



BUILDING ISLAND CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM WORKSHOP

**OPENING REMARKS BY THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER AND
MINISTER FOR TOURISM AND CIVIL AVIATION, HON VILIAME
GAVOKA**

***MONDAY 28 OCTOBER, 2024
9:00AM***

***NOVOTEL NADI HOTEL
NADI***

Your Excellency Madam Marie Damour, Ambassador to
the Republic of Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, Nauru and Tuvalu.

Madam Adela Issachar Aru, Chairperson for the Pacific
Tourism Organisation

Excellencies and Distinguished Members of the
Diplomatic Corps

Representatives of the Pacific island States

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor to stand before you today at this significant occasion – the Building Island Climate Resilience and Sustainable Tourism Workshop. I want to begin by expressing my deepest gratitude to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the US Department of Commerce, and our esteemed partners, for bringing us together for this essential workshop. Your vision to champion such an initiative reflects a deep commitment to safeguarding the future of our islands, our people, and the lifeblood of our economy—tourism.

This gathering is a powerful reminder that while we enjoy the bountiful gifts of our islands, we are also bound by a shared responsibility to protect them. The opportunity to exchange experiences and discuss best practices among tourism, climate, and conservation practitioners is a vital step towards actionable solutions. Solutions that support our collective goals of climate resilience and sustainable tourism.

Setting the Context for Progress

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As island nations, we are on the frontlines of climate change. Its impacts, whether through rising sea levels, extreme weather events, or coastal erosion, are challenges we live with every day. Our economies,

closely linked to tourism, must adapt and evolve if we are to thrive in this new reality. This workshop offers the ideal platform for us to forge ahead with innovative solutions and resilient strategies.

We are not only here to listen but to act. Each of us brings unique perspectives shaped by our nations' experiences. Today, we focus on how tourism, a key economic driver, can also be a force for climate resilience and environmental stewardship.

Tourism as an Economic Pillar

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to share some promising numbers that speak to the strength and resilience of our tourism industry in Fiji.

From January to August 2024, Fiji welcomed 640,274 visitors, representing a 7% increase compared to the same period in 2023. This is not just a statistic; it is a testament to our resilience, our recovery, and the global appeal of Fiji as a world-class travel destination.

We in Fiji have set our sights on reaching the ambitious target of **1 million visitor mark** at the end of 2024, this target comes with a significant responsibility. We are not

just aiming for growth, but for growth that is **sustainable**, that builds **climate resilience**, and that prioritizes **environmental stewardship**. As we gather here, we recognize that this responsibility is shared by all of us in the region. Our collective efforts must ensure that tourism thrives in a way that preserves the very ecosystems and communities that make our islands unique.

Government's Commitment to Sustainability

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Fiji Government recognizes the importance of integrating sustainable tourism practices. We are committed to embedding Indigenous Knowledge and Nature-Based Solutions into our tourism strategies. Our approach is to ensure that tourism not only respects the environment but also preserves the cultural heritage that makes our destinations so unique.

Climate resilience must be woven into the very fabric of our tourism offerings. Whether it's through sustainable infrastructure, renewable energy, or supporting conservation initiatives, we are determined to protect what makes our islands so special.

Tourism's Economic Impact and Opportunities

Tourism remains a cornerstone of our economy, contributing approximately 40% to Fiji's GDP, which stood at \$5.49 billion USD in 2023. This industry directly and indirectly supports 119,000 jobs, making it essential not only for our economic health but for the livelihoods of thousands of Fijians.

Sustainable tourism, however, is not just about economic returns. It is about ensuring the well-being of our environment, our people, and our future. The upward trajectory in visitor numbers provides us with an unprecedented opportunity to scale our efforts, both in terms of marketing and enhancing the visitor experience.

Pacific Tourism Data Insights: Growth and Sustainability

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to acknowledge the work of the Pacific Tourism Organisation SPTO in providing critical data on tourism across the pacific region. This data includes visitor arrivals, which tracks trends across ten Pacific nations such as papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The Tourism sector is expected to continue growing, with projections indicating a potential contribution of USD 336 billion to the regional economy by 2034.

Other notable increases that we should also be aware of is the Visitor Expenditure which has seen a notable increase. Papua New Guinea for example has experienced a 21% rise in Visitor Expenditure from June 2023 to May 2024. This contributed an estimated 296 million into the economy.

The SPTO also focus on sustainable tourism, and we have aligned ourselves to this initiative through Fiji's National Sustainable Tourism Framework to promote eco-friendly tourism development. These insights underscore the sector's growing importance and the drive towards sustainable and resilient growth in the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen, tourism in the Pacific appears to be on a positive trajectory and with these workshops, we can continue to build on climate resilience and sustainable tourism practices in our home countries.

A Shared Vision for the Future

As we gather over the next few days, let this workshop serve as more than just an exchange of ideas. Let it be a call to action—a catalyst for meaningful change. Each of us has a role to play in safeguarding the future of our islands through climate resilience and sustainable tourism.

The time for action is now. Our islands are counting on us to create a legacy that balances economic growth with environmental stewardship. Together, through collaboration and shared commitment, we can turn the challenges of today into the opportunities of tomorrow. Let us strive for a future where our islands not only thrive but set a global example for sustainable and regenerative tourism.

Closing

In closing, I encourage all of us to make the most of this workshop. Let us share our experiences, learn from one another, and build a path forward that honours both our heritage and our future. With united efforts, we can ensure that the beauty, culture, and environment of our islands remain resilient for generations to come.

Thank you.

Vinaka vakalevu.