



McMASTER & HEAP VETERINARY PRACTICE

FROM FIJI

Thought I'd write a slightly different article....

I'm in Fiji for ITF tennis with my son Dylan for 2 weeks and I've never been to Fiji before. An interesting, warm place with splendid people. I've met some great folk and seen some great tennis and seen plenty of animals I so want to help. We have had our share of ups and downs on the tennis court (cramping and a pulled hamstring) and at our resort (leaking air conditioning units, power cuts, no Wifi as promised), but all has been sorted eventually and has made for a real travel experience, one I'll never forget.

We are a reasonable drive from the tennis so it's been a 45 minute car drive filled of daily adventures. We have had goats and cows just traverse the road in front of us, speeding cars and then ones that sit at 35km/hour and you can't pass them as passing lanes are rare. We have seen a road traffic accident with fatalities sadly. Fijians just aim casually along the sides of the roads waiting to be picked up for work or getting places on foot. Everyone looks happy and relaxed in sparkling clean attire, yet there is brown dust everywhere that infiltrates everything. The school children look fantastic in often starched white uniforms and clamber on the open aired buses, arms hanging out the sides, laughing. The drivers are hugely considerate, almost dangerously so, slowing right down to let cars cross in the middle of a busy open road. No one is in a hurry and everyone is up and rearing to go at 6.30am, waiting to be picked up for work. Not many people here own cars and taxis are everywhere.

The dogs touch my heart though. There are so many that aimlessly wander all over the place – in towns, sides of roads, the tennis center and outside homes. No one takes responsibility for them as the breeding is rampant and out of control. None are desexed so there are puppies everywhere. They are scarily thin, bloated with worms, crawling with fleas and ticks and hungry. They still manage a tail wag though and I've even managed to pat a few. I'm feeding them bread and one square meals and they are so gently accepting food. Many of them have sores all over their bodies, no hair and many are feeding puppies. I've hardly seen any cats, except ones that have unfortunately been squashed on the roads. The grazing tethered cows look friendly but on approaching them, they show me the whites of their eyes and lower their heads to charge. I have met a local Fijian Architect who is building a Veterinary Hospital In Nadi, funded



by a wealthy American couple who want to help the companion animals here. There is a small SPCA clinic in Lautoka but no surgeries can be performed there. The only clinic is in Suva where short anaesthetics can be performed. I think Steve and I would be keen to come back here and offer our expertise and help these animals and train some of the vets here. We'd bring equipment and supplies with us next time.

I have befriended a fantastic group of Fijian children at the Lautoka tennis club. They are aged between 7 and 12 years of age and get tennis coaching for free on Sundays, racquets and balls provided by the club. None of them have shoes to play in, most are from very poor families and tennis is an expensive sport. I went out and bought 10 pairs of sports shoes of different sizes for them to be kept at the club and used for the children that need them. They were all so grateful. Dylan is back in August so I'll send back most of the boys old tennis tops for the kids to enjoy playing in. If they progress at tennis it could be a way out for these children.



I won't forget my 2 weeks here. Everybody thought I wouldn't like Fiji at all, but the openness and genuine friendliness and interest shown by these people have made this experience one I'll never forget. I feel Steve, Isaac

and I can make a difference to these people in educating them on respecting and caring for their pets, when we next return. It makes you really realize how privileged and wealthy we all are. Giving back a little feels good.

Just an update on Indie, the White German Shepherd, who managed to deliver 8 little wriggly white pups on her own (6 boys and 2 girls) on 16th June. All are doing well, she is an exceptional mother and my friend Mala is realizing how big a responsibility and job breeding is. All pups have homes – 6 will be staying in Christchurch and 2 heading North.

DR Michele McMaster

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