

HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF FIJI

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Period/Year	Key Events
ca. 3500–1000 BCE	People of the Lapita culture, a blend of Melanesian and Austronesian cultures that emerged in the Bismarck Archipelago off New Guinea, settle in Fiji, likely replacing pre-existing Austronesian migrants from oceanic SE Asia.
ca. 500 BCE–1500 CE	Fijian culture develops with distinct clans, warring chiefdoms, ritualistic cannibalism and sophisticated voyaging canoes. Villages form around fortified settlements. Trade networks expand eastward and connect with Tonga and Samoa.
1643	Dutch explorer Abel Tasman becomes the first European to sight Fiji , passing by the northern islands, without landing.
1774	British Captain James Cook sails near the Lau Islands but does not land or explore further.
1789	Captain Wm. Bligh passes through Fiji ('Bligh Waters' channel named after him) during his 3700-mile open boat journey to Timor after the infamous mutiny on the <i>Bounty</i> . European merchants arrive on Vanua Levu for sandalwood trade. (To this day, the identity of the first intrepid European sailors to land on Fiji is unknown; it was likely involuntary as a result of shipwreck). Merchants, whalers, beachcombers and escaped convicts integrate into Fijian society, introducing firearms which greatly escalate longstanding tribal wars.
1804–1830s	Chief Cakobau rises to power in Bau using English muskets; he converts to Christianity.
1835	Wesleyan Methodist missionaries arrive in Lakeba from Tonga and Samoa.
1840	The US Exploring Expedition ('USExEx') led by Captain Charles Wilkes visits and charts Fiji.
1840s–50s	Chief Cakobau consolidates control over western Fiji, while Tongan Prince Ma'afu dominates the east. Tribal conflicts intensify.
1845–47	Conversion to Christianity of key chiefs continues. Tongan Prince Enele Ma'afu establishes influence in Lakeba.
1849–55	Incidents involving US Consul John Brown Williams lead to demands for compensation and US naval threats. Chief Cakobau allies with Tonga. The Rewa revolt is crushed.
1858–62	British Consul arrives. US naval visits escalate tensions. Chief Cakobau offers to cede Fiji to Britain, but the offer is refused due to lack of unified authority.
1865–68	Fijian chiefs form a confederacy. The 'Australian Polynesia Company' acquires land near Suva. Increasing unrest and economic issues lead to more offers of cession to Britain.
1868	Chief Cakobau sells Suva to an Australian company.
1871	European settlers establish a government in Levuka, naming Cakobau as King amid disorder. The Kingdom of Fiji is formed as an independent constitutional monarchy similar to Hawaii - but real power lies with wealthy Australian and British settlers.
1874	Fiji is formally ceded to Britain as a crown colony. Cakobau and subordinate chiefs sign the formal Deed of Cession on October 10, 1874.
1875–76	Measles epidemic kills one-third of the population. British forces suppress rebellions.
1876	The Great Council of Chiefs is established to advise the British on indigenous affairs.
1879–1916	Over 60,000 indentured Indian laborers arrive to work on sugar plantations, radically transforming demographics.
1881	Rotuma Island is annexed to Fiji and the first large Fijian sugar mill is built at Nausori.
1882	Capital moves from Levuka to Suva, where it remains to this day.

- 1897 Hannah Dudley arrives as the first European missionary to focus on the Indo-Fijian community, promoting education and campaigning against indentured servitude.
- 1904 Legislative Council is reformed with partial local elections for European settlers and a small group of 'nominated' Fijian representatives.
- 1916 **End of the indenture system.** First Indo-Fijian is appointed to Legislative Council.
- 1917–18 **Spanish flu kills 14% of population.**
- 1920 All indenture agreements end.
- 1928–29 First international flight to Suva, from Hawaii. Wealthy Indo-Fijians gain voting rights; Indo-Fijian legislature seats become elective.
- 1935–39 Toko Farmers movement forms in Ra Province. **Nadi Airport built as an Allied base.**
- 1940 Native Land Trust Board established under Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna.
- 1951–53 Fiji Airways founded. Queen Elizabeth II visits. Suva earthquake.
- 1954 Ratu Sukuna becomes first indigenous Speaker of Legislative Council.
- 1963 **Indigenous Fijians and women fully enfranchised.** Alliance Party (AP) formed.
- 1968 **University of the South Pacific is established.**
- 1970 **FIJI GAINS INDEPENDENCE FROM BRITAIN** on October 10, after 96 years. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara of the Alliance Party becomes Prime Minister.
- 1972–73 Sugar industry nationalized.
- 1977 Constitutional crisis after opposition party election win. Governor-General calls new election, and the Alliance Party wins by landslide.
- 1985 Fiji Labor Party (FLP) formed with union support.
Indo-Fijian-dominated coalition wins election and Timoci Bavadra becomes PM.
- 1987 **Lt. Col. Sitiveni Rabuka stages two coups to ensure indigenous dominance, proclaims a republic, and severs British ties.** Fiji is expelled from Commonwealth for 'anti-democratic' policies and actions.
- 1989–90 **Thousands of Indo-Fijians emigrate as new constitution favors indigenous Fijians.**
- 1995–97 Constitutional reform leads to Fiji being readmitted to the Commonwealth.
- 1999 Mahendra Chaudhry becomes Fiji's **first Indo-Fijian PM.**
- 2000 George Speight's **civilian coup holds the government hostage for 56 days. Commodore Frank Bainimarama assumes power.** The Commonwealth suspends Fiji.
- 2001 **Elections restore democracy;** Laisenia Qarase becomes PM. Fiji is once again re-admitted to Commonwealth. Speight is sentenced to death but the sentence is commuted.
- 2002–4 Speight imprisoned for life. Supreme Court rules for multi-ethnic cabinet.
- 2005–6 Controversy over amnesty for perpetrators of the 2000 coup. **Bainimarama overthrows the government in another coup,** and the Commonwealth suspends Fiji yet again.
- 2007–8 Bainimarama appoints himself PM, delays elections & chairs the Great Council of Chiefs.
- 2009 Court rules 2006 coup illegal; Bainimarama is reappointed under martial law. New constitution is planned. The Commonwealth upholds Fiji's suspension.
- 2010–12 Assassination plot against Bainimarama is foiled. Martial law is lifted
- 2013 Another new constitution is promulgated.
- 2014 **Bainimarama's Fiji First Party (FFP) wins elections and he becomes an elected civilian leader.** The Commonwealth reinstates Fiji once again.

- 2015–2016 Fijian soldiers who were deployed to British nuclear testing sites (in then-British Gilbert Islands in the late 1950s) receive compensation. Cyclone Winston causes massive damage and kills 44. Fiji is among the first nations to ratify the Paris Accords climate agreement.
- 2020–2021 COVID-19 pandemic: After initial successful containment, health care and vaccination facilities became strained and 2021 saw a surge with 69,000 cases and 893 deaths.
- 2022 Sitiveni Rabuka defeats Bainimarama in election. **Peaceful power transfer ends 16 years of tumultuous Bainimarama rule**, with a robust economic recovery post-COVID
- 2023 Bainimarama suspended from Parliament. National Economic Summit produces 14 resolutions for economic reform. Fiji-Australia Vuvale ('Family') Partnership renewed. Fiji defeats Australia in the Rugby World Cup, boosting national pride and rugby standing.
- 2024 Bainimarama and police commissioner sentenced for corruption - Bainimarama released early. His Fiji First Party deregistered. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu elected president. Record 1,583 new HIV cases, up 281% from 2023, linked to drug use. Economy grows 3.1%.
- 2025 Rugby director removed for homophobic comments. Dengue outbreak in Western Division. Fiji opens an embassy in Jerusalem. 55th independence anniversary celebrated.
- 2026 Population reaches 900,000. Elon Musk's Starlink expands coverage in Fiji.

