

Fijian Customs



Joining a traditional Fijian village is the most exciting aspect of our project! But with such a different culture, customs and way of life, it can naturally be a daunting prospect also. We encourage you to fully immerse into traditional life and make the most of this unique experience. Few people will ever have the chance to visit the community you are about to become a part of and by the end you will feel like this is your home. During the project, you will stay with a Fijian family in the village. You always live together as a leadership team. Accommodations are small, one-story wooden and tin structures. Traditional Bures (grass huts) are still used, but they are rare in Fijian villages today. The usual sleeping arrangements will be sleeping on a mattress on the floor with space to hang your mosquito net above you.

In line with our value 'Humility'- Always keep the following advice in mind; although you are leading a volunteering project and assisting the community, you are still a guest. Never force your views, opinions and your own way of life upon your hosts. The team will be a much wiser and more respected if they take the time to understand the local culture. Once you arrive in Fiji, immerse yourself in every aspect of life and the team will follow. Take an active interest in local customs, values, religious beliefs, stories and age-old legends and if things work differently than they do at home, give thanks, it's why we are there!

There are lots of traditional protocols and etiquettes in Fijian life. By learning a few of these customs, it will ensure you make a great impression from the moment you arrive. Here is your chance to really impress and to immerse into the Fijian village!

- Always take off your footwear (including flip flops) before entering any house, community hall or church.
- Always dress modestly in the village. For women, this means shoulders and knees should be covered at all times in the village, including when swimming in the creeks or sea, and when walking on the beach.
- Politeness is central to Fijian society. Never rush past someone without saying hello. Even if you do not know them say "bula"(hello) or "yadra" (good morning). You need not do this in large towns, but you should in any village and rural island.
- You should remove your hat or cap when walking through the village, and objects such as backpacks, handbags, towels and cameras etc should be carried in your hands rather than over the shoulder.
- Fijians consider it offensive to walk in front of a person seated on the floor, if you do need to pass someone who is seated please try to pass behind them and repeatedly say "tulou" (excuse me) softly.
- Sitting with your legs stretched out in front of you or with your knees up during grog ceremonies, meetings or when eating dinner is viewed as disrespectful. Whilst drinking Kava, you must ask permission to stretch your legs and never point them at anyone or at the tanoa (kava bowl). When drinking grog, men will sit cross-legged, whilst women will sit with their feet to the side.
- Fijians regard the head as sacred so it's advisable not to touch another person's head, especially children.
- It is extremely rare to see any public display of affection between men and women in Fijian society - even holding hands, kissing or cuddling. This would cause immense embarrassment for local people so we ask all volunteers to be very mindful of this.
- If offered Kava (yaqona), clap once with cupped hands, take the bowl, say bula, and drink it all in one gulp. Then hand the bowl back to the same person and clap three times saying vinaka (thank you).
- When sharing a meal, please remember to wait until grace has been said before eating.
- Remember, a Fijian village is a very peaceful place. Please refrain from shouting