

Day 24 – Suva, Fiji – Tour – Market – Send Off – 20 Oct. 09: The day started with calm sea, partly cloudy and warm but comfortable temperature. Throughout the cruise, so far, we have been pleasantly surprised by warm but lower than expected temperatures in these tropical regions.

We could see the island of Viti Levu and the large city of Suva, the capital of Fiji, along the coastline, as shown below.

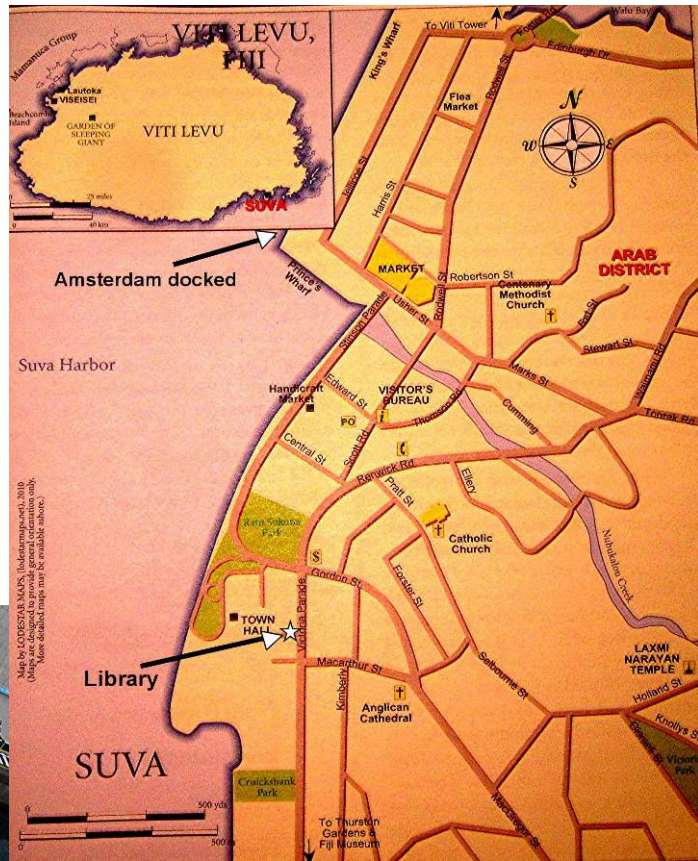


The Amsterdam slowly made its way to the dock in Suva. We had visited here in 2008 and we were happy to see the familiar sight with the welcome sign painted on the roof of the dock building. The Fiji Police Band was already assembled on the pier and we could hear them playing rousing marching tunes.



The map on the right indicates where Suva is located on the Fijian island of Viti Levu and where the Amsterdam could be found at the dock in Suva today.

The welcome of the Amsterdam at Suva was one of the most enthusiastic displays we have seen. The Police Band was the main attraction but the supporting tourist infrastructure was also there in force. Here are some photos we took as the band paraded up and down the pier.



While the local officials checked the paperwork for the visit with the Amsterdam officers the passengers gathered at all the rails of the ship and cheered the band.

About 8:30am the ship was cleared for the visit and passengers could leave. We had not signed up for any tours but were interested in a short drive around the city if we could find one leaving soon. Finding tours was not a problem as sales people were readily available at the tourist info booth with the thatched roof.

We liked the sound of the 1.5 hour tour of Suva offered at Cara's Tours by this young lady shown on the right. We bought tickets for \$30 USD each and waited a few minutes while they sold 6 more tickets to fill up the tour van.

While waiting we were able to get a posed picture of the handsome Fiji Police Band that was assembled nearby.



Soon our guide, Selai, gathered up our group. We threaded our way through the crowd and to our van parked at the head of the pier. Soon we were on our way through the bustling streets of Suva with Selai, shown in the picture on the left, providing a running commentary on what was passing by. She spoke very good English and said she learned it in the public school. She said that all children in Fiji must go to school and that



English is a required subject. The requirement of learning English stems from the time that Fiji was a British protectorate. However, as a penalty for that British influence they now drive on the left side of the road and we had to get used to that hazard when crossing the streets.

The following are some other factoids of interest. People of Indian ancestry outnumber native Fijians by a slim margin but nearly all the land is controlled by ancestral Fijians. There are many cultures on the islands and several of them share the tradition of “Fire Walking” where they walk across a bed of hot stones. Some tribes consider the dash across hot stones as an act of respect for their historical roots. Madras Hindus, of Indian extraction, also practice fire walking, but see the practice as redemption for sins of past lives. Regardless of the spiritual benefits, the ceremony has been thoroughly commercialized for the tourist industry and on our first visit here we attended one of the shows. The fact that people can survive this exercise without serious burns is probably a result of a fast paced walk on well calloused feet and the fact that the hot stones are covered by a layer of insulating ash left by burning of the wood piled on top of the stones. Cannibalism was a practice of Fijians that probably brought the islands the most notoriety. It was a ceremonial thing that was not done as a source of food but was done to humiliate the enemy and acquire the spiritual strength of the person being eaten. The practice has been banned since the 1920s and today the main benefit is that tourists buy “cannibal forks” which are utensil carved in elaborate shapes that were allegedly used to eat human flesh back in the good old days.

The largest employment in Suva is provided by government and the tourist industry. The downtown area of Suva that we saw had an array of prosperous looking businesses such as department stores, electronics stores, and food markets that any large city around the world might have. Two words that every tourist should know are “Bula” meaning Hello and “Vanaka” meaning Thank You.

Back to our morning tour - we drove by the library and we noted this location for a later visit with Barbara's library card. The first stop was at the entrance to Government House, President Ratu Josefa Iloilo's mansion. It looked like an expansive well manicured botanical garden, as viewed from the street. No visitors are allowed and the place was guarded by a uniformed soldier so we just took a couple pictures and moved on.



The drive took us along the southeast side of Suva. There was considerable open space and many large compounds that belonged to schools and universities. The picture below shows a typical building on one of these sites.



There was the usual infrastructure businesses such as this gas station. Selai said that gasoline costs \$1.75 Fijian dollars per liter. The recent conversion rate was \$1.73 Fijian per \$1 USD. At about 4 liters per gallon that works out to about \$4.05 USD per gallon of gas. That's lower than we have seen elsewhere in the South Pacific and close to the bargain rates we pay in the US.



We drove through some residential districts. Here are some photos of typical houses that we saw. This home on the right would probably sell for \$200,000 Fijian or about \$115,000 USD according to Selai.



These more modest homes shown below would probably cost on the order of \$20,000 USD.



We had been driving near the coastline but then we turned inland and drove up into the part of the Suva located on higher ground. There we stopped for a 20 minute break at a business called the Raintree Lodge. This was a hotel-restaurant that was in a jungle-like setting even though we were still in the city.

There was a welcome sign at the entrance, as shown on the right, with a hastily scrawled "Amsterdam" to personalize it a little bit. The setting was beautiful and we spent the time just strolling around the grounds.



A small lake was surrounded by wonderful tall spreading trees.



This photo opportunity with a long tongued native was too good to pass up.



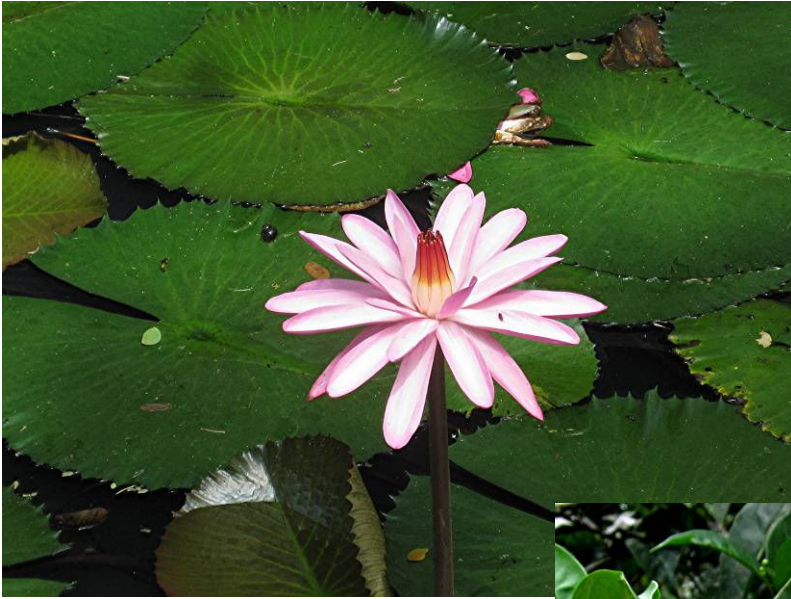
The Raintree Lodge had individual bungalows that were nestled in the jungle.



The restaurant part of the facility had some nice wood carvings decorating the walls.



There were many beautiful flowers on display around this very pleasant place.



The 20 minute stop passed quickly and it was time to climb back into our van for the return trip to the Amsterdam.



We were soon back at the docks and ready to explore the Suva downtown area.

The first order of business was the vegetable and fruit market that was across the street from where the Amsterdam was docked.

This place was filled with all sorts of well presented garden products.



These taro roots first got our attention.





We were afraid to ask if there was any special meaning to this hand gesture by the guy on the right unloading pineapples.

This was a lovely bunch of coconuts.



In this market district there seemed to be a sizeable business in “wheel barrow for hire”. These guys were like taxi drivers waiting for their next job while making themselves as comfortable as possible.



After seeing the Suva Municipal Market we hiked through the central business district to the library. Here, on the left, we got the evidence we needed for the visit of Barbara’s card to Suva, on Viti Levu, in Fiji.



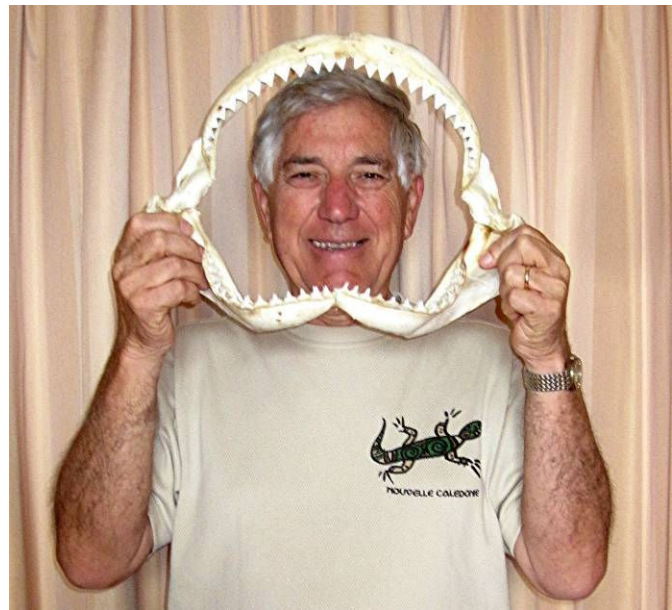
While at the library, we met a friendly gentleman, named Ali, who was curious about our impressions of Suva. We chatted a bit with Ali and then we parted ways as we headed for some souvenir shopping.



At an upscale departments store called Prouds, there were some young men dressed as warriors who put on a good scary show for us tourists as we wandered by.



At the Handicraft Market along the shoreline we managed to find the toothy open jaws of a shark (\$20 USD). This didn't have much to do with handicrafts but might fit the bill as an "unusual" souvenir.



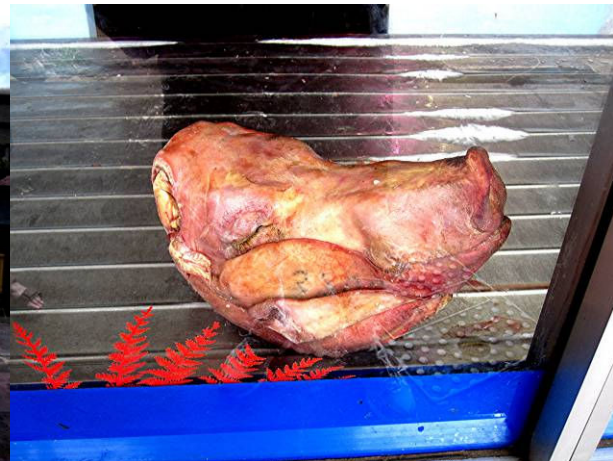
Barbara had been looking to find a cannibal fork to add to her collection. We wandered into a collection of stores called “Little India” and there we found Jack’s of Fiji. Jack’s is



a store that carries a complete range of goods that a tourist and maybe even a normal citizen might want. After looking around at their carvings and other crafty items we had nearly escaped out the door when Barbara spied an elaborate cannibal fork in the window. The big selling point of this item was the unusual fine woven material on the handle. Luckily they took a credit card and we got out of their for \$50 USD.

This purchase pretty well completed our list of essentials and we headed back to the Amsterdam. Our path took us by a meat market with the head of a pig in the window. This got

our attention and as an item you probably wouldn’t see in your average US city. We took the pictures shown below. Apparently the pig’s head is just what you need for preparation of your Lovo this weekend.



We finally made it back to the Amsterdam in time for the sail-away activity. The Fiji Police band had assembled back on the pier and were tuning up. They put on another good concert and we took these pictures.

At first there were passengers standing at the end of the gangway listening to the music. Then the mood got more energetic and some people joined in a dance with some of the band members.



As sail-away approached the passengers had to get on board the Amsterdam. The band continued to play and the ladies of Cara's Tours waved to us as the ship pulled away from the pier.

They really know how to take care of tourists in Suva.

Tomorrow is a day at sea as we sail toward our next port of call, Port Vila, in the group of islands

called Vanuatu. We have passed from Polynesia into a region of the Pacific called Melanesia. More about that later.