense (again, <u>travel</u> <u>insurance!</u>)
- > Fiji experiences cyclones, as well as occasional earthquakes which can trigger tsunami alerts. Make sure you know what the safety procedures are in your hotel or resort.
- There have been incidents of violent crime and sexual assault against tourists. Exercise caution and avoid walking alone, particularly in urban areas such as downtown Suva at night.
- For the latest health and safety advice, check smartraveller.gov.au

Do I need vaccinations to travel to Fiji? > Page 7

Tip: have you registered your travel plans with <u>Smartraveller</u> and checked the latest safety advice on the region you're travelling to?



Laws and watchouts

Laws

- > Fiji's legal drinking age is 18.
- It is illegal to be under the influence of alcohol at an airport or on a plane (so go easy on the Bloody Marys on your flight).
- Public nudity is illegal, including swimming/ sunbaking topless.
- Homosexuality is legal as of 2010 but is still not widely accepted culturally.
- Fiji has strict drug laws. Convictions can lead to jail time and hefty fines. Possession of any amount of marijuana carries a minimum three-month sentence.
- If you are travelling with medications classed in Fiji as controlled drugs e.g. pethidine, codeine, morphine) you'll need to apply in advance for approval from the Fijian Ministry of Health.

For road rules, see **Driving in Fiji > Page 14**.

Tip: No matter where you travel, you should carry all medications (even vitamins) in their original packaging, along with their original prescription. It's also a good idea to carry a letter from your doctor explaining what the medications are (using generic names), what they're for and dosage instructions.

Watchouts

- 'Tourist information centres' in Nadi are almost all run by commercial travel agents who will only advise you to take tours or stay in hotels that pay commissions.
- Some masks and tikis sold are unrelated to Fijian culture and are produced only for tourists. If you want to buy souvenirs, do your research on traditional artefacts first.
- > Beware of overly friendly people asking for your name. They'll quickly carve it into a wooden sword then try to sell it to you for an exorbitant price.
- Think twice about buying sea shells many are endangered and there's very little chance you'll be able to bring them back into Australia.





- Taxi drivers may tell you their meter is broken and try to negotiate a fare.

 Technically they're not allowed to do this so if you don't like to haggle, choose a different driver.
- Petty theft is fairly common. Keep your belongings close, or use the safe at your hotel.



Making a complaint

If you fall victim to theft or any other crime, contact the police (numbers below). If you have a dispute with a local business or service and you're unable to reach an agreement, you can direct your complaint to the Consumer Council of Fiji and Tourism Fiji. The Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association may also be able to help.

If your gripe is with an Australian or international tour operator, airline, or booking site, check online at choice.com.au for the usual procedures for making a complaint or seeking compensation.

Emergency contacts

Some of these numbers may not work if you're calling from an Australian mobile phone. Remember to insert the country code (+679).

> Police: 917

> Fire and ambulance: 911

> Fiji Visitors Bureau: 0800 721 721 (24-hour, toll-free emergency line)

Hospitals

Fiji's health care facilities are not up to the standard of Australia's and there are few private clinics. If you are very ill, you may need to travel to the private hospital in Suva or return to Australia.

Suva Private Hospital:

120 Amy Street, Toorak, Suva + 679 330 3404 sph.com.fj

Australian High Commission:

37 Princes Road, Tamavua, Suva +679 338 2211

fiji.embassy.gov.au

24-hour Australian Consular Emergency Centre: +61 2 6261 3305 (from overseas) or 1300 555 135 (from within Australia) or SMS +61 421 269 080.





Visas and passports

Australian passport holders do not need to apply in advance for a visa to visit Fiji for up to four months. You can get a visa on arrival in the country, provided you:

- have a passport with at least six months validity
- have a return or onward ticket.

Visa rules may change. For up-to-date information check with the Fiji High Commission: fijihighcom.com.

Vaccinations

Vaccinations may be necessary before you travel to Fiji. The Travel Doctor recommends you make sure your routine vaccinations are up to date, and consider shots for typhoid and hepatitis A and B. See its

Fiji health planner for more information, or speak to your doctor.

Tip: Some vaccinations need to be given four to six weeks before departure, so get in early.

Phone and internet

Global roaming and coverage

Australian phones that operate on a 900Mhz frequency will work on Fiji's GSM network, but coverage is likely to be patchy in remote areas and on outlying islands. The Mamanuca Islands, however, have quite extensive coverage thanks to Steven Spielberg, who paid for mobile towers to be installed while he was there filming the movie Castaway!

Mobile phone bills can skyrocket easily when you go overseas so check the rates with your telco:

- **>** Telstra
- Vodafone
- **>** Optus
- **>** Virgin

Tip: Switch off data roaming on your phone before you leave Australia. Likewise, switch off your voicemail and ask friends and family to text you rather than calling (you'll be charged if you answer incoming calls).



Local SIM

A pre-paid Fijian SIM is a cheaper option if you're planning to use your phone often. You can buy a SIM pre-loaded with credit, or even rent a SIM or phone for the duration of your stay. You'll find phone shops at the airports and in the towns. Credit can be topped up online or bought at phone shops and convenience stores.

Vodafone, Digicel and Inkk Mobile are on the GSM network, so they'll be compatible with Australian phones. Avoid SIMs from TFL (Telecom Fiji Limited), they operate on the CDMA network so they won't work with your phone.

Tip: The <u>Vodafone store</u> at Nadi Airport sells SIM card starter packs which they will set up and register for you.

Vodafone is one of Fiji's major telcos, but you'll still pay international rates if you use your Australian Vodafone SIM there. Likewise, phones locked to the Vodafone Australia network won't accept Vodafone Fiji SIMs.

Travel SIM

If you'd prefer to be organised before you go, a travel SIM is an easy option, though the rates probably won't be as cheap as with a local SIM. Travel SIMs are available online and from some travel agents and post offices. Check that the SIM you're buying has coverage for Fiji.

Remember: Your phone will need to be unlocked to accept a SIM from another network.

Beat global roaming shock - our guide to using your phone overseas.

Wi-Fi

Most hotels offer internet access, either free or paid,

and with varying degrees of speed and signal strength. Internet cafes and Wi-Fi hotspots can be found in the major cities and some towns, but the further off the beaten track you go, the harder it will be to find.

Power plugs

Standard voltage: 240V

Frequency: 50Hz Power sockets:



type I

Fiji's frequency and power sockets are the same as Australia's, and the voltage is only slightly higher than Australia's 230V, so you'll be able to use your Australian appliances without needing a transformer or adapter.

Money

Currency: Fijian dollar (\$FJD)

You can check xe.com for the latest exchange rates.



Important: Tell your bank about your travel plans two weeks before you leave. Card activity in a foreign country could be mistaken for fraud and you could find your account frozen.

ATMs



Available at the airports and in major towns and cities, as well as at some hotels. If you're travelling somewhere remote, particularly to a small or outlying island, stock up on cash (and hide it well). Remember you'll be charged a transaction fee and conversion fee every time you withdraw money.

Tip: Westpac and ANZ have ATMs throughout Fiji. Australian Westpac customers pay no ATM withdrawal fee at Westpac Pacific ATMs, just a conversion fee.

Credit cards

Credit cards are accepted in most hotels, high-end restaurants and tourist shops (again, you'll be charged a conversion fee) but expect to pay cash on the street and in taxis.

Money changers

Exchange booths be found at the airports, ferry ports, and in tourist areas and some hotels. You'll get a better rate if you wait until you're in Fiji to change your dollars, although exchange rates will likely be higher at the airport and in hotels than in banks or booths in town.

Travellers' cheques

Travellers' cheques are not so common these days, but many banks and hotels in Fiji will still cash them. If you're travelling to a remote area or an island, ask your hotel in advance whether there's anywhere to cash travellers cheques, or whether there's an ATM in the area.

Travel money cards

<u>Travel money cards</u> give you the security of travellers' cheques with the versatility of a debit

card. They can be pre-loaded with foreign currencies, however <u>finder.com.au</u> warns that there are currently no Australian travel cards that accept Fijian dollars. You can still load your card with Australian dollars and wear the foreign transaction fees.

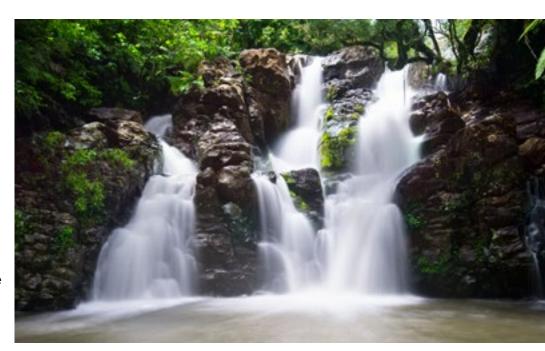
Tip: Carry at least two cards and more than one cash currency (Australian and Fijian). Split your money and cards between separate bags. That way if you lose one, you have a back-up.

Tax

VAT (Value Added Tax) of 15% applies to many goods and services. When you leave the country you may be able to reclaim the VAT paid on some purchases. Hotels and resorts charge a 5% Hotel Turnover Tax (HTT).

Travel insurance

Travel insurance is essential. Fiji has limited medical care, so if the worst happens you need to be covered for the cost of evacuation to an Australian hospital.





Buy insurance at the same time as you book your trip – that way you'll be covered if you have to cancel for some reason before you go.

For more information see our buying guide and to choose the best cover, see CHOICE's travel insurance reviews and comparisons.

Ask your insurer about exclusions that may affect you, including scuba diving, snorkelling and surfing, as well as pre-existing medical conditions.

Be aware that anything that happens to you while under the influence of drugs or alcohol is unlikely to be covered by insurance.

Tips:

- Keep a print-out of your travel insurance details with you at all times while on your trip.
- Share your insurance details with family or friends before you leave.

Handy links and apps

Consider adding these links and apps to your phone, tablet or laptop before you go.

Tip: Try to choose apps that work offline, so they won't chew up your mobile data or stop working when you're in remote places.



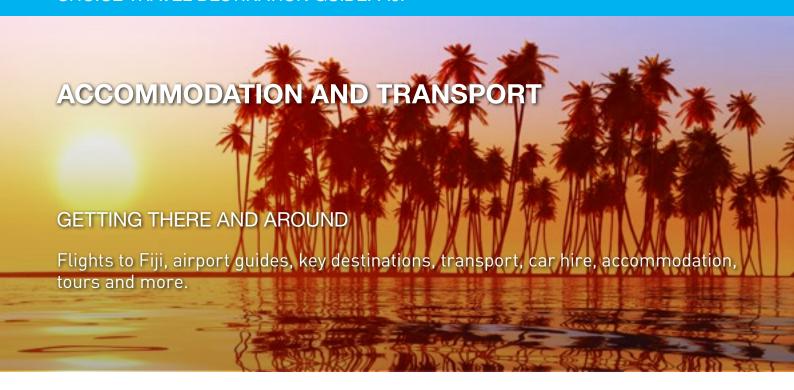
- Travel apps such as Triposo include maps and info about popular destinations in Fiji.
- **Currency conversion apps** help you work out costs in Australian dollars.

Tip: To save a map onto your mobile device for offline use, select the area on Google Maps then select 'Save offline map' from the menu and follow the directions on the screen. Your GPS positioning will still work on the saved map, even when you don't have access to the internet. Alternatively, download the Google Maps app, go to 'Offline maps' in the menu and select a city.

Websites

- fiji.travel (Fiji's official tourism website)
- **)** fiji.embassy.gov.au (Australia's embassy in Fiji)
- wikitravel.org/en/Fiji for crowd-sourced information on culture, travel tips and more (may not always be accurate).





Flights

Flight time from Australia: 4+ hours

- Non-stop flights are available from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane to Nadi International Airport with Virgin, Qantas, and Fiji Airways.
- <u>Jetstar</u> flies from Sydney, Melbourne (Tullamarine) and the Gold Coast to Nadi.
- Fiji Airways flies from Sydney to Nausori International Airport, near Suva.

At the airport

Fiji has two international airports, Nadi (pronounced 'Nandi') and Nausori (also known as Luvuluvu), both situated on the main island, Viti Levu. Domestic flights and boats connect Viti Levu with Fiji's many islands. Only some islands have air strips, but many can be accessed by seaplane, helicopter or boat.

Nadi International Airport (NAN)

- > Fiji's main airport, receiving more than 90 per cent of international flights.
- Situated on the western coast of Fiji's main island, Viti Levu. 8km from Nadi town. 12km from Port Denarau (for boat connections to islands). 192km from the capital, Suva.
- There is one terminal for both international and domestic flights.
- Taxis leave from outside the terminal. All taxis should be metered and include an airport surcharge of \$5 FJD.
- Public buses and air conditioned coaches connect with Suva, Port Denarau and many other towns and villages.
- **Airport shuttles** and **private cars** (with child seats if requested) can be booked in advance.
- Many hotels and resorts offer airport transfers be sure to arrange these in advance.



- > Airport website: airportsfiji.com
- > Car hire > Page 14

Nausori International Airport (SUV)

- > Situated on the eastern coast of Fiji's main island, Viti Levu. About 20km from the capital, Suva. 212km from Nadi.
- Some airlines operate domestic shuttle flights to Nadi (30 minutes) to connect with international flights.
- > Taxis are available outside the arrivals terminal.

- There are no direct bus services between Nausori Airport and Suva, but shuttle buses or private cars can be arranged via your hotel or travel agent.
- > Airport website: airportsfiji.com/nausori_airport

Australian tourists can <u>apply for a visa</u> on arrival at Nadi or Nausori airport.

Departure tax will be included in your airline ticket, so you won't need to pay in cash, as is the case in some countries.

VAT refunds can be claimed at Nadi Airport on some purchases made in the country.

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Key destinations

Viti Levu	Fiji's main island. Home of the capital, Suva, the country's two international airports and many tourist resorts and beaches.
How to get to	
The Mamanuca Islands	Around 15 minutes by light plane or up to an hour by boat from Port Denarau, Nadi. Tip: Many hotels and resorts will pick up guests from Port Denarau (near Nadi) in high-speed catamarans.
The Yasawa Islands	Around 35 minutes by seaplane or two to four hours by boat from Port Denarau, Nadi.
Ovalau and the Lomaiviti Islands	Around 15 minutes by light plane or three hours by bus and boat from Suva.
Kadavu	Around 45 minutes by plane from Nadi and 30 minutes from Suva, or three to eight hours by boat from Suva.
Vanua Levu	Around 40/45 minutes by plane from Suva/Nadi to Labasa or 60/70 minutes to Savusavu, or 6.5/11.5 hours from Natovi (north of Suva)/Lautoka (north of Nadi).
Taveuni	Around 60/90 minutes by plane from Suva/Nadi or 16 hours by boat from Suva.
The Lau Islands	Around 70 minutes by plane (weekly) from Suva to the main island Vanua Balavu. Infrequent boat and ferry services. More info on how to get to the Lau Islands.



Getting around

Tip: Check if you need to pre-book any tickets. Pre-booking transport in Fiji can be tricky since there's no unified national public transport system and many providers can't be found online. However, almost all hotels and resorts in Fiji will offer to arrange your airport transfers for you.

Buses

Most Fijians get around by bus, so you'll find a bus stop in almost every town and village. Timetables are loose, as buses tend to run on 'Fiji time', but locals should be able to help you with the when and where. Air conditioned tourist coaches run on a tighter schedule; companies include Sunbeam and Coral Sun (on Vitu Levu), and Pacific (on Vitu Levu and Taveuni).

Taxis

Taxis are cheap and easy to find in towns, cities, ports and airports. All licensed taxis should be metered -



make sure your driver switches theirs on so you get a reasonable fare. There is no central number to call for a taxi so if you find a driver you trust, take their card so you can book them again. Taxis organised through your hotel or travel agent may be private drivers who charge a set fare instead of using a meter.

Tip: Licenced taxis and minibuses have a yellow number plate.

Domestic flights

Domestic flights link Nadi and Nausori airports with outlying islands. Major



carriers include Fiji Airways, Northern Air,

<u>Aviana Airways</u>, <u>Island Hoppers</u> and <u>Pacific Island Air</u> (planes, seaplanes, helicopters).

Ferries and boats

Ferries and boats link many of Fiji's 320+ islands. Different companies service different routes, and some smaller operators may not be searchable online.



Main operators include:

- **South Sea Cruises** (Port Denarau, Nadi to various resorts in the Mamanuca Islands)
- The Yasawa Flyer (high-speed catamaran from Port Denarau, Nadi to the Mamanuca and Yasawa islands)
- Patterson Brothers Shipping (Suva to Ovalau and Vanua Levu)
- ▶ Bligh Water Shipping (Suva and Lautoka (30 minutes' drive north of Nadi) to Vanua Levul
- Goundar Shipping (Suva to Koro, Vanua Levu, Tayeuni and Kadayu)
- > Venu Shipping (Suva to Kadavu and Vanua Levu).

Making advanced bookings can be tricky – some companies may be contactable by email or phone, or you can ask your hotel to book for you.

Private boats and water taxis can be chartered, but be aware that some may not be up to scratch on safety standards. Ask your hotel or travel agent for a quality recommendation.

Transport tip: <u>rome2rio.com</u> is a great resource for working out how to get from A to B by any means of transport, anywhere in the world (although it may not have information on all local transport services in Fiji).



Car hire

Car hire is available on the main island in Suva, Sigatoka, Denarau,
Lautoka and the Coral Coast, as well as Nadi Airport (Budget, Avis, Hertz, Europcar, Thrifty, Central Rentals, Khan's Rental Cars, and Sharma's Rentals) and Nausori Airport (Budget, Avis, Thrifty, Hertz and Sharma's Rentals). On the island of Vanua Levu you'll find car rental companies in the towns of Savusavu and Labasa. Some major hotels also have car hire desks.

If you're travelling off the beaten track, consider a 4WD. Dirt roads are common in Fiji, particularly outside of Viti Levu.

On smaller islands, ask your hotel about car hire. If it isn't an option, you'll need to hire a taxi or driver, take a boat, or walk (particularly in places where there are no roads!)

You don't need an international permit to drive in Fiji, you can use your Australian licence (or any other licence from an English-speaking country).

Tip: Book with a well-known international car hire company. They're likely to be easier to deal with if you get into a dispute.

Always make sure both you and the vehicle are adequately insured. Check your <u>travel insurance</u> to see what's covered when it comes to car hire – it may save you paying for extra insurance with the rental company.

Tip: The insurance offered by many car hire companies may not cover you for driving on dirt roads.

<u>Ninemsn Travel</u> warns: "High taxes cause rental cars to be expensive. Collision damage waiver (CDW)

insurance is extra and there's usually a "non-waivable excess" amount for which you'll be liable – insurance or no insurance. This can be as high as \$6,000 Fijian, and since many cars on the road have no insurance, you could be charged even if you are not responsible for the accident."

Read more advice in our car hire guide.

Driving in Fiji

- > Vehicles drive on the left side of the road.
- You don't need an international permit to drive in Fiji, you can use your Australian licence (or any other licence from an English-speaking country).
- > The blood alcohol limit is .08.
- > Seat belts must be worn by law.
- Mobile phones can only be used hands-free.
- > It is illegal to eat or drink while driving.
- > The speed limit in villages is 50km/h.

Most Fijians have had very little driver training, so they can be unpredictable on the road. Drivers often break the speed limit, overtake on blind corners, make sudden stops and park in unexpected places.

- Farm animals such as goats, cattle and horses can stray onto the road.
- Villagers sometimes sit dangerously close to the side of the road.
- Speedbumps in and around villages are often unmarked.
- The quality of roads can vary watch out for potholes. You may need a 4WD if you're travelling on unpaved roads.



- There are no cats' eyes or reflectors on roads, and street lights are rare, so be careful driving at night or avoid it if possible.
- Petrol stations are common in the populated areas of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, but make sure you fill up before you go off the beaten track.
- > In the outer islands, petrol can be very expensive.
- Most petrol stations do not accept credit cards.

Accommodation and tours

Tip: Have you booked your accommodation for at least the first night?

Accommodation options range from five-star resorts to eco-friendly beach shacks. Bookings can be made on the usual sites, such as booking.com, booking.com, booking.com, or hostels.com, or you may find a more competitive rate through the hotel's own website (if available).

Check customer reviews on Tripadvisor_before you book.

Tip: Homosexuality is legal in Fiji as of 2010, but it's still not widely accepted. Same-sex couples can search for gay-friendly hotels using filters on Wotif and Lastminute or on travel sites such as purpleroofs.com and globalgaylodging.com.

Tours can be organised in advance through a travel agent or travel booking site, or through companies such as <u>discoverfijitours.com</u>, <u>fijitours.com.au</u> or <u>local-fiji-tours.com</u>. Search Tripadvisor or Viator for recommendations from other travellers. You may find a greater (and cheaper) range of tours and day trips available if you wait until you're on the ground.

Package tours are a low-stress option for travellers who don't want to organise their flights, accommodation and on-the-ground transport separately. For deals, check airline and travel booking sites, travel agents, or local businesses tourismfiji.com and rosiefiji.com. ■



