

## Developing the Tourism Potential of Papua New Guinea

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### Abstract

This article reports on a research project that explored the views of travel consumers and travel agents in Austria regarding the South Pacific Islands (Oceania) as a potential tourist destination. Papua New Guinea has a wealth of varied tourism products and services to offer compared with many other destinations in the world. Strong support has come from the national government to enable maximum participation in the tourism industry by everyone. Key source markets include Australia, Asia, Europe, the United States of America, New Zealand, Japan and Oceania. Apart from their spending power, they provide future long-term benefits that trickle down to rural populations and people in the informal economic sector of society. Other benefits associated with global tourism include technological and cultural exchanges and ideas for improvement in the quality of life. Before that can happen, there are decisions that need to be made by key decision makers and challenges that can be worked into opportunities. These are strategic choices to be made for the long-term benefit to the tourism industry and the nation of Papua New Guinea.

**Key words:** tourism, key source markets, Papua New Guinea Tourism Promotion Authority (PNGTPA), transport, long-stay of four or more holiday nights, politically stable environment, distance, unspoiled nature, interesting culture, transport connections, reliable destination information, equable climate, product and service diversity

### Introduction

The Papua New Guinea (PNG) tourism industry is currently enjoying a boom in global tourism demand. In 2007, the Tourism Barometer of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reported the fourth year of worldwide healthy tourism growth in spite of uncertainties and external threats such as terrorism, health and security scares. This growth is associated with low-cost airlines, emerging markets and new destinations in developing countries, which have benefited airlines in spite of the rise in fuel costs. According to the UNWTO Secretary General Francesco Frangiali, '... 2006 was another year of good growth above the long-term forecast rate of 4.1%, backed up by one of the longest periods of sustained economic expansion' (UNWTO website, accessed online 18/02/08).

The Asia and Pacific region received a favourable forecast in 2006 (+7.6%) due to the ability of Thailand and the Maldives to recover from the impact of the December 2004 tsunami. The opening up of the China economy and the emergence of India as an economic superpower has boosted the region's tourism industry. Papua New Guinea's performance in this area was noted by the New Zealand High Commissioner, Niel Holms, when he commented in August 2007 that Papua New Guinea was enjoying a global tourism boom and could become a major tourist attraction. He presented a cheque of PGK87,000.00 to the Papua New Guinea Tourism Promotion Authority (PNGTPA) to conduct a tour guide training program in Minj in the Western Highlands Province (*The National*, Thursday 23 August, 2007).

Peter Vincent, the Chief Executive Officer of the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority supported Niel by saying that tourism in Papua New Guinea was recognized by the Government in 2004 to be of strategic importance. The Somare Government's support for the industry included its intention to make PGK39 million available over a three year period to implement the ten year Tourism Master Plan 2007-2017 (*The National*, Thursday 24 May, 2007).

Other support for the tourism industry by the National Government included the establishment of a national tourism task force to be headed by the Prime Minister with relevant government ministers; removal of entry visa fees for bona-fide tourists from major source markets, other tourism investment incentives and PGK3 million to the Tourism Promotion Authority in 2007 for domestic tourism awareness and promotion.

In 2007, the World Travel and Tourism Council indicated that Papua New Guinea's tourism potential was second only to Fiji in the region and amounted to USD870 million. In the PNGTPA Tourism Master Plan 2007-2017, it was predicted that tourism in Papua New Guinea would be worth PGK1.1 billion by 2010 and PGK1.78 billion in revenue terms by 2015; that those on holiday would spend PGK363 million in 2010 and PGK727 million by 2015, and that total employment in tourism would increase by 4,800 jobs by 2010 and 13,000 jobs by 2015. The UNWTO Tourism Barometer News Release (January 2007) predicted Asia and the Pacific to be again leading the growth in international tourism for this year.

### **Considering PNG's tourism source markets**

The first quarter visitor arrivals summary of 2007 by the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority indicated Australia as the biggest source market contributing 49%, followed by Asia 22%, Europe 10%, United States of America 9%, New Zealand 4% and Japan and Oceania each on 3%. The majority of the visitors came for business purposes (70%) and the holiday segment made up the balance (30%). The summary report identified Papua New Guinea's key target markets to be Australia, United States of America, Japan, United Kingdom and Germany. According to the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority, the 2007 March arrival summary went up to 10,305 visitors reflecting an increase of 38% compared to the same month of the

previous year. It reported that the European holiday market had the highest growth followed by the Pacific market (Australia, Oceania & New Zealand). The Japanese market, on the other hand, recorded decreases, which was related to not enough cruise ship activity during that period.

Of the 10,305 visitors in the first quarter of 2007, the statistics showed that 5,038 visitors were from the South Pacific (Australia, New Zealand and Oceania); 2,461 visitors were from Asia (China, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, India and other Asia); 1,524 visitors were from Europe (United Kingdom, Germany, France, other Europe, Russia, Italy and Scandinavia); 1,211 visitors were from the Americas (United States of America, Canada, other America and Chile); 63 visitors were from Africa and 8 visitors were from Israel. Visitors from the South Pacific (led by Australia) and Asia accounted for over 50% of the total arrivals for the stated period influenced by their close proximity, trade and historical relations with Papua New Guinea.

Europe, on the other hand, accounted for almost a third of the South Pacific market and close to 15% of the total arrivals. This comparatively low statistic can be associated with distance, cost, information and logistical problems. The power that Europe has over the South Pacific and Papua New Guinea's other source markets in terms of spending is the value of its Euro currency. In economic terms this means that the Euro has more buying power and can increase the combined value of Papua New Guinea's foreign reserves. This could alleviate Papua New Guinea's balance of payment problems and help to solve other concerns such as import payments and debt repayment over time. Thus the European market presents the potential to Papua New Guinea to expand its marketing horizons and look into the future to divest its target segments portfolio and look beyond the mirror.

### **European tourism market potential to PNG**

According to Eurostats (85/2007), the Statistical Office of the European Communities, European Union residents spent EUR86.4 billion abroad in 2005, an increase of 6.3% from the previous period. However it should be noted that European travel during this period was restricted to intraregional travel due to accessibility, security and safety reasons. The main outside destination regions for European Union residents were the United States of America, Turkey, Switzerland, Croatia, Egypt and Thailand. Five European Union member states – France, United Kingdom, Italy, Germany and Spain – were responsible for three-quarters of the total expenditure and Germany and the United Kingdom were the biggest spenders in 2005 (23% each). In 2005, European Union receipts and expenditure amounted to EUR1.3 billion and EUR2.3 billion respectively, resulting in a deficit of EUR1 billion with China (Eurostats, 85/2007).

Of the 3.39 million long-stay of four or more holiday nights by European Union residents abroad in 2006, Africa collected 4.4% (2.349 million overnights), United States of America and Canada each collected 2.3% (1.228 million overnights each), Japan collected 0.2% (106,780 overnights), Australia

collected 0.9% (480,510 overnights), and New Zealand and Pacific Islands-Oceania each collected 0.1% (53,390 overnights each). Concerning the number of business trips with overnights, of the 5.363 million four or more business overnights by European Union residents abroad for the same year, Africa accounted for 1.9% (101,897 overnights), United States of America accounted for 7.7% (412,951 overnights), Central and South America accounted for 7.1% (380,773 overnights) and Australia accounted for 0.4% (21,452 overnights). There was no recorded figure for Pacific Islands-Oceania (Statistics Austria, 2007).

Based on these statistics it can be observed that the European market has a huge potential in terms of its spending ability and visitor numbers. It is also obvious that Pacific Islands-Oceania, where Papua New Guinea is located, is not a favoured destination for European tourists. It would be in the interests of this nation to explore how to make Papua New Guinea a more attractive destination for European travellers.

The growth of tourism in Asia, compared to Papua New Guinea, is linked to major transportation networks (both air and sea) that enable onward smooth flight connections through Singapore, the growth of India as an economic superpower and new emerging markets such as Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. These countries belong to the Asian subcontinent which reduces connectivity time and makes travel easier compared to Pacific Islands-Oceania countries.

To find out why not many European tourists travelled to Pacific Islands-Oceania destinations, a literature search revealed a summary of the most important positive and negative factors that have shaped Europe's international tourism over the three years from 2002 through to 2004. These included political factors (due to the ensuing effects of terrorism and war after the September 11, 2001 USA terrorism attacks); economic factors (due to the weakening of the European Union economic situation during this period); social, health and weather factors (due to tactics of hostile hosts in certain destinations and disease outbreaks during this period); market and accessibility factors (due to change in travel behaviour of consumers) and technology factors (Eurostats, *Panorama on Tourism*, 2006, p. 11).

Positive highlights concerning travel to the Pacific Islands-Oceania region are drawn from the tenth edition of the *Columbus World Travel Atlas* (2006, pp. 144-5), which argued that the region is away from some of the (developed) world's worst problems; it is generally regarded as safe with no terrorism activities; it scores highly on the three aspects of cost, safety and the desire for new or exciting experiences; a high return of visitors; unspoiled quality of tourist destinations and products; and, although travel costs are high, there are an increasing number of bargains available.

### **European inclinations towards travel to the South Pacific Islands**

A small online study was done in December 2007 in the city of Salzburg in Austria to explore the views of European outgoing travel agents, wholesalers and potential consumers regarding the South Pacific Islands (Oceania) as a tourist destination. The study was conducted in Austria as the author was studying there at the time. The study involved an online questionnaire and personal interviews conducted by the author using the same questionnaire. There were nineteen questions and fifty-three respondents who were all Austrians from the six provinces of Austria. The intention was to get a representative view of Europeans concerning their travel inclinations. Limitations of the study included the method of collecting data, the respondent sample and their experiences, and the choice of questions in this study. A brief analysis is given of the results of this study.

Questions 1 and 2 asked respondents to select where they came from and their status. The results were that all respondents were Austrian citizens; 88.6% were travel consumers, 9.43% were travel agents and 1.88% was a tour operator.

Question 3 asked travel consumers if they had previously travelled to the South Pacific Islands. The result was that most (85.1%) of the 53 respondents *had never travelled* to the South Pacific Islands region.

Question 4 asked travel consumers who *had been* to the South Pacific Islands region if they would go there again. Interestingly all respondents indicated they would like to travel to the region again.

Question 5 asked travel consumers that *had not been* to the South Pacific Islands region if they would like to visit the region in the future. Of the respondents, 43.5% indicated that they would like to travel to the region in the future, 2% indicated that they would not, and 51.2% were unsure. This indicated that there was not a strong interest amongst the respondents to visit the South Pacific Islands region.

Question 6 asked travel agents/tour operators/wholesalers if they had sold travel packages to South Pacific Islands' destinations in the past. A minority (37.5%) of respondents had sold travel packages to the region while the majority (62.5%) had never sold any travel packages to the region.

Question 7 asked the travel agents/tour operators/wholesalers if they planned to sell any travel packages to the South Pacific Islands' region. Some respondents (42.8%) were certain that they would try to sell packages to the region; the remainder was divided between being uncertain (28.5%) and not planning to sell any travel packages to the region (28.5%). This result indicated that less than half of the surveyed travel agents/tour operators/wholesalers in Salzburg were positively interested in selling travel packages to the South Pacific Islands as a tourist destination.

Questions 8 to 17 had statements seeking respondents' views on factors influencing travel decisions. Results are shown in percentages.

### **Q.8 Importance of travel distance and cost**

Extremely important	Somewhat important	No opinion either way	Somewhat unimportant	Not important	Total
13.2%	66.0%	0.0%	18.8%	1.88%	100%

The majority (79.2%) of respondents indicated the cost and the distance to be travelled were important considerations when people were choosing a travel destination. This may be a factor why Europeans choose to travel to destinations closer to home rather than coming to South Pacific Islands' destinations.

### **Q.9 Importance of good transport connections**

Extremely important	Somewhat important	No opinion either way	Somewhat unimportant	Not important	Total
45.2%	32.0%	11.3%	9.43%	1.88%	100%

The majority (77.2%) of respondents indicated the good transport connections were important considerations when planning itineraries. Good transport connections are necessary to avoid spending unnecessary time in airport lounges or at mid-way points of little interest. This result highlights the importance of connections between Europe, Singapore and Papua New Guinea.

### **Q.10 Importance of friendly and politically stable destinations**

Extremely important	Somewhat important	No opinion either way	Somewhat unimportant	Not important	Total
47.1%	39.6%	7.54%	1.88%	3.77%	100%

A clear majority (86.7%) of respondents indicated that friendly and politically stable destinations were important criteria in choosing travel destinations. Embassies usually issue warnings about travelling to destinations that are considered to be unsafe. This factor is favourable for the South Pacific Islands region which is typically described as friendly and politically stable.

### **Q.11 Importance of good services that meet expectations**

Extremely important	Somewhat important	No opinion either way	Somewhat unimportant	Not important	Total
24.5%	43.3%	16.9%	13.2%	1.88%	100%

About two-thirds (67.8%) of the respondents indicated that good services to meet expectations were important considerations in choosing a travel destination. Compared with earlier results, the implications are that, while good services are appreciated, travellers might be prepared to accept lower standards

of service if the travel was offset by other factors such as friendly people, political stability or an interesting culture to explore.

### **Q.12 Importance of unspoiled nature and interesting culture**

Extremely important	Somewhat important	No opinion either way	Somewhat unimportant	Not important	Total
41.5%	35.8%	7.54%	11.3%	3.77%	100%

Over three quarters (77.3%) of the respondents indicated that an interesting culture and unspoiled natural environment were important criteria in choosing a tourist destination. These are factors that would enhance Papua New Guinea's appeal as a tourist destination.

### **Q.13 Importance of diverse tourism products and services**

Extremely important	Somewhat important	No opinion either way	Somewhat unimportant	Not important	Total
13.2%	50.9%	9.43%	22.6%	3.77%	100%

Almost two-thirds (64.1%) of the respondents indicated that diverse tourism products and services were important considerations in choosing a travel destination. Compared with other results, the implications are that, while diversity in tourism products and services appeals to some travellers, other travellers may have their own ideas about the activities they would like to engage in when they travel.

### **Q.14 Importance of good tropical climate and weather**

Extremely important	Somewhat important	No opinion either way	Somewhat unimportant	Not important	Total
35.8%	32.0%	18.8%	9.43%	3.77%	100%

Similarly, good tropical climate and weather were important for two thirds (67.8%) of the respondents. This result would indicate that, while climate and weather may influence the clothing travellers take with them, climate and weather are not as important as some other criteria in travellers' choice of a destination.

### **Q.15 Availability of reliable destination information**

Extremely important	Somewhat important	No opinion either way	Somewhat unimportant	Not important	Total
22.6%	49.0%	15.0%	11.3%	1.88%	100%

The majority (71.6%) of respondents indicated the availability of reliable destination information was an important factor for planning trips. This might include information on visas, currency, accommodation, transport, sightseeing attractions, safety, health, language, food and climate.

**Q.16 Availability of travelling in a group**

Extremely important	Somewhat important	No opinion either way	Somewhat unimportant	Not important	Total
15.0%	11.3%	5.66%	28.3%	39.6%	100%

Only a minority (26.3%) of respondents viewed the availability of group travel as an important factor in planning trips. Clearly group travel was not important for the majority (67.9%) of respondents.

**Q.17 Availability of travelling to low-cost destinations**

Extremely important	Somewhat important	No opinion either way	Somewhat unimportant	Not important	Total
1.88%	28.3%	24.5%	26.4%	18.8%	100%

Only a minority (30.18%) of respondents indicated that low-cost destinations were important criteria for planning trips. Almost a quarter (24.5%) of the respondent group had no opinion either way. The implication is that people plan according to their budget and it may be a low, medium or high cost destination. The result indicates that only a minority of travellers would be seeking a low-cost destination. This may also depend on the people's reasons for travelling and also when people set their minds on a destination, cost does not seem to matter.

Question 18 asked respondents how much they would be willing to spend for a return airfare for one person to the South Pacific region, 4-star hotel accommodation, tours and car for six nights. The majority (73.5%) chose the lowest amount EUR 4,000 – 6,000, 20.7% chose EUR 6,000 – 8,000 and 5.66% chose EUR 8,000 – 10,000. This indicated that respondents were interested in economy and getting value for their money. Using information from online travel websites such as [www.opodo.co.uk/](http://www.opodo.co.uk/) (accessed online, Wednesday 13 February 2008, 14:30pm), this travel package from Vienna to Fiji would cost around EUR 2,734.00 (PGK9,349.00) and to Papua New Guinea around EUR 3,500.00 (PGK11,967.48).

Question 19 was an open-ended item which gave respondents the opportunity to make their own comments. Comments included the following.

- The option of EUR 8,000 – 10,000 in question 18 is too expensive for a one-person travel package of six days duration.
- I would be interested in travelling to South Pacific destinations but it is a long way from Austria and too costly to get there.
- I do not send clients to the South Pacific region but would do so if an opportunity arose.



- I would not travel to the South Pacific region if there were health or safety risks, such as tribal fights, a high crime rate or disease epidemics.
- I would not travel to a South Pacific destination if vaccinations were needed.
- One problem would be the ease and safety for female travellers in Papua New Guinea or other South Pacific destinations.
- Political stability in a destination is important.
- A lack of reliable information makes South Pacific destinations unpopular.
- Being able to make the travel with ease as an individual traveller without being in a group is a concern.
- Getting value for money is important.
- I have found out about the South Pacific region through this study and might travel there when I have saved enough money.

### **What possibilities does the European market have for Papua New Guinea?**

Based on the information from the literature and from this study, certain affirmations can be drawn about the potential of European travellers to the South Pacific and in particular to Papua New Guinea.

Although Papua New Guinea has its own problems, it is away from some of the world's worst problems, such as war, terrorism and major disease outbreaks. Some of the 'talked about' problems concerning Papua New Guinea are not nation-wide and some of it is perception rather than reality.

Papua New Guinea is generally viewed to be exotic, safe, friendly, unspoiled, full of new and exciting experiences and where one can sometimes get good travel bargains.

Papua New Guinea has a high return rate for visitors, indicating favourable experiences of people who have been here. The local people are generally regarded as friendly and hospitable.

Since Papua New Guinea is still in the exotic category of tourism destinations this may encourage travel providers in Europe to promote travel to this country.

The distance and travel costs from Europe to Papua New Guinea were concerns for some respondents and it would be important for discount packages and good travel connections to be developed.

The availability of group travel and being a low-cost destination would not be major concerns for European travellers.

Generally PNG has a pleasant tropical climate and predictable wet or dry weather patterns.

Papua New Guinea offers a diversity of tourism products and services.

PNG has enough international standard facilities and services to cater to overseas delegates and has been the host nation to various international events.

PNG offers unique experiences compared with other destinations.

These points affirm that Papua New Guinea as a tourist destination has what other markets including the European market are looking for. It has the potential to attract more holiday tourists from the European market, apart from visitors who come on business, as reported by Tourist Promotion Authority in the March 2007 arrival summary. A distinguishing factor concerning business and holiday travellers is that business travellers usually do not have a choice over where to go, what they do and where they stay because in most cases it is prearranged and paid for by the sponsoring company. Tourists on business visas mainly stay in larger towns or cities and there is less chance of these people moving out of their comfort zone so fewer benefits of their travel reach the rural areas. On the other hand, holiday travellers are most likely to venture out to other provinces, visit different places and access rural facilities thereby enabling a wider dispersal of the tourism benefits for Papua New Guineans.

Therefore PNG's tourism decision makers need to consider the potential and long-term value of PNG's tourism business and diversify its target segments portfolio and expand its marketing horizons to make strategic choices that can also bring cultural exchanges, exchanges of technology and ideas that come along as part of global tourism benefits.

### **Challenges facing PNG's tourism industry**

Not all things can work easily for PNG tourism. The tourism industry in PNG is in its developing stage and has its own unique challenges and obstacles that need to be overcome. Some of these may be addressed in the short-term while others need to be addressed for the long-term. Examples of challenges and obstacles to PNG's tourism industry are:

- The perception of law and order problems
- Media reports of criminal offences in different locations in PNG
- A highly unstable airline industry with frequent cancellations and delayed flights
- Inadequacy of flights between Singapore and PNG destinations
- Minimal airline competition in PNG that contributes to high costs of air travel
- Lack of high quality facilities at PNG's airports
- Lack of communication infrastructure, such as internet facilities at airports and other locations
- The long time taken to service aircraft, process visas, do immigration and quarantine formalities and unload baggage
- Expensive accommodation in hotels or resorts
- Poor infrastructure for travellers such as the bad conditions of roads (e.g. the damaged and poorly maintained scenic Highlands Highway), broken bridges and driving through rivers

- Deteriorating conditions of public transportation, such as buses and taxis
- Mostly no reliable public transportation in PNG and buses and taxis that are often crowded, dirty and in poor condition
- Inadequate brochures or Internet information on tourist destinations and products for customers both within PNG and overseas
- Doubts about hygiene standards of meal preparation in commercial outlets and limited variety of food availability both in towns and in rural locations
- Concerns about the quality of service provided to travellers.

What it means is that PNG cannot have a thriving tourism industry until these issues are addressed. PNG is losing customers, losing its image as an attractive destination and creating a spiralling effect whereby one problem leads to the next and instead of the problem getting solved it generates other problems and more problems. The solutions to the problems require combined action from government, business and non-government organizations.

Some of the decisions that need to be made concerning PNG's tourism industry include the following.

Airline flights between Singapore and Port Moresby need to be frequent and economical and have convenient connections with flights coming into Singapore from destinations in Asia, the Middle-East, Africa, Europe and the Americas. New competitors with suitable airline connections and strategic alliances can lead to better flight connections and lower airfares, which can increase the flow of tourism traffic to this country.

Funds need to be invested to upgrade provincial airports in centres such as Madang, Mount Hagen, Goroka, Alotau, Kavieng and Lae. These destinations offer tourism products such as diving, cultural shows, village crafts, fascinating markets, botanical gardens, river cruises, diverse agricultural activities and attractive scenery and provide a contrast to the urban landscape of Port Moresby. Cost of accommodation in provincial centres is usually much less than in the capital city. Provincial terminals need to be well maintained and offer friendly service, comfortable seating, clean toilets, the sale of refreshments, and services such as public transport, car hire, and information on various levels of accommodation and tourist activities.

A mass education of the PNG public is needed on various topics concerning favourable interactions with tourists. This could include benefits of tourism, greetings, polite questions to ask, respect, responsibility, accountability, health and hygiene, sanitation, and technology. The aim is to bring the level and understanding of the people up to a certain level whereby they can meaningfully participate in creative development of tourism products or services.

Tour operators, travel agents, hoteliers and leaders in public and corporate life, including politicians, could go on experiential trips to selected tourists destinations to learn what others do to satisfy tourist needs and how these

experiences could be adapted to benefit the tourism industry in PNG. This could become a life changing experience. Knowing comes with experience.

Creativity and innovation in providing diversity and quality of tourism products and services need to be promoted and supported. The industry needs to recognize and reward ingenuity in creative and innovative solutions, and provide support. This could bring out the light and fire in people, and that could improve the way things are done in different places in this country.

Overseas agents for business or pleasure travellers could be invited to PNG to experience the products and services first hand. This will increase their confidence and background understanding in order to sell PNG's tourism products and services to their customers. They acquire greater credibility with their customers if they have some familiarity with the travel package they are trying to sell.

The problems of *raskolism* and unemployed youth need to be addressed to minimise theft and assault incidences that terrorise tourists, their safety and peace of mind. An agitated young population will create trouble from wherever they are because they have nothing useful to do. This is a time-bomb that is waiting to explode. A friendly, safe and politically stable environment is necessary to sustain the PNG tourist industry. PNG needs to avoid being seen as a high risk country to travel to. While tourists are usually advised to take out appropriate travel insurance, the good name of tourism in PNG would hope that such insurance is not necessary.

The infrastructure for tourism needs to be appropriate. There needs to be economical quality public transport by road, sea and air to enable tourists to visit multiple destinations. There needs to be accommodation that is available at budget, mid-range and upper level rates. There needs to be communication facilities such as Internet or international telephone services that enable tourists to contact their families. There needs to be money changing facilities for people accessing currencies other than the PNG kina currency.

The government needs a recurring expenditure budget to cater for the needs of the tourism industry to ensure the provision of appropriate infrastructure, transport, education and law and order conditions. If the government invests in tourism and by making it self-funding, e.g. by using funds collected from tourism into bettering tourism, the government can avert recurring expenditure such as for law and order, as such cost-incurring activities will be minimised.

## **Conclusion**

This article has addressed concerns related to developing the tourism potential of Papua New Guinea. The questionnaire administered to tour operators in Austria in Europe indicated that most of the respondents had never visited the South Pacific Region and knew little about it. However, the results were useful in identifying important factors that customers consider in choosing a travel destination. These included: a friendly and politically stable environment,

distance to be travelled and associated costs, unspoiled nature and interesting culture, good transport connections, availability of reliable information about a destination, good services for tourists, equable climatic conditions for the time of travel and diversity in products and services available for tourists.

PNG as a potential tourist destination offers unique experiences. It is a beautiful country with many examples of unspoiled nature and interesting cultures. PNG as a destination is still in the exotic category of tourism destinations and this is attractive for many potential visitors. However, the tourism industry is in its early stages of development and much needs to be done to educate and involve citizens from the informal sector of society, to improve transport links and accommodation at reasonable prices, and develop a range of products and services for tourists.

The article has identified the key source markets for tourists to PNG that provide future long-term benefits that trickle down to rural populations and other benefits that come along with global tourism such as cultural exchanges, exchange of technology and ideas for improvement. It is important that decision makers realize the challenges and obstacles for the industry and work them into opportunities that can rejuvenate creativity, innovation and meaningful participation within the industry. The suggestions that have been put forth in this article should generate further thought so that appropriate options are worked out. It is safe to add that failing to take appropriate action can result in consequences that could be dire for the future of the tourism industry in this country.

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