



Education Authority Document
Fiji 2020

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to delineate some of the key procedures in place for Operation Wallacea trips to Fiji. When creating the document, reference has been made to the National Guidance produced by the OEAP (Outdoor Education Advisory Panel – see <http://oeapng.info>) in the United Kingdom in addition to guidelines from the Expedition Provider's Association and BS8848 (the British Standard for organising and managing visits, fieldwork, expeditions and adventurous activities outside the UK). Additional guidance has been sought from bodies including but not limited to the HSE (Health and Safety Executive) DfE (Department for Education), AALA, and numerous Acts of Parliament.

This document may be useful for a number of parties interested in the expeditions, in particular but not limited to: The Educational Visits Coordinator (or equivalent) appointed by the school or college; the senior teacher(s) accompanying the trip (the group leader); parents or guardians of the students on the trip; students or other participants on the trip.

2. Structure of the expeditions

The structure of the expeditions is a little different to that with many other expeditions or educational trips that are run by schools. Operation Wallacea are running a biodiversity and socio-economic research programme in the lowland forests of the Natewa National Park and the beaches and coral reefs of Natewa Bay which are both located in the east of Vanua Levu Island, Fiji. These surveys are led by university academics from a range of British, North American and Australian universities and academic organisations. The school groups are joining this survey programme and providing an important part of the survey team by completing detailed forest structure and habitat surveys across the whole forest study area. Figure 1 shows the location of the research sites with Fiji and Figure 2 shows the distribution of the forest sites and marine site within the Natewa National Park. At the Niuvudi forest camp, transects have been installed and sample sites designated. Each camp has a management team and a series of scientists completing biodiversity surveys using techniques such as light trapping, flight intercept trapping, trapping for mongoose, and point counts and mist netting for birds.

After spending their first two nights in a homestay in one of the traditional Fijian villages (see map below) where they will complete a Fiji culture course, the school groups will spend their next 4 days in the Natewa forest camp, which is reached via a short trek (less than 2 hours). The group will participate in the biodiversity surveys and will also complete a Pacific Island Ecology course which has been written by Professor Martin Speight from Oxford University and summarises the last 10 years of published research on Pacific Island ecology.

For their second week the groups will travel down to Natewa Bay Marine Research Centre (2 hours) to complete a PADI Open Water dive training course, or if they are already dive qualified or don't wish to dive, to complete a Pacific coral reef ecology course. This latter course consists of two lectures each day and two in water practicals (either diving or snorkelling) and teaches them how to identify the fish, invertebrates and corals as well as marine biological survey techniques. Note those doing the dive training course will still need to complete the Pacific reef ecology course lectures but won't be able to do the practicals associated with this course.

Details of the travel between the various sites are provided in the transport section of this document.



Fig. 1 Location of forest and marine research

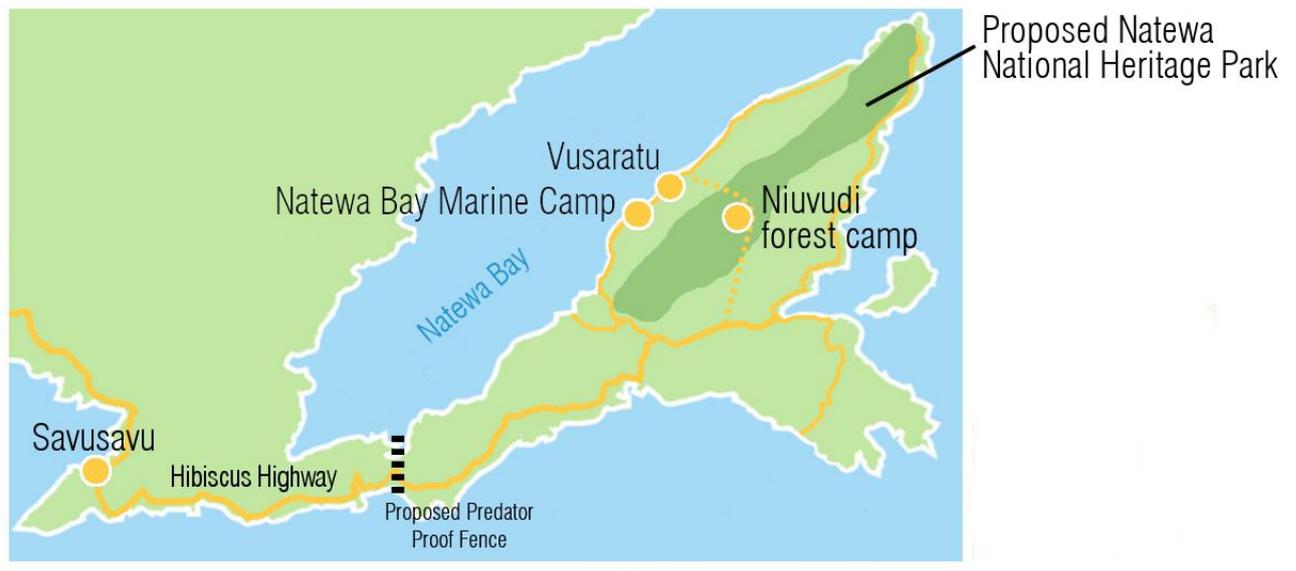


Fig 2. Location of research camp and surrounding villages

3. Booking Process

School and college students have the option to either book as a group, where there is a contract between the school and Operation Wallacea, or as individuals, where the contract is between Operation Wallacea and the participant (and their parent or guardian, if the participant is under the age of 18 at the time of booking the expedition). Once a school group has demonstrated interest in the expeditions, they are given

a full presentation about the site where students, parents and teachers have the opportunity to ask any questions they feel are necessary. Following from this the school, or collection of individuals, are given an agreed amount of time to secure their places on the trip with a deposit. Operation Wallacea's terms and conditions are made available prior to booking, and acceptance of those terms and conditions is necessary before the booking can be confirmed.

4. Inclusion

In line with the Equality Act (2010) Operation Wallacea's policy is to make all reasonable adjustments to enable students of all physical and mental ability levels to participate in the programme. Likewise, participants will not be discriminated against on the basis of any protected characteristic (e.g. gender, race or religion). Any specific needs (such as requirements due to religious customs, or those arising from a physical disability) are discussed with the school shortly after the booking has been made. If it is not possible to make suitable adjustments without substantially jeopardising the quality or safety of the programme for the remainder of the participants, then those students unable to participate would be offered a full refund of any monies paid.

5. Risk Management

Prior to the expedition

A thorough assessment of all research sites and activities are completed before the start of each expedition and reviewed throughout via in-house audits. Risk assessment and management instructions are put in place for general activities (such as trekking), for specific activities (such as the bird surveys) and specific sites (such as Natewa Bay). The risk assessments are published on the Operation Wallacea website and hard copies are available on request, free of charge.

During the expedition

The risk management policies are dynamic and can be amended by the senior Opwall staff on-site should new or unforeseen risks present themselves. All medical incidents and near misses are recorded throughout the season, in addition to the completion of in-house audits. Any major incident (e.g. requiring emergency evacuation or significant deviation from the planned expedition activities) results in an incident report being written by the senior Opwall staff member on-site and statements being taken from parties involved as appropriate. Additionally, the Operation Wallacea Senior Management Team is informed of any major incidents immediately, in case the in-country team should require any further support.

6. Training before the expedition

Operation Wallacea staff work closely with teachers to ensure that pupils are ready and prepared for the expedition abroad. Various joint meetings take place with the Operation Wallacea schools team and the teachers regarding facilities on site and skills required. A training package is sent to each of the schools including the following:

Details of the level of fitness required from the pupils

The level of fitness required by students is outlined in detail in the training presentation. For those students that have limited outdoors experience professional UK based outdoor adventure companies can be recommended to provide this additional training. Furthermore, bleep tests can be sent to the school to be carried out by teaching staff if this is deemed necessary or helpful

Other information

Operation Wallacea also make available a student handbook (downloaded from the Opwall website) containing full details of the facilities at each site, the learning outcomes for the expedition, and the planned itinerary.

Additionally, participants are given a kit list (which is also available on the Opwall website) and some identification guides for the local fauna and flora. The Operation Wallacea staff are always available to talk to any student, parent, or teacher, who has any questions about any aspects of the expeditions, and the preparation required.

Whilst Operation Wallacea aims to ensure that the pupils are well prepared for the expedition, the teachers are responsible for the dynamics and teamwork abilities of the group.

7. Designated Leaders and Competencies

Qualifications, licensing and technical competency

Operation Wallacea is not eligible for a license through AALA (Adventurous Activities Licensing Authority) as we do not conduct licensable activities and because we operate outside of the UK. Many of the activities organised by Operation Wallacea are research focused and so no formal qualifications exist. Wherever possible though, the procedures for ensuring technical competency of key staff are in line with AALA recommendations. Where new staff are recruited (i.e. those who have not worked for us before) the selection process includes a review of the CV or resume, a telephone interview, and obtaining at least two positive relevant references from previous employers. The qualifications or experience levels necessary for the various activities are described below, in addition to the roles and responsibilities of the key staff.

Role of the teachers

The teachers accompanying the students are responsible for ensuring the pupils' travel arrangements from the school until the expedition start time at Vusaratu Village on a Sunday at 1600hrs. For groups that overnight in Nadi the night before the start of the expedition they are advised to stay in the Bamboo Backpackers Hotel. Airport transfers and hotel bookings can be arranged by contacting Operation Wallacea who will arrange for an airport pick-up in a coach and book overnight accommodation for the group. Once the expedition starts the teachers will be travelling with the group and are responsible for pastoral care issues and checking that the safety procedures run by Operation Wallacea are working in full. The end of the expeditions is on a Saturday at 0800 hours at the Natewa Bay Marine Research Centre and the teachers are responsible for accompanying the group back to their home country.

Role of Operation Wallacea staff

Country Manager

The Country Manager is responsible for the overall running of the expeditions and for the safety of the volunteers and staff working on the project. This person has various staff assisting in different aspects of the project. It is the responsibility of the Country Manager to ensure that the correct level of leadership is provided for each of the groups and to check that the designated leaders have the requisite qualifications and/or experience. The project has a very high overall level of staffing (approximately 1 staff member to every 2 volunteers onsite) with up to 20 staff at any one time running the surveys or providing logistical support for the expeditions. The Country Manager is Joe England who has worked on 3 survey seasons in Fiji with Opwall. The Forest Venture Leader is Dave Byng who has run camps for Opwall in Egypt, Honduras and Fiji and was until recently the Deputy Minister of Education for British Columbia in Canada. Sara Carlson who has worked for 8 years running various research programmes for Opwall in Indonesia, Honduras, Dominica and Fiji and she will be the Assistant Country Manager for the marine side.

Leadership during transfers from Labasa to the forest site

An Opwall staff member will be travelling on the buses taking the groups to and from Labasa airport. This staff member will be Cherly Byng a teacher from Canada. On arrival the groups will be briefed by the Assistant Country Managers at their respective sites.

Leadership at the forest camp

Dave Byng who has run camps for Opwall in Egypt, Honduras and Fiji and was until recently the Deputy Minister of Education for British Columbia in Canada will be the Camp Manager for the forest camps.

Leadership for biodiversity surveys

When students join biodiversity surveys from a camp these are led by academics from British, North American, Australian or Fijian universities plus local staff. The senior scientist on site will be Dr Jane Hardwick.

Professor Martin Speight – Martin who has recently retired from Oxford University will be the lead scientist on the research permit. Martin led the surveys last season, but will be at a different Opwall site this summer.

Mark O'Brien – Mark heads up BirdLife in the South Pacific and is based in Suva on Viti Levu. BirdLife have already managed to get the Natewa forests designated as an Important Bird Area and have had funding to get some bird related ecotourism skills training in some villages and developed some low-level tourism activity in the area. Mark has been very helpful and is keen to help with funding applications to ensure better protection of the forests. Hopefully he and his main bird surveyor Vili will be on site for a few days to meet the team and advise particularly on the bird surveys.

Leadership at Natewa Bay Marine Research Centre

The Natewa marine research centre is managed by Matthew Norman, the Fiji Marine Site Manager. Matthew has over 6 years experience managing marine research sites with Operation Wallacea and is a qualified PADI Master Instructor. Matthew is responsible for training all participants in the safety and operating procedures for the site.

Leadership for diving activities

All dive training is led by PADI qualified dive Instructors. Dive training is run at a ratio of 1 Dive Instructor AND 1 Divemaster per 8 students. For qualified divers and snorkellers the ratio is 6 divers per 1 Divemaster.

Use of Guides

A local Fijian guide will accompany groups leaving a forest camp. No formal guide qualifications exist in Fiji, (particularly that are available to the local people in the remote communities in which we work) so the appointment of guides relies primarily on their levels of experience and their suitability gauged via personal references from senior village members. The Forest Camp Manager has the responsibility of employing locals as guides. Each newly appointed guide would have training on how to respond to emergency situations, basic first aid and how to lead a group. Their training follows a 3-stage induction period: shadowing a more experienced guide; then leading a group while supervised; and finally leading a group on their own.

8. Medical Procedures

This section summarises the medical procedures report which is a much more detailed description of the staffing, First Aid facilities and procedures to be followed.

Information and records

All participants will be required to enter their medical details onto the Operation Wallacea data portal. Details of how to log on are sent out upon receiving the booking from the participant. The data is stored securely and is initially only available to certain Operation Wallacea staff members, and, for groups of school students, the teacher leading the group. All medical forms are assessed by Operation Wallacea. The venture leader may seek to contact the participant to gather further information, which they would then enter on to the portal.

Operation Wallacea has purchased Medical and Repatriation insurance cover for all volunteers and staff. Once collected, the medical details of any participants who have described current or past health concerns, or are taking any current medication, will be passed on to Operation Wallacea's insurers. They may then want to talk directly to the participant if they have any further questions, and in some cases may choose to request a premium payment in order to provide cover for any pre-existing conditions.

All medical problems, illnesses, injuries and near misses are recorded at each of the sites. At the end of the season, these data are collated and a health and safety report is completed and published on the website. This report classifies incidents into 7 categories and allows comparison between the expeditions and other activities. The policy of publication of the accidents and illnesses recorded on the expedition is a unique aspect of the Operation Wallacea expeditions and helps ensure the procedures on site are followed fully.

Medical staffing

Operation Wallacea have doctor or accident and emergency nurse at the forest camp throughout the survey season. There is a 24 hour clinic with a doctor and nurse in Natewa village and which is only a 20 minute vehicle ride from both the forest camp and the Natewa Bay marine site.

Medical facilities

A full medical kit is provided by Operation Wallacea which includes the equipment and medications needed to be able to deal with the minor conditions that may be encountered in the field. This reduces the need to rely on general medical care and enable us to continue working in the field.

Research into medical facilities in country are completed prior to the start of the season by the in-country representative and are checked at the start by the Operation Wallacea medical coordinator or senior medical officer. Operation Wallacea has very close links with the clinic in Natewa Village, hospital in Savusavu, and the hospital and recompression chamber in Suva (see Medical and Evacuation report on the Opwall website for more details).

9. Operating procedures

There are detailed operating procedures for all aspects of expedition management. The main measures used to minimise risk are included in the risk assessments, which are published on the website but are summarised below if they are not included in other sections of this report:

Groups leaving camps

At the forest camp there is a whiteboard system operating, where all groups leaving camp have to sign out, with details of the group leader, the group members, the intended location, departure time and estimated time of return. The group leader has to take a mobile phone or a runner so they can communicate with the main base and ensure all groups have appropriate attire (e.g. hats, boots) and have enough water for the trip. In addition, a local guide has to accompany the group. No school group members (pupils or teachers) are allowed to leave any of the camps unless this procedure is followed. Navigation from each camp is fairly easy since there are marked transects and survey sites and maps available of the transect layout at each camp.

Trekking

The guide takes the front of the trek line with the slowest group member immediately behind and the fittest group member at the end of the line followed by the group leader. There are no deepwater river crossings on any of the trails, but wading through shallow streams may be necessary on certain trails. These shallow water crossings will be led by experienced field guides at the beginning and end of the trek line.

Diving

All SCUBA diving follows protocols that are more conservative than PADI procedures. All training dives are completed with a ratio of 1 Dive Instructor plus 1 Divemaster to a group of no more than 8 students. All qualified divers are accompanied by a Divemaster at a ratio of 1:6. Maximum diving depth is 18m, maximum dive time is 50 minutes and all divers have to perform a 5 minute safety stop at 5m during their ascent. Surface interval time must be sufficient to return all divers to pressure group A. No night diving is allowed

for school group members unless they are already a qualified Advanced Open Water diver. If one or more of the group wish to undertake the Advanced Open Water dive training course they will need to do one dive to no deeper than 30m as part of the course. This dive would need to be completed as the first dive of the day and only one additional dive would be permitted that day. These restrictions mean that all divers are well within the limits allowed for no-decompression recreational diving by PADI.

Snorkelling and swimming

No snorkelling is allowed unless accompanied by a Divemaster and carrying an inflated SMB. The Divemaster will ensure the group stop every 2 minutes and look around them for boats. Swimming is only allowed close to shore away from boat traffic, and under the supervision of a Divemaster or similarly qualified water sports safety individual.

Alcohol

Alcohol is not consumed regularly amongst traditional villages in and around Natewa, and so alcohol will not be available at either the forest or marine sites.

10. Emergency procedures

This section summarises the emergency procedures report which is a much more detailed description of the procedures used at each of the sites.

Training of staff

Carefully planned evacuation protocols are in place in all of the sites in Fiji and are designed with the worst-case scenario in mind. All staff will have training on evacuation procedures and protocols are rehearsed prior to the expeditions starting.

Emergency levels

Operation Wallacea has 3 levels of evacuation: **Emergency** (requiring the fastest possible transfer, usually by air, from the forest site and marine site to Colonial War Memorial Hospital in Suva), **High Priority** (requiring the patient to be moved at the fastest speed possible by land and/or sea and/or non-chartered air to hospital facilities in Savusavu or Suva) or **Medium Priority** (requiring the patient to be moved as quickly as possible without the need to hire special vehicles or boats to the nearest appropriate medical facilities).

In all Emergency or High Priority cases where a patient is being transferred to medical facilities they are accompanied by the relevant medical officer or someone appointed by the medical officer as fit to accompany the patients. The absence of the medical officer from the site whilst the patient is accompanied to the hospital will require the suspension of all activities at the site until they return. In the case of a Medium Priority evacuation (e.g. transfer to a hospital for a confirmatory X-ray) another suitable staff member other than the medical officer may be nominated to accompany the patient.

11. Insurance

Operation Wallacea has purchased a comprehensive travel insurance policy on behalf of all of its participants which includes personal property, cancellation, curtailment and rearrangement cover as well as unlimited overseas medical and repatriation expenses. Operation Wallacea prepare detailed evacuation plans which are passed to insurers so that any Medivac planes and hospitals likely to be used during an evacuation can be contracted in advance and if there is a need for an evacuation then there are no delays. In addition to this, Operation Wallacea have comprehensive combined liability insurance with up to £10,000,000 for public/product liability.

12. Safeguarding and Child Protection

We endeavour to ensure that all school students participating in our activities are safe in accordance with the Protection of Children Act (1989 and 2004). This is done a number of ways as outlined below. It is important to note that it is not possible, practical, and in many cases useful, to obtain government supported vetting checks (such as Disclosure and Barring Service) for all staff that students will come into contact with during their time on the expedition. As such Operation Wallacea adopts the following policies where vetting service checks are included where appropriate amongst other safeguarding methods, but are not the sole precaution taken

Staff who work for Operation Wallacea in the UK, and then lead the various expeditions around the World, are subject to an enhanced DBS check. All locations where students are sleeping have a DBS checked staff member in attendance. DBS and other vetting service checks are included where applicable amongst other staff team members. The teachers accompanying these school groups will, at the responsibility of their employer, be vetted through the DBS (or national equivalent system if one is available), and whilst on expedition will stay with the students overnight at each location.

All medical staff are also required to be checked and will have had enhanced checks completed by either their University or place of work. Operation Wallacea use a copy of these as part of the recruitment process of medics.

All Operation Wallacea staff in the field are required to sign a code of conduct before they are employed. The Code of Conduct commits each staff member to not entering into relationships with school volunteers as well as conformity to restrictions on alcohol use and a complete ban on drug abuse. Operation Wallacea will dismiss staff that do not follow the code of conduct.

Any complaint by a school pupil about inappropriate behaviour from any staff member or other student will be treated as a formal complaint and documented. The accompanying teacher will be informed immediately and together with the senior Operation Wallacea staff member on site will investigate the complaint. If the complaint is upheld then any individuals involved will be dismissed from the expedition and a police file created if the incident was serious enough.

13. Communications

Forest site and camps

There are satellite GPS messengers at the forest camp and with some of the forest survey teams, so communication is by text messaging. The terrain is too hilly for walkie talkies to work properly and there is patchy mobile phone coverage along the transects. In emergencies the local guide will be a runner back to the base camp

Marine site

There is mobile phone coverage at the Natewa Bay marine site and each boat also carries a mobile phone.

Transfers

All bus and vehicle transfers have cell phones with the drivers and with the accompanying staff member.

14. Transport

All transport arrangements conducted by Operation Wallacea in the field are subject to stringent protocols. Transport used to move pupils around Fiji have been assessed by the Operations Manager and his team in Fiji and only reputable companies with an excellent safety record are used.

Buses

All buses used on arrival transfers and movements between the forest and marine sides are contracted from registered companies with English speaking staff and handphone communications. A pre-departure vehicle check is carried out which includes checking fluid levels on each of the buses before they are allowed to depart with volunteers. An Opwall staff member is present on all transportations to ensure that drivers conform to safe procedures such as no speeding.

Dive and research boats at the Natewa Bay Marine Research centre

There is a whiteboard system operating at the marine site, so that all boats leaving the centre have to sign out and complete various safety checks (presence of life jackets, oxygen, First Aid kits, radio test etc). The whiteboard contains details of where each boat has gone and the estimated return time. The Marine Research Centre are in mobile phone contact with each of the boats.

15. Accommodation and Camp Security

Natewa forest camp

Accommodation is in tents. Operation Wallacea policy is that only single sex accommodation is allowed for school pupils. The tents are situated in the heart of the camp with teacher accommodation located nearby. All students are made aware of where each staff member is located including medical staff in case of the event of an emergency during the night.

Village homestays

The groups will stay with local families. All rooms are single sex with three or four guests per room. Medical and bathroom facilities are shared with the hosting family, though prior to the season Operation Wallacea teams conduct a full assessment of the facilities to ensure that they are safe, clean and have acceptable levels of privacy. The villages are all extremely safe and there is almost no through traffic or visitors, making it an ideal location to take groups.

All students are made aware of where each staff member is located including medical staff in the event of an emergency during the night.

Natewa Bay marine camp

Accommodation is in tents near the beach. Operation Wallacea policy is that only single sex accommodation is allowed for school pupils. Security guards will be posted at both ends of the camp.

16. Integrity and Cultural Aspects of the Expedition

The model of conservation used by Operation Wallacea is strongly rooted in principles of suitable economic growth in areas whose biodiversity is under threat. This means that huge efforts are made to ensure that conservation is tied to the development of alternative income sources to, for example, logging and hunting. There is strong local support for the projects in all the communities in which the school groups will be staying.