

Departed Germany on the 18th August, arrived in Fiji 20th August. My flight took me from Hamburg to Dubai to Brisbane to Nadi. Our team chose to fly on Emirates as economy class passengers have a 30kg allowance and oversized luggage has quite a generous limit of around 180cm. I spent my first night in Nadi with two colleagues, also doing their master thesis research in Fiji. We eventually made it to Suva; I drove to avoid the excess luggage fees on the domestic flights, as we had a lot of scientific



Figure 1: Savusavu town sunrise, I spend my last 3 months staying closer to Savusavu town

gear, dive gear, and our personal luggage. There are several buses that run services from Nadi to various parts of Viti Levu, Fiji's main island where the international airport is located.

The real work began approximately four months before we departed; this was preparation time for fieldwork. Planning my study with our German and Fijian counterparts, selecting a site and designing the study. The devil was in the details and we had to plan precisely down to pre-ordering materials and double checking what hardware stores stocked in Fiji, and finding accommodation through colleagues in Fiji. What we were not sure we could get we had to pre-order from elsewhere or bring ourselves.

The REPICORE team of which I was a part of were renting two flats in Lami, a town just outside of Suva. From here it took approximately 45minutes on the bus to get to the University of the South Pacific (USP). I moved on to Savusavu, all my travels between Savusavu and Suva were on the Westerland ferry, and Lomaiviti Princess if I was out of options. Domestic flights in Fiji are expensive, and you should expect to pay at least FJD 275 if you book early, from there the price just goes up. Ferries on the other hand will cost between FJD50 – FJD100.



Figure 2: The Copra Shed Yacht Club, where you could join the sailing club

I have a Westpac Fiji bank account, from what I understand it is very difficult for non-residents in Fiji to obtain a local bank account. Prior to leaving Germany I applied for a master card and had all the money that I would use during fieldwork including any funding transferred to that account. I was able to use this account when I ran out of money in my local bank account (Westpac). Unfortunately I was unable to transfer money from my German account to Westpac as the Fiji IBAN was not recognized so I had to resort to withdrawing lump sums from an ANZ ATM as they had the smallest withdrawal fees.

Food at the university is cheap but is not remotely healthy, they love oil and sugar and MSG here so I preferred to save my money for the market where the majority of things are locally grown and cheaper than food that wants me dead. On campus I had access to the library at lower campus but found little need for it, instead I downloaded as many papers and all the literature that I thought I would need while I was still in



Figure 3: Natuvu village, my study site was ~200m from the beach

Bremen. I went through close to 100 scientific papers prior to starting fieldwork, and I continued to go through more during my first 3 months in Fiji summarizing those. It saved my trips to the library and also helped speed up writing my thesis when I had to start on it.

I did not need internet on campus as most of my work was in a remote village on a separate island so I used a “pocket WiFi” from one of the phone providers. Digicel had the best data package for smart phones, while Vodaphone had the best data package for portable 3G and 4G dongles/pocket WiFi.

I personally did not get involved in things on campus, instead I made friends elsewhere whom I would go surfing and diving with. If I had the time I would head down the coast to a backpackers called Beachouse where I could access the surf straight from shore. Longer breaks meant that I could catch a bus to Nadi and visit family and friends there for a few days. Nadi offers a chance to see the Mamanuca and Yasawa island groups, but for me it was a welcome change from the very rural village I was working in. I was just happy to have a hot bath, clean drinking water, and better food. As my research was based at Natuvu, a village across the bay from the township of Savusavu I spend the majority of my time either in Natuvu or in Savusavu. I made a total of four trips to Suva during my time in Fiji. In Savusavu I would go spearfishing and diving during my free time, I also started working part time for J. Hunter Pearls as I have worked with them before during my bachelor studies at USP.

We did not have any introduction courses to the university or its facilities as we were researchers, instead we would have meetings with our local supervisors. These meetings were first to introduce us to the team and provide some background information about where we were working and research plans, after researched commenced they were to ‘touch-base’ to provide updates on how our work was progressing.

I used my PROMOS funding to cover the cost of my accommodation in the village, partly pay for accommodation when out of the village, and for transport costs. Accommodation in the village cost 12 EUR per night, this included meals however I did purchase additional food mainly breakfast foods, fruit and vegetables as meals in the village were not particularly healthy. A return trip to the village was 70 EUR, I had to hire a private vehicle to drop and pick me up,

the journey took approximately half an hour on paved road and an additional hour on gravel road. There was a bus that ran twice a day however it took three hours and I was very restricted as to how much equipment I could carry and how safe that equipment would be. In Savusavu I stayed with family and friends, I did contribute to grocery shopping every week while staying with family and friends in Savusavu.



Figure 4: Village children working on their poses in the morning



Figure 5: My personal best Flowery Cod, spearfishing put a lot of fresh fish on the dinner table!

governmental organizations (NGOs), Suva is home to quite a few major NGOs such as World Wildlife Fund, Wildlife Conservation Society, and Fiji Locally Managed Marine Areas, and they could always use some input from outside.

I was quite fortunate with my project being partnered with Wildlife Conservation Society Fiji, they were kind enough to provide a short profile of me and my project in their annual report. The project has also attracted interest from other NGOs, I hope my work will have some relevance to the commercial sector and attract attention there as well. Following the completion of my master thesis I may have a meeting with the Fiji Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture to discuss a new memorandum on sea cucumber fisheries in the country.

Overall I think returning to Fiji for my Master thesis research was quite a rewarding experience. The results of my research look quite promising so far and despite not enjoying my stays in the village I enjoyed my work and made good contacts that could possibly help me further my career. Biggest of advice I could give for people interested in doing their master thesis research in Fiji is to be very very patient, things do not happen here as efficiently as they do in Germany, have a plan be and keep your plans flexible. If it can go

wrong it probably will, I have had to deal with my research materials not being what I ordered and being unable to replace them with the correct materials, villagers demanding 'good will payments', getting sick and injured, cyclones, etc. Be flexible.

I enjoy being based out of Fiji but returning here for research, now I will likely try to find a PhD project in which I can study abroad and research in Fiji. I have made some promising contacts and for my interests I feel as though Fiji, Savusavu in particular offers a lot of opportunity to do big things.

As tempting as using a bicycle is in Fiji, drivers here are not as courteous to pedestrians and cyclists as they are in Germany therefore it can be a very dangerous option to get around. In smaller towns such as Savusavu it is possible, despite a few large hills. Buses are very cheap in Fiji most bus rides within a city e.g. Suva will cost 0.30 EUR, taxis are also quite cheap a 5.00 EUR taxi ride would get me from my accommodation outside Suva to the university.

There are no student jobs available to foreign students, and study-work opportunities are sparse even for local students. A possible option is to work on a volunteer basis for Non-



Figure 6: Sampling sediment cores for Sedimentary Oxygen Consumption. The weather was rarely this good during the first 3 months