

COLLABORATION AND INCLUSION IN VANUATU'S TOURISM SECTOR

The 'New Normal'

Vanuatu was greatly impacted by both the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastation caused by Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold in 2020. Prior to the dual crisis, the tourism industry contributed approximately 47% to Vanuatu's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

When international borders closed in March 2020, there was confusion and panic within the sector. Policies and strategies that guide the administration and operations of tourism businesses in Vanuatu were in question.

Travel restrictions brought international tourism to a sudden halt, which in turn resulted in a sharp increase in unemployment levels. 70% of individuals working in tourism-related employment lost their jobs in the first six weeks of the crisis, as most tourism businesses were shut down or laid off the majority of their staff in order to maintain business survival.

In addition, the wide range of new hygiene and operational requirements recommended for COVID-safe business practices were largely outside the skill sets and daily practice of businesses in the sector.

The 'New Normal'

In response, the Department of Tourism and Vanuatu Tourism Office led coordinated, collaborative, and inclusive planning discussions with partners and stakeholders to better understand how the tourism sector could respond and recover post COVID-19.

The Tourism Crisis Response & Recovery Plan was developed with a focus on building and strengthening partnerships and coalitions within the tourism industry, communities, and government institutions. The new term 'public, private and community coalition' was coined for this 'new normal' within the sector in Vanuatu.

As a result of these stakeholder meetings, a Memorandum of Agreement was signed by six partners, including the Vanuatu Skills Partnership, to support the Department of Tourism and Vanuatu Tourism Office to develop and deliver a contextually relevant training course for businesses directly and indirectly linked to the tourism sector. The course was titled 'Guidelines for Safe Business Operations in Vanuatu in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic'.



The Vanuatu Skills Partnership brokered a coalition to support key training providers – the Australia Pacific Training Coalition and the Vanuatu Institute of Technology – to develop the training resources for the Safe Business Operations course. In addition, the Partnership provided ongoing program management and human resources support, including the part-time secondment of its Productive Sector Manager into the Department of Tourism for two months.

The first official training occurred in October 2020 as part of the 'Niufala Rod Blo Tourism' forum, which was attended by 51 tourism business operators from Efate and the outer islands.

In 2021, this training course will be delivered to approximately 900 tourism businesses throughout Vanuatu to ensure safe operating practices are in place prior to the re-opening of borders to international travellers.

Vanuatu has some excellent training facilities, and we are confident that our training providers will rise to the challenge of delivering quality training to meet the diverse needs of our tourism workforce. What is needed is a stronger partnership between the tourism industry and the Vanuatu skills system, to ensure that tourism training meets the needs of the industry. It must be demand driven, not supply driven.

Jerry Spooner, Director,
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