

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN FIJI - VANUA LEVU SCOPE

The Tourism industry which is currently Fiji's leading foreign exchange earner and employment provider has encountered various phases of economic, political, cultural and social conditions to attain its current status.

A highlight of the industry is the fact that it is a multi-sectoral one hence involves all levels of the society and its impact is something that is experienced by majority in the community.

Major indicators include investment level in all spheres of Fiji's Tourism components i.e. Accommodation, Transport, Attractions and Facilities. It also encompasses of the employment level, tourism earnings & arrivals and the overall improvement in the standard of living of the community, acquired through tourism activities & involvement.

The industry contributes around 17% to the country's total GDP Growth. Visitor arrivals has increased rapidly from 430,800 in 2003 to 500,280 in 2004 with earnings of \$638.8m and \$713.3m respectively. In vestments in the sector has also increased dramatically from \$201,017,707 in 2003 to \$682,650,970. This again depicts the confidence of foreign investors towards this vibrant and dynamic industry.

Amongst the Ministry's objective are to increase visitor arrivals, increase economic contribution & the retention of the tourist dollar, enhance resource owners participation, provide human resource development and the promotion of sustainable eco-tourism development and public awareness at all levels of the society.

With regards to these objectives, the Ministry is now involved in carrying out Tourism Development in non-concentrated tourism areas. Such an initiative is carried out with the objective of spreading the tourism benefits across the island so that its impact is experienced by majority within the community.

The Ministry recently visited Fiji's second largest island; Vanua Levu, with the intention of establishing a taskforce (Vanua Levu Tourism Development Taskforce) that would be the consultative group for Tourism Development in Vanua Levu involved in driving tourism industry development and developing, coordinating & implementing policy initiative and programmes.

Such an initiative emerged from the urgency to manage and control development in Vanua Levu so that development problems that may occur in the conventional tourism areas are minimized in the North. This is also a preparatory work of the Review of the Tourism Development Plan that would be in line with our Tourism Development Area (TDA) Strategy.

Vanua Levu has had its share of benefits from being part of the Tourism industry. Visitor arrivals into the region has significantly increased from 9,809 in 2003 to 11,391 in 2004 encompassing of around 2.5%. However, with this initiative, there are favorable prospects for the region particularly having to offer various products that have not been exposed to excessive development. This will be further enhanced through the infrastructure development that is currently been carried out in the region such as the currently constructed Savusavu Marina Village and Wairiki Port together with the proposed Seqaqa International Airport and the Valaga Bay Port.

Current Hotel Occupancy in the region has guaranteed further Tourism growth with hotels such as JM Cuosteau being fully booked. Savusavu Hotsprings has also been experiencing increasing turnover since last year and was fully booked during our visit.

Tourism Development segments that are being promote include that of the Accomodation, Access, Attractions and Amenities sector. Examples include hotels/resorts/villas, ecotours & Ecotourism, diving, cruise, recreational parks, transport and aviation, timeshare, restaurants, shipping, culture & heritage, MICE etc.

In due consideration of the above development initiative, the Northern region surely will be a renowned Tourism region once all essential amenities and attractions are structurally implaced. In the meantime however, Vanua Levu is definitely depicting successful Tourism involvement when other region may be stating otherwise. Given tine, the region is sure to attract all sorts of visitors from different parts of the world converging to witness and experience a different product altogether.