



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

PIFS(22)FEMM.Info.1

FORUM ECONOMIC OFFICIALS MEETING

FORUM ECONOMIC MINISTERS MEETING

10-12 August 2022
Port Vila, Vanuatu

INFORMATION PAPER 1: REGIONAL TOURISM INITIATIVES

Purpose and Summary

Purpose

To highlight key regional tourism partnerships and initiatives that have been progressed by SPTO since the last update provided to the 2021 Forum Economic Ministers Meeting. Given the ongoing pandemic related challenges, SPTO has continued to focus on regional recovery efforts to support sustainable, inclusive and resilient tourism reactivation in the region.

Summary

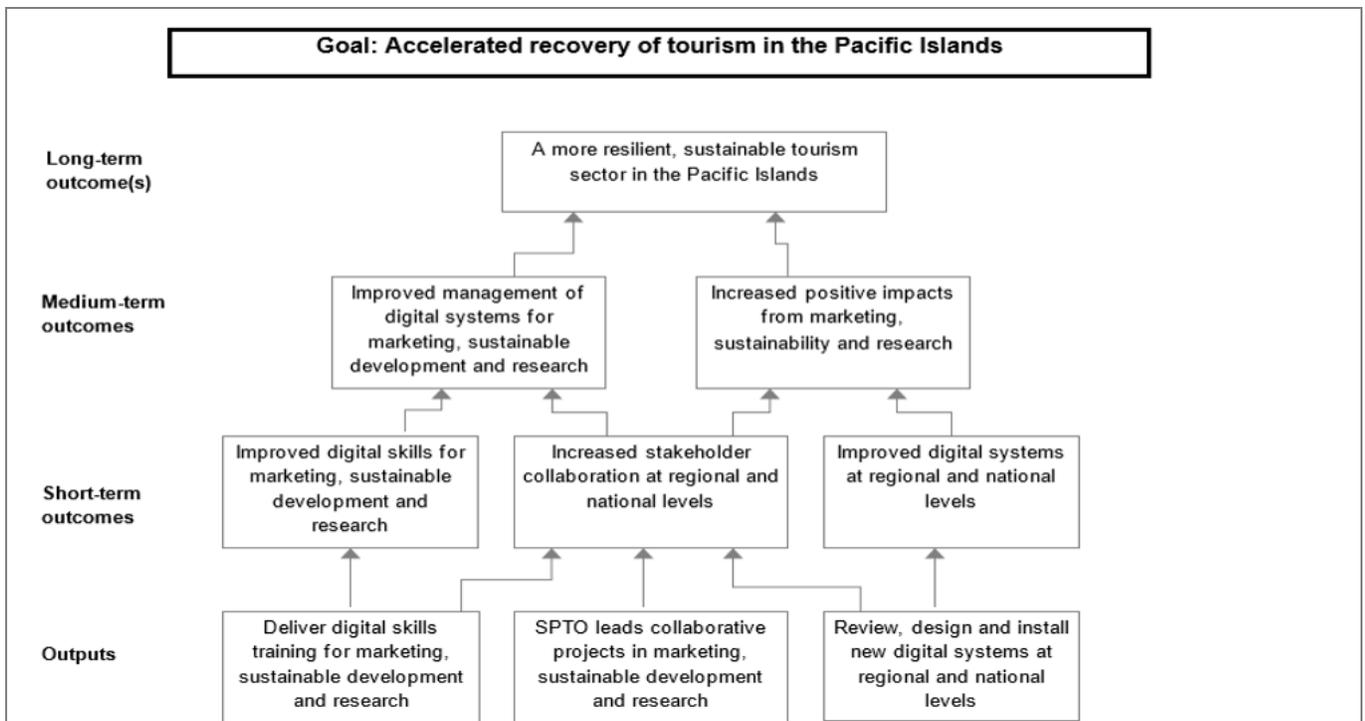
Partnerships

Since the last update SPTO has continued its strong partnership with the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (NZMFAT) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB)'s Private Sector Development Initiative (PSDI) on the following regional tourism programmes:

- **NZMFAT Organisational Development and Tourism Recovery Programme (Phase 1 & 2)**

Following the successful completion of the NZMFAT Organisational Development and Tourism Recovery Programme (Phase 1), SPTO was able to secure ongoing funding to implement the 4-year Pacific Digital Tourism Transformation Project (Phase 2). This project totals NZD\$4 million and will support [SPTO's 2021- 2024 Strategic Plan](#), which emphasises the strategic priority areas of sustainable planning and development, destination marketing and tourism data/statistical information.

Through the delivery of digital skills training and improved digital technologies and systems, Phase 2 aims to accelerate tourism recovery in the Pacific, with the long-term goal of creating a more resilient and sustainable sector.



This partnership is the first time SPTO has attracted major funding from New Zealand, under their International Development Cooperation Programme (IDC). This partnership recognises the critical importance of tourism as a major driver of economic growth and an important cross-cutting sector, as well as recognising the umbrella regional leadership role SPTO fulfils guiding tourism development in the Pacific. It endeavours to support the potential of tourism to:

- Improve the livelihoods of Pacific communities; and
- Meaningfully contribute to the protection, enhancement and restoration of Pacific cultures, islands and ocean ecosystems.

This vision for a more sustainable, resilient, prosperous and inclusive Pacific tourism industry has its roots in the [Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework \(PSTPF\)](#), [Pacific Tourism Statistics Strategy \(PTSS\)](#) and [SPTO Digital Strategy Framework \(DS\)](#), all of which were developed under Phase 1 and will be used to shape tourism activity that contributes positively to Pacific regionalism.

• **Private Sector Development Initiative (PSDI) IV**

PSDI is a technical assistance program funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the governments of Australia, New Zealand and the European Union (EU). Now in Phase IV, which will conclude in October 2024, PSDI focuses on the tourism sector and works across ADB’s 14 Pacific Developing Member Countries (DMCs) which include: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

The overall delivery of the Workplan will be led by PSDI in collaboration with SPTO in the following key areas, with key work progressed to date noted accordingly:

A. Evidence-based tourism planning

- Pacific Tourism Data Symposium and PTSS (Regional support - ongoing).
- A methodology for measuring domestic tourism (PNG and Vanuatu).
- Development of sustainability indicators for tourism (Kiribati).
- Value chain analysis on the role of women in tourism (Fiji).
- Supporting evidence-based strategies to guide the future growth and sustainability of tourism (Multi- country).

B. Crisis management

- Regional Pacific Tourism Reopening Framework (December 2021 and June 2022)

A Reopening Framework for Tourism

1. Public private coordination in reopening planning, implementation and MEL	2. Border reopening policies and agreements	3. Health and safety measures for COVID-safe tourism	4. Stakeholder Communications
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.1. Whole of Government and public-private coordination mechanisms to plan and mobilise the safe reopening of tourism.1.2. A documented, but adaptable plan for reopening that covers all tourism-related functions with clear accountabilities, timelines, and resource requirements.1.3. A system for monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) and reporting on tourism reopening progress and issues.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">2.1. A clear reopening policy statement.2.2. Negotiation of bilateral agreements on border reopening with partner countries.2.3. Documented conditions for reopening borders to visitors.2.4. Documented requirements for visitor entry.2.5. Agreements with airlines/cruiselines on resuming tourism operations.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">3.1. The normalisation of COVID-19 health and safety measures amongst the population.3.2. A COVID-19 (C-19) contract tracing system.3.3. Ministry of Health 'C-19 case management' protocols for suspected/confirmed cases.3.4. C-19 Health and Safety Protocols for tourism businesses (accommodation, attractions and transfer/tour operators).3.5. C-19 Health and Safety Protocols for other operations in the tourism value chain (airlines, airports, ports, taxis, local sea transport, retailers, restaurants, etc).3.6. Resources and training to support tourism businesses related operations in protocols understanding and compliance.3.7. Availability of adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies.3.8. A C-19 Health and Safety compliance certification program for businesses.3.9. A clear policy on the regulatory requirements for business compliance.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4.1. Sustained communications to target markets for (i) destination marketing and (ii) critical updates (e.g., COVID-related information, reopening dates, etc).4.2. Frequent updates, online resources and on-call advice for the local industry.4.3. Ongoing community engagement in and communications about reopening plans.4.4. Regular communication with development partners about reopening plans, progress and needs.

- Research on building resilience and longer-term sustainability: a 'build back better' approach (Regional support - ongoing).
- Country-level adaptation of reopening framework, protocols for the private sector, and recovery strategy (Niue, PNG, and RMI).
- Impact, evaluation, and recovery following COVID-19 and recent natural disasters (Tonga, in partnership with the World Bank).

C. Financing sustainable tourism

- Research to improve access to tourism finance. Study to be released Q3 2022 (Regional, with country support on request).
- Assessment of tourism taxation mechanisms. Study to be released Q1 2023 (Regional, with country support on request).
- Support for blue financing through development of coral reef insurance (Fiji and Solomon Islands, in partnership with ADB).

D. Enabling private sector-led tourism

- Benchmarking the enabling environment to support private sector tourism. Study to commence Q4 2022 (Regional).
- Study on opportunities to attract “digital nomads” or longer-term remote workers. Study to commence Q4 2022. (Regional).
- Country-level support and implementation on request basis from 2023.

Further to the above, the following PSDI tourism publications have been completed and are available on the [PSDI website](#):

- Thematic analysis of country information: regional trends
- Part one: Evaluating the challenges after COVID-19
- Impact of COVID-19 on Pacific tourism, recovery forecasts
- Initial recommendations for recovery
- Part two: to follow, focus on “looking forward”
- 14 Individual Country Tourism Snapshots

- **UNSIDIS Tourism Working Group**

Through six regional tourism groupings (African Tourism Council (ATC), ASEAN Tourism Association (ASEANTA), Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO), Destination Mekong (DM), Indian Ocean Tourism Organization (IOTO) and SPTO) this group was established to advocate for interregional collaboration to strengthen the sector among developing countries that face cross-cutting social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities.

With support from United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) and the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) the Working Group aims to provide a means for collaboration aimed at strengthening the sustainable development of tourism in SIDS by:

- Creating a system for support, knowledge-sharing, and cooperation among SIDS tourism organisations and stakeholders;
- Supporting, advocating and promoting Culture and Heritage preservation and development across SIDS;
- Exploring solutions and/or jointly addressing the unique challenges that confront the SIDS tourism sector; and
- Outlining a vision for SIDS Tourism aimed at developing a Tourism-blueprint for sustainable, resilient and equitable economic recovery and long-term growth.

The establishment of the Working Group was formally announced by SPTO on behalf of the group at the SIDS Global Business Network Forum, on 12 April, 2022 in Koror, Palau. The working group is part of the SIDS Global Business Network under the UN SIDS Partnerships Steering Committee.

A. Overview - Situational background

Despite differing levels of tourism dependency throughout the region, the sector is a key contributor to economic development in the Pacific. Pre- pandemic, tourism performance in the region was exceptional; tourism employment stood at 90,821 and Pacific tourism receipts totalled USD\$4 billion whilst the industry’s contribution to regional GDP was 7.8%¹.

2. We now know all too well, that the impacts of the pandemic have been devastating for the industry. 2020 ADB estimates noted that the Pacific economy had contracted by 5.3% with more tourism intensive economies contracting from 8% to as high as 15.7 %². As at 3rd June 2022, only 4 of SPTO’s 20 Pacific members, are open for tourism (Fiji, PNG, Cook Islands, and Tahiti) and a complete return to pre- pandemic tourism is unlikely for the next 2-4 years.

3. However, what the pandemic has provided is an important juncture for the industry to assess, reset and re-strategise towards building back better, so as to ensure that Pacific tourism evolves into a more sustainable, resilient, prosperous and inclusive sector. With that in mind, SPTO has worked innovatively and collaboratively to support tourism reactivation.

B. Discussion

Key initiatives

Regional Sustainable Tourism Development through the PSTPF

4. Through the shared vision of the PSTPF – “*We are empowered by and benefiting 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*” – SPTO has pursued high- level commitment to region-wide tourism transformation. To date, eight Tourism Ministers have endorsed SPTO’s Pacific Leader’s Sustainable Tourism Commitment (SOC); Federated States of Micronesia, New Caledonia, Samoa, Niue, Vanuatu, Timor Leste, Tokelau and the Solomon Islands. The Statement of Commitment is inspired by various tourism stakeholders including Pacific nations, industry, civil society, development partners, and global agencies, all of whom are committed to advancing sustainable tourism across the region by 2030. It holds Pacific leaders accountable to elevating sustainable tourism as a regional priority for environmental, socio-cultural, and economic development. Moreover, it also aims to make Pacific tourism a force for good through the adoption and implementation of the PSTPF.

5. Further to the above, in alignment with goal 1 of the PSTPF (Prosperous Economies), capacity building to support Pacific SMEs in sustainable and responsible recovery was delivered through the ‘Building Resilient Tourism Futures Project’, funded by the US Embassy Fiji Economic Recovery Grant. The SPTO SME Recovery Toolkit initially benefitted NTO and private sector representatives from Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga and Tuvalu but is now openly accessible on the [SPTO website](#).

Tourism Statistics & Research Development through the PTSS

6. The PTSS envisages “*regular production of high quality, sustainable tourism statistics and indicators that are acknowledged as the key source for monitoring sustainable tourism in the Pacific*”

¹ COVID SNAPSHOT

² Looking Forward Vol. 1 – Evaluating the Challenges for Pacific Tourism After COVID- 19

Region”. It defines strategies and initiatives to increase the production of a new and wider range of tourism data and to encourage the wider use of tourism and related data to inform decision making by all tourism stakeholders.

7. In November 2021 SPTO convened the inaugural Pacific Islands Tourism Research Symposium (PITRS) to engage key tourism stakeholders to discuss the state of play, common challenges, opportunities and the way forward for improving regional coordination in tourism research. The PITRS engaged 161 participants and achieved the following:

- Stakeholders obtained a better understanding of research activity and available information
- Identified research and information needs to inform policy development, business and destination recovery planning and to provide direction to research institutions and organisations
- Inspired meaningful dialogue and partnerships between researchers and practitioners
- Established recommendations for consideration in the development of a robust and inclusive cooperation framework to address gaps in collaboration, understanding of stakeholder roles, capacities and future opportunities
- Identified pathways to link research effort and tourism statistics and data improvement initiatives in line with the vision and objectives of the PTSS and the PSTPF.

8. A detailed outcome report on the PITRS can be accessed [here](#).

9. Moreover, under Phase 2, SPTO will commence work on establishing tourism sustainability indicators to monitor progress towards the ambitions of the PSTPF.

SPTO Digital Strategy

10. Based on the following four pillars, SPTO’s Digital Strategy will guide a range of activities under Phase 2 which will support robust, actionable and future focused digital programmes for the organisation and its member countries:

- (i) Capability and Connections- opportunity for a step change in digital capacity
- (ii) Content and Community – empowering Pacific storytellers
- (iii) Technology and Infrastructure – leveraging technologies and tools – using data
- (iv) Data and Insights – using data to market and manage a better tourism industry

11. The strategy will work in sync with SPTO’s strategic priorities (Sustainable Tourism Planning, Marketing the Region and Research and Statistics) and will guide industry digital transformation through:

- **Reach:** Connect & communicate with visitors, locals, the tourism industry & other stakeholders in new, engaging & personalized ways
- **People:** Build core digital knowledge, confidence & capabilities across the people of the Pacific
- **Productivity:** Use digital technologies to work in smarter, more efficient & productive ways.
- **Better Tourism:** Leverage digital knowledge, tools & solutions to develop tourism that offers broader, more sustainable benefits to people & the environment incl. Improved seasonality & dispersal.

C. Next Steps

12. Through phase 1 SPTO laid the groundwork for regional tourism recovery. In moving forward, the organisation will continue to build on these efforts through the above-mentioned partnerships and initiatives, with guidance from the organisations key strategic documents (SPTO Strategic Plan 2021- 2024, PSTPF, PTSS and SPTO Digital Strategy).

13. Given tourism’s economic potential, multi- sectoral linkages and connections with local communities, culture and the natural environment, it is uniquely placed to contribute to enhanced Pacific regionalism, strengthened environmental protection mechanisms, prosperous and inclusive development and Pacific climate resilience.

14. However, SPTO cannot advance this work alone. It is now more critical than ever that meaningful and long- term support be assigned to SPTO, as the mandated regional agency for the sustainable development and marketing of Pacific tourism. SPTO’s ongoing and strengthened partnership with the New Zealand government, ADB- PSDI and other key partners indicate their recognition of the rationale behind rendering support to Pacific tourism, via SPTO, given the industry’s potential to advance progress towards the 2030 agenda whilst improving the lives, environments and eco-systems of Pacific peoples.

*Pacific Tourism Organisation
6 June 2022*