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## What Africa Can Learn From Fiji About Sustainable Tourism Development

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More of us, including governments, economists and the society at large, have become concerned with our collective future – the future our children and their children will inherit.

This concern is the basis of “sustainable” and sustainable anything – be it the economy, agriculture or tourism – all these deal with the concept of ***“what we do today that will not degrade or rob the future of its future.”***

In terms of international tourism, there is a problem – it is very difficult to be conclusive about “sustainable” – certainly it includes ecological, or to use the current popular term “green” – to reuse your towels – distilling drinking water shipboard in an effort to eliminate the plastic water bottles, as Crystal Cruises are instituting - asking hotel guests to use water sparingly - recycling “anything” and “everything” – reduce “your carbon footprint” when and however you travel. And there is profusion of acronyms - REEP, CDM, MAB, AB32, IPCC, NOAA, CARB, WHG and on and on through the entire alphabet.

All these help – however, with all this knowledge, every day, whether we are at home or away from home on a holiday, we consume part of the next generation’s future – the “sustainable” question needs to be: “can what we step on and in essence injure, can it return to its original state,” an example would be stepping on a blade of grass and the grass springing back as if we were never there, or what we consumed can it be replaced, or what we eat can it be regrown.

“Sustainability is more than peripheral short-term environmental protection effected on a case-by-case basis to ward off risks; rather it means blanket, comprehensive and long-term protective care in line with the enduring responsibility we bear for the world around us, for the world we share with others and for the world of the generations to come.” stated in a paper by Prof. Dr. Peter-Christoph Storm. He stressed that to sustain sustainability, a social and environmentally sound market economy must be the ultimate goal – in terms of tourism it becomes a concept of national tourism policy.

Of all the “tourism economies” and now more and more are coming on line that speak of conservation and position themselves as green, sustainable tourism destinations, one stands out brilliantly.

It is FIJI, with all her islands in the middle of the Pacific.

Fijians have surmised that sustainability was important to all aspects of their future – their economy, and overall durability. Tourism has been identified as their major export product, currently bringing in 25% of their GDP with about 600,000 per year visitors, and that needs to be sustained, and provided for. Without an overall set of programs and combined involvement of the government, the private sector, the resorts, hotels and everyone in tourism and most importantly, the people of Fiji, the anticipated 1 million visitors by 2016 could become an ecological disaster.

In terms of economic development and sustainability, Fiji has placed priority on tourism as the least investment intensive industry, with manageable ecological and sustainability impact, the highest employment ratio and one of the highest ROI – certainly better than building a steel plant and polluting the Pacific.

To make it work the managements of Fiji, private and public; top resorts, retailers, travel operators and environmental societies have teamed up and launched proactive environmentally-conscious initiatives, to make Fiji one of the most unspoiled visitor vacation destinations in the South Pacific.

One of Fiji's top tourism executives, Ms. Iisapeci Matatolu relates one of the more profound ingredients within Fiji's efforts - sustainability being anchored to local cultural heritage: *"...without the environment there would be no economy! For small fragile economies like Fiji, we have to ensure we do all we can to protect our environment for perpetuity – we have so much wisdom in our traditional customs and practices that can be adapted to modern conservation practices."*

One example is the "Tabu," a Fijian custom that places a reef under village protection and off limits to fishing after the death of a high chief in a village. Under Tabu, fishing in the reef areas surrounding the village is banned for 100 days. Fiji has taken this traditional custom and expanded it to create Marine Protected Areas (MPA), a unique application of traditional customs to sustainability. At the moment, Fiji has over 170 MPAs managed by individual villages. The goal is to protect 30% of Fiji's reefs by 2020.

Fiji society is very giving, with high respect and dedication to their children – thus the reforestation was positioned as a gift by the current generation to Fiji's future generation - under the "Plant a Million" Fiji will have over million new trees by 2012.

Ms. Matatolu provided an insight to the private and public sector cooperation: "In one of our island resort regions (Mamanuca Islands) the resorts have teamed up with village communities in a program called the Mamanuca Environmental Society ([www.mesfiji.org](http://www.mesfiji.org))." The Society's purpose is "Sustaining community livelihood and tourism through environmental protection" and serves as a tangible grouping of efforts and ideals to secure Fiji's sustainable tourism.

Ms. Matatolu adds: "...our long term goal is to become the first country in the world to implement a national low carbon tourism sector program. This is a critical area for us because we know that the environment is an important part of the decision making process with international travelers."

Africa and the general tourism industry everywhere, need to take a closer look at Fiji.