

## **Editor's introduction**

# **Tourism in Pacific Islands**

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## **Abstract**

*Pacific Islands have long been stereotyped as 'paradise', but in fact they vary greatly. All have been modified, to varying degrees, by external influences, including colonialism (the impact of which varied across time and place) and many have been caught up in wars and conflicts not of their own making. Most became producers of primary export crops, and for many, tourism is their major—sometimes their only—development option. Commencing mainly in the 1960s, tourism development is constrained by difficulty of access, political upheaval and unrest, and 'traditional' land tenure. Nevertheless, some islands linked to the USA have developed mass tourism. Elsewhere, it is on a much smaller scale. How far tourism is an example of sustainable development is much debated, and rhetoric is not always translated into practice. The papers in this special issue provide examples of both failure and success.*

**Keywords** Tourism, business, development, Pacific islands

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FOR ALMOST TWO MILLENNIA, tropical islands have been portrayed in Western literature as latter-day examples of the Garden of Eden (Loxley, 1990; Grove, 1995; Harrison, 2001a). By the nineteenth century, the stereotype was well established, and Melville's mid-nineteenth century account of his stay in the Marquesas, for example, describes 'softly swelling plains . . . delicious groves . . . and . . . purling brooks, and the entire country but little elevated above the surrounding ocean' (1996: 21).

Like all stereotypes, that of the tropical Pacific island paradise contains some truth but much inaccuracy. Melville's suggestion, especially in the first edition of *Typee*, that colonialism had brought more harm than good to the region (1996: 153) was but one contribution to an apparently endless (and usually simplistic) debate over the 'fatal impact' of colonial expansion on the more or less 'noble' savage of the Pacific islands (Moorhead, 1966: 3–85; Lal, 1994: 439–55; Harrison, 2001a). The tension between inherent nobility and savagery continues in today's literature: tourism brochures focus on the warm hospitality of friendly islanders and encourage tourists to 'discover paradise', while press reports and development agencies paint a harsher picture of poverty, domestic and political unrest, law and order problems and racial discrimination.

In fact, Pacific islands vary considerably in almost every imaginable dimension. Coral atolls are common in Polynesia, where a total population of some half a million is widely dispersed, but the more populous Melanesian islands tend to be volcanic and more densely populated, and two-thirds of their six million people are in Papua New Guinea. Even within Pacific island national societies, there are considerable differences. The relative ethnic homogeneity of Tonga, for example, contrasts with the fascinating but troubled ethnic mix that so dominates Fiji's politics. It is thus not surprising that generalising about Pacific islands is fraught with difficulty (Berno & Douglas, 1998: 65–8).

Nevertheless, some crude generalisations are possible. First, external influences have been crucial, especially the introduction of Christianity and colonialism. By the end of the nineteenth century, 'only one Pacific island group, Tonga, was able to retain a semblance of its traditional sovereignty—but as a British Protectorate' (Lal, 1994: 438). All the great colonial powers have been involved in the region (along with some that are not so great), and few islands can now be regarded as truly independent.

Secondly, the impacts of colonialism on Pacific island life varied across time and territory. Some indigenous inhabitants paid a dreadful price for colonial expansion, especially in Australia, New Zealand and Hawai'i. Elsewhere, populations and cultures were more resilient or the invasive forces less rapacious. In Melanesian Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, in Fiji (which effectively straddles the Melanesia/Polynesia divide), and in Polynesian Samoa and the Cook Islands, for example, large proportions of land are still communally owned. By contrast, in French Polynesia and New Caledonia the land of indigenous people was generally commoditised during the process of colonialism. This is not to say that communal ownership was unproblematic. Governors generally regarded as among the most enlightened have been criticised for wittingly or unwittingly misrepresenting traditional institutions and it is arguable that communal patterns of land tenure have often acted as a brake on 'rational' exploitation of natural resources (Lal, 1994: 440–3).

Thirdly, once colonial expansion was consolidated in the region, first through 'beachcombers' and then missionaries, traders and settlers (Ralston, 1978), 'development' (in so far as it occurred at all) focused primarily on such export crops as copra and sugar. In Fiji, the perceived need for labour on sugar plantations was so great that, following his experience in Trinidad, Governor Sir Arthur Gordon introduced indentured labourers from India, who were imported in great numbers from 1879 until 1920. In stark contrast to the policies he followed in Trinidad (Wood, 1968: 272–80), Gordon ensured that most land remained in indigenous communal hands, thus *also* laying down a legacy of bitter conflict for the post-independence period (Akram-Lodhi, 2000; Ratuva, 2000).

Fourthly, colonial links and geographical position ensured that Pacific islands were caught up in wars they themselves did not instigate. The Second World War brought intense confrontation, bloody battles, and hundreds of thousands of service personnel to the region, along with ports, airports, systems of communication and entertainment, and Western material goods, the like of which most islanders had never seen (Douglas & Douglas, 1996b: 27–8; Grant, 1996: 78–9; Lal, 1994: 445–6; Laracy, 1994; Laracy & White, 1988). One result was that existing 'cargo cults' in Melanesia were reinforced and others emerged (Kaplan, 1995; Worsley, 1968).

After 1945, the United States, Britain and France all tested nuclear devices in the region, notably in the Marshall Islands, especially Bikini atoll, the (then) Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (now the separate countries of Kiribati and Tuvalu), and Moruroa, in French Polynesia (Johnson, 1999; Niedenthal, 2001: 2–13, 92–3; Narsey, 1999; Vidal, 1995). Damage of a different kind occurred through the exploitation of mineral resources, and phosphate mining on Ocean Island (Banaba, now part of Kiribati) made the island uninhabitable and forced its population to move to Fiji. Phosphates are also mined in Nauru, Palau and French Polynesia, nickel in New Caledonia, and gold in Papua New Guinea and Fiji (Lal, 1994: 444).

Finally, despite (some would say because of) the interests of the great powers, Pacific island states have few development options. This is irrespective of their current political affiliation, which ranges from independence (as in Fiji, most of Polynesia and all of Melanesia except New Caledonia) to full statehood (Hawai‘i). In between there are numerous forms of association with ‘big’ powers, including the USA (American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Palau, Guam, the Northern Marianas), France (‘French’ Polynesia, the Wallis and Futuna Islands and New Caledonia) and New Zealand (Cook Islands, Tokelau and Niue). Unfavourably placed in the world trading system, most remain MIRAB economies, living on the proceeds of migration, remittances, overseas aid and employment in government bureaucracies (Bertram & Watters, 1985). Migration and remittances, in particular, have been crucial (Berno & Douglas, 1998: 67), as is overseas aid, especially from Australia and New Zealand. However, none have prevented periodic crises and virtual bankruptcy in some small states, particularly where the desire to create employment in the public sector has sometimes far outstripped prudent financial management.

Some states have employed novel methods to obtain foreign exchange, often in combination with a mixture of sheer opportunism and good fortune. Tuvalu earns money by licensing the sale of web sites with the suffix *tv* (Waq, 1999), the Federated States of Micronesia markets the domain name of *fm*, and Niue, Tuvalu, Nauru and Tokelau have all obtained income from licensing telephone lines for international phone sex services. Offshore banking facilities, too, have been developed in Nauru, the Cook Islands, Niue, Vanuatu and the Marshall Islands, allegedly making their governments

unwitting accomplices in money-laundering (Henley, 2001; Keith-Reid, 1999: 38 and 2000a), while Kiribati has dabbled in the sale of passports, and seeks to provide Japan ground facilities for its space programme ('New industry for Kiribati', 1998: 11). Most bizarrely of all, perhaps, in September 2001 Nauru was 'persuaded' by Australia to establish a detention centre for several hundred asylum seekers and refugees seeking entry to Australia, in return for fuel, generators and other economic benefits (Barkham: 2001).

### **Tourism in Pacific islands**

Faced with limited development opportunities, most island states in the Pacific have welcomed tourism. Hotels of a kind were first made available to accommodate early traders and settlers, and by the 1930s several steam ships were operating in the South Pacific (Douglas, 1996: 39–67). In Fiji, upmarket hotels catered for passengers changing ships, and the Suva Tourist Board (1923) grew out of the White Settlement League, which was founded to persuade temporary visitors of the economic opportunities awaiting them in Fiji (Scott, 1970: 1). With the Second World War came servicemen and women. Roads and airports were constructed, and their presence encouraged the sale of souvenirs, as well as mass recreation and sexual services (de Burlo, 1989: 307–10; Bailey & Farber, 1992: 35–61; Douglas & Douglas, 1996b: 27–8). However, it was the post-war improvements in aircraft technology, enabling aircraft to travel farther, faster, more economically and with more passengers, that really prompted the development of Pacific island tourism. By the end of the twentieth century, tourism was the major industry for many Pacific islands, and a priority for many more.

The 'attractions' of Pacific islands are well known. The climate, especially in Polynesia, is ideal for those seeking sun, sea and sand and, as indicated earlier, the lasting (if inaccurate) composite image of coral atolls, waving palms, white sand beaches, balmy breezes and (of course) gentle, exotic, erotic and welcoming people, is well established in Western thought (Harrison, 2001a). It is consistently reinforced in tourism brochures, which also emphasise the slow, unhurried pace of island life. For those dissatisfied with mere sun and sand, the night life of Papeete (Tahiti) or Honolulu (Hawai'i) provides urban excitement; and Melanesia, especially, offers the ethnic and cultural diversity of 'cultural' tourism, overlaid with the frisson

of meeting and photographing modern 'savages' descended from cannibals (Douglas, 1996: 174–82). Alternatively, there are ample opportunities to experience the natural attractions of marine life, or the tragic beauty of the wreckage (and carnage) of the Second World War, all neatly packaged for 'niche markets'.

The type of tourism found in Pacific islands is contingent on numerous factors, including the attractions on offer, distance, ease and cost of access from tourist-generating markets, their economic buoyancy, and general perceptions of health, safety and 'development' in the destination area. On a continuum, with mass tourism (quite rare in the Pacific) at one extreme and no tourism at the other, the former is represented by Hawai'i, with 1.2 million residents and more than 6 million visitors a year (World Tourism Organization, 2001a: 84). Tuvalu (population 10,000) is close to the latter end and receives about 1,000 tourists annually, mainly on business or to visit friends and relatives. It attracts only about 200 non-Tuvaluan holidaymakers, because it is difficult to reach, has few recreational facilities, no quality accommodation or restaurants, and a highly irregular air service (Tourism Council of the South Pacific, 1992: 18–47, 1997a; World Tourism Organization, 2001a: 191).

The constraints to tourism development in Pacific islands generally have been discussed at length by others (Britton, 1987a; Fletcher & Snee, 1989; Milne, 1992; Fagence, 1997; Pearce, 1995; Ryan, 2001; Tourism Council of the South Pacific, 1997b). They include limited natural resources, small size, poor accessibility and inadequate air links, especially where the domestic market is small or non-existent, an absence of skilled personnel and local capital, and hotel operations that are relatively small in scale. In many islands, too, the communal ownership of land is considered to hinder the rational development of tourism. All of this is exacerbated by out-migration, a process whereby younger and relatively well-educated people further their careers elsewhere. As a consequence, there is a reliance on international capital, *especially* where there is marked tourism development. In the Pacific, the more developed the tourism industry, and the more it caters for high-spending tourists or for tourists in great numbers, the more likely it is to be owned and operated by overseas interests.

A further constraint is political upheaval and domestic unrest. Over the last two decades the image of 'paradise' in the Pacific has undoubtedly been tarnished. In 1987 and 2000, for instance, coups in Fiji removed elected

governments allegedly dominated by Indians, and in January 1998 riots occurred in Vanuatu (Decloitre, 1998). Papua New Guinea has seen a decade of corruption and inter-ethnic conflict, with secessionist rebels from Bougainville opposing the government, until the signing of a peace accord in April 1998 began the resolution process. Ethnic conflict, still unresolved, also surfaced in Solomon Islands in the late 1990s, culminating in a coup in July, 2000 and the threat of total breakdown of the national state, prompting 'friendly' Australian intervention in 2003 ('Getting rid of guns . . .', 1999; Callick, 2000; Field, 1998; Keith-Reid, 2000b and 2000c; Robie, 1989: 198–253). The first years of the new millennium suggest that such problems are not yet over. More generally, too, the terrorist attacks in the USA in September 2001 were immediately followed by a radical decline in air travel, and destination areas reliant on visitors from the USA, including parts of the Pacific, were especially affected. Not for the first time, Pacific island tourism was crucially influenced by external factors far beyond local control. The invasion of Iraq in 2003, and generalised post-9/11 'terrorism jitters', have done nothing to improve the situation.

### **The pattern of Pacific tourism**

The general pattern of international tourist arrivals in the Pacific has been discussed at length elsewhere (Harrison, 2003) and (subject to the usual caveats about the problems of collecting tourism statistics) is broadly indicated in table 1. Mass tourism is primarily associated with islands in the North Pacific most closely linked to the USA. Until 2001, Hawai'i, the most popular, was consistently attracting nearly seven million tourists a year. A third of its visitors are from East Asia (especially Japan), and nearly all the remainder are from North America (World Tourism Organization, 2001a: 84), which explains the reduction in arrivals in 2001. By contrast, visitors to Guam and the Northern Marianas are primarily from East Asia and the Pacific (89% and 95% respectively) (World Tourism Organization, 2002: 79 and 140).

In the South and Central Pacific, mass tourism has not yet developed, but there are concentrated facilities in Fiji and French Polynesia, which together account for some 50% of the region's arrivals. Most visitors to French Polynesia are from the Americas or Europe (especially France) and, until the bankruptcy of the leading tour operator (following the September

Table 1 Tourist arrivals in the Pacific, selected years, selected islands: 1990–2001\*

Year	1990	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	%change 1990–2000	%change 2000–2001
Cook Islands	33,882	48,500	48,819	49,964	48,628	55,599	72,994	74,575	115.4	2.2
Fiji	278,996	318,495	339,560	359,441	371,342	409,955	294,070	348,014	5.4	18.3
French Polynesia	132,361	172,129	163,774	180,440	188,933	210,800	240,450	227,658	81.7	-5.3
Kiribati	3,040	3,318	3,940	4,925	5,450	4,695	4,578	4,831	50.1	0.2
New Caledonia	85,213	86,256	91,121	105,137	103,835	103,352	109,587	100,515	28.6	-8.3
Niue	649	2,161	1,522	2,041	1,736	1,778	2,010	2,069	209.7	2.9
Papua New Guinea	40,742	32,578	61,215	66,143	67,465	67,357	58,429	54,280	43.4	-7.1
Solomon Islands	9,195	11,795	11,217	15,894	13,229	17,395	5,753	3,418	-37.4	-40.6
Tonga	20,919	29,520	26,642	26,162	27,132	30,883	37,694	32,386	80.2	-14.1
Tuvalu	671	920	1,039	1,029	1,077	770	1,504	976	124.1	-35.1
Vanuatu	35,042	43,721	46,123	49,605	52,100	50,746	57,360	53,203	63.7	-7.2
Samoa	47,642	67,954	73,155	67,960	77,926	85,124	87,688	88,263	84.1	0.7
Marshall Islands	4,856	5,500	6,116	6,254	5,727	4,622	5,246		8.0	-
TOTAL	693,208	822,847	874,273	931,849	964,680	1,043,076	977,363	990,188	41.0	1.3
American Samoa	(?)	26,000	49,060	41,050	29,997	41,201	39,749			
Federated States of Micronesia				28,000	27,000	28,000	33,000			
Guam	780,000	1,362,000	1,363,000	1,362,000	1,137,000	1,162,000	1,288,000		65.0	
Hawai'i	6,971,000	6,629,000	6,829,000	6,876,000	6,738,000	6,741,037	6,948,595	6,303,791	-0.3	-9.3
N. Mariana Isles	426,000	669,000	728,000	685,000	481,000	496,000	529,000		16.4	
E.A.–Pacific (m)	54.6	81.3	89.0	88.3	87.4	96.8	109.1	115.1	100.0	5.5
World Arriv. (m)	457.2	552.3	597.4	618.2	636.0	652.2	696.7	692.7	52.7	-0.6
%EAP of world	11.9	14.4	14.9	14.3	13.7	15.0	16.0	16.6		

\* Figures for most destinations vary according to the source of the statistics. Those for American Samoa, in particular, show marked divergence.

Sources: Tourism Council of the South Pacific (u/d, 1994 and 1999); <http://www.amsamoa.com/statistics.htm> (26.8.02); National tourism organisations; World Tourism Organization (1996, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002) and [http://www.world-tourism.org/market\\_research/facts&figures/latest\\_data.htm](http://www.world-tourism.org/market_research/facts&figures/latest_data.htm); 25 August 2002, South Pacific Tourism Organisation (2001 and 2002).

11th 2001 terrorist attacks in the USA) an increasing number flew to Tahiti to transfer to cruise vessels. By contrast, most tourists to Fiji (and many other South Pacific islands) are from New Zealand, Australia or the USA. In neither case, however, is the urban-based tourism of Hawai‘i much in evidence, and tourist accommodation tends to be away from local centres of population.

Fiji’s tourism development would undoubtedly have been maintained in 2000 had the May coup not occurred. However, the political uncertainty it generated led to a catastrophic decline in arrivals of nearly 30%. Ironically, the industry recouped some losses in 2001, despite a downturn in US visitors, and that year’s figures paint a misleadingly successful picture. Fiji’s loss was others’ gain. In 2000, the Cook Islands received a record 73,000 arrivals, putting pressure on its limited stock of accommodation, and there were increased arrivals in French Polynesia, Samoa, Vanuatu and (despite problems with the national airline) Tonga. Unrest in Solomon Islands—yet to be established as a tourist destination—led arrivals to decline to less than four thousand, and conflict and corruption in Papua New Guinea also restrict growth in that country’s tourism industry.

Like Tuvalu, the small island states of Kiribati and Niue attract only a few thousand tourists a year, who nevertheless make an important contribution to those small economies.

Clearly, the record of different island groups in the Pacific over the last decade is variable. However, the overall average increase in arrivals (up to 2001) in the Central and South Pacific of 41% needs to be situated in a wider context. It was less than the growth in all world arrivals over the same period (which was more than 52%) and *much* less than the increase in arrivals in the East Asia–Pacific region as a whole (almost 105%). Over the last five years, the numbers of tourists visiting the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, the Northern Marianas and Hawai‘i have remained virtually static. Seen in this light, and assuming that increased tourist arrivals *are* a measure of success, the progress of the tourism industry in the Pacific gives some cause for concern.

Tourist numbers alone are not especially helpful. Attention must also focus on the *nature* of visits to different destinations, the overall *purpose* and, if on holiday, the *type* of holiday being taken. Visitors to French Polynesia and Fiji are most likely to be holidaymakers, whereas the largest category of tourists to Samoa and American Samoa is made up of those visiting friends

and relatives (World Tourism Organization, 2001a: 66, 70, 144; Samoa Visitors Bureau, 2001). By contrast, business tourists predominate among arrivals to Papua New Guinea (World Tourism Organization, 2002: 147). As a consequence, throughout the Pacific a wide variety of accommodation is on offer, even in such established destinations as Fiji and French Polynesia, to cater for different types of tourists. And niche markets abound. Many islands, especially those with stereotypical white sand beaches and swaying palms, compete for wedding parties and honeymooners, perpetuating the image of Bali Hai and the 'romantic' Pacific, and there is also a tendency to focus on such niche markets as diving.

### **Pacific island tourism, 'development' and sustainability**

The debate as to whether or not tourism *is* a tool for 'development' in less developed countries has generated much passion and has been articulated at length, both for less developed countries generally (Harrison, 1992: 18–31; 2001b: 28–39) and in the Pacific (Harrison, 2003). Against tourism, it is usually argued that transnational companies cream off the economic benefits and leave local companies, employees and populations with relatively little; and that the industry produces negative impacts on the family, religion and local tradition, as well as polluting the physical environment. Others point to the increased income and training provided by transnational companies, suggesting that tourism is but one of many 'modern' influences in Pacific societies, where chiefs and elders have a vested interest in controlling 'their' women and young people. They also note the coincidence of interest of the tourism industry and environmentalists in ensuring that environmental damage is minimised. Furthermore, as MacNaught (1982: 363) and Douglas & Douglas (1996a: 61) point out, it is perhaps both dangerous and patronising to treat Pacific islanders as hapless and helpless victims of modernisation. They are no less able than others to arrive at their own moral judgments and, for good or ill, have long been willing participants in the continuous process of globalisation (Harrison, 1997: 167–71).

Indeed, it is sometimes argued that indigenous economic and social institutions actually *prevent* tourism development from occurring. This is especially so for 'traditional' forms of land tenure, which, most notably in Melanesia, are allegedly antithetical to tourism. How far this *is* the case is difficult to determine. Principles of land tenure varied considerably in the

precolonial period, and changes introduced by colonising powers were similarly varied. Although often made in the *name* of tradition, they frequently consolidated power in the hands of groups whose previous hold on land was tenuous and dependent on particularities of time and place (Crocombe, 1987 and 1995). Precolonial structures were undoubtedly relevant to colonial and postcolonial development. The fact that land in precolonial Hawai‘i was under the absolute control of a relatively small number of chiefs, for example (Meller & Horvitz, 1987: 25), facilitated the later process of commoditisation and helped ensure that land ownership in modern Hawai‘i remained concentrated in relatively few hands (Meller & Horvitz, 1987: 41–3). By contrast, whereas much land in Polynesia seems to have been controlled by chiefs, the leadership powers in Melanesia apparently did not extend to control of land (Crocombe, 1987: 10–11).

Throughout the Pacific, disputes over land, access to land and its resources are common, and involve not only tourism, but also other forms of development (Harrison, 1997: 173–6; Johnston, 1998; Thomson, 1996: 108; Waqa, 1998; Sofield, 1996). In addition, conflicts may sometimes be extended to the claimed ownership of marine resources. In Viti Levu, Fiji, for instance, for years there has been a (sometimes violent) dispute over which villagers have the right to ferry surfers to Cloudbreak Reef, one of the world’s most famous surfing spots (Johnston, 1998: 36)—an argument, in effect, over who rules the waves.

These kinds of problem are not going to go away, for while there are attempts to move from a narrow focus on sun, sea and sand (Tourism Council of the South Pacific, 1998: 21), ‘nature-based tourism’ is likely to remain central to the marketing of Pacific islands for the foreseeable future. In fact, the criticisms levelled at mass tourism in such destinations as Hawai‘i (Minerbi, 1992) should be regarded as warnings of what might happen in other Pacific islands, rather than indictments of what has already occurred. In any case, the mantle of such critics has been taken up and their ideas given much wider currency by those now focusing on ‘globalisation’ (Waters, 1995) and the need for ‘sustainable’ development.

In effect, environmentalism, modernisation theory and underdevelopment theory have converged. Much of what is now debated under the overall title of ‘globalisation’ theory is, in fact, a reworking of much older but still relevant concerns. It was therefore inevitable that questions would be raised

about how far tourism—an increasingly popular *tool* for development—should or could be ‘sustainable’ or (less often) how it fitted into more comprehensive programmes of sustainable development, especially in less developed countries (Wheeller, 1993; Harrison, 1996, 69–72; Wahab & Pigram, 1997; Mowforth & Munt, 1998: 11–43, 84–124) and, even more specifically, in islands and microstates (Briguglio, Butler et al, 1996; Briguglio, Archer et al, 1996).

The tourism industry responded (M. Brown, 1994; Wight, 1994; International Hotels Environment Initiative, 1996). European resorts started to re-evaluate their tourism ‘product’. Books on ‘sustainable tourism’ multiplied (Inskeep, 1991; World Tourism Organization, 1994; Middleton, 1998), as did codes of practice (Mason & Mowforth, 1995; Neale, 1998: 27–71). Pressure groups were formed (O’Grady, 1990: 80–81; Botterill, 1991) and less damaging varieties of alternative tourism were proposed, including ecotourism (Cater & Lowman, 1994; Butler, 1992; Fennell, 1999; Honey, 1999). Tourism was going green.

At least, tourism *seemed* to be going green. In fact, as critics have pointed out, some responses from within the tourism industry are little more than cynical attempts to capitalise on the latest political correctness, and others openly doubt that there are realistic alternatives to mass tourism (Wheeller, 1993). There was also a distinct reluctance in some quarters to go beyond populist rhetoric and ask how criteria of ‘sustainability’ might actually be implemented in practice (Harrison, 1996).

In the Pacific region, a similar pattern emerges. Critiques of tourism development, especially mass tourism, provided the backdrop to the debate (Britton, 1982, 1983, 1987a and b; Farrell, 1977 and 1992; Hall, 1992; Kent, 1983; King, 1997: 37–50; Milne, 1990; Minerbi, 1992; Tran, 1996) and, more than a decade ago, the Tourism Council of the South Pacific (TCSP) recommended legislation to protect the region’s environment and assist in tourism development (1988 and 1990). Indeed, the TCSP’s recognition of the value of environmental conservation was noted in a series of studies appearing in 1995 (Bourdais, a and b; Kendall; McVey, a, b and c; Schuller, a, b and c), as well as by others more specifically focused on conservation issues (Watling & Chape, 1992: 82–7; S. Weaver, 1992; Weaver & King, 1996). Still at the regional level, concern over the effects of mass tourism in Asia and the Pacific

prompted the United Nations to issue guidelines on the development of coastal tourism (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 1995).

Others have concentrated more on the extent to which *social* sustainability can be maintained during tourism development. Examples are Ranck's study of village-based tourism in Papua New Guinea (1987), Farrell's work on Hana, on the island of Maui, Hawai'i (Farrell, 1992; Wyllie, 1998), and Sofield's work on Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. Discussing the Pentecost land dive in Vanuatu, Sofield proposes several principles for sustainable ethnic tourism and emphasises the importance of local control and government support (1991). This should be compared to de Burlo's later account of the same area (1996). By contrast, Sofield's work is ample evidence that local involvement in 'ecotourism' in Solomon Islands is far from straightforward (Sofield, 1996; Rudkin & Hall, 1996).

As elsewhere, commitment to sustainable tourism development in Pacific islands is not always translated into practice. National tourism organisations (NTOs) pay lip service to the concept but their success is often evaluated (by themselves and others) primarily through their ability to increase tourist numbers. At the local level, resorts claiming 'green' credentials still promote 'reef walking', encourage guests to feed fish, and advertise shark feeding! On the credit side, throughout the Pacific islands greener and more sustainable forms of tourism are being encouraged (Harrison, 2003). Since 1997, a voluntary Cook Islands Accreditation Scheme has rewarded sound environmental management practices and, as Louise Twining-Ward's chapter in this special issue shows, sustainable tourism development is now being taken seriously in Samoa. In fact, several NTOs give annual ecotourism awards, as does the South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO) (the re-named TCSP). Changes in the way the SPTO is funded by the European Union—hitherto not known in the region for its knowledge of or commitment to sustainable tourism development—may facilitate the process (Keith-Reid, 1999), and SPTO's closer working relationship with the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)—which has developed initiatives for ecotourism in the region (Martel, 2000)—is especially encouraging. Finally, NZODA (New Zealand Official Development Assistance) has for some time actively promoted ecotourism in Pacific islands (Tourism Resource Consultants, 1999).

In some respects, the lack of tourist development in many Pacific islands is an advantage. It is still necessary to emphasise the need for sustainable (as opposed to unsustainable) mass tourism (SMT) (D. Weaver, 2001: 167–8), but island states where mass tourism has not yet been introduced can still avoid its negative impacts. In the meantime (lacking the *facilities* for large-scale tourism), they can concentrate on implementing smaller scale *ecotourism*, guidelines for which have already been provided from within the region (Hay, 1992; Bushnell, 1994; Liu, 1994; Slot, 1996; Harrison et al., 2003).

It should no longer be necessary to argue a case for promoting sustainable tourism development in Pacific islands. Properly planned and managed, tourism can help economic diversification and reduce dependency on primary export crops. It can assist in the conservation of natural resources and bring benefits to local communities, including valuable skills in entrepreneurship (often through training initially provided in-house by transnational hotel chains). However, if the ideal of sustainable tourism development is to be approached, it must be through increasing *awareness* of the issues involved, and through *partnership*, of government and private sector, of local populations and the tourism industry, of transnational operators and local business. It is to be hoped that this special issue will make a contribution to this process, which is really only just starting in many Pacific island states.

### **Issues arising**

It has been argued elsewhere that when tourism in less developed countries is under consideration, three key issues are prominent: the relationship of tourism to migration, the processes by which capitalism has expanded in the region, and the role of the state (Harrison, 2001b: 23–46). To some extent, all these issues figure in Pacific tourism, but to a greater or less extent, depending on the level of tourism development in the destination area.

The paper by Ngaire Douglas on the early stages of tourism in Solomon Islands sets a rather bleak scene. Tourism was instigated by expatriates of European origin, who catered primarily for visitors of European origin, and at least at some hotels in these early years denied entry to any Pacific Islanders. Instead, the 'locals' were 'attractions', enacting the parts of savage natives (men) or dusky, near naked beauties (women), in

ethnographically-framed performances that had been widely advertised through travelogues in Australia, where still photographs and cinematography whetted the appetite for Melanesian destinations. Shipping agents capitalised on the demand, and advertised the prime shooting and fishing adventures awaiting the explorer-tourist in the Solomons. However, although cruising developed during the first decades of the twentieth century, tourism remained a minor feature of the domestic Solomons economy, and continued so throughout the twentieth century. Local participation in the industry was minimal, and Solomon Islanders generally lacked (and still largely lack) the financial and cultural capital to participate in tourism in other than a passive sense. Attempts to involve them more directly have frequently failed (Sofield, 1996) and yet they continue, often through the good offices of non-governmental organisations (Russell & Stabile, 1993). Even at the time of writing, rather than having 'taken off', tourism is better described as having crash landed! Years of domestic unrest have taken their toll, and in 2001 less than four thousand tourists visited Solomon Islands. In such circumstances, small-scale 'ecotourism' is virtually the *only* option, but one that enables a more thoughtful approach to tourism planning and development. However, this will require a more active, organised and efficient state apparatus, which has yet to emerge in Solomon Islands. At present, the only way Solomon Island tourism can go is up!

Having foreign ownership and a (relatively) settled political situation is no guarantee of commercial success. Fiji may be the most 'developed' tourism destination in the South Pacific, but it still has a 'human resources' problem. As described by Larry Dwyer and Sharon Kemp, *Fiji's Hidden Paradise* (FHP), an ecolodge on the island of Vanua Levu, Fiji, was worthy soap opera material. Their account is of two philanthropic Australian businessmen who decide to 'do good' by financing a small hotel development, in which shares are to be held by hospitable, friendly villagers. However, there was a 'lack of sound, strategic management' on the part of the Australians, whose failure 'to conduct audits of its internal and external environments contributed to the implementation of strategies which . . . resulted in failure to achieve its mission'. FHP was badly organised. Its mission statement was vague and confused, its owners lived in Australia, its local management was inexperienced and part-time, as were other staff members, who went to the resort only when there were guests. There were

no recreational facilities, shops, radio or television. No business or marketing plans had been prepared, no marketing research had been carried out, and the marketing that did occur was haphazard. Partly as a result of these deficiencies, FHP was susceptible to better-organised competition from other companies, suppliers had little confidence in its ability to deliver a satisfactory tourism 'product' and it was unable to counter a general image of Fiji tourism as jaded and stale. Also, as a small and new venture in Vanua Levu, which is peripheral to Fiji tourism, it did not attract state support. Not surprisingly, the venture failed, to the disappointment of all the stakeholders. Philanthropic motives on the part of the Australians, and warmth and friendliness on the part of the villagers, were simply not enough. It cannot be argued that capitalism *failed*. Reportedly, the owners were not primarily interested in *making* a profit. Arguably, FHP failed because no one was capitalistic enough! Putting the issue crudely, it went bust because no one knew what they were doing!

For different reasons, neither Solomon Islands nor FHP can be considered satisfactory examples of sustainable tourism development—or even of sustainable *tourism*. However, the scenario in Samoa is more promising. Over the last decade, the number of international arrivals to Samoa has risen, albeit unspectacularly, as indicated earlier in table 1. However, as Louise Twining-Ward and Tapulolou S. Tuaillemafua indicate, more than one-third of these arrivals are Samoans residing overseas, who go to Samoa to visit friends and relatives (a further indication of the importance of migration in small Pacific islands). At first sight, these visitors seem to have no negative impact on their society of origin, but Samoans were, and are still, anxious to avoid what many see as international tourism's negative effects. They wanted to monitor tourism development and ensure that it was sustainable, and the paper focuses on a three-stage process, involving first the identification of sustainable tourism development (STD) *objectives*, then appropriate STD *indicators* and, finally, the formulation of an implementation *framework* to act on the results. More widely, however, the paper is *also* about the cooperation of numerous stakeholders in Samoan tourism, including the state, NGOs, the tourism industry and other sections of Samoan society, and how concepts of sustainable tourism development and stakeholder involvement are brought into sharper focus by being operationalised in a particular political context. Sustainable tourism

development is thus seen to be linked to wider social and developmental concerns, and the *state*—most notably the Division of Planning and Development and the Samoa Visitors' Bureau—plays a key role.

Of course, questions remain. As the authors recognise, considerable subjectivity is involved in identifying indicators and deciding what constitutes an acceptable level of change (or continuity), and status and power differences on the Stakeholder Committee must surely have emerged or been subsumed. Indeed, the role of Louise Twining-Ward, whose PhD fieldwork was centred on the development of STD indicators, must have been relatively significant, as was *fa'aSamoa*, the underlying value system of Samoa, which would at least have conditioned the discussions and decision-making process. However, these are issues for other papers, and the Samoan experiment seems promising. If it continues to be successful, it could provide a sound and cooperative base for future tourism development in Samoa, and provide ideas for similar activities elsewhere.

A close reading of the paper by Russell Staiff and Robyn Bushell on 'healthy tourism' in Fiji reveals marked similarities with the previous paper. Both were linked to other research projects, and both involved the quest for social indicators. However, Staiff and Bushell were (clearly) constrained by the fact that their research was part of a wider *Healthy Islands* initiative by the World Health Organisation (WHO). From the outset, health and tourism were linked as aspects of sustainable development, and the research was 'framed and contextualised' not only by the WHO project, but also by *Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry*. Furthermore, their research was disrupted by the coup and constitutional crisis of May 2000, which was decidedly *unhealthy* for Fiji tourism. Aiming to 'develop a conceptual framework for healthy tourism' they, too, encouraged stakeholder participation, and brought together 'discursive frameworks' from health and tourism, which seemed to them to coincide in a Fijian emphasis on village-based ecotourism. From two workshops held in Suva, involving tourism and non-tourism professions and interests, it emerged that participants from all sectors increasingly realised that tourism and health were far more inter-linked than at first appeared, and needed to be integrated in a wider community context. However, it was felt that communities *themselves* should negotiate and formulate measurable indicators of health and tourism, rather than have them imposed by outside agencies. As Staiff and Bushell

argue, *Agenda 21*, the Healthy Islands initiative and village-based ecotourism discourses have 'a similar conceptual language', and (ideally?) guidelines 'need to be "holistic," community-centred, locally "owned", empowering, consultative, culturally, environmentally, historically and gender sensitive and "scientifically" endorsable'. The authors conclude (adding a suitably open caveat) that any framework for healthy tourism should be 'enmeshed in a Fijian way of thinking and seeing (however it is locally defined and/or negotiated)'.

Reference to the 'operating environment' of a tourism venture—and suggestions that indicators of various kinds should be 'negotiated' and developed by communities themselves, rather than imposed from outside—imply that sustainable tourism development in Pacific islands should be positively related to local peoples' sense of belonging, to their psychological, collective and geographical sense of place. Such themes are developed, in their different ways, by Greg Ringer and Tina Jamieson. The former focuses on Kosrae, in the Federated States of Micronesia, an island of devout Christians where 80 per cent of the population is under fifteen. Among older people, relatively few have left the island, whereas younger members of the population are more widely travelled and more exposed to tourism. This is evident from the 'cognitive maps' provided by Ringer's respondents. Tourists envisaged the 'place' of Kosrae according to the services they received. Not surprisingly, it was perceived within a framework comprised of tourist-oriented buildings, sites and sights, often derived from guidebooks. Rarely venturing inland, they knew little of the island's communities. By contrast, Ringer suggests that islanders' perceptions were based on their historic experiences of place. As one would expect, they were much better informed than tourists about who lived where, and what they did. But there were differences among them. Responses of older islanders indicated clear gender differences, apparently related to their occupational patterns, whereas responses of younger people showed no gender variation (perhaps because of their greater involvement with tourists). They were, however, more knowledgeable than their seniors about what was on the island, having travelled around it more frequently. Unlike their elders, they were unaware of sites associated with the Second World War (which ended long before they were born) and they knew *nothing* about the Lelu Ruins, the historic centre of Kosrae.

Clearly, tourists bring to the destination area a partly-formed sense of 'place', which may (or may not) be reinforced by later experiences. However, through providing them with services and generally interacting with them, younger islanders were found to have developed a sense of 'place' for Kosrae that in some regards differed markedly from that held by the older generation. It could be argued that they started to see Kosrae through tourist eyes. How far this is indeed the case, in Kosrae or elsewhere, should be a matter for further research but, as Ringer notes, it is a tendency that tourism planners and managers would do well to understand and counter.

Tina Jamieson's discussion of the niche tourist market of Cook Island weddings and honeymoons encompasses some of these themes and raises other issues. The 'romance' of the Pacific island is a long-established stereotype, and is reiterated and reinforced by travel agents and tour operators promoting the Cook Islands as a favoured venue for weddings. It is a 'conspiracy' in which Cook Island 'hosts' and the brides and grooms willingly collude, as Cook Islanders busily construct the (social and physical) context for the weddings, and couples project on to the islands all their own feelings of romance. Away from the daily grind and arduous social relations, relieved of the wedding list and the onerous preparations, couples project on to landscape, seascape, beachscape and local inhabitants the warmth they themselves feel (or wish to feel?). The natural and social worlds revolve around them. Rugby players become gentle, the hitherto unreal becomes real, and time and space are transformed in a new and romantic (sur)reality. In purchasing the wedding, it is argued, tourists assert not only their right to be on the island, but their *ownership* of it and all that is therein. This is not bad faith, for *place*—any place—does not exist 'out there', as some kind of objective reality. As elsewhere, in the Cook Islands it is *constructed and negotiated, through social interaction*.

Of course, this is not the complete picture. While wedding tourists and honeymooners are happily being helped along their romantic road, Cook Islanders are constructing very different scenarios, often involving emigration from the Cook Islands to live elsewhere. Equally, it might be argued that lovers visiting the Cook Islands are no more dewy-eyed than lovers marrying or honeymooning elsewhere. They might not be dewy-eyed at all, but going along with a romantic game, knowing full well that other realities will intrude

soon enough. If this were not the case for at least some of them, we would be close to branding them all ‘cultural dopes’, an implication that sits uneasily on the kind of phenomenological approach underpinning the paper. Or is it simply that when ‘true love’ and the myth of the Pacific island paradise combine, one can really discover Bali Hai, that special island? In your dreams? In your dreams!

The paper by Levinson and Milne brings us down to earth, while yet remaining with tourism in the Cook Islands. It reminds us that persuading visitors to come to your destination is usually hard work, even if they are already predisposed to come to a tropical island. After all, it does not have to be *your* island, and there are plenty of competitors in the Pacific and further afield—in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean, for example. The authors compare the marketing of the Cook Islands in a selection of tourism brochures (issued in New Zealand) and Internet web sites. Can Internet technology help the small operator and hospitality provider counter the advantages of big hotels and international chains? The answer is positive, to some extent, for it is relatively inexpensive to develop web sites, and contact with clients and potential clients is thenceforth cheap, quick and flexible. In this respect, small hotels and guesthouses can ‘catch up’ with their more powerful competitors. However, the playing field is not yet level. Compared to small operators, large hotels are still more likely to have their own web sites, which are better and more comprehensive and, because there is a shortage of IT skills in the Cook Islands, most such sites are developed and maintained overseas. Indeed, as was seen earlier in the case of Fiji’s Hidden Paradise, mere possession of a web site is no guarantee of success. In any case, one can perhaps make too much of the advantages of modern technology; Levinson and Milne discovered that, in most cases, the Internet merely reproduced the images and texts of more ‘traditional’ forms of advertising—in effect, no more than ‘virtual brochures.’

Whether marketed through standard brochures or the Internet, Cook Islands tourism may, if anything, be too successful. In 2000, much aided by the May coup in Fiji, the tiny country was struggling to accommodate all its visitors (Keith-Reid, 2001), with subsequent complaints of inadequate sewerage and other facilities. In some circles, at least, this excess demand was attributed to successful advertising on the Internet (J. Brown, 2001: 23). Such problems, though, would be welcome in Levuka, the first colonial

capital of Fiji, a town which, as Harrison's paper indicates, has struggled for more than a century to find a role and an economic basis for its development. Its lack of success is not through want of trying. Over the years, many have considered tourism to be an answer but, despite the intermittent efforts of the tourism industry, by 2000 only a few thousand visited the town every year. Would it be different if Levuka was formally listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site? Perhaps, but the answer is not as simple as that. Issues of place, and competing conceptions of history and place, emerge in this account, which shows that while UNESCO, the tourism industry and some pressure groups in Fiji would willingly see Levuka become the first World Heritage site in Fiji—and one of very few in South Pacific islands—others (including Levuka's most recently elected Town Council) are less convinced. How far should a town founded by people of *European* origin, and still associated in the minds of many indigenous Fijians with them and their descendants, be considered worthy of this honour? What is UNESCO's interest in promoting Levuka's cause? And how far could any government claiming to represent indigenous Fijians offer financial and other support to Levuka's claim?

It will take time for these questions to be answered. Meanwhile, it is again evident—as all the papers in this special issue indicate—that neither 'heritage' nor tourism is politically neutral. What is marketed, who does the marketing, and how 'attractions' are presented are profoundly political and contentious issues. Tourism can indeed bring many benefits to Pacific islands, but sustainable tourism development needs to be carefully planned, efficiently organised and implemented, and consistently monitored. If this does not occur, the benefits may be short-lived and the price may be high.

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**Note**

Parts of this editorial are based on a longer introduction to tourism in Pacific islands: D. Harrison, 'Themes in Pacific Island Tourism', in *Pacific Island Tourism*, ed. D. Harrison, Cognizant, New York, 2003.

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But the Pacific is an enormous region with many islands, so where's the best place to begin? Although you might think that there's no way to go wrong with a Pacific island vacation, there are definitely some islands better suited to specific travel tastes and best times of the year to visit. So as you narrow down your choices of which area to visit and when keep these island recommendations in mind! Get Travel Deals in Your Inbox. Email Address. Rarotonga is the capital of the Cook Islands and as tropical and beautiful as any capital could be. It's the center of tourism and also easy to get your bearings because the island is only about 20 miles around in size. Savai'i, Samoa. Credit: Bigstock.com.