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Diplomat calls it a day

Shayal Devi

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EU ambassador to Fiji and the Pacific Andrew Jacobs with FRIEND Fiji founder Sashi Kiran with other recipients of EU grants at Tuvu, Lautoka yesterday. Picture: BALJEET SINGH

HAVING never set a foot in a Pacific Island country, Andrew Jacobs could only guess what his appointment as the Pacific ambassador for the European Union would bring.

More than four years after he boarded a flight to Fiji from Brussels, Mr Jacobs is leaving Fiji with fond memories of the place he has called home over the years.

"When I found out I was coming to Fiji, I think it was at the end of 2012, I was extremely excited," he said.

"I had never been to the Pacific before and since then it has been an amazing journey right from when I got on the flight in Brussels in early 2013.

"My wife and my youngest son were already here because he had to start school a few weeks before I started the job.

"I still remember arriving at the Nadi International Airport in February, 2013, getting on the domestic flight to Nausori, looking out of the plane and seeing this beautiful country unfolding below me and that's one of the overriding memories.

"From that moment I looked forward to getting to know the country and its people and that is something I will always treasure."

Since his arrival, Mr Jacobs says things in Fiji have changed quite a lot. One of the memorable events Mr Jacobs says he has been a part of include the 2014 election.

"I was very proud that we were able to provide some support and have some experts in the country at the time.

"I was here unfortunately for Severe Tropical Cyclone Winston which devastated the country and again, I was proud the EU could provide support.

"I think one thing I will really take with me is the friendship of the Fijian people. I have enjoyed very much being here and I have established a very close working relationship with a wide range of people, whether it's people in the Government but also with civil society."

One of the NGOs the EU works closely with is the Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises and Development (FRIEND) and Mr Jacobs visited the office in Tuvu for the final time in his capacity as ambassador last month.

"I'm very sad my journey in the Pacific is coming to an end. It's been quite a challenging job because I cover nearly the whole Pacific so I spend a lot of time on planes.

"We cover the north Pacific, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Marshall Islands, we cover the Cook Islands, Niue, Tonga and Samoa so I spend a lot of time on planes but the Pacific is a hugely satisfying place to work.

"It's an area where we can see very quickly the benefits of the co-operation we have with the Pacific countries, these are small populations but they are populations which do need support sometimes and it's very satisfying to see how well our support is used, whether it is Fiji or some other countries in the region."

After leaving Fiji, he is headed back to the EU headquarters in Brussels.

"I hope to go somewhere else on another post but the Pacific and Fiji will always be in my heart and a big part of me."

Living in Fiji has not only impacted Mr Jacobs but his family too. He says his wife and son have been very pleased to be in Fiji.

"My wife Hilary has been working closely with Mobile Kindy Organisation in Suva and helping with small childhood education.

"She's been helping in the Colonial War Memorial Hospital with breastfeeding mothers.

"She has found a very fascinating but challenging time here and made the most of her time.

"My younger son wants to stay in Fiji. I think he's in Savusavu learning to be a dive master and if he could, he would stay forever I think so Fiji will always have a very critical role to play in our lives.

"I would just like to thank the people of Fiji for their very warm hospitality. Wherever I have been in Fiji, I have been welcomed most warmly and I will miss the Fijian people greatly and it's been a very interesting four and a half years.

"I think it's been a very important time in Fijian history and I am very privileged to have been here in this period."



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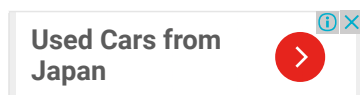
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