

Webinar on Environmental Considerations in Sustainable Tourism in the Pacific Island Region



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Overview of Tourism in Samoa

- ▶ Tourism is a key pillar of the Samoan economy and contributes approximately 25% of total GDP, contributing \$3.7 billion tala to the total revenue of Samoa's economy over the past 10 years. In the financial year 2018/2019, tourism earnings exceeded half a billion tala with total earnings of \$514.1 million
- ▶ The accommodation sector has been on a significant rise in the last four years with a total room stock of 2,328 as of June, 2019. Given the continued increase in the number of accommodation properties in the tourism sector, it is crucial that all new tourism developments follow strict environmental planning guidelines under PUMA and follow the Minimum standards.
- ▶ The Measles followed by COVID-19 has had a severe impact on the tourism industry with the closure of borders and travel restrictions. With the impacts of the Measles epidemic and COVID-19, visitor arrivals for FY 2019/2020 dropped by 30.33% and it is expected a further downturn in visitor arrivals is projected at 65% for FY 2020/2021.

Overview of Sustainable Tourism

- ▶ Tourism is a major contributor to the GDP of Pacific Island Countries and was growing rapidly before the COVID-19 pandemic. The importance of tourism as an engine for development is highlighted by its inclusion in targets of SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), 12 (responsible consumption and production) & 14 (life below water)
- ▶ The integration of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into the Samoa National Development Strategy mirrors the Government of Samoa's strong commitment to the achievement of the SDGs for a sustainable future for all as well as to ensure that implementation is contextualized.
- ▶ Given the heavy reliance of tourism on healthy ecosystems, Pacific Island ecosystems are uniquely vulnerable as the growing Pacific tourism industry puts increasing pressure on island ecosystems and cultural heritage.
- ▶ The government has prioritised and emphasised sustainable tourism development for Samoa and this is evident with sustainable tourism outlined in the SDS and also in the Tourism Sector Plan with its vision of Samoa becoming the leading Pacific destination for sustainable tourism

Role of STA in Promoting Environmental Planning on Tourism Development

- ▶ The Authority plays an important role in encouraging and promoting sustainable tourism development through proper environment planning given the increasing investments in new tourism developments such as accommodation.
- ▶ Close collaboration with the Planning and Urban Management Agency as a key stakeholder of the tourism sector and STA. PUMA conduct their screening and scoping of tourism developments before advising the Authority for any feedback/concerns.
- ▶ The Authority through the Planning and Development Division is responsible for leading and enforcing of the Minimum standards for the Samoa accommodation providers. The standards are used as an evaluation and planning document by STA, accommodation providers and investors and is enforced through an annual inspection program by STA
- ▶ One of the main issues we continue to face, are tourism developments that proceed without following the proper channels and approval processes.

Sustainable Tourism Initiatives/Projects

- ▶ ***Global Sustainable Tourism Council*** – Samoa was the first in the region to participate in this program and was recognised as regional and global leaders in sustainability through the Early Adopters Program by GSTC.. The assessment looked at different criteria such as Sustainable Destination Management, Social and Economic, Community & Culture Heritage & Environmental issues. The results identified the following as examples of good practice:
 - ▶ A commitment to Sustainable Tourism
 - ▶ Mechanisms to Manage and Coordinate Sustainable Tourism
 - ▶ Commitment to Sector and Community Engagement
 - ▶ Well-enforced planning and development regulations which provide a stellar environment for the visitor
 - ▶ Authentic tourism products that engage with and often provide benefits to the community
 - ▶ Small businesses are provided with support and have the opportunity to thrive.

Sustainable Tourism Initiatives/Projects

- ▶ ***Sustainability Monitoring Program*** - The Authority in partnership with SPTO participated in the pilot phase of this important sustainability program which assists hotels to monitor and keep track of their energy and water consumption and also the waste generated on a monthly basis. At the SPTO Board Level, Samoa is also currently the Chair for the SPTO Sustainable Tourism Board Sub Committee.
- ▶ ***Climate Change Adaptation Projects funded by LDCF*** - Enhancing Resilience of Tourism Reliant Communities to Climate Change Risks in Samoa (ICCRITS) Project was designed to enhance the resilience of tourism-reliant communities to climate change risks. The project had a number of key outcomes which supported sustainable tourism:
 - ▶ The development of Management Plans for the Tourism areas to identify the key priorities and also to show the potential impacts of climate change and their mitigation and adaptation measures.
 - ▶ The project also developed alternative tourism products that were less dependent on the beaches such as the attraction sites. This component of the project enabled upgrading of key infrastructure at a number of attraction sites.
 - ▶ The other key outcome was the strengthening of the resilience of beach fale operations. The project funded an architect to design more resilient fales to ensure the long term sustainability through natural disasters and climate change impacts.

Sustainable Tourism Initiatives/Projects

- ▶ **Review of the Tourism Accommodation Standards:** The review of the Minimum Standards which has now been completed has incorporated all the requirements from the different agencies such as MNRE, PUMA and Building Code from MWTI, so that developers are aware of the requirements which must be adhered to. The new Standards will be more strict in enforcing environmental requirements and ensuring the safety aspects are addressed and maintained.
- ▶ **The upgrading of Attraction sites under the STGP funded by NZ:** The upgrading of our attraction sites is also another initiative which focuses on not only improving the visitor experience but also ensuring that the site is sustainable in the long term, so that visitors will continue to enjoy the sites for years to come without affecting the natural environment of the sites. Eg. Afu Aau Waterfall



- ▶ **EIA Training Workshop SPREP 2015** - members of our team participated in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Training Workshop which was led by SPREP. Whilst PUMA is the EIA focal point in Samoa for ALL developments, this workshop provided us with the opportunity to also build our capacity in EIA Processes and the different types of EIA's such as PEAR and CEAR.

Conclusion/Way Forward

- ▶ Whilst the tourism industry in our region and around the Globe are in unprecedented times given the uncertainty of COVID-19, we are confident that as a region we will recover and continue to prosper in the near future.
- ▶ We acknowledge the ecosystems in our region are a vital asset of the tourism industry, however; they are extremely vulnerable if developments do not adhere to environmental planning approval processes.
- ▶ In moving forward, we must all work together as a region to promote and encourage sustainable tourism development through proper environmental planning and the use of the planning tools, so that future generations and visitors continue to enjoy our region.

