3RD PACIFIC SUSTAINABLE TOURISM LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

20 – 21st October 2025
Vava'u Island, Kingdom of Tonga

OUTCOMES REPORT

Prepared by: The Pacific Tourism Organisation

Pacific Sustainable Tourism Leadership Summit Outcomes Report

Midway to 2030: Realigning, Reaffirming, and Recommitting to Sustainable Tourism
Monday 20 October – Tuesday 21 October
Puataukanave Hotel, Vava'u, Kingdom of Tonga

Introduction

1. The third Pacific Sustainable Tourism Leadership Summit was held in Vava'u, Tonga, under the theme of *Midway to 2030: Realigning, Reaffirming, and Recommitting to Sustainable Tourism.* It brought together 100 tourism leaders from government, industry, Non-Government Organisations, youth, community representatives, regional and international organisations and development partners from across 14 SPTO Member Countries.
2. The Summit sought to provide updates on the progress of SPTO in advancing sustainable tourism across the region and realign tourism priorities, to facilitate new dialogues, strengthen networks of partners, and enhance the coordination of investment efforts and collaboration for support of the Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework (PSTPF).
3. To support these objectives, the Summit was facilitated in panel sessions that related to each of the four goals of the PSTPF: Prosperous Economies, Thriving and Inclusive Communities, Visible and Valued Cultures, and Healthy Islands and Oceans.
4. The Summit was made possible through the generous support of the Government and People of the Kingdom of Tonga, the Tonga Ministry of Tourism, PACER Plus, Fiji Airways and Solomon Airlines.
5. The SPTO acknowledges with gratitude the support and contribution of its Member Countries, the Council of Tourism Ministers, SPTO Board of Directors and representatives from National Tourism Organisations (NTOs), private sector, regional and international organisations, development partners, Non-Government Organisations and all delegates of the Summit.

Session One: Presentation of the 2030 Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework Mid-Term Review

6. Strong progress has been made toward each of the four PSTPF goals:
    i. The Pacific region has made significant progress in promoting sustainable tourism, through initiatives such as the Pacific Sustainable Tourism Commitment (with 19 signatories), the launch of the Pacific Sustainable Tourism Standard and portal, recognition through the Commonwealth Secretary General's award, the hosting of leadership summits and a range of initiatives.
    ii. Efforts to support businesses, communities, culture, and the environment include Pacific Youth Forums, Women in Tourism Talanoa, community-based tourism exchanges, cultural tourism guidelines and training, climate resilience

workshops, and initiatives to phase out single-use plastics and strengthen environmental governance and stewardship.

7. Key challenges were highlighted as tourism not being a priority sector for national investment, funding and human resources limitations for implementation, progress monitoring is hindered by data gaps, competing donor priorities, and the varying capacity within and between destinations in the region makes funding and support challenging.
8. Several reflections and suggestions for the way forward were offered, including collaboration across partners and sectors, communities being at the centre of development and policy, sector governance improvement and support, capacity development for the sector requiring ongoing support, and tourism integration across government programmes.
9. A summary of the progress made from 2021 - 2025 can be watched in video format, here.

Session Two: Goal One – Enabling Economic Opportunities for Tourism

10. A strong policy enabling environment is essential in realizing the potential of tourism as a key driver for the Pacific region.
11. As demonstrated by Fiji's experience, it is essential to maintain and deliver a consistent enabling environment for investment through incentives, strengthened aviation connectivity, and enhanced credibility and policy certainty.
12. In the Cook Islands, tourism is a driver for good that is supported, planned, and delivered through an interconnected national framework that promotes inclusion and stewardship, while a lens of sustainable financing ensures every investment strengthens people, culture, and environment, guiding strategic decisions that deliver lasting value.
13. Adventure travel presents significant opportunities to enhance local benefits through increasing the tourism receipts retained within destinations and expand employment opportunities.
14. Recommendations included adopting a phased development approach that prioritises locally operated initiatives and value-added experiences, particularly those that celebrate cultural heritage and environmental sustainability.

Session Three: Goal Two – People Centered Tourism Development

15. The inaugural face to face Pacific Youth Forum on Sustainable Tourism (PYFST) was successful, producing five key outcomes, nine strategic recommendations, and seven thematic priorities. The Forum underscored youth leadership, cultural identity, environmental stewardship, inclusive economic participation and regional collaboration as key outcomes.
16. The PYSFT Outcomes document presented to the Ministers can be accessed here.

17. Discussions also considered the importance of navigating interconnected layers of identity, culture, and faith, recognising that these elements are deeply interwoven. By centring tourism development on this shared cultural-spiritual identity, destinations can create meaningful, authentic experiences that not only celebrate identity but foster shared prosperity and community empowerment.
18. Inclusive tourism policies were noted as key to empowering local communities, particularly female, youth, and indigenous counterparts, with the potential to contribute a 20% increase in Gross Domestic Product for some Pacific nations.
19. Integrating gender-sensitive policies into national frameworks, alongside improved data and leadership capacity is critical to building a more equitable and resilient sector.
20. There is a need for high-level capacity-building initiatives for youth, like that of the Young Entrepreneur Council of the Solomon Islands. Strengthening basic business skills and facilitating streamlined access to business registration processes were seen as essential to enabling greater youth participation.
21. Tourism operations based on environment preservation and restoration were recognised as opportunities to mitigate risk, strengthen resilience, and enable communities to shape their futures.
22. Encouraging tourists to be environmental stewards while visiting destinations and communities was identified as a distinct and valuable aspect of the Pacific tourism experience.

Session Four: Goal Two – Leveraging Partnerships that Matter – Public-Private-Community Partnerships

23. SPTO presented a Community-Based Tourism Peer to Peer Exchange highlights video, which can be watched here.
24. Panellists presented two differing perspectives of the Samoa and Fiji Peer to Peer Exchange on Community Tourism
    i. The first emphasised the importance of aspirational thinking and moving forward together, grounded in shared experiences, cultural traditions, and mutual respect in tourism activities.
    ii. From a government perspective, similar value was placed on learning from neighbouring countries and cultural heritage, with a particular focus on strengthening public-private partnerships to advance community-based tourism.
25. Tourism was metaphorically described as a tree with roots that continues to grow, exemplified by the experience shared from the Ha'atafu village in Tonga. The critical role of women and traditional knowledge was highlighted as central to community development.
26. New Zealand Māori Tourism's role in supporting Pacific exchange programs to develop meaningful, values-driven community tourism was acknowledged.

27. It was strongly recommended that regional community tourism investment be approached from the position of fostering shared prosperity, not providing financial aid.
28. Tourism was identified as a connector industry that engages multiple sectors and contributes to generational wealth creation.
29. The transition from mass tourism to sustainable tourism in Palau initially faced resistance, but has since fostered greater understanding, sector diversification, and national pride in both natural and cultural assets, providing a strong model for other Pacific countries to consider.
30. The development of a Pacific Community-Based Tourism Framework was identified as a potentially valuable tool to support Pacific communities.

Session Five: Goal Three – Reimagining Cultural Tourism Possibilities

31. The Cook Islands' approach to tourism is grounded in holistic guardianship, emphasising cultural, economic, and social dimensions across all age groups, with a particular focus on empowering youth through their Cook Islands Tourism Leadership Programme.
32. The Pacific tourism sector is currently experiencing systemic fragmentation; however, greater integration can be achieved through evidence-based, values-driven research that unifies and supports sustainable and measurable outcomes.
33. Tourism development grounded in *vanua* (land, people, tradition) preserves authentic cultural experiences and honours indigenous knowledge systems. Embedding these values in sector development builds trust with communities and provides a respectful foundation for tourism initiatives that reflect local identity.
34. Pacific beauty pageants extend beyond aesthetics, serving as platforms for the reclamation and redefinition of Pacific feminine identity. This fosters cultural pride and diversity, strengthening regional unity. By elevating female voices and empowerment, pageants contribute to tourism by showcasing the region's identity, drawing interest in local traditions, art, culture and reinforcing the region's identity on a global stage.

Session Six: Goal Four – Building Resilient Pathways

35. To strengthen economic performance and community resilience and ensure fairness, it is necessary to design inclusive climate action plans. These plans must recognise the differing vulnerabilities faced by all individuals involved in the tourism sector due to their specific roles, ensuring that adaptation and mitigation efforts accurately reflect these varied vulnerabilities and experiences.
36. A strong connection exists between meteorology and tourism, highlighting the need for improved weather services to inform planning and minimise tourism-related losses and ensure visitor safety.
37. It was noted that regional efforts prioritise strategic coordination and partnership mobilisation supported by SPTO. At the national level, a tourism-meteorology

coordination mechanism must be established or strengthened within national frameworks and sector plans.

38. Proactive planning and inclusive stakeholder engagement are fundamental to successful crisis management, ensuring that wellbeing, diversification, sustainability, and the three pillars of resilience – availability, accessibility, and affordability are embedded in response strategies.
39. A paradigm shift is required in how insurance is perceived, reframing it from being a financial burden to being a critical investment in resilience.
40. Vanuatu's experience with crisis management and recovery efforts over the years since Cyclone Pam highlighted crucial lessons for the region. These joint efforts between government, communities and industry, prioritised restoring confidence, rebuilding infrastructure, and supporting tourism-dependent livelihoods. The nation's experiences reinforced the importance of resilient planning and preparedness, coupled with sustained partner support to allow the tourism sector and the wider country to withstand future shocks.
41. Samoa's experience in having a dedicated Climate Change Unit within the Samoa Tourism Authority illustrates the evolving role of NTOs in responding to emerging challenges and opportunities. Integrating climate change considerations into tourism planning strengthens resilience and cross-sector collaboration. This leadership demonstrates the need for NTOs to move beyond traditional marketing roles to address cross-sector needs to address sustainability challenges and resilience goals.

Session Seven: Goal Four – Environmental Stewardship through Tourism

42. When conservation and tourism are thoughtfully integrated, they create a mutual synergy that supports ecosystems and local communities. This aligns with the shift from sustainable to a regenerative model of tourism, which transforms how the sector engages with the environment and communities, enabling active restoration, community empowerment, and visitor participation.
43. There is notable global shift from single-use plastics toward sustainable alternatives and substitutes. Through initiatives such as the Pacific Ocean Litter Project (POLP), the Pacific region has an opportunity to demonstrate leadership in environmental protection, thereby ensuring the long-term viability of the ecosystems that underpin its tourism offering.
44. There is concerted effort to embed circular economy principles within the Pacific tourism sector through the Sustainable Tourism Enhancement in the Pacific (STEP) project. This is driving systemic change by removing longstanding barriers and strengthening alignment across countries, industries, and stakeholders.
45. The Summit featured the official launch of the STEP Regional Roadmap informed by four Country Pathways for Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa and Vanuatu.
46. The Summit welcomed the announcement of STEP Phase 2 which signals continued success of this initiative made possible by the European Union's funding and technical assistance through the SWITCH Asia Initiative.

47. The Republic of the Marshall Islands emphasised that community ownership sits at the heart of sustaining long-term commitments to sustainable tourism, reflecting their own journey as a small island state leading by example. Their experience in developing its High-Level Sustainable Tourism Policy and Development Strategy underscored a call for Small Island States and Territories to adopt similar commitments, supported by development partners who can assist in strengthening and scaling these efforts.

Acknowledgement of Summit Contributors:

SPTO on behalf of its Member Countries acknowledges with gratitude the contribution of the following individuals:

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Appendix:

1. Programme
2. Concept Note
3. Pacific Youth Forum on Sustainable Tourism Outcomes 2025
4. Panellist Presentations
5. Photographs from the Event
    a. Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework Mid-Term Review
    b. Community-Based Tourism Peer to Peer Exchange Highlights
6. List of Attendees