

Fiji Tourism Talanoa 2017

Bula Acting Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism, Honourable Faiyaz Koya,

Permanent Secretary for Tourism, Mr Shaheen Ali,

Tourism Leaders and Stakeholders.

Today is a historic occasion as we revive an event where tourism stakeholders gather to meet and discuss matters of interest to the Tourism Industry and the Nation. The last such Forum was held in 2009 at the Plantation Resort (8 years ago)

Every industry or profession has an annual event for its stakeholders and members and it is about time we had ours.

This is also a time where all the stakeholders get to meet and understand the role each company and segment plays in growing the Tourism Industry. This is a time we want to hear from all the stakeholders.

Tourism is Fiji's largest foreign exchange earner (\$1.6b in 2016), the major employer (1 in 3 jobs involve tourism) and the prime vehicle for investment. Aligned to Government's policy of spreading the benefits of development to all corners of Fiji, tourism is doing that which also lifts living standards in Fiji wide. In fact in our industry, many visitors prefer the more remote areas to be in touch with nature.

Tourism is 40% of GDP and growing rapidly and is a vital cog in Fiji's economy.

The Government has finalized the Fiji Tourism 2021 plan which we will discuss today. As with any business we need a plan to chart our way forward in a profitable and sustainable manner.

This week we had the Industry Days – Tuesday at Pacific Harbor and Wednesday at the Intercontinental at Natadola. Next Monday Tourism Fiji will have an Industry Day in Savusavu which is long overdue in the North – thanks to Tourism Fiji.

This wide interaction between Tourism Fiji and Tourism Stakeholders is necessary and refreshing.

Dialogue and discussion help to resolve matters and also concentrate the focus of stakeholders to achieving the best for our economy and our industry.

The Talanoa Planning Committee in consultation with the Minister is even contemplating having this Tourism Talanoa twice a year.

I would urge that we have discussions in a cordial and productive manner with the best outcome for Fiji and tourism. Already there has been good cooperation with the Tourism Marketing Committee whereby tourism stakeholders meet on a regular basis to discuss strategy and tactics to increase traffic to Fiji especially in the weaker months. The partners involved are Fiji Airways, FHTA, SOFTA and Tourism Fiji.

As we heard during the Industry Days, working closely together brings about results and benefits for all. We just heard that Government has launched the National Development Plans for the next 5 years and 20 years which hopefully will merge with stakeholders' plans seamlessly.

Government has done much to assist the industry by way of infrastructure development i.e. roads, bridges (Denarau and consequences if it failed), airports, jetties, etc. Even medical facilities though the recompression chamber is an outstanding priority especially for our diving business.

With Fiji's leadership role in COP23, we are obligated to lead by example as our Honourable Prime Minister is the Chair. However, it is our livelihood to have environmentally sound and sustainable business practices to ensure that our environment and oceans remain pristine as this is what we market and promote as the last pristine area of the globe to visit. We need to keep that dream alive.

I suggest that we should plan to hold future Talanoa events prior to the National Budget so that our suggestions can be considered for inclusion.

This year we dovetailed this Tourism Talanoa with HOTEK, a tourism industry expo, happening right next door. So please go and take a look at the latest products and services that help make our industry more efficient and up to date with the latest developments and technology.

Interesting to note that the Fiji Tourism 2021 plan talks about earning \$2.21b foreign exchange. This is the crux of the matter, we need more high value tourists who stay longer and spend more during their stay in Fiji. This is not only about visitor arrival numbers alone.

It is very important for Fiji to have a viable, cooperative, and responsive National Carrier working closely with the accommodation sector, Tourism Fiji and Stakeholders so that the inventories and marketing effort can be synchronized to maximize benefit to all involved in the industry i.e. the Government, companies and the workers. Andre will elaborate more on the national carrier's plans and the exciting times ahead for them and how this will benefit the whole tourism industry.

We are not the only tourist destination in the world, we face competition from all quarters. As such we need to be competitive in all respects. We need a holistic approach to growing this industry with the assistance of Government with growth led policies and the active participation of all stakeholders in developing the tourism industry for the good of our economy and all Fijians.

We need to do things better and smarter but above all we need to work together as Team Fiji to grow this wonderful industry of ours.

We hope that you will fully participate in today's event and I thank the Permanent Secretary and the Organizing Committee for bringing this Tourism Talanoa to life and we look forward to a successful Talanoa today and in the future.

Vinaka.

Dixon Seeto.

President.

Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association.