

ANIMALS FIJI

Horses - Working Animal, Friend, or Both?



Opinion



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Mary-Anne is a volunteer on assignment with Animals Fiji as part of the Australian Volunteers Program, an Australian Government Initiative.

Have you noticed that being close to a horse sometimes makes you feel better? Research has shown that interacting with a horse can lower blood pressure and heart rate, decrease stress levels, and decrease levels of anger or anxiety.

So, being around and treating your horse well can make you feel better!

Horses in Fiji are primarily used as working animals, for example, preparing the ground for planting and transporting goods such as timber in difficult areas.

Horses may be used to herd or manage livestock or for weed control and pasture management. Some resorts and tourist businesses use horses for guided rides on the beach or through scenic landscapes.

Some people enjoy having a horse to ride for pleasure and relaxation.

What we now consider the modern horse was originally developed over hundreds of thousands of years in central Asia's drier and harsher grassland plains to Europe and not in tropical jungle environments where they have only been for one or two hundred years.

It is good then to know how to care for your horse correctly in our hot, humid and wet climate.

How to care for your horse.

Shelter and shade: It is important to protect horses from the intense sun, heat, heavy rain, and cyclonic winds. Sturdy, well-ventilated shelters will help.

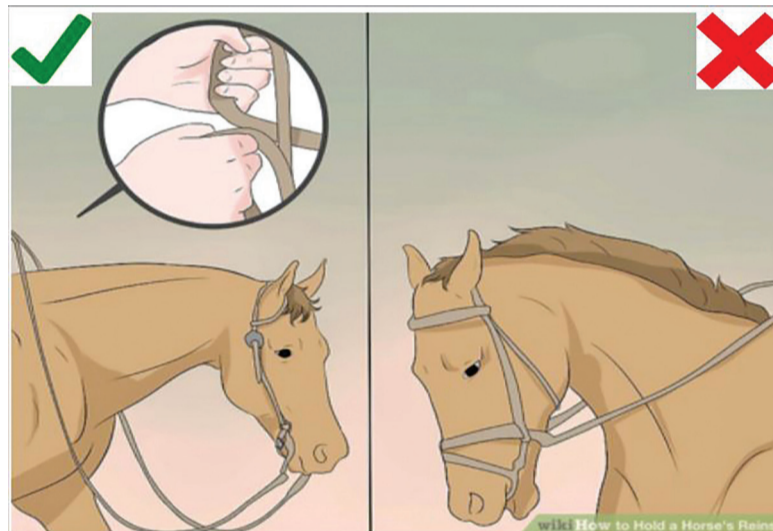
Also, ensure access to shade, either natural (trees) or artificial structures in the paddock.

Be prepared with shelter, food and water during tropical storms and cyclones.

- **Water:** Horses are large animals and need access to clean, fresh water to prevent dehydration. Horses will need 30-50 litres daily, so a large clean tub or container where the horse can easily reach it is required. Horses cannot drink very salty or seawater – it will make them sick, so freshwater is needed even if they have been in or around the ocean.
- **Food:** Your horse will stay healthy by eating grass for food. An average horse will eat about 10 kg of food a day.



Junior looking after horses at a Savusavu resort. He regularly takes them on beach walks.



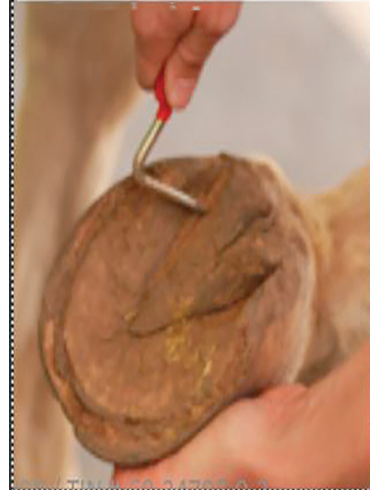
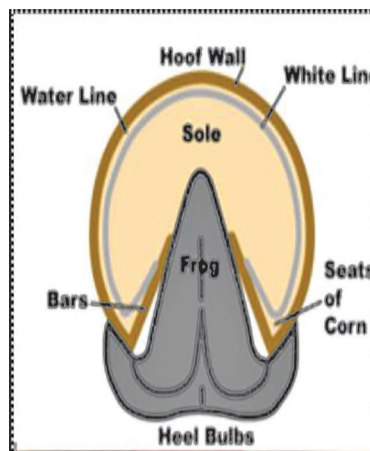
Correct way to halter a horse.

If the grass is old or dry, the horse might not get enough nutrition from the grass and could become thin. Also, adding grains for extra protein is good for the horse. Salt blocks are very beneficial to replace the minerals that are lost through sweating.

- Horses, like humans, love treats – like mango, papaya, coconut, sugar cubes, apple and carrot pieces, but these should be treats and not the main diet for the animal.
- **Regular grooming:** Due to our warm climate, horses in Fiji may have shorter or thinner coats than those in colder climates, so regular grooming will remove dead hair, help keep the coat clean and promote good skin health. Wiping down with a towel at least once daily will help control skin diseases like rain rot, caused by prolonged wetting by rain, high humidity, and high temperature.
- **Hoof Care:** Regularly checking and cleaning a horse's hooves will benefit and improve their performance. Hooves should be regularly trimmed to prevent issues such as overgrowth and infections. Moisture can affect hooves; being too moist makes hooves prone to fungal and bacterial infections. Try to ensure the horse has a dry area where they can stand. Also, regular exercise is important as it promotes blood circulation in the legs, which helps support the growth and quality of your

Other health issues:

- **Saddle Sores:** If you are using your horse for riding, ensure you have a saddle that fits well. A poor-fitting saddle can cause sores and hairless patches that can become infected. If your horse does develop saddle sores, do not ride until the sores have healed or ride bareback or with a soft blanket. Contact Animals Fiji for advice regarding care.
- **Mouth care:** Horses can get sores on the side of the mouth if their bit doesn't fit correctly. Please do not use a rope or a chain as a bit, as they can cause severe damage. Use a rope halter instead and remove it when the horse is not in use and resting.
- **Sunburn:** Like humans, horses can get sunburnt, especially on the pink-skinned areas around the eyes and muzzle of pale and white-faced horses. Apply child zinc cream or sunscreen to those areas to prevent this.
- **Parasites/internal worms:** Horses can ingest worms through food or water. To prevent your horse from getting internal worms that affect their health, de-worm the horse twice a year.
- **Rain rot:** A skin disease that starts as tiny lumps on the skin/hair and progresses to matted tufts of hair and large scabs. To prevent this, brush/towel down your horse daily, wash with fresh water and use



Cleaning a horse's hoof

must read

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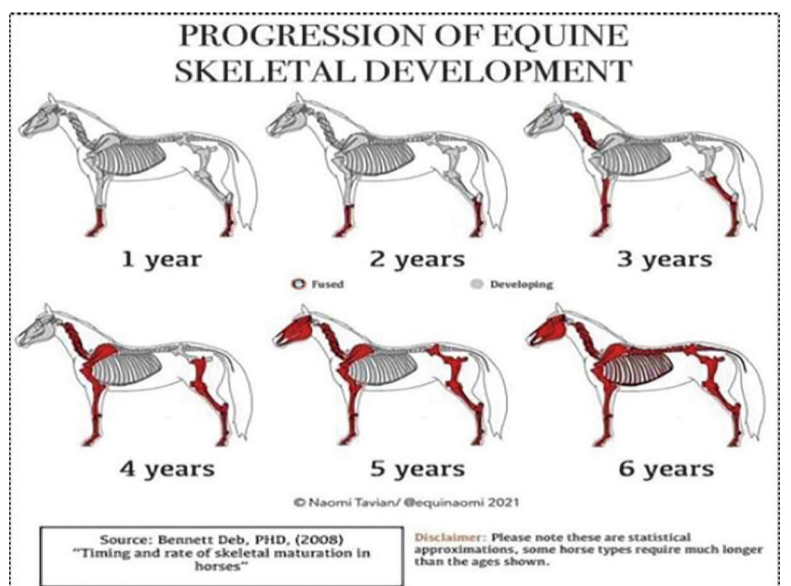
As a non-profit charity, Animals Fiji depends on the kindness of donations to continue in their work to support animals across Fiji. To find out more about Animals Fiji's services and how you can help please contact their Savusavu Clinic at (+679) 998 6253 or Nadi Clinic at (+679) 993 6647 or visit their website at www.animalsfiji.org. >ANIMALS FIJI

TAKE Note:

The Horse Sanctuary

Animals Fiji partners with the Horse Sanctuary in Vanua, Vitu Levu, to assist in caring for and rehabilitating mistreated or abandoned horses.

Visit their website <https://horsesanctuaryfiji.squarespace.com/> to find out more.



Graphic shows development of a horse's skeleton over time - only reaching maturity at six years old.

an anti-fungal shampoo every two weeks.

Regular health checks:

These are vital, mainly if the horse performs physically demanding work – it will catch any health issues early and ensure your horse is fit for the tasks you need.

If you have any concerns regarding your horse's health and care, talk to your local veterinarian, who can assist you.

Using your horse on the farm or for general work

Most people do not realise that a horse's skeleton is only fully mature when they reach the age of five or six. The graphic shows that even at five years old, the horse's backbone and ribs are still not mature. It is important to remember the age of your horse when you are using them on the farm or for transport jobs. **DO NOT RIDE YOUR HORSE UNTIL IT IS 3 YEARS OLD!**

- **Light work:** For lighter work tasks, like pulling small carts or doing ground work or light riding, this can be introduced around 3-4 years of age, depending on the breed and the horse's health.
- **Heavy work:** Waiting until the horse is at least 4-5 years old

and sometimes older is recommended for heavier tasks such as ploughing fields or pulling heavy loads. This allows the horse's skeleton to develop fully and reduces the risk of strain and injury.

It is important to introduce any physical work gradually to allow the horse to build strength and stamina, just like in a human.

General:

Horses respond to training by doing things repeatedly.

It is important to get the horse used to wearing a harness, different implements, and the commands you use.

Kind words and encouragement work well with any animal, and treats can help the horse remember the correct response to a command. Keep in mind that each horse is an individual.

Pushing a horse too hard or too soon can cause long-term damage, which will reduce their ability in the future, so it is crucial to make the horse's well-being and development a priority.

Always if you have any concerns regarding your animal contact Animals Fiji or your closest Veterinary Clinic for advice.

Source: Animals Fiji