

Unit 18: Fiji – Suva, from one village to another

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Facts

Capital:	Suva
Urban areas:	Suva, Lautoka, Nadi, Nausori, Sigatoka, Labasa, Ba
Population:	944,720 inhabitants (July 2009 estimate)
Most populated island:	Viti Levu
Highest Point:	Tomanivi (1 324m)
Language:	English (official), Fijian, Hindustani
Independence:	21 October 1970

Glossary

Soro	a tabua given as an apology
Sevu Sevu	tribute or offering when arriving in a village
Tabua	a whale's tooth given as an offering, tribute or apology
Rara	village square



Figure 18.1. Map of Suva, Fiji From One Village to Another

This chapter is a study of change over time, from the creation of Suva village to Suva city.

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- describe the origins of Suva city
- understand the struggle to retrieve indigenous lands
- describe the changes that take place as cities grow
- describe the difference between a village and a city

Suva City today

Suva is the name of the capital city and is also the name of the district in which the city is located. Suva city is also located on a geographical feature known as Suva peninsula and is part of the province of Rewa. Suva has an important role in the history of Fiji. From the 19th century to the present, the city of Suva has been changing. It is difficult for Suva people today to remember what this place was like in the past.

Suva city today is a site of many cultures. These cultures have staked their claim on Suva by owning buildings, holding festivals, or naming roads, streets and parks. Suva, as a cultural site, has its own history. This history shows that a community was living in a village, a village called Suva. This was the original Suva - a Fijian village.

The legend of Suva

Many cultural sites have myths and legends about them. The legend of Suva says that there is a snake that inhabits the waters of the Suva Harbour, where it keeps watch over the village of Suva. The snake has eight heads and this is why the bay is called Walu Bay. *Walu* means eight in Fijian.

Walu Bay is now the main industrial zone of Suva. For many of our young Fijians today, it is hard to link the city with a legend. The city has become so modernised. Almost all traces of the old Suva have disappeared beneath steel, concrete, glass and tar-seal (see *Figure 18.1* and *Figure 18.2*).

Suva – bures, temples and a moat

The modern city of Suva did not grow out of the original village. The city was created by removing and replacing the original village. The people of Suva village had originally lived in a place called Nauluvatu, a citadel on top of a steep rock cliff rising straight up from Walu Bay (close to where the Australian Embassy is today).

This site was later abandoned and the people of Suva moved south along the peninsula and settled in the area that is today known as Thurston Gardens. A description at this time says that, "Suva in 1843 was a busy growing village, its bures and temples surrounded by a moat". (from Kim Gravelle, *Fiji times History of Fiji*, 1988) This year is important because it was when the Siege of Suva took place. This was one of the most tragic battles that occurred in the history of Fiji.

Suva – the siege

The siege of Suva, described in Kim Gravelle's *Fiji Time's History of Fiji*, saw the clubbing to death of 400 women and children of Suva by the men of neighbouring Rewa. The cause of the conflict between the two sides was the stealing of a pig by the chief of Rewa, Qaraniqio. The pig belonged to the chief of Suva, Tabakaucoro.

After the pig was stolen, just before dawn, the Suva *batikadi* or guerrilla fighters came upon the sleeping camp of the Rewans and promptly killed one of them. The Rewa chief Qaraniqio fled but he was insulted by what had happened. A few months later he attacked Suva. The attack was a failure because Tabakaucoro had been warned that it would happen. The only casualties of this attack were Rewans. Several were cooked and eaten.

Qaraniqio was now bent on revenge. He bribed all of Suva's possible allies with a promise of spoils. When the chief of Suva turned to them for assistance, they would not help him.

The first part of the Rewa attack was on Suva women returning from their plantations. A group of Lomaivuna warriors who were visiting Suva at the time were the secret weapon. They set fire to Suva while Rewa attacked. Clans that were assisting Rewa tried to prevent Tabakaucoro and his people from fleeing but they were able to break through the ranks and fled to Nauluvatu, the site of their deserted village on the cliff top.

There were about 400 women and children. Food began to run out and the men were weak from wounds and fatigue. On April 9, 1843, a herald bearing a whale's tooth (*tabua*) and a Suva chief's young daughter left the cave of refuge to present their *soro* to the Rewa enemies. The *soro* was accepted.

What followed should never have happened. As the Suva men, women and children left their hiding place to return home, a Rewa chief named Kovelevu seized a woman who was carrying a child. When she struggled to get free he clubbed her. The woman's husband grabbed a weapon and the battle was on again.

This time it was an easy victory for Rewa. They captured the four hundred Suva people and clubbed them to death before taking the bodies to Rewa.

The siege of Suva also marked the beginning of one of the longest wars in Fiji – the Rewa and Bau war. Suva is to the west of the Rewa River. Bau is a small island to the east of Rewa. Bau Island was the homeland of Ratu Cakokau, one of the most powerful of Fiji's fourteen great chiefs at that time.

Questions and Activities

1. Which province is the modern city of Suva in?
2. Why is Suva's harbour called Walu Bay?
3. The Siege of Suva occurred in what year?
4. What caused the attack after the Suva people had offered their **soro**?
5. Match a word in list A with a description in list B:

List A

- i) *Nauluvatu*
- ii) *batikadi*
- iii) *Quaraniqio*
- iv) *Tabakaucoro*
- v) *Ratu Cakokau*
- vi) *Kovelevu*

List B

- a) Rewan chief who seized a Suva woman
- b) the chief of Rewa
- c) the chief of Bau Island
- d) original home of people from Suva
- e) guérilla fighters
- f) the chief of Suva

Suva: The new capital

Thirty to forty years later, major events in this part of Fiji would forever change the history and lives of the people of Suva.

In what is known as the "triangle" in modern Suva city there is a stone monument which serves as a historic marker. It gives the dates of significant historical events, such as the arrival of the first missionaries and cession day. The stone itself is on the site of the Suva land sales of 1880. This memorial gives Suva a western-style history.

The most important event marked on the stone is the proclamation of Suva as capital of Fiji in 1877. For the proclamation to take place a series of earlier events had to occur. First, the people of Suva and their village had to be moved to an alternative location about ten kilometres west of their original settlement. Why did this occur?

There is an interesting connection between the European settlement of Suva and the accidental burning of the American Consul's house on nearby Nukulau Island. The great chief of Bau, Ratu Cakobau, was held responsible. The USA placed a huge debt in front of Cakobau for the damage. After accepting the offer of the Polynesia Company of Melbourne, in Australia, to pay this debt, Cakobau gave the company the land from under the feet of the people of Suva. The Suva people were removed to the area known as Lami and their new village was given a name - Suvavou, meaning new Suva.

It did not take long for the Australian settlers to provide Suva with streets, trade stores and wharves. By 1880 Suva had a new shape and an identity of its own. It was not a Fijian town but rather an English one.

Names were borrowed and bestowed. One such borrowed name is Toorak. An Australian settler, Mr Huon, owned land on the rise behind the waterfront. He wanted to name his estate after an exclusive suburb in Melbourne. (Toorak is an Australian Aboriginal word and it means 'where the chief is'.) Toorak it became and is still named today.

Other names were used to give Suva an English atmosphere. The streets in the centre of town were named after English colonial, naval and political leaders - Hercules, Gordon, Des Voux, Macarthur, Goodenough, Kimberley, Carnarvon, Gladstone, Disraeli, Thurston, Gorrie and Macgregor.

The English writer Rupert Brooke described Suva in 1913-1914 as:

“a large English town with two banks, several churches, dental surgeons, a large gaol, auctioneers, book makers, two newspapers and all the other appurtenances of civilisation.” (Deryck Scarr, *Short History of Fiji*, 1984, p.79)

By 1943, according to Mrs J.J. McHugh’s *Recollections of Early Suva*:

“Suva was lit at night by kerosene lamps and the task of lighting lamps was that of Indians. Imported rickshaws were pulled by Fijians. The gaol, known as Na Korovou was divided, one for the Indians and one for the Fijians. Samoans were employed as launderers, but when new labour regulations came into force, they were replaced by Indians and Chinese. The streets of Suva were made of coral and people were fined for spitting - one pound, one spit. A Fijian man by the name of Samisoni whose job it was to hoist the flags when the regular steamers were sighted, fired a gun every Saturday at noon so that all clocks could be regulated.” (Deryck Scarr, *Short History of Fiji*, 1984, p.)

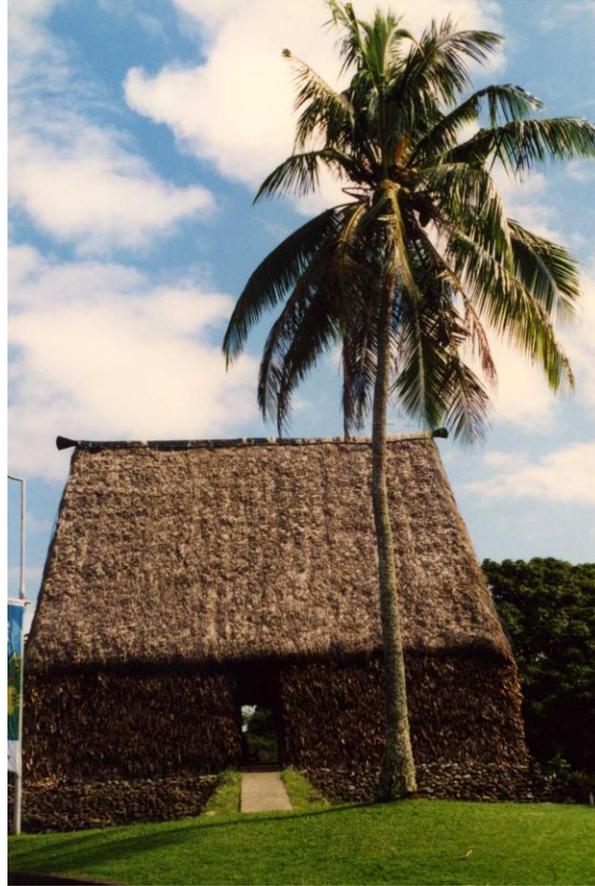
Before 1867, “Suva” had been a Fijian village. But by 1887, “Suva” was an English city.



Figure 18.2. Modern day Suva



Figure 18.3. Government Buildings, Victoria Parade, Suva



18.4. Traditional hut/bure.

Questions and Activities

6. Why is the stone monument at the “triangle” important?
7. When did Suva become the capital of Fiji?
8. Why were the people of Suva moved?
9. How did Suva change after the Australians came?
10. Who else lived in Suva besides Fijians?

Suva – The Site of the 1987 Coup

The 1843 siege of Suva is considered the most devastating war in the history of Fiji.

One hundred and forty-four years later another "battle" occurred. On the 14th May, 1987, not too far from where the original village of Suva once stood, ten soldiers in gas masks stormed into the parliament. The session had just begun at 9.30 am. The enemies this time were not villages or tribes. They were political groups - the government (a coalition of the Fiji Labour Party and National Federation Party), the opposition (who had recently lost the election) and the Army (who were now illegally interfering in political affairs).

Hostages were taken. They were herded out of Parliament House at gunpoint into two trucks that took them to Nabua. As this was happening, other troops stormed the Suva telephone exchange and for the next four hours all telephone, telex and fax services were suspended. This event and the chain of events that followed would change the shape of the nation.

One common belief was that the coup was carried out to improve the lot of the indigenous people. But for the original Suva people, it was not until 1996 that the new Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, granted the people of Suvavou commercial rights over a piece of their original land. This land was in the city near the Government Buildings. The people of Suva returned home, but this time as investors and real estate entrepreneurs.

Suva – a New Village, a New House

It was 120 years since the removal of the people of Suva to Suvavou. Suvavou is now a crowded village on the outskirts of modern Suva city. It has grown into a large village that needs more space for expansion. Some waterfront reclamation (building up shallow sea to turn it into land) is taking place. The entire village has been described as 'not much to look at'. This is true when compared with the grand government buildings and tourist hotels that occupy the centre of the city, which was once their original village.

Meanwhile the modern Suva city has expanded and developed to become a vibrant city. It is made up of people of many races. Its buildings reflect this. One can find Bidesi Flats, Khatriya Hall, Banaba House, Kadavu House, Vanua House, restaurants with all types of food and many religious places of worship. Multicultural or Multi-Ethnic festivals are held throughout the year.

A New Village

Right in the middle of the modern city another new village has sprung up – a new type of village that operates almost like a traditional village. To enter the village one needs a **sevusevu** that may cost up to \$4.00 for an adult and \$3.50 for a child. On entering the village, one will see that it contains six houses and there is even a special area like a **rara** set aside for games. The Village Six Cinemas is similar to the set-up of a traditional village.

Inside the history of the city of Suva, the history of a group of people has been hidden - the original inhabitants of Suva. Today they are known as the people of Suvavou Village. They lost their name and their land. But the name of the building erected in the city, on what used to be their original lands, is an act of revival and assertiveness by the original inhabitants of Suva. Their house is named New Suva House and not Suvavou House.

Questions and Activities

11. When did the coup in Suva occur?
12. Who became the new Prime Minister?
13. In 1996, what did the Prime Minister grant the people of Suvavou?
14. What is Suvavou like today?
15. What is the 'new village' in the middle of Suva? Why is it like a traditional village?
16. In 50 words write a paragraph on 'Who owns the city of Suva?' (or your own capital city)
17. Complete the table on the following page for your capital city:

Name of city		
Local name for this area/ district		
Name of original village on this site		
Date city was proclaimed a capital city		
List three main streets		
i) Name:		Origin of name:
ii) Name		Origin of name:
iii) Name		Origin of Name
List two monuments in the city		
i) Name	Date erected:	Reason erected:

ii) Name	Date erected	Reason erected: