

Thoughts of the Local Residents of Espiritu Santo on Australian Visitors
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Abstract

Mass tourism, which may lead to environmental problems, cultural and social degradation, distortion of economic benefits and disease, particularly in poorer countries, provides financial reasons for preserving cultural, historical and natural resources or traditions, which otherwise may be neglected. Vanuatu, is a less developed country (LDC), reliant on tourism for such benefits. Therefore, this study focuses on identifying the views of local residents and the impact on their lifestyles and perceptions of Australian tourist expectations. Analysis revealed that most Ni Vanuatu want tourism development on Espiritu Santo and Tangoa Island, as it hasn't yet impacted on their traditional lifestyle. They were concerned about improved road needs, accommodation and tourist attractions.

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INTRODUCTION

To initiate development in remote areas a number of conditions need to be satisfied (Milne 1992; King & McVey 1997), including recognition by government that the development of tourism infrastructure is desirable, a willingness by residents of remote areas to accept tourism development, the building of infrastructure to foster tourism growth requiring contributions by both the private and public sectors, and finally the marketing of the remote localities in an effective manner (Bonham & Mak 1996). These issues are significant for small states that find that their traditional export industries of primary products are in decline and have few options aside from tourism with which to generate export income.

In global terms, the Pacific region attracts approximately 5.4% of the world's international tourism arrivals (PATA 1999). In spite of its small size, tourism is one of the mainstays of the region's economy and is a major employment provider for many of the countries in the region (Milne 1992). Parnwell (1993, p. 235) noted: "tourism represents a potentially powerful means by which economic activity might be spread to peripheral, economically underdeveloped areas". Projected growth in intra-Pacific travel and increased interest in heritage and cultural tourism is seen as being an asset in developing tourism growth in these regions.

The problems associated with tourism development in small remote areas are well illustrated in the South Pacific where there are two effective orders of remoteness:

- remote island nations such as Nauru, Pitcairn Island, Tonga, Cook Islands
- remote regions within remote island nations; these may be termed outer islands (Bonham & Mak 1996).

The research reported on in this paper examines the issue of tourism development in remote island regions using, the case of Espiritu Santo and the near offshore island of Tangoa, two of a number of relatively underdeveloped outer islands in Vanuatu. The research focused on the type of experiences which the Ni Vanuatu felt the Australian tourists wanted whilst on the outer islands and areas of operation and infrastructure which they thought could be improved on to enhance the tourist experience. The research also sought to identify the local residents' views in regard what economic gains are likely to be derived from tourism.

THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IN VAUATU

Following the lead of other successful South Pacific nations, Vanuatu has emphasised on tourism as a means of economic development and a source of foreign exchange. According to the Tourism Council of the Pacific (1990) the objective was to use the money earned for the development of domestic industries, especially those classed as agro-based, upon which the country's economic strength could be founded. The agro based policy did appear to be successful in the early 1980s, however, numerous natural and political disasters led to a dramatic reduction in arrivals in the latter half of the decade (Hoon 1990). Improvement in tourist figures in the early 1990s has led to tourism again playing a leading role in

the nation's economy. In the year 2001, with unrest in several other Melanesian countries, Vanuatu's economy should improve through tourism, with some potential benefits for the country, provided that a stable and secure political climate remains in place.

As a consequence of the neglect of regional economic development in the outer islands there are ongoing problems of poor infrastructure, particularly in relation to transport, education and health. There are also issues with tourism infrastructure. The outer islands of Vanuatu appear to have much to offer visitors, including unique cultures, abundant coral reefs, diving and fishing, as well as desirable scenery that include idyllic beaches, forests, and mountainous panoramas. Considered in unison with the tourism product currently available on Efate, the tourism potential of Espiritu Santo, Pentecost and other islands have the potential to provide a broader range of tourism experiences making the country more attractive as a tourism destination.

Recent investigations of the nature and style of tourism planning in the Pacific region (Jensen 1999; Muqbil 1995) have to its credit, revealed variations in style and approach and in commitment by governments. Vanuatu does have a tourism plan, whereas some other Pacific Island countries do not. However, there have been several changes within the government in Vanuatu and the Minister for Tourism has changed several times over recent years. This has led to a lack of commitment and consistency of practices by government (Hall 1998) and indicates that governments, at times, fail to "accord promotion of tourism a sufficiently high priority to ensure it competes on even terms with other segments of local economies" (Pearce 1990, p. 31).

As Britton's (1982) research implied, the shackles of colonialism have often been broken by many small island states in the Pacific region, but a new post-colonial order and dependency has replaced the export of primary produce with an alternative dependence on importing international visitors. This is substantiated in part by the significant growth in visitor arrival numbers to Vanuatu in recent years.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN REMOTE ISLAND COMMUNITIES

A number of studies have been undertaken into the development of tourism in remote areas, including remote regions in continental areas (Buhalis & Cooper 1998) and in remote islands (King 1997; Fagence 1997; Craig-Smith 1996). Some studies have investigated tourism development by indigenous societies (Weaver 1998; Wahab 1997) but little research has been undertaken in the South Pacific region. Minerbi (1992) suggests that tourism is not a practice of the indigenous, but of large corporations making as much money as possible in ways which may not be compatible with balanced island development. The large corporations are looking at maximising profit and this may conflict with the traditional island ethics of giving and sharing. In many instances tourism planning tends to bypass the local people. The limited coverage of this topic in the literature indicates that there is considerable scope for further research into issues such as the outcomes for the local residents on the outer islands of Vanuatu.

Craig-Smith and Fagence (1994) suggest that difficulties which may be faced in

developing remote regions include few financial resources, unskilled labour, social structure, land tenure and poor planning. To this list can be added environment issues (Dowling 1999), issues of foreign investment criteria (Mistilis & Tolar 2000), culture (Carlsen 1999) and climate (Craig-Smith 1996). Hall (1997) noted that the secondary tourism activities (STAs) would be useful in diversifying and expanding activities by involving the local indigenous people in the tourism industry. Hall (1997) indicates that this type of tourism must ensure:

- it is achievable and profitable,
- to supplement the village's subsistence economy,
- it enhances the preservation and enrichment of local culture,
- it enhances village stability both socially and economically,
- there is an initial investment indicated and that it is not exceeded, and
- it can be achieved and managed by locals only.

Whilst local residents see tourism as an economic advantage and that it should supplement the village economy and be profitable, it is doubtful that at this stage, that development would be achievable and profitable if managed only by locals as there is a lack of education in this and many other fields. While Hall's (1997) study was specifically directed at the village level, similar issues need to be addressed when considering tourism development in remote regions.

In addressing tourism development in remote areas two major issues are apparent:

- What form of development is possible given the level of exploitable resources available in a remote area and what level of use is sustainable?
- What form of tourism development will interest potential visitors?

These are significant issues for the outer islands, as developing inappropriate forms of facilities may lead to non-sustainable levels of development or the failure to attract sufficient tourists to ensure viability as a destination.

De Burlo (1996) suggests that the government of Vanuatu, together with their planning advisers, feel that indigenous culture is at the centre of tourism development in their country. Crandell (1987) has concerns that indigenous cultures that have experienced little change for centuries are threatened by the powerful influences of Western culture, that often accompany the arrival of mass tourism in the developing world.

Research conducted by Pizam (1978) found that a heavy concentration of tourism on a destination area leads to negative resident attitudes towards tourists and tourism in general. Belisle and Hoy (1980) found that resident perceptions vary with the distance of resident's home from the tourism area while Milman and Pizam (1978) and Lankford and Howard (1994) found that residents employed in the tourism industry had a more positive attitude towards tourists than those not employed in the tourism industry.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT ON ESPIRITU SANTO

Tourism facilities on the outer islands are generally not well promoted and on Espiritu Santo there are relatively few developed tourism attractions. World War II relics and diving are the main two. Air links to the main island are limited to

services of the government airline Vanair, which flies 21 services a week to Espiritu Santo and uses DH8 turboprop aircraft seating 32-37 passengers per flight and DHT turboprop aircraft seating 20 passengers per flight. Both tourists and local residents use these flights. With approximately 362 seats available weekly there is considerable scope to enhance tourism providing that:

- the local community is willing to embrace tourism as a new industry;
- additional infrastructure is constructed where required; currently Espiritu Santo and the near offshore islands have 16 accommodation houses and there is only one superior resort (Bokissa) and five others which are described as adventure lodges (Braynart Publishing 2001); and
- interest in visiting the area can be generated in markets such as Australia.

There appears to be scant recognition however by the government in Port Vila of the tourism aspirations of residents in Espiritu Santo and little effort to identify and develop those elements of the supply side necessary to develop the outer islands. A low level of commitment by government may hinder tourism development in economic and environmental terms. This is surprising considering the importance of special niche tours, or ecotourism in general, to many of the Pacific Islands (King 1997).

Vanuatu is promoted overseas by the National Tourism Office of Vanuatu (NTO) which is represented by Air Vanuatu in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne in Australia, and which has representative offices in Auckland, New Zealand, and in Noumea in New Caledonia. The Tourism Council of the South Pacific (TCSP) represents the National Tourism Office of Vanuatu in Belgium, France, Germany, North America and the United Kingdom. However, as funds are limited, many smaller tourist regions are given a low priority or worse, are simply ignored in various marketing campaigns. These areas have responded by trying to promote their own islands whenever possible. At this stage, the effectiveness of regional promotion is not really known, as little research has been conducted to determine its effectiveness.

The task for remote regions and host communities wishing to encourage tourism is to identify possible markets and market sectors, identify the infrastructure required to service those markets, identify deficiencies in the region's supply side that need to be rectified before preferred markets can be exploited and institute a process to implement required development. The first step is to identify the scope of potential markets and match these with the potential inherent in the region to identify which markets may be possible future targets for development. This requires analysis of the views of both residents of the remote region or "host" community (Mowforth & Munt 1998) and tourist sectors that might be potential targets for future marketing.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The specific research problem investigated centred on identifying the views of the local residents in relation to the economic gains to be derived from tourism. It also sought to explore their beliefs as to the type of experiences they think the Australian tourist expects from their destination. The research then sought to

highlight the areas operation or infrastructure which the local residents thought could be improved on to enhance the tourist experience.

METHODOLOGY

There are a number of sources of secondary research including data gathered from government statistical sources, the tourism industry, general literature on Vanuatu and the outer islands' and travel brochures to the destination. For this research, existing academic and government reports were obtained from the Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University (ANU), Vanuatu Bureau of Statistics (VBS), Government of Vanuatu, the National Tourism Office of Vanuatu (NTOV) and the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA). Obtaining this information provided a sound understanding of the history and growth of tourism to this region.

A questionnaire was considered the most suitable form of research instrument because of the need to obtain primary data. The use of a questionnaire had several advantages. It enabled the researcher to distribute the questionnaire personally, which enabled the respondents to ask questions on any points which they were unclear on. Secondly, it enabled the collection of specific information required for this research (Malhotra 1999). The questionnaire was pilot tested and minor amendments were made. It should be noted that most of the questions were kept to a yes/no or agree/disagree series due to the limited education of the local residents.

This research required the implementation of a survey to be conducted using a questionnaire, to obtain the required primary data.

- A survey was conducted on the Island of Espiritu Santo and the small offshore Tangoa Island. The questionnaire sought to identify the views of the local residents in relation to the economic gains to be derived from tourism. It then required the respondents to advise what type of experiences/facilities they thought the Australian tourist would use on the island. The research then sought to highlight the areas operation or infrastructure which the local residents thought could be improved on to enhance the tourist experience. The survey used both quantitative and qualitative questions and was completed by 61 respondents.

RESULTS

The demographic findings appear first in this section followed by information covering tourism, infrastructure and facilities. The results relating to the age of respondents is shown in Table 1 indicate that 59% of all respondents on Espiritu Santo and Tangoa Island were between the age of 21 and 39 years.

Table 1 Age

Age group	Percentage (%)
20 and under	19.7
21-29 years	32.8
30-39 years	26.2
40-49 years	9.8
50-59 years	9.8
60 and over	1.6

Approximately 46% of respondents were male and 54% were female. The majority of respondents (62.7%) of respondents were employed on a full time basis whilst 38% thought that their employment was tourism related.

Local residents were asked if they wanted tourists to come to Espiritu Santo and Tangoa Island. The majority of respondents (93.4%) said that they did want tourists to come to their island. The remaining 6.6% chose not to answer this question. The main responses given as to why local residents want tourists on their island were that the tourists are good for the economy (73.8%), the local residents like showing visitors their culture (62.3%), and that tourists bring development (54.1%).

The Ni Vanuatu were then asked to indicate which activities/facilities they thought tourists to their island would be interested in using. The top three activities shown in Table 2 were going to the beach, buying local handicrafts and going scuba diving. The least important factor considered by the local people was going to clubs.

Table 2 Activities

Activities/facilities	(%) Yes	Rank	Mean	(%) No	Rank	Mean
Going to beaches	83.3	1	1.17	16.7	14	1.30
Buying local handicrafts	80	2	1.58	18.3	13	1.35
Scuba diving	75	3	1.87	25	12	1.63
Visiting local rainforests	53.3	4	1.72	46.7	11	1.85
Cultural shows	48.3	5	1.51	51.7	10	1.75
Boat cruises	35	6	1.62	65	9	1.85
Fishing	33.3	7	1.90	66.7	8	1.90
Visiting national parks	28.3	8	1.74	71.7	7	1.90
Coach tours	23	9	1.75	75.4	6	1.90
Shopping	21.7	10	1.12	78.3	5	1.30
Restaurants	21.7	10	1.20	78.3	4	1.40
Casino	13.3	12	1.78	86.7	3	1.95
Night clubs	8.3	13	1.88	91.7	1	1.95
Clubs	8.3	13	1.97	91.7	1	1.80

Local residents were asked to simply either agree or disagree to a series of statements relating to tourism. Their responses would be based on their experiences and beliefs and are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Local resident responses

Statement	(%) agree	Rank	(%) disagree	Rank
Tourism is good for employment	98.2	1	1.8	8
More restaurants are needed on the island	96.6	2	3.4	7
More local cultural experiences needed	94.6	3	5.4	6
More tourism related activities needed	92.7	4	7.3	5
More shopping opportunities needed	89.7	5	10.3	4
There should be more tourism on the island	85.7	6	14.3	3
Tourism has no effect on the traditional way of life	40	7	60	2
Tourism has a bad effect on traditional way of life	25.9	8	74.1	1

While most Ni Vanuatu agree that tourism is good for the economy the majority also feel that the tourism experience on their outer island is lacking by way of limited restaurants, shopping, cultural experiences and other tourism related activities. Although the Ni Vanuatu indicated in Table 3 that only a small percentage of visitors would use shopping facilities or restaurants. Perhaps their previous answer regarding activities/facilities reflected the lack of opportunity existing at the present time.

In the next question the Ni Vanuatu were asked to rank in order of importance what they felt should be improved to enhance the tourism experience for the tourists. The findings are shown in Table 4

Table 4 Areas that could be improved for an enhanced tourism experience

Areas	Ranked in order of importance (%)
Roads	65.5
Accommodation houses	18.8
Tourist attractions	14.5
Tourist safety	11.1
Cultural activities	10.7
Medical facilities	9.4
Local handicrafts as souvenirs	8.8
Shopping facilities	3.7

Whilst the improvement of roads is clearly an issue with the local residents there is little difference in numbers between the accommodation houses, tourist attractions and tourist safety.

Conclusion

It should be noted that there were limitations in relation to the research relating to the duration of the study and the time of year in which it took place. However, little research has been conducted with the local resident of Espiritu Santo or Vanuatu in general and this research gives first hand insights into what the locals think of tourism to their region. Whilst the majority of Ni Vanuatu agree that there is a need for tourism there should also be greater consultation between the National Tourism Office of Vanuatu and the local stakeholders which reflects the findings of Hall (1997). There should be additional government investment by Vanuatu in education and training and developing tourism infrastructure (at grass roots level) particularly product suitable to all stakeholders. It is obvious there are some grounds of agreement and of disagreement. Clearly, it would be inappropriate to force the outer islands to develop a tourism industry that they are uncomfortable with. Respecting the wishes of the local residents is important.

Social and cultural issues, which should be considered, are the fact that Australian tourists visiting the outer islands are travelling to an area with a primitive culture or which is considered to have an unsophisticated population (King 1997; de Burlo 1996). This is noted in relation to restaurant and hotel staff who serve guests. Many local residents may find the tourist lifestyle exotic or appealing and compare the clothing and possessions of the tourist to what they have, or do not have themselves (Carlsen 1999). There is the division in comparing what one culture has against another and wanting to take only those elements which are seen as 'good'. Not all groups will see the ways of the tourist as desirable and in some cases resentment by local people toward tourists may be generated by the apparent gap in economic and cultural circumstances (Mistilis & Tolar 2000; Hall 1997).

Further study should be conducted with tourists departing Vanuatu and the off shore island to establish if what the local Ni Vanuatu residents feel the Australian tourists want to experience or participate in, is actually what they used or think they would use should they venture off the main island. A comparison of both findings would assist the local tourism authority to develop a product which is acceptable to both the local residents and the Australian tourists alike.

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