

**Country for the project**

Fiji

Degree programme

CENMI, Energy and Environmental Engineering

A field study on enhancing water security and climate resilience in Fiji

Before departure

We have both wanted to go on a KTH Field Study since we first heard of the opportunity. We decided early to focus on Fiji when trying to find a project as it was a country in an area of the world neither of us had ever been in before, as well as being a country unfortunately very affected by climate change, meaning there would likely be many interesting projects available which could help mitigate climate change effects. Another reason we were interested in Fiji was because of earlier students doing MFS there previous years. This meant we had someone to ask questions to and receive advice from regarding anything from the culture of Fiji to some places we couldn't miss when we went.

We found the project through contacting many different organizations in Fiji and finally connecting with one which we felt had a relevant project which we would be able to assist and contribute to. We worked with the organization SPC (Secretariat of the Pacific Community).

As for preparations, the most important part was probably vaccinations. Our local vaccination clinic recommended hepatitis A and B, which fortunately we both already had, as well as typhoid and meningitis as we would be spending some time living with locals. Fiji also requires you to have a permit if you are to study or work there, which was a very long and frustrating process which wasn't possible to solve before we arrived in Fiji, which caused some problems and delays, however everything worked out fine in the end! As English is one of the official languages in Fiji we did not need to take any language courses in preparation.

Upon arrival

We arrived in Fiji at the end of March and had planned for a few days to adjust to the time difference before our planned start of our project. However, because of the uncertainties of our permit we ended up with a couple weeks before we could officially start with our project. We used those weeks to acquaint ourselves with the city we lived in, Suva, as well as doing some research for our literature study. We were very well received and the couple we lived with, one of which worked at the organization we collaborated with, organized a dinner where we met our contact person for the first time, as well as some other colleges. The couple we stayed with also offered a lot of advice and recommendations during our first few days, which was very appreciated.

Financials

We realized early in our planning that going to Fiji for a KTH Field Study were going to get expensive. Just the flight tickets cost us more than the scholarship we received from KTH for conducting the studies abroad. But by planning out our economy, saving up money beforehand and getting some help from the organization we worked at we were able to travel and explore Fiji as well as some other Pacific Islands without getting totally financially ruined.

In general life in Fiji is cheaper than in Sweden. If you buy local food from food markets or local restaurants you can get by pretty cheap. However, due to lot of food being imported from overseas, it

can be hard to navigate what ingredients to use to save up some money. One clear example of this is beans and lentils which in Sweden can be regarded as easy, cheap can food. In Fiji however, the prices for a can of black beans can be three to five times as expensive due to it being imported. Other examples include most dairy products which could be more than five times more expensive than in Sweden. Public transport and taxis are generally cheap in Fiji and we were able to get around without any big expenses.

Fiji as a country is heavily dependent on tourism which means that there is great risk of falling for tourist traps and avoidable expenses. To avoid this our best tip is to avoid taxis in touristy areas and instead go for the local bus as well as getting to know locals for their tips on cheap restaurants, accommodations and activities.

Accommodation

When looking for accommodation we joined a few different Facebook groups and asked for recommendations in them. Fiji is an amazing country with very helpful people, so we received an overwhelming number of messages and offers. We really recommend asking, because Fijians are so happy to help. In the end we were incredibly lucky and were able to homestay for a colleague at the organisation we worked at. They were going on a long trip and needed someone to stay and take care of their animals and house for a month. We were able to use all the facilities in the house, including a fully equipped kitchen, laundry machine and pool. After they returned from their trip we asked if we would be able to stay and rent a couple rooms for a while longer instead of having to look for another place for our final weeks, which was completely fine for them.



Project

Our project was called “Enhancing water security and climate resilience in Fiji” and was part of a bigger project spanning different countries in the South Pacific. We joined in on this project which the organization we worked with were conducting. The purpose was to examine the current hydrological landscape in Nabutautau, a rural village in Fiji, and assess what improvements can be made to increase their water security. SPC will continue with this project in different areas of the Pacific. A typical day during our field studies would be us working at the office, usually writing on our thesis, or assisting with other work regarding the project with the team. We also visited the village of Nabutautau to do our actual research. During these days we made hydrological examinations of their water sources, interviewed and chatted with the inhabitants regarding water habits, as well as participated in cultural traditions. As we worked very closely with a team (which included our contact person) we always felt very supported and always had someone to turn to if we had any questions.

When finished with our project we shared it with our contact person and were planning to have a presentation, however most of the team were in another country with another project so we unfortunately couldn't have our presentation.



Country

Fiji is an amazing country which is home to some of the friendliest people we've met. Everyone greets you with a smile and are always ready with a helping hand if you need it. We always felt safe, however we were advised to take regular safety precautions, such as not walking alone at night, which we followed. The culture is very interesting as many inhabitants have roots in India, however many have lived in Fiji for generations so the cultures may have mixed a bit. It was however very interesting to talk to different locals and see how they perceived the different cultures. Fiji is mostly Cristian with a big Hindu population as well. We didn't experience any big culture shocks, even though the culture differed quite a bit from Sweden. However, as mentioned, almost everyone we met was so open and friendly, so we did not have any negative experiences.

Leisure and social activities

We lived in Suva, which is the capital of Fiji. However, Nadi, on the west coast, is the "tourist hub", where the international airport is, and where a lot of day trips are based from. However, Suva offered some culture and sports, we were able to watch a rugby game, which was very confusing, but the atmosphere was absolutely amazing. Rugby is the biggest sport in Fiji, so it was great being able to attend a game, even though we didn't really understand what was going on. We were also able to see some different parts of Fiji during some weekends. Fiji has a well-functioning bus system around the main island, so it was easy to move around.

Getting to know locals and other internationals the same age as us was hard as there weren't that many activities to attend as there may have been in Nadi. However, as we worked in an office, we got to know

a lot of locals and expats there. When we were able to travel around the island and to different Pacific Islands, we got to know a lot more international travellers from all over the world.



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Sustainability

When arriving in Fiji we struggled a bit to live sustainable in our everyday lives, as we were dependent on taxis to get around and hadn't fully understood the public transport system in the country. As time went by, we did become more and more independent and took advantage of their bus system, travelling together with the locals around the island in the charming Fijian buses.

As already mentioned, we tried to buy most of our food from local markets as it was both cheaper and more sustainable. This allowed us to both try out new foods and locally grown fruits and vegetables but also challenge ourselves with embracing the Fijian food culture.

Our thesis focused primarily on the global sustainable development goal "Clean Water and Sanitation" as we studied the water usage and development of the village of Nabutautau and how to help the community with securing a sustainable water source. Other important SDGs were "Sustainable Cities and Communities" as well as "Good health and Well-being".

Other recommendations and observations

Travel!! If you have the possibility to travel to other countries around the South Pacific, please do! The people are amazing, and the nature is beautiful. We went to Vanuatu and Samoa and are so happy we took the opportunity. We also recommend documenting your trip as much as possible. We went perhaps a bit overboard and made an Instagram and posted every day, but it's not only fun for family and friends back home to see what you are up to, but it's also fun to be able to look back on what you have done.

If you are interested in Fiji or have any questions about KTH Field Studies in general, feel free to contact us at:

arobling@kth.se
ollebav@kth.se

