

# Celebration of the Fijian Language and Culture

## Na marautaki ni noda Vosa Vakaviti kei na iTovo Vakaviti

#pacificstars



### Facts on Fiji | Na iTukutuku kei Viti

- Fiji is officially called the Republic of Fiji.
- The capital and largest city of Fiji is Suva on the island of Viti Levu.
- Fiji is made up of 322 islands spread over 194,000 square km. Around 110 of these islands are inhabited.

### History | Na iTukutuku makawa kei Viti

Fijian legend tells the story of Lutunasobasoba leading his people to Fiji. It's thought the first inhabitants of Fiji came from Southeast Asia. In 1643 Dutchman Abel Tasman and Captain James Cook discovered the Fijian group of islands. Fiji was a British colony from 1874 and became independent on 10 October 1970.

### Population | Na iWiliwili ni lewe ni vanua kei Viti

- About 57 percent of Fiji's population is native Melanesian or Melanesia/Polynesian.
- 37 percent are descended from indentured Indians brought to the islands in the late 19th century by the British to work the sugar cane plantations.
- Of the total Pacific population in New Zealand 4.9 percent or 14,445 identified as Fijian.
- 58.8 percent of Fijians live in Auckland, mostly in the Henderson-Massey local board area.



### Language | Vosa Vaka Viti

The Fijian language spoken in Fiji is a type of Austronesian language and is part of the Malayo-Polynesian family. The Austronesian languages are normally found among islands in continental and Southeast Asia along with islands in the Pacific.



As a spoken language, Fijian was first introduced in Fiji 3500 years ago by the islands' earliest inhabitants, who either originated from an island in Vanatu or from the Solomons. For a long time, it was the only spoken language in Fiji. Early missionaries residing in the country felt it was very important to use the local language in all their work. In 1835, two Methodist missionaries developed a written version of the language,

and by 1840, missionaries had invented a Fijian spelling system and had published various books in different dialects of the language. When it was decided that a standard dialect was needed, Bau Fijian was chosen. Bau was chosen being the prominent centre of political power and influence at the time.

### Culture and Identity | Na iTovo kei na Veika Eda Kilai kina na iTaukei kei Viti

The Fijian Traditional Welcoming Ceremony known in the Fijian language as 'Veiqaravi Vakavanua' is the traditional ceremonial event to welcome an honoured guest and accompanying visitors. It is the embodiment of the Fijian cultural identity and heritage and is a solemn event performed and observed in silence as a sign of dignity and respect.

**Matanivanua (Herald)** – The Chief Guest's herald or spokesman will sit on the ground close to the Chief Guest during the ceremony and will perform all the formal speech-making, receiving and acknowledge the presentation on his behalf.

**Tama** – As the Chief Guest enters the venue he will be greeted by an acclamation – the 'tama' by the assembled Chiefs or group performing the ceremony. His 'Matanivanua' will respond. Apart from the 'tama' it is considered disrespectful to be loud and noisy and strict silence is observed.

**Qaloqalovi** – Presentation of whales tooth (Tabua) – the most highly valued ceremonial item in a Welcoming Ceremony. A 'Tabua' is an ultimate symbol of wealth in the Fijian society, with words of assurances of welcome to the honoured guest or visitors. At the end of the presentation the 'Tabua' is given to the Chief Guest and passed to the Herald for a response.

**Vakamamaca** – The purpose of this ceremony is to provide dry clothing and mats to visitors and the Chief Guest. Its significance is to provide the honoured guest or visitors with something to help dry them in acknowledgement of their journey, often across the ocean.

**Sevusevu** – Presentation of Kava (Yaqona) received by and responded to by the matanivanua. Yaqona will be served to the Chief Guest and his matanivanau.

**Yaqona Vakaturaga** – This part of the ceremony is the mixing of the ‘Yaqona’ and presentation to the Chief Guest. The first bowl of Yaqona is given to the Chief Guest. After the first cup is drunk, assembled Fijians will acclaim ‘maca’ – it is empty) followed by independent ceremonial clapping. The matanivanau will drink immediately after the Chief Guest.

**Wase ni Yaqona Vakaturaga** – Cultural presentation to the Chief Guest (Magiti/food) to accompany the Kava, followed by a response by the Chief Guest’s matanivanua. A baked pig with cooked taro or other root crops are often used.

**Vosa Vakaturaga (Chief Guest)** – Speech by the Chief Guest responding to the traditional welcome and those in attendance.



**Ulivi ni Vosa Vakaturaga** – Formal acknowledgement of Chief Guest’s address with thanks by a spokesman of the people performing the ceremony which is followed by clapping by those presenting.

## Fijian Language Week | Na Macawa ni Vosa Vakaviti

Fijian Language Week was launched in 2013 and led by the Fijian communities throughout New Zealand in partnership with the Ministry for Pacific Peoples.

The language weeks celebrate the Fijian language and Fijian culture by promoting and raising awareness of the Fijian language in the home, in education, at work, in government, in the media, in sport, in the arts, in the church and in the community.

## Pronunciation | Cavucavu Ni Vosa

Fijian pronunciation is similar to English, but with a few changes to the phonetic alphabet. Below is a brief guide which will bring you close to the correct pronunciations.

The Fijian alphabet is made up of all the English letters excluding the letter “x,” though the letters “h” and “z” are also rarely used and primarily are only found in borrowed words.

### Pronouncing Vowels:

Vowels are mostly pronounced as they would be if they were spoken in Spanish, Italian and German:

- A** as in “ah” as in father
- E** as in *error*
- I** as in *me* or *sit*
- O** as in *for* or *toll*
- U** as in “oo” in *food* or *too*



### Pronouncing Consonants:

Most of the consonants are pronounced the same as they are in English, except for the letters b, c, d, g and q.

- B:** “mb” as in *lumber*. Bula is pronounced “Mbu-la”
- C:** “th” as in *father*. My island “Yacata” is pronounced “Ya-tha-ta”
- D:** “nd” as in *Sunday*. Nadi is pronounced “Na-ndi”
- G:** “ng” as in *finger*. Gauna (time) is pronounced “Nga-una”
- Q:** “nq” as in *finger*. Qaravi (to serve) is pronounced “Nqa-ra-vi”

Note letters like k, p and t, are generally pronounced the same as they are in English, except there is not the sound of a slight breath that usually follows, so “t” would sound like “ch” when it is behind the letter “i.” Also, “j” is pronounced like the “ch” as in *touch* and “v” is pronounced with a short “ve” sound, like in *vein*.

### Stress:

In most cases, unless with long vowels, the stress tends to be on the **next** to last syllable.

**Examples:** Ka **u** ta – bring, vi **na** ka – thank you, good. For long vowels, stress is applied wherever it appears.

**Examples:** Ki-**la** – know, ma**ca**wa – sky, week.

### Word Order:

Unlike an English sentence, which goes from noun to verb to object, for Fijian, a verb phrase followed by a noun phrase is normal. In simple terms and for basic learners, it is useful to keep this difference in mind with examples below.

**Fijian:** Sa lako (verb) ki Suva (object) ko Jone (noun)

**English:** John (noun) is going (verb) to Suva (object)

## Key words and phrases | Vosavosa leleka Vakaviti

Ni sa bula vinaka	Greetings to visitors/guests
Bula	Greetings to you two (dual)
Dou bula	Greetings to three or more people (plural)
Va cava tiko?	How are you?
Au bulabula vinaka tiko	I am well
Vinaka vakalevu	Thank you very much/very good
Moce	Goodbye (to someone who is going) / Goodnight
Au lako mada yani	Excuse me (to get past)
O lako ivei?	Where are you going?
Curu mai	Come in
Wananavu	Great
Vosa mai vei au	Speak to me
Au lako tiko i...	I am going to...
Io / Sa donu	Yes / Ok
Sega	No

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