



High Commission of the Republic of the Fiji Islands London

TOURISM

Tourism is now Fiji's most important industry and the largest foreign exchange earner. The industry provides employment directly and indirectly to an estimated 40,000 people (15 per cent of the labour force) and contributes approximately 17 per cent of total production in the economy.

The tourism industry achieved a record number of visitors and foreign exchange for 1998, the eighth year in a row. The country hosted 371,342 visitors with foreign exchange earnings expected to be over the half - billion mark, \$527. 1 million dollars for the year. Major hotel and resort projects include the \$29 million Denarau Villas which have just been completed. Work on the \$48 million Outrigger Reef Resort has started and several other major projects worth hundreds of millions of dollars are in the pipeline. These include the Air Pacific Hotel Project at Denarau and a comprehensive proposal for the development of Natadola as a prime tourism centre. Government will give these projects the necessary push and support to facilitate their early commencement. To develop and provide healthy competition within the shopping industry and duty free traders in particular, there is an extension of Duty Free Shopping to other premises away from Nadi and Nausori airports. Government upgraded the Tourism Department to ministry status in 1994 as a reflection of the importance of the tourism industry to the economy. The Ministry of Tourism is geared towards assisting the industry in increasing visitor arrivals, primarily through the continuation of government's support in the international marketing of tourism, the development of 'Eco Tourism' in rural areas, and encouraging private investment in the sector.

A Tourism Development Plan has been prepared by EU in close consultation with the industry and Government. The Master Plan sets the following targets for the year 2005: the attraction of a total of 500,000 to 600,000 visitors a year, creation of additional 2,500 rooms, 22,000 new jobs and an additional \$325 million in foreign exchange.

FIJI VISITORS BUREAU

With the same kind of commitment shown by the tourism industry, 1999 is expected to be another record year. Fiji Visitors Bureau is forecasting a 7.1 per cent increase or 398,400 visitor arrival.

The bureau is targeting over 370 thousand visitors for next year, with revenue earnings up to \$521 million.

Fiji's main tourism source markets in Australia and New Zealand have shown positive signs of economic growth. This augurs well for the industry with an expected increase in tourist arrivals from these markets. Air Pacific has one direct and three via Auckland flights weekly to Honolulu. Plans are also underway for Air Pacific to enter into cost –sharing agreements with other airlines to help increase visitor arrivals as well as to increase services. Charter flights by Canada 3000 which operates in October through to April together with Air Pacific and Air New Zealand flights to Vancouver via Honolulu had contributed to the increase in Canadian visitors. Direct flights to Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch continued to bring in significant number of New Zealand visitors, a record 68,116 in the last five years. Air Pacific has commenced two direct flights to Sydney from Nausori Airport. The country experienced a record year for Australian visitors who topped the 100,000 mark for the first time since 1990 - a 25 per cent increase over 1997. New Zealand visitors also set a record, passing the 70,000 figure for the first time, that amounted to a 4 per cent increase over 1997. The FVB in its campaign is placing more emphasis on marketing Fiji's richness and diversity, and its uniqueness. For too long the nation has been sold as a sun, sand and sea destination. The major focus of image marketing will be culture and traditions coupled with the friendly Fijian smile and traditional hospitality. The FVB had been promoting the theme "Discover the Fiji You Don't Know". To spearhead an active marketing plan it has introduced the second phase of its discover theme with the slogan - "Discover the Fiji You'll Never Forget".

The Bureau is also examining ways to capitalize on major forthcoming events which includes the 1999 America's Cup Challenge in NZ, the Sydney 2000 Olympics, and the dawn of the new millennium. Air making every positive effort and reducing dependency on overseas carriers who may not have national interest at heart. It has introduced two flights a week to Narita, Japan. The airline has resumed five flights a week to Los Angeles. The new Boeing 737 - 800 the latest in the Boeing 737 series brings the latest in technology and has passenger comfort. Fiji is served by five regional airlines - Air Caledonia International, Air Nauru, Polynesian Airline, Solomon Air and Marshall Island Airline and three international airlines - Air New Zealand, Qantas and Air Pacific. Fiji's second international airline 'Fiji Airways' is expected to be in operation later in the year, serving the United Kingdom and South East Asia. With the growth in the tourist industry, Fiji has developed a major duty free shopping industry. Few products available at reduced prices are electrical and sports equipment, perfumes and cosmetics, jewelry, cameras and radios. Duty free shopping outlets can be found in cities, towns, hotels and Nadi International Airport.

The Fiji Visitors Bureau had an increased marketing budget from a 1997 total of \$4.5 million to \$11 million for last year.

ECOTOURISM

Another interesting aspect of the tourist industry exhibiting great potential for profitable business enterprise is secondary tourism initiatives, or ecotourism. Ecotourism has emerged as an exciting complement to mainstream tourism. Fiji has the capacity to be leader in the world ecotourism sector and it is one of the niche areas which held great possibilities for the country.

Ecotourism is to be seen as an amalgam of the whole range of criteria with the ultimate outcome for the guests being great tourism experiences, whilst safeguarding the welfare of the future generations.

There are several established attractions of this kind which have succeeded in tapping the tourism market. The Garden of the Sleeping Giant at Nadi offers tourists as an opportunity to see some of Fiji's natural heritage and the Coral Coast Railway takes people on sugar tramlines to a picturesque beach in Nadroga.

The government has already undertaken a number of other ecotourism initiatives which has the potential to diversify and enrich the industry in a new direction and encourage active participation of Fijians in the industry's economic stream. The Bouma Falls and the Lavena Walk in Taveuni are already open to tourists and the Tongan Hill Fort has recently been opened in Tavuni in Sigatoka. The promotion of cultural heritage and backpacker type accommodation will be encouraged. It is of particular benefit to remote regions and offers opportunities for indigenous Fijians to become involved in the tourist industry.

While more tourist attractions and developments are centered in the Western Division, efforts will be undertaken to spread the benefits of tourism development to other regions.