

Sustainable Tourism in Fiji

Subjects: [Others](#) | [Environmental Sciences](#)

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The tourism industry has evolved as a major contributor to economic development and employment creation globally. Over the past seven decades, the tourism industry has experienced growth in both developed and developing countries. Although tourism has significant economic benefits, it often compromises environmental quality. Thus, tourism sustainability becomes an important element in managing the industry. Tourism sustainability has emerged as a leading policy paradigm and is important because tourism is a significant contributor to carbon emissions worldwide.

resident perceptions

tourism sustainability

1. Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism has gained widespread acceptance to reconcile and balance various aspects of heritage tourism, tourism management, social pressures, and economic development ^[1]. Noting the link between tourism development and environmental quality ^{[2][3]}, Adriana ^[4] found that public pressures can promote green supply chains, but organizational factors and strategic myopia hinders the implementation of sustainable tourism. Chan et al. ^[5] found that environmental knowledge, environmental awareness, and environmental concern are positively associated with tourists' ecological behaviour in a survey of 438 hotel employees in Hong Kong. Chen and Tung ^[6], Dunk et al. ^[7], and Suriñach and Wöber ^[8] indicated that the tourism industry uses many disposable products, which may lead to soil and water pollution.

In a study by Movono et al. ^[9], respondents of a Fijian village revealed that the first 20 years of tourism brought much social and economic change in the community that was both good and bad. The women of Votualailai village in Fiji were the first to receive full-time employment when the Naviti resort opened. More people left farming and fishing to focus on paid work which changed livelihood activities ^[10]. Movono et al. ^[11] also found that tourism involvement has driven a wedge between traditional human-ecology relationships. Villages now recognise these changes and find ways to rescue what all has been lost and adapt to challenges. The effects on stakeholders need to be considered in sustainable tourism planning ^[12].

2. Sustainability in SIDS

SIDS perceive tourism as an invaluable tool that helps them realize their national and development aspirations ^[13] ^[14] ^[15] ^[16]. Perceptions of the various social impacts of tourism have been extensively studied since the 1970s ^[17]. Tosun ^[17] stated that studies have focused on how segments of the host communities react to tourism impacts.

However, further investigations in other geographical locations are required to help develop theories on the perceptions of the social impacts of tourism [17]. Various models of perceptions of the impacts of tourism have been developed [18][19][20].

SIDS depend on tourism for exports and contribution to GDP [21]. SIDS depend on imports of food, water, and raw materials [22]. This dependence can cause island destinations to focus on economic gains and ignore social and environmental issues that tourism can potentially have [23][24][25][26]. Negative issues facing SIDS include habitat destruction, natural resource depletion, erosion, inflation, increasing crime, and loss of local identity [22][23][27]. In addition to these, the growing population of SIDS put pressure on limited resources, and sustainable alternatives are difficult to implement due to cost, location, lack of technical expertise, and infrastructure issues. Due to these reasons and limited size, marginalization, and resource limitations, SIDS will face significant challenges in the sustainable development of tourism [28].

Indigenous communities have taken advantage of the socio-economic and environmental potential. They have created new businesses, created natural protected areas, gained formal employment, and adapted to tourism as a means of creating a living [9][29]. Studies on the perceptions of sustainability in tourism are essential to small island economies because they rely extensively on tourism for growth and development [30] and are vulnerable to environmental degradation, exploitation, and rising sea levels. Mainstream tourism has been found to entail unsustainable practices relating to environmental and societal impacts [1].

3. Residents Perceptions towards Tourism Impacts

Nunkoo and Ramkissoon [31] used a sample of 230 residents to examine the resident attitudes towards tourism in Port Louis, Mauritius. The authors found that while residents recognize the positive impact of tourism, they are also concerned with some negative influences of the industry. Rughoobur-Seetah [32] also conducted a similar study in Mauritius with a sample of 178 residents. The results of this study indicated that residents agree that tourism has economic value to the island while they also believe that the environment should not be harmed, and more community participation should be initiated. Ribeiro et al. [33] studied a sample of 418 residents from Cape Verde. They found that economic factors had a direct influence on the pro-tourism development behaviour. The study also found that both attitudes to positive impacts and negative impacts have a direct influence on residents' pro-tourism development behaviour. The authors also recommended that it is important for policymakers to guarantee that tourism developments will have more benefits than costs. In SIDS, residents' perspectives are not considered and frequently excluded from decision making related to tourism. Therefore, there is a need to include residents in the process of development as it allows for greater transparency, equity, and sustainability of tourism resources [27].

Rahman and Reynolds [34] established a comprehensive model of consumers' behavior decisions and examined the interaction among consumers' biospheric value, willingness to sacrifice for the environment, and behavioural intentions. They conclude that the biospheric value influences consumers' willingness to sacrifice for the environment. Torres-Delgado and Saarinen [35] and Blancas et al. [36] introduced composite indicators to measure and quantify socio-economic dimensions of sustainable tourism for decision making. Sustainable tourism can

defend environmental protection, improve community's health and education, and reduce poverty in destinations [21][37].

4. Sustainable Tourism Planning Model

Padin [38][39] proposed a sustainable tourism planning model based on the triple bottom line (TBL) dimensions, viz., ecological, social, and economic planning. "Triangle Nijkamp" initiated the model of this study which arises in Hall [40]. Padin's TBL approach has been applied by numerous scholars such as Svensson and Wagner [41][42], Hunter [43], Høgevold [44], Cambra-Fierro and Ruiz-Benítez [45], Dos Santos [46], Høgevold and Svensson [47], Pilgram [48], Padin et al. [39], Ferro et al. [49], and Grah et al. [50]. The TBL approach asserts that stakeholders show concern towards tourism activities' economic, ecological, and social aspects. These conflicting relationships are referred to as the TBL approach [51].

The literature treats the three dimensions as independent and uncoordinated. Thus, it is crucial to ascertain relationships between these dimensions. The stakeholders or the so-called social capital are of utmost importance to the model since it represents the same population for whom and why this process exists. Many authors have stated the importance of participation of the stakeholders in any sustainable process or planning in tourism [52][53][54][55][56][57][58][59][60]. However, this is problematic in practice [61]. Studies that have tested the TBL elements separately include those by van Beurden and Gössling [62], Dixon-Fowler et al. [63], Albertini [64], Javed et al. [65], Esteban-Sanchez et al. [66], Liao et al. [67], Wang and Sarkis [68], and Theodoulidis et al. [69].

References to sustainability in TBL is based on theory [41][42][43][48] and in case studies [41][42][44][45][46][47]. These works raise three dimensions, socio-cultural, economic, and environmental, and finding the right balance between them ensures long-term sustainability [38]. Sustainable tourism is a balance between tourism development and the sustainability of the environment. Public pressures ensure that sustainability happens while organizational factors hinder it. For sustainable tourism to occur, all stakeholders of the tourism industry must work together. The TBL model suggests that there needs to be a balance between economic, social, and environmental factors for sustainability to occur. Researchers have also studied the TBL elements separately. It is vital to understand whether the relevant populace is aware of the negative impacts of tourism. An absence of awareness of the negative issues will not lead to any public pressure to resolve the issues.

5. Tourism and Fiji

Tourism contributes about 34 percent towards GDP and 26.3 percent of total employment to Fiji and is an essential driver of economic activity [70] (**Figure 1**), which is higher than the average of 33 percent in other pacific island countries. There is a growing demand from tourists for multiple pit-stop vacations [71]. Fiji can benefit from island hopping by developing holiday packages for multiple destinations for long haul tourists through its cruise ship, airline, and rental networks [72]. Flying to smaller island destinations provides tourists with a great aerial view of Fiji

and showcases unique features such as reefs and atolls. Resorts and excursion sites link through land and air transport [\[72\]](#).

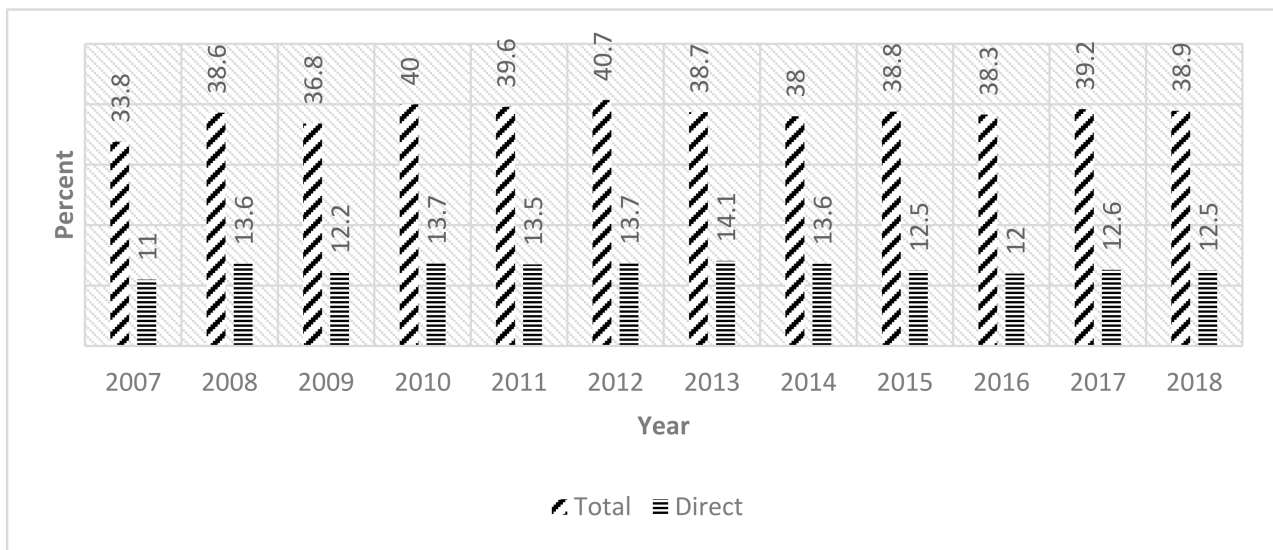


Figure 1. Tourism's direct and total contribution to Fiji's GDP (2007–2018). Source: World Tourism and Travel Council, Country Reports (various issues).

Fiji has the largest tourism industry in the South Pacific, employing about 26.3 percent of the total workforce [\[70\]](#). COVID-19 had a massive impact on the tourism industry as the economy was expected to contract by 21.7 percent due to insufficient tourism activity and its effects on the economy. The impact also increased unemployment and further pushed households below the poverty line [\[73\]](#). This is explained by the fact that 27 percent of staff from tourism businesses are on reduced hours and days, 25 percent are on leave without pay, and 8 percent have been made redundant. Additionally, 50 percent of tourism businesses are hibernating or closed with anticipation that if the COVID-19 situation did not change by November of 2020, around 500 tourism and non-tourism businesses anticipate bankruptcy [\[74\]](#). The primary sources of tourists to Fiji are from Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, each contributing about 44 percent, 18 percent, 10 percent of arrivals, respectively (**Figure 2**).

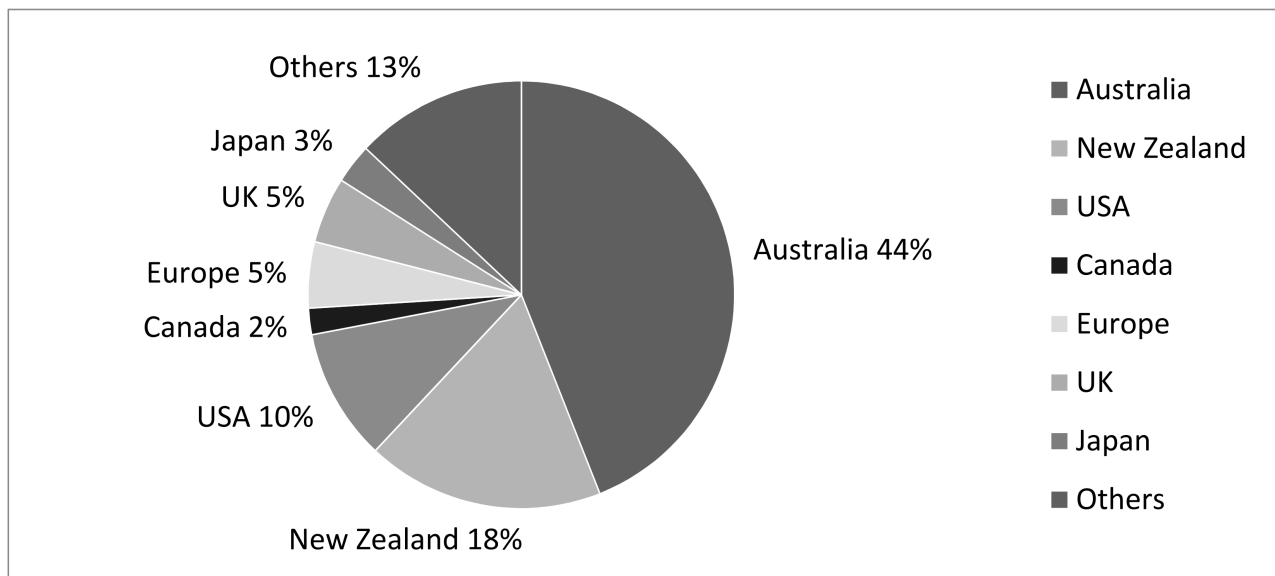


Figure 2. Key source markets for international tourism in Fiji (1975–2018). Source: Fiji Bureau of Statistics and Reserve Bank of Fiji Quarterly Reviews (various issues).

Tourism Fiji is the marketing arm of the Fijian government that promotes Fiji as a tourism destination throughout the world. Tourism Fiji has international offices in Sydney, Auckland, Los Angeles, London, Germany, and China, with representatives in India, Singapore, and Japan. Fiji has a good network of transport services, including buses, ferries, and taxis, and has two domestic airlines, Fiji Link and Northern Air, which operate between the outer islands. Yachts, cruises, and car rentals are also great ways of exploring Fiji [75]. Growing tourist numbers indicate Fiji's popularity as a tourism destination. From the year 2000, tourist arrivals have grown by about 187 percent to reach about 900,000 in 2018. Tourism earnings were FJ \$2.08 billion in 2018, which brings Fiji close to achieving its 2021 targets [76].

Major tourism infrastructures in Fiji, such as hotels, are typically in the form of greenfield investments. This results in significant long-term leakages and repatriation of profits [77][78], which further complicates attempts to develop linkages between tourism facilities and local economies [77][79][80][81][82]. This leads to unequal spatial and geographic development [81]. Narayan and Prasad [80] stated that 94% of the 132 tourism projects implemented between 1988 and 2000 were foreign-owned, with just 6% local ownership. Farrelly [83] argued that there may be a need to reform Fiji's local traditional decision-making systems for local ownership ventures in the future.

Lastly, tourism is affected by political instability and pandemics [84]. Fiji has gone through four coups since 1987 and numerous changes in government [29]. At present, Fiji's tourism sector is at a halt due to the coronavirus pandemic. Border closures meant job losses to 40 percent of the Fijian workforce and a ripple effect on businesses indirectly related to the tourism industry. The Reserve Bank of Fiji Economic Review of April 2020 indicated that the economy was expected to contract more sharply than the initial -4.3% estimated for 2020 due to a significant decrease in tourism activity and the ripple effect on the rest of the economy. The report also stated that 65,800 members had withdrawn from the Fiji National Provident Fund from a scheme targeted to individuals affected by the COVID-19 pandemic [85].

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