



## Tourism in a Developing Country

### The Case of Fiji

**Jean-Jacques Rousseau's preachings of A noble savage, Bougainville's description of Tahiti as Garden of Eden, the novels of Somerset Maugham, Louis Stevenson or James Michener, even popular scientific reports of Thor Heyerdahl and Gauguin's paintings:**



All transmit the **MYTH OF PARADISE** presented by the Pacific

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#### Promotion of Fiji

The promotion of Fiji as a tourist destination is built upon the perception of the Pacific as a group of islands with a happy and harmonious life lived by friendly and hospitable people. Current plans to promote tourism on Fiji, which are intended to bring twice as many tourists to Fiji by the year 2000, will bring about sociocultural changes that will characterize the islands future.

#### Traditional way of life

The concept of "sharing and caring" was applicable to the islands' societies prior to contact with the outside world but was changed when missionaries introduced European beliefs and views to the indigenous culture. This led to the concepts of a society separated from the outside world and one with the colonially installed "christian tradition", with each concept supporting the other. This "traditional way of life" of indigenous Fijians is promoted as probably the most hospitable in the world. Indigenous Fijians purposely confirm their own identity and fulfill the expectations expressed by the images of the tourist industry in the "South Pacific".

#### Impact of tourism

The tourist industry is one of the factors which causes changes in societies' values based on western images.

Basically two obvious aspects are identified:

- \* The difference between the standards and needs of tourists and locals
- \* The "demonstration effect" of different values and behaviour

Need for financial support arises in the countryside to enable its inhabitants to participate in supplying the expanding consumption of paid goods which tourists demand. This means a transition from subsistence farming to paid labour and therefore migration from the countryside to cities and towns. This leads to changes in the local societies' attitudes, demands and behaviour. Finally hostility towards tourists can also arise. There is always the danger that such negative effects on the islands' social structure might outweigh economic benefits.

## **Economic Background**

Sugar production was introduced by British colonists in order to initiate economic development of the islands.

*Sugar dependency:* At present Fiji's economy still depends on its sugar industry as the main employer and second largest provider of foreign exchange. The need to diversify the economy has been obvious for decades. The world sugar market is saturated and prices are falling. The ACP Lomé Convention (STABEX) secures higher prices for some of the sugar exports on the world market. Despite goldmining, copraproduction, fishing and the garment industry, the only sector with a prospect of a reasonable growth is the tourism industry.

*Tourism industry:* From the mid' 1960's this industry has grown at a considerable rate in Fiji reflecting a worldwide growth of tourism. The colonial government supported this growth by legalising tax free trade of tourism goods and giving generous tax incentives to investments in industry. After reaching the state of independence (1970; 105.000 visitors) the Fijian government valued the tourism industry and decided to continue with the policy since there seemed to be no economic alternatives in sight. The coups of 1987 caused a decrease of tourist numbers but by 1994 the yearly average had increased up to 300.000 visitors (Main Groups: 35 % Australians, 15 % Americans, 15 % Europeans, 12 % New Zealanders, 10 % Japanese). The tourism industry today provides 19 % of the GNP and 10 % of all jobs.

*Planning the future:* The sugar and tourist industry remain the backbone of the economy,

the latter being the only sector with a prospect of growth. Recent plans by the Native Land TrustBoard to further the development outside the existing core areas would strengthen the tourism industry as a counterbalance to existing regional economic disparities on "idyllic, isolated islands".

*Governmental policies:* Government policy has always been very tolerant of the tourism industry's plans regarding the economic benefits gained by its presence. Control and awareness of its sociocultural effects became stricter with Fiji's independence, but even if the development plans have stressed the urgent awareness of sociocultural impacts, the government still supports the expanding sector.

## History

### No outside world contact

**1643-1797:** European discovery: Tasman, Cook, Bligh

**1800:** Sandelwood Traders

**1830:** First Missionaries

**1874:** British Colony

**1879-1917:** Import of labourers from India

**1970:** Independence

--> **Dominion of Commonwealth**

**1987:** Military Coups -->**Republic**

**1990:** New Constitution

## Social Background

The paternalistic intent of the first British governor to Fiji was to protect the indigenous Fijians from the market economy, so that they could develop on their own from "the middle period of barbarism" to "civilisation". Indigenous Fijians had been granted 80 % of all land, but they were not allowed to take waged labour. They were ruled by the colonial government through the Fijian Administration based on a strict tribal hierarchy of chiefs.

*The Indians:* The British colonial government imported 60.000 Indian labourers between 1879 and 1916 in order to work in the sugar industry. Two thirds of them stayed in Fiji. Since the end of World War II there are equal numbers of indigenous Fijians and Indians.

*Ethnic conflicts:* In contrast to indigenous Fijians, Indo-Fijians increasingly participated in education and small scale business, overtaking the indigenous Fijians by doing so. They were regarded as undesired guests and the indigenous Fijians felt oppressed by their economic presence. After the first elections (in 1970) the indigenous Fijian dominated Alliance Party formed the government.

## Facts on Fiji

Name: Republic of Fiji

Capital: Suva (140.000 Pop.)

Size: 18.272 km<sup>2</sup>

Islands: 332

Latitude: 15 S - 21 S

Longitude: 176 E - 178 W

Inhabitants: 760.000 (1994)

Pop. groups: Fijians (49,7%); Indofijians (45,3%); others (5,0%)

Tourists: 300.000 (1994)

In 1987 the Alliance Party lost its office to the Indo-fijian dominated National Federation Party in coalition with the newly formed multiethnic Labour Party. But this new government was overthrown by the indigenous Fijian dominated military one month after election and up to 1990 a new constitution was built on indigenous Fijian dominance.

*Consequences:* Promotion of Fiji is based on an image of an idyllic Pacific paradise. The presence of Indo-fijians disturbs the image of holiday harmony and prompts disquieting questions. 35 brochures promoting hotels, tours or Fiji as a tourist region show 86 photographs of indigenous Fijians while Indo-Fijians are seen on only 3 photographs.

\* Ethnic stereotypes grown out of colonial times are strengthened: The "Indian" is perceived as sour, pushy and individualistic, while the "Fijian" is happy, hospitable and caring to others. According to these stereotypes Fijians are far better "skilled" than Indo-fijians to work in the industry of "hospitality".

\* The tourism industry supports the political aim of bigger participation in the market economy by indigenous Fijians. The tourism industry is favourable to this policy since Fiji as tourist destination represents indigenous Fijians.

\* The chiefly tribal elite is supported by the tourism industry because its political dominance in villages is legitimized by referring to traditional hierarchy. The brochures represent the indigenous Fijian way of life as essentially traditional.

## Perspectives

Generally the Fijian government values tourism as an opportunity to diversify Fiji's sugar production dominated economy. Visitors from abroad and paid labour in the tourism industry seems, however, to have brought changes. Whether it is possible to retain some aspects of tradition whereas others are changed remains to be proved, but seems very unlikely.

*Tradition versus economy:* On one hand the government supports the tourism industry, on the other hand it protects the role of tribal chiefs as representatives of indigenous "Fijian tradition". There is an inherent conflict in the aim of the government to protect the Fijian way of life and pursue economic policies, i.e. the development of tourism which alters this very same tradition.

*Nationality:* The sugar industry still depends on Indo-fijian farmers for growing sugarcane. The tourism industry prefers to employ indigenous Fijians. It promotes tradition as a positive form of life and confirms the claim of the tribal elite who regard fijian nationality as represented by indigenous Fijians only. Indo-fijian traditions are excluded. But the government's concern for the socio-cultural consequences of tourism seem mainly to be a fear of a deteriorating "hospitality" climate which might cause damage to the industry.

*Plurality demanded:* The tourists' searches for harmonious pacific tradition might undermine the current promotion and cause a dissolution of the homogenous perception of the Fijian way of life. Tourists staying in a resort will be aware of the multiethnic situation in Fiji. So maybe the tourists will bring the plurality of local traditions to the surface. The promotion of life lived by people themselves, indigenous Fijians and Indo-fijians, could be the future.

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