

A Day in the Life in Fiji

The Backside of Paradise

Most days in Fiji, I work around the house a bit and cut it off at 3:30 for a beverage and sit on my deck overlooking the ocean and a parade of odd-character shaped clouds on the horizon. I sit with my wife, sipping away, and we point out cloud stories.

I live in the midst of Nature's paradise.



Most people don't want it. They love to look at it and think about it. But they want a mall nearby, a super store for shopping, a hospital, a freeway to the airport, city hookups for water and electricity, and garbage pickup. In short, convenience.

We have no such things here in paradise! We have days like yesterday.

We left the house at 9 a.m. with our mini-van-like Toyota Succeed, back seats down for hauling, stuffed with trash bags, old suitcases and a surfboard bag, broken fans, shovels, rakes, old batteries from our solar-only days, and on top our dirty laundry. We rumble over the mountain on a two mile gravel road, with some cement strips on the steep hills, but scattered pot holes with rebar showing make it a zig zag contest to avoid tire damage. We made it to the Queen's Road, and now it's fairly smooth sailing.

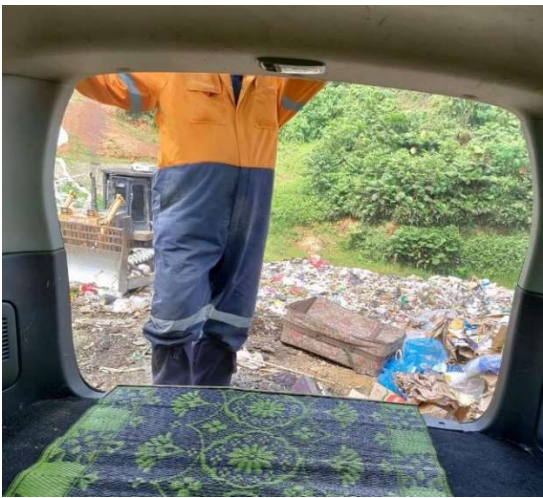
First stop, a 35 minute drive, we pull up to a residential home, the home of our laundry lady. A very kind lady, with an overly friendly dog greets us at her driveway and takes our dirty laundry. She usually takes our garbage too, but today we are making a trip to the dump with all that above garbage. The laundry will be done by the time we finish our mission today.

Next, we stop at the local café for breakfast, a regular laundry day treat. Fully nourished and delighted with the food, we head out to the dreaded dump. We have never done the dump trip before and don't know exactly how it works.

We make a left turn off of the Queen's Road at a sign for Naboro Landfill. We pull up to a truck scale by a guard shack about a kilometer down the dirt road. We don't quite

know what the Fijian lady means by “do you have a reflector?” So she asks, “Is this your first time?”. That clears it up for her and she hands us a bright green jacket with reflector tape on it. She notes the weight of the car and gives us a receipt with the weight, and tells us to follow the road.

We zig zag up the road, following big dump trucks, until they pull up and back up to the edge of a tremendous waste land hole. We do the same, feeling dangerously small between trucks, and a man opens the back of our car and empties it, surprisingly taking everything including lead batteries without a question except to wonder if the cushions are meant to be thrown out. We are done in two minutes and head back on the bumpy road to the guard shack. We pull up on the scale, the lady checks the weight, and charges us \$6.16 Fijian Dollars, probably \$2.86 U.S. We head off, relieved of our burdens, physical and mental, and now we add navigating a trip to the dump to our Fiji skill set.



But wait! There’s more.....to do. We need to get pre-mix gas for a weed-wacker, called a “grass cutter” in Fiji, as well as protective eye wear and grass cutter string for our Fijian lawn man that is going to cut our grass tomorrow. You will not see a lawn mower in Fiji. Fijians cut grass with a “grass whipper”. We need to get more citronella tiki torch oil too, and these things cannot be found except in Suva, a two hour drive down the Queens Road. We use the tiki torches to keep the mosquitos off of our deck at night. Very Important.

We drive through the higglety-pigglety mess of traffic and people in the downtown area, through the construction and detours to the other side of Suva. The tension of driving with aggressive drivers and pedestrians, keeping your head on a swivel, and driving on the “wrong” side of the road (remember – passenger towards the gutter) manifests itself at the end of the day.

We purchase our replacement kettle, gloves, eye wear, grass-cutter string after two store stops. We stop at the third store and encounter a too-often Fijian experience. They are out of citronella tiki torch oil. Two weeks ago, no one could find potatoes.

When they were replenished, the onions disappeared. Onions came back and no citronella oil. A couple of years back a friend brought back a suitcase of nail gun nails from the U.S. because Fiji had no nails. They had a cement drought not long ago. You pull up your boot straps and wait until they import some more. Fortunately, Fiji makes its own beer, rum, and now vodka and whiskey, to bide the time. And the clouds will be there.

We replenish our American connection by purchasing Big Macs at one of the few MacDonalds in Fiji. The place was packed!

We wearily make it back through the traffic, out of Suva and back down the Queens Road.

We stop at the new True Mart, a South Korean addition which stocks way more than the little local Fijian markets. It's big and popular. We get our emergency groceries, milk, potatoes, cheese, bread, and gin and tonic. It's still hard to find mustard anywhere, but we know a secret little hole in the wall place that carries mustard and sauces. You will not find hotdogs. Lamb sausages fill the freezers.

Onward. We get pre-mix grass whipper gas at the gas station. A gas pump is dedicated to pre-mix for grass whippers! Find that in the U.S.! Ok, so you don't want to find that in the U.S.

We finally return to pick up our laundry, 6 hours later. She charges \$37 Fijian for two loads and we always give her \$40. That's \$18.58 U.S.

We don't want to cook dinner when we get home, so we stop at the local café and get a chicken pot pie and a tandoori wrap to go.

We get home, unload and finally sit down with a gin and tonic, on our deck, in front of paradise and re-acclimate.

AHHHH! Paradise. Start the parade of clouds.

