

Updated 2026

Orientation Guide for Anaesthetic Locums

Labasa Hospital, Labasa, Fiji

Labasa

Labasa (pronounced Lambasa) is a town in Fiji located on the island of Vanua Levu (“Great Land”) and is the largest town on that island with a population of about 30,000. It is the fourth-largest city in Fiji. Labasa is predominantly Indo Fijian and is an agricultural town, off the tourist track.

Labasa Airport is about 7km from the town centre with multiple daily domestic flights to Nausori and Nadi international airports. Labasa is known as the Friendly North for its warm, hospitable culture.

Hospital

The hospital is the referral center for the whole island servicing a population of about 135,000 with only 160 beds. There are no other hospitals on Vanua Levu that offer theatre services other than Labasa Hospital. There are two other smaller hospitals with medical officers.

There are only two main theatres and a minor procedures theatre and only two were staffed during the day with one for emergencies overnight.

There are theatre techs although not formally trained as in New Zealand and they have other roles that they cover so are not always in theatre.

There are two ICUs – one NICU and one mixed paediatric and adult ICU with a capacity of three ventilated patients with the potential for overflow of two more ventilators in the ‘COVID’ ICU. The ICU runs ventilators, dialysis, and inotropes. They will also run inotropes and airvo in the ward to protect ICU resources and the medical ward can run dialysis. You are expected to cover the adult patients in the ICU and to insert central lines and dialysis catheter for patients requiring support on the ward. There was very limited capacity for arterial line blood pressure monitoring but blood gases were available.

During the week, our team of three anaesthetists from Australia worked with two hardworking, local registrars. One senior registrar who was on site overnight and a junior registrar who worked with us during the day. Elective cases were suspended for the week, but we were kept busy with emergency cases, operating two theatres throughout most of the days. We also rotated the on-call and ICU cover/perioperative roles and found this to be manageable. Overall, although there were adjustments to be made in terms of drug availability, equipment availability and some processes (e.g. the Fiji positioning for spinals) it was familiar to our practices back home and the local anaesthetic assistants and theatre staff were very professional and supportive in helping us adapt.



Equipment Availability

Airway/Breathing

- Laryngoscopes – direct only, **there was a handheld VL but it didn't work.**
- **Fibre optic scope which unfortunately didn't hold charge so was not useful.**
- Adjuncts like OPA and bougies available.
- LMA and ETTs cleaned and reused where possible – second gen LMAs available, some reinforced ETTs/cuffed and uncuffed, **limited stock in smaller sizes of microcuffed ETTs.**
- Anaesthetic machines – new-ish and reliable– Mindray and GE – ET CO2 monitoring on all

Lines/Block Equipment

- **No bungs or PIVC dressings available usually (micropore tape used to secure); limited surgical tape.**
- **Central lines** (short supply).
- Ultrasound (**limited block needles available** – mainly donations).
- Spinal Needles – no introducers, 18g needles used as introducers instead.
- Very limited epidural needles, not routinely performed in labour.

Other/Emergency Equipment

- **NMT/TOF – not available.**
- 2x defibrillator (not AED, paddles not pads).
- Anaphylaxis box with cards only.
- CT scanner in hospital but frequently out of action (not available during our week), private CT scanner at Damodar city but also out of action as had no power.
- The cardiology team were good at facilitating urgent perioperative TTEs

Drug Availability

Basic and emergency drugs were available however quite a few sourced from donations and were limited in stock. Caution with multiple brands because of multiple sources. Local anaesthetics (ropivacaine, bupivacaine, lignocaine with adrenaline) for blocks and metaraminol/phenylephrine particularly limited. Vials split where safe to do so.

- **Induction agents:** Ketamine and Propofol – not really practical to run TIVA (one syringe driver for theatres and no BIS)

- **Opioids:** Fentanyl/morphine available; oral tramadol available on outpatient script (family bring in for patients)
- Sevoflurane
- Suxamethonium/rocuronium, atracurium (few amps of vecuronium when we were there but stock was low)
- **Reversal agents:** Neostigmine/glycopyrrolate available; Sugammadex – couple of vials for emergencies.
- Adrenaline/ noradrenaline/ labetalol/ ephedrine/ atropine/ phenylephrine/ metaraminol (limited donated stock).
- Generally made stock of phenylephrine in 100ml NS bag and kept clean per theatre.
- **PPH management:** oxytocin and syntometrine; no/unreliable availability of TXA.
- Intralipid – available.
- Dantrolene – available, limited.



What to bring

For work:

- Bungs and dressings for cannulas!!!
- Block needles, sterile lubricant sachets.
- Local anaesthetics for blocks, phenylephrine/metaraminol.
- Theatre shoes or overshoes.
- Bring your own scrubs and theatre caps – note: theatre staff mainly wear previously donated scrubs.
- Pens/markers (there are limited drug stickers to label syringes).
- Stethoscope.
- Hand sanitiser and a box of gloves (supply varies and definitely bring latex free if you need them).
- Reusable:
 - mug
 - water bottle
 - lunchbox
 - cutlery– there's small kitchenette near OT area
- Your own tea, coffee and milk

Accommodation

There are others but we stayed in these:

- The Grand Eastern: 20min walk to the hospital and the hospital will send transport if it's raining or late. Restaurant at the hotel and pool.
- The Friendly North Inn: Closest to the hospital - <10min walk, reasonable lighting on way at night. A bit cheaper than the Grand Eastern but doesn't have some of the perks. Does offer complimentary breakfast and will launder scrubs/clothes (extra fee). Discounted/complimentary access to municipal pool within walking distance.

Food and recreational

- There is a fruit/vegie market across the way from the Grand Eastern – Saturday is the big market day.
- Damodar City – a new shopping centre <1km from the hospital (on the way to/from the Grand Eastern).
 - Has a Woolworths-like supermarket, prices are NZ/Aus equivalent
 - Dehli6 – excellent Indian restaurant (went twice) plus other takeaway options
 - Movie theatre
- The hospital cafeteria is cheap and pretty good for sandwiches, curry roti's and cooked meals.
- Some of us jogged around town. Biggest thing to watch out for are stray dogs (there are many) and cars.
- Personal safety:
 - Busy roads and no traffic lights or pedestrian crossings. Road trauma is a big burden. Be careful.
 - Take sensible mozzie/dengue precautions.
 - Tap water is not safe for drinking.
 - There's a park between the Hospital and Damodar city that is a bit dicey at night, be sensible.

