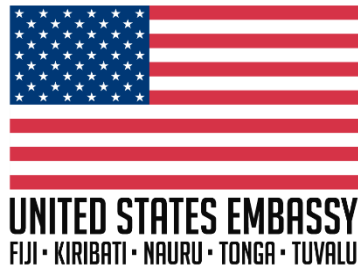




PACIFIC TOURISM
ORGANISATION



SPTO SME Recovery Toolkit

Introduction

The aim of this handbook is to support the recovery of small, medium and micro sized tourism enterprises across Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga, Tuvalu (and the wider Pacific region) that provide products and services to tourists and the tourism industry in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This includes providers of accommodation, transport, attractions and experiences. The handbook will explain how to meet the requirements of international tourists and how to supply your products to tour operators, ground operators, excursion suppliers and online travel agents. The guide will also introduce the range of online marketing tools and platforms available and how they can be used to promote and sell tourism products.

The handbook is designed to guide you through the entire product development process from understanding market trends to online sales and marketing. The chapters are as follows:



How to use this handbook and toolkit.

The handbook aims to support a wide range of SMEs; some will be at the very beginning of the product development process and others will be more experienced.

To support all SMEs a range of tools complements the content provided within the manual. These are referenced throughout each chapter and can be found via hyperlinks and are intended to give further, in-depth guidance and practical examples to support the application of learning. It is recommended that the tools are reviewed alongside each chapter, however they also provide useful reference as stand-alone documents.

Toolkit icons

	Knowledge booster: More information to support knowledge and understanding of a topic
	Checklist / template: Documents that can be downloaded and used
	Case Study: Illustrative examples

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Tools used for this chapter:

1.0	Knowledge Booster: The tour operating landscape	1.2	Knowledge Booster: Supporting Communities
1.1	Checklist: Researching visitors	1.3	Case Studies: Cultural tourism experiences
1.1.1	Knowledge Booster: Understanding visitors	1.4	Knowledge Booster: Authentic experiences
1.1.2	Case Studies: Traveller's optimism for travel	1.5	Case Studies: Nature and adventure experiences

Chapter 1: Evolving market trends

Getting started

Before getting started it is important to understand the different types of tour operators and agents, the types of customers they cater for and how they work. This first part of the handbook will help to set the scene before introducing the evolving market trends.

Understanding evolving trends

You will find information about who visits the region, where they are from and what experiences they are looking for.

This includes **current and evolving consumer trends** based on desk research as well as primary research with international tour operators and agents. Interviews were conducted by the authors of this manual to provide insight on evolving visitor trends and market expectations. Where possible information relevant to Pacific destinations has been provided, however the purpose of this guidance is to provide a general perspective on mid-long term trends from a global perspective so that it might be considered within the Pacific context.

You will also gain information about **how the COVID pandemic has affected customers' purchasing behaviours, booking trends and demands**, as reported by industry representatives and consumer insight reports.

Finally, you will find top tips on how your business can respond to these trends.

How to use this chapter of the handbook:

This chapter is intended to 1) **introduce you to the key trends** and 2) **reflect on how they apply** to your particular destination and business. It is recommended that you write down your reflections and follow-up with research to help shape your ideas. This could include talking with other tourism businesses, communities or researching online.

In the next chapter you will be guided on how to design or adapt products and you will start to define your product.

Understanding the tour operating landscape

The development of this handbook was supported by leading tour operators. They took the time to share their insights into consumer trends they were seeing before the COVID pandemic as well as the key demands that tourist providers will need to meet during the recovery phase and beyond.

You will find helpful insights into what tourists want from their experiences and tips on how to create quality products that will appeal to the international market. This information will help you regardless of whether you sell your products to operators or directly to tourists.



To help you with understanding the different types of tour operators and agents that will potentially purchase your products refer to [Tool 1.0](#) which explains how they operate and the different customer profiles that they cater for.



Understanding Tourist Appeal

What are tourists looking for?

The rich cultural heritage, landscapes and immense biodiversity of the Pacific Island Countries hold great appeal for tourists seeking a range of experiences. There is significant opportunity to create high quality tourism products that **protect the environment and culture** whilst bringing economic benefits and opportunities for local communities. To do this successfully it is vital to firstly understand what tourists are looking for.

Nature-based experiences

Tourists are looking for experiences where they can be surrounded by nature or engage in physical activities set in beautiful landscapes. Seeing and learning about wildlife and ecosystems such as coral reefs and forests are also sought-after activities.

Activities can range from passive (simply enjoying the surroundings through to adventure sports. Typical experiences include:

Passive activities	Meditation, yoga retreats or other relaxing pastimes that benefit from natural surroundings, staying in traditional village accommodation
Gentle activities	Walking, swimming, wildlife watching / safari / boat tour / farm tour
Soft Adventure (specialist skills not required)	Hiking / trekking, kayaking, snorkelling, rafting, cycling, zip lining
Hard Adventure (More strenuous, technical support required)	Mountaineering, white-water rafting, other sports



Cultural experiences

Many tourists are curious about different cultures and look for experiences that help them to **find out about other people's way of life** by learning about their traditions, food, religion and history. Tourists expect to interact with local people to make their learning experience more emotional, authentic, unique and interesting.

Typical experiences include:

Historical sites	Visiting built or natural heritage sites, significant in terms of historical events / culture / religion
Culturally rich areas and community-based tourism	Visiting villages and tribal communities, local markets, traditional farms. Immersive experiences include cooking / food preparation, arts and crafts such as weaving, music, bushcraft, storytelling, harvesting and traditional farming practices.

Combining nature and culture

Although these experiences have been categorised to illustrate the differences, it is important to recognise that there are opportunities to integrate culture and heritage features into nature-based activities and vice versa.

In Pacific Island Countries, **nature and cultural heritage are closely intertwined and therefore**, any type of tourist experience that you create is an opportunity to meet the tourist demand for both nature-based and cultural experiences.



Understanding Your Visitors

Who visits the Pacific Islands?

In recent years before COVID, tourism in the Pacific region had seen consistently positive growth. Here are some statistics from **2019 to illustrate trends prior to the pandemic. To find out more about visitors to your country** go to the website of the National Tourism Organisation or relevant authority to request information. A list of contacts is provided at the end of this chapter.

Air	2.26 million visitors were received by air and this was 5.2% above 2018 and this positive growth was seen in almost 90% of the Pacific destinations .
Sea	728,091 visitors arrived by sea. These were mainly cruise (day visitors).

In total, 2.9 million people visited Pacific Island Countries during the year. The illustration below shows the top source market countries for **Pacific Island Countries as a whole** and the percentage increase in growth between 2018-2020.



The top source markets vary for Pacific Island Countries and for up-to-date information you should check with the relevant tourism authority in your country.

Prior to the pandemic, top source markets that were showing the biggest growth in visitors included: USA 14.6%, Europe 10.9%, Pacific Islands 7.3%

This shows a significant increase of visitors from across the Pacific Islands, illustrating great potential during the recovery phase and beyond. It is important to note the diversity of these markets and to understand how they differ from each other when considering how to create experiences that meet their needs.

Purpose of visit to the Pacific:

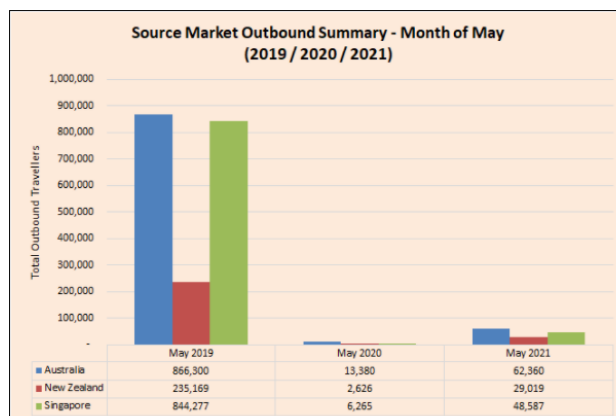
- Leisure 62.3%
- Visiting friends and relatives (VFR) 14.7%
- Business Visitors 13.1%

All data taken from 2019 Annual Review of Visitor Arrivals Report, SPTO¹.



Watching outbound market trends in 2021 and beyond

SPTO produce a monthly [market watch newsletter](#)² for source markets and it is recommended that you subscribe to receive this. The left image below illustrates the number of people that travelled internationally (i.e. outside of their country and not necessarily to the Pacific Islands) in May 2019, 2020 and 2021. It is worth noting that the Singapore market grew x8 times from 2020-21. The image on the right shows the progress that source market countries are making with vaccination programmes which also impacts on readiness to travel.

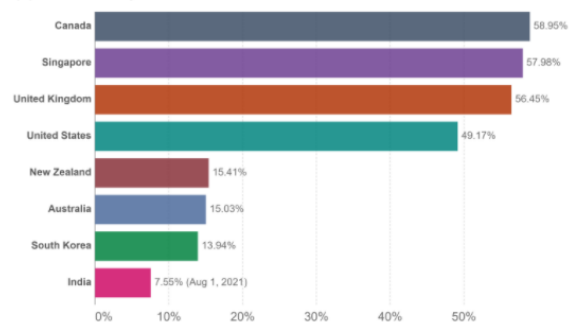


May 2021 vs May 2020 vs May 2019: Year-on-year look at outbound trends in our sample of 3 source market countries

Source: SPTO Market Watch June 2021

Share of the population fully vaccinated against COVID-19

Total number of people who received all doses prescribed by the vaccination protocol, divided by the total population of the country.



Source: Official data collated by Our World in Data. This data is only available for countries which report the breakdown of doses administered by first and second doses. Alternative definitions of a full vaccination, e.g. having been infected with SARS-CoV-2 and having 1 dose of a 2-dose protocol, are ignored to maximize comparability between countries. CC BY

Credit: David Kirkland & SPTO



Understanding visitors to individual destinations

Understanding the profile of visitors to your destination is very important in designing and adapting products and therefore keeping track of available information should be an ongoing activity. (Refer to [Tool 1.1](#) for a checklist to help with this.)

Each year SPTO produce **annual visitor reports** and highlight valuable insights for individual countries where data is available. Some countries are able to conduct **international visitor surveys** (IVS) that show **who** visited (demographics), the **purpose** of their visit (PoV) and **satisfaction** with activities and experiences.

Whilst it is not possible to include all data at the time of writing (and this would also very quickly become outdated), below is a snapshot from 2019 data on the **PoV** for individual destinations that was available at the time of writing. (SPTO, 2019)

Destination	Leisure	VFR	Business	Other	Total
Fiji	656, 249	92, 026	56,933	89,181	894, 389
Tonga	28,296	25,596	3,816	9,809	67,517
Kiribati	3,348	267	3,469	822	7,906

For information about your country, contact the relevant tourism authority. SPTO also produce quarterly reports available on their [website](#)³ and you can request access to Snapshot Reports [here](#). Explore and understand the key reasons that tourists visit as this will help to appreciate the types of activities that will suit them. For example, business travellers will have less time than leisure visitors and will need convenient options such as short transfers, however they may be prepared to pay higher prices than leisure visitors particularly for corporate experiences.

Visitor profiles

Understanding the profile of visitors to your destination will also help you in understanding types of activities that are in demand and the different consumer trends that may influence their purchasing decisions and expectations. You can request this information from the relevant tourist office, authority or NTO to understand the demographics better for your destination. For further guidance on how to use visitor profile information refer to [Tool 1.1.1](#).

Keeping up-to-date with visitor demographics, trends and satisfaction will benefit your business by being able to adapt and respond as necessary. To read about visitor optimism for returning to travel see [Tool 1.1.2](#)



The domestic / regional market

After lockdown, the first response to the pandemic was for consumers to default to domestic tourism, driven by the desire to catch up with friends and family, as well as take advantage of nature and open space after staying indoors for months.

One of the few positive impacts of the pandemic has been a rise in people taking the time to discover what is on their doorstep. This has been a crucial support for businesses and it is expected that domestic tourism will continue to play an important role in supporting destinations to recover from the pandemic.

Although it is not realistic for all destinations in the Pacific region to benefit from domestic tourism given that these are often very small markets, however it is likely that Pacific Island residents will look to explore destinations closer to home during the recovery phase and beyond. Initial trends for international markets indicate a strong desire to travel close to home even if travelling internationally⁴ (rather than taking long-haul flights) so this may result in more international travellers from the Pacific region travelling to closer destinations rather than taking much longer flights.

Meeting the needs of domestic and regional visitors Pacific Island Case Studies

In the Marshall Islands, the Office of Commerce, Investment & Tourism (OCIT) has been promoting the rediscovery of local tourism experiences to boost livelihoods. A promotional booklet containing discounted hotel rates, information on activities such as game fishing, neighbouring island getaways, calendar of events and flight information are a selection of activities as well as a **summer night market** to support small business communities to showcase and sell their products. **Source:** SPTO⁵

The Vanuato Tourism Office (VTO) is running a marketing campaign to grow domestic tourism and has enabled thousands of Vanuatu's people to discover their own country with fresh eyes and has driven bookings to businesses that previously had little or no domestic patronage prior to the pandemic⁶.



Examples of domestic deals on offer in Vanuatu

Source: www.vanuatu.travel

Domestic and regional tourists are interested in similar experiences to international tourists, including adventurous, authentic experiences and opportunities to spend time outside in nature but they might want to do things a bit differently, so consider what small 'tweaks' to your product that you might want to make to reach this market. For example, food and drink expectations may be different and the amount of time spent in activities might need to be changed. In the next chapter there is guidance on 'creating added-value' and this applies to adapting products for new markets.

Don't presume that urban residents have access to the activities you offer! For example, many young people won't have had the opportunity to visit a rural village.

Think about what you can do to reach this growing market and create different 'add-ons' so that if local tourists have tried one experience already, they can try something different.

Across the world many hospitality businesses are adapting and evolving by pivoting / switching up their services to make an income. For example:

- Accommodation → Cafes and catering services
- Cafes and restaurants → increase outdoor capacity

Tourists from within the Pacific region could be a key driver for kick-starting your business before long-haul international arrivals pick up again.

REFLECTION

What can you do to attract locals to visit your business?

- Consider how to adapt your offer to make it a special experience for domestic and regional visitors.
- **Consider offering special prices / packages.** Many hotels offer reduced prices for weekend stays to attract locals. Contact and network with local accommodation providers to better understand this growing market. **You don't want to focus on discounting too much but rather create deals that suit their preferences.**
- **Think about your marketing.** Can you do an interview in a local newspaper to promote your business? Can you work with local social media influencers to better promote your product to a local audience?
- **Consider organising a special event/day specifically designed for domestic / regional tourists.** Make small changes to presenting your product for this event so that it is tailored for these markets. This can increase interest, provide valuable insights into what works and how to cater for domestic and international tourists. For example, if you usually offer a fruit tasting experience for international tourists, this may not be so popular with Pacific Island residents as they are accustomed to eating tropical fruits regularly, but you could showcase lesser-known recipes or find other ways to incorporate more immersive experiences beyond food tasting.



Credit: David Kirkland & SPTO

Understanding Evolving Market Trends

Tourists are increasingly looking to discover what lies beyond the hotel and beach to experience the sights and sounds of the **'real'** destination. Our research suggests that, in many respects, COVID has accelerated the travel trends that were emerging before the pandemic as people continue to seek out **unique, authentic experiences that stand out from the crowd.**

Visitor trends will build on pre-pandemic trends

"We believe that the **new trends are just a follow up of things that were already moving in the past, that they are being accelerated**... Things that maybe in the past used to be seen as special or as especially defined or designed for a target group are now completely becoming a mainstream trend.

For example, everything that has to do with sustainability, open air experiences, adventure and nature-based activities, cultural experiences, bespoke and more immersive experiences, smaller groups, and everything with a focus right now on Health and Safety"

Alberto Cervera, Head of Caribbean, TUI

TUI is a major international tour operator serving mainstream European and North American markets (via Sunwing)

Although in the short to medium term visitor numbers will be down compared to pre-pandemic levels, when it is safe to travel again, pent up demand is expected to result in a fairly rapid increase in tourist arrivals.

*Many operators anticipate that tourists' **appetite for adventure and for experiencing foods, cultures and different settings** will be at an all-time high after spending so long cooped up in their own homes and locales during the pandemic.*

Younger audiences are likely to lead the way. Millennials and Generation Z are at the forefront of these trends so make sure your advertising and promotion is targeting these groups. This will mean ensuring that you have an active online presence, especially on social media. (Note that chapter 7 is dedicated to online marketing)

The following pages of this chapter will explain the key trends identified through primary research conducted with international tour operators in 2020/21 alongside top tips on how you can respond to these trends and ensure that your business stands out from the crowd when tourism returns post-pandemic.

Private and small group tours

Several tour operators have reported a growing demand for private tours in recent years and especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as people are less willing to travel in larger groups. The demand for smaller or individual tours also fulfils a growing interest in having a more tailored, bespoke experience in which the tourist(s) can get to know a local guide, ask questions and get an insider's perspective of the destination.

This is considered more immersive and authentic than a pre-programmed tour with a coach load of other tourists that provides the same experience multiple times per week. The trend for smaller or private tours is expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

Wide open spaces

Research conducted by Tourism Australia reports that Australian tourists consider naturally wide-open and remote destinations as safer and that this is a top trend⁸. After spending more time at home during the pandemic people are developing a new appreciation for being out in nature.

REFLECTION

If you offer tours and excursions, can you adapt these to offer a wider variety of options for customers that include private and small group tours?

When advertising these types of tours, make sure **you demonstrate how the experience can be tailored to smaller groups or individuals** so that customers understand there are ways of having a more unique and tailored experience that is different to the standard group experience.



Sustainable products and experiences

The pandemic has accelerated the demand for sustainable products and practices, a trend that was already gathering pace before the COVID pandemic⁹.

In 2019, 10 million travellers using the online booking platform Skyscanner selected a "Greener choice" option when booking.

Booking.com reported that 72% of travellers think travel companies should offer more sustainable choices

In a survey conducted by tour operator Exodus, 78% of travellers considered themselves to be more ethically conscious than they were a year ago.

"We've recognised a large increase in environmental travels. We see a lot of environmental concerns in clients" - Christian Schutte, Product Manager Der Touristik



Top Trend: Travel as 'a force for good'

Australian travellers seek brands and experiences that are 'not only good for them but also for the world around them'.

91% like to travel to become more open-minded and knowledgeable about the world

74% seeking out travel experiences that allow them to give back to a destination.

'Young Aussies' lead the way on this trend with 70% of 18-24 year olds wanting to be more environmentally and socially conscious on their travels¹².

Research suggests that because of the pause in travel due to COVID and as a result of growing concern over sustainability, many consumers will be booking fewer but longer trips. When travel resumes, they may also look to book once in a lifetime, bucket-list type trips. This is a good sign for pacific islands that are perfectly located for round-the-world trips.

REFLECTION:

Consider how you can respond to the increased demand for sustainability. The key aspects to consider are:

- Reducing energy and water use.
- Purchasing local products where possible.
- Reducing single-use plastic and minimising waste
- Ensuring tours do not negatively impact natural habitats and wildlife.
- Informing customers how they can help to protect the environment
- Think about what you may already be doing!

Experiences that 'give back' to local communities

The growing demand for tourism that supports local communities is being reflected in consumer holiday decision-making. Increasingly, tour operators are incorporating into the holiday experience a way to **give back to the community that goes beyond just paying for an excursion and providing jobs.** Refer to [Tool 1.2](#) for further insight.



Consumer demand for sustainable travel has not only increased, but the emphasis has also changed; social impact has moved to the top of the agenda, taking its place alongside environmental sustainability

*Source: WTTC 'To Recovery Beyond' **Error!** ookmark not defined.*



REFLECTION

Even if your business is not providing a community tourism activity or experience, it is still possible to demonstrate how it supports the local community. This could help to tap into the increasing tourist desire to give something back to the destination they are visiting. For example:

- **Are you buying goods or services from local suppliers?** If so, showcase this. Tell your customers about the farmers, or craft producers, you work with so that your customers can see how their money is helping to support the local economy.
- **Are your staff from the local area?** If so, make sure this is communicated to tour operators and customers, and use this as a marketing tool. Having local staff not only supports the local economy but also provides a more authentic experience for guests.
- **Can provide training opportunities?** Maybe you could offer work experience opportunities to young people or students to learn more about running a tourism business by giving talks or running a 'back of house' tour.
- **Can you offer free or subsidised experiences for surrounding communities?** E.g free/reduced cost meeting spaces or use of other facilities, or opportunities for children to go on a tour, visit an attraction or try out an activity?
- **Consider using your business/tour/activity as a means of collecting tourist donations towards a community project.** This would need to be decided in conjunction with the local community and managed appropriately but could be an effective way of mobilising your tourism activity to support the surrounding area and people.

How you work with communities must be communicated very clearly. Tourists and tour operators will be very keen to understand **how the experience they have purchased benefits people and communities.**

Case Study: Amoa Resort, Samoa

The Amoa Resort Savaii took part in the 2018 Sustainability Monitoring Programme and have since been working to improve resource consumption, waste reduction, conservation efforts and procurement which includes looking at how much the resort spends on local products rather than imports¹³.

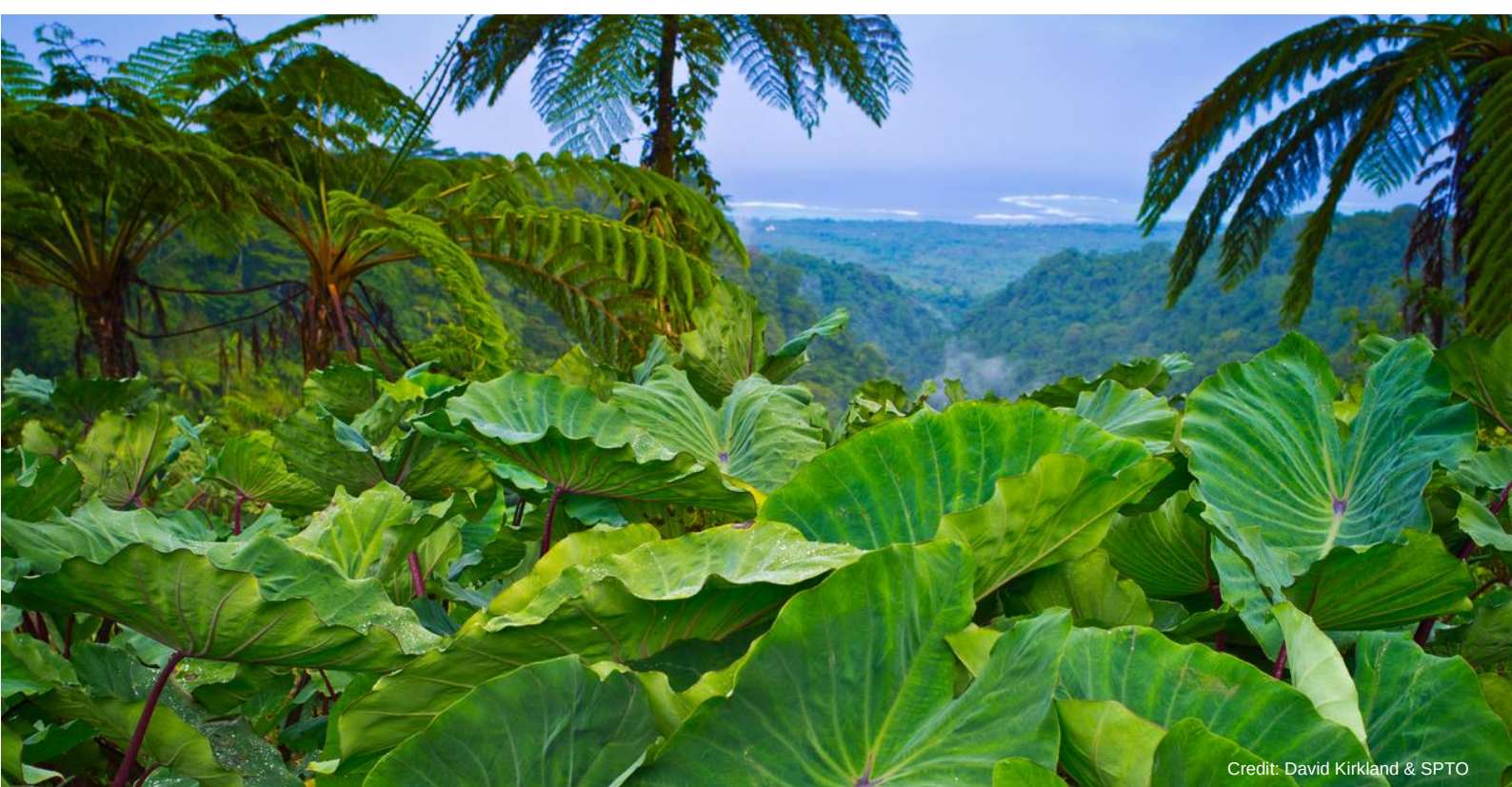
*"We've always had the mantra **local where possible**, particularly for the menu and souvenirs.*

*We are on an island so it makes sense to operate this way and our overseas markets and locals **appreciate knowing where their money is going**. We have a growing variety of quality meat, seafood & vegetables grown on the island, not to mention koko and coconut oil and the quality is far superior to what our guests can find overseas.*

*This in itself is a **unique selling point** to travel to Savaii and taste our very best produce."*

Elisabeth Siaosi, Resort Manager Amoa Resort Savaii.

This programme was made possible through support from SPTO, Samoa Tourism Authority, Sustainable Travel International and the UNDP



Credit: David Kirkland & SPTO

Culture and heritage

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation have adopted the following definition of cultural tourism:

“A type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination.

These attractions/products relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions”.

Source: UNWTO

Tourists can experience pacific island culture across a variety of different excursions through **gastronomy, community and nature tours as well as entertainment including music and dance**, so what makes a culture tour a culture tour? In reality, all of these types of tours can tick the ‘culture’ box as long as they provide an **educational or immersive experience relating to the culture** of the destination that is different to that of the tourist’s home country.

Heritage tours are usually focussed on a particular aspect of the history or customs of a country and might include tours of historical sites, and museums. The demand for tours and activities with a cultural element can be seen across all types of travellers from couples to families to older groups. **Heritage tours, on the other hand, are particularly popular among older travellers.** For examples of cultural experiences see [Tool 1.3](#).



Credit: David Kirkland & SPTO

Tourists love ‘your normal’!

The normal and everyday aspects of life might not seem exciting to you but many great tourist experiences can be created where they can get to experience life as a local. For example, not many tourists can taste freshly picked coconut!

“Look at your international visitor survey to see what tourists enjoy most about your destination.”

Petero Manufolau, Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Authority of Kiribati

In Kiribati, 40% of tourists cited friendly and hospitable people as the best feature of their visit.

Authentic and unique experiences

The search for authenticity: All the international tour operators that were consulted to develop this handbook stated 'authenticity' as one of the top qualities that tourists are looking for when deciding where they want to go on holiday and what they want to do in destination.

*According to Euromonitor International, the world's leading provider of strategic market research, in the post-COVID landscape **authentic and local experiences** are now the **most valued holiday attribute beyond safety**.*

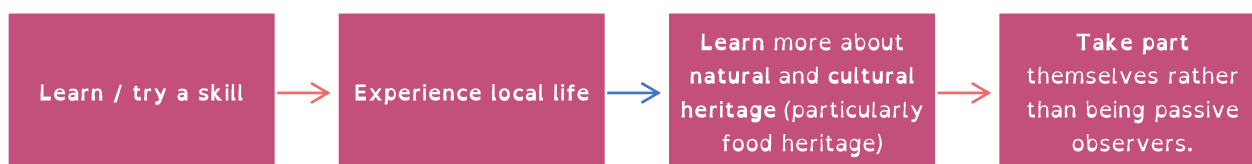
What does authentic mean?

Unfortunately, there is no one agreed definition of authenticity when it comes to tourism, although there are many academic studies on this topic! However, as illustrated throughout this handbook there are features of cultural tourism experiences that the tourism sector agree on as important:

- An authentic tourist experience has **wide tourism appeal**, while remaining **true to the past** and **present culture** of the community.
- An authentic tourist experience allows tourists to **appreciate and learn about local ways of life**.

These aspects are very important to consider for selecting the right type of experiences that a tourist can respectfully engage in and enjoy. It is also important to understand the present needs of the community and the types of activities that they **want to engage in** with tourists.

The demand trend that is being seen now is for **rich learning and cultural exchanges**. For example, where tourists can:



Refer to the case studies in [Tool 1.4](#) for examples of authentic experiences.

On the next page, the message from Jerry Spooner, Director of Department of Tourism, Vanuatu illustrates the importance of educational and experiential tourism experiences as well as meaningful participation in tourism for communities.

A message for SME's developing authentic experiences



Jerry R. Spooner, Director

Department of Tourism,
Republic of Vanuatu

"As part of our Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Strategy, we are supporting SME's to develop 'Agritourism experiences' as a decolonisation strategy to support a return to our **rich local food culture**. The educational and experiential component of agritourism is used as a strategy to better **connect our people our youth and visitors to Vanuatu's productive sector, value added products, and traditional food and traditional farming heritage**.

This is a different approach to how agritourism has been applied previously in the Pacific. **It is about so much more than supplying resorts with fresh produce**. We cannot expect resorts to use our local produce and value-added products if our own people do not have pride in our food culture anymore. Our people have transitioned from our local food to consuming imported low nutritional, high calorie products which is behind the increasing NCD rates in our country.

At the core of agritourism for Vanuatu is ***tourism is not your primary source of income***. 'Agritourism experiences' are designed to encourage meaningful participation from our people and our communities in tourism while also supporting Vanuatu's SME's to diversify and lessen their dependency on tourism. This speaks to the strength of Ni Vanuatu which is our incredible resilience and adaptability. Returning to our land and our cultural heritage is the best strategy in supporting the wellbeing of our people against increasing external threats such as the COVID 19 pandemic and climate change".



Authentic experiences incorporating Indigenous knowledge (IK)

An International Visitor Survey conducted in Australia, reported that there was a 5% increase each year for the six years prior to the pandemic in visitors taking part in indigenous tourism experiences. Whilst this data was recorded for Australia it does show a trend amongst international visitors⁸. When thinking about experiences involving indigenous communities, the UNWTO¹⁴ advise to embrace indigenous knowledge. For example, of nature, natural medicine and plants, how to look after the environment. **Bringing this knowledge to life** for tourists is an important direction to take when creating cultural tourism experiences.

“Embrace the great diversity of the revitalized Indigenous knowledge (IK) during the pandemic, as it will feed in the authentic Indigenous tourism experiences of the future, bringing market innovation and valorization of the IK for the generations to come.”

Source: UNWTO Inclusive Recovery Guide¹⁴

REFLECTION

- Are you providing an authentic or unique experience? If so, make sure you tell this story.
- How does your product/experience stand out from the crowd?
- What makes it unique and special? For example, if it is a family business, say this, and let people know how long the business/land/hotel has been in your family. People love personal stories and this may make your business more appealing than a similar one nearby that doesn't have a family history or unique anecdote attached to the business.
- Think about other changes or personal touches you can make to your product that will make it more unique and help it to stand out from similar activities or experiences.



Credit: David Kirkland & SPTO

Food, glorious food!

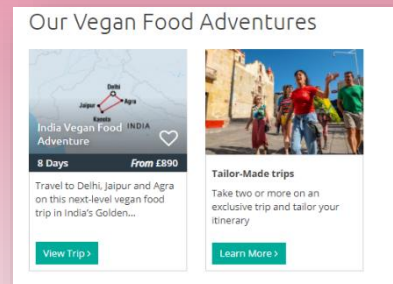
Gastronomy tourism was witnessing a big surge in popularity before COVID and demand for local produce is at the forefront of this wave. 'Trying a local delicacy' came second in a 2019 Booking.com survey that asked customers to list the activities they had planned for their next trip.

Gastronomy tourism ticks off many boxes for customers as it provides an immersive experience that enables them to discover the 'real' destination through food and to learn about the history and culture of local cuisine. It is also being driven by a desire to support local businesses and reflects a growing consumer demand for health and wellbeing products.

A recent report by **Booking.com** predicts that eating 'local' food is now an important component of the holiday experience for 71% of travellers.

An Intrepid General Manager told us *'people don't have to buy tours but they have to eat, so let's give them a high quality experience. It can be street food, food cooked by Grandma... it doesn't have to be high-end'*

Travel companies are responding to this increase in demand with many different offers such as cooking classes, food tours and more that they are beginning



Source: Intrepid

The Vegan Boom!

Asia is reportedly seeing a boom in veganism according to an article by TTT Asia¹⁵. Intrepid¹⁶, based in Australia reported an 80% increase in vegan food tours between 2018-2019. Tour operators and tourists are actively seeking vegan experiences and so this is a key trend to focus on. It is likely there will be a slight dip in demand for gastronomy experiences in the short term due to ongoing health and safety concerns and initial caution about busy settings with lots of people in close proximity. However, this is expected to subside as vaccinations programmes progress and restrictions are eased.

REFLECTION

Do you provide food and drink to customers? If so, where does this food come from? If it is local, then make sure that people know this. If not, can you source more local ingredients?

- Are you serving authentic cuisine?
- Can you incorporate anecdotes about the history of local delicacies? For example, centred around the importance of the coconut tree to Pacific culture. If you are serving authentic local dishes, then this is likely to be quite different to the food that tourists eat at home and can be viewed as a cultural experience in itself for many guests.
- Be sure to make the most of this and provide information on the background, customs and preparation of local dishes, fruits, juices, seasonal specialities etc.
- Can you provide vegetarian or vegan options? If so, make sure that customers know this! Add information on signs and menus to show which dishes can also be served vegetarian or vegan.

Nature and adventure is on the list

*“People will play safe in 2022, and then people will book their bucket-list type experiences from 2022. I think they’ll be more adventurous than before. I think there’ll be higher spend than before. People will be looking for these **once in a lifetime experiences**.”*

Kirsten Hughes, UK Managing Director / Chief Commercial Officer, Travel Counsellors
Travel Counsellors is a global tour operator selling tailor-made holidays.

'Bucket list' refers to a wish list of
once in a lifetime experiences

'Adventure' tours and experiences
include things like zip lining, rafting,
falls-climbing. These trips are
especially popular with younger
travellers - Millennials and Generation
Z.

The pandemic has inspired a return to nature for many people who have been spending more time outside to meet social distancing requirements, as well as to exercise and escape the confines of their house during lockdown. This increasing appreciation for nature and the great outdoors has spilled over into travel preferences. The tour operators we interviewed mentioned they are getting **more requests for outdoor, nature-based activities and experiences**. This provides a great opportunity for the creation of new experiences that capitalise on the unique natural features of the Pacific islands.

Tourists are increasingly keen to try something new while on holiday and the pandemic seems to have accelerated this trend with more wanting to book their 'bucket list' destination when restrictions have eased and they can travel safely again.

REFLECTION

- If your business ticks off boxes relating to adventure, nature and culture then make sure this is really clear on your website and social media. Think about using key words and phrases such as **'open air'**, **'connecting to nature'**, **'once in a lifetime'** etc.
- Can you move more of the experience outside to avoid any concerns relating to COVID and tap into the appetite for open-air experiences?

If you offer a tourist experience that is classed as a cultural experience consider the following:

- Are tourists supported to learn about the culture?
- Is the experience immersive – can the tourists take part themselves or interact with local people in a meaningful and culturally appropriate way?

Ensure that you highlight these aspects of your tour to show how your product is responding to the market trends.

Health, Safety and Security

Underlying all of these trends is the importance of demonstrating how you are adhering to COVID health and safety protocols and how you are taking steps to ensure your customers feel safe and secure. **Your first priority should be to follow health and safety protocols that have been developed for your country.** International expectations for health, safety and security is covered in Chapter 3 of this handbook.

A Euromonitor survey conducted in 2020 found that offering a 'safe destination' was the most valued attribute that a travel company could provide to a customer. This is echoed by research in Australia illustrating that this is a worldwide trend.

"People want something authentic but they also need to feel safe in these experiences" Kirsten Hughs, Travel Counsellors



REFLECTION

Make sure you have visible signs that show you are taking health and safety seriously. This will probably include multiple hand sanitization stations, face masks and social distancing in the short to medium term. Make sure that staff are well-trained on these protocols and that they are being adhered to in a consistent manner.

It is also useful to provide a space for customers to read up about less visible health and safety procedures you have in place e.g. risk assessments, enhanced cleaning standards, contactless payment options, digital menu options etc. These could be listed on your website and on a notice board in your premises.

Online and corporate markets

Research conducted for this handbook found that many tour operators emphasised the growth in demand for online, virtual experiences such as **tours, cooking and craft lessons**. There are great opportunities for small businesses to connect with global markets as well as the corporate sector looking for employee rewards, incentives and social events. Educational institutions are also looking for virtual experiences in the absence of international travel and topics such as geography, biology, history and art could be explored for opportunities to create virtual experiences.

Businesses often organise team building events or rewards for employees. In the absence of travel there has been a significant surge in demand for virtual experiences. For example, purchasing a cooking class for a group of employees. An ingredients list would be sent in advance and the whole experience lasts for approximately one hour.

Art and craft lessons are also growing in popularity as gifts, and this is a great opportunity for artisans to share their skills in a non-invasive way.

Educational institutions are also looking to connect students with expertise in particular areas of the world; topics that are particularly well suited to the Pacific islands include biodiversity and species protection, marine conservation, indigenous culture and heritage.



Intrepid Travel is the largest small group adventure travel company in the world. The company offers more than 1,000 escorted tours worldwide.

“Online experiences are here to stay. Now the market is much more open which is good for SMEs but also competition is much bigger and wider. Small operators need to be very agile and know how to change to be competitive. Bear in mind that virtual tours are not a massive money maker but it keeps guides engaged and in practice. “

General Manager OTAs, Intrepid Travel

Whilst you may not be immediately ready to offer online experiences, customers and travel companies are increasingly expecting suppliers, particularly experience providers to produce digital content so it is worth exploring how you might do this. In other words, **content is key!**

Although there is a great deal to potentially learn when it comes to producing great online content and experiences, many small businesses have learned very quickly during the pandemic demonstrating that it is possible!

Here are some tips from Intrepid Travel, for creating online experiences:

- Quality of tour guides / activity leader is extremely important (as with any experience!)
- Guides should be ‘trained’ / shown how to use the camera, understand how to manage lighting and entertain during the film.
- Ensure that the guide / activity leader has practiced and that the timing works as advertised.

REFLECTION

- Which of these types of online experiences would work well with your product?
- Research types of online experiences and identify how you could create an appealing product for this market
- Could you practice by starting to create a digital advertisement of your product?



Chapter 1: Key Takeaways

Keep up-to-date

Stay alert to changes in markets and customer requirements. In particular, restrictions relating to Covid-19 will impact who can visit as well as how you should operate safely. Keep regular contact with your National Tourism Organisation as a reliable source of information.

Respond to the search for authenticity

More and more people are looking for authenticity and meaningful connections as part of their travel experience. This means that products that include genuine Pacific Island culture, cuisine, communities and natural environments will be in demand. Anything you can do to weave these types of opportunities into your product or experience will be beneficial.

Ensure caring for communities and environment is at the heart of your product

Connect with community groups and relevant local organisations and people that can advise you on how you can create positive impacts. Before you set about adapting or creating new products consider how you can create the lowest environmental impact and the maximum social benefit.

Communication with your customers is key

If your product is already ticking off some of these emerging trends, then make sure this is being communicated clearly to potential customers. This can be through signage, flyers, websites and social media channels. Look for ways of including key words and phrases in your (digital) marketing content e.g. 'authentic', 'unique', 'local', 'sustainable', 'open air', 'connecting to nature', 'once in a lifetime' etc*.

Often, by making certain small changes, you can respond to several growing travel trends at once, providing customers with an authentic and cultural experience that also uses sustainable products. By providing a more sustainable product, you will increase your appeal to customers and differentiate yourself from less sustainable competitors, helping to sell your product to tour operators and customers alike.

Chapter 1: Activity

How to adapt your product to respond to emerging trends

Think about your product, does it correspond to any emerging trends? If so, how? Which aspect of your product aligns to the trend?

Trends

Smaller groups and outdoor activities
Sustainability – environmental impacts
Sustainability – social impacts
Authentic cultural / immersive experiences
Gastronomy
Nature and adventure
Local markets
Online and corporate markets

Once you have recorded your reflections on this first chapter of the manual it is recommended that you **follow up by conducting research**.

This could include speaking with other tourism professionals, businesses, associations and agencies, meeting with community leaders to assess what may be feasible in terms of product development and researching online to look at other experiences on offer locally as well as in other international destinations.

List of Contacts

National Tourism Organisations and Destination Marketing Offices

COUNTRY	NTO/DMO Contact
American Samoa	American Samoa Visitors Bureau Email: info@americansamoa.travel Phone: +1 684-633-9805 Website: American Samoa Visitors Bureau
Cook Islands	Cook Island Tourism Corporation Email: online@cookislands.gov.ck Phone: +682 29 435 Website: Cook Islands Tourism Corporation
Federated States of Micronesia	Tourism Division, FSM Department of Resources & Development Email: fsmtourism@gmail.com Phone: 691 320-5133
Fiji	Tourism Fiji Email: infodesk@tourismfiji.com.fj Phone: 679 6722433 Website: Tourism Fiji
French Polynesia	Tahiti Tourisme Email: info@tahititourisme.com Phone: 1 (310) 414.8484 Website: Tahiti Tourisme
Kiribati	Tourism Authority of Kiribati Email: info@kiribatitourism.gov.ki Phone: +686 25573 / 26003
Nauru	Nauru Tourism Corporation Email: tourismnauru@gmail.com ; olsson.cappy@gmail.com Phone: +674 5540449 Website: Nauru Tourism
New Caledonia	New Caledonia Tourism Email: hello@nctps.com Phone: +687 25.00.29 Website: New Caledonia Tourism
Niue	Niue Tourism Office Email: infocenter2@mail.gov.nu Phone: +683 4224 Website: Niue Tourism
Papua New Guinea	PNG Tourism Promotion Authority Email: info@papuanewguinea.travel Phone: 675 3200 211 Website: Papua New Guinea Tourism Promotion Authority
Rapa Nui	Easter Island Tourism Chamber Email: info@descubrerapanui.com Phone: +56-32-255 0055 Website: Easter Island Tourism Chamber
Marshall Islands	RMI Office of Commerce, Investment and Tourism Email: marketing@rmiocit.org Phone: +692-625-4624 Website: RMI Office of Commerce, Investment & Tourism

Samoa	Samoa Tourism Authority Email: info@samoa.travel Phone: +685 63500 Website: Samoa Tourism Authority
Solomon Islands	Tourism Solomons Email: info@tourismsolomons.com.sb Phone: +677 22442 Website: Tourism Solomons
Timor-Leste	Timor-Leste Ministry of Tourism Email: info@timorleste.tl Phone: 670 3331206 Website: Timor-Leste Tourism Site
Tokelau	Department of Economic Development, Natural Resources and Environment Phone: +690 730831 Website: Tokelau Tourism
Tonga	Tonga Tourism Authority Email: info@tourism-tonga.com Phone: +676 25334 Website: Tonga Tourism Authority
Tuvalu	Tuvalu Department of Tourism Email: info@timelesstuvalu.com Phone: 688 20840 Website: Timeless Tuvalu
Vanuatu	Vanuatu Tourism Office Email: info@vanuatu.travel Phone: 678 22685 Website: Vanuatu Tourism Office
Wallis & Futuna	Tourism Unit - Higher Administration of Wallis and Futuna Email: info-tourisme@mail.wf Phone: +681 72 11 26 Website: Wallis et Futuna Tourisme

Chapter 1: References

¹ <https://southpacificislands.travel/rtrc/>

² <https://eepurl.us2.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=64c2559d6db2e4b7414ccff0d&id=a52e4ef901>

³ <https://southpacificislands.travel/rtrc/>

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