

PROTECTING OUR FUTURE

Cook Islands Sustainable Tourism Development Policy Framework & Goals



Cook Islands Tourism Corporation
Government of The Cook Islands



COOK ISLANDS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOALS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Sustainable Tourism Development Policy Framework (STDPF) presents policies and related indicators that can inform a future National Tourism Strategy for the Cook Islands. The focus is on a monitoring and evaluation framework featuring specific policy guidelines and a set of indicators to measure the progress made towards achieving more sustainable forms of tourism development.

The overarching vision for the STDPF is drawn from Cook Islands Tourism: Tourism advances the well-being of resident Cook Islanders in a way that is socially acceptable, economically viable and environmentally sustainable. The Policy Framework is influenced by and draws on the SPTO Regional Tourism Strategy, the Cook Island's National Sustainable Development Plan and current global best practice in sustainable indicator design. Most importantly the framework and indicators are informed by consultation with a wide range of tourism stakeholders from Rarotonga and Aitutaki. Those consulted range across a number of Ministries, industry sectors and NGOs and also include representatives of the community.

The discussion is framed by seven new sustainable tourism goals: (1) Ensure strong governance, leadership and management; (2) Perpetuate the strong essence of the Cook Islands culture; (3) Develop a strong and sustainable workforce and provide career pathways and employment opportunities for the Cook Islands people; (4) Ensure the protection of the pristine environment through sustainable practices; (5) Adopt a yield driven approach to tourism development – optimising sustainable economic outcomes; (6) Adopt marketing and destination development strategies that promote the unique products and experiences of the Cook Islands in a way that drives sustainable outcomes; (7) Ensure the health, safety and security of all visitors.

Policy guidelines and indicators are presented for each of these goals. A brief outline of what the policy focus is and why it is important is presented. This is followed by indicators designed to measure performance towards meeting policy guidelines. Further details on the indicators are provided in a framework presented towards the end of the document. The STDPF is designed to be a starting point for the development of a more sustainable tourism industry in the Cook Islands: as time progresses so will the range of guidelines and associated indicators.

1. INTRODUCTION: TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Over the past 50 years the Cook Islands has been the focus of a number of tourism planning, strategy development and performance evaluation exercises. A review of the related literature points to a common theme: the need to balance the need for economic opportunity and growth through tourism development against the importance of sustaining the natural and cultural resources upon which both the people of the Cook Islands and the tourism industry depend.

Over this five decade period there is noticeable evolution in the sense of urgency in the message that is being delivered. While previous tourism strategies have addressed the importance of sustainability as a platform for tourism development there has been little true buy-in on the part of key stakeholders to the underlying concepts. This lack of buy-in partly reflects the fact that the environmental and cultural consequences of unsustainable development did not seem like impending dangers in the past, and partly also because there existed no cost effective way to measure the impacts and implications of the approaches being proposed.

Cook Islands tourism now finds itself scaling new heights in visitor arrivals and for the first time there is very real concern being expressed over the ability of national environmental and cultural resources to sustainably provide for the needs of the tourism industry and Cook Island residents. These challenges are not just evident in Rarotonga but are also present in Aitutaki and other outer islands. The steady (and at times rapid) increase in tourism development is putting a strain on the natural environment and stretching the 'fabric' of the society and culture of the Cook Islands.

Tourism is the key driver for economic development in the Cook Islands, contributing over 60% of its GDP. It is vital that a suite of sustainable tourism development policies and related indicators are put in place to build a stronger and more competitive tourism sector, one that can foster strong support from the local community. It is also critical that sustainability is seen as something that underpins every activity in the tourism experience 'chain': encompassing initial marketing messages, the on-island experience and the return home.

The Sustainable Tourism Development Policy Framework has been informed by a broad consultation process with key tourism sector stakeholders in Rarotonga and Aitutaki (see the STDPF Resource Kit for details). The core message to emerge from the consultation is that the time is right for a serious sustainable tourism planning and development process to commence in the Cook Islands – this policy framework represents a starting point. The STDPF is also informed by an extensive review of current policy and related documentation and by global best practice in sustainable indicator development (see the STDPF Resource Kit).

The STDPF takes a SMART approach to indicator development and sustainable tourism planning – Specific; Measurable; Achievable; Relevant; Timely. Research lies at the heart of this approach. It is vital that planning for more sustainable tourism, along with related strategic investment in marketing and product development, be guided by robust evidence.



2. COOK ISLANDS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Cook Islands Sustainable Tourism Development Policy Framework is aligned to tourism objectives at regional (SPTO - South Pacific Tourism Organisation), national (NSDP - National Sustainable Development Plan) and sectoral (CITMC - Cook Islands Tourism Marketing Corporation Act 1998) scales. The document reflects the key messages underpinning these three documents - emphasizing the need to inspire growth and empower local people and promote and develop tourism in a manner that is economically viable, environmentally sustainable and socially acceptable. The range of indicators presented in the Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Plan represent an important broader backdrop to the tourism indicators presented in the STDPF.

i. VISION

The overarching vision for the STDPF is drawn from Cook Islands Tourism:

Tourism advances the well-being of resident Cook Islanders in a way that is socially acceptable, economically viable and environmentally sustainable.

ii. KIA ORANA VALUES

The report builds on the essence of the Kia Orana Values Program that lies at the heart of tourism in the Cook Islands.

TE TANGO – CORE VALUES

KIA ORANA

Kia Orana is the essence of the Cook Islands Maori people and their culture. Just two words, Kia Orana, share our personality, our way of life and our aspirations for the future. The phrase literally means may you live long, or may you have a long and fulfilling life. We want to help our visitors to the Cook Islands to learn how to live a long and fulfilling life the way we do.



MEITAKI

Meitaki means everything is good, well, and thank you all in one. To be Meitaki is to be feeling great. It is how we share how happy we feel. This is how we want our visitors to feel while they are here with us.



MANA TIAKI

Tiaki means keeper or guardian and Mana translates as influence or power. It means guardianship with a sacred purpose, to preserve it for future generations. The keeper has the power or the ability to keep our culture and heritage alive. Mana Tiaki also refers to our responsibility as guardians of these islands and the environment.



AU AKATEREANGA MEITAKI – PRINCIPLES AS HOSTS

How we provide for our visitors while in the Cook Islands and how we interact with them.

UTUUTUANGA *Service and care*

UTUUTU in Maori is to care, cherish or nourish and UTUUTUANGA is to act this way. This value denotes someone matured in skills and common sense providing service with genuine care.

PIRIANGA TAEAKE *Genuine friendliness*

TAEAKE is both a friend and a blood relative to you, and PIRIANGA is relationship. Visitors are treated as our own friends or members of our family

TIAKI MEITAKI *Responsible hosts*

TIAKI MEITAKI is a good or virtuous guardian. This is taken on by hosts and stewards who are responsible for the well-being and safety of visitors and guests.

**SHOW
YOUR MANA
SAY
KIA
ORANA**

**MEITAKI
— MEANS —
IT'S ALL
GOOD**

**MANA TIAKI
— OUR —
CULTURE
— OUR —
ENVIRONMENT
— OUR —
RESPONSIBILITY**

MATENGA *Passion for our industry*

Matenga is passion. We show passion for our island homes, our environment, our traditions and culture, our people and their dreams and aspirations. We share that passion with our visitors through authentic and genuine experiences that reflect the unique character of each of our islands.

AU AKATEREANGA TIAKI – PRINCIPLES AS GUARDIANS

How we develop and grow the tourism industry in union with how we develop as a nation.

AKONO I TE AO RANGI *Preserve our natural environment*

AKONO denotes using our natural resources sustainably to prevent loss or damage. We are responsible for the continued sustainable use and development of our natural resources.

PEU MAORI *Traditions, customs and lifestyle*

The word **PEU** means not only tradition and custom but also lifestyle and culture. **MAORI** means indigenous, being a native of the land.

The traditions and lifestyle of people indigenous to the Cook Islands must be respected. Our visitors are immersed in our traditions and way of life as they come to appreciate and value our rich culture and history.

TURANGA EVANGELIA *Respect for all religious beliefs*

TURANGA here refers to an important status, and **EVANGELIA** means religion.

We enjoy freedom of religion in the Cook Islands and so have deep respect for each other's beliefs. We encourage courtesy and respect amongst our visitors for the religious customs of Cook Islanders while not imposing our own religious beliefs on others.

TUPURANGA TANGATA *Development of our people*

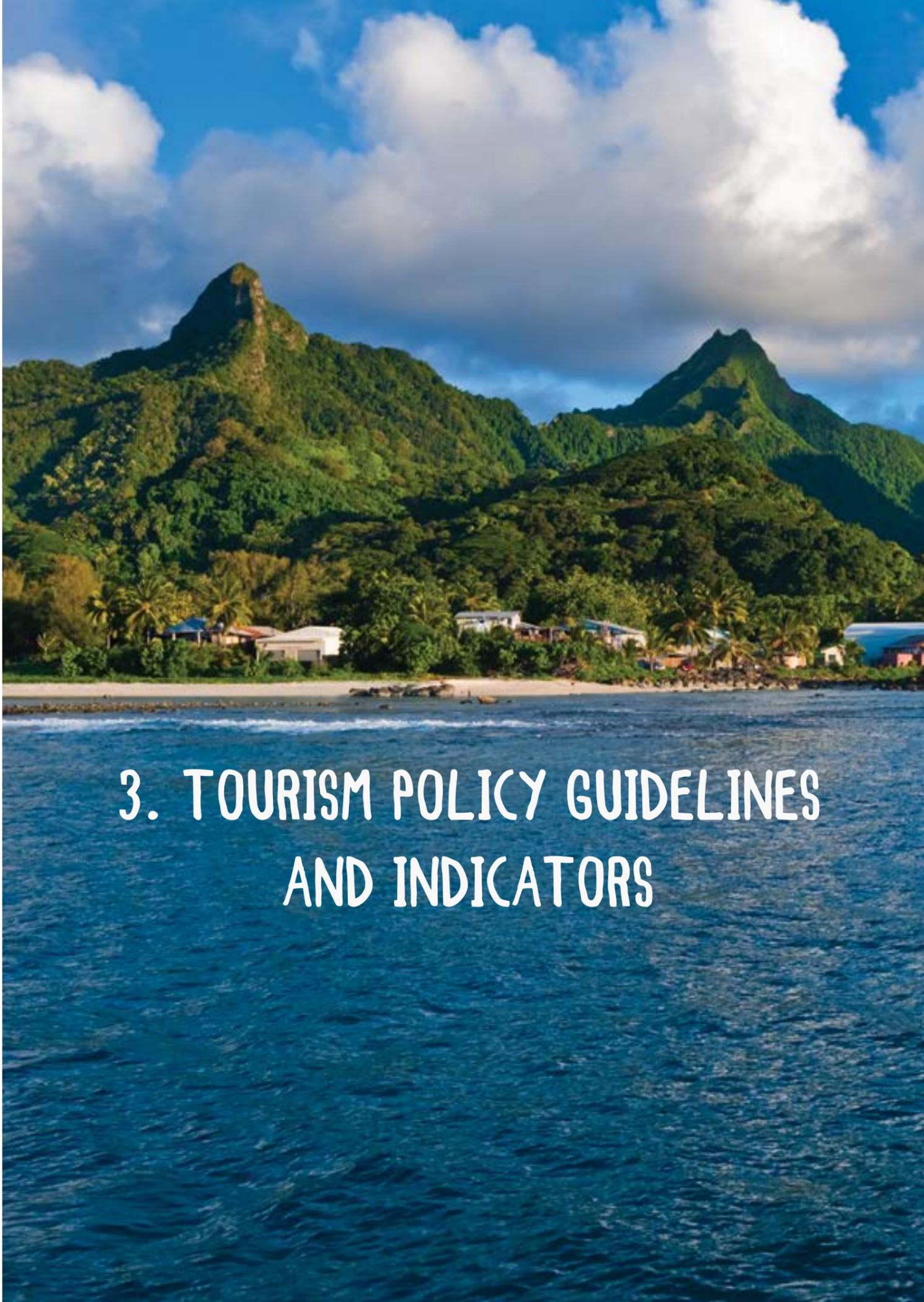
TUPURANGA means to grow or develop and **TANGATA** means people.

Investing in our people is important to foster talent in the industry and community. Through this value we celebrate and reward the essential ingredient in the tourism recipe – our people.

iii. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM GOALS

The following Sustainable Tourism Goals underpin the STDPF and guide the structure of the policy framework:

- GOAL 1** Ensure strong governance, leadership and management to guide the sustainable development of the tourism sector
- GOAL 2** Perpetuate the strong essence of the Cook Islands culture to sustain the distinctiveness of its people and their identity
- GOAL 3** Develop a strong and sustainable workforce and provide career pathways and employment opportunities for the Cook Islands people
- GOAL 4** Ensure the protection of the pristine environment through sustainable practices
- GOAL 5** Adopt a yield driven approach to tourism - optimising sustainable economic outcomes
- GOAL 6** Develop marketing and destination development strategies that promote the unique products and experiences of the Cook Islands in a way that drives sustainable outcomes
- GOAL 7** Ensure the health, safety and security of all visitors



3. TOURISM POLICY GUIDELINES AND INDICATORS

GOAL#1

ENSURE STRONG
GOVERNANCE,
LEADERSHIP and
MANAGEMENT

A. GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

A key message to emerge from the consultation that informed this report is the need for a more coordinated approach to tourism planning and development in the Cook Islands. Tourism is everyone's business and it is vital that stakeholders work together.

» A 'Whole of Government Approach' will underpin future sustainable tourism development

An Executive Tourism Working Group is formed. The leaders of key Ministries that link to tourism meet on an agreed basis to discuss issues affecting this multi-faceted industry. This will raise broader awareness of tourism across government and assist in developing coordinated approaches to challenges and opportunities as they arise. A similar model, featuring a Tourism Advisory Group, is being adopted in Aitutaki and could be developed in other outer islands as tourism opportunities grow.

- Executive Tourism Working Group is formed and meets twice a year. Tourism groupings develop more formal structures in the outer islands.

» A 'Whole of Industry Approach' supports future sustainable tourism development

To achieve sustainable tourism development requires a concerted and coordinated effort from industry. A clear tourism-focused industry voice needs to be developed at a national and individual island level. The Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Industry Council and other stakeholders must look to mechanisms that can provide a more effective single voice for the private sector in Rarotonga and the outer islands and which can attract interest from smaller operators and any business that is linked to tourism.

- A unified tourism voice for industry is developed through a new body or a combination of existing bodies.

» A pathway toward mandatory accreditation of tourism operations in the Cook Islands.

The time has also come for a look at industry accreditation and the role that it can play in moving tourism towards a more sustainable development pathway. All tourism businesses should, by law, be accredited to ensure that standards are being met. It is acknowledged that the current accreditation scheme is voluntary, however a pathway toward mandatory accreditation should be put in place. Without such an approach true development of a more sustainable tourism industry will be difficult to achieve.

- Percentage of tourism businesses accredited
- Accreditation processes are strengthened and refined to link with the STDPF goals and indicators.

» Reliable and robust research will underpin the STDPF and future tourism planning in the Cook Islands.

Good data allows decision-makers to monitor the key elements that determine destination attractiveness and competitiveness. The data provide a barometer through which to measure the performance and sustainability of the industry. Visitor, business and community surveys provide vital insights and can be adapted to gain deeper insights into Outer island tourism:

- Consistent running and provision of visitor, business and community surveys
- Survey design, implementation and analysis skills developed among CIT and Statistics Staff to facilitate future in-country analysis
- The future integration of tourism related questions in the Census
- Mandate collection of occupancy data as part of accreditation
- Develop outer island specific research

» Broader awareness of the tourism industry among all stakeholders is developed

Community, business and government groups require a better understanding of tourism and the benefits, opportunities, costs and challenges that are associated with it. While research based data is useful it must be translated into usable outcomes and resources.

- Regular industry updates are available through the CIT website and other mechanisms (eg workshops, school visits) for all stakeholders

» A User pays approach is tested and adopted to generate funds that can support key environmental and cultural policy initiatives relating to sustainable tourism development

There is a growing trend around the world to channel funds from visitors to help protect the resources that they consume. A voluntary scheme has been introduced in the Cook Islands and is known as the 'Mana Tiaki Program'. If conducted in a transparent and non-intrusive way research shows visitors are willing to contribute.

- National and/or Island specific user payer systems are developed, tested and implemented.
- Amount of revenue available for transparent use in environmental/sustainable development initiatives.

GOAL#2

PERPETUATE THE STRONG ESSENCE OF THE COOK ISLANDS CULTURE

B. CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Cultural heritage and intangible heritage are key elements of the tourism industry in the Cook Islands, underpinning the unique sense of place that the country, and each of its islands, offers visitors. Land lies at the heart of culture and visitors not only experience the terrestrial resources on offer but also the cultural dimensions, museums, creative arts and intellectual property that are important elements of the Cook Islands experience. While it is vital to ensure that the everyday life and culture of local people is shared with visitors this must be done in an appropriate fashion that is informed by the community itself.

» **The community experience of tourism must be better understood and valued alongside the visitor experience**

Hosts are not just the property owners and restaurant staff who visitors interact with – they are the broader host community in all its forms. It is vital that communities throughout the Cook Islands benefit directly from tourism and that they are aware of the benefits (and potential costs) the industry brings. To understand community awareness of and links to tourism it is vital to put in place ongoing community focused research on any islands exposed to tourism development.

- Community support for tourism. The percentage identifying as strongly supportive or showing limited support.
- Community impacts of tourism – local identification of benefits and costs (%)

» **Maximise opportunities for visitors to understand and learn about heritage in all its forms.**

If community are to benefit from tourism it is vital that they have opportunities to link to the industry directly through appropriately developed and managed products and experiences. An increase in visitors engaging in appropriate forms of community focused tourism will support the growth of local jobs and income and also enrich the visitor experience. This is particularly vital in the Outer Islands where the opportunity exists to build on dimensions of everyday life and culture that offer a point of difference to

Rarotonga.

If cultural heritage sites are to be linked more effectively into the tourism experience they require protection, maintenance and interpretation - tourism can play an important role in assisting to fund such sites.

- percentage of visitors engaging in culturally immersive activities
- visitor satisfaction with culturally immersive activities
- number/percentage/range of tourism products and/or experiences featuring community/cultural elements
- amount of user pay funding going to protect heritage sites

» **The Kia Orana Values program is sustained and developed**

The Kia Orana Values program is a vital tool to reinforce the important links between community, culture and sustainable tourism development. It is important that the early gains achieved by this program are sustained through ongoing investment. The success of the approach can be monitored through the community research discussed earlier in this section.

- Funding continues for the Kia Orana program and grows with visitor numbers or as issues require intervention.

GOAL#3

DEVELOP A STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE AND PROVIDE CAREER PATHWAYS AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE COOK ISLANDS PEOPLE



C. GOAL THREE: HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Human resources are critical to the future development and sustainability of the Cook Islands tourism industry. Tourism is, in turn, vital to the development of our people. Human resource development lies at the heart of Matenga or creating a 'Passion for the industry' and it is this passion that can lead to fulfilling careers in Tourism.

» **Enhance local Cook island Maori involvement in the tourism sector**

There is no doubt that industry struggles to attract and retain Cook Island Maori workers. The inability to hire local residents leads to growing demand for international labour and there is increased pressure for the adoption of short term labour contracts/working holiday schemes. While the latter may be necessary in the longer term and during peak seasons, it is essential that the number of Cook Islands Maori staff grow in number – for both the visitor experience and the creation of work and income opportunities. There should also be opportunities communicated to the Cook Islands community overseas to encourage return migration.

- Percentage of tourism workforce Cook Island Maori and number entering workforce
- Number of school leavers entering the industry or moving into relevant training

» **Improve the match between industry skill needs and training provision and grow and promote career pathways in tourism and related sectors**

Tourism needs to feature across the school curriculum and needs to be introduced to children from a young age. It is vital that tourism specific case material be integrated into the broader curriculum above and beyond tourism specific courses. This approach needs to be backed up with a clearer sense being provided of the career pathways that can stem from longer term engagement in the sector.

- Percentage of overall curriculum that features tourism content
- Percentage of students having access to tourism programs at upper levels of study
- Number of aspirational stories developed that feature

tourism career pathways

- Percentage of industry saying skills needs are being met from local labour

» **Increase the role of women in tourism**

It is important to find ways to engage women in tourism whether it be in the formal sector or through more informal activities such as handicraft production. It is critical also to ensure that women are well represented among entrepreneurs, managers and business owners within the sector. It will be essential to target women in the development of aspirational stories related to career pathways.

- Percentage of tourism workforce that is female
- Percentage of tourism businesses owned/managed by women

» **Develop employment data to support better decision making**

Good employment data remains critical if we are to gain clearer insights into the industry's performance and also the experience of its workforce.

- Continue to develop the Business Confidence Index (BCI) to incorporate further relevant labour related information
- Develop dimensions of the community attitude survey to gather insights into worker experiences and perceptions and/or implement a workforce satisfaction survey.
- Conduct tracer studies to support the development of career pathway stories

GOAL#4

ENSURE THE PROTECTION OF
THE PRISTINE ENVIRONMENT
THROUGH SUSTAINABLE
PRACTICES

D. ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

The Kia Orana value Akono I Te Ao Rangi – Preserve our natural environment - is central to the sustainable development of tourism in the Cook Islands. The potentially fragile nature of the resource base upon which tourism depends and the need for coordinated efforts across all agencies to manage environmental challenges must be addressed.

» **General environmental quality in Rarotonga and Aitutaki is vital to tourism and the industry must play a role in protecting this resource.**

Muri and Aitutaki Lagoons are a vital component of the Cook Island's tourism industry with their images integral to marketing efforts and their waters hosting an array of visitor experiences and products. Recent algal blooms have highlighted the importance of collective evidence based approaches to solving environmental degradation and similar approaches need to be adopted for all challenges to environmental quality.

- Visitor comments on general environmental quality
- Percentage of businesses complying with Environmental Warrant of Fitness.

» **The Environmental Impact Assessment process is applied to all new tourism products that have the potential to disrupt or damage the environment**

As the range of tourism products develops it will be important to ensure that new products have an effective EIA conducted – this is especially the case for water or land based products that do not feature permanent structures (e.g. lagoon based activities and terrestrial trail development).

- The percentage of new tourism developments that complete an EIA

» **Increased use of bicycles, hybrid/electric rental vehicles and public transportation by visitors and the tourism industry**

Growing congestion on the roads of Rarotonga threatens the health and well-being of both visitor and resident alike. There is no question that traffic congestion significantly reduces the pristine Pacific allure of Rarotonga. Cycling in particular also enables a slower more interactive form of tourism. These are just some of the reasons to focus on shifting visitors towards bicycles, electric vehicles or public forms of transport. Over time this may become a marketable point of difference for the Cook Islands.

- percentage of visitors using car, cycle or public transport
- percentage of rental transport hybrid or electric

» **Reduce waste generated by tourism related activities and raise awareness**

There are numerous initiatives being put in place to reduce

waste and improve its management. The accreditation system represents an important tool to ensure that tourism operators minimize waste production while also educating visitors.

- percentage of businesses undertaking waste reduction approaches
- percentage of visitor comments on waste/rubbish

» **Enhance water conservation through improved measures and education**

There are concerns around current and future water availability on Rarotonga, Aitutaki and Atiu. It is vital that the industry contribute to efforts to reduce water use and the accreditation system represents a model to achieve these goals.

- percentage of businesses undertaking water conservation approaches, including visitor information/education

» **Tourism development should occur in a fashion and at sites that minimises exposure to the risks of climate change.**

The area of climate change and community resilience is dealt with in some detail by the NSDP. The critical issue for tourism is not just how buildings are constructed but where and certainly it is important to encourage investment away from areas that appear to be most vulnerable to sea level rise and cyclone damage.

- percentage of tourism plant and product located in highly vulnerable settings is reduced

» **Continue to grow and enhance the Vaka Pride and other community focused environmental improvement programs**

The Vaka pride program is an important initiative recently designed to enhance the engagement between communities and the environment they share with visitors. It has recently been expanded to Aitutaki and represents an important tool to support Tourism's contribution to the environment.

- Funding and expansion of Vaka Pride continues to grow.
- Scorecard of every Vaka Pride and Te Vaka O Ru competition.

GOAL#5

**ADOPT A YIELD DRIVEN APPROACH TO
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT – OPTIMISING
SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC OUTCOMES**



E. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

As a major contributor to the Cook Islands economy tourism has a critical role to play in the achievement of the key NSDP goals of equity, income distribution and the alleviation of economic hardship. Tourism also has a vital role to play in shaping future rises in income, and is at the heart of attempts to increase real GDP and develop and promote economic stability.

» **Tourism industry targets are focused on visitor yield not simply visitor arrivals**

An integral part of having a sustainable tourism industry is receiving a healthy mix of visitors of different types and increasing yield from all groups. If visitor spend can be increased per day then it is not as necessary to grow visitor numbers at a potentially unsustainable rate. The key to enhancing yield is to provide good value for money – and this is achieved through developing unique and sustainable local experiences. Other variables of significance include return visitation, length of stay, satisfaction and likelihood of recommendation.

- Yield per visitor per day (spend in country / pre-paid) including yacht and cruise
- Percentages: return visitation; likelihood of recommendation; length of stay; satisfaction

» **Grow and enhance linkages between tourism and local agriculture and handicrafts**

Tourism can play an important role in supporting other sectors of the economy through the creation of linkages to key suppliers. Linkages to the agriculture and handicraft sectors are particularly important ways to generate benefits for local community and women.

- Trends in visitors comments on availability and quality of local food and handicrafts
- Visitor spend on local food and handicrafts
- Availability of local produce and cuisine on menus
- Development of food and agriculture related tourism experiences

» **Build awareness of cruise and yacht sectors and develop effective yield driven strategies Develop further understanding of the cruise and yacht visitors**

While there is relatively limited cruise and yacht traffic to the Cook Islands there is little doubt that this is an area with potential for future growth and that needs it needs be managed carefully.

- Develop data collection strategies for yacht and cruise visits

- Build local stakeholder awareness of cruise/yacht opportunities (percentage aware)
- Focus on increasing yield from yacht/cruise visitors (spend per visit).

» **Enhance economic development in the Outer islands within the constraints of local labour, infrastructure and environmental resources**

The International Visitor Survey (IVS) has revealed, from the perspective of both visitor yield and length of stay, the national economic value of developing outer island tourism. There is a particularly pressing need to build awareness and knowledge of the industry in the outer islands and a need to build human resources/capacity in a way that can link tourism to the cultural and environmental diversity found in these destinations.

- percentage of visitors that travel to Outer islands
- Outer island tourism product development – total number of products; number of products that feature local culture, way of life, food etc
- Visitor Yield in Outer islands – spend per visitor per day
- Outer island research, for example development of ‘spin-off’ questions in the IVS

» **Human resource development lies at the heart of Matenga or creating a Passion for the industry’ and it is this passion that can lead to fulfilling careers in Tourism.**

In attracting and/or facilitating investment it is critical that relevant agencies evaluate the proposal against the key infrastructural and human resource constraints that characterise the local context. It will also be important to evaluate future investment performance in terms of jobs, income, linkage creation and other sustainable tourism development indicators included in accreditation processes.

- Investment prioritized and evaluated on the basis of local infrastructure availability, longer term economic performance/local benefits and evaluated through accreditation.

GOAL#6

ADOPT MARKETING AND DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES THAT PROMOTE THE UNIQUE PRODUCTS AND EXPERIENCES OF THE COOK ISLANDS IN A WAY THAT DRIVES SUSTAINABLE OUTCOMES



F. MARKETING AND DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

In order to achieve the goals outlined above it is vital that the focus not just be on what happens once the visitor arrives – but also how their expectations are shaped before they arrive and what destination development supports the visitor experience.

» **Focus marketing and product development initiatives on increasing visitor yield rather than simply bed nights or arrivals.**

Destination marketing and product development must work hand in hand to provide the type of experiences that can enhance visitor satisfaction, increase yield and support more sustainable development outcomes.

- Audit marketing materials to evaluate the presence of material focused on local food, handicrafts, cultural and other areas prioritised for local linkage. Also audit marketing of outer island experiences.
- Review product development initiatives - what percentage are focused on products that will generate high levels of local economic linkage and local employment. Ensure that information is available in emerging market languages that reflects the broader sustainable tourism development dimensions outlined in this framework.

» **Focus on (RoMI) as well as Cost of Acquisition (CoA)**

While CoA is a valuable tool to reveal the cost per visitor of marketing spend the introduction of a Return on Marketing Investment approach adds an additional dimension. In effect this approach factors in the differential income generated by specific markets: thus while cost of acquisition may be relatively high for long haul travellers their per-person spend is higher than shorter haul visitors.

- Introduce a simple RoMI measure for different markets to complement existing CoA analysis.

» **Tourism planning and policy making will embrace outer island dimensions of the Cook Islands tourism product**

There is considerable opportunity to develop and market stories around everyday life and cultural/environmental experiences in the Outer islands. There is a need to tell these unique stories and to build on the interest expressed by visitors in engaging in deeper cultural experiences. Such an approach not only builds income and employment opportunities on the Outer islands but also increases national length of stay and overall yield.

- Increasing amount/percentage of information and marketing materials featuring Outer island experiences.
- Relative marketing spend on Outer island dimensions increases over time

» **Continue to develop and diversify air linkages to international markets and grow domestic service within the Cook Islands. Ensure that any such development is first assessed against existing infrastructure and local capacity.**

Air links are the life blood of the tourism industry in the Cook Islands both in terms of international links and the domestic distribution of travellers. It will be important to develop links in the future to ensure sustainable visitor flows and diversify markets and gateway access. The recent growth in flights has shown, however, that care must be taken to prepare for and manage increased numbers before they arrive, and due consideration must be given to the following features:

- Can existing resources and infrastructure handle projected visitor arrival increases
- If a new or emerging market is being developed are their sufficient trained workers and business owners and sources of information to be able to manage the increased numbers?

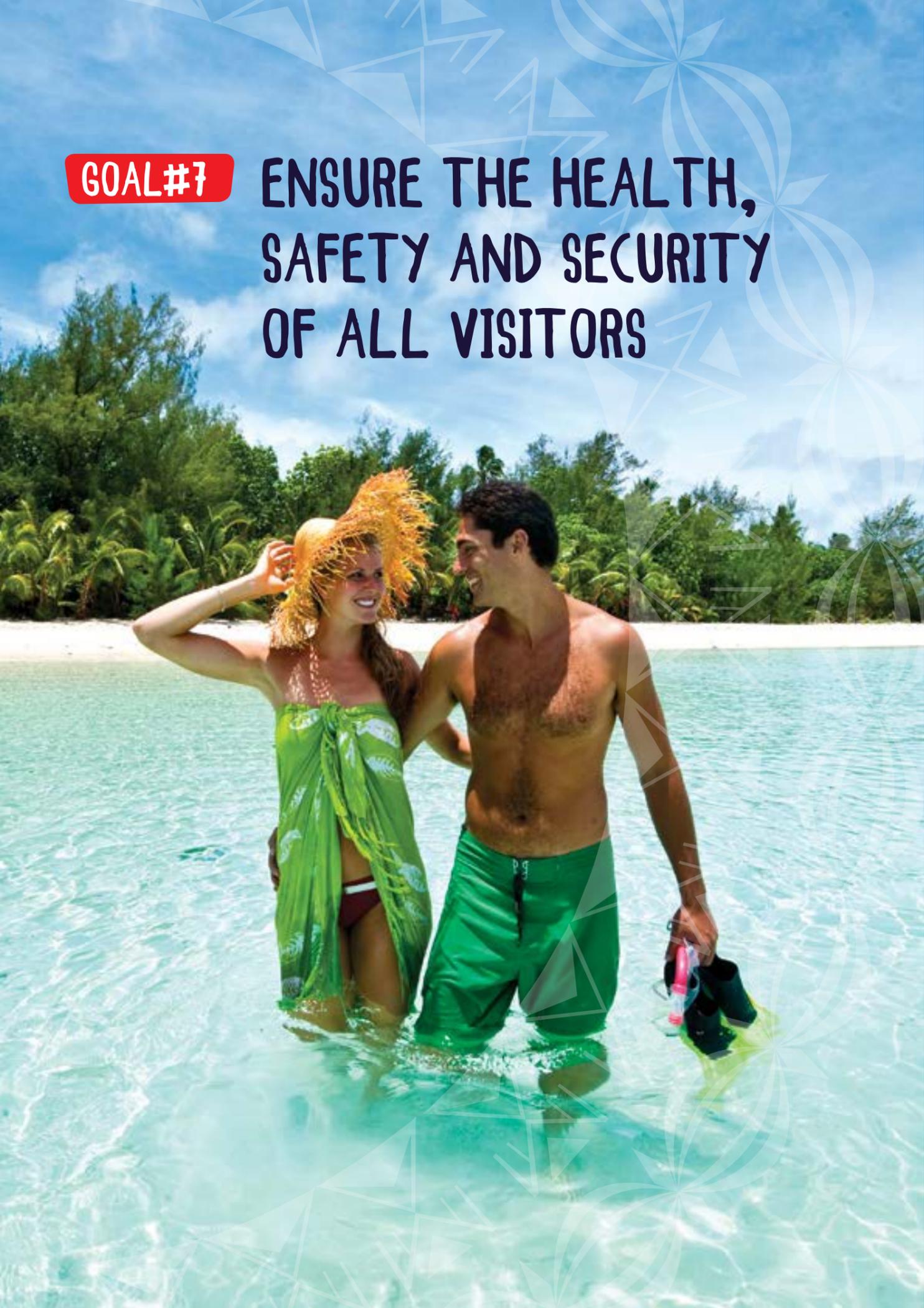
» **Work with industry and other stakeholders to develop disaster response marketing strategies to enable a fast response to devastating events.**

Natural disasters, disease and terrorism all represent distinct threats to the demand for Cook Islands tourism. It is vital that worst case scenario driven strategies be developed and prepared for in the event of such an occurrence. Coordinated use of social media and other platforms by government, industry and community will be required to provide clear and consistent information and to encourage post-event 'bounce-back' as soon as possible. Specific strategies should also exist for Outer islands.

- Development of new/enhancing of existing media response plans at a national and island specific scale.

GOAL#7

ENSURE THE HEALTH, SAFETY AND SECURITY OF ALL VISITORS



G. HEALTH, SAFETY AND SECURITY

The health and well-being of the visitor to the Cook Islands is a critical factor in the development of a more sustainable tourism industry. While there are many facets that can drive policy and indicator development in this area the focus here is on the key issues highlighted and prioritised in consultations.

» **Tourism plays a key role in lobbying for and supporting the creation of a more coordinated emergency response system**

Emergency response is a critical area for tourism – not just in terms of cyclone and other natural disaster response – but also in terms of any form of unexpected tourism related accident. There are currently 3 groups involved in emergency response: Police, Emergency Management Cook Islands and the rescuers themselves (airline, vessels). Coordination between these groups could be improved – perhaps in the form of an integrated First Response Centre. A disaster management plan is also an essential component of the all industry accreditation approach.

- Review of emergency incident response time and effective outcome of responses
- Cyclone/disaster plans in all businesses

» **All visitors are well prepared for the Cook Islands' health and safety environment.**

There is a need to focus on the preparation of visitors for their stay in the Cooks – do they have medical insurance? Are they aware that an ambulance trip will cost money? With increasing numbers of visitors booking through the internet it should be a priority to make this information available to visitors through easily accessible means.

- Review and audit online resources to ensure a clear and consistent message is reaching visitors about health insurance and potential health related costs

» **Compulsory helmets for all visitors renting a motorcycle**

In support of the NSDP's focus on improving health and promoting healthy lifestyles it is important that efforts are made to reduce health related incidents for visitors. There is a particular opportunity to focus on reducing injuries through driving accidents and particularly motorcycle injuries. It will be important for marketing materials to reflect this focus and for rental companies and police to assist in enforcement.

- Number of visitor road accidents is reduced
- Visitor admissions/use of ambulance is reduced

- Percent of visitors using helmets rises to 100% with industry support and gentle enforcement.

» **Enhancing accessibility for visitors with disabilities is a key factor in growing a more sustainable industry.**

It is vital that the Cook Islands look to increase the percentage of its tourism plant and services that can cater to people with disabilities. This market segment is growing rapidly as the population ages in key source markets. Any new tourism structures and plant should be built with accessibility in mind. Tourism facilities should also reflect best practice in accessible fittings and offerings for the hearing/visually impaired.

- Percentage of facilities and buildings with access for those with disabilities
- Percentage of properties highlighting their accessibility status and offerings online

» **Reducing the incidence of stray dogs and related accidents**

If visitors are to be encouraged to leave their vehicles and walk or cycle it is essential that continued efforts be made to reduce the incidence of dogs running loose onto footpaths and roads. A reduction in stray dogs will also have an impact on road related accidents for cyclists and scooter riders and will increase the likelihood of localised economic interactions.

- Percentage of visitors reporting negative experiences with dogs

» **Recording crime against tourists and reducing the prevalence of such crime.**

Police statistics on tourist related crime will be beneficial in developing the tourism sector. Such data not only indicate where safety measures and education are needed but also represent a barometer of community tensions/attitudes towards tourism.

- Regular (6 monthly) updates on core crime statistics relating to tourism

4. MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK



MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

Indicator	Definition	Baseline	Target & Goals	Data	Freq. Report	Key Role
Whole of Government/ Industry approach. Number of meetings per year	Bodies are formed by Government and Industry to enable more coordinated responses	1-2 meetings by end of 2017 Govt and Industry groups	Sustained Govt and Industry coordinated approach to issues and communication	NA	NA	CIT plus other key Government Ministries Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Industry Council
% of industry accredited	All tourism operations in the Cook islands are accredited	2016 Accred. levels	100% accreditation within the next 3 years	Accred. Data	Annual	CIT with inputs from other Ministries
IVS, BCI, AM, CTS continue	International Visitor Survey; Business Confidence Index; Accom. Monitor; Community Tourism Survey	Ongoing barometers continue (IVS, BCI; Accom. Monitor) Development of in-country survey capacity Community Tourism Survey starts 2017	Sustained data collection across all survey instruments.	IVS	Cont. Qtrly	CIT and other partner Ministries/users
Additional spin-off surveys for outer islands Created	Additional outer island data is gathered through the creation of 'satellite' surveys	Ongoing barometer	Sustained data collection	IVS BCI CTS AM	various	CIT, Local Governments
Population Census contains tourism questions	Tourism related questions added	Next census is control	Sustained collection over census periods	Census	5 years	Statistics, CIT
Population Census contains tourism questions	Tourism related questions added	Next census is control	Sustained collection over census periods	Census	5 years	Statistics, CIT
Broader stakeholder awareness (%)	Regular industry updates disseminated to stakeholders	From 2017 broader based dissemination via internet	Sustained regular dissemination of information on the industry	BCI	Qtly and as needed	CIT and other relevant news and info. sources
User-pays funds for environment protection	Funds generated through tax or donation based systems	2017	Fund in place and working at local/national scales. Amount generated increases over time.	Fund	Regular reports	Range of stakeholders from NGO through to Govt

CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Indicator	Definition	Baseline	Target & Goals	Data	Freq. Report	Key Role
Community awareness of and support for tourism (%)	Awareness of and support for the tourism industry at an individual and community level	2017	Strengthening awareness of the industry	Comm. Survey	Bi-Annual	CIT and other partner Ministries
Community involvement in tourism %	Direct involvement in tourism or exposure to it	2017	Increased direct and/or indirect involvement with the industry	Comm. Survey	Bi-annual	CIT and other partner Ministries
Community perceived impacts of tourism %	Perceived impact on income, Quality of life etc	2017	Increased sense of positive impacts, reduction in negative	Comm. Survey	Bi-annual	CIT and other partner Ministries
Visitor engagement with cultural experiences	Visitor interaction with key cultural activities	2013 activity rates	Growth in % of visitors undertaking culturally immersive activities	IVS	Qtrly	CIT and other partner Ministries/users
Visitor satisfaction with cultural experiences	Visitor interaction with key cultural activities	2013 satisfaction rates	Sustained yield increase of 4%	IVS	Qtrly	CIT and other partner Ministries/users
Visitor attitudes to local people	How do community and local people feature the appealing aspects of visit	2012/3	Increase in those stating local people and community dimensions were appealing aspect of visit	IVS	Qtrly	Statistics, CIT
Number of products offering cultural experiences	The range of cultural products available to the visitor. Simple count of product	2017	Increased number of available products with cultural focus	CIT	Annual	CIT
Amount of User pays funding for heritage	The amount of user pays funding that is transferred to heritage attractions	2017	Increased amount of user pays funding to heritage	Fund agent	Annual	CIT, Fund agents
Kia Orana Values	Kia Orana program continues	2016	Increased budget and outcomes	Kia Orana data	Annual	CIT

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Indicator	Definition	Baseline	Target & Goals	Data	Freq. Report	Key Role
% Cook Island Maori/ Female workers	% of tourism workforce that are Cook Island Maori/female	2016	Increase the percentage/ number of Maori/women in the workforce	BCI	Semi-Annual	CIT, other Ministries
% of curriculum featuring tourism content	What % of the curriculum features tourism cases/themes?	2017	To increase the percentage of school programs that feature tourism in some way	Edu data	Annual	CIT, Education
% of students having access to tourism programs	What % of students have access to tourism programs	2017	To increase availability of tourism focused courses at secondary level	Edu data	Annual	CIT, Education
Number of school leavers entering the industry or further training	What is the transition from school into the sector or training	2017	Grow number of school leavers moving into training or industry	Edu Data Tracer study	Annual	CIT, Education, CITI, Industry
% of industry saying skills needs are met	How does industry feel about the match between demand and supply	2016	Increased business confidence in ability to have labour/training needs met	BCI	Semi-Annual	CIT
Number of career pathways stories	A series of career pathway stories are developed	2016	Build stories of success and development through tourism, ensure that mix of skills, careers, gender etc are portrayed	Web audit Tracer Study	Annual	CIT Education, Industry
% of businesses owned/managed by women	% of local tourism operations owned/ managed by women	2017	Increase the percentage/number of women owning, managing businesses in the sector	BCI	Semi-Annual	CIT
Develop labour force research and data	Increase data collection activities around labour force	2016	Build on data collected from other sources. Increase the range of data	BCI	Cont.	CIT

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Indicator	Definition	Baseline	Target & Goals	Data	Freq. Report	Key Role
Visitor comments on environment (+ -)	Visitor feedback on environmental dimensions of their visit – qualitative & quantitative	2012/13	To reduce negative feedback on environmental quality	IVS	Cont. Qtrly	CIT and other partner Ministries/users
% of visitors using car, cycle or public transport	Percentage of visitors who make use of these transport forms.	2012/13	Greater public transport/ zero emission transport, fewer car rentals	IVS	Cont. Qtrly	CIT and other partner Ministries/users
% of rental transport hybrid or electric	Percentage of vehicles for rent that are zero emission or hybrid	2017	Increasing % of rental vehicle stock is electric	Rental	Annual	CIT and Industry
% of tourism developments complying with EIA standards	Trails, underwater activities etc	2017	Apply EIA to all tourism products and experiences that are not fixed in site	Accred	Annual	CIT
% of businesses with water conservation measures	Dual flush toilets and other approaches and tourism education	2017	Part of accreditation. Expand range of businesses accredited	CIT Accred	Annual	CIT and Accreditation program
% Visitors commenting on waste	Visitors discuss least appealing aspects of visit – incl. waste	2012/13	Reduction in % of negative comments on waste/garbage	IVS	Qtrly Annual	CIT
% of tourism enterprises engaged in waste minimization incl. education	Business actively engages in cutting waste and educates clients	2017	100% engagement by industry in waste minimization Accreditation	BCI, Ind Assoc. Accred	Annual	CIT Accreditation program
% of tourism plant in areas vulnerable to climate change	Reduce % of tourism plant located in places vulnerable to GCC	2017	Build GCC resilient and well planned industry that	Co Office etc	As needed	CIT/ Co Office/ Infrastructure
Vaka Pride program expands and budget increases Improvements in Vaka Pride scorecard	Strengthening local program/ initiatives to enhance environment Vaka Pride score card results	2015	Number of vaka pride participants grows Improve scores, improved environment	CIT	Annual	CIT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Indicator	Definition	Baseline	Target & Goals	Data	Freq. Report	Key Role
Visitor Yield	Visitor spend per person per day	2013 Visitor spend	Sustained yield increase of 3-4%	IVS	Cont. Qtrly	CIT and other partner Ministries/users
Return Visitation % Length of Stay etc	Expressed desire to return Av. L. of stay	2012/13	Consistent or rising % return % Rising L of Stay	IVS	Cont. Qtrly	CIT and other partner Ministries/users
Business supply linkages	Business data collected	2016 BCI	Increased linkages to local economy	BCI	Semi-annual	CIT, CoC
Investment impacts	Measurement of the broader economic benefits of investment	Time of investment	Local employment Local economic linkages	Accreditation	As needed	CIT, BTIB, Accreditation
Visitor Comments on availability of local food/HC	Review trends in comments from visitors that focus on food/ Handicrafts	2012/13	Increase in positive feedback and decrease in negative	IVS	Qtrly Annual	CIT, other ministries (eg Agriculture)
Visitor spend on local food/ handicrafts	Data on in country and prepaid spend	2012/13	Increased spend on local food	IVS	Qtrly Annual	CIT, other ministries (eg Agriculture)
Number of food experiences & products	The number of tourism offerings that focus on agri-tourism	2017	Increased role of food and food production in visitor experiences	Accred BCI	Annual Semi Ann	CIT
Local food linkage	Local food and cuisine in menus	2015/16 audits	Sustained increase in local food in menus	Web audit	Cont. Qtrly	CIT and other partner Ministries/users
Cruise/Yacht Yield	Spend in country by cruise and yacht visitors	Data collection required 2018	Implement ongoing data collection	IVS adapt.	Cont.	CIT and other partner Ministries/users
Awareness of cruise and yacht tourism	Support for / awareness of cruise/yacht tourism.	2017	Implement ongoing data collection	CTS	Bi -Annual	CIT and other partner Ministries/users
Outer island research	Enhanced research to inform decisions	2012/13 Survey data mining	Data on the tourism industry in the outer islands	IVS BCI	Ongoing	CIT, Local Government
Visitor Yield in Outer islands	Visitor spend in outer islands	2012/13 Visitor spend	Sustained yield increase of 4%	IVS	Cont. Qtrly	CIT and other partner Ministries/users
% of visitors travelling to Outer Is.	Flow of visitors to outer islands	2012/13 flows	Steady increase based on infrastructure	IVS Pass-port	Qtrly Annual	CIT and others

MARKETING AND DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

Indicator	Definition	Baseline	Target & Goals	Data	Freq. Report	Key Role
Return on marketing investment	Marketing investment: yield per person	2015/16 data	Increase RoMI by specific market sources	IVS, CIT	Annual	CIT
Marketing materials support local linkage creation	Extent marketing materials promote linkages to food, culture	2017 web audit	Greater cultural content in web marketing campaigns	Audit	Annual	CIT
% of Marketing materials support outer islands	To what extent do marketing materials promote outer islands	2017 web audit	Greater outer island content in web and other marketing campaigns	Web-Audit	Annual	CIT
Marketing materials provide sustainable tourism info. in emerging market languages	Relevant material to support sustainable tourism is available in emerging languages	2017	Build the range and amount of content available in emerging market languages	Web audit	Annual	CIT and other partner Ministries/users
Develop/Refine Rapid Marketing Response plan for Disasters	Enhance/create stronger plans to respond to disaster scenarios	2017	Build the range and strength of possible responses	CIT	Bi-Annual	CIT
%/No. of product that is highly linked to local economy	Product dev. supports economic linkage in areas	2017	Growth in number and range of highly linked, culturally immersive product	Accred	Annual	CIT
%/No. of product that is outer island focused	Product dev. supports Outer Is. and culturally immersive tourism	2017	Growth in number and range of outer island product offerings	Accred	Annual	CIT
Increased air linkages international and domestic	Build stronger and sustained air links BUT grow links only at a rate that reflects current capacity	2017	Review all proposed air links in terms of impact on current carrying capacity for tourism. Grow all air links in a considered fashion	Various	As needed	CIT, all related Ministries
Amount of User pays funding for heritage	The amount of user pays funding that is transferred to heritage attractions	2017	Increased amount of user pays funding to heritage	Fund agent	Annual	CIT, Fund agents

HEALTH, SAFETY AND SECURITY

Indicator	Definition	Baseline	Target & Goals	Data	Freq. Report	Key Role
Disaster Response effectiveness	Performance in response to emergency situations	2017	Improving response effectiveness	Emer serv.	Variable	CIT and emergency response services
% of operators with disaster plans in place	Businesses have clear and workable cyclone/disaster response plans	2017	Increased number of businesses with plans – rising to 100%	CIT Acc.	Annual	CIT Accreditation
Online info. easily available on health care costs etc	Increase the number of visitors aware of the health care costs in the Cook islands	2017	Prepared visitors Reduction in visitor complaints / issues around health charges	Health	Annual	CIT Health
Visitor road accidents	Vehicular and cycle accidents reported	2017	Implement ongoing data collection	Police reports	Semi-annual	Police, CIT
Percent of visitors using helmets	Visitors using helmets when using motor cycle and bicycle.	2017	All visitors use helmets	Rental Cos	Semi-annual	Rental vehicle sector, CIT
Visitor admissions/use of ambulance	Records of visitors using medical services	2017	Reduce number of visitor admissions/ use of services	Health	Annual	CIT, Health
% of new and existing tourism businesses that are access friendly	Increase the accessibility of the Cook islands tourism industry	2012	Increase the % of tourism plant that features access friendly design and increase access related information available online	Intaff CIT Accred	Bi-Annual	Intaff CIT Accreditation
Percentage of Facilities and buildings with access features	Accessibility audit – access and internal fittings	Previous audit 2012. 2018 next	Ensure sustained development in accessibility for visitors	Phys. Audit Accred	5 years Accred	CIT, Intaff,
Percentage of properties highlighting accessibility in marketing	More information provided to the visitor about accessibility options	2017		Web audit	Bi-annual	CIT
Reduction in visitor reports of dog related issues	Stray dogs annoy visitors on the road and foot paths	2012 onward	Reduction in IVS data showing visitor dissatisfaction with stray dogs.	IVS	Qtly Annual	CIT Esther Honey Health
Visitor related crime %	Tourism related crime reported to the police	2017	Reduction in crime and improved community-visitor relations	Police Crime Stats	Regular Annual	Police, CIT

CONCLUSION

A focus on sustainability must lie at the centre of all future tourism planning in the Cook Islands. This Sustainable Tourism Development Policy Framework represents a simple starting point upon which a more comprehensive and better resourced Tourism Master Plan for the Cook Islands can be developed.

Whether tourism continues to grow in the Cook Islands, or experiences a down turn, challenges will inevitably be faced in attempting to achieve more sustainable forms of development.

The critical thing is to be able to respond to these challenges in a resilient and effective fashion. To do so requires a coordinated effort across government and industry and a realisation that “we are all in this together”. There is a need for a common focus and vision backed up by robust evidence based indicators of industry performance.

While the recent growth in visitor numbers has been welcomed by many, and has created important income and employment opportunities for the country, there is no question that both industry and community have concerns about the ability of current levels of infrastructure and labour to meet visitor demand.

There is also a strong sense that “Tourism needs to provide more opportunities for local people” and that a “Closer partnership between tourism and community is needed”. In this respect it is vital to not only monitor the

environmental and economic performance of the industry but also its ability to create sustained benefits for the local population.

In the end what is critical is “trust, understanding and responsibility” between the visitor and the host.

Underpinning both the Kia Orana Values program and the STDPF is the core principal of Tupuranga Tangata – Development of our people.

It is critical that the Cook Islands community see the benefits of tourism flowing into jobs, income and opportunity and that the industry does not degrade local quality of life: if tourism works for the people, then the people will work for tourism.



