

26 – Suva, Fiji – Saturday: Because of the International Date Line we skipped Friday, 9 February so today is Saturday, 10 February. We are 16 hours ahead of the Eastern Time Zone in the US. In other words, 8am Saturday here is 4pm Friday, US Eastern Time Zone. We will continue to whack off 1 hour increments as we continue always westward until we arrive back at the US Eastern Time Zone with the correct time, weekday and calendar date.

Amazing!

Today we cruised into Suva Harbor and Suva City on the island of Viti Levu, Fiji.

In the outer harbor we saw a pod of what we thought were small porpoise surfacing and diving. We were informed later that these were tuna fish. We docked at Prince's Wharf and were joined there by another large cruise ship, the Oriana of P&O Cruise Lines.

Suva is the capital and primary seaport for the nation of Fiji which is made up of 322 islands spread across the Koro Sea. The population is of about 50% Melanesian (native Fijian) and 50% Indian descent. Fiji used to be a part of the United Kingdom but is now independent and suffering through some growing pains. They recently had a military coup so there were military check points on the highway and a few soldiers milling around. However, there was never a feeling of danger.

We had a bus tour starting at 9am with our guide Alici. English was not her first



language but she did a good job of getting us through the tour.

Our bus, which was not air conditioned on this hot and muggy day, took us through lush tropical countryside and several rural settlements showing some signs of poverty but not obvious suffering.



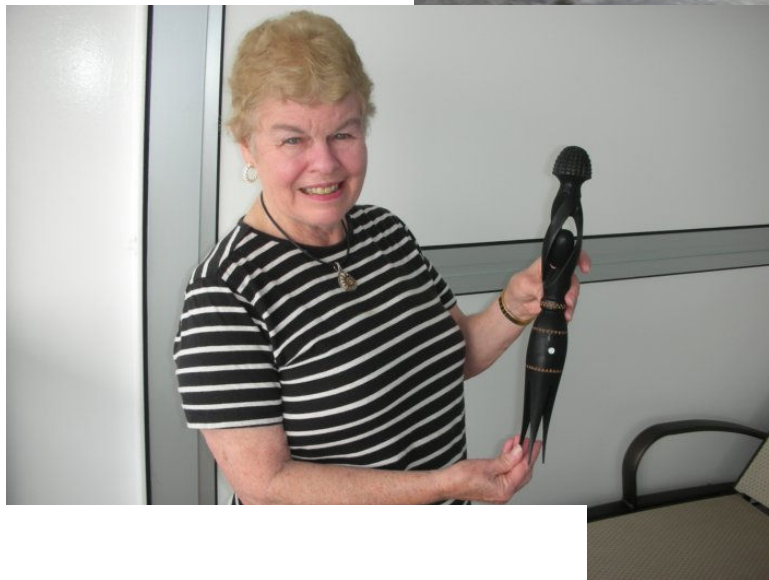
In some communities there were containers for drinking water delivery beside each driveway. Getting an adequate supply of uncontaminated drinking water is a real problem in poor nations and this seemed like a good progressive program.

After about an hour bus ride we arrived at the Arts Village of Fiji and the Fijian Fire Walkers. The purpose of this visit was to give us a chance to examine and purchase

native craft articles and observe a demonstration of the famous Fijian Fire Walkers. At this point we got the feeling that dealing in wholesale tourism, like a couple cruise ships at one time, put a strain on their tourist facilities and staff. Many busloads of the two cruise ship's passengers were dumped off at about 10am to mill around the vendors' stalls and fast food restaurants. There was no clear indication of the time schedule or process for getting all of us into the fire walkers' demonstration.

We used this confused time to buy a couple carved wooden forks of a special design that native Fijians in the past used to eat human flesh. We had been told this was the prime tourist item to acquire while in Fiji. The practice of cannibalism was a normal part of the religious life in many South Pacific islands.

Captured enemies were sacrificed to honor warriors and the strength and spirit of the victim was acquired by the people eating his flesh. Fortunately, these religious practices were replaced by more user friendly Western religions in the 1920s.



We were beginning to wonder what the plan was for getting us to the fire walker demonstration when we were gathered up and herded into a nicely arranged outdoor amphitheater where we saw the fire walker demonstration and enactment of a Fijian dance depicting conflict between two tribal leaders and triumph of one of them. The fire walker

demonstrations took place on the other side of a small lagoon separating the audience from the participants. They had a simulated native village setting with palm frond covered lodge and fire pit. The fire pit had pieces of wood burning before we got there.





The fire walking ceremony was part of the ancient religion and only the priests of the religion had the power to walk on the hot stones without getting burned. Part of the priest's preparation for the exercise was to abstain from sex and eating coconuts for about 10 days. The ceremony started with the priest, dressed in gold grass skirt shouting some blessings onto the fire and then his helpers removed the burning wood to expose a pile of large ash covered stones. Over a period of about 20 minutes the helpers pushed and pulled the stones with wooden poles until they were spread out fairly level. Once in a while they would flick a small stone into the lagoon and it would sizzle a little when it hit the water. Finally they were ready for the fire walking. The priest shouted some more incantations and then carefully placed his feet on about three of the large stones as he made his way across the fire pit. He repeated the act a few more times and then his understudies also tread gingerly across the hot stones.

Here, on the right, is the priest treading lightly across the hot stones.

There are lots of ways to explain how they do this act without injury. For example, there was 15 to 20 minutes of cool down time after removing the burning wood, the stones were under the burning wood and not exposed to the flames and the stones were covered with wood ash that can be a nice insulation. Obviously, this is more of a traditional magic act than any demonstration of divine power but it was fun to see a demonstration of something we had heard about many times.



After the fire walking demonstration there was a large cast of actors and dancers who acted out a native drama involving a dispute between rival tribal leaders. The significance of much of it was lost on us but the costumes and energy that went in to the performance made it enjoyable. Here is one scene.

After the show we boarded our bus and headed back to Suva and the Amsterdam. Once back at the ship we took a few photos of scenes in the market near the dock area.



The bundles of club-like items in the middle of the food market photo on the right are taro roots which are a staple of the diet in this area.



When the time came for the Amsterdam to leave, the Fijian Police Band came down to the docks to give us a musical send off.



Our next door neighbors, Carl and Trudy, threw a sail-away party as we departed Suva Harbor. Here are Joan and Barbara with Barbara holding some cannibal forks that Trudy had bought.





Trudy and Orlin



The passengers of the Oriana line the decks to say goodbye to the Amsterdam.

At dinner this evening the theme was Dutch Country Fair and the ship provided all of us with Dutch style hats to wear for fun. We joined in the silliness as can be seen below.



Bob and Esther



Roy and Gayle.



Just us on the left.

Now you can tell who the real cut-ups are at our table!