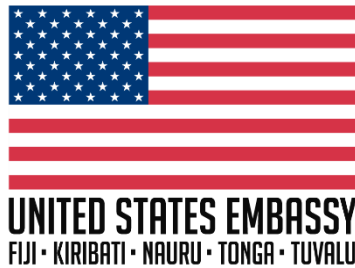




PACIFIC TOURISM
ORGANISATION



SPTO SME Recovery Toolkit

Chapter 2: Designing & Adapting Products

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Tools used for this Chapter:

2.0	Sustainable accommodation
2.1	Sustainable experiences
2.2	Sustainable practices checklist

Chapter 2: Designing and adapting products



The first chapter of the handbook provided information on market trends and the importance of understanding what customers want and need. You will have explored how to respond with suitable types of products and activities that will appeal to tourists and operators.

In this chapter you will find tips on how you can adapt your product to ensure that it appeals to your target markets. You will gain insights into the types of **requirements and minimum standards expected by international tour operators** and how to make sure you are getting the basics right. Lastly, you will find examples of how you can **embed sustainability principles to a range of products and experiences**.

How to use this chapter of the handbook:

The aim for this chapter is to help you to refine your ideas for adapting / enhancing your product or creating a new experience.

This chapter is intended to present important considerations that must be made in the design of your product. Work through each topic, reflect on the information presented and answer the questions.

At the end of the chapter there is an activity that will require you to describe your product in terms of how it fulfils market requirements and shows how you intend to act responsibly in terms of communities and the environment.

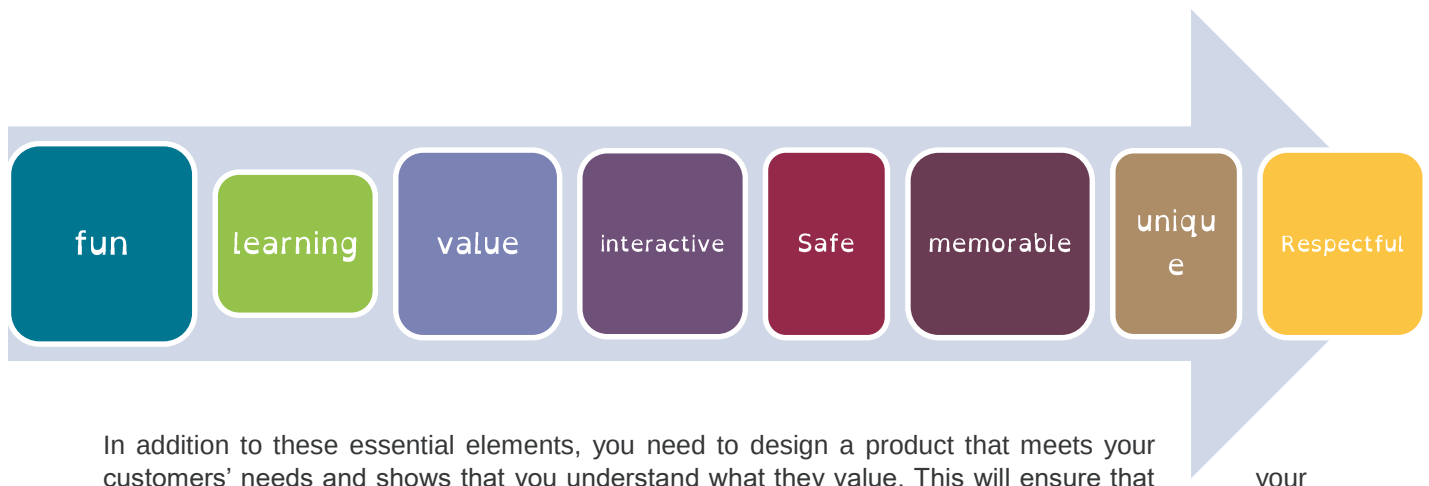


Credit: David Kirkland & SPTO

The essential elements of products

Before thinking about the details of your product it is important to understand firstly, the essential elements or building blocks that must be present as well as the concept of added value. The following two pages explain these critical aspects of product development.

All tourism products should include the following elements, weighted differently, according to the types of product being offered. However, being safe and enjoyable for customers, as well as respectful to the environment and local communities should always be at the heart of your product.



In addition to these essential elements, you need to design a product that meets your customers' needs and shows that you understand what they value. This will ensure that your product is **attractive both to tourists and to tour operators**.

Here is a checklist of what you need to offer to meet tour operator and customer requirements when selecting accommodation and experiences:

- ✓ Provide something unique and different.
- ✓ Include all of the essential elements and be clear which ones **stand out** e.g., interactive, fun, unique.
- ✓ Cater for different ages and needs within your target markets.
- ✓ Provide authentic experiences that will create special memories.
- ✓ Ensure your product has a positive impact on the environment and local communities.
- ✓ Accommodate different group sizes.
- ✓ Communicate how your business is adhering to health and safety protocols to ensure the customer feels safe.

Each of these will be addressed throughout the handbook

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

An important way to add value to your product is by creating opportunities for customers to contribute to local communities. Care should be taken to ensure that this is done in **consultation with community leaders** and that any arrangements are positive for everyone involved.

School or children's homes visits should not be included as they disturb learning and can have a negative impact.

Further guidance is provided later in this chapter

Understanding 'added value'

"Adding value" is about finding a way to **make an excursion really special** so tourists always want to buy it and **recommend** it to others. This can be achieved by offering **very attentive personal customer service, in depth knowledge about a place and its people, extra comfort, additional services or convenience** AND **opportunities to contribute to the local communities visited**.

Adding value is about delivering a product or service that has been designed to meet your customers' needs and delivering it in a way that demonstrates what **they value most**. This includes **tangible** benefits, such as providing a locally grown fruit snack, as well as **intangible** benefits such as the feeling of authenticity that the fruit and how it is served, will provide.



Credit: David Kirkland & SPTO

Added Value



Tour operator selling adventure and activity -based holidays including special interests such as photography and cycling itineraries

"There are very few unique excursions; what we want is something that **adds value** to our clients and gets them immersed in the culture and the nature of a destination"
Product Director, Exodus

All tour operators are looking for products that "add value" to:

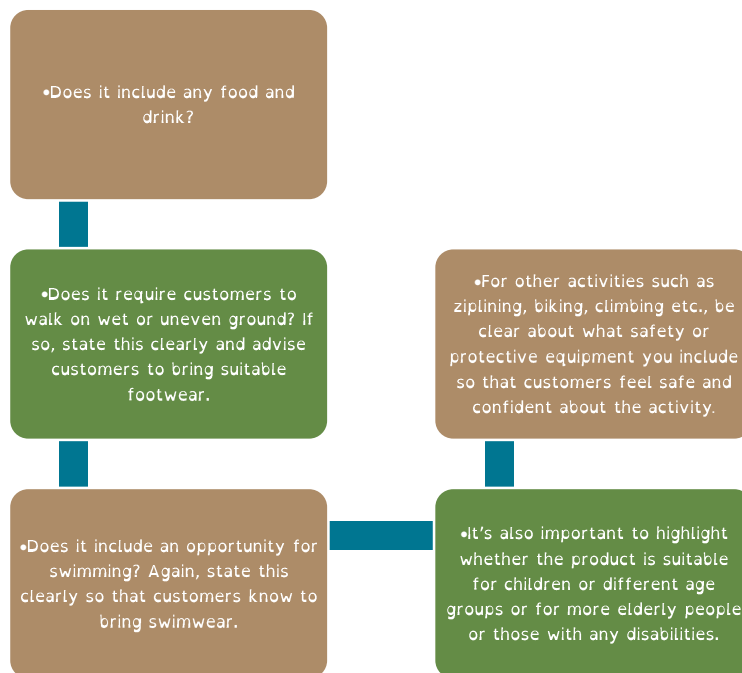
Their Company	There is a lot of competition and all tour operators are looking for a way to differentiate themselves. It is crucial that you can explain how your product "adds value" when compared to similar businesses. Do you offer something that helps tour operators attract more clients AND helps them differentiate themselves from their competitors?
Their Clients	Tour operators want to create moments that will never be forgotten. Will their clients have a memorable experience AND tell other people about it?
Destinations	Tour operators want to show clients that they respect the environment and the destination, it is part of their corporate social responsibility. Clients are demanding this too. No one wants to holiday in a destination that is not being looked after and protected from overdevelopment which destroys its very appeal. Does your business impact positively on local communities and their environment?
All	A General Manager from Intrepid explained that they look for 'a twist'. There will be lots of operators offering similar tours in popular destinations. Operators should find a way to create something special - meeting local people, hearing a story, walking a certain route will 'wow' tourists and they will tell their friends. Communities benefit as do guides and the businesses they represent.

Getting the basics right

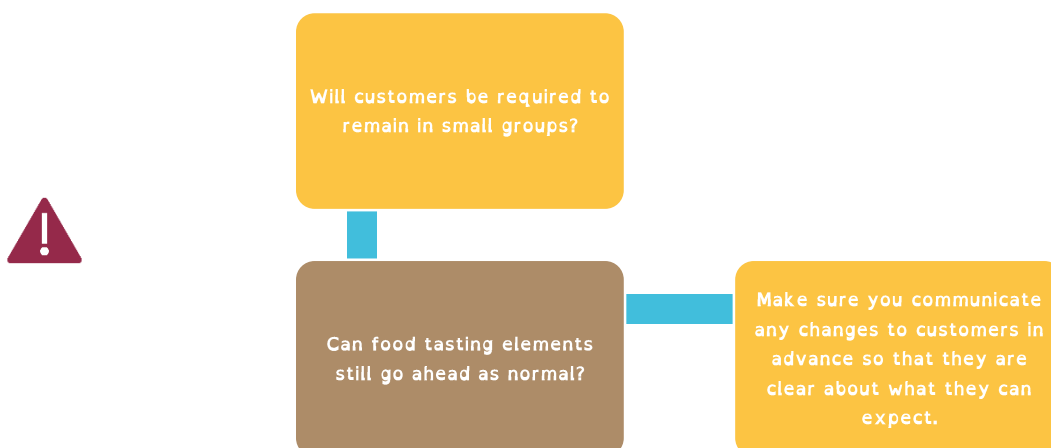
You may have the most polished and unique product but if you can't get the basics right then you will struggle to sell it to tour operators and tourists alike. The points below may seem obvious but it is easy to overlook small details that are essential to customers and tour operators.

Clear description of tour/experience/activities

It is vital to create a clear description of all of the elements of the tour/experience/activity so that customers are well-prepared and know what to expect. For example,



It is also necessary to **update descriptions** to reflect any changes that you have made to conform with COVID-19 Health and Safety protocols or local regulations as follows:



This also minimizes the potential for customers to make a complaint or leave a bad review.

Duration

Attractions and experience providers need to consider how their product will fit into existing tours. This means being clear about whether you are offering a half-day / less than half-day or if you plan to provide a full-day experience.

- If your experience is part of a day-long tour that incorporates other attractions, you will need to be set up for quick visits.
- If you are offering a longer duration, there must be enough for tourists to do as well as a variety of activities.
- Alternatively, you could consider working with other attractions to create a new tour, or offer different experiences at different times of day, such as sunset.

You may also need to reconsider your timings as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.



- **Social distancing:** If you are required to ensure that customers are spread out in a socially-distanced manner, does this affect the length of time it will take for them to view/experience the product?
- **Activities:** Are you still able to offer all of the same experiences and activities that you did pre-pandemic? If not, you may need to adjust the duration of your tour or experience accordingly.

Credit: David Kirkland & SPTO



Opening Times

It is very important to make potential suppliers and customers aware if you only operate at certain times. Consider the following:

- Any promotion should always make the opening times very clear.
- If your business is running at reduced capacity due to the pandemic, ensure that customers are aware of this before they book so that they know what to expect, including any changes to opening times and availability of activities.
- If you are working with communities consider cultural and religious factors that may impact on days and times when they are available

Unclear information can lead to negative reviews which are extremely costly, especially at a time when tourist numbers are lower than usual.

Cancellation Policy

In the short term, it is vital that you have a flexible cancellation policy to attract customers and to account for evolving travel restrictions caused by COVID-19. A highly flexible cancellation policy will not only attract customers but will also help to sell your product to tour operators and third-party agents.

Credit: David Kirkland & SPTO



Embedding sustainability

Sustainability is critically important for the long-term health and wellbeing of people and the planet. It is therefore an increasingly important principle guiding customers' travel choices.

- 64% of global consumers want to travel sustainably and with a purpose.
- 76% of consumers are expected to be more concerned about sustainability after COVID.

Source: Euromonitor International's Voice of Industry Sustainability Survey, April 2020

The diverse ecosystems and indigenous cultures of the Pacific Islands attract tourists from all over the world and tourism can bring important benefits for communities and contribute towards protection of biodiversity when well managed. Unfortunately, tourism also places a greater pressure on these fragile environments and limited supply of agricultural products, water and energy. Waste, particularly plastic generated by the tourism industry is a major problem for marine species and the environment as a whole.

All tourism businesses, therefore have a responsibility to take steps to **minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts on your surrounding environment and community**. These practices will also enhance the appeal of your product to potential customers.

This part of the handbook is designed to support you with implementing sustainable practices as they relate to your business:

- Environmental sustainability for accommodation and for tourist experiences
- Social Sustainability
- Sustainability checklists



Environmental Sustainability and caring for the planet

All types of tourism businesses must have a plan for reducing its environmental impact or 'footprint'. Tour operators and tourists are increasingly expecting suppliers to demonstrate how they practice the following:

- Minimising **energy** consumption: taking measures to reduce the amount of energy needed and how often.
- Minimising **water** consumption: Being efficient with water and encouraging guests to do the same.
- Eliminating and minimising **waste**: Stop or switch to products or services that create zero / less waste, responsible waste management practices.
- Sourcing **local products**: Cut down on imports to reduce travel emissions and support supplier industries closer to home.

Think about your businesses' use of resources such as water and energy. Do you have practices in place to conserve these and minimize waste?



The following tools will support you with environmental practices:

- [Tool 2.0 \(accommodation\)](#)
- [Tool 2.1 \(tours and activities\)](#)
- [Tool 2.2 is a checklist for environmental and social sustainability](#)



Credit: David Kirkland & SPTO

Social sustainability and caring for people

Staff welfare and well-being: What policies do you have in place to motivate your staff and support their well-being? If staff feel happy and supported in their job, they are much more likely to provide high-quality customer service to guests. Do you have any systems in place to incentivize and reward staff? You could think about linking this to your sustainability goals. For example, you could reward staff that take the time to communicate specific environmental policies to guests or you could nominate staff on a rolling basis to act as a sustainability monitor or plastic reduction champion.

Giving back to your local community:

As illustrated in chapter 1, tourists are looking for travel experiences that give something back to the local community. **It is now important to identify specific actions that you will take** to support communities and demonstrate **how your actions create benefits locally**. Use the questions below and the case study on the next page to help with your planning.

In addition to employing local staff and identifying opportunities for training and upskilling local people to facilitate future employment opportunities, can you find ways of forging additional links with your local community. For example:

- If you operate an accommodation near a beach, think about hosting a local community **beach clean**.
- **Donate funds to local conservation groups or charities** that are doing valuable work to support the local people and environment? This could be through donations direct from your business or through creating a mechanism where your customers can provide donations.
- What about **donating excess food** that would have gone to waste to local charities, schools, or social projects?
- Can you provide space **for local artists to display and sell their work** in your business? Tourists love buying souvenirs and the more local the products are, the better!

*“The sense of giving back, embedding into the experiences a way to give back not just in terms of paying for an excursion and providing jobs but also in doing something for the community. I really think that one of the things that all of us as travellers are looking for is to not only be the ones that go to a destination and take something away, maybe experiences, memories but also to be able to **give something back and make sure they know that they are giving something back**”.*

Alberto Cervera, Head of Caribbean, TUI

The checklist provided in [Tool 2.2](#) covers environmental and social sustainability.

Guidelines for sensitive tours

Operating tours to culturally and environmentally sensitive locations requires a careful, consultative approach. Whilst there are general principles to follow it is imperative that specific protocols are researched and followed. Below are general guidelines for sensitive or 'high risk' tours followed by a specific example.

Special guidelines apply for “sensitive” and “high risk” tours: *(adapted from tour operator guidelines to suppliers)*

The following guidelines relate to tours that can be considered sensitive for cultural or environmental reasons.

- Always consult community leaders when planning visits to indigenous people, vulnerable communities, local neighbourhoods.
- All animal activities must strictly meet Animal Welfare Guidelines. (covered in chapter 3)
- When visiting protected areas and other fragile ecosystems (eg. coral reefs), **specific regulations** of the protected areas and fragile ecosystems must be followed. Such tours should be guided by skilled and/or certified guides.
- When visiting cultural heritage sites or other culturally sensitive places (eg. places of worship), specific regulations of these places must be followed. Such tours should be guided by skilled and/or certified guides.
- Tours that include physical activity, animal activity and visits to vulnerable communities must undergo a Health & Safety assessment



Working with Indigenous people

With such diverse cultures and histories across the Pacific Islands it is not appropriate to generalise on how to create tourist experiences in consultation with indigenous community groups and this should always be approached via community leaders or agencies that are already in place.

However, these are some guiding principles to follow in your approach:

- The tour demonstrates participation of and meaningful benefit to the Indigenous people and community.
- Cultural content is presented in an appropriate, respectful manner that follows local protocols
- The community being portrayed have control over the content of the cultural elements..
- The provider (SME) can demonstrate a connection to the community portrayed that reflects a responsibility to that community.
- The community is involved in the delivery of experiences.

Case Study

Talanoa Treks, Fiji¹ provide guidance on etiquette alongside tour information.

When you're visiting or staying in a Fijian village there are some important rules for you to remember so that you are being respectful of Fiji's history and culture.

The most important ones are:

- Always wear a sulu (sarong/wrap around material) that covers your legs down to just above your ankles while you're within the village boundaries
- Never wear a hat or anything on your head while you're in the village
- Always take your shoes off before going inside (you can keep your socks on)
- Sit down as quickly as possible when you go inside and don't stand up indoors
- If you need to move around indoors when others are sitting, it's polite to stoop or crawl
- If you're presented with a bowl of kava it's polite to drink the first one.... clap once, take the bowl and drink it all, and after returning the bowl clap three times



Guides mixing kava in Naga – Photo: Elliot Wright

Source: Talanoa Treks¹

Tourists can read about the communities that they will visit and gain a sense of what life is like and the individuals that they will meet.



Certificates and Training

Basic First Aid

Guide Training Course;

Community Health Workers course

Selita Mata Tuivuna

I'm from Nanoko and I'm married to a man in the village of Nabutautau. My husband's name is Setariki Tuivuna. I had two children the eldest one is schooling in Ba. She's in year 9 and she is 14 years old. The second one is still in Primary School. She's in class 4 at Navatusila District School. She's 9 yrs old. I'm doing domestic duties and my husband is a farmer. I also works as a Village Health Worker of Nabutautau. My favourite game is volley-ball and net-ball and my favourite dish is fish with lolo and dalo. Thank you!!!

Interests

playing volleyball weaving mats helping people

Source: Talanoa Treks¹

Certification / accreditation schemes



Whilst it is not necessary to have a formal sustainability certification there is growing awareness amongst tourists of sustainability schemes and it can certainly help your business to stand out. Often the international schemes can be very expensive, however it is important to know what schemes exist locally and what standards are expected so that you can work towards implementing good practices. Examples of well known international schemes for the hotels and tour operators include:

- Travelife for Accommodation²
- Travelife for Tour Operators³

Both of these are based on the GSTC (Global Sustainable Tourism Council) Criteria.

OTAs are also moving towards signposting businesses that have good sustainability credentials and 'sustainability' will become a standard filter option on travel search engines. (There will be more on this in Chapter 7).

[Hotelbeds⁴](#) is a Travel Trade wholesaler selling hotel rooms to tour operators, travel agents and airlines. They are committed to '*becoming a more responsible and transparent business*'. They now identify, highlight and promote sustainable hotels which demonstrates the increasing importance that the industry and consumers are placing on sustainability.



Sustainability Case Study

The accommodation featured below provides great examples of how to implement **good environmental practices and support local conservation efforts**.

The Beach House & Coral Cottage

Unique serviced holiday accommodation in Vava'u, Tonga

Being caretakers of these 8 acres of paradise on Fofoa, we aim to keep our ecological footprint to a minimum.

What we do:

Our eco-homes are run using solar and wind energy with a small generator for back up.

All our water is rain water catchment producing beautiful safe drinking water for all our guests. We provide glass water bottles and carafes for use in the houses and aluminium bottles for trips out on the boat.

Using the recycling centre on Vava'u, we separate our waste and take all glass, tin and hard plastics into Neiafu. All left overs and scraps are fed to our dog, cats or chickens or simply turned into compost.

Our complimentary soaps are made from coconut oil here in Vava'u and the washing up liquid provided is also eco-friendly. In our attempt to minimise our use of single use plastics, we do not provide toiletries. We ask our guests to bring non-toxic hair and body products as well as reef-safe, biodegradable sunscreen and to take home used toiletries so that the plastic is recycled responsibly.

All fruit and vegetables from our garden are 100% organic.

What you can do:

Come whale watching with us!

We donate 20TOP from each of our whale tours to [VEPA](#) (Vava'u Environment Protection Association) to sponsor a variety of environmental projects around Vava'u.



Consider

how you might follow this example:

- ✓ Solar and wind powered energy
- ✓ Rain water catchment
- ✓ Provide reusable bottles for guest water
- ✓ Separate waste and recycle
- ✓ Compost / redistribute food waste
- ✓ Source locally made soaps and eco-friendly cleaning products
- ✓ Communicate to guests about chemical free, reef-safe cosmetics and sunscreens and request that they take home plastic waste with them
- ✓ Donate a proportion of sales to a conservation or community-based NGO

Communication with customers

Finally, don't forget to tell your customers and tour operators about what you are doing to protect the environment and support local communities.

Include information on your website about the measures you are taking and list any codes of conduct or sustainability schemes that you are signed up to.

New initiatives, or updates on how your business is supporting local communities and the environment can be shared on your social media channels.

Most customers will also welcome information about how they can help and opportunities to get involved, such as beach cleans, or donation schemes for local charities.



Chapter 2: Key Takeaways

Ensure your product meets customer needs.

Check for ways that your product **'adds value'** for customers and tour operators and how it stands out from competitors. How is your business providing something unique, fun, educational, safe, interesting, memorable or interactive?. Think about what you can do to add in some of these elements if your business is not ticking off enough of them already. This will ensure that your business is attractive to the needs of tour operators and prospective customers and will put you ahead of the competition.

Ace the basics.

It is imperative that you provide an up-to-date description of your product in addition to key information such as opening hours, contact details, cancellation policies so that ground agents/3rd party sellers and customers know exactly what to expect in advance. This will minimize the potential for anyone to make a complaint or leave a bad review.

Embed sustainability into your product.

Think about what your business is doing or could do to improve its sustainability credentials and find ways to support the local environment and community. Don't forget to let your customers know what you are doing and how they can help. The checklist included at the end of this chapter summarizes many of the suggestions given to help you start making positive changes to your business that will appeal to customers and will help to save you money in the long run!





Chapter 2: Activity

Once you have worked through each topic in this chapter it is recommended that you now **create a description** of your product ensuring that you include all of the essential elements covered:

- Describe your product in basic terms
- Explain how it adds value (stick to a few key points otherwise the messages will become diluted)
- State your practices for managing environmental impacts and any codes of conduct that you will adhere to
- State your activities / actions for supporting communities and any specific protocols that you will adhere to.



References

¹ <https://www.talanoa-treks-fiji.com/hit-heights/#1521334887168-26253a01-517a>

² https://travellifestaybetter.com/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwqp-LBhDQARIsAO0a6aKUTiABzKZ8VifuivY7Th-OWrwKNDnX6mzf4naF8AyzGK0_hLqcVcAaAmghEALw_wcB

³ https://www.travelife.info/index_new.php?menu=home&lang=en

⁴ <https://corporate.hotelbeds.com/sustainability>