

Fiji, oh you live in Fiji. I am so jealous, swaying palms, white sand beaches, beautiful sunsets, a tropical paradise.

More than once I have heard these words.

Yes, I saw the travel brochures also.

But my reality is nothing like the travel brochure. Yes, there are swaying palms, coconut trees to be exact. Loaded with coconuts that drop at any given time so parking a car or sitting under one is not a good idea. They sway violently during cyclone season, get stripped of their foliage and fruit, clogging roadways at times. That is if you are lucky enough to have a vehicle to travel in. And as for those white sand beaches, well they aren't where I am. The beach near where I live requires walking access through a swamp to a black/grey sand that sticks like glue to all surfaces. Yes, the sunsets can be spectacular, but the sun sets the same in many parts of the world with the same glory. It very much depends on the weather and facing the morning sun does no justice to beautiful sunsets.

Tropical paradise.... Let me see. Sandflies, mosquitoes therefore the potential for dengue, mud wasps that build their nests on everything, hornets that come out of hibernation to mate and overtake the airspace in any house, giant beetles and giant moths that like to bash themselves against the tin roof of a night time or hover around the light above while you eat dinner, geckos that shit on everything from a great height, spiders are few, snakes are none, ants are in plague proportions, minor birds that love to come inside and feed off whatever is on the stove but they aren't alone, dogs do also. What about the chickens that come inside to find a roosting place, or the mongoose that flit silently across open spaces also searching for food. Tropical brings bugs and not just the crawling, flying kind. Bacterial bugs are aplenty wreaking havoc on human tummies and noses and sinuses and skin.

I fail to see what there is to be jealous about. The tiny gnats that come out of an evening in plague proportions to mate and die cover the ceilings (or should I say roof because ceilings are rare) they get in your face and up your nose, you wake to find your bed covered in them and when you sweep the next morning it looks like a woolly mammoth has had an shave during the night. So many die nightly that they create a forest floor of fine bodies to stick to your feet when you alight from bed.

There are no cocktails, there is no power. There is no water to create ice even if there was power. Life in the village is tough. Very tough and a long way removed from the picture postcard images that tourists get to enjoy. This is the life of many. To collect firewood to cook the breadfruit or dalo or rice for a meal. To keep that fire burning even during cyclonic conditions is essential. To cart the brackish water daily from the river to boil the dalo and rice and breadfruit and to wash the dishes in. You take the laundry to the river and with a bar of soap and a scrubbing brush you scrub the stains and rinse the clothes; meanwhile the soap creates algae and disrupts the eco system. The brackish water gives people diahorrea when they drink it particularly the babies, it can dehydrate them fast.

And being tropical means your constant companions are mould and mildew.

Advertising sells a very different story to the reality of life. But, you pay for that don't you? You buy the dream, it comes at a price, it is short lived with an expiry date but you get a memory that imprints. And you on-sell that to friends and family. As do the postcards and glossy adverts. It all comes at a price. No-one sells the reality, why would they?