trade journals would enable the country to promote its ecotourism products. Only by a serious effort in promotion will Bangladesh start to be seen as an ecotourism destination.

Conclusion

Traditionally tourism has been viewed as largely beneficial to, and compatible with, the process of economic development. As the demand from tourists to visit natural scenic areas increases, developers have resorted to exploit this segment of the tourism market by developing tourist attractions in and around scenic sites, such as mountains, forests, beaches and cultural and historical areas. However overdevelopment, inappropriate development and poor management can cause environmental degradation. There is a need to balance the requirements of tourism development with the environmental constraints to ensure both economic and ecological sustainability. To create a form of tourism that utilises unique local, natural, historical and cultural resources, and to promote the conservation and preservation of forests through proper management, and to combine successfully the resources and the promotion of tourism, it is necessary to implement ecotourism and a green productivity program in a planned way. The philosophies and practices of ecotourism and green productivity can be, and should be, a part of the tourism development strategy for Bangladesh.

Tourists visiting virtually unknown, developing countries like Bangladesh are concerned about food, disease, infection, inconvenience, language barriers, safety and security and so on. Therefore this negative image has to be addressed by the Bangladesh Parajatan Corporation by participating in international fairs, seminars and workshops and also through advertising and publicity campaigns. Government, NGOs and private organisers involved in the general tourism sector should work hand in hand to develop ecotourism and green productivity initiatives. Ultimately, with the right policies and understanding of the relationship between tourism and the environment, all tourism (including mainstream) will move towards being sustainable.

Chapter Six

Ecotourism in Fiji

Manoa Malani

Introduction

Tourism is a major industry for Fiji. Fiji is the major tourism destination of the Pacific (excluding Hawaii) and plays an important role in South Pacific regional tourism. In 1999, an all time record high of 409,955 visitors went to Fiji. Tourism is directly or indirectly responsible for over 40,000 jobs in the formal sector, where it is the most important business, followed by sugar production. The country is now a mature destination with a widespread range of products and markets.

Tourism earnings for Fiji were an estimated $F619 million in 1999. While the total earnings are the largest sector contribution to the national economy, the direct contribution of mainstream tourism to the average Fijian family is limited. The economic benefits acquired through resort-style tourism development are patchily distributed. It is here that nature and cultural-based tourism in rural districts has the potential to bring economic benefits to grass roots communities.

While many travellers to Fiji have typically sought the “sun, sea, sand, and smiles”, there are strong indications that travellers seeking nature-oriented experiences are on the rise. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, approximately 7% of international tourism sales are spent on nature tourism. Tourism in general is on the rise at a high rate. And, according to analyst Kreg Lindberg, nature travel is growing at a rate of 10 to 30%.

It is hard to put figures on ecotourism in Fiji, and probably few foreign visitors come to Fiji solely and specifically for an ecotourism holiday. But many visitors spend at least part of their holiday using areas or products that depend on protection of the significant indigenous natural and cultural values of Fiji. For example, 6000 people visited the Tavoro Falls at Bouma in 1998, many as part of a week’s diving package to Taveuni.

While there is strong interest by Fiji nationals to picnic and swim in places such as the Colo-I-Suva Forest Park, the Sigatoka Sand Dunes and the Bouma National Heritage Park, the predominant markets for these parks
are international with visitors from Australia, New Zealand, North America and Europe.

The Fiji tourism industry has become more actively involved in marketing ecotourism over the last three or four years. Even without large numbers of visitors to ecotourism sites, these have value to the industry as a whole by rounding out a complete range of products the country has to offer. The Fijian Visitors’ Bureau has a website for ecotourism and actively promotes community-based tourism projects in its international marketing.

Tourism and Ecotourism Policy

Two significant Government policies for ecotourism are the provisions in the Tourism Development Plan 1998–2005 and the recently approved Ecotourism and Village-based Tourism Policy and Strategy for Fiji. The Tourism Development Plan sets conservation and environmental protection measures (which are required for all tourism, not just ecotourism) in the context of development plans for the overall industry. It also deals specifically with ecotourism but refers specifically to the Ecotourism Policy and Strategy for most details. The strategy defines ecotourism as:

**A form of nature-based tourism which involves responsible travel to relatively undeveloped areas to foster an appreciation of nature and local cultures, while conserving the physical and social environment, respecting the aspirations and traditions of those who are visited, and improving the welfare of the local people.**

The policy incorporates five main principles. It recognises that ecotourism should complement but not compete with more conventional tourism, that tourism should take second place to conservation and, at times, may be banned or restricted in areas considered especially vulnerable, and that successful implementation of the policy can be achieved only through social co-operation. Tourism usually involves a wide range of stakeholders. Ecotourism in Fiji (with the spread of natural and cultural heritage protection functions through many government agencies, and the involvement with communities, customary landholders and those with customary rights to the coast and natural and cultural heritage) has an even greater range of stakeholders than normal. Because of their importance, the major players in Fiji ecotourism are discussed in Box 1.

**Box 1: Major Ecotourism Stakeholders**

**Landholders and Communities.** Most land is held communally in Fiji and customary landholders and those with customary rights to marine resources (usually those with adjacent landholding rights) are perhaps the most important players in ecotourism in the country. Without their agreement and in many cases active participation, the commercial use of many areas with potential for ecotourism is just not possible. It should be noted that 83% of all land in Fiji, and virtually all land with high natural heritage values, is still in customary tenure. While this land may be leased for protection as a reserve or for tourism in some circumstances, increasingly the landholders wish to be actively involved in business on their land themselves. This offers them the potential of making more than a subsistence living on their own land and an alternative to leaving their villages in order to get work.

**The National Lands Trust Board (NLTB).** The administration of all Fijian land in customary tenure is vested in the NLTB. The NLTB has the key function of controlling the commercial management of customary tenure lands of Fiji. It is responsible, on behalf of landholders, for negotiating leases for the land. As part of its activities, the NLTB has commercial or industrial leases for tourism purposes, usually for hotels or resorts. By the end of 1998, there were 94 such leases, mainly in the west. However, as an alternative to long-term leasing and in order to promote care of the environment, the NLTB has in recent years actively advocated community-based ecotourism. This it sees as an ideal way of generating income and employment for landholders, without the long-term alienation caused by leasing. Also, it can make a real contribution to conserving natural and cultural heritage values. The NLTB can rightly be perceived as the founder of ecotourism in Fiji. It has been very active in conservation initiatives on behalf of the landholders, in line with its custodial role. The recent restructuring of NLTB re-emphasised the importance of ecotourism initiatives.

**The National Trust of Fiji.** The National Trust has broad functions that allow it to be involved with the protection of both natural and cultural heritage. It manages several areas of importance to ecotourism, including historic buildings in Levuka, Waisali Forest Levu, and the Sigatoka Sand Dune National Park on the Coral Coast. In many ways, the Trust is the logical agency to assume a greater role in the management of properties, and give advice to landowners in areas of high natural and cultural value, but at present it is woefully under-resourced for this task. The new Government has announced its intention to boost the role of the Trust but has not yet announced how this will be done.

**The Department of Forestry.** The Department administers several classes of land with current or potential interest for ecotourism, Nature Reserves, Forest Reserves and an informal category, Protection Forests. One sanctuary has full protection, and in these, public use is restricted. The Department has an environmental forestry division which is responsible for the Department's activities in ecotourism. Its major role is in the management of Colo-I-Suva Forest Park, a native forest reducing in value for indigenous nature-based ecotourism as it is rapidly being dominated by planted African mahogany.

**The Department of Tourism.** This body has an ecotourism unit which is responsible for developing policies on ecotourism and for monitoring existing ecotourism projects. The Department has developed an ecotourism and village-based tourism policy which has recently been formally adopted by the Government. The Department of Tourism is also actively involved in supporting pilot community-based ecotourism projects such as those at Namuamua and at the Wayalailai Resort.

The Fiji Visitors Bureau’s (FVB). This is Fiji’s national tourist board, with functions to market and promote Fiji overseas, to provide information services to visitors in Fiji and in certain cases to be involved in tourism product...
There are other institutional stakeholders in addition to the above key ones. The following organisations have an interest in ecotourism in Fiji: Department of Environment; Department of Cooperatives; Fiji Museum; Department of Fisheries; Ministry of Fijian Affairs; Ministry of Women and Culture; Budget and Aid Coordinating Committee, Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Regional Development and Multi Ethnic Affairs; Tourism Council of the South Pacific; Fiji Dive Operators Association; World Wide Fund for Nature, South Pacific Program (WWF); South Pacific Action Committee for Human Ecology and Environment (SPACHEE); Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific (FSP).

With the involvement of numerous government and non-government agencies in ecotourism, there is considerable overlap in their interest and activities. At times, however, regular breakdowns of communication occur, even within and among government departments.

Once clear benchmarks for ecotourist projects have been established within a national accreditation scheme by the ecotourism committee, there should be more co-operation in marketing ecotourism. The decision by NLTB and Fiji Pine, through the Vanua Tourism concept to consider jointly marketing ecotourism projects on communally-held land, may indeed be correct, but it would seem to involve a considerable duplication of effort.

Most importantly, relationships between local owners and tourist enterprises operated by other villages or outsiders continue to be a problem. Despite the assumptions underlying tourism awareness schemes, it should not be assumed that villagers either want or need tourism, or that the kind of tourism they may (or may not) want is ecotourism. And even if they do desire to play the role of host, the conditions under which they are prepared to do so may differ significantly from those envisaged by tourism developers, planners and hotel management. Unless they are convinced on both counts, efforts to persuade them to develop a quality tourism product will fail. Aside from this fundamental matter, there are a range of other matters that should be addressed.

At present there is no legislation concerning environmental conservation practices in the tourism sector. The only relevant document is the National Environmental Strategy which was drafted in 1993. It encourages ecotourism development as an effective means of resource management. Fiji has never had a proper environmental strategy and the concept of environmental conservation is still relatively new. As a consequence, most development in Fiji has not had to adhere to any environmental guidelines and this has led to substantial damage to the environment and in particular to the coastal areas.

An urgent educational program on coral reef and coastal management needs to be embarked upon by the relevant Ministries and agencies, including the University of the South Pacific. The Government is looking at incentives for energy saving equipment and other items related to better environmental management. The Government is attempting to continue to provide resources to assist with further improvements to infrastructure for the tourist industry, especially for ecotourism in the rural areas. And the tourism industry is trying to work with local authorities and the Department of Town and Country Planning to improve the visual infrastructure of tourism parkways, view corridors, parks, beaches and public spaces.

**Ecotourism Products**

The main ecotourism products or destinations at present are listed in Box 2. These are based on National Parks and other protected areas.

**Box 2: Park-based Ecotourism Products**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Name</th>
<th>Date Established</th>
<th>Funding Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colo-I-Suva Forest Park</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Department of Forestry with assistance from NZODA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sigatoka Sand Dunes National Park</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Fiji National Trust in 1989, with assistance from NZODA for archaeological investigations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bouma National Heritage Park</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>NLTB and the Department of Forestry, with assistance from NZODA supporting facility development and training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koroyanitu National Heritage Park</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>NLTB, Fiji Pine Limited and the Department of Forestry, with support from NZODA and SPREP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tavuni Hill Fort</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Initially funded by the European Union with development channelled through the Tourism Council of the South Pacific, with cooperation from the Department of Tourism, Fiji Museum and the Department of Forestry.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the products listed in Box 2 had strong government or donor input. Two are managed directly by Government agencies and the others are community-based projects. Overseas aid may often be appropriate, but too
often the first hint of a problem is followed by an instinctive reaction to ask Australia, New Zealand or (less frequently) the UK or the USA for technical and financial assistance. In the long term, what is most needed is local institutions and funding commitment from the Fiji government.

The major repository of cultural knowledge and objects is the Fiji Museum and this has an important role in retaining cultural awareness for Fiji nationals and interpreting it to visitors. The Museum provides advice to landowners on the value and care of archaeological sites on their land. There is thus a key link between the Museum and the protection of sites of cultural importance throughout Fiji. The Museum is already an important visitor attraction and plans for further improvements of the Museum and neighbouring Thurston Gardens will enhance that.

A number of the resort-based dive operations have local arrangements with indigenous fishing rights (qoliqoli) owners to stop or control fishing in areas of value to divers, and the Fiji Dive Operators Association has a code of environmental protection for its members.

On land, ecotourism operations include Adventures in Paradise, Rivers Fiji and resort operators such as the Jean-Michel Cousteau Fiji Island Resort. These operators use high standards of environmental ethics and are actively involved in the protection of areas of significant natural or cultural value.

**Case Study: Rivers Fiji**

Rivers Fiji originated in February of 1998 as a nature-based adventure company. Currently, Rivers Fiji operates one-and two-day river trips on a “class II” river called the Wainikoroiuluva in the Upper Navua Gorge. Rivers Fiji also operates one-day sea kayaking programs to the island of Beqa, and coastal areas of Viti Levu near Pacific Harbour. Multi-day packages with river rafting and inflatable kayaking, sea kayaking, island exploration and sailing on tall ships are also available.

Tours are organised and conducted in two central provinces of Viti Levu by local guides, using a ‘leave no trace’ concept. Local landowners receive land-use fees, lease payments, and employment from Rivers Fiji. The company is owned by a partnership comprised of two North Americans and one Fijian. The Fijian manufactures the boats and other white-water gear locally. A North American manager resides in Fiji and provides technical training for the Fijian guides. To date, one local person has been trained as area manager.

It was necessary for the Rivers Fiji managers to discuss the project with landowning patrilineages (mataqali) who controlled access to the rivers. Company representatives consulted with all the villages along each corridor. At the request of the provincial leaders (Roko Tuis) of each Provincial District office (Namosi and Serua), a second series of meetings with villages of Nakavika and Nabukelevu occurred after FTIB approval. The primary focus of these meetings was to secure signatures of approval by relevant mataqali so that Rivers Fiji could begin business.

Rivers Fiji directors also discussed the project with the FVB, the Department of Tourism, the Ministry of the Environment, including the Department of Forestry, local tour operators, and the WWF. In general, government bodies were unaware of the economic and ecotourism potential of whitewater recreation, but they supported the project, primarily because it would provide tourism opportunities in remote areas and support rural communities with an alternative income opportunity.

Once established, Rivers Fiji directors continued to liaise with government entities, provincial offices, and landowners, and found an especially enthusiastic ally in the FVB. It was at the behest of the FVB that a meeting was held in July, 1998 with several Ministers and Directors from the Departments of Environment, Tourism and Transport, Fijian Affairs, and Women and Culture, at which Rivers Fiji outlined a proposal for developing Fiji’s hinterland, an area not included in the “sun, sand, and sea” tourism for which Fiji tends to be known. At the meeting, Rivers Fiji directors explained the need for a conservation area on the Upper Navua. As a consequence, the river corridor on the Upper Navua Gorge will be protected through a conservation lease 20 kilometres long and 400 metres wide (200 metres on either side of the high-water mark).

Agreements with villages for exclusive use have been obtained through traditional (i.e. a special ceremony and signed agreements with the village members and the provincial council office) and legal means (i.e. a lease agreement). Significant income has been generated for one of two communities involved in the project (Nakavika Village). Guides have markedly improved their English language speaking skills. All in all, Rivers Fiji has established a good prototype model for conservation through ecotourism.

**Case Study: Bouma and Koroyanitu National Heritage Parks**

Ecotourism projects in these areas have received considerable technical and financial support. Some of this support can be regarded as the costs of developing new approaches to rural development and conservation in Fiji. Both areas are now receiving significant benefits from ecotourism and the future is bright, providing the communities manage their enterprises well.

As well as direct income to the villages additional benefits include: the conservation of Koroyanitu's forests; the wide range of technical skill development that has occurred during the program; indirect benefits to transport operators and accommodation suppliers based in Lautoka and Nadi. The Fiji tourism industry has gained from having a high profile ecotourism destination near Nadi.
The Bouma project, including the Lavena Coastal Walk, the Tavoro (Bouma) Waterfalls Track and the Vidawa Bush Trek, now has about 7000 visitors a year, and generates well in excess of F$25 000 a year directly to the park owners, and much more to the Taveuni visitor industry. Like Koroyanitu, there has been a wide range of benefits including: conservation of Bouma's forests; creation of several permanent jobs; collective pride in what the Vanua Bouma have achieved; skill development such as in first aid, guiding and book-keeping practices; plus the development of basic infrastructure in the areas, such as bridges, signs and visitor centres. The main Tavoro waterfall is a major tourism attraction for the majority of visitors to Taveuni and is well known within the Fiji tourism industry.

While good progress has been made at Bouma and Koroyanitu, there is still work to be done at both sites in the areas of skill development, product development and ensuring that benefits are spread more widely to some of the other villages, such as Navilawa and Nalotawa at Koroyanitu.

The Japanese Tripple T PECC Group has provided assistance in terms of facility development for the Koroyanitu and National Heritage Park by building a rest room and providing a guidebook for Abaca, which is part of the Koroyanitu National Heritage Park.

Moreover, the Japanese organisation has produced phenological calendars for Lavena and Abaca, which are part of the nature tours of Bouma and Koroyanitu National Heritage Parks.

**Conclusion: A Best Practices Program**

It is evident that the multitude of incongruent approaches to responsible tourism practices often dilutes the effectiveness of the principles on which ecotourism is founded. Clearly the tourism industry requires internal guidelines and best practices which operators, tourists, host communities, and governments can utilise in working towards common ecologically and socially responsible goals.

A proposal exists to develop a best practices program for ecotourism in Fiji. This proposal is based on bringing experts from the world's first and most successful ecotourism accreditation program to Fiji, to work together with local experts to provide an integrated system (accreditation or best practices program, guide standards, business development and marketing) to stimulate responsible and effective ecotourism development and growth. This program does not aim to transplant Australia's Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP) to Fiji. Rather, our primary objective is to adapt and integrate that internationally recognised program and guidelines into a system that works for Fiji and meets its cultural, societal, and environmental needs specifically.

Ecotourism is moving forward in Fiji and in order to stay ahead of the wave and ensure the quality of product, we believe the task requires an evaluation system that monitors the situation from the field. In addition, the industry must find a way to support an evaluation system that can exist in remote regions. Host communities must be empowered through education and financial means. Lastly, fragile ecosystems must be protected through cooperative efforts at all levels.

The above program is proposed to assist Fiji in meeting the international standards of ecotourism in preparation for the United Nation's Year of Ecotourism 2002. It is the hope of the Ministry and the Fijian Ecotourism Association that this proposal will provide further links with Australia (the major source market for visitors) by creating a pattern of excellence in ecotourism.