

# UNESCO PACIFIC WORLD HERITAGE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ASSESSMENT



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ORGANISATION**



**PACIFIC  
SUSTAINABLE  
TOURISM**

This report was prepared by TRC Tourism for SPTO and UNESCO Office of the Pacific States.

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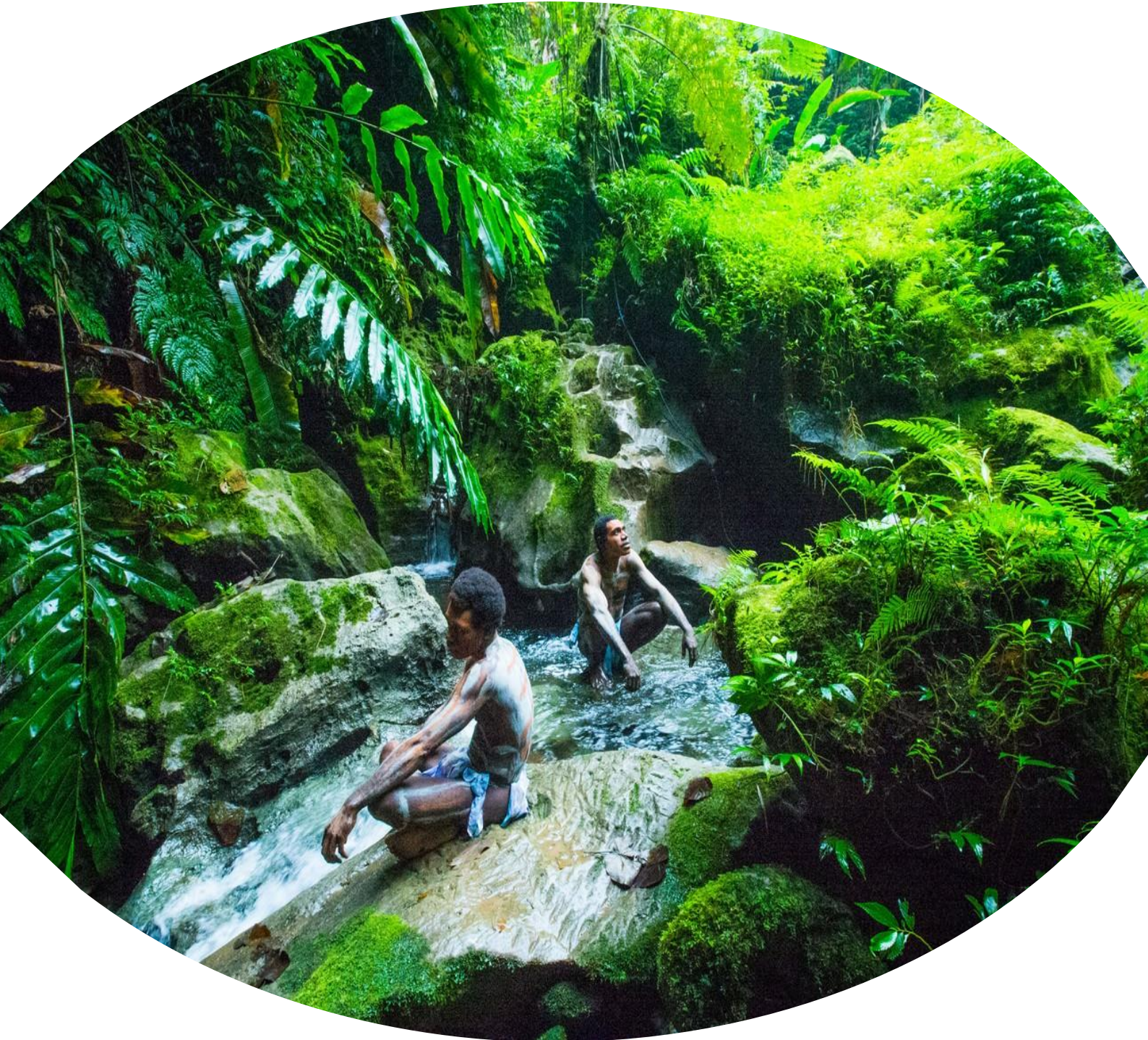


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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a comprehensive assessment of the sustainable tourism potential of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the Pacific. It examines various factors influencing tourism, including socio-political contexts, management strategies, and stakeholder dynamics. The assessment acknowledges the uniqueness of each site and identifies consistent themes impacting on their tourism potential. It is intended to inform the development of further initiatives to encourage sustainable tourism that protects the integrity and supports the conservation of each site, brings income generation opportunities for local communities, and contributes to greater awareness of the Outstanding Universal Values of the sites across the Pacific.

The report evaluates the current situation of tourism at the ten World Heritage Sites in the Pacific. The World Heritage sites are:

- 1 East Rennell – Solomon Islands
- 2 Kuk Early Agricultural Site – Papua New Guinea
- 3 Lagoons of New Caledonia: Reef Diversity and Associated Ecosystems<sup>1</sup>
- 4 Chief Roi Mata’s Domain - Vanuatu
- 5 Phoenix Islands Protected Area - Kiribati
- 6 Bikini Atoll Nuclear Test Site – Marshall Islands
- 7 Levuka Historical Port Town - Fiji
- 8 Nan Madol: Ceremonial Centre of Eastern Micronesia
- 9 Taputapuātea, French Polynesia<sup>1</sup>
- 10 Rock Islands Southern Lagoon, Palau

Six sites are inscribed for their cultural values, three sites are inscribed for their natural values and one site is inscribed for its mix of outstanding natural and cultural values. There are currently two properties listed as in Danger: East Rennell – Solomon Islands and Nan Madol - Ceremonial Centre of Eastern Micronesia.

The potential for sustainable tourism for each World Heritage Site is shaped by its distinct values, location, accessibility, historical status as a tourist destination or attraction, existing level of tourism development pre-World Heritage listing, and various other factors including the site's socio-political context, its management strategies and the level of collaboration across government, community and industry.

Sustainable tourism, if planned and managed well, can bring about social and economic benefits and the empowerment of local populations. However, if tourism is poorly planned or managed, it can lead to negative impacts on the values of site and the intended benefits for local communities will not be realised.

Learnings from elsewhere indicate that the benefits that can be accrued from tourism activity at World Heritage Sites are rarely accidental or unintended – they are overwhelmingly the result of coordinated and well thought through efforts to achieve targeted change. In short, sites that have achieved significant socio-economic benefits have had a clear logic chain from the identification of the issues and problems they wished to address, a clear understanding of how World Heritage Site status could be used to catalyse change, following through to investing in the resources, activities, capacity and processes to deliver the impacts desired.

In recognition of the need for greater co-ordination, UNESCO and the Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO) are working in collaboration to further the opportunities for sustainable tourism across the Pacific’s ten World Heritage sites. This collaboration is identified as a priority in the Pacific Regional World Heritage Action Plan 2021-2026.

### Key Findings

1. **Governance and Coordination:** The report highlights the diversity in governance and management structures across the sites, often involving a complex mix of stakeholders. A critical finding is the lack of coordination among various government agencies, which hampers the effective management of these sites for tourism.
2. **Visitor Infrastructure and Experience Development:** Many World Heritage sites face challenges in developing adequate visitor infrastructure and experiences. This results in limited tourism products and experiences available for visitors.
3. **Culture and Community:** The potential for closer collaboration with local communities is recognised as a key to developing sustainable tourism practices. Emphasis is placed on community involvement in planning and

<sup>1</sup> not included in the countries covered by the UNESCO Office for the Pacific States.

managing tourism while preserving traditional knowledge and practices.

4. **Community Expectations:** There is a disconnect between community expectations and the actual benefits realised from World Heritage status. Some communities have expressed that they are not experiencing any direct economic advantages associated with the areas being inscribed on the World Heritage List, which is contrary to their expectations. This is particularly evident at Levuka World Heritage Site.
5. **Marketing and Promotion:** Despite having tourism policies and strategies, there is minimal promotion and marketing of World Heritage Sites across the Pacific. This underutilisation affects the visibility and attractiveness of these sites to potential visitors.
6. **Tourism Management Capacity and Resources:** Post-inscription, many site managers reported a reduction in financial support over time, affecting their ability to manage tourism effectively.

#### Recommendations

1. **Develop a Community-Based Tourism Toolkit:** A UNESCO World Heritage Community-Based Tourism Toolkit for the Pacific is proposed to provide a guidance for developing sustainable tourism. The toolkit will emphasise local community management and involvement, equitable benefit sharing, and conservation.  
**Pilot the Toolkit at Levuka World Heritage Site Ovalau, Fiji:** Implementation of the Community-Based Tourism Toolkit at Levuka and across Ovalau is recommended, focusing on socio-economic benefits, sustainable tourism, infrastructure investment, and community empowerment. If successful, expand the program to other sites across the Pacific.

2. **Optimize Community Capacity:** A multi-year skill development program is recommended for community members in tourism-related activities, emphasizing experience development, business management, and sustainable practices.
3. **Strengthen Government Coordination Mechanisms:** Form inter-agency committees and develop joint management plans for World Heritage Sites, encouraging resource and expertise sharing among national and provisional/local government agencies that involve tourism, cultural and environment representatives. This would also support resource mobilisation for visitor infrastructure.
4. **Establish a Pacific World Heritage Knowledge Sharing Network:** Create a network to facilitate information exchange on sustainable tourism planning, management, and cultural tourism opportunities among World Heritage Site managers, tourism stakeholders and community representatives.
5. **Leverage the World Heritage Brand in marketing and promotion:** Build knowledge and understanding of how to leverage the UNESCO World Heritage brand in regional and national tourism marketing strategies, emphasising the unique values of these sites and their regional and global significance.
6. **Increase Awareness of World Heritage Values:** Develop programs that are aimed at increasing awareness about the significance of World Heritage Sites, targeting both local communities and tourists at a regional and national level.
7. **Collaborate with the Tourism Industry to develop World Heritage experiences:** Promote joint initiatives between tourism enterprises and World Heritage Site management authorities, focusing on training and sustainable tourism planning and development.

Figure 1. Recommendations to support Sustainable Tourism in Pacific World Heritage Sites



An underwater photograph showing two divers in a clear blue ocean. One diver is in the foreground, wearing a blue shirt and a large oxygen tank, looking towards the camera. Another diver is in the background, swimming away. The seabed is covered in various types of coral, including a large, rounded, yellowish-green coral in the foreground. Bubbles from the divers' breathing apparatus are visible in the water.

**The UNESCO World Heritage brand is an indispensable tourism resource for Pacific nations in terms of differentiation and competitiveness. The challenge is to leverage the potential opportunity it presents.**



# 1 Introduction

This section provides an overview of the project including background, purpose and method of analysis and an outline of the structure of the report.

## 1.1 Overview

One of the objectives of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. The 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage aims to identify, protect, present and transmit natural and cultural heritage to future generations. The Convention provides structures and processes to enable State Parties to identify potential sites that are of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and sets out their role in protecting and preserving them. By signing the Convention, each country pledges to conserve not only the World Heritage sites situated on its territory, but also to protect its national heritage.

Most Pacific nations have ratified the World Heritage Convention, and the region currently has ten inscribed sites. Eight of the sites are in the Pacific SIDS and are covered by the UNESCO Office for the Pacific States. Two sites are located within French Territories. The sites are extremely diverse, showcasing universally outstanding biomes, marine and terrestrial ecosystems as well as geological and evolutionary processes and culturally significant places due to their connection with the customs of Pacific Islanders and the development of island societies. This extraordinary heritage is often managed through traditional practices that reinforce the inseparable relationship between communities, cultures and the natural environment and the need to strengthen culture and the protection and utilization of traditional knowledge in various development contexts.

Six sites are inscribed for their cultural values, three sites are inscribed for their natural values and one site is inscribed for its mix of outstanding natural and cultural values. The sites inscribed to the World Heritage List outlined below and described further in Table 1 and Appendix A.

- 1 East Rennell – Solomon Islands
- 2 Kuk Early Agricultural Site - PNG
- 3 Lagoons of New Caledonia: Reef Diversity and Associated Ecosystems\*
- 4 Chief Roi Mata's Domain - Vanuatu
- 5 Phoenix Islands Protected Area - Kiribati
- 6 Bikini Atoll Nuclear Test Site – Marshall Islands
- 7 Levuka Historical Port Town - Fiji
- 8 Nan Madol: Ceremonial Centre of Eastern Micronesia
- 9 Taputapuātea, French Polynesia\*
- 10 Rock Islands Southern Lagoon, Palau

\*French Territories are not included in the countries covered by the UNESCO Office for the Pacific States.

As a signatory to the World Heritage Convention, each nation has several obligations which include providing educational and information programmes to strengthen appreciation and respect by communities and visitors, to give the heritage a function in the life of the community and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals.

When the OUV's of a property inscribed on the World Heritage List is threatened by serious and specific dangers, the Committee considers placing it on the List of World Heritage in Danger. When the Outstanding Universal Value of the property which justified its inscription on the World Heritage List is lost, the Committee considers deleting the property from the World Heritage List. There are currently two properties listed as in Danger: East Rennell – Solomon Islands (listed in 2013) and Nan Madol - Ceremonial Centre of Eastern Micronesia (listed in 2016).

TABLE 1 WORLD HERITAGE SITES IN THE PACIFIC <sup>2</sup>

States parties to the Convention	Inscribed World Heritage sites	C –Cultural site N –Natural site CN –Mixed site	Year of Inscription
<b>Fiji</b>	Levuka Historical Port Town	C	2013
<b>French Polynesia</b>	Taputapuātea	C	2017
<b>Kiribati</b>	Phoenix Islands Protected Area	N	2010
<b>Marshall Islands</b>	Bikini Atoll Nuclear Test Site	C	2010
<b>Federated States of Micronesia</b>	Nan Madol: Ceremonial Centre of Eastern Micronesia	C	2016
<b>New Caledonia</b>	Lagoons Reef Diversity and Associated Ecosystems	N	2008
<b>Palau</b>	Rock Islands Southern Lagoon	CN	2012
<b>Papua New Guinea</b>	Kuk Early Agricultural Site	C	2008
<b>Solomon Islands</b>	East Rennell	N	1998
<b>Vanuatu</b>	Chief Roi Mata’s Domain	C	2008



<sup>2</sup> World Heritage sites as at December 2023.

## 1.2 World Heritage and Tourism in the Pacific

Tourism is one of the main pillars sustaining growth and development in the Pacific. For many nations it is the major driver of economic growth, foreign exchange earnings and employment and contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Prior to the Covid 19 pandemic tourism contributed \$1.5 billion to the region while employing over 5 million people either directly or indirectly.

Sustainable planning and management of tourism is also one of the most pressing challenges and potential opportunities concerning the future of the World Heritage Convention.<sup>3</sup> The elements that contribute to World Heritage sites as successful and sustainable visitor destinations are intertwined and circular. The natural, cultural values that people seek to visit at World Heritage sites require protection and management. They require investment and community support to enable this protection and management, visitor infrastructure and experiences for visitors to access and enjoy the site, and promotion of the site can only take place once infrastructure and visitor services are in place. Tourism, if managed well, can bring about social and economic benefits and the empowerment of local populations. There are also potential cultural benefits as practices and skills are transmitted from one generation to the next. However, if tourism is poorly planned or managed, it can on the contrary lead to negative impacts on the OUVs and to local communities.

How the Pacific World Heritage community responds to the challenges and opportunities sustainable tourism provides is a major factor in the success or otherwise of implementing the aims of the Convention.

UNESCO and the Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO) are working in collaboration to further the opportunities for sustainable tourism at World Heritage sites across the Pacific according to the priorities in the Pacific Regional World Heritage Action Plan 2021-2026. As the regional focal point for tourism, the SPTO and its stakeholders aim to achieve economic growth through tourism in national economies to improve the livelihoods of Pacific people, whilst protecting the unique environmental and cultural heritage through sustainable development.

## 1.3 Project Aims

The aim of this project is to assess the existing situation with respect to the development of sustainable tourism at World Heritage Sites across the Pacific. Through an increased understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with tourism development across the region, this project will inform the development of further initiatives to encourage sustainable tourism that protects the integrity and supports the conservation of each site, brings income generation opportunities for local communities, and contributes to visitors' awareness about the sites OUVs.

The project has three objectives:

- provide an up-to-date analysis of tourism at the World Heritage Sites across the Pacific
- understand the context for tourism development at World Heritage Sites and the challenges and opportunities facing them
- provide recommendations to support the development of a Pacific World Heritage Tourism Strategy.

## 1.4 Methodology

### 1.4.1 Desktop review

A desktop review was undertaken to understand the strategic context for each World Heritage site across the Pacific. The review included key documents prepared by State Parties to the Convention, IUCN, UNESCO World Heritage Centre and/or considered by the World Heritage Committee as well as the State of Conservation (SoC) reports, mission reports and periodic reports.

The review also analysed the tourism context of each nation within which the World Heritage site is located.



<sup>3</sup> UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Programme

Specific information was collated under several themes, informed by the UNESCO World Heritage approach to Sustainable Tourism<sup>4</sup> (refer Section 2 for further information) as follows:

- Destination Overview
- Site Description and Governance
- Market Demand Analysis
- Supply and Competitiveness
- Attractions and other tourism products
- Supporting infrastructure and services
- Community empowerment and participation
- Heritage, cultural, social and ecological considerations
- Communication & Marketing
- Resources and institutional capacity

The methodology is presented Figure 2.

#### 1.4.2 Stakeholder Engagement

Representatives from each of the ten sites were invited to participate in discussions, together with the UNESCO Focal points in each nation and National Tourism Organisation representatives. Discussions centred on the following themes:

- Status of tourism at the site
- Community awareness and interest
- Tourism-related impacts/benefits
- Community and industry involvement in developing/managing the site
- Stakeholder collaboration in the site
- Initiatives promoting sustainable tourism
- Priorities for sustainable tourism and current needs
- Request for up-to-date information/documents on the site.

#### 1.4.3 Site Visits

Site visits were planned for two World Heritage Sites – Levuka, Fiji and East Rennell, Solomon Islands. The sites were selected by UNESCO Office for the Pacific States to represent a diverse typology of sites and to include a site on the in-Danger list.

A site visit to Levuka Port Town occurred in August 2023. The meeting was facilitated by the Levuka World Heritage Site Manager and was attended by representatives from the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts, the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, SPTO and the regional council. Individual meetings included Sevusevu to the four high chiefs of

Ovalau and consultation with the Chiefs, and Mata ni Tikina and Turaga ni koro of 26 villages in Ovalau. Separate meetings were held in the villages of Tokou, Lovoni, Naiviteitei, Nukutocia and Levuka vakaviti. Meetings were also held with the Levuka Tourism Association and the Levuka Business and Infrastructure working group and rate payers/general community.

A workshop was held in August 2023 with stakeholders associated with the East Rennell World Heritage Area in Honiara. Representatives from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Tourism Solomon Islands and Investment Solomons attended the meeting, together with the site manager and provincial representatives from Bellona. A site assessment of East Rennell was not conducted due to the logistical issues associated with travel.

#### 1.4.4 Reporting

The final component of the project involved summarising the key findings and guidance for the development of a Pacific World Heritage Destination Tourism Strategy.

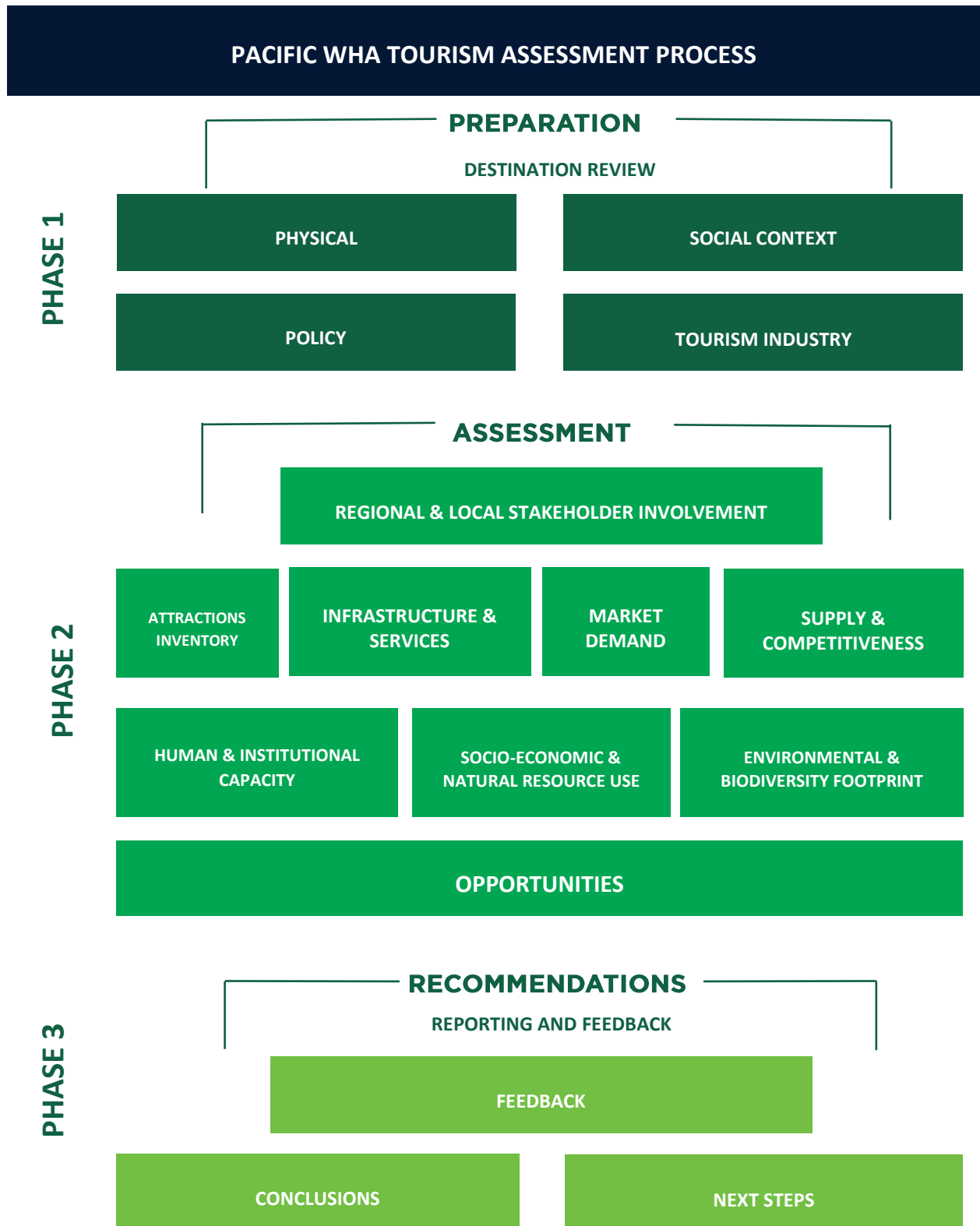
## 1.5 Report Structure

This report is structured as follows:

- Section 1 - Introduces the project and the methodology used to assess tourism across the World Heritage Sites.
- Section 2 - Summarises the global, regional and national context for tourism development at the World Heritage Sites.
- Section 3 - Summarises the current situation associated with tourism; considers the influences on management of the sites and their operating context.
- Section 4 - Outlines key findings of consultation and the desktop analysis with a focus on areas that need to be in place for sustainable tourism development in World Heritage Sites.
- Section 5 - Recommendations for development of sustainable tourism across the World Heritage sites and provides direction and guidance for UNESCO and SPTO.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tourism/>

Figure 2. Overview of methodology - Pacific World Heritage Areas Sustainable Tourism Assessment





## 2 The Global, Regional and National Context for Sustainable Tourism

This section summarises the range of strategies and frameworks that provide the context and direction for sustainable tourism across the ten Pacific World Heritage sites and their role in advancing the global, regional and national commitments.

### 2.1 Global Context

#### 2.1.1 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Tourism is widely recognized as a key sector for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), given its major potential to contribute to jobs and wealth in the Pacific.

In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, tourism explicitly features as a target in Goals 4, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 14 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production, and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, respectively. Given the cross-cutting nature of the sector, it has the potential to contribute directly and indirectly to all 17 SDGs.

Eight of the ten sites are Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Like many SIDS, Pacific SIDS are characterized by geographic isolation with a vast expanse of 30 million square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean, small land area and population sizes and resource constraints.

One of the five priorities of the UNESCO SIDS Action Plan<sup>5</sup>, is enhancing capacities for the safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage, including marine and underwater heritage, as well as living heritage and the creative and sustainable tourism. This priority focuses on implementing normative instruments, including the UNESCO Culture Conventions, as well as adopting national laws and policies. To support the Action Plan, UNESCO runs a World Heritage Small Island Developing States Programme, which supports the strengthening of site management practices, as well as assisting with new nominations to the World Heritage List.



<sup>5</sup> UNESCO SIDS Action Plan, 2016

## 2.1.2 UNESCO Policy and Principles for Sustainable Tourism

UNESCO's policy guidelines define the relationship between World Heritage and sustainable tourism as two-way: World Heritage offers tourists/visitors and the tourism sector destinations; tourism offers World Heritage the ability to meet the requirement in the Convention to 'present' World Heritage properties, and a means to realise community and economic benefits through sustainable use. It recognises that tourism is critical for World Heritage as a major means by which the performance of World Heritage properties, and therefore the standing of the Convention, is judged. It also views tourism in relation to:

- the potential for tourism infrastructure to damage the sites Outstanding Universal Value
- the threat that World Heritage properties may be unsustainably managed in relation to their adjoining communities
- sustaining the conservation objectives of the Convention whilst engaging with economic development
- realistic aspirations that World Heritage can attract tourism.

It recognises that the impact of tourism, and the management response, is different for each World Heritage site and each site has many options to manage the impacts of tourism. It states that the management responses of World Heritage properties need to work closely with the tourism sector; be informed by the experiences of tourists/visitors to the visitation of the property; include local communities in the planning and management of all aspects of properties, including tourism. The application of UNESCO Policy and Principles for Sustainable Tourism is limited across the Pacific World Heritage sites.

## 2.1.3 UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Program

UNESCO's work in relation to tourism planning in World Heritage areas is closely linked to their contribution in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. The goal is to develop consistent approaches that help managers to protect the heritage and at the same time facilitate sustainable tourism development.

UNESCO's Sustainable Tourism program supports the World Heritage Committee and site managers to use tourism as a positive force to retain World Heritage site values and to help mitigate threats. It is aimed at promoting responsible and sustainable tourism practices at World Heritage Sites. With a focus on preserving cultural heritage, safeguarding natural resources, and empowering local communities, the program fosters tourism that leaves a positive impact on both the environment and society.

The UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Toolkit provides a helpful framework for sustainable tourism at World Heritage site in general. Among other things, it examines cooperation with local partners, communication concepts and the management of visitor behaviour.<sup>6</sup>

The UNESCO Principles for Sustainable Tourism provide a best practice framework to ensure that heritage resources will be protected and conserved and the many positive benefits of tourism realised. They serve as a useful guide for the development of tourism at World Heritage sites across the Pacific and are presented on the following page.

<sup>6</sup><https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/activities/documents/activity-669-7.pdf>





## **UNESCO Principles for Sustainable Tourism<sup>7</sup>**

### **Principle 1 - Contribution to World Heritage objectives**

Tourism development and visitor activities associated with World Heritage Properties must contribute to and must not damage the protection, conservation, presentation and transmission of their heritage values. Tourism should also generate sustainable socio-economic development and equitably contribute tangible as well as intangible benefits to local and regional communities in ways that are consistent with the conservation of the properties.

### **Principle 2 - Cooperative partnerships**

World Heritage Properties should be places where all stakeholders cooperate through effective partnerships to maximise conservation and presentation outcomes, whilst minimising threats and adverse impacts from tourism.

### **Principle 3 - Public awareness and support**

The Promotion, Presentation and Interpretation of World Heritage Properties should be effective, honest, comprehensive and engaging. It should mobilise local and international awareness, understanding and support for their protection, conservation and sustainable use.

### **Principle 4 - Proactive tourism management**

The contribution of tourism development and visitor activities associated with World Heritage Properties to their protection, conservation and presentation requires continuing and proactive planning and monitoring by Site Management, which must respect the capacity of the individual property to accept visitation without degrading or threatening heritage values. Site Management should have regard to relevant tourism supply chain and broader tourism destination issues, including congestion management and the quality of life for local people. Tourism planning and management, including cooperative partnerships, should be an integral aspect of the site management system.

### **Principle 5 - Stakeholder empowerment**

Planning for tourism development and visitor activity associated with World Heritage Properties should be undertaken in an inclusive and participatory manner, respecting and empowering the local community including property owners, traditional or indigenous custodians, while taking account of their capacity and willingness to participate in visitor activity.

### **Principle 6 - Tourism infrastructure and visitor facilities**

Tourism infrastructure and visitor facilities associated with World Heritage Properties should be carefully planned, sited, designed, constructed and periodically upgraded as required to maximise the quality of visitor appreciation and experiences while ensuring there is no significant adverse impacts on heritage values and the surrounding environmental, social and cultural context.

### **Principle 7 - Site management capacity**

Management systems for World Heritage Properties should have sufficient skills, capacities and resources available when planning tourism infrastructure and managing visitor activity to ensure the protection and presentation of their identified heritage values and respect for local communities.

### **Principle 8 - Application of tourism generated revenue**

Relevant public agencies and Site Management should apply a sufficient proportion of the revenue derived from tourism and visitor activity associated with World Heritage Properties to ensure the protection, conservation and management of their heritage values.

### **Principle 9 - Contribution to local community development**

Tourism infrastructure development and visitor activity associated with World Heritage Properties should contribute to local community empowerment and socio-economic development in an effective and equitable manner.

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Program

## 2.2 Regional Context

### 2.2.1 2050 Strategy for the Pacific Blue Continent

The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent is the overarching regional policy framework that aims to address the region's challenges, including climate change-related impacts and intensifying geostrategic competition, by reinforcing commitment and working together as a collective for advancing Pacific regionalism. The 2050 Strategy focuses on seven key thematic areas:

- Political Leadership and Regionalism
- Resources and Economic Development  
Climate Change
- Oceans and Natural Environment
- People Centred Development
- Technology and Connectivity
- Peace and Security

The Resources and Economic Development Thematic Area includes reference to tourism and refers to the need to diversify investment portfolios, increasing the role of the private sector in important areas such as fisheries, agriculture, forestry, mining and tourism, and cultural industries. It states that creating employment and entrepreneurial activity in the micro, small and medium-sized enterprises are vital for improving and expanding wellbeing opportunities for Pacific peoples.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.2.2 UNESCO Pacific Regional World Heritage Action Plan 2021-2025

Strengthening World Heritage protection in the Pacific and improving the effectiveness and coordination of policy and legislation are essential goals of the Pacific World Heritage Action Plan 2022 and 2030. The plan sets out the specific challenges, needs and opportunities for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention and identifies national and regional priorities.

The aims of a Pacific Regional World Heritage Action Plan 2021-2025 are to:

- increase community, national, regional, and global awareness of the heritage of the Pacific countries and the contribution of Pacific Island and Ocean heritage to sustainable development.

- strengthen the foundation for sustainable implementation of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in the Pacific countries.
- build global recognition and support for conservation of the unique heritage of the Pacific through increasing representation of the heritage of the Pacific region on the World Heritage List.

Key action areas include capacity development and training, reappraisal of tentative World Heritage lists, effective awareness campaigns, creating supportive legislation, expanding the thinking around funding, and improving communication and collaboration between responsible agencies and stakeholders.

One of the priority actions is to examine the potential for developing a Pacific World Heritage Destination Tourism strategy/tour package. The Sustainable Tourism Assessment for the Pacific World Heritage Sites (this report) responds directly to this priority action.

### 2.2.3 Regional Framework World Heritage Action Plan for Asia and the Pacific (2022-2030).

The objectives for the Regional Framework World Heritage Action Plan for Asia and the Pacific (2022-2030) are to (i) Strengthen the representativity and credibility of the world heritage list in the Asia-Pacific region (ii) improve conservation, effective management and promotion of World Heritage (iii) promote the development of effective capacity-building measures, including assistance for preparing the nomination of sites to the World Heritage list (iv) Increase public awareness, involvement and support for World Heritage through communication (v) strengthen community and stakeholder engagement for effective management of World Heritage properties. Tourism is a critical component and is referenced throughout the document.

### 2.2.4 The Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas 2021-2025

The Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas 2021-2025 is the principal regional strategy document for environmental conservation in the Pacific. Its purpose is to guide nature conservation planning, prioritisation, and implementation in the region including natural World Heritage sites. It reflects the urgent need for transformative action in response to the multiple accelerating threats that are faced by nature and

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.forumsec.org/2050strategy/>

people in the Pacific. Environmentally and culturally sensitive tourism is a priority for the strategy and recognises the SPTO as a key partner for implementation.

## 2.2.5 Regional Culture Strategy 2020-2030

The Regional Culture Strategy recognizes the increasing role of culture in development and provides policy direction for Pacific Island countries and territories in the strengthening of the culture sector and in the protection and utilization of traditional knowledge in various development contexts. It is unique in that it reflects a Pacific worldview, guided by Pacific cultural values. The metaphor “Our future is in our past” reinforces the acknowledgement of the inherent value of culture for the wellbeing of Pacific peoples and of its contribution to resilience building. The strategy includes actions associated with support for the development and implementation of the Pacific World Heritage Action Plan 2021–2025 and ratification of UNESCO cultural conventions and effective implementation of conventions that have been ratified.

### 2.2.6 Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework

The Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework sets out the vision, policies and actions needed to transform tourism to make it more sustainable and provide greater benefits to the communities of the Pacific. It is designed to empower the communities of the Pacific region by providing them with greater benefits from tourism while ensuring that tourism is more sustainable and resilient. The framework aims to achieve this by promoting sustainable tourism practices that protect marine and coastal ecosystems, reduce energy, water, and plastic usage, and encourage appropriate behaviour at cultural sites.

It is an important step towards promoting sustainable tourism practices in the Pacific region. It provides a comprehensive roadmap for transforming tourism into a more sustainable and inclusive industry while ensuring that it provides greater benefits to local communities.

## A VISION FOR PACIFIC WORLD HERITAGE SITES FOR 2025<sup>9</sup>

Pacific Island heritage is protected and enriched for current and future generations.

We the people of the Pacific offer a unique contribution to the World Heritage community, through our enormous wealth of cultural diversity, as well as the island and marine biodiversity of our region.

For us, indigeneity is inseparable from heritage. Our indigeneity has the following characteristics:

- Heritage in the Pacific defines our cultural identity and remains inseparable from our social, economic and environmental wellbeing, now and for future generations.
- Our heritage is holistic, embracing all life, both tangible and intangible, and is understood through our cultural traditions.
- There is an inseparable connection between the outstanding seascapes and landscapes in the Pacific Islands region, which are woven together by the rich cultural, historical and genealogical relationships of Pacific Island peoples.
- The region contains a series of spectacular and highly powerful spiritually valued natural features and cultural places. These places are related to the origins of peoples, the land and sea, and other sacred stories.
- The Pacific is a region of distinct and diverse responses to oceanic environments.
- Protection of our heritage must be based on respect for and understanding and maintenance of the traditional cultural practices, indigenous knowledge and systems of land and sea tenure in the Pacific.
- This extraordinary heritage, moreover, is often managed through customary practices that reinforce the inseparable relationship between communities, cultures and environment that underpin sustainable development.

Note. This vision is founded on the Pacific Appeal, which continues to be a valid and integral basis for World Heritage Action Plans in the Pacific region.

<sup>9</sup> Source: Weaving Nature with Culture: Review of World Heritage Priorities in the Pacific Region, UNESCO Nov 2021

## 2.3 National Context

### 2.3.1 National Policy Co-ordination and Tourism Development

Each Pacific nation has its own national strategy to address its development priorities. Many development programs are in place and include support for resilient economies, improving livelihoods, increasing incomes, climate resilience, climate mitigation objectives, health investments, water and sanitation systems, education investments, social protection systems, women empowerment and culture. Tourism is recognised as an important economic pillar owing to its potential for growth and economic and social benefits.

Long-term national tourism planning is a well-established practice across the nations and is not only in dedicated policies for the sector but also in high level policies covering sustainable development. Commitments to the sustainable development of the sector are present in all the national tourism policies reviewed, with over half of them including comprehensive references to sustainability. The policies broadly refer to the SAMOA Pathway priorities. Some contain specific actions aimed at diversifying tourism opportunities (ecotourism, agritourism, cultural tourism), supporting local communities and enhancing equitable employment measures, and conserving and contributing to cultural heritage, ecosystems, and biodiversity.

For example, Vanuatu, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands have a strong government commitment to sustainability which is aligned with the commitments identified in sectorial policies for tourism. Some are choosing higher yield tourism over higher volumes of visitors.

The presence of a policy statement, however, does not guarantee implementation. Feedback from some nations suggests that there is a mismatch between tourism policy priorities on the one hand and programs and funding to support implementation on the other.

Some nations have been assisted by NGOs and other agencies for programs that support local communities living adjacent to World Heritage sites or other protected areas. For example, The Action Plan towards Developing Sustainable Livelihoods in the East Rennell World Heritage Site (2022) provides a road map for the East Rennell Community.

## 2.4 Key Insights

- The Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face challenges of geographic isolation and resource constraints.
- Tourism is seen as vital for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Pacific, directly aligning with Goals 4, 8, 9, 10, 12, and 14.
- UNESCO emphasizes a two-way relationship between World Heritage and sustainable tourism, recognizing the potential for both presenting World Heritage properties and realizing economic benefits through sustainable tourism.
- UNESCO has a Sustainable Tourism program promoting responsible and sustainable tourism practices at World Heritage Sites but it is not contextually relevant for Pacific nations.
- UNESCO Pacific Regional World Heritage Action Plan 2021-2025 aims to increase awareness of Pacific heritage, enhance the implementation of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, and improve global recognition and support for Pacific heritage.
- There are several regional strategies that support the development of sustainable tourism including the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, The Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas 2021-2025 and the Regional Culture Strategy and the Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework. These frameworks highlight the importance of respecting traditional knowledge and sharing Pacific culture through the development of cultural tourism experiences.
- Each Pacific nation has its own national strategy to address development priorities, with tourism recognized as an important economic pillar. Some nations emphasise sustainability in their tourism policies, with commitments to diversify tourism opportunities, support local communities, and conserve cultural heritage and biodiversity. There is often a gap between policy priorities.



### 3 Sustainable Tourism in the Pacific

This section describes the tourism sector, the level of tourism activity and key markets that are relevant to the development of tourism across Pacific World Heritage sites.

#### 3.1 The Tourism Sector

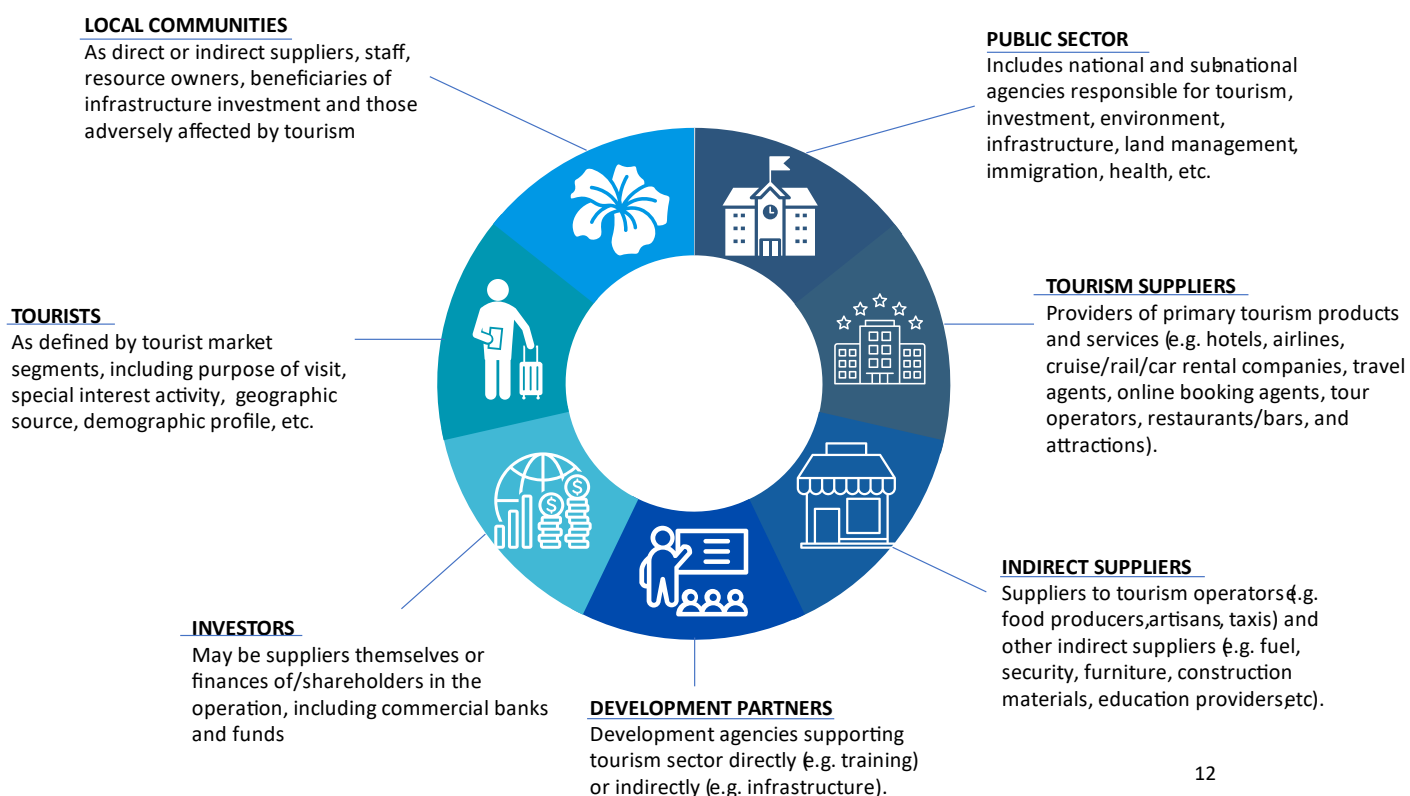
The tourism sector is complex, involving multiple actors, sub-sectors, markets, stakeholders, and policy and legal frameworks that are necessary to produce, deliver and regulate the tourism products and experiences. Since tourism depends on many other sectors, and many government agencies, coordinating the diverse set of interests to support the growth of sustainable tourism in and around World Heritage sites is a considerable challenge (refer Figure 5).

International assistance, in collaboration with national governments, non-governmental organizations, and tourism stakeholders, strive to integrate sustainability into the tourism industry in the Pacific. The aim is to ensure that tourism supports the preservation of the region's unique environmental and cultural values while contributing to the sustainable development and prosperity of the local communities. Assistance programs focus on providing training and capacity-building to tourism operators and communities to

enhance their understanding of sustainable tourism principles, responsible business practices, and effective management strategies. Efforts are also directed towards environmental protection and conservation implementing sustainable tourism practices that preserve the environment, protect fragile ecosystems, and mitigate pollution associated with tourism activities, such as waste management and sustainable energy use.

Assistance programs also aim to involve local communities in tourism planning and decision-making processes, ensuring they benefit from tourism revenues and are engaged in the protection of their natural and cultural heritage. Support also includes the development of tourism infrastructure in a way that aligns with sustainability goals, balancing economic benefits with environmental and cultural preservation.

**Figure 3. Tourism Stakeholders**



## 3.2 Challenges for Tourism Development

Despite their different levels of tourism dependence, and the development of their tourism offerings, the tourism sectors of the Pacific nations face many of the same challenges.

- The geographic spread and isolation of many Pacific countries.
- A small population base and limited domestic capital for investment.
- Low level of critical mass, restricting marketing funds and increasing cost of business.
- Limited international and domestic air services and high cost of infrastructure and services.
- Limited capacity among key public sector tourism related agencies.
- Limited capacity of the private sector and loss of staff following Covid- 19.
- Lack of awareness and engagement at a community level and complex land tenure systems.
- High vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change impacts.
- Private sector investment can be constrained by legal and regulatory difficulties, in addition to high costs of doing business and poor access to finance.
- Many nations struggle to differentiate their offerings from each other, and marketing budgets are commonly too small.
- The sector tends to be characterised by a high share of micro, small, and medium enterprises, often individually or family owned.
- Water and energy supplies and waste disposal capacity can be strained when tourism grows faster than the capacity of a destination's infrastructure.
- The increasingly severe weather events and rising sea levels associated with climate change only add to these challenges.

## 3.3 Tourism Experiences

The existing offering of tourism experiences in each of the destinations in which World Heritage sites are located is critically important for developing opportunities for tourism at each site. The mix of experiences available provides useful context for developing tourism at World Heritage Sites, noting that most sites are inscribed for their outstanding cultural values and others are listed for their outstanding natural values associated with marine ecology. A summary of the tourism activities offered by each nation is presented in Table 2. The desktop analysis and consultation with World Heritage site managers suggests that the broad range of experiences available in the destination are not occurring in or near most of the World Heritage sites.

Several nations are actively enhancing their eco-tourism offerings. Examples include the Ngaremeduu Biosphere Reserve in Palau and the Utwe and Atoll Reserves in the FSM that exemplify a commitment to sustainable development and environmentally responsible tourism. The Arnavon Community Marine Conservation Area, a marine turtle sanctuary in Solomon Islands, has been drawing a growing number of visitors in recent times. Kiritimati Island in Kiribati is globally celebrated for fly-fishing, while the Marshall Islands host fishing tournaments and captivate marine life enthusiasts, boasting the world's largest shark.

The distinctive history, culture, and heritage of each nation serve as significant attractions for tourism. These cultural offerings encompass a wide range of experiences such as Pan Pipers of Malaita and Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands, land diving (Nagol or N'gol) in Vanuatu, and firewalking ceremonies in Fiji. Papua New Guinea (PNG), with its rich linguistic diversity of 850 languages, proudly hosts a diverse array of cultural festivals. Tourists are equally enticed by visits to local markets, enjoying local cuisine, and experiencing the practice of cultural expressions through carving and dance remains prevalent.

Birdwatching is also popular - PNG is rich with a wide diversity of exotic birds, and the bird sanctuary and breeding ground at Kiritimati in Kiribati supports both endemic and endangered species.

Community Based tourism (CBT) experiences provide visitors with authentic, immersive, and sustainable interactions with local communities and their culture. Fiji, known for its stunning natural landscapes and vibrant indigenous culture, offers several opportunities for community-based tourism. CBT initiatives often. They aim to empower local communities economically and socially while



preserving their cultural heritage and natural environment. In Fiji, Tribewanted Vorovoro allows visitors to stay on Vorovoro Island and engage with the local Mali community. Travellers can participate in various activities, including traditional arts and crafts, and contribute to community development projects. Kila Eco Adventure Park (Viti Levu) is run by the local community and offers zip-lining and canopy tours through the lush forests of the area. The revenue generated from these activities supports community initiatives and environmental conservation efforts. In Vanuatu guided tours led by community members allow visitors to experience traditional village life, explore lush landscapes, visit the Mele Cascades Waterfall, and participate in cultural activities and ceremonies. Local guides from nearby communities often lead guided tours through the iconic Rock Islands Southern Lagoon, providing insights into the geological, ecological, and cultural significance of this UNESCO World Heritage site. Various boat tours around New Caledonia, especially to the smaller islands and remote areas, are often guided by locals. These guides share insights into the local marine life, conservation efforts, and the traditional practices of the Kanak people related to the sea.

All nations offer numerous cultural festivals and events throughout the year. These events showcase traditional dance, music, and food. Travellers can join in the festivities and experience the vibrant culture of the destination.

### 3.4 Tour Operations

The Pacific nations all offer a range of tour options through a variety of tour operators. Not surprisingly, most of this touring involves the sea. Diving, snorkelling, fishing, island day trips—and whale watching—are popular throughout the region. Cultural tours are also popular. These can include trips to sample local cuisine, visit villages, and view dance, music, and other kinds of local performances. Guided tours of World War II battlefields and relics are offered in a number of nations, as are hiking, walking, and biking nature tours.

The number and type of tour operators vary according to size and tourism market development. The more established tourism economies such as Fiji offer a variety of tours.

Most tours are run by small family businesses, others by large outfits that employ more than 200 local people and provide multi-destination itineraries. Tour operators can be in short supply in some small destinations. A lack of qualified diving instructors is a problem that stymies the potential of a high value market. Dive instructors in the Marshall Islands' capital city of Majuro often struggle to cope with demand during international conferences and other busy periods. In more challenging destinations, such as PNG, many tourists choose to use international tour operators, including larger providers such as Intrepid Travel.

Some Pacific nations regulate their tour industries, but others do not. In Palau, for example, providing tour services, including land transport and boat tours, is reserved for Palauans. Guides must be licensed. To protect the marine ecosystems, they must also adhere to environmental standards, such as those governing boat mooring locations.

Although some nations are moving toward greater regulation, enforcement can be challenging. Palau's Bureau of Tourism has worked to improve its tour and boat operator accreditation processes after it found several operators not complying with regulations.



### Tourism Products and Experiences – Nations with World Heritage Sites

Location of World Heritage Site	Diving	Beach	Surfing	Fishing	Whale Watching	Hiking	Birdwatching	World Heritage	Culture	WWII History	Community Based
Federated States of Micronesia	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Fiji	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
French Polynesia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kiribati	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Marshall Islands	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
New Caledonia	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Palau	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Papua New Guinea	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Solomon Islands	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vanuatu	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

### 3.5 Tourism Performance

Although it varies from country to country, tourism is an important source of economic development in the Pacific. It is an important source of jobs, especially for women and youth, and income, via tourism receipts and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows for all nations.<sup>10</sup> Tourism provides more than 20% of gross domestic product (GDP) for the Cook Islands, Fiji, Palau, and Vanuatu. On the other hand, Papua New Guinea received only 1.5% of its GDP from tourism in 2019, and Kiribati and Solomon Islands just 5.1% each.<sup>11</sup>

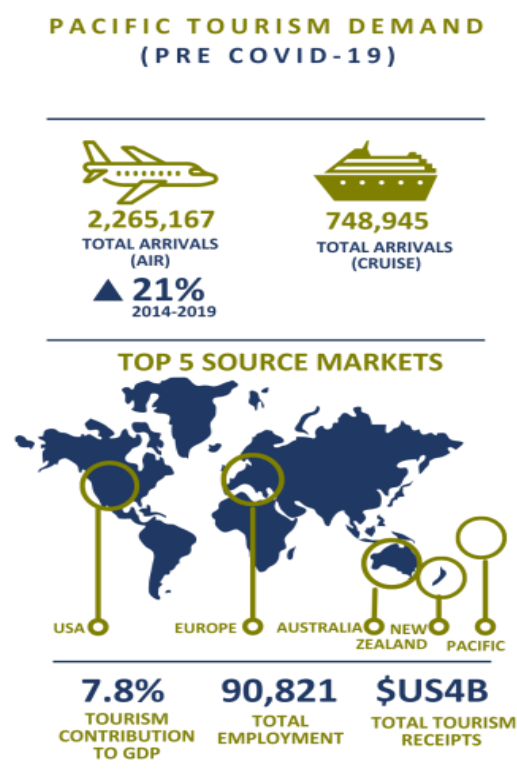
Almost 900,000 of the 1.75 million visitors to the Pacific in 2019 went to Fiji, which has the most developed tourism offering in the region. One of the smallest tourism economies, Kiribati received fewer than 10,000 visitors.

The major source markets of visitors are Australia, New Zealand, US, Europe, and the Pacific Islands.

Prior to Covid – 19 visitor arrivals to nations in the Pacific with World Heritage Areas is summarised below and presented in Figures 5 and 6.

- Fiji and French Polynesia receive the most visitors to the Pacific.
- The Cook Islands, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia and Vanuatu received between 100,000 and 200,000 visitors per annum.
- Palau received around 90,000 visitors.
- FSM, and the Solomon Islands receive between 20,000 and 30,000 visitors per annum.
- Kiribati, Marshall Islands receive less than 20,000 visitors.
- Most cruise arrivals are received by New Caledonia and Vanuatu (Figure 6).

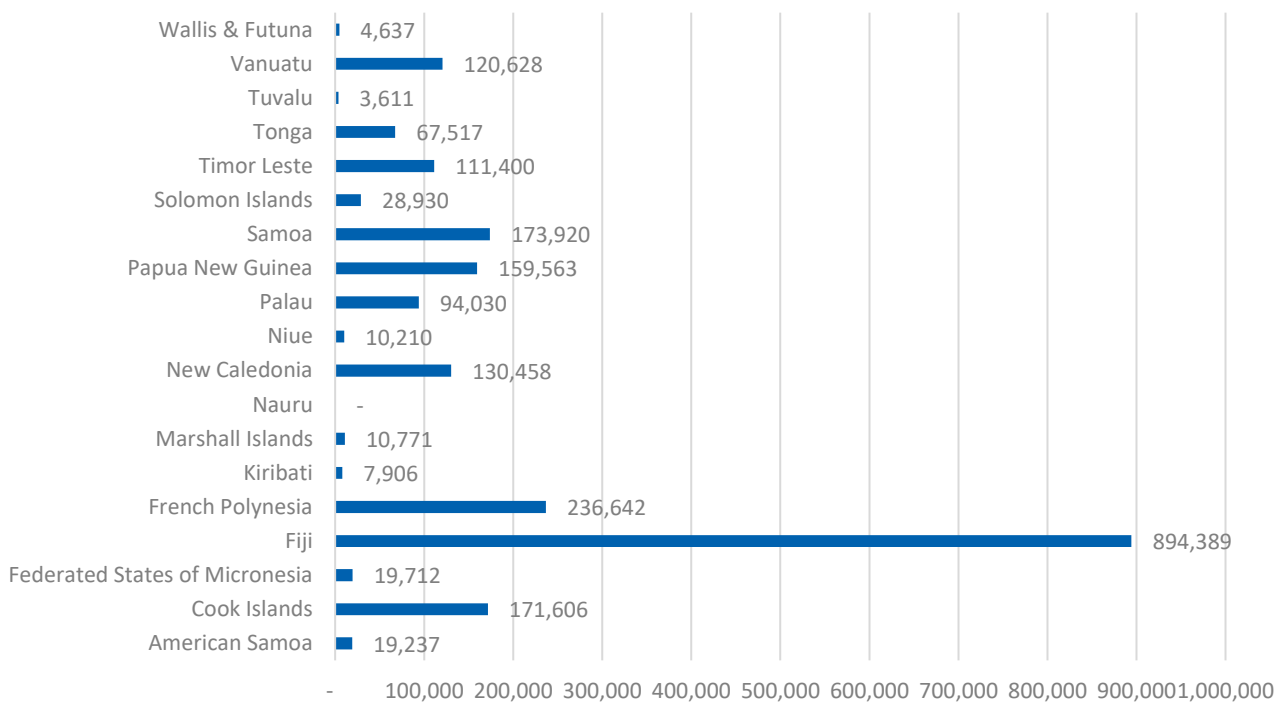
Figure 4. Pacific Tourism Demand (Pre COVID-19)



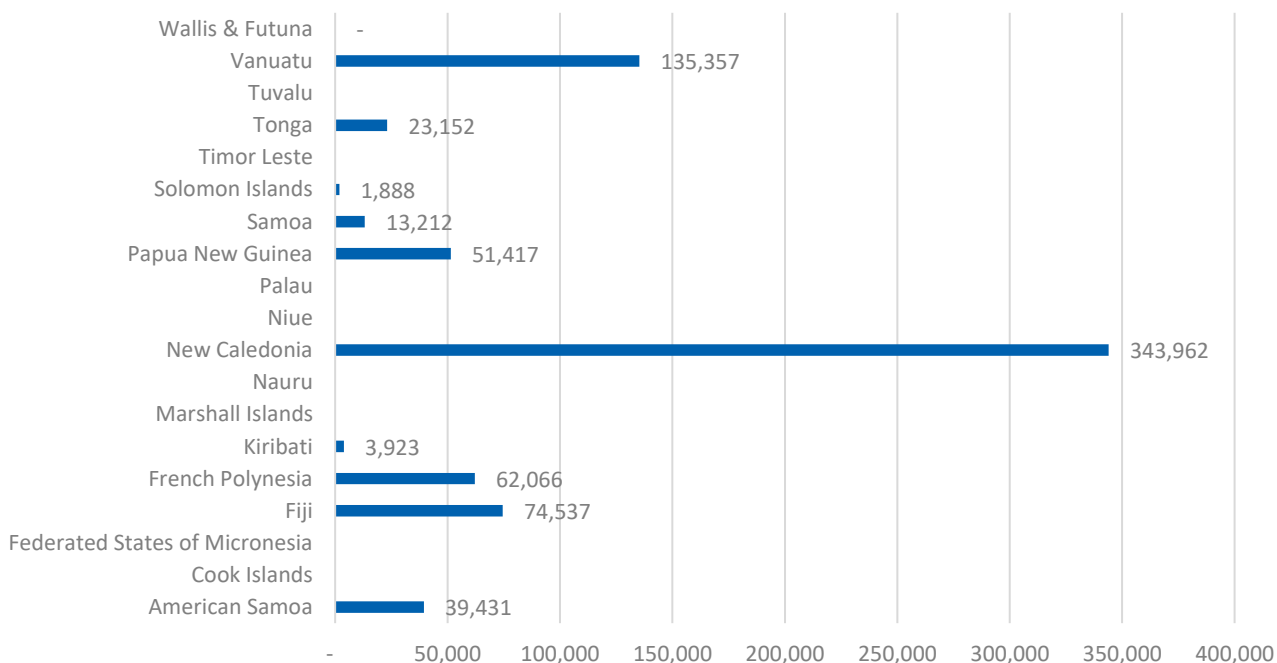
<sup>10</sup> The World Bank, NTOs, NSOs, and SPTO. Note: SPTO Estimates provided for Total Tourist Arrivals (Air) for FSM, Niue, Timor-Leste and Wallis and Futuna.

<sup>11</sup> Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative Looking Forward Vol.1: Evaluating the Challenges For Pacific Tourism After Covid-1, ADB 2021

**Figure 5. SPTO Nations and Territories – Arrivals 2019 (Air)**



**Figure 6. SPTO Nations and Territories – Arrivals 2019 (Cruise)**



### 3.6 The Future Traveller

Travellers are shifting from a focus on checking off destinations, to an emphasis on purpose- or interest-driven travel. Younger generations are also looking for greater alignment in values such as sustainability and inclusivity among the brands and companies they support, and the places they travel to.

Cultural tourism is a significant and growing segment of the global tourism industry. It involves travellers seeking immersive experiences that connect them with the unique cultures, traditions, heritage, and history of a destination. Cultural tourism allows visitors to understand, appreciate, and interact with the local way of life, arts, crafts, rituals, and cultural practices and contribute positively to local communities and their cultural preservation.<sup>12</sup>

As well as visiting historical and cultural heritage sites, tourists are seeking authentic interactions with local communities, participating in cultural activities, festivals, ceremonies, and traditions that provide genuine insights into the local way of life. They want to taste local food, participate in food preparation, the creation of traditional art, crafts, textiles, pottery, and other handmade products. There is also growing interest in homestays, village experiences, or cultural immersion programs that allow them to live with local families, experiencing their daily routines, customs, and traditions firsthand.

Nature-based tourism is often used interchangeably with adventure tourism, but there is a subtle difference between the two. Nature-based tourism is focused on experiencing nature, while adventure tourism is focused on challenging oneself in a natural environment. For example, hiking in a national park is a nature-based tourism activity, while white water rafting down a river is an adventure tourism activity.<sup>13</sup>

How people are choosing what to do is continuing to change. Younger generations of travellers are increasingly spending more on experiences — research shows they're prioritizing experiences over things with their discretionary spend — how they discover and book those experiences will necessitate a shift in marketing strategies of experience providers, for example to a greater emphasis on influencer marketing.

Both nature-based tourism and adventure tourism are important sectors of the global tourism industry, and both are growing rapidly. Notably cultural tourism represents approximately 40% of world tourism revenues<sup>14</sup> and presents a significant opportunity for Pacific nations. In summary cultural tourism, adventure and nature-based tourism represent best prospect markets for developing tourism to World Heritage areas across the Pacific.

### 3.7 Key Findings of this Section

- Tourism plays a vital role in the Pacific's economic development, contributing significantly to GDP, job creation, and income.
- Several challenges hinder tourism development in the Pacific, including geographic isolation, limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change impacts.
- The Pacific tourism sector encompasses a diverse range of offerings, which can be leveraged to support tourism in the and around World Heritage Areas.
- The sector is made up of these diverse interests to support sustainable tourism, which can be a significant challenge to co-ordinate for World Heritage Site managers.
- Community based tourism is growing in strength and presents a significant opportunity for the development of sustainable tourism for World Heritage Sites.
- International assistance focuses on training and capacity-building for tourism operators and communities, environmental protection, community engagement, and sustainable infrastructure development that could be potentially leveraged for World Heritage sites.

<sup>12</sup> The Global Nature-Based Tourism Market 2023-2032 by ReportLinker (2023)

<sup>13</sup> Nature-Based Tourism: A Global Phenomenon with Significant Economic and Social Impacts by the World Tourism Organization (2021)

<sup>14</sup>

[https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/info\\_sheet\\_2030\\_agenda.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/info_sheet_2030_agenda.pdf)



## 4 Sustainable Tourism Assessment of World Heritage Sites in the Pacific

This section provides an assessment of the opportunities associated with the development of sustainable tourism across the World Heritage Sites.

### 4.1 Overview

The assessment has found that the approach to tourism at each World Heritage site in the Pacific varies significantly and is influenced by a myriad of interrelated factors. These factors encompass the site's socio-political context, its management strategies, the effectiveness of collaboration between government, community and tourism sector and community awareness and involvement.

Each World Heritage site stands as a unique entity, shaped by its distinct nature, characteristics, location, accessibility, historical status as a tourist destination or attraction, existing level of tourism development pre-World Heritage listing, and various other factors. Any strategy aimed at supporting tourism across these sites must acknowledge and accommodate the unique context of each site.

There are several consistent themes across all sites that impact their tourism potential. Further detail is presented under each theme later in this section. Table 3 provides a summary of the challenges and opportunities in relation to sustainable tourism for each World Heritage site.

**Governance and Coordination:** Each site has a unique governance and management structure, often involving multiple stakeholders such as local and national governments, traditional landowners, and NGOs. Tourism Departments are often not involved. Most nations manage their tourism, environment and cultural heritage portfolio under different ministries. Given the cross-sectoral nature of tourism, there's a notable lack of coordination among various agencies, particularly concerning World Heritage sites. Improved collaboration emerges as a critical imperative for developing the tourism potential at each World Heritage site.

**Visitor Infrastructure & Experience Development:**

Challenges and opportunities in developing and managing tourism infrastructure are a recurring theme. Many sites lack adequate visitor facilities and as a result, there is limited tourism products and experiences available for visitors across most sites.

**Culture and Community:** The World Heritage site managers consulted acknowledged the potential for closer collaboration with local communities to develop or enhance tourism products and experiences, aiming to deliver social, cultural, economic, and environmental benefits. This points to the need for local community involvement in the planning and management of tourism at each site. This includes the importance of preserving traditional knowledge and practices and the need for community centred tourism planning.

**Community Expectations:** There is a pressing need to heighten awareness within communities regarding the value of World Heritage, emphasising its role in safeguarding cultural and biological diversity and highlighting the tourism opportunities it presents. Key concerns raised during consultations included the impact of World Heritage on community livelihoods, food security, infrastructure, economic development, and issues relating to customary rights and governance.

**Marketing and Promotion:** Every nation has a tourism policy and a dedicated tourism strategy or plan, typically overseen by a National Tourism Organization. Some of these explicitly acknowledge the presence and significance of the World Heritage site, however there is minimal promotion and marketing of the sites to visitors.

**Tourism Management Capacity and Resources:**

Following the initial ratification of the World Heritage Convention, many nations experienced a reduction in financial support for the management of their World Heritage sites. This affects the ability to implement management plans, develop infrastructure, and promote sustainable tourism. The tourism potential of most sites is not realised due to the inadequate financial resources, skilled personnel, and management capacities within World Heritage structures that hinder comprehensive tourism planning and management at the site.

## 4.2 Governance and Coordination

The recognition and commitment of the government towards tourism significantly impacts the potential of World Heritage sites to capitalize on sustainable tourism. Such recognition is crucial for integrating these sites into the broader national tourism policies and strategies, thereby assigning them the necessary priority for sustainable development.

In many instances, the effective management of World Heritage sites is contingent upon the support from various other government agencies. These agencies play a vital role in providing essential infrastructure and services. However, coordination between different governmental authorities presents substantial challenges.

A significant obstacle in the management of World Heritage sites for tourism arises from inadequate coordination among the government agencies that provide support. The involvement of multiple national and provincial agencies, each responsible for different aspects crucial to tourism (such as access infrastructure, environmental management, water resources, business licensing, and promotional activities), further complicates the situation.

Site managers are tasked with the crucial responsibility of navigating the relationship with the range of authorities (in areas such as infrastructure, culture, and environment), community groups, and tourism operators. Such collaborations are vital to foster a positive dynamic between tourism development and conservation efforts. This task can be particularly arduous in the face of limited resources.

All sites possess distinct management structures. Some are centrally managed under the auspices of

Heritage or Environment Authorities, while others adopt a decentralized, community-led approach, albeit with coordination from a central body.

Numerous sites have instituted management committees. These committees function as a vital coordination mechanism, addressing various aspects such as tourism, and facilitating collaboration among government bodies, communities, and industry stakeholders.

The involvement and influence of stakeholders differ markedly among sites. This variation significantly shapes the design and execution of partnerships and collaborative initiatives in tourism within their respective national contexts. Where tourism interests are represented, there is a focus on deriving benefits from these activities.

In certain locales, such as East Rennell, the political environment presents significant challenges to tourism development. Issues like local community conflicts and exploitation have profound implications on the engagement of various stakeholders and their approach to tourism.

## 4.3 Visitor Infrastructure and Experiences

The fundamental appeal of any World Heritage site to tourists is rooted in its unique offerings. These offerings encompass various tourism assets, including natural, cultural, or man-made elements, along with a range of activities, products, and services that enhance these assets. The crux of the tourism experience at these sites lies in the effective amalgamation of these components to create a compelling, accessible, and market-driven World Heritage experience.

Key findings from the analysis include:

- **Funding for Management and Infrastructure:** A persistent challenge for all sites is securing consistent, long-term funding necessary for effective management and infrastructure development.
- **Visitor Accessibility Issues:** Many sites face significant accessibility challenges. Factors such as geographical remoteness, the availability and reliability of transportation, travel duration, and associated costs often act as deterrents for potential visitors.
- **Unrealized Potential from High-Spending Tourists:** There is a notable demand from high-spending tourists, which remains

largely untapped due to limitations in activities, facilities, and access restrictions at various sites.

- **Lack of Infrastructure for Optimal Visitor Experience:** A common shortfall across most sites is the inadequacy of infrastructure required for visitors to fully engage with and appreciate the World Heritage values.
- **Inconsistent Quality of Tours and Transfers:** While many sites offer tours and transfers, the quality and overall experience provided by these services are varied and often inconsistent.
- **Diverse Accommodation Options:** Accommodation near the sites is available but varies widely in terms of quality and range.
- **Opportunity for Community Involvement in Experience Development:** All sites present significant opportunities for local community involvement in the development of tourism experiences.
- **Visitor Monitoring and Low Visitor Numbers:** Visitor numbers at most sites are not systematically monitored. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the footfall is generally low.
- **Suitability for Tourism Development:** Not all World Heritage sites are conducive to tourism development, often due to challenges in accessibility and a lack of infrastructure. Prioritizing areas with the highest potential for tourism is crucial.
- **Incorporation of Tourism in Management Strategies:** While tourism considerations are typically integrated into the management strategies of World Heritage sites, there is often a gap in the capacity or capability to effectively implement the strategies outlined in the Management Plans.

## 4.4 Culture and Community

Cultural tourism encompasses a wide spectrum, yet at the local level, there is often a narrow understanding of this concept. Typically, cultural tourism is mistakenly confined to tangible or built heritage, overlooking the vast scope of intangible cultural elements which is inherent to each World Heritage site. This narrow perception leads to missed opportunities in leveraging the full spectrum

of cultural expressions, particularly intangible cultural heritage, as valuable assets for cultural tourism around World Heritage Sites.

Other common themes that emerged during the analysis include:

- **Colonial History:** At sites like the Levuka World Heritage site, the coexistence of Pacific heritage with European heritage, often linked to colonial history, presents complex challenges in the development of tourism and its objectives.
- **Cultural and Religious Sensitivities:** Certain communities are reluctant to share aspects of their pre-colonization culture, owing to conflicts with contemporary Christian beliefs.
- **Local Cultural Expressions:** The importance of local cultural expressions and knowledge is often underemphasised in the conservation narratives at World Heritage Sites.
- **Lack of Interdepartmental Collaboration:** Most national tourism organizations do not engage in active collaboration with their counterparts in cultural ministries, which hinders the growth of cultural tourism.
- **Importance of Community-Based Tourism Development:** Embracing a community-based approach in tourism development is key to enabling communities to seize these opportunities effectively.
- **Significance of Quality Interpretation:** Providing quality interpretative experiences is crucial for educating visitors, enhancing their experience, and fostering pride among local communities in their cultural heritage.

## 4.5 Community Expectations

Certain local communities hold the belief that being nominated as a World Heritage site would bring positive benefits, which, in many instances, have not materialized. The communities feel a disconnect between the World Heritage status and any direct economic advantages.

East Rennell and Levuka serve as examples where expectations of positive outcomes from World Heritage status have not been fulfilled. Reports from community and industry representatives indicate that local populations anticipated tourism opportunities and infrastructural improvements



following the nomination, which did not occur as expected.

This perception is shaped by several factors. In places like Levuka, tourism associated with the World Heritage site has not translated into tangible economic benefits. The residents and business owners see the World Heritage designation more as a business constraint and a financial burden rather than an asset. The communities on Ovalau share the same view. The link between the site's heritage and colonialism weakens the local community's connection and enthusiasm towards its World Heritage designation, particularly among residents of Ovalau.

A substantial portion of the Levuka community feels that their interests and concerns are not adequately represented in the management and decision-making processes related to the World Heritage site.

In East Rennell, the community's reliance on natural resources for sustenance and livelihood conflicts with conservation restrictions imposed by the World Heritage status. This creates a tension between immediate needs and long-term conservation goals.

## 4.6 Marketing and Communication

National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) and/or tourism associations generally provide visitors with information about World Heritage Sites. However, there is a noticeable shortfall in effectively leveraging the UNESCO brand to enhance their promotional strategies.

In the case of specific sites like Levuka, the local tourism associations play a pivotal role in promoting the site. These associations are instrumental in disseminating information to potential visitors, thereby aiding in increasing the site's visibility.

The availability of information regarding tour products and services associated with these World Heritage Sites is notably limited. This is largely attributed to the scarcity of products that are ready for international markets. Consequently, this restricts the potential reach and appeal of these sites to a global audience.

The findings indicate a need for National Tourism Organizations and local tourism associations to utilise the UNESCO brand in their marketing efforts. Additionally, there is an imperative to develop and market tour products and services that meet international standards, thereby enhancing the global appeal of these World Heritage Sites.



## 4.7 Tourism Management Capacity and Resources

The analysis highlights the need for enhanced support in tourism management capacity, stronger collaborations with National Tourism Organisations and funding for tourism planning,

World Heritage site managers are often experts in the field of natural and cultural heritage preservation. However, they require additional support and resources specifically tailored to the development and management of tourism at these sites. However, the extent of collaboration between World Heritage site management and National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) varies. While some nations exhibit a robust working relationship with their NTO, others lack such connections, leading to disjointed efforts in promoting and managing tourism.

Key areas requiring capacity building relate to community centred tourism planning and management as well as marketing and promotion. Strengthening capabilities in these areas is crucial for the sustainable development of tourism at World Heritage sites.

There is a significant lack of designated funding for implementing effective tourism planning across World Heritage sites. This gap in financial support hampers the strategic development of tourism that is in harmony with preservation efforts.

There is a notable absence of evidence showing active contributions by the tourism sector to the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the sites. This situation highlights a pressing need for increased awareness among stakeholders and the development of opportunities for the tourism sector to contribute positively to heritage preservation.

The introduction of specific taxes and charges targeting tourists is currently not a general practice. However, there is growing interest among some nations to explore this avenue to support ongoing conservation efforts at World Heritage sites.



TABLE 2 SUMMARY ANALYSIS OF TOURISM AND WORLD HERITAGE SITES IN THE PACIFIC

World Heritage Site	Criteria of inscription	Challenges in relation to sustainable tourism development	Opportunities in relation to sustainable tourism development
<b>East Rennell – Solomon Islands</b>	Natural site in Danger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OUVs at risk (the core visitor attraction)</li> <li>• Community benefit is not real - World Heritages generates no income for communities despite original intent</li> <li>• Management Plan not finalised/ no Tourism Plan</li> <li>• Access is difficult - remote and costly for visitors</li> <li>• Lack of financial and technical support</li> <li>• Visitor safety (cyclones, conflicts, medical etc)</li> <li>• Lack of support from national agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infrastructure to support tourism is required</li> <li>• Community capacity-building and empowerment for management and tourism development</li> <li>• Experience development and visitor services (eg activities, interpretation, tours, accommodation/ hospitality) can be offered subject to access</li> <li>• Integration of culture into visitor experience</li> <li>• Targeted visitor promotion once reliable infrastructure and experiences are in place</li> <li>• Implementation of the Action Plan towards Developing Sustainable Livelihoods in the East Rennell World Heritage Site (2022)</li> </ul>
<b>Kuk Early Agricultural Site - PNG</b>	Cultural site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently no government support for management operations and community liaison, and legal protection for the site and its preservation</li> <li>• Access is challenging for visitors</li> <li>• No on-site visitor experience available</li> <li>• Limited awareness of Kuk as a World Heritage Site in both community and international community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kuk community endorsed Management Plan 2017 reportedly being endorsed by government and the potential for funding</li> <li>• Infrastructure and facility development (to the site, at the site, at the museum, and supporting accommodation etc)</li> <li>• Experience development at the site, virtually, and at the museum (interpretation etc)</li> <li>• Capacity building (management, training etc)</li> <li>• Links to other culture/heritage experiences e.g. Kokoda Trail, and the Kuk festival</li> </ul>
<b>Lagoons of New Caledonia: Reef Diversity and Associated Ecosystems</b>	Natural site (marine & coastal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visitor management required due to scale of lagoons</li> <li>• Previous tension between communities and the volume of tourism generated by cruise ships</li> <li>• Environmental impacts affecting OUVs</li> <li>• Complexity of governance arrangements and legislation</li> <li>• Not included in the countries covered by the UNESCO Office for the Pacific States</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of quality over quantity tourism (and targeted promotion)</li> <li>• Inclusion of site planning and visitor management practices</li> <li>• Development of supporting services at areas (eg accommodation)</li> <li>• Better promotion of how to experience and access each lagoon (and differentiation between them)</li> <li>• Exploring options for visitor levy/tax</li> </ul>

World Heritage Site	Criteria of inscription	Challenges in relation to sustainable tourism development	Opportunities in relation to sustainable tourism development
<b>Chief Roi Mata's Domain – Vanuatu*</b>	Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No allocated government funding</li> <li>Lack of preservation and frequent earthquakes degrading OUVs (cave paintings)</li> <li>Lack of visitor safety (on boat tours and in caves)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guide training programme to deliver consistent, quality experience</li> <li>Strong community involvement supportive of further tourism development</li> <li>Promotion and information on accessing the site, itinerary, timing, duration, cost etc</li> <li>Development of the World Heritage Area Cultural Centre</li> </ul>
<b>Phoenix Islands Protected Area – Kiribati*</b>	Natural site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No visitor infrastructure on Kanton</li> <li>No access to Kanton (except via charter flight or fishing expedition)</li> <li>Environmental issues (degradation of seamounts, overfishing, coral bleaching, iron in water)</li> <li>Have recently lifted the no-take zone affecting the site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small scale/special interest organised voyages</li> <li>Charter boats and scheduled sailings from other Kiribati Islands for snorkelling/diving/catch and release fishing</li> <li>Addition of cultural heritage into the existing limited visitor experience</li> </ul>
<b>Bikini Atoll Nuclear Test Site – Marshall Islands*</b>	Cultural site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Currently only accessible to tourists via two liveaboard dive operators</li> <li>Environmental issues – shipwrecks that are leaking fuel and radioactive fall out</li> <li>Limited funds to implement Management Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tourism as a medium to tell their story</li> <li>Capability development of Bikinians – diving, cultural and historical tours</li> </ul>
<b>Levuka Historical Port Town - Fiji</b>	Cultural site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership and coordination</li> <li>Cost of management and upkeep</li> <li>Relatively limited and unreliable access</li> <li>Impact from natural disasters on the OUVs</li> <li>Focus on preservation versus socio/economic benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infrastructure to support private sector development</li> <li>Incorporating further intangible history into the experience (storytelling, imagery, virtual reality etc)</li> <li>Develop a wider range of accommodation</li> <li>Packaging/cooperatives of complementary activities</li> <li>Targeted promotion</li> </ul>
<b>Nan Madol: Ceremonial Centre of Eastern Micronesia</b>	Cultural site in Danger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental threats to the physical OUVs</li> <li>No integrated management system</li> <li>Access to the country and the site</li> <li>Lack of awareness as a World Heritage Site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementation of the 2020 Management Plan</li> <li>Infrastructure development to provide access and manage impacts (to and at site)</li> </ul>

World Heritage Site	Criteria of inscription	Challenges in relation to sustainable tourism development	Opportunities in relation to sustainable tourism development
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of visitors at the site to protect the OUVs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of interpretation and training (what is appropriate to share and by whom)</li> <li>• Collaboration between tourism and heritage</li> <li>• Promotion of the World Heritage Site and also with complementary attractions on and with neighbouring islands</li> </ul>
<b>Taputapuātea, French Polynesia*</b>	Cultural site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing visitors at the wider site – especially arriving by private vessel (effect of anchoring etc).</li> <li>• Site impacted by wave action and invasive species.</li> <li>• Not included in the countries covered by the UNESCO Office for the Pacific States</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion as a World Heritage Site</li> <li>• Packaging and promoting with neighbouring island activities (eg vanilla)</li> <li>• Guide programme development</li> </ul>
<b>Rock Islands Southern Lagoon, Palau</b>	Mixed Natural and Cultural site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Super-typhoons impacting on OUVs and communities</li> <li>• Managing visitor numbers/pressure on the marine environment</li> <li>• Local community dependent on visitors to the World Heritage Site</li> <li>• Lack of funding to implement plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversifying the visitor experience with culture and non-marine activities (eg bird watching)</li> <li>• Welcoming locals – potential for cultural and hosting experiences</li> <li>• Transitioning to higher end ‘green’ tourism</li> <li>• Promotion of wider experience options</li> <li>• World Heritage focused visitor centre hub</li> <li>• Keen for knowledge sharing with other Pacific World Heritage Site</li> </ul>

\*Based on desktop assessment only.

## 5 Recommendations

This section provides recommendations to strengthen the opportunities for sustainable tourism at World Heritage Sites in the Pacific.

Planning for sustainable tourism across the Pacific World Heritage sites is an evolving challenge that requires building flexible capacity into operational responses, a dynamic balance in meeting and coordinating the interests of multiple stakeholders and careful management to ensure that the local community receives and recognises the benefits that can flow from tourism.

The approach to tourism will need to be site-specific and will depend on various factors, including (importantly in this context) how tourism is planned, developed, and managed. UNESCO and the SPTO can

play a critical role in supporting World Heritage site managers and associated communities with the tools and skill development required to support tourism growth.

The following recommendations are drawn from the desktop analysis and expert interviews to support the development of sustainable tourism across the Pacific’s World Heritage Sites.

**Figure 7. Sustainable tourism - recommendations**



## Recommendation 1 – Develop a Community Based Tourism Toolkit for World Heritage sites and pilot the approach at Levuka and Ovalau, Fiji.

The development of a UNESCO Pacific World Heritage Community Based Tourism (CBT) Toolkit is recommended. It would provide a useful toolkit for developing and managing sustainable tourism at each World Heritage Site in the region. CBT is generally small scale and involves interactions between visitor and host community, particularly suited to World Heritage Sites. CBT is commonly understood to be managed and owned by the community, for the community. It is a form of 'local' tourism, favouring local service providers and suppliers and focused on interpreting and communicating the local culture and environment.

The toolkit would be developed in consultation with Pacific tourism boards, local authorities, UNESCO, SPTO, and other stakeholders. It would provide specific guidance for site managers, the community, government, NGOs and other stakeholders on how to develop and implement sustainable tourism practices at Pacific World Heritage Sites.

The toolkit should provide guidance on:

- how tourism can benefit local communities in or adjacent to World Heritage sites, contributing to their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their cultural and environmental assets
- hosting tourists in the local community
- managing a tourism scheme communally
- sharing the profits/benefits equitably
- using a portion of the profits/resources for community development and/or to maintain and protect a community cultural or natural heritage asset (e.g. conservation)
- involving communities in tourism planning, on-going decision making, development and operations.

A community-based approach to tourism in World Heritage sites in the Pacific will:

- broaden the distribution of benefits from tourism to the community level for various purposes
- develop and diversify a tourism product in and around the World Heritage site
- authenticate visitors' experience of an area

- act as a stimulus to local products and a sense of ownership at the community level
- empower local communities
- contribute to poverty reduction/employment
- transfer decision making to a community level
- strengthen community identity and sense of pride in the World Heritage site.

It is recommended that the Community Based Tourism approach be piloted at Levuka World Heritage Site and applied broadly across the island of Ovalau and involve all communities and villages.

There are five areas of immediate focus for the Levuka World Heritage that were evident following the site visit that can be addressed by the Community Based Tourism Toolkit:

1. Review the Levuka Heritage Management Plan to align the dual objectives to achieve significant socio-economic benefits through tourism and preservation of the site that allows for effective conservation of heritage, in both its tangible and intangible dimensions; and balance local development that respects the culture of the host communities.
2. Leadership and co-ordinated Governance - The development of sustainable tourism at the site must be based on close and productive cooperation between public sector tourism authorities, private sector tourism operators and heritage site managers, planning and conservation authorities. Such cooperation will be crucial to achieve short and long-term sustainable outcomes that protect the resources on which their business will rely in the future.
3. Enhance funding base and leverage new partnerships to pull in funding for a wide range of projects to address critical infrastructure issues and foster profitable partnership between public and private sectors.
4. Invest in infrastructure to support tourism to create the economic basis to secure the future of the site.
5. Stimulate awareness raising and educational initiatives and incentivise business owners in the town.
6. Enhance tourism image and profile to drive awareness and community pride.
7. Generate greater involvement and maximize the benefits for local communities through

development of tourism experiences, products and services across Ovalau.

8. Conduct capacity building programs across all communities.

## Recommendation 2 - Optimise the capacity of communities for tourism.

- Optimise capacity building through a multi-year skill development and capacity building program for communities in tourism-related activities (to support the Community Based Tourism Toolkit). Capacity building needs to be targeted at the community level in the following areas; experience development, business planning and management, customer service, marketing and promotion, sustainable tourism practices, and cultural heritage interpretation for local community members.
- Training is perhaps the most important element of community-based tourism development. Some sites have previously hosted similar programs however they are not sustained or supported over the long term e.g. Levuka. Continual and intensive training is needed for the community members to prepare them to successfully launch and implement a tourism business.
- It is important to stress that the training and skill development be adapted to the local context. For example, the communities on the island of Ovalau support the development of sustainable tourism and welcome the opportunity to develop skills in tourism. They also require basic tools to support the development of their arts and crafts such as sewing machines, art supplies etc.
- Develop World Heritage site manager capacity to actively collaborate with communities and tourism agencies to support the development of tourism at each World Heritage Site is also required (to support the Community Based Tourism Toolkit).

## Recommendation 3 - Establish and strengthen government coordination mechanisms.

By establishing and strengthening coordination mechanisms between government agencies, Pacific governments can help to ensure that tourism at World Heritage Sites is sustainable and beneficial to both local communities and visitors.

Importantly, many of the challenges facing World Heritage Sites, as highlighted in this report, are complex and require a coordinated response from multiple government agencies. When government agencies are not working together, it can be difficult to address these challenges effectively.

Options include:

- Inter-agency committees for World Heritage Sites: Inter-agency committees can be a useful forum for government agencies to coordinate their activities and develop joint management plans for World Heritage Sites. These committees should include representatives from all relevant government agencies, as well as representatives from local communities and the tourism industry.
- Joint management plans for World Heritage Sites such as Levuka: Joint management plans could be developed by all relevant government agencies, in consultation with local communities and the tourism industry. These plans should set out the shared goals and objectives for tourism development and management at the World Heritage Site.
- Sharing resources and expertise: Government agencies can share expertise to support sustainable tourism development and management at World Heritage Sites. This could include sharing data, training staff, and providing financial support.
- Leverage the skills and knowledge of Regional and National Tourism Authorities – Regional and National Tourism Authorities have a deep understanding of the tourism industry and are well-positioned to advise on best practices for tourism development in World Heritage areas, particularly in the following areas: Embedding World Heritage sites into relevant tourism marketing strategies and initiatives and increasing awareness of World Heritage and its activities and policies for the tourism industry and visitors.



## Recommendation 4 – Establish a Pacific World Heritage knowledge sharing network.

Establish a Community of Practice for Community Based /Cultural Tourism (COP) that includes World Heritage - a network that supports managers and stakeholders across different land tenures associated with community-based tourism.

The COP would allow World Heritage Site managers and staff to learn from the experiences of other protected area managers and community tourism leaders.

This network could be used to share information on a variety of topics, such as:

- Sustainable tourism planning and management
- Cultural tourism opportunities, interpretation and education
- Community engagement and participation
- Marketing and promotion
- Revenue and regulatory interventions
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Community /traveller awareness

The network could be established as a joint initiative of multiple organizations including UNESCO, SPTO and Pacific tourism boards and UNESCO Focal points. It should be accessible to all World Heritage Sites in the Pacific region, regardless of their size or resource and involve a wide range of stakeholders in the development and management of the network. This could include World Heritage Site managers, tourism boards, local authorities, community, academia, and the private sector.

Additional recommendations for the establishment and management of a knowledge-sharing network include:

- Establishment of an online platform about sustainable tourism at World Heritage Sites across the Pacific for sharing information and resources. This platform could include a database of case studies, best practices, and lessons learned.
- Organize regular tourism workshops and seminars for World Heritage Site managers and staff. These events could provide opportunities for participants to share their experiences and learn from each other.

## Recommendation 5 - Leverage the World Heritage brand in marketing and promotion activities.

The iconic value of the World Heritage 'brand' is well understood by travellers and the tourism industry and serves as an important aspect of the value adding of the site and to the destination. Highlighting the exceptional attributes and features that earned the site its World Heritage status is crucial for attracting visitors and showcasing what other attributes the nation offers.

A regional approach using selective and evocative marketing can target visitors to the Pacific's World Heritage sites. This will increase the (i) profile of the region (ii) raise awareness of lesser-known sites and (iii) improve awareness of the unique values of world heritage sites in well-known destinations. An example of this approach is the European Union, in collaboration with UNESCO, "World Heritage Journeys" platform. This program focuses on thematic journeys that connect multiple World Heritage Sites, promoting sustainable travel and encouraging visitors to explore multiple sites within a region.

Regional and national tourism organisations also have the potential to develop joint marketing campaigns that promote the Pacific region's UNESCO World Heritage Sites. These campaigns could be run through various channels, such as social media, online advertising, and print advertising.

Airlines and other large tourism operators have a global reach and can play a vital role in increasing awareness of and attracting visitors to the Pacific region's UNESCO World Heritage Sites. For example, Air Tahiti Nui, the flag carrier of French Polynesia, often collaborates with local tourism boards to promote the region's UNESCO World Heritage Sites, such as Taputapuātea on Raiatea.

Emirates and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): Emirates, the flag carrier of the United Arab Emirates, has partnered with UNESCO to promote sustainable tourism at UNESCO World Heritage Sites. This partnership includes joint marketing campaigns, training programs for tourism industry stakeholders, and support for local communities.

Lufthansa and the German National Tourism Board (GNTB): Lufthansa, the flag carrier of Germany, has partnered with the GNTB to

promote the country's UNESCO World Heritage Sites, such as the Cologne Cathedral and the Wartburg Castle. This partnership includes joint marketing campaigns, special packages that include flights to destinations near UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and support for local communities.

Air France and the French Tourism Development Agency (Atout France): Air France, the flag carrier of France, has partnered with Atout France to promote the country's UNESCO World Heritage Sites, such as the Palace of Versailles and the Mont Saint-Michel. This partnership includes joint marketing campaigns, special packages that include flights to destinations near UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and support for local communities.

## Recommendation 6 - Increase Awareness of World Heritage values to communities and visitors

Awareness-raising programs can take many different forms and need to be developed specific context of each site. Options include:

- Development of a Community Partnership Program to (i) increase awareness and make the benefits of World Heritage Sites visible for local communities (ii) build tourism industry collaboration and support – capacity building and incentives for tourism. This could be part of the Community Based Tourism Toolkit in Recommendation 1.
- Build traveller awareness about Pacific World Heritage and use evocative imagery to tell the story behind the picture to build awareness of the World Heritage communities and cultural tourism opportunities.
- Develop educational materials for tourism operators and visitors about the global significance of World Heritage Sites, the reasons for their protected status, and the benefits that they bring to local communities and the tourism industry.

## Recommendation 7 - Collaborate with the Tourism Industry to develop World Heritage experiences.

Promote collaboration between tourism enterprises and the management authorities of World Heritage Sites. This can be done in several ways, such as:

- Establishing joint planning forums or committees. These forums can provide a platform for tourism enterprises and site management authorities to discuss common challenges and opportunities, and to develop joint plans and strategies for sustainable tourism development. This can also be built into the Community Based Tourism Toolkit (Recommendation 1).
- Developing joint training programs for tourism operators and site management staff. These programs can help to build capacity and understanding on both sides, and to promote a shared vision for sustainable tourism.
- Providing financial support for collaborative initiatives. This could include supporting the development of joint marketing campaigns, tourism products, and infrastructure.

## Recommendation 8 – Establish a regional leadership and funding model.

Establish a **Pacific World Heritage Tourism Council**: A Pacific World Heritage Tourism Council could be established to oversee the development and implementation of the framework. The council could be made up of representatives from UNESCO, SPTO, national governments, local communities, the private sector, and civil society to provide advice to and support the development of the Community Based Tourism Toolkit and the facilitation of tourism to World Heritage Sites.

Investigate the feasibility of establishing a **Pacific World Heritage Tourism Fund as part of the UNESCO World Heritage SIDS program**. Funding is and will remain a critical issue for all sites. A Pacific World Heritage Tourism Fund could assist with the implementation of recommendations in this report to support sustainable tourism development at World Heritage Sites in the region. The fund could be funded by a combination of government contributions, donor funding, and private sector investment

# APPENDIX A World Heritage Site Assessments

## East Rennell – Solomon Islands



### General Information:

Name of the World Heritage Site: East Rennell

Geographic location: East Rennell makes up the southern third of Rennell Island, the southernmost island in the Solomon Island group in the western Pacific.

Category: Natural site in Danger (since 2013)

Date of Inscription: 1998

Criteria: ix

Property size: 37,000 ha

### *Brief description of the site (including OUVs - cultural, historical, and natural attributes):*

East Rennell (ER) is the largest raised coral atoll in the world and is an important site for the science of island biogeography and avifauna. It is mostly covered with dense forest.

A major feature of the island is Lake Tegano, which was the former lagoon on the atoll. The lake is the largest in the insular Pacific (15,500 ha) and contains many rugged limestone islands and endemic species.

### *Land Ownership:*

The site is under customary land ownership and management and occupied by the East Rennellese people (approximately 80 landowner groups). Its listing was a landmark in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, which established an important precedent concerning the acceptance of customary law as a sufficient basis for the protection of natural sites.<sup>15</sup>

### *World Heritage site management and governance structure:*

Management of the site is supported by the Department of the Environment and is responsible for communication with UNESCO, stakeholder liaison, implementation of activities, and engagement with local communities. Focal points for World Heritage and associated partner agencies (individuals and Ministries) change regularly causing lack of consistency, disruption and lag time and loss of knowledge and institutional memory.<sup>16 17</sup>

A management plan was developed in 2007 but has not been effective, in part because it lacked detail, a timeline a budget (WHC, 2012), and it has no basis under customary or State law (Price, 2018).<sup>18</sup> A Management Plan has been drafted.<sup>19</sup>

The Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association (LTWHSA) was established in 2007 - comprising some 250 volunteer community members. It is the

<sup>15</sup> Price, Stephanie (2018) World Heritage Conservation in the Pacific The Case of Solomon Island, Palgrave Series in Asia and Pacific Studies

<sup>16</sup> UNESCO, IUCN (2021) Weaving Nature with Culture: Review of World Heritage Priorities in the Pacific Region 2021-2025

<sup>17</sup> UNESCO (May 2019) MISSION REPORT, East Rennell (Solomon Islands)

<sup>18</sup> Kiddle, G.L. (2020) Achieving the desired state of conservation for East Rennell, Solomon Islands: Progress, opportunities and challenges  
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/app5.311>

<sup>19</sup> UNESCO, IUCN (2021) Weaving Nature with Culture: Review of World Heritage Priorities in the Pacific Region 2021-2025

acknowledged local management authority for the property and responsible for establishing conservation programs and coordinating management activities for the site.<sup>20</sup> Its operations have been impeded by a lack of resources (Price, 2017, cited in Kiddle, 2020).<sup>21</sup>

East Rennell is now on the List of World Heritage in Danger, threatened by the impacts of resource development, invasive species, climate change, and the overharvesting of certain animals. (2017).

An Action Plan towards Developing Sustainable Livelihoods in the East Rennell World Heritage Site was developed as a result of a stakeholder workshop held in 2022.

#### **National Development Strategy:**

2016-2035 'Improving the Social and Economic Livelihoods of all Solomon Islands'.

#### **Collaborations and Partnerships:**

Before and after East Rennell's World Heritage listing in 1998, New Zealand provided support including resource management plans for small-scale ecotourism, and small business development projects (Smith, 2011). This support ceased around 2000–2001, largely due to the commencement of ethnic conflict in Solomon Islands in 1998. None of the eco-tourism businesses were successful (Smith, 2011; Tabbasum, 2012).<sup>22</sup>

NGOs that have helped are Live and Learn Environmental Education and, more recently, BirdLife International. Currently there are number of projects funded by GEF.

The LTWHS and East Rennellese have limited resources and capacity to formulate and submit substantial funding proposals to donors, and manage funding once received.

#### **Socio-cultural Considerations:**

Approximately 1,000-1,200 people of Polynesian origin occupy four tribes/villages within the boundaries of the property, living mainly by subsistence gardening, hunting and fishing. Frequent cyclones have severe consequences for the local people and the biota, and rising lake water levels from climatic change are adversely affecting some staple food crops.<sup>23</sup>

Land ownership disputes are impeding infrastructure development for livelihoods and tourism.<sup>24</sup>

East Rennellese have received little financial benefit from the site's listing and their support for World Heritage may be wavering. To be effective, World Heritage conservation measures must be aligned with local peoples' aspirations and priorities, which include improving livelihoods and preserving culture.<sup>25</sup>

The heritage the East Rennellese most wish to preserve is linked to their cultural identity and customs (Smith & Turk, 2013). In addition, East Rennellese are highly concerned about improving their livelihoods and food security.<sup>26</sup>

The communities see no benefit from World Heritage, and they feel like that they're quite isolated. The pressure is strong for timber and mining. The community are struggling to understand what the World Heritage benefit is for them and why they shouldn't use other income from logging and mining.

There is little connection relationship between UNESCO and the site managers there is no training and they're mostly left on their own to deal with the site.

There is limited awareness of the value of culture within the community and is closely linked to religious beliefs. There are very strong cultural stories around food, the lake, the history etc.

Nature and culture need to be incorporated into the story in a contemporary way. There is a lot of history in the area however the mindset is that it should not be talked about because of their religious beliefs. They feel the stories reflect the old way - pagan beliefs and are no longer relevant today.

#### **Environmental Considerations:**

Threats to the site's OUV include logging, mining, invasive species, oil spills, and climate change. There are several NGOs trying to address the environmental issues mostly associated with conservation and less so about livelihoods. Black Rats are present and eating the crops on East Rennell. An eradication program is being investigated by the Ministry of Environment. Birdlife International is also involved.

<sup>20</sup> UNESCO; MISSION REPORT, East Rennell (Solomon Islands) May 2019

<sup>21</sup> UNESCO; MISSION REPORT, East Rennell (Solomon Islands) May 2019

<sup>22</sup> Kiddle, G.L. (2020) Achieving the desired state of conservation for East Rennell, Solomon Islands: Progress, opportunities and challenges <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/app5.311>

<sup>23</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/854>

<sup>24</sup> UNESCO; MISSION REPORT, East Rennell (Solomon Islands) May 2019

<sup>25</sup> Kiddle, G.L. (2020) Achieving the desired state of conservation for East Rennell, Solomon Islands: Progress, opportunities and challenges <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/app5.311>

<sup>26</sup> Kiddle, G.L. (2020) Achieving the desired state of conservation for East Rennell, Solomon Islands: Progress, opportunities and challenges <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/app5.311>

**Visitor Profile:**

Less than 10 international visitors are reported to visit the site each year.<sup>27</sup>

The small amount of visitor reviews<sup>28</sup> are very positive about the physical place but all note challenges in access.<sup>29</sup>

**Scale, quality, capacity, and location of tourism infrastructure and services at or adjacent to the site**

East Rennell is extremely remote and transport connections are expensive. There is air access to West Rennell. It is 46km to East Rennell /Lake Tegano by road which takes approximately 3-4 hours in good weather. The road is in poor condition.

There were previously small lodges for visitors in each of the four villages around Lake Tegano. Only one lodge now appears open and is listed on Visit Solomons website.

Activities at the site include swimming, fishing, bird watching, and hiking and there are local guides.

**Marketing:**

There is no promotion of the site via Tourism Solomons or at hotels in Honiara.

**Community Engagement and Empowerment:**

Women in the community have expressed a desire to develop small business skills and develop new cash-generating products (e.g. coconut oil produced from some of the world's largest coconuts in Rennell).<sup>30</sup>

The Action Plan towards Developing Sustainable Livelihoods in the East Rennell World Heritage Site (2022) includes actions to:

- Strengthen capacity of East Rennell communities to manage ERWHS and to improve livelihoods.
- Identify focal points for capacity-building activities (at communities' and government's levels)
- Provide capacity-building activities/training to LTWHS Committee/officers and other community members including youth on project management.
- Provide an enabling environment for sustainable livelihoods including assessing the

conditions required to develop sustainable tourism practices.<sup>31</sup>

**Challenges and Opportunities for tourism****Challenges:**

- East Rennell is extremely remote. Road infrastructure is poor there is no indication or commitment from government to address the issue. Any development for the World Heritage site is dependent on government following through on fixing the road infrastructure.
- The political context is important – the people of East Rennell are Polynesian, however the rest of the Solomon Islands is Melanesian - tourism is not a priority for Government at present.
- Frequent cyclones – safety of visitors and damage to infrastructure
- Status of WH in danger due to the threats posed by logging and bauxite mining in West Rennell, invasive species, over exploitation of marine resources, climate change, and lack of legal protection (World Heritage Committee 2013).
- Gap between the positions of the Convention bodies and the State concerning protection. The site does not have any greater protection under Solomon Islands law than any other areas. East Rennell is not declared a protected area under the Protected Areas Act 2010.
- East Rennellese often don't see the benefit of World Heritage, especially when comparing with the benefits West Rennellese receive from exploitative industries. (Smith, 2011).<sup>32</sup>
- Poor internet and telecommunications (for management and visitors).
- Lack of progress made on the Action Plan.
- The Solomon Islands government has very limited financial and human resources to dedicate to heritage conservation.<sup>33</sup>

**Opportunities:**

- Implement actions in the Action Plan towards Developing Sustainable Livelihoods in the East Rennell World Heritage Site (2022).

<sup>27</sup> Kiddle, G.L. (2020) Achieving the desired state of conservation for East Rennell, Solomon Islands: Progress, opportunities and challenges <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/app5.311>

<sup>28</sup> Reviews: 3 reviews on tripadvisor and 2 reviews on World Heritage Travellers Community

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.worldheritagesite.org/list/East+Rennell>

<sup>30</sup> UNESCO; MISSION REPORT, East Rennell (Solomon Islands) May 2019

<sup>31</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2459/>

<sup>32</sup> UNESCO; MISSION REPORT, East Rennell (Solomon Islands) May 2019

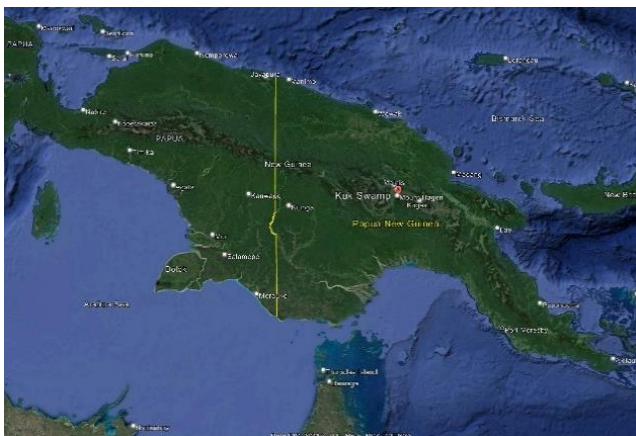
<sup>33</sup> Price, Stephanie World Heritage Conservation in the Pacific The Case of Solomon Island, Palgrave Series in Asia and Pacific Studies 2018

- Balance environmental goals with local peoples' aspirations and priorities - improving livelihoods and preserving culture (identity and customs)
- Community capacity-building and empowerment for managing projects and natural resources.
- Focus on bird watching as a point of difference (four species and nine subspecies are endemic to Rennell Island).<sup>34</sup>
- Local capacity-building activities to improve the ability of the local communities to apply for and administer funding is required (Kiddle 2020).
- There are several initiatives the East Rennell Heritage association has some support to develop fisheries, poultry farming and handicraft (no longer occurring because there is no market).
- Getting fish to the mainland is a priority and up until now there has been no market access for trade purposes. There is a proposal by Investment Solomon's to fly from Vanuatu to East Rennell to export fish to China. The fish is not for consumption - the fish is for animal feed only. The site manager has welcomed the opportunity to work with the East Rennell Heritage Association and Investment Solomons for business development. If the flight occurs it might well be that there might be a market for carving weaving and other handicrafts to export. It is likely it will be a helicopter so access for visitors by air will remain limited.
- Carbon trading is also a potential opportunity. The community's understanding is very basic information and awareness in very simple language would assist. Live and learn carbon trading - Currently in Phase 1, Carbon Financed Community Forest Conservation in the Solomon Islands (CFCFC project) focuses on the delivery of forest conservation and community development through the creation and sale of carbon credits from forest conservation activities in three rural communities in the Solomon Islands. East Rennell is one of the pilot sites.
- Using a Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) approach, this enables landowners to sell carbon credits instead of wood to fund their legitimate economic development needs, while also protecting the rainforest.

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<sup>34</sup> 2020 Conservation Outlook Assessment East Rennell

## Kuk Early Agricultural Site- PNG



### General Information:

Name of the World Heritage Site: Kuk Early Agricultural Site

Geographic location: Western highlands of Papua New Guinea

Category: Cultural Site

Date of Inscription: 2008

Criteria: (iii)(iv)

Property size: 116 ha

### Brief description of the site (including OUVs - cultural, historical, and natural attributes):

It is an excellent example of the transformation of agricultural practices over time from mounds on wetland margins around 7,000-6,400 years ago to drainage of the wetlands through digging of ditches with wooden tools from 4,000 BP to the present.<sup>35</sup>

### Land Ownership:

The Kawelka acknowledge government ownership (under terms of the 1968 lease) of the land, and the national government acknowledges the rights of Kawelka, and those groups invited by them, to cultivate and occupy the land for traditional purposes.<sup>36</sup>

### World Heritage site management and governance structure:

There is currently no legislation in place to support WH in PNG. However, there is a current Bill for

Protected Areas (including addressing World Heritage sites).<sup>37</sup>

Responsibility for management advice and guidance lies with the Department of Environment and Conservation. Management and administration is undertaken by the Management Committee.<sup>38</sup>

There is a Kuk Early Agricultural World Heritage Site Concise Management Plan 2013 (*but no allocated responsibilities, resources, timelines, measures etc*)<sup>39</sup>

Kuk site protection is mostly informal. The Department of Environment and Conservation have stated in the Management Plan that they will develop appropriate policy options to seek an effective physical protection consistent with the Values of the site, which will be achieved by a combination of measures including applying the Management Plan, the possible declaration of Kuk as Conservation Area, the application of special legislation, and taking on formal agreements with the landowners to protect the site from avoidable physical disturbance of the heritage values.<sup>40</sup>

The available budget is reportedly inadequate for basic management needs and presents a constraint to the capacity to manage the site and enforce legislation.<sup>41</sup>

### National Development Plan/Strategy:

Papua New Guinea Medium Term Development Plan III 2018-2022.

### Collaborations and Partnerships

Important partners include the Live & Learn Environmental Education, PNG National Museum and Art Gallery, the Australian government (Department of Environment, Australian Marine Safety Authority, military), WWF, James Cook University.<sup>42</sup>

### Visitor Profile

The site has mostly attracted archaeologists and scientists interested in the ancient farming methods.

### Scale, Quality, Capacity, and Location of Tourism Infrastructure and Services at or Adjacent to the Site

World Heritage values at the site are not easily visible to visitors and there are no visitor facilities provided.<sup>43</sup> There is little or no contact between tourism operators and those responsible for the World Heritage property.<sup>44</sup> There is an associated museum - JK McCarthy Museum in nearby Goroka.

<sup>35</sup> UNESCO

<sup>36</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/887.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> UNESCO, IUCN (2021) Weaving Nature with Culture: Review of World Heritage Priorities in the Pacific Region 2021-2025

<sup>38</sup> UNESCO 2012 Periodic reporting cycle 2

<sup>39</sup> UNESCO 2012 Periodic reporting cycle 2

<sup>40</sup> Kuk Early Agricultural World Heritage Site Concise Management Plan 2013

<sup>41</sup> UNESCO 2012 Periodic reporting cycle 2

<sup>42</sup> UNESCO, IUCN (2021) Weaving Nature with Culture: Review of World Heritage Priorities in the Pacific Region 2021-2025

<sup>43</sup> UNESCO 2012 Periodic reporting cycle 2

<sup>44</sup> UNESCO 2012 Periodic reporting cycle 2

The site is accessible, with several flights running weekly from the capital Port Moresby to Mt Hagen. From there it is a 12km drive to the site. There are several hostels, guest houses and home stays available in Mt Hagen.

**Marketing:**

Archaeological sites at Kuk Valley are included in official PNG Tourism Promotion Authority promotions (at a low level) but no mention of the site being on the World Heritage list.

**Community Engagement and Empowerment:**

There is no capacity development plan or community outreach programme in place; management is implemented by external staff and skills are not transferred.<sup>45</sup>

The Management Plan was reportedly developed in consultation with local landowners.

**Challenges and Opportunities for Tourism**

- Improved coordination between heritage, tourism, and the local community for the development of tourism activities such as guided tours, accommodation etc
- Develop a visitor plan and infrastructure to support the visitor experience at the site.
- Promotion of a World Heritage site once experiences and infrastructure is in place.
- Promotion of the Kuk festival to raise awareness about the story of Kuk. Traditional practices are demonstrated during the festival such as Amb Kurr, early gardening drama and Moka.<sup>46</sup>

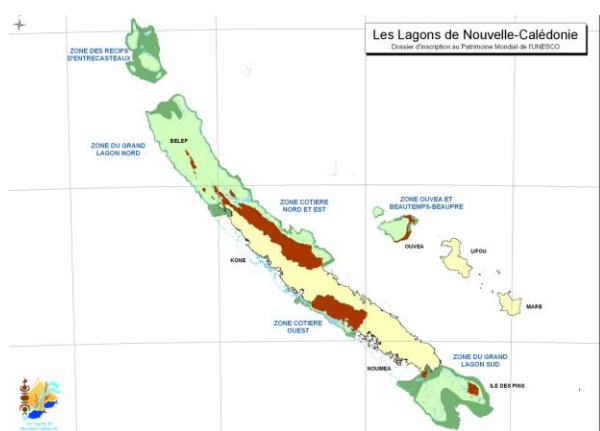
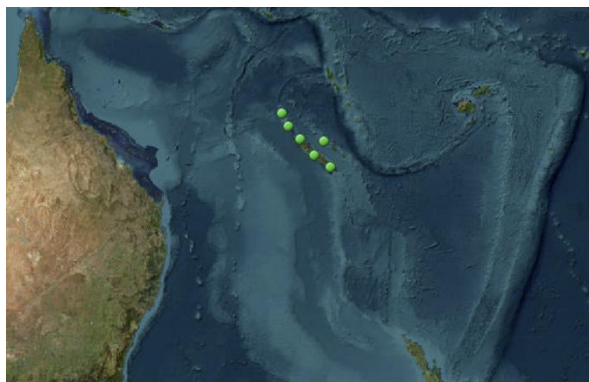
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<sup>45</sup> UNESCO 2012 Periodic reporting cycle

<sup>46</sup> Papua New Guinea Post Courier



## Lagoons of New Caledonia: Reef Diversity and Associated Ecosystems



### General Information:

Name of the World Heritage Site: Lagoons of New Caledonia: Reef Diversity and Associated Ecosystems

Geographic location: French Pacific Ocean archipelago of New Caledonia

Category: Natural site (marine and coastal)

Date of Inscription: 2008

Criteria: (vii)(ix)(x)

Property size: 1,574,300 ha, Buffer zone: 1,287,100 ha

### **Brief description of the site (including OUVs - cultural, historical, and natural attributes):**

This serial site comprises six marine clusters that represent the main diversity of coral reefs and associated ecosystems in New Caledonia and one of the three most extensive reef systems in the world. It is one of the planet's best examples of the ecological

and biological processes underlying tropical lagoon and coral reef ecosystems.

The lagoons are of exceptional natural beauty. They feature an exceptional diversity of coral and fish species and a continuum of habitats from mangroves to seagrasses with the world's most diverse concentration of reef structures. They contain diverse reefs of varying age from living reefs through to ancient fossil reefs, providing an important source of information on the natural history of Oceania. The Lagoons of New Caledonia display intact ecosystems, with healthy populations of large predators, and a great number and diversity of big fish. They provide habitat to several emblematic or threatened marine species such as turtles, whales or dugongs whose population is the third largest in the world.<sup>47</sup>

### **Land Ownership:**

Areas are under Kanak customary tenure.

### **World Heritage site management and governance structure<sup>48</sup>:**

The Conservatory of Natural Spaces /Conservatoire des Espaces Naturels (CEN) was established in 2011 and includes representatives from all levels of elected government, customary groups and NGOs. Its role is to enhance coordinated management of the entire serial property with the managers and the 13 sub-committees.<sup>49</sup>

The CEN acts as a tool for cooperation, consultation and communication in relation to environmental strategies defined by the communities of New Caledonia and by the State. CEN's mission is to study, understand, conserve, protect, restore, enhance and publicise the natural terrestrial and marine spaces of New Caledonia, in order to ensure integrated and sustainable management.<sup>50</sup>

CEN produces an Annual Activity report, and an Ecosystem profile report.<sup>51</sup>

The property is currently protected by fisheries legislation, which is being further improved. Management Plans and co-management arrangements with the Kanak communities are established for all clusters.

Enhanced surveillance and monitoring are required to address potential impacts from fishing and mining and, to a lesser extent, from agriculture and aquaculture.

<sup>47</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1115>

<sup>48</sup> N.B UNESCO Periodic report 2014 Annual Plans and Ecosystem profile reports are only available online in French

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.cen.nc/> and UNESCO, 2011; State of Conservation, Lagoons of New Caledonia

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.cen.nc/>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.cen.nc/documents/activites-transversales/rapports>

Tourist activity around the reefs is controlled. Small, eco-tours can still apply for permits to access the restricted areas.<sup>52</sup>

### **Collaborations and Partnerships**

As part of the Resilient Reefs project, CEN collaborates with:

- The Great Barrier Reef Foundation (GBRF), alongside four World Heritage sites.
- The South Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) and in particular its Pacific Invasives Learning Network (PILN).
- The Pacific Invasive Initiative (PII), led by the University of Auckland (New Zealand), for which CEN is also the focal point in New Caledonia.
- The New Zealand Department of Conservation - management of invasive species.<sup>53</sup>

### **Environmental Considerations:**

Current environmental issues include:

- high turbidity and elevated rates of sediment deposition in rivers, estuaries and coastal areas
- mining activities in the vicinity of the property which could potentially impact three of the six components of the serial property
- climate change vulnerability of coral reefs and coastal communities.<sup>54</sup>

### **Visitor Profile:**

New Caledonia receives approximately 600,000 tourists each year.<sup>55</sup>

Visitor reviews of the site are very positive: an average of 3.92/5 from 13 ratings from World Heritage Travellers.<sup>56</sup>

### **Scale, quality, capacity, and location of tourism infrastructure and services at or adjacent to the site**

Access to Noumea is via a 2.5 hour flight between Sydney or Auckland.

There are taxi-boat companies ex Noumea, buses, rental cars, flights and catamarans to the islands.

There are UNESCO inscription boards and maps depicting each of the 6 inscribed locations.

Tourism is much more developed at the lagoons (three of the six) that are closest to Noumea, and a wide range of accommodation is available. There is a myriad of activities on offer to explore the lagoons such as snorkelling, diving, sailing, kayaking, boardsports, fishing and whale watching. The sights can also be explored by air with a helicopter or skydiving.

Due to the greater accessibility and development already at this site, tourism is likely to increase in the future.

### **Marketing:**

UNESCO World Heritage site is well promoted as a key feature on government's tourism site at a top line level: <https://www.newcaledonia.travel/en/lagoon-pacific-ocean>, but detail on each of the 6 marine clusters is difficult to find.

### **Challenges and Opportunities for tourism**

- The ease of access and resulting increase in visitor numbers requires well planned and managed sites.
- The on-going evolution of governance arrangements and specific regulations, legislation and customary management practices supported with community engagement provides a sound platform for sustainable tourism.<sup>57</sup>
- Limited capacity and resources to enforce fisheries and water quality regulations and to respond to incursions.<sup>58</sup>
- Vulnerability of coral reefs and coastal communities to climate change.
- Sustainable financing strategies for the long-term management of the property.

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/australianz/new-caledonia-passes-new-rules-to-protect-coral-reefs>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.cen.nc/partenaires>

<sup>54</sup> UNESCO, 2011; State of Conservation, Lagoons of New Caledonia

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/australianz/new-caledonia-passes-new-rules-to-protect-coral-reefs>

<sup>56</sup>

<https://www.worldheritagesite.org/list/Lagoons+of+New+Caledonia>

<sup>57</sup> UNESCO, 2011; State of Conservation, Lagoons of New Caledonia

<sup>58</sup> UNESCO, 2011; State of Conservation, Lagoons of New Caledonia

## Chief Roi Mata's Domain - Vanuatu



Map source: Roi Mata - Wikipedia

### General Information:

Name of the World Heritage Site: Chief Roi Mata's Domain

Geographic location: on the Vanuatu islands of Efate, Lelepa and Artok

Category: Cultural Site

Date of Inscription: 2008

Criteria: (iii)(v)(vi)

Property size: 886.31 ha, Buffer zone: 1,275.42 ha

### Brief description of the site (including OUVs - cultural, historical, and natural attributes):

Chief Roi Mata's Domain consists of three early 17th century AD sites on the islands of Efate, Lelepa and Artok associated with the life and death of the last paramount chief, or Roi Mata, of what is now Central Vanuatu. The property includes Roi Mata's residence, the site of his death and Roi Mata's mass burial site. It is closely associated with the oral traditions surrounding the chief and the moral values he espoused. The site reflects the convergence between oral tradition and archaeology and bears witness to the persistence of Roi Mata's social reforms and

conflict resolution, still relevant to the people of the region.<sup>59</sup>

### Land Ownership:

Most of the land within Chief Roi Mata's Domain and the broader Lelepa region is under customary tenure, owned by individuals with chiefly titles connected to the three principal sites (Mangaas, Fels Cave and Artok Island), and by a local landowner who has been granted a parcel of land within the Mangaas area. The administration and management of all parts of the property, including Artok Island, are vested with the World Heritage and Tourism Committee (WHTC) for the Lelepa region, which was established in 2005.<sup>60</sup>

### World Heritage site management and governance structure:

The overall management system for the property involves both traditional management through the chiefly system and tabu prohibitions and government legislation for protection of the site.

The governmental institution responsible for the property is the Vanuatu Cultural Centre under the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

There is no allocated funding by government for the site manager (the site is community-managed, and the site manager is a community member).<sup>61</sup>

### National Development Plan/Strategy:

Vanuatu 2030 'The People's Plan'.

### Environmental Considerations:

Frequent earthquakes have caused considerable damage to the caves (a key attraction of the tour) and rubbish pollution is also an issue.

### Visitor Profile:

Many guided tours are reportedly run by locals and generally comprise of small groups.

Ratings from visitors are variable and satisfaction levels generally appear to come down to the quality of guiding – which is highly variable. Tours are offered on a demand basis by several locals, as well as more well-known companies. The day tours leave from the capital of Port Vila and visit all three sites.

<sup>59</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1280>

<sup>60</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1280.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> UNESCO, IUCN (2021) Weaving Nature with Culture: Review of World Heritage Priorities in the Pacific Region 2021-2025

Visitor reviews also mention the lack of preservation of the sites, particularly the Fels cave, which is quickly eroding and has been heavily impacted by earthquakes in the region. Despite this being a safety concern, it also impacts the longevity and sustainability of this heritage site.

World Heritage Travellers gave an average rating of 2.67/5 from 9 reviews,<sup>62</sup> including comments such as: “*Pretty rudimental - the only really tangible heritage from Chief Roi Mata's Domain consists of the paintings inside Fels Cave*”<sup>63</sup>. General visitors gave a higher average rating of 4/5 from 24 reviews on Tripadvisor.

**Scale, quality, capacity, and location of tourism infrastructure and services at or adjacent to the site**

All three locations can be visited on a combined guided tour from Port Vila.

Most tours include:

- Introduction to the Chief Roi Mata story at the museum in Port-Vila.
- Visit of the domain where Roi Mata lived, a dance show is performed by local people.
- Fels cave where the Chief dies (sometimes viewing from entrance only depending on stability).
- Boat trip to Hat Island the chief was buried.
- Lunch in a village with local people.

Access to the cave requires a steep climb of approximately 40metres.

Port Vila is accessible via a three-hour direct flight from Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Auckland, Noumea, Honiara, and Nadi by various international airlines.

**Marketing:**

The site is by Vanuatu Tourism on their website under the heritage theme. There is a link to a single tour operator but no information on access, itinerary, timing, duration, cost etc.

**Community Engagement and Empowerment:**

The local community has been central to the site nomination and its management and functions well with the tourism industry in a co-supportive arrangement. Community interaction with tourists is positive but could benefit from some specific capacity development to ensure this interaction continues to be positive.<sup>64</sup>

**Challenges and Opportunities for tourism**

- Resources to address visitor safety and management issues (inside Fel’s cave which is eroding and collapsing, guide’s operating small boats in rough water conditions with no basic safety devices)
- Conservation of key sites from earthquake damage (Fels cave), and rubbish pollution
- Tour guide training to reduce the variation in guided tour quality (vehicle quality, boat quality and safety, knowledge etc).

<sup>62</sup>

<https://www.worldheritagesite.org/list/Chief+Roi+Mata%27s+Domain>

<sup>63</sup>

<https://www.worldheritagesite.org/list/Chief+Roi+Mata%27s+Domain>

<sup>64</sup> UNESCO, IUCN (2021) Weaving Nature with Culture: Review of World Heritage Priorities in the Pacific Region 2021-2025

## Phoenix Islands Protected Area - Kiribati

Figure 1. The Phoenix Islands, Kiribati, Central Pacific.



### General Information:<sup>65</sup>

Name of the World Heritage Site: Phoenix Islands Protected Area

Geographic location: Phoenix Island Group, Kiribati

Category: Natural site

Date of Inscription: 2010

Criteria: (vii)(ix)

Property size: 40,825,000 ha

### Brief description of the site (including OUVs - cultural, historical, and natural attributes):

The Phoenix Island Protected Area (PIPA) marine and terrestrial habitat is the largest designated Marine Protected Area in the world. PIPA conserves one of the world's largest intact oceanic coral archipelago ecosystems, together with 14 known underwater sea mounts (presumed to be extinct volcanoes) and other deep-sea habitats. The area contains approximately 800 known species of fauna, including about 200 coral species, 500 fish species, 18 marine mammals and 44 bird species. The structure and functioning of PIPA's ecosystems illustrate its pristine nature and importance as a migration route and reservoir.<sup>66</sup>

### Land Ownership:

The property is owned by the Sovereign State of Kiribati.<sup>67</sup>

### World Heritage site management and governance structure:

PIPA is a protected area legally established under the Phoenix Islands Protected Area Regulations 2008. These regulations establish the Phoenix Islands Protected Area Management Committee and seek to ensure that a Management Plan is in place for the property.<sup>68</sup> Kiribati Cabinet adopted a decision to close, as of 1 January 2015, the entire area of Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA) to all commercial fishing. The Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources Development (MFMRD) has been tasked with compliance.

A Management Plan has been prepared for the property for the period of 2015-2020.<sup>69</sup> (Note only the 2010-14 draft is available on UNESCO site) The plan focuses on (i) Core Operational (capacity, infrastructure, zonation, surveillance and enforcement, monitoring, evaluation) and Strategic Outcomes (atoll restoration, reverse fishing license, world heritage site management, tourism, climate change adaptation) and (ii) the design and operation of PIPA's Sustainable Financing System.<sup>70</sup>

### National Development Plan:

Kiribati National Development Plan 2016-2019 'Towards a better educated, healthier, more prosperous nation with a higher quality of life'.

### Collaborations and Partnerships

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) funding supported the implementation of the area's first Management Plan, the establishment of its two Implementation Offices and the recruitment of six core staff.<sup>71</sup>

PIPA is currently financed by GoK, Conservation International and New England Aquarium<sup>72</sup> with additional partnerships and resources obtained from a variety of government, multilateral and private agencies.

Beginning 2015, the Waitt Foundation and Oceans 5 Alliance agreed to provide USD 1 million per annum for 5 years to the Trust Fund for the implementation of the Management Plan.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Image source: Phoenix Islands Protected Area Kiribati Draft Management Plan 2010 – 2014

<sup>66</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1325>

<sup>67</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1325.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1325>

<sup>69</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/3240>

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.thegef.org/newsroom/news/rising-phoenix-gefs-contribution-sustainable-development-kiribati>

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.thegef.org/newsroom/news/rising-phoenix-gefs-contribution-sustainable-development-kiribati>

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.neaq.org/about-us/>

<sup>73</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/3240>

**Environmental Considerations:**

The main environmental considerations are illegal fishing and overfishing by licensed and unlicensed vessels, degradation of seamounts,<sup>74</sup> and the presence of shipwrecks are impacting on the reefs through release of iron into surrounding waters.<sup>75</sup> Recently the no-take zone has been lifted causing further pressure on the site.

**Visitor Profile:**

The Phoenix Islands are periodically visited by private ocean-going yachts and by special boat charters for recreational divers and various researchers and ecologists, and the passage of occasional cruise ships.<sup>76</sup>

There are only a couple of visitor ratings by World Heritage community visitors; rated an average of 2.3/5 and no reviews on Tripadvisor.

**Scale, quality, capacity, and location of tourism infrastructure and services at or adjacent to the site**

There is no visitor infrastructure, running water or electricity on Kanton, but there is very basic local accommodation.

Attractions and activities include sport fishing, snorkelling/diving, and World War II relics on Kanton. There is one fishing tour operator listed ex Australia.

Accessing Kanton requires obtaining permit.

To get to Kiribati there are two international airports at the surrounding island groups of Gilbert and Line. There are several airlines offering a once or twice a week service from other Pacific centres such as Fiji and from Australia and Hawaii. There is no regular access to Kanton and the Phoenix Islands but you can charter a flight to Kanton (which has a very limited airstrip), or organise a fishing expedition via a tour operator.

**Marketing:**

Kiribati Tourism are tasked with the promotion of PIPA, tourism planning and tour operator/visitor management. The Phoenix Islands are promoted as a protected area on the official website with a link to each island/atoll, links to two charter flight operators to get to Kanton, accommodation and activities, but is not promoted as a World Heritage site.<sup>77</sup>

**Community Engagement and Empowerment:**

Sharing information on PIPA's values and undisturbed natural beauties through outreach programmes has greatly inspired the school children, youth and the public at large in Kiribati to take care for the environment and surroundings. Eco-tourism in the protected area - focusing on snorkelling and diving, catch and game fishing, bird watching, amateur radioing, and simply relaxing enjoying the beautiful environment –brings income to Kiribati.<sup>78</sup>

**Challenges and Opportunities for tourism**

Challenges:

- The isolation and consequent lack of regular transportation to and from Kanton Island makes for very high access and operating costs.
- No landing facilities except for Kanton
- Limited safe anchorage
- Climate change – coral bleaching
- Ocean dumping
- Unregulated visits

Opportunities:

- Addition of cultural heritage
- Small scale/special interest organised voyages (ie large enough vessel to deal with changeable ocean conditions/ self sufficient / suit limited anchorage)
- Charter boats and scheduled sailings from other Kiribati Islands for snorkelling/diving/catch and release fishing).

**Monitoring and Evaluation:**

Monitoring and Evaluation of PIPA under the Management Plan includes:

Appendix A- Scientific research and monitoring to detect trends in core and important PIPA values and issues (e.g., seabird populations, visitor numbers)

Appendix B- Management Plan Implementation Monitoring

<sup>74</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/3240>

<sup>75</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/3240>

<sup>76</sup> PHOENIX ISLANDS PROTECTED AREA KIRIBATI Draft Management Plan 2010 – 2014

<sup>77</sup> <https://visitkiribati.travel/island2explore/phoenix-islands/>

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.thegef.org/newsroom/news/rising-phoenix-gefs-contribution-sustainable-development-kiribati>

## Bikini Atoll Nuclear Test Site – Marshall Islands



### **General Information:**

Name of the World Heritage Site: Bikini Atoll Nuclear Test Site

Geographic location: Marshall Islands

Category: Cultural Site

Criteria: (iv)(vi)

Property size: 73,500 ha, Buffer zone: 130,425 ha

### **Brief description of the site (including OUVs - cultural, historical, and natural attributes):**

In the wake of World War II, in a move closely related to the beginnings of the Cold War, the United States of America decided to resume nuclear testing in the Pacific Ocean, on Bikini Atoll in the Marshall archipelago. After the displacement of the local inhabitants, 67 nuclear tests were carried out from 1946 to 1958, including the explosion of the first H-bomb (1952). Bikini Atoll has conserved direct tangible evidence that is highly significant in conveying the power of the nuclear tests, i.e. the sunken ships sent to the bottom of the lagoon by the tests in 1946 and the gigantic Bravo crater. Equivalent to 7,000 times the force of the Hiroshima bomb, the tests had major consequences on the geology and natural environment of Bikini Atoll and on the health of those who were exposed to radiation. Through its history, the atoll symbolises the dawn of the nuclear age, despite its paradoxical image of peace and of earthly paradise. The Bikini Atoll tests gave rise to a series of images and symbols of the nuclear era. They also led to the development of widespread international movements advocating disarmament.<sup>79</sup>

Radioactive fallout has affected the geology of the area, as well as made the area unsafe for human resettlement. Huge swaths of coral reef, plants, land, and three of the 23 original islands within Bikini Atoll

have been obliterated as a result of the nuclear bombs detonated in the region. To this day, any food grown in the contaminated soil is hazardous. Consuming fruits and vegetables grown on the atoll will result in radiation exposure. The fish in the lagoon however are now deemed safe to eat.

A tropical coral atoll which is not subject to the usual human pressures, Bikini Atoll hosts significant populations of endangered species and offers important insights to science on how coral reefs can recover from a major trauma.<sup>80</sup>

### **Land Ownership:**

Land on Bikini is held under customary tenure and land divided into parcels called 'weto'. All marine areas are legally owned by the people of the Marshall Islands through the Government with the recognition of traditional and customary rights to control the use of materials in marine areas (public Lands and Resources Act 1996).<sup>81</sup>

### **World Heritage site management and governance structure:**

The management process is the responsibility of the Kili-Bikini-Ejit (KBE) Local Government, which is based on an electoral procedure in the Bikini community; this community currently lives on other atolls.

Oversight of management is provided by the Bikini Atoll Conservation Management Committee which consists of representatives from the local council, traditional leaders, the Bikini Atoll Conservation Manager and the National Historic Preservation Office.<sup>82</sup>

The Bikini Atoll Conservation Management Plan was developed in 2010 and an annual work and action plan exists with many activities being implemented.<sup>83</sup>

The property is protected by the Historic and Cultural Preservation Act (1991), and the natural biodiversity of Bikini is protected by a local government decree (1997).

All yachts visiting Bikini Atoll must obtain permission from the KBE Local Government, for entry and diving.<sup>84</sup>

**National Development Plan/Strategy:** National Strategic Plan 2015-2017 – Republic of Marshall Islands – 'In our hands, our future'.

### **Socio-cultural Considerations:**

The Bikinians (while still living in exile from their native land) reportedly feel tourism is important because it

<sup>79</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1339>

<sup>80</sup> Bikini Atoll Conservation Management Plan 2010

<sup>81</sup> Bikini Atoll Conservation Management Plan 2010

<sup>82</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1339/documents/>

<sup>83</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1339/documents/>

<sup>84</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1339/documents/>

allows their story to be taken away by tourists and retold to their families and friends.<sup>85</sup> They also realise that the economic benefits from tourism would also be advantageous.

#### **Environmental Considerations:**

Residual radioactivity remains on the island – although it is safe to visit. Climate change is a major threat to the low-lying Marshall Islands, and many land and marine invasive species are threatening the biodiversity of the atoll.

#### **Visitor Profile:**

Visiting divers report that Bikini has “some of the best wreck diving in the world”, and Bikini receives a 5/5 rating from four reviewers on Tripadvisor.

Visitor numbers to Bikini Atoll are very low - less than 100 per year (2011).<sup>86</sup>

#### **Scale, quality, capacity, and location of tourism infrastructure and services at or adjacent to the site**

As the result of a cleanup project undertaken in the 1990s, select types of tourism activities are now allowed in Bikini Atoll such as scuba diving and sport fishing. Bikini Atoll opened to divers in June of 1996 to provide an economic base for a possible future resettlement of Bikini Atoll. The sunken wreckage of the historic warships of that earlier era have proven a popular draw for tourists. In 2008 diving operations ceased (and associated accommodation and dining on Bikini) due to local airline reliability issues, energy costs and US stock market conditions. The airstrip on the atoll is now permanently closed. Bikini Atoll is now only accessible via two liveaboard operators (approximately 10 days, basic living conditions, high quality dive associated equipment).

History is incorporated into dive trips - historical documentary films are shown, complete briefings about each of the ships and their respective histories are given, and there is a tour of the island and the atoll.

In 2011 the Bikini Atoll Local Government signed an agreement with Indies Trader Marine Adventures that would permit them to operate their liveaboard vessel on Bikini.<sup>87</sup> <https://www.indiestrader.com/bikini-atoll/bikini-dive-trip/>

#### **Marketing:**

Bikini is included as a diving and fishing spot on the Republic of the Marshall Islands Office of Commerce, Investment & Tourism’s website, but not as a World Heritage site.<sup>88</sup>

#### **Community Engagement and Empowerment:**

The islanders themselves made the decision to open the atoll for tourism to share their history.

A capacity development plan or programme is in place and partially implemented; some technical skills are being transferred to those managing the property locally but most of the technical work is carried out by external staff.<sup>89</sup>

#### **Challenges and Opportunities for tourism**

Challenges:

- Remote location
- Radioactive fallout has made the area unsafe for human resettlement<sup>90</sup> and potentially influencing visitors choice to visit
- Effects of climate change
- Safety issues with the presence of stocks of bombs and fuel in the underwater part of the property, and dive depths<sup>91</sup>
- Unauthorised visitation and the removal of artefacts<sup>92</sup>
- Finance to implement the Management Plan

Opportunities:

- Rich history – including a considerable mass of documentary material associated with the site and its history
- Capability development of Bikinians – diving, cultural and historical tours.

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.bikiniatoll.com/>

<sup>86</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1339/documents/>

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.bikiniatoll.com/>

<sup>88</sup> <https://www.rmocit.org/travel-guide>

<sup>89</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1339/documents/>

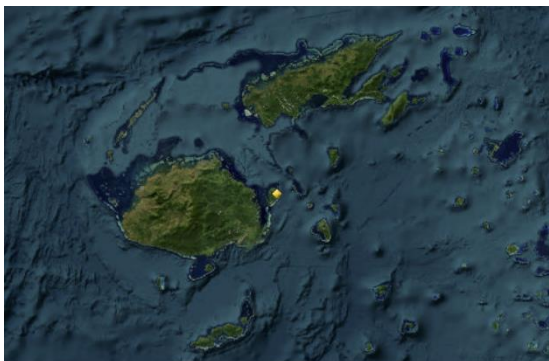
<sup>90</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1339>

<sup>91</sup> Bikini Atoll Conservation Management Plan 2010

<sup>92</sup> Bikini Atoll Conservation Management Plan 2010



## Levuka Historical Port Town - Fiji



### General Information:

Name of the World Heritage Site: Levuka Historical Port Town

Geographic location: Fiji

Category: Cultural Site

Date of Inscription: 2013

Criteria: (ii)(iv)

Property size: 69.6 ha, Buffer zone: 609.4 ha

### Brief description of the site

The town and its low line of buildings set among coconut and mango trees along the beach front was the first colonial capital of Fiji, ceded to the British in 1874. It developed from the early 19th century as a centre of commercial activity by Americans and Europeans who built warehouses, stores, port facilities, residences, and religious, educational and social institutions around the villages of the South Pacific island's indigenous population. It is a rare example of a late colonial port town that was influenced in its development by the indigenous community which continued to outnumber the European settlers. It is outstanding example of late 19th century Pacific port settlements, reflects the integration of local building traditions by a supreme naval power, leading to the emergence of a unique landscape.<sup>93</sup>

### Land Ownership:

The principal land ownership model is Freehold Land Ownership, owned by individuals and proprietors, churches and commercial businesses. The rest belongs to the crown (state) with a minor proportion listed as Native land.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1399/>

<sup>94</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1399.pdf>

<sup>95</sup> UNESCO, IUCN (2021) Weaving Nature with Culture: Review of World Heritage Priorities in the Pacific Region 2021-2025

### World Heritage site management and governance structure:

The Levuka Town Council and the National Trust manage the site and there is a Levuka Heritage Committee. The Committee has not convened since 2013<sup>95</sup>. A senior World Heritage Officer and a Senior Ranger from the National Trust are based in Levuka.

The Levuka Heritage policy is Cabinet approved and the Levuka Management Plan is in place and being implemented. The Levuka Heritage bill - which will be the legal mechanism for protecting and managing the site - is currently with the Solicitor General to be passed by Parliament and made law soon. Other relevant legislation includes the Town and Country Plan Act. An indigenous tourism framework is also being developed.

An allocation of \$1.5 million has been made for the renovation of the Levuka Heritage sites. The first part of the rehabilitation has already started, as part of the 20-year national development plan for traditional historic sites.<sup>96</sup>

### National Development Plan/Strategy:

National Strategic Development Plan Fiji National Development Plan 1990-2020.

### Collaborations and Partnerships

A survey of the condition of heritage buildings was undertaken in 2014 with the assistance of Heritage New Zealand (New Zealand Agency for International Development) and the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA).<sup>97</sup>

Funding was received from the World Bank for Development of legislative protection for the conservation of heritage in Levuka and development of a Management Plan for Levuka, World Heritage Stakeholder Consultation, and Comparative Analysis Study For Levuka.<sup>98</sup>

Recently representatives from the French, Australian and UK embassies visited Levuka as part of a multilateral discussion on funding.<sup>99</sup>

### Socio-cultural Considerations:

There are four chiefs on the island. The four chiefs were approached and gave consent on behalf of the people for World Heritage listing. They are interested to see the benefits to the life and people as a result of World Heritage listing.

<sup>96</sup> <https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/news/rehabilitation-on-heritage-sites/>

<sup>97</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/3278>

<sup>98</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/3278>

<sup>99</sup> Fiji Dept of Heritage and Arts workshop with TRC

**Visitor Profile:**

The 'quaint historic town' is viewed by many as 'well worth a visit', with Tripadvisor reviewers rating it an average of 4/5 from 17 reviews.

World Heritage Community members provided a lower average rating of 3.2/5 from 13 reviews.

**Scale, quality, capacity, and location of tourism infrastructure and services at or adjacent to the site**

Access is constrained by the state of the wharf (note investment planned), absence of air services and the state of roads. Accommodation options are limited as well as tourism products and services available to visitors.

Flights to Levuka (12 minutes from Suva) are currently suspended due to the condition of the runway. Two daily bus/ferry return trips operate between Suva and Levuka. The trip is about hour hours and includes a bus to the ferry at Natovi Landing (about 2 hours), then onto a ferry for a 60 min crossing, then another 60 min halfway around the island to Levuka. Costs are about FJ \$35 one way.

For accommodation there are several lodges, hotels, and guest houses available on the island.

There are a number of historical tours and village tours operated out of Levuka town, and there are also sites for fishing, snorkelling and hiking.<sup>100</sup>

Whilst Levuka does have the necessary tourism infrastructure, its location is on the opposite side of Fiji to where international tourists arrive (Nadi).

**Marketing:**

Levuka and its status as World Heritage is not high profile on Tourism Fiji's website. Levuka is not found under the main attractions and activities categories.<sup>101</sup> The NTO will need to be encouraged to use World Heritage Site status in their promotional and marketing activities to help drive demand.

Levuka does however have its own website (not linked to Tourism Fiji) managed by the Levuka Tourism Association with details on access and activities etc.<sup>102</sup>

**Site Visit Assessment**

The existing economic geography – Levuka is a remote site off the tourism trail with a small local population and a small tourism market - this results in limited social and economic benefits.

The local communities feel there is little benefit from the site being a World Heritage Area.

The absence of strong leadership and co-ordination across government agencies and the private sector has resulted in site management issues. The current system offers only limited and formal involvement to the local population and has minimal impact on community capacity.

The cost of managing the site has risen over the last decade due to a range of events including natural disasters. The costs are now more than government agencies can raise from rate payers and other sources. The cost of managing the site is perceived as a burden by local government and private business and there is little return on investment. There is an urgent need to demonstrate to the private sector and other stakeholders that the WH area is good value for money relative to alternative investment opportunities by investing in infrastructure to support tourism.

The resources available to manage the site have been declining and site managers have been unsuccessful in applying for funding.

The private sector businesses operating in the site have a much greater focus on socio-economic issues and relatively less on conservation of the site – this will, over time place the heritage values of the site at risk.

The buildings need painting and maintenance. the site needs a general uplift with street scaling and

The site has a significant opportunity to leverage the potential for greater social economic benefit for the communities of Levuka and Ovalau through tourism. These benefits will be greater where there is buy-in from the local community, and where the designation builds upon the local circumstances and traditional knowledge of the broader Ovalau communities.

There is a need to integrate culture and heritage (including World Heritage) as a tool for economic and social advancement for all of Ovalau.

The WH Brand can be used as a pathway to unlock intangible heritage of Ovalau with strong visual imagery.

Support and financing schemes will be required for cultural tourism projects, including, inter alia, cultural small and medium-sized enterprises, cooperatives,

<sup>100</sup> <https://www.levukafiji.com/getting-levuka-ovalau-island-fiji-islands/>

<sup>101</sup> Bula! Welcome to Fiji | The Official Travel Site of the Fiji Islands

<sup>102</sup> <https://www.levukafiji.com/getting-levuka-ovalau-island-fiji-islands/>

associations of artisans as complimentary paths for cultural entrepreneurship.

There are five areas of immediate focus:

- Review the Levuka Heritage Management Plan to align the dual objectives to achieve significant socio-economic benefits through tourism and preservation of the WH site that allows for effective conservation of heritage, in both its tangible and intangible dimensions; and balance local development that respects the culture of the host communities.
- Leadership and Co-ordinated Governance - The development of sustainable tourism at the site must be based on close and productive cooperation between public sector tourism authorities, private sector tourism operators and heritage site managers, planning and conservation authorities. Such cooperation will be crucial to achieve short and long-term sustainable outcomes that protect the resources on which their business will rely in the future.
- Enhance funding base and leverage new partnerships to pull in funding for a wide range of projects to address critical infrastructure issues and foster profitable partnership between public and private sectors.
- Invest in infrastructure to support tourism to create the economic basis to secure the future of the site.
- Stimulate awareness raising and educational initiatives and incentivise business owners in the town.
- Enhance tourism image and profile to drive awareness.
- Generate greater involvement and maximize the benefits for local communities through development of tourism experiences, products and services across Ovalau.

## LEVUKA SWOT Analysis

### Strengths

- **Plan of Management:** In place, focuses on punitive measures.
- **Beautification Plan:** Some funding available.
- **Department of Heritage:** Provides support.
- **Funding for Buildings:** \$200,000 is available for 20 buildings.
- **Government Support:** \$1.5 million has been allocated.
- **Infrastructure Developments:** Planned repair of the wharf, there is a regular passenger boat service, two wharves and an airstrip.
- **Cultural Initiatives:** Handicraft workshops, tour guide training, rich in traditional stories and culture.
- **Accessibility:** Proximity to Suva and other islands, cruise ship access.
- **Accommodation and Tourism Support:** Homestay style, Tourism Association, Levuka Heritage Conservation Committee.
- **Community Engagement:** Interest in tourism, small community conducive for collaboration, optimism.
- **Governance and Partnerships:** Traditional Governance structure, funding partnerships, new government focus.
- **Natural and Cultural Resources:** Rich natural resources, indigenous knowledge, diverse tourism products, and welcoming local character.
- **Facilities and Conservation Efforts:** Hospital, schools, police and fire stations, Corrections Centre, Marine Protected Areas, endemic species.
- **Economic and Social Stability:** Employment providers, resilient community, peaceful environment.

### Weaknesses

- **Community Benefit and Funding Issues:** Lack of tangible community benefit, reduction in funding, unclear ROI on UNESCO fee.
- **Infrastructure and Environmental Concerns:** Poor infrastructure, waste management issues, litter and rubbish problems.
- **Tourism and Heritage Challenges:** Limited tourism product, lack of marketing, disillusioned tourism industry and weak heritage connection.
- **Resource Constraints:** Small ratepayer base, limited resources for Levuka Town Council.
- **Educational and Economic Limitations:** No access to tertiary education on the island, and limited expansion opportunities.
- **Social and Operational Issues:** Friction within the community, odour from cannery, youth migration, and lack of coordination in tourism management.
- **Infrastructure Disrepair:** Impact of natural disasters, safety concerns, and lack of visitor monitoring.

### Opportunities

- **Community and Cultural Integration:** Connecting villages with unique attributes, and village development initiatives.
- **Tourism and Heritage Development:** Leveraging intangible heritage, tourism plans for the site and Ovalau, women's empowerment and heritage education programs.
- **Innovative Solutions and Funding:** Innovative funding models, practical solutions for property owners, and leveraging prison labor.
- **Marketing and Accessibility Enhancements:** Better marketing, app for heritage stories, as well as improved signage and presentation.
- **Environmental Initiatives:** Environmental and voluntourism opportunities, and protocols for tour operators.

### Threats

- **Investment and Economic Risks:** Lack of private sector investment and risk of buildings going into disrepair.
- **Environmental and Natural Risks:** Natural disasters, climate risks, and biosecurity concerns.
- **Societal and Cultural Risks:** Pandemic impact, sustainability challenges, risk of delisting, skill drain, and migration.

## Nan Madol: Ceremonial Centre of Eastern Micronesia



### General Information:

Name of the World Heritage Site: Nan Madol: Ceremonial Centre of Eastern Micronesia

Geographic location: Micronesia (Federated States of)

Category: Cultural site in danger

Date of Inscription: 2016

Criteria: (i)(iii)(iv)(vi)

Property size: 76.7 ha, Buffer zone: 664 ha

### Brief description of the site (including OUVs - cultural, historical, and natural attributes):

Nan Madol is a series of more than 100 islets off the south-east coast of Pohnpei that were constructed with walls of basalt and coral boulders. These islets harbour the remains of stone palaces, temples, tombs and residential domains built between 1200 and 1500 CE. These ruins represent the ceremonial centre of the Saudeleur dynasty, a vibrant period in Pacific Island culture. The huge scale of the edifices, their technical sophistication and the concentration of megalithic structures bear testimony to complex social and religious practices of the island societies of the period. The site was also inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to threats, notably the siltation of waterways that is contributing to the unchecked growth of mangroves and undermining existing edifices.

Parts of Nan Madol have crumbled over the last 200 years, with occasional typhoons blowing fragments into the sea. Sturdy mangrove trees and shrubs that cover parts of Nan Madol have damaged the walls.<sup>103</sup>

### Land Ownership:

Traditional land tenure. Aquatic areas are state managed as public trust.<sup>104</sup>

### World Heritage site management and governance structure:

Nan Madol is legally protected by the federal government and administered by the Office of National Archives, Culture and Historic Preservation (NACH) through the Historic Preservation Office of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). It is protected by the state government of Pohnpei under the Pohnpei Historic and Cultural Preservation Act (2002), administered by the Pohnpei Historic Preservation Office. The FSM Constitution acknowledges the customary interests of the traditional chiefs and the property is customarily protected by the Nahnmwarki Madolenihmw.

A management committee has been set up involving all stakeholders including traditional owners and this collaboration will be consolidated by passage of the proposed Bill LB 392 to create a Nan Madol Historic Preservation Trust with ownership and management under traditional oversight by the Nahnmwarki Chief. The site's property manager' is an interim arrangement only.<sup>105</sup>

A Master Plan for the Sustainable Conservation of the Nan Madol World Heritage Site was developed in 2020. The plan's three essential elements are:

- To remove the most severe, existential threats to the integrity and authenticity of Nan Madol
- To put in place the basic management structure necessary to sustainably conserve Nan Madol
- To activate networks of management support.

Some actions have been implemented, but the inability for travel to Pohnpei (due to COVID 19) hindered full achievement of some, most especially, the development of a Trust for the management of Nan Madol that will be essential for the sustainable conservation of the site.

No integrated management system for Nan Madol has been set up yet. An organization chart and qualifications and duties for each position has been prepared. Also, preliminary talks were held with organizations that would be able to provide ongoing support for a Nan Madol management system.<sup>106</sup> A vegetation

<sup>103</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1503/>

<sup>104</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1503.pdf>

<sup>105</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/4036>

<sup>106</sup> State of Conservation Report, Nan Madol: Ceremonial Centre of Eastern Micronesia FSM Office of National Archives, Culture, and Historic Preservation (2022)

management plan has been prepared along with online training for vegetation management.

The Tourism Strategy and Interpretation Plan, Sustainable Conservation Plan, and Site Management Plan requested by the Committee are yet to be developed. In addition to a wide range of tourism planning issues, this is urgent to identify which parts of the property can be accessible to visitors, so that conservation implications can be prioritized.<sup>107</sup>

#### **National Development Plan/Strategy:**

Micronesia Strategic Development Plan 2004–2023 – ‘Improving quality of life for all Micronesian people’.

#### **Collaborations and Partnerships**

The US State Department Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation Large Grant program funded the preparation of a 2020 Master Plan.<sup>108</sup>

Design and construction of a Visitor Centre (currently underway), is being funded by the government of Japan.

Organisations that have been and are planning to remain involved in supporting Nan Madol are the United States National Park Service, Division of International Affairs, the United States Office of Insular Affairs, The United States Department of Agriculture, the International National Trust Organization (INTO), and the Bahamas National Trust.<sup>109</sup>

#### **Environmental Considerations:**

Overgrowth of vegetation, Stonework collapse, Storms (Effects of storm surge), Erosion and siltation/deposition<sup>110</sup>

#### **Visitor Profile:**

World Heritage Travellers Community rated Nan Madol an average 3.8/5 from 11 votes, with comments including “a one-of-a-kind cultural masterpiece and the top attraction in the Pacific, perhaps even surpassing Easter Island. An added bonus is that you’ll encounter few other visitors here”.

Ratings on Tripadvisor averaged 4.5/5 from 121 reviews and included positive feedback, many saying it’s a ‘must do’ and ‘an experience of a lifetime’.

#### **Scale, quality, capacity, and location of tourism infrastructure and services at or adjacent to the site**

Micronesia is difficult to reach in itself - United Airlines is the main carrier serving the island. It has an island-hopping flight three times a week travelling from Honolulu—Majuro—Kwajalein—Kosrae—Pohnpei—Chuuk—Guam and back. The flight lasts about 14 hours and stops at each airstrip for 1 hour.

Once on the island of Pohnpei (location of the capital), getting to the ruins is easiest by boat. At high tide, small motorboats from the main town of Kolonia can easily make the trip to Nan Madol in about an hour. Nan Madol can also be reached by car, but it’s a half-day drive on rutted roads and must be timed with low-tide to wade across to the ruined city. There are several local tour guides that will take visitors out to Nan Madol.

Tourism on the island is based out of the capital Kolonia, where there are several hotels and restaurants and a tourist office. Other attractions on the island include the numerous waterfalls and historical war sites.<sup>111</sup> Guides are available but not well promoted online.

#### **Marketing:**

Nan Madol has a very basic website with limited information on travel logistics. The official visitor site of the Federated States of Micronesia profiles Nan Madol under Ancient sites but it is not promoted as a WH site.<sup>112</sup>

#### **Community Engagement and Empowerment:**

The US\$10 fee from visitors gets split three ways (1/3rd for the chief and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> for each of the two landowners).

#### **Challenges and Opportunities for tourism**

- Vegetation encroachment causing deterioration of masonry.<sup>113</sup>
- Threats for which the property was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger (environmental and management).
- Tourism activities be developed in the wider area in order to manage pressures on the property itself.
- Better access and information.

<sup>107</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/4036>

<sup>108</sup> State of Conservation Report, Nan Madol: Ceremonial Centre of Eastern Micronesia FSM Office of National Archives, Culture, and Historic Preservation (2022)

<sup>109</sup> State of Conservation Report, Nan Madol: Ceremonial Centre of Eastern Micronesia FSM Office of National Archives, Culture, and Historic Preservation (2022)

<sup>110</sup> State of Conservation Report, Nan Madol: Ceremonial Centre of Eastern Micronesia FSM Office of National Archives, Culture, and Historic Preservation (2022)

<sup>111</sup> <http://www.nan-madol.com>

<sup>112</sup> <https://visit-micronesia.fm/ruins/>

<sup>113</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/7693>

## Taputapuātea, French Polynesia (French Territory)



Image source: tahititourisme.com

### General Information:

Name of the World Heritage Site: Taputapuātea

Geographic location: Ra'iātea Island at the centre of the 'Polynesian Triangle', Pacific Ocean (French Polynesia)

Category: Cultural Site

Date of Inscription: 2017

Criteria: (iii)(iv)(vi)

Property size: Property: 2,124 ha, Buffer zone: 3,363 ha

### Brief description of the site (including OUVs - cultural, historical, and natural attributes):

Taputapuātea on Ra'iātea Island is at the centre of the 'Polynesian Triangle', a vast portion of the Pacific Ocean, dotted with islands, and the last part of the globe to be settled by humans. The property includes two forested valleys, a portion of lagoon and coral reef and a strip of open ocean. At the heart of the property is the Taputapuātea marae complex, a political, ceremonial and funerary centre. It is characterized by several marae, with different functions. Widespread in Polynesia, the marae were places where the world of the living intersected the world of the ancestors and the gods. Taputapuātea is an exceptional testimony to 1,000 years of mā'ohi civilization.<sup>114</sup>

### Land Ownership:

Mix of public land and private land.

### World Heritage site management and governance structure:

The Taputapuātea marae complex has been protected since 1952 under French Polynesian law and it has recently been classified as a historical monument. A protective and planning system, called a Zone de Site Protégé, is being put into place that would cover the whole of the property and the buffer zone. A steering committee has guided the management of the property since 2012. This committee is creating the permanent management structure for the property and a management plan was adopted in 2015. The plan will preserve the sites of memory that testify to the ancient mā'ohi civilization, protect the marae, preserve the terrestrial and marine environments of the cultural landscape and seascape and preserve and transmit traditional knowledge and skills. A three-person secretariat will manage the property in concert with a staffed bureau and the steering committee.<sup>115</sup>

### Socio-cultural Considerations:

Locals are hopeful the recognition of Taputapuātea marae as a heritage site will help attract travellers from the world seeking to discover the unique culture, history and way of life of the Polynesian people.<sup>116</sup>

### Environmental Considerations:

Much of the Taputapuātea marae complex is affected by wave action, particularly during storms. Cyclones create large waves in the lagoon.

Invasive species (plants and animals) are threatening the biodiversity, landscape, and seascape, and tourism, anchoring and their impact on coral reefs and marine resources also need consideration.<sup>117</sup>

### Visitor Profile:

In 2016 27,000 tourists came to the island, resulting in a 48% occupancy rate for the hotels and 37% for the pensions. The State Party estimates that numbers will increase by 30% by 2022 and that this can be accommodated by the current infrastructure.

Visitors gave the site a positive average rating of 4.5/5 on Tripadvisor from 336 reviews. Comments included the importance of having a guide or downloading information to appreciate the cultural significance of the site.

The World Heritage Traveller Community gave an average rating of just 2.8/5 from 5 votes.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>114</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1529/>

<sup>115</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/6895>

<sup>116</sup> <https://www.tahitianvacations.com/taputapuatea-marae-in-raiatea-named-a-unesco-world-heritage-site/>

<sup>117</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1529/documents/>

<sup>118</sup>

<https://www.worldheritagesite.org/list/Taputapu%C4%81tea>

**Scale, quality, capacity, and location of tourism infrastructure and services at or adjacent to the site**

Raiatea is a 45-minute flight from Tahiti's main airport in Papeete. Taxis and rental cars are available on the island and the road is reportedly in good condition. There are regular flights to Papeete from the US mainland, Hawaii and other countries around the Pacific rim. The island's mountain setting offers numerous scenic hiking trails and world class SCUBA diving in the surrounding waters (including a shipwreck).

There is a visitor centre across the road from the site, guides, brochures, signs to help interpret what you are viewing at each location within the marae and QR codes on each sign (to pull up the description on your phone in your language).<sup>119</sup> It is popular with scientists and nature lovers due to its rare flora and fauna species. Mount Temehani shelters the tiare 'apetahi (and about 30 other endemic plants), a flower found nowhere else in the world.

Raiatea is the top yachting location in The Islands of Tahiti. Most charter companies and marinas have chosen to settle around Raiatea. The island hosts a large number of moorings, bays (deep and calm) in a pristine and amazing environment (volcano craters, waterfalls). The sailing conditions are excellent.<sup>120</sup>

A narrow channel separates Raiatea from its sister island of Taha'a, where the famous Pacific Black Gold vanilla is grown. The high-quality vanilla has earned a reputation as a luxury item the world over.<sup>121</sup>

Accommodation is available on the island – two hotels (including high end) and 18 family run pensions or hostels with a total of 123 rooms to rent. A similar number are on Taha'a a short boat ride away.<sup>122</sup>

**Marketing:**

The island of Raiatea is promoted on Tourism Tahiti's website, with Taputapuatea marae featured, although not as a World Heritage site.<sup>123</sup>

**Community Engagement and Empowerment:**

Plans are in place to train islanders in guiding, catering, accommodation, and artisan crafts (2016).

**Challenges and Opportunities for tourism:**

- Managing visitors at the wider site – especially arriving by private vessel (effect of anchoring etc).
- Packaging and promoting with neighbouring island activities (eg vanilla)
- Guide program development

<sup>119</sup> [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g3219348-d309871-Reviews-Taputapuatea\\_Marae-Opoa\\_Raiatea\\_Society\\_Islands.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g3219348-d309871-Reviews-Taputapuatea_Marae-Opoa_Raiatea_Society_Islands.html)

<sup>120</sup> <https://tahititourisme.com/en-us/island/raiatea/>

<sup>121</sup> <https://www.tahitianvacations.com/taputapuatea-marae-in-raiatea-named-a-unesco-world-heritage-site/>

<sup>122</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1529/documents/>

<sup>123</sup> <https://tahititourisme.com/en-us/island/raiatea/>



## Rock Islands Southern Lagoon – Palau



### **General Information:**

Name of the World Heritage Site: Rock Islands Southern Lagoon

Geographic location: Koror State, Republic of Palau, Micronesia

Category: Mixed Natural and Cultural site

Date of Inscription: 2012

Criteria: (iii)(v)(vii)(ix)(x)

Property size: 100,200 ha, Buffer zone: 164,000 ha

### **Brief description of the site (including OUVs - cultural, historical, and natural attributes):**

Rock Islands Southern Lagoon (RISL) includes 445 uninhabited limestone islands of volcanic origin. Many of them display unique mushroom-like shapes in turquoise lagoons surrounded by coral reefs. The aesthetic beauty of the site is heightened by a complex reef system featuring over 385 coral species and different types of habitats. They sustain a large diversity of plants, birds and marine life including dugong and at least thirteen shark species. The site harbours the highest concentration of marine lakes anywhere, isolated bodies of seawater separated from the ocean by land barriers. They are among the islands' distinctive features and sustain high endemism of populations which continue to yield new species discoveries. The remains of stonework villages, as well as burial sites and rock art, bear testimony to the organization of small island communities over some three millennia. The abandonment of the villages in the 17th and 18th centuries illustrates the consequences of climate change, population growth and subsistence behaviour on a society living in a marginal marine environment.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>124</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1386>

<sup>125</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1386.pdf>

### **Land Ownership:**

Traditional communal land ownership (clans) and public lands authority.<sup>125</sup>

### **World Heritage site management and governance structure:**

The governance and ownership of resources is multi layered within Palau. Heritage responsibility interlinks between various national government ministries (Bureau of Cultural and Historic Preservation, National Environmental Protection Council), state governments, traditional chiefs and local communities, each with specific powers, mandates or interests in natural and cultural heritage matters.

At the site level, Koror State has focussed on cooperation, collaboration and partnerships for managing a site with many complexities.

The Koror State Government has built a range of effective management approaches for the property, including: visitor fees; surveillance and patrol; monitoring and tour guide certification. Management plans establish different conservation areas and zones, entry permit requirements and designated tourist activity areas.<sup>126</sup>

The legislative framework regulating the use and management of the environment and its resources is comprehensive and clear. The area falls in its entirety in Koror State, and the management jurisdiction of Koror State Rangers is well known and respected. Management authorities are operating on relatively reliable revenue from tourism. The strength of traditional value systems including resource governance systems is an asset and can enable management and zoning that accommodate both cultural/traditional and biodiversity conservation needs. Management objectives and priorities are defined in the Rock Islands Southern Lagoon Management Plan. Both legislative framework and management arrangements are conducive to protecting and maintaining the values of the property.

Cultural sites within the Rock Islands Southern Lagoon are protected under Title 19 'Cultural Resources' by the Historical and Cultural Preservation Act of the Republic of Palau. Underwater archaeological and historical remains are protected under Title 19 as the 'Palau Lagoon Monument'. All the designated sites within the property should be included on Palau's National Register of historic places.

The Koror State Department of Conservation and Law Enforcement collaborates with the Palau Historic Preservation Office, Bureau of Arts and Culture in

<sup>126</sup> UNESCO, IUCN (2021) Weaving Nature with Culture: Review of World Heritage Priorities in the Pacific Region 2021-2025

working with locally based agencies and organisations on management and research activities within the property. Koror State Regulations (1994) cover general resource use, recreational activities and the designation of protected areas within the Rock Islands Southern Lagoon. The Rock Islands Use Act was legislated in 1997 to regulate tourist activity in the islands. The laws and regulations are enforced by the Koror State Rangers.

The Rock Islands Southern Lagoon Area Management Plan 2004-2008 was adopted by the Koror State Legislature and Governor in 2005 and is currently under review.

Long term protection and management requirements for the property include the need to prevent negative impacts from tourism, including maintaining access restrictions to vulnerable areas, ensuring visitor numbers are within the capacity of the property, and mitigating the adverse effects from development of infrastructure and facilities in Koror.<sup>127</sup>

**National Development Plan/Strategy:** Republic of Palau National Master Development Plan (NMDP) 2020: 'Sustainable and widespread improvement in general standards of living while preserving cultural and environmental values for the people of Palau'.

#### **Collaborations and Partnerships**

The GEF programme has been an important funding ally for progressing WH site management needs.<sup>128</sup>

#### **Socio-cultural Considerations:**

In addition to being a source of subsistence and livelihood, the RISL is also a source of national pride and reverence.<sup>129</sup>

#### **Environmental Considerations:**

More regular and increasingly destructive typhoons (including recent 'super-typhoons') have caused damage to natural and historic sites and greatly impacted, if not completely devastated, local communities.

#### **Visitor Profile:**

Visitor numbers to Palau have reduced from 164,000 in 2015 to 106,000 in 2018. This reflects a move away from mass tourism towards higher end tourism, with spending per person increasing over this time.<sup>130</sup>

Visitor reviews are extremely positive. Trip advisor reviewers gave an average 5/5 rating from 347 reviews. Comments include: "mind blowingly beautiful", with the only negatives in relation to

rubbish, unclean rest rooms and uncommunicated closure of marine park due to custom.

The World Heritage Community Travellers gave an average rating of 4.6 from 15 votes, with comments including the lack of crowding. No cultural aspects were reported on.

#### **Scale, quality, capacity, and location of tourism infrastructure and services at or adjacent to the site**

Palau is a world-renowned premier diving destination. Activities include scuba diving, snorkelling, kayaking, hiking, fishing, and scenic flights.

There are a number of commercial (mostly charter) boat operators to get to and explore the islands.

There are flights from the US to Palau (5 days a week via other islands), direct from Taiwan two days a week, and from Papua New Guinea one day a week. There are a number of boats and flights out to the Rock Islands.

Koror has 45 listed accommodation properties ranging from hotels, luxury stays aboard floating boats (targeted at divers) and homestays.<sup>131</sup>

#### **Marketing:**

Promoted as a World Heritage site for diving (but not culture) on the official Palau Tourism Authority's website with links to boat/dive operators.<sup>132</sup> Lack of clarity around how to get to the Rock Islands.

#### **Challenges and Opportunities for tourism**

- Managing increasing visitor numbers - maintaining the feeling of a lack of crowding and retaining natural heritage values
- Transitioning from mass tourism to higher end 'green' tourism
- Experience development – combining cultural elements into ways to experience the islands.
- Better promotion – how to experience/ logistics etc.

<sup>127</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1386>

<sup>128</sup> UNESCO, IUCN (2021) Weaving Nature with Culture: Review of World Heritage Priorities in the Pacific Region 2021-2025

<sup>129</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1386.pdf>

<sup>130</sup> Becca (2019) BIKINI ATOLL TOURISM FEASIBILITY STUDY REPORT

<sup>131</sup> <https://pristineparadisepalau.com/directory-type/stay/>

<sup>132</sup> <https://pristineparadisepalau.com/>



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