

IMPACT

Fiji Tourism Development Program in Vanua Levu

Tourism that lifts everyone, benefits all | Newsletter | March 2026

Government Welcomes Completion of Labasa Airport Runway Strengthening Works

The Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation has welcomed the completion of the runway strengthening works at Labasa Airport, describing the development as an important step in the Government of Fiji's continued efforts to improve air transport connectivity and support economic development in Vanua Levu.

The works, implemented by Fiji Airports, were undertaken with financing under the World Bank-financed Na Vualiku Project, for which the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation serves as the lead implementing agency through the Central Project Management Unit.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation, Honourable Viliame Gavoka, commended Fiji Airports for the successful and timely completion of the works.

"I commend Fiji Airports for ensuring the timely completion of the runway strengthening works at Labasa Airport. This is an important achievement that will contribute to safer, more reliable and more efficient air services for the people and businesses of the Northern Division," said Honourable Gavoka.

He said the completion of the works also reflects the Government of Fiji's broader commitment to the development of Vanua Levu and to strengthening the infrastructure needed to support connectivity, tourism, trade and essential services.

"The Government of Fiji remains firmly committed to improving connectivity to Vanua Levu as part of our wider efforts to promote balanced national development and unlock greater economic opportunity in the North.

"Investments of this nature are critical to supporting communities, facilitating movement, and creating the conditions for sustainable growth," Honourable Gavoka said.

The Minister further noted that the runway improvement forms part of the wider Na Vualiku Project, through which the Government has worked with the World Bank to mobilise financing for strategic investments in infrastructure and services in Vanua Levu.

"The Na Vualiku Project reflects the Coalition Government's commitment to securing and advancing major development financing for Vanua Levu. Through this program, we are pursuing practical investments that can strengthen infrastructure, improve access, and support long term tourism and economic development.



Labasa Airport's upgraded runway, delivering safer, more reliable connectivity for Vanua Levu.

The completion of the Labasa runway strengthening works is a tangible example of that commitment being translated into results," he said.

The Ministry also acknowledged the collaborative efforts of Fiji Airports, project partners, contractors, landowners and local stakeholders who contributed to the successful completion of the works.

As lead agency for the Na Vualiku Project, the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation will continue to work closely with Fiji Airports and other implementing agencies to advance priority investments that support sustainable development in Vanua Levu.

Communities Set the Terms for Tourism Growth

Communities are clear: tourism must grow in a way that protects people, land, and livelihoods.

More than 120 stakeholders across Labasa, Bua, Savusavu, and Taveuni have validated key findings of the Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA), highlighting the need to actively manage environmental and social risks as tourism grows.

The SESA is informing tourism development to help protect communities, land, and livelihoods, while ensuring risks are identified early and addressed through planning.

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Shaping the Future of Tourism in Vanua Levu and Taveuni through the Integrated Tourism Master Plan



Community voices at the centre, with participants from Labasa, Bua, and Taveuni engaging in visioning workshops to define priorities for tourism development that protects culture, environment, and livelihoods.

The Integrated Tourism Master Plan (ITMP) is progressing steadily, with baseline analysis completed and visioning workshops held across the Northern Division.

This work is shaping how tourism will grow across Vanua Levu and Taveuni, ensuring development is coordinated, sustainable, and grounded in community priorities.

Across Labasa, Nabouwalu, Savusavu, and Taveuni, communities, government, and industry stakeholders came together to reflect on what tourism should look like in the years ahead.

These discussions went beyond identifying opportunities.

They explored what must be protected, what should be strengthened, and how growth can deliver meaningful benefits to local people.

Work is now advancing into GIS-based scenario modelling, mapping how tourism could evolve over the next 5 to 25 years.

A clear message has emerged: communities support tourism development, but only where it protects the environment, respects culture, and delivers real benefits to local livelihoods.

This process will help identify where development can be supported, and where it should be carefully managed or avoided altogether, ensuring that growth does not come at the expense of the very assets that make Vanua Levu and Taveuni unique.

At its core, the ITMP is about making deliberate choices.

It brings together data, community voices, and long-term planning to guide decisions on where and how tourism should grow.

The next stage will see spatial development scenarios being developed and reviewed with stakeholders, leading to the selection of a preferred pathway for tourism growth, one that reflects shared priorities and sets a clear direction for the future.

Revitalising a Key Natural Asset



The Waisali Rainforest Reserve is one of the few remaining unexploited native forests on Fiji's second largest island, Vanua Levu.

Planning is progressing to revitalise the Waisali Rainforest Reserve, one of Vanua Levu's most important natural assets, with upgrades focused on improving visitor access, strengthening conservation, and creating local opportunities.

The project will enhance walking trails and plan a new Visitor Centre, where visitors can learn about Waisali's unique biodiversity and cultural heritage. Improvements to access, parking, and arrival areas are also being considered to make visits safer and more accessible.

A Community Tourism Development Plan has been completed, with the Management Plan now under review, guiding the vision for a community-led, regenerative tourism experience that protects biodiversity while supporting local livelihoods.

Procurement is advancing, with the tender for Design and Supervision (D&S) having closed on 1 April 2026.

Following the selection of the D&S consultants, the project will move into the design phase, ensuring infrastructure and visitor experiences are aligned with conservation and community priorities.



Stakeholders in Labasa validating SESA findings, including identifying emerging risks.

Protecting Communities, Land, and Livelihoods

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Stakeholders showed strong alignment on the need for practical and coordinated risk mitigation measures to manage the impacts of tourism growth.

Discussions reinforced that planning must stay grounded in local realities, with clear actions to safeguard communities, natural resources, and public safety.

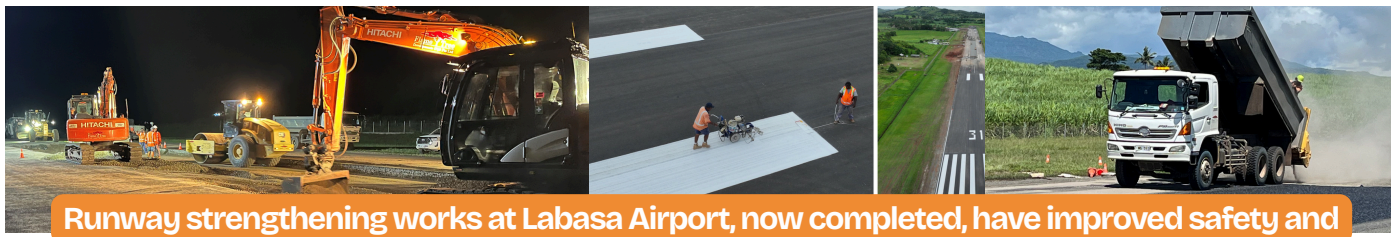
The findings were also presented to the ITMP Advisory Working Group, strengthening coordination across planning efforts and ensuring consistency between the Strategic

Environmental and Social Assessment and the Integrated Tourism Master Plan.

The project team is now integrating this feedback into the Interim SESA, with a focus on translating stakeholder input into clear recommendations that can guide future investments and decision-making.

The final Interim SESA will be submitted, continuing to inform the ITMP and other project activities to ensure tourism development remains safe, inclusive, and responsive to community priorities.

Rebuilt for Strength, Safety, and Reliability



Runway strengthening works at Labasa Airport, now completed, have improved safety and operational reliability.

The upgrades to the Labasa airport runway has focused on two critical priorities: structural strengthening and operational safety improvements. The runway has been rebuilt from the ground up to support heavier aircraft loads. This included full removal of degraded pavement layers and installation of new subbase and base courses to ensure long-term durability.

In parallel, targeted safety upgrades have improved ground operations. A hazardous drainage channel at the taxiway–apron interface was removed and replaced with a modern drainage system, ensuring a level surface for aircraft movement while maintaining effective water management.

Improving Waste Management and Sanitation in Savusavu

The project is advancing critical work to strengthen waste management and sanitation systems in Savusavu, supporting healthier communities and improved environmental outcomes.

A contract has been signed with GHD for a detailed design study of a new landfill and rehabilitation of the existing dump site, marking a major step forward. Site visits will kick start in April and will assess environmental and social impacts, evaluate options, and develop a long-term solution for waste management.

At the same time, the project is progressing the Savusavu Participatory Sanitation Master Plan, with contract award expected in May 2026. The plan will deliver practical and inclusive sanitation solutions aligned with broader infrastructure planning. Consultants are expected to mobilise in June 2026, initiating technical work that will guide both waste and sanitation improvements in Savusavu.

Enhancing Public Spaces in Labasa and Savusavu

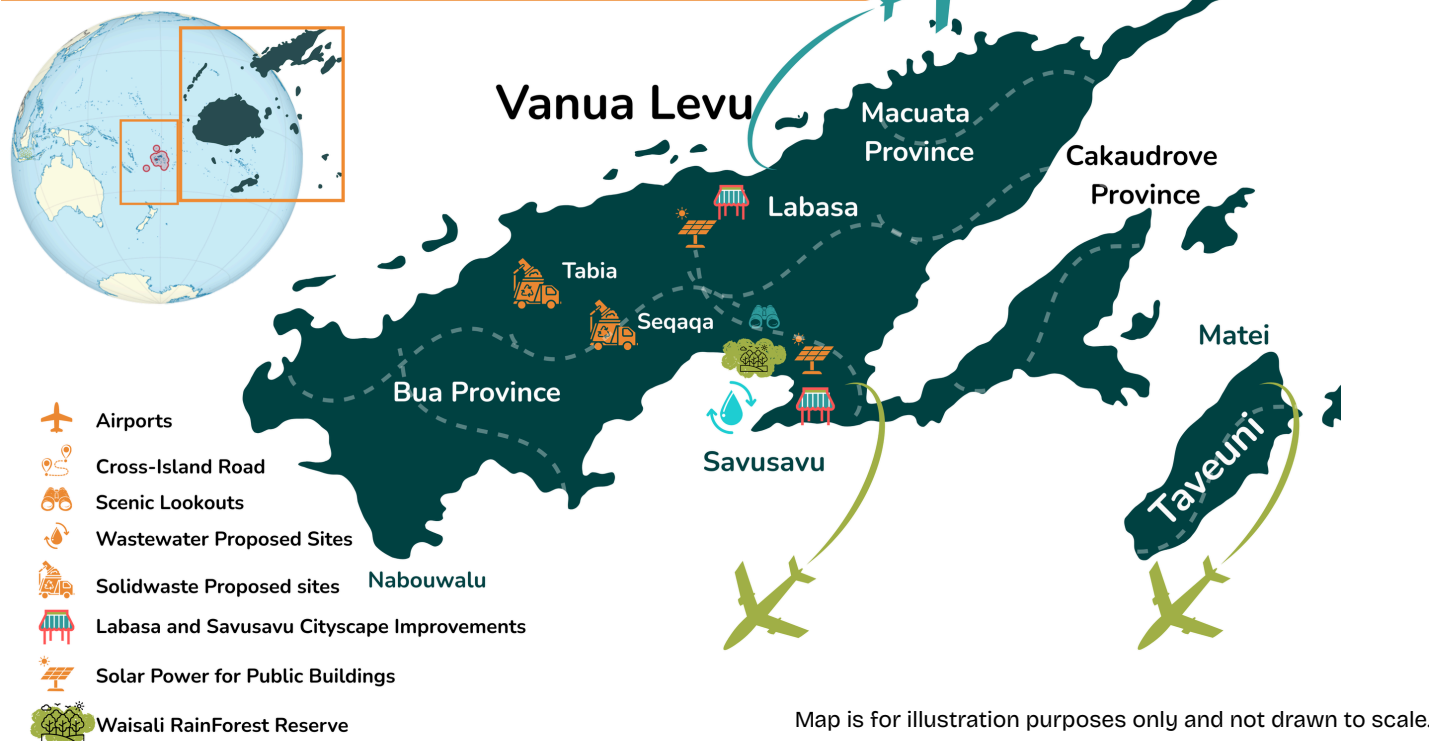
Procurement for cityscape improvements in Labasa and Savusavu has progressed. The Request for Proposals closed on 1 April. The project is working closely with Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the consultants developing the Savusavu Blue Town Ecosystem-Based Adaptation Master Plan to ensure strong alignment across initiatives and to support climate-resilient, environmentally sustainable tourism development.

The planned upgrades will enhance public spaces, parks, waterfront access, signage and wayfinding, and streetscapes, while strengthening coastal resilience.

These improvements aim to create more attractive, accessible, and climate-resilient town environments that benefit both communities and visitors. Technical evaluation of tenders will be undertaken as the next step, ahead of progressing to design and implementation.

PROGRAM INTERVENTION MAP

Fiji Tourism Development Program in Vanua Levu (Na Vualiku Project) - Phase 1 (MPA)



Map is for illustration purposes only and not drawn to scale.

Future Planning: New Airport Feasibility Study



Engagement with landowning units of potential sites.

AirBiz, an international aviation consultancy specialising in airport planning and development, is currently undertaking a feasibility study to assess future aviation needs in Vanua Levu.

This includes a feasibility study for a potential new airport in Vanua Levu, an air connectivity study for Taveuni Island, and the development of master plans for Labasa and Matei airports.

Following its kickoff meeting in January 2026 and submission of the Draft Inception Report in February, the team is progressing technical work, including field visits to Matei and Labasa airports, as well as assessments of four potential sites for a possible new airport in Vanua Levu.

Engagement is ongoing with government agencies, local councils, landowning units of potential sites, and industry stakeholders across the Northern Division to ensure the study reflects operational requirements, growth projections, and local context.

In parallel, a separate team is consulting stakeholders in Suva and Nadi, along with Fiji Airports management and technical teams, to inform the analysis.

This work is part of a feasibility assessment only. Once completed, the report will be presented to Cabinet with options and recommendations.



Highlights

World Bank and IFC Leadership Highlight Opportunities for Women, Private Sector and Communities in Vanua Levu

Last month, senior leadership from the World Bank Group, together with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation, Hon. Viliame Gavoka, engaged with communities, business leaders, and visited project sites across the Northern Division.

World Bank Vice President for the East Asia and Pacific Region, Carlos Felipe Jaramillo; Vice President for Operations Policy and Country Services, Gallina A. Vincelette, and IFC Regional Vice President for Asia and the Pacific, Sarvesh Suri, together with Deputy Prime Minister met with the Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei ni Cakaudrove, recognising the role of women in driving community-based tourism and local enterprise.

The delegation also engaged with private sector leaders to explore opportunities to strengthen investment and improve the business environment, while reviewing progress on air connectivity, including runway works at Labasa Airport and future upgrades in Savusavu.

Such engagements highlight the importance of aligning community participation, private sector growth, and infrastructure investment to ensure tourism development in Vanua Levu is inclusive, sustainable, and delivers real economic opportunities.



Deputy PM and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation Hon. Viliame Gavoka, with Senior Project Manager, Fiji Airports, Navneet Maharaj (left) and Practice Manager, Transport and Logistics, East Asia and Pacific, World Bank, Benedict L. J. Eijbergen (right), following a site inspection at Labasa Airport.



The delegation at Savusavu Airport as they arrived into Vanua Levu to meet communities, business leaders, and visit project sites.



Hon. Viliame Gavoka highlights aviation priorities, reinforcing the importance of safe and reliable air connectivity for Vanua Levu.



Fiji Airports Director Projects, Niranjwan Chettiar, provides an update to the delegation on runway strengthening works at Labasa Airport.



The delegation met with the women of Na I Soqosoqo Vakamarama I Taukei ni Cakaudrove – The Society for Indigenous Women of the Cakaudrove Province



World Bank Vice President for the East Asia and Pacific Region, Carlos Felipe Jaramillo engages with business leaders on advancing sustainable tourism to support jobs, investment, and long-term growth in the Northern Division.

ABOUT NA VUALIKU PROJECT

The Fiji Tourism Development Program in Vanua Levu (Na Vualiku Project) is a flagship government-led initiative financed by the World Bank that aims to transform Vanua Levu into a leading sustainable tourism destination.

Spearheaded by the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation (MTCA), in partnership with Fiji Airports and the Fiji Roads Authority, the Project is anchored in long-term, coordinated investments.

By enhancing infrastructure, boosting local enterprise and safeguarding cultural and natural assets, the Project will empower communities, unlock private sector growth, and deliver authentic, high-quality experiences for visitors.

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