

### A Day in the Life of Semi

Written by Tiago Miranda

Hardly outcompeted by its landscape, Fiji has unique features undeniably by any human eye. A complex of landmasses – archipelago – is a group of volcanic islands in the South Pacific, lying about 4,450 kilometres southwest of Honolulu (Hawaii) and 1,770 km north of New Zealand. Nadi, travelling around the main island and exploring further down near Waya Island in friends' presence, is a bliss achieved recently. Deep into Kuata Island, I had the pleasure to dive, explore a close-by protected marine reserve and defy bull sharks at arm's distance – of course; we were protected by the divemasters, though.

Apart from that, I also encountered friendly locals always willing to help. A touristic trip can still be a blocking wall for fundamental social interactions, but this one was different. Walking further down the island, away from bungalows, Semi Sivo was there, doing his routine of 50 push-ups and 30 pull-ups with a splendid smile on his face. He invited us for a walkabout. In his late sixties and a robust native look, he claims, “barefoot is the way to go”.

*“I like to feel the earth I was born”, he says. Our walk leads us to the “resort garden”, as Semi explains, where here “I am in peace and can check what it is available to eat”.*

A few metres up the hill, we step into solid rock with a downhill face to the ocean. Stunning. He points further down south to his hometown, Waya Island. From fearful knowledge of what can happen due to climate challenge, thus relentless love for his island, he thrives daily looking at the horizon. He is pretty philosophical and likes to share his wisdom.



Source: T. Miranda 2019

## ON-SITE

After a few push-ups and a bit of human hood challenge, we continue down the track towards a little forest. Amazed by its diversity, different plants start glaring my curious eyes. Semi knows all of them and their medicinal uses.

A standard firewood used for fencing and fishing rods is a shrub-like tree called **Vai-vai**, recognized as *Albizia lebbbeck*. Along the bush-track, going through a little empty creek starred by solid rock faces, he shows us a **wild lime** or most well known as **wiggy-wiggy** (*Citrus aurantifolia*), more like a lime balm. They use its leaves as fragrance, offering calming attributes and physical relaxation. Another specimen regularly collected by the locals.



Vai-vai (*Albizia lebbbeck*) / Source: T. Miranda 2019



Wiggy-wiggy (*Citrus aurantifolia*) / Source: T. Miranda 2019

Continuing into the walk, it gets easier once we are at the bottom of the hill but still challenging at some parts with narrow paths facing a relatively high fall due to erosion. Further down, we noticed tiny leaves lying on the ground with the shape of two blades and a seed package. At strong winds, it glides great distances for germination purposes. They called helicopter tree or **Tou-Tou**.

It is still amazing to watch, though. Not far from this tree, Semi is excited to show us a liana-like vine called **wata**. We stop, and he tells a story of how they build bows for hunting with this woody vine and tuba vine as a bowstring. After a long pause, he observed a notorious medicinal plant called **Yararo** that stops bleeding after birth, commonly used among their peers.

## ON-SITE

Mesmerizing the bush and noticing the silence for a few minutes made us feel integrated into his world. He did not stop there full of awe and respect, showing us what the forest has to offer. And this is just a little piece of land on a small island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Pointing to a skinny smooth trunk with a few large leaves at the top, it is a **papaya tree** (*Carica papaya*). Semi shows how female trees provide an essential bark that is good for rashes and minor bruises. Also, the male **papaya** has drinkable flowers suitable for stomach aches. Not tired from sharing his ancestral knowledge, he continues with enthusiasm, but my lack of writing skills cannot keep up with his thorough articulation. At least, my brain may hopefully register as happens typically if your interest is profound.



Wata, liane vine / Source: T. Miranda 2019



Wild-passionfruit / Source: T. Miranda 2019

Without misgiving, he reassures the use of **coconut husks**. They are everywhere. Such a bliss, on his behalf, to have several ways to use coconut palms. Nearby, he grabs a **wild passionfruit** and eats with absolute joy. He says that will help his groggy feeling, maybe concerning his hypoglycaemia. He does not stop there. Before dropping us off at the beginning of the track, he invited us once more to share his daily routine on the next day. Excited as we were, we could not say no for an answer.

## ON-SITE

Looking at Fiji as a country, it is frustrating that Indians came for sugar cane business purposes, providing cheap labour whilst increasing deforestation, thus helping the Fijian economy grow. I guess it is a way to sustain a country in the middle of the South Pacific within a capitalistic world.

A good thing that I find after chatting with local friends that the Fijian land laws seem to be down to earth. [There are three types of land titles in Fiji](#). The first one is the freehold land, privately owned and bought and sold between parties but with certain restrictions. It only covers 6% of the land in the country. The other is the state lease, covering only 4% of the land in Fiji. The estate owns it, and the Director of Lands' consent can only lease it. And the most important is the iTaukei land, owned by the units called Mataqali, covering more than 89.74% of land ownership.

All these policies of land possession are probably there to protect and preserve its native and wildlife habitat. Even though a tiny country like Fiji can be thrown around at the hand of the most powerful ones, tourism is necessary to generate income and provide financial stability to its people. It is a delicate situation that can leave environmental reasons aside, where land preservation becomes difficult. Fiji still recognized for its beautiful landscape, friendly people, and stunning waves for the time being. Hopefully, it will stay like this for more years to come.



*South-end of Kuata island / Source: T. Miranda 2019*