



MFS REPORT

Name

Year and term for exchange

Paulina Drugge

P2, 2023

Country for the project

Fiji

Degree programme

Bachelor

## Coral restoration project in Fiji

Since my first few days starting KTH I've always been very keen on either doing MFS or doing an exchange in some way. I love traveling and experiencing new places, and combining it with education and learning more about work in other countries seemed like an amazing opportunity for memories and knowledge I will keep with me my whole life. I found the organization we worked with by researching a lot online, so the country itself was not something I focused on at first, even if going to Fiji of all places was a big plus. The preparations were not much, since I've travelled a lot before I did not have to do any vaccinations, you get a permitted visa on arrival for 4 months when entering the country so that was also sorted out pretty easily. The main thing I did was plan my studies, so I read over 100% in the period before to make sure I didn't have to have any other courses continuing into this period when I was overseas. I also made sure to rent out my apartment during the time to minimize the costs per month.

### Upon arrival

When arriving in Fiji we were met at the airport by one of our colleagues, this experience we had is probably a bit different from many others since we were interns at the organization and not only working with them for our project only. About 1,5 weeks went by when we helped the organization out with their other work before starting with our own project. The preparations for our own project took about a week to do and after that, and once the project was launched, we gathered results pretty quickly. Since we worked with corals which are living animals the results can come even in a few days so we could quickly gather results to analyse within a week even though the monitoring continued a bit longer than that. This meant we had a lot of time to write our report as well which was very nice, therefore we could finish writing it within the time limit and send it in on the original deadline.

### Financials

We were very lucky to get accommodation and lunch+dinner for free since we got admitted as interns at the organization we worked with and they work together with a resort which gives them both accommodation, food among other things for them to help them out with restoring the reefs in front on the hotel. I also had the opportunity to rent out my apartment during the time I was overseas which ended up in me spending less money per month during this trip than I normally do in Sweden. But since we were on the other side of the world we travelled around a bit as well, and the prices in Fiji were higher than I expected, more decent restaurants have the same prices as in Sweden and a lot of groceries too. There are some things they grow here themselves, and some more local restaurants that are also cheaper, but depending on how you travel and what you want to eat it's more or less the same as Sweden.

### Project

The project we conducted was about coral restoration where we looked if a very territorial fish protected the coral if they were put in or close by their territories. We outplanted 10 replicates with the type of coral named Acropora withing every replicate there were 3 spots, one inside the Damselfish territory, one just outside it, and one a bit further away. In total, we therefore had 30 corals that we monitored every day to see the difference in survival rate and absence/presence of predators. The project was created by our contact person and she helped us out with all the preparations while on sight as well. After everything was set out properly, we did the monitoring ourselves. After the project was finished, we had a presentation for the hotel management team as well as our colleagues where we described the project and our results but also our experience living and working with them and if we had thought of any improvements that the organization but also the hotel could do for the future.

### Country

I didn't know so much about the Fijian culture before arriving, but the hospitality and welcome have been amazing. We had the privilege to both work and live with people from here that showed us a lot and we also had many conversations about the differences when it comes to Sweden and Fiji which I

am incredibly grateful for. One of the biggest cultural shocks was the accommodation and food though, we lived in a house that did not have a fully functional kitchen, there were ants and cockroaches inside a lot and tons of frogs outside the house as well. We also encountered rats which was very hard for me to handle. The food we were given was typical Fijian food which was very fun to try, but we had lamb stew with rice almost every day for either lunch or dinner which was not a favourite for me or Ronja whom I was traveling with. Since we didn't have anything except a little oven and a kettle we therefore survived on a lot of 2-minute noodles or rice with soy sauce which was an experience in itself.

### **Leisure and social activities**

Since we were interns we had to officially have the same workhours as our colleagues which was to work 6 days with 1 day off. We did have 2 days of per week though but saved the days up to use in the end to travel instead. This did not make up for very much free time while being on the island we worked on, but the work itself was like vacation a lot of the time since we got to go out with the boat and snorkel in different reefs almost every day or at least a few days a week. We also helped out with activities for the resort guests which was very fun and nice to join in on. When we had our days off we could use the facilities on the resort such as lay by the pool, use the kayaks, SUP, try and get around on the floating watercourse etc.

### **Sustainability**

When it comes to sustainability our everyday life was pretty good, we could walk just barely 5 minutes to and from work and go to the small store and all the other things we did in our everyday life. The organization we worked with works to improve marine life and save corals and they, therefore, had a lot of work where we included the guests for them to follow around and see our nurseries or come talk to us every Wednesday evening, help out with building fish houses or cement cookies etc which made us more involved in practical work to help the ecosystems and improve the sustainable impact each individual can have both on vacation but also every day, as well as how the resorts can work to improve this. When it comes to our project we looked at a future outplanting strategy that can improve the overall health of coral reefs which are incredibly important for the ecosystems in the oceans and for marine life. It increases biodiversity and also protects the land from waves, increased sea levels among many other things. Therefore working with saving them as well as finding ways for them to grow more safely and faster is incredibly important to improve the effects and help with the environmental challenges we are now facing.

### **Other recommendations and observations**

If you are interested in doing something similar to MFS don't hesitate to try, It's such an incredible opportunity to go overseas and learn about work in another country as well as learning about their culture etc. Reach out to older students and ask them questions if you want to know more, it's so worth the extra effort.