

# Tourism in Pacific island countries: A status quo round-up

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## Abstract

In the 21st century, Pacific island countries (PICs) continue to leverage for tourism the attributes that have imbued them, including appeals to their cultural, geographical, and climatic allure. However, the question raised more frequently by many is why despite the many decades of tourism across the region, development impacts from the sector remain largely muted. The key remit of this paper is to offer a status quo round-up of tourism in PICs and to draw on key emergent themes that underlay the present context. There is little doubt that for policymakers and their international development partners, whether tourism has or can lead to enduring development outcomes remains clouded in questions over whether there is ample evidence available to support such assertions. However, this has failed to dampen the enthusiasm of multilateral agencies that promote the notion that tourism's potential remains largely underdeveloped. With largely narrow economic bases, PICs have little choice but to seek further development of tourism despite the many fundamental constraints that make them less competitive than Southeast Asian destinations.

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The countries in the Pacific Islands have had a long association with the international tourist gaze that is widely tied to notions of paradise, friendly “natives,” and tropical splendour. Such conceptualizations hark back to the era of discovery by Europeans where the exotic allure of the islands, coupled with the dual colonization and missionary agendas were key drivers for visitation. As W. P. Morell noted (1960, p. 5), “The early voyagers’ idyllic pictures of life in the island were no mere figment of the romantic imagination.” Such conceptualizations were corroborated by many pathfinders including Captain James Cook, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, and artist Paul Gauguin, among others, who were architects of enduring European and British views of the Pacific Islands and of Pacific islanders themselves.

In the 21st century, Pacific island countries (from herein PICs) continue to leverage for tourism the attributes that have imbued them, including appeals to their cultural, geographical, and climatic allure (Pratt & Harrison, 2015). Contemporary imaginings of the Pacific Islands remain imbued with superlatives such as in Paul Thoreaux’s description of his arrival in the Trobriands (1992, p. 132):

*After an hour of high clouds and blue ocean the green islands shimmered into view. They were in the middle of nowhere: it was another experience of the Pacific being like the night sky, like outer space, and of island hopping in that ocean being something like interplanetary travel.*

Such conceptualizations are reinforced in the ever-popular Lonely Planet guidebook to the South Pacific and Micronesia where Easter Island is described as: “Easter Island emanates a magnetic, mysterious vibe” (2006, p. 85) and Fiji as: “a sprawling brew of lush islands surrounded by kaleidoscopic reefs” (2006, p. 136). Naturally, although such superlatives are tasked with driving visitation and destination branding during the dreaming phase for travellers, these sentiments are not new and more importantly, they elide many of the development shortcomings, economic development deficiencies, and threats from climate change effects evident across the region’s countries (Cheer & Peel, 2011).

In their collection of papers cross-examining the performative aspects of Pacific island culture and the links to tourism, Taylor and Alexeyeff (2016, p. 4) argue that the “very notion of tourism can be seen to act as a powerful ideological category or trope” and that “through their reparation such tropes become endlessly sedimented as ‘self evident’ essence.” This more or less suggests that through tourism and the recruitment of culture as a device for promotion and monetization, tourism development in the region is inescapably linked to cultures, both traditional and hybrid, and fundamental to destination development (Cheer, Reeves, & Laing, 2013; MacCarthy, 2016). Yet as the growth in tourism continues, and with it growing pressure to monetize the performative aspects of islander culture, the extent to which this is allowed to continue is increasingly moderated by concerns over the sanctity of culture, and the tensions concerning ownership and conferral of benefits, and whether any of this has led to enduring improvements to basic needs (Cheer & Peel, 2011; Tabani, 2017).

Accordingly, the question raised more frequently by many is why, despite the many decades of tourism across the region, development impacts from the sector remain largely muted (Britton, 1982; Cheer, 2010). In Vanuatu, the phrase in Bislama “Turism blong yu blong yumi” (tourism belongs to you and me) has resounded in official documents promoting the development of the industry, yet in practice, whether there is ample evidence of this being the case remains questionable (Cheer, 2016; Scheyvens & Russell, 2013; Tabani, 2017).

Nearly three decades ago, Samy (1980) voiced his hesitation about tourism's potential to improve livelihoods of Pacific islanders arguing that for the most part, at a local level, the returns from tourism were minimal amounting to desperate crumbs from the tourists' table. Such sentiments were prescient and remain as relevant today as it was in the 1980s. Ambivalence towards tourism from Pacific islanders is not a recent occurrence and this was demonstrated in Rajotte and Crocombe (1980) where the underlying sentiment was centred on maintaining control and ensuring that local level interests were sustained wherever possible.

Over three decades later, notions of tourism as a vehicle for economic development have intensified with the World Bank (2016, p. 4) lauding that “in 2040, transformational tourism opportunities could bring an additional US\$1.7 billion in revenue and 116,000 jobs” to countries in the region. Whether this is guess work at the very best or distinct possibility, must remain under scrutiny given the inherent competitiveness constraints that destinations in the region face, especially if compared with the price points of Southeast Asian destinations, and the noticeable absence of genuine low-cost airlines in the Pacific region.

In terms of overall numbers, South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO) reports that 2.30 million tourists arrived in PICs in 2016 (SPTO, 2017a, 2017b). Arrivals have been increasing at an average rate of around 4.9% over the last decade (1.34 million tourism arrivals in 2007). Although specific tourism types are difficult to quantify, large segments are concentrated into all-inclusive and enclavic resorts such as Denarau Island Fiji or in cruise tourism (Cheer, 2016). As noted by Harrison and Pratt (2015), tourism in PICs is split between destinations that attract predominantly leisure tourists such as Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia (Tahiti), Palau, and Vanuatu, and those that serve mainly “business tourists” including a high percentage of expatriate aid workers and consultants. These include Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands, and small coral atoll nations, such as Kiribati, Nauru, and Tuvalu. Others benefit from visiting friend and relatives tourists including Tonga, Samoa, Niue, and Kiribati.

Accordingly, the key remit of this paper is to offer a status quo round-up of tourism in PICs and to draw on key emergent themes that underlay the present context. Authors have leveraged much of their own primary research conducted across the Pacific region over the last decade, and several continue to undertake consultancies and work as practitioners and technical advisers. The themes presented are by no means exhaustive with particular attention given to thematics that have a direct influence on tourism as exemplified in the various research initiatives of authors and as opposed to wider pressing issues not discussed including climate change and rising sea levels, energy policy development, fisheries management, broader development policies, and reconciling efforts towards achieving United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) benchmarks in years to come.

## 2 | THEME 1: TOURISM AND GEOPOLITICAL INFLUENCES

Due consideration of the implications of geopolitical drivers are critical for PICs given that tourism is largely predicated on international visitation and expenditure. Although Australia and New Zealand have traditionally underpinned international visitation to PIC destinations,

there is an increasing shift towards Chinese arrivals. The geopolitics attached to this changing trend is especially discernible in northern PICs of Micronesia that abut the South China Sea where jockeying for strategic position is at all-time highs. This is coupled with the contest for geopolitical alliance that has intensified with the reinforcement of China and its unique brand of development assistance that has gained increasing prominence at the expense of traditional development partners Australia, New Zealand, and the United States.

When it comes to international tourism arrivals, the growing importance of the People's Republic of China as a source market has seen increased investments in tourism infrastructure in the region and allied with this are other development projects such as the development of public infrastructure and utilities, industry export development, and interventions in health and education. In relation to tourism development in PICs, Webster and Ivanov's (2015) six geopolitical drivers that impact world tourism are applicable to PICs:

1. The fall of the American Empire
2. The rise of the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, China) and PINEs (Philippines, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Ethiopia)
3. Increased global political instability
4. The increased importance of regional supranational organizations
5. Greater control of individuals on a global level
6. Corporations become more important and powerful than governments

A backward glance outlines that PICs have had extensive encounters with colonialism and the enduring influence of foreign powers, predominantly Britain and France but also Australia, New Zealand, and the USA (Harrison, 2004), are clear vestiges of this historical past. The lingering influences of the colonial legacy is evident in enduring bilateral links—this includes:

1. Australia: Norfolk Island
2. France: French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Wallis, and Futuna
3. UK: Pitcairn Islands
4. USA: American Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, Northern Mariana Islands
5. New Zealand: Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau
6. Chile: Rapa Nui (Easter Island)

To a great extent, tourist flows reflect these linkages to traditional alliances, with French travellers representing a much higher proportion of visitation to French overseas territories and New Zealanders dominating visitation in their dependent territories. As the largest and most developed country in the South Pacific region, Australia has long held the mantle as the largest source market for destinations in Melanesia, whereas New Zealand holds the equivalent position for destinations in Polynesia. The situation is different in Micronesia given its geographic proximity to northern Asian source markets meaning that destinations here predominantly attract visitors from China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (UNWTO, 2017).

With the exception of PNG and Fiji to a lesser extent, most PICs do not possess large extractive resource industries or manufacturing sectors meaning that opportunities for economic diversification are considerably constrained. Migration, remittances, foreign aid, and public sector bureaucracy (so-called MIRAB model) have long been backstops for PIC economies, as well as a small number of agricultural exports including copra and sugar. These constraints make PICs vulnerable to geopolitical fluctuations, and the outfall of contestation

between major geopolitical powers (China, USA, France, Australia, and New Zealand) can be seen in the strategic favours that are garnered from country to country.

It is indisputable that the People's Republic of China is in many ways a major world power, if not the most influential (Webster & Ivanov, 2015) and this is evident in PICs. The competition for influence in PICs has not only been between China and Western powers but has also traditionally included Japan and Taiwan (Yang, 2011). China is well known for exercising soft power, and with a growing number of Chinese with the appetite for travel, many PICs are forging closer ties with the Chinese government (Lanteigne, 2012). However, tourism is only one part of a broader bilateral agenda and very often cooperation in this sector is aligned with projects and investments elsewhere, including aid, infrastructure projects, and primary sector development (Brant, 2013). Another strategic benefit of courting PICs is linked to voting deliberations at various United Nations congresses and in other forums such as the International Whaling Commission (Lanteigne, 2012). The growth of Chinese development aid and investments have sparked concerns among traditional development partners (Australia especially) and international and local organizations on the basis that projects tend to maintain low environmental standards, lack the involvement of local communities, and are deficient in providing transparency (Dreher, Fuchs, Parks, Strange, & Tierney, 2017).

Regional organizations play an increasingly important role, and in the Pacific, the Pacific Forum is one of the preeminent regional collectives with the goals of encouraging regional cooperation and presenting as a united front on a global scale. For the most part, Fiji as one of the largest and most diversified economies, often asserts a leadership role and its geographic position strategically located at the crossroads of the South Pacific has made it an ideal regional hub (Mawi, 2015). When it comes to tourism, the SPTO is the regional body mandated to strengthen regional cooperation in tourism (SPTO, 2017a, 2017b). Its efforts in this regard are challenging given that it represents competing destinations that are predominantly looking to secure visitation from the same source markets and they tend to be poorly differentiated with sun, sand, and sea as key themes in almost all cases.

### 3 | THEME 2: UNDERSTANDING TOURISM IMPACTS

Tourism impacts are typically assessed across economic, social, cultural, and economic measures (Agyeiwaah, McKercher, & Suntikul, 2017). An enduring question is whether tourism contributes to the sustainable development of PICs, however, a dearth of reliable and relevant longitudinal data makes assessing tourism impacts inexact and challenging. For example, only nine PICs report data across both tourism and national development indicators. Table 1 provides a compilation of selected data related to tourism in PICs and evidently only six countries provide information related to the economic contribution of tourism. The shaded areas in Table 1 highlight the extent to which a country is dependent on tourism.

Absolute numbers of visitors and visitor receipts are comparatively low in contrast to South-east Asian destinations due to the constrained tourism capacity of PICs, however, the region remains above the world average per capita in this context (WTTC, 2017). International tourist expenditure also varies with Fiji demonstrating much higher tourist expenditure than other destinations around the globe (UNWTO, 2017). Table 2 outlines data related to the UN Human Development Index and demonstrates that with regard to economic and social indicators, PICs are generally laggards with five countries in the region below global averages and four slightly above (UNDP, 2017). Matters related to high economic leakages, lack of financial and human

TABLE 1 Tourism context in Pacific island countries

Country	Total visitor arrivals	Overnight visitor arrivals (2015)	Total expenditure (2015), US \$mIn	Estimated expenditure per arrival	Direct contribution to GDP (% GDP) (2015)	Total contribution to GDP (%) GDP)(2015)	Direct contribution to employment (%) share of total)(2015)	Total contribution to employment (%) share of total)(2015)
Fiji	869000	755000	1037	1193	14.9927	42.1445	13.4746	38.1455
Kiribati	9600	4400	3.9	406	9.39219	22.3607	7.75351	19.2044
Micronesia (Federated States of)		30200	29	960				
Palau		162000	156	963				
Papua New Guinea	199000	184000	2.8	14	0.708009	1.92202	0.559641	1.64246
Samoa	139000	128000	165	1187				
Solomon Islands		21600	56	2593	3.89961	9.0781	3.32857	7.93848
Tonga	73000	54000	48	658	6.45942	17.9112	6.49505	18.5724
Vanuatu	287000	90000	254	885	18.264	47.1048	14.4027	40.2012
World average		1.235 Billion (Total)	1220000 (Total)	990	3.06508	10.1079	3.56563	9.55486

Note. GDP = gross domestic product. Source: (UNWTO, 2017; WTTC, 2017).

**TABLE 2** Development indicators in Pacific island countries

Country	HDI Rank (2015)	HDI (2015)	Population	Life expectancy at birth (years; 2015)	Net official development assistance received (% of GNI; 2014)	Remittances, inflows (% of GDP; 2014)	Foreign direct investment, net inflows (% of GDP; 2014)
Fiji	91	0.736	892,149	70.2	2.1	4.54	7.6
Kiribati	137	0.588	112,407	66.2	24.3	9.59	5
Micronesia (Federated States of)	127	0.638	104,433	69.3	33.9	7.34	6.4
Palau	60	0.788	21,288	72.9	9.8	0.88	15.9
Papua New Guinea	154	0.516	7,919,825	62.8	3.5	0.06	−0.2
Samoa	104	0.704	193,759	73.7	12	17.55	2.9
Solomon Islands	156	0.515	587,482	68.1	18.1	1.41	1.8
Tonga	101	0.721	106,364	73	18.2	27.07	12.9
Vanuatu	134	0.597	264,603	72.1	12.1	3.45	1.6
World average	out of 188	0.698862	7,355,220,412 (total)	71.26737	5.977099	4.855148	4.840437

Note. GDP = gross domestic product; GNI = gross national income. Source: (The World Bank, 2017a, 2017b; UNDP, 2017).

resource capacity, and high levels of foreign ownership are well-documented issues that can diminish the economic contribution of tourism to advances in national development (Milne, 1992). Nevertheless, as Pratt (2015) demonstrates, although tourism in Small Island Developing States can potentially contribute economic development, the key is curtailing the extent of economic leakages. Although foreign ownership of tourism businesses is directly linked to economic leakages, large-scale expatriate-owned businesses do provide a range of benefits to local communities that small local operators are generally unable to provide (Pratt, McCabe, & Movono, 2016; Scheyvens & Russell, 2012a).

At the crossroads of economic, social, and cultural assessments tied to tourism is the question of land tenure, often fundamental to the securing of foreign direct investment in the sector. In general, land in PICs is not only an economic asset but is intrinsically linked to inheritances and critical cultural heritage. Most PICs have several types of landownership arrangements but of significance to indigenous communities is the issue of what is termed traditional, communal or “native or *i-Taukei* land” in Fiji, or *kastom* land in other parts of Melanesia—this is land that typically can be leased but remains the property of indigenous landowning groups. In general, indigenous landowners have several options insofar as tourism land use is concerned: lease to developers, develop tourism themselves, undertake other activities on the land (typically subsistence agriculture), or leave it fallow.

Leasing land to developers for the establishment of hotels and resorts can bring comparatively high levels of direct cash income to landowning groups, however, because of the length on leases, in some cases up to and around 75 years, communities are deprived from conducting



traditional livelihood activities and undertaking customary practice. This also creates a dependency on tourism development that hitherto was not a binding constraint (Pratt et al., 2016). Establishing a community-based tourism business requires investment, knowledge, skills, and the ability to connect to the international travel supply chain. For the most part, this is a risky strategy for communities and economic returns may not be as forecasted given the tendency for international tourist visitation to be buffeted by external and internal shocks such as natural disasters (Cheer, 2015). Indeed, when it comes to broader issues of land tenure, the sociocultural value of land and the ways in which traditionally owned land is linked to overall well-being and the strengthening of social networks must be addressed (Scheyvens & Russell, 2012b).

Table 3 provides two indicators for environmental sustainability in PICs. Notably, both the percentage of territory allocated to protected areas and metrics-related pollution is both below average. However, this does not mean that there are no environmental concerns and further steps to protect marine and terrestrial natural environments are required in the face of growing pressures for tourism development as seen in Micronesia, and in response to the growth in Chinese inbound tourism. Enforcement of regulations to protect the natural environment, especially fragile marine resources, is challenging considering PICs are largely under-resourced in both human capital and infrastructure terms. Indeed, the spectre of climate change looms large on PICs agenda and it is well publicized that countries in the region are being affected by sea level rises, extreme weather events, and coral bleaching. The tourism sector, although not necessarily directly responsible for driving the occurrence of climate change, will bear the brunt of these impacts, and whether tourism sector stakeholders can effectively drive mitigation and adaptation efforts remain to be seen (Klint, DeLacy, Filep, & Dominey-Howes, 2015).

## 4 | THEME 3—ECONOMIC LINKAGES AND LEAKAGES

Tourism is often seen as a panacea for Pacific island states, and the economic benefits of tourism are reiterated constantly by academics and industry alike (Stabler, Papatheodorou, & Sinclair,

**TABLE 3** Environmental indicators in Pacific island countries

Country	Terrestrial and marine protected areas (% of total territorial area)	PM2.5 air pollution, mean annual exposure (micrograms per cubic metre)
Fiji	0.97	7.870697
Kiribati	11.81	3.446646
Micronesia (Federated States of)	0	8.058594
Palau	0.24	
Papua New Guinea	0.66	13.85807
Samoa	0.16	3.807435
Solomon Islands	0.23	6.57933
Tonga	1.52	4.025835
Vanuatu	2.31	8.524103
World average	12.80739	43.98357

Source: (The World Bank, 2017a, 2017b).



2010). These benefits include tourism contributing to economic growth, supporting and creating employment, fostering foreign direct investment in the sector that can improve the transfer of technology and knowledge, potentially distributing income more equally, helping contribute to infrastructure development, and easing balance of payments constraints (Swarbrooke, 1999; Terzioglu & Gokovali, 2016). Recent examples of the economic impacts of tourism to different PICs include the research undertaken by IFC (2014, 2016) demonstrates that cruise tourism injected AU\$34.6 million directly and contributed another AU\$18.6 million indirectly to the Vanuatu economy. The cruise industry was estimated to support up to 1,170 full-time equivalent jobs in Vanuatu. The total economic impact of cruise tourism in 2015 to PNG and Solomon Islands was estimated to be AU\$5.9 and AU\$0.64 million, respectively.

However, the extent to which tourism can be of enduring economic benefit to Pacific island states depends to a large extent on both the degree of economic leakages out of the economy and the strength of intersectoral linkages between the tourism-oriented sectors and other sectors in the economy. The larger the leakages, the lower the multiplier effects and the lower the linkages with other sectors, the less likely economic benefits are dispersed throughout the destination economy.

Like other small-island states, the geographic size and modest populations of Pacific island states and territories mean there are limited human and natural resources (Wilkinson, 1989). Consequently, a high proportion of both consumer and capital goods are imported, reducing the size of economic multipliers. Import substitution is limited, and this is exacerbated because of the small size of domestic industries meaning that businesses cannot leverage economies of scale, and remoteness results in high transportation costs and high levels of openness to international trade.

Some scholars have also highlighted that economic leakages in the tourism industry can occur through repatriated profits of multinational hotels and savings from salaries of foreign management and employees (Ünlüönen, Kiliçlar, & Yüksel, 2011). However, this applies only in the more development destinations such as Guam and Fiji who have a significant number of foreign-owned internationally branded hotels (Harrison & Pratt, 2013). In countries with communally or indigenous-owned land, foreign-owned establishments are required to pay lease monies to the local community; an important source of income that theoretically goes directly to the local level. These multinational hotels often participate in community activities around basic services, health and education (Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008). These initiatives are often beyond what small-scale, locally owned accommodation providers can contribute to the wider communities.

The lack of data on exactly how much of the tourist dollar is being retained in PICs hampers the development of specific policies needed to address this issue. In Pratt's (2015) analysis of the economic impact of tourism in Small Island Developing States, Fiji was estimated to have a relatively high tourism income multiplier of 0.91 whereas American Samoa's equivalent figure was 0.44, implying 56 cents out of every dollar spent by a tourist leaked back out of the territory. Although somewhat dated, Milne (1992) estimated tourism income multipliers to range from 0.35 for Niue to 0.56 for Vanuatu with Kiribati, Cook Islands, and Tonga falling somewhere in-between this range.

Considering the lack of a developed manufacturing sector, the focus of PICs has been on strengthening linkages between the hotel and agricultural sector. Berno (2006) noted that hotels in Fiji spent about FJ\$30 million annually on imported food that Fiji could have grown or produced. More recently, Scheyvens and Russell (2012a) noted that small- to medium-sized hotels and resorts in Fiji had a higher likelihood of using local food suppliers, with some purchasing up to 70% of their food from within the country. Pratt (2013a) demonstrated that one eco-resort in Fiji reduced the amount of imported food offered to their guests in a 12-month

period from 18% down to 6% with a concerted effort to provide more local ingredients. Nevertheless, whether these initiatives could be intensified and adopted by larger, higher quality resorts remains in question. “Farm to fork” initiatives such as the development of cookbooks highlighting Pacific cuisines using local ingredients are a step in the right direction, however, enhancing links between local supply chains and the tourism sector remains pressing.

## 5 | THEME 4: CHINESE TOURISM IN PICS

Much has been made of the rapid growth in China's outbound tourism growth in recent years. Global Chinese outbound tourists rose from 3.74 million in 1993 to 10.47 million in 2000 (Kim, Yingzhi, & Agrusa, 2005) to 98.19 million in 2013 (Fu, 2014). With such large increases in outbound travel, PICs recognize that a small proportion of a large “pie” is still significant. Indeed, PICs have not wanted to miss this burgeoning market with intensive marketing and wooing of Chinese travellers critical to the diversification of source markets, reducing the vulnerability to exogenous shocks (Vada-Pareti, 2015).

Considering that there were over 100 million international trips taken by Chinese tourists in 2015 and approximately 140,000 visited the Pacific in 2016, representing 0.14% of total Chinese outbound tourism; this highlights obvious potential. Table 4 shows the number of Chinese

**TABLE 4** Chinese tourists by destination and destination share, 2014–2016

Destination	2014	2015	2016	Absolute change (2016–2015)	% Change (2016–2015)	Share of Chinese tourists (%)	Total visitors	Chinese share of total (%)
American Samoa	354	363	370	7	1.9	0.3	20,050	1.8
Cook Islands	390	551	786	235	42.6	0.6	146,473	0.5
FSM	2,732	2,495					30,240 <sup>a</sup>	8.3 <sup>a</sup>
Fiji	28,333	40,174	49,083	8,909	22.2	34.4	792,320	6.2
French Polynesia	3,268	5,555	5,987	432	7.8	4.2	192,495	3.1
Kiribati		0	89	89		0.1	5,018 <sup>a</sup>	1.8 <sup>a</sup>
Marshall Islands	87	134					6,311	2.1
New Caledonia		263	336	73	27.8	0.2	115,676	0.3
Niue	2	32					7,707 <sup>a</sup>	0.4 <sup>a</sup>
Palau	39,383	87,058	64,990	−22,068	−25.3	45.5	138,416	47.0
PNG	8,970	10,255	12,937	2,682	26.2	9.1	178,509	7.2
Samoa	2,009	2,333	3,211	878	37.6	2.2	145,176	2.2
Solomon Islands	425	742	827	85	11.5	0.6	23,192	3.6
Tonga		974	1,318	344	35.3	0.9	59,130	2.2
Tuvalu	60	4	75	71	1775.0	0.1	2,465	3.0
Vanuatu	1,563	2,186	2,736	550	25.2	1.9	95,117	2.9
Total	87,576	153,119	142,745	−7,713	−6.8	100	1,958,295	7.3

Source: (SPTO, 2016, 2017a, 2017b).

<sup>a</sup>2015 figures.

tourists by Pacific island destination. Although increases in visitation are all positive (with the exception of Palau), these originate from a very small base. Palau makes up just under half of all Chinese tourists to PICs, with Fiji comprising another third of all Chinese tourists visiting the region. The proportion of Chinese tourists as a percentage of total tourists to different destinations ranges from 0.3% for New Caledonia to 47.0% for Palau with an average across the region of 7.3%.

The current trends in Chinese tourism to the region raises two broader questions: “Do Chinese tourists want to visit Pacific Island countries?” and “Are Pacific Island countries prepared for them?” There is mixed evidence in response to the first question, and the answer to the second question is “probably not,” meaning that the status quo is largely unclear. With respect to destination attributes desired by Chinese tourists, an earlier study by Kim et al. (2005) noted that they desire destinations that are safe and have environments with high natural values and on both accounts, PICs meet this need (Pratt, 2013b). Moreover, the region is perceived as having friendly and welcoming people and PICs are largely peaceful. The exception has been political unrest, particularly in Fiji beginning in the late 1980s, however, Harrison and Pratt (2010) argue that the coups in Fiji have had little long-term negative impact on tourism in Fiji. Kim et al. (2005) also highlight that Chinese tourists do not place relative importance on destination attributes of “level of economic development” or a “good place for shopping” and this bodes well for PICs.

Nevertheless, Chinese tourists are known for their desire to shop while on holidays (Sparks & Pan, 2009), as well as renowned for their aversion to the sun and desire to experience many attractions in a compressed itinerary (Nasolomampionona, 2014). In contrast, PICs have tended to offer sun, sea, and sand as their main attraction (Weaver, 1998). Although Chinese outbound tourism is developing rapidly (Tse, 2015), more deeply ingrained cultural values rooted in Confucianism, Daoism, or Buddhism will continue to influence Chinese travellers (Mok & Defranco, 2000). The Chinese are considered superstitious (Simmons & Schindler, 2003) and because of widely shared values (respect for authority, interdependence, group orientation, face, harmony, external attribution), Chinese tourists tend to shop for gift-giving purposes, as well as for prestige and status, among others. Furthermore, Chinese consumers are very responsive to relationship marketing, abide by group decisions, and are less likely to complain (Mok & Defranco, 2000). Although all of the above are observed generalizations, it must be acknowledged that Chinese tourists are not a homogenous bunch and their travel behaviour is changing rapidly (Han & Cheer, 2018).

However, PICs will need to think strategically about whether the Chinese market is to be pursued on account of what may be a mismatch between the desires of Chinese travellers and the portfolio of experiences available. Attracting and sustaining the Chinese outbound market in the long term entails considerable investment, tailoring infrastructure and services to suit, as well as recognizing that there might be trade-offs by way of discouraging tourists from existing markets (Vada-Pareti, 2015). That said, destination management organizations and the tourism sector in PICs must be cognizant that China is a complex and diverse market (Zhang & Heung, 2002). In Tse's (2015) review of Chinese outbound tourists, he notes that tourism is wrapped up in the broader picture of geopolitics and as Chinese outbound tourism develops and matures, international travel will be used to express soft power and will be unavoidably linked to broader geopolitical discourses.

## 6 | THEME 5: TOURISM SKILLS AND TRAINING

The demand for skilled hospitality and tourism workers in PICs continues to grow as they expand to compete with destinations in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean (Perrottet &

Garcia, 2016). Moreover, tourism is widely acknowledged to be a sector that can share the benefits of prosperity through sustainable business growth in rural and remote communities (Du, Lew, & Ng, 2016). Most noticeably, tourism activity occurs in both the informal and formal economies and the boundaries in some cases between the two have become blurred (Chen, 2007); this is particularly seen in Vanuatu and other small-island states (Gibert, 2015). Developing adequately skilled tourism sector employees and successful hospitality and tourism enterprises are vital for servicing new markets, adapting to changing circumstances, and contributing to economic growth and social prosperity.

The goals of increased prosperity through sustainable and inclusive economic growth underpin many PIC national development frameworks such as the Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015–2025 and the Vanuatu National Sustainable Development Plan 2016–2030. PIC post-school education and training (PSET) policy environments are complex, and at times, there is a lack of clarity about the role of the private sector in a demand-driven skills system (World Bank, 2016). Government ministries and departments tasked with administering the PSET sector and skills development often lack the capacity to work effectively with the private sector (Asian Development Bank, 2008). This can result in a mismatch between the demand for skilled labour and the supply of graduates. Consequently, a challenge for PICs seeking to expand tourism sector activity is the supply of a suitably qualified and experienced national hospitality and tourism workforce capable of meeting the growth in the sector (Murki, 2014).

Formal tourism skills training in PICs are offered through a broad range of training providers including national training institutes, church-sponsored training centres, and international training companies. Programmes such as the Australia-Pacific Technical College funded by the Australian Aid Program and Vanuatu Tourism Ambassador Programme supported by the New Zealand Aid Programme contribute additional formal and informal skills training for the tourism sector. The majority of nationally registered hospitality and tourism training providers deliver skills training that is nationally accredited and part of the national qualifications framework. This generally takes the form of competency-based training delivered in long-cycle courses in institutional settings. Many of the challenges and issues for PSET in PICs such as underfunding, poor PSET management, and lack of coordination impact on the quality of hospitality and tourism skills training at the national level (Morris, 2015).

There is little private provision of tourism and hospitality skills training despite PIC national technical and vocational education and training or PSET policies seeking to promote diversity in delivery of skills training through increased private delivery (Government of Vanuatu, 2016). In addition to formal, accredited hospitality, and tourism skills training, many enterprises, ranging from large international-brand hotels and resorts to island bungalows, provide nonaccredited training to upskill employees and improve productivity and efficiency and business performance. This kind of workplace hospitality and tourism skills training is generally focused on the specific organizational context of the business, such as learning about a reservations operating system, improving the business website or financial management training.

Large national training providers such as Vanuatu Institute of Technology and the National Polytechnic Institute of Papua New Guinea offer courses up to diploma level courses in hospitality and tourism. They face considerable difficulties in meeting the demand for graduates who are adequately prepared for work in the sector. One particular difficulty relates to institutional capacity to deliver skills training in flexible modes that responds to the precise needs of employers (Morris, 2015; World Bank, 2016). Further, many national hospitality and tourism teachers and trainers lack appropriate experience and adequate knowledge of industry trends and employer expectations (Murki, 2014). In general, training providers have been criticized

for not providing industry-standard equipment and facilities, for poor quality teaching material and learning resources, outdated technology, and lack of exposure for students to contemporary industry practices and standards.

For many PIC tourism operators and employees, attendance at long-cycle accredited, campus-based skills training is not feasible due to high fees, geographical distance, and inability to take leave from business operations (Gibert, 2015). Blended skills training is increasingly seen as a strategy to overcome these constraints by combining accredited, formal training with business development services in the form of workshops, targeting training sessions and business coaching and mentoring. A successful example of the blended delivery approach in tourism skills training is the Vanuatu Skills Partnership—this programme facilitates skills training in rural and remote locations in Vanuatu through provincial skills centres. Tourism operators are supported to improve their business by means of targeted skills development focused on sustainable and inclusive economic growth. One of the outcomes of this approach has been the steady increase in the number of informal tourism businesses in Tafea, Torba, and Malampa provinces that, following participation in Skills Centre-facilitated skills training with a local training provider and support from a business coach, now meet the national tourism accreditation standards and are registered with the Department of Tourism.

Skills training alone will not meet all the emerging challenges or resolve the pressing issues facing the tourism sector in PICs such as maintaining business continuity during extreme weather events or responding to the steady rise in the number of Chinese tourists (Perrottet & Garcia, 2016). The 21st century PIC tourism worker needs more than enterprise-specific skills to work effectively in the tourism industry. Technical skills must be augmented by employability skills. There is growing recognition that technical, enterprise-specific tourism skills training without employability skills results in graduates who are not prepared for immediate work and frequently requires additional postemployment training before they can meet basic enterprise standards and expectations (DFAT, 2016). PIC governments need, therefore, to pay more attention to the tourism sector's skills development needs and create national, coordinated workforce development plans focused on meeting the demand for appropriately skilled tourism workers with capacity to contribute to economic growth and social prosperity.

## 7 | THEME 6: AIR TRANSPORTATION IN PICs

In PICs, the small size of domestic markets and high transport costs to external markets are key characteristics (Scheyvens & Russell, 2009; Taumoepeau, 2010). One element that contains a degree of commonality to all PICs is the vast distances that have to be spanned to maintain contact within any one island group, let alone between groups or with the rest of the world (Kissling, 2002; Taumoepeau, 2010). Most of these countries established national airlines, not only for economic reasons especially via the development of tourism but also for national pride and strategic intent. However, due to heavy financial losses in recent years, most have been restructured, or entered into commercial partnerships metropolitan carriers such as Qantas and Air New Zealand, or ended up in bankruptcy. The costs of owning and operating a national airline are still extremely high in these sparsely populated and remote South Pacific countries and for PICs, owning and operating a profitable airline is a formidable task (Taumoepeau, 2009).

Most airlines in the region are wholly or partially owned by national governments and still operate on the old traditional service structure (i.e., aircraft configured into two or three classes

and full on board catering service), enjoying government subsidies, tax concessions, and operate under bilateral arrangements. Even up to the mid-2000s, the aviation industry of most countries in the region was still highly regulated, dominated by a few long established national airlines (owned or partly owned by their respective governments) such as Air Pacific (Fiji Airways), Air Vanuatu, Polynesian Airlines, and Air Niugini. However, deregulation and multilateral air services agreements also known as “open skies” have introduced some destinations, such as the Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu to low cost carriers such as Jetstar and Virgin. Low cost carriers provided more frequent flights, capacity, and secondary routes at much lower fares than what the traditional airlines had offered over the preceding one to two decades (Kissling, 2002; Taumoepeau, 2010).

Despite the challenges of operating a national carrier, support from national governments endures as airlines continue to play an increasing public utility service role as well. The level and degree of government involvement in national airlines and tourism development varies, depending on government national objectives and on particular stages of economic development. Bilateral aviation agreements are increasingly seen as restrictive to the development of a multinational industry, and the case for a liberal multilateral regime is gaining momentum.

As the region is characterized by widely dispersed populations spread across many isolated islands (Scheyvens & Russell, 2009), current provision of air services is fragmented, often involving long routes with thin traffic and low freight volumes (Taumoepeau, 2010). As a result, PIC airlines face considerable constraints in managing returns and achieving sufficiently high levels of aircraft utilization. The more commercial Pacific air routes, with closer proximity to Australia and New Zealand, are generally tourism-related and have enjoyed growth in international arrivals from these two countries in the last decade.

Taumoepeau (2010) argues that regional airlines will continue to struggle to be economically sustainable on account of

1. Remoteness and length of distances between islands and airfields
2. Limited size of the markets and low volume
3. Specific overrun factors and high airport charges
4. Low load factors and necessarily thin sectors
5. Soft currencies (local regional currencies) earned by regional airlines are converted to US\$ for major operational items payments such as spare parts, fuel, and aircraft lease.

## 8 | THEME 7: TOURISM RESILIENCE

What is often seldom discussed in the extant literature is the fact that PIC communities are also uniquely composed of many social, ecological, and spiritual components, often obscured from common view (Movono, 2017). In general, Pacific islanders are in constant transition as they continue to find complex ways to contend with the intricate impacts of development on their communities and the many pressures that are applied to traditional lifestyles. Of particular concern are the impacts of development on social and ecological systems undergo different patterns and extent of change (Cheer & Lew, 2018; Lew & Cheer, 2018). Such changes depend on the livelihoods activities of people, their culture, and beliefs that are often embedded within the constructs of Pacific society.



Because tourism in the Pacific relies mostly on communal land (also known as traditional land), customary marine resources, and indigenous peoples as part of the tourism experience, islanders are exposed to the pressures that tourism brings. Tourism expansion can drive far-reaching changes within islander communities at the micro level, and like most peoples in the region, Fijians are seamlessly connected to their natural inheritances through customary practices, totemic connections, and ways of life. Movono, Dahles, and Becken (2017) have established that Fijian culture connects people to each other, and to the land, sea, and air and explain that over 40 years of tourism involvement has driven a wedge between the human and nature relationship that has underpinned life for most.

Movono et al. (2017) argue that the construction of the Naviti Resort in Fiji on communal lands has replaced fishing, foraging, and hunting grounds and substituted traditional activities with resort work. Their research argues that tourism induced changes in livelihoods practices have over time, withered connections and interactions between people, their interactions with customary resources, and relationships with each other. In essence, the establishment of tourism via the development of the resort triggered widespread departure from traditional practices and belief systems and lead to a decline in adherence traditional indigenous knowledge, appreciation for culture, and a loss of skills relevant to survival within their natural surroundings. Movono et al. (2017) contend that as individuals have become more dependent on the resort for employment, they become distanced from traditional activities such as weaving, craft making, dancing, carving, farming, and fishing and this has increased dependency, vulnerability and diminished their resilience to change.

## 9 | CONCLUSION

This paper spotlights some of the underlying issues that are shaping the discourse around tourism in PICs and the extent to which the sector might play a leading hand in the economic prospects of countries in the region in years to come. Insight about the tourism sector and its longer term effects are hard to come by given that so much of what is known is fragmented and based on sporadic and ad hoc research. The main contribution to knowledge made is in providing a status quo that underlines the state of the sector in the region. There is little doubt that for policymakers and their international development partners, whether tourism has or can lead to enduring development outcomes remains clouded in questions over whether there is ample evidence available to support such assertions (Cheer, 2010; Cheer & Peel, 2011). However, this has failed to dampen the enthusiasm of multilateral agencies that promote the notion that tourism's potential remains largely underdeveloped (World Bank, 2017a, 2017b). With largely narrow economic bases, PICs have little choice but to seek further development of tourism despite the many fundamental constraints that make them less competitive than Southeast Asian destinations such as Bali, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Although this paper has raised several emergent themes, others including the impacts of climate change on tourism, the growth of cruise tourism, and the issue of gender and empowerment provide further room for discussion. Further, whether tourism can help meet SDGs thresholds by 2030 is a logical link that interrogates the impacts of tourism on development progress. Indeed, the allure of PICs for tourists will remain, however, just how PICs can be competitive and offer holiday experiences that optimize tourist experiences while at the same time maintain islander sovereignty and mitigate the unintended consequences of sector growth remains in question. Although “overtourism” and responsible tourism have become catchcries



in other global destinations on account of rapid international tourism expansion, this has yet to permeate to PICs where “undertourism” is more the case, and where policymakers and tourism industry stake holders seek increased growth.

For PICs, whether trickle down from tourism has managed to permeate to the local level remains largely unproven given the dearth of longitudinal evidence to suggest so. It is without question that applying more longitudinal studies would enable a better understanding of the impacts of tourism on cultural, social, and economic change. Indeed, ethnographic research is one approach that can help enrich understandings of the range of impacts where tourism is only one of several land-use activities. Although tourists have been coming to PIC's for several decades now, and in many cases, the face of tourism development as manifest in resort development and infrastructure development suggests advancement for islander tourism communities, the fact that many PICs continue to languish at the bottom of development indicators insinuates that the long-term benefits from tourism have made little lasting impact on improving livelihoods and well-being.

The implications for further research are manifold on the basis that the tourism sector will continue to be a key contributor to the economies of PICs and at the same time have a commensurate effect on the demand for resources: human, capital, and natural. This might mean it may be at odds with social, environmental, and community needs, especially where trade-offs are required. Just how tourism will enable PICs to meet SDG is one area of prominent concern. Another includes how destination communities will deal with the effects of climate change and sea level rises. All of this has implications for tourism planning and policy development, something that PICs have been generally poor at undertaking. In the meantime, multilateral development partners such as the World Bank and bilateral donors such as New Zealand and Australia appear set to continue their enthusiastic support for tourism. However, what is needed is a more concerted attempt to validate the sector's true development credentials beyond the hype that often accompanies the sector.

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