PACIFIC ECOTOURISM RECOVERY INITIATIVE

Preliminary Feasibility Assessment of Potential Geotourism Sites in the Pacific: Samoa, Vanuatu, Tuvalu, and Fiji
The Preliminary Feasibility Assessment Report has been prepared by Savvy Vanuatu for the Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO) in collaboration with the Pacific Community (SPC), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Office of the Pacific States and the stakeholders of Samoa, Vanuatu, Tuvalu, and Fiji.

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Introductory Report
Introduction
The Pacific region welcomed a total of 2.9 million visitors in 2019 contributing USD $4 billion in visitor spending to regional economies. As a percentage of the national Gross Domestic Product, tourism receipts for some countries such as the Cook Islands reached 66% in the same year. Direct employment in the sector totalled 90,821 not including those working in support services and businesses in the informal sector. Across the region, some communities have increased dependence on tourism for livelihood support either from jobs, the sale of traditional artefacts, food (agriculture and fishing), cultural experiences and recreational activities amongst others.

Whilst the economic benefits from tourism are notable, the dependency of some Pacific Island Countries on the industry has been acutely evident when the pandemic struck in early 2020 leading to the closure of borders in March and subsequent closure of many businesses. Despite these challenges, the pandemic has provided an opportunity to refocus, rethink and redesign the future of tourism with sustainability of the natural and cultural environment at the forefront. Additionally, opportunities have emerged to diversify tourism experiences, promote niche experiences and services. The Pacific’s natural and cultural heritage are major draw cards for visitors to the Pacific Islands – its diverse flora and fauna, land and sea, home to a resilient and happy people, unique in their own ways yet united by their diverse culture and traditions, beliefs and sense of community, lived over many generations.

In response to the SPTO Council of Tourism Ministers Meeting decision in October 2019 which called for a research to better understand how Pacific Island destinations are differentiated from each other, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in partnership with SPTO launched a Destination Differentiation market research in the New Zealand and Australia markets for the four countries of Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The research concluded that the dominant motivation for travel to Pacific Island destinations is simple rest and relaxation. It further suggests that this view of the Pacific has developed over many years, fostered in part by the promotion of all-inclusive travel deals and high profile destination marketing campaigns. Importantly, the research identifies that the challenge is to develop higher-value differentiated destination offerings while retaining and building upon the positive attributes of the Pacific brand and some volume of activity that this has historically generated. The final report was completed in September and can be accessed here.

The NTO Needs Assessment Report of SPTO Member Countries in August 2020 which aimed at gauging priorities for support from SPTO considering the emerging impacts of the pandemic, pointed to the need for economic diversification within the sector. Research by the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) highlights that traveller patterns and preferences are changing with visitors desiring more environmentally responsible experiences, off the beaten track destinations, opportunities to be immersed in the culture and be able to give back to communities. This, coupled with the devastating impacts of COVID-19 on the industry and communities gives rise to the need for diversifying the tourism offering and rethinking the way in which the local market and inter-regional travel is perceived and developed.

In response to the need to diversify the tourism offering, an opportunity exists to assess the feasibility of developing ecotourism in selected communities with a view that such ecotourism sites could demonstrate strong linkages to

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1 2019 Annual SPTO Visitor Arrivals Review Report
2 SPTO Media Release, Geo – Tourism to Benefit under the Pacific Eco Tourism Recovery Initiative, 25 August 2021
geological sites as a niche segment which could potentially attract domestic and inter-regional demand focused on learning, research and adventure in addition to international market demands and preferences. The recently endorsed Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework sets out a vision for tourism in the Pacific that by 2030 “We are empowered by, and benefitting from tourism that is resilient, prosperous and inclusive. It improves the wellbeing of our communities and protects, restores and promotes our cultures, islands and ocean ecosystems”. This initiative responds directly to these collective regional aspirations as well as to global commitments including the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action or the SAMOA Pathway amongst others.

SPTO CEO, Christopher Cocker, has acknowledged the importance of tourism diversification against the backdrop of tourism reactivation in a post-pandemic world.

“Post–pandemic, we expect a rise in sustainably driven tourism. These eco and socially conscious travelers will be seeking authentic experiences and the Pacific has much to offer in that regard.

As we shift our focus to niche tourism opportunities and the sustainable development of our industry, diversification will become increasingly important to the work of SPTO."

**Background**

The Pacific Ecotourism Recovery Initiative aims to:

- Assess the potential of ecotourism experiences with strong linkages to geotourism opportunities as a diversification strategy for the Pacific Islands
- Enhance community engagement in managing selected tourism sites
- Identify opportunities (including investment options) and barriers for experience development

SPTO is mandated to develop and market tourism with a vision for the Pacific Islands to be empowered and benefitting from sustainable tourism through innovative partnerships as per its Strategic Plan 2020–2024. To this end, SPTO recognises the need to work closely with Pacific island countries and partners through innovative approaches that strengthen the value of Ecotourism and Geotourism opportunities in selected countries. This project aims to support a green and inclusive recovery through a tri-partite
UNESCO Geoparks

UNESCO established the Global Geoparks label in 2015. Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development. A UNESCO Global Geopark comprises a number of geological heritage sites (or geosites) of special scientific importance, rarity or beauty. These features are representative of a region’s geological history and the events and processes that formed it.

Assignment Purpose

Proposals to establish UNESCO Global Geoparks in the Pacific have triggered interest in the potential of geotourism in the Pacific, as a new tourism niche consistent with the SPTO diversification strategy.

This report is a preliminary assessment of the potential for geotourism/ ecotourism development in four Pacific Island countries where Geoparks are proposed:

- Tuvalu: Funafuti
- Samoa: Savai’i
- Vanuatu: Gaua
- Fiji: exact location to be confirmed.

As a preliminary assessment, desktop research was the major activity, particularly drawing off initial Geopark assessments undertaken by the Pacific Community (SPC) and Geology Departments in the respective countries. This research was complemented by stakeholder consultation and community consultation.

The assignment Terms of Reference (TOR) are attached as Annex 1.
the area's geological and other sites
• Networking: through the Global Geoparks Network and regional Geoparks networks.

One of the main strategic objectives of a Geopark is to stimulate economic activity within the framework of sustainable development, especially geotourism. This has a direct impact on the area involved by improving human living conditions and the rural and urban environment. In turn, this should strengthen identification of the population with their area, and stimulate ‘pride of place’ and cultural development, which in turn aids direct protection of geological heritage.3

At present, there are 169 UNESCO Global Geoparks in 44 countries. Most are located in Europe and eastern Asia. Currently there are none in the Pacific, including New Zealand and Australia.

What is Geotourism

Geotourism was first defined just over twenty years ago as: ‘The provision of interpretive and service facilities to enable tourists to acquire knowledge and understanding of the geology and geomorphology of a site... beyond the level of a mere aesthetic appreciation’. This is commonly referred to as the ‘geological’ definition of geotourism, as a type or form of tourism. More recent ‘geographical’ definitions view it more as an approach to tourism, similar to sustainable tourism. Under the ‘geographical’ definition, geotourism is ‘tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place – its environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and well being of its residents’.4

This report adopts the geological definition of geotourism, to avoid confusion with, or duplication of, widespread efforts in the Pacific to promote sustainable tourism. Geotourism in this definition differs from ecotourism by encompassing the geographical character of place instead of singularly focusing on sustaining the environment, and is not bound to protected or pristine areas like many of the ecotourism definitions.

However, as noted in the assignment TOR, there is a close link between geotourism and ecotourism: ‘In response to the need to diversify the tourism offering, an opportunity exists to assess the feasibility of developing ecotourism in selected communities with a view that such ecotourism sites could demonstrate strong linkages to geological sites as a niche segment which could potentially attract domestic and inter-regional demand focused on learning, research and adventure.’

Benefits and Challenges of Geotourism and Geoparks

UNESCO research from the United Kingdom has shown that:

• 76 UNESCO designations in the United Kingdom (such as World Heritage and Geoparks) successfully used their UNESCO status to generate an additional £151 million revenue in one year
• This additional revenue was mainly in terms of attracting research and management funding, as well as from higher levels of tourism activity
• World Heritage areas attracted the bulk of this additional £151 million, which are a better known UNESCO label than Geoparks
• In terms of tourism benefits, the additional revenue was linked to improved marketing

4 pp 1-2, Rannveig Olafsdottir and Edita Tverijonaitė, Geotourism: A Systematic Literature Review, June 2018
power of tourism products associated with the UNESCO status (refer text box). Chinese and Asian markets appear to respond well to these ‘higher status’ products.\(^5\)

As noted earlier, UNESCO Geoparks are obliged to develop management plans, which in turn enhances their ability to attract funding, especially for research and site management.

Other research papers have presented several locations around the globe where geotourism has contributed to sustainable development, and states that geotourism contributes to local communities by providing direct, indirect, and induced employment.\(^6\)

An online survey of 103 Geoparks in 2019 delivered the following results:

- 98\% of Geoparks considered Geopark designation had impacted on developing more sustainable tourism in and around Geoparks
- 85\% considered Geoparks drove local economic development
- 96\% considered Geoparks were attracting tourists or making tourism more attractive
- 71\% considered Geoparks were improving participation of women in economic activities.\(^7\)

Other positive contributions made by Geoparks and geotourism development include:

- Geopark listing provides a recognized brand for use in tourism marketing and grant applications
- Raising community awareness of the value of their geological resources
- Raising broader public awareness of the importance of geoconservation
- Improved distribution and dispersal of visitors
- Facilitating longer length of stay through having a broader range of activities offered to visitors.

\(^5\) National Value of UNESCO to the UK, UK National Commission for UNESCO, June 2020
\(^7\) SY. Lee and R. Jayakumar, Economic impact of UNESCO Global Geoparks on local communities: Comparative analysis of three UNESCO Global Geoparks in Asia, June 2021
It is, however, noted that empirical evidence regarding the actual contributions of geotourism, and Geopark listing, to the wellbeing of local communities is currently in short supply. This reflects the relative newness of both geotourism and Geoparks.

‘In step with the growing popularity of geotourism... the body of research on geotourism has increased exponentially over the past two decades. Certain research areas... receive a great deal of attention. However, other topics require further research [especially]:

- Empirical knowledge concerning visitors to geotourism destinations, their profile, needs, preferences, and motivations;
- Empirical knowledge concerning the main challenges faced by the managers of geotourism destinations, and possible solutions;
- Empirical knowledge concerning positive and negative impacts of geotourism on geoheritage and other aspects of the natural environment, on local communities and other stakeholders at geotourism destinations.8

Several challenges have already been clearly identified in the exiting geotourism literature:

- The difficulties of communicating complex scientific/geological information to visitors. Tools such as geotourist maps, digital technologies, videos, games, 3D modelling and web-based dynamic maps have generally been utilized. Most of these tools are expensive to develop and maintain

- Ensuring that geotourism benefits flow to local communities who may have limited tourism business experience and interpretive capacity. In some examples, the benefits of geotourism have gone to external tourism players who are better prepared to deliver geotourism activity than local communities9

- Another challenge noted is that ‘Geotourism has to be underpinned, because of the finite and often fragile nature of its resource base, by sustainable management techniques and policies.10 This includes managing potential overcrowding and potential damage to geoheritage, and development of geoconservation strategies

- A further challenge is how to manage visitor safety in the presence of natural hazards (such as volcanoes).

One researcher has emphasized that appropriate management of geotourism destinations is especially lacking in developing countries, where priority is given to economic development over geoconservation.11

8 p.12, Rannveig Olafsdóttir and Edita Tverijonaite, op. cit.
Geotourism and the Tourism Industry

Ecotourism and geotourism are niche components of the tourism industry and are dependent on many of the basic prerequisites of tourism, such as adequate and appropriate infrastructure, accommodation and visitor services, marketing, international transport connections, and a skilled tourism workforce.

These are the fundamentals that must be addressed to grow any form of tourism.

The [geological] resource alone is insufficient to provide the tourism resource; transport and accommodation infrastructure must be coupled with interpretative provision based upon a sound knowledge and understanding of the resource base and its users, or geotourists.12

It is instructive to look at the success of another UNESCO label, World Heritage, in the Pacific in building a tourism industry and delivering benefits to its local communities.13

Few of the Pacific’s World Heritage areas have built a strong tourism industry on the back of their World Heritage listing, because the fundamental conditions to build a tourism industry in these areas are not in place (such as, accessibility, security, marketing). Roi Mata Domain in Vanuatu, for example, attracts very few visitors, as it is centred on a small offshore island that is difficult to access. Some inbound operators have an interest in the site but do not sell tours there largely for safety reasons. The only tour product is community owned and operated and is inhibited by the community’s level of business experience.

Geoparks and geotourism products have the potential to attract:

• ‘Dedicated Geotourists’ as individuals who purposefully select to visit geosites and exhibits for the purpose of personal educational or intellectual improvement and enjoyment
• ‘Casual or Incidental Geotourists’ as individuals who do not have a special interest in geology, but who visit geosites and exhibits primarily for the purpose of pleasure and some limited intellectual stimulation.

As noted above, Geoparks are best known in Europe and Asia, which in the Pacific, are long haul tourism markets. These market segments may respond well to a Pacific UNESCO trail, a tourism product that combines visitation to Pacific Geoparks and World Heritage areas.

Waitaki Whitestone Geopark, New Zealand: Case Study

As noted earlier, Geoparks are a new concept for the Pacific region. In recent years, stakeholders in the Waitaki region of New Zealand’s South Island have been developing the case for listing of the region as New Zealand’s first UNESCO Geopark. Their experience provides a useful reference point for development of Geoparks in the Pacific region.

In terms of sustainable development outcomes, development of the tourism industry was a key initial focus and significant research was undertaken to quantify the economic benefits of Geopark listing for the tourism industry. There was a level of buy-in from the tourism industry, who saw marketing benefits, opportunities to

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12 p.259, Hose op. cit.
13 Currently there are nine designated World Heritage areas in the Pacific (excluding states and territories such as Hawai‘i and New Caledonia). These are Phoenix Islands (Kiribati), Rock Islands (Palau), East Rennell Island (Solomon Islands), Bikini Atoll Nuclear Test Site (Marshall Islands), Roi Mata Domain (Vanuatu), Kuk (PNG), Levuka (Fiji), Nan Madol (FSM), and Taputapuataia (Tahiti).
develop new experiences, and ‘another story to tell’ to visitors. The buy-in included potential industry sponsorships of the Geopark.

The proposed Geopark is managed through an independent Trust, and has no legal power to licence, accredit or regulate tourism operators. The Waitaki approach is that the Geopark can develop geotourism product but it relies on the tourism industry voluntarily buying-in and leveraging opportunities off Geopark listing. This requires a robust relationship with the tourism industry to build awareness of potential opportunities and to empower the industry with the capacity to tell the geological stories.

However, after consultation with community stakeholders showed a reluctance to increase international visitors in the region, the ‘value proposition’ of Geopark listing for the local community has shifted to community education and conservation.

Key lessons from Waitaki include:

- Potential economic benefits have been acknowledged by the tourism industry, and a robust relationship with the tourism industry is required to realise the economic opportunities
- The importance of community consultation in prioritizing sustainable development outcomes from Geopark listing.

**Geotourism Good Practices**

Some key learnings from the foregoing literature review, case study and analysis include:

- Geoparks that are located in areas which already host a robust tourism industry have a greater chance of building a sustainable geotourism industry, and thus delivering sustainable development benefits to the local community
- Local communities often need support with business development and management in order to create sustainable development opportunities associated with geotourism in their area
- Investment in geotourism sites and geotourism interpretation is important to leverage tourism opportunities off a Geopark listing
- Geotourism interpretation has to be accessible and understandable to visitors, and lends itself to investment in displays and other visual mediums
- Geopark management structures need to develop a robust relationship with the tourism industry to manage tourism impacts and leverage economic opportunities off Geopark listing
- Community consultation should guide
prioritization of sustainable development outcomes from Geopark listing

- Conservation and management of geotourism resources (and funding of such activities) should be addressed at the same time as development of geotourism activity.

### Methodology

Consultancy firm, Savvy Vanuatu, was selected to undertake this assignment, comprising the team:

Rob Macalister, Project Manager and Lead Consultant
Allan Thomas, Consultant.

The initial output was submission of a Research Plan which had three components:

1. Workplan, showing key tasks to be undertaken, responsibilities, time-frames and resources required
2. Sources of Information, showing where information is proposed to be sourced to enable completion of the four site Profiles
3. Key Research Questions, identifying the key questions to be answered through desk-top research and during stakeholder consultations.

Source of information focused on:

- Desktop research and literature review. Numerous documents were reviewed and these are identified in the footnotes to this Introductory Report and in the Methodology section of each Profile. Initial Geopark assessments undertaken by the Pacific Community (SPC) and Geology Departments in the respective countries, were particularly important references

- Stakeholder consultation. 10 tourism industry stakeholders and 24 other stakeholders were consulted. These stakeholders are identified in Annex 2, List of Persons Consulted

- Community Consultation. Community consultation in Samoa was organised and led by the Samoa Tourism Authority and comprised an eight-person team which spent three days on Savai’i, 6-9 September. Community consultation in Vanuatu was organized and led by Savvy Vanuatu, and comprised a five-person team which spent four days on Gaua, 23-27 September. Extensive community consultation is being planned for development of a Sustainable Tourism Policy in Tuvalu, and the Funafuti Profile will be updated once the consultation outcomes are available. Consultation in Fiji will commence once a Geopark site has been decided.

The draft report was submitted to SPTO for review on 29 September, with comments submitted by various stakeholders. The final report was presented by webinar to all stakeholders on 26 October 2021.

SPTO plans to follow up this Preliminary Feasibility Assessment with a full feasibility assessment, including a demand analysis, subject to funding support and endorsement by host countries.

### Acknowledgement

Thanks to all the people and organizations who participated in this assignment, as identified in Annex 2. Thanks especially to Christina Leala Gale, Catherine Mara and Ahmad Ali from SPTO, who managed the assignment.
Country Profiles
Savai’i Island, Samoa
Introduction

General Country Information

Samoa is a Polynesian country consisting of two main islands, Savai‘i and Upolu. There are also two smaller, inhabited islands (Manono and Apolima), and several smaller, uninhabited islands. The main island of Upolu is home to nearly three-quarters of Samoa’s population, and to the capital city, Apia. Savai‘i is geographically the largest of the Samoan islands with a population of around 45,000.

While all of the islands have volcanic origins, only Savai‘i remains volcanically active, with the most recent eruptions at Mt Matavanu (1905–1911). The highest point in Samoa is Mt Sisili on Savai‘i (1,858 metres).

Tourism Overview

The Samoan tourism sector was ‘the major engine of economic growth for Samoa‘ in recent decades with significant new investment in accommodation on Upolu. The Samoa Tourism Sector Plan (STSP) 2014–2019 articulated a Vision that ‘by 2019, Samoa will have a growing tourism sector, which engages our visitors and people and is recognised as the leading Pacific destination for sustainable tourism’.

Key findings of the STSP and International Visitor Surveys include:

- In 2019, there were 173,920 visitor arrivals to Samoa by air. The main purpose of visit was holiday-making (52% or 92,110), closely followed by VFR (Visiting Friends and Relatives). The business market was also significant.\(^\text{14}\)
- Of the holiday-making market, residents of New Zealand were the largest segment, at 44% of all arrivals, with Australian and other Pacific Islands also significant.

- A variety of factors influence visitor decisions to visit Samoa, in particular: friendly local people, warm and sunny weather, and quiet and relaxing atmosphere. A safe place, beaches and swimming, culture and history and natural attractions/ecotourism/photography, were also significant factors in people’s choice to visit Samoa.
- There is limited cruise ship visitation to Samoa with only 13,212 cruise visitors in 2019. ‘Samoa is disadvantaged due to its relative geographic isolation from Australia and New Zealand... and the majority of cruises [to Samoa] are trans-Pacific or round-the-world cruises’.
- Only 5% of visitor expenditure within Samoa was on tours and activities. Asian visitors spend significantly more on tours and activities than other source markets. ‘Research...indicates that the destination has limited attractions and activities compared to some other Pacific countries and the quality of cultural tourism attractions does not rate highly’.

\(^{14}\) Visitor arrival data sourced principally from SPTO Annual Visitor Arrivals Snapshot, 2019 and 2020.
The STSP identified a number of priority sites for upgrading, including signage, information and training in visitor site management (refer Community Needs Assessment). Signage to attractions and information rated poorly by visitors in the results of visitor surveys.

- The Sector Plan also sought to ‘facilitate greater linkages between attractions (for example through integrated walking and cycling trail developments):’

Key features of the tourism industry on Sava‘i include:

- In 2019, 29% of total visitors travelled to Sava‘i, with an average length of stay of 4 nights
- Sava‘i attracted a larger share of the holiday-making market, with 58% of holiday visitors travelling to Sava‘i in 2019
- Europeans and Australians, and younger demographic groups, were more likely to travel to Sava‘i
- Visitors to Sava‘i were more likely to participate in water-based activities and cultural activities than visitors to Upolu, but also had a lower satisfaction rate for some parts of their experience, such as customer service, food and beverage
- Sava‘i’s main wharf at Saleologa cannot provide berthing for cruise vessels. A few ships have anchored off the north coast at Manase
- There is an active tourism association on Sava‘i and the association’s Strategic Plan (2022-2027) identifies twenty-seven accommodation businesses, three car rental businesses, five tour operators and twenty attraction sites
- The Samoa Tourism Authority is in the process of establishing a Visitor Information Centre at the entry port of Saleologa.

### Brief on Ecotourism and Geotourism development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecotourism Features/Geotourism</th>
<th>Status in Sava‘i</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tourism that takes place in a natural environment</strong></td>
<td>Most tour activity takes place in a natural environment, as that is the dominant environment in Sava‘i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tourism that has positive environmental impacts</strong></td>
<td>Most tourism on Sava‘i is relatively small scale and Samoa has a long-standing commitment to sustainable tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tourism that promotes conservation</strong></td>
<td>Some tour activity occurs within community-based conservation initiatives such as Falealupo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geotourism</strong></td>
<td>There is already significant visitation to geologically significant sites, including Alofa‘aga Blowholes and Sale‘aula lavafields. At the latter site, the current focus is on the impact of volcanism on human activity, and cultural heritage aspects of the volcanic environment, rather than geology and geological processes</td>
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Assessment Background

Methodology & Stakeholder Engagement

The methodology for this assessment is summarised in the following diagram, and further detailed in the accompanying Introductory Report.

Documents referred to in the desktop research included:

- Samoa Geopark Project Phase-1 Final Report, Dr Aleni Fepuleai, Geoscience Division, Pacific Community, 2016
- Samoa Tourism Sector Plan (STSP) 2014-2019
- Samoa International Visitor Survey, January – December 2018 & January – June 2019, New Zealand Tourism Research Institute/ Auckland University of Technology
- Visitors to Upolu Only vs Sava'i Visitors, January – March 2020 & January-December 2019, New Zealand Tourism Research Institute
- Sava'i Samoa Tourism Association (SSTA) Strategic Plan 2022-2027
- Sava'i Community Consultation Report, Samoa Tourism Authority, 2021.

Stakeholder consultation included the Samoa Tourism Authority and the Sava'i Samoa Tourism Association.

Site Assessment

Site Description

Sava'i is reached by ferry (passengers and vehicles), or by air, from Samoa’s main island, Upolu. The ferry crossing takes up to 90 minutes.

The island’s main town and arrival point for ferries from Upolu is Saleologa in the southeast. A sealed road encircles the island and is currently in good condition. Sava'i is 80 kilometres long and 40 kilometres wide, and the drive around the island takes approximately 4 hours non-stop.

Sava'i’s attractions include high waterfalls, caves and blowholes, and particularly the dramatic lava fields and huge lava tubes that formed when Mt Matavanu erupted in the early twentieth century. Sava'i also has plenty of pristine beaches, great snorkelling, kayaking and diving, and a wide range of accommodation options.

Ecotourism Value

According to WikiTravel: ‘Overall, visit Sava'i if you want a more authentic and unspoiled Samoan experience away from the Internet cafes and McDonalds of Apia.' The visitor statistics presented in section 1.2 show Sava'i has a stronger appeal to holiday-makers than Upolu, which hosts the bulk of the VFR and business market.

Sava'i has some important features to support an ecotourism industry:

- All tourism businesses are reported to be locally owned, except for one resort
- Lower population density and lower levels
of development means Savai’i has stronger environmental values than Upolu

- There is at least one formally constituted conservation area on Savai’i (A’opo Conservation Area) and other community-based conservation initiatives often associated with site attractions (such as Falealupo Canopy Walkway)
- The commitment of the Savai’i Samoa Tourism Association to sustainable tourism: ‘Collectively we envision that by 2027, Savai’i is a thriving tourism destination that is recognized for its leadership in supporting community wellbeing through the promotion and development of sustainable tourism’.

Community Needs Assessment

Community consultation in Savai’i was organised and led by the Samoa Tourism Authority, with the participation of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, the Savai’i Samoa Tourism Association and a private geologist on contract to SPC. The eight-person team spent three days on Savai’i and consulted communities at four key geosites. Generalised outcomes include:

- Communities were supportive of international tourists returning, as this provided income and other benefits for the communities
- All sites have well established community management processes, except Mount Matavanu where site management has lapsed for several years. Community management includes dispersal of economic benefits across the community
- Communities were all keen that their geosites are further developed for tourism including better signage and access, improved marketing, as well as site hardening (eg: toilets and trail development)
- Communities all reported that there were other potential geosites within their customary lands, which had not yet been opened up or developed for tourism.

Potential for Geotourism Development

A range of tourism sites have been identified and developed on Savai’i and many of these are of geological significance. These sites are listed in the table below (drawing off Joplin’s Field Guide). The table also identifies which of these sites were listed in the STSP for product development and site hardening, and those which were identified as potential geosites for tourism visitation in the Samoa Geopark Report.

As noted in the latter report, ‘indigenous knowledge including traditional dances, songs, legends, places names, proverbs and myth act as a ‘geological library’ for these [geological sites]. Geoheritage linkage between the volcanism and cultural values is one of the major highlights of the Samoa Geopark Project’.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geological Site</th>
<th>Status and Development Opportunity</th>
<th>Recommended for development by STSP</th>
<th>Identified as geosite in Geopark assessment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tafua</td>
<td>Largest of Savai’i’s 450 volcanic cones with two craters, accessible by road with a range of walking options. Currently better known for bird-watching</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afu A’au waterfall</td>
<td>“Idyllic beauty” and accessible. More a site for swimming and relaxation than for geological significance. Toilet block on site</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mu Pagoa waterfall, Puleia shorelines</td>
<td>More an aesthetic and swimming site, accessible</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea arches and iron bound coastline</td>
<td>Good example of sea erosion on coastal lava, accessible after a short walk but undeveloped</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alofa’aaga Blowholes, Taga</td>
<td>“One of the Pacific’s best tourist attractions” and another example of lava flows on coast</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coral sand and beachrock, Satuiatua</td>
<td>Of geological interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fagafau</td>
<td>A scenic vertical fault scarp of black basalt, steeped in legend as ‘Lovers Leap’</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Mulinu’u area/ Falealupo</td>
<td>A range of natural/ cultural features in the area including a lava cave (House of Rocks), ‘Moso’s Footprint’, and a series of columnar jointed outcrops on a scenic beach</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Savai’i (Ologogo) Fault</td>
<td>A great slice of Savai’i dropped and slumped northwards towards the ocean. “Visitors stop to photograph the magnificent coastal panoramas from the road above these villages without realizing the geological significance of these slopes”. On the beaches there are interesting rock formations including “onion skin” weathered lava</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Visited</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Canopy Walkway</strong></td>
<td>Although primarily a rainforest attraction, there is an adjacent excavated cinder cone showing geological layers. The walkway also has an Information Centre</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mauga Afi eruption and Aopo Lava Field, Aopo</strong></td>
<td>Several openings in the vegetation along the road allow views over the lava fan – a’a lava different from Saleaula lava</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aopo, Letui, Paia Lava tubes</strong></td>
<td>Of Savai’i’s 20 known lava tubes, three tubes in the northern area are open to visitors. Aopo “is highly recommended by visitors”. Letui is a 40 m long tube alongside the road, convenient for a quick visit. Dwarves Cave is for adventure seekers, it can take an entire day to explore and accessible via a dirt road. Peapea Cave is another lava tube with a population of swallows that is easily accessible.</td>
<td>✔ ✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mataolealelo Spring</strong></td>
<td>Site of the Sina legend, also an example of underground water springs common in the volcanic rock</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mount Matavanu</strong></td>
<td>The drive to the walking track takes about 20-25 minutes and the walk to the crater 2-3 hours return (6km)</td>
<td>✔ ✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saleaula Lava Field, Saleaula</strong></td>
<td>Some 76 sq km of northeastern Savai’i were overwhelmed by the Matavanu eruption. Historic ruins at Saleaula, the most northerly village, “makes an awesome tourist attraction... some of the volcanic features are rare in many parts of the world but are well exposed include tumulus, lava tube, 8 columnar jointing, pahoehoe flow inflation and a formation of black sand spit parallel to the reef”</td>
<td>✔ ✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mauga Crater</strong></td>
<td>Near the road is a 35 m high tuff cone and lava flows</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt To’iavea, Mt Tagotala</td>
<td>Scenic view of two large cinder cones from the roadside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt Silisili</td>
<td>Walking from Aopo, the uphill trek takes 7 hours, passing “fascinating geological features”, then overnight camping at Mata o le Afì, a volcano that erupted in 1902. From the camp is the final hike to the cinder cone at Mt Silisili</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulemelei Step Pyramid</td>
<td>Pulemelei is “one of the Pacific’s most important archaeological monuments”, built from volcanic basalt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

The Sale’aula and Cape Mulinu’u area/ Falealupō sites are already among the top attractions in Sava’i, as shown in the following map from the 2019 Samoa Visitor Survey. Geological interpretation provides a strong basis to add further value to these sites.
**Major Challenges and Opportunities**

The Savai’i Tourism Association has identified that “as an outer island destination in Samoa, Savai’i faces unique... challenges including the higher cost of doing business, access to a quality pool of human resources, which is further heightened by inter-island access constraints and policy decisions, amongst others”.

Other challenges have been noted in the SSTM, in terms of improving the product offering, and improving accessibility and information at site attractions (refer section 1.2 above).

The Savai’i Tourism Association has also identified a need to strengthen working relationships with families and communities who own site attractions, to better value tourism resources and assist address land and financial management issues, which can disrupt site access.

As identified in the Introductory Report, listing Savai’i as a GeoPark would help raise the tourism profile of Savai’i, especially for Asian and European markets, and development of geotourism is consistent with the Savai’i Tourism Association’s objective to ‘actively explore simple diversification strategies for members as a de-risking strategy’. Signage, brochures and visual mediums are important interpretive options in the Savai’i context where there is limited tour guiding capacity and an ongoing need to train industry workers “given the high turnover rates in Savai’i”.

**Development Options**

The following options have been identified to leverage tourism growth through the listing of Savai’i as a Geopark:

a. Selecting sites for geological interpretation and site hardening within a Geopark needs to weigh up a number of factors such as access, safety, and community attitudes. Although selecting sites is beyond the scope of this report, previous work undertaken (section 3.4) suggest the best sites to do this are:

   - Tafua Crater
   - Sale’aula lavafields and historic ruins
   - North coast lava tubes/ caves
   - The cluster of sites around Cape Mulinu’u/ Falealupo
   - Mt Matavanu.

These sites align with the proposal from the Savai’i Geoparks Assessment Report: ‘The northern part of Savai’i is proposed to be the initial Matavanu Geopark being based
on the well-exposed volcanic features of the Matavanu volcanic [eruption]. A further proposed geopark extension toward NW Savai‘i is under consideration. Like Matavanu, Tafu-a-Savai‘i cone complex on the SE Savai‘i, is proposed to be another extension later.

b. There is also opportunity for interpretive road signage at scenic lookouts along the road, such as identified by Joplin for the North Savai‘i (Ologogo) Fault and Mt To‘iavea/ Mt Tagotala

c. The development of geology-themed or volcanic-themed self-drive/ cycling/ walking trails would assist to link these tourism sites and scenic lookouts

d. Another significant opportunity is broadening the proposed Salelologa Visitor Information Centre to include interpretive displays on the island’s geological heritage. This Centre could be further developed to become the “Savai‘i Geopark Gateway Centre”

e. Integration of geological interpretation into accredited or non-formal tour guiding. The latter could be sponsored through the Savai‘i Tourism Association.

Most of these development options have already been identified within the STSP and STA is encouraged to continue their efforts to implement the Plan, including securing New Zealand funding through the Samoa Tourism Growth Programme for site and product development tasks.

Recommendations for SPTO, SPC and Development Partners

- SPC and Samoa Government to continue to progress Geopark listing to support tourism diversification strategies
- SPTO and Samoa Government to consider the development options identified (refer Development Options), including for inclusion within the Samoa Tourism Growth Programme
- SPTO to consider how the SPTO Digital Transformation Program could support development of interpretive displays in the proposed Salelologa Visitor Centre
- SPTO to assess demand for geotourism in Samoa. The most prospective market seems to be new product offerings to the existing market (‘incidental geotourists’) as well as expedition ships and special interest groups
- SPTO, SPC and the Samoa Government to consult local stakeholders to determine how the management structure for a Geopark may align with tourism management structures on Savai‘i.
Gaua Island, Vanuatu
Gaua Island, Vanuatu

Introduction

General Country Information

Vanuatu is a Y-shaped archipelago consisting of 83 relatively small, geologically new islands of volcanic origin, that stretches 1,300 kilometres between the most northern and southern islands. There are several active volcanoes in Vanuatu, including Lopevi, Yasur and three underwater volcanoes. Volcanic activity is common, with an ever-present danger of a major eruption.

Vanuatu is divided into six provinces. The names in English of all provinces are derived from the initial letters of their constituent islands:

- Malampa (Malekula, Ambrym, Paama)
- Penama (Pentecost, Ambae, Maewo)
- Sanma (Santo, Malo)
- Shefa (Shepherds Group, Efate)
- Tafea (Tanna, Aniwa, Futuna, Erromango, Aneityum)
- Torba (Torres Islands, Banks Islands)

The nation’s largest towns are the capital Port Vila, on Efate, and Lugarville, on Espiritu Santo. Vanuatu’s population in 2020 was estimated at 307,815, of which approximately half live in Shefa and Sanma provinces. The island of Gaua is located in TORBA, the least populated province with just over 10,000 residents.

The highest point in Vanuatu is Mount Tabwemasana, at 1,879 metres, on the island of Espiritu Santo.

Tourism Overview

The Vanuatu tourism sector was a major driver of economic activity prior to the pandemic:

- In 2019, Vanuatu received 120,628 visitor arrivals by air (annual growth of 4.2% compared to 2018). In 2019, 74% of air arrivals were for the purpose of holiday
- In 2019, Vanuatu received 135,357 visitor arrivals by cruise ship, the second highest share in the Pacific
- Combining air and cruise arrivals, Vanuatu had the fourth largest share of visitor arrivals in the Pacific, after Fiji and the two French territories of French Polynesia and New Caledonia.\(^{15}\)

Visitor Surveys show the majority of air visitors come from Australia (52% in 2019), with New Zealand, New Caledonia and long haul (mainly from Europe and North America) each averaging around 15% of the market in recent years.

The capital, Port Vila, is the hub of the Vanuatu tourism industry and hosts the vast majority of cruise ship arrivals. Dispersal of visitors into Vanuatu’s six provinces is not strong:

\(^{15}\)Visitor arrival data sourced principally from SPTO Annual Visitor Arrivals Snapshot, 2019 and 2020
• 2019 Visitor Surveys showed that only 14% of air holiday arrivals travelled to SANMA province and 18% to TAFEA province
• MALAMPA and PENAMA provinces attracted 1% of air holiday arrivals
• No figure was given for TORBA province suggesting it was less than 1%

Consistent with the low visitation to TORBA, tourism on Gaua is in its infancy:

• Based on consultation with the Vanuatu tourism industry and the Gaua Tourism Association, it is estimated that, on average, 200 visitors for the purpose of holiday would travel to Gaua by air annually
• Many of these visitors were ‘adventure-seeker’ FITs (‘Free and Independent Travellers’) with New Caledonia a major source market. Their motivation to travel to Gaua was principally to trek to Lake Letas and the active volcano
• Vanuatu’s inbound tour operators and air charter services occasionally send charter groups to Gaua, though none sell it as a regular destination
• While smaller expedition ships occasionally visit Gaua’s east coast, open coastal anchorage has been an issue and passengers were sometimes unable to land on the island
• Gaua’s west coast anchorage is good and attracts a number of visiting yachts. However, Yacht crews generally do not trek to the lake and volcano
• There is an active Gaua Tourism Association which reports there are currently four bungalows and one campsite, one ecotour operator and several womens’ groups who perform ‘water music’ for visitors.

Government concerns that Vanuatu was following the path of mass tourism, especially on Efate, triggered recent interest in sustainable tourism. The Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Policy (VSTP, 2019-2030) and the Tourism Crisis Response and Recovery Plan are currently the principal policy documents for Vanuatu tourism. Goals identified in the VSTP are:

• **Goal 1:** To develop and manage a sustainable and responsible tourism industry
• **Goal 2:** Visitors connect with Vanuatu’s environment, culture and its people
• **Goal 3:** Sustainable and responsible tourism products and services developed, supported, and marketed to attract responsible high-value tourists
• **Goal 4:** Tourism that enhances, conserves and protects the environmental and cultural resources of Vanuatu
• **Goal 5:** Sustainable and responsible tourism brings improved income and well-being for Vanuatu and its people.

As a subset of the VSTP, the TORBA Provincial Tourism Plan has a range of actions for implementation in the next few years, including product development, improved transport access, site hardening within conservation areas, as well as development of TORBA as a slow-food destination and development of a yachting management plan. A Cultural Centre is also proposed to be established on the island of Vanua Lava, north of Gaua.

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*Benbow and Marum volcanoes, Ambrym Island*
Brief on Ecotourism and Geotourism development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecotourism Features/ Geotourism</th>
<th>Status in Gaua</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tourism that takes place in a natural environment</strong></td>
<td>Most tour activity takes place in a natural environment, as that is the dominant environment in Gaua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tourism that has positive environmental impacts</strong></td>
<td>Tourism on Gaua is very small scale and has limited environmental impact. Cultural impacts are a growing concern with cultural taboos being broken and cultural practices being undertaken specifically for tourists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tourism that promotes conservation</strong></td>
<td>Visitors to the volcano and adjoining lake pay a fee to landowners and a Management Committee ensure that the community practices conservation at this visitation site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geotourism</strong></td>
<td>Gaua’s geological sites are the current major focus of visitor activity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessment Background

Methodology & Stakeholder Engagement

The methodology for this assessment is summarised in the following diagram, and further detailed in the accompanying Introductory Report.

Documents referred to in the desktop research included:

- Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Policy 2019–2030
- Vanuatu International Visitor Survey Jan–Dec 2019, New Zealand Tourism Research Institute
- Application to Nagao Wetland Fund: Promoting wise use of Lake Letas Community Conservation Area, a proposed Ramsar Site on Gaua Island, Vanuatu, through community-based ecotourism development, 2017
- Pocket Eco Guide to Lake Letas Community Conservation Area on Gaua, Eco-lifelihood Development Associates, undated
- TORBA Provincial Tourism Plan, Department of Tourism, 2020

Stakeholder consultation included the Department of Tourism, Vanuatu Tourism Office, Department of Geology and Mines, Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation, the Gaua Tourism Association, as well as tourism industry stakeholders.
Site Assessment

Site Description

Gaua (formerly known as Santa Maria Island) is the largest and second most populous of the Banks Islands in TORBA Province, northern Vanuatu. It covers 342 km² with a population of around 2,500 people. The inhabitants are scattered among various coastal villages on the western, southern and northeastern sides of the island, and comprise five traditional language groups.

Gaua has rugged terrain, reaching up to Mount Garet (797 m), the peak of the active stratovolcano which lies at the centre of the island. Its most recent eruption was in 2013. The volcano has a 6 x 9 km caldera, and within this ancient crater resides the extensive Lake Letas, a freshwater lake which covers an area of 19 km²; the lake bows around the growing volcanic cone of Mt. Garet. The only outlet of the lake is the Mbe Solomul river which includes a 120 metre cascade (Siri waterfalls). The ancient caldera and its natural features have created a unique and beautiful landscape with significant geological, cultural and biological values.

The island is served by Gaua Airport, which is located in the northeast corner of the island.

Ecotourism Value

Gaua has a strong foundation to develop ecotourism:

- Lake Letas occupies the caldera of an active volcano and is the largest lake in the Pacific region outside of New Guinea
- The island’s upper slopes are recognised as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International
- The landowners at Lake Letas area are very keen to preserve their natural environment and have set up a Community Conservation Area that is in the process of being registered as an official protected area under the Environmental Protection and Conservation Act. The main issue delaying registration is a land lease that extends into the proposed Conservation Area
- The area is listed as Vanuatu’s first RAMSAR wetland and now several agencies within the Vanuatu Government have collaborated to propose the establishment of the Gaua National GeoPark (refer map p.34)
- The objectives of the proposed GeoPark include to promote and conserve the natural environment and to improve and promote geotourism activities
- A donor-funded conservation project on Gaua (GEFS Ridge to Reef) is supporting conservation efforts and plans to improve tourism product within the Conservation Area
- All tourism activity on Gaua is community owned.

Community Needs Assessment

Community consultation in Vanuatu was organized by Savvy Vanuatu, and comprised a five-person team (Savvy Vanuatu, Department of Tourism, Vanuatu Tourism Office, Department of Geology and Mines, Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation) which spent four days on Gaua. This included
a site visit to Lake Letas. Key outcomes of the consultation include:

- The community are keen for the return of international tourists, as other income opportunities on Gaua are limited to cash crops
- Many community members and chiefs do not want to be vaccinated against COVID-19, although vaccine awareness has yet to start on Gaua
- The community want to see more tourism infrastructure including improved road access to the volcano, trail development including new rails and footsteps, and signage
- Other infrastructure identified to improve tourism includes a better telecommunication network and an emergency evacuation site
- The Lake Letas/Mt Garet conservation area is under the management of a conservation committee. Conservation rules are in place which applies to both tourists and locals
- Admission fees to Lake Letas is 500vt per person, Mt. Garat is 1000vt per person and Letung geothermal field is 1000vt per person. All fees are paid to a chief who sends the money to the landowners from the western part of the island once a month
- One chief owns all the tourism infrastructure (campsite and canoe) at the lake
- There are 10 tour guides on Gaua who are qualified in trekking tours. To hire a tour guide the fee is 2,000vt per person. Every accommodation provider must book a tour guide in advance if their guest wants to do a tour to the sites. The trek to Lake Letas currently takes up to 4 hours from the airstrip/main settlement on a basic bush track. Ascending to the volcano is fairly easy after an exciting 30 minute canoe trip across the lake. Accessibility to the volcano is fairly easy after an exciting 30 minute canoe trip across the lake and fairly easy 30 minute walk up to the field. Accessibility to Siri waterfall is a 3 hour hike from the main road after a truck ride from the village
- The community have discussed developing a road to replace the current bush track on the first part of the trek to the lake. This would reduce walking time to under 2 hours, however it would also affect several cultural sites along the track
- No other geosites were identified apart from those listed (refer Potential for Geotourism Development), except an existing site near the airstrip that has some red scoria rocks
- The people of Gaua, customary land owners and the TORBA Provincial Government have been consulted about the proposed GeoPark and they have given their consent and approval to the proposal.
Potential for Geotourism Development

Several studies have been undertaken within the proposed Gaua Geopark area by different Government Departments studying the biodiversity, geological features and cultural sites. An outcome of this research is the 2019 report, ‘GeoPark Concept for Vanuatu: Proposed Gaua National GeoPark’ which identifies six geosites:

- TrG1 (Old Volcanic Crater)
- TrG2 (Lake Letas)
- TrG3 (Hot Springs)
- TrG4 (Letung Geothermal Field)
- TrG5 (Mt. Garat)
- TrG6 (Siri Waterfall).

These geosites were identified based on their cultural significance, scientific importance (as it relates to biodiversity including geological and geomorphological processes) and aesthetic value.

The Geopark report also notes that “the [proposed] GeoPark has several cultural sites and features that link... traditional folklores to the island geomorphology. These sites and features are of cultural significance...as they identify places where certain folklores begin and how certain geomorphological features of the Island were created”.

Major Challenges and Opportunities

The main challenges to develop tourism on Gaua are related to access:

- Apart from occasional inter-island trading vessels, which do not offer comfortable passenger services, entry to Gaua is by air.
- Air Vanuatu, the national carrier, has high air fares (no direct flight from the tourism hub of Efate, passengers have to transit in Santo) and their services to Gaua are unreliable. Unreliability is sometimes related to weather and the condition of the grass airstrip. Official advice from the Vanuatu Tourism Office is “remember to keep a few days up your sleeve, as flights can change on these small islands”
• Gaua airport is managed by the Department of Public Works and hosts two Air Vanuatu flights per week. When private airlines use the airport, the airport terminal is closed and airlines have to bring their own scales to weigh passengers

• Gaua’s key tourist assets (and all geo-sites) are located around Lake Letas and the volcano. As noted above, access to the lake is via a 4+ hour trek on an undeveloped uphill trail. It is only suitable for fit and adventurous travelers which currently comprise a very small segment of the Vanuatu tourism market

• Access to many coastal tourism assets generally require boat travel or walking, as roads are in poor condition and are only found on the eastern side of the island.

As noted in the Introductory Report, ecotourism and geotourism are niche components of the tourism industry and are dependent on many of the basic pre-requisites of tourism, such as adequate and appropriate infrastructure, accommodation and visitor services, marketing, transport connections, and a skilled tourism workforce. As recognized in the TORBA Provincial Tourism Plan, these are the fundamentals that must be addressed to grow any form of tourism in Gaua.

Development Options

Key opportunities to develop tourism on Gaua include:

a. More frequent and more reliable scheduled flights from Air Vanuatu. This may involve a subsidy to build volume for several years

b. Investment in air services infrastructure to improve services for air charter operators in particular

c. Development of a Gaua tourism brand, based on Gaua’s potential listing as a UNESCO Geopark, to improve its market presence

d. Improvement of current tourism product, and development of new product, around the main settlement/ airstrip to cater for less adventurous visitors (this new product is more likely to be ecotourism-focused rather than geotourism-focused)
e. Development of better trail infrastructure to make the lake and volcano accessible to a larger market. This may include trail development on the western side of the island to make the lake and volcano more accessible to visiting yachts.

f. Integration of geological interpretation into accredited or non-formal tour guiding.

g. Assessment of the option of developing a vehicle road to reduce walking time to the lake and volcano, and assessment of anchorage and landing options for expedition ships.

h. Discussion with air charter operators about delivery of a one-day tour to Gaua. Although this is insufficient time to allow trekking to the lake and volcano, it could focus on aerial views of the lake and volcano, similar to existing tours to Yasur volcano on Tanna. This may also require a subsidy in the initial years of operation.

Recommendations for SPTO, SPC and Development Partners

- SPC and Vanuatu Government to continue progress of Geopark listing in Vanuatu to support tourism dispersal in Vanuatu.
- Vanuatu Government to continue implementing TORBA Provincial Tourism Plan, with potential support from the GEF5 Ridge to Reef project.
- SPTO and Vanuatu Government to consider development options identified (refer Development Options), in the context of the TORBA Provincial Tourism Plan.
- SPTO to assess demand for geotourism in Gaua. The most prospective market seems to be ‘adventure-seekers’ as well expedition ships.
- SPTO, SPC and Vanuatu Government to consult local stakeholders to determine how the management structure for a Geopark may align with tourism management structures on Gaua.
Funafuti Atoll, Tuvalu
Funafuti Atoll, Tuvalu

Introduction

General Country Information

Tuvalu is an archipelago of nine islands located in the western South Pacific. It is the fourth smallest nation in the world in terms of land area and consists of five true atolls; namely Funafuti, Nanumea, Nui, Nukufetau and Nukulaelae, and four reef platform islands; Nanumaga, Niutao, Vaitupu and Niulakita. With an approximate total land area of 26 square kilometres, Tuvalu has an ocean-to-land-area ratio greater than any nation, making it the world’s foremost example of a Small Island-Large Ocean state.

Tourism Overview

Although neighbouring Fiji, which had 968,926 visitor arrivals in 2019, Tuvalu only received 3,611 visitors that same year. Between 2014 and 2019 Tuvalu averaged 2,593 visitor arrivals annually. The percentage of arrivals visiting for the purpose of ‘holiday’ is around 30–40% of that total. However, as VFR (Visiting Friends and Relatives) is not recorded separately in Tuvalu tourism statistics, it is understood many visitors arriving for ‘holiday’ are in fact VFR (the main source markets for ‘holiday’ visitors are USA, Fiji, Kiribati, Australia, and New Zealand). Thus the true number of ‘holiday’ visitors by air is estimated at 250 to 350 people per annum from 2014 to 2019. Visitors for the purpose of business comprise the largest percentage of visitors to Tuvalu.

Marketed by the Department of Tourism as Timeless Tuvalu: Find your Paradise, the Tuvalu tourism industry is in its infancy:

- Seven Funafuti accommodations are listed on the Timeless Tuvalu website, of which one was identified as being of international industry standard by an industry partner. These accommodations are more oriented to serving the business visitor market.
- Three tour operators were identified, operating on a casual basis in the current pandemic. The Funafuti Conservation Area (FCA), on the atoll’s uninhabited west side is a key tour destination. A historical sites tour is being developed through the Department of Culture.
- Only one international outbound operator brought tours to Tuvalu pre-COVID, the main market being ‘country collectors’ (people who want to visit as many countries as possible). The tour visited Tuvalu as part of a larger ‘Least Visited Country’ package. Another operator planned to develop an itinerary in Tuvalu and was interested in a climate change angle.
- There is a deep-water wharf at Funafuti, and a handful of small cruise/expedition ships made day visits to Funafuti pre-pandemic, drawing mainly on the Japanese market.
- A Hospitality and Tourism Association was recently established to promote the interests of the tourism industry.
- The tourism sector is estimated to have contributed 5.6% of total national GDP and employed 87 people in 2019.

Pre-pandemic, Fiji Airways operated between Suva and Funafuti three times a week and Air Kiribati operated once a week from Tarawa.

16 Visitor arrival data sourced principally from SPTO Annual Visitor Arrivals Snapshot, 2019 and 2020
**Assessment Background**

**Methodology & Stakeholder Engagement**

The overall methodology for this assessment is summarised in the following diagram, and further detailed in the accompanying *Introductory Report*.

The key document referred to in the desktop research was:


Other important documents included:

- Te Kete: Tuvalu National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2021–2030
- Tuvalu National Culture Policy Strategic Plan 2018–2024
- Ata Saukatoa Ote Fenua Funafuti (Island Profile of Funafuti), UNDP 2012
- Migration Arrivals 2019, Q1 2020
- Stakeholder consultation included interviews with three international tourism stakeholders and the Tuvalu Department of Tourism.

**Site Assessment**

**Site Description**

Funafuti is comprised of 33 reef islets with a total land area of 2.8 square kilometres. The central lagoon is 18 kilometres wide.

Funafuti hosts over 60% of Tuvalu’s approximate population of 12,000, the majority of which are
located on the islet or motu of Fongafale, where essential infrastructure and government offices are also based.

Funafuti has a limited international profile:

- This is where the Royal Society drilled cores to test Darwin’s theory of atoll formation in 1896 –1898, making it a significant site in global scientific history
- It served as an Allied base for action in the north Pacific during World War 2
- Tuvalu is also a leading global advocate for climate action, raising the profile of the country on a world stage.

**Ecotourism Value**

Funafuti has some important assets or resources that can support an ecotourism industry, including:

- Pristine environment. This is highlighted in the current National Strategy for Sustainable Development, included within the Vision: “...our sustainability is well managed accounting for our future generations and continued pristine environment”
- Funafuti Conservation Area. The FCA is a legally declared marine conservation area covering 33 square kilometres of reef, lagoon and motu (the reefs are reported to be in “excellent condition”). The FCA is home to many species of fish, corals, algae and invertebrates and includes nesting sites for the endangered Green Sea Turtle and a breeding colony of Black Noddy. Visitor fees include an entry fee which goes back to FCA management to support conservation activity
- Culture. Tuvalu has a strong commitment to showcasing and maintaining its cultural heritage, expressed through a National Cultural Policy. This includes plans to develop a Tuvalu National Culture Centre and Museum in Funafuti, to showcase movable cultural objects of significance and provide a place for knowledge and skill sharing. A National Cultural Festival has also been held in the past, with plans to revive this in future.

It is understood that apart from a Government-owned hotel, all tourism businesses are currently under ownership of the Tuvalu community, which means all financial benefits from tourism activity flows back to the community.

**Community Needs Assessment**

As extensive community consultation is being planned for development of a Sustainable Tourism Policy in Tuvalu, only limited community consultation was undertaken in Tuvalu for the purpose of this assignment. Initial consultation indicates that the community is cautious about tourism development and are concerned about potential impacts on culture and the environment.

It is also noted that maintenance of culture has greater precedence in the national policy framework than development of a tourism industry.

**Potential for Geotourism Development**

Geotourism in Tuvalu would focus on its status as a coral atoll – a distinctive geological feature consisting of a coral reef structure developed atop a submerged volcano. There are no coral atolls listed as UNESCO Global Geoparks, which would make a Funafuti Geopark unique globally.

Geosites that are considered to have potential to become key tourism sites, have been identified in the SPC Funafuti Geopark Desktop Study. Further sites are likely to be identified following further fieldwork and community consultation.
These geosites include:

- Darwin’s Drill Site
- Fossil beaches
- Hurricane Bebe gravel banks
- The FCA as an example of an atoll in pristine condition and atoll formation processes.

There is opportunity to link climate change (encompassing impacts, mitigation and adaptation, climate science, and traditional knowledge) into geotourism activity, and also to build geotourism interpretation into existing tourism activities (such as visitation to World War II sites, and snorkelling/diving tours).

As identified in the Introductory Report, listing Funafuti as a GeoPark would help raise the tourism profile of both Funafuti and Tuvalu, especially for Asian and European markets. However, generating demand for geotourism in Funafuti is challenging, given Tuvalu is currently not integrated into the global tourism industry, and does not have many of the fundamental elements to grow a tourism industry.

Major Challenges and Opportunities

The key challenges and constraints confronting tourism were well articulated in Tuvalu’s previous National Strategy for Sustainable Development:

- High air fares and poor air service
- Poor hotel accommodation and hospitality service
- Undeveloped eco-tourism potential
- Poor urban environmental management
- Under-manned and poorly situated tourism office, and lack of visitor information.

While some of these challenges are being addressed, it is also noted that Tuvalu does not possess any special or iconic tourist attractions that are not present elsewhere in the Pacific region. In other words, it has no strong competitive advantage in developing a tourism industry.

Government policy also recognizes that Tuvalu has a weak private sector and entrepreneurial culture, and that the public sector continues to operate enterprises more suited to the private sector. Data from 2012, for example, shows that only 26% of employment was in the private sector, and only 3.8% of the workforce were self-employed. Foreign investment in tourism is also constrained by factors such as the ‘burdensome’ investment approval process, and difficulty obtaining land for commercial development.

The current National Strategy for Sustainable Development has a number of relevant Outcomes/Actions to address these issues:

- Provide a conducive business environment to encourage private sector growth
- Private sector contribution to economic growth increased significantly
- Development of Tuvalu’s ecotourism potential accompanied by greater strategic marketing
- Mainstream culture into all sectors of development
- Develop cultural industries as imperative platforms towards socioeconomic and income-generating activities.

These Government policy directions should underpin strategies to develop tourism in Funafuti.

As noted in the Introductory Report, ecotourism and geotourism are niche components of the tourism industry and are dependent on many basic pre-requisites of tourism, such as adequate and appropriate infrastructure, accommodation and visitor services, marketing, international
transport connections, and a skilled tourism workforce.

These are the fundamentals that must be addressed to grow any form of tourism in Tuvalu and it is encouraging that, with the support of SPTO, UNDP and the Enhanced Integrated Framework, the Tuvalu Government is on track to develop a Sustainable Tourism Policy, the first dedicated tourism policy in Tuvalu's history.

To build community support, the policy must also ensure that visitor impacts, on a fragile atoll environment affected by climate change, are planned for and managed, and that the tourism industry delivers a net environmental benefit to Tuvalu. In this context, ecotourism is a natural fit for Tuvalu. As noted in Government policy, "the traditional structure of Tuvaluan society and its subsistence economy have been built on the sustainable use of the nation's limited, but nevertheless valuable natural resources, and the conservation and careful exploitation of its fragile atoll ecosystems. These are now under threat from changing attitudes in society and from a continuously growing cash economy".

**Development Options**

The following options have been identified to leverage tourism growth through listing Funafuti as a Geopark:

a. Develop an over-arching National Tourism Policy to address the fundamentals of tourism growth

b. Secure Government and community support to implement the National Tourism Policy, based on clear articulation of the potential benefits of tourism to Tuvalu and clear strategies to manage the potential negative impacts of tourism activity

c. Broaden the concept of the proposed Tuvalu National Culture Centre and Museum to include a role as a tourism hub: providing visitor information, including interpretive displays explaining Funafuti's geological significance, and acting as a booking agent for sale of tours and activities to the visitor market. If this is not possible, the proposed Visitor Centre for the FCA could be revived and deliver similar visitor services (in 2003 it was reported a new building was constructed...
to house an FCA interpretive centre, but has stood vacant since it was erected)

d. Develop additional interpretation and site hardening at the key geosites identified (refer Potential for Geotourism Development), and in other geosites that may be identified through further fieldwork and community consultation

e. Integrate geosites into the historical site tour currently being developed.

Recommendations for SPTO, SPC and Development Partners

• SPTO and Tuvalu Government to ensure the proposed Sustainable Tourism Policy articulates the potential benefits of tourism to Tuvalu and identifies clear strategies to manage the potential impacts of tourism activity

• SPC and Tuvalu Government to continue to progress Geopark listing to support the National Sustainable Tourism Plan’s strategy “to develop Tuvalu’s ecotourism potential through greater strategic marketing”

• SPTO and Tuvalu Government to consider the development options identified (refer Development Options), for inclusion within the Sustainable Tourism Policy

• SPTO to consider how the SPTO Digital Transformation Program could support development of interpretive displays in the proposed Cultural/Visitor Centre

• SPTO to assess demand for geotourism in Tuvalu. The most prospective market seems to be expedition ships and special interest groups, however both of these are competitive sectors with their own particular requirements. In the Tuvalu context, geotourism should also include a climate change interpretive angle

• SPTO, SPC and Tuvalu Government to consult with local stakeholders to determine how the management structure for a Geopark may align with tourism management structures on Funafuti.
Fiji Islands
Fiji Islands

Introduction

General Country Information

Fiji is an island country in Melanesia, consisting of an archipelago of more than 330 islands (of which about 110 are permanently inhabited) and more than 500 islets, amounting to a total land area of about 18,300 square kilometres.

About 87% of the total population of 883,483 live on the two major islands, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. About three-quarters of Fijians live on Viti Levu’s coasts: either in the capital city of Suva; or in smaller urban centres such as Nadi – where tourism is the major local industry; or in Lautoka, where the sugarcane industry is dominant. The interior of Viti Levu is sparsely inhabited because of its terrain.

The majority of Fiji’s islands were formed by volcanic activity around 150 million years ago. Some geothermal activity still occurs today on the islands of Vanua Levu and Taveuni. The geothermal systems on Viti Levu are non-volcanic in origin and have low-temperature surface discharges.

Fiji has one of the most developed economies in the Pacific through its abundant forest, mineral, and fish resources. The main sources of foreign exchange are the tourist industry, remittances from Fijians working abroad, bottled water exports, and sugar cane.

Tourism Overview

As noted above, the Fiji tourism sector was a major driver of economic activity prior to the pandemic, generating over 35% of GDP:

- Based on visitor numbers, Fiji is far and away the major tourism destination in the Pacific. As the major aviation hub for the region, Fiji commanded 39.5% of all air arrivals into the Pacific in 2019, and had 25,999 accommodation beds in the same year.
- This translates to 894,389 visitor arrivals by air in 2019 (annual growth of 2.8% compared to 2018, with significant growth from long-haul markets)\(^\text{17}\)
- In 2019, 73.4% of air arrivals were for the purpose of holiday with an average length of stay of 8 nights. Holiday makers overwhelmingly identified ‘rest and relaxation’ as the main purpose for their visit.
- Australia, at 46%, and New Zealand at 25%, were the dominant source markets for holiday arrivals in 2019, followed by USA at 11%.
- In 2019, Fiji also received 74,537 visitor arrivals by cruise ship, the third highest share in the Pacific.

The Fiji tourism industry is concentrated on the south and west coast of Viti Levu, between Nadi

\(^{17}\)Visitor arrival data sourced principally from SPTO Annual Visitor Arrivals Snapshot, 2019 and 2020
and Suva, including the Mamanuca and Yasawa islands, and the ‘Coral Coast’ (the location of many beach resorts). Suva and Lautoka are also the major ports for cruise ships.

Visitor dispersal to Vanua Levu and other islands in Fiji, is limited. The 2019 Visitor Survey showed that the number of visitors who traveled to regions within Fiji, for a day trip or longer, included:

- South and west coast, Viti Levu: visitor numbers ranged from 569,562 visitors to Nadi; 303,588 to the Coral Coast; 239,442 to the Mamanuca islands; and 167,309 to Suva
- Savusavu, 29,433 visitors
- Taveuni/Islands off Taveuni 26,084 visitors
- Beqa, 12,982 visitors.

Fiji’s national tourism plan, Fiji Tourism 2021, “is now focusing on increasing the value of tourism. Strategies include growing arrivals from high value markets, increasing the share of value retained in the Fijian economy, and spreading the benefits of tourism throughout the country”. The plan is divided into nine Thematic Areas that are considered critical in taking the industry forward:

1. Driving demand for Fiji’s tourism brand
2. Increasing the value of the Fijian tourism product
3. Facilitating and promoting foreign and domestic investment in tourism
4. Investing in tourism related infrastructure
5. Strengthening linkages to the tourism industry
6. Ensuring continued sustainable development of the tourism industry
7. Building a conducive and updated legal framework for the tourism industry
8. Enhancing risk management in the tourism industry
Brief on Ecotourism and Geotourism development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecotourism Features/Geotourism</th>
<th>Status in Fiji</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourism that takes place in a natural environment</td>
<td>Beach resorts are the dominant accommodation in Fiji, and there are many tour options that take visitors into the natural environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism that has positive environmental impacts</td>
<td>The Fiji tourism industry is very large and inevitably brings with it environmental impacts, although there is a growing awareness and movement toward sustainable tourism practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism that promotes conservation</td>
<td>There are positive examples of tourism that supports conservation in Fiji (for example: <a href="https://www.slideshare.net/stuartinfiji/ecotourism-in-the-south-pacific-what-is-what-isnt">https://www.slideshare.net/stuartinfiji/ecotourism-in-the-south-pacific-what-is-what-isnt</a>) although this is not widespread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geotourism</td>
<td>A number of Fiji’s potential geosites already host visitors, although geological interpretation is not always strong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Assessment Background

Methodology & Stakeholder Engagement

The overall methodology for this assessment is summarised in the following diagram, and further detailed in the Introductory Report. As noted in the Community Needs Assessment, community consultation in Fiji is yet to be conducted.

Documents referred to in the desktop research included:

- Potential Geosites – Fiji Preliminary Overview Report, August 2021, SPC
- Savusavu, North-West Vanua Levu Prospective Geopark, Geoff Taylor, 2021
- Fijian Tourism 2021, Government of Fiji
- Fiji International Visitor Survey, January–December 2019, SMS Research & Marketing
- [https://www.fiji.travel/](https://www.fiji.travel/)

Stakeholder consultation included the Fiji Tourism Office and a private geologist, Geoff Taylor, who is also Vice President of the Savusavu Tourism Association.

Site Assessment

Ecotourism Value

As per section 1.2 above, Fiji is primarily a ‘rest and relaxation’ destination, with coastal resorts the main focus, many of which are foreign owned. Much tourism activity also occurs within resort and integrated resort development areas. While ecotourism is not dominant in the Fiji tourism industry, there is a range of ecotourism activities available to the visitor. Foundations to grow ecotourism include:
‘Sustainability underpins the development agenda of the Fijian Government’ and national tourism plans recognize the need to build sustainability into the tourism industry

- Recognition of ecotourism within the Fiji Tourism Awards
- National tourism plans also recognize the need to diversify markets
- There are four legally established National Parks, three located around the tourism hubs between Lautoka and Suva, and one located on Taveuni
- There are also six marine parks including Waitabu at Taveuni, Namena at Savusavu and Shark Reef at Beqa.

Community Needs Assessment

No community consultation was undertaken for this assignment, due to internal COVID-19 travel restrictions, but also as a specific site for a Geopark has yet to be selected.

Potential for Geotourism Development

SPC and a private geologist based in Fiji have identified three potential Geopark sites.

- Viti Levu including the island of Beqa
- Taveuni island, off Vanua Levu
- The broader Savusavu area on Vanua Levu.

Viti Levu and Beqa: Many of the potential geosites in this area (refer to map, courtesy of SPC) are located in Fiji’s main tourism zone, and include:

1. Wainimala Group, Korolevu. Columnar jointing in basalt, also the oldest known rocks of Fiji
2. Wailotua Cave (also known as Nakoroloaloa Cave or Snake God Cave) is the longest cave on Viti Levu. It holds great cultural and historical significance and is one of the few roosting sites for Fiji’s blossom bat
3. Colo-i-Suva Forest Park contains native flora and fauna, sites of archaeological and historic interest, ecological systems, geological features, and other natural phenomena of special scientific interest
4. The upper Navua River cuts a deep, narrow gorge in the central highlands of Viti Levu. As a geosite, the formation of the canyon, its direct relationship with the surrounding flora and fauna, and methods used by traditional communities to preserve the area could be interesting aspects to showcase
5. Korotogo Beach (Fossil Beach) includes patches of fossil reefs and fossil beaches
6. The Sigatoka Sand Dunes, designated as Fiji’s first national park in 1989
7. TheVolivoli Caveis an important archaeological
site, containing extinct megafaunal remains that are unique to Fiji

8. Sigatoka River Valley, one of the major drainage networks of Viti Levu, shows important geological formations that have built the island over time since around 40 million years ago

9. Naihehe Cave is Fiji’s largest cave system and was used by the last known cannibal tribes in Fiji. The site has strong geological and cultural heritage

10. Natadola Beach is a very popular beach and can highlight the formation of sea caves and how the reef system and associated marine processes interact with oceanographic processes to form this beautiful beach

11. Momi Bay Historical Park could highlight the links between geology and WWII history

12. The Nausori Highlands are located in the interior of Viti Levu and include the Garden of the Sleeping Giant. The Sleeping Giant is a mountain range resembling a sleeping giant and thus has cultural significance connected to geology

13. Saboto Thermal Hot Springs and Mud Pool are amid the Sabto Valley and feature three thermal springs of different temperatures, heated by an underground geothermal source

14. Koroyanitu National Park (also known as Abaca Cultural and Recreational Park, Nase Lodge, or Mt. Batilamu) is a community-based project for the protection of nature and culture. It includes interesting rock formations, archaeological sites, waterfalls, and panoramic views

15. Beqa island is a popular dive destination and includes underwater geological features.
In addition, two other sites not marked on the map above have been identified:

- Namosi, in the interior of Viti Levu, is an old strata volcano
- Nakauvadra, the mountain range surrounding Rakiraki on the north coast of Viti Levu, represents the remnants of an eroded strata volcano.

**Taveuni:** Currently promoted by Fiji Tourism as ‘Fiji’s Garden Isle, [offering] the perfect balance of relaxation and adventure in Taveuni’s colourful coral reefs and waterfall-laden forests.’ A range of potential geosites have been proposed for this area (refer map below, courtesy of SPC):

1. Bouma National Heritage Park was established to protect the highest summit amongst the islands and the rainforest landscapes around it. The Park could highlight the geological history of the area, and the fundamental connection between Taveuni’s geology and biology
2. The Lavana Coastal Walk is also part of the Bouma National Heritage Park, and the variety of environments witnessed on this coastal walk verifies the richness of Taveuni’s geomorphology and biology
3. The Somosomo Strait which runs between Taveuni and Vanua Levu is one of Fiji’s best known dive destinations with underwater geological features
4. Vuna Blow Hole, at the very southern tip of Taveuni, is created by water rushing in between black volcanic rocks on the edge of coral rich Vuna Reef
5. The Waitavala waterslide is a natural rockslide demonstrating how the landform was created
6. Lake Tagimouca is one of the most famous geographical landmarks in Taveuni. Situated in a volcanic crater, at a height of 832 metres, the lake is filled with floating masses of vegetation and can highlight the connection between Taveuni’s landscape and high species richness
7. Waitabu Marine Park reflects a pristine ecosystem and showcases Taveuni’s conservation efforts.

**Savusavu:** Currently promoted by Fiji Tourism as ‘Laid back and uncrowded, Vanua Levu’s tropical beauty and simple, slow pace make [Savusavu] the perfect place to reboot’. Vanua Levu is much younger than the main island, Viti Levu – its oldest rocks are only 10 million years old as compared with Viti’s 40 million years. As a result, the volcanic plugs that are scattered across both islands are more prominent, forming magnificent mountain peaks across the island. A private geologist has proposed a range of potential geosites for this area (refer map, courtesy of Geoff Taylor):

1. The Nakama hot springs. The hot springs are unique in that they are located in the centre of town, and are also the most prolific in Fiji. They are unusual in being recharged by sea
water via a major fault along the seashore. The most recent eruptive event occurred in 1961 with hot water-spouts rising to a height of 30 meters. Visitors can view the hot springs and see the locals cooking there, while skiffs are docked at the mouths of the hot creeks in town to clean the growth off the bottom. Savusavu Bay is itself an old stratovolcano some 20 kilometres in diameter and there are also undersea hot water-spouts close to Nawi Island.

2. Thermal pools of Vakatia, Levuka Koro and Nakobolou. All around the island, hot water comes up through the earth to the surface to form hot pools. The hot pools of Nakobolou are enclosed in stone-lined baths which were once used exclusively by the chiefly family.

3. Youngest volcanic rocks in Fiji. Mount Suvasuva is the same age as Taveuni and represents the most recent example of volcanism activity in Fiji.

4. Earlier sea levels. Raised coral reefs can be seen at the airport as small mushroom shaped islands where the upper bench cuts mark the sea level 10,000 years ago. An earlier 30,000-year-old limestone bench occurs just east of the airport. Visitors can view marine fossils and caves.

5. Fiji’s first gold mine. Old gold workings from the 1930s occur along the Nacekoro ridge along a fault, exposed in a road cutting.

6. Volcanic plugs. Visitors will view a number of old volcanoes; the Savudrodro, Valili and Nabuna stratovolcanoes on the way to north-west Vanua Levu. They show features of erosion marking the original volcanic rim, faulting and clay alteration.

7. Columnar basalt at Naselesele Falls. A series of waterfalls are located close to the road and show columnar basalt jointing and mark the northern boundary of the lava flows.

8. Nasarawaqa fossil road cut. This is the richest fossil locality in Fiji, about an hour from Savusavu along the tar sealed road. Shallow marine shells, foraminifera and fish remains are abundant showing this area was a shallow marine basin about 10,000 years ago. The geological history of this area is fascinating as basalt flows spread to the north encroaching the shallow marine foreshore. The area is further enriched by at least three old village sites located nearby.

9. Devodara Beach and the Blue Lagoon. The Blue Lagoon is in fact a natural sink hole in the limestone reef platform.

10. Salt Lake. Salt Lake is an inland lake fed by the Qaloqalo river which links it to the sea. When the tide rises or falls, the water surges through the narrow channel at great speed.
Major Challenges and Opportunities

The first main challenge is to select a site for Fiji’s first Geopark.

Geopark establishment in either Savusavu and Taveuni is a good opportunity to:

• Support dispersal of visitors to other parts of Fiji
• Provide sustainable development opportunities for local communities in less developed parts of Fiji.

It is noted that many of the fundamentals are already in place at Savusavu and Taveuni to facilitate growth in tourism, such as direct flight connections from Nadi and Suva, and an existing tourism industry. This was noted in the national tourism development plan: ‘Vanua Levu has potential to be further developed for tourism as it has the basic infrastructure in place to cater for investment activity’.

It is further noted the Savusavu Tourism Association has formed a committee to develop the hot springs as a stepping-stone for a potential Geopark. Limited initial funding is also available to establish an information centre that is planned to display geological information on the springs, and to house displays of columnar basalt and fossils from Nasarawaqa.

Geopark establishment in Viti Levu is a good opportunity to:

• Add another dimension to Fiji’s main tourism zone, to potentially increase length of stay and visitor satisfaction
• Develop new products and experiences in a community or ecotourism context.

As noted in the Introductory Report, another challenge will be investment and training to leverage tourism opportunities off a Geopark listing:

• Investment in geotourism sites to address visitor safety and site conservation
• Investment in geotourism interpretation that is accessible and understandable to visitors (geological interpretation lends itself to displays and other visual mediums).

Development Options

In selecting a site for Fiji’s first Geopark, the national tourism development plan is relevant:

• The Vision to include the aspiration of ‘spreading benefits from tourism throughout the country, while developing a sector that is increasingly sustainable and inclusive in the future’
• Strategy 7 is to ‘Stimulate Product Diversification and Development across Fiji’

• Thematic Area 6 of the plan, ‘Ensuring Continued Sustainable Development of the Tourism Industry’ notes that ‘the growing global tourism demand has already strained ecosystems and environments in more developed destinations and is starting to impact Fiji: Although not specifically identified in the plan, there is general recognition that these environmental impacts are greatest in the Nadi-Suva region, including the Coral Coast.

However, the decision on the location of Fiji’s first Geopark rests with the Government of Fiji, with reference to current policy thinking, noting that the current national tourism development plan expires in 2021.

With reference to the Introductory Report, which noted the potential appeal of a Pacific UNESCO/Geopark trail for long haul markets in Asia and Europe, there is a lot of sense in establishing a Geopark in Fiji given Fiji’s role as a Pacific aviation hub and arrival point for long haul travelers.

**Recommendations for SPTO, SPC and Development Partners**

• Fiji Government to note the findings of this report in terms of potential locations for a Geopark (refer Community Needs Assessment) and respective benefits of those locations (refer Potential for Geotourism Development, and Major Challenges and Opportunities)

• Fiji Government, with support from SPC, to select a site for Fiji’s first Geopark

• Fiji Government, with support from SPTO and SPC, to undertake community consultation at the selected Geopark site

• SPTO to assess demand for geotourism in Fiji.

Naihehe Caves, Sigatoka Valley
Annexes
### Terms of Reference

Short Term Consultancy Services for the Preliminary Feasibility Assessment of selected Ecotourism Sites under the Pacific Ecotourism Recovery Initiative

#### 1. Background

The Pacific region welcomed a total of 2.9 million visitors in 2019 contributing USD $4 billion in visitor spending to regional economies. As a percentage of the national Gross Domestic Product, tourism receipts for some countries like Cook Islands reached 66.1% in the same year. Direct employment in the sector totalled 90,821 not including those working in support services and businesses in the informal sector. Across the region, some local communities have become reliant on tourism for livelihood support either from the sale of traditional artefacts, food (agriculture and fishing), cultural experiences and recreational activities amongst others.

Whilst the economic benefits from tourism are notable, the dependency of some Pacific Island Countries on the industry has been acutely evident when the pandemic struck in early 2020 leading to the closure of borders in March and subsequently that of many businesses. Despite these challenges, the pandemic has provided an opportunity to refocus, rethink and redesign the future of tourism with sustainability of the natural and cultural environment at the forefront. Additionally, opportunities have emerged to diversify tourism experiences, promote niche experiences and services. The Pacific’s natural and cultural heritage are major draw cards for visitors to the Pacific Islands – its diverse flora and fauna, land and sea, home to a resilient and happy people, unique in their own ways yet united by their diverse culture and traditions, beliefs and sense of community, lived over many generations.

The NTO Needs Assessment Report of SPTO Member Countries in August 2020 which aimed at gauging priorities for support from SPTO considering the emerging impacts of the pandemic pointed to the need for economic diversification within the sector. Research by the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) highlights that traveller patterns and preferences are changing with visitors desiring more environmentally responsible experiences, off the beaten track destinations, opportunities to be immersed in the culture and be able to give back to communities. This coupled with the devastating impacts of covid-19 on the industry and communities gives rise to the need for diversifying the tourism offering and rethinking the way in which the local market and inter-regional travel is perceived and developed. In response to the need to diversify the tourism offering, an opportunity exists to assess the feasibility of developing ecotourism in selected communities with a view that such ecotourism sites could demonstrate strong linkages to geological sites as a niche segment which could potentially attract domestic and interregional demand focused on learning, research and adventure. The recently endorsed Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework sets out a vision for tourism in the Pacific that by 2030 “We are empowered by, and benefitting from tourism that is resilient, prosperous and inclusive. It improves the wellbeing of our communities and protects, restores and promotes our cultures, islands and ocean ecosystems”. This initiative responds directly to these collective regional aspirations as well as to global commitments 1 2019 Annual SPTO Visitor Arrivals Review Report 2 including the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action or the SAMOA Pathway amongst others.
2. Objectives
The Pacific Ecotourism Recovery Initiative aims to:

- Assess the potential of ecotourism with strong linkages to geo-tourism opportunities as a diversification strategy for the Pacific Islands
- Enhance community engagement in managing the selected tourism sites
- Identify opportunities (including investment options) and barriers to community-based tourism for domestic and inter-regional markets

3. Strategic Partnerships
SPTO is mandated to develop and market tourism in the region with a vision for the Pacific Islands’ being empowered and benefitting from sustainable tourism through innovative partnerships- as per its Strategic Plan 2020-2024. To this end, SPTO recognises the need to work closely with Pacific island countries and partners through innovative approaches that strengthen the value of Ecotourism and Geotourism opportunities in selected countries.

This project proposes to support a green and inclusive recovery through a tri-partite partnership between SPTO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Pacific Office and the Pacific Community. Specifically SPTO and UNESCO will work closely in conducting a preliminary feasibility assessment of the potential for integrating ecotourism experiences with geotourism significance. SPTO and UNESCO will also collaborate with the Pacific Community (SPC) on strengthening geotourism opportunities which could be benchmarked to the UNESCO international standards and requirements for Geo-Parks. All three partners will continue to work in partnership in mobilizing technical and financial support for the implementation phase.

As a starting point, the project will focus on four Pacific Island countries with existing geological sites which can potentially also hold significant ecotourism potential. These countries are Fiji, Samoa, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. It is envisioned that should this concept be successful, it will be shared with other SPTO Member Countries. Given the encompassing nature of resource ownership and management in traditional communities where linkages are pronounced between the land, sea and the community, SPTO recognizes the importance of taking a holistic approach to planning and understanding the complexities in such circumstances that may benefit the wider communities and destinations in the long run.

This proposed preliminary feasibility assessment will focus on the supply side so as to firstly understand what is currently available, as the geotourism niche is new to the Pacific from the product offering perspective. This proposal will therefore support this as part of Phase 1. It will then feed into a larger future project proposal which is intended to be presented to potential donors by SPTO, UNESCO and SPC in Quarter 4 2021 or starting in 2022. It is envisaged that when funding resources are successfully secured, Phase 2 will entail an in-depth market focused research component. SPC has taken the lead on the technical feasibility study on the geological front. SPTO and UNESCO will collaborate within the scope outlined below on the ecotourism component.

4. Project Scope
The following key activities will be undertaken to achieve the objectives for the project:

a. **Desktop Research and Planning**
SPTO will work closely with the National Tourism Organisations (NTOs), Ministry of Education, Culture and the Ministry of Environment/Natural Resources and other key national and
regional partners in assessing the proposed sites and confirming these for the assessment. The planning and desktop research work is essential in understanding the past and recent initiatives and will build on these. It will specifically ensure that national and regional research initiatives including the niche market research profiles completed by SPTO in 2013/2014 particularly on Cultural Heritage Tourism and others are incorporated as relevant.

b. Stakeholder consultation

The project will support the engagement of all relevant national and regional stakeholders in the assessment, focusing on documenting feedback on the ecotourism value of the sites and the role communities play in the process. The reports will capture the social, economic and environmental value and benefits the project will bring to the community and site as well as potential challenges and gaps. Cultural significance of sites will also be explored and how these can be protected and shared in a respectful manner benefiting communities to preserve their natural and cultural heritage.

c. Documentation of a full Preliminary Report on Ecotourism Value for each of the 4 sites

Full-fledged profiles will be developed for each site, highlighting but not limited to the following:

1. Introduction • General Country Information • Tourism Overview • Brief on ecotourism and geotourism development
2. Background of the Assessment • Methodology • Stakeholder Engagement
3. Site Assessment • Site Description • Ecotourism value (economic, social, cultural and environmental) • Potential for geotourism development • Major Challenges and Opportunities domestic including those for inter-regional and international markets • Development Options and general Cost Benefit Analysis • Investment options and community needs assessment • Recommendations for SPTO, SPC and Development Partners • Geotourism good practices from within the country (if applicable) or outside the region

d. Presentation of Assessment findings

SPTO will co-host with UNESCO the presentation of findings via a Webinar event prior to project closure in September 2021

5. Scope of Work

The SPTO is seeking to engage the services of a qualified and experienced consultant to conduct the preliminary research and compile a full report on the Ecotourism Value of selected tourism Sites in Fiji, Samoa, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. He or she will:

• Submit a detail research plan with clear timelines and stakeholders identified
• Conduct a desktop research to gauge initial available information in the 4 countries
• Coordinate with the SPTO and the NTOs in the 4 countries and the partner Ministries and agencies at all levels to plan and conduct a full preliminary research at country level. The research will build on existing initiatives and information available at all levels.
• Compile the report based on the guiding sections above and changes as discussed with SPTO during initial meetings.
• Be available to conduct and attend virtual meetings with SPTO and stakeholders throughout the project timeframe given travel restrictions. If based in Fiji, the consultant will be available to have face to face meetings with SPTO as needed and only when possible given the current COVID-19 situation.
• Refer to the full concept note for further details.
## Persons Consulted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tuvalu</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tepola Eseka Mitilelei</td>
<td>Tourism Officer</td>
<td>Tuvalu Department of Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faatasi Malologa</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Tuvalu Department of Lands and Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sapolu Tetoa</td>
<td>Geologist</td>
<td>Tuvalu Department of Lands and Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gareth Johnson</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Young Pioneer Tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise Southerden</td>
<td>Travel Journalist</td>
<td>Bindu Tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Pagotto</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>Crooked Compass</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Samoa</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Ah Sam</td>
<td>Planning and Development Manager</td>
<td>Samoa Tourism Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marita Ah Sam</td>
<td>Principal Planning and Development Officer</td>
<td>Samoa Tourism Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lovine Leauanea</td>
<td>Planning &amp; Development Officer</td>
<td>Samoa Tourism Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lauina Leilua</td>
<td>Senior Cultural Advisor &amp; National Beautification Officer</td>
<td>Samoa Tourism Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Logoipule Malala</td>
<td>Marketing Support Officer</td>
<td>Samoa Tourism Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Aleni Fepuleai</td>
<td>Private Consultant</td>
<td>Geologist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katie Pogi</td>
<td>Senior Scientific Officer of Geology</td>
<td>Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lameko Talia</td>
<td>Geologist</td>
<td>Samoa Department of Geology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nive Gidlow</td>
<td>Office Manager</td>
<td>Savai'i Samoa Tourism Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neil Tiatia</td>
<td>Information Officer</td>
<td>Savai'i Samoa Tourism Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Consultation</td>
<td>Land Owners, Chiefs, Tourism Representatives</td>
<td>Savai'i</td>
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<td><strong>Fiji</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jacinta Lal</td>
<td>Principal Tourism Officer</td>
<td>Ministry Of Commerce, Trade, Tourism &amp; Transport</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miriama Ryland</td>
<td>Tourism Officer</td>
<td>Ministry Of Commerce, Trade, Tourism &amp; Transport</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salote Waiwalu</td>
<td>Senior Tourism Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jotishna Reddy</td>
<td>Principal Tourism Officer</td>
<td>Ministry Of Commerce, Trade, Tourism &amp; Transport</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geoff Taylor</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>Savusavu Tourism Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jerry Spooner</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Department of Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geraldine Tari</td>
<td>Principal Accreditation Officer</td>
<td>Department of Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Olivet Dorony</td>
<td>TORBA Tourism Manager</td>
<td>Department of Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Anmath</td>
<td>TORBA Product Development Officer</td>
<td>Department of Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul Pio</td>
<td>Manager, Short Haul Markets</td>
<td>Vanuatu Tourism Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michel Leodoro</td>
<td>Geoscientist</td>
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<td>Rolenas Tavue Baereleo</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reginald Moll</td>
<td>Chairman</td>
<td>Gaua Tourism Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZaZa</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>L'Esprit d'Adventure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kathy Nako</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Trek Vanuatu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lida Carlog</td>
<td>Sales Assistant &amp; Administration</td>
<td>Unity Airlines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Millie Samuel</td>
<td>Booking Coordinator</td>
<td>Air Taxi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Consultation with 31 People</td>
<td>Land Owners, Chiefs, Tourism Operators</td>
<td>Gaua Island</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gerard Quinn</td>
<td>Executive Manager</td>
<td>Waitaki Whitestone GeoPark NZ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lisa Heinz</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>Waitaki Whitestone GeoPark NZ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sasha</td>
<td>Geologist/Educator</td>
<td>Waitaki Whitestone GeoPark NZ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christina Leala Gale</td>
<td>Sustainable Tourism and Research Manager</td>
<td>Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ahmad Ali</td>
<td>Sustainable Tourism Officer</td>
<td>Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catherine Mara</td>
<td>Sustainable Tourism Assistant</td>
<td>Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nisha</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>UNESCO Office for the Pacific States</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rajendra Prasad</td>
<td>Advisor for Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melody Arevalo</td>
<td>Project Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Akuila Tawake</td>
<td>Deputy Director, Georesources and Energy Programme</td>
<td>The Pacific Community (SPC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gary Lee</td>
<td>Geotechnical Adviser</td>
<td>The Pacific Community (SPC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dana Tigarea</td>
<td>Geoscience Officer</td>
<td>The Pacific Community (SPC)</td>
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